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LETTERS OF JEREMIAH CHAPLIN
in the Colby College Library

BY MARY D. HERRICK

THE recent gift from Dr. Matthew Mellon, of Villa Nova, Pennsylvania, of an original autograph letter by the Reverend Jeremiah Chaplin has brought to fourteen the total number of holograph letters which we possess from the founder and first president of Colby College. These letters are supplemented by transcripts of eight others, which, with the originals, extend over a period of nineteen years—from 1819 to 1838.

Jeremiah Chaplin was born in Rowley, Massachusetts, in 1776. He became a member of the Baptist Church at the age of eleven, and his interest in religion was approached in ardor only by his belief in the value of education. Shortly after graduating from Brown University he came to Waterville in 1818 to found a "literary and theological institute." He remained to see it (by act of the Legislature of Maine, February 5, 1821) become a college, and he was inaugurated as its first president in 1822. In writing of a young man who was in need of financial assistance at the college Dr. Chaplin said:

"I am sensible that education alone will never make a minister of the Gospel. . . . But a good education . . . is of more importance than some are willing to allow. It is a great mistake to suppose that a minister of the Gospel can have too much knowledge, when the Bible assures us that his business is to 'feed the people of God with knowledge and understanding'. A knowledge of *history* will assist him greatly in explaining the prophecies. Besides, there are many things in the Scriptures which cannot be satisfactorily explained without an acquaintance with those *languages* in which the Scripture was originally written; and with the manners and customs of the eastern nations. Nor is this all. A good education will enable a preacher to express

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himself more intelligibly and agreeably, and to arrange his thoughts, much better than illiterate preachers generally do. I will add—a good education gives a preacher a weight of character and influence in society which unlearned preachers seldom possess.”¹

Many of these letters are concerned with routine matters at the College. The ever pressing problem of finance is usually paramount, and we can see the President struggling in his three-fold role of minister, scholar, and leader of what (in a letter to Nathaniel Williams, May 12, 1823) he called “begging excursions” for college funds. In a letter to Otis Briggs, Secretary of the Trustees, on June 25, 1829, he inquires if there is any hope of obtaining funds to pay the officers of the College who are greatly embarrassed by the arrears in their salaries. His own salary at that time was unpaid for over a year. When affairs went badly the President struggled, and when rare periods of spiritual or financial prosperity occurred he worried lest his ardor be relaxed. On May 8, 1822, he wrote to the Rev. Nathaniel Williams: “We are going on prosperously at present. . . . If the Lord continues to bless us, we shall do something, I trust, for the advancement of his glory in this part of our country. Pray for me, my Brother, that I may not be improperly elated with any prosperity with which the Lord has been pleased to favor me. Pray that I may feel a deep sense continually of my unworthiness to be employed by the Lord as an instrument for the advancement of his glory and that I may ever realize that all my sufficiency is of him.”

Two of the letters in this collection are of particular historical interest to Colby. The first is an official confirmation, dated August 28, 1828, to Robert E. Pattison of his appointment to the professorship of mathematics in 1828. Robert Pattison was also a minister and shared with Dr. Chaplin a firm conviction regarding the value of liberal

¹ Transcript copy of a letter dated November 3, 1821, probably to the Baptist Board in Beverley, Massachusetts.

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arts training in his profession. He had graduated from Amherst in 1826 and was a tutor at Columbian College before coming to Waterville. He left Colby in 1829 to resume preaching but was recalled in 1836 to become the third president of the college. He is the only man who ever served in that office for two separate terms,— 1836-1839 and 1854-1857. Dr. Chaplin concluded his letter to Pattison with “May God bless you, my dear Sir, and make you a rich blessing to this Seminary and to the world.”

The second letter is dated May 23, 1831. It was at this time that Henry Paine, a graduate in the Class of 1823, was considering coming to Waterville to act as principal of the Academy (later Coburn Classical Institute). One of the inducements offered Mr. Paine and the young men whom he would bring with him from his position at Monmouth Academy, was a workshop which had just been established at the college. Dr. Chaplin wrote to Mr. Paine: “With regard to the workshop, nothing very definite has yet been done in relation to the sale of the articles manufactured by the young men. It is our intention, however, to make sales of them ourselves, and allow the young men a reasonable price for their labors. We expect to make contracts abroad for furnishing homes, bedsteads, etc., to a pretty large amount. Our system is not yet matured; but I think the young men with you need be under no apprehension respecting the sale of their work, should they come to Waterville. They may rest assured that we shall do all we possibly can to render their labors profitable.”

The last letter of Dr. Chaplin's owned by the Colby Library is the one recently received from Dr. Mellon. Written on March 14, 1838, five years after leaving Colby, it is addressed to the Second Baptist Society of Rowley, Massachusetts. To this Society Dr. Chaplin presented his resignation and announced his intention to accept a call to Wellington, Connecticut. It is a commentary on his genuine modesty that he wrote: “Expecting soon to reside in a state where I am but little known, I would respectfully solicit of

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you such testimonials of my moral and religious character as you may feel yourselves warranted to give me."



BOOKPLATES AT COLBY

BY EDWARD F. STEVENS

IT was a most happy and complimentary recognition of Colby's Book Arts Collection, that Mrs. Frank Cowdery of Albany should greatly enrich the Library's treasures by the bestowal of her collection of bookplates. "Ex Libris" form an aspect of the Arts of the Book of special artistic and personal significance, for the bookplate associates the book with its owner in an intimate relationship. Mrs. Cowdery's bookplates, approaching a thousand examples in number, are recognized not only as an extensive but also as a discriminating collection, in which selective quality, even more than numbers, is apparent.

An historical study of the origin and growth of the book-owner's label would be an interesting story into which this brief paper may not venture, beyond alluding to early examples of family crests and escutcheons identifying the books pertaining to ancestral houses, remaining undisturbed for generations. The heraldic or armorial bookplates were characteristic of the early days, and are well-represented in our new acquisition. But, perhaps closer in keeping with the Book Arts, would be the more modern expressions wherein artists of many talents have lent their genius to a minor art of great individuality.

Inasmuch as many book collections, especially with institutions, are presented or endowed as memorials, the idea of the portrait has largely prevailed, more often by photographic reproduction. Such *carte de visite* photographs have unique character, but the repetition in every related book detracts from the specific honor intended, somewhat as the