

11 Mar 1906 cont'd

Our National Library, the library of Congress, comes first of course, and its history as traced in a volume just issued is extremely interesting. It appears as the first of a series on American Libraries. All letters and speeches which relate to the founding in 1800, many picturesque incidents, many antiquarian details, many expressions of contemporary opinion, so interesting in the light of its present status, are given in full.

It had reached only very modest size and importance when it was destroyed by the British in 1814. The private library of Thomas Jefferson at Monticello was at that time the ~~most and most~~ important private library in the States, and he offered to sell it to Congress for \$23,000. It consisted of about 7,000 volumes. After much discussion it was bought to form the foundation of the new Congressional Library.

The speeches and correspondences on this subject are of general interest as illustrative of the political and literary condition of that period. But of particular interest to Virginians are some specimens of the spirit of the press, in advancing reasons why Congress should buy the library of Mr. Jefferson.

The Petersburg Courier, of October 25th, 1814, says:

"Another great objection is that Mr. Jefferson's library contains the works of Voltaire—what a pitiful observation! Will it be said that the works of an author, which hold the front rank on the shelves of all the libraries of Europe, and which may be found in the libraries of Oxford and Cambridge, and in the four Scotch universities, should be prohibited a place in the Library of Congress? Will the force of Federal prejudice and supererogation be so powerful as to effect this?"

The National Intelligencer of same date says: "It is strange that the ~~interest of party~~ should penetrate even the temple of science, and that an objection is made to the purchase of a collection that any Monarch in

Europe would be proud to own. For such a library the British Parliament would give 50,000 pounds." Mr. George Ticknor, one of those choice spirits who made New England the center of learning, visited Mr. Jefferson at Monticello, spent several delightful and memorable days, and heartily approved the collection. Pardon is asked for a digression here to say that in no history or biographical sketch is there to be found a more intimate or thoroughly delightful study of the "Sage of Monticello" than in Ticknor's "Life and Letters," by his wife. Mr. Jefferson seemed to form quite an affection for the young Federalist from New England, for not long afterward he writes him a letter from "Poplar Forest, near Lynchburg." It may not be inappropriate to digress a bit further and to quote one sentence from the letter, in which his long-cherished plans for the Virginia University are set forth: "My hopes for the appropriation are kept in check by the character of the Legislature, whose members do not generally possess information enough to perceive that knowledge is power. Knowledge is safety and knowledge is happiness." The superiority of our Legislature of 1906 is shown in their liberal provisions for the educational institutions made in the passing session.

So we say, without any great stretch of the truth, that the Jefferson collection formed the cornerstone of the great National Library. And though the library has had its second burning, there is still preserved as its most precious remnant the library of the distinguished Virginian. The books were systematically catalogued by Mr. Jefferson, and his scheme is the basis of the present unrivalled system of that great library. Since its second destruction by fire in 1851, it has grown rapidly. In 1866, the great Smithsonian Institute library of 40,000 volumes was transferred to the library of Congress.

At this time an increased appropriation was asked for, and on the resolutions, speeches were made which were gems of logic and oratory. Since 1872, by the copyright law, one copy of every publication which claims copyright, is required to be deposited in this library, and from this source alone nearly 25,000 articles are received. The American people, in its love for books, has erected a building such as the world had never before seen devoted to the

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