No. 11

Fifty Years of GPW

Half a century elapsed between the time when George Parker Winship wrote a book on Coronado and the recent appearance of his *The Cambridge Press*, 1639–1692. They were fifty years of rich bibliographical scholarship. Someone ought to take cognizance of them. We propose to do exactly that.

Does this matter concern the Clements Library of the University of Michigan — a place far from GPW’s usual preserves? Yes, because when, in 1923, the late Mr. Clements published his book about this Library, he included the following statement in his Introduction:

And now a most important and personal acknowledgement must be made. A friend of some ten years, whom I first visited at the John Carter Brown Library at Providence, and later in the Widener room at the Harvard College Library, is George Parker Winship. He was given all the qualities of a great American collector, with the keenest sense of the historical and aesthetic worth of rare books. His advice has always been sought and given, and naturally I turned to him for a review, criticism, addition, or elimination, of the text of this synopsis, which work he has performed. He has been of immeasurable assistance to me, and in addition he has supervised the work of printing.

We have collated the text of the above quotation from Mr. Clements’ book (which he modestly called a “synopsis”) with the original manuscript, in Mr. Clements’ own fine handwriting, in our Division of Manuscripts. The tribute is Mr. Clements’ own, and we believe we need no other reason for devoting this issue of *The Quarto* to a literary chronology of George Parker Winship.

Of course, there is another reason. When, in 1923, this Library had been given and delivered to the University of Michigan, when it had been appropriately dedicated in a public ceremony, and when it had been opened to the public, someone asked Mr. Clements whether he proposed to employ a librarian. Yes, Mr. Clements had thought about the point. Candidates had been offered by the handpicked “Committee of Management.” Tradition has it that Mr. Clements avoided some first-class historians as candidates for the position. He explained that they were not “librarians.” Similarly, he evaded selecting one of several highly qualified professional librarians — on the ground that they were not “American historians.”

The summer of 1923 was slipping away and Mr. Clements’ Committee of Management was in some despair. What could be done to get Mr. Clements to make up his mind? The appointment had to be a regular University of Michigan affair, confirmed by the Board of Regents, although every member of the Board understood that until Mr. Clements decided the matter there would not be an appointment.

GPW & WLCL

Late in August, a young assistant professor of American history from a small southern college was catapulted into the Widener Room at Harvard by an imperious dowager-cousin whose addresses were Beacon Street, Boston, andingham, Mass. — names which, apparently, mean something in the Boston area. GPW had neither met nor even heard of the young assistant professor — nor had the latter ever heard of GPW. To add confusion, but no gaiety, the aforementioned Beacon Street matron could not remember GPW’s name, although she had met him at tea the previous winter. Nothing daunted, she barged into the Widener Room à la a Helen Hokinson drawing, introduced the young assistant professor and his wife, and promptly rushed away to shop at Jordan-Marsh’s. GPW was stuck with the young couple. He had every reason to be annoyed. He had been interrupted in the writing of an important letter. It was addressed to his friend William
L. Clements, and it was a last attempt to get Mr Clements to make up his mind about the vacant librarian's chair at the Clement's Library.

The young man, who is now twenty-three years older, has never been quite certain what happened next. The half-finished letter on GPW's desk was forgotten. The Winship charm was turned on. He enquired whether there was any particular book the visitors would like to see. The young assistant professor was groping frantically for some title to suggest when his eyes spotted the bright morocco backs of a row of solander cases which obviously (they were labeled) contained a set of Purchas' Pilgrimes (London, 1624-25). He asked to see the first volume. This was a lucky break, for Harry E. Widener's set of Purchas is noteworthy as the only known presentation set from the compiler. Books are like fishermen and horsemen; they can start swapping stories at the drop of a hat. Minutes extended to hours, interrupted by lunch at the Colonial Club. The letter to Mr Clements remained on GPW's desk until late in the afternoon, when his visitors finally left. The writer of these lines has been told he may never see that letter. Apparently, it was finished with a row of asterisks and a "Hold every-

Anas

GPW is a conscious New England Puritan of the John Winthrop type to which are added the characteristics of a Machiavelli brought up in Johann Gutenberg's printing shop. His "degrees," Harvard A.B. (1893), Harvard A.M. (1894), and Michigan Litt. D. (1917), display a conspicuous absence of the Ph.D. degree — an absence of which he is sometimes secretly proud. Another famous son of Harvard, George Lyman Kittredge, never sought further than for an A.B. Legend has it that when this deficiency was pointed out to Professor Kittredge, he replied gently, "Aha! But who would examine me?"

Pictures or photographs of GPW are not as easy to obtain as those of some less prolific authors. The curious may not be aware that one of the most interesting appears in Medina's La Imprenta in Mèxico, Vol. I (Santiago de Chile, 1912). We know of another picture of GPW which, in itself, is an historic document. Some time in the 1920's, a special committee of the Board of Regents of this university set out to invite the president of the University of Maine to become the president of the University of Michigan. The invitation was delivered at Bretton Woods and a photograph was taken of President Clarence Cook Little, flanked by the impressive regents from Michigan, Messrs Clements, Beal, and Sawyer. The presence of these four dignitaries in the picture is understandable. But what makes the picture interesting to us is the fact that one other person completes the group — George Parker Winship, decked out in gray flannels and the smile of a cat enceinte with canary. If he ever publishes his memoirs, GPW may throw light upon this obscure episode in Michigan history. The Division of Prints at the Clements Library can show photographs of all the gentlemen who have been members of its Committee of Management — except that of GPW. Even appeals to Mrs Winship have been unavailing.

This reticence is evidenced in other ways, too, notably in his The Cambridge Press. That book is the culmination of fifty years of scholarship; many of his preceding publications were by-products of the greater work. Yet, while he makes meticulous references to all other previous publications on his subject by author and title, he carefully omits author-entries for his own earlier publications.

The literary device of intentional double meaning is a familiar one, but the Winshipian style is not satisfied with that apparently simple
game. If GPW is on the diamond, better look for a triple play — with no one safe at home. GPW insists that it was a Zuñi or a Hopi who revealed to him the value of Truth. Said the Indian to GPW, “Truth is a precious thing — too precious to be wasted upon those who do not appreciate it.” More than one curator of rare books has been importuned by some curiosity seeker who wants to paw over precious and irreplaceable treasures. Very few of them have been able — as GPW often was — to jingle keys in his pocket and proclaim solemnly, “Unfortunately, the keys to the book case have been mislaid.”

Owl-eyed professional scholars who sniff at rare books as “unimportant” irk GPW and he often confounds and confuses them with his calm statement, “No, it is not important — it’s just nice.” Similarly, it was GPW who outraged humorless librarians by saying, “These books are not meant to be read; they are meant to be collected.”

Printer’s Ink

GPW’s career may be divided thus: (1) the John Carter Brown period, 1895-1915, (2) the Harvard Period, 1915-1936, (3) the post-Harvard Period, 1936 to the present. What follows is not a bibliography of GPW’s writings, nor is it even a trial checklist. It is simply a literary chronology of such of his writings as came to our attention in setting up an exhibition of Winshipiana upon the occasion of the publication of his The Cambridge Press. William A. Jackson has warned us that the Winship bibliographer must recognize that all imprints of the John Barnard Associates and of the Cygnet Press are apt to be Winshipiana. All printed reports of the John Carter Brown Library in his period there, are his; the Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America during the period when he was chairman of the Editorial Committee must be accounted partly his; the historian of Harvard points out that the Harvard Library Notes from 1920 to his retirement from Harvard are GPW’s work. The bibliographer must also note four “Livingston Reprints” of Benjamin Franklin’s “Bagatelles.” In this “literary chronology” contributions to journals, periodicals, serials, and the like abound. The ultimate bibliographer must be aware of the fact that any such entry is utterly incomplete without descriptions of separate reprints, in whatever form, derived from journals, periodicals, etc.

The very sketchy record of GPW’s publications as it appears below is merely a start. It is intended to provoke those collectors of Winshipiana who will promptly cry out “Oh, but you have omitted so-and-so” into activity. It is our modest hope that when a definitive bibliography of Winship is published, this number of The Quarto will be noticed as a pioneer in the field — analogous to Pinedo’s or White Kennett’s first bibliographies of Americana. We do not contend that Ann Arbor is the place from which a definitive bibliography of GPW may ultimately emerge, but we do not mind needling our friends.

A LITERARY CHRONOLOGY OF GEORGE PARKER WINSHIP

1850

1894
"Coronado’s Journey to New Mexico and the Great Plains. N.Y. (American History Leaflet)"

1896
"Index to Titles Relating to America in the "Coleccion de Documentos Ineditos para la Historia de Espana."" In Bost. Pub. Lib., Bull, NS, v. 5.

1897

1897