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THREE LETTERS

FROM

BR

EW

PORTLAND, MAINE

The Southworth-Anthoensen Press

1941

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## THIS TRILOGY

IT is a happy reunion of these three letters, now brought together into inseparable companionship. They had come to me within the interval of a year or two, wherein I had been mildly insistent in the cause of the Graphic Arts, seeking to arrive at the testimony of participants in events, to gain interpretations and points of view from those of established reputation, final authority and direct knowledge, in the interest of the annals of the Arts of the Book.

The letters had been treasured during the years since, as ever with those of the good and great in every line of achievement — their autographs, their handwriting, their correspondence, fondly “laid” within the leaves of books, which thereby become exalted into “association copies.” Beyond the sufficient pride of possession in the letters made known in this Keepsake, I have prized them equally for their intrinsic value, as revealing documents for the biographer and historian. But hidden within the folds of a treasured book locked in the bookcase of a personal library, lost to the sight and consciousness of all but the

owner, these "papers" are denied the contributions to thought and knowledge implicit in them.

The invitation given by Mr. Fred Anthoensen to reproduce these letters in the series of Keepsakes of his competent press was the hoped-for opportunity to make known their story and their philosophy to others of sympathetic understanding in the realm of the Graphic Arts.



It was in the summer of 1931, that I last visited London. One particular objective was to call upon Bruce Rogers who was, at the time, associated with Emery Walker at 16 Clifford's Inn. Upon presenting my card at the address, I was told that B R was already on the ocean, returning to America, having set in motion the printing of the Lectern Bible at the Oxford University Press. His frequent crossings and successive connections on both shores had earned for him, as with James Russell Lowell, the familiar line—"Whichever way he crosses the ocean, he is going home."

Upon inquiring for Emery Walker, I learned that he had been indisposed, and was only occasional in

his visits to the office. Returning disappointed to the hotel, I was soon rejoiced to receive a telephone message inviting me to call on Sir Emery at his home in Hammersmith. The next day I found my way to 7 Hammersmith Terrace, charmingly situated with garden inclining towards the bank of the Thames. On arrival, an attendant cautioned me that Sir Emery was not in the best of health, and, in conversation, it might be wise to avoid mention of *books*, lest the theme of his life's devotion might excite the invalid. The caution was quite superfluous, as the Master-Printer of the Kelmscott and Doves presses, immediately reverted to William Morris, and delighted his visitor with a half-hour of reminiscence which neither had inclination to repress. After the interview, to me an epic one, I was fortunate to be escorted by Miss Walker along Upper Mall to view the site of the Kelmscott Press and the Doves Press, and, indeed of the Doves "Pub." which had contributed the innocence of its name to such lofty flights of perfection. Upper Mall ran along the bank of the river which had lamentably engulfed the precious types which Walker had designed.

In writing to Emery Walker after my return to America, to confirm the impressions of that memorable call, I received, in reply, the letter which appears first in *This Trilogy*, revealing the inspiration of the Kelmscott faces, and deploring the waste of the Doves type, written in the consciousness that his letter might be, indeed, the "last word."

Sir Emery died the following year.



I don't recall the precise element of uncertainty in my mind that prompted me to write to Bruce Rogers in the spring of 1930, when he was identified with Emery Walker, Limited. But, doubtless, I had made reference to Frederic Warde's having intimated that William Morris gave the initial inspiration to Bruce Rogers which determined his career. To satisfy my inquiry, he wrote me, from 16 Clifford's Inn, with finality as to the source of that impulse which directed his art into original expressions. They have been expressions of a genius which had made his initials a symbol to bibliophiles and typophiles everywhere.

It is highly significant to American booklore to



learn from B R himself, in that conclusive note, how Morris's revolutionary Revival of Printing hardly more than suggested to him the course he laid out for himself in a direction of his own.

The tribute he pays to Charles Ricketts, also of the renaissance, brings to mind the brief and brilliant span of the little-remembered Vale Press which made a name for itself at the turn of the century.

Yielding to my persuasion, Bruce Rogers has given consent to the inclusion of his statement in this Keepsake, as a contributory factor to the story of Graphic Arts in America.



The third member of *This Trilogy* does not quite share the close affinity which belongs to the other two. They have similarity in throwing light upon possible moot points in printing history. Number three relates to the present and the future in setting forth an argument for change. In this letter Bruce Rogers revives the latent question of the wisdom of the prevailing method of determining the Fifty Books of the Year sponsored by the American Institute of Graphic Arts. The letter was written ten

years ago. It is quite as timely in 1941 as in 1931. This very season, at a gathering of bookmen, a member exclaimed "We don't think much of the Fifty Books this year." The merits of the jury system in book appraisal remains open to debate.

The occasion which invited this revealing letter from Bruce Rogers was my temerity in approaching him to accept the chairmanship of the jury of selection for the approaching exhibit. His response was conclusive and illuminating. My immediate need for guidance in another choice for chairman led me to call up the office of the late Burton Emmett for competent suggestion. William Reydel answered the telephone "The very man for your purpose is sitting, at the moment, in this office — J. M. Bowles." No other than the man who, nearly forty years before, had shown to Bruce Rogers the first product of the Kelmscott Press, *The Story of the Glittering Plain*, which gave the initial awakening, and who, thereafter, led the way to Boston where B R found his career opening before him.

In my experience with J. M. Bowles, in attending the sessions of that jury of selection, he opened

my eyes to the doubtful finality in the choice of the Fifty Books of the Year. Those who have served in other years have felt the inadequacy of much of the material entered in competition, and the dubious arrival at Fifty. One striking instance was when, after selecting 29 books, the jury insisted that they had found no others sufficiently worthy, whereupon they were instructed to return to the task and choose 21 more against their judgement. Many will recall that Lester Douglas spoke eloquently of the contest as "The Battle of the Books."

BR's letter, the third in *This Trilogy*, is professional, though personal, written to elucidate his point of view as to the method in vogue. It serves as provocation to "thinking it through."

Edward F. Stevens





## LETTER I

7 Hammersmith Terrace

11 February 1932.

Dear Mr. Stevens

Thanks for your friendly letter. You are quite correct in stating that in designing the Golden type Morris was influenced by Jenson, but in the Troy and Chaucer types, both being black letter, Morris needed no immediate model, he having been familiar all his life with Gothic art in all its forms. When he began printing, or thinking about it, we made photographs of a considerable number of types enlarged to a uniform scale of five times of the originals. These were made in order that he could study the distinctive features with greater ease. All the books from which they were taken were in his own library, and among them was a copy of Aretino's "Historia del Popolo Fiorentino" printed at Venice by Jacopo J. de Rossi in 1476 (Hain. 1562. Proctor 4242). Proctor identified the type as being Jenson's. Morris thought the scale of the letter was rather too great for his purpose so in making the type he had the punches cut to 14 pt. or English as we call it. I have the volume which I acquired at the sale of Morris's books.

Morris took great pains in designing the Golden type, but the

Troy type he designed in one day—out of his head so to speak, though undoubtedly he was influenced by Schoeffer's type. He admired greatly the Subiaco type of Sweynheim and Pannartz and was thinking of cutting a type based upon this at the time of his death.

The Chaucer type was a simple reduction of the Troy type. It was intended to have used the Troy for the Chaucer, and a specimen page was set, but it would have made such an enormous volume that the type used was cut for a pica body, and it was printed with one point leads.

You do not say much about the Ashendene Press—the Dante in folio is the finest edition of the Poet ever printed. A new type was made, and a Don Quixote in two volumes has been printed with it. This is a magnificent piece of printing, though not finer than the other folios printed at this Press.

With kind remembrances,

Yours very truly,

Emery Walker.

The Doves Press type was destroyed by Cobden Sanderson without my knowledge or consent.

## LETTER II

16 Clifford's Inn, Fleet Street, London

April 30, 1930.

Dear Mr. Stevens

I can answer your note only briefly. Warde's statement is quite true, as you quote it, but you will find, a little further along, the phrase, "however transitory" — and the direct influence of Morris's work [on mine] was very transitory, lasting through only one book — "The Walters' Collection" volume. Pollard's recent summing-up (in the Monotype pamphlet) is nearer the mark, regarding both Updike's and my own early work. Almost as soon as I went to Boston, where I got my first glimpse of really old work, I began investigation (and deviation) on my own account. Today, and for many years past, I get almost no thrill out of any of the books of "the '90's" — except, perhaps, Ricketts' "Hero & Leander" and "The Sphinx."

Cordially yours,

Bruce Rogers.





## LETTER III

New Fairfield, Conn.

Oct. 24, 1931

Dear Mr. Stevens

*Thank you for your good messages and for your news of having visited Emery Walker. He must have enjoyed your call, as he has always been so active, socially and professionally, that it goes hard with him to be shut up at home—even with the splendid books he has on his shelves. My last news of him was that he was somewhat better in health.*

*Regarding your very complimentary offer, of the principal jurorship for the 50 Book Show:—I am sorry to disappoint you, or to seem indifferent to your kindness in thinking of me in connection with it; but my one and only experience in serving on a jury for a printing-show, was so unfortunate and unpleasant (owing to there having been some work of my own unexpectedly entered) that I then and there resolved never to attempt to serve in a like capacity, under any consideration—a resolve that I have faithfully kept.*

*Aside from this personal prejudice, I am not sure that I am in favor of the jury system—in printing or in general shows. I realize that something of the kind is practically necessary—*

but the grounds for judging book-making are so many and so varied that I don't believe anyone should be empowered to say — by implication, at least — “This is good — that is bad” — (which is what the selective system amounts to) unless at the same time they are able to give detailed grounds — to the public — for their acceptance of one and rejection of the other — a thing manifestly impossible, unless theses were written about each book under consideration.

I don't know what the new basis of selection is, that they chose last week; but the latest News-Letter contained enough to prove that there was need of one — whether it will result in a better and fairer choice of books remains to be proved. In fact the whole question of whether “fine printing,” as such, has any real justification, is still (to my mind) an open one: — but as it would perhaps seem like burning the scaffolding on which my own work has been erected, I am not going to argue it. Time alone will sift out the real from the pretentious — I mean, amongst my own books as well as others'. I have made many merely pretentious ones.

So, my dear Mr. Stevens, I hope you will excuse me with a good grace; and let me remain outside the controversies and criticisms that are bound to arise; whatever the method, and whoever the jurors are. It is doubtless a selfish instinct, but I fear I value my own quietude of mind, as a workman above any ed-

*ucative influence I might conceivably exert in serving on a jury. What mental energy I possess is, to my thinking, much more profitably employed in countering the many difficulties and perplexities inherent in the actual production of books. Their after-fate is on the knees of the gods—one of whom I have no aspiration or inspiration to be—even temporarily.*

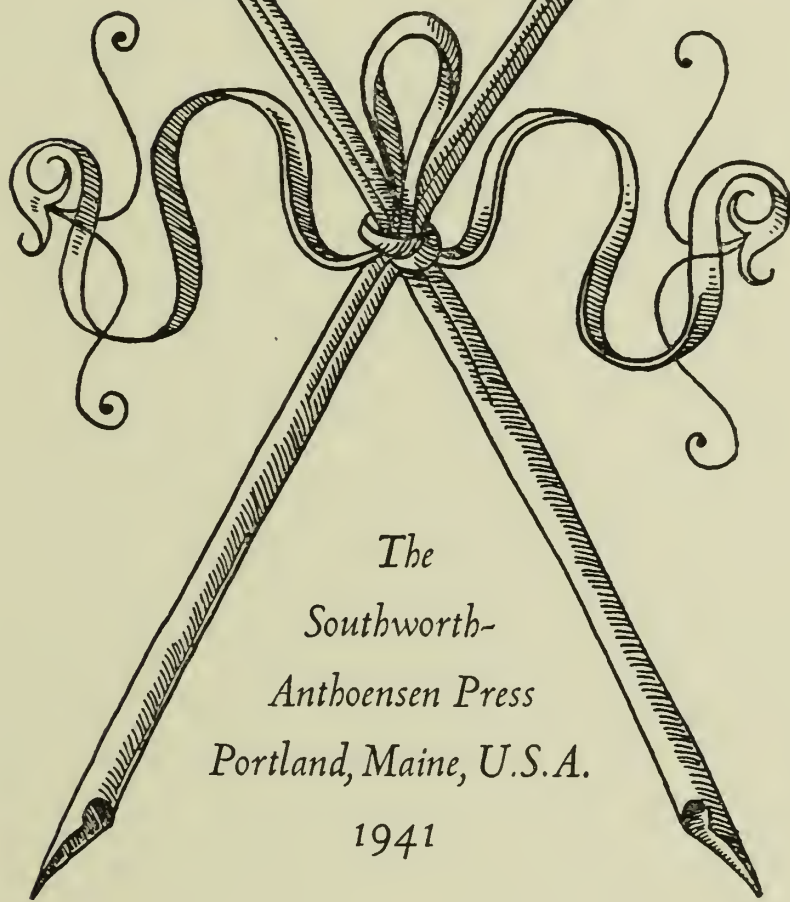
*Ever yours sincerely*

*Bruce Rogers.*





*Three hundred & fifty copies  
Keepsake No. 12  
have been printed in  
BR Centaur &  
Arrighi types*



*The  
Southworth-  
Anthoensen Press  
Portland, Maine, U.S.A.*

*1941*













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