

**ANTI-SLAVERY OPINIONS  
BEFORE THE YEAR 1800; AN  
ORATION UPON THE MORAL  
AND POLITICA EVIL OF SLAVERY**

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Anti-slavery Opinions Before the Year 1800; An Oration upon the Moral and Political Evil of Slavery by William Frederick Poole & George Buchanan

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**WILLIAM FREDERICK POOLE & GEORGE BUCHNAN**

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# Anti-Slavery Opinions

BEFORE THE YEAR 1800

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READ BEFORE THE CINCINNATI LITERARY CLUB, NOVEMBER 16, 1872

By WILLIAM FREDERICK POOLE

Librarian of the Public Library of Cincinnati

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TO WHICH IS APPENDED A FAC SIMILE REPRINT OF DR. GEORGE BUCHANAN'S ORATION  
ON THE MORAL AND POLITICAL EVIL OF SLAVERY, DELIVERED AT A PUBLIC  
MEETING OF THE MARYLAND SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING THE  
ABOLITION OF SLAVERY, BALTIMORE, JULY 4, 1791

CINCINNATI  
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1873



## ANTI-SLAVERY OPINIONS

Before 1800.

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I purpose this evening to call the attention of the Club to the state of anti-slavery opinions in this country just prior to the year 1800. In this examination I shall make use of a very rare pamphlet in the library of General Washington, which seems to have escaped the notice of writers on this subject; and shall preface my remarks on the main topic of discussion with a brief description of the Washington collection.

In the library of the Boston Athenæum, the visitor sees, as he enters, a somewhat elaborately-constructed book-case, with glass front, filled with old books. This is the library of George Washington, which came into possession of the Athenæum in 1849. It was purchased that year from the heirs of Judge Bushrod Washington—the favorite nephew to whom the General left all his books and manuscripts—by Mr. Henry Stevens, of London, with the intention of placing it in the British Museum. Before the books were shipped, they were bought by Mr. George Livermore and a few other literary and public-spirited gentlemen of Boston, and presented to the Athenæum. Mr. Livermore, as discre-

tionary executor of the estate of Thomas Dowse, the "literary leather-dresser" of Cambridge, added to the gift one thousand dollars, for the purpose of printing a description and catalogue of the collection, which has not yet been done.

The collection numbers about twelve hundred titles, of which four hundred and fifty are bound volumes, and seven hundred and fifty are pamphlets and unbound serials. Some books of the original library of General Washington still remain at Mt. Vernon, and are, or were a few years since, shown to visitors, with other curiosities.

Separated from association with their former illustrious owner, the bound volumes, which are mostly English books, present but few attractions. Among them are a few treatises on the art of war and military tactics, which evidently were never much read. These were imported after his unfortunate expedition with Braddock's army, and before the revolutionary war. There are books on horse and cattle diseases; on domestic medicine; on farming, and on religious topics—such works as we might expect to find on the shelves of an intelligent Virginia planter. It is evident that their owner was no student or specialist. Many of the books were sent to him as presents, with complimentary inscriptions by the donors. The bindings are all in their original condition, and generally of the most common description. The few exceptions were presentation copies.



Col. David Humphreys, Washington's aid-de-camp during the revolutionary war, presents his "Miscellaneous Works," printed in 1790, bound, regardless of expense, by some Philadelphia binder, in full red morocco, gilt and goffered edges, and with covers and fly-leaves lined with figured satin. As the book was for a very distinguished man, the patriotic binder has stamped on the covers and back every device he had in his shop. Nearly all the volumes have the bold autograph of "G<sup>o</sup> Washington," upon their title pages, and the well-known book-plate, with his name, armorial bearings, and motto, *Exitus acta probat*,\* on the inside of the covers.

There are persons at the present day who have very positive opinions on the subject of prose fiction, believing that great characters like Jonathan Edwards and George Washington never read such naughty books when they were young. Let us see. Here is the "Adventures of Peregrine Pickle; in which are included the Memoirs of a Lady of Quality," by Tobias Smollett, in three volumes. On the title page of the first volume is the autograph of George Washington, written in the

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\*The questionable morality of Gen. Washington's motto might suggest that it was not originally adopted by him. The sentiment, that "the end justifies the means," has been charged, as a reproach, upon the Jesuits. It was the motto of the Northamptonshire family from which Gen. Washington descended, and was used by him, probably without a thought of its Jesuitical association, or its meaning.

cramped hand of a boy of fourteen. The work shows more evidence of having been attentively read, even to the end of the third volume, than any in the library. Here is the "Life and Opinions of John Bunce," a book which it is better that boarding-school misses should not read. Yet Washington read it, and enjoyed the fun; for it is one of the few books he speaks of in his correspondence as having read and enjoyed. The present generation of readers are not familiar with John Bunce. Of the book and its author, Hazlitt says: "John Bunce is the English Rabelais. The soul of Francis Rabelais passed into Thomas Amory, the author of John Bunce. Both were physicians, and enemies of much gravity. Their great business was to enjoy life. Rabelais indulges his spirit of sensuality in wine, in dried neats' tongues, in Bologna sausages, in Botorgas. John Bunce shows the same symptoms of inordinate satisfaction in bread and butter. While Rabelais roared with Friar John and the monks, John Bunce gossiped with the ladies."

It is the good fortune of the youth of our age that they are served with fun in more refined and discreet methods; yet there is a melancholy satisfaction in finding in the life of a great historical character like Washington, who was the embodiment of dignity and propriety, that he could, at some period of his existence, unbend and enjoy a book like John Bunce. He be-

comes, thereby, more human; and the distance between him and ordinary mortals seems to diminish.

Thomas Comber's "Discourses on the Common Prayer," has three autographs of his father, Augustine Washington, one of his mother, Mary Washington, and one of his own, written when nine years of age. The fly-leaves he had used as a practice book for writing his father's and mother's names and his own, and for constructing monograms of the family names.\*

The pamphlets in the collection have intrinsically more value than the larger works. They were nearly all contemporaneous, and were sent to Washington by

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\*On one of the fly-leaves, written in a boy's hand, is "Mary Washington and George Washington." Beneath is this memorandum: "The above is in General Washington's handwriting when nine years of age. [Signed,] G. W. Parke Custis," who was the grandson of Mrs. Washington, and the last survivor of the family. He was born in 1781, and died at the Arlington House in 1857.

In the appraisement of General Washington's estate, after his death, this book was valued at twenty-five cents, and the *Miscellaneous Works* of Col. Humphreys, at three dollars. The boy's scribbling, in the one case, and the gorgeous binding in the other, probably determined these values. In the appendix of Mr. Everett's *Life of Washington*, is printed the appraisers' inventory of Washington's library. *Tracts on Slavery* was valued at \$1.00; *Life of John Bunce*, 2 vols., \$3.00; *Peregrine Pickle*, 3 vols., \$1.50; *Humphrey Clinker*, 25c.; *Jefferson's Notes on Virginia*, \$1.50; *Tom Jones, or the History of a Foundling*, 3 vols., (third vol. wanting) \$1.50; *Gulliver's Travels*, 2 vols., 1.50; *Pike's Arithmetic*, \$2.00,