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Some Good Advice to Those Who Have Books to Give

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From Dean Julian Park (of the University of Buffalo) we have received a copy of Edmund Gosse’s book on Gray—a copy lifted high out of the ordinary run of “English-Men-of-Letters” books by reason of the fact that it is inscribed by the author, Gosse, to W. E. Henley. It makes a most welcome addition to our “sentimental library.”

From Mr. E. N. Sanders, of Parkstone, Dorset, England, we have received a copy of Desmond Hawkins’s stimulating little book (1951) on Thomas Hardy. A recent issue of Radio Times (London) reports the gift of “a collection of 700 volumes” to the Thomas Hardy Memorial Room in the Dorset County Museum in Dorchester (Hardy’s “Casterbridge”)—a gift which includes “almost every edition of Hardy’s works published both in England and abroad.” The London announcement makes no mention of the man who made so princely a gift to the Dorset County Museum, but he is known at Colby to be the same Mr. Sanders (named above) who gave Hardy’s armchair to the Colby Library just a year ago.

SOME GOOD ADVICE TO THOSE WHO HAVE BOOKS TO GIVE

The current number of The New Colophon contains some remarks by the late Randolph G. Adams which are, we think, worth passing on—not to those whose names appear in the pages above, names of men and women who have made presents to the Colby library—but to those who are, perhaps, wondering what to do with their books, to owners who have not yet made up their minds. With the kind permission of the publishers of The New Colophon, we quote the following lines. (All Colby Library Associates are urged to pass this good advice on to places where it will do the most good!)

“If a book collector begins ‘I plan to leave my books to
a library . . . ’ he must expect to be rudely interrupted by questions such as these: What library? . . . What is the record of that library with regard to such gifts? . . . What are you doing to be sure that your books will be kept in the same condition they are now in? . . . Do you care whether the librarian slings your books on open shelves or in stacks where they can easily be removed by nimble-fingered and migratory experts who will dispose of them with great anonymity and profit? . . .

“... If you cannot face these and a hundred similar questions, you had better sell the whole lot at auction . . . But if you really want your books put into a library for the service of future scholars, . . . there is a right way to do it.

“The rules of the game are few and simple:

1. Select your library with care and discrimination, and after careful study. . . . There can be nothing more disastrous than giving your rarities to a library that does not want them. . . . There are countless examples on record where a generous, learned and well-intentioned book collector has given his books to his local public library and thereby simply handed the local librarian a problem and a headache . . .

2. Make sure that the curator of your books has appropriate, even academic, rank in whatever institution you select. . . . Be sure you understand, and are understood by, the top man. . . . Have him take you around his library. Make him show you the collection of rare books he already has. If you find incunabula resting on the floor within easy reach of the cleaning woman’s dirty mop—that’s all, brother! . . .

3. The next step is to consult your lawyer. . . . Leaving your books to a library is no laughing matter. . . . When you draw up your conditions of gift, however, use a bit of discretion. . . . Allow the library a reasonable amount of leeway. . . .

4. Make provision for the proper use and exploitation of your books. . . . Unless a library grows it becomes a mausoleum. . . . The job of keeping your collection alive
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is turned over by you with your books to the curator. From there on, everything depends on him... So, if, after collecting your books, you have any money left over, consider endowing your curator... The back hair of a collector seems to rise when it is suggested that he endow a curator. And yet he is singularly careful of the people he allows even to handle his books. Providing funds for future purchases seems to rankle a little less in the collectorial bosom. Remember, if you don't, maybe no one will.

5. Do it now...

6. Consider the fact that it will cost your favorite library from $5 to $15 to accession, catalogue, and shelve any item you give. Can you help bear that cost? Can you afford not to help?... Use your head as well as your heart.”

(Quoted by special permission of Dusches-Crawford, Inc., Publishers of The New Colophon.)

EXCITING NEWS AHEAD!

VISITORS to our Treasure Room have often noticed the hundreds upon hundreds of Hardy books now housed there. Those who stay long enough to make comparisons have been struck by the fact that among these hundreds of volumes, those published in 1891 have a distinctive appearance. Until recently, we have had no explanation of the artistic superiority of these few books among so many, but now we know. In our next issue, the Colby Librarian will have an exciting piece of news for us, which will do more than identify a book-designer of sixty years ago. Readers of this QUARTERLY therefore have three months in which to anticipate an unusual announcement of a distinguished addition to our library. We hope to accompany this announcement with detailed information about all the books which it will involve.