

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL

THE most significant feature of the Society's work in the last six months is the way in which members have aided in building up the Library during the period of our restricted income. For over a year we have purchased less than a quarter of the usual number of books and have been unable with our own funds to take advantage of the many opportunities offered us to acquire rare volumes. In the field of current and recent books—the historical literature of the past thirty years—our purchases have been reduced to a minimum. In this emergency, members like Mr. Taylor and Mr. Jones, who have been constant donors to the Library, have increased the number and importance of their gifts; other members, like Mr. Bowen and Mr. Kellen, have allowed us to select needed volumes from their private libraries; Mr. Lombard and Mr. Norcross have presented many valued titles; and some members through direct gift of funds have enabled us to buy at important auctions.

It is the ordinary belief that a library like this gains the larger proportion of accessions through gift rather than purchase. But this has not been true certainly in the last twenty-five years. In the infancy of the Society, the library was increased almost entirely by gift, which meant that there was little selection or discriminating acquisition. If the Society had been blessed with larger funds, the opportunity to purchase at the prices of a century ago would have placed the Library beyond all comparison in the field of rare Americana. But not until the Brinley sale was there any concerted effort to buy scarce and valuable volumes. During the last twenty-five years fully two-thirds of all acquisi-

tions have been bought at auction, from book dealers or from private owners. Early newspaper files, for instance, are almost never acquired except through purchase. Certain large collections, such as genealogy and local history, established for many years, need only the purchase of recent books or occasional early ones to keep the collection complete. The way in which later fields have been developed has been through buying a large private collection—such as the Marshall collection of bookplates—and then trying to fill in the gaps. The collection of American literature, one of the most useful in the Library because not gathered comprehensively by any other library, was developed by another method. Starting eight years ago with an assemblage of scarcely three hundred books, which happened to be in the Library, the collection has now been built up to about seven thousand titles, comprising four-fifths of the literary output of some four hundred American authors. This collection has been almost wholly made by examining thousands of lists and catalogues and buying volumes singly. But in all these various methods of acquisition, the purchasing of books has been necessary, often of course made possible by the gifts from members of funds wherewith to purchase.

Some of the rarest items, however, come to us through gift, true this present year as always. It is a temptation to enlarge upon such a gift as the broadside Declaration of Independence printed at Salem by E. Russell, presented by Mr. Jones, or upon the wonderful D. C. Johnston collection of drawings and caricatures given by Mr. Taylor, or upon the collection of early Hawaiian newspapers presented by Mrs. Amos R. Little, or upon the fine collection of Whitfield tracts given by Mr. Streeter, but these are all in the province of the Librarian's annual report to be prepared next October.

There have been no important alterations which concern the building or grounds. The new oil burning

boiler installed early in the fall has functioned satisfactorily and, in spite of the severe winter, there has been a considerable saving already apparent over the cost of coal. In the grounds, the barberry hedges in the small plots bordering the front walk were killed by the frost and have been removed, thus carrying the lawn up to the border of the walk.

The only two deaths in the membership since October were those of Archer Butler Hulbert who died at Colorado Springs, December 24, 1933, and Harold Murdock who died at Chestnut Hill, April 5, 1934. Professor Hulbert, eminent as a historian and chronicler of the far West, was elected to the Society in 1912, and at the time of his residence in Worcester in 1918-1920 was engaged for part of that time as an assistant in this Library, being in charge of the newspaper collection. Mr. Murdock, whose ability in historical research made him a recognized authority, especially on the American Revolution, was elected to this Society in 1922. Sketches of both members will appear in the Proceedings.

A bibliographical venture which greatly interests this Society is the comprehensive "Check-List of American Book Auction Catalogues" now in course of preparation by Mr. George L. McKay, curator of the Grolier Club of New York. This monumental task is one that the American Antiquarian Society has long desired to undertake or to see compiled. Bibliographically such a list would be valuable in tracing copies of rare or unlocated books, and from the literary viewpoint it would add much to our knowledge of the culture and the libraries of the country from the early times to the present day. The Check-List attempts to record chronologically every library or collection of books sold at auction from 1713 to 1930, with the names of the owners of libraries where given, and the location of copies of the printed catalogues. Already the proof has been printed, carrying the list to 1900 and this part alone comprises over four thousand

entries. The full list to 1930 would contain as many more. The proof is now being checked in this Library, rather a large task, as we have nearly six thousand catalogues, many priced and with names of buyers. We have had occasion to use our collection of book catalogues constantly, but because of the lack of a list of them, with an index of the owners of libraries sold, the collection has not been readily accessible. Now, due to Mr. McKay's laudable undertaking which is to be published in the *New York Public Library Bulletin*, the defect is to be remedied.¹

Respectfully submitted,

CLARENCE S. BRIGHAM,

For the Council

¹The Council Report as read included a partial history of American book auction firms. Later the writer of the Report was requested by Mr. McKay to contribute an introduction to his Check-List and to write a comprehensive history of book sales and auction firms. As this suggestion was agreed to, it has been deemed best not to print any part of the history in the Proceedings of the Society, since the subject will be treated much more fully in the article as prepared for the *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*.

Copyright of Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society is the property of American Antiquarian Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.