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Macavere

ÉMILE JOSEPH LABARRE

1883–1965 †

It is with deep regret that we must record that E. J. Labarre did not live to see the publication of his eleventh *Monumentum* – a volume in which he had taken so much pride. He died of a heart attack on the morning of 10 June 1965, within less than six weeks of its planned publication date. It is characteristic of the man that he should have been busily engaged in work connected with the book's distribution on the very day before his death.

Émile Joseph Labarre was born in Belgium on 8 December 1883. While he was still a child his father took up residence in England and both father and son became British subjects by naturalization. As a young man Labarre went to Germany to study the language, supporting himself by teaching English. Later he moved to Holland, where he continued his linguistic studies. In 1905 he became a sworn translator and interpreter, and in the following year he was appointed British Vice-Consul in Amsterdam – an appointment that he retained until 1918. He remained in Holland after the Armistice, settling in Hilversum, and was again British Vice-Consul for a short period at the beginning of the Second World War. From May 1940 until August 1944 he was interned in Germany. On his release he was repatriated to the United Kingdom, returning to Hilversum in July 1945.

E. J. Labarre's interest in paper history and watermarks dated from the years before the First World War, when he was introduced to the subject by his colleague, W. A. Churchill, then British Consul in Amsterdam. His first published work, the *Dictionary and Encyclopaedia of Paper and Paper-making*, which appeared at Amsterdam in 1937 (a much enlarged edition was published in 1952), was the product of a growing interest in the subject combined with his professional concerns as a translator. But his taste for the history of paper and watermarks did not become a passion until the years of his internment during the Second World War. While he was still interned and at work on the revision of his dictionary, he resolved that he would publish a series of monographs,



watermark facsimiles, and translations of paper-history classics so soon as he was at liberty to make the necessary arrangements.

By 1950, with the help of Dutch friends and the encouragement of scholars of a number of nationalities, Labarre had established the Paper Publications Society at Hilversum. This was the year of publication of the first of the *Monumenta Chartae Papyraceae Historiam Illustrantia* – his friend Edward Heawood's *Watermarks Mainly of the 17th and 18th Centuries*. This first, and immediately successful, *Monumentum* was followed by ten other imposing volumes relating to the paper history and watermarks of Austria-Hungary, Great Britain, Italy, Russia, and Switzerland, a volume of essays in honour of C.-M. Briquet, and another containing reprints of twenty-four of Briquet's *Opuscula*.

All the *Monumenta* (to say nothing of four other volumes issued *hors série*) were edited with scrupulous care by Labarre; some were translated by him; and every one of them owed its publication to his enthusiasm and organizing abilities. It is no exaggeration to claim that in this respect E. J. Labarre's services to paper history and to filigranology are unrivalled.

Labarre's record is the more remarkable in that during the last few years of his life he was more or less confined to his bed by an old leg injury. This disability meant that he was largely dependent upon the assistance of others. It says much for his personality that though he was an exigent taskmaster (he demanded from others the sometimes almost impossibly high standards that he set himself), he was capable of arousing the affection of a series of loyal helpers whose devoted service was an essential element in the functioning of the Paper Publications Society.

He would have been the last to deny that his chosen field was a somewhat specialized one. But towards the end of his life the outstanding nature of his services to scholarship was publicly recognized. On his seventieth birthday, in December 1953, he became the first recipient of the Ring of Honour of the Paper-history Research Centre – a salute on the part of his fellow-students which gave him great pleasure. Ten years later, on his eightieth birthday, he became both an Officer of the Most Honourable Order of the British Empire and a Chevalier of the Order of Orange-Nassau. He regarded these wider honours, bestowed on him by the country of which he was a national and by the land of his domicile, as in a sense marking the climax of his career; he saw in them – what they indeed symbolized – a confirmation of the 'worth-whileness' of many years of singleminded devotion to the cause of paper-history and watermark study, embodied in the row of stout volumes present in the reading-rooms of great libraries throughout the world, of which one can truly say: *Si monumentum requiris, aspice*.

In the nature of things, Labarre's contribution must remain a unique phenomenon: his publications have covered much of the ground, and his individual blend of enthusiasm, learning, judgment, industry, organizing ability, and business acumen is essentially unrepeatable. However, there is much still to be done in the field which he cultivated with such remarkable results, and it is some consolation to be able to report that before his death Labarre had taken steps to ensure that the activities of the Paper Publications Society would not be cut short by his passing. The Society will continue to function from the same address in Hilversum, where the members of its staff will work under the Direction of its Secretary, Professor de la Fontaine Verwey, Chief Librarian of the Amsterdam University Library. The undersigned will act as the Society's Consultant Editor. For us – as for all who knew him – Labarre's memory will stand as a shining example and as a powerful encouragement to give of our best in our work for the advancement of learning in the field to which he contributed so much.

Oxford, June 1965

J. S. G. SIMMONS