THE ATHENÆUM BOOK-PLATE.

By Frederick G. Blair.

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At the period to which the Athenæum book-plate belongs, interest in book-plates was only beginning in this country; it was not until 1880 that we had any work devoted to the serious study of the subject.¹ It is not therefore surprising to find that the records of the Athenæum reveal very little about its book-plate, or the source from which the design was first obtained, but I hope to show that William Roscoe was responsible for its introduction and subsequent use as a book-plate. The first reference I have found is under the date August 11th, 1817:

Resolved:—"That the design exhibited by Mr. Clements for a wood engraving proper to be affixed to works presented to the Library, be adopted."²

The design consists of a group of thirteen figures standing round what is presumably a stone chest, and gazing earnestly into it are figures, some clothed in livery, others in a semi-nude condition. The central figure wears a plumed helmet and carries a lance upon which is placed a bird; one figure appears to be lifting a volume out of the chest. The design was printed on hand-made paper, is oval in shape and measures $2\frac{3}{4}$ in. by 2 in.; underneath is the word "Athenæum" and below this again are the words "Bequeathed to this Institution By" and three lines for

² Athenæum Minute Book 2, p. 124.
The Athenæum Book-Plate.

the purpose of the donor's name and date of presentation. The name of the engraver, W. Clements, is seen on the left of the oval. The whole is enclosed in a border measuring 4 3/4 inches by 3 1/2 inches. The printers' name is just within the border. This design is still to be seen within the covers of some of the older volumes in the Library.

Little is known about the engraver of the wood-block, but he was well known in business and artistic circles in Liverpool, where at various addresses he carried on the business of wood engraver, print seller and dealer in statuary. Besides his work on the book-plate he designed and engraved the title page to the Athenæum Catalogue which was published in 1820. In the year 1831 he issued from his shop, 57, Bold Street, a medal struck in memory of William Roscoe; in 1849 apparently he retired from business and went to live in Summer Seat, after which his name disappears from the directory. A son of his was Sub-Librarian and Master of the Athenæum Newsroom between the years 1816 and 1824.

It will be seen that it has been in use for 126 years. The story usually associated with it is that the design was copied from a bas-relief, the work of John Gibson, the famous sculptor of the "Tinted Venus" and other equally notable pieces, and represents "Alexander ordering Homer's Iliad to be placed in a casket taken from Darius."

As to Gibson himself, it was due in no small measure to the generosity of William Roscoe that he owed his early artistic training, and it is interesting in this connection to recall Gibson's account of how he came to be commissioned by Roscoe to model the small relief mentioned. Speaking of his apprentice days with the brothers Francys in Brownlow Hill he says:—

1 In the prospectus dated Liverpool, August 22th, 1815, issued by Matthew Gregson, of his Fragments, is the following note: "The work will be printed by G. F. Harris's Widow and Brothers, Liverpool; and the engravings executed by Messrs. Hughes, Mosses and Clements, late pupils of Mr. Henry Hole,"
JOHN GIBSON'S RELIEF IN THE ROYAL INSTITUTION, LIVERPOOL.
I began my delightful employment in high spirits, and I was truly happy, modelling, drawing, and executing works in marble. When I had practised there some months, one day there came a tall magnificent looking old gentleman; his hair was white as snow, aquiline nose, thick brows, benevolent in manner. Mr. Francys presented me to him. This was William Roscoe. He came there to order a chimney-piece for his library at Allerton Hall. My numerous drawings were soon placed before him and my models: he looked over them all with very great attention, he said many encouraging things to me, and added that he would return soon and see more of me.

In the course of a few days Mr. Roscoe returned, and settled with my master about the chimney-piece. Also he said that I should make a basso-relievo for the centre of it, not in marble, but a model in clay baked (terra-cotta); he had brought with him a portfolio out of which he took a print, and showing it to us said, "This is what I wish to be modelled"; he said, "This print is of great value; it is by Marc Antonio from 'Raphael.'" It represented Alexander ordering Homer's Iliad to be placed in a casket taken from Darius—an excellent choice of subject for a library. The original fresco is in the Vatican painted in chiaroscuro.

I finished my model, which gave the greatest satisfaction to Mr. Roscoe; it has been preserved to this day, and placed in the Liverpool Institution. It is in a small room there.¹

This small relief has reposed in the Royal Institution for a number of years, but I would like to point out that there is a discrepancy between Gibson's account of it and the actual relief; for this relief is cast in lead and not in baked clay or terra-cotta. In the absence of dates in the life of Gibson by Matthews I assume this relief to have been completed about the year 1811.²

After careful deliberation as to Gibson's responsibility for the existence of the Athenæum book-plate, and in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, I have been forced to the conclusion that this relief could never have

¹ The Biography of John Gibson, R.A., sculptor, Rome; by T. Matthews, 1911, pp. 11-12.
² Through the courtesy of the late Mrs. Clarke, the owner of Allerton Hall, the writer made an examination of the library but no trace of the relief could be found.
been the basis of Clements' design. On the contrary it is to be supposed that William Clements, when he carved the wood block, had before him the actual engraving by Marc Antonio which had been lent to him by William Roscoe. The fact of his having placed his figures in the same order as Gibson has no doubt caused the belief that he copied his design from Gibson.

In support of my contention the original engraving should be compared with the Athenæum book-plate, and allowing for one or two liberties which Clements has taken with the work of the great master, I think it will be conceded that the wood-engraving compares favourably with the original.

This exceedingly rare engraving by Marc Antonio Raimondi¹ is substantially the same as the wood engraving, and what is most important to observe is, that in each the central figure carries a lance and wears a plumed helmet, two details which are absent in the work of Gibson. Attention must also be directed to a small tablet which rests at the foot of the chest and which has materially assisted in fixing Roscoe's responsibility for the introduction of this design into the Athenæum.

In 1826 there was a project to provide a proper form for acknowledging gifts to the Library, but it was not until November 1827 that the scheme materialized, as is shown by the following extract from the minute book:

Resolved:—" That Mr. Edward Smith's bill for engraving the vote of thanks for the Athenæum be not paid until it be ascertained that the engraving of the vignette is of that excellence which the price charged leads the Committee to expect it ought to be."²

In 1828, the Committee having satisfied themselves about the price of the engraving, Mr. Smith was paid the sum of £12 12s. for his work, which is engraved on copper;

¹ A copy of the engraving is in the British Museum, but unfortunately could not be reproduced here.
² Athenæum Minute Book 2, p. 305.
and although now very much worn and having survived a devastating fire in the year 1901, it will be agreed that it is a very fine piece of workmanship. The identity of the engraver has not up to now been known, but his work is highly prized by collectors. He is known chiefly by his engraving of "Puck" after Sir Joshua Reynolds, "The Piper," and "Guess my Name," after Wilkie. He was engaged in contributing to that famous work by William and Edward Finden, the "Royal Gallery of British Art," when that work collapsed with such disastrous results to its promoters.¹

From the year 1828 to 1899 this engraving continued to adorn the letters of thanks to donors, and it was in this latter year that Mr. George T. Shaw, the then Librarian, in order to mark the centenary of the foundation, had this engraving converted for use as a book-plate, the original wood block by Clements having for some reason fallen into disuse.

In seeking to establish the responsibility of William Roscoe for the introduction of this design one is not unmindful of his associations with the Athenæum; there is also the fact of his saying in conversation with Gibson that he considered the engraving "an excellent choice of subject for a library." It seems therefore not unreasonable to suppose that he would deem it also a subject worthy of a place in the library in the founding of which he had played no small part. It might be quite rightly argued that this is very slender evidence on which to base the claim, and it has been suggested that the engraving was lent by someone else. There is nothing in the records of the Athenæum to decide the point.

My attention was then directed to the catalogue of the sale of Roscoe's library in 1816. This catalogue, compiled

¹Bryan's Dict. of Painters and Engravers (New Ed. 1903), v, 2, and Dict. of Nat. Biog. art. Finden. Edward Smith lived at various addresses in Liverpool from the year 1816 to 1832. His name appears in the list of exhibitors at the Liverpool Academy in 1822 and 1828,
by Roscoe at Allerton Hall, is an interesting volume and reveals an intimate knowledge, not only of books, but of the early history of engraving and engravers.¹ On page 34 I discovered what proved to be of the utmost importance to the story of the book-plate, as follows:—

Doubtful pieces, and copies after Marc Antonio. Lot 282—Four [copies of] Alexander ordering the works of Homer to be placed in the chest of Darius; after Raffaelle.

I next examined the book-plate carefully under a glass, and from the inscription on the small tablet which rests against the chest I discovered that it owed its origin to one of the four spurious engravings mentioned in Roscoe's catalogue. This particular engraving of Marc Antonio Raimondi has been copied by at least three anonymous engravers mentioned by Bartsch in his catalogue of engravers and numbered by him 207 A., B. and C. It is to the work of No. 207 A.,² that I wish to draw attention. His work is distinguishable from the others by a small tablet which rests in the centre of the chest, and on it are engraved the words "Rafa Urb inue." I found this inscription to be identical with that on the Athenæum book-plate. This seemed sufficient to establish Roscoe's responsibility for the use of this design by the Athenæum.

This design, therefore, owed its inspiration to a fresco in the Vatican, the work of Raphael, which was afterwards engraved by Marc Antonio Raimondi; it was said to represent Alexander the Great ordering the Iliad of Homer to be placed in the casket of Darius. But an examination of the numerous authorities on the work of Raphael revealed a remarkable diversity of opinion as to what this fresco is meant to represent; so marked does it appear, that it forms a distinct branch of the investigation.

¹ The Life of William Roscoe, by his son Henry Roscoe (2 v., 1833), ii, 114.
² Le Peintre Graveur, par Adam Bartsch (Vienna, 1813), xiv, 168-169.
I have been at some pains to collate the opinions of these authorities as to what the artist intended to convey. The result has been to discover the existence of two interpretations of the fresco, both of which may be said to owe their origin to classical authors. The first, which is frequently quoted, refers to an incident in the campaign of Alexander the Great against Darius, in which Alexander is depicted in the fresco "ordering Homer's Iliad to be placed in a chest taken from Darius." There are several variants of this explanation, which are worthy of note as showing the uncertainty existing as to the meaning of the fresco. One is that it shows "Alexander ordering the works of Homer to be placed in the tomb of Achilles"; another (recently published) work states that it represents "Alexander the Great ordering the gold chest of Darius to be used for keeping the manuscripts of Homer." The second interpretation is one which was adopted by the earlier writers on Raphael, and states that the fresco represents Tarquin ordering the Sibylline Books, discovered in the tomb of Numa Pompilius, to be preserved.

The position is thus one of uncertainty. It would seem that the only way to arrive at a satisfactory solution would be to study the work of Raphael in the Camera della Segnatura as a whole, and also the circumstances which prompted the painting of this room.

The decoration was undertaken by Raphael at the request of Pope Julius II in 1508 and completed in 1511, and perhaps no other room in the Vatican has called forth such various and conflicting interpretations as to its meaning. Critics have attempted to invest the paintings with the most fantastic explanations; "zealous churchmen have


2 I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness to Mr. J. A. Twemlow, whose knowledge of the early sources of history has assisted me to an understanding of these frescoes and enabled me to arrive at what I believe to be the correct interpretation of the fresco.
turned Aristotle into St. Paul, and engravers have set halos upon the philosophers." Originally intended to contain the Pope's private library and also to serve as his study, "these paintings were to form the adornment of the room in which the head of the Church was to sign the papers and provisions drawn up for the good of the Church. Theology and philosophy, poetry and law, representing revealed truth, human reason, beauty and Christian order, were to preside from the walls over his decisions and their final sanction."

In another way also the artist marked the relation between the sciences and the Church from his point of view, namely in the grisailles or imitation bas-reliefs painted in monochrome, which fill the space underneath the two sides of the Parnassus. "The two doors at the end of the long sides of the room open immediately against the wall and then these grisailles are the first things to catch the eye on entering the room and the last to be looked at on leaving the room. This, therefore, was the most suitable place for the prologue and epilogue of the whole series, expressing their general idea and purport." Although these reliefs are some of Raphael's best and most finished work, they remained for a long time little observed or understood. It is only quite recently that the attention they deserve has been bestowed upon them, and that it has been discovered that the painter intended them to illustrate, in the person of Sixtus IV, uncle of Julius II, the attitude of the Papacy towards the true and the false learning.

The interpretation till then accepted of these reliefs was that they represented Alexander the Great commanding Homer's works to be placed in the grave of Achilles, and the Emperor Augustus forbidding the burning of the Aeneid. Wickhoff, however, proves this to be manifestly incorrect. He has the merit of having been the first to

RAPHAEL'S FRESCO IN THE VATICAN.
discover the true meaning of these reliefs, and their connection with Julius II. His account is as follows:—Julius II’s uncle, Sixtus IV, had a high reputation as a theological writer. Immediately after his election a Roman printer, Giovanni Filippo de Lignamine, published a work by the new pope, on the Precious Blood and the Power of God. In the dedication, in which he praises the services rendered by Sixtus IV to the Christian Faith by his writings, he says: “Not only the Fathers of the Church, but the heathen also acted as you have done. For when a sarcophagus filled with Greek and Latin books was found in the field of Lucius Petilius, the Consuls P. Cornelius and Baebius Pamphilus commanded that the Latin books should be carefully preserved, but the Greek, which were thought to contain things contrary to religion, were burnt by the order of the Senate.”¹ This narrative is to be found in the first book of Valerius Maximus.² From this Wickhoff infers: “There can be no doubt that Julius II desired Raphael to paint the story with which his uncle’s name had been thus flatteringly associated. On one side we see the two Consuls examining the sarcophagus and its interesting contents: on the other, the burning of the dangerous philosophical books.”

I have to acknowledge my indebtedness to the publishers of the following work for the use of the photographs from the Stanza della Segnatura:—Monumenti Vaticani di Archeologia e d’Arte a cura della Pontificia Accademia Romana d’Archeologia, Danesi Editore (Roma, 1922); to Messrs. Brown, Barnes and Bell for allowing me to make use of the photograph of the relief by Gibson; and to the Committee of the Athenæum for permission to use the two book-plates.

¹ *The History of the Popes*, by Dr. Ludwig Pastor, 1898, vi, 582-588.