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The Tradescant Catalogue

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## A GIFT OF PRINTS

Once again the Museum has to record its great indebtedness to Felix M. Warburg's generosity and his interest in the Department of Prints, for it has recently received from him two of the most beautiful engravings made north of the Alps prior to 1501. These are respectively Schongauer's Virgin in the Courtyard, certainly one of the most famous and undoubtedly one of the most charming of that great engraver's masterpieces, and one of the two Annunciations made by the Master F. V. B. The beautiful little Virgin by Schongauer has often been reproduced and is thus, in spite of its rarity, deservedly one of the best known early German engravings. The Annunciation by F. V. B. has not enjoyed either fame or reproduction, the only picture of it that the writer is acquainted with being one of the illustrations that accompanied Max Lehrs's learned article on F. V. B. in the *Print Collector's Quarterly* for February, 1923. While not so rare as some of the other engravings by its maker it is still sufficiently

uncommon, in its nine recorded impressions, all of which are now in public institutions, not only to have escaped the enthusiasm of the private collector (the last recorded sales of it having taken place in 1892, 1887, and 1876) but to have been overlooked by the writers of historical text books. While possibly not the most "important" of F. V. B.'s prints (as that phrase is used in the market) there can be little doubt as to its being one of the most charming that came from his burin, and, all things considered, one of the most beautiful of all early Netherlandish engravings.

In the older books F. V. B. is referred to as Franz von Bocholt, but as shown by Lehrs in his article (*loc. cit.*) there is no real reason for believing that there is any basis for such an explanation of his initials. All that is certain is that he was a Netherlander, that on occasion he copied prints by Schongauer and the Master E. S. (which was a common enough thing to do at that time), and that several times he copied easel pictures by the great early Flemish masters (which is a most unusual thing to find a primitive engraver doing). His kinship to the painters of the Bruges school is so great that Lehrs is inclined to place that city as the scene of his activity. And the rest, save for guesswork, is silence.

F. V. B.'s prints, however, no matter where they were made or what their maker's name or nationality, and despite their exceeding rarity, have such a personality back of them and so much character of their own that there can be no question of their being among the most noteworthy specimens of the engraver's art during the period prior to Dürer and Lucas of Leyden.

WILLIAM M. IVINS, JR.

## THE TRADESCANT CATALOGUE

One of the most amusing things that has been acquired recently for the Department of Prints is a copy of *Musaeum Tradescantianum*: or, A Collection of Rarities. Preserved at *South-Lambeth* near London By John Tradescant. London, Printed by John Grismond, and are to be sold by Nathanael Brooke at the Angel in Cornhill, M. D C, LVI.—to give the little volume

its full title. It is illustrated with portraits, etched by Hollar, of the two John Tradescants, father and son, to which some pious owner has added a little water color drawing of the tomb of Tradescant the younger and portraits of his wife and child. Technically, from our point of view, the book is

the Duke of Buckingham, and of Henrietta Maria. In 1617 he paid £25 for the passage of one person to Virginia, though whether he himself was the passenger is not known. In 1618 he went with Sir Dudley Digges to Russia, writing an account of the "voiage" which is now among



PORTRAIT OF JOHN TRADESCANT, JUNIOR  
BY WENZEL HOLLAR, 1656

regarded as the two Hollar etchings in their original setting; unofficially it is looked upon as much more than that, as a memorial of the two Johns and their prowess as collectors, and, most important of all, for even museum people take a certain pride and interest in their calling, as the first museum catalogue in English.

The elder Tradescant (probably pronounced Tradeskin), the date of whose birth seems to be unknown, was married in 1607, and was at various times in the service of the Earl of Salisbury, Lord Wotton,

the manuscripts in the Ashmolean at Oxford, and is said to be the earliest extant account of plants of Russia. While in Russia he collected many sorts of plants and berries. In 1620 he served with Mansell and Argall against the pirates of Algiers, bringing back among other treasures "the Argier or Algier apricot." In 1625 he wrote to a friend in Virginia that he was in the service of the Duke of Buckingham, for whom he dealt "with all merchants from all places, but especially from Virginia, Bermudas, Newfoundland, Guinea,

Binney, the Amazon, and the East Indies, for all manner of rare beasts, fowls and birds, shells and stones." In 1627 he went with Buckingham to La Rochelle. After the Duke's death he probably entered the King's service as gardener, and it seems that about this same time he started his garden and museum at Lambeth. His physic garden was one of the first in England, and he himself was "the first in this country who made any considerable collection of the subjects of natural history." In 1632 he was at court inquiring about unicorn's horns, which turned out to be "the snout of a fish, yet very precious against poison." He probably died in the late winter or spring of 1638, leaving his collections to his son.

John Tradescant the second was born in 1608. In 1637 he was in Virginia collecting flowers, plants, shells, etc., for his father's collection, and after his death succeeded him as gardener to the Queen. In 1650 he made the acquaintance of Elias Ashmole, and not long afterwards, assisted by Ashmole and Thomas Wharton, he began to write the catalogue of his collections. Because of various interruptions, among which was that he "found my kinde friend Mr. *Hollar* then engaged for about tenne Moneths, for whose hand to finish the *Plates*, I was necessarily constrained to stay untill this time," the little book did not make its appearance until 1656. In 1659 Tradescant and his wife executed a deed of gift of their rarities to Elias Ashmole. In 1662 John died, leaving to his dearly beloved wife, Hester Pooks, "my Closet of Rarities . . . during her natural Life, and after her decease I give and bequeath the same to the Universities of Oxford or Cambridge, to which of them shee shall think fitt at her decease." Two years later Elias sued Hester in Chancery "for the Rarities her Husband had settled on me," and on the 18th of May, 1664, the Lord Chancellor Clarendon, having heard the cause, found for the plaintiff "subject to the trust for the defendant during her life," and appointed Sir Edward Bysshe, Sir William Dugdale, and Sir William Glascock commissioners to supervise the accounting. In 1674 poor Mrs. Hester, evidently having

been pushed to it, turned over the collections to Ashmole, who seems to have wasted little time before showing them to Izaak Walton. In 1677 Ashmole made known his intention of giving his collection to Oxford, "provided"—full note of modernity—"a suitable building were erected to receive it." In 1678 Mrs. Hester "was found drowned in her pond," and a few days later the watchful Elias noted in his diary that "I removed the pictures from Mrs. Tradescant's house to mine." Sir Christopher Wren designed the "suitable building" at Oxford, and in 1683 the collections were moved there from Lambeth—but not as Tradescant's. It was Ashmole who got all the credit—and still has it.

As to Ashmole a word may not be out of place. Born in 1617 and died in 1692, he was "the greatest virtuoso and curios that ever was known or read of in England before his time." As a young solicitor in "indifferent good practice," and the son of a saddler, he needed to keep his eyes to windward, so that there was little surprising in his marriage in 1649 (*en second nocces*) to a wealthy lady, twenty years older than he was, the widow of three husbands and the mother of grown sons, but with just the fortune that Ashmole needed. After his marriage he "enjoyed his wife's estate, though not her company for altogether," to such an extent that when a few years later she sued for a separation—and alimony—he defended the case, and won it. Interested in many things, his wife's fortune enabled him to play at everything, so that by turns, and sometimes simultaneously, he was an astrologer, an alchemist, a Royalist, a botanist, and a student of Hebrew, engraving, and heraldry. After the Restoration, not having forgotten his skill as solicitor, he procured his appointment as Windsor Herald, and notes in his diary that he "had Henry VIII's closet assigned for my use." In 1668, his old wife having died, he married Sir William Dugdale's young daughter. In 1672 he published his "Institution, Laws and Ceremonies of the Order of the Garter," which is still the authoritative work on that important subject. In 1682 the University having provided the suitable building to receive the

great Ashmolean collection that had been formed by the Tradescants, twelve wagon loads of curiosities were moved down to Oxford, and a Dr. Plot installed as curator. That Ashmole once cured himself of an ague by hanging three spiders about his neck, and recorded the momentous fact afterward, is probably a sufficient key to his character and mind.

Now, as to the catalogue. It is a little duodecimo of 206 pages and three plates, the portraits of the father and son and their coat of arms. It is prefaced by a number of laudatory verses and by anagrams upon the name Tradescant, such as "Cannot hide Arts," "Had inocent Artes," "Can honest Art die?" and "Artes cannot die." The preface tells us "Now for the *materialls* themselves I reduce them into two sorts; one *Naturall*, of which some are more familiarly known & named amongst us, as divers sorts of Birds, foure-footed Beasts and Fishes, to whom I have given usual *English* names. Others are lesse familiar, and as yet unfitted with apt *English* termes, as the shell-Creatures, Insects, Mineralls, Outlandish-Fruits, and the like, which are part of the *Materia Medica*; (Encroachers upon that faculty, may try how they can crack such shels.) The other sort is *Artificialls*, as Vtensills, Household-stuffe, Habits, Instruments of Warre used by severall Nations, rare curiosities of Art, &c. These are also expressed in *English* . . ."

The first list is that of "Egges," among which we notice those of the "Cassawary or Emeu . . . Crocodiles, Estridges, . . . Divers sorts of Egges from *Turkie*: one given for a Dragons egge. Easter Egges of the Patriarchs of Jerusalem." A little further we find "Two feathers of the Phoenix tayle," and just beyond that "The claw of the bird Rock; who, as authors report, is able to trusse an Elephant." Among the "*WHOLE BIRDS*" is the "Dodard, from the Island *Mauritius*; it is not able to flie being so big." (And the head and feet of this dodo are still in the Ashmolean, the only known remnants of that famed and long extinct bird.) Over several pages is "A natural Dragon, above two inches long," and then, after many pages of

Latin names, we come to "Materialls of Dyers and Painters," among them "Symach" and "Woade," which remind us of the little room at the top of the Fogg Museum, so much nearer to us in time and space than the old "Musaeum" at Lambeth. And then come "*Mechanick artificiall Works in Carvings, Turnings, Sowings and Paintings*," such as "A Bird sitting on a perch naturall," "The Indian lip-stone which they wear in the lip," "*Jupiter, Io, and Mercury wrought in Tent-stitch*," "Flea chains of silver and gold with 300 links a piece and yet but an inch long," "A bundle of Tobacco, *Amazonian*," "The Idol *Osiris*. *Anubis*, the Sheep, the Beetle, the Dog, which the Egyptians worshipped," "A piece of the Stone of *Sarrigo*-Castle where *Hellen of Greece* was born," "A Trunion of Capt. *Drake's* Ship," "Severall sorts of Cymballs," "Poleaxe and Pistoll with a Mill and Cross-bow in it for either Arrow or Bullet," "*Pobatan*, King of *Virginia's* habit all embroidered with shells, or Roanoke," "An *Umbrella*". . . One could keep on quoting, and with every quotation range in memory from my grandmother's corner closet to the most prized of institutional possessions here and now in New York. And as one thinks about it it leaves one both humbled and filled with cheerful laughter. There are grave historians who assert that the idea of progress is a modern hallucination.

WILLIAM M. IVINS, JR.

## A PORTRAIT BY CHARLES BRIDGES

A letter written in December, 1735, by William Byrd II, master of the splendid estate of Westover on the James River in Virginia, to his former political opponent, Colonel Alexander Spotswood of Germanna on the Rapidan, recommends to that gentleman's gracious attention the artist Charles Bridges, in the following words<sup>1</sup>: "The Person who has the honor to wait upon you with this letter is a man of Good Family, but either by the frowns of Fortune or his own Mismanagement, is obliged to seek his

<sup>1</sup>Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, vol. IX, p. 235.