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978-1-108-06690-7 - Roxburghe Revels, and Other Relative Papers: Including Answers to the Attack on the Memory of the Late Joseph Haslewood, with Specimens of his Literary Productions

Edited by James Maidment

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Roxburghe Revels, and Other Relative Papers

Lawyer, book collector and friend of Sir Walter Scott, James Maidment (1793–1879) displayed a talent for antiquarian research. Many of his works were printed privately in small quantities, such as the present publication, which first appeared in 1837. Established in 1812 and named after the great eighteenth-century book collector, the Roxburghe Club remains the oldest and most distinguished society of bibliophiles in the world. Joseph Haslewood (1769–1833), respected as an editor of early English literature, was a founder member and enjoyed the club's tradition of informal fun alongside more serious business. After his death, his manuscript account of these early activities, *Roxburghe Revels*, was unaccountably included in the sale of his books; extracts and critical comments on Haslewood and the club subsequently appeared in *The Athenaeum* in 1834. Maidment then prepared this defence, presenting and discussing his friend's remarks. The appendices include a biographical sketch of Haslewood.

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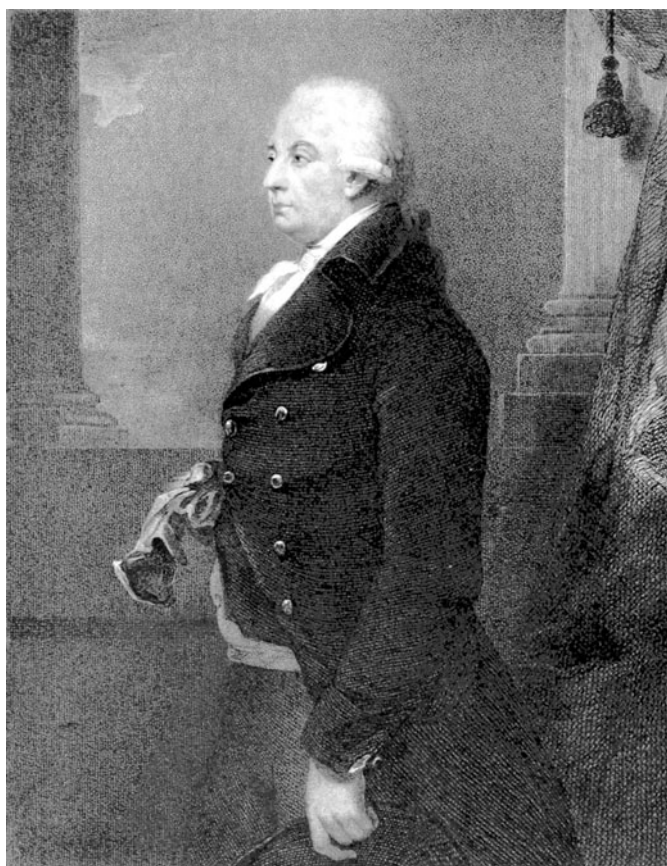
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Painted by W. Hamilton R. A.

Engraved by E. C. Wagstaff.

JOHN KER, DUKE OF ROXBURGHE, K. G. & K. T.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "John Ker". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

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PREFATORY REMARKS.

UPON the demise of the late Mr. Joseph Haslewood, his library was brought to the hammer, and, amongst other curiosities exposed to sale, was a very remarkable MS. in which the acts and deeds of the Roxburghe Club were duly recorded. As those persons who were to be benefited by Mr. Haslewood's succession were not in such circumstances as to render a few pounds any object to them, it naturally excited considerable surprise, that this Volume, the contents of which were not calculated to reflect much credit on its author, should have been allowed to see light. It would appear, that of the two executors named in the will, one only accepted; and it is to be presumed, that this individual was not very well qualified to decide upon the literary merit of this production, otherwise it is hardly credible that he would have permitted its sale. Be this, however, as it may, the indefatigable Mr. Thomas

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Thorpe bought the volume for forty pounds, and, subsequently, for a trifling advance, transferred it to the Editor of the Athenæum, and the first use made of the purchase was a publication in the columns of that amusing journal, of the greater part of its contents.

The extracts given were accompanied by observations, many of which had better been spared, as they indicate by no means an amiable spirit on the part of the commentator. Haslewood's birth, for instance, is made a matter of reproach,—his personal deformity a subject of lampoon,—his harmless pursuits are ridiculed,—and he is throughout sneered at for his desire to move in good society. All this is in the very worst taste; the more especially as the gentleman attacked was a person of an unoffending and amiable disposition. No doubt his faults, as a writer, are many,—his style as vicious as can well be conceived,—and his language far from grammatical; still, notwithstanding these defects, he had his merits,—he was eminently industrious, and particularly successful in gathering together curious facts which had escaped general notice. In support of this assertion, we beg to refer to his notices of the Old London Theatres, &c. which, as specimens of his merits and demerits, have been included in the present volume.

Not content with bespattering the memory of poor Haslewood, the compiler of the Roxburghe Revels commenced an attack upon the Club to which he belonged, and we cannot refrain from briefly offering one or two observations on the charges brought against it. In the outset, we may remark, that we really are unable to see what right any one has to

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find fault with a set of persons associating together for the sake of reprinting old books. If they choose to reprint “trash,” let them do so,—it is their pleasure, and certainly no one else has any title to object. In the next place, the limitation of copies is objected to; but if the books are worthless, why should they be multiplied?

The fact is, that the books are *not* worthless, and, with very few exceptions, may be useful to persons attached to the Ancient History and Literature of their country. The object of the Club, and of all Clubs of a similar description, is not for *publication*, but *preservation*, and the object is fully attained by an impression of forty or fifty copies. If any one of the works is deemed interesting, there is no copyright to prevent a republication by booksellers; and, accordingly, it is admitted by the Editor of the Athenæum, that three of the Roxburghe publications have been republished in another shape. To multiply copies would serve no good end, for how few readers nowadays care one farthing about the works, however important, of the older authors! Even History, the study of which was once deemed useful, has been designated by an individual holding a high rank in the country, as merely ‘An Old Almanack.’

Many years ago, the late Mr. Archibald Constable proposed to issue a series of reprints, a project which, under the Editorial care of the late Sir Walter Scott, he partially carried into effect. The works were intrinsically curious and valuable, and we justify this assertion, by stating, that Osborn’s Traditionary Memoirs of James VI, Sir Philip Warwick’s

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P R E F A T O R Y R E M A R K S.

Memoirs of Charles I, and the Autobiography of Lord Herbert of Cherbury, were amongst the number. Very few copies were sold, and the publisher was compelled to dispose of the remainder for little more than the price of waste-paper. More recently, the series of English Chronicles met with a similar fate; even English Poetry is at a discount, and accurate reprints of the works of many of our best ancient poets are seen tossing about the stalls for a shilling or two.

With the view of enabling such persons as were disposed to purchase the works originally issued by the Bannatyne Club, a certain number of copies were set aside, to be sold at very moderate prices. The importance of Spalding's Memoirs, and the Historie of King James the Sext, (a part of which was first published by Mr. Malcolm Laing) is pretty generally known to all students of Scotch History. These works were carefully edited, and, in every respect, well got up, but, nevertheless, the copies set apart for the public did not sell, and the result was, the Bannatyne Club declined, in future, printing any works for sale. In like manner, the Maitland Club printed some extra copies of a valuable Topographical History, but could get no purchasers. Of course, the attempt was not repeated.

The reason for all this is obvious,—there is no taste for books of this description, and a large impression would therefore tend to benefit only the printer and the papermaker. To expect Booksellers to risk such publications, is out of the question, and unless adopted by the Literary Clubs, it is extremely improbable that any valuable MS. would ever be printed.

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P R E F A T O R Y R E M A R K S.

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In the present Miscellany, various amusing articles have been collected together relative to the Roxburghe Club, including the far-famed Revels,—portions of which might have been omitted, had this volume, of which only a few copies have been printed, not been intended for private circulation.*

* In the “*Bibliotheca Selecta*,” as it is termed, recently published by Mr. Thorpe, a very singular Dramatic Collection by Mr. Haslewood (No. 656) occurs: It bears the following title, “*Theatrical Manuscripts and Printed Collections relative to the English Stage; History of the Theatres and minor places of Public Amusements, compiled by the late Mr. Haslewood, in 9 volumes 4to, forming the most important and complete collection ever made upon the subject, and supplying unrivalled materials for publication, L.31. 10s.*” This is probably the article, page 76, and which was purchased for L.20.

The ensuing note in the *Bibliotheca Selecta* is curious:—“These collections, to the lover of the drama, will furnish an invaluable source of amusement, comprising an immense number of original extracts from early histories, poetical volumes, newspapers, periodicals, satires,” &c. &c. the accumulations of a long life devoted to the pursuit, and frequently under circumstances highly favourable to the collector.

The Burney and other collections appear to have been most sedulously gone over, and the excerpts in manuscript, chronologically arranged. These form but a small portion, as there are many hundreds of advertisements from early newspapers and magazines.”

Mr. Haslewood’s announcement will best explain his original views in these collections.

“The following materials towards a HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH THEATRES IN LONDON, have been drawn from very promiscuous, very extensive, and very uncommon sources. Much from rare old publications, now little known, and still less attainable; a large proportion from public prints, things fallen into desuetude, and part from various MS. and other documentary evidence.

The origin of these volumes was a proposed attempt at a history of each play-house; the character it bore, openings and closings, uprising and downfalling in public favour, with public riots; a brief digression upon pieces that had a run, as, also, of proprietors.

I have not scrupled to embody much of the stage trickery: operas and concerts, of course, they are collaterals.”

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