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Publication Date

2025-11-05

Undergraduate

From First to Fine: Facsimile, Fine Printing, and Cultural Patronage
in William Andrews Clark, Jr.'s Christmas Gift Books

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June 2025

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my faculty mentor, Professor Fisher, for his invaluable guidance and steadfast support. I will always be grateful for the serendipitous path that led me to book studies through his captivating seminar on libraries and special collections. My thanks also go to Amanda and Jacobs at the Clark Library, Kelly at the Library Special Collections, for their expertise in preparing my documents and for their patience with my many questions.

On a personal note, I would like to thank my partner, Ziyang, for accompanying me on research trips to the Clark and for taking more than 1,000 document photos, now claiming 10 GB on his phone. To my family, thank you for your unwavering support of my education from across the globe. Finally, this journey would not have been possible without the generous support of the Undergraduate Research Center (HASS) and the Undergraduate Research Scholars Program. Thank you all so much!

Introduction

At Christmas in 1922, William Andrews Clark, Jr. inaugurated what would become an extraordinary tradition in America's private press culture. That Christmas, selected friends and institutions received an unusual gift: two volumes of Shelley's *Adonais*—one a meticulous facsimile of the 1821 first edition, the other a lavish folio reimagination by San Francisco's celebrated printer John Henry Nash. This dual presentation, pairing historical reproduction with contemporary fine press artistry, would become the signature format for Clark's Christmas books. The series continued through the early 1930s at extraordinary expense, with production costs for some volumes reaching \$37,000 despite their limitation to 250 copies.¹ More than bibliographic luxuries, these books were deeply intentional objects, offering a window into Clark's vision of how private collecting could contribute to cultural memory and public scholarship.

The Christmas books took shape during a period of sweeping cultural investment in the United States, when newly consolidated fortunes were being transformed into durable civic infrastructure. In the early twentieth century, industrial and financial elites—among them Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, and Henry Ford—began channeling their private wealth into the creation of libraries, museums, universities, and research foundations. This new mode of cultural patronage was not merely philanthropic; it was designed to build long-lasting intellectual

¹ Robert D. Harlan, *John Henry Nash: The Biography of a Career* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 65. Z232.N1 H22. Z733.W683 W55 1985. UCLA Library Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

and cultural infrastructure on a national scale.² Rare book collecting became one of the most refined channels through which this energy found expression, offering collectors a way to materialize both personal legacy and national belonging. As *Book Collecting and Scholarship* observes, these figures were “men of competence and vision whose interests went beyond their immediate professional and business tasks,” who transformed bibliophilia into an act of cultural responsibility rather than private indulgence.³

In the 1920s, Los Angeles experienced what bookseller Jacob Zeitlin terms “Small Renaissance: Southern Californian Style,” driven by a flourishing network of fine printers, booksellers, bibliographical organizations, and special collection libraries.⁴ New cultural institutions, established by wealthy collectors like Henry E. Huntington and William Andrews Clark, Jr., were not merely accumulating books but actively shaping the region’s intellectual infrastructure. Their commissions of fine press editions, their cultivation of bibliographic expertise, and their investment in public-facing institutions helped establish a distinctively Californian bibliophilic style. Within this regional ecosystem, Clark’s Christmas books represented a striking synthesis of aesthetic ambition and strategic cultural authorship, departing from conventional gift-giving practices by positioning private printing as an instrument of public legacy.

² Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century: The Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations in the Rise of American Power* (Columbia University Press, 2012).

³ Theodore Blegen et al., *Book Collecting and Scholarship: Essays* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 9. Z987. B6442. UCLA Library Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

⁴ Jacob Zeitlin, “Small Renaissance: Southern California Style,” *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 50 no.1 (1956): 18–19. <https://doi.org/10.1086/pbsa.50.1.24299402>.

What set Clark apart was his systematic pairing of facsimiles with newly commissioned fine press interpretations. While other collectors occasionally sponsored seasonal editions, Clark developed a format that united historical reproduction with modern design. The facsimiles made rare first editions materially accessible, while Nash's folios reimaged them within the aesthetic vocabulary of contemporary fine printing. Uniting preservation with reinvention, the Christmas books moved beyond the conventions of private press publishing and established a novel model of bibliographic expression.

Equally significant was the series' role in cultivating networks across collectors, libraries, and cultural institutions. Through carefully managed distribution, the books linked East Coast and European centers of learning with emerging cultural institutions in California. Their circulation mirrored the broader exchange of rare books, expertise, and cultural capital during the interwar period, underscoring how bibliophilic gifts could function as deliberate instruments of intellectual and artistic connection.

More broadly, Clark's Christmas books illuminate the entangled relationship between private wealth and cultural formation in the early twentieth century. Drawing on the ideals of the English private press movement while adapting them to American conditions, Clark's project demonstrated how individual patronage could operate across artistic, scholarly, and institutional domains. Each volume served multiple functions: as a gesture of personal generosity, as a display of connoisseurship, as a contribution to institutional holdings, and as a vehicle for fine printing experimentation. The extraordinary resources devoted to their production reflected not only Clark's personal affluence, but also a broader vision of collecting as a form of cultural

authorship. In this sense, the Christmas books combined aesthetic ambition with infrastructural intent, offering a new framework for how private collectors might engage with public culture.

While existing scholarship has explored Clark's role in shaping Los Angeles as a cultural center and Nash's contributions to California's printing renaissance, the Christmas books themselves—particularly their dual-format design—have received comparatively little sustained attention. Yet these volumes, situated at the intersection of historical facsimile and contemporary fine press interpretation, offer rare insight into how private collecting could advance both preservation and artistic production. This study argues that Clark's Christmas books represented an unprecedented fusion of bibliographic scholarship and cultural patronage, one that helped establish new paradigms for how private collectors could contribute to public culture. Through close examination of production records, correspondence, introductory essays, and the volumes themselves, this research reveals how Clark's project moved beyond conventional gift-giving to create sophisticated cultural artifacts that served multiple ends: preserving bibliographic heritage, advancing fine printing aesthetics, building bibliographical networks, and ultimately forging a transformative legacy in American book culture. In examining how these books were conceived, produced, and circulated, we gain deeper understanding of the complex ways private wealth could be deployed to serve both scholarly and artistic ends during this pivotal period in American cultural history.

Chapter I. Clark's Scholarly and Bibliophilic Vision

Befitting their names, the very *raison d'être* of Clark's Christmas books was to serve as heartfelt, personal gifts for the holiday season. While little evidence suggests that Clark had envisioned a decade-long project when he commissioned Nash to print the first Christmas book in 1922, it was clearly his intention to share with a select group of friends the treasures in his private library. In the introductory essay to *Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats* (1922), Clark articulates his motivations:

My reasons for publishing this volume of Shelley's *Adonais* are twofold: first to do honor to the genius of this immortal poet and in his memory to distribute his masterpiece at this Yuletide among my friends, in place of the conventional Christmas card of "greetings"; and secondly, to give to the fraternity of Bibliophiles another example of John Henry Nash's exquisite and matchless typographical art. (ix)

This synthesis of scholarly and bibliophilic interests, which underpinned the series from its inception, was directly reflected in the dual format of facsimile and fine reprint that characterized the entire Christmas book series. More revealingly, these privately printed gifts allowed Clark to share his personal fascinations, convictions, and memories in the form of tangible, flippable pages, "for [his] own satisfaction and pleasure of [his] friends."⁵

Origins and Historical Context

The tradition of gifting ornately decorated books for Christmas can be traced back to early 19th-century Europe. As tokens of cultural sophistication, gift books emphasized decorative appeal over literary substance. These literary annuals and keepsakes, which flourished in America during the "gift book vogue" of 1825 to 1865, primarily functioned as symbols of

⁵ Robert O. Schad to William Andrews Clark, Jr., Jan 17, 1934, Box 27, William Andrews Clark, Jr. and William Andrews Clark Memorial Library Records. Clarkive.Pre-1934, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

social status for the expanding Anglo-American bourgeoisie.⁶ Published annually before the holiday season, these volumes typically featured a mix of sentimental poetry, romantic stories, and steel-plate engravings, all designed to appeal to middle-class tastes and aspirations.⁷ Their success stemmed more from their “giftness”—the superficial status as artifacts—than from any recognized literary or artistic merit.⁸

Clark’s Christmas books, conceived exactly a century after the first English Christmas book appeared in 1822, stood in deliberate opposition to this commercial tradition. Emerging from the Private Press Movement at the turn of the 20th century, Clark’s volumes belonged to a bibliophilic tradition that prioritized craftsmanship, literary merit, and artistic integrity. Clark was not alone in transforming this form of seasonal publication into an opportunity for private fine printing—his series coincided with the zenith of Christmas book production among American private presses in the 1920s and 1930s.⁹ Among the most distinguished contemporary examples were the Lakeside Classics (1903-2019) produced by R. R. Donnelley, which would become America’s longest continuous Christmas book series,¹⁰ the Torch Press Christmas books (1912-1959) by Luther Brewer,¹¹ and the scholarly Cambridge Christmas books (1930-1973).¹²

⁶ Ralph Thompson, *American Literary Annuals & Gift Books, 1825-1865* (New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 1936), 4.

⁷ Ibid., 4-5; Frederick W. Faxon, Eleanore Jamieson, and Iain Bain, *Literary Annuals and Gift Books: A Bibliography, 1823-1903* (Pinner, England: Private Libraries Association, 1973): xiv-xv.

⁸ Simon Cooke, “Illustrated Gift Books of the 1860s,” *The Private Library* 5th Series 6:3 (Autumn 2003): 121.

⁹ To see a compiled list of privately published Christmas books, refer to *A Bibliographical Check-List of Christmas Books and More Christmas books*, both compiled and edited by Walter Klinefelter.

¹⁰ Walter Klinefelter, *A Bibliographical Check-List of Christmas Books* (Portland, 1937), xiii.

¹¹ Robert A. Shaddy, “Around the Library Table with Luther A. Brewer: Annual Reflections on Collecting Leigh Hunt,” *Books at Iowa* 57 (1992): 21, <https://doi.org/10.17077/0006-7474.1223>.

¹² Cambridge Insights, *The Cambridge Christmas Books: Creating a Digital Archive* (Cambridge: 2022), <https://www.cambridge.org/news-and-insights/insights/the-cambridge-christmas-books-creating-a-digital-archive>

While many private press Christmas books assumed informal formats like cards, leaflets, and envelope-sized pamphlets,¹³ Clark deliberately chose to print his series as large, impressive folios. This choice reflected not only Nash's printing virtuosity, but also Clark's ambition for these volumes as substantial bibliographic accomplishments rather than merely seasonal ephemera. Envisioned as private, personalized gifts for select recipients, Clark's Christmas books served the purposes of remembrance and good wishes while carrying significant symbolic and material value. More significantly, they served as intellectual currency, sustaining social connections among bibliophiles and friends while communicating their owner's taste and connoisseurship.

A Memorial in Print: Acts of Vindication and Literary Justice

Clark's collection was well devoted to Romantic literature, but *Adonais* is unparalleled in its importance as a funeral memorial—an elegy by Shelley mourning the unheroic passing of Keats at the young age of twenty-five. Clark clearly recognized the significance of this piece, stating, “*Adonais* is the most perfect lament of one poet by another; it is the greatest threnody ever sung by one genius to the genius of another.”¹⁴ In the biographical introduction, Clark wrote more than passionately about the injustice English critics had inflicted upon Shelley, and more grievously, upon Keats—so vicious that it caused his demise in despair. This sympathetic tone,

¹³ Klinefelter, *A Bibliographical Check-List of Christmas Books*, x.

¹⁴ William Andrews Clark, Jr., “Introduction,” in *Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats; in Commemoration of the Hundredth Anniversary of the Death of the Poet*, by Percy Bysshe Shelley (San Francisco: Printed for William Andrews Clark, Jr., by John Henry Nash, 1922), viii-ix. Press coll. Nash F076. William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

conveying a deep personal connection to the poets' mistreatment, elevated the book from a literary masterpiece to a vindication of their poetic legacy.¹⁵

The book's publication also marked a symbolic occasion: the centenary of Shelley's death.¹⁶ In this context, this special Christmas edition carried even greater significance. To privately publish these works and assert one's convictions about maligned poets was, in itself, a quiet but defiant cultural act.

Notably, throughout his Christmas book series, Clark consistently championed writers he believed deserved greater recognition or fairer treatment. His introductions often served as correctives to literary history, restoring reputations that had suffered from contemporary malice or later neglect. In *The Deserted Village* (1926), for instance, he lamented that Oliver Goldsmith "was a man much misunderstood by his contemporaries, and maligned by them and those who followed—through malice, jealousy, hatred, and envy."¹⁷ Similarly, he characterized Thomas Gray's *Elegy* (1925) as "[an] immortal poem... emotionally wedded to the genius of its people."¹⁸ It is evident that Clark saw his private publishing as both meaningful and meaning-making. By republishing, and therefore materially affirming the immortality of these masterpieces, Clark united his scholarly and bibliophilic visions through the Christmas series.

¹⁵ Harlan, *The Biography of a Career*, 61.

¹⁶ Clark, *Introduction to Adonais*, ix.

¹⁷ William Andrews Clark, Jr., "An Introduction to Oliver Goldsmith & The Deserted Village," in *The Deserted Village, a Poem by Dr. Goldsmith, by Oliver Goldsmith* (San Francisco: Printed for William Andrews Clark, Jr. by John Henry Nash, 1926), iv. Press coll. Nash F047. William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

¹⁸ William Andrews Clark, Jr., "Historical and Bibliographical Forward," in *An Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard*, by Thomas Gray (San Francisco: Printed for William Andrews Clark, Jr. by John Henry Nash, 1925), viii. Press coll. Nash F048. William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

Clark's most special—and perhaps boldest—attempt to vindicate a literary genius came with the publication of *Some Letters from Oscar Wilde to Alfred Douglas, 1892-1897, Heretofore Unpublished* (1924). As early as 1921, a year after acquiring the 25 original letters, Clark had been in frequent communication with his attorneys and bibliophilic friends regarding the possibility of publishing them.¹⁹ The process of obtaining legal approval from Wilde's executor was tortuous and contested, for the scandal between Wilde and Douglas was infamous, and even publishing the letter privately could leave Clark "liable to a suit for libel."²⁰ Despite all these forbidding consequences, Clark was determined to bring the papers to light, and he eventually secured official approval in 1923.

These letters were undeniably important as historical testimonies, but their true significance was in "giv[ing] a truer impression of the man and his life than we formerly possessed."²¹ As Dr. Rosenbach wrote in the prefacing essay to this volume, and as Clark had greatly approved of, "it is, however, necessary for us to dispel a mendacious impression, a false atmosphere, that Wilde created many years ago, and which, if not corrected would have crept into the chronicle of our literary history."²² Therefore, in publishing, albeit privately, the previously unpublished Wilde letters, Clark was doing justice to a great poet and directly contributing to the historiography of Wilde's life and legacy. His effort marked an important step

¹⁹ See Legal Correspondence 1921-1922, Box 34, Folder 3; Rosenbach Correspondence 1921, Box 34, Folder 4; Legal Correspondence and Correspondence with Vyvyan Holland re: publication rights 1923-1925, Box 6, Folder 33, William Andrews Clark, Jr. and William Andrews Clark Memorial Library Records. Clarkive.Pre-1934, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

²⁰ Clark to Nash, March 4, 1922, Box 34, Folder 3, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library Records.

²¹ A.S.W. Rosenbach, "An Essay by A.S.W Rosenbach," in *Some Letters from Oscar Wilde to Alfred Douglas, 1892-1897, Heretofore Unpublished* (San Francisco: Printed for William Andrews Clark, Jr., by John Henry Nash, 1924). Press coll. Nash F091. William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

²² *Ibid.*, xviii.

in shifting Wilde's posthumous reputation from that of a notorious criminal to a more complex, humanized artist, whose personal struggles and emotional depth were essential to understanding his literary genius.

Rarity and Remembrance: The Case of Tamerlane

The second book in Clark's Christmas series is Edgar Allan Poe's *Tamerlane* (1923), which he had acquired just a year before publishing it. The rarity of its first edition made this choice particularly significant—Clark's copy was only the fourth known copy at the time, with the other three held by institutions including the British Museum.²³ In the introduction, Clark crafted yet another beautiful prose passage, explaining the significance of this printing of *Tamerlane*—and more importantly, its facsimile:

Many there are who love a book for its inherent value, regardless of its format; many there are who cherish a volume because of its make-up and its typographical beauty, as evidenced in the productions of our foremost printers here and abroad; yet there is an elect circle of bibliophiles which takes to heart a volume for itself alone, regardless of its format and its intrinsic literary merit, seeking enjoyment alone in possessing, or in seeing a rare first edition of one of the Masters of literature. In certain cases, owing to the extreme rarity of particular editions, many of these booklovers, for want of opportunities, may have been unable to see these items as they were first issued to the world; hence, it appealed to me to reproduce in facsimile one of the rarest gems in Americana. In order to reconcile these divergent obsessions, I have thought fit to publish this book in a manner never heretofore issued, viz: a modern version by Mr. Nash and as a companion piece the facsimile herewith. (vi-vii)

As a bibliophile and book collector, Clark reflects genuinely on the challenges of acquiring rare editions and the satisfaction of owning an authentic copy. I will discuss in the next chapter the intertwined concepts of authenticity, rarity, and accessibility in facsimile, as well as

²³ William Andrews Clark, Jr., "A Bibliographical Note," in *Tamerlane & Other Poems*, by Edgar Allan Poe (San Francisco: Printed for William Andrews Clark, Jr. by John Henry Nash, 1923), viii. Press coll. Nash F071. William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

their broader implications for bibliographic culture. Here, though, in publishing *Tamerlane* in a dual format, Clark sought to address the “diverse obsessions” of the booklover community to which he felt deeply connected. He was driven by both a sense of obligation and an artistic desire to share the beauty and significance of such treasures, simultaneously increasing the accessibility of rare books and bringing joy to fellow friends.

Beyond its rarity, *Tamerlane* held personal significance for Clark due to his shared alma mater with Poe—the University of Virginia. In the introduction, Clark recalled his college days, when he helped organize the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Poe’s death as the vice president of the Poe Memorial Association.²⁴ The eventual presentation, which took the form of a bust of Poe, was reproduced on the frontispiece of Clark’s *Tamerlane*. This cherished personal memory, in tandem with the collective memory of the institution, crystallized into a masterpiece that commemorated the commemoration of a master. On the dedication page, Clark writes:

Poe was the most illustrious son of this beloved Institution, and mayhap the publication of this edition will serve to suppress the carping and ungrateful criticisms that began with Rufus Wilmot Griswold and which have been continued to the present day by unsympathetic essayists. Edgar Allan Poe is our greatest man of letters in America and will, eventually, take his place among the Immortals of the world.

This unique piece of memory thus became a nexus between the private and the public—a personal acquisition and heartfelt memory now serving as a gift to the wider world.

²⁴ Clark, *A Bibliographical Note for Tamerlane*, x-xi.

Chapter II. The Art of Facsimile Reproduction

Thus far, we have been considering facsimiles in general terms—as high-fidelity reproductions of original works. The practice of reproducing art has existed since antiquity, with particular attention given to paintings, sculptures, and ornamental objects. In the realm of book history, the imitation of printed works can be traced to the early modern period, where it served various purposes: editorial correction, scholarly dissemination, bibliophilic appreciation, and, at times, deliberate forgery.²⁵

Facsimiles, as we now understand them, became more widely accessible in the mid-nineteenth century, following the invention of photolithography, copperplate engraving, and other printing techniques that enabled faithful reproduction at scale.²⁶ As the genre matured, three principal forms emerged: photographic facsimiles, which prioritize graphic fidelity; type facsimiles, which replicate original typography; and luxurious facsimiles, which “seek to reproduce the general effect of the original with such concessions to modern usage as the producer may think desirable.”²⁷

In this chapter, we will discuss three fundamental tensions in bibliographic culture with reference to Clark’s Christmas books: authenticity, rarity, and accessibility.

Authenticity and Reproduction

The notion of *mimesis* has long stood at the foundation of aesthetic theory, beginning with Plato, who questioned the deceptive nature of artistic reproduction. To imitate, in his view,

²⁵ David McKitterick, “Representation and Imitation,” in *Old Books, New Technologies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 74.

²⁶ McKitterick, “From Copying to Facsimile,” in *Old Books, New Technologies*, 94.

²⁷ A. W. Pollard, “‘Facsimile’ Reprints of Old Books,” *Library* s4-VI no.4 (1926): 305.

was to claim the authentic status of the original work or reality. In the context of bibliographic reproduction, these concerns take a more literal form, where forgeries pose as originals and blur the distinction between copy and source.

It is therefore essential to note that facsimiles are not intended as imitations or forgeries. While they prioritize faithful reproduction of material features, facsimiles are primarily concerned with conveying the significant characteristics of the original manuscript.²⁸ This relationship operates on a distinctly historical level:

The facsimile aims to invoke the virtual presence of the source, so the bond between reproduction and source is not only graphical and material but is also defined by a retrospective relationship between two points in history, the then and the now. In doing this, however, the facsimile simultaneously makes use of subtle effects to highlight this historical relationship, to mark a difference towards the source.²⁹

It is precisely this historical mediation that grants the facsimile its scholarly value. Although it aspires to visual and material accuracy, the facsimile is not a simulacrum. It represents an interpretive act shaped by both the original's time and the moment of reproduction.

This approach was central to the design of Clark's Christmas books. By the 1920s, facsimile production had become a refined bibliographic practice. Clark's editions openly acknowledged their derivative nature while upholding the highest standards of material reproduction. Among the most technically ambitious was the 1924 facsimile of Oscar Wilde's letters, a project that took over two years to complete. Nash reproduced the twenty-five letters using copper photoengraving and paper crafted to match the texture, size, and color of the

²⁸ Mats Dahlström, "Copies and Facsimiles," *International Journal of Digital Humanities* 1 (2) (2019): 201.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 202.

originals.³⁰ Praised as “a virtuoso piece of facsimile printing,”³¹ the edition stands as both a technical achievement and a scholarly act of cultural recovery.

Bibliographic Rarity

The existence of facsimiles—and of fakes and forgeries—testifies to the enduring value of rare copies to book collectors. First editions, particularly of canonical works, often command exceptional attention due to their scarcity and historical significance. As Clark observed in his introduction to the *Elegy*: “For collectors of modern English literature and bibliophiles alike, the first edition of this immortal work holds paramount importance, much like the First Folio of Shakespeare (1623), which is regarded as the cornerstone of any distinguished collection of early English literature.”³²

Several of the Christmas books derive their significance not only from craftsmanship but from their bibliographic rarity. *Ode on the Pleasure Arising from Vicissitude* (1933), for instance, was based on what was then the only known surviving copy.

This concern with rarity also operated at a cultural level, particularly in the context of early twentieth-century American book collecting. In the decades following World War I, bibliographic historicism became a way of aligning American cultural identity with a longer European literary tradition. As Benton notes,

The books virtually embodied a sense of cultural cohesion and continuity. Fine editions of “classic” and historically important texts invoked a seamless heritage of Western civilization, aligning prosperous Americans with centuries of elite European culture. These classics of Western, particularly English, literature served to culturally anchor those Americans who felt beleaguered and adrift in a society whose population grew increasingly diverse—racially, ethnically, and linguistically. Augmented by the

³⁰ Harlan, *The Biography of a Career*, 61.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

³² Clark, *Historical Bibliographical Forward for the Elegy*, x-xi.

historicized forms in which they were housed, these editions offered a bridge between postwar America and the past centuries' world of elite, mostly masculine, privileged worlds of education and book ownership in Western Europe.³³

In this light, bibliographic rarity was not about exclusivity or price. Rather, it functioned as a ritual marker that bound present-day collectors to an imagined lineage of literary cultivation. By reproducing texts that survived in a single copy—or that were previously hidden in private archives—Clark reanimated a chain of custody stretching from early modern printers to twentieth-century bibliophiles. The limited press runs of his Christmas books, usually capped at 250 copies, underscored the preciousness of the originals while signaling that their cultural gravity transcended any one owner's estate. Rarity, therefore, became a performative gesture, dramatizing what Benton calls the “seamless heritage” of Western letters.

Accessibility and Preservation

As Chapter I outlined, Clark treated facsimile work as a single operation with two inseparable aims. Preservation demanded that fragile manuscripts be spared light, oil, and repeated turning, while accessibility required that their words, layout, and physical cues remain open to close inspection. The Christmas books answered both needs through meticulous photography, copper photo-engraving, and custom-milled papers that conveyed texture and watermark without endangering the source. By circulating these sturdy surrogates, Clark allowed textual scholars to collate variants and typographers to study letterforms, all while the originals rested undisturbed.

³³ Megan Margaret Benton, “The Elite Book in America: Fine Book Publishing, 1920-1932,” (Phd Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1997), 254.

Yet each volume made the absence of the original palpable. Colophons and preliminary leaves list edition size, paper stock, shelf-mark, and holding library with archivist precision, leading the reader to imagine an artifact likely out of reach. This strategy does more than acknowledge provenance; it recasts authority as a function of mediation. A transparent chain of custody—source library, photographic negative, pressroom, numbered sheets—assures scholars that what they hold is an honest stand-in, not an impostor. Legitimacy, therefore, flows from Clark's stewardship, not from the reader's physical possession of a singular object.

Because that stewardship was so explicit, it expanded rather than diluted the aura of rarity. Clark placed sets in major research libraries from Los Angeles to Oxford, priced individual copies within reach of serious scholars, and lent volumes for exhibition. At the same time, small print runs and careful materials preserved a sense of occasion. Rarity became evidence of care, not of exclusion, and preservation thrived on a calibrated openness. Decades before digital scans turned rare books into pixels, Clark demonstrated how scrupulous facsimile work could convert private treasures into shared intellectual capital while allowing the originals to remain safely in archival twilight.

Chapter III. Fine Printing and the California Style

The Christmas books were not the beginning of the collaboration between Clark and Nash. For a collector of Clark's discernment, entrusting a printer with such intimate and materially significant gifts would not have been a casual decision. Their professional relationship began in 1914, when Clark commissioned Nash to print the first volume of a catalog documenting his private library.³⁴

At the time, Nash was already a respected figure in San Francisco's typographic circles. He had previously worked with several of Clark's acquaintances—including printing a book catalog for Clark's brother, Charles—and had earned the praise of Clark's bibliographer Robert E. Cowan, who would later also compile a bibliography of Nash's own works.³⁵ Clark, too, was deeply impressed. Over the next eight years, Clark commissioned Nash to print six additional volumes for his library.³⁶ This period of collaboration laid the foundation for the Christmas book project that would follow in 1922.

Nash's Printing Aesthetics

Nash's once collaborator, Edward F. O'Day, praised him as “the Aldus of San Francisco,” situating him within a lineage of master printers. Nash, he wrote, “has rocked the cradle for the new birth of printing in the West.”³⁷

³⁴ Harlan, *The Biography of a Career*, 26.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

³⁶ Nell O'Day, *A Catalogue of Books Printed by John Henry Nash* (San Francisco: John Henry Nash, 1937), 1.

³⁷ Edward O'Day et al., *John Henry Nash, the Aldus of San Francisco* (San Francisco: San Francisco Bay Cities Club of Printing House Craftsmen, 1928), 12.s

Nash was profoundly influenced by the ideals of the English private press movement, especially the Kelmscott and Doves Presses,³⁸ which emphasized craftsmanship, historical typographic models, and the unity of content and form. His typographic achievement was acknowledged by the very figures who had shaped that tradition. In 1916, Nash reprinted *The Book Beautiful*, a key work of the Doves Press. T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, founder of the Doves Press, responded with enthusiastic praise: “What a perfectly beautiful book you have made of *The Book Beautiful*! I am enchanted with it! Paper, type, arrangement—all combined under your clever hands to a whole which is at once a ‘thing of beauty’ and a symbol of that great order touched with delight which I am never tired of finding to be the supreme characteristic of the universe itself!”³⁹

Clark, too, publicly celebrated Nash’s skill. In the dedication to *Adonais*, he wrote: “[Nash’s] preeminence in the art of typography is internationally known, ... devotion to his art should be emulated by all in the craft, ... knowledge of printing should be a source of inspiration for others to acquire, and which should be conducive to their renewed efforts in behalf of the typographical art.”

Nash’s typographic choices were both historically informed and sensitively tailored to each project. His repertoire included a broad range of typefaces—Caslon Roman and American Oldstyle Italic, Garamond Roman and Italic, Cloister Old Style, Bauer Bodoni Roman and Italic, Bulmer Roman and Italic, and Elzevir Roman and Italic—each selected with careful regard to

³⁸ Joseph FauntLeRoy, *John Henry Nash, Printer: Legend and Fact in the Development of a Fine Press Intimately Reviewed* (Oakland: Westgate Press, 1948), 7.

³⁹ O’Day., *John Henry Nash, the Aldus of San Francisco*, 15.

the tone, period, and materiality of the text.⁴⁰ Joseph FauntLeRoy, Nash’s assistant, observed that his passion for type was so profound that he “breathes a soul into [the type].”⁴¹

Among those who received and responded to Nash’s work was Henry L. Bullen, a respected printer and typographic archivist. In a letter of appreciation to Clark, he wrote that “[*The Deserted Village*] is much to be preferred to the best examples of the Doves and Ashdene Presses, in which severe simplicity, commendable as it is, but marks the rigidity of the printers’ ideas and their lack of versatility. The book is simple; it is technically perfect; and it redeems American book typography from the accusation of being cheerless.”⁴²

Nash was equally exacting in his presswork. All volumes of the Christmas books were printed on handmade Holland paper produced by Van Gelder Zonen, a Dutch papermaking company founded in 1783. Nash is said to have placed the single largest order in the company’s history—2,000 reams.⁴³ Each sheet bore a distinctive “John Henry Nash” watermark, a subtle but unmistakable assertion of craftsmanship (see Appendix II, Fig. 1).

The books were housed in custom-designed slipcases, tailored to the dimensions and needs of each volume. Some, like the *An Essay on Criticism* (1928), employed a slipcase designed to accommodate the facsimile and the folio reprint of two different sizes. Others, such as *Ode on the Pleasure Arising from Vicissitude* (1933), utilized a four-flap enclosure to hold both volumes together.

⁴⁰ For detailed description of the typefaces used for each Christmas book, refer to *A Catalogue of Books Printed by John Henry Nash*.

⁴¹ FauntLeRoy, *John Henry Nash, Printer: Legend and Fact*, 68.

⁴² Letter from Henry L. Bullen to William Andrews Clark, Jr., quoted in *John Henry Nash, the Aldus of San Francisco*, 17-18.

⁴³ Harlan, *The biography of A Career*, 39.

Nash's typographic sensibilities blended medieval references with modern elegance. In a separate series of six broadside leaflets⁴⁴—less formal Christmas greetings that he printed for Clark—Nash used ruled borders extending to the margins, evoking the *mise-en-page* of illuminated manuscripts. Printed in rich black, red, and gold inks, these pieces featured hand-colored illustrations, decorated initials, gilt-ruled frames, and gothic typefaces that paid homage to manuscript traditions while maintaining a distinctly modern execution (see Appendix II, Fig. 2).

Among these broadsides, *The Sermon on the Mount* (1926) received particular acclaim. A copy sent by Clark to Pope Pius XI was accepted into the Vatican Library, where it was placed as an example of rare and beautiful printing.⁴⁵

A California Model of Cultural Patronage

The remarkable success of Nash is largely credited to the generous financial support of his patrons, with Clark being the most significant.⁴⁶ As Nell O'Day observed, "The Clarks imposed no restrictions that would in any way detract from the high quality of the printing and in consequence the books produced for them stand in a class of their own."⁴⁷

Clark's support of Nash extended well beyond a typical client-printer relationship, evolving into a decade-long partnership built on financial, social, and artistic investment. Their

⁴⁴ These include *Sermon on the Mount* (1926), *The Bonnie Lass that Laid the Bed to Me* (1927), *Thanatopsis* (1927), *A Christmas Sermon* (1927), *The Last Will and Testament of Charles Lounsbery* (1929), and *The Lord's Prayer* (1932).

⁴⁵ O'Day, *John Henry Nash, the Aldus of San Francisco*, 18-19.

⁴⁶ Will Ransom, *Private Presses and Their Books* (New York: AMS Press, 1976), 154.

⁴⁷ O'Day, *A Catalogue of Books Printed by John Henry Nash*, viii.

collaboration was grounded in mutual respect: a patron whose bibliographic knowledge matched his wealth, and a printer whose relentless pursuit of typographic perfection defined his craft.

Edward O’Day captured the historical significance of this alliance: “[Clark’s] only counterpart in history is that Duke of Parma for whom Bodoni produced masterpiece after masterpiece.”⁴⁸ The comparison is telling, not only for its implication of lavish patronage but for its recognition of how sustained support can drive typographical progress. Just as Bodoni’s experiments revolutionized eighteenth-century printing under ducal patronage, Nash’s fine printing innovations thrived under Clark’s unwavering support.

Among the Christmas books, the most lavish in both artistic execution and financial investment is John Dryden’s *All for Love*, published in 1929. Nash’s biographer, Harlan, described it as “one of the most perfectly executed books that money could buy.”⁴⁹ At a cost of \$37,000 for just 250 copies (equivalent to over half a million dollars today),⁵⁰ this volume represented an unprecedented investment in fine printing craftsmanship. The book featured numerous colored plates reproducing the thirteen murals in the salon of the Clark Library, each depicting scenes from Dryden’s play. It was not only a bibliographic treasure but a visual expression of Clark’s pride in his Dryden collection, said to rival that of the British Museum.⁵¹

This model of patronage stood in stark contrast to the institutionalized cultural machinery of the East Coast, where committees and bureaucracies mediated between wealth and art. Clark’s approach was distinctly Californian: personal, bold, and unencumbered by tradition. By

⁴⁸ O’Day, *John Henry Nash, the Aldus of San Francisco*, 17.

⁴⁹ Harlan, *The Biography of a Career*, 65.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ O’Day, *A Catalogue of Books Printed by John Henry Nash*, 67.

channeling private fortune directly into artistic experimentation, he and Nash forged a new paradigm—one characterizing the “Southern California Style.” Free from the weight of established hierarchies, they pursued innovation with the vigor of pioneers, setting aesthetic standards that would echo across the West.

The success of the Nash-Clark partnership helped orient West Coast printing toward an entrepreneurial model, one that departed from the East Coast emphasis on academic and institutional authority.⁵² Although the partnership came to an end with the Great Depression and Clark’s unfortunate death in 1934,⁵³ it left a lasting imprint on American bibliophilic culture.

⁵² Alastair M Johnston, 2011, “A Glance at the First Century of California Printing,” *Printing History*, no. 9: 22.

⁵³ Norman H Strouse, 1973, *John Henry Nash: A Collector’s Reappraisal. An Address by Norman H. Strouse at the Annual Meeting of The Grolier Club on 25 January 1973* (New York: The Grolier Club), 28.

Conclusion: From Private Vision to Public Legacy

As Lawrence Clark Powell remarked, the Clark Library’s history embodies a movement “from private collection to public institution.”⁵⁴ Clark’s Christmas books exemplify that shift, translating private connoisseurship into a disciplined form of cultural stewardship. Their paired format joined preservation with design renewal, asking readers to meet each work twice: first as historical evidence, then as a fresh, coherent typographic statement. Crucially, materials and documentation served the text, not display; colophons, paper notes, and edition records made each volume a self-accounting artifact and a model of responsible collecting. By circulating through Los Angeles and beyond, the books helped consolidate a West Coast infrastructure for bibliographical research and fine printing, aligning regional ambition with rigorous, transparent practice.

This project extends Clark’s legacy by digitizing the record of distribution for the Christmas books, based on thank-you notes preserved at the Clark Library.⁵⁵ These documents show that the volumes reached an extraordinary range of recipients: bibliophilic societies such as the Grolier Club, the Zamorano Club, the Book Club of California, and the First Edition Club in London; major universities including Yale, Harvard, Columbia, Princeton, Williams College, the University of Virginia, Cambridge, and Oxford; and leading public repositories such as the Library of Congress, the British Library, the California State Library, the New York Public Library, the Boston Public Library, and the Los Angeles Public Library. Specialized collections—the Pierpont Morgan Library, the Newberry Library, the John Carter Brown

⁵⁴ Lawrence Clark Powell, “From Private Collection to Public Institution: The William Andrews Clark Memorial Library,” *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 20, no. 2 (1950): 101–8.

⁵⁵ William Andrews Clark, Jr. and William Andrews Clark Memorial Library Records, Clarkive.Pre-1934, Boxes 24–27, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

Library, and the Keats-Shelley Memorial Association—also figured prominently, alongside individuals whose influence spanned collecting, scholarship, and the arts, including Estelle Doheny, Henry E. Huntington, A. S. W. Rosenbach, Alfred W. Pollard, Henry Lewis Bullen, Jascha Heifetz, Robert A. Millikan, John Howell, and Edward Weston. Mapping this network makes clear that the Christmas books were never confined to private exchange: they were deliberately embedded in the most influential cultural and intellectual circuits of their time.

Seen from today, the series models accountable patronage: rarity calibrated to access, and beauty subordinated to textual understanding. Clark's method—clear documentation, faithful facsimile, and ambitious printing—offers a practical template for how private means can build durable, open cultural infrastructure. It reminds us that the private and the public need not be opposites; joined through craft and transparency, they expand the conditions under which texts are preserved, studied, and reimagined.

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Appendix I: The List of Christmas Books⁵⁶

1. Adonais: An Elegy on The Death of John Keats (1922)
In Memoriam / Adonais / An Elegy / On The Death Of John Keats / By / Percy Bysshe Shelley / In Commemoration Of The / Hundredth Anniversary Of The Death / Of The Poet / Printed For / William Andrews Clark, Jr. / By John Henry Nash / San Francisco / 1922.
2. Tamerlane & Other Poems (1923)
Tamerlane / & Other Poems / By / Edgar Allan Poe / With An Appreciation By / James Southall Wilson / Edgar Allan Poe Professor of English / At The University Of Virginia / ... [Ornament] / Printed For / William Andrews Clark, Jr. / By John Henry Nash / San Francisco / 1923.
3. Some Letters from Oscar Wilde to Alfred Douglas, 1892-1897 (1924)
Some Letters from Oscar Wilde to Alfred Douglas / 1892-1897 / [Heretofore Unpublished] / With Illustrative Notes by / Arthur C. Dennison, Jr., & Harrison Post / and an Essay by / A. S. W. Rosenbach, Ph.D / [Ornament] / San Francisco: / Printed for William Andrews Clark, Jr. / by John Henry Nash / 1924.
4. An Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard (1925)
An / Elegy / Written In A / Country Church-Yard / by Thomas Gray / With / An Introduction by James Southall Wilson / & A Foreword by William Andrews Clark, Jr. / ... [Ornament] / San Francisco: / Printed for William Andrews Clark, Jr. / by John Henry Nash / 1925.
5. The Deserted Village (1926)
The / Deserted Village / A Poem / By / Oliver Goldsmith / With An Introduction / By William Andrews Clark, Jr. / ... [Ornament] / San Francisco / Printed For William Andrews Clark, Jr. / By John Henry Nash / Mccccxxvi.
6. Sonnets from the Portuguese (1927)
Sonnets / From the Portuguese / By Elizabeth Barrett Browning / With Some Observations And / A Bibliographical Note / By William Andrews Clark, Jr. / ... [Ornament] / San Francisco: Printed / For William Andrews Clark, Jr. / By John Henry Nash / Mccccxxvii.
7. An Essay on Criticism (1928)
An / Essay On Criticism / by Alexander Pope / Si quid novisti rectius istis, / Candidus imperti; si non, his utere mecum. / Horat. / San Francisco: / Printed for William Andrews Clark, Jr. / by John Henry Nash / 1928.

⁵⁶ For bibliographic description, see Cora Edgerton Sanders, *Books Distinguished in English and American Literature: With Facsimiles of First Editions Privately Printed for William Andrews Clark, Jr. by John Henry Nash* (San Francisco: John Henry Nash, 1934), and Nell O'Day, *A Catalogue of Books Printed by John Henry Nash / Compiled and Annotated, Including a Biographical Note, by Nell O'Day* (San Francisco: John Henry Nash, 1937).

8. All for Love: Or, The World Well Lost (1929)
All For Love / or, the World well Lost: A Tragedy / By John Dryden / Facile est verbum
aliquod ardens (ut ita dicam) notare: / idque restinctis animorum incendiis irridere.
Cicero. / San Francisco: / Printed for William Andrews Clark, Jr. / by John Henry Nash /
1929.
9. Father Damien (1930)
Father / Damien / An Open Letter To The / Reverend Dr. Hyde of Honolulu / From.
Robert Louis Stevenson / Dated / February Twenty-Fifth / Mccccxc / [Ornament] / San
Francisco / Printed For William Andrews Clark, Jr. / By John Henry Nash / Mcmxxx.
10. Ode on the Pleasure Arising from Vicissitude (1933)
Ode / On the Pleasure arising from Vicissitude / Left unfinished by Mr. Gray, and since
completed / With an Introduction by / Leonard Whibley / [Ornament] / San Francisco: /
Printed for William Andrews Clark, Jr. / by John Henry Nash / 1933.

Appendix II: List of Images

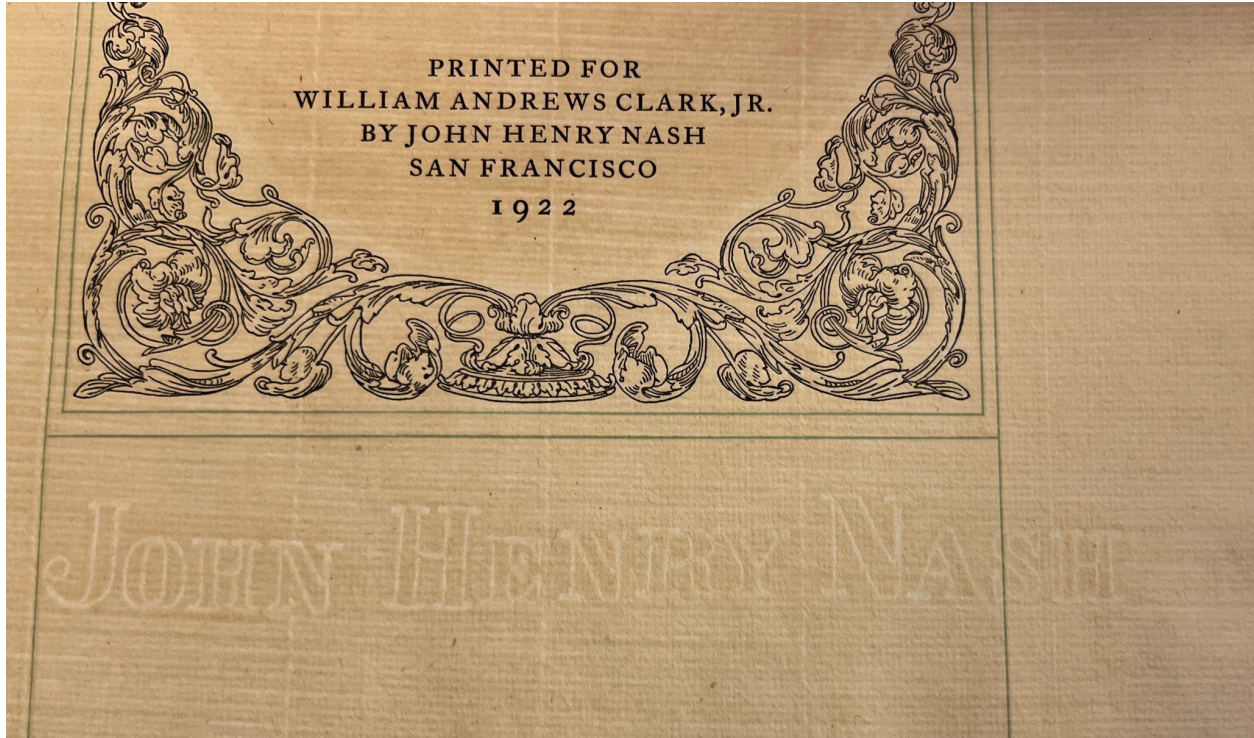


Fig. 1. “John Henry Nash” watermark in the title page of Adonais. (Photo taken at the Clark Library, Nov 8, 2024).

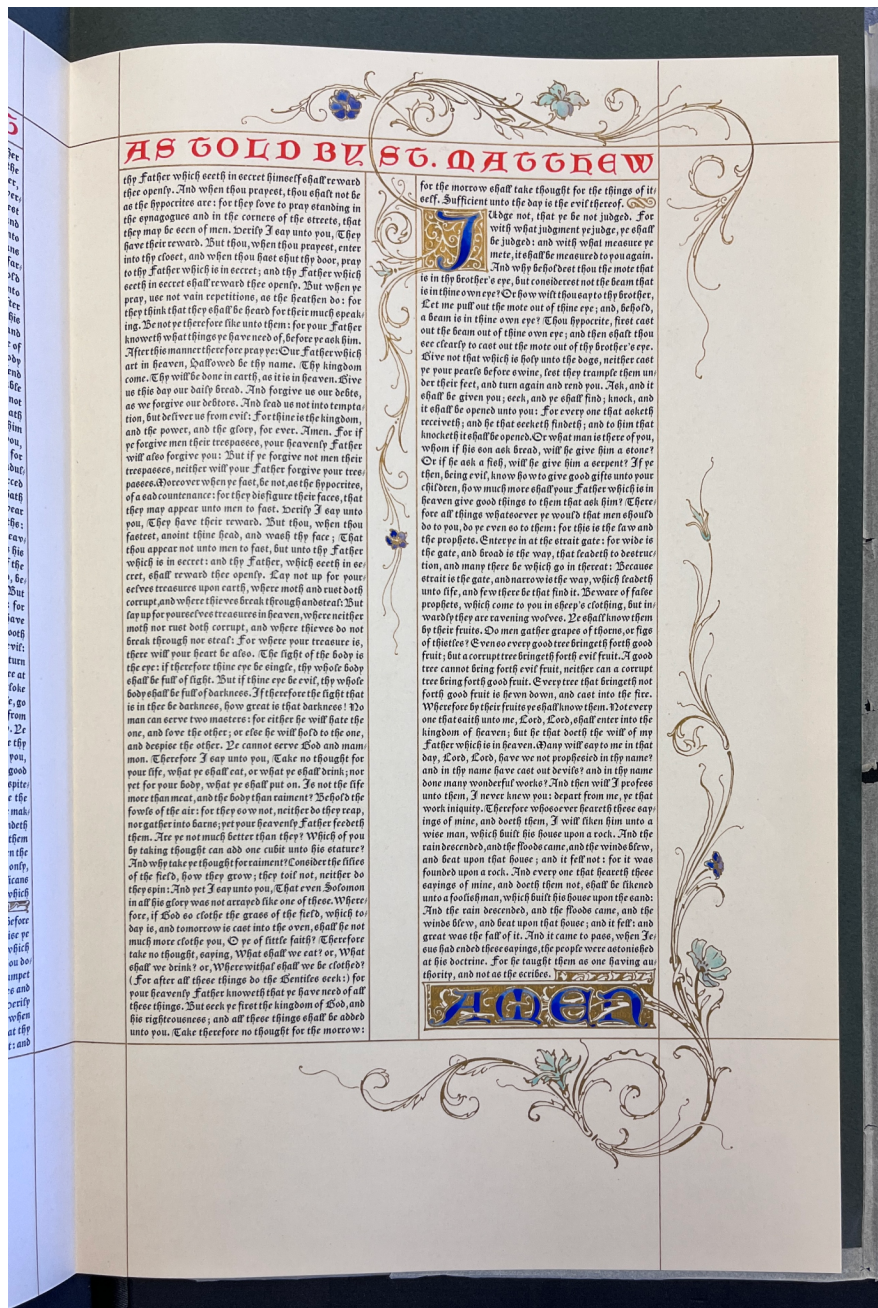


Fig. 2. Recto of *The Sermon on the Mount* (1926).