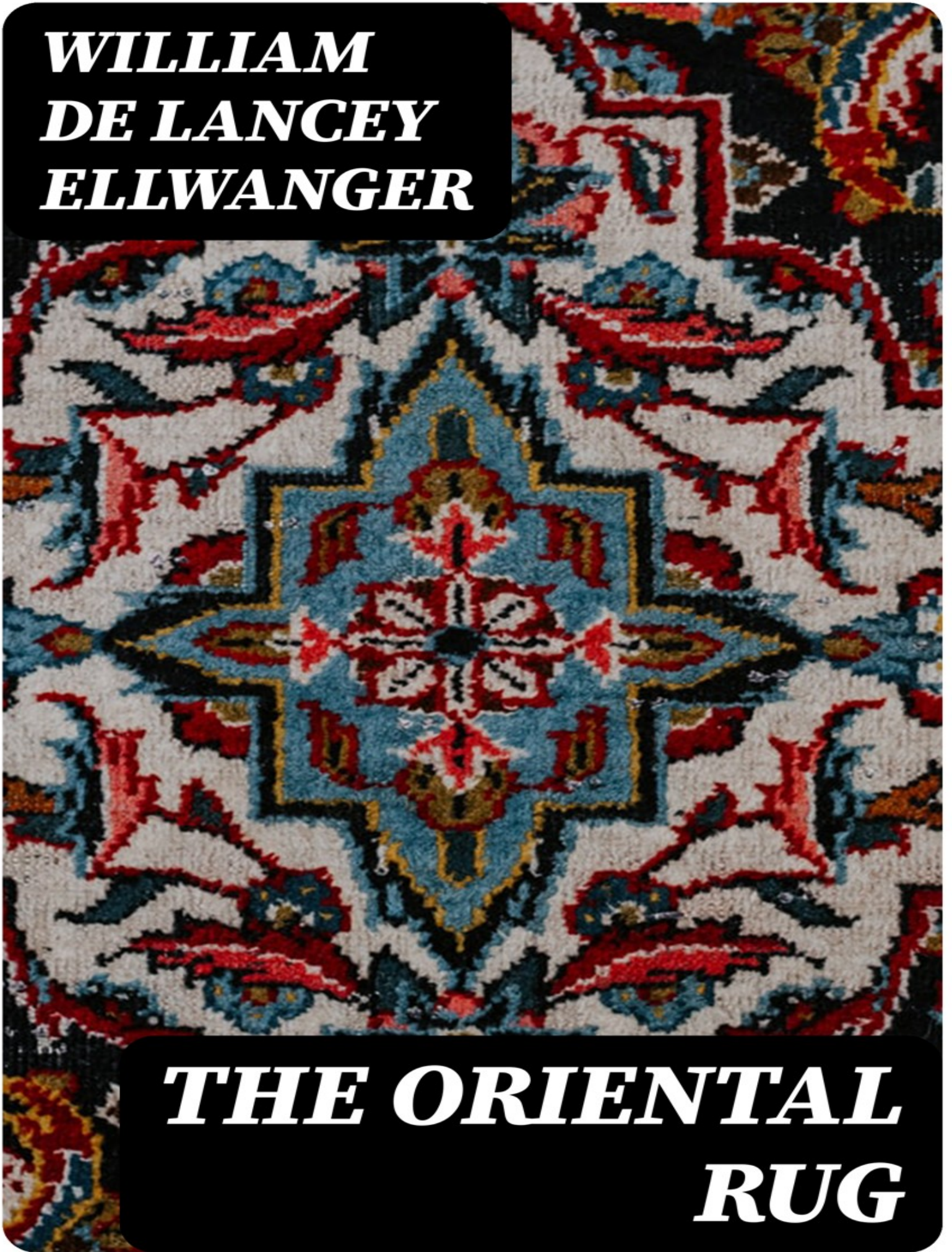


***WILLIAM
DE LANCEY
ELLWANGER***

***THE ORIENTAL
RUG***



William De Lancey Ellwanger

The Oriental Rug

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



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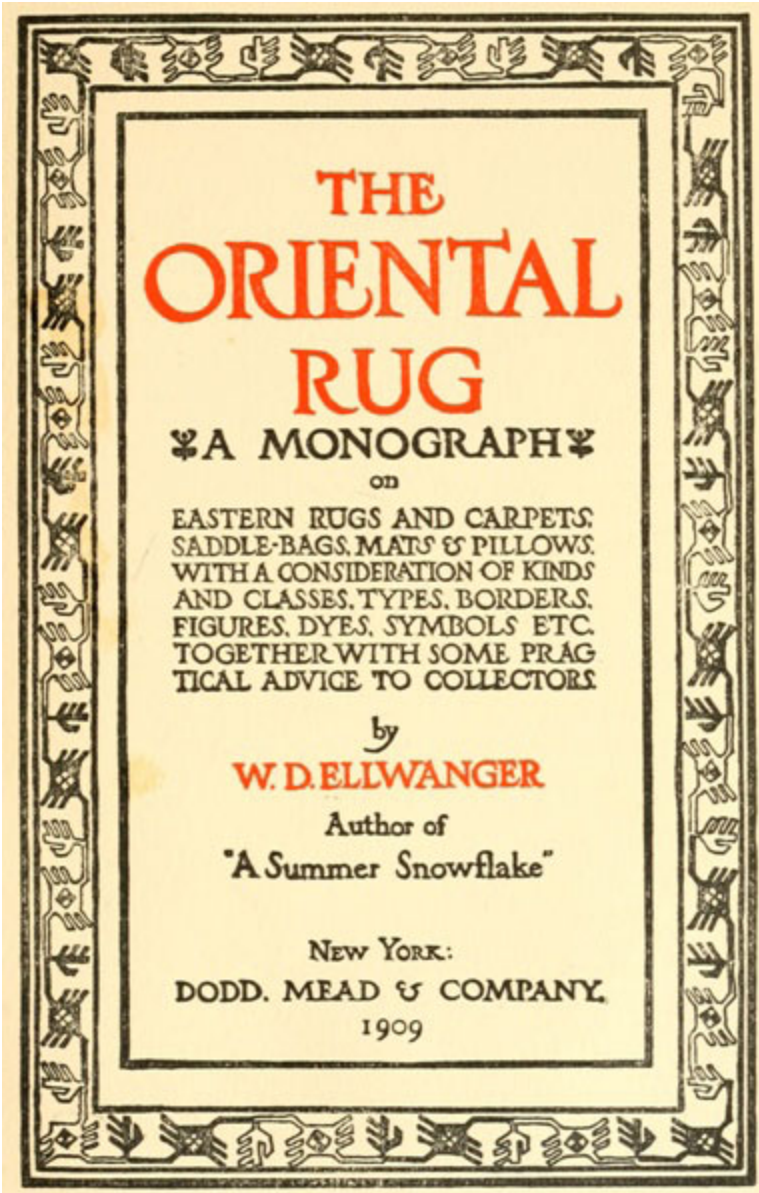
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W. D. ELLWANGER



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PREFACE

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That Oriental rugs are works of art in the highest sense of the term, and that fine antique specimens, of even modest size, have a financial value of ten, fifteen, or thirty-eight

thousand dollars, has been recently determined at public auction. At this auction, several nations had a representative voice in the bidding, and the standard of price was fairly established. The value of rugs may have been imaginary and sentimental heretofore; it is now a definite fact, with figures apparently at the minimum. What the maximum may prove, remains to be seen.

Choice old rugs, therefore, to-day come into the same class with genuine paintings of the old Dutch School; with canvases of Teniers, Ruysdael, Cuyp, Ostade, or whatever similar artist's work may have escaped the museums. They vie in prestige with the finest examples of Corot, Diaz, Troyon, or Daubigny; and in monetary supremacy they overtop the rarest and grandest of Chinese porcelains.

And yet the Oriental rug, as against such competitors for the wealthy collectors' favour, has hardly a history, and is practically without a name or a pedigree. Experts will tell you at a glance whether or not your Wouverman is genuine, or inform you where every true Corot was owned or whence it was bartered or stolen. In Chinese porcelains, the knowing dealer will easily prove to you not only under what dynasty but in what decade or year a particular piece was produced.

The painting has descent, signature, or the brush mark of a school to father it. The Chinese vase, bowl, or jar has its marks, cyphers, stamps and dates, and an undoubted genealogy to vouch for its authenticity. The rug must speak for itself and go upon its intrinsic merits. It is its own guarantee and certificate of artistic and financial value.

The study of Oriental rugs, therefore, can never lead to an exact science or approximate dogmatic knowledge.

Whoever is interested in them must needs rely upon his personal judgment or the seller's advice. There is practically only one current book authority in the premises.

A new volume on the subject would thus seem to be well justified. It is the hope of the author that this book may prove itself sound and practical, and that it may help to make more clear and simple the right appreciation of a valuable rug.

W. D. ELLWANGER

ROCHESTER, N.Y., 1903

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THE MYSTERY OF THE RUG

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The Oriental Rug

CHAPTER I

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THE MYSTERY OF THE RUG

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To judge of an Oriental rug rightly, it must be looked at from several points of view, or, at least, from two aspects; against the light and with the light. From the first standpoint, against the light of knowledge, speaking figuratively, there may be seen only a number of rude and awkward figures in crude colours scattered erratically on a dark or dingy-looking background, a fringe of coarse and ragged strings at either end, and rough frays of yarn at the sides. This is what is accepted by many people as an Oriental rug. And indeed this is what most rugs are.

If, on the other hand, we view our rugs with the light of a better wisdom and happier experience, we will see the richest and softest of colours, the most harmonious shadings and blendings, medallions brilliant as jewels, or geometrical designs beautiful as the rose windows of a cathedral; or, again, graceful combinations of charmingly conventionalized flowers and delicate trceries and arabesques,—all these displaying new glories of ever changing and never tiring beauty. Each woven picture, too, is as soft to tread upon as a closely mown lawn, and caresses the feet that sink into its pile. These are Oriental rugs as their admirers know and love them.

Perhaps the chief charm of all such beautiful rugs is in their mystery. Their designs are odd and strange and full of

hidden meanings, and their effects are often evolved from the crudest and clumsiest figures, hooks and squares and angles; they owe their wealth of colour to simple vegetable dyes from the woods and fields and gardens, and yet the secret of many of these dyes is still a secret, or has long ago been lost. The places whence the rugs come, the people who make them and those who sell them, all are mysterious and hard to know and understand.

Moreover, broadly speaking, there are no experts on the subject, no authorities, no literature. He who would know them must learn them by experience. The rug dealers, for the most part, seem to treat their wares merely as so much merchandise, and what knowledge concerning them they are willing to impart is so contradictory as to be almost valueless. Few of them would agree upon the name of an example which might be out of the ordinary, or be able to tell where it was made. Ask of them what a "Mecca" is, and they will stammer in their varying answers. And yet the Armenians who handle most of the rugs in this country are often highly educated, and fully appreciate the beauty of their wares. Their taste, however, is not always our taste, and all the Orientalists seem to retain their barbaric fondness for crude and startling colours. When we would turn to books for information in the matter we find that the authorities are not many. They might be numbered on your fingers and thumbs. These few books, moreover, have been published only in limited editions at high prices, and are not easily obtainable. One of the most important of such works is the sumptuously illustrated, elephantine folio, issued in Vienna in 1892 by the Imperial and Royal Austrian and