BOOK REVIEWS


Two years ago, Edward T. Chase, writing in The New Republic, commented as follows on Anthony Jan's Management and Machiavelli:

Only an Englishman could have written this kind of book.... It is so refreshingly un-American, unacademic, stylish. Blithely grappling with some of the more exasperating imponderables of political economy, Mr. Jay, a Cambridge graduate, writes in the tradition of the gentleman dilettante, secure in his assumption that a classical education in history is armaments enough to confront any question.

This book admittedly has nothing whatever to do with folklore. Yet I think the above review captures rather nicely something of the spirit of the late nineteenth century folklore scholarship in England. Not that the English folklorists were graduates of Cambridge or any other university: in fact few had academic backgrounds. They were certainly "gentleman dilettantes," an amazing and varied group of inspired amateurs who managed to produce an incredibly good corpus of scholarship "after their day at the bank or publishing office," as R. M. Dorson has phrased it. Of course not all commentators have assessed their work so generously. Even Dorson has stated that this amateurism, carried on beyond its time, produced severe limitations in later English folkloristics. Yet, highly appealing is their concern for "popular curiosities" and the antiquarian. Highly appealing is their sense of an interest and excitement which perhaps only amateurs can generate. It is a scholarly tradition which must be looked upon retrospectively with admiration. And it is in the perspective of such a tradition that we see Charles Hindley.

Hindley seems not to have been in the "mainstream" of late nineteenth century folklore collecting. According to Leslie Shepard, his name does not appear in the early subscription lists of the Ballad Society; likewise one does not find any learned papers by him in the early issues of Folk-Lore or the Folk-Lore Record; his name does not appear in the various published lists of members of the Folk-Lore Society. Nevertheless, Hindley remains very much in the tradition in question, and was throughout his life a book seller, publisher and amateur antiquarian, though certainly some of his methods prefigure those of contemporary folklorists.

It is to Hindley that we owe our extensive knowledge of James Catnatch,
who might be called the last of the big time ballad mongers, and much of our knowledge of the inner workings of the nineteenth century broadside industry. Yet, ironically, we know little about Hindley himself. What we know, aside from the information we can draw from his books, is distilled in a foreword by Leslie Shepard to a reprint of Hindley's Curiosities of Street Literature, which was brought out in 1966 by John Foreman, the "Broadsheet King" (to whom Shepard makes reference in The Broadside Ballad). Hindley was born in London in 1821 in the district of Clerkenwell, a place apparently known for broadside printing, although he was to devote his later attentions chiefly to the Seven Dials district. He moved to the seaside resort of Brighton and carried on a bookselling business there until he sold out in 1864. His son, also a Charles Hindley, also became a book seller (and the publisher of the volumes under review) in London, and the elder Hindley apparently spent a good deal of time in that city. After his retirement from active business in 1864 he seems to have devoted most of his time to his books and especially pursued his interest in street literature, a subject which had been of interest to him for some time. In fact, while still in the book business he had published some pamphlets in chapbook style. He spent the rest of his life writing, editing and having a hand in the publication of a number of volumes, including an edition of the poems of John Taylor, the "water poet," and a book of ready made speeches. He attained a certain notoriety, because in 1862 he reprinted an edition of Richard Head's Life and Death of Mother Shipton, the famous book of prophecies first published in 1661. Hindley added a few prophecies of his own, which, aided by historical hindsight, seemed to give the work credence; thus his prophecy that the world was to end soon caused a panic in the countryside. He owned up to the hoax in 1873. Hindley died in Brighton twenty years later.

Aside from his researches in the broadside ballad field, several of Hindley's books seem to offer peculiar interest to folklore students. These are not field collections, but the two which are collections seem rather to have been put together by means of "snipping and pasting" clippings and various bits of "quaint" information out of numerous other sources, in the tradition of a certain type of antiquarian research. The first is Tavern Anecdotes, essentially a reprint of an 1825 work by William West, but with new editing and apparently additions by Hindley. It is an alphabetically arranged hodgepodge of factual information and bits of lore connected with pubs and drinking, including comparative statistics of national beer consumptions, etymologies of tavern names, tallies of personages commemorated by tavern names (43 Duke of York's Head's to 37 for the Duke of Wellington), information on local custom, such as the serving of pickled eggs at a pub called the Pickled Egg, in addition to epitaphs, epigrams, other snatches of supposedly traditional verse, and even a few actual anecdotes, mostly historical and pseudohistorical. The second collection is a more unified work, and one of the volumes under review, A History of the Cries of London, of which more below.

Another of the books Hindley edited, The Life of a Cheap Jack, prefigures one of the methods used by modern folklorists, for it amounts to being a life history of a "folk," of an informant, as well as an "inside" portrait of various phases of nineteenth century lower class life in England. A "cheap jack" was an itinerant hardware seller and Hindley claims to have edited the work from a manuscript received from a certain Mr. William Green, who followed this trade. The book recounts Green's travels and transactions and gives also a number of anecdotes and impressions. I was at
first a bit unsure as to how to take the book, being, as it is, spiced with Latin and French phrases and references to Byron's Don Juan, Butler's Hudibras and Dickens; and, in as much as Hindley is known to have perpetrated one hoax, and in as much as the book is dedicated to P. T. Barnum, one wonders if Hindley is trying to "fool some of the people all of the time." But of course as we have just discussed amateur erudition and I must recall that the tourist-class barber on a trans-Atlantic liner once lectured me on the differing concepts of love in Chaucer and Byron, as he was cutting my hair, so I should be the last person to doubt that a traveling iron-monger should know about such things. But it is nevertheless fair to speculate as to how extensive Hindley's editing may have been and certainly very intriguing to speculate on how he happened to come by the manuscript in the first place. The possibility that the material was collected orally is of course even more intriguing, though extremely remote. So far as I know, however, no one has investigated the background of the book.

Hindley produced four books related to broadsides and the literature of the street, in addition to an edition of the Roxburghe Ballads (he was unaware that the Ballad Society was preparing an edition). These are Curiosities of Street Literature, The Life and Times of James Catnatch, The Catnatch Press and The History of the Catnatch Press (this last being one of the volumes just reissued and under review). The Catnatch Press is principally a collection of broadside art work (Hindley was quite interested in this phase also, especially in the engravings of Thomas Bewick). Curiosities of Street Literature is a compendium of several hundred broadsides, by no means all ballads. In fact prose pieces predominate, although many have a song, a "copy of verses," tacked on. The Life and Times cannot be easily characterized, for it is part genealogy, part biography, partly an extended portrait of an industry.

These four volumes are rather intimately related to each other and to A History of the Cries of London, which, despite its concentration upon street commerce in general and its wider historical perspective, deals much with street literature; indeed much of the illustrations for it are from chapbooks and broadsheets. Not only is there a certain amount of duplication, but Hindley envisioned the volumes (though not always too clearly) as a sort of series. In the Introduction to Cries Hindley explains that the book came into existence as the result of his correspondence with the Rev. Thomas Hugo, of Stoke Newington, the devoted collector of Bewickiana, author of Bewick Woodcuts and other volumes on the artist. Hindley was chiefly interested in various Bewick cuts that had been owned by John Catnatch, father of Jemmy and founder of the family printing firm, and which were now owned by Hugo. When the Rev. Mr. Hugo died in 1876 Hindley bought parts of his collection of engravings and blocks, including Lot 405, a series depicting street cries. This set of woodcuts formed the nucleus of Hindley's book, which he fleshed out with many other illustrations and energetic researches into the literature about street cries and commerce.

Hindley begins his survey with Lydgate's earliest reference to London cries and carries on through a chain of literary and scholarly references. The book is virtually a history of English street economics. He reprints whole poems, scenes from plays and, where broadside verses have seen fit to describe the street life of which they were a part, Hindley takes delight in using them too. His style is rambling and the book is arranged rather
in bits and pieces, yet the text is delightful to read and Hindley's obvious joyful concern for visual effect is contagious.

The History of the Catnatch Press is probably of somewhat greater value to the folklorist. Hindley was working, really, at the very end of the great era of broadside printing; for although, as Shepard points out in The Broadside Ballad, we still have a minimal amount of broadside literature today, the wide popularity of broadsides did very sharply decline in the later years of the nineteenth century. Hindley himself was quite aware of this and notes that a ballad monger he interviewed told him, "I've sold me four and five quires a-day, but I don't sell above two and three dozen a-day now." So, although folklorists are forever talking about collecting "at the last moment," Hindley in fact was doing so. And it is to Hindley that we owe not merely a fine collection of late broadsides, but also a wealth of information on the operations of the last days of ballad mongering. In contrast to his other works, Hindley seems to have done a certain amount of fieldwork for his books on broadside printers and printing, although not all of it fieldwork in the sense in which we think of it today. In addition to the sort of "fieldwork" of going out into the streets and buying broadsides, and the antiquarian "fieldwork" of attending auctions and the like to obtain cuts of broadside art work, he apparently also interviewed printers and song sellers and must have been known to them. When it came to the life of the streets he was not purely a library scholar. Essentially he was trying to reconstruct recent history and the collecting of oral history was one of his methods. Jemmy Catnatch had died in 1841, long before Hindley had the leisure to carry on his investigations. Hence he was forced to piece together the recollections of the men connected to the "stationery" trade centered in the Seven Dials quarter to round out the written sources he uncovered. In the process he became acquainted with the whole broadside industry, and Shepard only regrets that Hindley did not leave us more information: for example, about John Pitts, Catnatch's chief business rival. Of course some of Hindley's fieldwork was of a rather genteel sort. In The History of the Catnatch Press he tells us in great detail how he lured John Morgan, one of Catnatch's hacks, to a London flat (occupied by one of Hindley's relations), where he proceeded to ply Morgan with whiskey and pump him for information while he himself calmly finished his breakfast. Morgan seems to have remained perpetually drunk thereafter.

The History begins with John Catnatch, who was born in Scotland in 1769, continues through his founding of the printery, and his partnership with William Davison, a chemist, although the bulk of the work is devoted to Jemmy. The historical narrative does not divide personal and financial history from printing history, so copious illustration abounds throughout the work. In fact much of the work is taken up with page after page of samples of Catnatch work. Hindley also traces the relationship of broadsides to historical events, for the broadside was often the poor man's newspaper (and often based on accounts printed in the more expensive newspapers of the time). Catnatch got plenty of mileage out of the latest murders, but also out of such important, if sensationalistic, events as the Cato Street Conspiracy and the trial of Queen Caroline. So Hindley might be viewed not only as a pioneer in the field of broadside scholarship, urban folklore research, and the use of life histories, but also as an early investigator of the relationship between history and folklore. It must be admitted, however, that few if any of Catnatch's topical productions passed into oral tradition.
Both these minor classics were due for reprinting and these new editions will be welcomed. They belong in any collection or library devoted to folklore, British social history, graphics, business or communications history, or Victorian studies. General libraries might consider acquiring them for their visual wealth alone.

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Professor Kenney has in this book produced a notable combination of family history with a convincing insight into a whole cultural complex within our national cultural history.

Histories have recognized, however vaguely, that the Dutch colonial venture into the Hudson River estuary introduced a pattern not modelled on the more familiar British one, but few have explored the nature of the difference, nor its persistence. Even the fact that the Gansevoorts still spoke Dutch in the family in the 1820's is significant.

But Miss Kenney is less interested in language than in the social and political overtones. The difference, she argues, lies in the Dutch medieval and later mercantile inheritance, midway between the Roman and the Germanic, and reaching back to the Dutch trade on the early "frontiers" of the Baltic. The society was mercantile, with a high degree of communal autonomy. Power was in the prosperous families, sustained by judicious intermarriage alliances, and continued by a system of "co-optation," whereby members of the Councils nominated their own successors, with the consent of the overlord. In return, this "patriciate" protected communal interests, and contributed heavily to buildings, bridges and public affairs.

Carried over into the frontiers of Rensselaerwyck and Beverwyck (old Albany), the system favored enterprising traders, who developed their own local patriciate on the same principles. So rose the Schuylers, even the Livingstons, within the system. Thus a plebian like Herman Gansevoort, brewer, farmer, could shrewdly advance his fortunes, find modest but useful marriages for his children, and count the rewards. By the time of the Revolution, Colonel Peter Gansevoort, having proved his worth by his sturdy refusal to be intimidated at Fort Stanwix by St. Leger's advance, could be made a brigadier-general, and see his sons advance to a part in constitution-making, to a big house, and a large lumbering operation in the woods of the north. One was a graduate of Princeton.

We cannot, of course, trace a family history in detail, to its final line representative, dying in 1918 in Albany in a house filled with mementoes of the past. In that story there is room for Herman Melville, grandson of the old general, whose fictional "Billy Budd" reflected a Gansevoort encounter with naval justice.

The Dutch persistence had to yield in time to Yankee pressures, though