

THE work known as “ Watson’s Collection ” has long been “ extremely scarce,” and when a copy has occurred for sale, could only be obtained at an increasingly extravagant price. To meet the demand thus indicated, and render this important work accessible to the growing class of Book Collectors, the present limited *fac simile* reprint was projected ; and for the cordial support which it has received from the lovers of our early Scots Literature, who have so promptly subscribed, acknowledgment and thanks are here tendered by

THE PUBLISHERS.

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INTRODUCTION.

IN reprinting this Collection, which, as Motherwell says,* “has preserved several interesting parcels “of our vernacular poetry,” it may not be considered inappropriate to furnish a few particulars regarding James Watson, to whose enterprise as printer, publisher, and probably also as compiler, we owe the original edition of this, the first compilation of its kind which issued from the Scottish press, and who may therefore be regarded as the pioneer of a revival of literature “in our own Native “Scots Dialect,” as well as in that of the Art of Printing in Scotland, both of which had fallen into decay, in consequence of the Civil Wars. The latter had, moreover, been most injuriously affected by the “Extensiveness” of the “Royal Gift” or monopoly of King’s Printer, which “one Andrew Anderson,” (son of George Anderson, the first printer in Glasgow), in consideration of the “payment of a composition in Exchequer, and *other weighty reasons*,”† had succeeded, Anno 1671, in obtaining for a period of “Forty-one Years.” “By “this Gift,” says Watson, “the Art of Printing in “this Kingdom got a dead Stroke; for by it no “printer could print anything, from a Bible to a “Ballad, without Mr. Anderson’s Licence.”

From the same source, viz., “The Publisher’s “Preface” to “The History of the Art of Printing,” a work translated from the French, and issued by

* Minstrelsy, Ancient and Modern, 1827, Introduction, page lx.

† Vide Acta Sec. Concil, March 14, 1701.

Watson as a sixpenny pamphlet, in 1713, we learn that the choice of profession followed by him, and probably in no small degree his success therein, resulted from the liberality of his grandfather, and of his father, as the latter, who was originally a merchant in Aberdeen, appears to have had his first connection with printing through his advancing "Money to thrice the Value of all they had in "the World" to two Dutch printers who had been brought to Edinburgh, in the first instance, as "Workmen," and who, after several mutations, had acquired the printing establishment, but had become involved in difficulties through the extent of their purchase, "and the ill Payment of most of "their Employers."

From the pamphlet referred to, we also learn that Watson's father befriended the Dutchmen, "From "mere Compassion to them as Strangers, and "being," as he says, "my Mother's Countrymen." In return, "they made over the Printing House" to their benefactor, who appears, in his turn, to have speedily got into difficulties, as, in 1685-6, his landlady, for mails (rent) due by him, poynded his press and goods, but he had them removed to Holyrood, where he also retired, and thus procured for himself and them the privilege of sanctuary. In this conjuncture "He went to Court, to demand," says Watson, "a Debt due to my Grandfather, of Money "lent King Charles II. in his Exile. But finding it "could not be paid at that Time, and having now "got too great a Concern in Printing, crav'd a Gift "of being the Sole Printer of Almanacks in *Scotland*, "which he obtain'd; and was also made Printer to "his Majesty's Family and Household, for which "he was to have a Salary of 100 lib. *Stcr. per An-* "num. He dy'd *Anno* 1687, when I was young, "whom he had design'd to be bred a Printer; and "brought a Good Workman, for that End, from

“ Abroad. Before his Death, he obtain’d a Gift in
 “ my Favour of being King’s Printer, after the ex-
 “ piry of Mr. Anderson’s Gift ; but by his Death,
 “ it was neglected to pass the Seals.

“ In *October*, 1687, Peter Bruce (or Bruschi),
 “ an Engineer, a *German* by Birth, who brought in
 “ the Water to the Wells in *Edinburgh*, by an order
 “ from the then Chancellor, took Possession of my
 “ Father’s Printing-House. But the Mob, at the
 “ Revolution, and a pretended Creditor of the
 “ *Dutch-Mens* (who long before were divested of
 “ all their Right in favour of my Father) carried
 “ away the Printing-House, *brevi manu*, and the
 “ pretended Creditor sold it to the Society of Sta-
 “ tioners.”

“ In 1695” Watson “set up,” and was soon
 doomed to experience the evils of his then perilous
 calling, as he was apprehended and imprisoned for
 having printed a book entitled “Scotland’s Grievance
 respecting Darien.” He did not, however, long
 remain in prison, for a rumour having reached
 Edinburgh, on 19th June, 1700, that the Spaniards
 had attacked the Scots colonists of Darien, but
 had been signally routed, these glad tidings raised
 such a tumult of joy that a large mob quickly
 assembled, kindled bonfires, forced the citizens to
 illuminate their windows, and broke the windows
 of those who declined to manifest their pleasure
 in this manner. A portion of the mob also forced
 an entrance into the house of Sir James Stewart,
 the King’s Advocate, and compelled him to sign
 a warrant for liberating Paterson (no doubt the
 indefatigable projector of the Darien scheme) and
 Watson, while another portion of the mob, still
 more zealous, without waiting for such quasi-legal
 means of liberation, assaulted the prison, forced
 an entrance, and set free Paterson, Watson, and the
 other prisoners. As Watson prudently abstained

from obtruding himself upon public attention, after this opportune outbreak, until the public feeling subsided, Mrs. Anderson, who, on her husband's death, in 1676, had succeeded to his monopoly, and who, in the exercise of it, had "persecuted all the printers "in Scotland," availed herself of these proceedings, and, as stated by Watson, "prevailed with "the Magistrates of *Edinburgh* to discharge" his "Working for some time; and in 1701 obtain'd "a Warrant from the Privy Council, on a false "Representation, to shut up" his "Work-House. "But upon a full Information, given in by" him "to the Lords of Privy Council (wherein all the "printers in Edinburgh concurr'd), and a debate "in presence of their Lordships, she was so well "exposed that she made no attempt afterwards of "that kind." Her allegations were that Watson had been bred a Papist, that he printed Popish and Jacobitical Books, that he had been several times prosecuted, had fled from Justice, and that to enable him to carry on business he had recanted his popish principles and turned Protestant.

"In A.D. 1699, an *Edinburgh Gazette* was published by authority, by James Watson,"* and on February 19, 1705, the first number of "The "Edinburgh Courant," a tri-weekly newspaper, was issued, of which Mr. Adam Boig was the "enterpriser," and "James Watson, in Craig's Close," the "undertaker" of the printing. It consisted "of "a small folio, in double columns," and contained "about as much matter as a single column of a "newspaper of moderate size."†

On the near approach of the expiration of Mrs. Anderson's patent, Watson opened a negotiation with Robert Freebairn, a printer in Edinburgh, with the view of obtaining for themselves the office of King's

* Arnot's History of Edinburgh, Chap. IV., p. 455.

† Chambers's Domestic Annals of Scotland, Vol. III., p. 314.

Printers for Scotland. He seems to have rested some claim to the privilege on the fact of the King's concession to his father in 1685, which had not passed the Seals. Freebairn entered into the project, and it was agreed that application for the patent should be made in his name. A formal agreement was entered into along with John Baskett (Queen's Printer for England), by which Freebairn, Watson, and Baskett were each to have one-third of the patent, if obtained. Their efforts were successful, and in August, 1711, Freebairn obtained the Queen's warrant for the appointment to himself, his heirs, partners, assignees, or substitutes, for 41 years, and the patent passed the Seals in October the same year, which is also distinguished in the annals of printing as the year in which Baskett printed, at Oxford, his celebrated "Vinegar Bible."

In 1713 Watson issued the "History of Printing," to which reference has already been made, and from the introduction to which, or as he styles it, "The Publisher's Preface to the Printer's in Scotland,"* the preceding autobiographic extracts have been derived. Watson, also, therein refers "to the Gift lately obtain'd from Her Majesty," and apologetically explains "That tho' Mrs. Anderson had enjoy'd her extensive Grant upwards of Forty years, and was become rich and old; yet she left no Stone unturn'd to procure a new one: Which Mr. Freebairn and I being appris'd of, used our Interest (for the Ease and Relief of our selves and the other Printers) to get a Patent in our own Favours, which we happily obtain'd. You had no Reason to dread ill Consequences from this Gift, which is far less extensive than Mr. Anderson's, and

* In this Preface he gives a very interesting account of Printing in Scotland, from the earliest times down to his own day, forming a most valuable contribution to the materials for a history of this art in Scotland.

“ gives much greater Liberty to all other Printers. And I am very hopeful, the Art of Printing shall lose nothing by Her Majesty’s Favour to us.”

But Watson’s old enemy, Mrs. Anderson, was not yet done with him, as by working on the avarice of Freebairn, and arranging to become his partner, they, in conjunction with Baskett, combined to represent the late patent “ as void, and solicited a warrant for a new Gift, for the purpose of annulling the right of Watson, who printed much better than either.”* A lawsuit arose in consequence, and after the customary “ law’s delay,” the Court of Session decided, in June, 1715, in Watson’s favour, and, on appeal to the House of Lords, this judgment was affirmed.

On the breaking out of the Rebellion in 1715, Freebairn declared for King James the Eighth, “ retired to *Perth*, and set up as the *Pretender’s* printer there, with the instruments the rebels had brought out of the printing-house at Aberdeen.”†

In consequence of this act of treason to the Hanoverian succession, Freebairn forfeited his patent, and a new one, for a like term of 41 years, was gifted in 1716 to Baskett in conjunction with the indefatigable Mrs. Anderson. But if by this fresh combination they expected to extinguish Watson, their hopes were not realized, and, singular to say, even Freebairn was permitted to resume his right as Printer to King George and his successors, who continued to employ Robert Freebairn, *and his assignees*, as printers, till the year 1752.

Several of the most distinguished Scottish writers have highly commended Watson for the excellence and accuracy of his printing. For instance, “ in speaking of the time which succeeded the expira-

* Lee’s Memorial for the Bible Societies, note, p. 179.

† Rae’s History of the Rebellion, 1715.

“tion of Mrs. Anderson’s first patent,” Principal Lee remarks that “it would be injustice to an enterprising and ingenious man to pass over in silence his neat and carefully executed editions of the Bible—*some of which have never since been excelled.* Four or five editions of small sizes, printed in 1715, 1716, 1719, and 1722, are deservedly in great request. His Folio of 1722 is also much esteemed. This man, having been persecuted by his rivals, was provoked to do his utmost to excel them. How much he surpassed them in the beauty of his work, is obvious at first sight. But he was also incomparably more studious of accuracy than any of his contemporaries in the same office.”*

Principal Lee, as evidence of the pains taken by Watson to secure accuracy, recapitulates certain proceedings in connection with an application made by the latter in the year 1717, to the General Assembly Commission, regarding the printing of the Church Standards, and of the Holy Scriptures. The Commission approved “a proposal tending so much to the honour of religion,” and appointed a committee of “ministers and elders” to supervise the texts. The result was the publication in (1719-22) of “A Collection of Confessions of Faith, Catechisms, Directories, Books of Discipline, &c., of public authority in the Church of Scotland, commonly known by the name of Dunlop’s Confessions,” and of various editions of the Bible printed between the years 1719 and 1722. The Folio Bible printed in 1722 being specially mentioned by Principal Lee as “generally valued” on account of its “accuracy.”*

But Watson was not wholly occupied with the printing of Church Standards and of Bibles, as in addition to other and more bulky works,† we find

* Lee’s Memorial, pp. 187-193.

† See General Index, (17.), (27.), and (28.)

issuing from his press, in 1718, a very neat reprint in 12mo, of "*The Famous History of the Renown'd and Valiant Prince, Robert, surnamed the Bruce, King of Scotland:*" by Patrick Gordon, Gentleman; the first edition of which work had been printed at Dort, 1615. And, in 1719, in 12 pp. folio, the celebrated Ballad or Poem entitled

HARDYKNUTE; A FRAGMENT.

Watson set up his first printing house in Warriston Close, north side of High Street, but in 1697 he removed to Craig's Close, opposite the Cross, where he continued to print while he lived, and after his death it was long called "The King's Printing House." In 1709 he opened a bookseller's shop, "next door to the Red Lion, opposite to the Luckenbooths," which faced St. Giles' Church, High Street, which shop he continued to occupy during the remainder of his chequered life. He died on 24th September, 1722, and was buried in the Greyfriars Churchyard, his obituary in the newspapers styling him, as does his celebrated Folio Bible of the same year, "His Majesty's Printer." Notwithstanding the persecutions of Mrs. Anderson, and other rivals, his business appears to have proved lucrative, as may reasonably be inferred from the following obituary notice which appeared in the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, of 26th August, 1731—"Last Tuesday, died Mrs. Heriot, late the widow of Mr. James Watson, His Majesty's Printer, by whom she had a very considerable estate, a great part of which comes to her present husband."

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R. A.

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