

**THE MORRIS BOOK SHOP:  
IMPRESSIONS OF SOME OLD  
FRIENDS IN CELEBRATION OF  
THE XXVTH ANNIVERSARY**

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The Morris Book Shop: impressions of some old friends in celebration of the XXVth anniversary  
by Laurence Conger Woodworth

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**LAURENCE CONGER WOODWORTH**

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# THE MORRIS BOOK SHOP

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*Impressions of Some  
Old Friends in  
celebration  
of the*  
**XXV<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY**

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Laurence C. Woodworth.



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**CHICAGO**  
1912

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## FOREWORD

Some weeks ago Mr. Wilbur D. Nesbit, upon learning that the current year was the twenty-fifth in the history of the Morris Book Shop, conceived the idea of gathering together a few reminiscences and comments, and presenting them to the "genial proprietor." He consulted with other friends of Mr. Morris (*vide* table of contents), and met with such instant and hearty response that the present booklet is the result. It became necessary, finally, to let Mr. Morris into the secret, in order to get from him certain matter, such as the lines from Eugene Field and other old-timers, and to arrange for a portrait as frontispiece. At this latter idea Mr. Morris balked vehemently; but he was eventually argued into submission. And he delegated to the writer of these lines the pleasure of being the vehicle through which to make formal, sincere, and cordial acknowledgment of the tributes herein contained.

Frank Morris has been accumulating friends, even as a captain of industry accumulates money—because he can't help it; so as the booklet goes to press, contributions of song and story are still coming in, making it a matter of regret that they cannot be included, though grateful acknowledgment is hereby made to all of those who would have coöperated in this tribute of friends to a friend.

*Laurence C. Woodworth.*

*Chicago, November, 1912.*

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## THE BOOK SHOP

Morris's book shop gets younger as it gets older. Here it is twenty-five years since Frank Morris came to Chicago from Indiana, and he has had a book shop ever since.

L  
LILEY  
RITE

Morris ought to be a slim, ascetic, bespectacled, mild-eyed, benign old character, who glides around among musty books on dusty shelves. He ought to wear shiny, slimsy trousers and a nankeen coat. Yes; I shall insist on the nankeen coat. I never saw one, to my knowledge, but that sounds like the sort of coat he should wear. And his fingers should tremble as he reverently touched a cherished volume you wanted to buy. His book shop ought to be staged by Belasco. There should be dim light over everything, and Frank should be discovered down stage in the center, with a dull spot-light silvering his hair and illuminating his face with a sort of a soft religious radiance, so that you would be ready to weep when he speaks.

OR

And there should by all means be a shelf of old books out on the street in front of the book shop, under a tree. Yes; under a tree, with a wide armed-chair beside that. And a nondescript dog should be sleeping beside the chair, now and then opening its eyes and thumping its tail on the sidewalk as if it wished to be polite but did hope you would go on and allow it to doze. And there should be a stern old man standing by the shelf of books, with a gold-headed cane tucked under one arm, which was doubled up almost to his

sharp chin so that he could read what was in the ancient book he held close to his sharp nose. And a handkerchief should hang out of the tail pocket of his frock coat, and a fringe of white hair should drop from under the back of his bell-crowned silk-hat. And he should hem and haw and look over his glasses at you and mutter something to himself about there being so many young upstarts and scapegraces nowadays that a gentleman could not follow a literary bent without annoyance.

But Morris is as plump as he was when I first met him—a matter of ten years ago. Maybe a bit grayer, but so am I, so I don't notice that. And he doesn't wear a nankeen coat or shiny trousers or reverently touch cherished volumes—so far as I know.

Morris's book shop is—well, it always has been and always will be Frank Morris. It is booky, but it is not shoppy.

When I came to Chicago—and I came some years after Fernando Jones landed at the foot of Wabash avenue—Frank had his shop over on West Madison street near Fifth avenue. It was a handy place to drop into on the way to the train. The first thing that struck me as odd about the book shop was a placard which said that you should nose around to your heart's content and nobody would bother you by sidling up and asking if you were looking for something. If there's anything that exasperates one it is to have a clerk ask him that. What in the name of time is he looking for if he is not looking for something? The placard

went on to say that if you wanted to find some particular book or needed any assistance or advice you might request any of the salespeople to help you, but that they were there for your convenience. Now, that's book-shop atmosphere.

When a person goes to buy a book he isn't in the mood he is in when he has to match silk or wants a package of breakfast food. He doesn't want a salesman dogging his heels and telling him that here is something that is very choice this spring, or here is something that is a great favorite with the best people. What he wants is to go a-booking. There is a fellowship with books which cannot be had with anything else that one purchases.

One balmy winter's night, when the mercury was sitting helplessly at the bottom of the tube, there was a fire on West Madison street, and next morning Morris's book shop was neatly frapped in congealed streams of water. Morris came down and looked things over and concluded that it would really be out of the question to stay in that building in its state, as he did not like draughts, so he moved over on Wabash avenue. Just at that time there was a right and a wrong side of Wabash. Frank got on the wrong side. So he moved over on the right side, in a half-basement room on the corner of Monroe just back of the Palmer House. No sooner had we become accustomed to this spot—it truly was a restful place to drop in and steal reads—the march of improvement made a flank movement on that corner and the building was torn down.