

A COLLECTOR'S WORLD OF BOOKS, DEALERS, AND LIBRARIES

(OR ADVENTURES AND MUSINGS OF A BOOK COLLECTOR)

by

Charles Caldwell Ryrie

3310 Fairmount, 5-D, Dallas, TX 75201

Introduction and Caveat

I have never been a librarian; I have never been a dealer; but I do have lots of books—for use in my vocation and in what has become a consuming avocation. Therefore, there will be numerous personal experiences and observations in this presentation which may amaze, amuse, bore, but hopefully encourage libraries which have little interest in special collections (for economic reasons, I expect) to find ways to begin or enlarge such collections.

I. The Genesis.

An older, almost retired theologian took a liking to me when I was a very green theological student and began to tell me about some out-of-print books I ought to try to find and acquire. One of the first ones was *Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* by W. W. Skeat. Several years later he told me he was going to leave his library to me when he died. Eventually this came to pass and further whetted my appetite for old books. Later, in 1962, I taught a Bible class in a home on the main line out of Philadelphia. As a thank you the class presented me with a framed page of the 1611 King James Bible. A while later another group gave me a page from each of the three Saur Bibles nicely framed together. Then I bought the page from the Nuremberg Chronicle which showed the martyrdom of Peter and Paul. By then I was hooked. Onward and upward—from pages to books!

II. Tutors and Mentors.

I was a very green, would-be antiquarian book collector. I didn't even know how much help I needed. But looking back I had some of the best tutors in the book world. Very early I saw a Wycliffite N.T. advertised in a dealer's catalog. I knew the manuscript was important but had no idea whether or not the price was reasonable. I consulted Decherd Turner, then the librarian at Bridwell Library (SMU). It must have been difficult for him to maintain his composure while he advised me to buy it as quickly as possible.

During what looked like it would be a boring session at one of those scholarly society meetings in NYC, I decided to visit a nearby book dealer. His interests and stock were not what I was looking for, but he recommended I walk a few blocks and visit John Fleming. I did, and this was the beginning of a long and close friendship with one of the most experienced bookman of his day. Every chance I had to be in NYC I carved out time to sit with him and soak up his knowledge of the book world. In time he invited me to stay in his condo on weekends when he went to his home in the suburbs. Every bookcase and cabinet was unlocked for me to investigate. I was in book heaven!

Alan Thomas, a longtime book seller semi-retired in London, crossed my path first by catalog, then in person in London. I tapped into his long association with the antiquarian book world on a number of occasions. At one point he wrote me to say that from then on he would give me the right of first refusal on any Bible he acquired. Many of you realize what an unusual privilege that was for me. Several at Quaritch have helped through the years. In addition, others in varying ways have educated and guided me.

All of these mentors emphasized two principles that would well serve any collector: (1) have a clear focus for your collection and (2) aim for quality.

The cordiality of librarians I have visited (often without any previous arrangement) has broadened by knowledge as well. To be allowed to see and compare other copies of books I had in my collection and to examine books I will never have is a great privilege.

III. Some "Finds" (with the aid of a little Calvinistic Luck!)

Thinking I would never find an Aitken Bible, I bought about 10 miscellaneous pages years ago. Much later an opportunity presented itself to acquire a copy privately, but when I checked it about 6 pages were missing in the middle of the book (probably never bound in). So I reported that to the owner who reduced the price. Guess what? The missing pages were among the miscellaneous pages I had acquired years before. So I was able to complete the book. *Complimentary rec.*

I had a similar experience with the Complutensian Polyglot. Five of the six volumes came on the market, and I decided to buy them since the sixth volume was not part of the biblical text. A year later I saw the sixth volume only advertised in a catalog. It is a little shorter than the five, but it completed that set.

Browsing at Quaritch in the days of E. M. Dring, he offered to take me to a basement area where they kept fragments and incomplete copies. I was in bibliophile heaven and acquired (at incomplete prices) two incomplete 1537 Matthew Bibles (which I put together) and a nearly complete first edition of Foxe's Book of Martyrs. For the record, that basement gold mine no longer exists.

On another occasion when a bookseller could come up with nothing that appealed to me, as a last resort he showed me a printed ordination certificate with blanks to be filled in with the individual's name, date, etc. It was signed by Luther at Wittenberg and filled in by Melancton. Years later I successfully bid on a Luther hymnbook in the front of which were six handwritten pages of a homily on Genesis 2:7 dedicated to a couple about to be married. It was signed Philip Melancton.

In 1967 John Fleming showed me a small Greek manuscript from the inventory of his predecessor, A.S.W. Rosenbach, the vellum leaves of which were shuffled as a deck of cards. He lent it to me over a winter to put it in order. It turned out to be 80% of Luke and all but three leaves of John. I took a stab at the date and came up with 13th century. In 1988 I took it to Germany and showed it to the Alands. Though it is not an important manuscript, they were delighted to see it since it was previously unknown to them. Prof. Aland dated it 13th century. It also contains a rubbed image of the Apostle John.

IV. Gifting Books

Any librarian worth his or her salt is always on the lookout for additions to the institution's collection, especially if they are gifts. Too, every collector must face the

1537
1535 Luther

inevitable disposition of his or her collection. Every board of trustees has to deal with the bottom line and the place a non-income-producing collection of books has in the budget. How can these be integrated? The librarian wants the books. The collector wants the collection to be kept together and cared for. The trustees want money.

Here is a suggestion that might serve as a framework for an agreement between the donor and the institution. (1) The institution agrees to keep the collection together and to care for it. (2) In the event that the institution sells any part of the collection, the proceeds will go directly to the donor or his heirs for the next 99 years. (3) Thereafter any proceeds shall go to a charity that the donor designated at the time of the gift. Obviously such an agreement would make it very difficult for the receiving institution to disband or sell the gift, but that is exactly what a conscientious donor and librarian want. And, hopefully, the trustees will see the wisdom of having institutional treasures that money cannot measure.

I hope it doesn't need to be said that all designated gifts shall be guarded and used with integrity. Too, donors always appreciate (but seldom receive) regular reports of who their gifts have and are being used. Who knows? Perhaps a donor has additional gifts in mind but wants first to see how the recipient is using what he already gave.

V. Autographs, etc.

Another area of collecting which has several distinct attractions to it is autographs (and photographs and working papers of important committees, coins and artifacts, etc.). I have found autographs fascinating. One attraction is that, on the whole, they are less expensive than rare books. Also to remember that the person whose autograph you are holding in your hand was held in his or her hand. Autographs make good anchors for small, specialized displays suitable for the lobby, hallway, library entrance or classroom. A friend of mine has a hobby of collecting fossils, and he must have hundreds of them of all kinds. Recently he purchased a display cabinet in which he placed some of his fossils and the cabinet will be placed in a hallway of a school where students will pass by regularly. Among autographs I have are those of Barth, Brunner, Tillich, Moody, Sankey, ^{Henry} R. C. Trench (discussing a debated translation for the ERV). Also a bill of sale for ^{Alford} two slaves (1836), and a plenary indulgence granted in 1870 by Pius IX for one of the faithful living in N.Y. state. Each of these items cost less than \$50. It doesn't take much imagination or creativity to see how items could put to good use.

VI. Some Thoughts

In general, Americans seem much less interested in and appreciative of history than those in some other parts of the world. If something is 50 years old we tear it down in order to build a mall. My own concern about this lack grew out of having student groups for an evening in my home which usually included viewing some of my old books. Some were interested, some could care less and began to offer reasons why they must leave (especially if the refreshments had already been consumed). Even those who have studied Greek sometimes didn't care to see anything associated with that discipline. Erasmus was only a name to be learned for an exam.

I think librarians can play a significant part in creating a love of history and an appreciation of those who lived and labored in years past. This in turn helps shape our

perspective on the present and goals for the future. This group knows better than I do how to do this, but here are some thoughts for whatever they are worth.

(1) Educate colleagues as to what is available even if only in facsimile.

For various reasons some don't know what is available right on campus, and the internet, valuable as it is, will never replace the thrill of holding a book in one's hands (gloved, of course).

(2) If it hasn't already been done, start and continually add to the memorabilia connected with the institution, its denomination, or other affiliations. In my own limited experience I have observed institutions that woke up to this need too late to be able to acquire documents, letters, furniture, photos, etc. that belonged to their history.

(3) Display, display, display. Consider displaying an item each month with enticing and concise explanation. Use hallways, classrooms, lobbies or wherever there is traffic. If people won't come to the library, take pieces of the library to them. And with some regularity plan larger displays with catalogues and lots of publicity. Sometimes larger displays can be done in cooperation with sister institutions and even rotate among them especially if are close by. Four seminaries in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area cooperated in such an exhibit with a very simple catalog in commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the publication of the Bishops' Bible.

In the meantime don't lose heart. We will win some, maybe even colleagues, to see the importance of a library. Hopefully we will influence those who plan the budget not to cut but rather to increase the library's allotment, and maybe even trustees to guard our collections. Thank you for all you do and for listening today.

Special collection