

XXI. THE ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY

Although the library continued functioning usefully through the war, with little abatement of its patrons, the increase in attendance and study as the war receded has been most marked, and frequently surprising. Richard de Bury pointed out just six hundred years ago that wars were the greatest enemies of books: so with peace it may be expected that an era of friendliness to books and the culture they transmit will continue and grow in the years ahead.

A. HOLDINGS AND ACQUISITIONS

Over 2,000 volumes were catalogued, bringing the present total to 72,400. It is estimated that there still remain about 20,000 volumes for such recording. Several hundreds of books were recatalogued, and a start was made to change over the non-Pacific catalogue to the standard 5 in. × 3 in. card, which has been the objective for some time. Purchases have continued in the main fields of English literature and Pacific material. An effort is being made to improve the Milton collection, already of eminent standing. The Sir Hugh Walpole collection made a number of interesting additions, and begins to have value as a unit. Pacific voyages and ethnology, cartography, shipping, and naval history were fields that showed gains.

Of earlier books, two are notable as incunabula—"Sacrobosco's *Spaera Mundi*," 1488, and Aurifaber's "*Speculum Exemplorum*" 1487. The former was printed at Venice by Santritter and Sanctis. It is interesting typographically for a good Roman letter and for woodcut illustrations in line and colour, an early use of this feature. More important, however, is the fact that it shows how fully the idea of the earth's rotundity was grasped in the fifteenth century, although opposing opinion continued long after. Another book of geographical interest was a 1548 Venetian edition of Ptolemy's "*Geographia*" with copper-plate engraved maps. This is Mattioli's revision, but it persists with some of Ptolemy's errors that confused geographical knowledge of the Middle Ages. It has significance in American and Pacific cartography.

The other incunabulum was a Strassburg edition of 1487 of the "*Speculum Exemplorum*," a collection of curious monkish legends and tales in the manner of the "*Gesta Romanorum*." It is commonly attributed to Aegidius Aurifaber: even its printer is unnamed, for he is known only as "the printer of the 1483 '*Jordanus de Quedlinburg*,'" his definitely identifiable work.

In the realm of literature the most interesting items were four letters of Kipling, one of Loti, first editions of George Borrow, Shelley, D'Urfey, and Wootton. A number of volumes were added to the Shakespeare-Bacon group: two handsome volumes to the Baskerville Press collection, as well as a score or so to the shelves of modern press books.

B. USE OF LIBRARY

Apart from the continual stream of minor requests for books and information, there are regular students who follow particular themes, and, in addition, the library has been used a great deal by historians and other writers, the Historical Branch of the Department, and schools and colleges (especially for New Zealand history and English literature). Local history of various parts of the country, family history, and art in many branches are favourite studies. The reading-room attendance has been something over 3,750.

Many schools make a practice of sending classes into the library for general visits and specific purposes, when lecturettes are given by staff members.

Various cultural organizations continue to hold regular or periodic meetings here. It is felt that such contacts are mutually beneficial and appear to be appreciated by the members concerned.