

MOSHER'S SHIP BOOKS

I decided it might be fun to share an excerpt from my memoirs which relates to an acquisition of some of the books Thomas Mosher had on board with him when, under his father Captain Mosher's command, the whole Mosher family sailed around the world on the clipper ship *Nor'wester* from 1867-1870. While members of the family could recount all sorts of exciting experiences while at sea, Tom Mosher most often would spend his days in relative seclusion reading from his set of *Bell's British Theatre* and a variety of other books purchased at some of the ports of call they visited. These are probably the scarcest books from Mosher's library and obviously relate to Mosher's early reading background long before being a publisher was even a twinkle in his eye. To start off, there's the wonderful story of a little find of two volumes obtained in 2003.

All of the purchases made during the last months of 2003, however, paled in comparison to what I purchased out of Alaska, OF ALL PLACES!!!! I acquired two little Tauchnitz books containing five of Charles Dickens Christmas stories:

First Volume

(Collection of British Authors) Dickens, Charles. *A Christmas Carol in Prose. Being a Ghost Story of Christmas*, Leipzig, Germany: Bernh. Tauchnitz Jun., 1843. vi, 78 pp. First Tauchnitz edition, first issue, including tissue-guarded, colored frontispiece by John Leech entitled "Marlys Ghost"(sic). (Todd & Bowden A1Aa)

-- bound together with --

Dickens, Charles. *The Cricket on the Hearth A Fairy Tale of Home*. Leipzig, Germany: Bernh. Tauchnitz Jun., 1846. vi, 120 pp. First Tauchnitz edition, first issue. (Todd & Bowden A5a)

-- bound together with --

Dickens, Charles. *The Battle of Life. A Love Story*. Leipzig. Germany: Bernh. Tauchnitz Jun., 1847. vi, 119 pp. First Tauchnitz edition. (Todd & Bowden A6).

Todd & Bowden note the following about Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*:

It would appear that this separate issue A1 may have been published a day or two before the sanctioned issue of *Martin Chuzzlewit*..., and thus leads the long procession of Tauchnitz-Dickens volumes published before their London counterparts. [and] As noted in the first reported communication from Dickens to Tauchnitz on 9 October 1853 (House iii, 579, n.2; v.176, n.2), beginning with this first 'sanctioned edition' the author regularly forwarded early proofs; and it is therefore quite possible, as recently conjectured, that this issue 'preceded the first English edition by a few days' (Christie, Manson & Woods Ltd., auction catalogue 17 October 1984, lot 45). The 'etching' appearing in earliest impressions actually is a coloured lithograph. --pp. [774, 775]

Original cloth spine and brown marbled boards. All First Editions. Signed by Thomas Bird Mosher. This little book contains three of Dickens Christmas stories bound together with half-titles reading "Collection of British Authors." The original binding has "Boz. | Christm | Cricket, | Battle." gilt-stamped on spine. **Thomas Bird Mosher, of the future Mosher Press, has signed/dated the front free endpaper in ink: "Thomas Bird Mosher | Feb'y 19th 1867 |**

[flourish]". Beneath this Mosher's father, Captain Benjamin Mosher, writes in pencil:

Tho C. B.M. Mosher
Elbe Hotel
Hamburg
Germany
Feb 19th 1867
Formaner [?]
12 A.M.

Second Volume

(Collection of British Authors) Dickens, Charles. *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain. A Fancy for Christmas-Time*. Leipzig, Germany: Bernh. Tauchnitz Jun., 1848. iv, 131, [1]pp. (First Tauchnitz edition, Todd & Bowden A9)

-- bound together with --

Dickens, Charles. *The Chimes: A Goblin Story of Some Bells that Rang an Old Year Out and a New Year In*. Leipzig, Germany: Bernh. Tauchnitz Jun., 1845. iv, 88pp. (First Tauchnitz edition, Todd & Bowden A3a) Original cloth spine and brown marbled boards. Both First Editions. Signed by Thomas Bird Mosher. This little book contains two of Dickens Christmas stories bound together with half-titles reading "Collection of British Authors." The original binding has "Boz. | haunted man | chimes." gilt-stamped on spine. **Signed/dated by a youthful Thomas Bird Mosher, of the future Mosher Press, on the front free endpaper at top "Thomas Bird Mosher | Feb'y 1867 | [flourish]"**. A scarce edition of Dickens with an important association signature.

Dane Yorke, the Mosher bibliographer in the 1940's who never fully completed his biography of the publisher, and whose typescript and ms. notes are in the Mosher Collection, wrote about the young Mosher who accompanied his father and family to Germany. The following is a brief excerpt from Yorke's biography:

It was in Hamburg that the famous purchase was made of the set of *Bell's British Theatre* which Mosher grandly declared "first unlocked to me the treasure-trove of English literature." But that statement was made 45 years after the event, and in apparent forgetfulness of other purchases made at the same time. For in his sister's possession, almost 70 years later, I found several small volumes bought by her brother during their common voyaging. Even at this early period (1867) the boy had developed the bibliophile's trick of recording the time and place of purchase, and thus we can date his possible first encounter with the famous Tauchnitz edition of standard British authors. At any rate, among the books the sister had preserved there was a Tauchnitz *Works of Alexander Pope* which the boy had marked "Hamburg, February, 1867" and a Tauchnitz volume of Dickens (containing *The Christmas Carol*, *The Cricket on the Hearth*, and *The Battle of Life*— the latter described as a love story) which he had dated more carefully (and perhaps lovingly) "Thomas Bird Mosher, Elbe Hotel, Hamburg, Germany, February 19, 1867." The Elbe Hotel was the small waterfront hostelry where the family stayed while the Captain anxiously sought cargo to begin the voyage. He was unsuccessful and on February 22nd (three days after the Dickens purchase) the *Nor'wester* in ballast dropped down the Elbe River, crossed the cold North Sea and arrived on Cardiff, Wales, where finally the Captain found a cargo of coal for Montevideo. It was a pattern to be often repeated: that waiting in port while a cargo was gotten, and then loaded.

Now to be sure, I wish it was Mosher's copy of the *Bell's British Theatre* set that I had purchased, but I'm still mighty glad to get these two little Dickens volumes along with Mosher's childhood inscriptions which were at one time preserved by his sister, Elizabeth. In addition to these volumes there are two other inscribed-dated books from this period now in the collection. One is the first book Mosher's

father ever bought for him, inscribed in 1863 by Captain Mosher in London, which TBM himself considered to be the first book he collected:

Bunyan, John. *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which is to Come; Delivered Under the Similitude of a Dream*. With a Memoir of the Author. London: The Religious Tract Society, [ca. 1863]. 8vo, original lavender gilt-stamped cloth, a.e.g., color plates, inscribed "Thomas B Mosher presented to him by his father. London October 15|63." Mosher himself wrote of the influence *Pilgrim's Progress* had on him. In relating his earlier recollections, he mentions this particular copy in saying "later when I was in London in the fall of 1863 my father took me in a cab along with my mother and sister to the Bible Society under the shadow of St. Paul's Cathedral where at my request the finest copy that they printed of the book--colored plates, gilt edges and bevelled [sic] cloth boards cover--became mine, the first copy I ever owned but assuredly not the last... I think it is clear that other than Mother Goose I must first have felt in any lasting impressions that magic of prose--The Pilgrim's Progress was the starting point..." --see Hatch, pp. 12-13 with except taken from a 1918 autobiographical note by T. B. Mosher.

Other than the Beadle's dime novels, this book may be said to mark the beginning of Mosher's book collecting. Before his death in 1923, the book was given by Mosher to his assistant, Flora Lamb. Eventually it was purchased by a Portland bookdealer at her estate sale, and then sold to another Portland bookdealer before coming to the Bishop Collection.

The other book from this time period of Mosher's childhood is Samuel Butler's *Hudibras*. With Variorum Notes... Edited by Henry G. Bohn. London: Bohn, 1859. 8vo, original green cloth. With Mosher's signature and date on the title-page: "Thomas Bird Mosher May 1869" Though not so listed, this is certainly one of the "Ship" books.

It's the Tauchnitz books which, quite frankly, ooze with the romance of those early seafaring days. I asked the bookseller to recount a few things about his business and whatever he knew about the provenance of these little books. Incidentally, while we were concluding our telephone transaction to purchase these books, there was a little ruckus on his end and he indicated there was a moose at the window disturbing him. I asked what he meant by that and he said he'd send me a picture. I got a picture attached to an email and sure enough, like the man said, there was a moose just outside his shop window staring through the glass. In his delightful letter to me written upon my request, this hardy bookseller recounted (here reprinted in full with his permission):

December 17, 2003

Dear Phil,

My wife Sally and I started The Old Inlet Bookshop here in Homer exactly six years ago to the day, December 17, 1997. There were a few factors that prompted us to start a used bookshop literally at the end of the road in North America. One reason was it would keep me from going crab fishing in the winter in the Bering Sea, something I had done in the past to make ends meet. I had commercially fished since 1979, first out of Rockland, Maine on scallop draggers, bottom trawlers, lobster boats and tuna boats, then here in Alaska fishing everything from crab, shrimp, scallops, sea cucumbers, sea urchins, herring, and salmon since 1982. My having two daughters and a bookshop would keep me close to home winters. I still subsidize the shop by fishing the Copper River salmon commercially in May of each year.

Another reason to start the bookshop was books are in my blood. My mom has had a shop for 35 years in Marshfield, Massachusetts, my Dad helped start that shop, I worked in the shop for pocket money as a kid. Both my father's parents were in the book

business. I came from a family of booksellers, so it seemed natural to create an outpost up here.

This area had a large spruce bark beetle epidemic, where most of the old growth spruce died. I ran a sawmill over parts of four winters, built our house from the wood, and decided I could make lots of bookcases with the rest. And what better use for bookcases than a bookshop?

My Dad was overjoyed with the prospect of me having a bookshop. That would mean he could be a book-scout again, like he was in college. He is an avid collector and has amassed a huge medical and ornithology collection of his own. He also collected modern firsts. He loves yard sales, book sales, estate sales or anything like them. He loves the hunt. He sends about 150 boxes a year to Alaska. Also, when I travel back east, he breaks out some of his private collection. I hand carry these special books back to Alaska in Samsonite suitcases. It was in one of these shipments that the two Tauchnitz volumes of Dickens made it up here.

When I asked him where he got them, he told me there was a bookseller named Mason Foley who had a bookshop in the Fore River Shipyard area of Hingham, Mass. Mason would tuck anything unusual away for my Dad, especially if it was Dickens related. My Dad bought them and gave them to my grandfather, who put himself to sleep every night reading Dickens. The two Thomas Bird Mosher inscribed volumes were bought for the Dickens association. They were purchased between 1958 and 1961. Mason Foley died while shaving in 1968 on the day of Robert Kennedy's assassination. Apparently he was the town historian.

Andrew Wills
Old Inlet Bookshop
Box 382
Homer, Alaska 99603
907-235-7984

Should you need to know: yes, the Old Inlet Bookshop is still there in Homer, Alaska, only when I was dealing with Andrew, the business was located down the street in the basement of the Old Inlet Trading Post. It's new location is 3487 Main Street in Homer, Alaska. For so many bookshops, these are not the best of times and Andrew struggles like the rest of us. If readers of this essay would care to visit the Old Unlet Bookshop on-line, one just needs to google his shop, but careful... a moose might interrupt your transaction.

To the above "Ship Books" one has to add that copy of Bret Harte's *The Lost Galleon and Other Tales* (San Francisco: Towne & Bacon, Printers, 1867), Harte's first book, which I wrote about in *Endpapers* back in March 2008. In his biographical introduction to the Gehanna Press's *A Check List of the Publications of Thomas Bird Mosher of Portland, Maine*, Benton Hatch writes about this book: "Once, the sea-fog rolls back, permitting a glimpse of sixteen-year-old Tom Mosher with an understanding doctor at San Francisco who is introducing him to a wonderful book. In his [Mosher's] recollections, his acquaintance with the doctor loomed larger than his memories of major sea dramas..." (p. 14) Mosher's hand-written comments about Dr. Mackintosh are recorded in this copy of *The Lost Galleon* which Mosher first saw in his parlor in San Francisco and which Mosher acquired in April of 1868.

Most likely we can also include that volume of pamphlets bearing Captain Mosher's stenciled book stamp which I wrote about in the September 2009 issue of *Endpapers*. Books such as these are not only important for the texts that they contain, but through their associations one can just envision the ship's captain purchasing these books for his son, and the boy absorbing their content while the ship plowed through the mighty seas of the world. Some day they will certainly be shown in what will be the most extensive exhibition of things related to

Thomas Bird Mosher and the Mosher Press. For now, it's my humble duty to take care of and preserve them, a responsibility which I do not take lightly.

Philip R. Bishop
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