

# Review Articles

## **Charles Evans, American Bibliographer.**

By Edward G. Holley. (Illinois Contributions to Librarianship, No. 7.) Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963. 343p. \$7.50.

Here, at last, we have a very full, detailed biography of one of the great figures of American bibliography. The childhood, education, and early influential friendships are investigated, and their relation to the mature and old man pursued.

An orphan at nine, Charles Evans received most of his formal education at the Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys. One can hardly imagine a less likely school for a bibliographer. At sixteen he went to work in the Boston Athenaeum as an apprentice in the library presided over by William Frederick Poole and later by Charles A. Cutter. This first job is the key to his whole life. While Poole lived, he continually advised and helped Evans.

Dr. Holley has had the use of all of the important sources for this biography, both published and unpublished, and he has also been careful to interview members of Evans's family as well as others who knew and worked with him. Yet some questions remain unanswered, and may remain so always. Why was Evans so stubborn in sticking to bibliographic practices against which he was constantly warned by those whom he respected and trusted? Why did he invariably antagonize those in authority over the libraries he headed? This cost him his employment not once but several times, until at last he was no longer employable. By then his influential friends were dead.

How did he and his family live? From 1902 until his death in 1935 he held no salaried position but rather devoted his time to his great bibliography. Several times this work was stalled until his friends helped him borrow money to print the next volume. The profits from the venture could not have sustained the family. Dr. Holley has seen the Evans ledgers and bank books but does not tell us much about the family income. Perhaps the sources are unclear.

One rather serious piece of misinforma-

tion is the statement, on page 250, that Evans worked on each volume separately, and that he left, at his death, only a handful of titles for the 1801-1820 period. As a matter of fact, there are seventeen corset boxes full of his manuscript slips, representing many, many thousands of titles of that period, in the possession of the American Antiquarian Society. One explanation of this error is that the slips had not yet been found in an old trunk at the time Dr. Holley was in Worcester, but the reviewer saw and used these slips three years ago.

No one interested in American bibliography can do without this definitive biography of Charles Evans. One can only wish that Dr. Holley were a more felicitous writer and had edited this dissertation more rigorously before its publication. Much important information is relegated to the very voluminous footnotes, while at the same time, a good bit of trivia remains in the text. It probably is not cricket, however, to carp about style when presented with such a thorough, searching biography of an important American librarian and bibliographer. Dr. Holley deserves our thanks for his contribution to library history.—*Richard H. Shoemaker, Rutgers University.*

## **Joseph Charless, Printer in the Western Country.**

By David Kaser. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963. 160p. \$4.50. (63-15011).

With this biography of Joseph Charless of Dublin, Pennsylvania, Lexington, Louisville, and St. Louis, David Kaser makes another solid contribution to the history of printing and publishing in nineteenth-century America. Charless is best known as the first Missouri printer, indeed, the first printer of the trans-Mississippi west (but not the first printer of the Louisiana Territory, since Braud, Boudousquié, and James Lyon had worked in New Orleans long before Charless saw St. Louis).

The story of Joseph Charless is not much different from that of John Bradford, Elihu Stout, Matthew Duncan, William Maxwell,

or other early Ohio Valley printers. The early tribulations of the frontier printer and his ultimate emergence as a community leader follow a fairly routine pattern. Charless is almost a prototype, although the others are all worthy of a biography. Professor Kaser refers to Joseph Charless as "a relatively unimportant man." Viewed from a perspective of world history, this comment is true; but viewed from the history of Lexington or St. Louis, Charless was an important man, a founding father of the community. Henry Clay thought Bradford and Charless were important enough to include them on his select list of card-playing companions.

With this captious note the present reviewer has exhausted any adverse criticism of Professor Kaser's work. Step by step, from the parish register of Killucan in County Westmeath, through the advertisements of Charless' St. Louis hostelry in his own *Missouri Gazette*, the source material on Charless has been excavated, interpreted, and put together to give a full picture of one of St. Louis' most important early citizens. As a practitioner of "the black art" Charless was a typical frontier printer and publisher but this rôle takes away none of his individuality.

The chapter on "The Kentucky Country" fills in the history of early printing, book-selling, and publishing in Lexington with several important details. If this chapter is any measure of the accuracy of other sections dealing with Charless against a local background (Ireland, Pennsylvania, or Missouri), Professor Kaser's use and interpretation of his sources cannot be questioned. The portrait of St. Louis in the first half of the nineteenth century is a chapter of western history which ought to be a point of departure for studies of the plains, Rockies, and far west. The merchants, factors, trappers, military men, politicians, and adventurers who created the mosaic of early nineteenth-century St. Louis are a part of this colorful picture of the first city of the trans-Mississippi west. The Story of Charless' feud with Thomas Hart Benton is a minor classic of American politics and journalism.

There are two appendices, one on Charless' family, giving short biographies of each of the five children, and the other giving a list of Charless imprints. Locations and full

bibliographical descriptions of the latter would have been helpful, but most of this information can be found elsewhere and inclusion in this work would have expanded it to a point beyond which the commercially oriented university presses will not go without fat subsidies. Perhaps such a subsidy should be sought unless we want to wait for the next depression when we will again have an employers' market. There is a full index.

If the proto-typography of every North American jurisdiction were as well documented as is that of St. Louis with this study, life would be far easier for students of nineteenth-century American publishing, printing, and bookselling. The Ohio Valley, the "old Southwest," and the plains, Rockies, and Pacific coast urgently need this type of study. There are many rather superficial masters' essays and articles in state and regional historical journals on the life and work of individual early printers, but studies of the scope and quality of Professor Kaser's work are the exception. We may hope that a trend has been started with this work.—*Lawrence S. Thompson, University of Kentucky.*

**Medical Librarianship; Principles and Practice.** By John L. Thornton. New York: Philosophical Library, 1963. 152p. \$4.50.

The disclaimer on the dust jacket of this book, that it "is primarily for the newcomer to medical librarianship," is scarcely adequate to excuse the thinness of its contents. It is largely reportorial, citing miscellaneous facts and figures about hundreds of institutions, publications, and medical bibliographers. The Medico-Chirurgical Society of Aberdeen was founded in 1789, and among other things preserves the minutes of the society since that date; in 1947 the British Medical Association launched two abstracting journals, one of which lasted for only a few years; the name of Conrad Gesner's uncle was Hans Frick. These nuggets are interspersed with frequent rhetorical questions, pious homilies, and conventional exhortations. One-sixth of the volume is devoted to an alphabetical listing of 700 medical libraries, with dates of founding.

There is naturally a British bias to the