

NOTES ON EARLY AMERICAN LITERATURE.

BY JAMES F. HUNNEWELL.

MINERVA, we are told, appeared before the world in a manner that might be called unique, and so did the products of the earliest printing-presses, which appeared at once in full-grown perfection. If two centuries later our primitive books did not rival them, they have an interest and a value, both in themselves and in their position in the history of a great nation, that, as time passes, will make them more and more precious.

A majority of our earlier authors were ministers, and, naturally, their works are largely theological or doctrinal, yet the variety of subjects treated by them, and by others, was as great as their time and place permitted, and really made no small variety and no trifling aggregate, which are well worth examining.

Any one who now tries to collect the works of these authors will be rather sensibly aware of their number, and of their value as expressed in current funds.

The first paragraph in the body of the first book printed in our country is so good a text or motto for everything to follow, that it may well be recalled from page one of "The Whole Booke of Psalms," Cambridge, 1640:—

“O Blessed man, that in th’ advice
of wicked doeth not walk:
nor stand in sinners way, nor sit
in chayre of scornfull folk.”

Starting with psalmody, our earliest literature had a rather large proportion of it, and through all following time no small amount.

At first, and for many years, *Historical Works* were not numerous. Including pamphlets on special topics along with the larger works, and excepting two classes mentioned later, it is hard to enumerate over thirty-eight to forty published during the seventy-six years after 1640, beginning with Morton's "New England's Memorial," 4°, 220 pages, Cambridge, 1669, and ending with Church's "Philip's War," 4°, 120 pages, Boston, 1716. This war formed the subject of half a dozen, or a few more, publications from 1676 to 1682. The Revolution of 1688 did the same for about a dozen. Mather's "Short History of New England," Mayhew's "Success of the Gospel," and Scot-tow's "Planting of Massachusetts Colony," came in 1694. Miscellaneous works, most of them small, followed.

There were two subjects of special interest on which there were groups of works that should be added. During the 17th century, publications on *Witchcraft* were sufficiently numerous in London. While it was of universal, it was of course of local, interest, and furnished material for several American works. Remarks about them here should be brief after Mr. Winsor's elaborate paper on the subject in the last number of the "Proceedings." As a marked part of the present general subject, some mention of these works is, however, needed. In 1689, came Mather's "Memorable Providences," and two years afterwards his "Late Memorable Providences * * Reccommended by the ministers of Boston and Charlestown." In 1692, the Rev. Deodat Lawson added a "Brief and True Narrative" of events at Salem, and the Rev. Increase Mather "A Further Account," which was more general, while from Samuel Willard, Philadelphia, came "Some Miscellany Observations." The next year Lawson published a sermon "Christ's Fidelity the Only Shield against Satan's Malignity," Cotton Mather his large work on "The Wonders of the Invisible World," and Increase Mather, "Cases of Conscience." In 1696, the last named issued his "Angelographia," on

the Holy and the Fallen Angels, and also a supplementary "Disquisition." Four years later, Robert Calef published in London a compilation entitled "More Wonders of the Invisible World," which elicited at Boston, in 1701, "Remarks" on his work, called a "scandalous book." In 1702, also at Boston, appeared what is now one of the greatest rarities on the subject, "A Modest Enquiry Into the Nature of Witchcraft," by the Rev. John Hale of Beverly. In 1704, Lawson's "Satan's Malignity" was republished in London, and as late as 1720, also there, a second edition of Francis Hutchinson's "Historical Essay."

Notwithstanding the conduct of the *Quakers* and legislation hereabouts in the seventeenth century, there were few publications. Roger Williams's book, "George Fox Digg'd out of his Burrowes," appeared in 1676, and was followed in 1677, by Fox's answer, "A New England Fire Brand Quenched," but there was very little more until 1690, when a series of controversial tracts relating to George Keith began. There were at least four this year, and over twenty in the course of seven years; indeed, they make about three-quarters of the American Quaker literature of the seventeenth century, and they were chiefly Pennsylvanian.

While there were not many *Biographies* or *Lives*, there was a large number of Memorial Discourses, containing, along with much of a theological or doctrinal nature, some personal history. The writer makes a list of 214 printed within the first hundred years of the American Press. Seventeen years had passed before the earliest Biography appeared—the Rev. John Norton's "Life of the Rev. John Cotton," 4^o, 56 pages, 1657. Except in 1706, there were only one or two Discourses in a year until 1711. Later there were one to ten in a year, except 1727 with sixteen, and 1728 with thirteen. They form a large class, notable, interesting and praiseworthy, for matter, for style, and still more, for the pious and kindly regard they show for men.

and women honored and loved in their place and generation:

Sermons attending the execution of criminals were more numerous than they would now be. As memorable a work as the first printed in Boston was one of them—the Rev. Increase Mather's "Wicked Man's Portion," a Lecture, January 18, 1674, on Two Men, 4^o, 25 pages, issued in 1675. Terrors were added to death by the length and the nature of some of these compositions.

Practical or prosaic as may have been the people, and engrossed as they were in labors for a living, there were *poets* almost as numerous as historians. As already mentioned, the first book printed within the limits of our country was in verse, and verse that exercised the powers of at least three of the best men then in the land. Such a favorite was it that it was republished and revised to many an edition for the use and comfort of nearly a century of New Englanders. By weight or size a copy of the *princeps* is now about the dearest book on earth. Psalm-books in English, or in Indian, formed, may be, the bulk of indigenous poetic issues, but there were the works of a "Tenth Muse," the amazing verse of Mather, and the lines of the Simple Cobbler, or the solemnities of Wigglesworth, also in many an edition, to Cato's Moral Distiches in 1735.

The range of subjects was from the Day of Doom, to the Whalebone Petticoat, in 1714. If in ability there is nothing Miltonian, there is nothing of the Joe Miller; there is much exalted intention if there is scant humor, there is little that is not worth saving, and work to that end is now being done.

Following Anne Bradstreet and Edward Johnson, and in company with much Psalmody, was *Elegiac Poetry*, comparatively in large amount. The Reverend Cotton Mather tells us of the earliest, in lines "To The Reader," introducing his first work, a Poem on President Qakes of

Harvard. Only one copy of this poem, it may be added, is known to have survived to our time.

“To the Reader,” he says—

“Cotton *Embalms* great Hooker; Norton Him;
And Norton's *Hearfe do's* Poet-Wilson trim
With Verses: Mitchel writes a *Poem on*
The Death of Wilfon; and when Mitchel's gone,
Shepard with *fun'ral Lamentations gives*
Honour to Him: and at his Death receives
The like from the [like-Maró] Lofty Strain
Of admirable Oakes!”

While enough of our early poetry is uncouth or forced, examples of directness and of grace are not wanting. For instance, Mather in his “*Vigilantius*,” an *Elegy on Seven Young Ministers*, wrote—

“First, *What they were not*”—
“*Not who to Pulpits hop Unfledg'd and there*
Talk twice a Week and Preach not once a year.”

or, not in awe of a Poet Laureate he could write—

“*Dryden Sayes, Look the Reformation round,*
No Treatise of Humility is found.
Dryden, Thou Ly'ft”;

like a real poet, he could write on his dead friend Hubbard—

“*So has his After-Beams the Setting Sun*;
Tho' he be Set, his Splendor is not gone.”

Again, a President of Harvard, Oakes, writes of his loved friend, the Reverend Thomas Shepard of Charlestown, who died in 1677,—

“*If Holy Life, and Deeds of Charity,*
If Grace illustrious, and Virtue tri'ed,
If modest Carriage, rare Humilty,
Could have brib'd Death, good Shepard had not di'ed.”

As might be expected of communities where everyone was busy in labors for a living, and where there was little to inspire or teach in *Art*, it is hard to find anything that could be called a work on the subject. At a period, also, when treatises on *Science* were far less common than they now are, we find few that could be counted in this class.

As early as 1665, however, Samuel Danforth published a Description of a Comet that had appeared in 1664, to which in the fashion of the times, he added a "Theological Application." Earthquakes, as well as comets, at considerably later dates were subjects of no few sermons and essays. Inoculation was treated in at least a dozen pamphlets between 1721 and 1730.

Important subjects not included in the classes already mentioned were also treated, among them *Military Art*. In 1701, appeared Boone's "Military Discipline," enlarged in 1706; and in 1702, a tract on "The Exercise of the Musket." There were other works scattered to the period of the Revolution, when more elaborate treatises were needed and were published.

In 1691, a duodecimo of 24 pages appeared in Boston, entitled "Considerations of Bills of Credit." *Financial Affairs* had attention, and by a dozen years after Witchcraft had been an engrossing subject, they caused not a few publications. In 1714, there were half a dozen, all in Boston. "A Projection for Erecting" a Bank of Credit "Founded on Land Security" was supported by a "Discourse in Explanation thereof." Paul Dudley presented "Objections," Joseph Burrell vindicated the plan from his "Aspersions," as also did Samuel Lynde "& Others," and "one in Boston" added an answer to Burrell. These publications, all small tracts, were followed by many more on Banking and Currency. Mr. Brinley had thirty-one issued between 1714 and 1762. When Part I. of his library was sold in 1879, they brought \$376, — an average of \$12½ each, — a higher value than that of some suggestions which were here and there offered.

Serial Publications, now become so numerous, were begun at a very early date. Massachusetts has one of them so long that we must wait a century before we can be sure that another will be longer. The *Election Sermons*, so called, were preached year by year from a very early

date, and in 1663, the one for that year, the Rev. John Higginson's, was printed. The Rev. John Norton's for 1661, was printed in 1664. With few exceptions, the sermons were delivered every year for more than two centuries, and were also printed. A great number and variety of preachers were represented, and as many subjects of public concern and interest were treated, so that there was a very notable representation of the thought and of the affairs of the State. It would be hard to find another series comparable. Eight or more public or society libraries, and two that are private, contain sets that reach or approach completeness, but hereafter only a young man with a long life before him, probably, will be able to form another set. Names and dates of the earliest *Newspapers* are subjects of debate. In 1690, a small sheet called "Publick Occurrences, Both Foreign and Domestic," was issued on September 25th, and has been accorded the distinction of being "the first newspaper in America." Such a bold and inexcusable invention did it appear to be that it was promptly suppressed. Fourteen years passed before another and a more successful attempt was made. Then appeared, April 25, 1704, No. 1, of "The Boston News-Letter," which, under sundry styles or headings, lived seventy-two years, dying at the departure of the British from Boston. Its life and services are narrated by Mr. Thomas in Vol. VI., pp. 7 and 12-27 of the Transactions of the American Antiquarian Society. As late as 1754, he says (p. 8), there "were four newspapers only printed in New England," and "these were all published in Boston." New York seems to have had only half as many. In 1743, appeared, naturally at Boston, "Christian History," that has been called the first religious newspaper in the world. However rivalled, it was certainly very early.

A movement, sometimes considered rather modern, was treated at a rather early date, in a tract by Benjamin Lay;

entitled, "All Slave Keepers that Keep the Innocent in Bondage Apostates," published at Philadelphia, 1737, and enlarged in 1738(?). Anti-slavery ideas were finding printed expression.

Observance of *Centennials*, or of great historic events, is also sometimes considered a mark of recent enlightenment. But as soon as time allowed our forefathers to have a centennial it was observed. On the 23d of August, 1730, the Rev. Thomas Foxcroft preached a Century Sermon on his church, the oldest in Boston. Eight years later, the Rev. John Callender delivered an "Historical Discourse on the Civil and Religious Affairs of the Colony of Rhode Island," *etc.*, "to the end of the first Century." Both of these valuable works were printed in Boston. At later dates, there were discourses on the Rebellion in Scotland, and on the Victories at Louisbourg, Havannah and Quebec.

Bibliography seems to have had, for a long while, scanty attention, and that shown in a few catalogues, which, however, probably give us clear evidence of what was owned and wanted. Titles are apt to be so briefly given that edition or even subject can hardly be determined. It is evident that there were neither people nor means enough to make any considerable "home-market" for native work, or for republications of European books, even if tastes here or interests over sea would allow the latter. Small demands would be better met in price and quality by imported books, as for instance even in the one book for which there was a large demand. The English Bible was a finer and a cheaper volume than any that could have been made here through a long period. But in the primitive times scarcely anyone seems to have cared for what is called literature. Proof is given by early manuscript catalogues, all of which have a certain family likeness. Eliot's library, bought of Thomas Weld in 1651, according to the writer's copy, had two hundred and two volumes (forty-five folios, ninety-five

quartos, sixty-two octavos and smaller.) In these are many Expositions of the Scriptures, much Theology, some Church History, a trace of Classics, and none of English Literature. Another list of about the same date, called a "Cattaloug of bookes * * being tow hundred Bookes * * of mine Thomas Jenner," shows similar qualities and proportions. The Brewster and Harvard libraries would help to confirm opinions that these suggest.

In February, 1685-6, John Dunton, a dealer in books, arrived in Boston from London. He brought a stock for sale, and, with Dr. Palfrey (III., 488), we wish that he had put the invoice on record as "a basis for very interesting considerations" of what was then called for in New England. Instead of it, he, however, gave some account of ladies in Boston. "Mrs. —," he said, "painted herself, but was a good customer. The chief books she bought were Plays and Romances,"—showing that he had brought them. "Mrs. A— was one of the first that pos'd me in asking for a Book I could not help her to"—it was not one prominent in English literature.

The inventory of Michael Perry, bookseller, Boston, dated 1700, gives clearer evidence of what was wanted. Examining the long and mixed list of publications and stationery, the writer counts 2,504 large or small volumes, besides 1,459 catechisms and 26 "Kallenders." There are 35 Bibles, 4 of them Latin, 1 Hebrew; 11 Testaments, 8 of them Latin; 52 Psalters and 310 Psalm Books. Notably, there were 6 "Common Prayer Books." On other Religious subjects, there were 1,404, or in all, 1,818, three-quarters of the whole number. School-books number 399; miscellaneous, 92. Of the Classics, there were 73 volumes.—Juvenal, Lucius Florus, Ovid (in 3 vols.), and Thesaurus Poeticus, 1 each; Ovid's Metamorphoses, 4, and De Tristibus, 5; 7 Virgils; 6 Cicero's Orations, 7 De Officiis, and 8 Epistles; 14 Æsop's Fables; and 18 "Cato's." History was represented by 61 volumes, Navigation by 13, Law by

6, Surveying by 5, Medicine by 4, Husbandry by 3, "Shour of Grace" by 3, "Shour of Earthquakes" by 2, and Astronomy and Gardening by 1 each. Of Heywood's life there were 17 copies, 8 of Vernon's Counting House, and 1 of "Alcibiades and Carolina." "In the Garretts" were 942 copies of other Religious books, many of them in sheets, and all recently published; 450 of Stubbe's "Conscience the best friend" (1699, or 1700),¹ 250 of "Doolittle's Call" (1700?), and of Willard's works, 84 of his "Man of War," 25 of his "Spiritual Desertions," both 1699; and 25 of his Peril of the Times, and 108 on Morality, both 1700. Somewhat obscured among pens, ink, spectacles and copy-books, are "9 packs playing cards." Of the total 4931 copies mentioned, 4245, or over 86%, are religious, less than 2% classics, and none in general English literature, other than "3 Pilgrims Progress with cuts," at one shilling apiece.

The earliest printed catalogue of a private collection is thought to be that of "The Library of The Late Reverend and Learned Mr. Samuel Lee," 4^o, 1693 (Prince Library). Titles, meagrely given, are arranged by classes. In Divinity there are 389 (84 folios, 136 quartos, 83 octavos Latin; 61 quartos, and 25 octavos English.) Of "Phisical Books," all sizes, there are 122; of Philosophy, 64; Geography, 17; of "Mathematical, Astrological and Astronomical," all Latin, 61; History, including Biography and a few travels, 127 in Latin, 45 in English. Under "School Authors," which includes Classics, there are 61; Law, 8, all in Latin; "Miscellanie Books," chiefly Divinity and Classics, 326. The total is 1,220. Very few American books or authors are named, and no Milton, Shakespeare or general English literature.

It was not until 1723, that what is thought to be the first printed Catalogue of an American Public Library appeared—Catalogus | Librorum | Bibliothecæ | Collegij Harvard-

¹ Reprint of 1700 in the Society's library.

ini | Quod est | Cantabrigiæ | in | Nova Angliā. | Bostoni
Nov-Anglorum: | Typis *B. Green*, Academiæ Typo-
graphi." The books are chiefly of the sixteenth and seven-
teenth centuries, and largely theological. American auth-
ors have far from full representation. There is an Eliot's
Indian Bible, 1663 (p. 44), but no Morton's New England's
Memorial, or work of Anne Bradstreet. There are 26 works
of Increase Mather, and 9 of Cotton Mather, not including
his *Magnalia* of 1702, or some of the now rarest works of
each author. Milton is only shown by his "Defensio
pro populo Anglicano," 4^o, London, 1651. There are
"Shakespear's Plays," 6 vols. 8^o, London, 1709 (p. 95).
Tonson's edition, the next after the Fourth Folio, was pub-
lished 1709-10, 8^o, the plays in 6 volumes, and another
volume with the poems. The library would naturally show
the kinds of gifts received, perhaps as much as it showed
results of selection.

The Inventory of books that belonged to Major Robert
Beverley of Newland, made in 1734, shows what then
formed the library of a gentleman in Virginia. So far as
the writer can count there were 266 volumes, 39 of which
(or 15%) were religious, 41 were literature, including
Bacon's *Essays*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, *Hudibras*, More's
Utopia, Pope's *Poems*, and "Beggar's Opera." 63 vol-
umes (25%) were classics, 24 History, 12 Dictionaries, 9
Law, 9 Grammar, 6 Geography. There were 4 Bibles,
Greek and Latin Testaments, and English and Greek
Prayer Books; 15 might be classed as Mathematics and
Sciences. There was a book on Dancing, and another of
Music — "a Flute Book." (*Virginia Mag.*, III., 388.)

Charlestown, Massachusetts, would rank among the
well inhabited, flourishing seaports of New England.
So far as the writer learns, there was no better library
in the place before the Revolution, than that of the
Rev. Thomas Shepard, who died in 1677, and left it
to his son. It was valued at £100, which, as prices then

were, would indicate that there were over 500 volumes.

The only bookseller in the place during the same period, had volumes printed for him for sale at his shop, and probably such as were in paying demand. All that the writer has been able to find were small, and on religious subjects. The only representatives of the modern legion of periodicals were Almanacs. A similar result follows examination of the lists of publications affixed by other early booksellers to works that they issued. A large proportion are on religious subjects, and as even the best of dealers must regard the demands of customers, we can but infer that books of this class were those that were chiefly wanted.

At the close of the Provincial period there was a very exceptional opportunity to show what a large town contained. Charlestown was burned, and the inhabitants were asked to make statements of their losses. Everyone, apparently, complied, and enumerated everything. Much had been removed and saved, but much was destroyed. In the four hundred and eighty-four statements made, about one in ten included books. As several persons mention a Bible, and as this was a volume that might be considered the most valued, we may infer that there was less attention to removal of books than of some other articles, as, for instance, silver, which must have been held in considerable amount, but which appears slightly in the losses. Neither by description nor values is there evidence that anything to be called a library was destroyed. The valuations range from Elizabeth Johnson's "one Booke, 3 s," to Elizabeth Lemmon's "1 Large Bible and sundry Books, £20, old tenor." By far the largest list is that of Thaddeus Mason, sixty-four volumes, about one-third of them religious, ten classics, four that might be called English Literature, and on Anatomy, Gazetteer, Lexicon, Travels, Rhetoric and Witchcraft, one each. Only two volumes seem to be by American authors. Of more value and present interest, it

is probable, were, in addition, "200 Pamphlets * * great Part of 'em valuable," and "Newspapers for 40 years past," the whole then called worth 8 £. 7 s. 4 d.

Apart from this list, few titles are given, and there is little or no trace of general English Literature. There are John Chadwick's "Harvey's Meditations" (5 s. 4 d.), Richard Cary's "Trammels Books in the Garrot," Abigail Stevens's "large Master Book with Cuts" (15 s.), Jas. Bradish Jr.'s "grate Bible" (12 s.), the widow Eeddey's "large bibel," Capt. John Hancock's "Grat Bible," Nicholas Hopping's 2 "Bibls," Nathaniel Rand's "Larg bibill," and Abigail Williams's "Soom Quantay of Books" (£1; 4 s.), but neither Milton nor Shakespeare. They were a free and independent people, and added some proof of the fact by their spelling.

"History" tells us that Dr. Mather's library was, at the same time, lost, but long search and waiting have failed to yield to the writer any evidence that it was. If "History" is right, our Society shows marvellous recreative power by displaying hundreds of his volumes safe and sound.

In regard to the preservation of our early literature we can hardly fail to be impressed by the limited means and disposition to that end which, until of late, existed. There were few private libraries of any great size or scope, and few collectors; differing from England, America had few family homes permanent through generations where collections would, or could, be kept; public libraries hardly existed, collegiate do not appear to have been large or comprehensive, and all were insecurely lodged. Here and there a minister or a layman saved what he, in a small way, gathered. Vague ideas have been held that "old families" had collections, but these seem to have been exceptions. Thoughtless disregard, junk dealers, and women who "clear up things," seem to have been more numerous and active. These, and fires, and removals of many substantial people near the beginning of the Revolution, largely

account for the later rarity of our earlier books, pamphlets and engravings. One of the books or papers that we wish we could read, would contain a detailed story of how, when and where the contents of Mr. Brinley's library were obtained. It was an extraordinary proof of wide and successful search for Americana, and never again can any man show such results.

Through all the period before the Revolution, there appears to have been a Colonial or Provincial literary centre, and at the same place that has been called a literary centre in more recent times, although there have been scoffs at the designation so applied. It may not be possible to be exact to a unit, but we can get certain rather close results. Of poetic works written and printed in British America before 1775, the writer makes out a list of one hundred and twenty-two, of which seventy-nine, or about two-thirds, hail from Boston, while of elegiac poetry, seven-eighths have the same origin and imprint. Of History published during the first eighty years of the American Press even a larger than the latter proportion was Bostonian.

In the art of bookmaking, apart from authorship, the earlier generations in our country could but show their limited resources and skill—scanty and poor indeed if we compare the products with those of only the first printers of Germany, Italy, or even England. In the two former countries the art of printing leaped at once near to perfection, proved by an array of books that, at our best, we have hardly rivalled. Bibles, Classics, Fathers of the Church, Missals, the great poets of the age of revived learning, and many a subject, indeed, were given to the world by the older countries in a style and with a profusion here unknown. Magnificent as were these achievements abroad, they were by no means always due to princely munificence, or public encouragement, but often to the struggles of real and ill-requited genius or enterprise. So

also, to some extent, it may have been with our pioneer authors and printers.

Although the products of our Early Press do not mark the World's Revival of Learning, and a rebirth of civilization, they are monuments of the coming and of the growth of a people already advanced in shaping human history.

Neglected often, at times despised, these simple monuments of a new world's life, have, in latter times, found appreciation such as exists for few others in literature. The rare and scattered remnants will now be kept as they deserve — the precious heirlooms of a continental race. Happy the service and the privilege of those whose lot it is to help save them! Woe to man or woman who harms or who destroys them!

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