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Books of Special Interest

Childe Hassam's Art

THE ETCHINGS AND DRYPOINTS OF CHILDE HASSAM. With an Introduction by Royal Cortissoz. Scribner's. 1925.

Reviewed by FRANK JEWETT MATHER, JR.

BEFORE giving his first exhibition of etchings, in 1923, Childe Hassam had been working on the copper for some thirty years. Thus we had instead of the usual piecemeal revelation of a talent a sudden and thrilling confrontation with a life-work. On inspection the thrill diminished, for the etchings merely told us in a new idiom precisely what we already knew from Mr. Hassam's paintings. There was no such sense of surprise and of new understanding as one gets when he passes from the paintings of a Whistler or a Daubigny to their prints. There was instead a confirmation of Mr. Hassam's extraordinary athleticism in his ready mastery of a new and difficult discipline. We now have all his prints (238) carefully catalogued in beautiful form with appreciations by Royal Cortissoz and Pennell. Some fifty-odd half-tone cuts are welcome memoranda of typical compositions, but no one should take them as satisfactorily conveying the zest and precision of Mr. Hassam's workmanship. For that one should consult constantly the frontispiece, the original etching, Cos Cob, No. 32.

The immediate impression is of a skilful and joyous craftsmanship in the service of a rather slight gift for design. One feels an etcher of the type of Lallanne. Mr. Hassam, however, usually ignores the linear tradition, for his theme, as in his paintings, is flickering light and dappling shadow. So the lines fuse into webs of shimmering tone after the fashion of Whistler's "Doorway." Not but that the line can be expressive in its own right, catching with sure and summary indications the poise of a nude, the swirl of surf or tideway, the uprightness or the sagging of old buildings. In short his technical resourcefulness is amazing. His inventive resourcefulness is less so, but here scrutiny revises a too generalized first impression. Among numerous fine etchings there are exceptionally a few fine inventions that take Mr. Hassam at his best out of that class of artists whose ability is merely professional.

The best prints are mostly those of inhabited places—old New England houses, churches, barns, fish-shanties, wharves, or bridges. Apparently Mr. Hassam's most complete affection and application are for such themes. We feel that his early paintings of Paris, New York, and the Isles of Shoals are still his finest in mood, though technically he has surpassed them since. And among his prints of places those of Portsmouth, Gloucester, and East Hampton are not only most skilful but also magically invested with mood—real treasures for the temperamental amateur. The *tours-de-force*, however, are in the Cos Cob series—such as the dock with tossing skiffs or the crinkled tide-way appropriately called "Old Lace"—marvels of delicate precision in touch of needle and of acid. The numerous figure subjects, including a long series of nudes by the sea, seem merely clever, and uninterestingly so. Indoors or outdoors, Mr. Hassam lacks the gift of making his figures belong; they have an inserted quality. Yet even here he is capable of creating exceptionally a composition of such Fantin-like fascination as No. 150, "Summer."

In short, when he is good he is very, very good, in etching as in painting, but too facile and prolific to be often at his best, possibly too much engrossed with his own talent to give himself generously to his theme. It is when the theme really hits him hard that we get a fine Hassam. To pick the one very fine print from the ten that are misleadingly good is ever the collector's delicate task. In the present instance he will find it rewarding. This record of what has been only a minor activity though in itself a substantial life-work for an artist of weaker fibre, is impressive from its sustained competence as it is precious for its occasional moments of inspiration.

Largess

THE RED CORD. By T. G. SPRINGER. New York: Brentanos. 1925. \$2.

Reviewed by OLIVER HERFORD

THERE are some communications that, like eggs, cannot possibly be broken gently, and this, which I am about to make public, is one of them. No amount of circumlocution will absorb the shock or soften the impact of the news that a publisher in this year of nineteen twenty five and this town of Manhattan is distributing largess in the shape of real coin to all who will accept it, without discrimination, without any hope of return and no questions asked.

The actual face value of the coin—errant with which Mr. Brentano—for that is the publisher's name—is playing ducks-and-drakes, is of no consequence; it is the principle or rather the variation from principle that provokes our admiration. When Mr. Rockefeller at published intervals bestows a dime upon an entire stranger it is not the amount of his largess that excites our wonder, indeed were it to be multiplied by ten or even a hundred our wonder would still remain stationary.

As a matter of fact the exchange value of the coin that will make Mr. Brentano preëminent among publishers to the end of time, is somewhere between one tenth and one eleventh of one cent. Some numismatists rate the Chinese ventilated coin known as a *cash* as high as one fifth of a cent, but generosity is one thing and prodigality quite another and in justice to Mr. Brentano I shall adhere to my own computation.

Also there is a string to this largess of Mr. Brentano, but happily the string has no retrogressive tendency, it is no string in the vulgar, mercenary sense of the word, it is a Red Cord attached to a book of that name and looped through the Chinese coin serves to draw it into the hand of each and every purchaser of this delightful romantic novel by Mr. Thomas Grant Springer. It serves too as a book-mark for the use of such unfortunates as must for one reason or another be compelled to lay the book down instead of finishing it at one sitting as I very nearly did.

I have never, until Mr. Springer's book came into my hands, read a Chinese novel written in English. I have always felt that Chinese books should be written only in the Chinese language and read only by Chinamen and Chinawomen.

But now I am convinced that all the Chinese novels should be written by Mr. Springer and read by everybody.

Wo Loie, the heroine of the story is the Virgin Wife of . . . but his name has escaped me . . . that is the only fault I have found with "The Red Cord" . . . the Chinese names are not as Mr. Christopher Morley would say, Chinese to remember, and when the name begins with a syllable that sounds like an adverb such as *So* or *Yet* it becomes entangled in the syntax with a result that is oftentimes perplexing.

Wo Loie (if I may be allowed to finish a sentence) is a most alluring little almond-eyed Becky Sharp—and when I say almond-eyed I do not mean salted-almond-eyed (whatever Mr. Morley may say). Wo Loie for all her mishaps never sheds a tear. I like her much better than Becky Sharp and I forgive her her wiles (one in particular that you will suspect but never know) because of her fortitude.

There is a witty and erudite preface to "The Red Cord," written by John Luther Long, but it must not be read until the story is finished because Mr. Long has most indiscreetly hinted at the dénouement and why should other readers be spared the suffering I endured (without a murmur) in resisting the temptation to read the last page before I was quite come to it.

The second series of the "Bibliographies of Modern Authors," published in sequence to the volume edited by Henry Danielson in 1921, has just been published in a limited edition of 750 copies. The American publisher is the R. R. Bowker Company. The second volume has been compiled and edited by C. A. and H. W. Stonehill, and includes full collations of the works of John Davidson, Ernest Dowson, Katherine Mansfield, Alice Meynell, Walter Pater, and Francis Thompson, in all 178 items of six authors.

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