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as or Wisconsin, the Colby College Library is indeed a small affair, but the phenomenal growth of its rare books and manuscripts section well justifies those Colby men and women who point with pride to its Treasure Room.



### AN INCUNABULUM BY SAINT AMBROSE

By JOHN R. MCKENNA

THE Library's holdings of incunabula have recently been greatly enriched by a gift from Mr. Eugene Bernat, of Milton, Massachusetts, consisting of a copy of Saint Ambrose's *Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Luke* as printed in Augsburg, Germany, by Anton Sorg in 1476. This book now takes its place as the oldest example of German printed book-making in the Colby College Library, for though we have had in our possession another incunabulum dated 1476—the *Mammotrectus* of Marchesinus—it was printed in Venice, and Mr. Bernat's gift is, apparently, Colby's first example of Sorg's printing.

Augsburg is best known in history for the famous "Augsburg Confession," which associates this German city with Martin Luther and the beginnings of Protestantism. Anton Sorg began his career in Augsburg in 1472 at the Monastery of Saints Ulrich and Afra. In 1475 he set up a printing press for himself and operated it for eighteen years, becoming one of the most prolific of German printers and publishers. The most famous product of Sorg's press was Ulrich von Reichenthal's *Account of the Council of Constance* (1483), which was illustrated with more than eleven hundred woodcuts.

Sorg's edition of St. Ambrose's *Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Luke* is printed in type that closely resembled the local handwriting of the time. The book contains 158

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pages. It is divided into ten chapters, each of which begins with a large woodcut initial letter which is colored by hand.

As far as we know, this copy is the only copy in any American college library. There are eight other copies on record as found in the United States, but none of the eight are in college libraries. Two universities (Harvard and Michigan) have copies; three other libraries (the Huntington in California, the Pierpont Morgan in New York City, and the Library of Congress) each has a copy; and there are three more in private hands. Our copy of this rare incunabulum is in excellent condition—a fact which is the more impressive when we remember that the book, a large folio, is now 482 years old.

It is, however, not merely age, or place, or printer, that makes this volume of special interest in the world of books. The name of the illustrious author is part of its appeal. Saint Ambrose, born at Trèves in or about 340, was the Bishop of Milan from 374 to 397 A.D., at which time he was recognized as one of the most illustrious Doctors of the Church. He is credited with having developed the use of music in the services of the church and with having founded what is known as the Ambrosian chant. His writings (in Latin, of course) have been looked upon as being the official teachings of the Church at that time. Most of these writings were homilies, that is, spoken commentaries on the Old and New Testaments taken down by his hearers and afterwards reduced to their present form. In the course of the centuries between the time of Saint Ambrose and the invention of printing, many of the commentaries which he is known to have written on the Bible were lost, and his Discourse on Saint Luke is apparently the only one of his treatises on the New Testament which has survived. This is indeed a rare book, and the Colby College Library is very fortunate in thus coming into possession of a copy.