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# Colby Library Quarterly

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## ABBOTT'S DRAWING CARDS

WHEN the Colby College Press published, in 1948, *A Bibliography of Jacob Abbott*, there was every reason to think that its 155 pages contained a record of everything that Jacob Abbott had written. He was known to be the author of more than two hundred books; and while not all of the two hundred were to be found in the Colby College Library, the *Bibliography* published ten years ago had not been based exclusively upon the Abbott Collection at Colby but had included a score of other libraries as well.

Thanks to the interest and generosity of Mr. H. Bacon Collamore, of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the Colby Library is now in receipt of a new and previously unknown, unrecorded, and unheard of item. It bears the title *Abbott's Drawing Cards: Foliage Series for Schools and Families*, New York: Saxton & Miles; Boston: Saxton & Kelt, 1845; boxed. It consists of thirty-two cards, together with an eight-page leaflet entitled *Directions to Accompany Abbott's Series of Drawing Cards* by Jacob and John S. C. Abbott.

The interest which attaches to these *Drawing Cards* is not confined to the fact that Abbott was at one time a well-known writer, creator of Little Rollo, author of a famous set of history books, or to the fact that he was a native of the State of Maine and a one-time teacher of Henry W. Longfellow. These cards, and the date—1845—at which they were published, combine to supply us with fresh evidence of what a pioneer Jacob Abbott was in the educational world.

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On page 130 of the Colby *Bibliography* Abbott's "Little Learner Series" of five books is listed, a series that included *Learning to Think* and *Learning to Read*. But there is no book on learning to draw. Until our receipt of Mr. Collamore's gift, we had no evidence that Jacob Abbott and his brother included drawing in the curriculum they designed "for schools and families." Now we know better, and we are impressed by the fact that Abbott emphasized drawing at an earlier date, here in America, than the dates when two famous Englishmen lent the force of their reputations and eloquence to the importance of drawing in the training of the young.

John Ruskin spent the winter of 1851-1852 in Venice, studying and sketching in preparation for writing the second and third volumes of *The Stones of Venice*. One day he went to sketch an old yellow-and-white palace which Turner had once painted. Ruskin took special interest in this palace because his old drawing teacher in England, Charles Runciman, had found fault with the perspective in Turner's painting. As Ruskin made his own drawing of the palace, he discovered something. On September 19, 1851, he wrote to his father: "I forgot to tell you what I found out about that Turner [painting which Runciman] . . . found fault with. . . . As I was examining this palace . . . a day or two ago . . . , I found it was *not square*, but that the corner [shown in the painting] was an acute angle. Turner's perspective is therefore perfectly right."

A month later, in writing again to his father, Ruskin had occasion to revert to the subject of accuracy in drawing. On October 23, 1851, Ruskin reported: "Mr. [David] Roberts left us last night. . . . Venice does not lose much. . . . He sketches the Ducal palace this way"—and then Ruskin drew a rough pen-and-ink sketch of the doges' palace—"and says it is quite enough. How he is ever to work up his sketches I cannot imagine—however I am rather an unfair judge for I am morbidly accurate—but

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... I am ... sorry to see him falling in this way, ... pretending to draw things when he does not." These words about being "morbidly accurate" were written eighteen years before Ruskin was made the first Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford University and thirty-one years before another famous Englishman lent additional emphasis to the importance of drawing.

In 1882 Thomas Henry Huxley published an essay on "The Principal Subjects of Education" in the course of which he declared:

If I could make a clean sweep of everything ... , I should make it absolutely necessary for everybody ... to learn to draw. Now, you may say, there are some people who cannot draw, however much they may be taught. I deny that *in toto*, because I never yet met with anybody who could not learn to write. Writing is a form of drawing; therefore if you give the same attention and trouble to drawing as you do to writing, depend upon it, there is nobody who cannot be made to draw, more or less well. ... You *can* teach simple drawing, and you will find it an implement of learning of extreme value. I do not think its value can be exaggerated, because it gives you the means of training the young in attention and accuracy, which are the two things in which all mankind are more deficient than in any other mental quality whatever. ... I consider there is nothing of so great value as the habit of drawing, to secure those two desirable ends.

Jacob Abbott did not live to read those words; he had died in 1879. But if he had been alive in 1882 when Huxley's *Science and Art* came from the press, we may be sure that Abbott would not only have approved of everything that Huxley said but would have reminded his brother John that "*we* said all that back in 1845 when Huxley was just graduating from London University." Abbott's ghost can be grateful to Mr. Collamore for rescuing these *Drawing Cards* from oblivion. Since they comprise a "Foliage Series," the implication is that there are other series dealing with other subjects. Can any reader inform us? Better still, can anyone enrich the Colby College Library with further Abbott material? Abbott's death in 1879 need not end his influence.