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We're Ready for Darwin!

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Colby Library Quarterly

Sergeant Perry, who (a dozen or thirteen years later), married Lilla Cabot, niece of James Russell Lowell (see the Colby Library Quarterly for March, 1943, page 19). By generous gift of their daughter, Miss Margaret Perry, this copy of Browning's poems, with William James's autograph inscription to his friend Perry, is now a highly prized item in the Colby College Library.

One would like to be able to show this book to all readers of The New Colophon for 1950, because of its article by Richard D. Altick (pages 78-81). This article deals with the printing of Browning's poems in twenty-three issues of the timetables of the Chicago and Alton Railroad, beginning in December, 1872. Mr. Altick is, of course, talking about the publication of Browning's complete works, but careless readers of his article are likely to conclude that there had been no previous American publication of Browning. On page 78 the railroad is called "the first American publisher of Browning's collected poems," as if Ticknor & Fields had not published a volume of his collected poems more than sixteen years previously. On page 80 in The New Colophon one reads of "this forgotten first American reprint of Browning's works"—i.e., the 1872 timetable—but one can safely trust the statement only if one remembers that "works" means all the works, and not merely the poems in Men and Women.

WE'RE READY FOR DARWIN!

The December, 1950, issue of The Johns Hopkins Magazine contained an article on "This Matter of Freedom" by Dr. Sidney Painter, Professor of History in The Johns Hopkins University. He pointed out that the political ideals for which the United States stands today rest on two basic conceptions. "One of these is the belief that the
people as a whole should control their government—the system correctly called democracy. But equally important is the conviction that no government should be absolute. . . . Democracy cannot be effective unless the individual is protected from arbitrary harassment by the officials of the government. . . . There is grave doubt that a democratic state can long survive unless it allows free expression of opinion. . . . Hence freedom of thought and expression is not merely a mystical ideal that forms part of our heritage, but a very practical necessity.”

To accompany Dr. Painter’s article, the editors of the Hopkins Magazine provided a picture of a shelf of books which illustrate this “freedom of thought and expression”—books from all lands and all ages, from Plato’s Dialogues and Aristotle’s Politics down to the Psychology of William James. Among a score of authors representative of “This Matter of Freedom,” William James was the only American chosen. Only two nineteenth-century English books appeared on the list: On Liberty by John Stuart Mill, and Darwin’s Origin of Species.

Charles Eliot Norton once remarked at Harvard that the Origin of Species is “a book perhaps as important, not only in its immediate but in its remote effects, as any ever issued from the press.” It first appeared in 1859—the centenary of which date is now not far off. A copy of that famous publication by Charles Darwin was recently offered at auction in New York City, and was knocked down to an agent of a group of scientists on the Colby College faculty. Thanks to this cooperation and far-sightedness on the part of our Departments of Science, the Colby College Library is now equipped with a good copy of the first edition of The Origin of Species, and when its one hundredth birthday arrives in 1959, we shall not have to go a-borrowing, a-begging, or a-traveling.