

The serendipitous find still awaits the traveler to real book stores

The Internet is a fine place to locate a certain book, but one can get only so much from surfing the books for sale listings, and the chances for the book collector to have a serendipitous encounter is greatly diminished over that of an actual visit to a book store. Just the other day I picked up several boxes of books from one of my "clients" when I decided to take a side trip to a book barn out in the middle of nowhere. I've been there before and actually had been returning every four or five months to try to find a book which I thought I had seen there but which the owner says he doesn't recall or just doesn't remember. Strange how one can be so sure that the image in one's mind directly connects to some venue. I was so sure I had seen the little book: a copy of Dante's *Inferno* bound in full Venetian vellum and with a portrait of Dante hand-painted on the front cover amid laurels. That's not an image one could forget or disassociate from the place where one saw it, but in this case that's exactly what I must have done or I must have dreamt it. Whatever the case, that persistent nag to find the book was in the back of my mind and I drove the extra nine miles to the open book shop.

Again, the Dante book wasn't to be found. My dream. Their reality. So while at the shop I started to browse the shelves in the vast holdings of this book barn. In all the times I was there I had never come upon the old standby "books-on-books" category. Digging through the three shelves of books I came upon one I had never encountered before: George Somes Layard's *Suppressed Plates, Wood Engravings, &c., Together with Other Curiosities Germane thereto being an Account of Certain Matters Peculiarly Alluring to the Collector* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1907). In checking the contents my eyes alighted upon Chapter 9 "The Suppressed Omar Khayyam Etching" to which I immediately turned and an old name quickly engrossed my attention, that of Mr. Edwin Edwards. A quick flip through the pages and I found a picture of the Edwin Edward suppressed frontispiece for Omar Khayyam which Mosher used in his 1902 publication of the Rubaiyat. I muttered something to myself like "I say now, this is interesting..." and proceeded to spot read throughout the chapter and coming to the last paragraph which extends from pp. 190-191:

And now just one word with that gentle hunter, Mr. Thomas B. Mosher of Portland, Maine, U.S.A., who did me the honour of transferring a large portion of the above, originally written for *The Bookman*, to the pages of his beautiful 1902 edition of *The Ruba'iyat*. Of that I make no complaint, for I think it very probable that he asked and obtained my permission. What I do complain of is that, in a footnote, he falls foul of

me for being "ungracious" to Colonel Prideaux in suggesting the date 1871 as the year of publication of the third edition, instead of the year 1872, as Colonel Prideaux has it in his most valuable little "Notes for a Bibliography of Edward FitzGerald" 1901. Mr. Mosher says "no manner of doubt exists as to the date." Let me tell him that I have it on the authority of one who was on intimate terms both with FitzGerald and Edwin Edwards at the time when this third edition was published that, though the book bore the date 1872 on the title, as a matter of fact it was published in the autumn of 1871 and post-dated. If it be "ungracious" to give Colonel Prideaux a piece of information which he had not the opportunity of obtaining for himself, then I sincerely hope that all who read this volume, and find themselves better informed, as well they may, than I am, will be equally "ungracious" to me. La plupart des hommes n'ont pas le courage de corriger les autres, parcequ'ils n'ont pas le courage de souffrir qu'on les corrige. [Most men do not have the courage to correct others because they lack the courage to bear being corrected]--translation courtesy of Jean-Francois Vilain

In the interest to fair play, here is Mosher's actual wording of the footnote to which Layard takes exception:

See in the London *Bookman* for April, 1902, "An Omar Khayyám Curiosity," by G. S. Layard. But why does this writer persist in saying "the third edition published by Quaritch in the year 1871," and "published by Quaritch in 1871, not, I think in 1872, as Colonel Prideaux has it"? The implication is ungracious, to say the least, when no manner of doubt exists as to the date. Colonel Prideaux's little book is a model of bibliographical excellence.

Oh the trials and travails of the bibliographer. Had I not stopped at that book barn and riffled through its bookland section I would have never come across this. I had never seen the book before. Nothing beats the chance encounter.

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