



A PRIVATE LIBRARY OF NEW JERSEY

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE COLLECTION OF MR. WILLIAM NELSON OF PATERSON

BY WILLIAM F. COLLINS

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AMONG the private collections of rare books, documents and manuscripts in New Jersey, or, indeed in the United States, there are few of so much interest as that of William Nelson, of Paterson, N. J. It represents the results of many years of research along various lines, historical, legal and literary, and a list of its component parts, with the briefest explanations, would make up a good-sized catalogue. The antiquarian, the student and the book lover each would find in it matter of special value. It is possible only to call attention to a comparatively

small number of the treasures in Mr. Nelson's possession.

Mr. Nelson is an enthusiast on the subject of New Jersey history, and he prizes particularly the original sources of information regarding it that have come into his hands. The oldest document of this description that he has acquired is a contemporary copy of a letter sent from Elizabethtown in 1681, by Governor Philip Carteret, setting forth the rights of the proprietors of the colony. The letter is well preserved, but the chirography is so involved as to be well nigh undecipher-

able. Another manuscript is a contemporaneous copy of a letter dated Perth Amboy, August 3, 1695, the copy being made August 8, 1695. This letter is an address from the "Gentlemen of the Council" to the Grand Committee of proprietors in London, and has to do with quit rents in East Jersey. The proprietors are called "worthy gentlemen," and the signers of the letter subscribe themselves as "your faithful friends and most humble servants." Mr. Nelson's rarest New Jersey imprint is a copy of the Session Laws of 1727, the first book printed at Burlington and the second printed in New Jersey. It came, in 1728, from the press of Samuel Keimer, by whom Benjamin Franklin was employed, and it is supposed, naturally, that Franklin worked upon it. There are but two copies of this publication extant, so far as known, the other one being in the New Jersey State Library. The first New Jersey imprint, a copy of the Session Laws, bears the date 1723, the place of publication being Perth Amboy. An edition of these laws was also printed at New York, the New York copy containing thirty-three pages, while the Perth Amboy imprint has thirty-two. The first twenty-four pages are identical in both editions, but the remaining pages in the Perth Amboy edition are set in wider measure, so as to get the balance of the matter on less paper than was used in the New York imprint. A very valuable volume owned by Mr. Nelson is a

copy of Kinsey's *Laws of New Jersey* from 1703 to 1732, printed at Philadelphia. Another curiosity is *Eumenes*, described as "A collection of papers, written for the purpose of exhibiting some of the more prominent errors and omissions of the Constitution of New Jersey and to prove the necessity of calling a convention for revision and amendment." These papers all were written by Judge William Griffith, one of the leading lawyers in Burlington, and were published originally in the *Trenton Federalist*, in 1799.

A most interesting paper bearing on the development of "Jersey justice" is the original of an indictment drawn up by William Paterson, the first attorney-general under the State Government. Paterson, while holding that position, rendered services of great importance to the commonwealth, in establishing new precedents of law, and the documents from his pen are models of their kind. The presentment in question signed by Paterson in his official capacity and dated July, 1779, is as follows:

"The jurors, in behalf of the State of New Jersey for the body of the County of Monmouth, upon their oath present that this State of New Jersey and the United States of America, now are, and for some time past have been at open war & enmity with Great Britain, and that Edward Price, Jr., late of Shrewsbury, yeoman, on the tenth day of October in the year of our Lord one thou-

said seven hundred and seventy-eight and during the war aforesaid, from Shrewsbury in the same county, of Monmouth, did voluntarily and unlawfully go over to the City of New York in the State of New York, which said City of New York was then in possession of the enemy to wit, of the army of the said king of Great Britain, without any license, permission or passport previously obtained from any competent authority, to the evil example of all others in the like case offending against the form of the Act of the Council and General Assembly of this State in such case made and provided, against the peace of this State, the Government and Dignity of the same."

An indorsement upon the indictment indicates that the defendant Price was found guilty and fined £15.

A receipted bill, dated at Trenton, the tenth day of the third month, 1796, shows that the State of New Jersey was at that time indebted to Isaac Collins, the printer, for one thousand copies of the votes and proceedings of the assembly, the amount of the obligation being £86.

A fine example of bookmaking is Mr. Nelson's copy of Sewel's *History of the Quakers*, printed by Isaac Collins, at Burlington, in 1774. The portly volume contains eight hundred and twelve pages besides the index.

A very rare book owned by Mr. Nelson is *The Prompter*, one of the first of the Newark imprints, and published

by John Woods, in 1793. The title page reads as follows:

THE PROMPTER

or

COMMENTARY

on

Common Sayings and Subjects
Which are full of Common Sense

The best Sense in the World

"To see other's faults and feel our
own."

To which is added a selection of matter that will be found

Instructive, Entertaining and Curious.

A separate volume issued by John Woods in 1796, with a new title page, *Collections*, etc., contains a lot of his "leftovers," stripped of their title pages, including *The Prompter*, *The Morristown Ghost*, etc.

Mr. Nelson has a copy of the first issue of the *United States Magazine*, a "General Repository of useful instruction and rational amusement," published in Newark, April, 1794, by John Woods, for an unnamed and unknown editor. The magazine, which was recommended by Governor Howell, Rev. Dr. Alexander MacWhorter, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Newark, and Rev. Jedediah Chapman, pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Orange, cost two and a half dollars a year. The initial issue contains the following announcement:

"The publishing of the first number of the *United States Magazine* has

been postponed for some time on account of the Subscribers' names not being returned. The editor intended to procure an elegant engraving for each number, but was unfortunately disappointed. As soon as a number of Subscribers equal to the expense of the magazine are procured, every number shall then be ornamented with some pleasing representation."

This was New Jersey's third periodical, and the first published in Newark. It ended abruptly with a half-finished word, in the course of six months.

Mr. Nelson's collection of the works of Philip Freneau, the poet of the Revolution, is very full and very valuable. Among the editions are *A Voyage to Boston* (Philadelphia, 1775), and a volume printed in Philadelphia in 1786, containing all of Freneau's poems up to that year. At Philadelphia, in 1794, there was published a book, including *The Village Merchant* and *The Country Printer*, by Freneau. Of this Mr. Nelson has a copy, and he owns also a copy of the *Poems, written by Philip Freneau, of New Jersey*, between the years 1768 and 1794, and printed at the press of the author in Mt. Pleasant, 1795. The typography of this book is very attractive, the arrangement of the title page with its fifteen stars calling for special notice.

Other Freneau items in the collection are the poet's *Miscellaneous Works*, 1788; *Letters of Robert Slender*, 1799; *Poems*, Philadelphia, 1809,

in two volumes, with the rare portrait of St. Tammany; *Poems*, New York, 1815, in two volumes, one set cut and one set in boards uncut; *Poems*, London, 1861; *Poems*, New York, 1864, one of one hundred copies, quarto, uncut, and, also, some manuscript verses, unpublished, written about 1774.

Freneau published at Mt. Pleasant for a year beginning in 1795 the *Jersey Chronicle*. A unique Freneau in Mr. Nelson's library is a broadside containing the poet's announcement of the publication of *The Monmouth Gazette*, a paper which never saw the light. In this broadside Freneau said:

"It is proposed by the Subscriber, if sufficient Encouragement should be afforded, to publish at Mount Pleasant, near Middletown Point, in East New Jersey, a weekly Newspaper, to be entitled, *The Monmouth Gazette*, or, General Magazine of Information and Amusement.

The growing Population, Opulence, and Importance of the extensive County of Monmouth, seems to demand a Circulation of Foreign and Domestic Intelligence, as well as political Information among its Inhabitants, in a Mode different from what has hitherto been adopted through the uncertain and very difficult Communication of the Public Prints from the city of New York, and which, when they are received, are in a great Measure taken up with local matters, most commonly uninteresting, to the Jersey Reader.

Impressed with these Sentiments, the Subscriber has, by the Advice of several Gentlemen, Inhabitants of said County, undertaken (if suitably encouraged) to publish a paper once a week, under the above Title; which, from the Connexion he has established with Printers in different Parts of the Continent, as well as from several other sources, he flatters himself will be inferior to none printed in the State of New Jersey, and containing considerably more in Quantity."

It is interesting to note the early recognition of the fact that New Jersey newspaper readers want a good deal more than is furnished by the New York journals.

Freneau considered that the "Necessity and various Advantages of some such Publication as the above-mentioned, to every Citizen in a free Government like ours, is too obvious to need dwelling upon." He proceeded therefore to the statement of the "Plan and Conditions" upon which he meant, if "properly patronized" to conduct his Gazette.

The paper was to be published "early" every Saturday morning and forwarded "immediately" to the places mentioned. It was expected that subscribers "in the neighborhood" would call or send; "to such as cannot, every suitable opportunity will be taken, if desired, to forward it." The "Subscription money," it was stated, "will be Sixteen Shillings per Annum, law-

ful Money of New Jersey, or the Value thereof in most Kinds of Country Produce, at the Market Prices, payable one Half on the first Day of December, and other Half on the first Day of June."

Mr. Nelson's library has long been noted for its Poe treasures. A number of the most valuable of these were disposed of at a sale held in Philadelphia last May, but enough remain to form an interesting exhibit. A copy of Poe's *Eureka*, especially, attracts attention. The book, which was published by George P. Putnam in 1848, belonged to Poe. It contains many notes in pencil by the author indicating verbal changes, and, in some instances, whole sentences are interlined. The writing, which is Poe's without doubt, is very neat, and inasmuch as the "prose poem" was a great favorite with the author, it is probable that the annotations were made with the idea of issuing a new edition. This book Mr. Nelson bought at a stall on Fourth avenue, New York, paying a quarter for it. His copy of *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane and Minor Poems* (Hatch & Dunning, Baltimore, 1829), sold at Philadelphia for \$1,825. It cost Mr. Nelson \$75. Mr. Nelson also sold at Philadelphia the original manuscript of *The Bells* and *For Annie* and two unpublished manuscript poems by Poe, both acrostics written to his cousin, Elizabeth Rebecca ———, a young woman whose last name is unknown. These acrostics were secured

by Mr. Nelson at an auction and are unquestionably in Poe's handwriting at an early period in his career. The longer one dedicated an autograph album, and is signed "Edgar," and the shorter, evidently cut from an album, is signed "E. A. P."

From time to time Mr. Nelson has accumulated many old manuscripts and books and his library contains some of the earliest printed volumes. His oldest manuscript, which dates back to the thirteenth century, is a theological disquisition in crabbed Greek characters. A folio manuscript of 200 leaves of vellum sets forth thirteen sermons on the epistles of Sts. Peter and Paul. The initial letters to the several sermons are grotesquely illuminated in the Gaelic manner. The manuscript dates from the fourteenth century and is evidently the product of a monastery in Brittany. Another manuscript volume of much historical interest was written in the seventeenth century, and gives an account of some the disputes between Charles I. and his Parliament. He has a book of the sermons of St. Chrysostom, printed at Nuremburg in 1471, and another volume printed in the same city in 1494. The latter, an edition of Thomas a Kempis, is what is known as a "chained book," a hole in one of the stout oaken covers covered with stamped pigskin showing that at one time it was securely fastened to a reading desk to insure its remaining in the possession of its rightful owner. In-

cluded in the collection are also a Vulgate printed in 1498, bearing a book plate of one of the early Dukes of Sussex, and a "Cranmer" Bible printed in 1549. The latter is bound in four folio volumes. The first and last leaves, as is usual with ancient Bibles, are missing, and those that are left have been badly worn at the edges. These pages have been repaired by piecing out the margins with paper that has been incorporated into the original leaves in a marvellous way, so that the place of joining cannot be detected by the touch. Aside from a few chapters of Genesis and Revelations, the work is complete. The title page of the New Testament is a fine example of wood engraving of 350 years ago. This edition of the Scriptures is sometimes known as the "Treacle" or "Molasses" Bible, from the reading of Jeremiah viii., 22: "Is there no treacle in Gilead?" It is printed in black letter, with many wood cut initials; the text is not divided into verses. Some of the titles of the books seem strange to modern readers, as "Parallellapedon," for "Chronicles;" "The Ballet of Ballettes," for "The Song of Solomon," etc.

A fine copy of *Calvin's Institutes*, printed at London in 1634, now in Mr. Nelson's possession, belonged to Rev. John Brainerd, the early missionary to the Indians at Crosswicks, near Freehold, N. J. On the fly leaf of the book, in Mr. Brainerd's handwriting, is the following:

"Gift of Mr. Isaac Walker to Revd. Mr. John Brainerd for the use of the Indians under his care."

Mr. Nelson has many interesting autograph letters. Among them are missives written in 1711 by William Bradford, the first New York printer; Archibald Home, the first New Jersey poet, secretary of the Provincial Council, 1732-41, and from Aaron Burr to John Rutherford, Senator from New Jersey, dated New York, December 5, 1800. A letter from President Green, of Princeton College, written February 2, 1815, tells of a notable revival among the students of that institution. It is addressed to Mr. John F. Clark, "Preacher of the Gospel" at Flemington, and in part reads as follows:

"It has indeed pleased a gracious & condescending God to visit our college in a very remarkable manner. Nothing like it has been seen here for more than forty years. Yet all is still & silent—no noise, no extravagance, no enthusiasm. The chief instrumental cause of this awakening is believed to be the bible studies of the college. Other means, no doubt, have been also blest. But God has specially owned, & blessed his own sacred truth. His spirit has descended on us, we hope, like the dew & the rain on the tender grass. There are already about 25 of the students who, during the present session, have, it is hoped, passed from death to life. There are ten more, who, it (is) believed are not far from the kingdom of

God; & about twenty more who are under very serious impressions. Indeed there are very few who are not more or less affected. What is remarkable, all the best scholars & most influential individuals, are either among those who are hopeful converts, or those who are most earnestly pressing into the kingdom. Surely there was scarcely ever so altered a place as our college—comparing the last winter with the present. Instead of meetings for plots and conspiracies, we have now nothing but meetings for religious conference and fervent social prayer."

President Green wrote Mr. Clark that he had done all that he could to "keep this work from making a noise abroad," saying further than "tho' it is not possible any longer to keep the knowledge of it to ourselves, I will still thank you to speak of it with a degree of reserve. I hate religious garrulity, & I fear that too much publick attention may injure the youth who are the subjects of the work."

Other letters which Mr. Nelson owns are from General George Washington, written at Passaic Falls, in 1780; from Alexander Hamilton, 1792, announcing his decision that the town of Paterson should be located at the Passaic Falls; Andrew Hamilton, 1723, the great Philadelphia lawyer, who defended Peter Zenger and laid down the law ever since followed in America, that in indictments for libel the jury is the judge of the law and the facts; General

W. T. Sherman, a twenty-page document, all in his handwriting and signed by him, detailing the plan for a reorganization of the United States army; Lord Nelson, written with his left hand; his brother, the first Earl Nelson, giving some curious family history, which has never been published; Lady Emma Hamilton, "Kit" North, Sir John Bowring, James Russell Lowell; original poems by Martin Farquhar Tupper and Philip Hone; Dinah Mulock Craik; a copy of *America* in the autograph of the author, S. F. Smith; Francis, Lord Jeffrey, Edward Bulwer Lytton, Charles Reade, John Forster, William Pennington, Governor of New Jersey; John G. Whittier and Sir Gilbert Parker. These are a few which escaped the disastrous conflagration of

last year, in which Mr. Nelson lost several thousand manuscripts of priceless historical and literary interest.

Mr. Nelson has the manuscript of Frank R. Stockton's novel *The Derelict*, and the original manuscripts of Theodore Tilton's *Thou and I*, carefully bound.

Mr. Nelson is devoting his spare time this summer to revising his work on the Indian words, personal names and place names in New Jersey, and to the compilation he is making from court records, papers and other sources of the New Jersey "Loyalists" at the time of the Revolution. All his work on this compilation, comprising several thousand pages of manuscript, completed previous to the Paterson fire, was lost in that conflagration.

