

Choice 13

"Tracts of the Reign of George 3"

That is the title Walpole gave these 59 volumes. By "tract" he meant the second definition of the word in the *OED*, "A book or written work treating of some particular topic; a treatise." He collected 335 of them for this collection; 224 in fifty-four octavo volumes, five with 111 tracts in quarto. All are bound in calf with Walpole's arms on the sides and elaborately tooled spines labelled "Tracts of Geo. 3." The earlier volumes have title-pages printed at the Strawberry Hill Press, "A Collection of the most remarkable TRACTS/Published/in the REIGN/of/King George the third," and all have a "List of Pieces in this Volume" written on the inside of the front covers in Walpole's clearest hand. He frequently added the month below the year on the title-page and the names of anonymous authors; throughout are his crosses, short dashes, exclamation points, and, rarely, an asterisk. I bought the collection from the estate of Sir Leicester Harmsworth in 1938.

Its variety appears in volume 39:

Williams, John. *An Account of some remarkable ancient ruins, lately discovered in the Highlands*, 1777.

Junius, pseud. *A serious letter to the public, on the late transaction between Lord North and the Duke of Gordon*, 1778.

Burke, Edmund. *Two letters from Mr Burke to gentlemen in the city of Bristol*, 1778. Dated "May" by Walpole and with one identification by him.

Burgoyne, General John. *The substance of General Burgoyne's speeches*, 1778. A few marginal markings by Walpole.

[Tickell, Richard]. *Anticipation: containing the substance of His M---y's most gracious speech*, 1778. Among Walpole's many notes is, "Ch. Fox said 'he has anticipated many things I have intended to say, but I shall say them never-the-less.'"

[Bryant, Jacob]. *A farther illustration of the Analysis [of Mythology]*, 1778. Author identified by Walpole and numerous marginal markings by him.



List of pieces in this Volume.

Account of ruins in the highlands.

Prospect from Barrow-hill.

Transaction between a North & D. of Gordon.

Two letters from Mr Burke.

On the abuse of unrestrained power.

Substance of General Burgoyne's Speeches.

Anticipation. by Mr Rickell.

Mr Bryant's Answer, on his Analysis.

Three letters from Sir J. Dalrymple to Dr Harington.

Mr Gibbon's Vindication of the 15th & 16th Chapters.

Considerations on the State of affairs.

Barrett's Introduction to the Carmen Seculare.

Mr Walpole's letter on Chatterton.

[Gibbon, Edward]. *A vindication of some passages in the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of the History*, 1779. Dated "Jan. 14" by Walpole with one note and numerous markings by him.

[Walpole, Horace]. *A letter to the editor of the Miscellanies of Thomas Chatterton*, Strawberry Hill, 1779. One correction in manuscript by Walpole. Above the "List of Pieces" in volume 39 he inked a large asterisk to mark the volume's special interest. This is the volume of the "Tracts of Geo. 3" I am taking if the Almighty says I can't have the entire collection.

Also at Farmington is the collection of earlier tracts from 1613 to 1760 that Walpole began to collect about 1740. There are 662 pieces in 88 volumes, 8vo. Walpole listed the pieces in each volume, but made only a few marginalia. A disappointing lapse is his failure to identify himself as the son referred to in Ranby's *Narrative of the Last Illness of the Right Honourable the Earl of Orford*, 1745, where Ranby states, "The ensuing Journal was kept with all imaginable exactness by one of his own sons, as well as by myself." The son was undoubtedly Horace, though he did not identify himself in any of his three known copies of Ranby's *Narrative*, as I noted in Choice 2. His failure to do so is odd, but neither of his brothers was with their father constantly during his last illness, nor did they keep meticulous journals. Allen Hazen was certainly right, I think, to include Ranby's *Narrative* in Horace's "Editorial Contributions."

The pre-1760 tracts were bought at the Strawberry Hill sale in 1842 for the Buckingham Palace Library—I like to believe that Prince Albert encouraged their purchase—and migrated subsequently to Windsor. The story told in the nineteen-thirties of how they left Windsor was that Sir John Fortescue, the King's Librarian, asked his employer for extra money to buy something he thought the library should have. George V, a keen philatelist but no bookman, turned him down. "Sir," the story went, "would you mind if I disposed of some books I think are less important to us and use the money for this purchase?" The King told Fortescue to do as he pleased and the earlier tracts went to Sir Leicester Harmsworth by private treaty through Quaritch who subsequently bought the George 3 volumes for Harmsworth at Sotheby's in 1920, making a total of 1037 tracts in 147 volumes. I heard from William A. Jackson that they were in the Harmsworth library at Bexhill in Kent. When my wife and I lunched with the Harmsworths at Bexhill a year later all the volumes were laid out on tables for our inspection. The owner was asking ten times what he paid for them, a figure that seemed excessive to me at the time. How-

ever, our visit was not in vain because in 1938 after Harmsworth died his trustees sold all the tracts to me through Quaritch for a fifth of the asking price, which was still twice what the late owner had paid for them. Bookselling. Collecting.

Walpole made three other collections of pieces printed from 1760 to 1796: "The Chronicle of Geo. 3," "Poems of Geo. 3," and "Theatre of Geo. 3." All are similarly bound in full calf with his arms on the sides. "The Chronicle of Geo. 3" in 36 volumes is a set of the *London Chronicle* from 1760 to 1796 that came to Farmington from Lord Derby's sale. It is disappointing because it has no marginalia; doubtless Walpole had another set that he annotated and cut up. Next to it at Strawberry stood "Poems of Geo. 3" in 22 volumes containing 244 pieces with special title-pages printed at the Strawberry Hill Press for the earliest volumes. This collection was given to Harvard in 1924, a most enviable gift.

My acquaintance with "The Theatre of Geo. 3" began in March 1925 when I walked into Pickering and Chatto's for the first time and asked if they had any books from Walpole's library. The man who greeted me was Mr Charles Massey, a survivor of the old-time bookseller. "We have," he said, "Many plays from Walpole's library," and then, when he saw the effect of his words, he called out: "Dudley, Watson! Fetch up two or three of the Walpole plays," and they did so.

The first of the young men summoned I learned later was Massey's son. Watson made out the invoices for the firm in a beautiful copper-plate hand because Pickering and Chatto had not yet acquired one of these new-fangled typewriters. Dudley and Watson sat at small tables, their faces to the wall, their backs to the light, in accordance with the discipline that required junior clerks to be as inconspicuous and uncomfortable as possible while ready for instant action. Mr Massey explained to me that it would take time to "look out" all the plays and suggested that I come back in a week. When I returned there were 130 of the plays waiting for me on a long table. They had been bought by Maggs at Sotheby's in 1914, Mr Massey explained to me. Maggs offered them in two or three catalogues and then broke them up, having Rivière rebind the plays by Sheridan and Goldsmith and putting a few other plays back into their original Walpolian bindings. They sold the rest, over 500 plays, to Pickering and Chatto, who put each play into a brown manila wrapper with acid, I was to discover years later, that defaced the title-pages. Mr Massey stood deferentially beside me while I went through the collection, play by play. Walpole had written the month the play appeared below the year on the title-page and occasionally pasted in a newspaper cutting.

Dudley and Watson also brought up twenty-four of the tattered remains of the original covers that were hanging from them. The spines were lettered, "Theatre of Geo. 3." Walpole wrote "List of Pieces in this Volume" inside the front cover of each. It occurred to me—or possibly to Mr Massey—that it would be a pious act of restitution to put the plays back as nearly as possible into the original covers. There had been 59 volumes when the set was sold in 1914, but only 40 of the original covers remained; the rest had been sold off by Maggs with single plays. Accordingly, some of the 130 plays had to go into different covers. This sorting and arranging went on for days, while Mr Massey, who suffered cruelly from asthma, stood by my side and talked about books and book-collecting. It was one of the pleasantest experiences of my collecting life.

There was a notable interruption the morning Dr Rosenbach strolled casually into the shop with his blank stare. He had been making history by buying up most of the Britwell Court books at Sotheby's with bidding so unconventional and successful that he had earned the hearty dislike of the Trade. Instead of sitting at the long table with the other booksellers and indicating his bids silently, he stood up by the pulpit in which the auctioneer sat and called out his bids in a loud voice. I went to see him bid one day. A lot was put up and advanced by five-shilling stages from one to three pounds. Rosenbach, who was chatting to a friend, turned to the auctioneer, Charles Des Graz, and said, "*Seven* pounds!" The bidding resumed its canonical course until it reached ten pounds. Then Rosenbach turned again and pronounced, "*Twenty* pounds!" From there on the Trade carried the bidding by pound jumps, all silently conveyed, to thirty pounds. At that point Rosenbach had had enough. "*Seventy* pounds!" he shouted. "*Seventy* pounds," repeated Des Graz blandly. He looked round the room. "*Seventy* pounds?" Then he brought down his hammer. "*Seventy* pounds."

"Excuse me, sir," said Mr Massey when the greatest bookseller of all time appeared on that March morning, "but I'm afraid I must attend to him." Mr Chatto, who sat behind a glass partition at the back of the shop, hurried out to take Mr Massey's place beside me; he did not look at the visitor, but stood with his back to him as he bent solicitously over me. "Please don't bother about me," I said to him. Mr Chatto shook his head briefly and assumed an air of absorption in the table before us. I did not feel that his concern in our transaction was fully engaged. The room was so cold I kept my winter overcoat on, but I noticed that Mr Chatto, who of course was not wearing an overcoat, was perspiring freely.

"Have you any *Folios*?" Rosenbach asked quietly, referring to the Four

Folios of Shakespeare. A First Folio had recently sold for £12,000. In a few minutes he left, having bought a Third Folio for thirty times what I was to spend on the collection of plays, the sale of which took days. Mr Chatto bowed to me and returned to his office, mopping his brow. Mr Massey hurried back full of apologies. "Very sorry, sir," he said in a low voice, "but I had to wait on him."

Having at last got the plays into twenty-four of Walpole's original covers, we sent them off to Bayntun of Bath and had them re-bound. This seemed the thing to do at the time, but it was a mistake, as I found out four years later when more of the plays turned up in New York at the Brick Row Bookshop. All the plays I looked at in the Brick Row had a note in Walpole's hand on the title-page or cuttings from newspapers that he dated and pasted on the fly-leaves, but when I went through this new collection at Farmington I found that only about thirty of the plays in it had been so marked. Many were printed before 1760 and so could never have been part of the "Theatre of Geo. 3," but others, printed after 1760, began to glow with significance. They, too, had been ripped untimely from bound volumes and remnants of their former bindings clung to their spines. Fortunately, Mr Massey had prevailed upon me in 1928 to buy the broken covers of the original set. These now proved that the plays before me printed from 1760 on had come from the "Theatre of Geo. 3." Bits and pieces of their bindings matched the elaborate tooling on the Walpolian spines that were virtually intact. This discovery supplied thirty more plays and showed that Walpole did not annotate every one. Since Dudley and Watson had brought up only plays with notes in Walpole's hand, there were doubtless unannotated plays from the "Theatre of Geo. 3" still in Pickering and Chatto's cellar. "How," I wrote Dudley, who was now in command of the firm, "are we to identify them? Maggs were wicked to break up the set, but haven't you by cleaning off the spines and covering them with your manila wrappers removed the last proof that they were Walpole's?" There was a further proof, he replied, the staining on the edges. Eighteenth-century binders used a red, brown, green, or blue stain on the edges of their books, applying it with a plain, marbled, or sprinkled effect. No two volumes had precisely the same stain, but of course the staining on all plays in each volume was the same. Dudley suggested that I send him the titles I lacked from the Lists of Pieces in each volume and that I match their copies with mine. This we did. One hundred and fifty of the missing plays arrived from Pickering's cellar and sixty-five proved to be Walpole's.

Further identification of the plays was provided by the angle test. Since the back of a book is slightly rounded in the binding, the front becomes concave; therefore, the fore-edges of the plays first mentioned should slant inward and those last mentioned should slant outward, while those in the middle should be straight. The angle test, which R. W. Chapman called "the Farthest North in Bibliography," was a success: all the "right" plays slanted exactly as they ought to do. When I was convinced that the play had been in the "Theatre of Geo. 3" I pulled off the manila wrapper and found that the stitching coincided precisely with the stitching in the other plays originally in the volume, and that, final proof, faint remains of the original binding still clung to the plays' narrow spines.

Shortly after the Brick Row cache appeared, I wrote to Pickering & Chatto for a list of the plays they had sold before I appeared in 1925. Their list (in Watson's fine hand) contains 64 plays, 37 of which I marked with an H. At the top of the list I wrote: "H-Hopeless." These were plays that had been sold to American libraries, the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, and the University of Michigan, chiefly. Of these 37 "hopeless" plays, 33 are now at Farmington.

The first of the "hopeless" plays to arrive were two from Yale. Mr Andrew Keogh, the then Librarian, handed them over to me, knowing that one day they would return to Yale with the rest of my collection. When I asked him if he thought Michigan might follow suit, he wrote to the Librarian, W. W. Bishop, on my behalf. The request was unusual, but after consultation with the Michigan authorities Mr Bishop agreed to let me have them. I returned duplicates and (since Walpole's copies were worth more than ordinary copies) paid the original bill. When after several years I was unable to find duplicates of some of the plays, Mr Bishop generously allowed me to substitute photostats of the missing plays for the duplicate copies I had contracted to supply. In all, twenty-two plays have come to Farmington from Ann Arbor. Later a similar arrangement was concluded for two plays at the University of Illinois. All of these copies had one or more of Walpole's notes in them. Doubtless there are others of his copies without his notes in these libraries.

The Folger Library offered a more difficult problem, which took twelve years to solve. J. Q. Adams, its Director, became convinced that it was in the best interests of all concerned that I should have the plays, but the terms of Folger's will made it difficult to dispose of any books in his library. Several years later I got the corrected proof sheets of Steevens's and Reed's folio edition of Shakespeare, 1791-1802. They "belonged" to

the Folger as much as its copies of Walpole's plays (all of which it had in other copies) "belonged" to me. This was clear to everyone. So, the trustees concurring, my Shakespeare proof sheets went to the Folger Library and its plays came to me; and then, for good measure, Adams let me have Walpole's copy of Sheridan's *Critic* from his own library.

I always called on him when in Washington. He was a scholar who was a humanist; a bookman who read books; a librarian who had bought for his library one of the finest collections of printed books (the Harmsworth library of English books to 1641) ever brought to this country. My call on Adams in April 1939, after the exchange of the proof sheets and plays was completed, was a particularly pleasant one. Then, when I rejoined my wife in the exhibition gallery outside his office, she pointed silently to a book in a case, another play, not included in the just-completed transaction, Walpole's copy of *Timon of Athens*, 1771, restored to its original Strawberry Hill covers—which meant that it contained another "List of Pieces in this Volume" in Walpole's hand. I prevailed upon the guard to let me show the book to Adams. "Heaven knows how many more of Walpole's plays we have!" he said rather wildly. "We shan't finish our catalogue for years. Have you ever been down in the stacks?" I hadn't, and he asked Giles Dawson to take me there. We walked along the central aisle between bays of plays bound in manila wrappers until I paused, turned into one of the bays, looked along a shelf of identically bound plays, took one down, opened it, and there on the title-page was a note in Walpole's hand.

When the Library was finally catalogued, additional plays from the "Theater of Geo. 3" and some two dozen volumes from Strawberry Hill, including Walpole's copy of the Second Folio had been found. I had run out of Shakespearean proof sheets and had nothing worthy of the Folger. Would they sell its books from Walpole's library if they were duplicates? The question was put to the chairman of the Library's board, Chief Justice Harlan Stone, who approved the transfer just a week before he died. With the money it received for the duplicates, the Library was able to buy a picture of Shakespeare made for Edmond Malone before the original was retouched. "In my judgment," wrote Adams, "this is far more valuable to students than the Chandos portrait as it now is. And the price we paid was almost exactly the same represented by your check. Thanks!"

There are now 390 of the 553 plays in the "Theatre of Geo. 3" at Farmington and 35 known elsewhere (20 at Harvard); 135 are still un-

traced. Forty-eight of the fifty-seven covers are at Farmington, seven at Harvard, two are untraced. The plays at Farmington have been shelved by my librarian, Mrs Catherine Jestin. Most of the Bayntun bindings had to be taken apart to restore the plays to their original order. Eight of the volumes are complete and at the end of the set is volume 58, the Prologues and Epilogues given me by Mrs Percival Merritt in memory of her husband. The plays stand above the unbroken collection of 220 pre-1760 plays in nineteen volumes that came from Lord Derby at Knowsley in 1954. Somehow, the broken "Theatre of Geo. 3," which is held together by red string, does not suffer by comparison. The hard covers put on by Yale, Michigan, and the Library of Congress preserve the plays' history. It is the corner of the library where I enjoy sitting most; the plays are at my right, the tracts are at my back, and across the room to the left are the 36 volumes of the *London Chronicle* standing next to the books from the Glass Closet. About eighty percent of Walpole's collections of plays, tracts, and poems that he made from 1760 to 1796 have been reunited at Farmington for the benefit of scholars as long as the collection survives.