A CHESTER BOOKSELLER, 1667-1700: SOME OF HIS CUSTOMERS AND THE BOOKS HE SOLD THEM.

SOME eighteen years ago Mr. W. H. Rylands read before the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire a paper on the booksellers and stationers of Warrington in the middle of the seventeenth century, as the result of the discovery of their wills with a long inventory of the books in the stock of one of them at the time of his death. The paper and the inventory with bibliographical notes were published in the transactions of the society for the year 1888, and are worth the attention of students of the book trade of that period.

A very similar record has lately come before me at the Record Office, in the form of a schedule attached to some Chancery proceedings, and though the period is later by some fifty years, and the books the schedule mentions are confined almost entirely to one class, this later list has one or two points of individual interest, and affords an opportunity of comparing the prices of books during the period of the Revolution and after the Restoration.

The document is one of a series in a Chancery suit brought by the Stationers' Company against two booksellers, Robert Wellington of London and

John Minshull of the city of Chester, in the year 1699, for infringing the Company's privilege of printing the Psalms in metre, and for importing and selling other books which the Company claimed as its exclusive property.

The Company's bill of complaint recited the various patents from the days of John Day, upon which it based its claim, and incidentally it introduces us to a patentee who is very little heard of, one Verney Alley, to whom in the thirty-third year of Queen Elizabeth's reign was granted the reversion of John Day's patent after his death and that of his son Richard. Whether this curiously named individual ever succeeded to the title, is of little moment, as on the succession of James I. the Company secured this and a good many other patents previously in the hands of individual printers.

Both the defendants to the suit put in answers, but those of John Minshull are of the more interest, in the first place, because he sets out a few facts about himself that are worth noting, and also by reason of the schedule attached to them. It seems likely that John Minshull was a native of Cheshire, but from which of the numerous families of that name in the county he came has not been discovered. He sets out in his first answer, that he was apprenticed to a London bookseller, Mr. Peter Bodvell or Bodrell, who was burnt out in the Great Fire of 1666, and then removed to the city of Chester, where he died shortly afterwards, before John Minshull's term of apprenticeship was complete. Minshull goes on to say that he purchased his freedom from the stationers of Chester, that he

had carried on the business of a bookseller in the city for five and twenty years, and that he considered that he was free to do so without the interference of the London company.

According to Timperley, John Minshull died in 1712, but whether he is also to be identified with the John Minshull who was Mayor of Chester in 1711, is not quite clear. At any rate, from the fact of his having had books specially printed for him, we may take it that he was in a large way of business.

But to return to the Chancery proceedings. In obedience to the order of the Court, John Minshull, after delaying as long as possible, put in a schedule of certain classes of books he had in stock, and of certain books that he had sold, to whom he had sold them, and at what prices. First of all he set out those he had in stock, under three heads, those in quires, that is to say unbound, those bound, and those stitched, *i.e.*, pamphlets.

Leaving out of account the Common Prayers, Psalms and Psalters, the following items amongst the books in quires may be noted:

- 78 Weeks Pr[e]parac[i]ons 1st part.
- 63 Weeks Pr[e]parac[i]ons both parts.
- 56 Ovid's Metamorph[ose]s.
- 227 Corderius's.
- 75 English Examples.
- 100 more English Examples.
- 63 Hill's Secretary's Guide.
- 82 Ovid's Epistles.
- 100 Hool's Sententia.
- 24 25 Sturmes Epistles.

Under the other two heads of 'bound' and 'sticht,' in addition to all the above may be added:

13 Lillies Rules.

7 Catos.

From this list it is clear that John Minshull was a large dealer in school books, for, with the exception of the 'Week's Preparation,' which was a devotional work, all these were of an educational character. It is also interesting to find on comparison with the inventory published by Mr. Rylands, that several of these books had been standard educational works for more than half a century.

It is almost impossible to identify the work referred to as 'Corderius.' Maturinus Corderius, who died at Geneva in 1564, was the author of several Latin school books which were translated into English, and of which there were numerous editions. Perhaps the best known was that entitled:

'Maturinus Corderius's School-Colloquies English and Latine. Divided into several clauses; Wherein the propriety of both Languages is kept. That Children by the help of their Mother-Tongue, may the better learn to speak Latine in ordinary Discourse. . . . By Charles Hool, Mr of Arts of Lin. Col. Ox. Teacher of a private Grammer School, betwixt Goldsmith's Alley in Red Cross-street, and Maiden-head-Court in Aldersgate Street, London. . . . London, Printed by Sarah Griffin, for the Company of Stationers. 1657.'

This was an octavo of 414 pages, and four leaves of preliminary matter. A copy in the British Museum has a note on the fly-leaf, 'Thomas Phillpott me tenet pre. 3^s 4^d.' Charles Hoole, the translator, dated his dedicatory epistle, 'Novemb. 4th 1652,' so that in all probability the first edition bore the date 1653.

There was also a smaller work entitled:

‘Corderius Dialogues translated Grammatically . . . Done chiefly for the good of Schools to be used according to the directions set downe in the book called *Ludus Literarius*, or, *The Grammar Schoole*, London, Printed by Anne Griffin, for the Assignes of Joan Man and Benjamin Fisher. 1636.’

This was an octavo of only 160 pages, the work of John Brinsley, the author of ‘*Ludus Literarius*.’

Another of the books named in Minshull’s schedule as ‘*Hool’s Sententia*,’ was usually bound with the same author’s translation of Corderius, and its proper title was:

‘*Sententiæ Pueriles*. Sentences for Children, English and Latine. Collected out of sundry Authors long since by Leonard Culman and now translated into English by Charles Hoole. | *London, Printed for the Company of Stationers*. 1658.

It was a small octavo of forty-two leaves, with the English rendering printed in italic type opposite the Latin text, which was in Roman.

Even more difficult to identify than ‘Corderius’ is the work referred to as ‘English Examples.’ No copy of any book with a title resembling this of so early a date has yet been found. The only thing approaching it is a work entitled:

‘*English Examples to Lily’s Grammar Rules*. By William Willymot. Fourth Edition. *Printed for the use of Eton School*. 1727.’

which was perhaps modelled on the lines of the earlier work. There is also a later edition called:

‘*Exempla Minora, or New English Examples*. To be rendered into Latin. Adapted to the Rules of the Latin Grammar, Lately printed at Eton, For the Use of the Lower Forms. A New Edition, Revised. *Eton, Printed by J. Pote*. MDCCLXV.’

The second part of Minshull's schedule sets out the number of copies he had sold of various works, to whom he had sold them, and at what prices.

In his reply to the bill of complaint, he pointed out that he could not possibly account for every copy he had sold, as in many cases he had sold a single copy and had made no note of the transaction. So that the return which he did make represented so much of his wholesale trade as he thought it expedient to disclose. The names occurring in it are those of various booksellers in Lancashire, Cheshire and the border counties of Wales. They were, Mr. John Williams of Ruthin, Mrs. Mary Ovens of Kannershmeed [?], Mr. Onesephorus Wright of Kannershmeed, Mr. Simon Lloyd of Mold, Mr. Thomas Davies of Denbigh, Mr. Richard Parry of Bangor, Mr. Hugh Thomas of St. Asaph, Mr. Charles Vaughan of Bella [Bellan, co. Denbigh], Mr. Henry Fisher of Wrexham, Mr. Ephraim Johnson [no place named], Mr. Hughs of Benmorris [? Beaumorris], Mrs. Stones of Namptwich [Nantwich], Mrs. Powell of Flint, Mr. Wright of Namptwich, and Mr. Taylor of Whitchurch.

Of these, Mr. Ephraim Johnson was Minshull's largest customer. He took no fewer than three hundred grammars, two hundred Psalters, two dozen Common prayers, one hundred and twenty-five 'Lillies Rules,' fifty 'Corderius's,' a dozen 'Tully's Epistles,' a dozen 'Catos,' and twenty-five 'Aesop's Fables.' Hazlitt has recorded in his 'Collection and Notes' (second series, p. 595; third series, p. 246), two books written by Zachary Taylor each of which bears the imprint: 'London, Printed for John Jones

at the Dolphin and Crown in St. Pauls Church yard; and Ephraim Johnson, bookseller in Manchester.' No doubt he was in a large way of business and Minshull thought that Johnson was sufficiently widely known to make it unnecessary to give his address. Next to him in importance was perhaps Mr. Taylor of Whitchurch, who in addition to fifty grammars and accidences took two dozen 'Ovids,' twenty-five 'Aesops,' and two dozen of the 'Weeks Preparation.' None of the others seem to call for notice, but it is interesting to find English school-books selling in Wales to the extent which these figures show.

The sums placed against the various items in this schedule clearly represent the wholesale price ruling in the trade at that time; but Minshull apparently was not bound by any hard and fast figures, but allowed other considerations to weigh with him in dealing with his customers. For instance, the work known as 'Corderius' is found ranging from a fraction under fivepence a copy, which is the average price of the fifty copies sold to Johnson, to ninepence halfpenny a copy in the case of the eighteen copies taken by John Williams, but as these last are described as being 'bound,' the difference may be accounted for in that way. Again, in the case of the 'English Examples,' Minshull sold three copies to Thomas Davis of Denbigh for two shillings and sixpence, that is, tenpence a copy, but Wright of Kannershmeed and Fisher of Wrexham each bought six at the rate of ninepence a copy, while Mrs. Stones of Nantwich made an even better bargain, obtaining half-a-dozen for four shillings, or only eightpence a

copy. So, too, in the case of 'Æsop's Fables,' Fisher of Wrexham had to give thirteen and fourpence for sixteen copies whereas Johnson and Taylor both obtained twenty-five copies for fourteen shillings.

The most expensive books were the octavo Common Prayers, which averaged two shillings a copy, and Ovid's 'Metamorphoses,' which sometimes exceeded a shilling. On the other hand, the editions of Cato and Tully must have been very small books, as one averages only threepence halfpenny a copy, and the other fourpence. The remainder nearly all averaged between eightpence and tenpence a copy.

Many of these books, more especially the works of Ovid, Tully and Cato, were undoubtedly foreign editions. It was one of the results of the monopoly held by the Stationers' Company, that by keeping the market starved, it enhanced the price of its own editions, and consequently dealers met this by importing foreign printed copies, which they sold at much cheaper rates, and consequently in much greater numbers. And not only were these foreign books cheaper, but they were often much better printed than the English editions. To mention only one at random, a duodecimo edition of Ovid's 'Metamorphoses' was printed at Amsterdam by Ian Blaew in 1650, with an engraved title-page. It was a beautifully-printed little book, the types were clear and readable, while the press work was excellent. Indeed, the English edition of the same period will not bear comparison with it. According to a note in the British Museum copy the Amsterdam edition cost one shilling and fourpence, so that it may well have been the edition sold so largely by Minshull.

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SCHEDULE OF SALES.

		£	s.	d.
June 24,	To M ^r John Williams of Ruthin 24			
1699.	Gramers bound at	01	00	
	24 Construing bound & sticht vizt			
	1 doz. bo ^d & 1 sticht	0	08	0
	18 Corderius's bound 9 ^s 6 ^d per doz.	14	3	
	12 Accidents 6 at 5 ^s . 12 sti. at 3 ^s			
	in all [A puzzling entry.]	8	0	
	6 Com: Pray ^r 12 ^o bo ^d at 12 ^d each .	6	0	
	4 Ovids Metam 6 ^d , 1 ^s 3 ^d	5	0	
	20 Engl. Examp. at 10 ^d	0	16	8
	6 Catos sticht	0	01	9
	3 doz Psalters at 8 ^s	1	4	0
	3 weeks p ^r paracons compleat	3	0	
		<hr/>		
1699.	To M ^{rs} Mary Ovens of Kannersh-			
	meed 6 Grammers	0	5	0
	6 Accidents	0	2	0
	6 Construing	0	2	0
	4 psalters	0	2	8
January 23:	To M ^r Symon Lloyd of Mould 3			
1699.	Grammars. 6 ^d	0	2	0
	3 Accidents sticht			10 ¹ / ₄
	To M ^r Thomas Davis of Denbigh 3			
	English Examples	0	2	6
June 27	To M ^r Onesephorus Wright of Kan-			
1699.	nershmeed 1 doz Gramers 6 ^d	0	9	0
	6 Grammers with Construing	0	6	6
	1 Doz: Psalters	0	7	6
	4 Corderius's	00	3	0
	6 Cato st. (<i>i.e.</i> stitched)	00	1	9
	6 English examples	00	4	6
	12 Accidents st.	00	3	3
	6 Corderius's	00	4	6
	12 Psalters	00	7	0
	24 Accidents st.	00	6	6
	24 Grammers	00	19	0
	24 Psalters	00	14	0
	24 Construing	00	06	0
		<hr/>		
Novemb.	To M ^r Richard Parry of Bangor. 6			
1699.	English Examples	00	4	6

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		£	s.	d.
	5 Corderius's	00	3	5
	18 Lilly's Rules	00	5	9
	6 Com. Prayers in 12 psalmes, 6 no psalmes	0	6	0
	12 Accidents	0	4	6
	6 psalters	0	4	0
	6 Grammers	0	4	6
<hr/>				
Octr. 13	To M ^r Hugh Thomas of S ^t Asoph. 18			
1700.	Psalters	0	12	0
	18 Grammers	0	13	6
	18 Accidences	0	7	6
	6 Corderius's st.	0	3	0
<hr/>				
1700.	M ^r Charles Vaughan of Bella 18 Gram-			
	mers	0	13	9
	3 doz Psalters	1	4	0
	2 doz Accidences	0	7	0
	18 Lilly's Rules	0	6	0
<hr/>				
	To M ^r Henry Fisher of Wrexham 6			
	Grammers	0	4	9
	4 doz and 6 accidents	0	13	6
	5 doz and 6 psalters att 7 ^s 6 ^d p doz .	2	1	6
	24 Lilly's Rules	0	6	0
	16 Aesops Fables	0	13	4
	3 doz Corderius's	1	4	0
	10 Ovids Epistles	0	8	0
	6 English Examples	0	4	6
	24 English Exercise	1	0	0
	12 weeks P ^r paracon both parts . . .	00	12	00
	7 Ovid's Metamo.	00	07	00
June 6 th .	To M ^r Ephraime Johnson. 50 Gram-			
1700.	[mers] 12 of 'em bound	01	07	00
Octo 7 th .	more 50 Grammars 13 of 'em bound			
1700.		01	07	00
	200 Grammers in Q ⁿ at 2 ^{li} 10 ^s p C ^t .	05	00	00
	31 English Exercises att 7 ^s p[er] doz.	00	18	01
	200 Psalters att 2 ^{li} p C ^t	04	00	00
	50 Corderius's	01	00	00
	125 Lillies Rules	01	10	00
	12 Com. Prayers in 12mo.	00	07	00

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		£	s.	d.
	12 Com. Prayers 8vo w th Psalmes	01	04	00
	12 Tullie's Epistles	00	04	00
	12 Cato's	00	03	06
	25 Aesops Fables.	00	14	00
	25 Weeks Preparacons	00	16	00
June 24.	To Mr hughes of Benmorris. 6 Psalters			
1700.		00	03	9
	6 English Exercises	00	05	00
	6 Aesops Fables	00	05	00
	6 Corderius's	00	04	06
	6 Ovid's Epistles	00	06	00
July 3.	M ^r s Stones of Namptwich 6 English			
1700.	Examples	00	04	00
	6 English Exercises	00	04	06
	6 Weeks P ^r paracon	00	04	03
	6 Grammers and Construing.	00	07	6
	25 Psalters	00	14	2
Jan ^r 18 th .	To M ^r s Powell of Flint 1 doz Psalters.			
1700.		00	07	0
June 18 th .	To M ^r Wright of Namptwich 25			
1701.	Gram[mers]	00	16	2
	25 Psalters	00	14	2
	12 Corderius's	00	07	0
	3 Ovid's Metamorphor.	00	03	3
	4 Sturmers (<i>sic</i>) Epistles	00	02	0
	4 Ovid's Epistles	00	03	0
	4 Weeks P ^r paracon both parts	00	03	4
	12 Cato's st.	00	03	6
	12 Lillies Rules	00	03	0
Sept ^r 29 th .	To M ^r Taylor of Whitchurch. 50 Gram-			
1700.	[mars]	01	05	0
	50 Accidences	00	10	0
	25 Lillies Rules	00	06	0
	25 Corderius	00	10	0
	50 Psalters	01	00	00
	12 Ovid's Metam.	00	11	0
	12 Ovid's Epistles	00	09	0
	12 Hill's Guide	00	04	0
	12 weeks P ^r paracons compleat.	00	08	0
	12 do. First P ^t	00	05	0
	25 Aesops Fables	00	14	0

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