Bay, Jens Christian

The American BOOK COLLECTOR
The Editor's Say So!

Dr. J. Christian Bay is 85. His name is known by every librarian and rare book dealer in the land, and by a great many abroad. Many bibliophiles and everyday collectors have read his popular bibliophilic and scholarly books; a few are lucky to possess them.

His *Handful of Western Books* I, II and III, have been the guide to U.S.-iana collectors for twenty years. The first volume appeared at Christmas, 1935 "Privately Printed for the Friends of Walter M. Hill," in an edition of 350 copies (Torch Press). Below the title page is the proverb: "'Tis youth in man that makes history."

Dr. Bay has made history since he was born in Rudkøbing, Denmark, October 12, 1871. This may be exaggerating a point but his school years began when he was four. He took "Realeksamen" at 15; studied assiduously under Professor Rasmus Pedersen at the University of Copenhagen until he left in 1892 for St. Louis. His first bibliographical contribution appeared in *Botanisk Tidsskrift*, 1890.

Since his first position as an assistant at the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis (under the direction of Dr. William Trelease), Dr. Bay has been a productive giant with his pen. Not only has he made his imprint in literature: the sciences, belles lettres, biography and bibliography; but he has served the Library of Congress well (from 1901 to 1905), and the John Crerar Library (from 1905 to 1947) where he has been Librarian Emeritus since 1947.

In his bibliography *J. Christian Bay at Seventy* (1941), Kanardy L. Taylor lists 160 items. Walter M Hill remembered the occasion too for in that year he published *The Fortune of Books: Essays, Memories and Prophecies of a Librarian*, by J. Christian Bay (pp. xi, 442). This magnificent book, with many portraits and facsimiles, contains thirty pieces of Dr. Bay's work under the subheads: "Bookmen and Scientists," "Library Life," "Books and Literary Events," "Time and Chance" and "Americana." This book has also become a scarce item. Since then, the honored Librarian Emeritus has continued writing his memorable Christmas books, printed by the Torch Press and Simon Gullander at Skjern, for his many loyal friends. Sandwiched in between he has written such essays and bibliographical papers as "Some Vital Books in Science: 1848-1947," which appeared in *Science*, Vol. 107, and which we reprint in this number through the courtesy of the author and the publisher.

The cover picture of Dr. Bay was taken on his eighty-fifth birthday in the banquet hall of the famous Aksel Nielsen Restaurant in Chicago, by Kenneth Smith of the Engstrom Studio. It is published without the knowledge of Dr. Bay, who resents publicity like a bibliophile resents *Anobium fritum*. We trust Dr. Bay will forgive us this time, we promise not to run his picture again until he reaches the century mark.

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We are planning another special issue for February. Some important Lincoln material has come our way, and we are prepared to bring some fabulous Lincoln pictures in this number. We are open for suggestions and welcome contributions.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Mr. Thorsen:

Columbia University is preparing for publication a new and complete edition of the papers of Alexander Hamilton.

The editors wish to locate any letters to or from Hamilton and any other Hamilton documents that are in private hands. If any one possesses such documents, the editors would appreciate any information on their whereabouts and availability.

Very truly yours,

Harold C. Syrett

The Papers of Alexander Hamilton
Box 9 Butler Library
Columbia University
New York 27, New York
Bibliographical Reminiscences

And

Prophecies

J. Christian Bay
It is an act of gracious consideration that you wish to give heed to the somewhat enunciated ideas that blend in my mind as a mixture of reminiscence and prophecy. It is the order of the day to prophesy upon existential principles rather than on past experiences. Men of the year 171 - I name with deep respect Koch, Bishop, Radin and Windsor - have been inspired (as I, a lesser relic of 171, confess to be) rather by the cumulated experience and tradition of ages. Men, of you close the doors of the past and begin a new era. New systems develop everywhere about us, innocently engineered by such as now intimately the mechanics of libraries but perform or denied the pleasure of opening the books.

My first thought was to wish upon you a fourth handful of Western books. These, however, now are figuring in High Finance, which is beyond the ken of bibliographers, so I shall approach the bibliographic gospel in a round about way, and introduce an old friend, Sir James M. Barron, one of the last of our secular Fathers, inspired and prophetic. I demonstrate to you his last book hence for mystic Miss Julie Logan, whose ethereal existence makes us aware of history quite as forcefully as Peter Pan, singing upward, draws us beyond it. Of bibliographic interest is that Miss Julie Logan was the first book of pure fiction ever honored by
special publication (London having been paved with books for centuries) as a supplement to the Times (December 21, 1931). One hundred copies of this original issue were numbered and signed by Sir James and bound, – but I warn you that copies exist, ingeniously manufactured and signed in that bibliopelagic laboratory impromptu: was it at the Isle of Wight? where Dickens also was said to have been given attention. Less exposed to counterfiting was the issue in 1930 of fifty privately printed copies of Barrie's early essays collected under the title The Greenwood Hat and printed for the Earl Baldwin of Bewdley, K.C., – the copy I now show to you having served for the edification of Ada and John Galsworthy, to whom it forever is "affectionately" inscribed. My point in producing it is to show that even a rag of newspaper in a gutter, its message forgotten, – such an object, as immortalized in one of these essays, may serve the ultimate purpose of bibliography, which I understand to be definitive characterization of form and contents.

I admire Barrie as one provincialisist admires another.

My own provincialism began with my father, who came from an island in Denmark, as remote as Thrums, to California in 1851, a seafaring man, a vigilante and a member of the San Francisco Keystone Lodge of Scottish Masons. He was up in the Sierra Nevada about the time (Christmas eve, 1851) when Professor Lindsay in London gave to our big trees the name
Wellingtonia, which in a late hour was changed to
Bennindensia and Washingtonia, respective of two
genera, his Grace the Duke being ruled out.

Those were the years when our army engineers
sturdily surveyed our Western country and left a rich
dossier of description and adventure, giving also to a
wondering multitude of pioneers a treasure of authentic
pictures of our national landscape. The lithographs we
find in the Pacific railroad reports and others, similar,
publications, never have been equaled. One of the sur-
veyors, Ulrich Hellinghausen, wrote two excellent works
about his journeys and later nearly a hundred tales of
American types and forms of life. His *Landings in the
Prairies and Deserts of North America* was the first book
on the West that I read.

My father returned to Denmark in 1866 journeying
overland. The prairies scattered over the Nicale Border
impressed him deeply. So when I, twenty-seven years
later, came to Iowa, a young and naive botanist, in my
twenty second year, I expected to find prairies every-
where. To my amazement, not ever the same prairie was
found in the then most voluminous handbook of geology,
even though a score of scientists by that time had de-
bated the problem of the origin of this form of land-
cape. In 1893 Prof. L. H. Parmel hunted in vain for a
piece of native prairie in Iowa. So did a stalwart,
of this, and all the lessons learned.

Before joining the Library of Congress, I had worked in several government agencies and
museums, but none that offered the intellectual and human ecology
that opened my eyes to the impact of metadata and cataloging on
progressive seasons. I spent a decade in museums and doc-
s...
Missouri. After 1905, when I went to Crerar, Chicago for many years offered fine opportunities for specialized personal collecting efforts, even in most narrow fields. But my domain also widened. While concentrating on Iowa or Nebraska one is tempted to cross Lake Michigan and the Ohio River, to look beyond Detroit or into Kentucky, or peep beyond the Rocky Mountains. Overland journeys lead us into remote places where any hill or road crossing is significant. And how may one avoid the Leatherstocking Tales when they stare you in the face? In my case, The Last of the Mohicans, uncut and in blue boards, literally fell into my lap in Chicago, and I had a nice half-binding put on the two volumes! But that happened long before Herschel V. Jones appeared on the scene and preached about leaving books as far as possible in their original state.

In my "handfuls" I have mentioned numerous fine Western books easy to obtain in Chicago during the first quarter of our century but now never seen. Let us agree, however, that currently, year by year, new jewels turn up to be garnered by those who possess the needed instinct for permanency of interest. This perennial comfort brightened my days, as they elsewhere were directed to promote the welfare of a rapidly growing scientific-technical and medical reference library, the healthy growth of which involved an instinct for, and knowledge
of anatomic illustration; his collection was willed to the University of Chicago. Mr. Charles Hubens acquired source-material on Dickens, and the Manierre and Wentworth accumulations became scattered by auction. Dr. Irving S. Cutter very deliberately brought together the Western books now housed in the Chicago Tribune tower. The choice little Americana collection donated by Senator Wm. Mason to the Urbana Public Library, came upon the auction table. Those were the years when genial William Smith Mason, of Evanston, brought together his famous Frankliniana, surrounded by an extraordinary apparatus of sources on our War of Independence; this enormous treasure, carefully selected, now ornaments Yale. Mr. R. Henne gave attention to English poetic classics. Partly through Chicago connections Mr. W. T. H. Howe, of Cincinnati, built up a towering mass of literary ornaments, English, American, books and manuscripts, which at his death was purchased by Dr. Berg and donated to the New York Public Library.

Earlier Dr. Nicholas Senn had assembled by purchase several large European medic l collections, which were donated to the Newberry Library, whence they came by transfer to the Crerar.

In those years I unofficially gave advice to Mr. Cyrus H. McCormick and at times stood between him and Mr. H. V. Jones in their contentions for plagiarism. Jones was a keen, spectacular plunger, first for early examples of
of, books of a vastly different order, but not of less importance.

To get away from myself, let me sketch briefly the book-collecting scene as it looked then. We had here, in our early days, formidable magnates, such as John A. Spoor and the Valentines, specializing in English literature. Mr. Spoor assembled his unique Charles Lamb collection, which the Livingstones catalogued. Mr. Hubbard came over from Michigan in search of colonial Americans, as did Mr. Clements. Mrs. Harold McCormick wished for a few unique incunabula and classical philosophy, while her brother-in-law, Mr. Cyrus H. McCormick, favored colonial Americans, especially Virginica. Gentle Mr. Edward Everett Ayer sought historical American and material on our Indians. Mr. Otto L. Schmidt filled his house with valuable rarities of all kinds, somewhat like Mr. Ayer, and, like him, proved wholesome philanthropic motives. Private collections numbering from 5000 to 60,000 volumes, were not scarce in Chicago and suburbs early in the century. Mr. Ellsworth's treasury counted better than Dr. R. reported then in later years, and Mr. Charles Gunther assembled vast collections, notably Lincolniana, incunabula and manuscripts. Genial Dr. Mortimer Frank brought together early illustrated medical works and used them in preparing an expanded edition of Choulant's work on the history
printing, then of English literature, later of Americans, and finally of first editions of famous authors' first books. Auctions followed each advent of a new field, except the last.

It may seem idle for a librarian in active service to pay attention to such private activities. Nevertheless to scan each book in the small hundred composing the Ambrose collection, which formed the nucleus of Jones's Americans, each book a monument to its author and in perfect condition, was educational and enlightening; the outstanding one being the Account of the Inoculation of Small-Pox in Boston, 1721, an uncut copy, - incidentally an anonymous book then recently identified by Professor Kittredge as a Cotton Mather.

The most picturesque and inspired of all our local collectors of books was, however, Chester Hjordur H. Thordarson, a native of Iceland, known in his day as the Nicola Tesla of America. He as a child had walked from Kane Co., Wisconsin, to North Dakota, and later he had carried a dinner-pail along Chicago's western suburbs. His inventions in industrial electricity gradually permitted him to cultivate - literally reap - books on a large scale, not only his beloved Icelandics but even more extensively the great works of the ages that would reveal the forces and forms in Nature and man's interpretation of them. He was an autodidact gifted with extraordinary powers of
ter's only school where he was impressed, was the entire theater.

- Help by the genius of Utopian tradition. The old one -

collection bears witness to the Utopian tradition of sociology.

University of Pennsylvania, except that he has been exposed to the

settled position and much more. In 1946 Mr. Mathew Houghon gave a much more

private discussion of his findings. Having seen the entire book

one chapter and thought about the idea for an article. In 1939 I

went on hand in hand. He made even a Utopian tradition and the Utopian

perspective the predominant thesis of the sense and the perspectives

modernized those and others. The collection has four corners-

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