The Ranney Collection

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This account of the Ranney Collection may best begin with the history of the two persons responsible for it—Dr. Mark Ranney, to whom it is a memorial, and Mrs. Ranney, who collected the books and gave them to The University of Iowa.

Dr. Ranney was born in West Westminster, Vermont, July 7, 1827. His father was of Norman parentage. After taking his degree in medicine at Vermont Medical College in 1849, Dr. Ranney served for several years at Butler Hospital for the Insane, Providence, Rhode Island. In 1854 he was elected assistant physician of the McClean Hospital for the Insane, near Boston. He came to Iowa in 1865 as superintendent of the state hospital for the insane at Mt. Pleasant, a position he held except for a two-year period, 1873-75, when he was superintendent of the Wisconsin State Hospital for the Insane, until his death in 1882. In 1870 he was appointed lecturer on insanity in the newly established College of Medicine of The University of Iowa.

"He married, October 2, 1865, Martha Wright, daughter of Thomas Sawyer, Esq. of Sterling, Mass." A single sentence in the article on Dr. Ranney in Atkinson's *The Physicians and Surgeons of the United States* (1878) tells all I know about Mrs. Ranney up to the time of her husband's death. After his death, she decided that a library of beautiful books would be the most suitable memorial that could be devised for a lover of books, and she began the task of forming such a collection as a memorial to her husband.

Our knowledge of the progress of this collection is gained from a group of letters and receipted bills relating to its purchase, now the property of the University Libraries. Unfortunately the correspondence is far from complete. It includes what must be only a small part of the letters she received and no copies of her letters. Those that we have cover the period February 3, 1901 to December 13, 1906, showing that Mrs. Ranney spent at least five years in bringing the books to-

gether. Advertisements of some of the sets in the library suggest that the collection was begun much earlier.¹

From these letters we learn that although Mrs. Ranney confined herself to limited editions in fine bindings and art books, books which the University could not purchase out of its regular appropriation, she was not uncritical of the contents of her fine bindings. The bills record a number of exchanges; two letters reply to questions she had raised as to the desirability for the library of the content of certain books. One from J. H. Smart expresses surprise that she was disappointed in Ainsworth's *Historical Romances*. He assures her that Ainsworth is considered the English Dumas and that his romances are at once entertaining and instructive. The other is from Thomas J. Caie of Thomas J. Caie and Co., from whom Mrs. Ranney had purchased the works of Lady Jackson. Mrs. Ranney had apparently taken exception to something in Lady Jackson's writings, and Mr. Caie hastens to assure her of their worth and respectability. After mentioning the names of several of his patrons who could not be parted from their sets, he concludes by telling her that he has just called Mrs. Caie and asked her whether the set in question contained anything to which the most fastidious could object. Mrs. Caie replied, as quoted by her husband, "If our little daughter could understand the language in which they are written . . . I would gladly read them to her." Apparently Mrs. Ranney was convinced, for she kept the books.

Mrs. Ranney died July 18, 1907. By a codicil to her will dated just six days earlier, certain property was left to The University of Iowa to be held in trust and to be designated as the "Mark Ranney Memorial Fund." From the income derived from this property, \$25.00 per month was to be paid to Bertha Barbara Stinner, who had been Mrs. Ranney's companion. Miss Stinner was to be employed as caretaker of the books and pictures and was to receive a slightly larger sum from the estate as long as she was so employed. The additional sum was so small that Miss Stinner preferred not to accept it. The balance of the income was to be used in establishing the "Mark Ranney Memorial Institute" as a foundation for a college of fine arts. The books and pictures in her estate were to be kept together as separate collections, the books to be marked with a suitable book plate designating each volume as belonging to the "Mark Ranney Memorial Library."

The University obtained possession of the books during the summer of 1907. In September of that year, the University Libraries moved

¹ An account of the origin of the Ranney Collection, written by the man who at the time was director of The University of Iowa Libraries, will be found in Malcolm Glenn Wyer's *Books and People* (Denver, 1964), pp. 52-58.

into the Natural Science Building, making room for the Ranney Memorial Library in a part of its old quarters on the third floor of the Liberal Arts Building, later Macbride Hall. There it remained until September 1932, when it was moved into a room in the basement of the same building directly under the newly opened Foreign Language Libraries. In 1933, this room was refurnished with comfortable chairs, a study table, and three display cases in which books from this collection or any other might be exhibited.

The library divides itself roughly into three groups, Dr. Ranney's library, limited editions in fine bindings, and art books. Dr. Ranney's personal library, except his medical books which had already been given to the College of Medicine, was included in the gift. It was a typical gentleman's library of the nineteenth century, containing sets of standard authors; novels and poems of contemporary writers, English and American; a few books on art; and books on religion, psychology, natural science, travel, and history, particularly American revolutionary history and the history of Vermont. Either by accident or design, several first editions of American authors are included, of which the only one of significant value is a first edition of *Ben Hur* by Lew Wallace. Dr. Ranney owned a set of Audubon's *Birds of America* and *Quadrupeds of America*—not the folio *Birds of America* published in London, but the smaller, less expensive American edition. These copies are very well preserved with the plates almost unstained. The drawings in the *Quadrupeds of America* are the work of Audubon's two sons.

Limited editions in fine bindings comprise the greater part of the books purchased by Mrs. Ranney. Of these by far the most beautiful and most valuable is the *Life of Napoleon Bonaparte* by William Sloane in 12 volumes, bound by the Hertzberg Monastery Hill Bindery of Chicago and exhibited by them at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition at St. Louis, 1904, where the set was awarded the gold medal for binding. After the exposition, Mrs. Ranney purchased the set for \$12,000. The volumes are bound in dark green crushed levant, beautifully tooled and inlaid with various colored leather. The panels inside the covers are a different color in each volume, and are also profusely tooled. However, the binding represents only a part of the value of the set. The *Life of Napoleon Bonaparte* was originally issued in four volumes. A copy was taken apart, each leaf inlaid in Whatman paper, and the set increased to 12 volumes by extra illustrations. It is described in a letter to the librarian of the University Libraries dated October 20, 1908, and signed Ernest Hertzberg and Sons:

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Mr. Ernest Hertzberg has been a life-long enthusiast of the great Napoleon. For twenty long years he had been collecting the autographs and engravings for himself, but when we were invited to participate in the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, he resolved to embody them into the beautiful set it became and exhibit it as a masterpiece of bookmaking and extra illustration. It took two years to do the inlaying and binding. . . . The engravings were searched for all over Europe and this country. . . . Many of the engravings are so rare that they cannot be duplicated. All the known arts of picture making during a century are represented in this collection. There are copper plates, steel plates, etchings, lithographs, photogravures, 3-color printing, etc., etc.²

From the Hertzberg exhibit at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, Mrs. Ranney purchased another beautifully bound set, *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* edited by William Knight, large-paper edition limited to 115 copies. The 11 volumes are bound in heliotrope crushed levant with inlays and doublures of green levant, and decorated with Roger Payne tooling. Only a few of the many beautiful bindings can be mentioned specifically—the works of Thackeray bound in autumn leaf levant, Ford's *Life of Washington* in straight-grain morocco, the *Works of Oliver Goldsmith* in beautifully tooled dark-green morocco. The 22 volumes of *Great Events By Famous Historians*, although not themselves beautiful specimens of the binder's art, may be mentioned here because the binding of each volume reproduces the design of some volume bound by a famous binder—Berthelot, Grolier, or some other. This set is interesting apart from the binding because it is copy three of The University of Iowa edition. In this connection also may be mentioned Lee's *History of North America* in the "edition of the states," limited to one copy for each state and territory. This copy is dedicated to the people of Iowa, and printed and bound for the Ranney Memorial Library.

Before turning to illustrated books and art books proper, we may consider a few which are of interest from the standpoint of bookmaking. *The Golden Legend* of Jacobus de Varagine, translated into English by Caxton, would have been the first book printed at the Kelm-scott Press, had not delays in the papermaking postponed its beginning. For this book, William Morris designed his first type face, the "golden" type, a distinctly Roman face quite different from the Gothic "Chaucer." This edition follows a copy of Caxton's first edition loaned to Morris by the syndics of Cambridge University. The *Golden Legend* is printed on handmade, laid paper and decorated with two wood-

² See Albert Perdue, "Hertzberg's Napoleonana," *Books at Iowa*, no. 10 (April 1969), pp. 3-8.

cuts by Sir Edward Burne-Jones. The title page and initial letters were designed by William Morris. As is usual with Kelmscott books, the inner margins are narrower than the outer, in accordance with Morris's theory of book design: the two pages seen at one time in an open book should be treated as a unit.

The *Ellesmere Chaucer* in two large volumes is a photographic reproduction of a manuscript of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the property of the Earl of Ellesmere. The original, which is considered by some scholars the best extant manuscript of the *Canterbury Tales*, is written on vellum in a fifteenth-century hand. At the beginning of each tale is a miniature of the narrator. Furnival believes that the miniatures are later than the text.

Here may be mentioned also Stevens's *Facsimilies of Manuscripts in European Archives* relating to America, 1773-1783, of which two-hundred copies were printed. The contents, photographic reproductions of all sorts of documents, are of great value to scholars. The Ranney Library owns copy two. Later, Mr. Stevens published in a single volume a photographic reproduction of the *Book of Privileges* of Christopher Columbus, with a translation and commentary.

A foreign style of bookmaking is exemplified in Brinkley's *Japan*. This collection of articles on the history, civilization, art, and literature of their country prepared by Japanese writers under the editorship of Captain Brinkley and illustrated with photographs hand-colored by Japanese artists is printed and bound in Japanese style. Leaves are printed on but one side of Japanese paper and uncut. Japanese cloth decorated with a design representing the wheels of fortune in the stress of time is used for binding.

Many beautifully illustrated books are included in the Ranney Collection of which only a few can be described here. Notable among them are the volumes of the *Works of William Shakespeare* edited by James O. Halliwell, illustrated with wood engravings by William Fairholt, and extra illustrated with watercolor drawings in the margins. Apart from the notice of the sale of two other copies described respectively as having "water color drawings on the margins by Le Bourn" and being "extra illustrated with 700 water colors by LeBrun," no clue as to the artist who made them has been discovered. Ordinary art-reference books tell nothing about an artist by either name who worked in the period between the book's publication and its acquisition by the University Libraries.

The *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Divine Comedy* with Flaxman's drawings are also very important. From his crippled boyhood, Flaxman showed a great interest in the classics besides a precocious talent

for drawing and modeling. While he was in Rome, he was commissioned to make drawings illustrating the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, an undertaking for which his classical studies had peculiarly fitted him. Shortly afterwards, another patron commissioned him to do a similar series for the *Divine Comedy*. All three series were engraved in Rome from Flaxman's drawings, by Proli. The *Odyssey* drawings were later reengraved by William Blake because the original engravings were lost between Rome and England.

The work of three well-known American illustrators is represented in the Ranney Collection—Elihu Vedder, F. Hopkinson Smith, and Rockwell Kent. Elihu Vedder's drawings for the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam, completed in 1884, won him wide recognition and first established his place in the front rank of American artists. The originals were done with black crayon on gray paper. This book is also a beautiful example of bookbinding. Francis Hopkinson Smith is known both as a writer and an artist. *Venice Today*, in which the drawings and paintings are accompanied by descriptive essays by the artist—or should one say the description of Venice is accompanied by illustrations by the author—represents both phases of his work. It is difficult to say which is the more important. The artist's edition is printed on laid paper, each leaf watermarked with the words "Venice Today," the design of a small sailboat, and the lion and pigeons of St. Mark's. Very different are Rockwell Kent's illustrations for Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*—not woodcuts, with which his name is usually associated, but colored drawings. These illustrations were made for a limited edition of *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* which is signed by the author and the illustrator.

The Life of Christ and *The Old Testament* illustrated from Tissot's paintings must not be omitted. Tissot, a French artist, spent many years in Palestine, which had then changed very little since the times he depicts in the *Life of Christ*, studying the country and the people, so that every detail in his paintings might be accurate. He says himself that there is not a line, not a color, in any one of them for which he did not have some reason. These paintings were exhibited for the first time in 1894.

Among the art books, perhaps the most interesting are not books, strictly speaking, but portfolios of plates. Bode's *Die Italienische Malerei des XV und XVI Jahrhunderts*, eight portfolios of large, colored reproductions of Italian paintings, is easily the most beautiful of these. The reproductions are unusually faithful to the originals in color and in texture. Other portfolios contain photographs of French chateaux and cathedrals, Gothic and Renaissance architecture and

sculpture in France and Italy, Spanish architecture, Egyptian art, Dutch interiors, and other art subjects.

The books proper provide a good, if small, collection covering most phases of art. Many of the more important artists and galleries of Europe and America are discussed in separate monographs. More comprehensive works treat less specifically of architecture, sculpture, painting, and some of the minor arts. Modern art, however, is almost neglected. The library includes a number of beautifully illustrated books on Oriental art, including *Old Oriental Carpets* issued by the Austrian Museum for Art and Industry, in two large volumes with many colored plates; *Oriental Ceramic Art* illustrated from the collection of William Thompson Walters; and Morrison's two volumes, *The Painters of Japan*.

Ranney Collection: Four of the many original watercolor drawings which embellish the margins of *The Works of William Shakespeare*, edited by J. O. Halliwell (1853-65), 34 folio volumes. Illustrations from *Richard II* and *The Tempest* (upper row) and *Henry VIII* and *The Taming of the Shrew* (lower row). Artist unknown.

A selection of titles from the Ranney Collection. Aside from a few books from Dr. Mark Ranney's personal and professional library, the collection consists largely of books on the fine arts and literary and historical sets in fine bindings that were collected by Mrs. Ranney during the first decade of the 1900s.