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In Memoriam

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in the reach of our students and teachers. Together we are something!



IN MEMORIAM

BACK in 1900 a mendicant Taoist priest was engaged in “improving” one of the frescoes on a wall in one of the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas in Western China. He discovered that the wall concealed the mouth of a store-room which he found to be piled high with books and manuscripts. Among them was the oldest printed book now extant—a copy of the Diamond Sutra or collection of aphorisms. The book is now in the British Museum.

When it was examined by scholars, they were startled to discover, at the end of the book, the explicit printed statement that it was “printed on May 11, 868, by Wang Chieh, for free general distribution, in order in deep reverence to perpetuate the memory of his parents.” That memory has thus been preserved for nearly eleven hundred years, thanks to the generous act of that Chinese printer, the first whose name has come down to us.

In the fall of 1903 an eighteen-year-old Freshman entered Harvard College. His name was Harry Elkins Widener. During his four years as an undergraduate he became interested in book collecting; and after he graduated, in 1907, he devoted himself quite seriously to building up a splendid personal library. Five years later he went abroad and was in London when part of the Huth library was sold at auction. Harry Widener instructed Quaritch the bookseller to make certain purchases for him at this auction, and just before sailing for America Widener dropped in to give Quaritch final directions regarding his purchases. Among them was a copy of the excessively rare 1598 edition of Bacon’s *Essays*. In saying good-bye to Quaritch, Widener remarked: “I think I’ll take that little Bacon with

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me, and if I am shipwrecked it will go with me." Thereupon Harry Widener sailed with his parents on the *Titanic*. She struck an iceberg and sank on April 15, 1912. Harry and his father were lost; his mother was rescued. Like Wang Chieh in ancient China, Mrs. Widener turned to books to perpetuate the memory of the son whose book collecting was cut short by a disastrous accident. Every book-lover is familiar with the magnificent library-building which she erected in Cambridge and the name of Harry E. Widener will always be associated with books.

A book recently received by the Colby Library bears a printed statement that it "was published from a gift fund established in memory of Walter Marion Manly He was killed in action at Moncourt, France, November 9, 1944." A similar memorial endowment for the publication of Colby books would be appropriate and welcome. The books now collected on Mayflower Hill could be made of service to a wider body of readers, if we had means for paying the printer.

In 1942 a young student entered Colby College and spent a year as a Freshman before being inducted into the Armed Forces of the United States. A year later he was killed in action in Normandy, France, less than two weeks after the initial landing of American forces there. His parents, both of them Colby graduates, have, like Harry Widener's mother and like Wang Chieh of old, turned to books in order to perpetuate the memory of that young student. Let us hope that, eleven hundred years from now and even long after that, students will still be reading Colby books that carry the following words: "In memory of LYMAN I. THAYER, JR., who entered Colby in the Class of 1946, was inducted into the Armed Forces June 15, 1943, and was killed in Normandy June 17, 1944. Presented to the College by his parents LYMAN I. THAYER, M.D., Colby 1916, and RUTH MURDOCK THAYER, Colby 1917."