

Obituaries

WILLIAM EVARTS BENJAMIN

William Evarts Benjamin, financier, collector and patron of many historical undertakings, died in New York, February 24, 1940. He was born in New York, February 19, 1859, the son of Park and Mary Brower (Western) Benjamin. His father, well known as poet and journalist, was literary editor of Horace Greeley's *New Yorker* and established several literary periodicals, notably the *New World*. The son was educated in the public schools of New York, the Union Classical Institute, and Union College at Schenectady, where he was a member of the class of 1880. Leaving college before graduation, he spent six years in the publishing business with the firms of John Wiley & Sons and Dodd, Mead & Co., and associating with his brother, Walter R. Benjamin, in the autograph business. In 1887 the brothers dissolved partnership, Walter specializing in autographs and William selling rare books and first editions, as well as autographs and prints. His first catalogue was in January, 1885, and in the ensuing seventeen years nearly one hundred catalogues came from his shop, covering all the fields of rare books, but primarily American literature. Some of the prices, such as \$30.00 for the first edition of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, and \$90.00 for Hawthorne's *Celestial Railroad*, are significant of the low prices of the times. He also engaged in publishing, bringing out of J. Appleton Morgan's *Shakespeare in Fact and Criticism*, John Boyd Thatcher's *The Continent of America*, Edgar Saltus' first novel, *Mr. Incoul's Misadventure*, and the revised edition of Stedman and Hutchinson's *Library of American Literature*. Part of the time he was in business with William H. Bell, under the firm name of Benjamin & Bell. He published in 1885 *The Longfellow Collectors' Hand-book, a Bibliography of First Editions*. From 1888 to

1890 he published a magazine for collectors, called *The Book Lover*. All of his work was characterized by carefulness and good taste. In 1902 he retired from the book business to spend the rest of his life in travel, collecting, and managing his estate. He was a director of several industrial corporations, at one time was president of the Atlantic Coast Electric Railway, and from 1921 to his death was president of the Taykair Corporation of New York City.

On November 17, 1886, Mr. Benjamin married Anne Engle Rogers, daughter of Henry H. Rogers, a founder of the Standard Oil Company. His wife died September 8, 1924, and he was survived by a son, Henry Rogers Benjamin, and a daughter, Mrs. Frederic McEvoy.

Mr. Benjamin never lost interest in his hobby of collecting, whether of books, manuscripts, or art. He was a donor of funds and book rarities to the several institutions in which he was interested. His most important gift was to the Library of Congress in 1927, when he made a donation of \$75,000 to endow a chair in American history, for the promotion of the study of American history. He gave to the Library of Congress the original manuscript of Jefferson's first draft of a constitution for the State of Virginia; to the New York Historical Society a document signed by King Charles II in 1674, authorizing Edmund Andros to take possession of New Netherland; and to Columbia University the Park Benjamin collection of American literature and an important collection of family papers. He was elected to the American Antiquarian Society in 1927 and to the Council of the Society in 1929. He made several important gifts to the Society, contributing a total of \$18,500 to its funds from 1928 to 1935. It was through his generous aid that we were able to acquire some notable files of early Pennsylvania newspapers, and his interest in our collection of American literature was evidenced by frequent gifts.

Mr. Benjamin possessed a forceful personality, was decided in his views and had a remarkable command of the English language. In an hour's conversation with him, one listened to an enormous vocabulary and an unusual fertility of thought. He was fond of

reminiscence, and because of his clear memory, his stories of the early days of American book collecting, fifty or more years ago, were stimulating and informative. It is unfortunate that he did not preserve in print the memories of an interesting life.

C. S. B.

JOHN HUSTON FINLEY

John Huston Finley died in his sleep on March 7, 1940. Although his health had been poor for some time, he was still carrying the weight of his seventy-six years lightly, and on the day before his death had gone to his office and written an editorial. He is survived by his widow, Mrs. Martha Ford Boyden Finley, a daughter, Mrs. William H. Kiser, Jr., and by two sons, Mr. Robert Lawrence Finley of New York and Professor John Huston Finley of Harvard University. His death brought messages of sorrow from many countries. In New York, where love rather than mere popularity is the word to describe the attachment which thousands of people from different groups had for him, flags were ordered at half-mast.

Finley had the rare ability to draw people to him because of the very qualities which usually narrow the circle of friendship. He was once described as one of the ten most cultured men in America, and yet he was beloved by people who never had the opportunities for culture. His scholarship was vast, but, far from drying his wit, it made him the most charming of after-dinner speakers and presiding officers. He attracted everyone to him without changing in one iota the characteristics which he had inherited. His lifelong consistency was one of the most remarkable things about him. His ancestry was colonial Scotch-Irish, and his last scholarly work, completed three days before his death, was a volume on the *Coming of the Scot*; but his friendship was international. President Masaryk was an intimate friend, and the Czecho-Slovaks of America officially mourned his death. Twelve governments bestowed thirteen decorations upon him. His back-

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