The R.T. Aitchison Collection of Vergil's Works

at the University of Kansas Library: Lawrence
The Robert Aitchison
Collection of Vergil's Works
... by L. R. Lind
It would be an act of sheer temerity to attempt in the brief space at my disposal anything but the most superficial description of this excellent group of books, which reflects the care and taste of its originator and so abundantly enhances the Department of Special Collections in the University of Kansas Library, already the home of numerous fine collections. There is here an admirable variety: large formats and small, old books and more recent, variorum texts and plain ones without a note, illustrations, translations, and a manuscript-facsimile. The collection contains even a respectable paper manuscript of the late fourteenth century, with an intriguing problem of hands and a provenience traceable through the famous Phillipps Collection in England to the Italian abbey of Nonantola. The star in this particular Vergilian crown is, however, an incunable, evidently unique in America, the 1487 Opera printed by Leonardus Pachel and Uldericus Scinzenzeler at Milan. Who could, in good conscience, ask for more in a gathering of only forty-three items?

Of the sixteenth century Vergils, the 1502 Opera printed at Strassburg by Johannes Gruninger (also known as Rein-hart) is the most impressive and the oldest. It is illustrated with 214 charming woodcuts which reveal many aspects of Renaissance life from field and farm to city and tower. These illustrations, certainly the first to create so illustrious a progeny, form the basis for practically all the Vergilian illustrations of the sixteenth century as they may be seen in the 1517 and 1529 Opera of Lyon, the Giuntine Opera of 1537, and the 1546 Opera of Venice, whose woodcuts are recut from the previous Giuntine edition. These famous pictures were provided through the artists and woodcarvers at his command by Sebastian Brant, known for his German satire, The Ship of Fools (Basel, 1494), itself copiously illustrated in the same style as the Vergil (see Edwin H. Zeydel' translation, with reproductions of the original woodcuts, Columbia University
Those who handle these books will quickly find favorites among them. I am drawn to several. One is the Lyon Opera of 1528, with its trickle of Latin text walled off with commentary by ten different scholars, from Servius and Donatus to Christoforo Landino, Jodocus Badius Ascensius, the Paris bookdealer and text-editor, and Johannes Pierius Valerianus, better known for his work on the tragic fates of authors (De Litteratorum Infelicitate, first printed at Venice, 1620). Another is the 1602 Opera at Venice, with a few small woodcuts for the Eclogues alone, differing from those of the 1502 Gruninger, and notes by Ludovicus Coelius Rhodiginus, whom I met while translating Ulisse Aldrovandi. The Elzevir (Leiden, 1636) contains a folding map of Aeneas' journey, a reader's guide which has been absent from that day to this in texts and translations of Vergil until I provided one in my translation of the Aeneid into verse (Indiana University Press, 1963). There is a copy of Joseph Scaliger's commentary (Antwerp, 1575) to the Vergilian Appendix (an horripilating word!) and a very early example of the Imprimerie Royale, founded by Cardinal Richelieu in 1640, with an engraved title by Nicholas Poussin.

The 1701 Jacob Tonson has a title which resembles the large and lovely "modern" type of the 1757 Baskerville, with no editor's name but a letter nonetheless from him to the reader. I am impressed by the huge size of Dryden's collected translations of Vergil, containing his excellent letter to Hugh Lord Clifford, Baron of Chudleigh, his patron; but it is a relief to hold in my palm the little 1534 Opera of de Sabbio, Venice, and to admire its small elegant print. Translations are well chosen in the Aitchison collection; for example, it is good to see William Morris' rather stirring version in fourteener couplets and in his beautiful chaste typography, reprinted at the Chiswick Press (Longmans, New York, 1902).
On a bright afternoon in the summer of 1962 I spent several hours in the company of Dr. Uberto Cuzzelli, director of the Accademia Virgiliana of Mantova, and came away with his gift of a copy of the Academy's Tercentenary deluxe edition of Vergil's works and two articles on Vergil's portrait. As I now recall the rather forlorn and meager collection of modern editions and translations which Dr. Cuzzelli showed me I am forced to conclude that far off in Kansas, a world away from the country of Vergil, there is a collection of his works even the Academy founded in his name cannot hope to match.

A Gathering of the Forty-three Items

1. Aeneid, excerpts from books 2-9. A manuscript of 67 leaves, probably written in Northern Italy in the last quarter of the fourteenth century. There are two main scripts, a late Italian gothic and a good humanist hand, and extensive annotations in several other hands. The paper may be somewhat older than indicated by the hands. Formerly in the collection of Sir Thomas Phillipps (Phillipps 12281); who obtained it (via the booksellers Payne and Foss) from the Abbey of St. Stephen of Nonantola.


MAMBELLI 136.

MAMBELLI 141.

MAMBELLI 154.

MAMBELLI 158.

MAMBELLI 170.

MAMBELLI 179.


MAMBELLI 193.
NOT IN MAMBELLI.


VARIANT OF MAMBELLI 242.

15. P. Vergilii Maronis poemata quae extant omnia. Frankfurt, J. Feyrabend, 1579. 8vo. 18 full page woodcuts. Contemporary blind stamped pigskin, with panel of Judith on upper board and of Jael on the lower. (Goldschmidt, 64).
NOT IN MAMBELLI.

16. Opera P. Vergilii Maronis. Zurich, Froschauer, 1587. 8vo. Blind-stamped pigskin binding with portrait of Luther, overstamped with the arms of Cluny.
NOT IN MAMBELLI.

NOT IN MAMBELLI.

MAMBELLI 305.

MAMBELLI 309.

Engraved portrait of Ogilby and engraved frontispiece and other illustrations by Hollar and others.

MAMBELLI 1364.


MAMBELLI 338.


29. Publii Virgilii Maronis Bucolica, Georgica, et Aeneis. Birmingham, J. Baskerville, 1757. 4to. The most famous of Baskerville's books, this is the first book printed on wove paper and
shows beautifully the force of his plain type on hot pressed paper as well as his characteristic use of the white space.

MAMBELLI 414.


NOT IN MAMBELLI.


MAMBELLI 417.


MAMBELLI 422.


MAMBELLI 1275.


MAMBELLI 432.


MAMBELLI 436.

MAMBELLI 472.


XII = 1804. 8vo.

MAMBELLI 1285.


MAMBELLI 511.

39. The eclogues done into English prose (by) J. W. Mackail Portland, T. B. Mosher, 1898. 12mo. One of 450 copies.


The Columbus, Kansas Advocate in 1887 noted Clarence and Mollie Aitchison had a new son — life began in the Lord Fauntleroy Era.

After Highschool there was a family conference as to whether it would be KU or Art School — the boy won (or lost) and attended the Academy of Fine Art in Chicago for a couple of years.

Newspapers in those days did not use photographic illustrations, which was a break for budding artists, and young Aitchison signed on with the Chicago Tribune. On an assignment to interview President Taft in San Antonio, he liked what he saw and decided to stay on in that charming old lazy town. While doing cartoons for the San Antonio Express he started a commercial art studio on the side. Feeling established, with an income, he returned to Columbus and married Mary Cheshire, his 8th grade sweetheart.

In 1920 the Aitchisons moved to Wichita. It was his job to establish a creative department for the McCormick-Arms­trong Co., a printing company he was with for over forty years. Now retired, he still serves on the Board of Directors, and as treasurer of the company. These were forty years of inspirations to printers, and of help to hundreds of young artists.

Aitchison has produced 39 colorful maps varying in content from the state histories to Indian ruins. Among his first, A Chart of the History of Printing in Europe. and A Chart of the History of Printing in America, are found in fine printing offices the world over. In production is the history of the alphabet,

A fine easel painter of the New Mexico scene, his recent one man show at the Wichita Art Association received many fine notices.

Retirement offers him little relief from keeping busy. Serving on twelve boards keeps him on the move, along with
his hobbies of rare books and maps, painting, pre-Columbian ceramics, and poker. Bob and Mary Aitchison are the gracious hosts at many literary gatherings at their lovely home on Back Bay, on the banks of the Little Arkansas River, in Wichita.

This little booklet has been printed under the auspices of the University of Kansas, Tom Buckman, librarian, at the Four Ducks Press, Bill Jackson, proprietor. From an edition of 150 copies, this is number 145.