June 1944

The Pope Collection At Colby

Frederick A. Pottle

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/cq

Recommended Citation
Colby Library Quarterly, series 1, no.7, June 1944, p.106-112

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colby Quarterly by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Colby. For more information, please contact mfkelly@colby.edu.
us look round upon the present time, and back upon the past . . . , and the pretensions of Pope will be no more disputed. Had he given the world only his version [of Homer], the name of poet must have been allowed him."

Alexander Pope died on May 30, 1744. On the two hundredth anniversary of this date the Colby College Library opened an exhibition of twenty-eight First Editions and other early issues of books by Pope, all now in the Colby Library. Eight of these books are recent purchases; the other twenty are part of a splendid gift from Mr. Carroll A. Wilson, of New York City, without whose generosity so representative an exhibition as this would have been impossible.

THE POPE COLLECTION AT COLBY

BY FREDERICK A. POTTLÉ

WHEN Wordsworth and Coleridge, early in 1801, brought out the second and enlarged edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* with the famous Preface and the punning motto depreciating Pope,¹ they were deliberately bent on overthrowing the authority of the greatest name in English poetry of the eighteenth century. "I am willing to allow," wrote Wordsworth, "that, in order entirely to enjoy the poetry which I am recommending, it would be necessary to give up much of what is ordinarily enjoyed," and he meant it. Leigh Hunt took up the cry; Keats, in his first volume, excommunicated the whole neo-classical school as "a schism nurtured by foppery and barbarism"; Shelley announced that didactic poetry was his aversion. Byron's

¹ *Quam nihil ad genium, Papiniane, tuum!* Professor Garrod is surely right in ignoring the original application of the verse—it has not been traced beyond Selden, who appears to be quoting it—and in considering "Papinianus" to be a Coleridgean pun: "How absolutely worthless all these poems will seem to the taste of the hanger-on of the school of Pope!"
intemperate but by no means insincere defence of Pope was powerless to halt the progress of the revolution. Matthew Arnold in 1880 gravely summed the matter up in a paradox: Pope was not a classic of our poetry but of our prose. Every school-text of my childhood treated the Romantic Movement as the blooming of the poetic spirit after a long drought.

It would be saying too much to maintain that the world now knows better. The taste of the majority of readers of the present day is still romantic; that is, finds itself more fully expressed in the poetry of Wordsworth than in the poetry of Pope. But there are clear signs that another revolution is in progress, and that before the end of this century—perhaps much sooner—Romantic poetry will in its turn fall under the ban, and Pope will resume his position among the great English poets. Poets, I repeat; not writers of prose. Let us hope that by that time we shall have realized that though the establishment of a new idiom probably does call for “the giving up of much that is ordinarily enjoyed,” the giving up is not permanent. The battle won, the idiom established, and lo! what you rebelled against seems not merely inoffensive but admirable, and it is the established authority that puts your back up. I speak to younger readers of this Quarterly: when you feel impelled to settle Shelley’s business, read what the Romantics and the Victorians wrote about Pope, and then see if you can’t do better; that is, see if you can’t separate the attempt to define an idiom appropriate to your own time from the attempt to evaluate great figures of the past.

Pope, I have been trying to say, is not merely a great poet but one whom it is particularly important for libraries at the present time to have in significant early editions, for the rehabilitation of a poetic reputation calls for, and is in part based on, minute textual study. The Twickenham edition, of which the first volume appeared in 1939, will be the first genuinely critical edition of Pope. (An amusing bit of evidence of this need for possessing early editions: it
was possible for Roscoe to accuse Bowles of faking a passage in Pope's letters, neither realizing that there were at least twenty variant printings of the letters in the year 1735, and each relying on the one text he happened to have at hand.) The gift to the Colby Library by Carroll A. Wilson (LL.D. 1940) of twenty early editions of Pope raises the Colby collection at one bound from insignificance to splendor. I have not been able to examine the texts, and in any case am not enough at home in the bibliography of Pope to go into detail without making mistakes, but the general nature of the gift is clear enough. It contains first editions of practically all the poems published by Pope from 1732 to the end of his life; that is, all the mature satires plus the Essay on Man and The Universal Prayer. The four parts of An Essay on Man (not merely first editions but first issues of first editions) form a group that few libraries in the world will not covet. The Universal Prayer is also a piece of great rarity. The individual pieces, in short, are of great interest, but perhaps the finest thing about the gift is its comprehensiveness. To assemble all the first editions of an important and prolific author during half his poetic career is something that a college library, with its limited funds and its many obligations, accomplishes very slowly. It is not hard to get books enough for any author to make a showing, but to fill in the gaps—even when the pieces are individually not too expensive—is the sort of thing that private collectors do better than institutions. In this gift Mr. Wilson tenders us not only the equivalent of a considerable sum of money, but also his knowledge, perseverance, and skill.

THE BICENTENARY EXHIBITION

No work can be done with early editions of Pope without reference to the universally hailed authoritative study by R. H. Griffith, Alexander Pope: A Bibliography, Austin, University of Texas: Part I (1709-1734), 1922; Part II (1735-1751), 1927. Griffith identifies 752 Pope books pub-
lished during the forty-two-year period. To save minute description, each of the Colby books is here identified by the number assigned it by Griffith. [Identifications and notes by Carl J. Weber.] All were published in London.

"Many years ago, in 1882 to be exact," so wrote A. Edward Newton in the privately printed pamphlet referred to on page 105, "I determined that I would one day have a library, and I asked a man . . . where to begin. I said I wanted to begin at the beginning: 'Very well,' he replied, 'get Pope's Homer's Iliad.'" In this qualified sense, the Colby Pope Bicentenary Exhibition begins "at the beginning." The number prefixed to it is the number in the Griffith Bibliography.

42. The Iliad of Homer Translated by Mr. Pope. Folio, 6 vols. Vol. I: 1715, with pages 2-3 of Book II wrongly numbered 34-35. In this copy pages 21-24 are missing.


215. The Dunciad, With Notes Variorum, 1729. Octavo. Griffith points out (p. 168) that pages 189-190 were cancelled and a substitute leaf pasted on the stub of the cancelled pages. In this copy the substitute leaf is missing.


man knows, ... but it was never till now recommended by such a blaze of embellishment, or such sweetness of melody." Wilson gift.


352. *An Epistle from Mr. Pope to Dr. Arbuthnot.* 1734 [i.e., January 1735]. Large Paper Folio. First edition; page 20 is misnumbered 30. Wilson gift.


Colby Library Quarterly


546. The New Dunciad: As it was Found In the Year 1741. Quarto. 1742. This copy lacks the half-title (page 1). Purchased.

Also included in the exhibition were the following un-numbered accessory volumes:


A Pope Library, T. J. Wise: London, 1931. This book was opened to exhibit the facsimile of the title-page of An Essay on Criticism, 1711.

The R. B. Adam Library, New York, Oxford University Press, 1929. 3 vols. Gift of H. B. Collamore, Esq. Volume III was opened to the inserts between pages 197-198, showing a picture of Pope's Villa at Twickenham, and a holograph letter (reproduced) dated "March 18" and signed "A. Pope."

The following selected titles would make the collection representative of Pope's entire poetic career. The majority are not expensive. To save minute description each item is identified by the number in Griffith's bibliography of Pope.*


---

EARLY MAINE IMPRINTS OF POPE

BY CARL J. WEBER

DOROTHY CANFIELD FISHER, writing in the March, 1944, issue of *The American Scholar*, remarked: "I knew in my childhood a very old great-uncle, so venerable when I knew him, that his literary tastes were of the pre-Romantic school. To have come under the influence of someone who enormously admired ALEXANDER POPE seems almost as strange an experience as if I had known someone who still believed in the Ptolemaic theory of the universe."

* In making this list I have been greatly helped by Professor Maynard Mack, editor of the *Essay on Man* in the Twickenham Edition.—F. A. P.