March 1946

The Fiftieth Anniversary Of A Shropshire Lad

Gilmore Warner

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/cq

Recommended Citation
Colby Library Quarterly, series 1, no.14, March 1946, p.217-232

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colby Quarterly by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Colby. For more information, please contact mfkelly@colby.edu.
THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF

A Shropshire Lad

BY GILMORE WARNER

THE famous Lad of A. E. Housman was first presented to the world in February 1896. Since that date, the poems have been reprinted more than three-score times, and one or more copies of almost all these editions have been quietly collected by Professor Weber. On the fiftieth anniversary of the first appearance of A Shropshire Lad, Dr. Weber presented his entire collection to the Colby College Library. It makes a fitting companion for our already well-known Hardy Collection; for, as C. Lewis Hind has remarked (in Authors and I, p. 155), “The attitude of this Shropshire lad is akin to that of Thomas Hardy. . . . They might be brothers in spirit.” And Dr. Weber, one may justly add, has in this act beautifully demonstrated his own kinship with Samuel Johnson. “He approved of the famous collection of editions of Horace by Douglas, . . .” says Boswell, “and he added, Every man should try to collect one book in that manner, and present it to a publick library.”

The Housman books were placed on exhibition, and members of the Library Associates were given first sight of them at their February meeting. The Library signalized the occasion by publishing a Jubilee Edition of the poems—an attractive volume printed by the Southworth-Anthoensen Press—containing in addition to the text many enlightening notes and comments and a list of what we may now refer to as the Colby Housman Collection. In the thought that Colby Library Associates who live at a dis-
tance may be glad to read about these Shropshire books, I append a descriptive bibliography of the collection. If reading the following pages should whet your appetite for a copy of the Jubilee Edition, I hope you will write for one promptly before the limited supply is exhausted.

1896: London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Company. First Edition. Blue-gray boards, with vellum spine and paper label, on which the word “Shropshire” measures 33 mm. (On some copies the word is said to measure 37 mm.) 500 copies were printed by Ballantyne, Hanson & Co. (150 sent to America); published in February.

The covers of the book followed the poet's own suggestions. To his brother Laurence, Housman jocosely wrote: "The binding seems to me so extraordinarily beautiful that I cannot bear to lose sight of it by opening the book." The original price was 2/6 (half a crown); but, as John Carter remarked in 1938, "A Shropshire Lad, 1896, is not a common book...[and] it has for some years been a fairly expensive book.... This is one book of English poetry which I do not think will ever slump." (From "On Collecting A. E. Housman" in The Colophon, February 1938, p. 55.) Laurence Housman found, in 1898, that six copies of the first edition remained unsold. He bought the lot. "Thirty years later," so he has reported, "I contrived to sell one copy for £12, the next for £20, the next for £30, and the last for £70. It sold later in America for £80, which I believe constitutes the top price [about $400] up to date." In 1945 Frank J. Hogan's copy sold for $250. The Colby copy is in a red morocco and linen protective case. The paper label on the book is undamaged and the red letters are fresh and whole.


This is, therefore, an even rarer book than the English First Edition,—perhaps the rarest of all editions. The Colby copy was bought when it first appeared by William Henry Hudson (1862-1918) and bears his autograph "William H.
Hudson, March 1897." He was an Englishman who, from 1892 to 1901, was professor of English literature at Stanford University. He wrote an Introduction to the Study of Literature, in which (p. 410) he remarked: "Contemporary literature . . . must inevitably have an interest for us quite different from that possessed by even the greatest literature of the past." The original price of this book was $1.25; its value has increased one hundredfold.


"It is a great exaggeration to talk of a boom in connection with the second edition: such boom as there was began with the war of 1914."—A.E.H. in 1933.

"Alterations were made by the printer in the second edition of A Shropshire Lad. The proofs were not sent to me for correction."—A.E.H. in 1935.

In this edition, the last poem is followed by two pages on which Grant Richards quoted various English and American reviews of A Shropshire Lad. The book was printed at the Ballantyne Press.

1900: London, Grant Richards. Third Edition. Green leather, gilt tops, with the author's name and the title on both the front and the back cover. 1,000 copies were printed in Edinburgh, Scotland, by T. and A. Constable; of these, 300 copies were sent to the John Lane Company in New York. Published in February.

Housman wrote to his publisher: "The new get-up is very pretty." This was the first 32mo printing of the book.


The date does not appear in the book, but is here drawn from the Library of Congress card. These features identify the book: (a) green cloth, with floral decorations and gilt lettering; (b) the title reads up the spine; (c) the cover reads "A Shropshire | Lad | Housman"; (d) there is no frontis-piece; (e) on the title-page "A Shropshire | Lad" is in red
ink, surrounded by a crown-shaped decorative frame in green ink.

1902? Philadelphia, Henry Altemus Company. The 128 pages are printed from the same type or plates as the "green book" above; this is a "brown book."

It is distinguished from the other Altemus publication in the following ways: (a) brown paper-covered boards with brown cloth spine; (b) the title reads down the spine; (c) the front cover does not give the author's name, and the title is printed in three lines inside a gilt wreath; (d) there is a colored-landscape frontispiece; (e) on the title-page the title "A Shropshire Lad" is in brown ink, inside a green and brown decorative frame.

I have been unable to establish any priority between the green and the brown books. The Altemus Company is said to have issued a green leather edition also, but I have not seen a copy.

1903: London, Grant Richards. Red paper covers with black lettering. 2,000 copies were printed by Ballantyne, Hanson & Co. Dated "1903" for publication in January 1903, but the book was actually issued in December 1902.

Richards sent the poet some copies of this "scarlet paper-covered, foolscap-octavo shilling edition," as the publisher called it. On February 13, 1903, Housman acknowledged their receipt thus: "Many thanks for the copies of the Shropshire Lad which I received to-day. The colour attracts the eye, and the convolvulus-leaf detains it in fascinated admiration."

Although the Colby copy is only one of two thousand copies—the largest printing of the book up to this date—it is apparently a unique copy: unique not only among the copies of this edition but among recorded copies of any edition. According to John Carter, "Whereas signed Housman books are legion, genuine presentations are of the utmost rarity"; and P. H. Muir stated (in November 1943) that "no inscribed presentation copy of *A Shropshire Lad* is recorded." The Colby copy is such an inscribed presentation copy and it is here and now placed on record. It is inscribed: "L. Thicknesse | from A. E. Housman | May, 1904". L. Thicknesse was the Mrs. Ralph Thicknesse to whom Hous-
man wrote the six letters (1900-1924) printed on pages 203-206 of My Brother A. E. Housman.

When Housman sent Percy Withers a copy of the 1933 edition of his Introductory Lecture, he wrote: "It is no use asking me to autograph it." Withers remarks (in A Buried Life, p. 45): "This is typical."

As further evidence of the unusual nature of this autographed presentation copy of A Shropshire Lad, a holograph letter from Housman was shown in the Colby exhibition, a letter dated "7 Feb. 1936," in which he answered an applicant for his autograph thus: "Your request is one which I have sometimes received from Americans, but I have not acceded to it, as it seems to me unwarrantable. There arrived here this morning what appeared to be your copy of A Shropshire Lad, but I returned it to the post office."

1903: New York, McClure's Magazine. This Colby volume of Shropshire Lad poems contains pages excerpted from the magazine between December 1903 and September 1908—a period during which fourteen of the poems were printed in McClure's, one of them printed twice.

For Witter Bynner's explanation of these printings, see page 120. One poem appeared in the magazine in 1903, three in 1904, four in 1905, four in 1906, one in 1907, and two in 1908. The lyrics which were thus printed are those numbered 2, 13, 14, 15, 18, 20, 22, 36 (printed twice: once under the title "The World is Round," and once merely as "Song"); 38, 40, 52, 54, 56, and 57. The McClure-Shropshire volume, assembled by the donor of the Colby collection, contains the front covers, the "Contents" pages which list the poems, and the pages on which they are printed. It is bound in green buckram.

1904: London, Grant Richards. Red leather, gilt tops; royal 32mo. Published in July.

Housman acknowledged the receipt of copies of this edition, No. 4 of Richards' "Smaller Classics" Series, by writing: "The leather binding makes a very pretty book." It was printed by William Brendon and Son in Plymouth. The title appears in gilt in three lines, without the author's name, on the front cover.
Colby Library Quarterly

1906: New York, John Lane Company. Dull green cloth, gilt lettering, with "John Lane Co." at the base of the spine.

This is John Lane's first printing of the poems, as contrasted with his previous importation of English sheets supplied by Kegan Paul or Grant Richards. A half-morocco binding of this edition has been reported, but I have not seen a copy.

1906: New York, John Lane Company. Dull red buckram, with "The Bodley Head" at the base of the spine.

This copy in red is not quite as tall as the copy in green.


This book is bound in pale blue boards with vellum spine. Housman's comment (dated June 12, 1907) was: "The Mosher edition is nicely got up, except for the stupid practice of breaking stanzas in two at the foot of a page. It has misprints too."

1906: Portland. A second copy of this Mosher edition, but bound in cream-colored stiff-paper covers with divinity edges, and with the title on the cover printed in brown ink, inside a decorative wreath.

This was Thomas B. Mosher's own copy, used by him in setting up his third edition of the book in 1922; with his penciled instructions to the printer.

1906: Portland. A third copy of the Mosher edition, printed on Japan vellum, bound in paper covers. This copy is No. 45 of fifty numbered copies printed on vellum.

Once the possession of Miss Jane Lord Burbank, of Portland, Maine, and bearing her bookplate, this book was added to the Colby Collection in her memory by John Rogers, Esq., of Portland.
As Housman's London publisher, Grant Richards, pointed out, "Mosher did as much as any man to make *A Shropshire Lad* known to his compatriots and, in doing so, in no way vexed its author, who never hid from his American correspondents that his book enjoyed no copyright in the United States."

This book consists of sheets of Richards' London edition of 1907 (no copy of this London edition at Colby) with a cancel title-page. The sheets were printed by William Brendon and Son at Plymouth, England.

1908: London, Grant Richards. First Illustrated Edition. Large octavo with eight illustrations in color by William Hyde. White (or, perhaps more accurately, cream-colored) buckram with gilt decorations. 2,000 copies.
Of Hyde's drawings, Housman wrote: "I did not know they were to be in colour, and should have preferred black and white; but the colour has a good effect in the autumnal scene on Wenlock Edge." This scene facing page 65 was shown in the Jubilee Exhibition. On November 8, 1908, Housman wrote again: "I do not care for the new edition. . . Coloured plates always strike me as vulgar." Twenty years later he explained to an inquirer: "An illustrated edition was produced to please the publisher: the illustrations were Shropshire landscapes by William Hyde. They were in colour, which always looks vulgar, and the edition is now withdrawn."

Sheets of Richards' First Illustrated London edition, with a New York title-page.

1912: London, Grant Richards Ltd. Brown suede limp leather, all edges gilt; royal 32mo.
In Richards' so-called "Omar Series." Gilt-lettered title on the spine; brown-inked title and name of author on the front cover.
224  Colby Library Quarterly

1913: Portland, Maine, Thomas B. Mosher. Cream-colored boards, with divinity edges, in a board box.

Mosher's second edition. "This second edition on Van Gelder paper consists of 925 copies." Printed by George D. Loring of Portland, Maine. The title on the cover is in brown ink; on the box, in black ink.


The Colby copy in immaculate state is No. 11 of the thousand copies on paper. Housman remarked in 1929: "Though I despise limited editions and will not let my publishers produce one, I did let the Riccardi Press do one of A Shropshire Lad in 1914." For five years thereafter, further British publication of the poems was interrupted by the first World War.


The word "Company" is spelled out in full, unlike the "Co." of the Lane edition of 1906.

1918: Boston, Massachusetts, Four Seas Company. In the "International Pocket Library" with an Introduction by William Stanley Braithwaite, dated March 1918. Maroon imitation-leather paper; red lettering on front cover. 2,000 copies were printed.

For Housman's comment on the war-born interest in A Shropshire Lad, see under the Second Edition of 1898 above. This Four Seas Company's edition was reprinted in 1919. The Colby copy is in fresh, mint condition—unusual in the case of so fragile a piece of printing.


1920: New York, John Lane Company. Green cloth. Title in black ink (instead of gilt) on front cover and spine; otherwise a reprint of the 1917 edition, repeating the error of "seeds" for "seed" in the ninth line of the last poem.


1922: New York, Henry Holt & Company. "Authorized Edition." Red cloth, like that in which the book just listed above is bound. This edition was printed in America; it contains errors on twenty pages. A dozen years later, Housman had not forgotten them and remarked: "In the authorized edition by Holt there are disgraceful misprints." As a result of this experience, Housman insisted on a contract, one clause of which read: "The publishers . . . shall copy the page arrangement . . . and shall devote particular care to preserving the punctuation and spelling of the author."

1922: New York, Dodd, Mead & Company. Dull olive-green cloth with gilt lettering; brown dust-wrapper with red lettering. Printed from the plates of the John Lane Company.


Published by Digital Commons @ Colby, 1946

In this edition two textual changes appeared for the first time. See notes to poems numbered 38 and 52. On July 6, 1932, Housman wrote to Grant Richards: "I gave directions that in the [next] edition of A Shropshire Lad . . . there should be two alterations made in the text. These directions you disregarded, so the changes had to wait for the next edition, which may have been the 1923 copy . . . ."

Housman never made any other textual changes.


The "Authorized Edition" reprinted, with previous errors corrected on twelve pages, but with three pages still bearing mistakes. Laurence Housman remarked: "Alfred's minute insistence on accuracy is well exemplified in his reply to a friend . . . 'two commas are missing'.” The Colby copy is in mint condition, with the original manila paper wrapper.

1926: London, Grant Richards Ltd. Olive green cloth; black ink lettering on the cover; 32mo. Printed by The Mayflower Press in Plymouth.

Housman's rage over this edition was, according to Richards, "great." On June 25, 1928, the poet wrote to the publisher: "My feelings towards you are much embittered by the discovery that your last small edition of A Shropshire Lad contains fifteen errors, some of them filthy."


1927: London, The Richards Press Ltd. The same book as the one just listed above, but bound in a special full rose calf skin binding by Riviere & Son, of London—a beautiful piece of work: all edges gilt; marbled end-papers; in a rose-pink protective box.


A reprint of the Dodd, Mead edition of 1922. The cover design was originally John Lane's, used by him in 1906.
A reprint of the 1924 edition, published in September 1928, even though the title-page reads 1922.

1929: Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire, England: The Alcuin Press. Printed by H. P. R. Finberg. Gray boards, linen spine with paper label. Title in black ink, author's name in red ink, on title-page; red initial letters. 325 copies were printed (300 for sale).

Percy Withers explains (in A Buried Life, p. 79) that this beautiful edition came into being as the result of "a request I made to him [Housman] in the year 1929. My friend F. L. M. Griggs, R.A., had written to ask if I could persuade Housman to let Mr. Finberg print the two volumes of poems [A Shropshire Lad and Last Poems] at his Alcuin Press. . . . The verdict . . . was favourable."

This is certainly the most beautiful piece of press work among all these Shropshire editions. The Colby copy is from the library of the late John Charrington, Esq., of Shenley Grange, Herts., and bears his bookplate. He and the poet were friends and frequently dined together at Cambridge.

This is the first edition printed from Dodd, Mead plates; their previous editions, from 1922 on, were from John Lane's plates.

A re-issue of the former Four Seas edition of 1919. The Colby copy was presented to Carl J. Weber by Mitchell Kennerley, who is described by Grant Richards (in Author Hunting, p. 96) as "a publisher of much vision and originality."
This edition was printed by the Colonial Press of Boston. A second copy was opened, in the Jubilee Exhibition, to show the pictorial end-papers in green. This edition was reprinted in 1936 (no copy at Colby).

This is a reprint of "Little Blue Book No. 306," first published in 1920, no copy of the 1920 edition at Colby. Shown with this edition was the Haldeman-Julius catalogue, in which, under the heading "Murder and Crime," this book is listed under the title "Hanging of Shropshire Lad."


This is one of the bulkiest of all the editions of A Shropshire Lad. The Colby copy is in mint condition.

1932: New York, Illustrated Editions Company. A second copy in a different format: light-brown cloth; dark-green spine, with light-green areas bearing the title in gilt. All edges light green; with a blue and yellow dust-wrapper.
The Colby copy was presented to Carl J. Weber by Oliver C. Sheean, Esq., of Portland, Maine.

Colby Library Quarterly  229

The same edition as above, illustrated by Elinore Blaisdell, but printed on vellum; light-brown end-papers.


Another form of the DeLuxe edition just listed, but with blue end-papers. In a brown protective box.


The Colby copy is in mint condition, with the original gilt dust-wrapper, with picture in green.

1934: New Rochelle, New York, Peter Pauper Press. The first Peter Pauper edition. Pale green paper over flexible boards, with a brown pattern in the paper. 950 copies were printed on Archer paper; 50 copies on Shadow-mould paper.

Some copies were bound with green paper showing a different gray-and-white pattern, over stiff boards. The Colby copy is in the first binding. Ex Libris John M. Cameron and with his bookplate. In an olive-drab protective box.


One of only 100 copies, printed on green-tinted paper; top edges gilt. The Colby copy of this most attractive edition is in mint condition.

1934: New Rochelle, Peter Pauper Press. A third copy of this edition in a special blue leather binding by Riviere and Son of London. Full blue calf, all edges gilt; title in gilt on red.
Colby Library Quarterly

This superb piece of printing and binding is in a blue protective box.

A reprint of the 1924 edition; published in July. In mint condition.

Dark-blue leatherette, with marbled end-papers; boxed.

A reprint of the 1931 edition, in a brighter binding. The Colby copy is in mint condition.

The Colby copy is in mint condition throughout.


The Colby copy is in mint condition.

1936: Mount Vernon, New York, Peter Pauper Press. Brown and white floral design, paper-covered boards; yellow spine; top edges green; in a light-green box.
Three thousand copies of this edition were printed. It is a taller book than the Peter Pauper Press edition of 1934. The Colby copy is in mint condition.

A reprint of the 1931 edition. The Colby copy is in mint condition, with the original thin-paper dust-wrapper.

This “Arden Library” edition is a reprint of the illustrated (Blaisdell) edition of 1932. The Colby copy, in mint condition, has blue end-papers, with the original blue and yellow dust-wrapper.

Presented to Carl J. Weber by his son and daughter.

1938: New York, Concord Books, Inc. All edges dark blue.
Identical with the Arden Library edition except for the publisher’s name. The Colby copy is in mint condition, with the original blue and yellow dust-wrapper.

Housman, who disliked the colored illustrations of an earlier edition, would, if he had lived, have been pleased with the splendid black-and-white artistry of the 56 illustrations in this delightful edition. These engravings were done by the same Agnes Miller Parker who illustrated Hardy’s The Return of the Native in The Heritage Press edition of 1942, in which the Colby College Library received honorable mention (pages v-vi). The Colby copy of this Harrap edition is in mint condition.
Colby Library Quarterly

A reprint of the 1924 edition, with no correction of its three misprints. Published in August. The Colby copy is in mint condition, with the original white paper-wrapper, with red title and decorations.

1942: Mount Vernon, New York, Peter Pauper Press. Green and white paper-covered boards; with scenic decorations in green by Aldren Watson. This is the third Peter Pauper edition. It was one of the "Fifty Books of the Year." Three thousand copies were printed. The Colby copy, in a dark-green protective box, is in mint condition throughout.

1942: Cleveland, Ohio, World Publishing Company. Gray cloth, blue spine; title in gilt on brown; all edges pale pink; end-papers dark blue.
This is a re-issue of the Illustrated Editions Company's 1932 edition, but with a different binding. In mint condition, with the original blue and yellow dust-wrapper.


Another (and later) binding of the 1944 "Wartime Book." Both copies retain the errors of the 1924 "Authorized Edition" (two words omitted and one punctuation-mark modified). This was the sixty-fifth volume in the Jubilee Exhibition of A Shropshire Lad.

1946: Waterville, Maine, Colby College Library.
The fiftieth-anniversary Jubilee Edition of which five hundred copies were printed by The Southworth-Anthoensen Press in Portland, Maine.