

## Princeton University Chapel

WHEN it was proposed that a college be founded in New Jersey for the training of Dutch Reformed ministers the Classis of Amsterdam suggested that instead of going to the expense of building a new college thought should be given, instead, to making use of Princeton, because it had been founded by "the purest Scotch Presbyterians". The pureness of any Presbyterians, Scotch or otherwise, may be a matter of debate, but the founding of Princeton by Presbyterians is a matter of historical fact. The Great Awakening of the middle 18th century in the New England area caused the Calvinists to break up into two camps, the Old Lights and the New Lights. The latter, with their emphasis upon the necessity of personal experience in the religious life, found themselves discriminated against by the Old Lights, who were strongly entrenched at Harvard and Yale. Candidates for the ministry who would have filled the pulpits of the New Light churches were often expelled for their views by these institutions, so that it became imperative to found a college where the necessary educational background could be provided.

In October 22, 1746, the acting Governor of New Jersey, John Hamilton, granted a charter to the seven trustees who had worked so effectively towards this end. Having overcome the obstacles set in their way by both the Old Lights and the Episcopalians, they had still to overcome, however, yet another obstacle, that of raising the necessary funds for the building of something more suitable to their needs than that which was then available. One of the methods used by the trustees towards overcoming this handicap was to send the Rev. Samuel Davis, of Hanover, Virginia, and Mr Gilbert Tennent, of Philadelphia, to the old country to solicit the necessary funds. Working their way northwards from London they arrived in Edinburgh, where they were given a sympathetic audience and had their petition presented to the General Assembly on May 27, 1754. This petition was endorsed without a dissenting vote. The next day the Assembly directed that collections should be made for the College at the "church-doors of all the parishes through Scotland upon any Lord's day until the New Year." In a sense, therefore, the new building

called Nassau Hall, which was to house the college, was built upon a foundation that was in part Scottish both religiously and economically.

The distinctive atmosphere given to Princeton by her founders has managed, to a certain degree, to linger on. This atmosphere has been strengthened, if anything, by Scots who have joined her ranks. Two of the most outstanding Presidents in the University's history are of this ilk, John Witherspoon and James McCosh. Witherspoon, born in Gifford, Haddingtonshire, February 5, 1723, graduated from Edinburgh University in 1739 and was ordained on April 11, 1745, at Irvine, after having successfully defended himself against charges of unorthodoxy. For twenty years he was a strong supporter of the Popular Party which offered so much opposition to the Moderates. In 1756 he was called to the Laigh Church, now a Congregational Church, in Paisley, but only after he had ousted the local Presbytery who had refused at first to grant the call because of his views expressed in a tract entitled *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*. From Paisley he went to Princeton to assume the position of President of the College of New Jersey in 1768, a position he held with distinction for twenty-six years.

McCosh was a student at Glasgow University from 1824-1829 and at Edinburgh University from 1829-1834, was called from the chair of Logic and Metaphysics at Queen's College one hundred years after Witherspoon to be President of the College and remained as such until 1888. Both men were in the same religious and academic tradition. Witherspoon guided the small college he took over through the difficult years of the Revolutionary War until it achieved fame as the School of Statesmen. McCosh was to tend the College he took over until it became Princeton University; a university which looked back gratefully to its source and to the recognition that "religious experience and learning go hand in hand".

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the General Assembly became concerned about the lack of interest in the ministry on the part of Princeton students, and also about its worldly character. Sons of wealthy merchants and southern planters predominated to such an extent that the poor and pious felt very much out of place. When the trustees of the College heard that the General Assembly intended to found a seminary for the purpose of giving theological education to ministerial candidates they were

thoroughly upset and proposed that a divinity school in the college be established rather than a separate seminary. Unfortunately, the General Assembly did not accept this proposal, so that both College and Seminary went their different ways and have retained separate identities ever since.

The original building that once housed the whole College is now used for the offices of the University administration, and what was once the Prayer Hall is now the Faculty Room. The old Prayer Hall was replaced in 1847 by a separate chapel building which was succeeded in 1881 by a more grandiose chapel of brown stone, Romanesque doors and a high tower with a cone-shaped dome. According to some, this chapel was destroyed by a wise act of God as well as by fire on the night of a student ball on May 14, 1920. The fact that Dr. John Baillie, of Edinburgh, was the last to preach in its pulpit does not seem to be of particular significance, as he was not awarded an honorary degree until 1948.

The cornerstone of the present Chapel was laid June 13, 1925, and it was dedicated May 31, 1928. In design it is not limited by any exact historical precedent. Its internal plan is closer to that of a Post-Reformation Abbey or Cathedral Church in Scotland, for example, Paisley Abbey, in that there is no screen to separate the choir from the nave. The choir is similar to the English chapel tradition, being unusually long and without architectural aisles. Like King's College, Cambridge, it has no tower. The architectural aisles of the nave are narrower than in the medieval churches and used primarily as passage ways.

The general lines of the building are determined by the use of a masonry vaulted ceiling. Although the general proportions, particularly the low triforium, are similar to those of many English churches, the vault itself and the supporting columnettes are according to the pattern of French Gothic.

As one enters the Chapel by the West door one passes under the sculptured tympanum which depicts the majesty of Christ as St John in his Apocalypse was inspired to portray Him. Supported by two angels He is seated on His throne wearing His kingly crown. In His hand He holds a scroll on which is inscribed ΤΙΣ ΑΕΙΟΣ ΤΟ ΒΙΒΑΙΟΝ ΑΝΟΙΞΑΙ (Who is worthy to open the Book?) Surrounding Him are little bust figures representing the twenty-four elders, and in the angles are the four beasts,

the symbols of the evangelists. The architects, Cram and Ferguson, used this symbolism to suggest that the Chapel is a pictorial book which opens to those who come in reverence and joy to the worship of Almighty God. The entrance from the Narthex into the Nave is purposely low to increase the impression of height.

The theme of the stained glass window is the life and teaching of Jesus Christ together with the predictions and parallels in the Old Testament. Only two of the windows in the South clerestory remain to be completed. The Great West Window successfully sums up all that the glass and sculpture are trying to express. For its title it has the text, "I came that they might have life and have it more abundantly". The scene is that of the Second Coming of Christ, surrounded by the adoring figures of all those depicted in the other windows.

The pews are an instance of spears being turned into plowshares, as the wood from which they are made was originally intended for Civil War gun carriages. The seating capacity of the Nave and Transepts, by the way, is about 2,000.

The pulpit, which is on the North side, is from the north of France and dates back to the middle of the 16th century. Carved in the parapets and ramp are the signs of the zodiac, the labours of the months and the sibyls.

The North Transept houses an apsidal chapel which is used for small services. On the wall of the South Transept are the arms of Princeton University flanked by the arms of Edinburgh University and those of Queen's College, Belfast, honouring John Witherspoon and James McCosh.

The wood for the choir stalls and organ cases came from Sherwood Forest and were carved by English craftsmen.

The dimensions are as follows :

*Exterior :*

Extreme length (including buttresses), 277 feet.

Extreme width (nave buttresses), 76 feet.

Extreme width (transept buttresses), 64 feet.

Extreme width (choir buttresses), 64 feet.

Extreme height (ground to ridge), 121 feet.

*Interior :*

Extreme length, 249 feet.

Extreme width (nave and aisles), 61 feet 4 inches.

Extreme width (transepts and crossing), 93 feet 6 inches.

Extreme width (choir), 43 feet.

Extreme height (nave), 74 feet.

Extreme height (choir), 71 feet 6 inches.

Gifts from the alumni and friends of the University to the extent of about three million dollars made the building of the Chapel possible. In a sense it represents the ongoing tradition of the University despite the many changes that have come about during the past two hundred years. Wisely it is still held that God speaks to reason, challenging it with the mysteriousness of what lies above and beyond it. For this reason the Chapel is built on the highest piece of land on the campus. Although it is built at a vantage point it does not dominate; for it takes its place with the work of the University, recognizing that faith without reason leads to blind dogmatism and narrow sectarianism. Architecturally it completes the North arm of the quadrangle which houses the lecture halls, and is the neighbour of the very fine Firestone Library which lies to the North.

The two places where the University is able to transcend departmental lines are the football field and the Chapel. It is the latter which seeks, therefore, to emphasize the necessity of the University recognizing that only the spirit of God at work in our midst can ever enable us to become a community. Of necessity the Chapel is non-denominational, being related to none of the established denominations except through the affiliation of the Dean of the Chapel. The administration is directly in the Dean's control, but he has as his advisors a board of thirty-six deacons selected from the upper classmen. These assume the responsibility of ushering at services, handling the offerings and determining to which charities they should be given, reading one of the lessons, assisting at Holy Communion and keeping the Dean in touch with undergraduate needs and problems. In addition, there is a Chapel Council consisting of members of the faculty and administration who support actively the work of the Chapel and advise in matters relating to the faculty. The attendance, on an average, at the Sunday morning service is 1500. On several occasions this session the seating capacity of 2,000 has not been sufficient for the number attending. The Sacrament of Holy Communion is celebrated monthly and about 800 remain to participate, the others withdrawing during the singing of the Communion hymn.

### **Order of Worship**

The vastness of the building, the poor acoustics and the diverse backgrounds of the worshippers necessitate a simplified service which takes no longer than one hour. Be-



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY CHAPEL: FROM THE WEST



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY CHAPEL : THE NAVE LOOKING TOWARD THE CHANCEL



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY CHAPEL: THE CHOIR



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY CHAPEL: THE NAVE LOOKING TOWARD THE MAIN  
ENTRANCE AND THE GREAT WEST WINDOW

ginning with the Organ Prelude it moves on to the Introit, sung by the choir of 80 voices from the South East Porch or from the Narthex. The choir then, preceding representatives from the student body, the faculty and administration, process, during a hymn of praise, to their places in the Choir. The congregation remains standing during the singing of the last stanza of the hymn " America ", to the same tune as the British National Anthem.

" Our father's God, to Thee,  
Author of liberty,  
To Thee we sing.  
Long may our land be bright  
With freedom's holy light :  
Protect us by Thy might,  
Great God, our King " .

This serves much the same purpose as the old gathering psalm. For a while I deleted it from the service, but had to face so many deputations from the students and faculty that I deemed it wise to retain it. From here we proceed to the Sentences, Salutation and prayers of Adoration, Confession (said in unison), the Absolution and a Prayer for Grace. The *amens* are not sung but spoken. Usually, only two lessons are read, one by a student and the other by a professor. After the lessons the Anthem is sung by the choir. From practice it has been found that this does not interfere in any way with the sequence of the Liturgy of the Word, but rather that it helps to highlight the importance of the lessons from God's Word by allowing the congregation to meditate briefly on what they have heard. During the singing of the hymn before sermon the minister proceeds to the pulpit.

Because of the restrictions caused by space and time the Offertory is not received after the sermon. Instead, following the ascription at the end of the sermon, the Doxology is sung, and the minister goes to the prayer desk to lead the sequence of prayers proceeding through the *Sursum Corda*, the Preface and sung *Sanctus* and the versicles. The prayers, which are invariably presented in the form of a Litany in order that the congregation may have a sense of participation, close with a prayer for the University said in unison, and the Lord's Prayer. The prayer for the University goes as follows : " O Eternal God, the Creator and Preserver of all mankind, we beseech thee to bestow upon this University thy manifold gifts of grace ; thy truth to those who teach, thy laws to those who learn, thy wisdom

to those who administer, and thy steadfastness to all who bear her name. Bind us together by these gracious influences of thy Spirit into that fellowship which can never fail, the Company of Jesus Christ our Lord ". While certain liturgical compromises have been made in order to suit our particular situation, I believe we have an order that is both meaningful and dignified. As the congregation is made up of Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, and so on through the wide range of American denominationalism, it is obviously impossible to please everyone.

The order for the Celebration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion has been taken directly from the current *Book of Common Order of the Church of Scotland*, and was introduced by my predecessor, a Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the U.S.A.

The academic session begins with Opening Exercises in the Chapel and closes with the Baccalaureate service. On both of these occasions the address is given by the President of the University, at present Dr. Robert F. Goheen, the son of Presbyterian missionaries.

### Dean of the Chapel

The Dean of the Chapel is responsible to the Board of Trustees for the religious welfare of the University. In addition to the customary duties in the Chapel, which serves as the Church to a parish of about 4,000, he sits as a member of the University Council and of the various committees which assist the President and the Trustees. Thus, he is able to encourage the University to bear a Christian witness to itself by this opportunity he is given of taking his place at the centre, rather than at the periphery, of university life. To help him he has an assistant who usually serves for a period of from three to five years.

Over the past ten years or so the religious interests of undergraduates have been further helped by the addition of denominational chaplains sent to the Campus, and financed by their various denominations or religious societies. These include representatives from the Episcopal, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Unitarian, Roman Catholic and Jewish faiths.

The interest among Presbyterians, engendered by the University Chapel, led to the formation of the Church Service Society of the U.S.A., in the Chapel in January,

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1957. Already the influence of this society is being felt, and concerned ministers are turning to it for guidance.

The beliefs and attitudes of approximately 2,900 undergraduates are bound to differ greatly, yet by the time most of them have finished their four years at Princeton they have been confronted by the challenge of the Christian faith, either through the teaching in our flourishing department of religion or through the Chapel and its outreach on the campus.

The motto of the University declares what her founders and succeeding servants have tried to uphold:

DEI SUB NUMINE VIGET

ERNEST GORDON