

REVIEW

BARKER, Nicholas. *Bibliotheca Lindesiana. The Lives and Collections of Alexander William, 25th Earl of Crawford and 8th Earl of Balcarres and James Ludovic, 26th Earl of Crawford and 9th Earl of Balcarres.* London, Bernard Quaritch, 1978. pp. xviii + 451. £25.

This remarkable account of the rise and fall of the *Bibliotheca Lindesiana* constitutes the "contribution" of the late Lord Crawford to the Roxburghe Club. A limited first edition appeared in 1977 to be met by overwhelming commercial and critical acclaim. The volume under review is the 1978 reprint with minor corrections.

Without doubt Barker's narrative, based on extensive manuscript sources, is a *tour de force*, being both immensely readable and scholarly in the style of the late Dr A.N.L. Munby. The chronological framework of the narrative is roughly from 1822 when Lord Lindsay began collecting at the age of ten to the death of his son, Ludovic, in 1913. Barker provides a brief prologue and epilogue to complete the historical framework.

The wealth which provided the basis for the rise of the *Bibliotheca Lindesiana* came from the family coal fields in Wigan, Lancashire. In 1861 Lord Lindsay wrote with the confidence of the progressive and optimistic Victorian society:

The growth of trade and commerce has, by a strange recompense, afforded us, through the possession of coalfields in England, the means of doing that which our more powerful ancestors, the contemporaries of Cosimo, could not have compassed — of building up our old Library after the example of the Medici, and in the mode they would themselves have acted upon had they been now living.

It was in due course the decline in the profitability of the coal mines that led in part to the initial dispersals from the Library.

The Crawford family comes vividly alive in the volume, particularly Lord Lindsay (from his harrowing experiences at Eton as a child to the macabre theft of his body from the family grave), but we learn nearly as much about the person and dealings of Bernard Quaritch. It would be true to say that Lord Lindsay helped establish Quaritch as one of the leading booksellers of the day but equally Quaritch's bibliophilic acumen, particularly with reference to Continental auctions and dealers, was indispensable to the more retiring Lindsay. Barker indicates that "Quaritch did more than anyone else except Lindsay himself to make the *Bibliotheca Lindesiana* the greatest of all private libraries. There have been larger, but none more systematically designed to contain all the best books on every subject and in every language in the world."

Both Lindsays, but perhaps particularly Lord Lindsay, attempted to achieve just that in what might now be regarded as a golden age for book collecting. Even in areas in which Lindsay expressed relatively little interest, e.g. the discovery and

conquest of Spanish and Portuguese America, the classics in their original languages slowly but surely were amassed. Ludovic himself added a new dimension to his father's interests by his acquisition of scientific, particularly mathematical and astronomical, works.

The Library was probably at its peak in the early 1880s, before family financial pressures forced sales. Later in the decade, Quaritch, as astute as ever, bought back many of the books he had originally been commissioned to buy. The dispersal of categories of material, such as MSS, from the Library continued during Ludovic's lifetime and the process sadly continued in the 1920s and the late 1940s. The *Bibliotheca Lindesiana* has this volume as its memorial. Its rise and fall in a way paralleled that of Britain's economic fortunes. Thus the volume is not just a history of book collecting, it is also the story of a family depicted against the changing background of Victorian and Edwardian England.

Barker's narrative reveals that nothing changes in the book world. The following words written by Frederick Molini in 1885 could have been written today and yet, by the year 2000, 1979 may be seen as a golden age:

Books have got much dearer of late . . . the political atmosphere is just now so hazy, that Book Buyers may become less and less.

The roll of characters that wander through the book are a veritable who's who of nineteenth-century book collecting such as Richard Heber, Sir Thomas Phillipps ("not so mad as people suppose . . . a wily selfish old man"), Henry Stevens, James Lenox, Robert Curzon and many more. A review can only skim the surface of the riches of the volume.

Given the mass of details, especially of book titles, there are understandably a few misprints and inconsistencies such as the two different spellings of the Quechua grammar by Diego de Torres Rubio (on pp. 153 and 174) and the conflation of Samuel Purchas's *Pilgrimes* and *Pilgrimage* (p. 318) but these are small matters in the richness of the whole. This is a book which should be in every institutional library that purports to be interested in the history of the book and book collecting. Barker's superb reconstruction of the rise and fall of the *Bibliotheca Lindesiana* will long remain with the present reviewer.

Colin Steele,
Australian National University.

Copyright of Full Text rests with the original copyright owner and, except as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, copying this copyright material is prohibited without the permission of the owner or its exclusive licensee or agent or by way of a license from Copyright Agency Limited. For information about such licences contact Copyright Agency Limited on (02) 93947600 (ph) or (02) 93947601 (fax)