



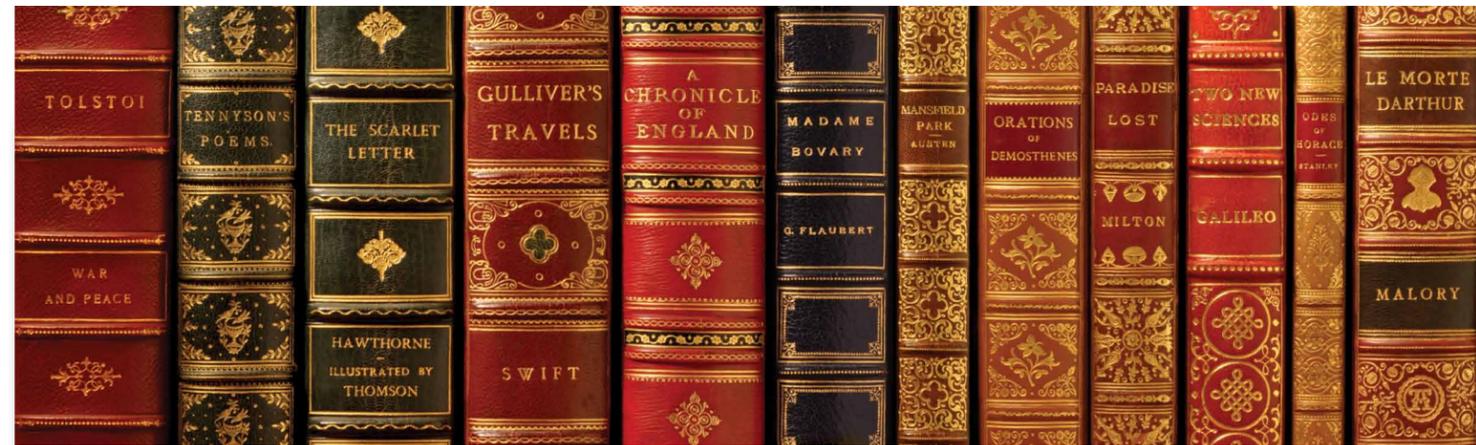
▲ A Roman miniature bronze figure of Cupid, who lost his bow centuries ago, has found a home among the books in William Joy's library.

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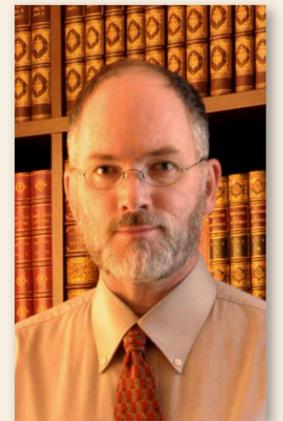
▲ A sampling of books from William Joy's library.

Imperial Fine Books Interview



Bibi Mohamed

BIBI MOHAMED, proprietress of Imperial Fine Books in New York City, and christened “The Bookwoman of Madison Avenue” in Pradeep Sebastian’s “The Groaning Shelf & Other Instances of Book Love,” talks with her clients about how they became interested in books and literature, and the passion that has driven them to build important collections.



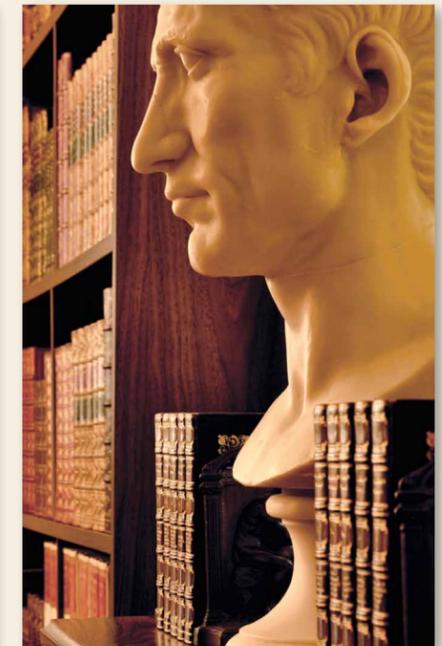
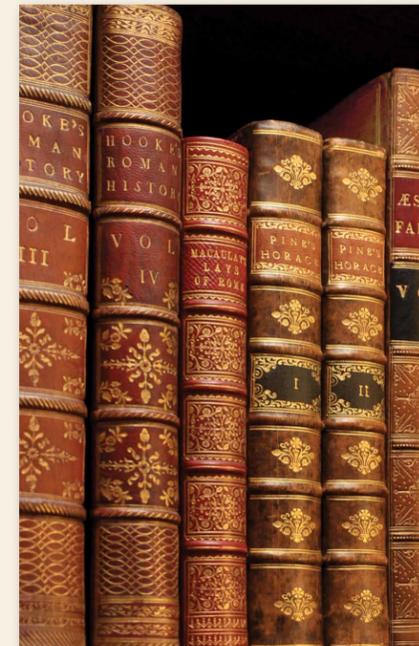
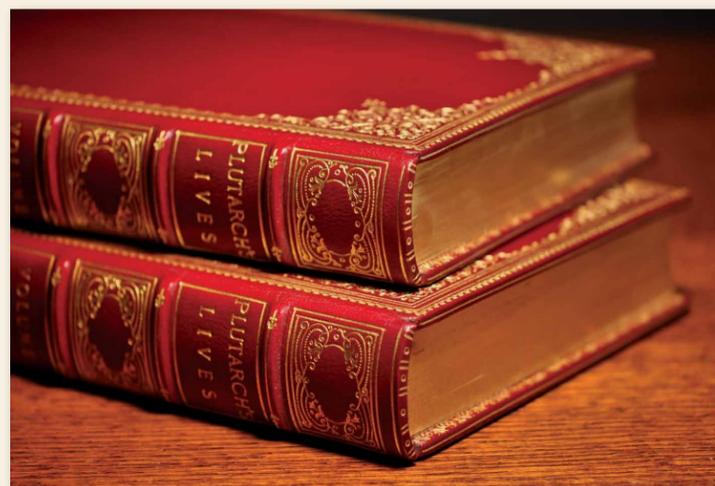
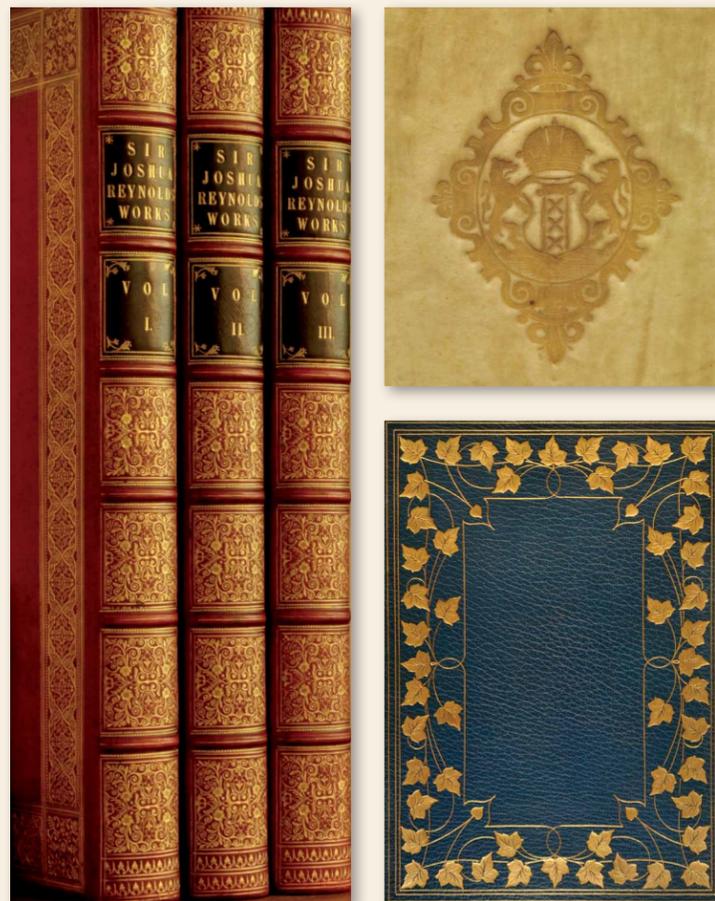
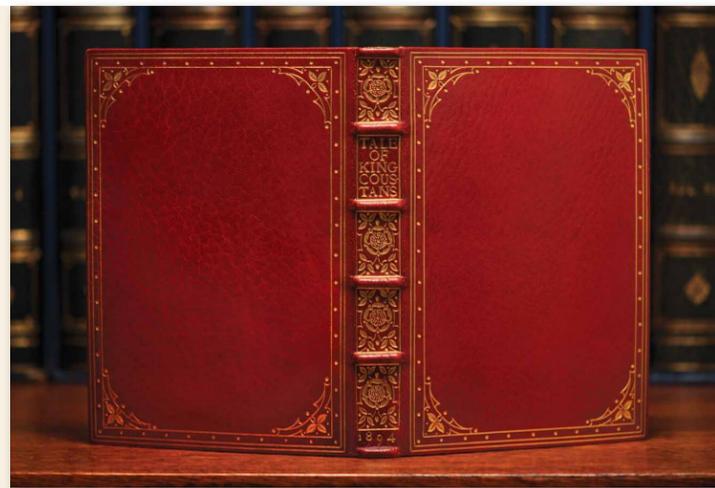
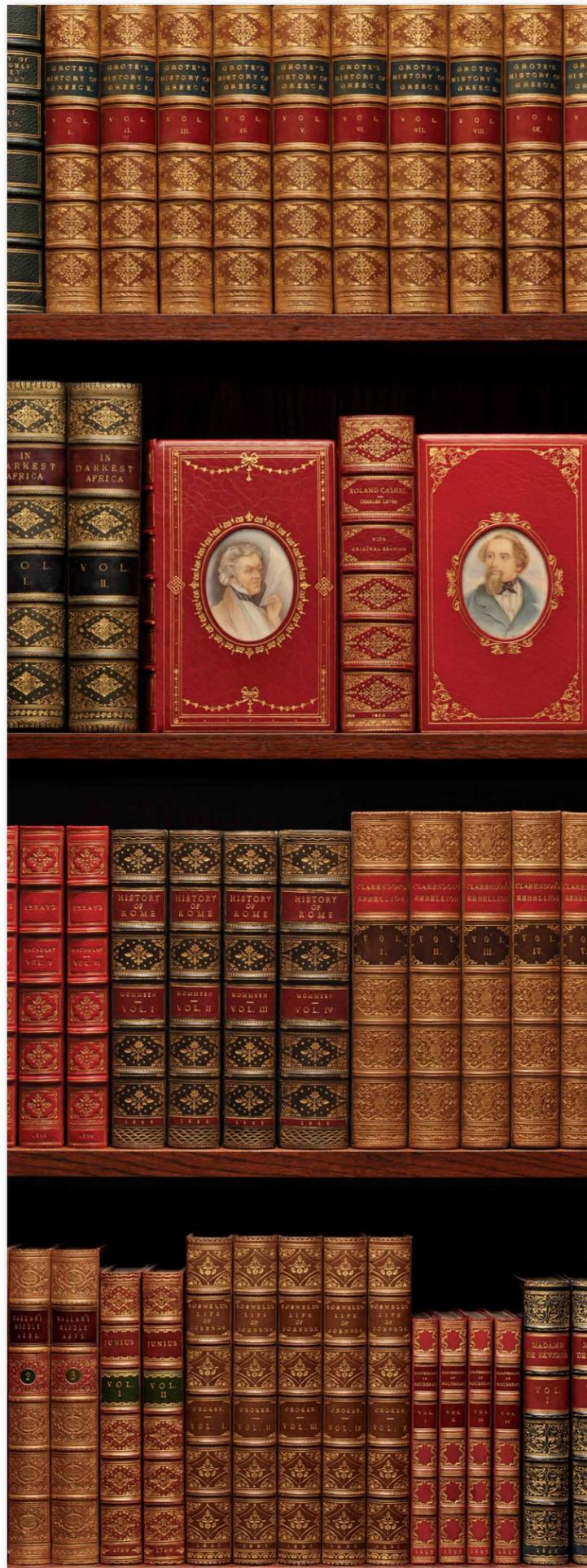
William Joy

IN THIS interview, Bibi talks with William Joy, a Michigan-based bibliophile who works with physicians from around the world in the field of medical research. His interests range from classical art and archeology to English history and baroque music, and his knowledge of literature, whether ancient Greek or Latin, or medieval or modern European, is extensive. There are currently some 4,000 volumes in his personal library.



December 2013

IMPERIAL FINE BOOKS



◀ Finely-bound books in William Joy's library. ▶

Imperial: William, I would like to learn how you first became interested in book collecting, and could we talk about some of the books in your library?

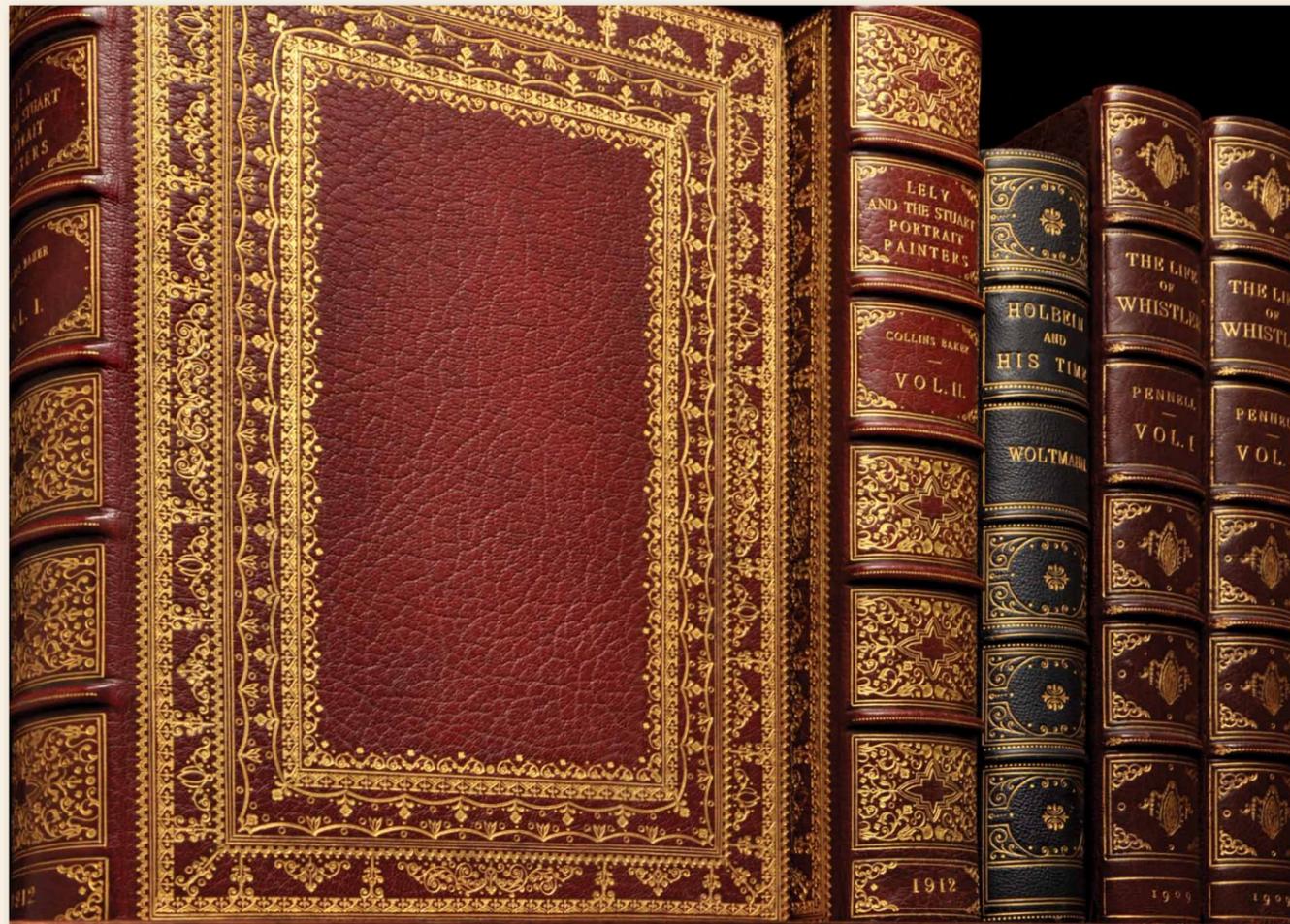
William: Certainly; my pleasure.

Imperial: I know that you have worked on creating two libraries; your own, and also that of your mother... what can you tell me about these?

William: My own library is one of general interest. The subjects of history, literature, and art from most time periods and places are represented, but there is perhaps a bit more emphasis on ancient Greek and Roman history, and the respective art and literature for these cultures. Significant English and American authors also, especially from the 17th to the early 20th centuries, have been given a welcome home. My 79-year-old mother is fascinated with ancient Egypt, and helping her assemble a library of Egyptology books, especially earlier antiquarian editions, has been a special interest for some years.

Imperial: As a collector, were you first drawn to books for information or entertainment, or was it principally for their beauty?

William: Initially, it was for the purpose of self-education, but of course, entertainment as well. After reading through some heavy historical "tome" of time-honored importance, I felt I could then "reward myself," so to say, with a lighter novel. The love of books for reasons such as handmade paper, quality printing, beautiful illustrations and bindings, or an appreciation for first editions would come, but this took time. It's something of an educational process; or at least it was for me. The first step was simply to discover the treasure of desirable information books could provide, no matter how they were made, or what edition they happened to represent.



▲ Elaborate gold work on art books, which account for a fifth of the volumes in this library.

Imperial: Do you remember the first book you acquired?

William: Yes. When I was seven, my father introduced me to the series of “Golden Guide” volumes. These were published to help children better understand science, and included all sorts of titles in the fields of biology, botany, geology, astronomy, and so forth. They were small in size, and inexpensive (about 75 cents each) and paperbound, but were still printed with care and attractively presented, with many color illustrations. A pharmacy not far from my childhood home had a newsstand which always had a few of these titles, as did our one and only local bookstore, and over a period of about four years, I acquired nearly three dozen books in the series, and still have them.

Imperial: So your first book was a scientific title?

William: It was: “Rock and Minerals,” subtitled: “A Guide to Familiar Minerals, Gems, Ores and Rocks.” Over time, as more books in the series were acquired, and the row of volumes became longer, their appearance became as impressive as their information was useful.

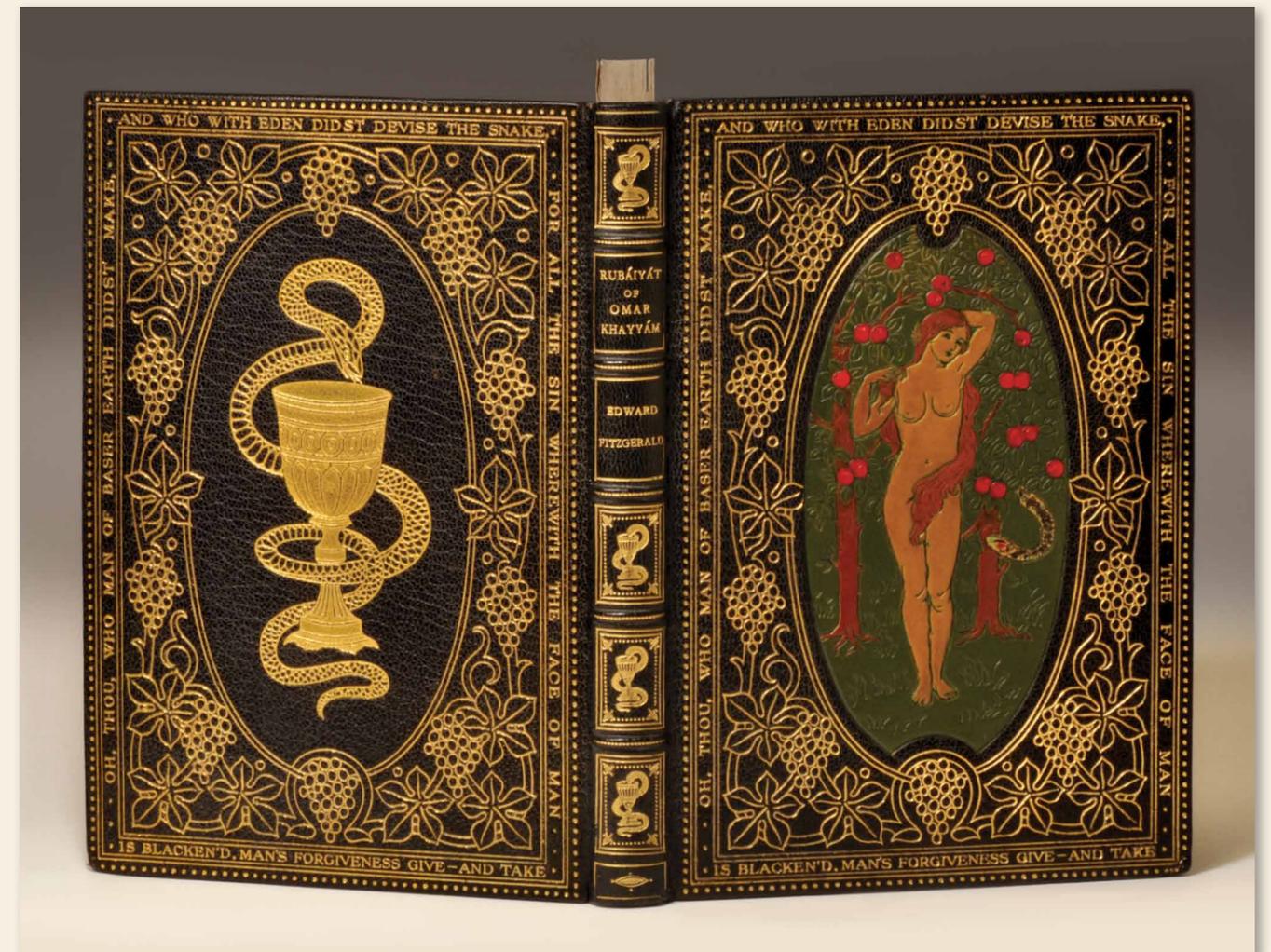
Imperial: So you appreciated large sets of books, even as a child?

William: I learned the power of “shelf presence” you might say, at an early age.

Imperial: How did you move from the scientific works you collected as a child, to the many important historical and literary works you would later acquire?

William: You can thank Winston Churchill for that. Among the books my parents had in our home when I was growing up was a set of Churchill's: “A History of the English Speaking Peoples.”

Imperial: Let me stop you right there... that is one of our most frequently requested titles. We always try to keep a first edition set in stock.



▲ Fitzgerald's translation of the “Rubáiyát” by Persian poet Omar Khayyám (c. 1048-1132).

Along with a detailed pattern of gilt-tooling, the binding features intricately inlaid leather pieces, forming a scene of Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Bound by Riviere & Son in London, over a century ago.

William: Reading those four volumes had a profound effect upon me. Churchill's style of writing and his manner of presentation was such, that it encouraged me to want to learn more about the past. After some years of reading English and American history, I worked my way backwards, eventually "settling in" for quite some time, in the classical worlds of Greece and Rome. I made good use then of books borrowed from other libraries, but it didn't take long to exhaust the supply my local public library could provide, so I moved on to larger ones, especially the library at Michigan State University. Because these places were some distance away however, it was more practical to own certain of the titles, rather than continually travel to check them out from libraries. At first I bought inexpensive paperbound copies, and over time these were replaced with cloth-bound versions, and then... well, you know the rest.

Imperial: Yes; your library now features many rarities. Let's discuss some of them.

William: We could begin with Stanhope's English translation of Epictetus, the stoic Greek philosopher. I would make mention, that what survives for Epictetus are not actually his own writings, but rather transcriptions of his verbal discourses, made by one of his pupils, Arrian. This particular copy has an appealing provenance.

Imperial: I presume it has a bookplate?

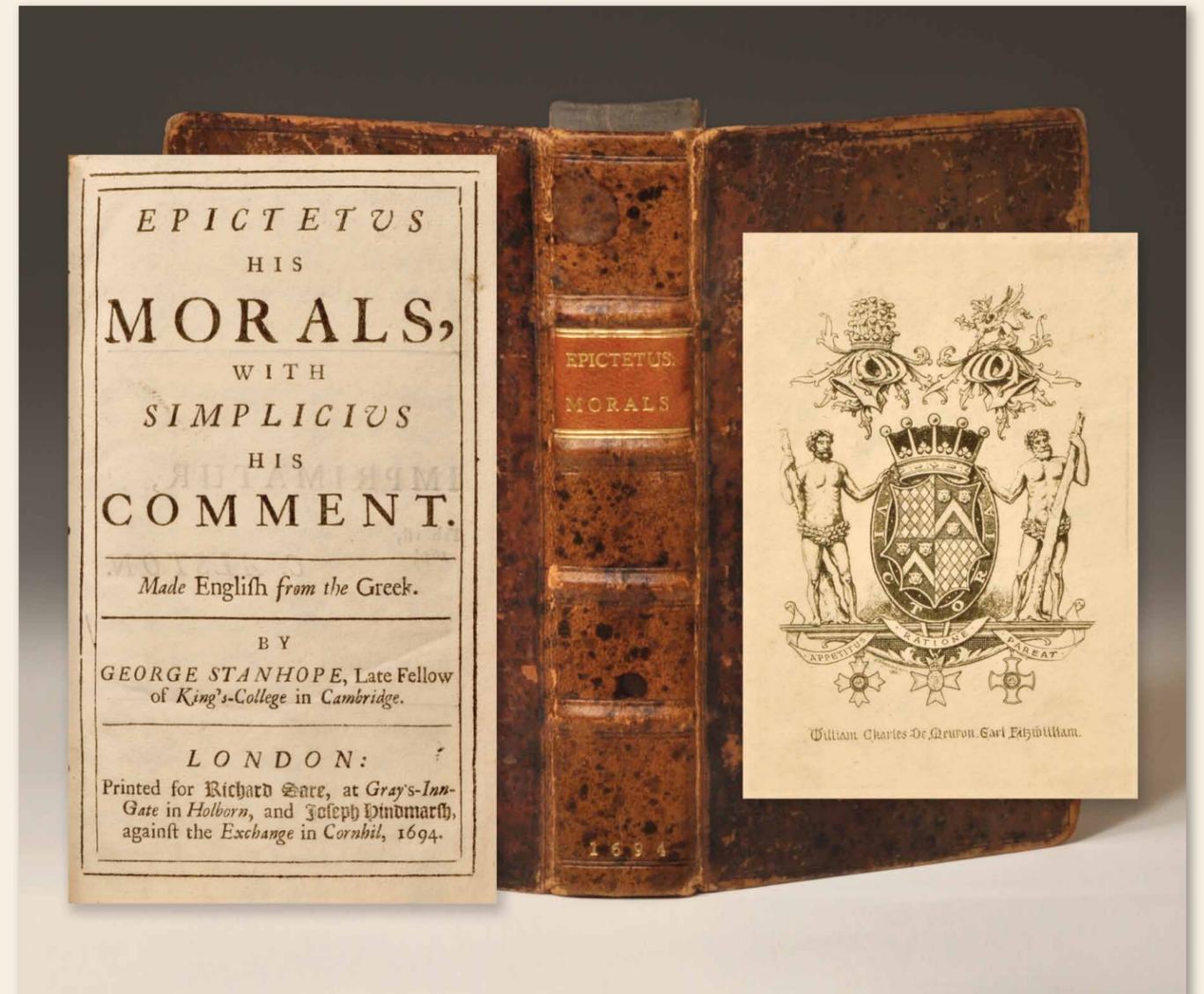
William: It does, and of course, the armorial plates early books often bear can tell much about their past histories. Some originated from once-grand English manor homes, which saw their contents broken up and dispersed at the end of the Second World War. The libraries in those homes were often significant, and had been generations in the making. This book, published in London in 1694, came from such a home, though the plate is more recent.

Imperial: This a first edition of this translation, isn't it?

William: Yes it is, and on the front pastedown you will see the bookplate. It's for the 7th Earl Fitzwilliam, one of the more fascinating figures the English peerage produced. His full name was William Charles de Meuron Wentworth-Fitzwilliam, though he preferred the shortened nickname of Billy. His accession to the earldom in 1902 was challenged by members of his own family, who denounced him for being a "changeling." They claimed he had been an unrelated baby deceptively substituted for a legitimate female newborn, and that this switch was also made in order to rid the family of epilepsy, with which Billy's alleged father had been afflicted. Simply put though, his relations were upset that Billy's branch of the family was set to inherit, rather than theirs. The earldom brought with it the largest Georgian house in all of England: the 365-room "Wentworth," in South Yorkshire, which possessed an exceptional library, a roomful of paintings by Sir Anthony van Dyck, and a vast estate of coal-rich land.

Imperial: I see an inscription on the plate... *Appetitus Ratione Pareat*?

William: A quotation in Latin from Cicero: "Let your desires be ruled by reason."



▲ The first edition of George Stanhope's English translation of the "Morals" by Greek philosopher Epictetus (A.D. 55-135).

Imperial: It also says: "Earl Fitzwilliam," so I am going to make a presumption that Billy was able to keep the title... am I correct?

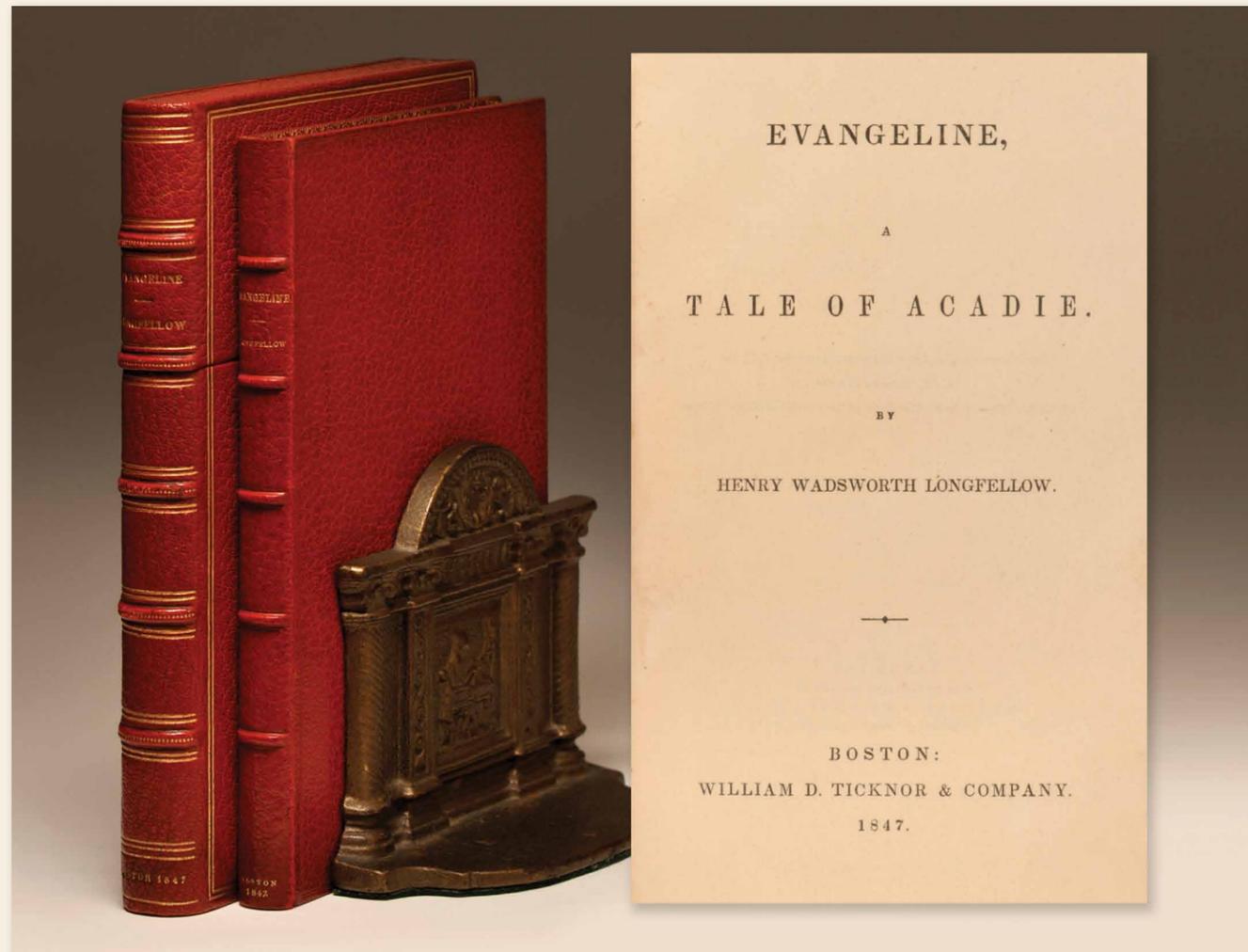
William: You are; he did keep it, but his family's subsequent history would be filled with scandals and tragedies; it played out like a sensational novel. The sister of a future American president even became entangled in their story, for Kathleen ("Kick") Kennedy, who was having an adulterous affair with Billy's son and heir, died in a plane crash with him during a tryst to the south of France.¹

Imperial: So through association then, certain copies of books can offer more interest, than just the author's text.

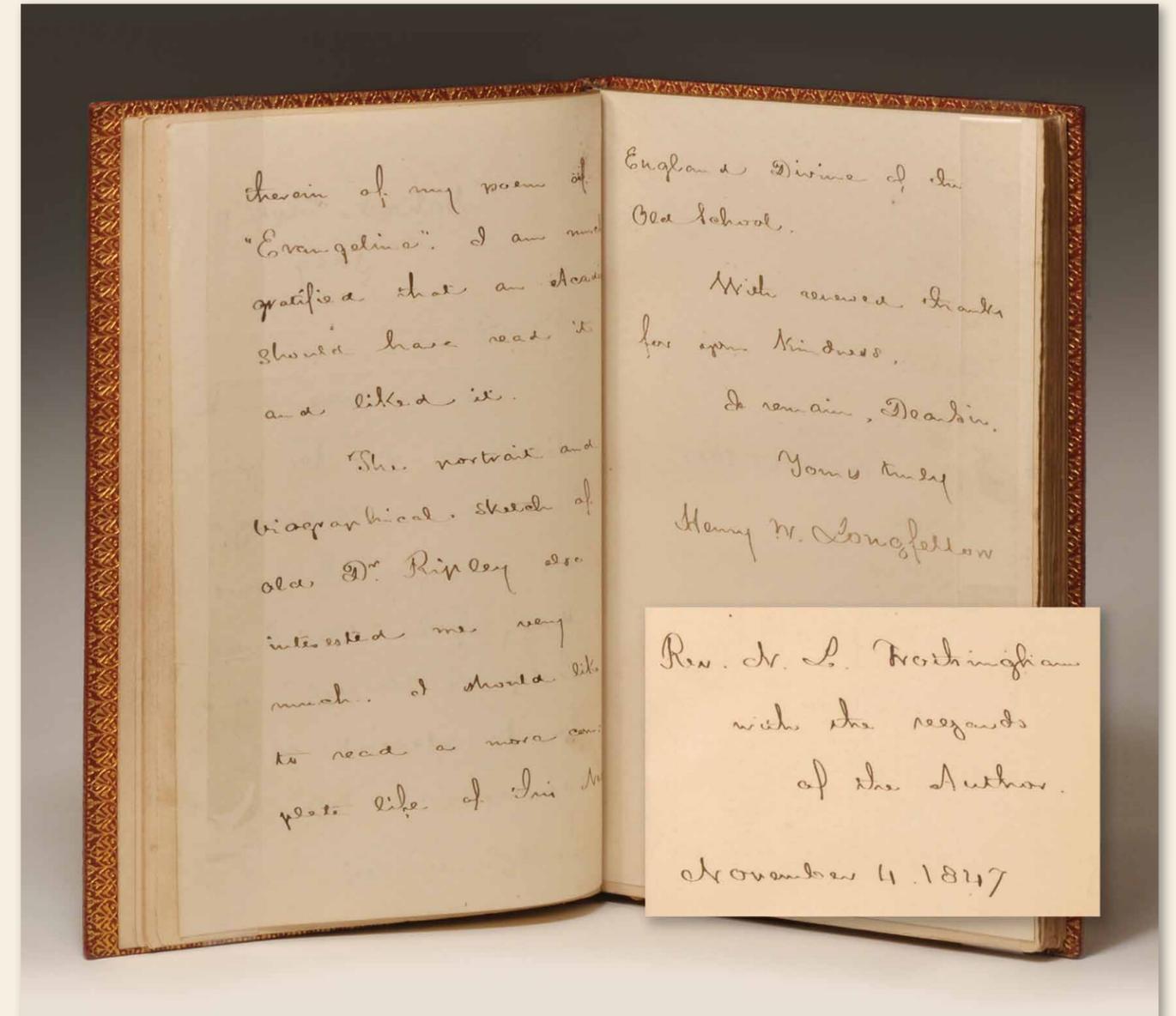
William: Oh yes, very much so; and the collectible interests some books possess, can run deep. For example, here is a copy of "Evangeline," by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882). This is the most important work in dactylic hexameters, and arguably the greatest epic poem, irrespective of meter, in American literature. It is a first edition, but it is also a presentation copy. The author inscribed it for Rev. Nathaniel Frothingham on November 4, 1847, four days after the book came off the press in Boston.

Imperial: I see there is also a letter bound into this copy.

William: It's a letter of thanks from Longfellow to French-Canadian author Louis Surette (1818-1897), for praise he had given "Evangeline." Surette was so enthusiastic over the poem, he even named a daughter after it.



▲ The first edition of Longfellow's "Evangeline," in a signed binding by Alfred Matthews (c. 1890), and with a later morocco pull-off case, made by the Rowfant Bindery (c. 1909).



▲ Longfellow discusses "Evangeline" in a letter bound inside a first edition copy of the poem; the author's presentation inscription is found on a preliminary blank.

Imperial: I like the engraved bookplate; it's very elaborate.

William: That was designed by E. D. (Edwin Davis) French (1851-1906), for the book collector Charles B. Foote (1837-1900), both of whom were early members of the Grolier Club² in New York.

Imperial: Books from your library have been featured in exhibitions at the Grolier Club, and published in books about books, haven't they?

William: Some of them have, in relation to the history of bookbinding, and also in early library catalogues.³

Imperial: What more can you tell me about the bookplate?

William: “Evangeline,” and a number of other books with titles or author’s names, are depicted on the plate, and the choices offer a subtle reference to a nearly forgotten literary quarrel.

Imperial: The Longfellow War?

William: It came to be called that, yes. Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose portrait is present, provided Longfellow with the idea for “Evangeline,” and encouraged him to write it. Edgar Allan Poe, whose name is on one of the volumes, once offered great praise for Longfellow, describing him as “unquestionably the best poet in America.”⁴ Later he charged that his inspiration drew too heavily upon European sources, especially Tennyson, who also has a volume on the plate. Differing authors then took sides, but Poe’s attack may have had financial motivation, as sales of his editorial publication grew over the controversy he manufactured. Longfellow paid no attention, and refrained from comment.

Imperial: Could you talk more about Charles B. Foote? I know he was very interested in American literature.

William: Foote’s library was something of a novelty, for at the time American literature didn’t have a very long history, or the established collecting tradition European literature enjoyed. Actually, Foote’s interests paralleled those of many people today, who collect “modern firsts”; he sought out first editions of contemporary works he liked, and others which he felt were important, and considering the titles he chose, time has proven him correct.

Imperial: I understand he was more successful as a collector, than in business affairs.

William: True. His stock brokerage firm Hatch & Foote, of which he was a partner with Daniel Hatch, collapsed during a panic in 1884, and though it rose again, it was only to fall once more, even harder, in 1900. This last disaster destroyed him. One contemporary news account described him as “insane and dying in bed,” as the result of failed speculations with stocks. His financial difficulties caused him at times to sell parts of his library, and his collection of American first editions were auctioned in New York, on November 23, 1894. I have an article regarding the sale, printed the next day in The New York Times. It’s written in a somewhat florid, but entertaining style.

Imperial: What does it say?

William: “Scarce First Editions Appreciated. Prices at the Sale of Charles B. Foote’s Collection Charmingly Exorbitant. . . . It was to book lovers the most encouraging of book sales, if they care at all for expression in money of appreciation for scarce books.” It then runs through prices realized, and concludes: “If a wise man, a sage like Cato, had come into the room while the revelry was at its height and said, ‘You are wrong; the later editions are better because they are more correct,’ he would have been regarded as a maniac.”

Imperial: That is amusing. What sort of prices did the books bring?

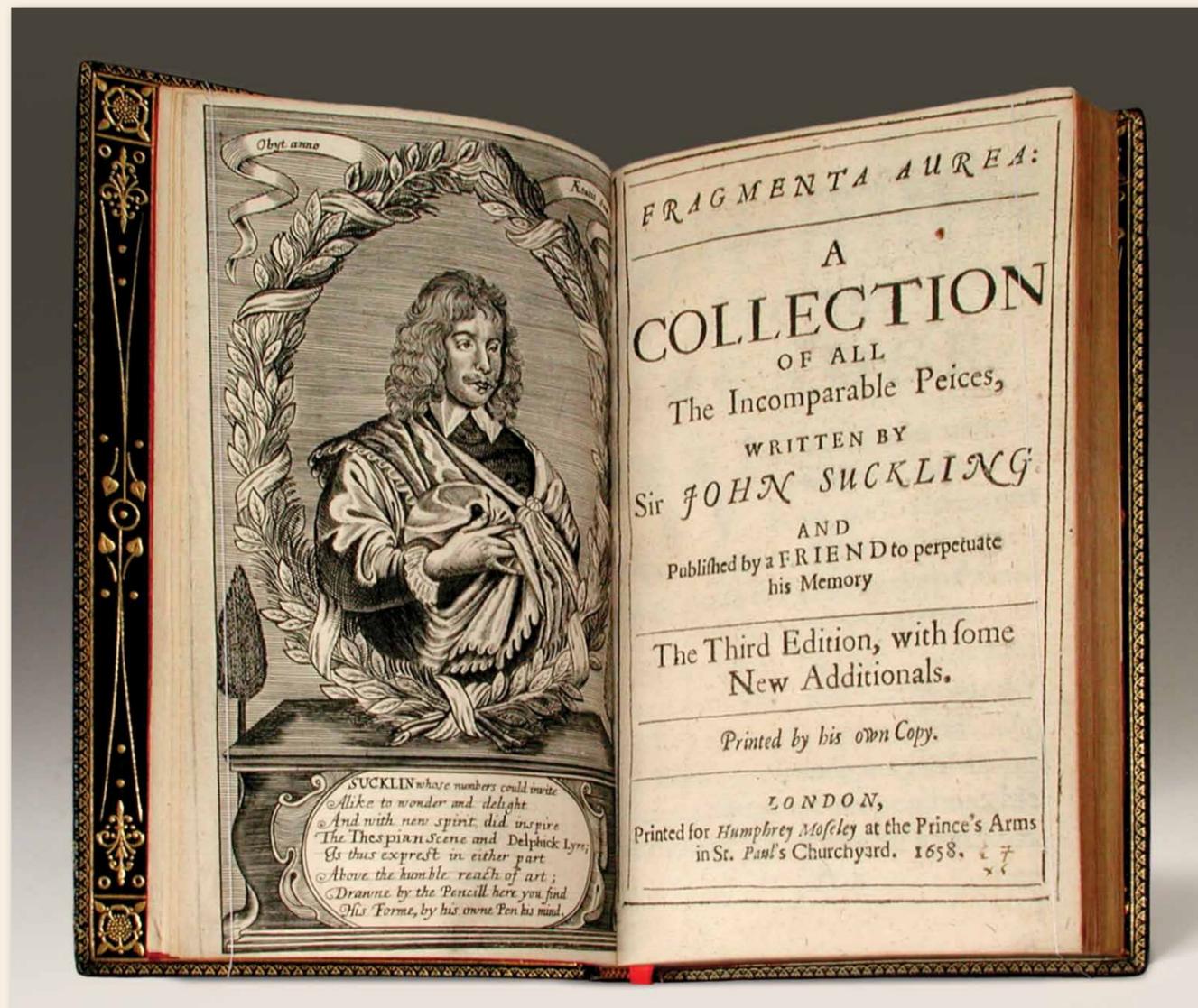
William: “Evangeline” which we have been discussing, topped the list of Longfellow works at \$62.50, though the original manuscript for Poe’s “The Bells” surpassed it, at \$75. The Times described the money for Poe’s work as being handed over “with imperturbable nonchalance.” Other first editions included Stowe’s “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” which realized \$22, and Hawthorne’s “The Scarlet Letter,” which achieved a price of \$50.



▲ Bookplate by E. D. French for Charles B. Foote, dated 1894, inside Foote’s copy of “Evangeline.”

Imperial: If we could only find items like those today, at such prices!

William: Foote had a collection of English first editions also, which was auctioned the following year, and a comparison of prices against the sale of his American collection is interesting. Books by authors such as Dickens, the Brownings, and Lamb, reached prices up to several hundred dollars each. The New York Times may have been surprised at what they felt were high prices for his American books, but collectors were starting to notice them. They hadn’t quite achieved the level of importance accorded their European counterparts, but the disparity was beginning to vanish.



▲ Sir John Suckling's collected works "Fragmenta Aurea."

Imperial: So far we have talked about first editions of books. Do you always make an effort to seek out only first editions for your library?

William: Oh no, not at all. First editions have their appeal of course, but so too can copies of many later editions. The Times writer previously quoted, had a valid point about the later editions being "more correct." I have always liked the way the great Dr. Johnson addressed this topic in one of his letters, regarding book-hunting: "The most curious edition is commonly the first, and the most useful may be expected among the last."⁵ He also wrote about the desirability of "splendid" editions, which he felt perhaps an easier challenge to locate, as only one's eyes (and good taste of course) were required. In his words: "The most splendid the eye will discern."⁶

Imperial: Beautifully stated.

William: Here is copy of the colorful Cavalier poet Sir John Suckling's "Fragmenta Aurea," which Dr. Johnson may have approved of. Most of Suckling's work never appeared in print during his lifetime, but circulated in manuscript form for some years after his death. The first substantial printed edition was brought out in 1646. Subsequently, as new writings were discovered, further editions were required to present these "New Additionals" to the public, as they are described on the title page of this third edition (London, 1658). This copy could qualify as being "useful" I believe in Dr. Johnson's opinion, as it is more complete than the previous editions.

Imperial: He would have thought it splendid also. Tell me something of the "colorful" Sir John Suckling.

William: His life was short (he died at 33), but eventful. When not writing poetry or plays, he was fighting in wars in Germany and Britain (and over women, once receiving a dreadful beating from a rival suitor). He was an expert at bowling and card games, and the inventor of cribbage; but he was also an inveterate gambler. Legend has it he made gifts of card packets to the wealthiest of England's elite, but as they were all marked, he was able to bilk fortunes out of them whenever he would visit. His demise is still debated; it may have been suicide in France, though one tale has him running afoul of the Inquisition, after he eloped with a woman to Spain.

Imperial: That would count as a colorful life!



▲ Elaborately gilt-tooled full morocco binding for "Fragmenta Aurea."



▲ Illustration by Lady Diana Beauclerk for “Leonora,” by Gottfried August Bürger (1747-1794).

William: Here is another non-first edition, but still with appeal. This is partly owing to the fine illustrations by Lady Diana Beauclerk (1734-1808), an English noblewoman who like Lord Fitzwilliam and Sir John Suckling, enjoyed a life enlivened by a bit of scandal. Her pictures were made for William Spencer’s translation of the German poet Bürger’s enormously popular “Lenore” (translated as “Leonora”), the Gothic ballad which had so much influence on later Romantic writers.



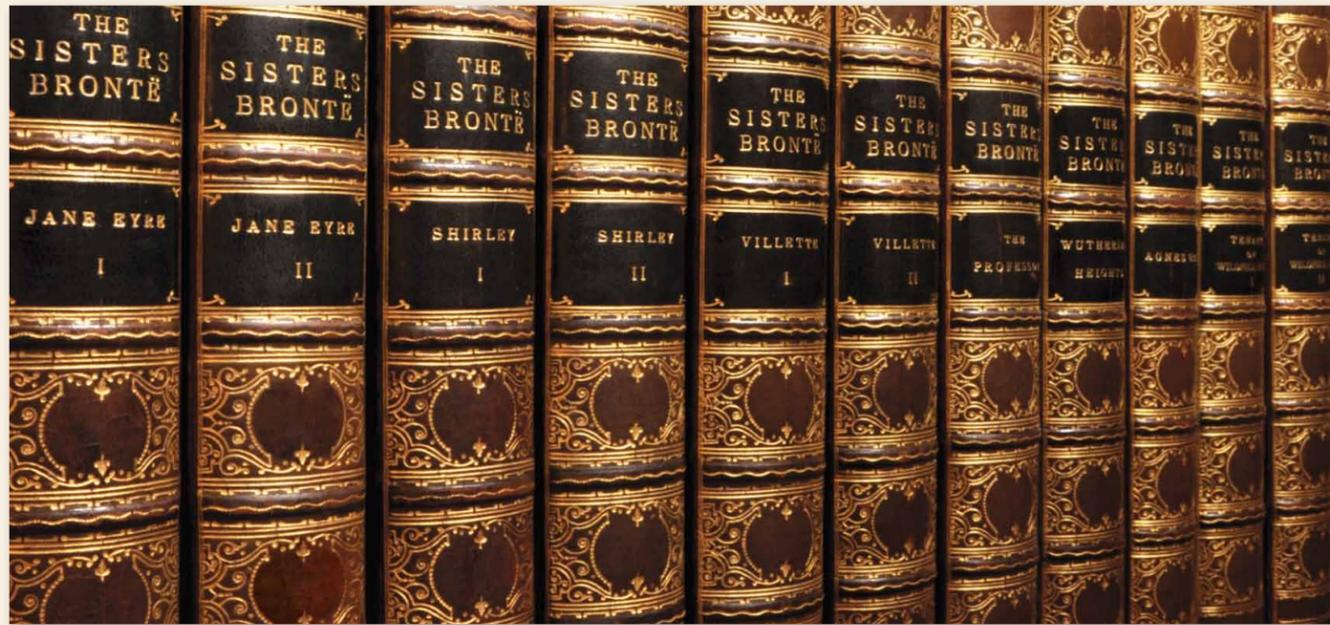
▲ Bookplates for Mathew Wilson and his granddaughter, famed book collector Frances Mary Richardson Curren, inside Bürger’s “Leonora.”

Imperial: Wasn’t this one of Percy Shelley’s favorite books?

William: It was. His biographer Dowden noted that Shelley owned Spencer’s translation with the Beauclerk illustrations, and enjoyed giving frightening readings from it.⁷ Mary Shelley also admired the poem, and placed it on her required reading list.⁸ The Spencer translation first appeared in 1796, though this particular copy, a second edition (London, 1808), has a desirable pedigree, for it bears the bookplate of one of the greatest of all book collectors: Miss Frances Mary Richardson Curren (1785-1861). It appears opposite a plate for her maternal grandfather, Mathew Wilson. Miss Curren’s library included many items inherited from her forebears, but she made significant additions of her own, which necessitated a remodeling of her home, Eshton Hall (in North Yorkshire), to accommodate the increase. Dibdin, the English bibliographer, made special trips to see her. He estimated she had 15,000 volumes,⁹ though a later visitor revised the number upwards, to 20,000.¹⁰

Imperial: I know she had a connection with an important novelist.

William: Yes, she did. Miss Curren had the disability of deafness, and preferred to spend the larger part of her life sequestered in her library, surrounded by her beloved books, as well as collections of fossils, shells, old master paintings and prints, and coins and medals. Nevertheless, she took an amiable interest in the lives of those who happened to enter her society, and even acted as a patroness and supporter of charities. It has been conjectured that she financially assisted Rev. Patrick Brontë with the education of his daughters, one of whom adopted the name “Curren” as the first part of her authorial pseudonym.¹¹



▲ All of the Brontë sisters' novels, in antique Zaehnsdorf bindings.

Imperial: You are speaking now of Charlotte Brontë, who would write under the name "Currer Bell."

William: I am, and in 1839 Charlotte began working as a governess for families in the county of Yorkshire, including the Sidgwicks, whose property bordered Miss Currer's. So, it's possible Charlotte may have visited the Currer library, which by that time was famous throughout northern England.

Imperial: You have to tell me something about the scandal of Lady Diana Beauclerk... what's the story?

William: She was the unhappy wife of Frederick St. John, the 2nd Viscount Bolingbroke. "Lady Di" as she was known, had artistic interests and taste. Her boorish husband on the other hand (appropriately nicknamed "Bully"), was concerned only with drinking, gambling, and maintaining mistresses. She bore him two sons, but repaid his infidelity by taking a lover, named Topham Beauclerk. She gave Beauclerk four children — three while still married to Bolingbroke. Eventually they divorced and she was able to marry Beauclerk, but it was no improvement; his nature was just too similar to that of her first husband. Horace Walpole, who knew Beauclerk well, described him as being "remarkably filthy in his person," and thought he actually "generated vermin."¹² Their familial customs would not be lost upon the next generation, for Lady Di's eldest child, the 3rd Viscount Bolingbroke, engaged in a long-term extramarital affair with his younger half-sister Mary Beauclerk, who gave him four sons.

Imperial: Oh my... that would be scandalous.

William: They were quite the family.

Imperial: As your Brontë set, and so many other books in your library were bound by the Zaehnsdorfs, you have to say something about those medals.



▲ The Dublin and Paris Zaehnsdorf Medals (reproduced actual size).

William: Their discovery was owing to my mother's interest in Egypt. The French and English, at war over Egypt between 1798 and 1801, issued many medals. The English examples primarily commemorated victories and heroic personalities, whereas Napoleon's tended to be of a more propagandistic nature. My mom appreciates these, and earlier this year an English dealer sold one to me for her collection. In discussing other recently acquired medals, he mentioned a pair he had obtained from the descendants of "a family of bookbinders." He certainly had my attention, and when I learned the name Zaehnsdorf was upon them, I couldn't believe my luck.

Imperial: These were prizes for competition weren't they?

