

An article on the Mercantile Library of this city appeared in the BULLETIN a few evenings ago, drawing the attention of "the great reading public" to this flourishing institution; the benefits that have arisen from the late duplication of the stock in an increase of revenue, and the necessity soon of either enlarging the present building or erecting a new one, to accommodate its rapidly increasing treasures, and afford room for its stockholders, now numbered by thousands.

Whilst every one is willing to admit the usefulness of this institution, the object of the present article is, if possible, even more deserving. Any one acquainted with books knows that if an order was given to Lippincott of this city, or Appleton of New York, to duplicate the volumes in the one, a few weeks would suffice to carry it out. But how many weeks would be required to replace those in the Philadelphia Library—priceless treasures, I might add, that neither time nor money united with the utmost zeal and interest in the pursuit could restore. And yet this invaluable collection, the accumulation of upwards of a century, is allowed to remain in the present building, anything but fire-proof, and exposed to all the danger that such a location in the heart of this city, and on two sides adjoining inflammable dwellings, must be subject to, the apathy existing on the subject being truly remarkable.

How universal would be the regret, not only in Philadelphia but throughout the literary world, if this library was destroyed! A few thousand dollars, it is true, have been subscribed towards a new building, but nothing like the sum required for the erection of a suitable edifice, and those in charge of the matter, as with the Washington monument, seem to be making but little progress.

Quite recently a very valuable and in some respects extraordinary library, belonging to one of our most esteemed fellow citizens, who has devoted a lifetime to scientific pursuits, and especially to natural history, was presented to the College of Physicians of this city. The donor was very anxious that his books should be preserved in a fire-proof building, and after examining the various libraries that our city boasts of, finally decided on the college as the only place that could fully carry out his wishes. There can be but little doubt that the collection is in excellent hands, and will contribute much to the benefit of this old and deservedly esteemed institution; but every one will admit, on the score of usefulness, that where the volumes will be sought for and read by a favored few in their new location, they would have been studied by thousands in the larger library.

Before concluding, permit me to say a few words of the treasures of the Philadelphia Library, spoken of as priceless in the commencement. Who that has visited the Library but has admired the beautiful Bible written on parchment at the commencement of the Eleventh century, one of the few copies of the "Book of all Books" in manuscript in this country; and the still more perfect Psalter, illuminated with so much care as to make it the admiration of all Bibliomaniacs, and their despair at the hope of ever possessing such a volume, dating back to the early part of the 15th century, and in the most wonderful preservation?

Aiken's Revolutionary Bible of 1782, so exceedingly rare at the present time, is also in the Library, in this respect to be classed with Caxton's Golden Legend, printed the same year that Gower's *Confessio Amantis* was, and ranking as four in rarity, (six being the highest); as well as works from the press of his successor, Wynker de Worde, and other early printers, that easily bring their weight in gold. The Vulgate Bible, also, is in splendid preservation and was printed a score of years before even America was discovered.

"That place that does
Contain my books, the best companions, is
To me a glorious court, where hourly I
Converse with the old sages and philosophers;
And sometimes, for variety, I confer
With kings and emperors, and weigh their counsels,
Calling their victories, if unjustly got,
Unto a strict account, and in my fancy
Deface their ill-placed statues. Can I then
Part with such constant pleasures, to embrace
Uncertain varieties? No: be it your care
To augment a heap of wealth; it shall be mine
To increase in knowledge."

England, and the nations of Europe are well represented in the library, and proud must we be of such an army, if Johnson was right in declaring that "the chief glory of every people arises from its authors," whilst its treasures on American history makes it dear to every student's heart. Du Simitiere's collection of books, pamphlets and manuscripts, collected during and after the Revolution, would alone make the fortune of an ordinary library, and when we add to it nearly all the known works relating to America that have ever been published—public documents, &c., presented when our city was the seat of government—complete sets of newspapers, including the *American Mercury*, from 1719 to 1745—Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette*, from 1728 to 1804—the *Pennsylvania Journal*, from 1747 to 1793, and others too numerous to mention—*Poor Richard's Almanacs*, from 1733 to 1747, and most of the other works that were composed by or bear the imprint of Franklin, our anxiety as to the safety of the library may be well excused.

The same feeling of security that exists here existed in Washington some fourteen years ago with regard to the Congressional library, and it was only its destruction by fire at that time that aroused our representatives to the necessity of erecting a thoroughly fire-proof building, and the result is the beautiful apartment that contains the present collection, the whole room, even to its most minute part, being of iron; a rare combination of beauty, strength and adaptation to the use for which it was designed. Walk through its long galleries or explore its alcoves and you are struck with the sense of perfect security against its old enemy, fire, nothing being left, literally, but the books to burn, and even these would be protected to a certain extent by their bindings. It is too much to hope we may have such a building in this city, but it may well serve as a guide in the erection of a less costly edifice, in which the library may remain for generations the delight and instruction of all seekers after knowledge who may be drawn within its portals.

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