

Preface

BY THE eighteen-thirties, in Great Britain, the powerful publishers like John Murray and Constable, who had been looked upon as and considered themselves as patrons of authors and therefore in a sense as arbiters of excellence in literature, had either crashed financially or suffered diminished influence at the hands of a public which determined its pleasure in reading by standards that were not aristocratic. The middle classes were becoming the principal support of booksellers and publishers. The prices of books were dropping; their formats were becoming less adapted to libraries of noblemen. Fiction, formerly issued at a guinea and more a novel, was cheapening in price as it swept into popularity. It and volumes of informative materials for general reading outstripped poetry. By 1830 Murray was refusing to read manuscripts of verse and was publishing few novels. Versifiers on social themes and poets who relied on the rhetoric of noble sentiment were in public favor. The great critical journals, the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly*, although still authoritative, were experiencing sharp competition from smaller, cheaper, and less intellectual periodicals. Financial distress and social unrest were in the air.

Edward Moxon, Yorkshire born and apprentice bred, lover of poetry, ambitious, and looking back toward the great days of the publishers when the volumes of Lord Byron sold in editions of thousands, opened business in 1830 in London. The social connections he had made as a young man determined both the course his business should run and its tone. In spite of his upbringing among workingmen and his social sympathies, that tone tended toward the aristocratic, and the course was in the direction of a selected clientele. Elaborate illustrated editions of Rogers's poems were largely responsible. Soon Moxon was bidding for verse manuscripts. They came to him readily. When within two decades it was

PREFACE

necessary for Her Majesty's ministers to appoint a poet laureate for Great Britain, the six poets who were considered for the post—Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Samuel Rogers, Leigh Hunt, Henry Taylor, Sheridan Knowles, and Alfred Tennyson—had each published for a period of years with Edward Moxon. Another of his authors, William Wordsworth, had been poet laureate for seven years. Moxon had established, in the face of bad business conditions, of falling book prices, of the rise of a new reading public, a sound trade in the issuing and sale of poetry.

Moxon priced volumes moderately, putting them within the financial reach of middle-class readers. He printed his books in clear type and designed them in good taste. He looked upon his business as something superior to mere trade. Poets liked to have their volumes come before the public over the name of Edward Moxon, publisher. Against a few more than twenty volumes of lesser poetry published by him there were fifty by major poets. No other publisher during the thirty years following 1830 showed any such list. Of the major Victorian poets Arnold, Rossetti, and Morris published nothing with Moxon. Only Arnold's first volume, *The Strayed Reveler, and Other Poems*, 1849, could have appeared from the firm of Edward Moxon, for Rossetti wrote in early life, but published late, in 1870, and *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*, the first book of poems by Morris, appeared in 1858. Moxon died in that year.

Because Edward Moxon rose in early Victorian days to commendable achievement as a publisher of poetry and because he associated on friendly terms with many literary persons, his life is worthy of record. This book attempts to show his nature, his ideas about publishing, the manner in which he built and maintained his business, and his relations with the poets whose writings he placed before the public.

No personal diary of Edward Moxon's, no business journal, and few of his letters have been available for the construction of this biography. There exist no important manuscript sources of information. Facts and ideas have of necessity been gathered from materials about the writers he published and the men with whom he associated. Their letters, diaries, autobiographies, and biogra-

PREFACE

phies have been searched. Such accounts as members of the book trade have left of Victorian publishing have been read. The process of construction has been that of matching fact with fact, of placing comment beside comment.

Several English and American scholars, librarians, booksellers, and men who possess knowledge concerning different phases of the subject have shown interest in this proposed life of Moxon and have offered counsel and whatever materials have been in their possession. I again express to them my gratitude. I am in particular indebted to Mr. Gordon Wordsworth, of Ambleside, England; Mr. de V. Payen-Payne, of London; the Rev. R. S. Moxon, of Lincoln, England; the Trustees and Mr. Stephen K. Jones, librarian, of Dr. Williams's Library, London; Mr. James Reynor, of Luton, Bedfordshire, and Mr. W. R. Le Fanu, of the library of the Royal College of Surgeons, London. Professor Edith J. Morley, of Reading University, England, and the late T. J. Wise, of London, offered materials and advice. Miss Maud Moxon, of Brighton, granddaughter of Edward Moxon, answered inquiries and placed some letters and photographs at my disposal. In this country Miss Belle Da Costa Greene, of the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, was especially helpful and gracious in allowing use of manuscript materials. The librarian of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California, kindly gave access to the letters of Wordsworth to Moxon that were formerly in the Rowfant Library. Mr. E. D. North discussed with me Lamb documents. My colleague Professor Edmund L. Freeman has given the manuscript criticism. The librarians at Montana State University have been indefatigable in their aid.

This study was begun under the counsel of the late Professor Ashley H. Thorndike, and completed under that of Professor Emery Neff, to whom I offer my gratitude for patient criticism and encouragement.

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