

1907

A booklet devoted to the book plates of Elisha Brown Bird, being a collection printed in photogravure

Elisha Brown Bird

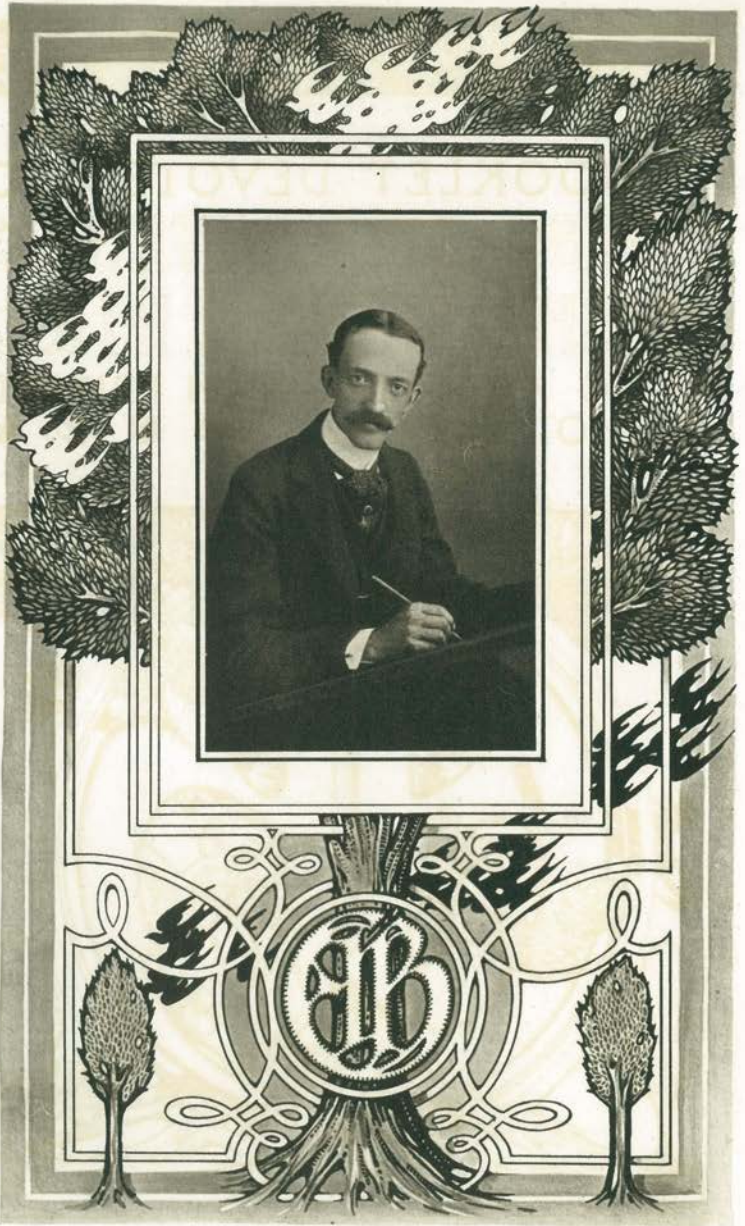
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A BOOKLET DEVOTED TO
The BOOK PLATES OF
ELISHA BROWN BIRD
BEING A COLLECTION PRINTED
IN PHOTOGRAVURE 



• B I R D •



ARTISTIC book-plates although spoken of frequently are nevertheless most infrequent. This is not so much the fault of the artist as of the owners who insist on the insertion of all sorts of fancies and personalities, and look to the artist to arrange the whole and somehow crowd the name into some part of the design. A book-plate is a good place in which to put some of the personal tastes of the owner, but as a rule the fewer of these the better the result, at least from a good artist.

It seems to me that in the making of a book-plate which is supposed to last a lifetime, and therefore be of sufficient interest not to pall by daily contact, the design should be left as much as

possible to the invention of the artist. One reason for the enormous number of mediocre designs is that the owners do not rightly understand the subject and too often override the artist and limit him too much. Mr. Bird has been very fortunate in this, his judgment having been respected with the most gratifying result when the designs are viewed either singly or collectively.

A book-plate in its simplest definition is a printed indication of the ownership of a book. It may take the form of a simple name card, or it may be embellished with heraldic or other designs explanatory of the owner's name, tastes or ancestry. But primarily it is intended to fix ownership. How satisfactorily it serves its purpose is largely a matter of its practical utility, beauty and appropriateness.

In following the artistic book-plate however, we enter upon a field strewn with many difficulties. From the simple usage of a harmless convention it has developed into an expression not only of the owner of the book, but also of the artist who may give it pictorial form.

In the countries of Europe where the pride of ancestry touched the worthy & unworthy alike, the heraldic symbol used as a sign of one's own distinction has been perpetrated in all stages of

design, good and bad, and we still find these coats of arms which once served as inspirations, and which had a genuine meaning to their owners and retainers, doing service among our modern book-plates.

An artistic book-plate is the expression in decorative illustration of the tastes of the owner, and properly, made by an artist who can sympathetically realize the feeling desired. It may express one or two salient characteristics, of temperament, habits or pleasures of its owner. There are innumerable ways in which to make such a book-plate, and as each one of us has some trait not common to all, the aim of the artist should be to embody same in decorative form, simple and direct, the simpler and more direct the more satisfying the result. In other words, one should not set the artist an impossible or æsthetically distasteful problem to solve; but recognizing the fact that in matters of composition and technique the artist is usually the better equipped, after suggestive initial directions give to him absolutely free play. The real book-plate is a matter of genuine inspiration, at least it should be made so, and its charm, value or utility depends as much on the artist as on the individual who desires it. It should be planned with care and executed with feeling,

and like no other book-plate in that it shall possess some feature that is private and personal.

There are many things it should not be also, but these are so numerous and withal so self evident that I will spare you.

If it comes within the scope laid down above it will be ideal, it may be a poor thing, but it is your own; but it may be a thing of beauty, and your own also.

Last but not least, the reproduction of the design is a matter of prime importance and here there is much to be said in favor of the photogravure which gives a delicacy and richness of tone obtained by no other reproductive process. It provides a copper plate for printing with many of the advantages of an engraving but without its disadvantages. Mr. Bird is one of the few designers of prominence who has recognized this, and a few words therefore in regard to the process may be of interest.

A photogravure plate is one of metal, preferably of copper, which bears on its surface in intaglio an etched reproduction of the subject to be reproduced. In other words, the portions of the plate representing the shadows in half tones of the subject are sunk instead of being the high points—as in the case of half tone and other blocks intended

for use in ordinary letter press printing—and the portions representing the lights of the subject still retain the original level and surface of the plate. This intaglio state of the plate is the result of the action of a mordant or etching fluid upon the metal whereby the latter is etched or eaten away wherever the mordant comes in contact with it.

As the name given to the process indicates, in a photogravure, the etching of the metal is controlled by photographic means, and the process is therefore a mechanical one, to some extent, at least, as distinguished from an etching; however in the reproduction of paintings and drawings, the photogravure assumes an important position. The object here is to produce the most truthful and accurate reproduction possible of the original. As to accuracy of outline, there can be no serious contention that the engraver surpasses the lens; but in interpretation the photogravure has a distinct advantage over the engraver in employing half tone instead of line to represent a half tone picture; and if the photogravure is not yet quite equal to rendering with absolute truth the entire range of colors found in a picture, this difficulty can be overcome by hand work on the negative supplemented by corrections on the copper.

✻ The mechanical nature of the photogravure

too is distinctly in its favor for reproductive purposes; there is no opportunity for the individuality of the engraver to leave an impress on the print antagonistic to that of the painter. It is the work of the painter in its entirety that the reproduction should portray—not a portion only of his work, contaminated with the style and mannerisms of another in whom, possibly, the possessor of the reproduction has no interest.

Looking over the set of Mr. Bird's plates here shown will impress one with his versatility both in execution and design. How happy he has been in that most difficult field, plates for the gentler sex, is well shown in the Isabelle Francis and Ruth William Sears plates, to mention but two, which are delicate and graceful and yet just conventional enough to give permanence of character. There is not one of the plates which fails to reveal some charm or some feature beautifully executed and none that fails to suggest a story, and yet without an obvious struggle. Flowers and nature subjects are used frequently, and always with the artistic touch of one thoroughly in sympathy with his subject. Heraldic devices are used with a rare sympathy and feeling for the now almost forgotten principles of this art.

✿ He also displays a fine sense of the fitness of

things, a feeling for harmony and rhythm that renders his expression of a design entirely appropriate. And yet in some of the plates he shows that virility and breadth of conception amounting to boldness that can only be attained by the true artist. Nothing could exceed the boldness of the John Douglas Merrill plate, and yet the composition is attractive, decorative and eminently illustrative, and the lettering is graceful and readable; varied in some particular cases to harmonize with the balance of the design, and give variety without checking too severely the individual style. Drawing in many styles, Mr. Bird is most happy in the delineation of the picturesque costume and setting of the Colonial period and of imaginative subjects. And finally, his decoration is the most beautiful rendering of the acanthus ornament that is to be found on book-plates.

A DESCRIPTIVE LIST OF THE PHOTO- GRAVURE AND ENGRAVED PLATES

1 CHARLES H. TAYLOR, Jr. Engraved by Edwin Davis French. The marine view represents a hobby which interests Mr. Taylor sufficiently for him to wish it incorporated in his plate. The press on the right is a facsimile of the Franklin press, and is owned by Mr. Taylor, the original being in the Old State House. The sky line at the top represents the familiar lines of the city looking from Boylston St. through Copley Square.

2 FRANK WOODS. The objects on this plate are too numerous and too self-evident for extended comment. The composition carries out almost in its entirety the wishes of the owner. Every part of it is typical of the man, and of the business which has been his lifework—printing.

3 WINFRED PORTER TRUESDELL. An exquisitely delicate landscape set in a rich frame of rectangular form. The artist here aims at a general breadth and nobility of feeling, and yet to keep away from the beaten track followed by most designers. The long vista of trees with its little dell gives distance and obviates the cramped appearance usual to engraved plates; the figure

ensconced in the fork of the tree denotes a lover of nature and books, the jester at the base whittling a palette is emblematic of a love of dabbling in matters artistic.

4 WINFRED PORTER TRUESDELL. Intended for insertion as a special plate for books of Sir Walter Scott. It has a portrait of Scott in the centre surrounded by a suggestion of the mediæval atmosphere so dear to this author, and lovers of his work.

5 ELISHA BROWN BIRD. This design can hardly be considered entirely representative of Mr. Bird's ideas in regard to book-plates; it was made when his enthusiasm was first aroused in the subject, and was the result of an inspiration. To-day he would work more in the style of the double frontispiece of this little volume.

6 HAROLD A. HOLMES. This shows the representative ideal of all printers, the carrying out of the Gutenberg idea, and how a book-plate can be treated in a very unconventional way, and yet retain the harmony and rhythm proper to the subject.

7 MARY ESTHER SAWYER. Composed in the feminine spirit, having all the delicate lines,

softness of tone and poetic feeling demanded by a woman book-lover.

8 FRED ERWIN WHITING. Engraved by J. Winfred Spenceley. A good example of a plate in which the artist was given *carte blanche*; the only thing specified was that the crest should be brought in. It is a plate that the average book-lover would like for its repose, at least; a free rendering of the Colonial period, a style which interests Mr. Bird greatly, and in which it seems to me he is at his best.

9 WILLIAM OSGOOD TAYLOR. The observer will be attracted to the plate by its odd shape. It has a distinctly personal flavor, & brings out the hobbies of the owner, such as yachting, golfing, and other out of door pursuits.

10 DAVID ALLEN THOMPSON. This design was made for a gentleman emanating from Quaker stock, and is one of the most elaborate designs the artist has ever undertaken. It shows an old Dutch room with all the delightful romance associated therewith. The border is a beautiful piece of decoration, with a double Greek lamp at the top, and books brought in appropriately throughout.

11 RUTH WILLIAM SEARS. An example

of a design which was to be like another, and yet not to be a servile copy. The artist was asked to make it like the Sawyer plate in spirit, than which it is a little more labored. It has an odd shape, but is well balanced with the two columns at the sides supported by Cupids.

12 JOHN DOUGLAS MERRILL. The limitations of the book-plate are here successfully overborne in one of the boldest conceptions I have ever seen. Mr. Bird has illustrated in an inimical manner the phrase common to a plate "Ex Libris" meaning, "From among the books of," by putting a Lilliputian figure among books of Brobdingnagian proportions in a room peopled with books of a like huge size, the light of the candle casting his shadow on the cover of a book.

13 HENRY LOWELL MASON. Mr. Mason is well known to music lovers as a member of the firm of Mason & Hamlin, makers of the famous organs and pianos of that name. The central feature of the plate is the family arms, with a border introducing various musical emblems.

14 IDABELLE FRANCIS. This is one of the daintiest designs the artist has made. It represents the extreme of delicacy in general makeup, while yet keeping sufficient body.

15 MINNIE DESPEAUX DICKERMAN. The two figures at the sides represent poetry and prose. The owner was of French extraction, giving a good opportunity for the use of the French rococo ornament. The panel in the lower center shows the owner's favorite retreat, and on either side, below the figures, fleur de lis are added.

16 ALFRED SMITH BROWNELL. A gift plate carrying out the general spirit of the Norse legends, in both picture and ornament. The artist has departed from his usual style of lettering in the plate, believing in variety, so far as possible in every detail of design, so long as the individual style is not too severely checked. The Brownell arms surmount the design.

17 JOHN LAWRENCE YATES. A typical professional book-plate. Mr. Yates is a physician which gives ample excuse for the figure of Aesculapius.

18 EDWARD COMSTOCK. One of the rare cases where Mr. Bird has used a perfectly rectangular form, the nature of the central feature of the design, showing the ancestral mansion of the owner, however, making this a necessity.

19 THE BOSTONIAN SOCIETY. The gift of Charles H. Taylor, Jr., to the Society. It is most

typical of the City in its historical interest; it shows three old Colonial landmarks, which are known to everybody throughout the land, and about which occurred some of the most important events of the early Republic. Surmounting the top of the composition is the home of the Society, the Old State House, balanced on either side by the two old places of worship in Colonial days, the Old North and the Old South Churches. At the base is the seal of the Society.

20 ERNEST L. GAY. A design made especially for pocket editions. The decoration, while rococo, is kept very subdued.

21 INSTITUTE OF 1770. Here Mr. Bird had to incorporate the old seal of the Institute in such a way as to place the new plate in a dress which would be decorative, and yet not too prominent.

22 FRANK B. HOPEWELL. One of the rare instances of a punning plate which is yet pleasing. At the top is the emblematical allusion to the name Hope—well. In the lower section are the Hopewell arms, three rabbits playing bagpipes, taken from an old tombstone in England.

23 JOHN HOPEWELL. Same as the foregoing but with name changed.

24 ARTHUR BRAINERD HITCHCOCK Jr.

A study in half tones with the ornaments brought in so as to be most effective, and yet subdued. The figure represents a Cavalier. The plate has an aerial effect, the figure posed as if clinging to the scroll for support.

25 HOWARD STOUT NEILSON. Oval in form; within a border of rich decoration, and carrying numerous animal studies, is a view of a beautiful country estate, with a reading figure in Colonial costume seated against a tree, in the foreground, and with several young children at play.

26 MABEL WESTALL PETTEE. Another of the artist's plates in Colonial style, and one of the best; has a very bookish flavor, and a rich, decorative effect.

27 M. ROBERT GUGGENHEIM. A successful attempt to obtain a unique shape. Within a border of fine decorative effect are two figures illustrative of the verses incorporated on the plate as to the return of books loaned. In a panel at the upper center are the crest and monogram of the owner, and in the base the emblem of his chief interest, copper.

28 FREDERIC T. HUNT. A strictly armorial plate, simple in style.

29 EUGENE E. PETTEE. The plate of a

yachtsman, showing as the central feature a ship under full sail. The name is enclosed in a cartouche composed of sea horses.

LIST of MR. BIRD'S WORK REPRODUCED
BY THE ZINC ETCHING PROCESS, AND
NOT SHOWN HEREWITH.

1 IDA B. HOLMES. The central figure is the head of Pan used by the owner as a symbol on jewelry, stationery, etc.

2 WINFRED PORTER TRUESDELL. A bookman seated at a desk reading, with richly bound volumes scattered around. Ornament of Gothic style.

3 EDITH E. FRAINE. The central figure of this plate is the old witch of nursery tales riding her broom by the light of the moon; at the bottom among rich acanthus ornament, a ship, the Mayflower.

4 AMY IVERS TRUESDELL. In two colors. A female figure in a library, seated in a voluminous leather chair reading. Thro' the mullioned window is a beautiful little bit of landscape.

5 ELISHA BROWN BIRD. Studio Library. A small circular plate showing torso of a man of

Colonial days with ruff and velvet costume reading; in the background an artist's palette. A two color plate.

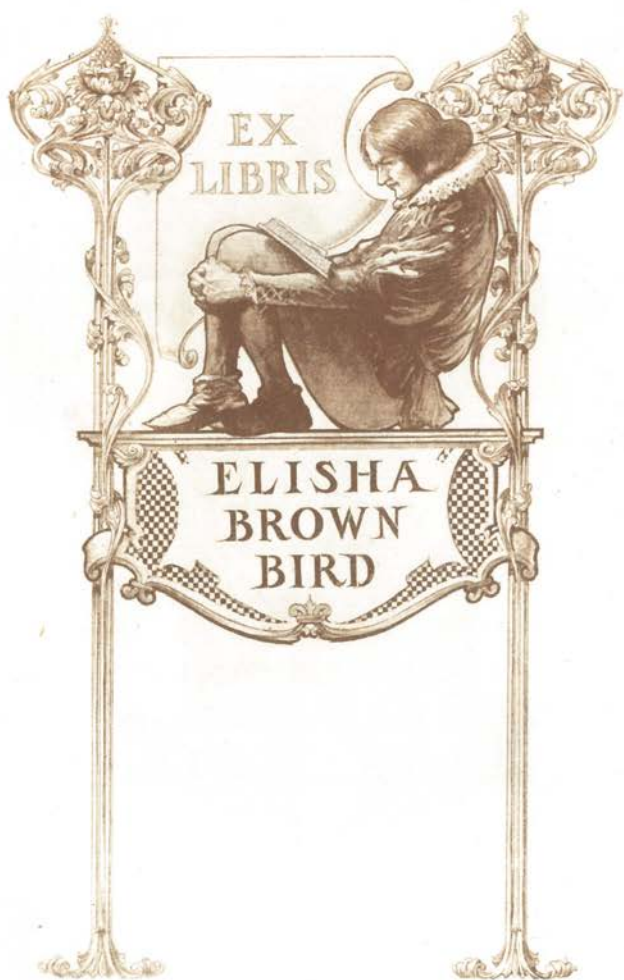
6 HOWARD REDWOOD GUILD. In this design Mr. Bird was obliged to include so many things as to overload it. A library interior, showing a view of Boston through the open mullioned window. In two colors.

7 H. MORTON CUTLER. An architectural frame forms a panel in which is shown a landscape, with a female figure seated at the base holding a book on which is inscribed "Ex Libris." A curtain is draped back at the left side.

8 BENJAMIN FRANKLIN KRAFFERT. Oval in shape with a seated female figure in the upper part holding a book open for inspection. Between this and the lower part, holding the owner's name, is a panel with an appropriate quotation from Alcott.

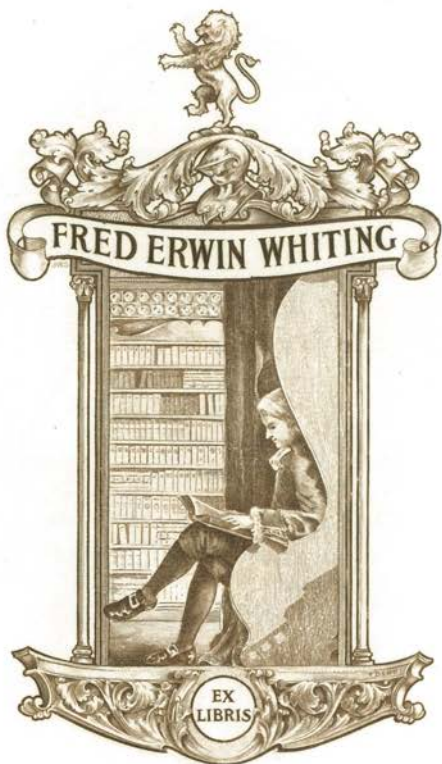
9 T. HENRY VAN DYKE. This is a copy of No. 5 with the name changed and lines added making the plate square in shape.

10 WINFRED PORTER TRUESDELL. An old bookman in Colonial costume, with paste pot before him about to paste a book-plate in his books.



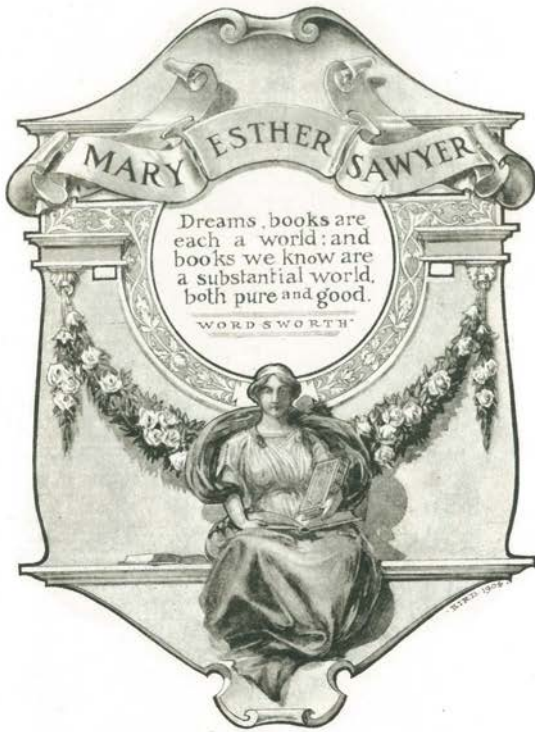
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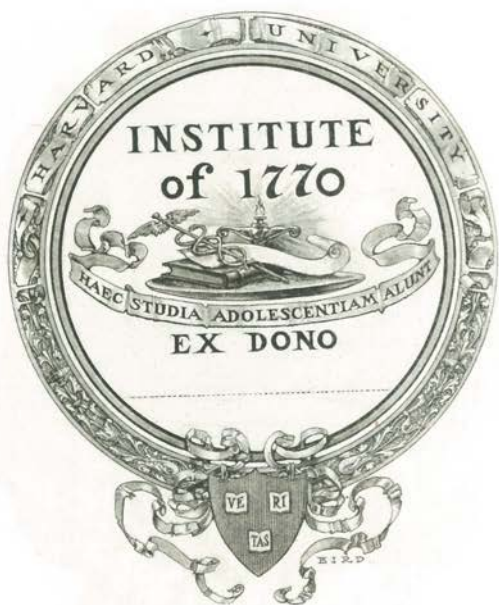






H. BIRD

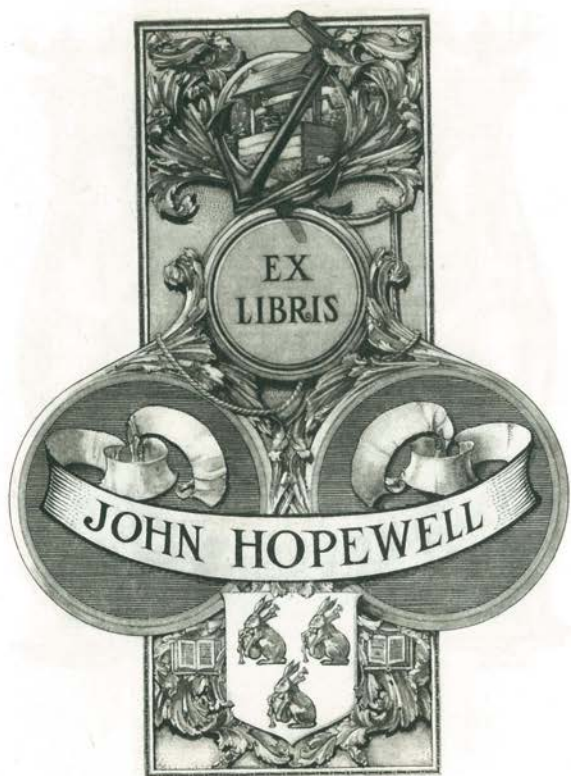




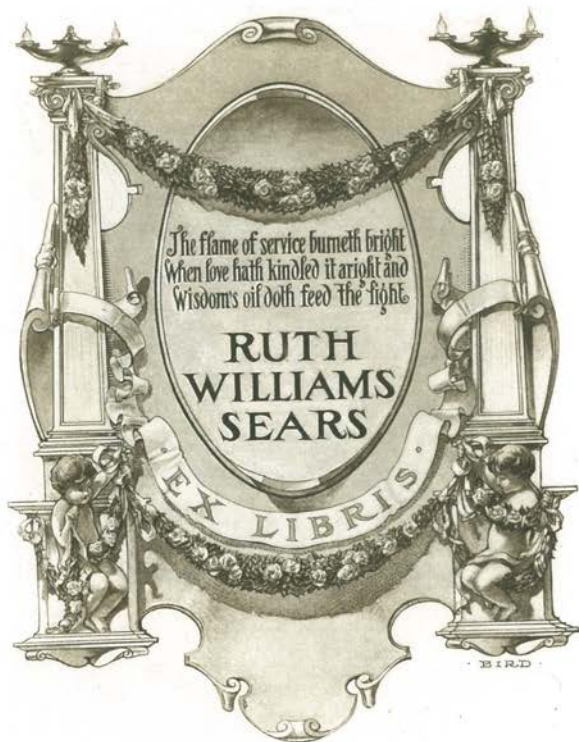


FROM AMONG THE BOOKS
OF ALFRED
SMITH
BROWNELL

BIRD.



. BIRD · 1904 ·

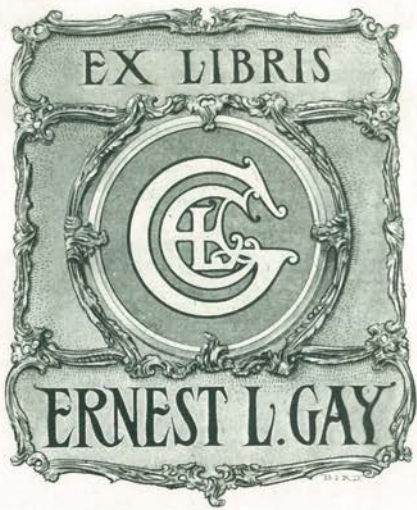


The flame of service burneth bright
When love hath kindled it aright and
Wisdoms of doth feed the light.

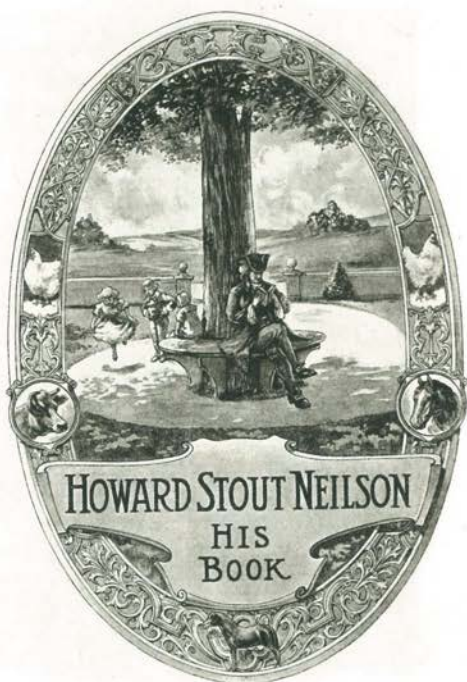
RUTH
WILLIAMS
SEARS

EX LIBRIS

BIRD







HOWARD STOUT NEILSON
HIS
BOOK

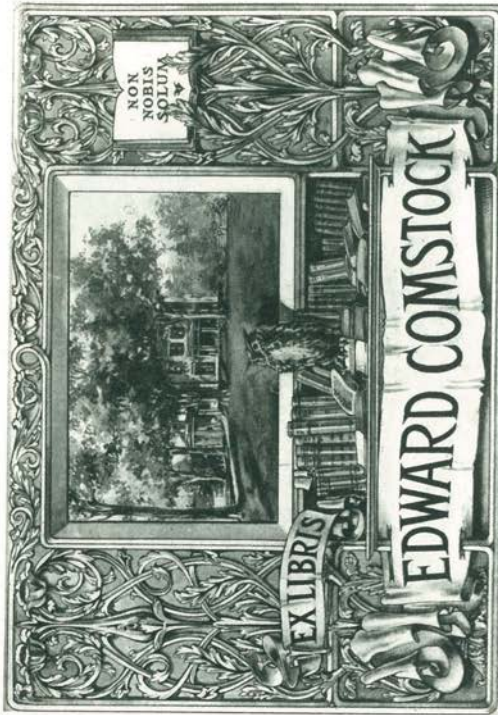
BIRD



From Among the Books of
JOHN DOUGLAS MERRILL



• BIRD •

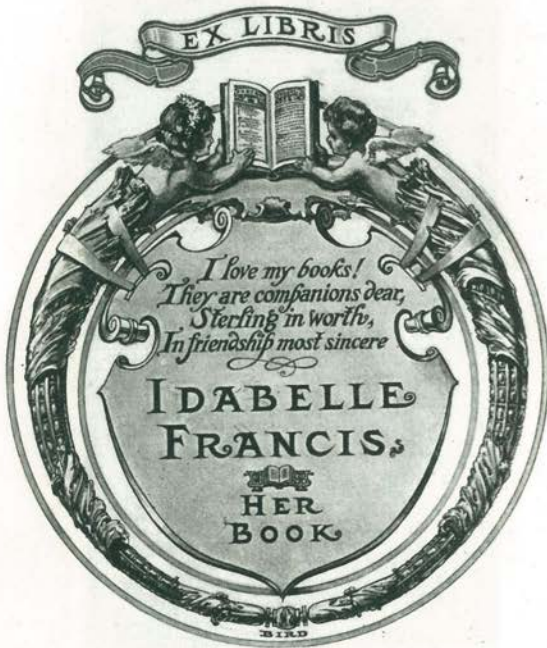


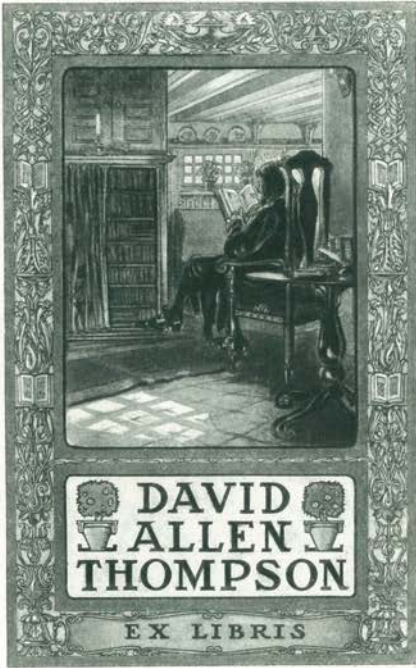
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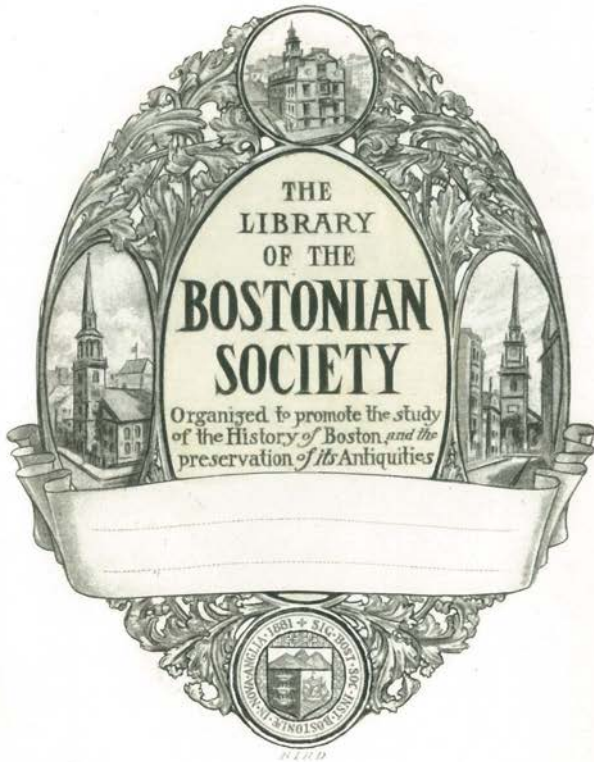




DAVID
ALLEN
THOMPSON

EX LIBRIS

BIRD



1881

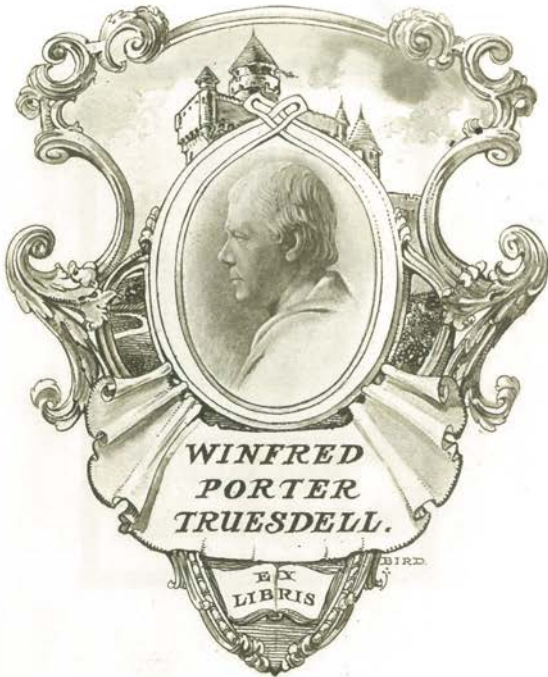




EX LIBRIS

WINFRED PORTER TRUESDELL

PAINTED BY
W. H. CHAMBERLAIN





BIRD

EX LIBRIS

ARTHUR
BRAINARD
HITCHCOCK
JR.



• BIRD •

This edition of Elisha Brown Bird, His Book-Plates, printed for Winfred Porter Truesdell, Arlington, Massachusetts, consists of one hundred and ten copies on Van Gelder handmade paper, and forty copies on Japan vellum. The text has been composed by Bertha M. Goudy, in Village type designed by Frederic W. Goudy, and printed by them at the Village Press, New York, in September, 1907.

This copy is No. 50.

Winfred Truesdell

