

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07653-1 - The Bibliographical Decameron: Or, Ten Days Pleasant Discourse upon Illuminated Manuscripts, and Subjects Connected with Early Engraving, Typography, and Bibliography: Volume 3

Thomas Frognall Dibdin

Excerpt

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NINTH DAY.

VOL. III.

B

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ARGUMENT.

*Characters of deceased and living Book-Auction-loving
Bibliomaniacs. Of Book-Sales by Auction since the year
1811.*

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Ninth Day.



SUDDEN doubt and anxiety possess me. The thought of what I am now about to narrate almost overwhelms me with horror: for know, gentle auditors and docile subjects, that there is no *one* day, recorded by Homer in his Iliad, which discloses such a scene of contention and bloodshed, as that which will be displayed upon this the NINTH DAY of our BIBLIOGRAPHICAL DECAMERON. The hearts of the Ladies will be cut in twain by recitals of vanquished Knights and slaughtered Chieftains. Neither old nor young will be found to have been spared; and as ‘the work of death’ advances, courage is only aggravated into ferocity, and pity and courtesy shriek as they fly before the face of such monsters! To borrow Philemon’s favourite Homeric version:

With streams of blood the slippery fields are dyed,
And slaughtered heroes swell the dreadful tide.

ALMANSA. Terrific foretaste! But I trust our monarch

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is now merely indulging the warmth of a metaphorical fancy. We are surely not about to be exposed to all these horrors of Homeric warfare?

LISARDO. The result will best shew. And yet . . . at the very outset I must touch a mournful strain . . . a sort of ‘dead march in Saul’ must be the prelude to this bustling and blood-shedding scene!

PHILEMON. What mean you?

LISARDO. Can Philemon ask? Call to mind, I beseech you, some six years ago, when you took me into a certain AUCTION ROOM,* where we heard a sort of muster-roll read of the champions who thronged the field upon book-selling contests . . . and where, as certain odd-looking, or ardent, or confidential, or dreaded heroes, came into the front ranks, we were made acquainted with their characters, their reputation, and their ‘deeds of chivalry’—of success, or of discomfiture.

PHILEMON. We were so. But why, in consequence, are you to favour us with ‘the dead march in Saul?’

LISARDO. Listen. Since that memorable day, I strove to make acquaintance with the greater and better part of the heroes described. My acquaintance was consolidated into friendship. But, of late, death . . .

PHILEMON. I understand you. Give us therefore their epitaphs and characters; and be as unsparing to the living as to the dead.

LISARDO. Cease: the flute and double-drum of this ‘dead march’ have already uttered their dirge-like notes—and here follows the remainder of that solemn movement.

* *into a certain AUCTION ROOM.*] See the *Bibliomania*, p. 160, and following pages. The greater part, if not the whole, of this NINTH DAY of the *Bibliographical Decameron* must be considered a commentary, or rather sequel, of the transactions recorded in the work just referred to.

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First for LEPIDUS.* He survived the description that was given of him about two years; dying suddenly, and without pain; and leaving behind, a family, not only

* *First of LEPIDUS.*] See the *Bibliomania*, p. 160. For the first time, since the publication of the work just mentioned, I present my readers with a KEY, manufactured of equal parts of *gold, silver, and copper*, (and therefore perhaps rather a unique unlocking instrument) for the explanation or appropriation of the characters described in the AUCTION ROOM: but—of such characters only as—NOW CEASE TO BREATHE. Concealment and secrecy are of no avail towards the dead: living characters have a sort of éclat thrown around them by the mystery of fictitious names. ‘First’ then ‘for LEPIDUS.’ Under this name was designated the late Reverend Dr. ISAAC GOSSET; so long and so well known, so generally and so justly esteemed, that my own delineation of him, whether as ‘Lepidus’ or ‘Gosset,’ can add little to his reputation.

In the *Pursuits of Literature* he was called ‘milk-white Gosset.’ This must not be understood with reference to the colour of his complexion, or of his clothes—but to his love of books ‘bound in vellum.’ As a friend and neighbour I was well acquainted with the tone and texture of his library, but there was no violent predilection for this ‘milk-white’ tint; and the ‘cliquant’ of an epithet is, we know, oftentimes as thoughtlessly reverberated as the epithet itself is precipitately bestowed. Dr. Gosset’s library was rather select than numerous. In *Grammars, Classics, and Theology*, he was justly proud of its strength. His readiness and even kindness of communication will be long remembered by those who have had frequent opportunities of experiencing its beneficial effects; and by none more than by the author of these necrological *Gossettiana*—who, during the composition of the second edition of his *Introduction to the Classics*, used to have frequent conferences with our Doctor, and the most unlimited command of his library. Nor was Dr. Gosset’s willingness to procure books—or to give advice, in the selection of them, to his friends—less distinguished than his natural benevolence of character. During a sale he usually took his station at the right hand of the auctioneer; which, since the days of Askew, he filled with marked distinction and celebrity. He was at times vastly gay and cheerful during the sale, and may be said to have dealt around his gibes and jokes in a manner the most felicitous imaginable. He loved a good laugh when a *would-be* BIELOGNOST was caught; and his laugh was generally ‘the heart’s laugh.’ He was fully impressed of the importance of his own remarks when a volume was ‘put up,’ and that numerous eyes and ears were opened to receive his oracular opinions; but he was by no means elated with such bibliographical homage, and was rather discreet, quiet, and cautious in the delivery of his criticisms. In consequence, he rarely committed himself. He was very fond of ardent young bibliomaniacs; and loved much a little bibliographical disporting or sparring during the sale! Mr. Heber was always a prodigious favourite with him. He once told me

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enriched by the good fortune of their parent, but benefited by his instructions, and impressed with the deepest respect for his memory. No man ever had a more thoroughly parental heart; and he chose to bear with the utmost good-humour

emphatically that he considered him as 'HIS PUPIL.' The pupil and master used oft-times; in former days, to enjoy their evening revels (after the heat and hurry of a book-sale) over sober Souchong, succeeded by 'milk-white' punch!

Within several months of the publication of the *Bibliomania*, I read to him, in the shop and presence of Mr. Payne, my character of LEPIDUS. It was a bold measure: but he enjoyed it thoroughly, and laughed as heartily as Mr. Payne himself. He had strong, sound, good sense and scholarship; and in his time had been an animated and popular preacher. His dissolution was sudden, and let us hope 'without a pang.' His family were at breakfast; but the Doctor not coming down, as usual, they visited his bed room, where he was found dead in his bed. He had reached his 68th year. Consult the *Gent. Mag.* vol. lxxxii. pt. ii. On the 2d of February, 1813, the sale of his Library was thus announced by Messrs. Leigh and Sotheby: 'The very valuable library of the late Reverend Isaac Gossett, D. D. F. R. S.' Shortly afterwards, the following more formal notice was given. 'By LEIGH and SOTHEY, Booksellers, at their House, No. 145, Strand, opposite Catherine-Street, on Monday, June 7, and Twenty-two following Days (Sundays excepted) at 12, the Extensive and very Valuable LIBRARY of the late Rev. Isaac Gosset, D. D. F. R. S.—To be viewed on Thursday, June 3, to the time of Sale, and Catalogues, price 2s. 6d. to be had at Mr. Cook's, Oxford; Mr. Deighton, Cambridge; and the place of Sale.' During the sale, some piquant rogue had stolen the Doctor's copy of 'The Oxford Sausage.' The Newspapers thus announced the theft: 'A BOOK COLLECTOR.—For some time past, at all the most respectable sales of libraries, books have been stolen from the shelves, and the practice has gone on to an extent that made it necessary to place a watch to discover the depredator. On Wednesday, at the sale of the late Dr. Gosset's library, in the house of Messrs. Leigh and Sotheby, a young man was detected in putting a volume into his pocket. After the sale, he was addressed by Mr. Benj. Wheatley, the chief clerk, and told that he had pocketed a volume which did not belong to him. It was 'The Oxford Sausage,' bound up with other tracts. He was taken to Bow-Street, and his lodgings being searched, sixteen volumes, stolen from Dr. Gosset's and other collections, were found in his rooms. He is to be brought up again for examination at Bow-Street this day.' The punishment subsequently inflicted upon him was (as I learn) the swallowing of the 'sausage' whole—with an unusual addition of mustard and pepper!

The Doctor however was not left uncelebrated by the Muses; for in the *Gent. Mag.* as before referred to, were the following verses, supposed to be from the pen of CHING-CHOU:

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and philosophy, all the ‘*flings*’ at his sequestered habits of life, and at the *subdued* tone of colour of his garments. He

The TEARS of the BOOKSELLERS

‘ When GOSSET fell,
Leigh rang his knell,
And Sotheby ’gan to vapour ;
For I’ve been told,
That Folios sold

Indignant for waste paper.

The Trade all swear,
They’re in despair,
At so severe a crisis ;
For all agree,
’Twas only He
Supplied the town with prices.

Shop, stall, and shed
Lament him dead,
And blubber o’er his carcase ;
Ah me, the day !
Cries sad *Lochéé*,
Ah me ! replies the Marquis.

Words are but faint,
The woes to paint,
Of *Maltby* and of *Relham*,
Payne sobs and cries,
And *Cuthell’s* eyes
Are big as tears can swell ’em.

Not classic *Lunn*,
Nor *Jeffery’s* fun,
Nor *Evans’* first appearance,
No means were found
Could bring him round,
And give him a rehearance.

Then learn all ye,
Who visit Leigh,
To buy or to be bought in,
You’ll soon or late,
Share Gosser’s fate,
And your own lot be caught in.’

The reader may consult Mr. Horne’s *Introd. to Bibliography*, vol. ii. p. 651, and

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has left those behind who will not suffer his name to perish, or his virtues to be forgotten. His own collection of books was disposed of, quickly after his decease, in that room—which he had so frequently enlivened by his ‘gibes,’ and benefited by his attendance and advice.

ALAS, POOR MUSTAPHA!*—for, if you remember, he

eke the *Classical Journal*, no. xvi. p. 471, &c. for some of the prices for which the Gossetian tomes were disposed of.

* ALAS, POOR MUSTAPHA !] For ‘MUSTAPHA,’ read now, the late WILLIAM NELSON GARDINER, Bookseller in Pall-Mall. This unfortunate bibliopolist laid violent hands on himself, about three years after the delineation of his character, in the *Bibliomania*, under the name of ‘Mustapha:’ see page 163 of that work. That delineation, however, was by no means the cause of such a catastrophe. It had been provoked, or it would not have been obtruded upon the public. Mr. William Nelson Gardiner found that it was not stingless; as indeed it was not intended to be—for, previously to its appearance, my name and pretensions had been treated, in one of his own hotch-potch catalogues, with so little ceremony and courtesy, that he must have considered me a mere dolt to have quietly submitted to such outrageous and unfounded censure. Accordingly he received the castigation in question; which, coming upon a thin-skin surface, necessarily produced blisters, and engendered a disposition to retaliate. His ‘lex talionis’ was demonstrated in a subsequent catalogue: his usual channel of making the public acquainted with the importance of his sentiments on all points—for he verily believed that ‘none but himself could be his parallel.’

That ‘retaliation’ was first read to me by ATTICUS, when at breakfast with him; and on no account did it diminish my appetite, or slacken my attacks upon muffin and peko tea. There were parts in it that even amused me; and I learn (of which indeed I have reason to be proud) that it so much enhanced the copies of his catalogues, as to render them quickly out of print, and to produce, at book-sales, the sum of THIRTEEN SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE of lawful money of Great Britain.* Poor Gardiner was ‘right welcome’ to the profits. He was

* A very active and well-disposed, but perhaps, in this instance, somewhat injudicious friend, evinced his zeal on this occasion by proposing to publish a sort of REPLY, under one of the following titles, of which I was requested to choose which seemed ‘most meet’ for the purpose:

1. *Early in the Month of March will be published, price 3s. 6d. crown 8vo. a curious and interesting treatise, entitled*

BIBLIOMANIACAL GUNPOWDER: OR A CRACKER FOR MUSTAPHA TO LET OFF.
The whole wittily conceived and maturely digested by its author,
LISARDO THE LITTLE.

‘I love to hear that the bibliographical labour bestowed upon a catalogue has

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came next in the muster-roll before mentioned. Sore vexed was Mustapha at the character therein given of him. He was chafed to the quick; and seized the very first oppor-

an instance, of which there are many instances in this very strange world, of uniting, in a person of the most dirty and dismal physiognomy, with the filthiest attire, the greatest possible share of conceit, vanity, and self-complacency. He would sit at a book-sale (as he did at that of the Roxburghe) with his hat cocked on one side—stroke his chin, flourish his pencil, and deal out his gibes against the fraternity, whilst his garments were of a hue and scent that absolutely forbade approach! Yet he could, in his self-memoir, talk of persons 'greatly his inferiors, in every respect, towering above him; whilst the most contemptible amongst them, without education, without a knowledge of their profession, and without

answered the end proposed, by sharpening the appetite of purchasers. But the present is a different case.' *Bibliomania*, p. 164.

2. *In the course of this present season will be published, in a thick octavo pamphlet, price 6s. stitched,*

BIBLIOMANIA VINDICATED: OR A SCOURGE FOR ANTI-BIBLIOMANIACS. Containing, amongst other things, Strictures upon certain Reviews of the *Rev. Mr. Dibdin's Bibliographical Romance*; also, A PILL TO PURGE MUSTAPHA; or the danger of a Cobler's going beyond his last. The whole interspersed with pleasant conceits, and supported by learned annotations.

By A PUPIL OF ROSICRUSIUS, F. R. S.

'Bibliomania is, of all species of insanity, the most rational and praiseworthy.' *Bibliomania*, p. 124.

'I have to sell bookes, for men of Devyne,
And bookes of all lawes, most pleasaunt and fyne:
Of al Artes and Storyes, as men wyll encllyue,
What lacke you Gentyelman? Come hether to me.

I have inke, paper, and pennes, to lode with a barge,
Inke hornes, and pennours, fine small and large:
Primers and a b c es, and bookes of small charge,
What lacke you Scollers? Come hether to me.'

*Thomas Newbury's Dives Pragmaticus, very preatly
for children to rede: no date, 4to.*

Printed for all the Booksellers on the west side of Pater-Noster-Row, and on the east side of Pall-Mall.

To prove the accuracy of what is above said, respecting the increased price of poor Mustapha's catalogue, in consequence of his reply to my attack, the reader is presented with the following; from the *Catalogue of Messrs. Todd of York*, of the present year: no. '8495 Gardiner's (the late Wm. of Pall Mall) Catalogues for 1809, 1810, 1811, 1812, and 1813, (*that of 1812 contains his celebrated Defence from the Attack of Mr. Dibdin in the "Bibliomania," under the Name of "Mustapha,"*) very neatly half bound in one volume, russia back, 2l. 2s.'

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tunity of bedaubing his critic with as much dirt as he could conveniently hold in both hands—supplied, not from the

an idea, had been received into palaces, and into the bosom of the great,' &c. Now when it is recollected that he was surrounded by biblioplists of such long established reputation as Messrs. NICOL, PAYNE, EVANS, and TRIPHOOK, there does seem, to speak the most mercifully, somewhat little short of insanity in this 'dealing out of death-blows.' However, Gardiner had those who chose to consult him, and who exhibited prodigious powers in the mastication of slanderous intelligence. For himself, I will do him the justice to say that he was *consistent*; a liberal abuser of toryism—and although he had taken a degree at Cambridge, and studied for the church, he was not eclipsed by Ritson himself in the acrimony of his ecclesiastical antipathies.

The evening before his death (the manner of which must excite the commiseration of every good man) he addressed a letter to the editor of the *Morning Chronicle*, who had shewn him repeated kindnesses, enclosing 'a brief memoir of himself.' This memoir is written in a very unpolished style, yet with an occasional 'gaieté de cœur,' which makes it evident that the almost immediately subsequent act of self-destruction was an act of insanity. In this letter he declared that 'his sun had set for ever—that his business had nearly totally declined—his catalogue failed—his body was covered with disease—and he had determined to seek that asylum where the weary are at rest.' This is quite sufficient. Over human wretchedness, thus complicated and complete, let us draw the curtain of charity; and let us mourn the more inasmuch as the sufferer himself seemed to sorrow as a man 'without hope.' Rest to his corpse! and as the Sabbath-sun is setting, and we go home to our families to comfort them from the pages of Taylor, Jortin, or Paley, let us just turn our heads towards yonder hazel-skirted grove—and sigh from our hearts as we read

