

Colby



Colby Quarterly

Volume 4
Issue 11 *August*

Article 6

August 1957

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Recommended Citation

Colby Library Quarterly, series 4, no.11, August 1957, p.201-204

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tive statements are considerably less enthusiastic than Housman's expressions of disapproval:

Page 105: "Quite" Page 251: "True" Page 420: "Yes indeed"
" 167: "Good" " 295: "Right" " 495: "So it is"



PAUL AKERS OF MAINE*

By WILLIAM B. MILLER

ONE hundred years ago Benjamin Paul Akers presented to the world the marble bust of John Milton which is now in the Reference Room of the Colby College Library. Unsigned and uninscribed, the bust shows the English poet nude, looking straight forward. The face is framed by locks of hair depicted in the manner worn by the poet. The bust is conceived in terms of a strict symmetry. The expression on the face is serious but not stern, calm and still, without aloofness on the one hand and without a hint of animation on the other. In terms of the ideals of one hundred years ago, we confront the classic image of a classic poet.

Paul Akers was active during the first flourishing period of American sculpture. During this period the Neo-Classical style ran its course. Imported from Europe, Neo-Classicism lingered in the United States longer than in Europe. As a sculptor and a sojourner in Italy, Akers received a double dose of Neo-Classicism.

Born in 1825 in what is now Westbrook, Maine, Benjamin Akers was the oldest of eleven children. As a child he assumed the name Paul. He was sent to Connecticut for schooling, and in Norwich (it is alleged) he saw a piece

* This is an abbreviated version of an address delivered on April 2, 1957, to the Colby Library Associates by Professor Miller of the Department of Art at Colby. The editor regrets his lack of space for printing the address in full.

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of sculpture for the first time. He spent some months in Boston in 1849 learning the technique of plaster casting from Joseph Carew, and possibly came in contact with Horatio Greenough, recently returned from Italy.

In 1850 Paul Akers moved to Portland, where John Neal, journalist and novelist, offered Akers a room over his office as a studio and offered himself as the subject for Akers' first life-size portrait bust. During the next two years in Portland, Akers did a number of busts, including one of Henry W. Longfellow and another of Samuel Appleton of Boston, who subsequently commissioned Akers to do some work for him in Florence, Italy.

Akers made three trips to Italy. Of the first trip he writes in a letter from Paris: "I was set down in the Louvre—a boy from the woods—of that new world, no idle spectator." He completed his commissions for Mr. Appleton, and in Florence made arrangements for the portraits he had done in clay to be "pointed" in marble. The Neo-Classic sculptor rarely chiseled the stone for his statues and portraits. This was done cheaply and expertly by Italian craftsmen, and this was one of the reasons why American sculptors went to Italy.

In 1854 Akers was busy in Washington, D.C., taking the likenesses of President Pierce and half a dozen other political notables. Possibly his cousin, Hannibal Hamlin, provided the necessary entree. In 1855 he returned to Italy with the clay models for pointing in marble.

His second stay in Europe was longer than the first. He moved into a studio once occupied by Canova, and there undertook some of his important imaginative pieces. These included "the Pearl Diver," now in the Portland Museum, and the Colby bust of Milton.

Hawthorne and his family visited Akers in Rome, and the bust of Milton made its appearance in Hawthorne's novel, *The Marble Faun*, two years later. In the Preface the

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novelist confesses: "Having imagined a sculptor in this romance, the author laid felonious hands upon a certain bust of Milton which he found in the studio of Mr. Paul Akers and secretly conveyed it to the premises of his imaginary friend." In Chapter 13 of the novel Hawthorne describes this "grand, calm head of Milton, not copied from any one bust or picture yet more authentic than any of them, because all known representations of the poet had been profoundly studied and solved in the artist's mind."

According to a letter, Robert Browning also visited the Akers studio in Rome and upon seeing the bust exclaimed: "It is Milton, the man-angel."

The tragic phase of Akers' life began in 1858. He had been active and happy in Rome, but he was tubercular. He returned home for a year, and then made his third trip to Rome to work on his most important commission—a statue of Commodore Perry, to be placed in Central Park, New York City. This statue was never finished. He made his final transatlantic voyage in 1860 and died in Philadelphia in 1861.

Akers' career as a sculptor is marked by its brevity. He was active at most for twelve years. In this period he produced thirty-six works, of which eighteen are portraits in medallion or bust. Apart from these portraits, Akers' subject-matter is less strictly Neo-Classic than might have been expected. Four statues deal with subjects from Christian religion, several others were inspired by literary references, and I find only one truly classical subject among his works—"Diana and Endymion," which he may have reached by way of Keats's poem.

I characterized the bust of Milton as the classic image of a classic poet, and so, I believe, Akers conceived it. Not literally "classic" but rather figuratively "classic," Milton as the choice for an ideal portrait is typically a Neo-Classic subject as we see it today. On the formal side, our bust of

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Milton, with the meticulous finish to the Carrara marble, is the cold and inert Neo-Classicism of one hundred years ago.

This bust of John Milton is an appropriate statue for the college library. A library is probably the place for which it was intended by the sculptor. It is as good a work as Paul Akers ever did, one on which he expended considerable time, and one the excellence of which was recognized by distinguished contemporaries of the sculptor.



AUTOGRAPH LETTERS AND OTHER GIFTS

THANKS to the kindness and generosity of Everett L. Getchell (Class of 1896) the collection of autograph letters in the Library has been enlarged by more than three-score new items. These letters were collected by Professor Getchell in the course of the many years during which he taught at Boston University. Included in his gift are letters from Conrad Aiken, William Beebe, Phyllis Bentley, Rollo W. Brown, Thornton Burgess, Gladys Hasty Carroll, Robert P. T. Coffin, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Dana, Josephus Daniels, Bernard DeVoto, Rachel Field, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Harold Laski, Stephen Leacock, John Masefield, Robert Nathan, Bliss Perry, William Lyon Phelps, Kenneth Roberts, Nancy Byrd Turner, Ben Ames Williams, and others. The earliest of these letters is dated February 5, 1931, and the latest October 21, 1941.

Through the kindness of Mr. Reginald H. Sturtevant (Class of 1921), a member of the Board of Trustees, the Library has been able to add to its JACOB ABBOTT Collection an unrecorded edition of *Rollo on the Atlantic*. Colby College Monograph No. 14 (*A Bibliography of Jacob Abbott*, 1948) lists twelve different editions of this Rollo book. Thanks to Mr. Sturtevant, we now have a thirteenth, previously unknown to us. It was published in Boston by D. Lothrop & Co. (n.d.).