

# LITERARY "FIND"

## 18th Century English Manuscript Unearthed in Turnbull Library

LAST week we printed an article by Professor Ian A. Gordon on the facilities for research in New Zealand, in which he spoke in general of some of the difficulties that obstruct original study, and make it necessary for graduates to go abroad to do fruitful work. In his own field, the study of English literature, Professor Gordon could have cited an example of his own experience which demonstrates both the pleasures and frustrations that attend discovery and

research for a New Zealander. When we heard of his discovery and identification in the Turnbull Library of a manuscript book of William Shenstone, the 18th Century English poet (author of *The Schoolmistress*), we had a photograph taken of its title-page and asked Professor Gordon to tell us the story of the book.

### The Leasowes Circle

Shenstone is best known as the author of the Spenserian imitation *The Schoolmistress*, but was better known in his own time as the owner of an estate called The Leasowes, which he developed into one of the showplaces of England. With its ornamental urns, studied vistas, and cunningly-placed inscriptions by Shenstone, the place attracted many friends—Percy (the collector of *The Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*), the poets Thomson, Jago, Graves, and Somerville, the printer Baskerville, Dodsley the publisher, and others. Various of his works were published in his lifetime, and others after his death. One publication he was known to have contemplated for some time was an anthology of unpublished verse collected mainly from the friends who made up the Leasowes circle. It was known that "according to Percy, Shenstone had a choice collection of poems preparing for the press at the time of his death" (1763).

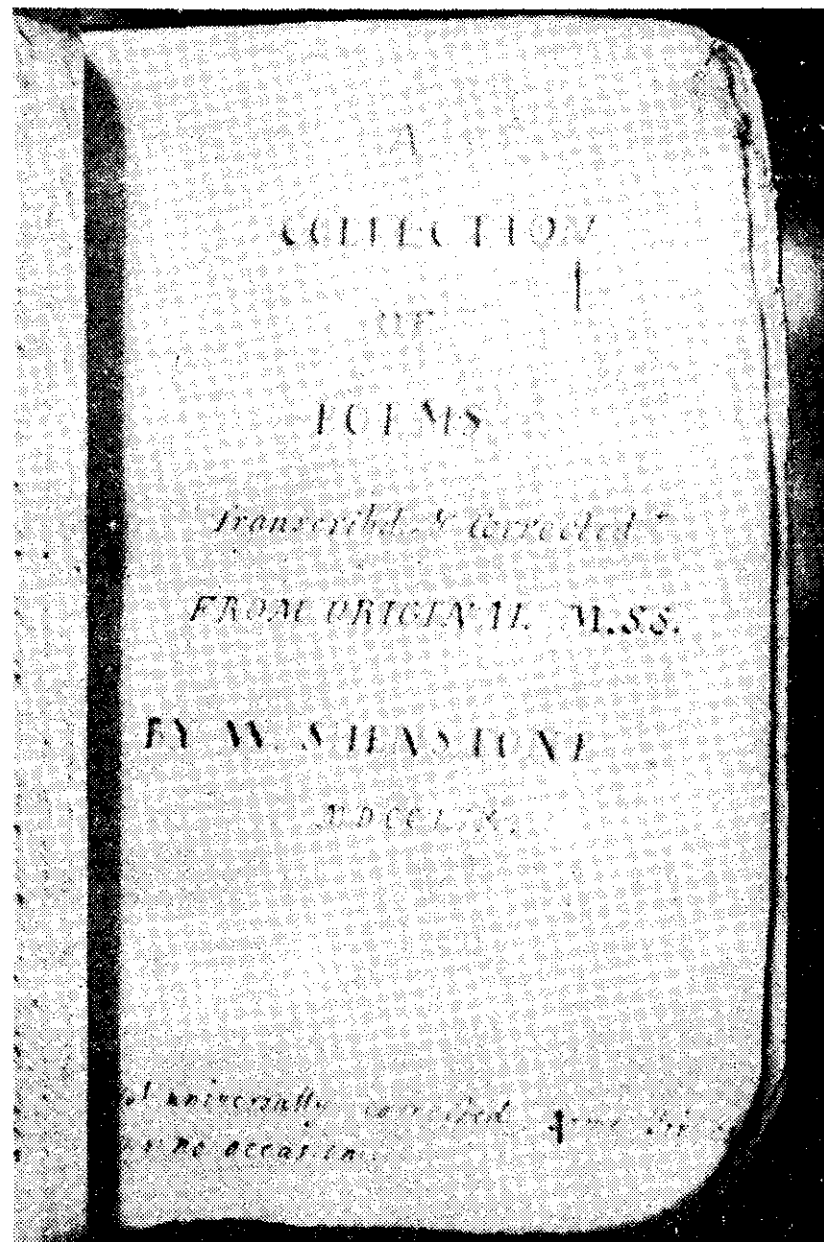
A letter from Shenstone to Jago in 1759 asked him for copies of verses by him and his friends, and said: "I have thoughts of amusing myself with the publication of a small Miscellany from neighbour Baskerville's press. . . ."

The volume was never printed, and if it had not been for Percy's mention of it, its existence might have been forgotten altogether.

### Sent to New Zealand

But the manuscript found its way to the Turnbull Library in Wellington, and a few years ago, before the rare books of the Turnbull Collection were sent away into the country for safe keeping, the Librarian (C. R. H. Taylor) showed the small leatherbound volume to Professor Gordon, who found it to be none other than the missing anthology.

The eighty poems fall into four classes—first, about 40 poems of the Leasowes circle (Thomson, Percy, Somerville, Jago, Graves, Lady Luxborough); second, a group of ten ballads copied from "From the Old Collection of Ballads" (Percy's famous manuscript from which the *Reliques* were derived); third, about 30 poems sent from various sources, poems sent by booksellers, and epitaphs; and fourth, a handful of poems copied from already printed sources, *Tea Table Miscellany*, *The Chronicle*, and so on. At the end, there is an index in Shenstone's hand, a short list of further poems to be added, and



PHOTOGRAPH of the title page of Shenstone's manuscript anthology, found in the Turnbull Library, Wellington. The inscription reads "A Collection of Poems, Transcrib'd and Corrected\* from original M.S.S. by W. SHENSTONE, MDCCLIX." The asterisk refers to the following autograph note at the foot of the page: "Not universally corrected; some Pieces having no occasion."

in Percy's hand a list of the Ballads in the Miscellany which were later published in the *Reliques*.

Since he identified the manuscript Professor Gordon has been trying to work out its ownership—not without difficulty.

### Mysterious Erasure

The volume is a small book of 300 pages, in a leather binding that is not the original one, into which Shenstone copied over 80 poems in his own hand. A few cuttings from contemporary periodicals are also pinned in with versions of poems. The title page (which we have reproduced) is done in black and red ink.

On the first fly leaf, in the hand of Percy, is this note: "This precious ( ) of my poor Friend Shenstone was thus piteously burnt in the fire wch. consumed my Library at Northumbd.

House in 1780. P." Then there is inserted a letter from a friend of Shenstone's presenting the volume to Percy.

The edges of the pages are badly charred, but the text escaped damage, almost entirely. The present binding was presumably put on after the fire.

Alexander Turnbull got it from a bookseller who had a blanket commission to obtain for him the writings of Richard Graves. Before this bookseller had it, there is record of it in a Sotheby's catalogue, and there is also a record of its being bought at a booksale in Bristol by a man called Drake. There is still a gap in the record of the book's ownership, and there is still that missing word in Percy's note, an erasure which mystifies the layman. But the manuscript itself is safe, and its discovery and identification here is a further contribution to the detailed study of minor 18th Century verse.

### FOR HOME-BUILDERS

GUIDE TO IDEAL PLANNING AND BUILDING OF YOUR NEW HOME. By D. E. Barry Martin, B.Arch., A.R.I.B.A. A. H. and A. W. Reed (Wellington).

MOST of us know what the world calls a litigant who conducts his own case. Not so many have a name for the home-builder who designs his own house. Yet the first man injures nobody but himself, while the second man may be a pest to the whole community. It is far more likely than not that a home-made plan will be a bad plan economically. It is almost certain that it will be bad socially—an eyesore that the community will somehow or other have to endure.

The purpose of this little book—it is far too small and too crowded for the good things in it—is to steer people away from home-designed houses. If cynics say that it has another purpose as well, they may be right and they may be wrong, but they are more foolish than cynics usually are if they worry about it. What matters is that anyone who is thinking of building a new home or modernising an old one has a guide here for two shillings that will protect him against expensive mistakes in convenience and taste if he has the wit to study it with an open mind.

### MUSICAL UNDERSTANDING?

MUSIC AND THE LISTENER. A Guide to Musical Understanding. By Keith Barry. Robertson and Mullens (Melbourne).

THE sixth edition of a short book by an Australian, in which some well-known heresies are repeated, and some novel ones are introduced: e.g., there is practically no difference between symphonies and sonatas except in instrumentation; Mozart's operas are "cheerful works"; "Poor Handel seems doomed to live only by *The Messiah* and two or three songs"; the quartets of Beethoven and Haydn cannot be compared because "one is an advance on the other and is not to be compared in any way"; out of 100 marks, Mozart would get 70 for "formal beauty" and 30 for "emotional content"; John Bull, the Elizabethan composer, is the original "typical Englishman"; Hugo Wolf is a composer "of whom we shall probably hear more in the years to come"; and so on. Some hair-raising pronunciations are given in the back.