

## The Princeton Library

BY WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

*The Commencement season at Princeton, always gay and memorable, was particularly memorable ninety years ago. In addition to the usual events—the Baccalaureate Sermon by President McCosh on Sunday, the annual Gymnastic Exhibition and the Class Day exercises on Monday, and the degree-conferring exercises on Wednesday—on Tuesday, 24 June 1873, two new buildings in the Gothic style were inaugurated with addresses by distinguished Americans. John Cleve Green (1800-1875), a descendant of Princeton's first president, Jonathan Dickinson, had made a fortune in the China trade and in American railroads. The largest benefactor of the College up to that time, he had purchased and presented the northeast corner of the present campus and financed the construction of the original Dickinson Hall (1870-1920) and the John C. Green School of Science and the Chancellor Green Library, designed by William Appleton Potter, which were completed in 1873. The School of Science, a massive stone building with a clock tower, stood on the site of Firestone Library. (It was destroyed by fire 26 November 1928.) The new library, the first separate building Princeton had possessed for that purpose, was named for Mr. Green's brother, Henry Woodhull Green of the Class of 1820, sometime Chancellor of New Jersey. Joseph Henry, emeritus professor of Princeton, secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, and president of the National Academy of Sciences, gave the address inaugurating the School of Science. The venerable white-bearded William Cullen Bryant (Williams 1813), poet, lawyer, editor of the New York Evening Post, and the acknowledged first citizen of New York, addressed the gathering in the Chancellor Green Library; the next day he was made LL.D. of the College of New Jersey. We reprint his remarks from his Prose Writings (1884), edited by his son-in-law, Parke Godwin (Princeton 1834), II, 324-328. The building referred to by Bryant ceased to be used as a library in 1948; it now houses the Chancellor Green Student Center, opened in 1954.—M.H.T.*

IN RISING to address a public assembly in this pleasant town of Princeton, allow me to say that there is something in the solid and venerable aspect of the place, in its historical associations as the scene of one of the most important battles of our Revolution, and for a time the seat of the Continental Congress, and in the recollection that a president of its noble institution of learning was one of the leaders in that Revolution, and that from these learned shades have gone forth more statesmen than from any other college, to shape the polity of our Republic and direct its workings—not to speak of the illustrious men whom it has trained up for other walks of life—in all these there is something which inspires a kind of awe, and I naturally dread to encounter the grave judgment of those whom I see before me. But, inasmuch as I do not mean, fortunately for myself and those who hear me, to hold the audience long, the dread will soon be over.

Before I congratulate the public and all the friends of good learning—and this includes, of course, the friends of the College of New Jersey—on the opening of this beautiful building as the College Library, let me congratulate the gentleman to whose liberality we are indebted for it, and for the provision made for the gradual enlargement of the collection of books which it is to contain. He is one, I am happy to say, who prizes the uses of wealth beyond its possession; and, instead of clinging to it while life lasts, and only then directing how it shall be disposed of when he can possess it no longer, he forces it to go from his hands upon an errand of beneficence. He has his reward in seeing how worthily thus far it has performed the office on which he sent it forth.

I read the other day, in a book published in 1839, that the library of New Jersey College then consisted of eight thousand volumes. At present, with the aid of the benefactions of Mr. Green, to whom I have just referred, I am informed that the number will exceed a hundred thousand—a number equal to that of several of the public libraries of Europe which have long been famous—while provision is made for its future increase from year to year. If in the next half century its increase should be in the same proportion, it will take its place among libraries of the first class in the Old World—the accumulations of many centuries. It is well that the library should keep pace in its growth with the institution to which it belongs. Under the present wise and fortunate administration of the college, the course of study prescribed to the students has been greatly enlarged; new branches of learning and sci-

ence have been added; new professorships have been created, fellowships endowed, and prizes proposed to reward the diligence of the students. A library amply stored has become more important than ever, for with a wider sphere of study there must be wider and deeper research.

To form an adequate idea of the value of books, it is only necessary to suppose a state of things which should cause their sudden destruction. I do not recollect that any author into whose works I have looked has ever taken the trouble to imagine and describe the condition to which the immediate annihilation of books and manuscripts would reduce the human race. It may be said that such an event is altogether impossible. Nay, not so—improbable, I grant—improbable, if you please, to the utmost limit of improbability—but still possible. Let us suppose the white ant—the insect pest which in South America devours and destroys books and manuscripts with such fearful voracity that, as Humboldt avers, they have not left in an extensive district a single manuscript a hundred years old—to become unexpectedly numerous in all civilized countries. Let us suppose it to multiply as strangely as the sugar-ant in the West India island of Grenada, when, coming from nobody knew where, it invaded the plantations in vast armies, forming dams across the streams with their drowned bodies, over which the living ones crossed to the opposite bank, devouring everything before them which had animal or vegetable life, desolating the fields and gardens, and threatening to drive the human race from Grenada, until, in 1780, the beneficent interposition of a terrific storm of wind and rain annihilated the vast mass of insect life and delivered the island. Imagine the white ant, produced in like numbers, by means as mysterious, invading the haunts of men everywhere, creeping into our libraries and publication offices, and consuming every printed page and every manuscript, and everything on which the pen or the press can leave its trace. Into what confusion and dismay would society at once be thrown! The reader of the daily gazette from that moment would find himself ignorant of what was going on in the world, and would long in vain to learn what had happened since yesterday. In the crowded city he would find himself a hermit. The reader for entertainment would miss his accustomed refreshment; the inquirer after knowledge would find no path open to his researches; the daily reader of Scripture would look about him in vain for the sacred volume. The tribunals would be forced to grope their way without statutes

or lawbooks; the advocate would have no precedents on which to found his arguments save those which he might possibly remember or invent for the occasion. All the records of the past, all the lessons of history, all the discoveries of science, all the conclusions of philosophy, all that the poets have woven into song, all that has been written down of moral and religious truth, would be lost, and be as if they had never been, save such portions of these priceless treasures as might be retained in that treacherous repository, the human memory; and how soon, by the process of oral transmission, might that portion become changed and corrupted and encumbered with spurious additions! In the places of worship, half-remembered litanies would be stammered, half-forgotten hymns given out in halting metre and sung to tunes imperfectly recollected, and mutilated passages of Holy Writ repeated to unedified congregations.

In such a state of things we should become deeply sensible of our immense obligations to the past. For it is to the past that we owe what we are, both in body and mind. The past ages have moulded the age in which we live to the shape it now wears; but for the past, man would be helplessly in a savage state. Every advance in civilization, every shining example of active virtue, every wise or sacred precept of human conduct, every triumph of art and skill, everything, in short, that stores the mind with wisdom, or instructs the hand, or enlightens the conscience, is of the past, and books are the repositories in which they are laid up for the use of mankind from generation to generation. Destroy the volumes in which they are contained, and you blot out the past ages, with all that they have done for us, and the human race would drift hopelessly into barbarism.

And now we stand under a roof dedicated to the great minds of the past—the temple of a thousand venerable memories. The illustrious ones who have passed the gates of death before us may have left their material part in graves marked by some known memorial, or their dust may be scattered to the winds, but here is what the earth still possesses of their higher nature. Here are their words, still animated by the living soul, and here is the record of their glorious example. It matters not where their bones are laid while we have among us, in the volumes which this structure will contain from century to century, this remnant of the immortal spirit. May none enter among them without an emotion of reverence; may none who come to hold converse in these al-

coves with the mighty minds of other years fail to recognize with gratitude the providence which, through the invention of letters, has enabled those whom God endowed with eminent gifts of intellect to speak to their fellow-men of all succeeding time, and has thus in part repealed the doom of death.

## Library Notes

### BOOK OF BOOKS

During the period from May 15 through September 30 the Library presented in the main gallery, in honor of the Sesquicentennial of the Princeton Theological Seminary, an exhibition called "Book of Books, The English Bible and Its Antecedents." A related display of "Maps of the Holy Land," prepared by the Curator of the Maps Division, showed the work of early map-makers and pointed out ways in which the concept of "the Holy Land" found cartographic expression in guides for navigators and pilgrims and in publications of biblical archaeologists. A display in the Princetoniana Room, described more fully below, recalled the beginnings of the Princeton Theological Seminary and its relationship to the College. A preview of these exhibitions with a reception for faculty and students of the Seminary was held on the afternoon of May 15.

The "Book of Books" exhibition, built around the English versions of the Bible which have exercised a decisive influence on the language and literature of the English-speaking world, was based to a large extent on the private collection of William H. Scheide, with supplementary material from the Princeton Theological Seminary, the American Bible Society, and the Princeton University Library itself. A leaflet available to visitors, which was distributed to subscribers with the last issue of the *Chronicle*, contains a brief guide to the exhibition and records the more important of the items shown. Four outstanding pages selected from the exhibition are reproduced in the present issue of the *Chronicle*, through the courtesy of Mr. Scheide. The following notes provide a commentary on these illustrations:

1.—*Wycliffe Bible*. The Wycliffe Bible, the first complete translation into English, from St. Jerome's Latin Vulgate version, was completed about the year 1382, in Chaucer's time. It was inspired and partly done by John Wycliffe (ca. 1328-1384), who was aided by Nicholas of Hereford and other Oxford scholars. Soon after its completion this text was revised by John Purvey and most of the surviving manuscripts are in this later form. The manuscript in

