

age"); but most undergraduates will be either repelled or confused by the uneven emphases of this book.

This is not to say that Professor Mueller makes no useful comments on his chosen authors. Many a paragraph represents an interesting and stimulating point of view. But too many of them seem to me to be obvious truisms, cloudy generalizations, or forced and untenable interpretations or assertions. "Troy everlastingly stands for endangered homelands. Homer's poetic humanity bestows equal sympathy on friends and foes." (p. 8); "The Renaissance throws itself with a mystic ecstasy to the bosom of nature." (p. 125); "The concept of tragedy is an unpleasant aesthetic concept, because it defies explanation." (p. 116). These are average samples of the three types.

Furthermore, the treatment is too slight

and eccentric to satisfy the student of any one of these authors. The sixth chapter, on Hamlet, Erasmus, Montaigne, and Rabelais as illustrations of the Renaissance, allots three brief pages to a perfunctory summary of two conventional attitudes toward Hamlet; four pages to the author's hurried exposition of his own belief that the play includes Hamlet's normative tendency to purify or correct "together with the obstreperous and obstructive blindness of irrational nature"; and two paragraphs to the other three authors.

The style is somewhat awkward at times, possibly from the translation of phrases first conceived in German. The volume, though attractive, is carelessly printed, or proofed, so that there are too many annoying small errors. —Allen T. Hazen, *School of Library Service, Columbia University.*

Fore-Edge Paintings

A Thousand and One Fore-Edge Paintings, with Notes on the Artists, Bookbinders, Publishers and other Men and Women Connected with the History of a Curious Art. By Carl J. Weber. Waterville, Colby College Press, 1949. (Colby College monograph no. 16). xvi, 194p. \$7.50.

Here is the first book to be published on fore-edge paintings, although the "curious art" itself is not new. Born in the seventeenth century, it grew strong in the eighteenth, reached its height early in the nineteenth and lingers on, mainly as a hobby, even today. An English invention, and practiced most extensively and successfully in England, one wonders why the book-minded British have neglected to tell the world about such a fascinating aspect of bookmaking. We can be grateful to Professor Weber for filling this gap with a delightful account that is a pleasing mixture of about three parts literary lore with one part book history, thus reflecting his dual position—professor of English literature and curator of rare books and manuscripts in Colby College.

Professor Weber's study is based on examination of hundreds of volumes whose edges bear paintings. His curiosity was aroused by the few examples of the art in the Colby College Library, and by the dearth of literature on the subject. He found the

largest single collection of all in the volumes assembled by Mrs. Edward L. Doheny in the Doheny Memorial Library at St. John's Seminary in California. The "Thousand and One" of the book's title refers to the number of fore-edge paintings listed in an appendix. These are located in more than 50 collections, public and private.

The author, in explaining his subject, says that many people do not know what fore-edge paintings are, even those "who have known and handled books all their lives." Fore-edge paintings are paintings on the fore-edge of a book. If the paintings are executed on the panel which the closed book offers, then we are dealing with a practice which goes back to at least as early as the tenth century, when edges were decorated with designs stamped into the gilt with a hot tool. But it is not this obvious kind of fore-edge decoration with which this book is concerned. Far more provocative is the result obtained by opening the book, fanning the leaves, painting a design on this larger surface and then gilding over the paintings. When the book is closed the painting disappears and the edges appear merely gilt. No wonder this is called a "mysterious art." Occasionally an ambitious artist, after painting the edges when the leaves were fanned from the front, would fan the leaves the opposite way and execute

another painting on that surface. These are known as double fore-edge paintings.

Edge paintings were invented and executed in binders' workshops. Professor Weber takes us from the establishment of Samuel Mearne, royal binder to Charles II from 1660-1683, to the Lakeside Press in Chicago, where Alfred de Santy, supervisor of the handwork in its bindery from 1923-1935, executed fore-edge paintings. The author lingers longest with the achievements of the Edwards family, beginning with William Edwards of Halifax, fine binder, who revived the art of fore-edge painting about the year 1750. Under him and his sons the art was practiced with such skill and taste that the name of Edwards shines out above all others in the history of this charming kind of book decoration.

The height of production was reached in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, a time when American men of letters were sailing to Europe and returning with books. From the first the curious art appealed to the American bibliophile and this was reflected almost immediately in the scenes of the fore-edge paintings. The picturesque spots of England were often replaced by views of Boston, or Philadelphia, or New York—the home cities of the moneyed Americans who were able to satisfy their taste for these expensive bibelots. Soon the art of fore-edge painting began to be practiced on this side of the Atlantic. With knowledge of the process came what is probably the first statement in print of this mysterious art in James B. Nicholson's *Manual of the Art of Book-binding* issued in Philadelphia in 1856. British paintings remained more popular, however, so that American contributions to the art are slight. But American collectors have been such enthusiastic patrons that Professor Weber says that no student of fore-edge painting needs to cross the ocean.

A valuable feature of this book is the way the author relates its topic to other aspects of book and literary history. The subject takes its place in a rounded account of literary and book taste and trends, rather than as an art which exists in a vacuum. There are, however, a few errors that need to be corrected. It is an exaggeration to say that manuscript books of the Middle Ages were "usually large and heavy." Books of conveni-

ent and portable size were necessary for private use then as now, and a fair part of the shelves of manuscript divisions of our libraries are filled with normal size books. The mass productions of Bibles in the thirteenth century has left behind quantities of tiny volumes far smaller than the average printed book of today. Even more numerous, especially in American collections, are the small *Books of Hours*. Since Professor Weber is so interested in the Edwards purchase of the *Bedford Missal* his description of it should have included the information that the famous manuscript is incorrectly titled "Missal" as it is a *Book of Hours*. King Henry VII (1485-1509) was not the "first English monarch to form a library." Edward IV (1461-1483) is the man to whom the British Museum gives the credit of being the king "who first acquired for himself a library that could be called a national institution." English kings of several centuries earlier certainly had collections of books, as royal records show.

You will enjoy rambling through the pages of Professor Weber's book whether you are being regaled with facts or presented with clues and asked to try your skill at deduction, or whether you are chuckling at his witty "asides." If you dabble with water colors his chapter on "Technique" may inspire you to follow his directions and decorate your own volumes. Even before you have finished the book no doubt you will hasten to the shelves of your library to see whether you *might* have overlooked a fore-edge painting on a Baskerville *Virgil* or *Terence* or a Bodoni *Castle of Otranto*, which the Edwards firm published as well as bound. Perhaps your best chance would be to try the eighteenth-nineteenth century editions of Scott whose volumes of verse were chosen more often for edge decoration than those of any other poet. But Cowper, Milton, and James Thomson's *Seasons* were popular also. The chances are that you will return without a fore-edge painting to fan and admire, but you can satisfy yourself with the excellent plates, two in color, which liberally illustrate this book. Skillfully presented and admirably printed by the Anthoensen Press this is a book written by and printed for a real booklover.—Bertha M. Frick, *School of Library Service, Columbia University.*