

## Book Review

R. C. Alston, *A Bibliography of the English Language from the Invention of Printing to the Year 1800*, Volume VIII: *Treatises on Short-Hand*. Printed for the author by E. J. Arnold & Son Limited, Leeds, England; 1966. xiii + 152 pp. £5. 10s.

R. C. Alston, a philologist of Leeds University, ruefully acknowledges that "the peculiar nature of early books on shorthand" rendered his self-imposed editing task "unenviable and exasperating." He is not the first to experience such a feeling: it is assuredly one reason why so few bibliographers have been attracted to this field while fewer still have brought their labors to fruition. So far as the English language is concerned no serious attempt was made to record the literature of "the lithe and noble art" until Julius Ensign Rockwell produced his *Teaching, Practice, and Literature of Shorthand* (Circulars of Information of the Bureau of Education No. 2—1884. Washington, 1884). A supplement was added and a second and enlarged edition published in 1885. Rockwell pursued his researches until his death, in 1926, deprived us of a far more comprehensive and accurate record; but his manuscript collections, now in the Library of the University of London, constitute a rich quarry for future bibliographers.

Rockwell's pioneer work provided the basis for John Westby-Gibson's *Bibliography of Shorthand* (London, 1887), hurriedly prepared to ensure its publication in time to coincide with the first International Shorthand Congress held in London in that year. Access to the British Museum and a few private collections enabled the compiler to add a number of items to those garnered by Rockwell, but lack of time and care led him into errors which much reduced its usefulness. An impartial critic has written that Westby-Gibson seldom relinquished his grasp of Rockwell's hand in rough places without stumbling. Although the justice of this verdict is undeniable, Westby-Gibson nowhere acknowledged his debt to his predecessor.

In 1935 the New York Public Library printed an admirable catalogue of its important shorthand collections. Since this was perforce confined to the library's own holdings, it is of course not a bibliography but is much more than a mere list of titles. The compilers are to be congratulated in particular for heeding the warning given by

Pollard and Greg that "any attempt to treat books of all periods in the same way will be found to be impracticable." Thus books printed before 1837 are given much fuller treatment than those which proliferated after that date. Nearly nine-tenths of this catalogue's 548 pages (plus an index of nearly 100 pages) deal with English-language material.

Alston's volume—a short title catalogue or inventory rather than a bibliography in the strict sense of the term—is one of a series with a General Preface in Volume I which lays down certain general principles. Some of these he has clearly found it difficult to observe in dealing with a subject admittedly calling for special treatment, and two "inviolable principles"—attention to bibliographical detail and a personal scrutiny of every item—are diluted by the qualification in Volume VIII: "I have attempted to verify each item either by personal inspection or by correspondence." The scope of this bibliography, unlike that of the volumes of Rockwell and Westby-Gibson, is restricted not only to the period ending in 1800 but understandably by the exclusion of books printed in shorthand, such as Shelton's and Rich's *Psalms in Meter and New Testament*, Addy's *Bible*, and Mason's *Short-Hand Exemplify'd*. On the other hand, its value is enhanced by an indication in nearly every case of one or more libraries where the book may be found. This characteristic should be especially useful to those who wish to pursue their studies by consulting the books themselves. Wisely, the editor disclaims any attempt to make these locations, or his references to "secondary material," exhaustive. Unhappily, however, many of the locations given are misleading while others are inexplicably lacking. As many as 27 of them (Nos. 9, 12, 30, 38, 45, 55, 56, 77, 78, \*85, 86, 88, 90, 91, 100, 103, 104, 121, 124, 125, 128, 148, 152, 157, 159, 162 and 172), all noted as being in "Crawford," appear to be ghosts; the copies of these books which were formerly in the library of the Earl of Crawford at Haigh Hall, Wigan, being now in the libraries of London University and Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, Ltd. Almost the whole of Lord Crawford's early stenographiana were sold at Sothebys on July 6, 1948 (see *Times Literary Supplement*, July 17, 1948, p. 408).

Some of the "general works" listed under "Bibliographical References" (p. x) have long been superseded, e.g., Levy's *History of Short-hand Writing*, 1862. Surprising omissions, however, are Olof Melin's *Stenografrens Historia*, 2 vols., Stockholm, 1927-29; C. Johnen's *Allgemeine Geschichte der Kurzschrift*, 4th ed., Berlin, 1940; H. Butler's

*The Story of British Shorthand*, London, 1951 (containing the most complete list of British shorthand authors to date), and the proceedings of the various international shorthand congresses.

Weston's *Stenography Compleated*, 1727 (No. 185), was preceded by his *Directions for Writing Shorthand*, 1724, mentioned by Alston as having been issued separately. The latter was presumably Weston's first publication and the one referred to by John Byrom in his *Journal*, July 24, 1725. A copy now in the Guildhall Library, London, was formerly in the British Museum, having been discarded apparently as a duplicate. All bibliographers have overlooked the fact that there were two variant issues of the 1727 *Stenography Compleated*. The engraved title-page of the first issue claimed that the system was "the most easy, exact, lineal, speedy and legible method extant." Recognizing later the superior lineality of his rival Byrom's method (then unpublished), Weston discreetly dropped the word "lineal" from the title of the second 1727 issue and all later editions of his book.

Various dates from 1700 to 1765 have been assigned to Clayton's undated modification of Weston (No. 192). As Byrom had a copy in 1725 (Byrom's *Journal*, April 27 and 29), the date 1730? given tentatively here is probably not very wide of the mark.

The first edition of Gurney's *Brachygraphy*, 1750 (No. \*213), for which no location is given, is (or was recently) in Chetham's Library, Manchester; a photostat copy is in the Library of London University. Bordley's *Shorthand Alphabets*, 1791, mentioned in the note to No. 288, is in the National Library of Scotland (Warden Collection).

Henry Petre's "A Booke of Brachygraphie" (No. \*21) is known only from an entry in the Stationers' Register (November 24, 1621). Alston ignores four other early shorthand treatises entered in the Register: William Labourer's *The Art of Short English Writing* (March 15, 1620/21), Thomas Whiting's *Brachygraphia or Short Writing* (February 27, 1632/33), and Richard Maud's *Semen Brachigraphia, or the Academy of Short Writing* (October 27, 1634). None of these is known to be extant. Edward Willoughby's "book of stenography," entered on June 8, 1621, may not have been published as the entry was afterwards canceled. Other noteworthy omissions are Thomas Cross's *The Art of Charactre or Short-writing*, 1645 (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris: see *Notes and Queries*, CLVII, September 28, 1929, pp. 220-22); *The Methodist; or a New Method of Reading, Writing and Printing All Languages in Shorthand*, 1741 (anon.) and *Stenography; or, the Art of Short Hand Perfected*, by W.M.S. (1797). The two latter are in the

Library of the University of London, the last named being probably the first edition of an anonymous book with the same title, "sold by Callow, . . . published for the editor by Lackington, Allen & Co., . . . new edition, 1802," and later editions (Westby-Gibson, 1887, pp. 211-212). "The elements of a short hand," a paper read by Samuel Jeake at a meeting of the Royal Society on May 26, 1748, and printed in its *Philosophical Transactions*, Vol. X, Part IV, pp. 1380-83, is not listed by Alston, perhaps on the ground that although issued separately it is not a book. It is of some interest as the system has an alphabet of only eight simple strokes and provoked a comment from Byrom in the next (June) issue of the *Transactions*. Two items which might have been included in the useful lists of editions published after 1800 are the third edition, Liverpool, 1803, of No. 315 (Richardson's *New System*), in the National Library of Scotland; and an unrecorded edition, Hallowell, 1826, of No. 286 (Taylor's *Essay*), in the Library of the Maine Historical Society, Portland, Me. William Harding's version (p. 55) was first published in 1823, as Rockwell and Westby-Gibson noted.

The misspelling of Bathsua Reynolds for Bathsua Reginald (No. 17), repeated at the foot of Plate IV, may have been due to the pressure of a publication dateline from which this bibliography, like its predecessor, appears to have suffered. Although this particular error might have been avoided by a check with Westby-Gibson (who misspells Bathsua's first name, p. 188), a too confident reliance on him is responsible for other blunders. The basic criterion laid down by Westby-Gibson himself that "the value of a bibliography is in direct ratio to its accuracy" is implicitly accepted by Alston when he writes that "accuracy is obviously of cardinal importance." It is the standard by which any bibliographer must expect to be judged.

One of the most valuable features of this book is the excellent series of 92 facsimiles (the last seven misnumbered) of title-pages, shorthand alphabets, and abbreviating rules. The selection has been made judiciously on the whole and compensates to some extent for the absence of any guidance in the body of the work to the relative merits of the treatises listed. This might have helped the student to assess the progress of shorthand invention from the crude complexities of Bright's 1588 *Characterie* to the refreshing simplicity of Taylor's 1786 *Essay* (recognized at once as a major step forward and promptly adapted to other languages) and Bordley's revolutionary *Cadmus Britannicus* of the following year which pointed the way to an entirely

new conception of an abbreviated writing based on an analysis of the longhand alphabet, as opposed to the geometric symbols of earlier systems.

Although England forestalled other nations by half a century in the publication of textbooks on stenography, we are still without an adequate bibliography of English-language shorthand. René Havette's excellent *Bibliographie de la Sténographie Française* (Paris, 1908) and the New York Public Library catalogue already mentioned have shown what can be done. Although Alston's work will doubtless be of service to those for whom it is intended, there is room for a fuller and more careful survey that will meet the needs not only of philologists and phoneticians but of educationists in general and perhaps even those ingenious contrivers of shorthand systems who continue the search for a speedy and efficient means of communication to replace our laggard and laborious longhand.

William J. Carlton

William J. Carlton (37 The Avenue, Andover, Hants., England) retired in 1946 from the International Labor Office, Geneva, where he had worked since 1921, as registrar and later as librarian. Earlier he had held editorial posts in London with Amalgamated Press, Press Illustrating Co., and National Trade Press. He was a member of the advisory board and associate editor for the "Pilgrim" edition of *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, Vol. I, 1965. His publications include: *Dr. Timothy Bright, "Father of Modern Shorthand,"* 1911; *Charles Dickens, Shorthand Writer*, 1926; *Descriptive Catalogue of the Library of Samuel Pepys—Part IV, Shorthand Treatises*, 1940; numerous articles on shorthand and Dickensian topics in *The Dickensian*, *Dickens Studies*, *Harmsworth Encyclopaedia*, *Notes and Queries*, *Review of English Studies*, *Times Literary Supplement*, and other periodicals.

## Association Typographique Internationale Tenth Congress

Paris; November 6 through 10, 1967.

Theme: Letters and Signs in a Pictorial Age.

Under the auspices of UNESCO, the Congress will bring together European scholars, scientists, and practitioners to lecture and to discuss new alphabets, types, and signs in extending culture. A special meeting will consider recent legibility and reading research.

NOTE: Enrollment deadline was July 31. It is hoped a comprehensive report on the Congress will appear in a future number of this Journal. For information, address A.Typ.I., 18 rue Ferrus, Paris 14, France.