

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL

THE most important object in administering this Library is to make its possessions of continued usefulness in research. It goes without saying that this should be the chief aim of every modern literary institution, but too frequently libraries seek primarily to acquire books rather than to make them useful. Perhaps the old idea of European museums which gathered great collections but welcomed few students, or were seldom open for visitors, persisted in this country. In the early days of our own Society, the library was not at all times open to visitors, and certain members had keys to enable them at least to conduct research—a kind of private institution of use chiefly for its own members.

But all this was changed, of course, many many years ago. Isaiah Thomas or Christopher Baldwin would be surprised, could they enter the Library today and witness the large number of scholars coming to us from every part of the country for information upon their chosen subjects. With increase of funds allowing us to make the collections available, and with the marvellous improvements in transportation admitting quick methods of travel, the scene has changed. Not a day passes but that visitors from far away States, making pilgrimages to New England, either specifically or incidentally to consult this Library, apply here for information, much of it not available elsewhere, or perhaps not so comprehensively found under one roof.

During the past summer this influx of visiting scholars, working during their freedom from academic studies, has been unusually noticeable. Often the space available for such readers has been insufficient

so that book alcoves or special rooms have been used. The Librarian in his Report usually refers to some of the specific queries which students bring, often in strange and unexpected fields.

One of the satisfactory results of such research is that the visitors take back to many sections of the country a knowledge of this Library, and spread an understanding of its resources far beyond our borders. Not only is this good for scholarship in general, but it brings to us a continual flow of offerings, whether for gift or purchase, allowing us to add notably to our collections. Particularly is this true in the fields of early printing and of newspapers, where the collections have been doubled in the last twenty years, largely from offers made to us from private owners whose knowledge of the Society comes only from reputation. To this knowledge gleaned from the impressions of visitors should also be added the prestige received from the Guide to the Resources of the Society, issued last year. This comprehensive and well illustrated publication, made possible through the aid of Mrs. Homer Gage, was distributed widely throughout the country, in an edition of 2000 copies, among libraries, collectors and possible donors. Already many times has its effect been felt in bringing accessions to the Library.

Unexpected gifts of rare books make for romance in collecting. For thirty years I have been seeking for information regarding a library which had been owned by a prominent Newport family. Although I was indirectly related to this family, all that I could learn was that it had disappeared seventy years ago, taken away by descendants who had moved to the far West. This past summer a letter came from a town in Texas, inquiring about the value of certain files of early Newport newspapers, the querist being referred to us by the librarian of a Texas library. It was soon discovered that this was a part of the Newport collection for which I had been searching so many years. As the result of a most interesting correspondence covering

several weeks, the newspaper files and scores of examples of rare and early American printing are now on our shelves, helping to complete collections already strong, and making available for use material hitherto unlocated. Such discoveries as these make up for the drudgery of library detail.

Quite the most important happening of recent weeks was the hurricane of September 21, 1938. Our own loss was fortunately small. As a matter of record, it is to be stated that we lost only some of the flashing on the copper dome, which was soon repaired, and a number of small evergreens in the pine grove in the rear of the building. Three of the fine elms bordering the front walk were bent over or partially stripped of branches, but with the aid of a firm of tree experts they were immediately righted to a vertical position or repaired. Throughout the storm most of the staff remained in the library building, watching the great elms crash all around us, and waiting for the gale to subside in order to travel on the few streets not blocked by fallen trees.

It might be of interest to turn back and inquire how often similar storms have endangered us in the past. The frequency of severe gales, or cyclones, or hurricanes in New England has been more noticeable than is ordinarily supposed. Sidney Perley of Salem, who died about ten years ago, and was prominent as a Salem historian, in 1891 wrote a book of 340 pages on "Historic Storms of New England." He included snowstorms, floods, earthquakes and other phenomena of nature, but it is in his narrative of great gales that we are primarily interested.

Mr. Perley gathered his facts chiefly from contemporaneous newspapers, although since newspapers did not begin until 1704, before that date he relied upon private journals and diaries. He stated that New England had more tornadoes, cyclones and hurricanes, in proportion to the area, than any other part of the United States.

The first great storm recorded for New England was in August 1635, when a terrific gale, which lasted for five hours, destroyed many ships, blew down houses and wrecked most of the standing timber—a storm which Governor Bradford records was greater than anyone living, either English or Indian, had ever seen. Almost every decade there was a great wind storm which did much damage, but generally over a small area or a limited section of the coast line. At Leicester, for instance, in 1759 occurred a cyclone which blew so hard that according to the chroniclers it drove loose nails into trees so firmly that they could not be withdrawn without a hammer, and articles from houses were found at Holden ten miles away.

Probably the most destructive storm in all New England's history was the historic gale of September 23, 1815. It seems much like the recent storm in that the wind blew from the southeast, wrecked the Southern New England coast line with floods and tidal waves, and covered a wide area. Its greatest force was felt in Providence, where the terrific wind and high tide forced the water up Providence Harbor into the centre of the town, to a depth of six feet. A brass marker still exists on a building in Market Square, a few feet above the sidewalk, to show the height of the water. I am told that the high water of this present storm was two feet above this mark, or about eight feet above the street line. Twenty large sailing vessels—ships and brigs—were driven into the centre of the town, cracking the bridges and left stranded in the streets and the cove, which was then back of the present Railroad Station. The damage in Providence alone was calculated at \$1,500,000.

In Worcester much the same conditions occurred as during the last hurricane: uprooting of trees, unroofing of houses and damage throughout the County by water. The Worcester *Spy* records that flocks of sea gulls took refuge in Worcester meadows and that salt blown by the wind formed on the windows and made

all fresh water brackish. One of the results of the storm was the great increase in building in 1816 around Worcester, and throughout New England, due to the cheapness of lumber saved from the fallen trees.

Not within memory has the Society been so heavily afflicted by death among its officers. Arthur Prentice Rugg, President, T. Hovey Gage, Recording Secretary, and Homer Gage and Francis Russell Hart, members of the Council, all died within the space of six months. Chief Justice Rugg, a member of the Council since 1909 and President of the Society succeeding Calvin Coolidge in 1933, died on June 12. Thomas Hovey Gage, Recording Secretary since 1921, died on July 15. Francis Russell Hart, a member of the Council since 1933, died on January 18. Homer Gage, a member of the Council since 1933 and constantly interested in the Society's welfare, died on July 3. Filling the vacancies caused by these deaths will be the duty of the Society at its meeting today.

In addition to the deaths noted above, there should be recorded the death on April 27 of Henry L. Bullen of Elmhurst, N. Y., elected to the Society in 1924, and the death on July 13 of Nathaniel T. Kidder of Milton, Mass., elected to the Society in 1916. Sketches of all of these members will appear in the printed Proceedings of this meeting.

There should also be noted the deaths of two foreign members: Arthur George Doughty, of Ottawa, Canada, Dominion Archivist, on December 1, 1936, and Luis Gonzalez Obregón, of Mexico City, Director of the Archivo General of Mexico, on June 20, 1938.

The Cotton Mather Bibliography, made possible by the initial gift of Tracy W. McGregor and by continued donations from William G. Mather, is approaching completion under the able editing of Thomas J. Holmes. When it is finally completed, funds will have to be found for its printing, not perhaps a difficult achievement in view of the importance and scholarly nature of the undertaking.

Several bequests have come to the Society during the last six months. The sum of \$20,000 bequeathed by Clarence W. Bowen was paid over to the Society in May, to be expended in completing Mr. Bowen's "History of Woodstock." Mr. Donald L. Jacobus of New Haven has been engaged to compile the remaining volumes of the work, which should be finished within two or three years. Whatever amount will remain after the completion of this History will be added to the Society's funds. The will of Nathaniel T. Kidder of Milton bequeathed \$5000 to the Society, evidencing the interest which Mr. Kidder showed in the Library during his lifetime. Mr. Thomas Hovey Gage, a member of the Society since 1914 and its efficient Recording Secretary for the past seventeen years, left to the Society the sum of \$5000. His constant aid and counsel in conducting the Society's affairs is here gratefully recorded. Dr. Homer Gage, a member of the Society since 1910 and upon its Council for the past five years, in his will made provision for the gift to the Society of \$100,000, to be used according to his wish in the construction of the much needed addition to the book stack. Dr. Gage, one of the most helpful supporters when Mr. Lincoln was trying to put the Society financially upon its feet, and always ready to give of his own time to aid in raising funds, has thus made it possible eventually to relieve our crowded condition. Only six months ago he was discussing with certain members of the Council the need of beginning upon some method of raising funds for a new stack, and now out of his own generous impulses, this relief has been granted.

Respectfully submitted,

CLARENCE S. BRIGHAM,
For the Council

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