

1939

## College Books

University of New Mexico Press

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### Recommended Citation

University of New Mexico Press. "College Books." *New Mexico Quarterly* 9, 2 (1939). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq/vol9/iss2/18>

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## College Books

*Melville in the South Seas*—(Columbia University Press, 1939)—By Charles Roberts Anderson.

*Melville in the South Seas* is a noteworthy contribution to scholarship in American literature, having the subsidy and sanction of the Modern Language Association of America and the American Council of Learned Societies and appearing in the series of Columbia University Studies in English and Comparative Literature. The book brings to bear new material on the writings of Herman Melville, one of America's re-discovered and much talked-of novelists. Melville is known, today, mostly through the studies which constitute the Melville revival of the twenties, the works by Weaver, Freeman, and Mumford. The importance of Professor Anderson's book lies, not so much in its sound scholarship or in its new light on Melville's life and writings shed by careful research into the naval records of the United States, as in a corrected emphasis on the intrinsic merits which make Herman Melville significant in the history of letters. Recent apologists have tried to present him as a mystic and a prophet. This conception of Melville came from the allegory with which he invested his great story of the whaling days of New Bedford, the *Moby-Dick*. There have been others beside the reviewer who have objected to the obscuring fog of the "hideous and intolerable allegory," which accompanies the chase of the white whale.

Professor Anderson asserts and proves that "the survival value of Melville's reputation rests on the fact that he was the literary discoverer of the South Seas." *Typee*, *Omoo*, *White-Jacket*, and *Moby-Dick* "as the romance of the sea," are the cornerstones on which his popularity rests. "Melville yearned to be thought a philosopher, but his four-year residence in the South Seas is the most significant part of his life." The "fullest, richest life he was ever to know, at least in the physical and emotional sense," came in the whaling

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boat and on the island of Taipi, or Typee, among Polynesian savages.

In 1842, when Melville, with one companion, deserted ship to live what he hoped would be a pleasanter existence among the cannibals, he found the natives unbelievably and almost unspeakably savage. He had become weary of the food on board the whaler *Acushnet*, for "when you come to sit down before a meat pie nearly one hundred feet long, it takes your appetite." But once safely ashore, out of danger of floggings by cruel cat-o'-nine-tails, he was terrified by every lavish show of hospitality on the part of his hosts. He and his companion apparently were being fattened to take the principal part in a royal feast.

Though it is true that the technique of Melville is indebted to the Gothic novel of terror,—the descriptions in all of his books are sharpened in outline and heightened in color both by general reading and by research—the South Sea Islands, in the first half of the nineteenth century, were primitive in the extreme. Despairing of converting the natives or of softening their savagery, missionaries brought their wives thither in hope that the ladies could exert a refining influence. Alas! The Islanders first thought these creatures of extraordinary costume gods, but soon subjected them to the indignity of physical examination. Upon the discovery that the new arrivals were only women, in strange disguise, the contempt of the inhabitants knew no bounds. The missionaries were forced to return their wives to their native land.

Professor Anderson, by his chronology, ends the possibility that the influence of Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840), which "did start a vogue of seafaring for gentlemen's sons in the 1840's and 1850's," had any connection with Melville's shipping for the South Seas. When he left New Bedford, Melville had no prospect of business or financial success; and his great love at the time was "to sail forbidden seas and land on barbarous coasts!"

Professor Anderson points out in detail the great indebtedness of Melville to other travel books, and to Sir Thomas Brown and Rabelais. The reader will probably agree with the reviewer that it is these erudite allusions in Melville which have brought him to the favorable attention of modern scholars and have thus made the extended research of Professor Anderson possible.

DANE FARNSWORTH SMITH.

*The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*—(Columbia University Press, 1939)—Edited by Ralph L. Rusk—In six volumes.

In publishing *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Professor Rusk, of Columbia University, has brought together in six volumes all of the scattered efforts of Emersonian scholarship for over a century. In this work the Columbia University Press has made available an edition of Emerson's letters so complete, so literally accurate, and so skillfully edited that it will doubtless be the chief source of Emersonian biography for years to come. Professor Rusk, in his introduction, shows great finesse in arranging the fragments of Emerson's thoughts without distortion and without the intrusion of editorial bias or brilliance. His style is readable but has the modesty and objectivity of lasting biography. A perusal of his introduction shows at once why the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association and numerous other students of Emerson and owners of the letters have been willing to entrust this monumental task to his hands.

This new collection of letters goes far to complete our picture of Emerson, the man, and adds some stirring events to what has usually been considered a comparatively quiet life. For the first time, most of Emerson's readers will get an adequate impression of his sense of humor and his occasional violence of temper. True, "his letters could be prim, bloodless, maidenly enough" where "he was on terms of respect rather than of intimacy." In such cases they were even "pale and insipid." Yet the collection plainly indicates

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"that he was capable of more warmth and enthusiasm in his friendships as well as his domestic relations than has been supposed."

When the family moved to Plymouth for an outing, he "thought it past wonder that his mother had left behind the shower bath and the calf." The more intimate Emerson was with a correspondent the more exuberant was his imagery. The letters reveal his close intimacy with Anna Barker, to whom he was drawn by her "unique gentleness." They show a passionate attachment to Ellen Tucker, his first wife. They prove that he could become rhapsodic over a great city. New York, for instance, was to him "a symbol of abundant life."

Though mental adventures were the most exciting events of his life, his lecture trips furnished enough stirring incidents to round out a scenario. At Niagara Falls he made a dramatic escape from a burning hotel. On Lake Erie his steamer caught fire in a blaze that terrified both passengers and crew. At St. Louis he found himself in a house where people were dying with cholera. He traveled over the frozen prairie in the snow; he crossed the Mississippi on the ice. "At Lafayette, Indiana, he was compelled to charter a special train in order to reach Chicago in time for his lecture."

But with all his adventures in America and in Europe, his inner experiences constitute the real life of the man. He was inspired by Carlyle, whose *Heroes and Hero-Worship* was the fertility and nurture of *Representative Men*. He loved Carlyle "because he was above the meanness of pretending to knowledge which he did not have." But Coleridge, master of English philosophical thought in the early nineteenth century, was a much stronger influence,—the Coleridge of *Biographica Literaria*, *The Friend*, and *Aids to Reflection*.

Emerson's reputation during his life time and much of his eminence among posterity is due to his Phi Beta Kappa address. But this great pronouncement on *The American*

*Scholar*, the most famous address ever delivered before the fraternity of scholars, was given only by accident. The Reverend Doctor Wainwright, who had been engaged for the occasion, created an emergency by suddenly withdrawing his acceptance of their invitation. They seized upon Emerson as a stop-gap. Emerson readily accepted only to find himself becalmed with the lack of inspiration. The "toiling substitute orator," three weeks before the event, wrote that "he could not get any word from Olympus," any Periclean fire. But the spark came; the address was delivered; and he found himself the internationally famous author of an eighteen-cent pamphlet. His *Divinity School Address* at Harvard the next year "was like the explosion of a bombshell in a peaceful countryside." Friends predicted that the affair would be his ruin. The sage of Concord was unperturbed. He wrote to his brother: "The world is somewhat vexed with us on account of our wicked writings. I trust it will recover its composure."

In the hundred years which have passed since the delivery of these two addresses, the world, which soon came to view the ideas of Emerson with complacency, has through greater cataclysms lost much of its stability and faith. Though Emerson does not lack the color of temperament, his life and writings have more inner serenity than those of any other American author. And that part of the world which is fortunate enough to read the letters made available in this edition is likely, once more, to regain its composure.

DANE FARNSWORTH SMITH

*Edward Moxon, Publisher of Poets*—H. G. Merriam—Columbia University Press, 1939—\$2.75.

One English critic gained immortality by a lashing in words he applied to the poetry of John Keats. Edward Moxon, in contrast, will always be remembered for the encouragement he gave to poets rather than the censure. Perhaps his sympathy grew out of the fact that as a young man

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he wrote and published poetry of his own, not very good poetry, as Professor Merriam points out, but poetry nevertheless. Moxon's verse-writing echoes the tradition of Gray and Crabbe rather than the new sowing in themes and forms by Byron, Shelley, and Keats, yet the young poet, soon to become publisher, did not allow his own tastes to blind him to the virtues in the genius of others.

Moxon was one of the earliest publishers to view publishing as a public service, rewarding to both the merchandiser of books and the growing public of readers in all classes. As printed literature emerged from the patronage of the aristocratic class, poets and essayists found themselves enslaved to a new kind of condescension, that of the publisher who became middle man in a continuing servility to the aristocracy and genteel middle class. Moxon's sympathies were of the large and humane variety. In his first published book of verse, *The Prospect and Other Poems*, he expresses his desire to wake pity for the poor, remind the rich that wealth has a debt to society, and to paint the dignity of the toil of workaday mankind. This breadth of viewpoint must have been an essential element which drew contributions from Leigh Hunt (who gave Moxon the manuscript of Shelley's *Masque of Anarchy* for posthumous publication), Charles Lamb, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and other Victorians, some of whom loom larger in their own day than they do in ours.

Professor Merriam quotes from an obituary notice which called Edward Moxon "the poets' publisher—the Dodsley of his day." How little tribute has been paid this man who helped to establish the fame of so many others. Dr. Merriam has helped to remedy this neglect. Along with the valuable discussion of the relations between the publisher and the great literary figures he served, there is a fine background of the England in which Moxon and his contemporaries lived. For this, the author's years as a student

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at Oxford and subsequent trips to the island have admirably fitted him.

T. M. PEARCE

*University of New Mexico*  
*Albuquerque*

On Seeing Wallis' Etching of  
The Death of Chatterton

By PHYLLIS E. HARVEY

There you lie,  
On a grey and faded counterpane  
With sunlight streaming in  
Upon your fair face  
Etched in ivory—  
And scattering radiant sunset  
From your tousled head  
That time could not contain.  
Had you but waited  
For the storm to cease  
And the rainbow stretched across the sky  
That now awaits your praise,  
Would you be here?

A rose that bloomed  
But waited not to hear  
Of her blossom, nor see  
The tear that silently  
Drops upon her faded form.