

# Thomas Jefferson's Book-Marks

BY JAMES A. BEAR, JR., *Curator of Monticello*



Published in honor of  
the visit of the GROLIER CLUB to  
Charlottesville, Virginia  
1958

#### CHRONOLOGY OF JEFFERSON'S BOOK COLLECTING

- 1743. Born at Shadwell.
- 1757. Inherited father's library.
- 1764. Began book purchases in Williamsburg.
- 1769. Began importation of books.
- 1770. Shadwell burned, destroying most of first library.
- 1772. Bought books from estate of Bathurst Skelton.
- 1773. Monticello Library contained 1,244 books.
- 1773. Inherited John Wayles' books through his wife.
- 1774. Bought books from estate of Dabney Carr.
- 1776. Bought Peyton Randolph's Library.
- 1783. Early Catalogue listed 2,450 books at Monticello.
- 1784. Made sketch of Library on second floor at Monticello.
- 1785. Bought books from Library of the Rev. Samuel Henley.
- 1784-9. Bought books in Europe, importing about 20 cases.
- 1793. Moved Library to southeast wing of remodelled Monticello.
- 1805. Stated intention of bequeathing Library to University of Virginia.
- 1806. Described Library arrangement to James Ogilvie.
- 1806. Inherited Library of George Wythe.
- 1815. Sold the Great Library to Congress, and within days was buying books for his Third Library.
- 1826. Died at Monticello, leaving about 1,000 volumes to the University of Virginia and a few books to Nicholas P. Trist and Joseph Coolidge.
- 1829. Third Library sold at auction in Washington D.C., by Nathaniel Poor.
- 1851. Library of Congress burned, destroying perhaps half of the Great Library.
- 1873. Poplar Forest Library sold at auction in New York by the Leavitt Brothers.
- 1955. Board of Directors of The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation authorized the reassembling of the Third Monticello Library.

## Thomas Jefferson's Book Marks

THOMAS JEFFERSON never used a bookplate to distinguish the more than 8,000 volumes he assembled during a lifetime of avid book collecting. Instead he employed other identifying devices, so that today even a cursory glance at a volume marked by Jefferson will enable one to distinguish it not only as Jefferson's but probably to assign it to one of three distinct collecting periods, each of which yielded a separate library.

### The Shadwell Library (1757-1770)

JEFFERSON'S first personal library burned at Shadwell in 1770. It consisted of perhaps 500 volumes (Jefferson valued the collection at £200 sterling at a time when he was importing books at substantially under £1 each). The library included two score of books inherited from his father (Peter Jefferson died in 1757 when Jefferson was 14), school books, and (most important of all to the 27-year-old lawyer) books on the Common Law.

The book losses at Shadwell were described in a letter to John Page written immediately after the fire: Jefferson lost "almost every book." Furthermore, "The loss fell principally on my books of common law, of which I have but one<sup>1</sup> left, at that time lent out." A year later, another statement to a different person is equally clear: "A very few books . . . were with difficulty saved from the flames."

It is suggested here that the majority of the Shadwell Library books carried on their title page the owner's inscription: "Ex Libris Thomae Jefferson," as illustrated in Plates I and IV. The records of the contents of the Shadwell Library are fragmentary, consisting of an inventory of Peter Jefferson's estate (original in Huntington Library), entries in the Vir-

<sup>1</sup> This was apparently Sowerby No. 1811.

ginia Gazette Account Books (Peden, Appendix H, p. 228-231), and a 1769 London invoice printed in the Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Boyd ed., Vol. 1, p. 34.

### The Great Library (1770-1815)

CERTAINLY the finest private collection in the young Republic, Jefferson's second library was sold to Congress in 1815 to replace the original "Library of Congress" lost in the burning of the Capitol in 1814 during the War of 1812.

There were upwards of 6,000 volumes in this collection, approximately 44% of which have survived.

Fittingly, this Great Library has a great catalogue, which makes it unnecessary to burden the present account with anything more than a respectful citation of E. Millicent Sowerby's *Catalogue of the Library of Thomas Jefferson*, Washington, 1952-58. (The fifth and last volume is expected from the press in December of this year and has been consulted in page proof).

It is proposed here that the majority of the books in the Great Library were marked with the "secret" mark in the cursive script of Plates II and III, as opposed to the block script of Plates VI and VII.

### The Poor Library (1815-1826)

JEFFERSON'S third personal library, named after an 1829 auctioneer<sup>1</sup> and not for the condition of the owner's pocket-book, was willed to the University of Virginia, but the em-

<sup>1</sup> Nathaniel P. Poor's *Catalogue, President Jefferson's Library*, Washington, 1829. Three of the auctioneer's copies of this catalogue, including the one with annotations of volumes "Withdrawn" from the sale, are now in the Tracy W. McGregor Library at the University of Virginia. The Catalogue is McKay's No. 226. The Clements copy was reproduced in facsimile in 1944 by the University Lithographers, Ypsilanti, Michigan.

barrassed financial position of an ex-president in the early years made it necessary for the executors of the estate to sell the books. An effort is now being made to reassemble this library at Monticello, and work on improving the descriptions of the 1829 auction catalogue is under way.

It is proposed here that the majority of the Poor Library books were marked with the "secret" mark in the block script of Plates VI and VII, as opposed to the cursive script of Plates II and III.

THE POPLAR FOREST LIBRARY  
(1815-1826)

The Poplar Forest Library was a small collection of about 70 titles kept at Jefferson's Bedford County retreat, chiefly for pleasurable reading. The only record of the collection is in the *Catalogue of a Private Library . . . The Messrs. Leavitt, Auctioneers* [New York, 1873]. The Jefferson items listed in this sale occupy Numbers 601 to 671. No ownership marks have been observed in the twenty books known to have been in this library.

Difficulties of the Hypotheses

It should be understood that the proposals made here, though not lightly made, represent working hypotheses subject to modification as information accumulates. None of Jefferson's libraries was ever a completely discrete set of books. There were Shadwell books both in the Great Library and in the Poor Library. There were books in Jefferson's possession in 1815 not sold to Congress. There were books in the Great Library which duplicated Shadwell books, as well as books in the Poor Library which duplicated books in the Great Library. And the Poplar Forest Library was never anything more than a branch of the Monticello Libraries.

Thus it is assumed that the 1752 Prayer Book Jefferson inherited in 1757 (See Plates I, II, and III) was inscribed "Ex

Libris Thomae Jefferson" some time between Jefferson's 14th and 24th years; that this inscription was erased between 1767 and 1776 when the cursive initials were added; and that this Prayer Book was one of the very few surviving Shadwell books which escaped from the Great Library into the Poor Library. Conceivably, this same Prayer Book could have spent one or more summers in the Poplar Forest Library.

The terminal date of 1776 in the preceding paragraph is necessarily an approximation, but one set of genealogical notes in the Prayer Book may date from 1776, and may have been made at the same time the initials were inserted.

The 1767 date is equally an approximation. The year of the fire, 1770, would have been neater, but there is inconclusive evidence that some Shadwell Library books never carried the "Ex Libris" mark. Of 13 titles known to have been added to the Shadwell Library in 1769, "some" are known to have been "unfortunately lost" (Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Boyd ed., I, p. 51) and reordered; and eight of the thirteen, at least as titles (Sowerby 438, 439, 1409, 2715, 2877, 2891, 2892, 3042), survived in the Great Library. These eight, none bearing the "Ex Libris," were either all replacements for burned copies, or else represent evidence that Jefferson's system of marking had entered its second phase before 1769. Since, therefore, the "Ex Libris" phase seems properly associated with the college youth or before, 1767 (the year of Jefferson's admission to the bar) has been chosen as the latest possible date of Jefferson's coming-of-age as a book-collector. He was then 24.

This date may be set at a substantially earlier year by an even more speculative hypothesis: that the teen-age Jefferson in 1760, on leaving for College, inscribed "Ex Libris" in only those books inherited from his father (Known "Ex Libris" books—Sowerby Nos. 40, 63, 114, 1604, 1639, 4666; T. Salmon's *A New Geographical and Historical Grammar*, 1751,

THE  
BOOK  
OF  
COMMON PRAYER,  
And Administration of the  
SACRAMENTS,  
AND OTHER  
Rites and Ceremonies  
OF THE  
CHURCH,  
According to the Use of the  
CHURCH of *ENGLAND*:  
Together with the  
PSALTER OR PSALMS  
OF  
DAVID,  
Pointed as they are to be sung or said in CHURCHES.

O X F O R D :

Printed by THOMAS BASKETT, Printer  
to the UNIVERSITY. 1752.

## *Saint Thomas the Apostle.*

rence between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the Gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world. But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you. But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me. But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.

*The Gospel.* S. Matth. 4. 18.

**J**ESUS walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea (for they were fishers): And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

*Saint Thomas the Apostle.*

*The Collect.*

**A**Lmighty and everliving God, who for the more confirmation of the Faith, didst suffer thy holy Apostle Thomas to be doubtful in thy Sons resurrection; Grant us so perfectly, and without all doubt to believe in thy Son Jesus Christ, that our faith in thy sight may never be reproved. Hear us, O Lord, through the same Jesus Christ, to whom with thee and the holy Ghost, be all honour and glory now, and for evermore. Amen.

*The Epistle.* Ephes. 2. 19.

**N**OW therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners,



*The xvi. day. The Psalms. The xvi. day.*

3 Turn us again, O God: shew the light of thy countenance, and we shall be whole.

4 O Lord God of hosts: how long wilt thou be angry with thy people that prayeth?

5 Thou feedest them with the bread of tears: and givest them plenteousness of tears to drink.

6 Thou hast made us a very strife unto our neighbours: and our enemies laugh us to scorn.

7 Turn us again, thou God of hosts: shew the light of thy countenance, and we shall be whole.

8 Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it.

9 Thou madest room for it: and when it had taken root, it filled the land.

10 The hills were covered with the shadow of it: and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedar-trees.

11 She stretched out her branches unto the sea: and her boughs unto the river.

12 Why hast thou then broken down her hedge: that all they that go by, pluck off her grapes?

13 The wild boar out of the wood doth root it up: and the wild beasts of the field devour it.

14 Turn thee again, thou God of hosts, look down from

heaven: behold, and visit this vine;

15 And the place of the vineyard that thy right hand hath planted: and the branch that thou madest so strong for thyself.

16 It is burnt with fire, and cut down: and they shall perish at the rebuke of thy countenance.

17 Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand: and upon the son of man, whom thou madest so strong for thine own self.

18 And so will not we go back from thee: O let us live, and we shall call upon thy Name.

19 Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts: shew the light of thy countenance, and we shall be whole.

*Psalms 81. Exultate Deo.*

**S**ing we merrily unto God our strength: make a cheerful noise unto the God of Jacob.

2 Take the psalm, bring hither the tabret: the merry harp with the lute.

3 Blow up the trumpet in the new-moon: even in the time appointed, and upon our solemn feast-day.

4 For this was made a statute for Israel: and a law of the God of Jacob.



Plate IV. The Shadwell Ex Libris, unerased. The Inventory Shelf Label is at the upper left of the ornament. Sowerby 63, now in the Library of Congress.

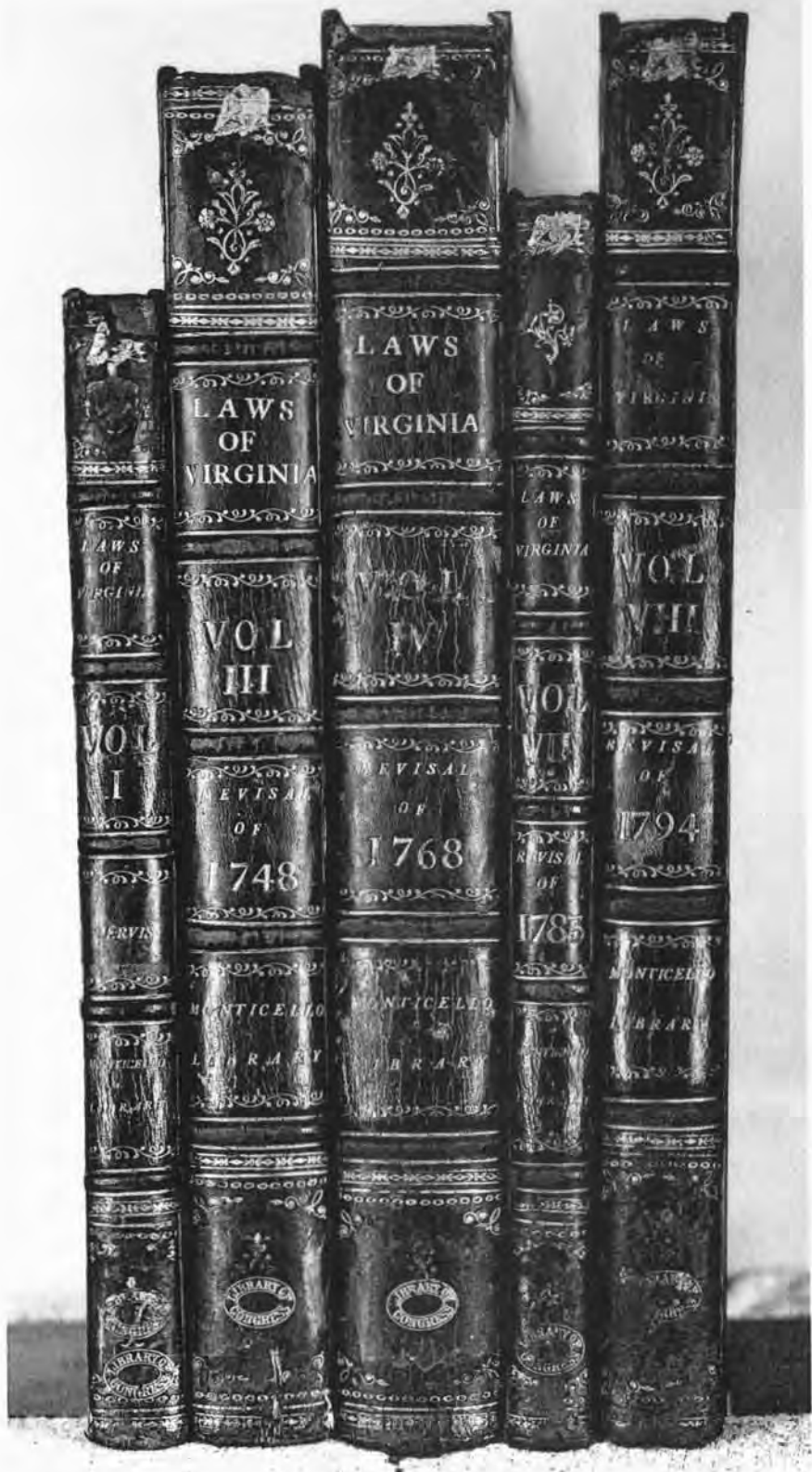


Plate V. The "Monticello Library" binding; Sowerby 1837, 1839, 1840, 1861, and 1862. Now in Library of Congress.



## L I N I

H. GROTIUS INTERPRETE.

## I.

Certius ut veri possis infistere callem,  
imbue sollicitas nostris sermonibus aures,  
ut procul immanes Furias de pectore pellas,  
quæ pœnis vincire solent genus omne profanum,  
inductæ varias mendaci corpore formas:  
has arcere vigil mentis custodia debet:  
hoc etenim te rite sacrum lustrale piabit,  
si potes ex animo pestes odisse nefandas,  
quarum prima, malis, & maxima causa, voluptas;  
quam laxis agitat frænis furiosa cupido.

## II.

Omnia sunt speranda, nihil sperare negatum:  
nam nihil est, quod non valeat divina potestas.



T I.

lectionis in emendandis meminit, unde eam adsciverunt sequiores editores.

456. χαλεπῶ δ' ἔργματι κῦδος ἔπι. *Gloriosum est rem difficilem perfecisse. Qui se ex difficultatibus expulit, hunc gloria consequitur.* Hæc est poetæ mens, quam emendata verba referunt. Libri omnes sine sensu χαλεπῶ δ' ἔργματι κῦδος ἔχει.

457. τὰ δίκαια φίλ' ἔστω. Sic codd. Aldus, τὰ δίκαια φίλα, imperfecto versu, quod, ut alia multa, ostendit quanta cum religione & fide codicem quem typis describeret, sequi & representare solebat. Turnebus edidit φίλ' ἔστωι, facta melioris lectionis in emendationibus mentione.

464. Hic versus citatur tanquam Eveni a Plutarcho, *Moral.* p. 1102. B.

465. παραστὰδὸν οἰνοχοεῖτω. Quis? ὁ οἰνοχόος. Adsumitur enim extrinsecus cognatum verbo substantivum. Sed alia mihi oborta suspicio: adverbium παραστὰδὸν suppositum fuisse a pudico quodam ludimagistro; scripsisse vero Theognidem:

τῶ πίνειν δ' ἐθέλοντι καλὸς παῖς οἰνοχοεῖτω.

Idque firmare videtur sequens ἀεὶρα παθεῖν.

469. Hoc distichon & quatuor sequentia citat Athenæus cum multa varietate lectionis p. 428. Illinc sumfi v. 475. σώφρων τε καὶ ἠπίος. Vulgo legitur σώφρων, τότε ἠπίος, fluctuante in veteribus libris lectione. Nam Aldus habet αὐτε ἠπίος. Tres codd. ἔτε ἠπίος.

479. Aldus σὺ δὲ ἔχει τοῦτο μάταιον. Sicque tres codd. sed cum vacuo post δὲ spatium, quantum sit syllabæ recipiendæ. In quarto σὺ δ' ἔχει. Nec σὺ δ' ἔσχεις, nec σὺ δ' αὖ ἔχει scribendum erat. Emendo certissime σὺ δ' οὐκ ἔχει τοῦτο μάταιον. In seq. v. Aldus dedit κοτύλης αἰεὶ, quod sane infecuti editores non intellexerunt, sed fulciendo

T. I.

now owned by Mr. William Barrow; the title page of an unidentified 12mo edition of Homer's Iliad which is now at the American Antiquarian Society; and the Prayer Book—all ante-date Peter Jefferson's death); and that the new system of the Great Library was installed when the grown-up man of 24, the licensed lawyer, returned to his ancestral Albemarle to begin building his great architectural monument of Monticello. The great home and the great library would under this hypothesis be coeval.

Only one discrepancy emerges: the large Bible willed to Jefferson by his father, which bears the initials but no longer an "Ex Libris." The discrepancy is, however, easily explained by the assumption either that the first title is now lacking or that the 14-year-old Jefferson, recognizing this volume as the family Bible, gave in to his mother's ownership of it, re inheriting it as the "quarto Bible" on Jane Randolph Jefferson's death in 1776, a year in which it has already been assumed on other grounds that only the initials would then have been inserted into the book. Certainly, in any case, the book was in Jane Randolph's possession in 1772, because she recorded this fact on A2-recto of the volume.

### The "Secret" Marks of the Great Library

THE WORD "secret" scarcely any longer applies to Jefferson's ownership initial-marks placed before the first I-quire signature and after the first T-quire signature. The system was certainly not original with Jefferson. Miss Sowerby kindly supplies the information that Nathaniel Crynes (d. 1745), an assistant in the Bodleian Library, signed his books in this manner. Mr. Frederick Goff calls attention to another early (1704) example of the practice, by a James Randolph in an unidentified edition of *The Royal Grammar* in the Library of Congress. Jefferson may well have observed his father-in-law, John Wayles' (d. 1773) method of placing an I W

before the E-quire signatures of his books (S-2073, 2077, 2086, and 4713) and then adopted it for his own use.

There is little evidence that Jefferson considered the mark very secret. The fact that a fellow Charlottesvillean, Frank Carr, copied the system in Jefferson's lifetime argues that the practice was known at least among Jefferson's friends, and indeed anyone reading a Monticello book, as so many did, would have been likely to notice it anyway.

Except for the major variation of cursive initials until 1815 and block initials thereafter, which is here proposed as a working hypothesis for the dating of the book-marking initials, the variations in Jefferson's markings are no more than one might suppose would occur in the process of marking upwards of 5,000 books over a period of half a century.

Before detailing these less interesting variations, it is as well, however, to offer some evidence in support of an hypothesis which might seem fanciful to anyone unaware of the systematic nature of Jefferson's mind. Block initials appeared in Jefferson's hand as early as 1790 on tobacco hogshead marks and on other freight parcel labels, but there are no block-initials so far located among the Great Library books, although the number of surviving initials in these runs into the thousands. The surviving Poor Library books, on the other hand, are fewer and more widely dispersed, but among dozens of these seen, all are marked in block capitals, although the cursive form continued to appear in Jefferson's hand elsewhere than in book marks after 1815. The proposal made here, then, that Jefferson in 1815 consciously decided to mark the books in his last collection in a recognizably different way from volumes in his earlier collections, may not be subject to final proof, but it will not be easy to disprove.

The less significant variations in the placing of initials are numerous. Jefferson often forgot or neglected to mark his books. All initials now in Jefferson's books are not in Jeffer-

son's hand. In long books with multiple quire alphabets, Jefferson more commonly marked only the first I and T, but sometimes he marked all of the I's and T's in the multiple alphabets (S-4663; this one was in 22 volumes, and surely it represents an early practice). In multi-volumed works, sometimes only the first volume was marked, sometimes all the volumes (S-4666; this again is presumed to have been an early practice). Sometimes (S-4662) he marked the I signature in Vol. 1, the T signature in Vol. 2.

Once (S-1461) Jefferson missed the I altogether by mistaking an L for an I. Once (S-1469) a G signature was inadvertently marked because a numeral on the [G]-1 sheet was mistaken for an I. Once (S-1609) the third rather than the first leaf of an I signature was marked; once (S-1638) the second leaf was marked, since the first, being a half-title, was unsigned.

When a book was too short to reach the I signature (S-120), Jefferson sometimes supplied both initials on the final page, sometimes (S-1580), even more simply, he just didn't bother to mark it at all.

In later books, as the printers' practice of signing quires in numerals became common (S-4702), only a T was placed against the 1.

#### BINDING MARKS

Of volumes bound especially for Jefferson, presentation volumes may be disregarded as far as the record of ownership-marks goes, but five volumes survive on which Jefferson was party to the extra bindings carrying the binders' lettering "Monticello Library." These volumes are, however, unique, and there is no further evidence of Jefferson ever indicating ownership by bindings. (See Plate V.)



#### SHELF-MARKS

The shelf marks now pasted on some of the title pages of books in the Great Library, giving chapter and number<sup>1</sup> from one of Jefferson's Catalogues, were placed by Jefferson in some books sent to Congress, Mr. Goff thinks only in books which had been sent earlier to the Georgetown binders, March and Milligan. Jefferson's object in placing these shelf marks in the books was to facilitate their identification through one of his inventories. The phenomenon of the paste-on labels does not occur, needless to say, in any of the Poor Library books. These labels were in no sense ownership marks, and thus fall outside the scope of the present essay, but those wanting further information on them should consult Jefferson's letter to Watterston of May 7, 1815.

#### Bibliographical Note

OTHER ASPECTS of Jefferson's book-collecting are dealt with in William H. Peden's *Thomas Jefferson: Book-Collector*, a 1942 University of Virginia doctoral dissertation, and the works cited by Dr. Peden will serve as an adequate guide up to the war years, though special attention may appropriately be drawn here to Grolier Club-member, Randolph G. Adams' *Three Americanists*, 1939.

The essential works since 1942 on this phase of Jefferson

<sup>1</sup> Recorded shelf marks are S-63, 79, 443, 451, 1394, 1395, 1455, 1456, 1480, 1482, 1496, 1521, 1553, 1580, 1588, 1600, 1618, 1624, 1638, 2334, 2365, 2369, 2547, 2784, 2880, 2981, 3165, 3374, 3399, 3511, 3520, and 4257. Jefferson shelved his books according to size, the duodecimos occupying the topmost shelves, the favored octavos the middle and most easily accessible shelves, and the folios and quartos the lowest. Large folio volumes, Jefferson referred to as "Great folios," and these were shelved separately. Generally a book with a low shelf or chapter number (as the "24" in Chapter I of Plate IV) would indicate a duodecimo or smaller size; those with larger numbers (e.g., C 24. 309. of S-3511) an octavo, the largest (e.g., C. 24. 439. of S-3165) a folio. A shelf number was, however, relative, and depended upon a combination of the number and size of books in a given chapter. In a large grouping, such as Politics, 1 to 60 might all have been duodecimos, those to the three hundreds octavos, and those in the four hundreds or beyond in the quarto and/or folio category.

have been cited, namely: E. Millicent Sowerby's *Catalogue of the Library of Thomas Jefferson* and *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, edited by Julian P. Boyd. The student will also want to consult William B. O'Neal's exhaustive special study *Jefferson's Fine Arts Library*, 1956; Elizabeth Cometti's *Jefferson's Ideas on a University Library*, 1950; J. C. Wyllie's *Thomas Jefferson's Prayer Book*, 1952; and the 1958 *Report of the Curator of Monticello*.

This publication is issued by the Alderman Library  
of the University of Virginia  
and the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation  
to commemorate the visit of the Grolier Club to the University  
and Monticello on October 24 and 25, 1958.  
Acknowledgements are extended to Mr. P. J. Conkwright  
of the Princeton University Press,  
who designed the booklet,  
and Mr. Harold Hugo of the Meriden Gravure Company,  
who very generously contributed the prints.