

The Butler Collection

by

Sylvia A. Earley, B.A.

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University of Dublin  
Department of Modern History

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### **Declaration**

I declare that the work contained within this thesis is my own and that it has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university.

I agree that the Library may lend or copy this thesis upon request.

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Sylvia Earley

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## Introduction

The Butler library, the topic of this thesis, is a collection of books which was given to Trinity College in the late eighteenth century. Theophilus Butler, Baron Newtown-Butler, a Dublin based politician who died in 1723, was the main contributor to the collection. The books are currently housed in the Long Room of the Old Library and can be seen to the north of the library. Despite the fact that the books are still used individually by students in the college today little work has been done on the collection itself or its history. The only major article written in relation to any part of Butler's collection has been James Woolley's *John Barrett, "The Whimsical Medley", and Swift's Poems*. This will be published in 2001 in *Eighteenth Century Contexts: Historical Inquiries in Honor of Phillip Harth*. It does not primarily discuss the collection but rather the manuscript *The Whimsical Medley* which belonged to Theophilus Butler and was also donated to the college. *The Whimsical Medley* is a three volume manuscript of poems and songs. It is thought the works were copied by Butler both from manuscript sources and from the books and periodicals in his library. Woolley's work does offer some insight into Butler's life and points out the necessity of an exploration of the main collection.

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Butler's library is catalogued in the *Catalogus librorum impressorum Dublin 1864 -1888* but the catalogue entries are brief and have no details of provenance. During the nineteenth century books were added to the bays in which the Butler library is kept. This meant that when cataloguing took place no distinction was noted between Butler's books and the additions made to the shelves.

The aim of this thesis is to establish just what is in the Butler collection. Initially, Theophilus Butler's life was examined in order to identify any personal interests which might be seen in his library. The Irish and English book trade at this time was also examined in order to establish their changes and the influence these might have had on Butler's buying habits. Once this was done the collection could be examined as a gentleman's collection. It could then be asked if Butler was

typical in the types of books he was buying and the trends of his collection could be compared to those of other collectors of the time.

Because the collection had never been properly examined in its totality before, it was necessary to go to the Long Room in order to establish which books belonged to Butler and to the Butler family by an examination of the shelves. The nineteenth century additions were easily recognised by examining their imprints. Some of Butler's books could also be easily identified by the use of his bookplate or a bookstamp marked T.B. In other cases still his signature appeared. Signatures of other members of his family or other identifiable marks of his acquaintances are also found in the collection. Difficulties arose, though, where books had been rebound in the nineteenth century. In these cases a bookplate, stamp or signature may have been pasted over. Here it is only the interests of Butler or the period of the imprint which make inclusion within the collection probable. Because of these difficulties almost 2,000 books in all were examined. As well as establishing the author and title of a particular volume, each book was also examined in order to identify the year of the imprint, the place of publication, the subject matter, call number and the mark of identification, if any, with the Butlers. These are not all individual books but also collections of pamphlets or periodicals. Butler bought copies of broadsides and serials and bound them into his own volumes. In these cases the imprints of each individual work was examined in order to gain the necessary information.

Another aspect to examining the collection is identifying the history of the collection itself. Because the collection was not directly passed to Trinity on the death of Theophilus Butler it was necessary to examine the history of his descendants in order to identify the probable journey of the library. This became problematic where the wills of his family did not survive and because no records are kept of gifts to Trinity College for this period.

This work is important in three ways. For the first time since the donation of the library it provides a catalogue of the books within the Butler collection. As well as access to these individual works within the Long Room the student now can identify these books specifically to

Butler's library. In establishing the content of his library, Theophilus Butler can now also be examined as and compared to other gentleman collectors of his period. Finally, in attempting to identify the date of the donation of the collection an important aspect of the history of Trinity College is also considered.