

THOMAS JEFFERSON'S BOOKS.

The story of the third president's library gathered together in Europe and the United States—its sale to the government the foundation of the present Congressional Library—Details of the collection.

BY AINSWORTH R. SPOFFORD.

Of notable book collectors very few are to be found among the presidents of the United States. Washington and both the Adamases had moderately good private libraries, that of Washington (now in part preserved in the Boston Athenæum) numbering about a thousand volumes. Garfield collected perhaps as many more, but the only president who made what could be termed a notable collection of books was Jefferson. He began it early in life, and before he went to France as minister he had acquired a fairly good select library, especially in political science and jurisprudence. As an example of his assiduity in this direction, he copied with his own hand several volumes of Virginia laws, either out of print or never printed, and these form a part of his collection now in the Congressional Library.

In Paris, where he resided six years, he continued to amass books for his library, frequenting book shops on the quays along the Seine (then rich in intellectual spoils) and placing orders with commissionaires for works desired, until he had accumulated an aggregate of nearly seven thousand volumes. Returning home in 1789, Jefferson collected but few books during his busy year, as secretary of state and as president. Six years after retiring from the presidency, in 1809, he found himself encumbered with debt at Monticello,

"An old man broken with the storms of state."

For he had kept open house with old-fashioned Virginia hospitality for years, the "hotel Jefferson," being a resort for countless friends, admirers and foreign visitors. This, with short crops, an estate neglected during his long absence at Washington, and endorsements for relatives, reduced him almost to penury.

He then embraced the opportunity of the destruction of the entire Library of Congress, with the burning of the capitol by the British army in August, 1814, to tender his collection to the government at such valuation as might be agreed upon. In a letter to his friend, Samuel H. Smith, a member of congress and publisher of the National Intelligencer, Jefferson wrote:

"I learn from the newspapers that the vandalism of our enemy has triumphed at Washington, over science as well as the arts, by the destruction of the public library, with the noble edifice in which it was deposited. Of this transaction, as of that of Copenhagen, the world will entertain but one sentiment.

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I presume it will be among the early objects of congress to recommence their

collection. This will be difficult while the war continues. You know my collection, its condition, and extent. I have been fifty years making it, and have spared no pains, opportunity, or expense, to make it what it is. While residing in Paris, I devoted every afternoon I was disengaged for a summer or two, in examining all the principal book stores, turning over every book with my own hand, and, putting by everything which related to America, and, indeed, whatever was rare and valuable in every science. Besides this I had standing orders during the whole time I was in Europe, in its principal book marts, principally Amsterdam, Frankfort, Madrid, and London, for such works relating to America as could not be found in Paris. So that in that department particularly, such a collection was made as probably can never again be effected, because it is hardly probable that the same opportunities, the same time, industry, perseverance, and expense, with some knowledge of the bibliography of the subject, would again happen to be in concurrence. During the same period, and after my return to America, I was led to procure also whatever related to the duties of those in the high concerns of the nation. So that the collection, which I suppose is between nine and ten thousand volumes, while it includes what is chiefly valuable in science and literature generally, extends more particularly to whatever belongs to the American statesman. In the diplomatic and parliamentary branches, it is particularly full. It is long since I have been sensible it ought not to continue private property, and had provided that at my death congress should have the refusal of it at their own price. But the loss they have now incurred makes the present the proper moment for their accomodation, without regard to the small remnant of time and the barren use of my enjoying it. I ask of your friendship, therefore, to make for me the tender of it to the library committee of congress. I enclose you the catalogue, which will enable them to judge of its contents. * * * They may enter into immediate use of it, as eighteen or twenty wagons would place it in Washington in a single trip of a fortnight. * * * I do not know that it contains any branch of science which congress would wish to exclude from their collection; there is in fact no subject to which a member of congress may not have occasion to refer."

Mr. Jefferson wrote three days later to his friend Madison, then president:

"I have sent my catalogue * * * to make the offer of my collection, which may be delivered on a valuation by persons of their own naming, to be paid for in any way, and at any term they please; in stock, for example, of any loan. I have long been sensible

that my library would be an interesting possession for the public, and the loss congress has sustained and the difficulty of replacing it, while our intercourse with Europe is so obstructed, render this the proper moment for placing it at their service."

A bill providing for the purchase of the library passed the senate without difficulty. In the house it met strong opposition. Many federalists were foolish enough to oppose it on slight pretexts; while not avowing partisan reasons, they alleged that Jefferson's collection was too philosophical, had too many books in foreign languages, was too costly, and was too large for the wants of congress. Some members declared that many of the books were of irreligious tendency, the works of Voltaire being specially objected to. Others thought the collection had too much literature and too little history and politics, while, in fact, the latter were its strongest features. The debate was long, amusing, and sometimes acrimonious, though not reported save in a bare outline. The advocates of the library insisted that so valuable a collection, and so well suited to the uses of congress, could not be found elsewhere; that exceptions taken against certain books were no reason for rejecting it, since no collection was ever made to some of which exceptions would not be taken, from feeling or prejudice; that the cost was very moderate and on terms of long credit; and that the collection afforded a most admirable substratum for a great national library.

The purchase was finally authorized, January 26, 1815, by the close vote of 81 to 71, and the sum of \$23,950 was paid for the Jefferson books, numbering when delivered in Washington 6,479 volumes, rather more than double the size of the Congressional Library burned by the British troops. President Madison supervised the arrangements for the reception of the books, which were shipped in boxes, under care of a wagon master, a hundred and twenty-five miles, from Charlottesville, Va., to the capitol. Mr. Jefferson personally verified the contents of each division of the library by the catalogue, which he had arranged by subject-matters, and prepared with his own hand an index of authors. This catalogue, printed by congress in 1815, in a quarto of 210 pages, is highly curious, as exhibiting Jefferson's method of classification, which he based upon Lord Bacon's division of knowledge. The book bears the significant and appropriate title "Catalogue of the Library of the United States," no doubt prefixed by Jefferson himself, and, indeed, it appears from the terms employed in the debate that the members of congress believed that they were founding a national library.

The collection, though overrated numerically by its owner (as libraries always are) embraced what was for its