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THE THREE SOWERS

By James Humphry, III

When the American Branch of The Newcomen Society held a National Dinner at the Union League Club of New York City on February 16, 1944, it was addressed by Franklin Ferguson Hopper, then Director of the New York Public Library. He spoke on the subject “Three Men—their Intellectual Contribution to America.” When the address was afterwards printed, its summarizing section appeared under the heading (page 19) “The Three Sowers.” This heading is now made to serve anew as a title for this article, and for reasons which will shortly appear.

The three men about whom Mr. Hopper spoke at the Dinner are the three whose names are carved on the eastern face of the New York Public Library building: John Jacob Astor (1763-1848), James Lenox (1800-1880), and Samuel J. Tilden (1814-1886). The address pointed out that “it is certain that Astor, Lenox, and Tilden, the three Sowers, had no notion that the seed sown by them singly, in 1848, 1870, and 1886, respectively, was to have its greatest fruition on May 23, 1895.” That is the date when an enabling act, passed by the New York State Legislature, made effective the consolidation of the Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations and opened the way for the construction of that “citadel of scholarship, of learning,” the present nine-million-dollar Central Building of the New York Public Library. It is highly appropriate, therefore, that the names of these three public benefactors should be carved into the stones of the building.
With this inspiring New York example in mind, the reader is invited to shift his attention to another group of three sowers: George Barr McCutcheon (1866-1928), Carroll A. Wilson (1886-1947), and Crosby Gaige (1882-1949). These three men, like the New York trio, had a great interest in books; and they were united in sharing a special interest in the works of one author. They all collected books by Thomas Hardy. When the auctioneer prepared a catalogue of the McCutcheon books which were sold on April 20, 1926, he remarked in the preface: "Mr. McCutcheon's Hardy... books are in the finest procurable condition. . . . In addition there are many smaller works which are so rare as to be almost unknown at the present day. . . ." Of Mr. Wilson's Hardy books, some were exhibited in the Yale Library in 1928, shortly after Hardy's death, and many of them were exhibited at the Grolier Club in New York in 1940, on the occasion of the centenary of Hardy's birth. The Descriptive Catalogue which Wilson prepared for this centennial exhibition (a catalogue which Colby had the honor of publishing in 1940) indicated the richness of Mr. Wilson's collection in presentation-copies of Hardy's books and in autograph letters from the author, many of them unpublished. Mr. Crosby Gaige's Hardy Collection was no mere duplication of the work of McCutcheon and Wilson. Mr. Gaige was specially successful in assembling the periodical appearances of Hardy's work, which often involved finding out-of-the-way magazines like To-Day or St. James's Budget or Light.

In Mr. Hopper's New York address, he pointed out that his "Three Men" differed markedly, in spite of their common interest in books. "Astor wanted a memorial; Lenox a scholar's haven; Tilden a library for the people." Similarly, McCutcheon, Wilson, and Gaige differed, in spite of their common interest in Hardy. McCutcheon had a fine eye for "condition" and for minuscula; Wilson had a nose for biographical significance and for sentimental as-
association; Gaige was alert for magazine and newspaper appearances. The Hardy Collections of these three men therefore supplemented each other in a helpful and instructive way.

To return once more to Mr. Hopper’s 1944 address:—In addition to his “three sowers” he spoke about Joseph Green Cogswell (1786-1861)—the Harvard graduate who “was to exert so compelling an interest” on John Jacob Astor and to lead him, eventually, to provide half a million dollars for the establishment of a library.

Similarly, we here at Colby are indebted to a college graduate through whose agency various elements of the Hardy Collections of our three sowers have been brought together. I refer to Mr. H. Ridgely Bullock, Jr. (Colby 1955), whose purchase of Hardy books and letters was given brief notice in the CLQ for last February (page 102). The statement was made that Mr. Bullock’s “gift is on such a princely scale and involves so many books, pamphlets, letters, manuscripts, and other Hardiana, that . . . even a brief description of the lot . . . will have to await some future issue of our quarterly.” We shall probably never be able to find space in these limited pages for a detailed description of all that Mr. Bullock has given us—there are over two hundred items from Mr. Wilson's collection alone—and to give details about the material that was once in Mr. Crosby Gaige’s Hardy Collection would require far more space than we have here. The best plan that we have been able to devise is that of returning, from time to time, to the Bullock gift of Hardiana and of dealing with it a little at a time.

In accordance with this plan, the reader will find, in the pages that follow, a fresh transcript of a dozen of Hardy’s autograph letters—most of them published in this issue of the QUARTERLY for the first time—with informative notes by Professor Weber.

Just as Astor, Lenox, and Tilden had no notion that
their names would be associated in the establishment of
the New York Public Library, so McCutcheon, Wilson,
and Gaige had no notion that their common interest in
Hardy would, one fine day, thanks to the Bullock benefac-
tion, find appropriate and united memorialization in the
Treasure Room of the Colby College Library.

FORTY YEARS IN AN AUTHOR'S LIFE
A Dozen Letters* (1876-1915) from Thomas Hardy
annotated by CARL J. WEBER

During his lifetime Henry Holt, the American pub-
lisher, was very proud of the fact that he had been the
one to introduce the Wessex Novels to American readers.
"I introduced Hardy here," he boasted. He began by pub-
lishing Hardy's Under the Greenwood Tree in 1873—without
Hardy's knowledge or permission—and he therefore had
little just ground for complaint when, on June 20, 1875,
the New York Times began the publication of a new Hardy
novel about which Holt had received no information. He
promptly roused himself to obtain the novelist's permis-
sion for, and cooperation in, the publication of The Hand
of Ethelbertha in book form, but Hardy lived up to the terms
of his agreement with the editor of the newspaper, and
Holt had to wait until "Ethelberta" finished her run in the
Times on April 9, 1876. When Hardy mailed the last in-
stallment of the story to the Times, he sent Holt the follow-
ing letter of explanation:

* The original manuscripts of all these letters have been presented to the
Colby College Library by Mr. H. Ridgely Bullock, Jr.