

Catalogue Review

By James Fergusson

A.J.A. SYMONS'S quest for Baron Corvo began, he said, with a visit to an antiquarian bookseller, Christopher Millard, at The Bungalow, 8 Abercorn Place, London NW8. How many more Corvines have started their quest in old bookshops? Donald Weeks, perhaps the 20th century's most pertinacious Corvo collector, was alerted to Frederick William Rolfe, 'Baron Corvo', by a reading of *The Quest for Corvo*, Symons's strangely fascinating 'experiment in biography' published when Weeks was 13, but was sustained in his pursuit by antiquarian booksellers – notably Bertram Rota, George Sims, A.T. ('Dusty') Miller of Frank Hollings, Cecil Woolf and Victor Hall. To these five, the roll-call in Weeks's *Book Collector* obituary, might be added that of his obituarist, Timothy d'Arch Smith, who relates that he procured for Weeks the manuscript of Corvo's *The Bull Against the Enemy of the Anglican Race*, once in the collection of A.J.A. Symons.

Donald Weeks, author of a 1971 biography, *Corvo*, and editor of numerous pamphlets of Corvo-ana, died almost as mysteriously as Fr. Rolfe himself. Rolfe was found dead in bed in Venice in 1913, a destitute roué of 53. His brother dared not claim his estate for fear of taking on its debts. Weeks, an anglophile from Detroit, died in North Middlesex Hospital, Edmonton, in 2003, but, as he had filed no details of next of kin, it took more than three months for anyone he knew to discover. He was classified as a 'missing person' and Bo Maggs, who wrote his obituary for *The Independent*, was told that his landlord would probably dump, or have dumped, his belongings. Where on earth, wondered Bo Maggs, was his Corvo collection?

His Corvo collection, or as much of it as has been recovered, is now, thanks to the intervention of Maggs Bros and the generosity of Fay and Geoffrey Elliott, safe

in the Brotherton Library at Leeds University – putting the Brotherton on a par with the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, who bought Rabbi Bertram Korn's Corvo collection from Cecil Woolf in 1964, and Columbia University Library, the repository of the 'Martyr Worthy Collection' of David Roth, acquired in 1984-85. The Elliotts have already funded, also through Maggs, the purchase of Alan Clodd's 1890s holdings to add to the collection of Wilde, Beardsley and others that they donated to the Brotherton in 2002; a star item in that great gift was the manuscript that they had bought from Maggs in 1987 of Corvo's *Don Tarquino*, sometime in Weeks's collection. To commemorate what survived of the Weeks amassment, Maggs have published a special, 299-item catalogue, 'Baron Corvo: from the collection of Donald Weeks', produced with Any Amount of Books and available from Maggs Bros (50 Berkeley Square, London W1J 5BA: 020-7493 7160) in an edition of 126 copies only for £20. Timothy d'Arch Smith is the cataloguer.

The catalogue itself is frankly intimidating, from the naked gun on the cover (Rolfe's British Bulldog .45 revolver smuggled back to England by Weeks and, alas, lost) to a layout so austere and unleaded as to be almost unreadable. But it repays attention and will, for those few but unstoppable Corvo questers, become a necessary collector's item. D'Arch Smith has a way with a phrase and is a virtuoso of droll learning. He makes the catalogue as much a pendant, with notes, to his obituary for *The Book Collector* as a companion to Symons's *Quest*, in which latter capacity it is quite invaluable. Symons's 'experiment' involved interviewing his witnesses one by one, and quoting from them at length. Here are original testimonies from many of his protagonists and books inscribed to them. Letters to Symons from Max Beerbohm, E.F. Benson, ►

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R.M. Dawkins, Norman Douglas, Sholto Douglas, Kenneth Grahame, Trevor Haddon, Charles Kains-Jackson, Vincent O'Sullivan, Harry Pirie-Gordon, Canon Lonsdale Ragg and Grant Richards. In *Stories Told Me* Grant Richards has erased his own name from Rolfe's inscription. Charles Kains-Jackson's copy of *In His Own Image* has a photograph of Rolfe's painting *The Bathers* laid in, Shane Leslie's has an 1898 news-cutting (cf *Quest*, chapter 3) from the Aberdeen *Evening Gazette*, Sir Harry Luke's has a sheet of Greek text (unidentified by d'Arch Smith) in Rolfe's hand. Luke's copy of *Chronicles of the House of Borgia*, inscribed by Rolfe "An insult to the public intelligence." Author', is 'in very distressed condition. It appears to have been almost bent in half.' In his copy of *Hadrian the Seventh* Luke, whose son Peter made the play of the book, writes a key to the clerical characters. John Gambрил Nicholson inscribes *Don Tarquinio* to Leonard Green. *The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole* is in the copy of Ivy van Someren, Rolfe's hostess in Venice who was appalled by his writing it. Harry Pirie-Gordon's *Innocent the Great*, which Rolfe claimed to have edited, is present in the copy of R.M. Dawkins, who was responsible for taking Rolfe to Venice in the first place.

Here too, patiently gathered by Weeks, are petulant letters from Rolfe to Fr Sidney de Vere Beauclerk and Dr Ernest van Someren, even the original regalia of the preposterous Order of Sanctissima Sophia. More obscure, but with arcane allure, is *The Weird of the Wanderer* with letters to Symons from Mary Butts and to Pirie-Gordon from Rider Haggard. There are letters to Christopher Millard from Shane Leslie and John Gambрил Nicholson, and to Weeks from Pietro Annigoni, John Betjeman, d'Arch Smith himself (76 pieces), Leonard Green (75), Victor Hall (c100), Vyvyan Holland, Shane Leslie (21), Harry Pirie-Gordon (26), John Cowper Powys, David Roth (c59), Fr Brocard Sewell (27), Julian Symons (31), Ernest van Someren (14), Evelyn Waugh and Cecil Woolf (c135). And A.J.A. Symons's *Frederick Baron Corvo*, the paper (given to the Sette of Odd Volumes in 1927) that so annoyed Rolfe's brother Herbert, has a list by numbered copy of all 199 recipients.

'Among the privileges of the biographer,' wrote Symons in *The Quest for Corvo*,

is an assumption of omniscience in respect of his subject. And, when sufficient material is available, something very near full knowledge is possible. The evidence of a man's letters, of his contemporaries, his work, and the indisputable facts of his life, do sometimes make it possible, when the material has been collated and sifted, to write with certainty. In the present study a different method has been employed ... Truth takes many forms; and the dramatic alternation of light and dark in which my inquiries discovered Baron Corvo has, I am convinced, more value as verity than any one man's account. I have tried, accordingly, to be the advocate for neither side, but rather the judge impartially bringing out all aspects of the case for the benefit of the jury.

Was Rolfe mad, or was he a genius? The extraordinary thing, in 2009, is that the jury is still out.

A highlight of the Antiquarian Book Fair at Olympia last month was the flamboyant display of Bloomsbury material on the stand of Peter Harrington (100 Fulham Road, London SW3 6HS: 020-7591 0220). The 306-item catalogue related to this, 64, 'The Hogarth Press and the Bloomsbury Group', is one of the most impressive Bloomsbury catalogues ever produced. Glenn Horowitz has produced more elegant ones, but none as boldly self-confident. Bloomsbury is often derided; the latest Bloomsbury biography, Anne Chisholm's judicious and sympathetic *Frances Partridge* published in April, was treated by some reviewers with poised world-weariness. Yet the rare-book market in Bloomsbury writers, especially Virginia Woolf, has never been more buoyant. *Two Stories* (1917), the first Hogarth Press book, a collaboration between Virginia and Leonard Woolf and printed by them both, is priced at £22,500, as is Virginia's *Kew Gardens* (150 copies bound in Omega Workshop wallpaper, 1919) and, in dustwrapper, *Jacob's Room* (1922). *Mrs Dalway* (1925) in dustwrapper is £20,000, *To the Lighthouse* (1927) in dustwrapper £18,000, *A Room of One's Own* (1929) in dustwrapper £3,500, and, in a 'unique and entirely unrecorded' dustwrapper hand-painted by Vanessa Bell, £10,000, while the very scarce *The Roger Fry Memorial Exhibition: an address* (1935) is £12,500. Sydney Waterlow's subscriber's copy of *Jacob's Room* signed by the author is £32,500, Nelly Cecil's *The Common Reader* (both series, 1925-32), the second volume inscribed to her by the author, both in

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supplied dustwrappers, £15,000, *Mrs Dalloway* inscribed to Dadie Rylands £60,000, *To the Lighthouse* inscribed to Lady Sackville and with her marginal pencillings £65,000, *A Room of One's Own* in supplied dustwrapper and inscribed to Helen Anrep £25,000, and *The Waves* (1931) inscribed to William Maxwell, the printer at the Hogarth Press, £27,500. That's £356,500-worth of Virginia Woolf already – not counting £75,000 for eight volumes of her pocket engagement diaries, 1930-41.

Harrington's 'Bloomsbury Group' may be too wide-reaching for some purists, embracing writers such as Walter de la Mare, John Masefield and Charles Morgan, perhaps because they inscribe to Lady Ottoline Morrell, but there are many prizes. Besides T.S. Eliot's Hogarth Press *Poems* (1919), £10,000, and *The Waste Land* (1923), £3,750, is to be found the 1928 Dryden *Of Dramatic Poesie* inscribed by Eliot, author of the prefatory 'Dialogue on Poetic Drama', to Virginia Woolf, £67,500. J.M. Keynes inscribes *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919) and its 'sequel', *A Revision of the Treaty* (1922), to Ottoline Morrell, £18,750, Aldous Huxley his first book, *The Burning Wheel* (1916), to Evan Morgan (future Viscount Tredegar), £2,500, Clive Bell *Ad Familiares* (1917) to Arthur Waley, £2,250, Lytton Strachey a 1912 Shakespeare Head Press *Shakespeare's Songs* as a present to Ottoline Morrell, Christmas 1920 (albeit she was away in Rome), £2,500. The illustrations are tempting and the associations poignant; the prices set a new benchmark.

Does anybody still read *The Ingoldsby Legends*? I have in front of me my grandfather's copy of the 'Albion Edition', bought in Weymouth in 1905:

The Cardinal rose with a dignified look,
 He call'd for his candle, his bell, and his book!
 In holy anger, and pious grief,
 He solemnly cursed that rascally thief!
 He cursed him at board, he cursed him
 in bed;
 From the sole of his foot to the crown of
 his head;
 He cursed him in sleeping, that every
 night
 He should dream of the devil, and wake
 in a fright;
 He cursed him in eating, he cursed him
 in drinking,
 He cursed him in coughing, in sneezing,
 in winking;



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He cursed him in sitting, in standing, in lying;
 He cursed him in walking, in riding, in flying,
 He cursed him in living, he cursed him dying! —

Never was heard such a terrible curse!!

But what gave rise To no little surprise,
 Nobody seem'd one penny the worse!

According to Rosemary Scott, in her *ODNB* notice for Richard Harris Barham ('Thomas Ingoldsby'), 'The People's Edition of 1881 [published at sixpence, 36 years after the author's death] had a printing of 100,000, of which 60,513 sold on publication day.' By the time my grandfather invested in his copy, a fancy edition in red leather with gold patterned endpapers and every edge gilt, price 6s 6d, the book had sold some half a million copies in all since the three series of *Legends* were gathered together in 1840-47.

The life of R.H. Barham was not without colour. A minor canon of St Paul's and founder member of the Garrick Club, he was the illegitimate son of a Kent alderman; Richard Bentley, later his publisher, was at school with him; moving to London so enhanced his freelance opportunities that in 1823 he was even asked to edit the *London Chronicle*. He was in the literary swim and his conversation was said to rival that of his friend and colleague at St Paul's Sydney Smith. Yet the only biography to have appeared in 164 years, apart from a monograph by William G. Lane published by the University of Missouri Press in 1967, is that by his son Richard Harris Dalton Barham, also a clergyman, *The Life and Letters of the Rev. Richard Harris Barham, author of The Ingoldsby Legends* (1870, with another edition in 1880).

Charles Cox (River House, Treglasta, Launceston, Cornwall PL15 8PY; 01840-261464), 59, offers — along with such satisfying troves as a collection of 'memorabilia' from The Pines including Swinburne's napkin ring, £350, and Hodgson's catalogue of the 1938 sale of Thomas Hardy's library, marked up by Frederick B. Adams, with four dependent booksellers' catalogues (Maggs Bros 664, First Edition Bookshop 33, Frank Hollings 212 and Elkin Mathews 77, 1938-39), £165 — a key document in the history of the Rev R.H. Barham that deserves to have been snapped up by any self-respecting archive of 19th-century literature. At a mere £400

is to be found Barham's son's own interleaved copy of the biography, not only bearing numerous additional notes and corrections, but also including an autograph draft of the last two verses of 'As I Laye a-Thinkynge', penned within days of Barham's death:

As I laye a-thynkyng, the golden sun was
 sinking,
 O merrie sang that Birde as it glitter'd on
 her breast

With a thousand gorgeuous dyes
 While soaring to the skies,
 'Mid the stars she seem'd to rise,
 As to her nest;

As I laye a-thynkyng, her meaning was
 exprest:—

'Follow, follow me away,
 It boots not to delay,' —
 'Twas so she seem'd to saye,
 'HERE IS REST!'

The biography by Barham *files* was anecdotal. Richard Garnett, writing Barham's notice in the original *DNB*, described it as 'a book abounding in excellent stories, excellently told'. Harold Child, however, paying a(n anonymous) centenary tribute to the author of *The Ingoldsby Legends* in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1945, described his biographer as 'too respectable', as 'dutiful and trivial-minded'. Perhaps he has redeemed himself posthumously. Cox reports that most of the additions were

not intended for publication, but written as a kind of private commentary on his father's life and including a wealth of personal recollection. Identities are revealed, further facts or anecdotes connected with this character or that event are recounted at length, footnotes added, allusions explained, numerous unpublished poems are transcribed. Many of these additions are extensive, covering several pages, all are informative, some highly entertaining, and taken together this mass of new material, apparently unpublished, adds very considerably to our knowledge of 'Thomas Ingoldsby' and his personal, social and literary milieu — the world of the young Dickens, of Sidney [*sic*] Smith, Theodore Hook, and the *Bentley's Miscellany* writers. To select two at random: an account of an otherwise undocumented duel fought by R.H. Barham in his youth, and an eye witness report of the meeting between Barham *père* and his publisher which decided the name of Bentley's new magazine.

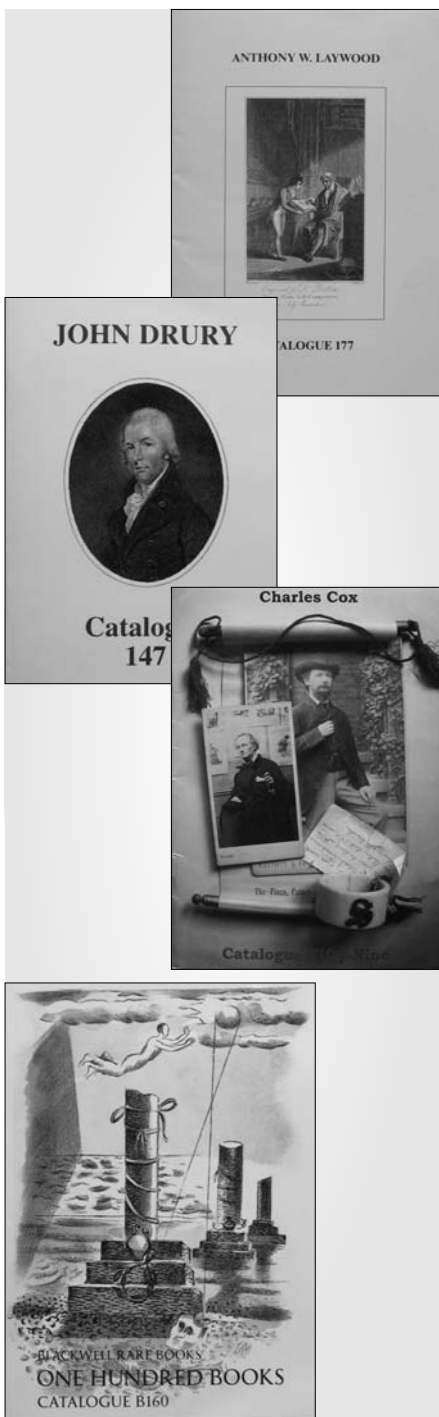
Two weeks before Harold Child wrote his disparaging remarks, 150 letters from

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Barham to Richard Bentley were sold at Hodgson's in London for £110. These now rest in the New York Public Library, which has amassed probably the most substantial batch of Barham material apart from that at the Houghton Library at Harvard, which holds a collection of Barham's incoming correspondence. Perhaps one of these two institutions has taken up the Cox challenge.

Among the month's other miscellanies, Blackwell Rare Books (48-51 Broad Street, Oxford OX1 3BQ: 01865-333555), B160, 'One Hundred Books', handsome and profusely illustrated, has two important works of Jewish polemic, *An Apology for the Honorable Nation of the Jews* (1648, but 1649), attributed to Edward Nicholas but probably by Menasseh ben Israel, and Menasseh's *Vindiciae Judaeorum* (1656), each £8,000; Lewis Carroll's first appearance, the poem 'Solitude' ('I love the stillness of the wood, / I love the music of the rill ...'—not a promising start), in a complete set of *The Train: a first-class magazine* (1856-58), £1,800; Anthony Powell's first novel, *Afternoon Men* (1931), in the Misha Black dustwrapper, £3,000; Evelyn Waugh's most famous novel, *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), 'very good' in dustwrapper, £2,250; C.S. Lewis's Durham lecture *The Abolition of Man* (1946) inscribed to A.S. Gribble and with a card thanking Mrs Gribble for 'fresh eggs', £1,800; and Philip Larkin's *High Windows* (1974) inscribed to Harry Chambers of Peterloo Poets 'in gratitude for every kindness', £1,250.

John Drury Rare Books (Strandlands, Wrabness, Manningtree, Essex CO11 2TX: 01255-886260), 147, 'Miscellaneous Books, Pamphlets, Broadsides and Manuscripts ca. 1597-1908', has Alexander Cumming's book on Lord Bute's barrel organs in the Highcliffe Castle copy of his grandson Lord Stuart de Rothesay, *A Sketch of the Properties of the Machine Organ, invented, constructed, and made by Mr. Cumming, for the Earl of Bute* (1812), 'A curious book with the ideal provenance by an extraordinary man', £3,750. Anthony W. Laywood (Kercheval House, 79 Main Street, Balderton, Newark NG24 3NN: 01636-659031), 177, offers a section of books (titles by Martial, James Thomson, Maria Edgeworth, Charles Lamb) given by Edmund Blunden to Douglas Grant, Britain's first Professor of American Literature, whose library was



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sold by Tennants Auctioneers in March; while Ash Rare Books (43 Huron Road, London SW17 8RE: 020-8672 2263), 91, ranges from a second edition of *The History of Tom Jones*, £2,000, to R. Price Williams's 1872 *Railway Map of England & Wales*, £500, from Dickens to P.G. Wodehouse.

It is more than a year since John Saumarez Smith departed from Heywood Hill (10 Curzon Street, London W1J 5HH: 020-7629 0647). The firm has issued its first catalogue of the new era in 1001 (surely an inflated figure?), 'A Selection from Stock', a celebration of the shop's strengths in the areas of the traditional country-house library (sets, architecture and design, travel and topography, natural history and gardening). There is even a section called 'Field Sports & Humour'. The books are attractive and catalogued with gusto, though not always with the blue-blood sure-footedness you might expect of a bespoke bookseller to the gentry. England's first prime minister was not Sir Horace Walpole, his son was not the Earl of Offord, nor is there any such title as the Earl of Harrowbay.

Other specialist booksellers' catalogues received included:

Art: Marlborough Rare Books (144-146 New Bond Street, London W1Y 9FD: 020-7493 6993), 212, 'Art & Illustration', with 14 sketchbooks by Henry William Burgess, 1820-28, £4,500, and 19 drawings by Walter Crane for the 1893 *Year Book of the Scottish Widows' Fund*, £12,000. **English Literature:** James Hawkes (Flat One, 63 East Dulwich Road, London SE22 9AP: 020-8299 2995), 25, 'Scholarly English Literature & Related Subjects', serious and useful, and, at £950, containing Charles Jeremiah Wells's 'very scarce' scriptural drama, a textbook for the Pre-Raphaelites (and reprinted by them) half a century later, *Joseph and His Brethren* (by 'H.L. Howard', 1824), inscribed by the author, a friend and later enemy of John Keats and father of the man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo.

Fantasy: Nicholas Culpeper (1 Bury Water Lane, Newport, Essex CB11 3TZ: 01799-540358), Spring 2009, 'Catalogue of Part Works, Periodicals, Magazines, Occultism, Fantasy Fiction', and, described as 'my last catalogue', Spring 2009, 'Occultism, Crowleyana, Fiction, Et Cetera'—but

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'I will continue to list similar items on ebay'; John Eggeling (Claremont South, Burnley Road, Todmorden, Lancs OL14 5LH: 01706-816487), 126, 'Fiction by Minor Authors', all items well annotated and many of them fantasy; Fantastic Literature (Simon and Laraine Gosden, 35 The Ramparts, Rayleigh, Essex SS6 8PY: 01268-747564), EO9.

First Editions: Peter Ellis (18 Cecil Court, London WC2N 4HE: 020-7836 8880), 61, including Ivy Compton-Burnett's *Brothers and Sisters* (1939) inscribed to Raymond Toole Stott, £1,450, and 36 High House Press items; Tindley & Chapman (4 Cecil Court, London WC2N 4HE: 020-7240 2161), 26, featuring the first issue of *The Oxford Broom*, 1923, £750, the dedicatee's copy of Forrester Reid's *Walter de la Mare* (1929), signed by author and subject and with a letter from Reid to J.N. Hart, £285, a 'very nice' copy of Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies* (1930) in dustwrapper, £3,950, and a portrait in brown crayon of Jocelyn Brooke by Nina Hamnett, 1947, £1,250.

Heraldry: Heraldry Today (Parliament Piece, Ramsbury, Nr Marlborough, Wiltshire SN8 2QH: 01672-520617), Summer 2009, heraldry, family history, genealogy, the peerage. **Medicine:** Bernard Dixon and Kath Adams (130 Cornwall Road, Ruislip Manor, Middlesex HA4 6AW: 01895-632390), 19, 'Science and Medicine'. **Middle Ages:** Bennett & Kerr Books (Mill-hill Warehouse, Church Road, Steventon, Abingdon, Oxon OX13 6SW: 01235-820604), 154, Middle Ages and 'Renaissance' with a section on 'Post-medieval English Literature & its Background'.

Middle East: P and P Books (Dairy Cottage, Yarhampton, Nr Stourport, Worcestershire DY13 0UY: 01299-896996), E54, 'Egyptology and the Middle East'. **Naval and Military:** Francis Edwards (The Old Cinema, Castle Street, Hay-on-Wye, via Haverford HR3 5DF: 01497-820071), 113, 'Naval Military and History'; Schull Books (Ballydehob, Co Cork, Ireland: 00353 28-37317), Spring 2009, 'Military History'.

Philosophy: Waterfield's (52 High Street, Oxford OX1 4AS: 01865-721809), 228, 'Modern Philosophy: from the library of John Stephens', a second tranche from the private collection of the late proprietor of Waterfield's, featuring J.L. Austin's copy of H.W.B. Joseph's *Some Problems in Ethics* (1931) with his detailed notes, £175, Iris Murdoch's copy of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (1956), £250, and books culled from the libraries of C.D. Broad, Patrick Gardiner, A.C. Grayling, H.L.A. Hart, Herbert McCabe, Margaret Macdonald, Peter Nidditch, H.H. Price, D.A. Rees and Sir Geoffrey Warnock. **Polar:** Kingsbridge Books (Horswell Coach House, South Milton, Kingsbridge, Devon TQ7 3JU: 01548-561798), Summer 2009, 'Polar Exploration Books', including books from the family of Raymond Priestley.

School Fiction: Robert J. Kirkpatrick (6 Osterley Park View Road, London W7 2HH: 020-8567 4521), 56, school fiction (boys' school stories, adult school stories), public schools (studies and histories). **Scottish:** David Houston (26 North Birkbeck Road, London E11 4JG: 020-8556 9048), 10; Larry Hutchison (27 Albany Street, Dunfermline, Fife KY12 0QZ: 01383-620394), 97, including a collection of 115 menu and invitation cards relating to Aberdeen, 1893-1934, £200, a complete set of 24 Porpoise Press broadsheets, £700, and 34 George Mackay Brown items, £5-£75.

Socialism: Left on the Shelf (Yard 91, Highgate, Kendal LA9 4ED: 01539-729599), 53. **Travel:** Francis Edwards (above), 1584, 'Voyages and Travel'. **Women:** Pickering & Chatto (144-146 New Bond Street, London W1S 2TR: 020-7491 2656), 784, 'Wollstonecraft to Pankhurst', 187 items from Mary Wollstonecraft's *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787), £4,750, to a set of Panko, the 'Great [1909] Card Game, *Suffragists v. Anti-Suffragists*', £500, via Grace Darling, Florence Nightingale and Rosa Luxemburg. ■

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