

## THE DE BEER GIFT TO THE UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO LIBRARY

THE LATEST OF MANY NOTABLE GIFTS from Dr. Esmond de Beer and his late sisters Mary Louise and Dora Hallenstein de Beer was recently unpacked in the University of Otago Library. Admitting himself too busy, at 87, to return to his childhood home in Dunedin, Dr. de Beer instead sent his books. (At almost the same time the remarkable family art collection was being newly shown in the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.) Not all his books; some have been retained while Dr. de Beer completes his monumental Clarendon Press edition of the correspondence of John Locke. What has come may be simply described as a good part of a fine scholarly library gathered over the past half century.

The importance of the collection lies not in its size alone, but this is respectable: some 2000 titles, more than half of them printed before the nineteenth century. The effect is very considerably to increase the University's holdings of early printed material, which already includes the 2000-strong de Beer Collection of mainly eighteenth-century verse, and the 3000 or so items of the William Arderne Shoultz Collection on deposit from Selwyn College.

The real value of the gift lies in its quality, reflecting the stature of its creator, a learned and dedicated scholar of wide-ranging intellectual and cultural interests. His books will remain a valuable research library, relocated at the antipodes, for those working on the history of Europe in the early modern period. The collection is strongest in and around the seventeenth century, the focus of Dr. de Beer's deepest and most persistent attention. Thus, there are a number of early editions of works by John Evelyn, whose diaries Dr. de Beer has definitively edited (Clarendon Press, 1955). Depending on one's interests, other choice works catch the eye: three editions of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1550, 1584, and the English translation by Sir John Harington, 1634), Montaigne's *Essays*, translated by Florio, second edition, 1613, the fourth edition of *Paradise Lost*, and so on. However, Dr. de Beer's aim was not so much to represent the major authors, readily accessible in one shape or other, as to allow study of their historical context. For instance, a group of more than a hundred extremely rare pamphlets document the political crises of the reign of Charles II, and have already attracted the attention of researchers.

The major and quite astonishing feature of the gift is the collection of some five to six hundred guide books, the count depending on how you classify them. These guides, descriptions, itineraries, views, etc. provide a record, written and pictorial, of the changing face of Europe over a period of four centuries. They are notably full for Rome, and range systematically throughout the rest of Italy, with important extensions to northern Europe, not forgetting the British Isles. In their intimate detail they explain, where once they encouraged, the long-continued English love of the Continent and of Italy in particular. This passion was not only the prerogative of the English milord, who returned home often strangely altered from his Grand Tour, nor the perquisite of his servants, but also touched the

heart and mind of the literate stay-at-home, whose mental horizon was enlarged by works speaking of the great cultural centres of Europe. One or two titles will stimulate modern curiosity. A fat copy of Andrea Scoto's *Nuovo itinerario d'Italia*, in three parts, Padua, 1632/Vicenza, 1638, extra-illustrated with something like two hundred plates, includes a set entitled 'Il Carnevale Italiano Mascherato', depicting the characters and happenings which in debased modern form still tempt the foreigner to Venice. For the more sober-minded there is a copy of Francesco Albertini's *Epigrammata antiquae urbis*, 'Romae in aedib. Iacobi Mazocchii', 1521, described in the bookseller's catalogue entry affixed as the 'first and fundamental work on Roman epigraphy and archaeology'. This too has its adventitious attraction: a pretty vellum cover once part of a fifteenth-century illuminated liturgical manuscript. Earliest of the guides, and suitably pocket-sized, is a sequence of illustrated *Mirabilia Romae*. Two are dated 1499 (Hain \*11202 and 11176); the others are of 1511, 1515, and 1550.

Travellers on horse-back or in arm-chair need help with the languages. For the more scholarly there were and are dictionaries: Latin-French (1552, 1680), French-English (1632, 1702, 1719), Dutch-English (1675, 1708), and no fewer than ten in English printed between 1656 and 1728. For the tyro there were phrase-books, which, as today, also did their best to shed some light on new places and customs. *The gentleman's pocket companion for travelling into foreign parts: being a most easy, plain & particular description of the roads from London to all the capital cities in Europe*, London, 1722 was no doubt a best-seller, but who could now tell — few copies would have survived the wear and tear. Its additional attraction was a multi-lingual phrase-book which tried by its lively dialogues to suggest some of the pit-falls and temptations of foreign travel. When the saddle-sore traveller arrived exhausted at an inn the conversation might go like this. 'Sweetheart. Is my bed made?' 'Sir, do you want anything else? Are you well?' 'Yes, my dear, put out the candle and come nearer to me.' 'I will put it out — when I am out of the room!'

The British Library, the Courtauld Institute, and the Bodleian Library understandably had first pick of the guides they did not possess. For the University of Otago to come fourth to this trio is distinction indeed. I have said nothing of the modern books, partly scholarly works relating to the earlier period, partly modern first editions, for instance of Yeats and Roger Fry. The whole collection will be catalogued as soon as someone can be found to do the job. The money has already been allocated by the University. Plans to make this new material more widely known by inclusion in the Early Imprints Project are not yet settled.

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