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THE SAGE OF CONCORD AND THE
AUTHOR OF "AMERICA"

By ERNEST C. MARRINER

RALPH WALDO EMERSON and Samuel Francis Smith once met on the same platform, and if a contemporary account can be credited, Emerson came off second best. The occasion was Emerson's second visit to Waterville (now Colby) College in 1863. He had previously spoken there in 1841, at the invitation of one of the literary societies.

Commencement at this central Maine college was a gala event, and not even the Civil War could dampen the enthusiasm of the populace, which came from miles around to attend the festivities. Only a circus could compete with the annual Waterville commencement in drawing a crowd. So it happened that, on Tuesday evening, August 11, 1863, the First Baptist Church of Waterville was packed with citizenry to hear an oration by Mr. R. W. Emerson and a poem by Rev. S. F. Smith.

Waterville's weekly newspaper, the *Eastern Mail*, in its three-column account of commencement, devoted considerable space to the exercises of that Tuesday evening, and the account reveals that, in local opinion at least, the laurels went to the clergyman-poet. The *Mail* said:

"Tuesday evening generally measures the attraction of this festival, and we have never seen a larger audience than that assembled to hear R. W. Emerson's oration and Rev. S. F. Smith's poem. We fear, however, that a large share came with no intention of listening to the exercises, for they had not even the grace to remain quiet during the opening prayer.

"Mr. Emerson's oration was upon *The Office of the Scholar*, and he came with words of counsel such as one standing where he does might offer without presumption, and such as those to whom he came might receive with reverence. He claimed for the scholar a regal rating, neither

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priest nor prophet having a higher or holier mission. Mr. Emerson's epigrammatic style of writing is no more peculiar than his oratory; and though he is a forcible speaker, one is not surprised to find his delivery far from smooth and graceful. He stands before you, a figure of sharp angles, with a marked face and head, indicative of character. At times, as he warms to his subject, he draws himself up with stern countenance and piercing eye, his voice ringing out like the challenge of a trumpet. Possessed by great thoughts that struggle for utterance, his sentences are jerked forth abruptly. He fires no blank cartridges; he sends up no blazing rockets; but his solid shot, of tough and well compacted metal, are hurled forth straight to the mark, and you feel that all that is not founded in eternal truth must crumble before the powerful fire.

"Dr. Smith's poem had one great merit, brevity; and it might be said, by no means disparagingly, that it was not too good for the occasion. The versification was smooth and easy, the sentiment pure and elevated, and it enforced a good lesson—labor and wait. The punning allusions to General [Ben] Butler were received with especial favor. While far from being a great poem, this much can be safely said: *Dr. Smith did what Emerson failed to do; he stilled the audience.*"



GIL BLAS AT COLBY

ON Thursday, October 10, 1957, Dr. Luella F. Norwood addressed the Colby Library Associates on the subject of Smollett's translation of Le Sage's *Gil Blas*. Since her retirement, Miss Norwood has been making an exhaustive bibliographical study of this work, and has found herself becoming involved in a study also of a later (and inferior) translation which has often been erroneously ascribed to Smollett. Dr. Norwood complimented the