

THE FORBES COLLECTION 1660-1712 (conclusion*)

by

Michael Finlayson

We come now to a consideration of the final section of the Forbes Collection, acquired by him some time between the Restoration in 1660 and his death in 1712. (This is to ignore those 9 titles which, since they were not published until after 1712, may for obvious reasons not be regarded as significant as an index to the mind of this particular late seventeenth century nonconformist clergyman.) In all, this part of the Collection numbers 763 titles. The following tables provide a guide in terms of place and date of publication of the works, and in terms of their language.

Date of Publication	Place of Publication				
	Continent	England	Scotland	Ireland	New England
1661-70	19	88	2		
1671-80	6	136	8	1	
1681-90	8	171	4		
1691-1700	8	202	4	1	
1701-1712	4	99	1		1
	45	696	19	2	1
Total published on Continent	45				
in Latin	43				
in English	2				
	45				
Total published elsewhere		720			
in Latin		42			
in English		678			
		720			

The most obvious feature of the table is the continued decline in the importance of Continental works, noted initially in my previous article (See Vol. V, no. 2, p. 4) although it might be remarked that the trend was reversed during the first of the 5 decades under consideration here. Almost all of the 45 titles are the works of Continental Protestant theologians and exegates and form the basic reference library for a learned preacher. There are 7 volumes by the Dutchman Gilbertus Voet, and 5 each by Johannes Hanbeeck, Melchior Leydecker and Herman Witsius.

* See the earlier articles in R&R, V, 1-2 by Michael Finlayson, David Sinclair and Natalie Z. Davis on the Forbes Collection, recently acquired by the Rare Book Room of the University of Toronto.

The balance of this part of the Collection was published in England and Scotland with the exception of 2 works published in Ireland and 1 in Boston. While, as we have seen, Forbes' library contained a number of works that were actually written by New Englanders, Increase Mather's Meditations on Death is the first example of a work published there that was acquired by the Gloucester Independent. According to Evans, this edition of Mather's work is actually the 1321st title known to have been printed in the American colonies.

Looking at these volumes published outside the Continent between 1661 and 1712 we can make a broad distinction between those 112 that are fundamentally secular in tone and content and those 606 that might be described as religious.

The following table attempts roughly to provide a general analysis of the content of the 112 secular works.

Contemporary political polemic	23
Rhetoric, Grammar	19
Metaphysics	14
Classics	12
History	10
Natural History	7
Pharmacoepeia	7
Parl. papers	7
Contemp. eco. soc. institutions	6
Biographies	4
Misc.	3
	<u>112</u>

Date of Publication

1661-70	14
1671-80	27
1681-90	27
1691-1700	32
1701-1712	<u>12</u>
	112

Once again the non-religious works in the Collection are those of the school-master rather than of the student of contemporary affairs, although the proportions are slightly different from those listed in the previous article. Forbes appears to have been at least a little more interested in the politics of the Exclusion crisis in the 1680's than he had been in the earlier period. His library contains, for instance, Robert Filmer's The free-holders grand inquest touching our sovereign lord the king and his parliament, published in 1680, as well as Shaftsbury's Letter from a Person of Quality to his Friend in the Country, published five years before. There is also a copy of Robert Ferguson's account of the stormy parliaments of 1680-1, A Just and Modest Vindication of the Proceedings of the Two Last Parliaments. There are also three volumes of The Historical and Political Monthly Mercury, covering April, 1697, August, 1703 and February, 1706. Finally there are two copies of the Republican Henry Neville's Plato Redivivus, both published in 1681.

Indicative of the peculiar bias affecting Forbes' choice of titles is the fact that while he possessed three works by John Locke they were scarcely the ones that we would now tend to regard as most important. While the first one is no surprise, An Essay concerning Human Understanding, the other two reflect Forbes' genuine pre-occupation. First there is A Common-place Book to the Holy Bible and secondly A Paraphrase and notes on the Epistles of St. Paul.

The second major category into which Forbes' secular titles fall includes English and Latin, grammar, rhetoric, logic, etc. Here the works are similar to those considered previously and range from William Ronksley's Regiae Grammaticae clavis; or two Parsing Tables, and Hugh Robinsons' Scholae Wintoniensis phrases latinae, through Thomas Lye's A New Spelling Book and William Lily's A Short Introduction of Grammar generally to be Used to Mark Lewis' Institutio Grammaticae Puerilis and Jean Le Clerc's Logica siva ars retrocinandi.

Amongst the other secular works that the schoolmaster Forbes acquired were four volumes of Ovid, including his Tristia, Metamorphoses and his Letters, one volume of Virgil's works, and one by Marcus Aurelius Antoninus. There are also a number of books concerned with contemporary social or economic institutions such as An Account of Charity-schools, and, also anonymous, Bank-credit: or the usefulness and security of the bank of Credit Examined.

Fundamentally, the conclusions drawn in the previous article concerning Forbes' attitude to and interest in non-religious questions do not require modification. Given the significance of the political and intellectual movements that were occurring during his lifetime the godly minister of Gloucester appears to have been remarkably unprogressive. Donne, Milton, Hobbes, Locke, Herrington and Newton, -- names we tend to associate with the profound intellectual, political and scientific revolutions of the century -- are all virtually unrepresented in what is a rather large library by 17th century standards. One rose hardly makes a summer, yet Forbes does not appear to belong within the ranks of the avant garde of his generation, as Percy Miller and Christopher Hill would both have us believe.

The bulk of this portion of the Collection as of the previous part comprises works basically religious in content. The following table lists all those authors of such volumes who are represented by at least three titles of which not less than two fall within the post 1661 period.

	<u>1661 -</u>	<u>Pre 1661</u>	<u>Total</u>
Bates, William	3	-	3
Baxter, Richard	42	19	61
Bridge, William	3	3	6
Brown, John	4	-	4
Bunyan, John	5	-	5
Burnet, Gilbert	5	-	5
Chauncy, Isaac	17	-	17
Clarkson, David	5	-	5
Delaune, Thomas	4	-	4
Doolittle, Thomas	7	-	7
Durham, James	7	1	8
Edwards, John	16	-	16
England, John	4	-	4
Fleming, Robert	6	-	6
Fuller, Francis	3	-	3
Gale, Theophilus	6	-	6
Gother, John	3	-	3
Gray, Andrew	3	-	3
Gouge, Thomas	3	-	3
Henry, Matthew	4	-	4
Hickeringill, Edmund	5	-	5
Hickman, Henry	3	1	4
Humfrey, John	3	-	3

Keach, Benjamin	3	-	3
Lobb, Stephen	3	-	3
Lukin, Henry	2	1	3
Manton, Thomas	10	2	12
Mather, Increase	3	-	3
Mather, Samuel	3	-	3
Owen, James	3	-	3
Owen, John	19	6	25
Pearson, John	2	1	3
Pearse, Edward	4	-	4
Polhill, Edward	3	-	3
Poole, Matthew	5	-	5
Shaw, Samuel	3	-	3
Shepherd, Thomas	3	-	3
Stillingfleet, Edward	5	-	5
Tomlyns, Samuel	4	-	4
Troughton, John	4	-	4
Vincent, Thomas	4	-	4
Watson, Thomas	3	1	4
Williams, Daniel	3	-	3
Whiston, Joseph	5	-	5
44	251	35	286

Just as the heavy preponderance of religious writings is indicative of Forbes' attitude - mainly one of indifference - to the major secular development of his day, so too, amongst these religious works, we may attempt to discern, this time, positively rather than negatively, his position in the spectrum of opinions. The above table contains the names of 44 writers, each of whom wrote at least three books acquired by Forbes and who, between them were responsible for almost half of the religious titles in this portion of the collection. With the exceptions only of Bishops Burnet, Pearson and Stillingfleet; and of the eccentric Edmund Hickeringill, who converted from Quakerism back to Anglicanism; and Edward Polhill, who together wrote 21 of the works, all were identified strongly with the cause of religious and ecclesiastical radicalism, and at least 18 were ejected from parishes, lectureships or colleges at the Restoration. In addition there were at least seven who were too young to hold a benefice in 1660 but who ministered to congregations outside the established church during the late seventeenth century as well as several others who were not ejected because they died before 1660.

It is less simple, however, to use the Collection as a more refined index to its owner's mind, to learn something about the precise kind of Non-conformism for which Forbes was so prepared to suffer. Puritanism, we know, is a label, of rather limited utility, used to describe the great variety of creeds and opinions, that proliferated, especially during the period of the English Revolution. Certainly when we come to look at individuals such as Forbes, Puritan is virtually useless as a label, and has to be replaced, in his case, by Independent. Similarly for the post-Restoration period Nonconformist is scarcely more helpful - here too we must make allowance for the quite distinct categories into which the so-called Nonconformists may fall.

Yet this is the point at which a library is too undifferentiated to be especially helpful. We have noted before in our discussions of this Collection that when we attempt to become too specific in our efforts to detect significance in the titles, we are frustrated by the presence of works presenting antithetical

positions. Here too, this is the case. Represented in the above table there are the relatively conservative, almost invariably scholarly Presbyterian, clergymen, such as Richard Baxter and the man who preached his funeral sermon (with a copy of that sermon) William Bates, along with the ecclesiastically and often doctrinally eccentric, frequently unlearned thinker-theologians such as John Bunyan and Thomas Delaune. Forbes, for instance, possessed a copy of Delaune's A Plea for the Non-conformists, for which the author was imprisoned in Newgate prison where he together with his whole family died of general privation.

It is, of course, in the nature of a library to mirror its owner's general field of interest, but, within that field to represent the variety of opinions to which men could and did adhere. We can thus go only so far when we attempt to chart a man's mind by reference to his library. There is, however, an alternative explanation for our inability to reconcile to our total satisfaction the man's mind with his library. This lies in the almost inevitable tendency on the part of historians to employ more or less anachronistic labels to dispose of the otherwise impossible complexities of this subject. Nowhere does this apply more than to the religious and ecclesiastical history of seventeenth century England where as I have already suggested, the labels "Puritan" and "Nonconformist" have been tried and found wanting: perhaps the same fate awaits the next layer of tags, "Presbyterian", "Independent" etc.



RECENT ACQUISITIONS AT THE NEWBERRY LIBRARY

Within the last few years The Newberry Library in Chicago has purchased collections of manuscripts, microfilms and printed books which will be of great interest to our readers working in Reformation studies. These acquisitions reflect the interest of Dr. John A. Tedeschi in the Italian Reformation and the role of the library as co-publisher of the Corpus Reformatorum Italicorum.¹

An important recent acquisition are the nine volumes of "Castelvetro" manuscripts containing copies of extremely interesting official and diplomatic documents, letters of sovereigns, reports of ambassadors concerning court and state affairs (in the style of the famous Venetian relazioni), and contemporary first-hand accounts of the political and religious situations in several European countries, almost all from the second half of the sixteenth century. Many of the documents have never been published and the originals may no longer exist. The volume containing reports on France (thirteen texts) includes an account by a Florentine gentleman, Tommaso Sasseti, of the St. Bartholomew's day massacre in Paris and a Report on the siege of Paris (1590). This fascinating historical library was assembled under mysterious circumstances at Copenhagen in 1594 by a Modenese religious exile and man of letters, Giacompo Castelvetro (1546-d.1615). Many of the texts contain marginal comments in his hand.

1. One volume has appeared thus far in this series of critical editions of the writings of 16th century Italian Protestant Reformers: Camillo Renato, Opere, documenti e testimonianze, a cura di Antonio Rotondò (Florence: Sansoni; Chicago: The Newberry Library, 1968). 350 pp. (Corpus Reformatorum Italicorum diretto da Luigi Firpo e Giorgio Spini con la collaborazione di Antonio Rotondò e John A. Tedeschi).