

Franklin Attends A Book Auction

TOWARD six o'clock on Monday evening, April 5, 1762, Benjamin Franklin walked along York Street, Covent Garden, to the shop of Samuel Baker, bookseller and auctioneer. On this evening and the next, the books of his friend James Ralph, who had died on January 24, 1762, were to be auctioned off.¹ Ralph had accompanied Franklin to England in 1724. His poetic ambitions led him to a literary career during which he produced poetry, plays, political and historical pieces, as well as other "miscellaneous" writings. Ralph had remained in England, but the two friends met again when Franklin returned to London in 1757. Franklin had visited Ralph during his last illness in 1761-1762.²

In addition to the usual gathering of book dealers, some friends of the two men were also present at the sale: William Rose, the schoolmaster in Chiswick; Sir Henry Cheere, the sculptor, also living in Chiswick; and the Reverend Thomas Birch, a friend of Ralph's before political differences had separated them, and of Franklin's. Rose and Sir Henry bought one book apiece; Birch bought none, although he was an interested spectator. Franklin, however, purchased many volumes during the two nights of the auction. The copy of the sales catalogue in the British Museum gives in longhand not only the purchase price, but also the name of the buyer of each item. It is therefore a simple matter to list the books that Franklin bought and the price he paid for them.³

¹ "A CATALOGUE of the LIBRARY of JAMES RALPH, Esq; (*Author of the History of England*) Lately Deceased: Containing a good Collection of English and French BOOKS. To which is added, Some rare *Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian* Books, of UVEDALE PRICE, Esq. of *Bath*. Which will be sold by Auction, By SAMUEL BAKER, Bookseller, In *York Street Covent Garden*, On *Monday* the 5th of *April*, and to continue the Two following Evenings, Beginning each Evening at Six o'Clock. The BOOKS may be view'd on *Wednesday, March* the 31st, to the Time of SALE. Catalogues to be had *gratis* at Mess. Dodsleys, *Pall-Mall*; . . . and at the Place of SALE." Price's books were sold the evening of April 7.

² See Robert W. Kenny, "James Ralph: An Eighteenth-Century Philadelphian in Grub Street," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, LXIV (1940), 218-242, and Carl Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 1938), 47-53, 275.

³ The list is given as it appears in the catalogue. The number preceding the entry indicates the lot number in the catalogue.

First Night's Sale

Monday, April 5, 1762

OCTAVO & INFRA

- 4 Sedley's Works, 2 vol. 1722 3/-
 SEDLEY, SIR CHARLES. The Works of . . . Sir C. Sedley . . . in
 prose and verse. With memoirs of the Author's life, writ by an
 eminent hand [and a preface to vol. 2 by W. Ayloffe]. London:
 S. Briscoe, 1722. 2 vols. 12mo.⁴
- 5 The Platonic Lovers 1732 1/-
 [FOWKE, MARTHA.] The Platonic lovers; consisting of original
 letters, in prose and verse that passed between Clio and Strephon.
 The third edition, corrected. London, 1732. 12mo.
- 11 The Weekly Essay; or, Middlesex Journal 1738 1/-
 The Weekly Essay; or Middlesex Journal. 19 nos. (November 5,
 1737—March 11, 1738).
- 27 The Secret History of Persia 1745 1/-
 [PECQUET, ANTOINE, or VIEUX-MAISONS, MADAME DE (?).]
 The Secret History of Persia. . . . Translated from the French,
 with a key. . . . London: M. Cooper, 1745. 12mo.
- 48 Marchant's History of the Rebellion 1746 1/-
 MARCHANT, JOHN. The History of the present Rebellion. . . .
 London: R. Walker, 1746. 8vo.
- 58 Incertitude de l'Histoire Romaine 1738
 BEAUFORT, LOUIS DE. Dissertation sur l'incertitude des cinq
 premiers siècles de l'histoire romaine. Par Monsieur L. D. B.
 Utrecht, 1738. 8vo.
- 59 Lettres de Louis XIV. au Comte de B. 1728
 BRIORD, COMTE DE. Lettres de Louis XIV. au Comte de Briord,
 Ambassadeur auprès des États Généraux, dans les Années
 1700 & 1701. . . . La Haye, 1728. 12mo.

⁴ After the price in this entry, the name Franklin has been entered and lined out.

- 66 Corbet's Poems 1672
CORBET, RICHARD, Bishop of Oxford and Norwich. The Poems of Richard Corbet. . . . The third edition, corrected and enlarged. London: J. C. for William Crook, 1672. 12mo. } -/6
- 67 Miscellaneous Translations, in Prose and Verse 1724
WARBURTON, WILLIAM. Miscellaneous Translations in Prose and Verse, from Roman Poets, Orators, and Historians. London, 1724. 12mo. }
- 68 Bernier's History of the Great Mogul 1676 -/9
BERNIER, FRANÇOIS. The History of the late Revolution of the Empire of the Great Mogul: together with the most considerable passages for five years following in that Empire. . . . Englished out of the French (by H. O. [Henry Oldenburg]). 2nd ed. London: Moses Pitt, 1676. 4 vols. 8vo.
- 75 Le Moyne's Art of writing and judging of History 1695 -/6
LE MOYNE, PIERRE. On the art both of writing and judging of History. . . . London, 1695. 12mo.
- 77 Enquiry into the antient Constitution of England 1695
[TYRRELL, SIR JAMES.] Bibliotheca Politica; or an Enquiry into the ancient constitution of the English Government; both in respect to the just extent of Regal power, and the rights . . . of the Subject . . . in thirteen dialogues. London, 1694. 4to. } -/6
- 78 Sherburne's Poems 1651
SHERBURNE, SIR EDWARD. Salmacis; Lyrian & Sylvia; The Rape of Helen, a comment thereon, with severall other poems and translations. By E. Sherburne. London, 1651. 8vo. }
- 80 Sammarco's Treatise on Revolutions in Kingdoms 1731 -/6
SAMMARCO, OTTAVIO, Baron della Rocca d'Evandro e di Camino. A Treatise concerning Revolutions in Kingdoms. Translated from the Italian. . . . London, 1731. 8vo.
- 87 Les Interets de l'Angleterre mal-intendus 1704 -/9
[DUBOS, JEAN BAPTISTE.] Les interets de l'Angleterre mal-intendus dans la guerre presente. Traduits du livre anglois, intitulé, Englands interest mistaken in the present war. . . . 6th ed., rev., cor., & augm. de notes historiques. Amsterdam: Chez J. L. de Lorme, 1704. 8vo.

- 88 Richlieu's Political Testament 1695 -/6
 RICHELIEU, ARMAND JEAN DU PLESSIS, CARDINAL, DUC DE.
 The Compleat Statesman; or, the political will and testament of
 . . . Cardinal . . . de Richelieu. . . . Done out of French.
 2 pts. London, 1695. 8vo.
- 92 Maimbourg's History of the League 1684
 MAIMBOURG, LOUIS. The History of the League. . . . Trans-
 lated into English . . . by Mr. Dryden. [With a Postscript
 by the translator.] London, 1684. 8vo. } 1/-
- 93 Les Oeuvres de Regnard, 2 tom. 1711
 REGNARD, JEAN FRANÇOIS. Les Oeuvres de M. Regnard.
 Bruxelles, 1711. 2 vols. 12mo. }
- 98 Donne's Poems 1669 -/9
 DONNE, JOHN. Poems, by J. D. With Elegies on the Author's
 Death. [6th ed.] London: In the Savoy, 1669. 8vo.
- 100 Howard's Reigns of Edward and Richard II. 1690 -/6
 HOWARD, SIR ROBERT. The History of the Reigns of Edward and
 Richard II.; with reflections and characters of their chief minis-
 ters and favourites. . . . London: F. Collins, for T. Fox,
 1690. 12mo.
- 101 Chalkhill's Thealma and Clearchus 1683
 CHALKHILL, JOHN. Thealma and Clearchus. A pastoral his-
 tory, in smooth and easie verse. Written long since, by J.
 Chalkhill, Esq. [Edited by Isaak Walton.] London: Benj.
 Tooke, 1683. 8vo. } 1/-
- 102 England's Worthies, by Winstanley. 1684
 WINSTANLEY, WILLIAM. England's Worthies: select lives of
 the most eminent persons from Constantine the Great, down
 to these times. By Will. Winstanley. London. 1684. 8vo. }
- 106 Dryden's Dramatic Works, 6 vol. 1735 8/6
 DRYDEN, JOHN. The Dramatick Works of J. D. [Edited by W.
 Congreve.] 2nd ed. London: Jacob Tonson, 1735. 6 vols. 12mo.

QUARTO

- 112 *Mascou's History of the Germans*, 2 vol. 1738 5/-
 MASCOV, JOHN JACOB. The history of the ancient Germans . . . and other ancient northern nations, who overthrew the Roman Empire, and established that of the Germans, and most of the kingdoms of Europe. . . . Translated into English by T. Lediard. London, 1737-1738. 2 vols.
- 113 *Life of Sir Dudley North* 1744 1/9
 NORTH, ROGER. The Life of the Honourable Sir Dudley North, . . . and of Dr. John North, Master of Trinity College, . . . Cambridge, *etc.* [Edited by Montagu North.] London: J. Whiston, 1744.
- 118 *Carribbeana*, 2 vol. 1741 2/6
 [KEIMER, SAMUEL, comp.] Caribbeana. Containing letters and dissertations, together with poetical essays . . . chiefly wrote by several hands in the West-Indies. . . . London: T. Osborne, 1741. 2 vols.

FOLIO

- 130 *Sacheverel's Trial* 1710
 The Tryal of Dr. Henry Sacheverell, before the House of Peers, for High Crimes and Misdemeanors. . . . London: for Jacob Tonson, 1710.
- 131 *Bohun's Collection of Debates, &c.* [n. d.]
 BOHUN, WILLIAM. A Collection of Debates, Reports, Orders, and Resolutions . . . touching the right of election of Members of Parliament. . . . By W. Bohun. London, 1702.
- 132 *The True Britain* 1723
 PHILIP, DUKE OF WHARTON. The True Briton. 74 nos. (June 3, 1723-January 31, 1724).
- 139 *History of the World*, by Alexander Ross 1652 1/9
 ROSS, ALEXANDER. The History of the World: the second part, in six books, being a continuation of the . . . history of Sir Walter Raleigh . . . till the end of the year 1640. . . . Together with a chronologie of those times. . . . London, 1652. 2 pts.

Second Night's Sale

Tuesday, April 6, 1762

OCTAVO & INFRA

- 186 Fog's Letters, 2 vol. 1732 2/-
 [MIST, NATHANIEL, assisted by DANIEL DEFOE and CHARLES MOLLOY.] Select Letters taken from Fog's Weekly Journal. London, 1732. 2 vols. 8vo.
- 187 Mist's Letters, 2 vol. 1722 1/6
 [MIST, NATHANIEL, selector.] A collection of Miscellany Letters selected out of Mist's Weekly Journal. London, 1722. 2 vols. [4 vols. by 1727.] 12mo.
- 188 Comazzi's Morals of Princes, by Hatchett 1729 1/9
 COMAZZI, COUNT GIOVANNI BATTISTA. The Morals of Princes: or, an Abstract of the most remarkable passages contain'd in the history of all the Emperors who reign'd in Rome. . . . Done into English, by William Hatchett. London: T. Worrall, 1729. 8vo.
- 201 Huartes's Trial of Wits 1698 1/3
 HUARTE, JUAN DE DIOS. Examen de Ingenios: or, the Tryal of Wits. . . . Published originally in Spanish by Dr. J. Huarte, and made English by Mr. Bellamy. London, 1698. 8vo.
- 204 Memoirs of Philip de Comines, 2 vol. 1723 2/-
 COMINES, PHILIP DE. The Memoirs of Philip de Comines; Containing the History of Lewis XI. and Charles VIII. of France; . . . Faithfully Translated from the Late Edition of Monsieur Godefroy, . . . To which are added Remarks on all the Occurrences relating to England. By Mr. Uvedale. 2nd ed. London: for J. Brotherton and F. Fayram, A. Bettesworth, and J. Pemberton, 1723. 2 vols. 8vo.
- 205 Davenant on Grants and Resumptions 1700 1/3
 DAVENANT, CHARLES. A Discourse upon Grants and Resumptions. Showing how our ancestors have proceeded with such ministers as have procured to themselves grants of the Crown-Revenue, and that the forfeited estates ought to be applied towards the payment of the public debts. By the author of, the Essay on Ways and Means. London, 1700. 8vo.

- 1956 FRANKLIN ATTENDS A BOOK AUCTION 43
- 207 Statutes abridg'd, 8 vol. [n. d.] 4/-
[Since no date is given in the catalogue, the exact reference cannot be determined.]
- 210 Use and Abuse of Parliaments, 2 vol. 1744 3/-
RALPH, JAMES. Of the Use and Abuse of Parliaments, in two historical Discourses: viz. 1. A General View of Government in Europe. 2. A Detection of the Parliaments of England from the year 1660. London, 1744. 2 vols. 8vo.
- 226 Miscellaneous Poems, by Lewis 1730 1/-
LEWIS, DAVID. Miscellaneous poems by several hands. Published by D. Lewis. (Second Collection.) London, 1730. 8vo.
- 230 Essay on Ways and Means, by Davenant 1695 -/9
DAVENANT, CHARLES. An Essay upon Ways and Means of supplying the War. London, 1695. 8vo.
- 247 Compleat History of Europe, from the Year 1600, to the Treaty of Nimeguen, 4 vol. [n. d.] 1/6
A Compleat History of Europe; or, a view of the affairs thereof, civil and military, from the Year 1600 to the Treaty of Nimeguen. . . . London, 1705 plus. 4 vols. [by 1720, 18 vols. in all.] 8vo.
- 259 Middleton's Cicero, 3 vol. 1755 10/-
MIDDLETON, CONYERS. The History of the Life of Marcus Tullius Cicero. 5th ed. London: W. Innys & J. Richardson, 1755. 3 vols. 8vo.

QUARTO

- 276 Rights of the Kingdom, by Sadler 1682
SADLER, JOHN. Rights of the Kingdom: or, Customs of our ancestors. Touching the duty, power, election, or succession of our kings and parliaments. . . . London: J. Kidgell, 1682.
- 277 England's Improvement, by Yarranton 1677
YARRANTON, ANDREW. England's Improvement by sea and land. . . . London, 1677-1681. 2 pts.
- } 1/-

- 279 State of Europe, or Monthly Mercury, 27 vol. [n. d.] 7/-
 (a.) State of Europe; or, the historical and political mercury.
 [Monthly periodical.] London: H. Rhodes, 1692 (Vol. I); or,
 (b.) The Present State of Europe; or, the Historical and Political
 monthly Mercury . . . from the original published at the
 Hague. . . . London, 1690-1720. 12mo. or 8vo. [The latter
 item is probably the one meant.]
- 284 Verstegan's Restitution of decayed Intelligence 1634 1/6
 VERSTEGAN, RICHARD. A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence:
 In Antiquities. Concerning the most noble and renowned Eng-
 lish nation. 3rd ed. London, 1634.
- FOLIO
- 286 Sidney on Government 1698 1/9
 SIDNEY, ALGERNON. Discourses concerning Government. . . .
 Published [by J. Littlebury] from an original manuscript of the
 author. London, 1698.
- 290 History of Appian, *English* 1696 4/6
 APPIAN OF ALEXANDRIA. The history of Appian of Alexandria.
 In two parts, the first consisting of the Punick, Syrian, Parthian,
 Mithridatick, Illyrian, Spanish, and Hannibalick wars, the
 second containing five books of the civil wars of Rome. . . .
 Made English by J. D. [John Davies]. 2nd ed. London: J.
 Amery, 1696.
- 297 Hobbes's Thucydides 1676 3/6
 HOBBS, THOMAS. Eight Bookes of the Peloponnesian Warre
 . . . Interpreted . . . by T. Hobbes. . . . [3rd ed.] London,
 1676.
- 301 Things new and old, by John Spencer 1658 1/6
 SPENCER, JOHN. *Καινα και Παλαια*. Things New and Old. Or, a
 storehouse of similes, sentences, allegories, . . . collected and
 observed from the writings and sayings of the learned in all ages
 to this present. By J. Spencer. [Edited by T. Fuller.] London,
 1658.

The following items were written in longhand at the bottom of the
 catalogue pages:

- State Tracts & 15 more 4/6
 State Tracts. London, 1689. fol.; London, 1692-1693. 2 pts. fol.;
 London, 1714. 3 pts. 8vo.

- Massingers Plays & 6 more 3/6
 MASSINGER, PHILIP. *The Dramatick Works of Philip Massinger*. Revised . . . by T. Coxeter. With notes critical and explanatory of various authors. . . . London, 1761. 4 vols. 8vo. [This may or may not have been the edition Ralph possessed.]
- Coke's Detection 3 Vol. 3/-
 COKE, ROGER. *A Detection of the Court and State of England during the reigns of K. James I. Charles I. Charles II. and James II. As also the Inter-regnum*. . . . The fourth edition. Continued thro' the reigns of King William and Queen Mary, and to the death of Queen Anne. London: J. Brotherton & W. Meadows, 1719. 3 vols. 8vo.
- Life of Ld Guilford & 4 more 3/6
 NORTH, ROGER. *The Life of the Right Honourable Francis North, Baron of Guilford* . . . wherein are inserted the characters of Sir Matthew Hale. . . . [Edited by Montagu North.] London: J. Whiston, 1742. 4to.
- A Parcel of Waste 7/6
 DAVENANT on Trade 3 V & 4 15/6
 DAVENANT, CHARLES. *Reflections upon the Constitution and Management of the Trade to Africa through the whole course and progress thereof, from the beginning of the last century to this time*. . . . London, 1709. 3 pts. fol.

Franklin spent a total of £6 5s. during the two nights. Eager as he was to buy books of all sorts, he could not compete with the agent of the Earl of Bute, the Prime Minister, who had bid more than twenty-five pounds for some eighty volumes of pamphlets Ralph had collected. Thomas Birch wrote to Philip Yorke, Lord Hardwicke, on April 15, 1762, that Lord Bute's agent had "shew'd a most uncommon Eagerness in bidding against his competitor D^r Franklin of Pennsylvania" for these volumes.⁵ Those works that Franklin did purchase add up to a respectable number of the approximately three hundred and fifty—not all were given a catalogue number—offered for sale, and indicate the catholicity of his reading taste.⁶

University of Colorado

JOHN B. SHIPLEY

⁵ British Museum Add. MS. 35399, f. 275. I wish to thank Mr. Edward Ruhe, Department of English, Cornell University, for bringing this letter to my attention.

⁶ I should appreciate any information about the location of some or all of the books purchased by Franklin at this sale.