

The Erasmus collection forms the core of the library institute on the University of Toronto campus which is known as the Victoria Centre. This Centre, founded in 1964, does not organize in any sense an advanced degree program in Renaissance and/or Reformation Studies, though there is reason to hope that there will be such a program (or centre) in Toronto soon, under the auspices of the School of Graduate Studies (see its Calendar for 1970-71: preliminary announcement). Rather, in collaboration with the Renaissance-Reformation Colloquium at Toronto, the Victoria Centre has sought to provide an association for interested scholars and their graduate students in the region, to supply an extra place for specialized advanced study, to stimulate interest with the help of extra lectures, seminars, exhibitions and so on (though on a modest scale), and above all to build up an institute library under the direction of scholars, on the model of similar libraries in Europe.

One of the reasons for the foundation of the Victoria Centre in 1964 was the presence on the Toronto campus of a large number of competent and sometimes brilliant scholars in a variety of disciplines involving what is broadly known as the Renaissance as well as the Reformation. Another was no doubt the existence at Victoria College of an already remarkable collection on Erasmus. Soon after the Centre was founded, the Erasmus collection was moved to the Centre. It was first carefully examined and cleaned, then reorganized and catalogued with the help of a classification system slightly modified from that of the Library of Congress with advice from the Folger Library, so that all materials directly relevant to Erasmus stand together in a section of the institute library. Those in charge of that library naturally made it one of their aims, though not the only aim, to expand the collection itself, with early and more recent works, books, xeroxes, offprints and microfilms, and to build around it, so that for the library the era in which Erasmus lived would become an area of concentration.

This was no mean task even if we had only concentrated on Erasmus himself and the men with whom Erasmus was directly in contact – scholars, printers, reformers, satirists, literary men, lawyers, princes, and so on (see, for instance, his enormous correspondence) – or the movements in which he was directly involved if not himself at the centre. Nor could we confine ourselves strictly to Erasmus' life-time, not only because we wanted to satisfy also some scholars in the literatures and history of the later sixteenth-century, but because (as readers of this journal are so well aware) Erasmus' influence continued long after his death in 1536. It was also distributed over the vast area of biblical, classical and patristic studies. The institute library of the Centre, now of a size of about 11,000 volumes, has only begun to meet the aims it has set itself, even if these themselves are on a modest scale – a kind of Folger or Newberry in miniature. But both Erasmus scholars and those working on humanistic scholarship in general will already find the institute greatly rewarding.

The Centre's Erasmus collection is certainly the greatest in Canada, and one of the five or seven most significant in North America. The two greatest collections of Erasmus books and manuscripts are those in the Rotterdam Public Library and the University Library of Basel. No comment here is needed on what is to be found in the British Museum, the Bib-



liothèque Nationale, the Royal Library in The Hague, the libraries in Oxford and Cambridge, but during our travels we came across collections of astonishing value and completeness at several other places, for instance Strasbourg, Prague, and Copenhagen. Those working in the Centre's collection will nevertheless find among its treasures several first editions and other items of exceeding scarcity (alas not the first edition of his *N.T.*, 1516, but early revisions of it are there), some xeroxes and films of unique materials (we need to get more), and many bibliographical tools which will help them locate elsewhere copies of books needed but missing in our collection. The B.M. and B.N. catalogues are not in the Centre but nearby. The Centre has begun a collection on the early printers. It has of course the two larger bibliographies devoted solely to earlier texts and editions by Erasmus – see below under III, and see frequent references to Van der Haeghen and *Bibliotheca Belgica* in the listing of our books, under IV. It has a copy of the catalogue of the Rotterdam Library, brought out in simple form in 1936 and 1941. It has some boxes containing xerox copies of the cards listing the Erasmus items at Harvard, Yale, and Folger.

In developing the collection since 1964, we have had generous financial support from Victoria University year after year, and from several foundations (chiefly the Canada Council) and individuals. We owe deep gratitude to them: the scholars and graduate students for whom we are attempting to provide a service deserve still greater support in future. Likewise we have benefited from the expert advice of several local scholars and many in the United States and in Europe. Our visitors have included such famous Erasmus scholars as Reedijk from The Hague, Guido Kisch from Basel, Ferguson from London, Ontario, Margolin from Paris and Tours, Craig Thompson from Philadelphia, Bainton from Yale, and Sir Roger Mynors from Oxford. The number of readers who have already made use of our materials is gratifying, and it is good to know that the collection will now provide a local centre of study for the enormous Toronto Erasmus Project (English translation) whose volumes will be published by the University of Toronto Press. Indeed it is hoped that from now on that part of our institute library mainly devoted to Erasmus will be made still more useful with the advice of the active members of the Erasmus Project, several of whom are in Toronto or nearby.

Brief attention, however, should be drawn to two sad facts. The first is that the original collection as assembled by Professor Bell was, when it reached us, neither complete in every sense nor in perfect condition, though reasonable efforts had been made to look after it properly when library staff was scarce. We do know that some scarce volumes on Erasmus, and for that matter many other early books once owned by Bell never reached us. During the difficult years immediately after Bell's death in 1932, much seems alas to have been lost. And Bell, when he collected his books, seems to have had in mind his own scholarship and that of his students, rather than what might happen to the collection, or collections, after his death. Moreover, he was not prosperous enough to house and organize his books ideally, or, for that matter, to acquire only ideal copies of his texts. Some were remarkably ideal, some reached him in wet condition, and one can imagine what fungus achieved between 1932 and 1964, others with many pages loose which he could not afford to have rebound, especially at a place where experts in rebinding scarce early books were almost non-existent. There is thus for instance in our collection, though naturally kept separate, a volume of Erasmus' first folio edition of Aristotle which an expert from the British Museum once advised me to drop into a New York garbage can, but which our



committee decided to keep as a sample of what can happen to early books when not well looked after, and about which even an expert Erasmian and bookman has told me that it is worth while saving for a few usable pages (repairing it would cost over \$1,000, and it is far from being worth that, even if we had the money). There is also, for instance, a copy of the 1518 *Utopia* by Sir Thomas More, at the end of which are included his own and Erasmus' *Epigrammata*; but as the leaves were loose, no wonder that two or three were lost: here the obvious solution is photographic copies of the missing pages. The most recent copy of that volume on the market was offered for \$3,000. Soon, however, after the Erasmus books, or most of them, reached Victoria College, Miss Marie Tremaine was engaged for expert assistance. She produced a handlist, typed on sheets and then bound, which is still a useful work of reference.

The other fact is well-known, and can be put briefly. Bell acquired even some of the scarcest items in the collection in the teens and twenties for \$3 or \$5. Similar items were easily procurable on the European book-market in 1947-50 for \$10, but then no one here made the effort and no one allowed our libraries a reasonable budget. By 1964 when we began, such items had, in general, disappeared into institutional libraries in many European countries and the United States, but we were fortunate in discovering a few at the lucky price-range of \$50-\$200 (we very rarely expend \$200 on a sixteenth-century book, for obvious reasons). Now, if such volumes are available at all, the price is \$600 up. I am not referring of course to the many editions of the *Colloquia* or *Apophthegmata* of the 1540s or 1550s in Latin of which we have anyhow enough, and which seldom, if ever, are needed by scholars, though they now tend to cost \$100 and up.

Moral: if by wonderful luck anyone reading this knows of a 1520 text available for \$50, or for that matter a volume of the 1540 edition of the *Opera*, you have the right to wire for it on our behalf at once, even if one or two leaves are missing. Other suggestions that will be helpful are: what early texts *which scholars really need* but are not found in our collection ought we to acquire in xerox or microfilm? what later editions and translations? what books *on* Erasmus not already found either in the Centre or in the Victoria College Library? how can more scholars be encouraged to send us offprints of (or xeroxes of them) of their own and other articles on Erasmus, in order to develop that adjunct to our collection more rapidly? To all those who have already obliged generously, our thanks.

Of any imperfection in the listing of our collection below, the compilers and directors of the Centre will be grateful to be advised. The collection is there to be of use. We will welcome all visitors competent to use it, as in the past. If anyone reading this is too far away to visit us and desperately needs a photocopy of one of our books, please write and we will try to oblige, but please don't expect us to lend out *any* of our items, and understand that sometimes a rare item is so huge or in such condition that photographing it might prove inadvisable.

To all those who have helped us in our project, including the compilers of this catalogue, we owe gratitude.