

Report of the Council

FOR another year the Society has functioned and even flourished under conditions of mounting taxes, decreasing income from investments, rising cost of living, and a gradually engulfing world war. All this still seems abnormal to the older generation, but to an increasing degree these conditions are becoming the natural course of things for younger scholars just reaching maturity. There is no use complaining about a state of the world for which we are all, in some measure, responsible. Adjustment is one of the laws of life. Looking back over the four thousand years of recorded history, it seems that a war or social-political upheaval in every generation is the normal expectation for the human race; whilst eras of peace, progress and plenty such as the United States of America enjoyed for half a century after 1865, are abnormal, and another may not be expected for many years to come.

The difficulties of maintaining a learned institution in times of violent adjustment are to some extent appreciated by all, and peculiarly felt by the Treasurer and the Finance Committee. As yet, our troubles are far less than those of our sister institutions in the British Isles; infinitely less than those of similar foundations in France, the Low Countries, Poland, the Scandinavian nations, and other nations that have fallen victims to the new barbarism. Our income from investments is impaired; theirs has been sequestered or wiped out. In our country, scholarly output has increased; in the conquered nations, including Germany and Austria, almost all the share of human effort which normally goes into learning and scholarship is absorbed in a quest for bare

subsistence on the part of the conquered, and in propaganda, or the organization of further crimes and cruelties, on the part of the conquerors. Our Society was founded in 1812, when a destructive invasion was momentarily expected. As the Act of Incorporation puts it, "the collection and preservation of the antiquities of our country" will "aid the progress of science," and "improve and instruct posterity."¹ We now have infinitely more antiquities to collect, face a greater danger of destruction, and believe that posterity is still in need of instruction and improvement.

There is only one other institution in the United States, the Library of Congress, that performs the same function as ours, of conserving the intellectual heritage of America as represented in the graphic arts. And it is not advisable to place all our cultural eggs in one basket. Our fellow-member, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in transferring his personal archives and collections to Hyde Park rather than in Washington, stressed the same danger of concentrating literary treasures in a capital city on tidewater, that was emphasized by Isaiah Thomas when he selected Worcester instead of Boston as the seat of the American Antiquarian Society. We have never had cause to regret the wisdom of our founders, and are gratified to have his principle of decentralization recognized in high quarters.

One indirect effect of the European war has been to make Americans more proudly conscious of their past, and more deeply interested in the beginnings of American culture. This has increased the value of our Society in the eyes of the public. Twenty years ago the tendency of American writers was to migrate to Europe, and employ their talents, if they employed them at all, on European, Oriental or universal themes. Most of these men and women are now back home, and some have discovered America anew in our Library. In

¹ *Proceedings*, 1812-1849, pp. 3-4.

1920, most cultured Europeans looked with indifference or contempt on America's past. Now, hundred of these intellectuals are refugees in our country, experiencing the values and virtues of American civilization. In the next few years we may expect some significant works by them on American history and culture.

In sum, the encouraging aspect of this era for our Society is the increased demand for material that we have preserved, and for the facilities that we offer. Letters requesting information flow in from every state of the Union, from other American countries, and from abroad. All this service imposes a severe burden on our small and faithful staff; but they and we do all we can to encourage and spread the idea that study in the American Antiquarian Society is indispensable for writers who devote themselves to the history of American literature and life. The scale of salaries in our Society, though perhaps not lower than that of other privately endowed institutions, is far lower than that of public libraries. Our staff is an unusually devoted group of men and women who give far more than is required in time and labor. We should, in the near future, provide for increases of salary of the existing staff, and add to it, in order to perform our functions effectively.

Financial bequests are therefore more needed than ever; and we have been fortunate in receiving several in the past year, as the Treasurer's Report relates. But the added income from these bequests does not compensate for the income from our earlier endowments, now necessarily being reinvested at a lower rate of interest. A year ago the Council issued an appeal for subscriptions from members, to be used for current expenses, such as salaries, upkeep and purchase of books. The result was most encouraging. Over one-third of the members answered this appeal, and several others who could not afford to give, wrote letters of encour-

agement and support. Seventy-five members gave sums varying from \$5 to \$1200, making a total subscription of \$10,210, which has enabled the Library to make its usual purchases, and to end the year without a deficit. For this loyal and generous support the Council is profoundly grateful to the members.

So far as we can see ahead, we shall have to rely on voluntary annual gifts of this sort to keep the Society functioning in a healthy manner. We cannot impose a membership fee, because all our members are elected *honoris causa*. We cannot obtain a state subvention, as many similar societies have done in Europe. Five years ago the Carnegie Corporation of New York came to our rescue with a grant of \$15,000 the last instalment of which was paid this past year. The aid thus given to the Society helped it to function normally at a time of severe financial pressure, and is again gratefully acknowledged. But we cannot expect these emergency grants to be repeated, for the competition for funds from the great educational foundations is very keen. The Society must in the long run depend on gifts and bequests of her members. The appeal to members for gifts for current use will therefore be renewed this year; and we hope that it will be met with even greater generosity than before.

Of our staff, the most important member under the veteran Director is the new Librarian, Dr. Clifford K. Shipton, who has just completed his first year of service to the Society, to our great satisfaction.

Mrs. Mary R. Reynolds joined the staff of the Society sixty years ago, in September 1881, and she has been constant and faithful in her service ever since. Last spring she was incapacitated by a severe illness from which she has fortunately recovered, but with strength so impaired that she cannot, at least in the near future, return to her "beloved work." Mrs. Reynolds will therefore become *emerita*

shortly. The Council wishes to express its profound gratefulness for her long, devoted, and expert labors for the Society. Her place is one of those that can never really be filled by anyone else.

Irreplaceable, too, are the fellow-members whom we have lost by death in the last six months. For varied and solid learning in the history and literature of classical antiquity, of Europe during the middle ages and Renaissance, and of Colonial New England, few if any members of this Society have been the equal of George Lyman Kittredge. Elected in 1901, he was one of the senior members at the time of his death on July 23, 1941. He contributed important papers to our *Proceedings*, enlivened our meetings with his mordant wit, and generously assisted his fellow members from his vast store of erudition. He was a man of such pungent personality that a Kittredge tradition began to form even in his lifetime. We may expect Kittredge biographies and bibliographies, even as of Cotton Mather, whom he championed at some of our meetings.

Charles Henry Taylor, who died August 18, 1941, elected to the Society in 1912, was a constant and lavish donor to the Society's Library during his nearly thirty years of membership. He gave literally thousands of imprints every year, including his complete collections of lithography and journalism. At the time of his death he had been a member of the Council for twelve, and a Vice-president of the Society for eight years. His warm friendliness, cheerful common sense and robust good humor made him thousands of friends, among whom none will miss him more than ourselves.

A society like this needs constant replenishment in the membership, and your Council spends considerable time and effort in making suitable nominations. So far there has been no dearth of excellent candidates. Although the core of the Society, those who direct its policy and watch over its

activities, must necessarily be recruited from a relatively narrow radius, the membership is national in scope; and the Council, in its nominations, endeavors to maintain a rough balance between collectors, professional scholars, and bibliophiles. There is a tendency to recruit new members from a rather narrow social and racial group, although they are well spread out regionally. In times of social flux like these, it is highly desirable that members make a search for new blood, and place in the nomination book names of men outside the "Brahmin Caste" who are becoming collectors of and authorities on American History.

One expenditure has had to be made from capital funds, and another must be made shortly. The hydraulic book-lift in use ever since this building was constructed has outworn its usefulness and has required constant repair during the last few years. A few weeks ago a serious leak in one of the pipes occurred at night, and when discovered early the next morning there were two inches of water on the basement floor. Fortunately only a few duplicate books were damaged; but this accident, which might well have had serious consequences, focussed attention to our defective equipment. By vote of the Council a new electric elevator for both books and passengers should be promptly installed in the same shaft, if Government priorities will allow it.

The need of a new book stack is becoming more insistent every year, owing to the crowded condition of the building. Until it is provided, room can be found for current accessions only by continually shifting books; and everyone knows how time-consuming that is for the staff, how damaging to the collections, and how fatal to prompt location. The last addition to the book stack, constructed in 1924, was expected to last for fifteen years, and did. A new stack would presumably last somewhat longer, since in view of the restrictions imposed on our various fields of collecting, the

rate of increase is declining, and we are confining our efforts to improving the collections already begun, rather than branching out into new fields.

The *Proceedings* of the Society for April and October, 1940, have been printed and distributed to members. A new format, with a wider page, has been adopted, as well as a new and more modern type. The appearance of the *Proceedings* has thus been greatly improved, and the wider page gives the opportunity to use larger illustrations.

One of the duties of our Society is to place the expert knowledge of her members at the service of the public. Much time of the Director and the Librarian is taken up in giving their opinions on the date, genuineness, or value, of printed books and manuscripts. A similar opportunity for public service exists in connection with archaeological discoveries, real and false. Last year your President was invited to examine the alleged Eleanor Dare stones in Virginia. Ordinarily, the finders or promoters of such objects do not want unprejudiced expert opinions. When they do, it seems that one of us ought to oblige. As the alleged Dare stones seemed a natural object of antiquarian interest, your President accepted the chairmanship of a committee that examined them *in situ*, and made recommendations for further research as to their genuineness. His report to the Society was delivered at the April meeting.

In accordance with a vote of the Council, your President represented the Society in the ceremonies at New Brunswick, New Jersey, on October 11, 1941, on the occasion of the 175th anniversary of Rutgers University. Academic ceremonies of this kind emphasize the unity and the continuity of all learning; it is therefore highly appropriate that our Society take part in them.

Difficult and dangerous times lie ahead for us all. Yet the fundamental things that affect human life on this planet

are still unchanged. The tides ebb and flow, the sun, moon and planets rise and set, the seasons come and go, and the God of our fathers watches over us. This Society was organized in the knowledge that human life goes on, somehow, whether we wish it or not; and that the quality of that life depends more on human effort than on blind forces of nature. The founding of this Society was an act of faith, to the effect that by conserving what we can of the learning, the beauty and the achievement of the past, we may impart the best of America's past to the infinite ages that lie waiting before.

SAMUEL ELIOT MORISON,
For the Council

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