

His pond an Ocean, his parterre a Down:

.....
Lo, what heaps of littleness around!
The whole, a labour'd Quarry above
ground.

On ev'ry side you look, behold the Wall!
No pleasing Intricacies intervene,
No artful wilderness to perplex the scene;
Grove nods at grove, each Alley has a
brother,
And half the platform just reflects the
other.

The suff'ring eye inverted Nature sees,
Trees cut to Statues, Statues thick as trees,
With here a Fountain, never to be play'd,
And there a Summer-house, that knows
no shade;

Here Amphitrite sails thro' myrtle bowers;
There Gladiators fight, or die, in flow'rs;
Un-water'd see the drooping sea-horse
mourn,

And swallows roost in Nilus' dusty Urn.
He advised Burlington to

Consult the Genius of the Place in all;
That tells the Waters to rise, or fall,
Or helps th' ambitious Hill the heav'ns
to scale,

Or scoops in circling theatres the Vale,
Calls in the Country, catches opening
glades,

Joins willing woods, and varies shades
from shades,

Now breaks, or now directs, th' intending
Lines;

Paints as you plant, and, as you work,
designs.

Still follows Sense, of ev'ry Art the Soul,
Parts answer'ing parts shall slide into a
whole,

Spontaneous beauties all around advance,
Start ev'n from Difficulty, strike from
Chance;

Nature shall join you, Time shall make
it grow
A Work to wonder at. . . .

WILLIAM KENT (1685-1748), the first real landscape architect and perhaps the most important member of the Burlington circle, was a young Englishman who had studied in Rome for ten years before he was brought back to England by Burlington to complete certain paintings at Burlington House. Under Burlington's sponsorship he became inspector of royal paintings (1727) and portrait painter (1739) to George II. As a member of the important Board of Works he designed such buildings as the Horse Guards and the Royal Mews. However, his place in the development of the natural garden is of more importance than his work as an architect. In a picturesque phrase of Horace Walpole, Kent "leaped the fence, and saw that all nature was a garden." He was the first, again in Walpole's words, to see that the old-fashioned garden should be "set free from its prim regularity, and the gentle stream taught to serpentine." He modelled his pictorial effects principally on the style of Claude Lorraine. "It was Kent . . . who apparently first grasped that the way to bring into being the artist's and philosopher's conception of ideal natural landscape was to study and to some extent reproduce

Collecting Press Books

By WILL RANSOM

COLLECTING is a normal human instinct which needs neither explanation nor apology. Almost everyone suffers from it in some degree, and many of us actually enjoy it. That spirit of acquisitiveness and pride of possession is stimulated by many diverse objectives, ranging in value and significance from butterflies to books. Most collecting programs represent an interest in a special subject, such as art or science, or in a notable personality and his works. Even rarity is esteemed, in a belief that its inherent limitations possess a strange esoteric quality.

Books are collected, principally, for what they contain of the facts and ideas that record the development of civilization and culture. Books came into being to supply a need for convenient packages of words, and they continue to serve that useful purpose. Some collectors are interested in source materials of history, others in literary style, and still others, in the writings of a particular author.

And there is another field of book collecting which is concerned only, or primarily, with the physical properties of the package, disregarding literary content except as it may appear to have influenced the technical planning of the visual and tactile presentation. Such specimens are called press books, emphasizing their material rather than their literary qualities. They are admired and cherished for the way they are printed or illustrated or designed, or for the personality of the individual who

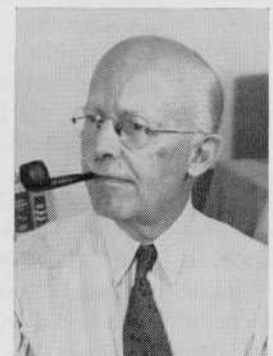
produced them. In short, press books are collected for any reason except for what they have to say. In fact, few of them are read; rather, they are preserved in what the dealers call "mint state" as art objects with no useful function. But they are fascinating to those collectors who are fascinated by them.

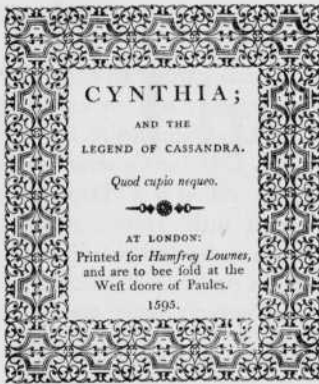
The term "press books" comes from the fact that most of them are identified by a "press" name, usually indicating the work of one printer. This was generally true in the earlier period, but in more recent years the classification often represents only a publishing program. The compelling factor in both instances is that such books are designed and produced by, or under the direction of, a single creative or dynamic personality.

Interest in this field was first aroused by the productions of private presses, those usually modest and unimportant personal essays in craftsmanship that have never been adequately defined. A private press is, in the simplest terms, a small quantity of printing equipment housed in the home and used for the pleasure of the operator. The most frequent incentive is enjoyment of something to play with, the do-it-myself instinct. Yet there are other stimuli: authors have set out to give form and substance to their own writings; designers have been impelled to record their ingenuity in the use of type and decoration; artists have used books as vehicles for their drawings or engravings. Whatever the purpose, a

About the Author

No one in the University can write with more authority—and loving care—on any phase of book making than can Will Ransom, who has spent a lifetime as typographer and book designer. The products of private and special presses have long been his hobby. His sensitive appreciation of the beauty of fine books is reflected in this article. The examples used are from his private collection.





Reprinted by the Beldornie Press, 1841.
(Slightly reduced.)

private press may be defined as the expression, by means of craftsmanship, of a personal ideal conceived in freedom and maintained in independence. By extension, the moving spirit may provide only direction to professional workers, as in the publishing programs mentioned above.

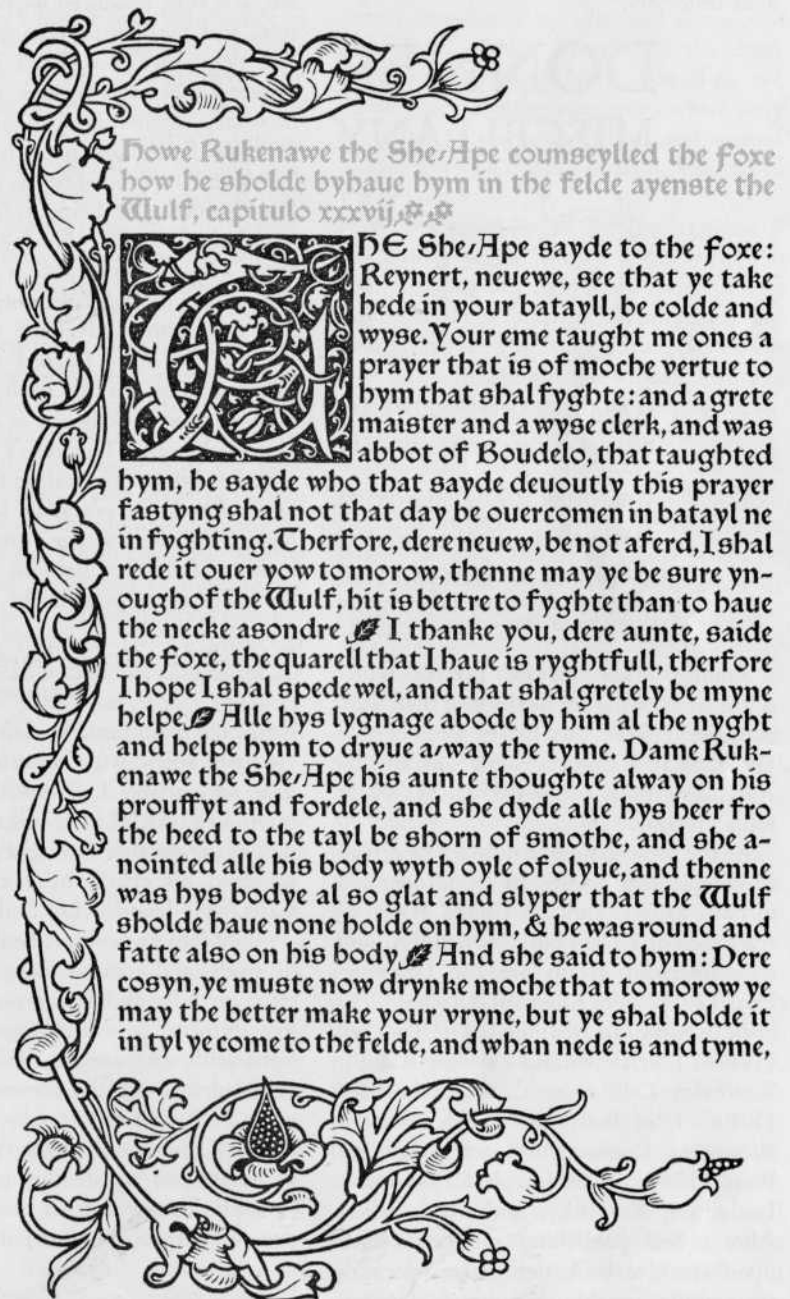
The earliest private presses to be noticed by collectors were established by English country gentlemen who provided press and type and then engaged professional printers to put into books or pamphlets literary material of the founder's choice. Only a few copies were printed, to be distributed among acquaintances. The world at large never heard of them at that time. One such enterprise, if a hobby deserves so definite a term, was the Beldornie Press (1840-1843), on the Isle of Wight, where Edward Vernon Utterson engaged a succession of printers to produce sixteen reprints of minor poems, with his annotations, in editions of from twelve to sixteen copies. Among the better-known of other such pioneers are: the Strawberry Hill Press (1757-1789), of Horace Walpole; the Auchinleck Press (1815-1818), of Sir Alexander Boswell (son of the man who made Doctor Johnson famous); and the Lee Priory Press (1813-1823), of Sir Egerton Brydges.

If all these ventures had remained private, they would have made no great stir in the world. The patrons and printers and the few favored recipients would have enjoyed the issues briefly, and oblivion would have swallowed them. But there are always have-nots curious about what the haves are doing, or covetous of a hard-to-get rarity. One early-nineteenth-century collector, J. W. K. Eyton, had a passion for unique copies which he arranged to have printed on special paper so that he might enjoy the smug satisfaction of possessing "the only copy in existence." Book dealers were quick to recognize this interest and "books from private presses" began to be listed in the catalogues.

But that was only the beginning. If there had never been any other kind of private press productions, they would have remained curious but relatively unimportant collectors' items. In 1891, however, William Morris established the Kelmscott Press (1891-1898), on the same basis of privacy and free choice, to demonstrate his ideas of how books should be made. In doing so, he inaugurated an entirely new era in the history of graphic arts. He was, at that time, firmly established as a writer, an artist, and a designer of furniture, wall papers, tapestries, stained-glass windows, and similar furnishings. He noticed and deplored the low level of printing and bookmaking then prevalent, and decided that he, as a practicing artist, should do

something about it. So he set out to produce books as works of art. He designed special type faces (now outmoded), drew innumerable decorations, sought for the best and most permanent papers and inks, and produced books unlike any others of the period, modelling his pages on those in manuscript and printed volumes of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

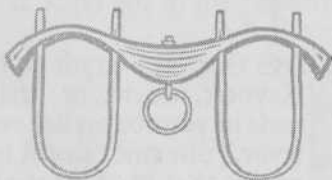
This did not imply that interest in well-made books was entirely a new idea. There had been great printers before and their work is still admired and collected for inherent distinction, even though their books were produced in the way of public business. It was the private and personal elements that provided fresh incentives for collecting.



A page from one of the simpler Kelmscott Press Books. (Original in two colors; reduced.)

Immediately after the impact of Morris's revolutionary gesture, a number of other artists and self-appointed prophets entered the field with more or less adequate imitations. C. R. Ashbee at the Essex House Press (1898-1909), Charles Ricketts at the Vale Press (1896-1904), Lucien Pissarro at the Eragny Press (1894-1914), and some few others designed types (none of which have survived), drew illustrations and often engraved them on wood, commissioned special papers, and generally entered the area of "fine book" design and production. The principal differences between these and the earlier specimens from gentlemen's presses were that the major emphasis was on presentation and that the books, although issued in small editions, were offered for sale—and quickly sold to avid collectors.

DONNER MISCELLANY



41 DIARIES AND DOCUMENTS

EDITED BY CARROLL D. HALL

THE BOOK CLUB OF CALIFORNIA

SAN FRANCISCO 1947

Title page by the L D Allen Press,
A Modern American private press.
(Original in two colors; reduced.)

Among other private presses which achieved even higher distinction than those mentioned were the Doves Press (1900-1916), of T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, and the Ashendene Press (1894-1935), of C. H. St. John Hornby.

At the present time, a number of private or independent presses are being operated, in both Europe and the United States, by craftsmen or retired businessmen. Among the American group are the Grabhorn Press (1919-), of Edwin and Robert Grabhorn in San Francisco; the L-D Allen Press (1940-), of Lewis and Dorothy Allen in Kentfield, California; the Redcoat Press (1940-), of Betty and Ralph Sollitt in Westport, Connecticut; the Gravesend Press (1949-), of Joseph C. Graves in Lexington, Kentucky, and many others. Also a few publishing programs based upon sensitive book design are operating successfully, notably the Limited Editions Club, directed by George Macy in New

York City; the Nonesuch Press, directed by Sir Francis Meynell in London; and the Folio Society, directed by Charles Ede, also in London.

During the forty-four years from the inception of Kelmscott to the closing of Ashendene, collecting press books became an active area in the broader reaches of book collecting as a whole, and it is a field of interest which includes, according to the collector's choice, the work of many minor individuals whose work is often less impressive than that of the masters but which is often exciting within its own limits.

The value of press books, however, does not stop with attractiveness or collectibility or rarity. The experimental work begun by Morris has affected the direction of all graphic arts history. Private press books are, as a rule, produced without regard for cost, and for a time commercial printers and publishers recognized no connection between that extravagance and their own necessary economies. Eventually, however, the basic idea that a book should be "designed"—planned for its purpose—was found worthy of being translated into a practical formula. Nowadays, thinking about a book's appearance is common practice among thoughtful publishers (including our own University of Oklahoma Press). We have learned that taste and discrimination may be applied as well to a million paperback books as to a few elaborate volumes. The result is not so impressive, but a practical aesthetic is maintained, and the everyday books of commerce, on the average, are much better looking than they used to be, thanks to the influence of press books.

English Landscape Garden . . .

Continued from page 24

landscape paintings."⁹ His method was "to paint a field with beautiful objects, natural and artificial, disposed like colours upon a canvas."¹⁰ He utilized the principles of perspective and light and shade. He achieved his effects by a variety of contrasts. He blended hill and valley imperceptibly into each other; he developed gentle swells and concave scoops; he clumped trees on hills and lawns too extensive or too uniform; he counteracted the glare of open fields with areas shaded by trees. He veiled deformities by screens of trees and gave animation to vistas by erecting seats, temples, and other buildings. He designed pathways and "floated" water in conformity with the new taste in "serpentine meanders." He even planted dead trees and

tree stumps to suggest the decay sometimes seen in nature itself.¹¹

Kent's most typical garden and the only one of his masterpieces still in existence was Rousham Park in Oxfordshire, laid out between 1738 and 1741 for General James Dormer. Walpole called it a "Daphne in little; the sweetest little groves, streams, glades, porticos, cascades and river imaginable; all the scenes perfectly classic."

The expression "perfectly classic" exactly places Kent as a gardener. His ideas of nature and of landscape were formed not from any observation of Nature itself, but from a study of the canvases of Claude and other even more artificial producers of the careful arrangements of groupings of trees and rocks, of temples and sculpture, of men and animals which pleased the *virtuosi* of the day. Nature, herself, was to them uncouth. Her charms might be great, but they were latent, and long training under a fully qualified master of deportment was essential before she could hope to be agreeable to a person of taste and sensibility. Kent, following . . . what his friend Pope had done at Twickenham, used his training as a painter to produce in his client's grounds the scenes which hitherto had only hung on their walls. So allied were these two forms of picture making that Walpole included his "History of the Modern Taste in Gardening" as a chapter of his "Anecdotes of Painting."¹³

To Walpole Rousham was "the most engaging of all Kent's works . . . at least, in the opening and retiring shades of Venus's vale. The whole is as elegant and antique as if the emperor Julian had selected the most pleasing solitude about Daphne to enjoy philosophic retirement." Rousham was indeed a kind of Claudian landscape, such as Thomson had described in his long nature poem, *The Seasons* (1726-30). It included temples and sculptured figures, a grotto, running water and a still pool, a contrast of light and shade, the serpentine line in the changing contours of the grounds and pathways, and vistas of landscape that reminded one of favorite pictures. "It is that rarity an organic yet disciplined design, applying order loosely yet lucidly to a slice of English country, and, in effect, crystallising Nature." It is "the ideal balance intermediate between earlier geometrical formality and the subsequent loose naturalism."

In the years to come the influence of Kent and the Palladians was to be a galvanizing force in stimulating the work of a celebrated group of architects and landscape gardeners who were to transform the very face of the English countryside into a series of pictorial compositions that were to remain almost unfaded down into our own times.

¹¹ Walpole, *ibid.*

¹² H. A. Tipping, *English Gardens* (London, 1925).

¹³ Hussey, *ibid.*

⁹ Hussey, *ibid.*

¹⁰ Henry Home, Lord Kames, *The Gentleman Farmer* (Edinburgh, 1776).