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THE BICENTENARY OF ALEXANDER POPE

In the year 1936 A. Edward Newton issued a privately printed pamphlet entitled *Pope, Poetry and Portrait*, in which one may read an imaginary conversation that runs as follows: "Samuel Johnson said: 'Sir, it may be a thousand years before we have such another poet as Pope.' To which Amy Lowell replied, 'Sir, let us hope so.'"

Miss Lowell represented the critical attitude that has been common, if not universal, for a hundred and fifty years. But there are straws that show that the critical wind is beginning to shift. Geoffrey Tillotson, after calling Pope "the greatest poet of his time," continues: "Pope is becoming, and is to become, better known. There is a chance that he will become known for the poet he is." (Essays in Criticism and Research, Cambridge University Press, 1942; p. 88.) Bliss Perry, in delivering at Princeton the Louis Clark Vanuxem Foundation Lecture (published in 1931), asked: "Are we and our friends of the present decade any better judges of wisdom and beauty as revealed through words than were Pope and his friends two hundred years ago? I cannot think that we are." And we are today in a more hospitable mood than was possible fifty years ago for heeding the comment of Dr. Samuel Johnson:

"It is surely superfluous to answer the question that has once been asked, whether Pope was a poet? otherwise than by asking in return, If Pope be not a poet, where is poetry to be found? To circumscribe poetry by a definition will only show the narrowness of the definer, though a definition which shall exclude Pope will not easily be made. Let
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. POTTL

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 a d 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 Coleridigean pun: "How absolutely worthless all these poems will seem to the taste of the hanger-on of the school of Pope!"