

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07407-0 - *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century: Comprising Biographical Memoirs of William Boywer, Printer, F.S.A., and Many of his Learned Friends: Volume 1*

John Nichols

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Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century

In this nine-volume work, published between 1812 and 1815, the author and publisher John Nichols (1745–1826) provides biographical notes on publishers, writers and artists of the eighteenth century, and also gives ‘an incidental view of the progress and advancement of literature in this kingdom during the last century’. (A shorter version had been published in 1782.) His subjects range from the publisher William Bowyer to Henry Fielding and Horace Walpole, and also include histories of individual publishing houses and of genres such as lexicography. The work remains a useful source of biographical material on authors and publishers at a period when many of the literary genres we take for granted, such as the novel, the autobiography and the analytical history, were first being developed. As well as individual short biographies, Volume 1 contains a history of Bowyer’s press from 1699 to 1731.

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VOLUME 1

JOHN NICHOLS



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J. Barre del. & sculp.

WILLIAM BOWYER, PRINTER.

Born in 1663, died in 1737.

From an Original Painting at Statemans Hall.

Published by J. Nichols & Son, Jan^y 1st 1812.

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LITERARY ANECDOTES
OF THE
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY;
COMPRIZING
Biographical Memoirs
OF
WILLIAM BOWYER, PRINTER, F. S. A.
AND MANY OF HIS LEARNED FRIENDS;
AN INCIDENTAL VIEW
OF THE PROGRESS AND ADVANCEMENT OF LITERATURE
IN THIS KINGDOM DURING THE LAST CENTURY;
AND
BIOGRAPHICAL ANECDOTES
OF A CONSIDERABLE NUMBER OF
EMINENT WRITERS AND INGENIOUS ARTISTS;
WITH A VERY COPIOUS INDEX.
By JOHN NICHOLS, F. S. A.

IN SIX VOLUMES.

VOLUME I.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR,
BY NICHOLS, SON, AND BENTLEY, AT CICERO'S HEAD,
RED-LION-PASSAGE, FLEET-STREET.

1812.

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TO

JAMES BINDLEY, Esq. M. A. F. S. A.

SENIOR COMMISSIONER OF THE STAMP-OFFICE,

NOW ALMOST THE ONLY SURVIVOR

OF THE CONTRIBUTORS TO THE FORMER EDITION,

THESE LITERARY ANECDOTES

OF MANY OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES,

ENRICHED BY HIS VALUABLE COMMUNICATIONS,

BOTH IN THE ORIGINAL AND THE PRESENT EDITION,

ARE, WITH THE TRUEST RESPECT, INSCRIBED,

BY HIS VERY FAITHFUL FRIEND,

AND MUCH-OBLIGED SERVANT,

J. NICHOLS.

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PREFACE

TO THE FIRST EDITION *, IN 1782.

“To preserve the memory of those who have been in any way serviceable to mankind, hath been always looked upon as discharging a debt which we owe to our benefactors; and it is but reasonable that they who contribute so much to the immortality of others, should have some share in it themselves.”

OLDISWORTH.

THOUGH it would be improper to begin with an ill-timed excuse for the manner in which this Work has been executed, it is necessary to observe, that the volume has been more than four years in the press †; and during that period many new and unexpected informations have swelled it to the present size, and far beyond what was originally intended.

“To adjust the minute events of literary history is tedious and troublesome; it requires indeed no great force of understanding, but often depends upon enquiries which there is no opportunity of making ‡.” The researches which have produced

* That Edition was thus inscribed: “To the Presidents, Vice-Presidents, and Fellows, of the Royal and Antiquarian Societies of London; these Anecdotes of Mr. Bowyer, a Printer of uncommon eminence, whose talents were long and laudably exerted in their service, are, with true respect and gratitude, inscribed, by their most dutiful servant,

J. NICHOLS.”

† In 1778 a few copies of a slight sketch of it were printed in a small pamphlet, of 52 octavo pages, and given to the intimate Friends of Mr. Bowyer. See vol. III. p. 294.

‡ Dr. Johnson, in the Life of Dryden,

these

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these Anecdotes have abundantly verified this remark. Though I have applied to the most authentic sources, and in general have been favoured with the most liberal communications, some subsequent discoveries have often rendered it necessary to compile a second article, sometimes a third or fourth, concerning the same Writer*. In such cases, it becomes necessary to request the Reader's indulgence, and to refer him to the Index. There are other instances, where, after every possible enquiry, it has hardly been practicable to collect a single circumstance of private persons, though of eminence in letters, except the date of their death. "The incidents which give excellence to biography are of a volatile and evanescent kind, such as soon escape the memory, and are rarely transmitted by tradition †;" and "Lives can only be written from personal knowledge, which is growing every day less, and in a short time is lost for ever. What is known, can seldom be immediately told; and when it might be told, it is no longer known ‡."

I had once an intention to give an alphabetical list of all the friends who have kindly assisted me with information: but they are now so numerous, that to name them would certainly be considered as ostentation; and to some of them (to Sir John

* "A man who has a deep and extensive acquaintance with a subject, often sees a connexion and importance in some smaller circumstances, which may not immediately be discerned by others; and, on that account, may have reasons for inserting them, that will escape the notice of artificial minds." KIPPIS.

† Rambler, No. 60.

‡ Dr. Johnson, in the Life of Addison.

Pringle,

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Pringle, Dr. Richardson, Dr. Fothergill, and Mr. Costard) those thanks would come too late, which to the surviving contributors are nevertheless very cordially paid.

The life of a private tradesman, however distinguished as a scholar, cannot be expected to “abound in adventure *;” and in fact the Anecdotes of Mr. Bowyer are few, when compared to the many that are introduced of his learned friends. But the principal figure of the piece stands every where foremost on the canvass; and the other persons of whom anecdotes are occasionally introduced were connected with him by the ties of friendship or of business.

Some anachronisms have unavoidably arisen, from the work’s having been so long passing through the press: but these are obvious, and will readily be pardoned; as will also the variety of style which may be discerned throughout this performance. It was sometimes almost impossible to change the expressions in which my intelligence was received; nor was it always necessary. The volume may perhaps be not less amusing (I am sure it is more authentic) by being illustrated with the notes of my friendly correspondents, and very frequently by the genuine sentiments of the writers of whom memoirs are here exhibited.

Convinced that I am “walking upon ashes under which the fire is not extinguished †,” I have endeavoured

* Goldsmith, *Life of Parnell*.

† — “incedens per ignes
Suppositos cineri doloso.” *HOR. Carm. II. i. 7.*
voured

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voured to guard against every species of misrepresentation. That errors may have intruded, is highly probable—but what work of such a nature was ever perfect?—I flatter myself that many of my friends, in various parts of the kingdom, will testify, that neither trouble nor expence has been spared in my enquiries; and in the Appendix I have chosen rather to appear triflingly minute, than to suffer articles to remain which it was in my power to correct or improve.

The whole is now cheerfully submitted to the publick; with an assurance, that whatever hints may lead to the improvement of a future edition will be most thankfully received, and properly regarded.

June 11, 1782.

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PREFACE

TO THE SECOND EDITION, IN 1812.

DURING an interval of Thirty Years, amidst the cares and anxieties attendant on an unremitting application to a great variety of professional duties, it has been one of my amusements to revise occasionally the former Edition of these “Anecdotes;” and to avail myself of the several hints for improving it, which the kindness of my friends, or the criticism of various writers who have honoured it with their notice, have from time to time thrown out. My stock of intelligence having thus imperceptibly increased, I had an inclination, in the year 1790, to have ventured on a new Edition; but was diverted from that intention by the accumulated toil of a County History, which demanded no small portion of the time I was able to allot to *the amusements of Literature*.

Still, however, having persevered in filling the margins of my interleaved copy, and in reducing the chaotic form of my original volume to somewhat of a more regular consistence; in May 1802 I once more began to print; and, by slow degrees, had got through nearly half the Work, when my progress was suddenly retarded, by a calamity which had well nigh disheartened me from again resuming the task either of Editor or Printer. But, on a serious conviction that despair was equally useless and criminal, I determined to begin my labour anew; the fruits of which, such as they are,
after

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after being four years longer in the press, are again submitted to the publick. To use the words of a learned Critic *, “ The fire which destroyed the first part of the impression has given an opportunity of increasing the materials, and of improving the Work : thus it may be truly said, that

— *incendia lumen*

Præbebant, aliquisque malo fuit usus in illo.”

Many imperfections, I am sensible, may be discovered in these volumes, by those who open a book to search only for its faults ; but from the very favourable reception which the first Edition experienced, not only from the partiality of Friends, but from the Editors of every periodical publication without exception † ; I cannot but confidently hope for that indulgence which the peculiar nature of the Work induces me to expect. Unremittingly employed in ushering into the world the works of others, my own have been laid aside, and resumed, again and again, to suit the convenience of Authors anxious for dispatch. Hence delay has unavoidably arisen ; and hence I have still, as in the former Edition, to apologize for anachronism ; the *Fourth* and *Fifth* Volumes, having been printed earlier than the *Second* and *Third*. In winding up the volumes, additions have been largely made to each of them ; but I would rather incur the chance of being censured for being too minute, than suffer errors to remain which I had myself detected. The *Additions*, I hope, will more than atone for the *Errors* ; and a

* Valpy’s Classical Journal, 1811, No. XI. p. 251.

† See vol. III. pp. 296—304 ; vol. IV. p. 713.

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reference to the *Index* will settle any apparent inconsistency.—As has before been observed, I have not attempted elegance of style. The communications of Correspondents being in general given in their own language, uniformity in that respect was impracticable: nor was it needful; clearness and conciseness being much more material than ornament.

In two or three instances, I am aware that a small article has been *repeated*; not, the Reader may be assured, for the purpose of swelling the size, as materials in plenty were at hand; but, in a work so miscellaneous and so extended—arranged amidst the thousand distractions of business, the interruptions of illness, and sometimes of an occasional excursion in the country—a lapse of memory, at *sixty-seven*, it is hoped, will be forgiven. In several cases, I have made the *amende honorable*; and punished myself by the additional labour and expence of canceling the leaves, and substituting new articles in their stead.—May I shelter myself under the same excuse for the insertion of a few passages, which in a young man would be imputed to egotism or vanity?

If, in any of these pages, I may appear to have borrowed largely from others, let it be recollected that others have borrowed largely from me; and that I frequently am only reclaiming my own.

One of the most melancholy retrospects I have to notice is, the loss of numberless Friends, who were literary contributors to the former Edition, and by whom the present volumes have been considerably benefited. Among these, the most prominent are, Dr. JOHNSON, Mr. STEEVENS, Mr. COLE, Mr. ASHBY, Mr. REED,

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REED, and, above all, my steady and indefatigable coadjutor Mr. GOUGH, who many years ago, speaking of a collection of Original Letters which I had communicated to him, says, "I shall stick as many of them as relate to Mr. Bowyer into his 'Anecdotes.' I most heartily wish you had the inclination to print a second edition, while you have opportunity to improve them by living information. I shall bequeath to you my interleaved copy—if you do not call for it sooner, and enlarge it with a second volume, to be intituled *Anecdotes of J. N.* and give the world two volumes of *utile dulci.*"

Mr. Gough closed his communications with the specific bequest* which he had promised, enriched by his own notes, and filled with the epistolary correspondence of many eminent persons, selected for the illustration of these "Anecdotes."

Previously to the entering seriously on the task of re-publication, I threw out the following request for assistance, in the Gentleman's Magazine.

"MR. URBAN,

Jan. 14, 1802.

"As you frequently oblige your Correspondents by inserting their literary enquiries; permit an old Associate to announce, that he is committing to the press, after a consideration of twenty years, a new edition of the "Anecdotes of Mr. Bowyer;" the outlines of which first appeared in your volume XLVIII. pp. 409, 449, 513; and which, to say no more, was received by the publick with a flattering indulgence (vol. LII. pp. 348, 582); and had the approbation of Dr. Johnson (vol. LIV. p. 893).—

* See vol. VI. p. 330.

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The difficulties and the expence attending such a compilation are so well illustrated by your Reviewers in vol. LII. p. 554, that it must be evident pecuniary emolument, in publishing the former volume, was wholly out of sight. If it displayed the Compiler's gratitude to an early and excellent Friend, and added to the stock of useful entertainment, his wishes were fully answered.

“As the intended new edition will of course be considerably augmented, and, it is hoped, proportionably improved; the principal reason of troubling you with this address is, to request your many critical and biographical readers to furnish me with such particulars as may lead to its correction, and extend its utility. Hints in particular of any valuable work, printed by either of the BOWYERS, which have escaped my notice, with any authentic anecdotes of the authors, or lists of their writings, will be particularly acceptable; as will also any part of the epistolary correspondence of Mr. Bowyer, which was frequent and valuable; it being my principal desire to render the work, in a considerable degree, a HISTORY of the LITERATURE of the EIGHTEENTH CENTURY. Yours, &c. J. NICHOLS.”

I had some thoughts of *continuing* the Work to a later period. “But I hear the Cock's crow proclaiming the dawning day, being now come within the ken of many alive; and when men's *memories* do *arise*, it is time for *History* to haste to bed*.”

To enumerate the names of Friends by whom I have been assisted in the present Volumes, would be an endless, though a pleasing task. Yet there

* Fuller's Worthies, Essex, ed. 1811, vol. I. p. 349.

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is one Gentleman to whom I am under so many and peculiar obligations, for intelligence which his matchless collection of scarce books, and his intimate knowledge of the treasures he possesses, have enabled him to communicate, that I could not content myself without inscribing the present Edition to my kind-hearted and respectable Friend Mr. BINDLEY; who, in a green old age, happily retains his *bibliomaniacal* spirit, and is as ready to impart knowledge, as he is liberal in the purchase of literary curiosities.

I must also particularly acknowledge the variety of information received, on frequent application, from Mr. ALEXANDER CHALMERS.

By the Rev. WILLIAM BAKER, LL. D. Rector of Lyndon and of South Luffenham in the county of Rutland, I have been favoured with some very important additions to the article of his grandfather, Mr. Henry Baker, one of the earliest Members, and one of the most active in the Institution of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce.

Mr. MALONE, the Rev. JAMES STANIER CLARKE, the Rev. ROBERT WATTS, the Rev. T. F. DIBDIN, Mr. HENRY ELLIS, Mr. H. J. MARKLAND, Mr. D'ISRAELI, Mr. STEPHEN JONES, and a hundred other Gentlemen, will accept my general acknowledgments.

I cannot, however, deny myself the satisfaction of publicly thanking my only Son, not merely for greatly facilitating the toil of correction, but for not unfrequently having prevented my falling into material mistakes. In addition to similar assistance from my Nephew, Mr. SAMUEL BENTLEY, it is to him that I am indebted for an accurate and copious Index.

June 11, 1812.

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