

# Colby



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## De Rerum Natura

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## DE RERUM NATURA

THE Keyes Science Building was formally dedicated on October 13, less than a month ago. The exercises were held in connection with the autumn meetings of the Maine Section of the American Chemical Society, the Maine-New Hampshire Section of the Technical Association of The Pulp and Paper Industry, and of Mathematics Teachers in Maine Colleges.

In recognition of the importance of the newly dedicated building, and as an item of interest to those who attended the meetings of the societies and associations, an appropriate exhibition of a score of Colby's rare scientific books and papers was set up in the Treasure Room of the Miller Library. The following is a check-list of these books:

1. Jacob Abbott's *Water and Land*; New York, Harpers, n.d. This is one of the earliest science books prepared in the State of Maine. Its author, creator of Little Rollo in another series of books, was once a teacher of Henry W. Longfellow.

2. Georgius Agricola, *De Re Metallica*, translated from the first Latin edition of 1556 by Herbert Clark Hoover and Lou Henry Hoover; London, 1912. The translators remark (on page iii): "Surely such a milestone on the road of development of one of the two most basic of human industrial activities [i.e., mining] is more worthy of preservation than the thousands of volumes devoted to records of human destruction." This book was opened to pages 104-105, to show two of Agricola's illustrations of various kinds of mining excavation.

3. *The American Atlas for Winterbotham's History of America*; New York, John Reid, 1796. The book was opened to exhibit Map No. 5: The Province of Maine, dated 1795. This map shows Fort Halifax at the junction of the Kennebec and Sebasticook rivers, but no town of Winslow and no Waterville.

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4. John Jansson's *New Atlas*; Amsterdam, Jansson, 1646; 2 vols., folio, bound in vellum. Volume I was shown opened to pages 132-133, on which appears a map of "Devon-shire," showing Plymouth and its environs only twenty-six years after the sailing of the *Mayflower*. These volumes are in Latin—a fact which serves to remind us that scientists continued to regard Latin as the only fit and safe language for scientific reports long after the date of this Atlas. As recently as 1794, the poet George Crabbe boasted that he had discovered a new species of British plant, while observing the vegetation on the beach at Aldborough. He wrote an "Essay on Botany" in which to announce his discovery, but his friend John Davies, Vice-Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, objected to the use of any language but Latin for scientific purposes; so Crabbe's essay on trefoils was thrown into the fire.

5. Bacon's *Sylva Sylvarum*, or A Natural Historie by Francis Lord Verulam, Viscount St. Alban; London, William Lee, 1635. Editor Rawley's preface "To the Reader" will find support among modern scientists: "As long as they be God's works, they are honorable enough. True axiomes must be drawn from plain experience."

6. Robert Boyle's *The Sceptical Chymist*, first published in 1661. "Like every true genius, Boyle was in advance of his time."

7. Benvenuto Cellini's *Autobiography*, translated by John Addington Symonds; London, Hacon & Ricketts (Vale Press), 1900. Cellini was born on November 1, 1500. The Colby Library Associates plan to observe the four hundred and fiftieth anniversary of this event at a meeting to be held next week, when Dr. James M. Carpenter will speak on Cellini and his book, "one of the most vivid and interesting autobiographies ever written." The exhibited book was decorated by C. S. Ricketts, one of the followers of William Morris. It was shown opened to page 36, where Cellini tells how he "laid down an oval framework" for a

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salt-cellar which would "leave the beaten track pursued by such as fabricated these things."

8. A. S. Eddington's *The Nature of the Physical World*; New York, Macmillan, 1929. This book, which discusses "the downfall of classical physics," was purchased by the poet Edwin Arlington Robinson and presented by him to his Harvard friend George Burnham (d. 1940).

9. Fagon, *Les Admirables Qualités du Kinkina Confirmées par Plusieurs Experiences, avec de nouvelles Reflexions pour s'en servir utilement*; Paris, Jouvenel, 1705. This French book was published after Charles II, King of Spain, had had "frequent success" in the use of quinine for curing a fever.

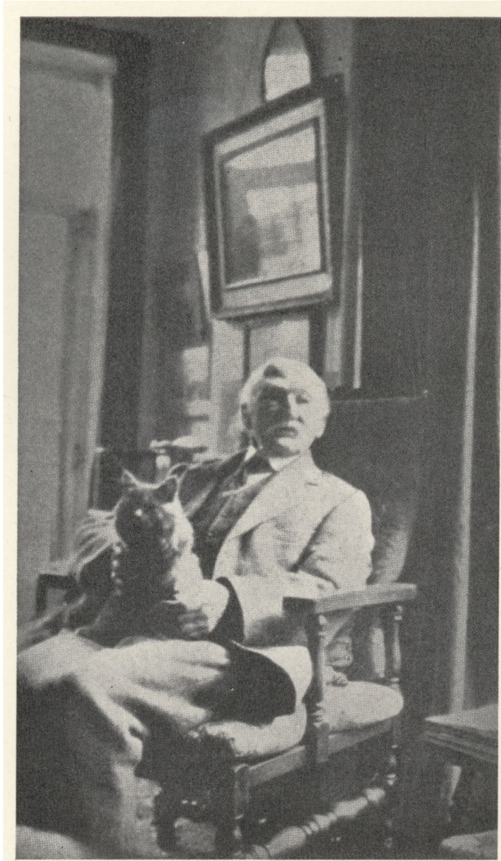
10. Franco de Frankenau, *Onyxologia, sive De Unguibus*; Jena, Johannis Bielkil, 1696. A treatise in Latin from the University of Jena, Germany.

11. Hu Yin, *Tu Shih Kuan Chien*. This is page 467 from a short Chinese Outline of History, printed about 1150. Members of the Technical Association of the Paper Industry were invited to examine the Colby College Library's claim that this specimen of Chinese printing, work done perhaps eight hundred years ago, is on one of the oldest pieces of paper in any American library.

12. Dr. Samuel Johnson's famous *Dictionary of the English Language*; London, 1765; 2 vols. Volume I is opened to show Johnson's definition of *chemist* and *chemistry*. Although he was writing nearly seventy-five years after the death of Robert Boyle (d. 1691), Johnson called a chemist "a philosopher by fire," and defined chemistry as "an art whereby bodies are changed . . . with a view to philosophy."

13. Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*. This Roman poet lived during the first century B.C. His chief work, *De Rerum Natura*, was first printed about 1470. In it Lucretius adopts the atomic theory of the universe formulated by Epicurus, who was (according to Lucretius) the first person to free mankind from the darkness of theological superstition by the "vivid force of his intellect." Since we





This photograph of Thomas Hardy, taken in 1927, shows him seated in the chair which has now come to the Colby College Library.



EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON  
and his books





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lack books by Epicurus, Lucretius may be regarded as the first scientific author. The copy on exhibition (London, Bohn, 1851) was bought by the novelist Thomas Hardy and retained by him until his death in 1928. The book was shown opened to page 34, on which Lucretius declares his atomic creed: "I am of opinion the truth stands thus: there are certain elementary bodies whose combinations produce fire. . . . To say that *all* things are fire seems to me in the highest degree absurd."

14. Sir Isaac Newton, *The Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms Amended*; London, Tonson, 1728. Page xiii offers "abundant reason to hope that Liberty and Learning will be perpetuated together."

15. Cardinal Nicolaus of Cusa (1401-1464), Map of "modern" Europe. Cardinal Nicolaus made a hobby of geography. He drew a map of fifteenth-century Europe, and in 1491, twenty-seven years after the cardinal's death, his map was engraved on copper. Two years later it was made the basis for "the first map of modern Europe," printed at the end of *The Nuremberg Chronicle*, 1493. In 1950 this Nuremberg map was reproduced in Los Angeles, California, in a monograph on the *Nuremberg Chronicle* by Ellen Shaffer. This work was shown opened to the end-papers on which the "first map of modern Europe" is printed.

16. Bartholomew Pitiscus (1561-1613), *Trigonometry*; Frankfurt, Nicolas Hofmann, 1612; with an engraved title-page.

17. Georgius Everhardus Rumphius, *D'Amboinsche Rariteitkamer*; Amsterdam, Halma, 1705. This Dutch folio is equipped with splendidly done illustrations of crabs, snails, and various shell-fish.

18. J. T. Desaguliers, *Mathematical Elements*, translated into English from the Latin of W. J. 'sGravesande; London, Senex, 1731.

19. Vesalius, illustrations from the *De Humani Corporis*

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*Fabrica*. "The publication of the *De Humani* of Andrea Vesalius in 1543 marks the beginning of modern science. It is without doubt the greatest single contribution to the medical sciences." In 1950 Vesalius's illustrations were published in Cleveland, with a biographical sketch by Saunders and O'Malley. This book was shown opened to page 86, to exhibit the most admired figure in Vesalius's osteologic series—a "skeletal Hamlet soliloquizing beside the tomb of some poor Yorick."

20. Rodericus Zamorensis, *Der Spiegel des menschlichen Lebens*; Augsburg, Gunther Zainer, about 1475. These two illustrations, showing early metal-workers, were reproduced in *Some German Woodcuts of the Fifteenth Century*; Hammersmith, Kelmscott Press, 1897. The reproduction was made from a volume in the possession of William Morris.



### CONRAD'S LORD JIM

By DAVID C. WEBER

*Harvard College Library*

THE year 1900 was busy and memorable for Joseph Conrad. It was begun with great anxiety over the troublous South African war, and Conrad took the war to heart. For instance, he wrote: "I am so utterly and radically sick of this African business that if I could take a sleeping draught on the chance of not waking till it is all over, I would let *Jim* go and take the consequences." When a London publisher solicited a contribution to an anthology, the proceeds of its sale to go to the relief of sufferers in Ladysmith—a town in Natal which had suffered severely from want of food during the four-month siege by the Boers—Conrad gave, without remuneration, "An Outpost of Progress," from his recent *Tales of Unrest*. Curiously