BOOKPLATES BY SIDNEY L. SMITH; WITH A CHECK-LIST OF THE BOOKPLATES

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Bookplates by Sidney L. Smith; With a Check-list of the Bookplates by Gardner Teall

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GARDNER TEALL

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Trieste

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With a Check-list of the Bookplates

ALFRED FOWLER
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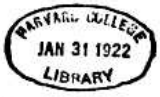

BOOKPLATES BY SIDNEY L. SMITH

By Gardner Teall

Among American masters of line-engraving Sidney L. Smith occupies a conspicuous place. The present century has not found united in the work of a single engraver more varied qualities of excellence than will be found in the achievements of this artist. In Smith's work, whether it be portraiture, landscape, architecture, allegory, symbolism, heraldic design, or lettering, one does not find a dull line, an insipid conception, inadequate technique, or a touch of the commonplace.

"Prints," says Emil H. Richter in a brief review of their technique and history,[1] "are familiar to every one of us, and yet the subject of prints is strangely unfamiliar. If we look at a painting, a piece of sculpture, or at a monumental building, we know how these things came into being. Without any effort we can see in our mind's eye the painter, with palette and brushes, applying the colors on his canvas, we can see the sculptor thumbing the clay model on the stand

[1] *Prints*, by Emil H. Richter, Houghton Mifflin, 1914.

libris is cold, awkward, or both. In Smith's designs such faults are absent.

Landscape has always attracted masters of the graver. This is no exception in Smith's case. But how different a problem is the miniature work imposed by the size of a bookplate from that where the engraver and etcher has at command a less limited surface! This should be taken into account in studying Smith's landscape bookplates. Yet in them all—the design for Bertram Perry Huggins with its lovely mountain waterfall, the Thomas Upham Coe with its fanciful moonlit Egyptian scene, the Susan Janney Allen with its glimpse of the far western mountainous Indian country, and the Bangor Public Library, State Fund, with its Maine river view, among other ex-libris—one finds the artist-engraver equal to his problem. In all his landscape designs there is verity of scene, atmosphere, and beauty of composition and the technical handling of these masterly landscapes in miniature evokes admiration and wonder.

Such bookplates as those for Dr. Joseph C. Egbert with its house set in a grove, the Bangor Public Library, Patten Fund, with the exquisitely conceived view of the city as seen through the library window, the view of the library in the Lynn Public Library, the "Prospect of the Colleges in Cambridge in New England" in the

Winward Prescott, Harvard University, Working Library design as well as the architectural features in other designs, exhibit a sympathetic and refined architectural sense in the application of which good taste and restraint are never sacrificed.

In decorative design—heraldic, symbolic, and other ornament—the bookplates designed and engraved by Sidney L. Smith never descend to the insipid. The design for the Reverend J. B. Troy, that for the Library of the Newton Theological Seminary, the Winward and Hazel Prescott, and the Andreini are masterpieces of exquisitely conceived ornament in which complete harmony prevails, free, too, from the discordant note of the bizarre.

In the angling design for the late Daniel B. Fearing, of which a small reproduction in photogravure was prepared for Mr. Fearing, we find a very naturalistic treatment of the subject, a trout rising to the bait. This bookplate is exceptionally remarkable in the annals of engraved bookplates and it is one more word in evidence of Sidney L. Smith's remarkable versatility, as is also the Alfred Fowler, etched in 1911, which is a technical achievement, reproducing almost completely the effect of the woodcut of the Kelmscott printer's mark.

To collectors these bookplates will prove the

same perennial joy that they must, indeed, prove to their original owners, and while such engraving is produced by contemporary artists there can be no decline in an art which has so enriched the world's intellectual advance.