SIMPLE YET FITTING

Parmly Billings Memorial Library Formally Dedicated and Turned Over to City by Generous Donor.

OCCASION TO BE REMEMBERED

Entire Community Turns Out in Honor of Distinguished Guests—With Music and Oratory Noble Pile Is Opened.

Billings made a holiday yesterday in its determination to show due appreciation of the splendid gift to which it now holds deed the Parmly Billings Memorial library. Shortly after noon all business houses closed and long before the time set for the doors of the opera house to open an eager, impatient crowd was gathered in front of them. As soon as they were opened the surging throng crowded through them and rapidly filled every seat in the body of the theatre in addition to the boxes. Even then many were forced to stand and the aisles were packed. To add to the size of the gathering the public schools closed and contributed their quota of juvenile enthusiasm and youthful interest.

Although announced to begin at 2:30 o'clock, it was much later when the formal exercises began. On the stage were seated the mayor and board of aldermen, the library committee representing the Billings estate, Frederick Billings, Jr., S. E. Kilmer and the different speakers. Mr. Babcock of the committee presided. After a selection by the orchestra the Billings quartette sang the "Lord's Prayer." Mr. Babcock then spoke briefly giving a history of the building and of the generosity of Mr. Billings in making liberal additions from time to time to the amount he originally intended he would be willing to expend in the erection of the library.

Judge Goss was now introduced. Nineteen years ago, he said, he first whitewashed this region and passed over the place where Billings now stands. They were members of an expedition returning from the Pacific coast which the government had sent out to investigate the purchase made a short time before from the French government. The conditions then existing, the speaker said, had continued until within the memory of many of those whom he was addressing, others had come and built up the city, which like a mushroom had grown up and taken a position with the bustling, energetic cities of the land. Coming to the city when it was given a name and place the speaker dwelt upon the generosity of the man for whom the town was named, and told of his gift of a church and school house which find place among the public institutions of the city. Next Judge Goss spoke of the early struggles of the citizens to secure a library and then told of the offer of Frederick Billings, Jr., to erect a library as a memorial to his dead brother and asking among others the opinion of the speaker. Fearful lest he tax his generosity too much he had said that about $3,500 would be ample to defray the cost of such an institution as would meet the requirements of the city. Instead of confining himself to that amount Mr. Billings had expended over seven times that sum. After paying tribute to the memory of Parmly Billings and the philanthropy of the donor Judge Goss closed.

Frederick Billings was now introduced and spoke of the pride he felt in the progress made by the city named for his father. It was not only a matter of money, but his love had been built into the library and its contents.

Mr. Billings read a dispatch from his mother invoking God's blessing upon the library and the people of Billings. After a few more remarks Mr. Billings handed the deed of gift to Mayor George.

Mr. George accepted the deed in a felicitous little address and in behalf of the people of the city thanked Mr. Billings for his princely gift and said it was all the more appreciated because offered at a time when neither the Rockefellers nor Carnegies had taken to advertising themselves by gifts of libraries and similar institutions.

The Billings quartette now sang "The Old Oaken Bucket." Dr. Reid, president of the Montana Agricultural college, was the next speaker. He opened his remarks by congratulating the audience upon the spirit shown and said it would be difficult for even a stranger to enter and not become inspired with it. This, he said, is preeminently the age of public libraries. Within the past three years gifts of libraries aggregating in value over $30,000,000 had been made by various public spirited men. Billings was to be envied in having for its friends such people as Mr. Billings.

Branching off from this topic Dr. Reid spoke of the purposes and missions of public libraries. The average time spent by the American child in attending school, he said, was only four and a half years. Consequently it was to be seen that the child must look elsewhere than to the schools for his education. Wherever else could be secured a few moments each day thoroughly and well as in a public library. Taking advantage of his experience in connection with many libraries the doctor said he would assume the right of giving a little advice in connection with the splendid library the city of Billings now owns. Great care should be exercised in the selection of books. With the immense output of the press today it was an easy matter to make serious mistakes and fill the shelves of a library with useless or even harmful books. The aim of the directors should be always to secure the latest and best publications. While fiction of a high degree was to be read and recommended, yet it would not do to listen too much to the demands of the reader of fiction. Books treating of the lighter sciences, sociology, history, travel and kindred works were the ones that should find the largest representation on the shelves of a small library in a small community. As had as buying too much fiction was the practice of buying those treating of profound scientific and others abstract questions, or books that
Next the speaker dwelt upon the necessity for cataloging books, and congratulated the people that this has already been done here. Next he spoke of the need of conscientious, intelligent and enthusiastic trustees, who should be chosen regardless of politics or influence. He also emphasized the urgency of having a competent, well-equipped librarian. A library should not be made a dumping ground for incompletes, relatives or others whom through charity or influence are given places they cannot fill.

After explaining the important mission that libraries have as educational institutions and the part they play in molding the minds of the people, Dr. Reid closed with an appeal for the introduction of books calculated to inspire morality and patriotism in all who patronize its shelves.

"Auld Lang Syne" was sung by the quartette and Colonel Sanders was introduced as the last speaker. While it was regarded as a local affair and the occasion of local joyfulness, the colonel said the occasion which had called the people of Billings together was one that interested the entire state. Anything that went to make for the intellectuality and education of one community contributed to the enhancement of those qualities in all other communities, as one who had been the state emerge from its condition of primitive savagery to a grand and wealthy commonwealth the colonel said he took particular pleasure in being present. Next he spoke of the efforts that had been made to secure a national highway across the continent in this latitude. He told how various efforts had failed until after the battle on the Little Bighorn, when the government had awakened to the necessity of doing something to protect the hardy settlers who had come hither to settle a new empire. After that had been done, the construction of the Northern Pacific became an assured fact.

Colonel Sanders spoke of the generosity of Frederick Billings, which had prompted him to give to education and religion in various parts of the country. It was due to him that the University of California was founded at the time it was begun and that its site was selected at the place where it now stands—the very name of the town was of his selection.

The speaker paid eloquent tribute to the memory of Frederick and Parmil Billings and to the character of the donor of the library and did so as one who knew the dead and enjoyed the recrudescence of the living.

Taking up where Dr. Reid had left off the colonel again impressed upon the minds of the directors the necessity for exercising their best judgment in selecting the books they expect the people to read. The "historical" novel was blamed by the speaker as one of the most pernicious books that can be given to anyone to read and he said that if it lay in his power every one in existence would be destroyed as dangerous and sacrilegious.

At the conclusion of the colonel's address the orchestra rendered a medley of national airs ending with "America," which when reached the audience arose and took up and all joined in singing.

The Library.

As will be seen from the attached illustration the building is constructed after the Romanesque style, a form of architecture highly popular and peculiarly adapted to the purposes of such a structure. While simple yet its rich elegance and impressive dignity appeal both to the eye and mind. Native sandstone is the principal material employed in its construction and was obtained from the quarries on the hills to the north of the city. The base is of granite, 18 inches high, forming not only a solid substantial foundation, but also security against dampness, which would otherwise have been the foundation of the more porous stone. The columns are clean cut, while the stone ashlar facing is left uncut, forming what is known as "rock-faced" work. The cornice is of copper and the roof of Spanish tiling, thus combining utility and enduring power with beauty and elegance.

On the first floor is the library proper. The flooring is composed of maple, while the finishing is all of antique oak, forming a combination at once durable and pleasing. In its furnishings nothing was overlooked and in consequence it is complete in every detail, being provided with every appliance and convenience found in a modern library such as the larger and more pretentious cities have. In fact it is superior in this re-
While well qualified for public life, Mr. Billings never consented to take an active part in politics, except during the campaign when California's loyalty to the union was secured. In 1861 he held the position of attorney general of that state and when President Lincoln was organizing his cabinet for his second term Mr. Billings was strongly urged for a ministership. The assassination of Lincoln alone prevented his appointment, as only a few days before that event occurred the president had assured a member of the California delegation that he would give Mr. Billings a place.

During his active career in law and other business Mr. Billings accumulated a large fortune, much of which he devoted to charitable and educational purposes. The gifts he made to churches and schools are many and munificent. Among them is that of the Congregational church of this city, which he built a few years before his death and which he deeded to the association.

Mr. Billings died at Woodstock, Vt., October 1, 1890.

Frederick Billings, Jr.

The gentleman to whom the citizens of Billings are indebted for the splendid library was born at Woodstock, Vt., in 1866. His earlier years were passed in the city of his birth and at New York City, where he fitted himself for college. In 1880 he graduated from the University of Vermont and since then has made his home in New York, devoting himself to the law and literature, although his active occupation is that of banker, being associated as special partner with the firm of William D. Barbour & Co. He has found ample time to indulge himself in the pleasures of travel and has visited many of the countries of Europe and the Orient. He is a companionable, genial gentleman and as may be judge from the gift he has made to the city, of a literary turn of mind, and finds much pleasure in the companionship of men of letters and in the perusal of their works.

Parmly Billings.

Parmly Billings, to whose memory the library has been dedicated, was the eldest child of the late Frederick Billings, for whom the city was named. He was born at San Francisco in 1832 and reared at Woodstock, in the state which gave birth to his father. In 1853 he entered St. Johnsbury academy, from which he graduated in 1850. The following year he entered Amherst college and finished his course, graduating in 1854. During the same year he came to Montana and after spending a few months on a ranch removed to this city and in partnership with his cousin, Edward Goldsmith Bailey, engaged in the banking business. He remained in business for about three years and during that time became intimately identified with the various interests of the city. While retaining his interest in the bank, he also was part owner of a ranch and served as a member of the board of education. His death occurred in 1888, caused by a cold and the exposure incident to an arduous trip made into the mountains to examine some mining property. Mr. Billings was of a lovable and commendable disposition and enjoyed not only the respect and esteem of all with whom he came in contact, but also had their sincere love and affection. He was a man of great promise and his death, untimely as it was, caused much sorrow and regret to both his associates and the community of which he was an honored and respected member.
The Late Frederick Billings, Sr.,
In whose honor the city was named.


The Late Parmly Billings
To whose memory the Library is a monument.
