



BOOKS AT BROWN

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THE FOSTER COLLECTION OF HORACE

I SOMETIMES wonder why librarians do not grow to hate books — the choosing, the buying, the listing, the shelving, the “charging,” the tracing, the repairing, the scores of necessary but utterly unliterary details intrinsically connected with their chief task might well make them abjure all books forever. Luckily this does not happen — or at least I never knew of a case. In spite of all, librarians love books; they even have their favorites.

The late William E. Foster, for half a century librarian of the Providence Public Library, was a lover of Horace, and, for the last thirty years of his life, a collector as well. His books by and about Horace are now prized possessions of his Alma Mater, and form one of the special collections in the John Hay Library. The variety is great; the earliest volume included is a Ms. of 1466, the latest, an edition of 1930. The major printers are represented — Aldus, Stephanus, and Elzevir; Baskerville, Bodoni, and Pickering. The humbler items appear as well, not forgetting school texts, paraphrases, parodies, and even that quasi-fraudulent volume by Kipling and Graves, “The Fifth Book of Horace’s Odes.” To a true Horatian nothing pertaining to Horace is alien, and nothing, not even a newspaper clipping, if Horatian, was beneath Mr. Foster’s notice.

Anyone who ever had the pleasure of calling on him when he was at home, among his books, will remember the delight with which he took this volume or that from the shelf, and the modesty with which he pointed out the special merit of one edition or another. His affection was not snobbish, and I am by no means sure that he cared much less for some little duodecimo picked up for a dime, than for the stateliest morocco-bound item. Both were books, and Horaces at that, books to handle, to open, even to read. Some, it is true, meant more than others by reason of their provenience — the many gifts, Christmas or otherwise, from Mrs. Foster, the rarities presented by the Trustees of the

Public Library, a little Elzevir Horace from Librarian Harry Lyman Koopman of the John Hay, a copy from Mrs. J. L. Lincoln which Professor Lincoln had used in his classes. Since Lincoln had been Mr. Foster's teacher when, as an undergraduate, he read Horace, this tome must have had a special charm for its recipient. One may quote Dr. Faunce respecting Lincoln's teaching:

"How he beamed and glowed over a happy translation . . . How he radiated his own joy in the *Ars Poetica*!"

This glow, this radiation, we may be sure were communicated to the young W. E. Foster no less than a decade later to the young W. H. P. Faunce. It was in Lincoln's classroom, 23 University Hall, no doubt, that Mr. Foster imbibed the zeal which prompted his undergraduate translations from Horace for the *Brunonian*, and which lies behind the marginalia he later jotted down as translation upon translation was added to his library. Like his teacher, he particularly admired conciseness; many a word in his copy of Conington's Horace is disapprovingly marked down as "superfluous"; on the other hand, when Conington translates "superante Poeno" by the two words "at Cannæ," he notes, "skilful substitution." Sometimes, however, he contents himself with a chilling word — "Inadequate."

Good librarian that he was, Mr. Foster kept a meticulous list of accessions, and this contains entries well into 1930, the year of his death. Reading between the lines is a dangerous practice, but no book-lover could help feeling a vicarious thrill in reading of the Bentin edition (Basel 1527) the note "\$0.91" (but this was in 1903), or of the Chabot (Paris 1582) 2s.6d. (\$0.65)," or better still, of Gilbert Wakefield's *Observationes*, "\$0.55. Only eight copies printed."

Book-lovers, too, will sense a pleasant little story in a loose page dated December, 1904, on which Mr. Foster had copied some lines of Eugene Field, ending

"And just to think! for £20 I might have had that 'Pine,'
When I was broke in London in the fall of '89."

A look in the accession-book will complete this story, for in June, 1905, he received a gift from Mrs. Foster — Pine's Horace, first edition. It cost her — he records — £4. It's just as well that Eugene Field never knew about that.

The accession-book seems also to reflect some opinions about former owners; one volume is described as having "a Latin inscription," another is "with manuscript notes," and a third — it is possibly significant that this one was published at Eton — has "cribbing Ms. notes." As for the Avignon edition of 1813, I fear it was by no means Mr. Foster's pet; the citation reads as follows: "Full sheep, badly battered. Expur

gated edition. Several odes omitted. Book-worm perforation, from p. 71 to p. 134. Scribbled in, but with no owner's name. Label formerly read, 'Horace | Latin'."

Actually, the back cover of this despised Avignon edition has an interesting feature, for the endpaper is made of two uncut labels, reading (in borders), "Poésies d'Horace. Tome 1." and "Poésies d'Horace. Tome 2." I would also put in a plea for the "cribbing" notes of the Eton edition by pointing out (and Mr. Foster would have admitted this) that they are written in a beautiful tiny script, worthy of a better use. (Mr. Foster himself, as a schoolboy in Beverly High School, had a volume of selections from Virgil and Horace, into which he pencilled many a note, but it is true that generally speaking these were not translations.)

Most of Mr. Foster's notes (in his accession-book) about individual volumes are technical, as to size, shape, binding, and the like. But in some instances he has inserted press clippings in the books themselves. For example, a Torrentius (Vanderbeken) Horace, which had belonged to J. E. B. Mayor and has his book-plate, has an inserted obituary from the *London Spectator*. It is, of course, Mayor's obituary, and nobody can be surprised that Mr. Foster preserved so extraordinary a document. For example, "J. E. B. Mayor was in orders for between fifty and sixty years, and he preached, so far as can be discovered, thirty-six sermons. . . He had some special notions, being a total abstainer and a vegetarian . . ." As a teacher, "He touched the boy made of finer clay; to the rest he was unintelligible." But as a librarian — ! "He was made University Librarian (at the University of Cambridge); he spent the year's allowance for books in three months." Any friend of Mr. Foster's can imagine how his eyes twinkled over this odd obituary, and how rich an "association copy" Mayor's battered quarto was to Providence's more prudent librarian.

I don't know which volume — if any — was Mr. Foster's favorite. He loved them all; I remember how he beamed as he once handed me simultaneously a tiny red Pickering Horace and a reading-glass. A beautiful little book this, and one that Mrs. Foster had given him (always an added merit, I suspected), but I could understand why I was to inspect it through a reading-glass; "diamond" type is not for most of us. But I doubt if there is a type-size which does not occur among the Foster Horaces; as for size and shape, these are such books as by their variety delight the bibliophile and distract the housekeeper.

The Cruquius edition must have been especially esteemed, for its points are listed affectionately in Mr. Foster's Ms. notes. A Landin edition of 1482 is full of book-marks, and pencil-marks show that these were Mr. Foster's, not those of some previous owner. (This would, I

think, be my own favorite for many reasons, its sheer legibility, the liveliness of its Latin notes, the neatness of the Ms. annotations in a sixteenth century hand.) Other examples might be preferred for age, for rarity, for this reason or that.

But large and small, handsome and plain, erudite and merely elegant, they stand today in the John Hay Library, all together a choice congregation, for the amateur to peruse and the scholar to study. Indeed, they have reached a haven which would have delighted Mr. Foster and would even, I think, have pleased the poet himself, who wrote,

"Exegi monumentum aere perennius."

Ben C. Clough

PROFESSOR OF GREEK AND LATIN CLASSICS

During the last six months the Library has received many varied and important gifts. Two of these in particular are of especial interest.

Mrs. Maude E. C. Covell, Pembroke, '02, has donated books and spare time. Mrs. Covell volunteered after the Librarian's plea for extra help. With other gifts of Mr. Frederick S. Peck, the broadside of "Yankee Doodle" represents the first publication of the song abroad, and probably the first publication of its tune.

Other contributors for the period July 1, 1942 — December 27, 1942 whose gifts were deeply appreciated.

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