

## *Bibliotheca Furliana* Revisited

**B**IBLIOTHECA FURLIANA, the catalogue of the great library of Benjamin Furly,<sup>1</sup> the Quaker bibliophile and merchant of Rotterdam, is an important document of the early eighteenth century. More than fifty years ago *The Journal of the Friends' Historical Society* (vol. 6, 1909, p. 105) observed that this "most interesting catalogue of books and curiosities, published in 1714, deserves more attention than it has at present received." But since that time, except for random references, only two writers have commented extensively on it. In 1914, Charles R. Simpson wrote two notes, chiefly recapitulations of material from J. F. Sachse's monograph of 1895.<sup>2</sup> In 1941, William I. Hull's valuable book, *Benjamin Furly and Quakerism in Rotterdam* appeared; it contains a biography of Furly and a detailed description but no evaluation of the catalogue.<sup>3</sup> Under these conditions it seems that a visit and an appraisal are overdue.

During his long life in Holland, Furly was in the centre of many of the social, religious, cultural and philosophical controversies which swirled through that country during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. His friends, as diverse as his interests, included such men as George Fox and William Penn; John Locke and the Third Earl of

<sup>1</sup> He was born in Colchester, England, 1636. As a young man he came to Rotterdam where he prospered as a merchant. He died in March, 1714. For genealogy, see *Furly of Colchester*, London, 1899.

<sup>2</sup> "Benjamin Furly, Quaker Merchant, and his Statesmen Friends," *The Journal of the Friends' Historical Society*, vol. XI, 1914, pp. 62-70, and "Benjamin Furly and his Library," *op. cit.*, pp. 70-77. Cf. "Benjamin Furly, 'An English Merchant at Rotterdam,' who Promoted the First German Emigration to America," Julius Friedrich Sachse, reprinted from *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, October, 1895. Philadelphia (U.S.A.), 1895.

<sup>3</sup> William I. Hull, *Benjamin Furly and Quakerism in Rotterdam*, Swarthmore College Monograph in Quaker History, Number Five, Lancaster, Pennsylvania (U.S.A.), 1941. The catalogue described here is the unique copy in the British Museum which has interleaves noting each transaction with price and name of buyer. Some marginalia and MS. notes point to Benjoham, Benjamin Furly's oldest son, as recorder of the sale. There are two other extant copies, one at Haverford College (U.S.A.), the other in the Friends' Reference Library, London. I have not seen the former; the latter contains no interleaves or marginalia. [A similar copy in the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, has the armorial bookplate of Charles Joseph Harford, F.A.S., and has passed through the hands of William George's Sons, the Bristol booksellers. *Ed.*]

Shaftesbury; Willem Sewell and Philip van Limborch; Jean LeClerc and Pierre Bayle. Although the holdings in the library stemmed directly from Furly's own interest in books and manuscripts, these intellectual leaders provided much aid and stimulation. As a result, the library is not only a substantial monument to its founder but also a good barometer of the intellectual climate of that time.

There is no evidence that Furly had printed a catalogue during his life; *Bibliotheca Furliana* must be considered the only available index of its contents. A dispersal of the library through sale was the occasion for its printing in October, 1714, only six months after Furly's death. With nothing tangible to account for such a hurried sale, a reasonable conjecture is that Furly himself had wished for such a procedure and had probably helped prepare the catalogue. It would seem to have been an almost impossible task to have produced such an accurate listing of more than 4,400 volumes and to have had it published in such a short time.

Identity of the compiler or compilers is unknown. The fact that some items are described in Dutch, some in Latin and others in English suggests that it was possibly the work of a member of the multilingual society in which Furly lived. Internal evidence clearly shows that it was prepared by someone closely identified for a long time with both Furly and the library. In a description of an "Old Almanack" there is this revealing comment: ". . . this Almanack has at least been ever since the Year 1664 . . . in the Possession of *Benjamin Furly*, as he has himself attested in it . . ." Such slight evidence does not solve the problem but it does offer a clue which might help to identify the compiler.

The worth of *Bibliotheca Furliana* lies in what additional information it yields about Furly himself, and in what evidence it provides of the intellectual forces that moved from England into Holland. The letters of John Locke, who lived in Furly's house for three years, indicate that he was a genial, kindly and lively patriarch. But Z. C. von Uffenbach's description in *Merkwürdige Reisen Durch Niedersachsen Holland und Engelland* of Furly as an old man is quite different.

In his personal appearance Benjamin Furly is . . . an old, tall, lean, serious man who, although it was already cold and chilly, went about in a thin, threadbare gray coat; around his head he wore a band

of black velvet, as he stated for the purpose of keeping his hairs from coming in his face when writing.<sup>1</sup>

An intimate glimpse into the mystical side of his character comes from the "Old Almanack" notation already partially quoted. The full description reads:

An Old Almanack, in which the Gentleman, who was Owner of it, has noted a very remarkable Prophecy, which Serls a say weaver in St. Edmunds Bury had found written by an invisible Hand upon the inside of his Kettle, while hanging over the Fire; to wit,

Wo to England for Poysoning of *Charles the second*, Cardinal yonder standeth MOLECH twenty Nations with him, Englands Misery cometh.

This is the more remarkable, because this Almanack has at least been ever since the Year 1664 (being so many Years before King *Charles* his Death) in the Possession of *Benjamin Furly*, as he has himself attested in it; with many more particulars about this Prophecy.<sup>2</sup>

Of greater importance, *Bibliotheca Furliana* shows where Furly's chief intellectual interests lay. The catalogue lists 2,177 volumes dealing with biblical and theological topics; 586, with secular history; 377, with philosophy; and 250, with Church history. These volumes comprise more than half of the collection.

By far the largest number of theological volumes were by English writers. These works went well back before Furly's topical interest and included among others John White's *Way of the true Church* (1612), *A Defcense of the Way of the true Church against A.D. his Reply* (1614), Samuel Smith's  *Davids Blessed-Man, or Exposition upon the first Psalm* (1629), William Bloy's *Meditations upon the XLII Psalme* (1632) and Doctor Syb's *Commentary on the fourth, fifth, and sixth Chapters of the Canticles* (1639). However, there were many theological tracts, pamphlets and books of a more contemporary nature leading to a realization of how deeply involved Furly was in having as full information as possible about theological thought in England in his own day. His desire to know about every shade of thought was encyclopedic. For example, the library had copies of Henry More's *Exposition of the Prophet Daniel* (1681), John Cotton's *Commentary upon the first Epistle General of John* (1658) and

<sup>1</sup> See Sachse's translation, *op. cit.*, p. 21. See Hull, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> *Bibliotheca Furliana*, Misc. Anglici. Number 321, p. 312.

the anonymous *Answer to Several Remarks upon D. Henry More his Exposition, of the Apocalypse and Daniel &c.* (1684). It also contained expository works by Isaac Penington, John Lightfoot, Gilbert Burnet, Richard Baxter and John Tillotson.

In addition to his concern with theological apologists and polemicists, there is strong evidence of his interest in England's achievements in science as may be noted by the full reports of the transactions of the Royal Society; and, in secular thought, by the works of Locke, Filmer, Hobbes and More. Now must be added another dimension. It is refreshing and exciting to find a veritable hoard of English literary works. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, Donne and Herbert represent a spectrum of earlier writers; but to this roster may be added a long list of contemporary English writers hardly, if at all, associated with religious matters or even yet fully recognized. There are works by Jonathan Swift, John Dryden and, surprisingly enough, by a large group of Restoration dramatists which includes Otway, Steele, Addison, Congreve, Wycherley, Cibber, Southerne, Etherege and Farquhar.

Had the library been isolated from the world in which Furly lived, one might not attach great importance to the kinds of books it held. But, it was familiar to some of the most influential men of his time and he took their counsel in shaping it. Therefore, it attains importance as an intermediary and gives strong clues about the orientation of thinking which was current in the *République des Lettres*, a title to which Holland had a just claim. It may be concluded from a study of the catalogue of the library that among the intellectuals from England, France and Holland who congregated in Amsterdam and Rotterdam more interest was evoked in what was being thought across the Channel than what was being thought and written on the Continent. And, there emerges the sort of evidence which supports the need for further investigation of Anglo-Dutch intellectual currents during this period.

Thus, *Bibliotheca Furliana* offers much to students and scholars of Anglo-Dutch cross-currents in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The period in which Furly lived was rich and vital to a flourishing Europe. His catalogue is well worth repeated visits for, surely, it is capable of giving



up even more information than has been herein explored and indicated. It is not too sanguine to think that *Bibliotheca Furliana* will become a much more important and valuable document than has heretofore been suspected; it surely deserves more attention than it has had in the last half century.

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