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Notes and Memoranda

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We wish that we could solve what Odell Shepard has called “the riddle of Jonathan Swift.” Alas, we cannot. “To think of him,” said Thackeray, “is like thinking of the ruin of a great empire.” Richard Garnett called Swift “one of the most tragic figures of English literature.” But at least one product of his tormented mind has become known all over the world, and on the Swift bicentenary the Associates in Waterville will be privileged to inspect a superlatively fine copy of the first edition of the *Travels of Lemuel Gulliver*. Published in London in 1726, this copy has been borrowed for the occasion from that good friend of the Colby Library, Mr. H. Bacon Collamore, of Hartford, Connecticut. Library Associates remember with pleasure Mr. Collamore’s vivid and instructive talks on his Robinson and his Robert Frost books, and will hope that he may be able to be present himself when we open the exhibition which includes his *Gulliver’s Travels*.

NOTES AND MEMORANDA

RALPH Waldo Emerson spoke at this college on August 11, 1863. In the course of his address he recalled an episode in the history of ancient Greece—a story well worth repeating:

“Pytheas of Aegina was victor . . . at the Isthmian games. He came to the poet Pindar and wished him to write an ode in his praise, and inquired what was the price of a poem. Pindar replied that he should give him one talent, about a thousand dollars of our money. ‘A talent!’ cried Pytheas; ‘Why, for so much money I can erect a statue of bronze in the temple.’ ‘Very likely.’ On second thoughts, he returned and paid for the poem. And now not only all the statues of bronze in the temples of Aegina are destroyed, but the temples themselves, and the very walls of the city are utterly gone, whilst the ode to Pindar, in praise of Pytheas, remains entire.”
An Associated Press dispatch from Paris on June 19, 1945, reported that, in the tiny village of Kirchdorf, twenty miles away from the ruins of what was once the city of Munich, “the irreplaceable library of the University of Munich, valued at several millions of dollars,” has been discovered. Bronze wears away; stone buildings crumble; but books have a miraculous way of surviving. What accounts for the high evaluation of such a library as that of the University of Munich? The word “irreplaceable” tells the story. War, and time, and fire are constantly at work reducing the world’s supply of ancient books. Even the commonest book may, in time, become a rare one. What is a rare book? Many attempts have been made to give a satisfactory definition, but one of the simplest is found on page 283 of *The Reference Function of the Library* (University of Chicago Press, 1943): “A rare book is a book that is important, desirable, and hard to get.”

Sarah Orne Jewett once served as chairman of the Subcommittee on Books, of the Examining Committee of the Boston Public Library. In the report of her committee she attempted an answer to the question: What books should a library collect? What is its chief duty? Said Miss Jewett: “Nor should a demand for the less important and quickly passing light literature of the day infringe upon a great library’s chief reason for existence,—the possession of the very best books, new and old.”

*Colby College* and “its very attractive [Library] Quarterly” received honorable mention in *The Grosvenor Library Bulletin*, Buffalo, New York, February 1945. Our June issue has brought us a number of responses. Three of them came as a result of the article by Professor C. L. Cline, of the University of Texas, on Wife-sale in Nineteenth Century England—a subject suggested by the opening episode in Hardy’s *Mayor of Casterbridge*. Professor Harold H. Scudder, of the University of New Hampshire, has found additional evidence to supplement that cited by Professor Cline; and Professor-emeritus Bliss Perry has called the
editor's attention to Ralph Waldo Emerson's remarks on this subject. Writing during Hardy's own lifetime, Emerson declared (in *English Traits*): "The Normans . . . were . . . greedy and ferocious pirates. . . . It took many generations to trim and comb and perfume the[m]. . . . The [English] nation has a tough, acrid, animal nature, which centuries of . . . civilization have not been able to sweeten. . . . The right of the husband to sell the wife has been retained down to our times." Emerson was in England in 1847, six years after his first visit to Colby College.

Dr. Walter Peirce writes from Santa Barbara, California, to commend Richard Rowley's account of his visit to Max Gate: "His impression was so exactly what my own had been: Hardy's cheerfulness and humor, his lack of any sign of pessimism or melancholy, his cordiality, his informality, and his ability to make a visitor, however obscure, feel that he, Hardy, was being honored by the visit."

In November the Library will open a Jubilee Exhibition of *Jude the Obscure*, the notorious novel with which Hardy shocked the world fifty years ago.

For the first time since the publication of the very first issue of the *Colby Library Quarterly*, we are reminded of—and are glad to quote from—a letter which Edwin Arlington Robinson addressed to Esther W. Bates in December, 1918: "Now that the war is over—at least, in a sort of way—I suppose one may say Merry Christmas again without feeling foolish."

In January 1946 we will exhibit a particularly pleasing association-item which has been given to the Library by the Boston Colby Club. The next issue of this *Quarterly* will have more to say about it.

In February 1946 the Library will observe the jubilee of "the most important book of poetry published in our lifetime." Will Associates enjoy the fun, between now and then, of trying to identify the author, and the title?