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FOREWORD

‘Some books’, wrote Francis Bacon, ‘are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested.’ And yet others, one might add, suffer the fate of never being put to the mouth at all. But for whatever complexity of reasons and circumstances one forms a collection of books of one’s own, the quality and range of content in a man’s personal library must broadly reflect the depth and extent and variety of his intellectual interests and pleasures, and individual works within it may by their rarity, annotation, or known context cast their unique light upon facets of his thought and character. That has long been acknowledged as a truism in the areas of literary and general historical scholarship, where the value of approaching a person’s mind and indeed imagination through the books which he or she has read, or had opportunity to read by possessing them, is well appreciated. In the specialist field of historical bibliography there has come to be a whole new scholarly art and science whereby one seeks to ‘feel’, through the touchstone of his books, the intellectual attitudes and predilections of their owner, extrapolating the care and forethought with which he has chosen and handled them and stored them away on his shelves into wider comment upon the habits and idiosyncracies of his mental activity and awareness. In the relatively youthful discipline of scientific history the lesson has taken longer to learn. Even so, the gathering flood of publication of the book holdings of many scientific worthies of the past is a mark of the increasing interest there is in such once ignored documentary records. And indeed, even at the lowest level, how revealing to compare the libraries of a Robert Hooke and a John Flamsteed, seeing how many works they owned in common in such unexpected subjects as pure mathematics and the Latin classics, as well as noting their differences! A whole generation of students of the multifold genius of that greatest of all English mathematical scientists, Isaac Newton, has hitherto been served by the publication in 1931 of Colonel de Villamil’s transcriptions of the list of books in his library at his death which was made for their purchaser John Huggins, and of the more complete catalogue of these compiled some thirty years afterwards by James Musgrave. Particularly

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since the generous gift by the Pilgrim Trust to Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1943 of the remnant (nearly half) of Newton's books which had not then been dispersed by piecemeal sale, 'de Villamil' has been a valued if far from wholly trustworthy tool of research; no serious Newton scholar would be without his personal copy, suitably corrected and marked up with present locations and call-numbers of those items which interest him. But de Villamil, for all his unflagging enthusiasm and the guiding mentor's hand of the learned Henry Zeitlinger of Sotheran's, was neither trained bibliographer nor experienced historian of Newton's period. The time is long overdue for his pioneering efforts to be given firmer foundation, the deficiencies of his lists repaired, their inadequate titles elaborated, present locations of books (as these are known) cited, the library as a unit set in the broad context of Newton's intellectual experience, and its general character outlined. In his present work Mr John Harrison does this with efficiency and despatch, and much, much more.

To the many who have had contact with him either personally or professionally Mr Harrison needs no introduction. He has spent his life working in one of the world's great institutional collections of books, the Library of Newton's own University of Cambridge, where he is now Senior Under-Librarian in charge of cataloguing. Beyond such confines most will know him for his careful, infinitely painstaking catalogue of *The Library of John Locke* which he first brought out a dozen years ago in collaboration with Mr Peter Laslett – being responsible, in the latter's generous words, for 'all the really difficult and exacting things'. Here now he brings to fruition his ambition to be a parallel authority upon the greatest of Locke's acquaintances: one who was (if I may betray my own partisanship) yet more catholic in his intellectual interests. During the half-dozen years Mr Harrison has laboured to produce this new catalogue it has been my onlooker's pleasure and privilege to watch from close by as he pursued his intricate detective work in identifying and collating individual titles in the Huggins and Musgrave lists, tracking copy after copy of the books themselves down to their present locations in public and private ownership, and gleaning all he can of their condition, pedigree, annotation, and such singularities as the 'dog-earing' of page corners which is so often found in books which Newton read. His hunt and his other corroborative foot-sloggings have, entirely at his own expense (how refreshing to be reminded that scholarship does not of necessity demand either sponsorship or subvention!), taken him all over this country and to the United States, and are still not ended – cannot be ended till he has satisfied himself of the fate of every last one of the books which Newton once possessed. The fruits of that investigation, insofar as they have accrued to date, are set out by him in the detailed catalogue which follows. Its enduring usefulness as a tool of bibliographical reference and research I need not emphasize. The professional scholar and librarian has in it an authoritative, precisely

FOREWORD

documented record of Newton's known holdings of books, listing and identifying their titles, and in the case of that majority of these whose originals have been traced adding a wealth of ancillary information in concisely coded form. To a yet wider circle of casual consultants and booklovers, from antiquarian booksellers to private owners and prospective purchasers of rare books, it will serve as an eye-opening bible, allowing them for the first time to distinguish the works with authentic Newtonian association from the chaff of the many spurious 'books from Newton's library' with which the market is so often filled. As one who has himself a few times in his life had the joy of finding an unidentified volume with the Huggins and Musgrave bookplates within, let me hope with Mr Harrison that his catalogue will flush out into public light some good many more of the thousand or so of Newton's books which at present still lurk in the limbo whither they were dispersed after the 1920 Thame Park sale.

There will of course be very few who will read Mr Harrison's catalogue through, item by item, with clerkish delight in its precision. He himself would, I know, prefer me to stress the broader themes which he treats in his splendid introductory essay, placing the books in their contemporary context, sketching in lightly but expertly the background of Newton's contacts with his contemporaries and of the practices of the late-seventeenth-century printing and publishing world, and also tracing the separate history of what happened to Newton's collection of books in the two and a half centuries after he died. His discussions there of Newton's habits and preferences in reading and buying books, his seemingly carefree lack of system in shelving them (or even putting marks of his ownership within), and his usual way of annotating their content on separate sheets of paper bring vividly to life the user rather than the lover of books in themselves which was Newton. One can learn a great deal merely from looking at Mr Harrison's tabular analyses of the works in Newton's library by topic, provenance, and year of publication; and also rightly be put on one's guard against any simplistic supposition that any such unweighted book numbers are an exact index of relative significance. The subtleties of the novel sidelight which he throws in so many unexpected ways on Newton's developing mind in reaction to reading the printed works available to him are well worth studying in themselves, in divorce from his itemization of their titles. The cliché of being a mine of information here regains its freshness with so rich an exploitation of Newtonian lode.

To say more would be to steal Mr Harrison's thunder. Let him forthwith, with my commendation and my blessing, speak for himself.

D. T. WHITESIDE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book has been more than five years in the making, and were I to delay its publication yet longer it is possible that some additional details about Newton's books would be forthcoming. But the author has eventually to decide when the moment has arrived to number the catalogue entries, to work out and analyse totals and percentages, and to present his findings. The material which I have been able to discover and the steady flow of information which I have been fortunate enough to receive, both here in Cambridge and from many parts of the world, have now virtually come to an end. Yet I am, of course, aware of the possibility that someone, somewhere, will unearth a cache of Newton's books. Should this happen I hope that this volume will have had some part in tracking down and authenticating such items.

Among the unexpected pleasures encountered in compiling this catalogue have been the kindness and the help which I have received from many people, most of them previously unknown to me. This list is a long one and includes librarians, booksellers, several distinguished Newton scholars, and others. If I name only some of them I trust that the rest will accept this warm expression of gratitude.

I owe a great deal to my friend Peter Laslett, since it was due to his prompting that I turned (though not for ever) from Locke to Newton. He continued to urge and encourage me to work systematically on the latter's library, even after I knew quite well that I had become a Newton addict!

From the world of librarianship I wish to acknowledge the assistance I have had from colleagues in the University Library, Cambridge: A. J. C. Bainton, Peter Fox, Peter Gautrey, Wilfrid Lockwood, John Oates, and George Rawlings (who took the photographs). Elsewhere in Cambridge, Dr Philip Gaskell, Trevor Kaye, and other members of the staff of Trinity College Library have all most generously smoothed my path, while the Master and Fellows of the College permitted me to reproduce the items shown in the plates of this book. Peter Croft, Librarian of King's College, has not only provided ready access to the Keynes Collection there but has also given me the benefit of his knowledge of the London second-hand book market. From

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the United States I wish to record the valued assistance I have had from Miss Dorsey Fiske, Mrs Virginia Harrison, formerly Curator of the Newton Collection at Babson College, Massachusetts, Dr Kenneth A. Lohf of Columbia University, and Dr John Neu of the University of Wisconsin – Madison. In addition to these, several other librarians of American institutions have replied promptly and patiently to my enquiries.

I have benefited much from the vast experience of the book trade of Dr H. A. Feisenberger of Sotheby's, David Low of Emmington, Chinnor, and Jacob Zeitlin of Los Angeles. Sir Geoffrey Keynes kindly gave me permission to read and to quote from his brother's unpublished papers, as well as showing me the two Newton items he owns. The Rector of Chinnor, the Rev. R. W. Horner, readily made available the Registers of his Parish for my examination.

From the world of Newton scholarship, Professor Bernard Cohen, Professor B. J. T. Dobbs of Northwestern University, Dr Karin Figala of the Technische Universität, Munich, Dr John Rogers of Keele University, and Dr Peter Spargo of the University of Cape Town have all given me freely of their knowledge and advice on particular aspects of Newtonian study.

But my greatest indebtedness by far is to Dr D. T. Whiteside. Although we were on little more than nodding terms when I first began to gather material for this book, no one could have been kinder or more generous with his time. He made available to me his unparalleled knowledge of matters Newtonian to be drawn upon, widely and regularly. And I did. He read my introductory essay in draft, corrected errors of fact, made suggestions for improving its content and style, pointed out further areas for investigation. In addition (and equally important to me), Tom Whiteside's invaluable help and guidance firmly restrained my early tendency to jump to speculative conclusions or to offer facile hypotheses without supporting evidence. For any blemishes that remain the responsibility rests squarely with me.

J.H.

University Library, Cambridge
23 November 1977