

## THE WORK OF ELIZABETH COLWELL

By ALICE ROUILLIER

*Miss Elizabeth Colwell is the first woman designer The Graphic Arts has presented in this department. Her drawings first attracted attention in connection with the publicity of Marshall Field, and, later, her series of lettered designs for Cowan were the subject of much favorable comment among those folks appreciative of distinctive advertising.*

*An inspection of Miss Colwell's work on the following pages will show its suitability for commercial requirements, such as the decorative treatment of artistic brochures and booklets. The examples of lettering shown in the Cowan advertisements are exactly in keeping with the nature of that firm's business from the viewpoints of layout and style of letter employed. It has been an axiom among designers, although just why it is hard to say, that women cannot do good lettering. Miss Colwell, with many other women designers, offers direct proof to the contrary.*

*Her work has been favorably known among book-makers for a long time, while examples of her book-plates are to be found in every collection representing the modern idea of this interesting art. It is regrettable that more of her plates are not available for presentation in this exhibit. Miss Colwell's studio is at 1373 East 57th Street, Chicago.—EDITOR.*



MISS COLWELL once said to me: "All the elements of a good painting, etching, or wood-block print, that is, design, balance, and color, are contained in a good initial letter."

This appreciation of the importance of perfection in little things at once explains, it would seem, the evenness in execution so consistently encountered in everything she does; an enviable quality always, but hardly to be overestimated in a good designer, and it is in the field of design we are to consider Miss Colwell.

In taking up individual work after a certain amount of orthodox training in the fundamentals of good drawing, Miss Colwell found that she leaned to the use almost exclusively of natural forms, rather than to the employment of the old-established French eighteenth century Renaissance and Gothic ideals, and in the adaptation of the leaf and flower she has been most successful.

The chief characteristic of her designs is a certain structural strength, and all are distinguished by rhythm of line. This is especially true of the many borders in which the favored acorn so often appears, and in the loose, freely drawn scrolls.

But it is in the branch of letter-making that she particularly excels. Her letters are

clear cut, her arrangements dignified and full of grace, bearing always the stamp of originality. Some of the designs made for Cowan, reproduced in these pages, in which the decorative result is obtained with that paucity of means, the combination of the Roman and the Italic letters, are among her most successful examples.

A page of her letters, particularly her script, has the necessary rhythm without sacrificing that most essential quality, legibility.

Of the three books she has lettered, one, "Songs and Sonnets," is in Italics throughout, and the selection seems particularly adapted to the lyrical content. White space is in abundance and the only decorations, if they may be so called, are worked into the title-page and the headings of the poems. In fact Miss Colwell seems most happy when depending only on letters for a pleasing arrangement for the eye. No alien element is introduced to mar the beauty and almost chastelike quality of this little book.

In "Tristram and Iseult" the double title is rich in pictorial strength and detailed ornament, particularly appropriate for this old-world tale. Each group of lyrics is started with an initial, dividing the poem into the consecutive movements it required, but barring these the book bears that same quality of simplicity as the "Songs and Sonnets."

Miss Colwell designed the books from cover to cover, even selecting the paper and