

Colby



Colby Quarterly

Volume 1
Issue 4 *October*

Article 6

October 1943

Biographical Notes And Queries

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Recommended Citation

Colby Library Quarterly, series 1, no.4, October 1943, p.65-72

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES AND QUERIES

NOAH WEBSTER died on May 28, 1843. If any notice of this event was taken on May 28, 1943, anywhere except in the Colby College Library, the fact has not been brought to our attention.* But at Colby the centenary of Webster's death was observed by exhibiting in the library two early copies of *The American Spelling Book*. Millions of Americans are familiar with Webster's Dictionary, but few today are acquainted with his *Spelling Book*. Yet no other secular book has reached so many minds in America. John A. Nietz, writing on "Textbooks McGuffey Didn't Write" in *School and Society* (57: 422), April 17, 1943, remarked: "The first textbook to have a wide circulation in America was the *New England Primer*. . . . The next textbook to have wide usage was Webster's speller." And Webster's biographer, Harry R. Warfel, observes (in *Noah Webster, Schoolmaster to America*, New York, 1936): "No other book, the Bible excepted, played so unifying a part in American culture. . . . To Webster's *Spelling Book* belongs much of the credit that . . . a basic pattern of written and spoken language prevails everywhere, from Maine to California and from Oregon to Florida."

The first edition of Webster's *Spelling Book* appeared in 1783. Second and third editions appeared in 1784. In 1788 the title became *The American Spelling Book*, and in 1794 a "Moral Catechism" was added. Warfel states (p. 68) that Webster sent copies of the first edition to college libraries and that "Harvard has its fresh, un mutilated calf-bound copy, a precious rarity housed in the Treasure Room." There was no Colby Library in those days, and we have no copy of the first edition. Thanks, however, to the generosity of Frederick G. Davis, of the Class of 1913, we have a copy of *The American Spelling Book* with illustrations as

* Some little time after this statement had been written, a copy of the London *Times Literary Supplement* for May 29, 1943, made its belated arrival in the Colby Library. On page 259 appears an editorial on Noah Webster, which states: "His achievement outstrips Johnson's and that of any other single-handed lexicographer. . . . His 'speller' attained a fabulous circulation."

66 Colby Library Quarterly

printed by Thomas & Andrews at Boston in 1801. It was owned and studied in 1803 by Sally Blood, an early member of the family of Governor Robert Blood of New Hampshire and an ancestor of Colby Alumnus Frederick G. Davis.

Also exhibited on the Webster centenary was a copy of the *Spelling Book* as printed by Jacob Perkins at Concord, N. H., in 1823. Have any of our Associates or readers copies of any other editions of this famous American textbook?

EDGAR ALLAN POE'S prize-winning story "The Gold-Bug" first appeared in print on June 21, 1843. One hundred years later no college or university library in the world was able to exhibit a copy of the *Dollar Newspaper*, Philadelphia, in which the story was first printed, for only one copy has survived, and that copy is in the Maryland Historical Society library in Baltimore. The Colby Library did the next best thing: it acquired, and exhibited on the *Gold-Bug* centenary, a photostatic copy of the pages of the *Dollar Newspaper* on which *The Gold-Bug* appeared. The Colby Library Associates met—the centennial came just at the beginning of the Summer Term—and heard an enjoyable and appropriate address by Dean Ernest C. Marriner on "Edgar Started Something": a review of one hundred years of the detective story as a literary type. One of the striking features of this address was a comparison of Poe's French detective with his more famous descendant, Sherlock Holmes.

Will some Library Associate supply a copy of Sherlock's first appearance in print? And will some Baker Street Irregular accept Professor Aplington's challenge and find "Quick, Watson, the needle!" in an authentic Doyle text? Dr. Aplington claims that it does not exist.

Professor White reports having searched the entire Sherlock Holmes canon, noting seven allusions to the use of cocaine but failing to find any "Quick, Watson."

Colby Library Quarterly 67

EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON, during the last six or seven years of his life, wrote more than sixty letters to a young admirer who had begun reading Robinson's poems in the Nichols School in Buffalo. In July, 1943, the Colby College Library published these *Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson to Howard George Schmitt* in an attractive volume printed by the Southworth-Anthoensen Press. An introduction and notes were provided by Professor Weber. The edition was limited to two hundred copies, and only a very few of these remain in the librarian's hands for sale.

Reviewing the book in the *Buffalo Evening News* on August 7, 1943, Henry A. Lappin remarked: "Prof. Weber has gracefully edited and the Colby College press has attractively printed these previously unpublished letters from a famous American poet. . . . It is pleasant to discover that an American schoolboy could be sufficiently enkindled by a first-rate sonnet to embark upon an enthusiastic reading of the poet's total 'corpus' to date, and . . . veteran Robinson collectors will recapture something of the ardour of their former hunting."

Jacob Blanck, Consultant in Bibliography with the Indiana Historical Society, exclaimed that the *Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson* "is beautifully done." After declaring that he could "think of no other publication that so interestingly and succinctly presents the story of how a book-collector came to be," Mr. Blanck, writing in the *Publishers' Weekly* for August 21, 1943 (p. 591), called the Colby publication "the most fully documented case-history on the subject that we have ever found." On the next day it was reviewed by Dr. Lawrence C. Wroth in the *New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review*.

IZAAK WALTON was born on August 9, 1593. The Colby Library Associates observed the 350th anniversary of his birth by holding a meeting at which Professors Mary H. Marshall and Henry W. Aplington gave appropriate addresses and at which various editions of *The Com-*

68 Colby Library Quarterly

pleat Angler were exhibited. This famous book made its first appearance in 1653; before 1953 arrives, would some kind Colby Library Associate like to provide a copy for a tercentennial exhibition? (That is a pretty big order; for, as Bliss Perry remarks, in an Introduction to one of the copies in the Colby exhibition: "The First Edition was originally sold for one shilling and sixpence. It passed the £400 mark many years ago, and is now worth just as many hundreds of pounds as a rich American is willing to pay for it.")

No copy of the first edition was available for the Colby exhibit, but—thanks to the kindness of Mr. Carroll A. Wilson, who lent his copy of the second edition (1655)—visitors at the exhibition were able to see the first appearance in print of the famous quotation, "What is everybody's business is nobody's business" (it did not appear in the first edition). Another noteworthy copy of *The Compleat Angler* was The Bodley Head edition (London, 1907), a gift to the Colby Library from Edward F. Stevens, '89. This edition carries over two hundred illustrations by Edmund H. New. His aim was "to illustrate *The Compleat Angler* as thoroughly as possible from a topographical point of view. The majority of the engravings illustrate the routes described by Walton" and other places connected with the life of the author.

Another interesting copy exhibited was a recent publication by C. E. Goodspeed & Co., Boston, 1928. This boxed edition was limited to six hundred copies, printed by D. B. Updike at The Merrymount Press. The title-page, in red and black, announces "an Introduction by Bliss Perry," and each of the Five Days of the famous "Conference" is introduced by a colored sketch by W. A. Dwiggins. The Colby copy of this book is inscribed by Mr. Dwiggins "For Charles Hovey Pepper, June 23, 1943"; and Mr. Pepper (Colby 1889) later in the same month inscribed and presented it to the college library. The book is beautifully printed and bound in boards covered by appropriately

Colby Library Quarterly 69

decorated colored paper, showing "Piscator" at his beloved recreation.

INCUNABULA, or books printed in the "cradle-days" of printing (i.e., 1440-1500), have not been extensively represented in the Colby Library. For many, many years the only incunabulum of which Colby could boast was the *Letters* of Mario Filelfo (or, if you prefer, Marius Philelphus, since the *Epistolae* are written in Latin). This book, presented to the Colby Library by J. Edwin Sherman, of Boston, was going through the press in Venice while Columbus was on his first voyage to America, and the printing was completed just about a week after Columbus first sighted land. Or, to quote the colophon at the end of the book, it was "printed at Venice with great diligence and care by John Cereto, alias Tacuinus de Tredino, on the 20th day of October, 1492. Praise the Lord!"

Colby is the only college (or university) in America possessing a copy of this particular edition of the *Letters* of Philelphus. (The *Second Census of Incunabula in American Libraries* [1940] lists only three other copies: one in the Library of Congress, one in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, and the third privately owned in New York City.) Although these *Epistolae* are little read today, there was a time when they were obviously in great demand. The first edition appeared in Paris in 1481 (Harvard has a copy); the second edition was printed in Basel in 1486 (Cornell has a copy); a third edition appeared in Milan in 1487 (there is a copy at the University of Michigan); a fourth edition was issued at Basel in 1489 (the Boston Public Library has a copy); a fifth edition appeared at Bologna, also in 1489 (the Newberry Library, Chicago, has a copy); and shortly before the publication of the Venetian issue represented by the Colby copy, a sixth edition was published at Venice in 1492 (the Folger Library in Washington has a copy).

For many years a slip of paper identified this volume as

70 Colby Library Quarterly

“the oldest book in the Colby library,” but the paper has now been transferred to another incunabulum, recently purchased at auction by the Colby Library Associates. It bears the title *Mammotrectus super Bibliam* (an Elementary Treatise, or Beginner’s Commentary, on the Bible) by Johannes Marchesinus. It was printed in Venice, by Franciscus de Heilbronn and Nicolaus de Frankfordia, in 1476. According to the *Second Census* (see above), no other college in the United States has a copy of this edition of this work. (Thirteen copies are recorded: two in the Library of Congress, two in private hands, one in the University of North Carolina, one in the Huntington Library, one in the Worcester Public Library, and half a dozen scattered among various theological seminary libraries and other institutions.) The Colby copy is in excellent condition. Although it is now nearly 468 years old, the paper has fed very few book-worms, and the original velum binding is sound. Many of the large initial letters of the book are hand-colored, after the fashion of mediaeval “illuminated” manuscripts. In addition to commenting on the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, this oldest book in the Colby Library contains directions (in Latin) for spelling and pronouncing Latin words, advice on how to live, complaints about the failings of careless printers, and other amusing reliques of the classroom of nearly five hundred years ago.

The book once belonged to the Rev. John Davis and later to Henry Schuman. It was printed when printing from movable type was only thirty-six years old. Will some Library Associate help the Colby Library to reach back even nearer to 1440? We might begin with a *Xenophon* done at Milan in 1474, or a *Thomas Aquinas*, Cologne, 1473. Next, an *Aristotle* from Padua, 1472, a *Plutarch*, Venice, 1471, or a Strassburg *Terence*, 1470. Then, “after the war,” we might aim at a *Vergil*, Rome, 1469, or a *Cicero* done in Mainz in 1465.

RECENT GIFTS

The Colby Library has recently received as gifts a large number of books, some of which can be mentioned here, and others which will have to await acknowledgment in a later issue.

From Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Berry, a good collection of general literature, together with a welcome addition to our shelf of Maine imprints, Joseph Whipple's *History of Acadia*, Bangor, 1816.

From Miss Louise Coburn (Colby, '77), several hundred volumes on botany and forestry.

From Henry W. Dunn, a selection of volumes from his own library, including scientific works by Darwin, Spencer, Huxley, and others.

From Miss Florence E. Dunn, valuable autograph letters, books, and art-material.

From A. Cressy Morrison, several hundred volumes, largely of modern literature.

From Frances Perry (Mrs. A. T.) Dudley, the manuscript of Sarah Orne Jewett's poem, "Discontent," first published in 1876.

From Edward F. Stevens, as a further contribution to the Book Arts Collection of which he is the founder, Trollope's *Orley Farm*, in the edition "profusely illustrated" by Sir John Millais.

When the *New York Times Book Review* commented (March 28, 1943, p. 27) on our "agreeable literary flavor," we blushed with pleasure. When the *New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review* gave us its blessing (June 27, 1943, p. 26), we read with modest delight: "The activities of the Colby College Library and of Mr. N. Orwin Rush, its librarian, demonstrate strikingly what a library can do in making known the wealth of a special collection it has formed. Too often such collections are formed with great devo-

72 Colby Library Quarterly

tion, enshrined behind glass doors, and thereafter regarded as something merely to be pointed out to visitors. In the last year the Colby library has published choice little volumes printed by the Southworth-Anthoensen Press . . . and . . . the *Colby Library Quarterly* . . .”—but modesty forbids our quoting further. But we really cannot allow modesty to prevent our acknowledging the gift of an unexpected bouquet just tossed to us by the journal published by our peers, the American Library Association. Writing on “New Periodicals” in the September 1943 issue of *College and Research Libraries*, Miss Carolyn F. Ulrich, of the New York Public Library staff, says: “The *Colby Library Quarterly*, published by Colby College Library, gives articles of literary interest as well as extensive notes on the library’s exhibitions and collections. Small and attractive, outstanding among college library publications, it compares favorably with the Princeton University *Library Chronicle* and Yale University *Library Gazette*. It is an excellent example for other library publications to follow.”

According to Hawthorne’s *House of the Seven Gables*, “Providence seldom vouchsafes to mortals any more than just that degree of encouragement which suffices to keep them at a reasonably full exertion of their powers.” Certainly the editors of the *Colby Library Quarterly* have enjoyed more than that minimum of encouragement. For this they are sincerely grateful.

With this issue the first year of the *Quarterly* ends. Readers can help keep it “outstanding among college library publications” by increasing and extending the financial support on which it must depend for survival. The treasurer insists that one of the wisest books in the library is one that reads:

“Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen nineteen six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery.”—*David Copperfield*, chapter 12.