

³ John Stephens, 'Hutcheson's *Inquiry* (1738)', *Book Collector* 32 (1983), 228. As early as 21 September 1737 Hutcheson wrote to Drennan 'I hope before it be very long to let you see in print what has employed my leisure hours, for several summers past; but I am at a loss how to get a right printer to employ, being a stranger to London. I don't incline to put my name to what I print or give any proofs of the Author, to any wasps in this Country, tis a System of Morality in English, larger than both my former books...' This was the *System of Moral Philosophy* posthumously published in 1755.

⁴ Two variant printed texts in McCosh, p.464 and Scott, p.81.

⁵ By the time this note appears the *Persuasive* will have been included in the new edition of Dr Gaskell's *Bibliography of the Foulis Press*. It is a foolscap octavo collating π1 A-F⁸ G1.

⁶ Printed text in Scott p.82.

⁷ James Moor (1712-1779), Librarian of the University of Glasgow 1742-1746 and Professor of Greek 1746-1774, edited several Greek texts for the Foulis Press.

⁸ Richard Duncan, *Notices and Documents illustrative of the Literary History of Glasgow* (Glasgow, 1886) p.49; Scott, p.81 n.3; T.E. Jessop, *A Bibliography of David Hume and of Scottish Philosophy* (London, 1938), p.146.

⁹ In the original, Hutcheson originally wrote 'the first half of which, & more, was my occupation last summer'. Playfulness was a characteristic of the letters to Drennan. The best example is the letter of July 8th 1741 congratulating him on his marriage, 'display to us the glorious example... rake away to Dublin every quarter; leave the wife behind you; or if you take her along, don't mind her; stay at the Walshes head till 2 in the Morning; saunter in Jacks Shop all day among Books; dine abroad, & then to the Walshes head again to Charles great Consolation & Edification. I'm sure you cannot be so foolishly fond or so stupid as to quit all comerads [*sic*], to despise the Inspiration of the Grape you recommend from the Pulpit, and sacrifice all Merry Conversation for one woman...'

¹⁰ Bodleian Library, Oxford, Vet A5 f.1466. This of course is close to what Hutcheson (Scott, p.113) originally wrote in his letter to Drennan cited at the start of note 9.

THE RARE NINTH EDITION

FOR THOSE OF US who regard booksellers' catalogues as an art form (specialised it is true, but always interesting and occasionally sensational) there is a particular pleasure to be gained from the intellectual ingenuity expended on puffery, as distinct from merely conveying information about the books. A recent example from the hand of a master is the description of George Savile's *Advice to a Daughter*, 1716, as 'the rare ninth edition'. This intriguing information is contained in the preface to the catalogue, to be followed later by a deftly administered shock when the price is announced at \$US1250.

Now George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, was one of the best prose writers of the latter part of the seventeenth century. His elegant, witty and aristocratic style ensures that his works are still read, at least by seventeenth century specialists. But most of his works are neither particularly rare nor particularly expensive and \$US1250 is a great deal to pay for a late edition of a relatively minor work, even for a very attractive copy (as, to be fair, this one seems to be).

Who, then is the likely customer for 'the rare ninth edition' of *Advice to a Daughter*? Not the collector of early editions; the work was first published in 1688, 28 years earlier. It proved popular and there were many editions during the rest of the seventeenth century. The 'ninth' edition is in fact about the twelfth, the numbering having become muddled in the 1690s. On no reasonable view can it be thought of as early.

The likely customer must be some person or institution that collects Halifax in very considerable depth. Now, despite the attractions of his style, he is not widely collected. Some impetus was given to the *Character of a Trimmer* by an unlucky mention in *Printing and the Mind of Man*, now used as a *vade mecum* by certain collectors who prefer somebody else to decide for them which books are important and which are not. But there must be few people so enraptured with *Advice to a Daughter* that they engage in fevered pursuit of it wherever it appears, even unto the ninth edition.

Even amongst those persons or institutions afflicted by this enthusiasm, most will already be familiar with the market and will not need to be told whether the ninth edition is hard to find. We must therefore suppose that the likely customer is still at an early stage of building up his collection so that he needs to be warned that if he passes by the present opportunity, he does so at his peril.

How should such an enthusiastic novice approach the question of scarcity? One of the first observations he will make on dipping into booksellers' catalogues is that rare books as a class are quite strikingly common. It is unusual to open a catalogue these days without discovering that at least a significant proportion of the books offered are described as 'rare'. Some enthusiastic souls¹ so describe almost every item. Is the novice to assume that such booksellers have so exquisitely fastidious a taste that they sternly reject the first eight editions of *Advice to a Daughter* as unfit for a gentleman's library and, by deliberate choice, offer their customers exclusively the refined delights of the 'rare ninth edition'? Or is there possibly some other explanation?

I think that there *is* some other explanation and that it is to be found by examining the evidence relied upon in making assertions of rarity. To take the case in point: 'This edition not in the ESTC (BL), which has the eighth and tenth editions.' The British Library does not possess this edition; therefore it is rare. This may be thought to be a rather extreme example of optimistic reasoning, but it differs only in degree from the more usual reasoning which moves from the fact that a particular edition is not in a well-known collection to the conclusion that it is rare.

It takes only a little reflection to see how unlikely this is to be true as a general proposition. Let us assume that a book is sufficiently popular to go through ten editions in the first few decades after initial publication. It is, of course, *possible* that fate will single out the ninth edition uniquely for destruction while leaving the eighth and tenth editions intact, but in the absence of special circumstances it is most improbable. If the only evidence that the ninth edition is rare is that it is not in the British Library, the question arises how heavily this evidence should be relied upon. Consider the way in which the holdings of a major library are built up. It is not to be supposed that generations of librarians brought down their grey hairs with sorrow to the grave because they were unable

to acquire the ninth edition of *Advice to a Daughter*. It is much more likely that this was one of the books which was not pursued with any particular enthusiasm but was bought if it happened to come to the attention of a purchasing librarian and was offered at a reasonable price.

Let us consider the result of such a policy by taking a hypothetical example. Suppose that there are ten early editions of a particular work and that a librarian decides to purchase them all as and when they become available on the market. At first all goes well. The first four copies offered for sale are all of different editions and he purchases them all. The fifth is a duplicate and he rejects it, but the sixth is again a different edition. So far, all has gone splendidly. Six copies of the book have been offered and five of them have been of five different editions. Already he is half way to success. Thereafter, however, life gets surprisingly difficult. Duplicates turn up with embarrassing frequency, the remaining editions very seldom. In fact, after twenty-six copies have been offered he still has only nine of the first ten editions. The ninth edition has eluded him.

In these circumstances, it is entirely natural to conclude that the ninth edition is especially rare. It is entirely natural, but also entirely wrong. In fact the sequence of events that I have outlined gives no evidence whatsoever that some future librarian intent on building up a collection of the work will find the ninth edition any more difficult to buy than the remaining editions.

I have chosen this example specifically to illustrate a statistical point. The particular sequence of events that I have outlined is precisely what one would expect if all editions were equally common. Specifically, if the ten editions are all equally common, it is more likely than not that any randomly chosen sample of four copies will all be of different editions. Similarly, it is more likely than not that at least five out of any sample of six will be different. However, a sample of twenty-six copies will probably contain no more than nine editions. There will still be one or more editions missing. To have a 90% confidence that your sample will contain all ten editions you need 44 copies. Thus, elementary statistics show that the first impression is entirely misleading.

It follows that in order to conclude anything at all about the rarity of the ninth edition, it is not sufficient to know that the British Library has the eighth and tenth but lacks the ninth. You must know the size of the effective sample from which the British Library holdings were drawn. (By 'effective sample' I mean those copies which came to the attention of a purchasing librarian at a price sufficiently attractive to make him want to purchase them.) Otherwise there is no reason why the novice librarian should not find that the ninth edition is the first one that is offered to him. If he purchases it under the impression that it is 'rare' he will then find that some other edition proves particularly elusive.

But perhaps this is all for the best. The pleasure given to institutions or collectors by the possession of minor editions not in the British Library undoubtedly exceeds any sorrow that the librarians of the British Library might feel at not possessing them. Similarly, assertions of rarity, even if unsoundly based, seem to give great pleasure to the booksellers making them. Finally, if despite the above advice any Australian librarian is sufficiently wealthy and enthusiastic to pay \$US1250 for the 'rare ninth edition' of *Advice to a Daughter*, I have no quarrel with him. It sounds an attractive copy.

J. McL. Emmerson,
Melbourne.

NOTES

- ¹ Not the vendor of the 'rare ninth edition' of *Advice to a Daughter*.

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