

Catalogue Review

By James Fergusson

CHRISTMAS is the bumper season for the new book trade – both for real shops and mail order. Amazon provocatively reported that on Christmas Day, a keen shopping day in cyberspace, for the first time they sold more e-books than physical books. Will anyone ever buy a secondhand book again?

Antiquarian booksellers cheerfully maintain the pretence – or still aspire to the hope – that old books make obvious Christmas presents. But it seems unlikely in the large. Who is going to give their beloved a set of Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-9), however handsomely bound, at \$20,000? Heritage Book Shop (8687 Melrose Avenue, Ste M46, Los Angeles, California 90069, USA: 001 310-659 3674) had one in their lush 'Holiday 2009 Catalogue', a lavishly illustrated 144-item, 84-page packet of seasonal goodies. Even the most enthusiastic law student would be a bit flummoxed to find four volumes of Blackstone in her Christmas pile. This catalogue is, rather, for collectors to choose themselves presents – not for bewildered parents seeking that unusual, even unique, gift. Heritage exploited the occasion, properly, to show off their wares, to put their flashiest foot forward. Here were first editions of Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755), \$27,500, Boswell's *Johnson* (1791), \$11,000, Robert Louis Stevenson's first book (*The Pentland Risting*, 1866), \$5,000, *The Story of Little Black Sambo* (1899), \$12,500, and *The Great Gatsby* (1925) in dustwrapper, 'one of the rarest' dustwrappers of the 20th century, \$100,000. Here were the Kelmscott Chaucer (1896), \$87,500, and the Limited Editions Club *Ulysses* (1935) signed by Joyce and Matisse, \$25,000. By any standards they build a dresy shop window.

A very different approach was adopted by Jarndyce Rare Books (46 Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3PA: 020-7631 4220), clxxv, 'The Museum: books for presents'. Brian Lake of Jarndyce, co-author

of *Bizarre Books*, has an eye for book titles: indeed, Jarndyce had a special offer on their greetings cards (book covers including *How to be Happy Though Married*, *The New Radiation Cookery Book*, *How to Abandon Ship* and *Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun*). But it is his son, Ed Nassau Lake, who takes the reins for this 526-item gallop. 'I thought that I would try something new,' he writes:

The first two sections, Miscellany and Literature, represent the more traditional Jarndyce 'Museum' catalogue. The remaining sections aim to make it easy to find a suitable gift for anyone and any occasion. What is their name? Where do they come from? What occasion are they celebrating? What is their occupation? What are their interests and pastimes? By categorizing our stock in a different way, I hope that we can make antiquarian books more accessible and appealing to both our current customers and a younger generation.

If only it were that easy. But Lake junior's method is creatively alluring. Colour photographs advertise such irresistible periodicals as *Armchair Science* for April 1929 ('We Eat bad Cheese why not Bad Meat?'), £25, and, for a mere £10 more, *Illustrated Sun Bathing News* for Spring 1935 ('Nudism Around the World', 'What Shall We Wear'). Johnson's *Dictionary* appears here, too, but in the first octavo edition (1756), £750, between *The Boy's Own Book* (1855), £45, and a shorthand manual, Thomas Gurney's *Brachygraphy* (1778), £125. John Maddison Morton's *How Stout You're Getting!* (?1855), 'a farce, in one act', might be an awkward present to get away with, but at £10 you can't deny its possibilities. Seamus Heaney's *Valedictory Verses: composed for the Carysfort Graduation Exercises, 1988*, may seem a bit specialized but it is 'unrecorded in the BL and Copac', £450.

'Pastimes & Sport' – the first of Jarndyce's innovative sections – takes in Camping, Cards, Do-It-Yourself, Food, Football and Railways. Alfred Pink's *Gardening for* ►

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the Million (1904), £35, carries on its cover a size-zero male model waving a rake, and, for the same price, *Fortune-Telling by Cards* (1906) – by P.R.S. Foli, i.e. Sir Arthur Pearson Bt, founder of the Fresh Air Fund – boasts a mad Druid emerging from tree-rings. Under ‘Occupations’ (I wonder how one deploys this, present-wise – surely present-giving isn’t like Careers Advice?), *How to Finance a Business* (1912), priced at £65 and subtitled ‘Where and How to Get Funds ... 202 proved methods of raising capital and using credit’, looks generally promising for these difficult times, and Sydney Gompertz Gamble’s *A Practical Treatise on Outbreaks of Fire* (1942), £65, might be of interest to others than just fire-fighters, but to whom does one give H.D. Neate’s *How to Manage a Butchering Business* (1890), £40? Surely not to one’s turkey supplier? F.L. Calder and E.E. Mann’s *Elementary Laundry Work* (1892, cover of a uniformed maid with flat-iron), £30, might be thought a trifle sexist; A.G.H. Thatcher’s unadorned green cloth *Scaffolding: a treatise on the design and erection of scaffolds, gantries and stagings* (1907), £85, looks a safer bi-gender modern option. Marcus Liston’s *How to Win a Lover: or, Matrimony Made Easy* (c1852) will alas, at £45, have been snapped up at once.

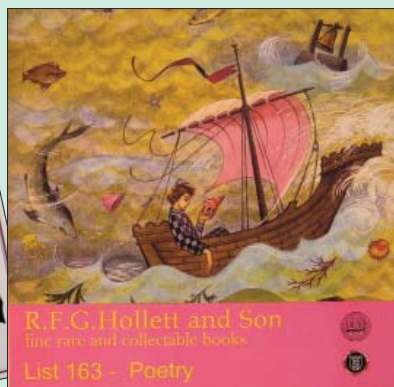
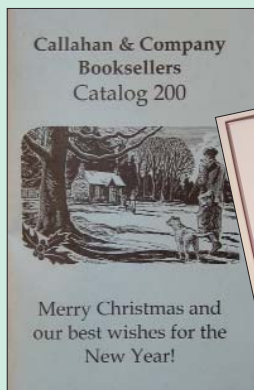
Most hopeful, perhaps, is Ed Nassau Lake’s name section, all the way from *Good Old Anna* (by Marie Belloc Lowndes, 1915) and *Baby Bob* (by Evelyn Whitaker, 1908) to *Sweet Emma* (by Miss Broderick, n.d.), *The Mating of Lydia* (by Mrs Humphry

Ward, 1913), *Sheila* (by Annie S. Swan, c1898), *Sue* (by L.T. Meade, 1906) and *Terence* (by Bithia May Croker, 1899) – each £35. But, if all else failed, you could fall back on the virtual away-break and order *Six Months Among the Palm Groves, Coral Reefs, and Volcanoes of the Sandwich Islands* (by Isabella L. Bird, 1882). At £90, it is cheaper than flying there.

Ken Spelman Rare Books (70 Mickle-gate, York YO1 6LF: 01904-624414), 67, ‘A Winter Miscellany of Recent Acquisitions’, is strong, as ever, on Italy and the Grand Tour, but is notable for a specifically English item – *A Catalogue of the Antiquities, Houses, Parks, Plantations, Scenes, and Situations in England and Wales, arranged according to the alphabetical order of the several counties* (1773) inscribed by Lord Strafford, ‘writ by Mr Grey [i.e. Thomas Gray] given me by Mr [William] Mason. 1773’. An edition of 100 copies was privately printed for Mason and ‘We can trace no record of another copy with a presentation inscription’. Albeit this is not, strictly speaking, a presentation but an ownership inscription, this is an attractive copy, bound with Pater-son’s *Roads* (1772) and bearing Strafford’s manuscript notes, priced at £2,600. Another association copy, more recent but relating to the same period, is John Hayes’s own set of his two-volume *The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough* (1970),

together with the bound typescript copy of his PhD thesis [for the Courtauld] *The Landscape Paintings of Thomas Gainsborough*,

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532pp. 1962. This has been very heavily annotated by him over the next ten years or so.

Hayes, who died in 2005, was Sir Roy Strong's successor as Director of the National Portrait Gallery. Spelman price his *magnum opus* at £130.

Congratulations to Callahan & Company (PO Box 505, Peterborough, New Hampshire 03458, USA: 001 603-924 3726) on a 200th catalogue, devoted to shooting and fishing. After 34 years in business, Ken Callahan writes, 'I find it particularly gratifying that a very old fashioned way of doing business – the bookseller's catalogue – still works. We will continue,' he says, 'to do business the old fashioned way, catalogue by catalogue.'

Among other specialist booksellers' catalogues received in the month were:

Children's: Robin Greer (The Old Chapel, Front Street, Chedzoy, Somerset TA7 8RE: 01278-425682), 138. **Fantasy:** Fantastic Literature (Simon & Laraine Gosden, 35 The Ramparts, Rayleigh, Essex SS6 8PY: 01268-747564), A10. **History:** A.P. & R. Baker (The Laigh House, Church Lane, Wigtown, Newton Stewart DG8 9HT: 01988-403348), 301, 'Archaeology & History'. **Humour:** R.F.G. Hollett and Son (6

Finkle Street, Sedbergh, Cumbria LA10 5BZ: 01539-620298), List 166, 'Humour, Cartoon & Caricature'.

Mining: R.F.G. Hollett and Son (above), List 165, 'Mines and Caves'. **Medicine:** Dr Bernard Dixon and Kath Adams (130 Cornwall Road, Ruislip Manor, Middlesex HA4 6AW: 01895-632390), 20, 'Science and Medicine'. **Modern First Editions:** Julian Nangle (16 Franklin Place, Chichester PO19 1BL: 01243-781342), 59, announcing his imminent return to Dorchester and including William Golding's *The Spire* inscribed to Michael Ayrtton, £300.

Poetry: R.F.G. Hollett and Son (above), List 163, running to an impressive 1,035 items and including W.E. Henley's first book, *A Book of Verses* (1889), inscribed to Coventry Patmore and with the bookplate of John Drinkwater, £350, and books from the collections of Neil Curry and Douglas Grant. **Socialism:** Left on the Shelf (Yard 91, Highgate, Kendal LA9 4ED: 01539-729599), 55. **Women:** Fortune Green Books (74 Fortune Green Road, London NW6 1DS: 020-7435 7545), 89, 'History (general, with a radical bias), Women's History, 19th & Early 20th Century Women's Writing'. ■

Catalogues for review should be sent to:
James Fergusson, 39 Melrose Gardens, London W6 7RN
E-mail for correspondence: jamesfergusson@btinternet.com

The contents of some of these catalogues can be viewed online at www.sheppardsconfidential.com