

Colby



Colby Quarterly

Volume 4
Issue 3 *August*

Article 3

August 1955

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Recommended Citation

Colby Library Quarterly, series 4, no.3, August 1955, p.57-62

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Series IV

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THE CHARLES R. CAPON COLLECTION OF BOOKS DEALING WITH THE GRAPHIC ARTS

By JAMES HUMPHRY, III

IN the fall of 1954, shortly before his death, Mr. Charles R. Capon of Hancock, New Hampshire, offered his Graphic Arts Collection in its entirety to the Colby College Library. Either directly (through Colby publications) or indirectly (through other products of The Anthoensen Press) the Library had had a long and intimate connection with the work of Charles R. Capon, and it was with particular satisfaction, therefore, that we learned of his decision to give us his distinguished and extensive collection. Before describing the books themselves, a few introductory words about Mr. Capon may be welcomed by readers of this QUARTERLY.

Ten years ago, when Professor Weber was engaged in the preparation of his little volume entitled *Hardy Music at Colby*, he turned to Mr. Fred Anthoensen in Portland, Maine, for expert assistance in designing the book. Mr. Anthoensen, in turn, called upon an artist to help with the design. This artist, Charles R. Capon, drew the picture of the violin which now graces the title page of *Hardy Music*, as well as the picture of the scroll of music that adorns the final page. No wonder Dean Julian Park, of the University of Buffalo, called it "a charming little book," and no wonder Mr. John T. Winterich, of the *Saturday Review*, called it "delightful, both for to read and for to look at." Mr. Capon and Mr. Anthoensen combined their tastes and skills to produce a successful little book.

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Mr. Anthoensen knew exactly where to turn when he wanted an artist's help, for Mr. Capon was the man who, fifteen years earlier, had supplied Mr. Anthoensen with a design for one of his own most successful productions. Mr. Anthoensen tells the story of this collaboration in his own book *Types and Bookmaking* (1943), a copy of which he inscribed "To Charles R. Capon, Master in Design and Lettering." On page 16 of this work, Mr. Anthoensen remarks:

I had always wanted to design and print *An Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard* by Thomas Gray, in a small, appropriate format. I realized that many editions had already been printed, and that a new one would need marked features to give it a reason for existence. In this book, I happily succeeded, I think. . . . The book . . . was printed in Linotype Scotch on Vidalon Velin paper; the binding, a specially designed decorated paper printed in three colors, repeated the quaint illustrations of urns and sheaves of wheat suggestive of the theme. . . . The book . . . was chosen as one of the Fifty Books of the Year and proved to be a quite successful edition of the poem. . . .

The decorated paper printed in three colors used in the binding of this book was designed by Charles R. Capon.

Others, too, besides Mr. Anthoensen knew of Mr. Capon's artistic skill. In 1932, two years after the appearance of the Anthoensen edition of *Gray's Elegy*, the Cedar Tree Press of Boston published a little book with an Introduction by A. J. Philpott; it was entitled *A Selection of Bookplates* and gave an excellent account of Mr. Capon's career as a bookplate designer.

Three years after Colby had published *Hardy Music*, Professor Weber was again engaged in the preparation of a bibliography, this time of the published writings of the Maine author, Jacob Abbott, the creator of the once-famous Little Rollo. Once again Mr. Anthoensen called upon Mr. Capon for help and the charming picture of Little Rollo in the published *Bibliography of Jacob Abbott* (1948) is the result.

During the last five years of his life, Mr. Capon was busy with book after book. In 1950 he drew the vignettes for

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Albert Trowbridge Gould's *The St. George River*. The Trustees of the John Greenleaf Whittier Homestead, Haverhill, Massachusetts, commissioned him to produce the delightful illustrations of the Whittier birthplace in the edition of *Snow-Bound* published in 1950. The Anthoensen Press published *A Selection from the Works of Charles R. Capon*, with a check-list of Mr. Capon's bookplates compiled by Francis W. Allen and Argie B. Allen. And in the two volumes of Hannah Palfrey Ayer's *A New England Legacy* (1950) the vignettes are by Charles Capon.

Last spring a sampling of the Capon Collection was placed on exhibition in the Colby Library, and many visitors at Commencement time showed interest in the extent and variety of the books. Space does not permit a complete listing here of the scores of titles in the collection, but a dozen examples will serve to indicate what is meant by "extent and variety."

1. BORLUYT DE GAND, GUILLAUME, *Ghesneden Figueren*, Lions, Ian van Tournes, 1557. Borluyt or Borluit, a Flemish poet and lawyer of the 16th century, published two books, one of Old Testament wood engravings for which he supplied the accompanying quatrains, and one of the New Testament. The Capon copy incorporates both, apparently a rebinding. According to Brunet's *Manuel du Libraire*, the wood-engravings, without a doubt, are those of Petit Bernard (Salomon), a sixteenth-century Lyonese painter and wood-engraver whom Dibdin in his *Bibliographical Decameron* refers to as "the man who executed such wonders upon wood in so small a space."

2. *Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius*, Venice, Aldus, 1515. This edition of the three Latin poets is a reprint of the 1502 edition, which was originally published in 1472 by da Spira, Aldus' Venetian predecessor. The elder Aldus died in 1515, and the colophon, which states that this edition was produced by Aldus' father-in-law, verifies this fact. Not until 1533, at the age of 21, did Aldus' son Paolo, take over the direction of the press.

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3. *The Rowley Poems of Thomas Chatterton*, edited by Robert Steele; two volumes, designed and printed by Charles Ricketts at the Vale Press, London, 1898. Charles Ricketts, a follower of Morris, produced forty-six titles at the Vale Press; all were supervised by Ricketts and characterized by wood-cut illustrations or decorations on hand-made paper. Colby owns copies of all the Vale Press productions, whose excellence, along with that of the Kelmscotts, indicates clearly the reason for Mr. Capon's having representation of both presses in his collection of graphic arts.

4. CHARLES DICKENS, *A Christmas Carol*; illustrations by Leech. Philadelphia, Carey & Hart, 1844. First American edition, probably a rarer book than the first London edition.

5. GIOVIO, PAOLO, *Dialogo delle imprese militari et amoresse, con un ragionamento di Lodovico Domenichi nel medesimo soggetto*. Lyone, Appresso Guglielmo Rouillio, 1574. Giovio, known also by the Latin form of his name, Jovius, was a 16th-century Italian historian who became Bishop of Nocera in Naples. This Italian edition, originally published by Rouillio in 1559, seven years after Giovio's death, deals with symbolism, or emblematic art (*imprese*). The 102 wood engravings, beautifully executed, were later used for editions translated into French and Spanish. Although not the first, one of the early allusions to crocodile tears appears in the engraving and the accompanying text on page 134 of this edition.

6. *A History of the Printed Book* (The Dolphin, No. 3), edited by Lawrence C. Wroth. New York, Limited Editions Club, 1938. A much sought-after edition, which contains a series of excellent treatises on printing, types, bookbinding and subjects allied with graphic arts.

7. *Kate Greenaway's Alphabet*. London, George Routledge & Sons [1885]. This little book (measuring only 2 $\frac{7}{8}$ " by 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ ") was first published in 1885, and the Capon copy is from the original edition. Kate Greenaway, the

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daughter of a wood-engraver, won great acclaim as a water-color artist, her work being highly praised by Ruskin. The *Alphabet* is an excellent example of her artistic ability, and a welcome addition to the Library's collection of children's books, presented to the college by Miss Julia S. Carpenter in December 1950 (see COLBY LIBRARY QUARTERLY, February, 1953, page 149).

8. *The Looking-glass for the Mind; or Intellectual Mirror . . .* with seventy-four cuts, designed and engraved on wood by Thomas Bewick, London, printed for John Harris . . . 1817. This item is of special interest for its wood engravings, executed by that famous master of the art, Thomas Bewick. Through the generosity of Mr. T. Raymond Pierce, Colby '98, the Library is the proud possessor of seven original Bewick woodblocks, all of which have been reproduced from time to time in this QUARTERLY (see the issue for August, 1953, page 11, for a description of these seven woodblocks).

9. DOUGLAS C. MCMURTRIE, *The Golden Book*, the story of fine books and bookmaking past and present, Chicago, Pascal Covici, 1927. This work, a comprehensive survey of the graphic arts, is cited by Elmer Adler as "a notable achievement" in the field.

10. MATTHEWS, ANNIE HARMON, *Thomas Bird Mosher of Portland, Maine*, Portland, The Southworth-Anthoensen Press, 1941. This 26-page book, of which only 350 copies were printed, is a notable association item on three counts. First it was produced by that master designer, Fred Anthoensen, who has executed many Colby publications. Second, the subject of the Keepsake is Mosher, scores of whose titles the Library now owns, and hopes to acquire more. Third, the book's Foreword and Portrait were written by Dr. Edward Francis Stevens, Colby '89, himself a distinguished student of the Graphic Arts, and the one who originally established the Book Arts Collection at Colby by the generous donation of much of his own distinguished private library.

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11. *The Tale of the Emperor Coustans and of Over Sea*, done out of ancient French by WILLIAM MORRIS, Hammer-smith, Kelmscott Press, 1894. The twenty-sixth title, in a series of fifty-three produced by Morris, whose work Updike called "a pleasure to look at for arrangement of type and pieces of fine printing." The Colby College Library has a complete file of the Kelmscott Press productions.

12. TERENTIUS AFER, PUBLIUS, *Comoediae*. Birmingham, Johannis Baskerville, 1772. According to W. T. Lowndes, in *The Bibliographer's Manual*, Terence's *Comedies* was the first Latin classic to be printed in that language in Great Britain, in 1497 by Richard Pynson. The present edition was printed in Birmingham, England, fifteen years after Baskerville, one of the most famous English type-designers of the 18th century, had introduced typography to that city by establishing his own paper mill, type foundry and printing office.

If space permitted, we could continue to examine many more of the interesting books in the CHARLES CAPON COLLECTION. Suffice it to say that such distinguished names in the field of graphic arts and bibliography as Updike, Pollard, McKerrow, Ransom, Bennett, Winterich, Orcutt, Rogers, Goudy, George Macy, as well as those previously mentioned, are amply represented.

As a fitting memorial to the work of Charles R. Capon and to the books he has presented to the Colby College Library, Mr. Fred Anthoensen has designed a beautiful bookplate, in color, in the true Capon spirit, for insertion in each of the books. What better example of reciprocity could there be?

