

THE PLIMPTON COLLECTION OF PLAYS

Mr. George A. Plimpton, '76, recently presented to the College a large collection of material relating to the English and American theatre of the nineteenth century. More than 1200 plays are represented in the collection in addition to numerous playbills, programs, libretti, histories, and after-pieces, as well as an autographed photograph of Edwin Booth as Richelieu. The collection seems to have been a part of the extensive theatrical library of Mr. Edward Boltwood of Pittsfield, whose father was born in Amherst in 1839 and moved to Pittsfield in 1870. Mr. Boltwood, although an active member of the Berkshire bar, made the theatre his avocation and found time to write a number of small pieces for the stage, one of which is included in the present collection. He was also instrumental in establishing the William Parke Stock Company in Pittsfield, and continued his connection with this company by writing reviews of its plays.

The collection is made up, for the most part, of paper-covered editions of plays, but many have been reinforced with cardboard bindings to serve as prompt-books. Directions for producing the plays have been written in these, and should afford the student of dramatic art some idea of the preparation given these "minor" plays by the stock companies of the '80's. Many of the plays are listed as "Minor Theatre," since the bulk of the material makes no pretensions to literary significance, but is made up of stereotyped farces, comedies, and melodramas,—poor examples of Drama (capital D) from the modern viewpoint, but immensely popular with the playgoing public of the period. There are many examples of the works of practically every famous playwright of the era, including Tom Robertson, James Sheridan Knowles, Dion Boucicault, M. R. Lacy, Douglas Jerrold, who, according to Allardyce Nicoll's "History of Early 19th Century Drama," (I, 186-7) "was holding forth his hand, if but weakly, to the author of *Strange Interlude*"; Bronson Howard, Tom Taylor, Henry J. Byron, John Howard Payne, "the American Roscius who failed to live up to his reputation," and many others. Of the editions of plays in the collection the most interesting are the unique Spencer's "Boston Theatre"; Turner's "Dramatic Library of Acting Plays with Spirited Engravings," published in Philadelphia; the Ames series

of "Standard and Minor Drama," published in Ohio in the '70's, and Roorbach's "Editions of Plays," issued by a famous New York house of the '50's. In the English editions are the well-known Cumberland's "British Theatre" with engravings by Bonner from drawings made in the theatre by R. Cruickshank; and Lacy's "Acting Editions," predecessor to the present Samuel French Company.

Of no little interest are the many adaptations and acting versions of popular novels and of Shakespeare. In the former category we find, among others, "The Heart of Midlothian," "Clarissa Harlowe," "Jane Eyre," "The Scarlet Letter," and an adaptation of Milton's "Comus" by George Colman. Prominent among the alterations of Shakespeare are Colley Cibber's "Richard III"; Tate's "King Lear"; Macklin's prompt-book for "The Merchant of Venice"; Macready's "King John"; Charles Kean's "As You Like It," and Garrick's treatment of "Taming of the Shrew," under the title, "Katherine and Petruchio," in which the adapter has almost dispensed with Hortensio and Bianca. An illuminating observation is made by "T. C. W." in his foreword to this edition. He writes, "Garrick's version has retained the stage as an especial favorite for a hundred years, while the original play has during the same period been consigned to the shelves of the library, among other works of the immortal bard, now deemed unfit for presentation." No bardolatry here!

As would be expected, tragedies and melodramas of both the tearful and hair-raising variety outnumber all other types in the collection except the one-act plays, although there are more than a hundred libretti of musical comedies and comic operas of the period.

Such an extensive collection as this one, giving as it does a complete picture of the early nineteenth century theatre which, until recently, has been disowned by the world of letters, should prove of value to the research student in drama and to the traveller on the byways of dramatic literature. He will find here, especially in the melodramas, plays which reflect a systematically romantic world, whose ethics are so naïve and simple that it seems a pity, sometimes, that Ibsen had to rise and complicate them as he destroyed the tight formula by which they were compounded. In them virtue is triumphant to the point of monotony, the villain

rarely fails to repent when he is brought to heel in the final tableau; and the comedy, less salutary than slapstick, is at least unspoiled by our modern predilection for Freudian themes.

It is hoped that the College may benefit by more bequests of this nature in the future, since an effort is being made at the present time to form the basis for a theatrical library to be housed, one day, in the College Theatre.

Curtis Canfield.

A CENSUS OF EXTINCT BIRDS

Mr. Burlingham Schurr, curator of the Amherst College Museum of Zoölogy, is engaged in taking a census of extinct and near-extinct birds in the museums and private collections of the United States and other lands. Mounted specimens, skins, and eggs are included in the survey, together with information, where it is available, as to when and where the specimens were originally collected. Among the vanished species that the Amherst naturalist is pursuing by correspondence are listed the great auk, the Eskimo curlew, the heath hen, the passenger pigeon, the California vulture, the Carolina parakeet, and the ivory-billed woodpecker. Any private collector who owns a relic of these departed birds or knows where any specimens exist in private hands will confer a favor by notifying the Curator of the fact. Correspondence with museums was begun in February and already a large number of replies have been received. Mr. Schurr hopes to have his census completed in June.

Never before in ornithological research has an attempt been made to ascertain the number of extinct or nearly extinct birds that have been preserved by institutions or by individual collectors. To know the exact number of such specimens and their whereabouts will be in itself interesting information to bird specialists. In addition the check up will reveal facts of importance as to when the various species became extinct in any given region.

For example, the reports so far received show that the Peabody Museum at Salem, Mass., has six passenger pigeons, all of which were taken in the state between 1868 and 1875. The Zoölogy Museum of Wellesley College reports two passenger pigeons, one of which was taken at Natick, Mass., in 1870. The Amherst College Museum of Zoölogy has three passenger pigeons, one of which was

collected in Amherst in the spring of 1888. But from far off Colorado comes the report from the Museum of Natural History at Denver that among the twenty-eight specimens of the passenger pigeon owned by this museum, are two secured by Samuel Lake at Lawrence, Mass., in 1895. In this instance the data relevant to the latest appearance in New England of an extinct bird come from a museum located outside the region; it is typical of what a nationwide census of such specimens may be expected to disclose. So far the last specimen of the passenger pigeon collected appears to be one taken at Iowa City in 1898, and now preserved with four of earlier date at the State University of Iowa.

The same institution also owns an Eskimo curlew secured at Burlington, Iowa, in 1895. Vassar College lists two of the same bird, one from Florida, the other from New York. Bowdoin likewise has two specimens, collected in 1891 in Labrador. Finally the Everhart Museum at Scranton, Pa., reports an Eskimo curlew purchased in the Boston market, a reminder of the days when birds and mammals of almost every kind were indiscriminately killed and sold in markets throughout the country. From this source William Brewster secured a number of fine specimens of birds which he mounted, and which are now treasured by museums throughout the country. The names of other famous naturalists such as Audubon, Agassiz, Hornaday, Chapman, T. A. Schurr, C. A. Reed, and Forbush are linked with rare specimens which have been described in the reports already received.

Plentiful data have been gathered about Carolina parakeets and heath hens, while thus far comparatively few ivory-billed woodpeckers have been reported and not very many California vultures. The Labrador duck is another elusive bird, rarely found in museums, though the report comes from Wells College that a specimen of this bird, a female, was identified there by Louis Agassiz Fuertes.

President Pease, whose love of nature and the inhabitants of the open spaces is well known, is much interested in the census of birds and believes that the results will be of much importance, not only in furnishing ornithologists with all available information in regard to extant specimens, but also in calling attention to the need of protecting various forms of wild life now threatened with extinction.