

The World of Rare Books

By FREDERICK M. HOPKINS

BEFORE AND AFTER THE HOLIDAYS

THE auction season in this country is divided into two well-defined parts—the half before the holidays, and that after them. Since the war, owing to the avalanche of rarities that have come into the market, the first half of the season has been used to try out the temper of collectors and the rare book trade, the remainder of the season depending upon the result.

This season the Arnold and Chew sales were looked forward to as furnishing a very thorough test of the auction market for genuine rarities. Not only were these sales remarkably successful, establishing many new high records, but there has not been a single session this season in any of the auction rooms at which rare books, autograph letters, or manuscripts of the first importance were offered that has not been successful. Evidently dealers and collectors are watching the sales very closely and can be depended upon to pay fair prices for anything really worthwhile that is offered to them.

Just what the remainder of the season has in store for us is not yet clear. It is a good time to sell. There is no doubt about that. But whether this condition will attract sales remains to be seen. January starts off well with several important sales, but there are few announcements as yet for the coming months. The unshakable stability of the rare book market under all conditions, as shown since the close of the war, is making collectors reluctant to part with their collections. As long as they are assured of good prices whenever they are ready to dispose of them, there is no particular reason why they should be in a hurry about it.

SALE OF RARE AMERICANA

AMERICANA, including a wide range of rare books, autograph letters and documents, the property of the late George E. Hoadley of Hartford, Conn.; John D. Lindsay of this city, and others, will be sold at the Anderson Galleries January 19, 20, and 21. The 783 lots include such extraordinary items as the original manuscript contract for the great chain across the Hudson River to prevent the British ascending the river, 1778; the first compiled laws of Arkansas Territory, 1835; California drawings, 1849 and later; first editions of early American fiction; Nathan Hale's account book, love poem to Alicia Ripley his betrothed; account of the siege of Ostend, with which is possibly the only contemporary engraving of Hudson's ship, "The Half Moon"; Hamilton's "The Farmer Refuted," 1775, written when only eighteen years of age; the rare Indian treaty with the Six Nations, held at Lancaster in June, 1744, printed by Benjamin Franklin; the first session laws of Iowa Territory, 1839; first compilation of the laws of Maryland with an unrecorded title page, 1727; the rare Maryland laws of 1728; the first number of the first Baltimore newspaper, *The Maryland Journal and the Baltimore Advertiser*; a collection of letters by, or relating to Joseph Bonaparte, mainly concerning his American affairs; rare New York Revolutionary broadsides; the first book printed in the North-West Territory, Cincinnati, 1796; the first code of Oregon, 1851; manuscript journal of a voyage from Georgia to California, 1852; the rare American edition of the proceedings of the Congress of 1766 protesting against the Stamp Act; the rare journal of the House of Representatives of Tennessee, 1805; journal of the council

of the first legislative assembly of Wisconsin, one of the earliest specimens of Wisconsin printing, 1836, and scores of other items of similar rarity.

WHAT IS AN ORIGINAL MS.?

THE query as to what is an original manuscript is growing in importance as the interest in and value of manuscripts advance. *The Bookman's Journal* has undertaken to answer this query in its current issue. It says:

"Questions of first or second or later issues of first editions are always with us; but, with typewriters clicking out several copies of the same work in every author's study, has not the time come to lay down what shall constitute an 'original MS'?" Of course, any MS. written or corrected in the hand of its author is original in one sense, but we mean original in the sense of the 'first.' The problem was with us before the age of typewriters. There is usually more than one manuscript of any literary work; a first draft, a second draft, perhaps more drafts, and then the final MS.—if any MS. be ever final! If, as in the case, the first separately-printed form is the one given to the public, why should it not be understood that the MS. from which the first printed version was printed is the 'original MS'?" The recent sale in America of the MS. of Stevenson's poem, 'Requiem,' with the words as first printed, may point a moral; an earlier and inferior MS. version was printed only a few years ago. There can be no doubt here which one should be called the original MS."

NOTES AND COMMENT

EMORY HALLOWAY'S new inclusive edition of Whitman's "Leaves of Grass," published by Doubleday, Page & Co., is a volume that Whitman collectors will want in the original issue. This vol-

ume is admirably edited and well printed and for the first time gives a full and final text.

"The Original Letters of Sir John Falstaff and His Friends," first published in 1796, have been reprinted direct from old style Caslon type in a limited edition of 720 numbered copies by Harper & Brothers. The original edition is rare, only several copies of which are in existence. The New York Public Library has a copy which lacks a frontispiece. There is another copy in the British Museum. Charles Lamb and James White, according to Southey, were joint authors.

One of the most limited of special editions is the Airdale, two-copy edition of "Where the Blue Begins," handsomely bound by the French Binders. One of these copies with the special proofs of the Rackham illustrations tipped in and an autographed preface by Christopher Morley is owned by James F. Drake, the rare book dealer, the other by a collector with an interesting private library. As Mr. Drake never sells books autographed to him, neither of the books is likely to find its way into the book markets.

THE question has frequently been asked of late as to what effect the new biographies of Robert Louis Stevenson, severely critical as to his literary work and personal conduct in his early years, will have on collectors who have been paying big prices for his first editions and manuscripts. There is no indication that Stevenson will lose any of his popularity among collectors on either side of the Atlantic.

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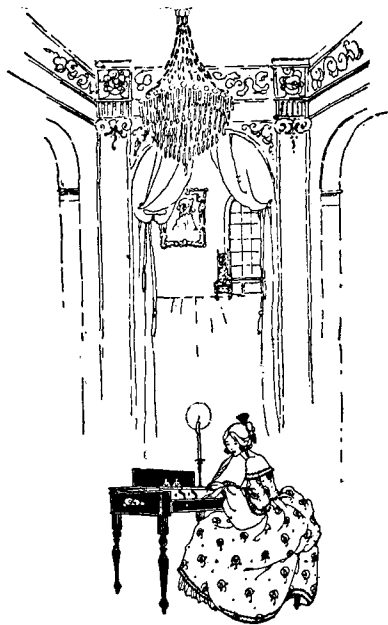
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— Mr. Samuel Butler
came to call — — —

"Aunt Anny's wit was so lightly lambent that often people missed her points. Samuel Butler came to call upon her one day soon after his Authoress of the Odyssey (which insists that that book was written by a woman) had been published. He told her that he was at work upon a book on Shakespeare's sonnets. He was, however, only bewildered at her saying, "Oh, Mr. Butler, do you know my theory about the sonnets? They were written by Anne Hathaway!" It was not she who repeated this story, but the author of Erewhon. He never saw that she was laughing at him, and used to tell it, shaking his head sadly and saying, "Poor lady, that was a silly thing to say."

**A
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The Phoenix Nest

A NEW type of American biography has decidedly struck our fancy. We have followed absorbedly his own life story as told by James J. Corbett; we have welcomed Marie Dressler, and latterly George M. Cohan, in their odd and interesting histories of themselves. But the pick of the heap, in many ways, is Felix Isman's "Weber & Fields: Their Tribulations, Triumphs and Their Associates."

Here is the apotheosis of the Broadway comedian, here the epic of the slapstick, the history of the American Music Hall's golden age. A great ballad might be written about Broadway, expressing in its crazy skysigns, its eight o'clock splendor and its Sunday afternoon tawdriness and one-horse-townness, so much of the urban soul of the United States; and any such ballad must draw for color and glamour upon the age of Oscar Hammerstein and the triumph of Weber and Fields.

Who of true Americans does not recall as a vivid memory that great Dutch knock-about act with its extraordinary evolution of idiom:

MIKE: I received a letter from mein goil, but I don't know how to writeninin her back.
MYER: Writeninin her back! Such an ed-umucation yu got it? Writeninin her back! You mean rotteninin her back. How can you answer her ven you don't know how to write?

MIKE: Dot makes no nefer mind. She don't know how to read.

So went the at-one-time convulsing lines that Felix Isman recalls to us, so progressed the tongue-tangling backtalk that introduced into American stage humor a fresh and lively element. Weber and Fields created a new comic world. They stamped their own brand of born foolishness as deeply upon the American consciousness as Lewis Carroll in "Alice in Wonderland" impressed his nonsense upon the minds of the English speaking world. In the days when there were crowns of thorns, as Mr. Isman reminds us, and crosses of gold, "full dinner pails and honest money; free and unlimited coinage of silver at the ratio of sixteen to one; leather lungs and flambeau clubs," Weber and Fields opened their own Music Hall on the Great White Way. The movie was then beginning as the kineopticon, John Wanamaker and Hearst had come to town, we sang "Put Me Off at Buffalo!"; danced the two-step, and viewed "The Yellow Kid" in the Sunday papers. The Weber and Fields burlesques were unique. They took hold. They farced the dramatic hits of the day; not particularly wisely nor too well, but they imbued New York with a certain salutary self-consciousness about its drama.

Mr. Isman recapitulates the state of the American theatre in the early 80's. Recently, in the Revival of *Anna Cora Mowal's* "Fashion" modern New Yorkers have had a chance to appraise what "was hailed in the 40's as a bit of realism, a fresh wind in the theater, indicating how banal the usual fare of our largest city's stage must have been." That fare remained often incredibly banal long after the Civil War, but in the 80's "a group of men and women began to push their way up from the beer gardens, the dime museums, the honkytonks and the variety saloons, bringing something racy of the soil and characteristically American."

Pete Dailey had made his debut at the Globe Museum, "the first of nut comedians," the pioneer of a stock vaudeville type. It was Broadway via the Bowery for many. The Weber and Fields Music Hall could boast Lillian Russell, Fay Templeton, Bessie Clayton, Weber and Fields, Warfield, De Wolfe Hopper, Kelly, Ross and a chorus of forty-two. As Mr. Inman says, if *Elsie Janis*, *Fannie Brice*, *Will Rogers*, *Ed Wynn*, *Joe Cook*, *W. C. Fields* and *Walter Catlett* could today be got on one stage, together with a "Follies" chorus, you might have a modern approximation.

The evolution of "The Follies," he avers, legitimately succeeded Weber and Fields, and he links the rise of Weber and Fields quite definitely with the rise of the drama in America. Just how far this connection can be stretched is a matter for argument, but the burgeoning of American musical comedy into the present spectacular display of "The Follies" is certainly a large and important chapter in the history of the American Theatre.

No form of American humor is more characteristic than the quick-line of the vaudevillian. From such repartee come the catch-words and retorts taken up all over the country, lines full of phrases that pass into what Mr. Mencken regards as the American Language. Weber and Fields were early adventurers with the quick-line, and they evolved a colloquial style as strongly and strangely American, and as individual, as the style of Mark Twain, though, of course, it demands the action suited to the word and does not survive examination in the study.

Weber and Fields formed a new art of clowning. They are in the tradition, we will venture, of *Triboulet* and his ilk. After all, in America, the Mass is Monarch, and demands its jesters. The notable thing about Shakespeare's fools is the shrewd wisdom mixed with their folly. And, though we be convicted of *lèse majesté*, we believe that this is the essence of the appeal of all great stage clowning, through Weber and Fields to Ed Wynn. Behind the balderdash one senses a particularly canny native wit, and native wit is the medicinal herb we all turn to with relief after confrontation by the insoluble riddles posed by philosophy and metaphysics. Many a highbrow, be it whispered, finds relief from tortuous speculation in the farcical explosion of some particular bit of buncombe accomplished casually by the knockabout grinner-through-a-horse collar, in a padded wig. There are still latent in our variety shows those "thunders of laughter clearing air and heart" that Meredith speaks of in connection with Shakespeare.

The history of Weber and Fields is the courageous history of the native wit, tenacity and inborn comic genius of two Jewish boys who wrote by themselves a brilliant page in the histrionic chronicle of these States. They gathered around them the first flowering of burlesque talent in the United States and laid a foundation for all future stage extravaganza. Today many of the methods and effects that the latest innovators are groping toward on the stage are fundamentally simply different aspects of the very ideas that Weber and Fields, crudely and with garish colors, splashed prodigally up and down Broadway. W. R. B.

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