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(1906)

From letter of William H. Lambert, giving
an account of some of the damages that
resulted from the fire at his residence, West
Johnson Street, Germantown, June 5, 1906

WEST JOHNSON STREET, GERMANTOWN,

JUNE 15, 1906.

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I have not yet completed the inventory of the losses caused by the fire which, on the fifth instant, destroyed a large part of my library, but I am happy to be able to say that the destruction was not so complete as has been stated in some of the newspaper reports, or so great as I had feared. None of the Lincoln and Thackeray manuscripts, and but few of the letters, were at risk because, in accordance with my custom each Summer, these had been removed to safes in the city. The damage to the books was confined principally to those in the Lincoln alcove and those upon the tops of cases in the main library, the books within those cases behind closed glass doors, comprising the first editions of Thackeray and books from his library and especial publications relating to him, were but little harmed. The greater part of the bound pamphlets contained in the closed cases in the alcove—Lincoln sermons, eulogies, political and personal publications—have been saved, although most, if not all, are more or less stained with smoke and water.

But whilst a large part of the collection was saved, the loss is very great and much of it irretrievable. The book case, table and chair from Lincoln's law office, at Springfield, were entirely destroyed; the chairs from the White House library ruined, though one, perhaps, may be fairly restored. The books contained in the Lincoln case, comprising biographies, various editions of his speeches and writings, volumes from his library, autographed presentation volumes, limited and especial editions were, in great part, either destroyed or damaged beyond repair, as also were the books in the open shelves adjoining,

in which were the convention reports, political pamphlets, campaign speeches and songs, and the assassination literature. The busts, including the Jones of 1862, and statuettes, and the framed proof engravings in the alcove, were demolished. The case containing the medals was reduced to charcoal, the white metal specimens melted, the bronze, brass and copper stained and scratched. About two-thirds of a somewhat full collection of sheet music, directly relating to Lincoln, were destroyed. The broadsides, campaign flags, photographs and engravings, contained in portfolios in the alcove, were ruined.

A large collection of Thackerayana, including memoirs and biographies of himself and his contemporaries, periodicals containing his contributions, collected editions of his works, and special editions of separate works, was seriously injured. The writing case, owned and used by Thackeray and presented by him to his Secretary, who carried it during the first visit to America, was ruined. The oil portraits of Thackeray, by Ward and by Eyre Crowe, were damaged beyond possibility of restoration as also was the copy of the death mask.

The scarred and twisted remains of many of my choicest books are pathetic memorials of collections which approached completeness and were fairly comparable with any others in the same lines, of which I had knowledge ; but I rejoice that excellent collections of both Lincoln and Thackeray exist elsewhere in the possession of enthusiastic and loyal collectors, who I trust may be spared the sorrow which has come to me in the loss of treasures whose acquisition, possession and exhibition were sources of great enjoyment. And I am truly thankful for the many messages of sympathy received from friends and collectors whose appreciation of my loss has given me much comfort and will be ever gratefully remembered.

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