ERNST BRACHES

‘Nieuwe Kunst’ in New York—A Quaere

There were more antiquarian bookshops than wet days in Vancouver in May 1988.1 In one of these many bookshops, Ashley’s Books, I followed an old habit and went through the shelf of religious literature. In that row of exalted wishes, prayers, thoughts and quotations, the well-known little volumes with the ‘limp chamois’ overhangs from the beginning of the century were not wanting. The contents of the velvety brown leather, lined on the inside with silk, do not usually exert any call on my cupidity. 

*Respectability* by Fra Elbertus turned out to be an exception to this rule. It is no *chef-d’œuvre* of typography,2 if only because on pp. 100-101 the compositor inserted a passage of seven lines, obviously sent in as an afterthought, by simply using less line space here than on the other pages of the book.

The booklet is then one of the numerous products of the utopian community which Elbert Hubbard (1856-1915) founded in East Aurora, New York, in 1895. After a varied career (in which he rose to the directorship of Larkin Soap Company, then one of the biggest soap factories in the United States), Hubbard had turned away from commerce. While travelling in England he met the artist-socialist William Morris in 1892. This encounter was of decisive importance for the foundation of the Roycroft Community in East Aurora.3 After a difficult beginning, success came to the enterprise in 1898. The ‘window-cleaner’ booklets sold by the thousand: ‘...Every goat in the world was a potential limp binding.’4

Elbert Hubbard’s *Respectability* (1905) is of interest to the Netherlands because the title-page (illus. 1) the initials (illus. 2),5 and the colophon (illus. 3), all of them printed in black and brown, must have been reproduced from drawings by the Dutch artist Theo Neuhuys (1878-1921), who is known to

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1 A handy little outline (with map) can be got from the antiquarian bookshops in Vancouver.


3 The name is derived from that of Thomas Roycroft, the London printer of the *Biblia sacra polyglotta*, begun in 1653 and completed in 1657.


5 A (p. v, 11, 21, 32, 52, 78), I (p. 35, 100), O (p. 51), S (p. 1, 95), T (p. 24, 46, 55, 63, 108), W (p. 6, 58, 76).

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1. Title-page; full scale