

**EX LIBRIS: A
COLLECTION OF
BOOK-PLATE DESIGNS**

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Ex Libris: A Collection of Book-plate Designs by Herbert Gregson

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HERBERT GREGSON

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1907
BOSTON
W · PORTER · TRUESDELL · PUBLISHER



"The artist brings all things into order, making one part to harmonize and accord with another until he constructs a regular and systematic whole." — Plato.



THE above quotation Mr. Gregson has taken as his ideal, and a study of the plates shown herewith will show how successful he has been in this regard. It is now some four years since I issued a little brochure on his work, which at that time was rendered entirely in heavy line, and to those who possess this earlier collection, these beautiful pictorial plates will come as a pleasant surprise. During the last few years Mr. Gregson has been changing his style, lightening his lines and tones and using a decorative motif with more meaning to it, and has evolved a style and individuality quite distinctive to himself and wholly unlike that of the other designers in this field.

While the plates are of the pictorial type, the principles of design have not been overlooked; the different parts of the plates are in perfect harmony each with the other, and the designs

taken as a whole have that accord which should be shown in the work of a designer who has succeeded in originating and adapting to his own peculiar method of expression the requirements and possibilities of his art. Nearly everyone who can wield a brush or pretend to any talent in drawing, in these days, tries his luck at a book-plate, which brings into existence a great many plates that were better left unmade. Good designs are produced in this as in the other lines of the profession, but too often they are imitations in style of treatment suggested in fine things done long before, or brilliant ideas of the past, altered but seldom improved, to serve the purpose of a book-plate. Often an original idea is well conceived but badly drawn, more often the drawing is very good but wanting in design, in which case it is the work of one who has technical training but little or no idea of composition.

The plates shown are of such general excellence that extended comment would seem to be unnecessary, but attention might well be called to the armorial designs which evidence a good feeling, and strict regard, for the prin-

ciples of heraldry; for designs of an odd, unusual character the plate of The Troutsdale Press stands pre-eminent, as well as the last plate in the book, designed for a printer.

The J. Reid is a fine example of a border design, rich and decorative, and still without taking too much from the essential features. For beauty and gracefulness, the designs for Cynthia W. Lynch, Beatrice West and Katharine Dudley Gregson show that the artist is able to handle successfully feminine plates, which require lightness and dainty forms; for a lover of nature, surely the John Nelson Slade is extremely successful and tasteful.

And finally, as showing plates of an entirely new character and treatment, there are the Washingtoniana and Lincolniana designs, intended for use in collections of books relating to these two great Americans. Mr. Gregson has in these shown an ability, and achieved a result that well might be envied by many of the older and better known artists. In the former, a combination of line and halftone, the frame is strictly Colonial, surmounting the design is a figure representing the "Spirit of 1776"

while on either side of the frame at the lower end is perched the American eagle; the laurel is cleverly introduced at the base of the frame indicative of peace, and thus with the design at the top making a beautiful rendering of the phrase, "First in war, first in peace," etc. The decoration in the *Lincolniana* is quite chaste and severe; in the upper part is the American eagle and shield, which is intended to carry out the simile of Lincoln as the saviour of the Ship of State which Washington so nobly built up.

