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Isdebsky Library of Russian Literature

Syracuse University Library recently strengthened its Slavic collections by purchasing the private library of Vladimir Alekseevich Isdebsky, gifted sculptor, connoisseur of Russian literature and discriminating book collector. Mr. Isdebsky, now almost eighty, assembled his library with great care during the past fifty years. In Russia, Paris and more recently New York, he worked surrounded by his books which were to him old friends. After shipping his library to Syracuse, Mr. Isdebsky expressed the feeling of a bibliophile when he said, "I am just deeply sorry to be separated from my books. Empty shelves have a strange effect on me, but I am content to know my cherished books are together in your Library." He found some consolation in the realization that the fruits of his book collecting will enrich the research in Russian history and literature of future generations of scholars on the Hill.

The Isdebsky Library contains approximately 4,500 volumes and includes representative works of the major Russian authors of both the Imperial and Soviet regimes. The works of many minor authors are also included. While the majority of the books were published in Russia, in Leningrad and Moscow particularly, the Isdebsky Library contains memoirs and criticisms of Russian literature, art and affairs published by emigrés and others in Berlin, Paris, Prague and elsewhere in Europe. Strong in the fields of the humanities and fine arts, the Isdebsky Library supplements the Solntzev Library purchased in 1952.

The catholic interest of Mr. Isdebsky in Russian literature is reflected in his library. Poets, novelists, dramatists and essayists are included and the collections of works by and about Pushkin, Gorkii, and Pasternak are distinguished. The latter's work was dramatically exhibited in the Library shortly after Boris Pasternak was awarded the 1958 Nobel Prize in Literature. The many rare books include a copy of Valentini's *Musei Museorum* . . . (1714), *Academia* (1922-1938) and a set of the *Church-Slavonic and Russian Dictionary* (1847). The collections on the Imperial and Moscow Art theatres are outstanding. The library also contains memoirs and works about Bakunin, Berdiaev, Hertenzen, Korolenko, Losskii, Miliukov, Soloviev, Vrangeli and Witte. This scholar's library will be of inestimable research value.

Lauro de Bosis: Icarus and Syracuse

The ripple of associations set off by a slender inscribed brochure in the Syracuse University Library—the *Storia della mia morte*, by Lauro de Bosis (Rome, Bardi, 1945)—touches a variety of events and situations, some of them of more than ordinary interest to Syracusans.

The central episode—the actual death of Lauro de Bosis—had world-wide repercussions, and will be remembered as perhaps the most spectacular gesture against Fascist totalitarianism.¹ At about eight o'clock in the evening of October 3, 1931, a mysterious little monoplane suddenly appeared over Mussolini's Rome and flew for about half an hour over the heart of the city, dropping thousands of anti-Fascist leaflets. The tiny pieces of paper floated down onto the houses and streets, over the Piazza di Spagna, the Pincio, Villa Borghese, and into the laps of people seated on the terraces of cafés and in an open-air cinema. Government war planes rose quickly to intercept the intruder. Relieved meantime of his cargo of propaganda, the unwelcome caller headed out to sea. It is uncertain to this day whether the lonely pilot who dared defy singlehanded the power of Italian Fascism was shot down by government planes or perished in the Mediterranean after running out of fuel.

The publication of a strange and moving document a few

days later established the identity of the audacious airman and the meaning of his act. The very afternoon of his descent upon Rome, Lauro de Bosis, a disillusioned young opponent of Fascism, had sent to a Belgian journalist friend the manuscript of *The Story of My Death*. The brief narrative, written in French the night before, discloses the essential facts leading to de Bosis' self-sacrifice. De Bosis conceived it his duty to do what he could to hasten the fall of Fascism and to steer his country between the Scylla and Charybdis of anarchy and communism back to constitutional monarchy. To this end he began in June of 1930 to put into circulation a clandestine bi-monthly letter. In December of the same year, while he was on a brief visit to the United States, the police traced the bothersome propaganda to its source, arrested a number of de Bosis' accomplices, including his mother, and applied punitive measures. Undaunted, the young rebel determined to go on with his work of enlightenment. Like the hero of his own lyrical drama *Icarus*, for which he had won the Olympic Prize for Poetry at Amsterdam in 1928, he would perish in a symbolic action calculated to rouse his compatriots and all free men. He took a few hours of instruction in flying and managed to acquire an airplane for his return to Italy. His first sally

southward ended disastrously in Corsica. A second attempt succeeded. On October 3, 1931, at 3:15 p.m., he took off for Rome from Marseilles, laden with four hundred thousand tiny manifestoes. The postmark on the letter to his journalist friend containing *The Story of My Death* bore the date October 3—3 p.m.: he must have mailed it on the way to the airfield from which he left.

Lauro de Bosis' dramatic end jolted the liberal world. "The sacrifice is not only for Italy," commented the French writer Romain Rolland.² "It is for us, also—for you, young men of Europe and America. You who have lost your way and who seek it in the night, Lauro points it out to you. He has redeemed, by his death, your abdication and your weakness." In America *The Story of My Death* appeared in publications ranging from the *New York Times* to the *Reader's Digest*. John Haynes Holmes devoted to Lauro de Bosis one of his most inspired sermons—"The Greatest Single Deed of Heroism of Our Time." And Harvard University established a Lauro de Bosis chair in Italian civilization, held until his retirement by one of Fascism's most implacable adversaries, Gaetano Salvemini.

Both prologue and epilogue to Lauro de Bosis' memorable flight take one back to Syracuse. Lauro's mother was Lillian Vernon, daughter of the Rev. Le-

Roy M. Vernon, Dean of the College of Fine Arts of Syracuse University from 1893 to 1896.³ Dean Vernon had previously resided for many years in Italy as a missionary, founding a branch of the Methodist Episcopal church in that country. Lillian, born in 1864 in St. Louis, Missouri, where her father once held a pastorate, grew up in Italy. There she met Adolfo de Bosis, a prominent young man of letters known for his creative poetic promise, critical sensitivity, and remarkable translations from Shelley. The wedding took place in Syracuse in 1890, in the First Methodist Church,⁴ of which the bride's father was pastor at the time. The couple then returned to live in Italy.

Lauro, their last child, was born in Rome on December 9, 1901. Precocious literary activity pointed early to a brilliant career in letters, from which a doctorate in chemistry from the University of Rome was only a temporary distraction. In 1924 he made his first trip to America to lecture on Italian literature, history, and philosophy in various cities and universities under the auspices of the Italy-America Society of New York. Buried deep in the files of the *Syracuse Daily Orange* is the record of an illustrated lecture on "Recent Archaeological Discoveries in Rome" Lauro de Bosis gave on May 11, 1925, in 117 Lyman Hall before the combined Classical and Romance Language clubs. The eve-

ning of the same day he spoke on the subject of "Italy and international problems" at the church in which his parents had been married thirty-five years before.⁵ Between 1925 and 1930 he spent much time in America, some of it certainly with his mother's relatives in and about Syracuse. The summer courses in Italian literature and philosophy which he gave at Harvard University in 1926 explains the lively interest of that institution in Lauro de Bosis. Such American contacts must have contributed to his estrangement from Fascism. In 1930 he resigned, after two years, an uneasy directorship of the pro-Fascist Italy-America Society and began his underground campaign against the tyranny that had settled upon his country.

The history of the little 1945 edition of *The Story of My Death* in the Syracuse University Library comes as an epilogue to Lauro de Bosis' meteoric existence. In the account figures another Syracuse dean, Dr. Paul Shipman Andrews, now emeritus, of the College of Law. Soon after the collapse of Mussolini's regime in World War II Dean Andrews was sent to Italy with the provisional American Military Government. Circumstances led to a meeting with Signora Charis de Bosis, a sister of Lauro, who subsequently served as Dean Andrews' secretary in his various assignments during the period 1944-46. This association

resulted also in a friendship with Mrs. Lillian de Bosis, who was still living in Rome.⁶ Meantime Italy, having thrown off the incubus of Fascism, had begun to do justice to the memory of Lauro de Bosis. The hero's name was given to squares and streets in several cities. In Rome, for example, what was once the Foro Mussolini now bears appropriately the name of Lauro de Bosis, and his bust graces the Janiculum. Small wonder, then, that in 1945 Prince Filippo Doria Pamphili, Rome's anti-Fascist mayor, should propose that *The Story of My Death* be published in Lauro's native city, the proceeds to be used to help the children of victims of Fascism.⁷ Speaking at the annual banquet of the Syracuse University Italian Club in the spring of 1947, Dean Andrews alluded to this commemorative edition of Lauro de Bosis' spiritual testament composed during the restless night of October 2, 1931. When it was suggested that the Syracuse University Library should have on the shelves this special reprinting authorized by the de Bosis family and edited with an introduction by Signora Charis de Bosis, Dr. Andrews agreed at once and promised to write to Mrs. Lillian de Bosis, then still alive, for a copy. In due time the little document arrived, inscribed "To Syracuse University / from the mother of the / author / and daughter of a former / Dean of the College of

Fine / Arts. / Lillian Vernon de Bois / Rome / July 5th 1947 /." Chancellor Tolley, apprised of the significance of the occasion, wrote to thank Mrs. de Bosis:⁸ "Syracuse University is extremely grateful to have in its possession a copy of *The Story of My Death* written by your son, Lauro de Bosis. It is a thrilling story of a great hero in the cause of world democracy"

Antonio Pace

1. The most complete account of Lauro de Bosis is now the *Storia della mia morte e ultimi scritti* edited by Gaetano Salvemini (Turin, De Silva, 1948). The largest collection of documents concerning Lauro de Bosis, in this country at least, is the accumulation of newspaper clippings, articles, and other miscellaneous matter at Harvard University.

His Syracuse connections, however, have been invariably either overlooked or, at best, barely intimated.

2. See Claude Aveline, "Le Souvenir de Lauro de Bosis," *Neo-Risorgimento* (Paris), 1945, p. 14.
3. W. Freeman Galpin, *Syracuse University: The Pioneer Days*, Syracuse University Press, 1952, pp. 116-117.
4. I am grateful to Dr. Albert L. Baner, present pastor of the First Methodist Church, who took the trouble to verify this fact from documents still in disorder from the fire which destroyed the church in January, 1957.
5. Mr. Lester G. Wells, our Rare Book Librarian, patiently helped me run down the tenuous clue to Lauro de Bosis' Syracuse lectures that appeared in a Syracuse *Post-Standard* article of December 4, 1930, dealing with Mrs. Lillian de Bosis' arrest by Fascist authorities.
6. In Dean Andrews' absence, Mrs.

Andrews was able to furnish the information I needed from her phenomenally accurate recollections of her husband's activity with the American Military Government in Italy.

7. Signora Charis de Bosis kindly answered my request for information relative to the circumstances that produced the 1945 reprinting of *The Story of My Death*.
8. Letter of November 3, 1947, a carbon copy of which is attached to the book donated by Mrs. de Bosis.

La Botanique de Rousseau

The Library recently received from Mr. David Fraser the gift of a rare and beautiful work, *La Botanique*, whose sprightly illustrations of flowers are most appropriate to the season of spring. It possesses the triple-sided attraction of combining the literature of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the painting of Pierre-Joseph Redouté, and the binding of Whitman Bennett.

The text consists of little known letters of Rousseau on the elements of botany and the excitement and significance of its study. Written from 1766 to 1776, the letters cover many facets of botany and botanical illustrations together with an explanation of the classification system of Linnaeus by Thomas Martyn. Following the letters is a "Fragment" for a dictionary of terms used in botany, which the editors believed significant enough to publish despite its incompleteness. *La Botanique* (Paris, 1805) is a second and

more inclusive edition of Rousseau's botanical efforts.

Redouté (1759-1840) carefully supplemented the Rousseau commentary with forty-six plates illustrating the letters on botany and eighteen illustrating the dictionary of terms. Engravers include Chailly, Marchand, Masson, and Tassaert. Printed in color and finished by hand, the plates include particularly important illustrations of chicory, quince, plum, lily, snapdragon, and narcissus. Books containing color plates by this famous French painter of flowers are highly coveted collectors' items. Redouté's three-volume *Les Roses* (1817-1824) is perhaps his most famous work; it is hoped that it, too, may one day be acquired for the Lena R. Arents Rare Book Room.

The handsome binding—full blue morocco gold tooled, a rose inlaid on front cover, white moiré end-papers, gold tooled leather doublures, and blue buckram chemise—was the work of Whitman Bennett of New York in 1905. The volume is a particularly fine example of Bennett artistry.

Mr. Baruch at Syracuse

The University was honored recently in receiving from the gifted biographer and Pulitzer Prize winner, Margaret L. Coit, her original manuscript of *Mr. Baruch* together with an inscribed copy of this widely read work published last year by

Houghton Mifflin Co. At Miss Coit's suggestion, her publishers also sent to the Library three preliminary manuscript drafts and the final typed manuscript or "setting copy" with galley and page proofs. Together these gifts tell the fascinating story of how Miss Coit's scholarly and penetrating study of Bernard Baruch became a book. For many the story will be as interesting as it will be useful.

Mr. Baruch earned for Miss Coit the coveted prize presented each year by the books committee of the National Council of Women of the United States to the author of "the outstanding book written by a woman and published in the United States."

William Morris Collection Grows

Mr. Sol Feinstone of Washington Crossing, Pennsylvania, has enriched the Library's collections of rare books and manuscripts with numerous gifts and he recently supplemented these with a gift of five letters written by William Morris and an original sketch of an initial letter designed by Morris for his monumental "Kelmescott Chaucer."

The five Morris letters to his artist friend and fellow-Socialist, Walter Crane, range in date from 1891 to 1893. They relate to sundry publications by Morris in which Crane had a part either as illustrator or literary contributor. Two concern publication of the *Arts and Crafts*

Essays (1893). One relates to the catalog of an exhibition by the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society and to a suitable gallery for the annual exhibitions. Two have reference to Crane's illustrations for *The Story of the Glittering Plain* written and published by Morris.

Morris's *Glittering Plain*, a prose romance, has been described by H. Buxton Forman (*The Books of William Morris*) as "treating of the renewal of youth without death." This appeared as the first publication of Morris's Kelmscott Press in 1891. He had engaged Crane to illustrate the book, but as Crane wrote "he [Morris] was so eager to get his first book out that he could not wait for the pictures and so it first appeared simply with his own initials and ornaments, the larger edition following later [1894] with the woodcuts from my designs . . ."

A few weeks previous to receipt of Mr. Feinstone's gift the Library secured with Library Associates' funds a copy of the 1891 edition from an English dealer. Two hundred copies were printed of which one hundred and eighty were offered for sale. This edition should not be confused with the trade edition published by Reeves and Turner, London, in the same year or with the 1894 edition illustrated by Crane. All three editions should ultimately be available in the collection, particularly the latter since the Library

has but one book illustrated by Walter Crane — Robert Louis Stevenson's *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes* (London, 1879), which was the gift of Chancellor Tolley.

The original Morris design is an ornamental letter "O" for his Chaucer and appears as the initial letter of the first word of "The Prologue of the Tale of the Manne of Lawe" — "O Hatefull Harm! Condicion of Poverte!" The design measures approximately $3\frac{3}{8}$ by 4 inches and it collates perfectly with the same initial letter in the Library's copy of the "Kelmscott Chaucer."

Mr. Feinstone's gift augments the Library's holdings of Morris materials enhanced last fall by Dr. Adrian Van Sinderen's gift of the *Kelmscott Chaucer* together with an original Morris letter addressed to F. G. Stephens, art critic of the *Athenaeum*, relative to one of the articles which Morris contributed to that periodical between 1876 and 1888.

In Memoriam

With deep regret, the Executive Secretary records the loss from our membership of Emil Hansen, deceased October 22, 1958.

Memorial Funds

Friends and relatives have established Memorial Funds for the purchase of library books inscribed in honor of:

Mrs. Frank A. Shane
Ralph F. Strebel

Herbals

The Library recently added to the Lena R. Arents Rare Book Room a notable collection of fifty original leaves from famous herbals published during the last five centuries. The fifteenth century is represented by 12 leaves, the sixteenth by 24; and for the seventeenth-nineteenth centuries 14 leaves are included. They depict the development of typography and book illustration with examples of woodcuts, copper engravings, lithography and hand-colored plates.

Accompanying the plates, enclosed in an attractive linen covered box with hinged cover, is a scholarly brochure in English by Claus Nissen giving a history of herbals from the time of ancient Egypt until 1957; a bibliography of the books in which the plates originally appeared; and an account of the life and works of the respective authors, artists, printers and publishers.

Herbals of Five Centuries supplements the following herbals acquired during the past year for the Lena R. Arents Rare Book Room:

Culpepper. *British herbal* . . .
London, 1840.

Gerard. *The herball* . . .
London, 1633.

Hill. *The British herbal* . . .
London, 1756.

Salmon. *Botanologia* . . . London, 1710.

Scholarly use of these books is being made by a graduate student in botany who is collecting data for his master's thesis on the history of the use of belladonna through all ages. In addition to his use of herbals in our Library, he has been assisted in his research by the five-volume catalogue of the "Arents Tobacco Collection" in the New York Public Library.

New Members

Mr. David Fraser, Chairman of the Membership Committee, announces with sincere pleasure the following new members:

Mr. George Daigneault, Chicago, Illinois.

Mr. Peter A. Gabauer, Larchmont, New York.

Huntington Harris, Leesburg, Virginia.

Earle J. Machold, Syracuse.

Mr. and Mrs. Sanford B. Meech, Syracuse.

Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Charles Nichols, Alexandria Bay, New York.

Miss Marguerite Swallen, Battle Creek, Michigan.

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