James Kelsey McConica

The English Reception of Erasmus

I propose to address the topic of this colloquium, 'Erasmianism: Idea and Reality' not from the aspect of text, or of authorial intention, but from evidence less dramatic but easier to verify — the channels through which his writings came to be circulated and his ideas taken in. If we can so identify the 'audience' for what Erasmus had to say, we can identify something of the 'reality' of 'Erasmianism', at least amongst those who thought him important enough either to follow or to oppose. I have chosen for this exercise, of which only an outline can be presented here, the first decades of the sixteenth century in England, decades crucial to the reception of Erasmus, where the mounting interest in Erasmus and his works is evident from the wide provision of translations alone, quite apart from other indications.[1]

Foundational influences in English education

At the simplest level (even if such 'simplicity' might be questioned), Erasmus was known as a pedagogue. Of this the evidence is of course massive, and as a teacher of humanism, at least in northern Europe, Erasmus shares the honours with others, especially with Vives and Valla. Since the chief burden of such teaching in schools was the acquisition of facility in written and verbal discourse in elegant — i.e. non-scholastic — Latin, with possibly the added acquisition of elementary Greek, influence at this level may be thought not to imply a great deal about 'Erasmianism' as a doctrine or outlook, nor to be an influence specifically tied to Erasmus' many school-books. However, this is to overlook the profound chasm which opened up between late scholastic grammar and dialectic and their humanistic successors. Nor was that slow alteration one that affected only the arts of discourse. Its implications for theology and religion are familiar enough, but consider the social and political instruction implicit in this passage alone from Richard Whittington's translation of the *De civilitate morum puerilium libellus*,[2] *A Lytell booke of good maners for chyldren*: "Let others paint on their escutcheons lions, eagles, bulls, leopards. Those

[1] James Kelsey McConica, *English Humanists and Reformation Politics under Henry VIII and Edward VI* (Oxford 1965) explores this evidence in detail for the period indicated in the title.
[2] de Worde, 1532; A.W. Pollard - G.R. Redgrave, *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland and Ireland, and of English books printed abroad, 1475-1640* (London 1926) 10467.

are the possessors of true nobility who can use on their coats of arms ideas which they have thoroughly learned from the liberal arts".[3]

Erasmus's prestige as the mentor of English humanist schooling found its flagship and memorial in Colet's foundation of St Paul's School in London.[4] This was the virtual re-foundation of a school which had existed in the cathedral precincts since the twelfth century and it was Erasmus, a friend both of John Colet and of Colet's first high master, William Lily, who wrote an introduction to a grammar as well as a catechism for the school's use.[5] To leave no doubt of St Paul's allegiances in elementary education, Erasmus also wrote a verse dedication which he hung in the proscholion, and well as the *Concio de puero Iesu* for delivery by a scholar at the school's devotions. As Craig Thompson wrote many years ago, "Through these and numerous other books this great Dutch scholar and writer did as much as any Englishman to set the pattern of humanistic training in English grammar schools of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries".[6] The object was to acquaint the youth of England with "Christum et optimas litteras", that potent formula which dissolved so many of the established customs and preconceptions in both education and religion even as it planted the seeds of new aspirations. If we add that among the chief modern works incorporated into English school curricula by 1530 were Erasmus' *Colloquies*, we are able to conclude that his influence was by no means confined to the learning of classical grammar and syntax, nor to the rhetorical variations taught in another of his popular texts, the *De copia*.[7]

Erasmus's strictures and methods were incorporated by and large into the writings of Tudor writers on education, most notably those of Sir Thomas Elyot, Richard Pace,[8] Roger Ascham, John Cheke (who with Thomas Smith attempted to introduce Erasmus' reformed pronunciation of Greek to Cambridge),[9] and the most enduring of them all, William Mulcaster.[10] The new methods of instruction in grammar were described by such as William Horman, vice-provost of Eton and former headmaster of Winchester, in his *Vulgaria* of 1519 and, despite Horman's denunciation of the state of Latin teaching in Britain, by the earlier, rival work of Robert Whittinton. Whittinton is a figure who bridges the generations back to William of Waynflete,

[3] Cited by Joan Simon, *Education and Society in Tudor England* (Cambridge 1966) 69.

[4] On the spread of humanism through English schools and the particular significance for subsequent foundations of Colet's foundation see Nicholas Orme, *English Schools in the Middle Ages* (London 1973) 111 ff. Some measure of Colet's success may be found in St Paul's roster of distinguished and influential graduates, among them Thomas Lupset; Sir Anthony Denny; John Leland, the impassioned searcher after the monuments of England's pre-reformation culture; and the Elizabethan antiquary and historian, William Camden.

[5] The ancestor of the *Institutum Christiani hominis*, first published in a collection of *opuscula* in 1514 but written earlier for Colet. The *De duplici copia verborum ac rerum* also originated in a commission by Colet. See the present writer's *English Humanists*, 48-49.

[6] Craig R. Thompson, *Schools in Tudor England* (Ithaca 1958) 11.

[7] Orme, *English Schools*, 114, 112.

[8] *De fructu qui ex doctrina percipitur* (1517). Ed. and trans. Frank Manley - Richard S. Sylvester (New York 1967).

[9] See the introduction by Maurice Pope to his translation of the *De recta latini graecique sermonis pronuntiatione dialogus*, CWE 26 (Toronto 1985) 356.

[10] Richard Mulcaster, *Positions Concerning the Training Up of Children*. Ed. William Barker (Toronto-Buffalo 1994).

founder of Magdalen College School in Oxford, where Whittinton was a pupil and may have been taught by John Stanbridge or by John Holt, who was later a tutor in the household of Henry VII. It is worth noting as well that Thomas Wolsey, the future cardinal, was also a master at Magdalen College School in 1498, and earned a laureation in grammar from Oxford in 1513.[11] While the work of such men can scarcely be called 'Erasmian', since they shared (amidst some differences) the common principles of the new approach to Latin learning, they provide the background to Erasmus's contributions to Colet's school, that signal achievement of the next generation of grammarians to be favoured in the world of the young Henry VIII.[12] All agreed on the paramount importance of the school master, and grammar masters were expected to be university men. Accordingly, we must turn next to Oxford and Cambridge.

Here we meet with an unexpected witness, a Benedictine monk of Evesham. He was Robert Joseph, for six years a scholar at Gloucester College in Oxford, a man devoted both to the life of the university and to his letter book. In this he entered 176 letters written between 1530 and 1533, the years immediately after he was recalled from Oxford to Evesham. They were addressed chiefly to a circle of monastic friends located for the most part in the valleys of the Severn and Avon. There is no comparable source at either Oxford or Cambridge for the intellectual enthusiasms of an ordinary university student of the day, so that Joseph's letters have an interest which surpasses the light they throw on English monasticism in the years just prior to the reformation. His comments reveal that 'good letters' most certainly could be acquired at Oxford, even within the confines of a Benedictine house of studies, and that Joseph, like Thomas More and an increasing number of lay students, thought their acquisition a principal reason for going to the university in the first place.[13] For that enthusiasm it is clear also that he thought himself indebted chiefly to Erasmus, whose works he quotes repeatedly.

Yet the teaching of humane letters as Robert Joseph admired them formed no part of the university's official curriculum which, embodied in the statutes, remained securely scholastic. By what pathways, then, did the humanism of Erasmus enter the novel academic culture that Robert Joseph so much admired? If we are to answer that question we must first spend a moment looking at the situation a generation earlier in late fifteenth century Oxford and Cambridge.

Here we find the first English scholars who were effectively influenced by Italian humanism. William Grey, nephew of Humphrey Stafford, duke of Buckingham and a pupil of Guarino da Verona, like Richard Bole, his secretary and companion, both left humanist collections to the library of Balliol College, Oxford. Robert Flemming, the second English pupil of Guarino, left his collection including important Greek manuscripts to Lincoln College, the Oxford foundation of his uncle, the bishop of

[11] R.S. Stanier, *Magdalen College School* (Oxford 1958).

[12] On the generational aspect of the classical revival in English schools see Orme, *English Schools*, 111-112.

[13] McConica, *English Humanists*, 95. On Joseph see also *The Letter Book of Robert Joseph*. Ed. W.A. Pantin. Oxford Historical Society, New Series 19 (Oxford 1967) and the introduction, especially xxviii-xxx.

Lincoln. Another such was John Free, a protégé of the bishop of Ely, who is considered to be perhaps the first English scholar to be genuinely accomplished in both Latin and Greek, but who died too young to leave a mark upon the learning of his day.[14]

At Cambridge, too, there was a small but growing community of men devoted to the new literary fashions along with scholastic studies. In Cambridge there was nothing exactly comparable to the momentous gift of manuscripts Oxford owed to Duke Humfrey of Gloucester, but the fortunes of politics brought the last part of Duke Humfrey's library intended for Oxford to King's College Cambridge instead. Here, John Gunthorpe went to Italy to study with Guarino at Ferrara, where it is likely that he met Oxford's John Free. John Doket (Doget) of King's College studied canon law in Italy and wrote a commentary on Plato's *Phaedo*, relying upon the translation of Bruni. The libraries of these men, like those of their Oxford peers, show an admixture of the new humanism with earlier features of the arts curriculum. Their careers, however, took them away from the universities, and it seems that their Italian learning formed for them the basis only of a leisured pursuit, and (except for the books they left behind) did not provide the beginning of new traditions in the universities.[15]

The prevailing intellectual culture in late fifteenth century Oxford and Cambridge was a kind of eclecticism which it would be misleading to label either 'scholastic' or 'humanist'. Thinkers at Oxford like the Carmelite scholar Thomas Netter, who embarked on a digest of patristic teaching on all of the questions raised by Wyclif, or Dr Reginald Pecock, the opponent of Wycliffism who was later bishop of St Asaph and of Chichester, or Dr Thomas Gascoigne, the admirer of Jerome for biblical study, such as these were men who were not systematic thinkers, who exhibited a strong individuality in their tastes and outlook, and who drew at will upon the various traditions available to them in arts and in theology. With them, textual criticism, patristic and historical scholarship began to make an appearance, partly inspired by the religious controversies in the previous century surrounding the views of John Wyclif and by the extended debate over the issue of dominion. Pecock, who died in 1461, questioned the authenticity of the donation of Constantine, and it has been said of him that, "While his interest focussed on the tradition of Christian doctrine, his sense of context and his textual criticism looked forward to Erasmus".[16]

What we find then is an academic society in which the first elements of Italian humanism were becoming known alongside traditional interests, where particular individuals acquired elements of literary humanism abroad to serve them in their careers, whilst others developed innovative views within the framework of the established

[14] On these men see Roberto Weiss, *Humanism in England during the Fifteenth Century*, (3rd ed.; Oxford 1967), and relevant chapters in *The History of the University of Oxford* 2 *Late Medieval Oxford.* Ed. J.I. Catto - T.A.R. Evans (Oxford 1992).

[15] A.N.L. Munby, 'Notes on King's College library in the 15th century', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 1 (1953) 281-813; H. Craster, 'An index to Duke Humphrey's gifts to the old library of the university in 1439, 1441, and 1444', *Bodleian Quarterly Record* 1 (1914-16) 131-135; M.B. Parkes, 'The provision of books', *History of the University of Oxford* 2 *Late Medieval Oxford,* 473-475; Damian Riehl Leader, *A History of the University of Cambridge* 1 *The University to 1546* (Cambridge 1988) 233-241.

[16] J.I. Catto, 'Scholars and studies in renaissance Oxford', *History of the University of Oxford* 2 *Late Medieval Oxford*, 772-733.

curricula. Moreover, in both universities in these same years there began a fundamental reorganization of the method of providing lectures which was to supply the most important single instrument for the curricular changes which were shortly to follow.

Following the custom of Paris, Oxford and Cambridge recruited their teaching staff from their recent graduates who were required, by ancient practice, to lecture cursorily on the undergraduate texts required by the statutes as an essential step to their M.A. degrees. Similarly, newly qualified masters of arts were expected among other duties to give 'ordinary' lectures on the seven arts and the three philosophies for the whole of the year in which they incepted M.A. and for the whole of the year following. These ordinary lectures which were more advanced and were expected to raise questions and point to problems, formed the 'necessary' — and unsalaried — 'regency' of the freshly qualified master of arts.

In England, as in most northern countries, the system of 'necessary regency' showed serious signs of strain by the end of the fifteenth century, and the universities moved towards the hiring of fully qualified lecturers with regular stipends. Newly-qualified masters did not want to prolong their stay in the university when advantageous positions awaited them elsewhere, and by its nature, the system militated against the introduction of new texts and expert teachers. At Cambridge in 1488 the regent masters voted in congregation to change the requirements for undergraduates in arts to institute a new sequence of lectures: the first two years were devoted to humane letters, the third to logic, the fourth to philosophy. These lectures were to be given by three salaried lecturers chosen annually to provide ordinary lectures, one in humanity, a second in logic, and a third in philosophy. At Oxford, too, the repeated measures taken to insure that the requirements for lecturing were observed suggest that necessary regency was breaking down, and at the same time — certainly from the earliest years of the sixteenth century — graces excusing individuals from fulfilling their statutory duty became the rule rather than the exception. In time, wholesale dispensations were given to groups of regent masters, certain individuals being chosen to lecture in their place. By mid-century, the requirement that all masters should lecture was formally abandoned in favour of lecturing by a group chosen annually by a committee from the current crop of graduates, each such master being paid a salary.[17] It was during this same period that endowed lecturerships situated in the colleges began to appear in both universities, providing a secondary response to the demand for better trained and established lecturers, and it was thus that the new studies were not only introduced, but effectively established in the arts faculties.

The linking of 'bonae litterae' to concern with public policy

When we examine these new collegiate posts in the arts faculties of the universities we discover the moment when the literary humanism which had made its way into

[17] J.M. Fletcher, 'The Faculty of Arts', *The History of the University of Oxford* 3 *The Collegiate University*. Ed. James McConica (Oxford 1986) 185-186. See also Leader, *The University to 1546*, 244, for a concise and informative summary.

English high culture in the previous half-century from various sources was fused with something more public and more evangelical, a version of 'bonae litterae' which we are able to describe (in what I take to be the received sense) as 'Erasmian' humanism. We also expose the sponsors of this more political humanism, who are to be found not surprisingly at the intersection of university culture with that of the court. In the wider, European context it is to be expected that prominent ecclesiastics and nobles will be discovered at the heart of what appears to be almost a concerted movement to build the channels through which Erasmian principles will irrigate the universities, and hence the government and policies of church and state. What is less predictable is the degree to which these sponsors tend to be associated with the traditions of a single dynasty, one of those which were combined — at least in principle — in the coming to power of Henry Tudor.

In point of time the starting point is Cambridge, through the alliance of the last representative of the Lancastrian line to wield royal authority, the Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby, and mother of Henry VII, with the ecclesiastic who became her chaplain, confessor, and agent, John Fisher, the patron and associate of Erasmus. As a person responsible also in no small measure for the success of Henry VII in seizing the throne of England, the Lady Margaret was immensely influential. What is also important to understand is the degree to which her outlook reflected earlier traditions of informed piety which can be identified in her royal forebears Henry V and Henry VI, and which were the hallmark of the English version of the 'devotio moderna', the world from which Erasmus too emerged.[18] The plain purpose of all of her initiatives was the reformation of the secular clergy — scarcely a novel idea — and (which is the point) to achieve that reformation through the infusion of the new learning into clerical studies.

Fisher was brought to the attention of the king by another bishop central to these events, Richard Foxe, bishop of Winchester. Foxe was an Oxford man, a commoner at Magdalen College, Wykeham's fifteenth century foundation. He held degrees in both civil and canon law, studied at Leuven and at Paris, and was in the service of the future Henry VII by January 1485. He was thus intimately associated with the Lady Margaret in her great gamble to obtain the throne of England for her son. In August 1485 he crossed to England with Henry and he was present at the decisive dynastic battle of Bosworth Field. He was an executor of the wills of both Henry VII and the Lady Margaret, and he was also the ecclesiastical sponsor of the career, among others, of Thomas Wolsey, a graduate of Magdalen College, Oxford as we have seen, in the generation after Foxe.

[18] S.L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London* (Chicago 1948) 180ff; Roger Lovatt, 'The *Imitation of Christ* in late medieval England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5th series, 18 (1968) 97-121; Phyllis Hodgson, 'The Orcherd of Syon and the English mystical tradition', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 50 (1964); W.A. Pantin, 'Instructions for a devout and literate layman', *Medieval Learning and Literature: Essays Presented to Richard William Hunt*. Ed. J.J.G. Alexander - M.T. Gibson (Oxford 1976) 398-420. It was characteristic of this fifteenth century English piety to be allied with solid doctrinal orthodoxy, and the spiritual formation of Thomas More can be associated with the same religious culture; see J.K. McConica, 'The Patrimony of Thomas More', *History and Imagination, Essays in honour of H.R. Trevor-Roper*. Ed. Hugh Lloyd-Jones - Valerie Pearl - Blair Worden (London 1981) 56-71.

Consider, briefly, the influence of these four upon the two universities of the kingdom. Their initiatives show unmistakably the hallmark of Erasmus's reforming policy: a combination of pastoral zeal with a Christian erudition based upon knowledge of sacred scripture and the fathers of the church in the original tongues, an erudition in which a grasp of the culture and achievements of pagan antiquity is taken to be a necessary propaedeutic. In Fisher's case, it was his influence on Lady Margaret Beaufort, whose chaplain and confessor he was from about 1498, that amplified his own ideals and gave them institutional embodiment.

In 1497, the Lady Margaret endowed theology readerships in both universities, readerships intended to give free instruction in the theology schools. Lectures were to be discontinued at Lent so that both the reader and his hearers could devote themselves to preaching. In Cambridge she also founded the Lady Margaret Preachership, providing six sermons annually in London and at selected points in Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, and Lincolnshire, the holder to be a D.Th. (or at least a B.Th.) and to be a perpetual fellow of some college in Cambridge without benefice, this in order to prevent mediocrity or negligence. The first to hold the post of Lady Margaret Preacher was a friend of Erasmus, John Fawne of Queens' College. The first to hold the Lady Margaret Readership in theology was Fisher himself.

Her great achievement, of course, was the foundation of St John's College Cambridge whose statutes, the work of John Fisher, reflect precisely the humanism of Erasmus.[19] The first version, in 1516, was adapted from the statutes of Christ's College (1505) and stated that some of the scholars were to learn Greek and Hebrew in their pursuit of theology, the goal of all learning. In the revision of 1524 this clause provides for the selection of especially proficient scholars for this purpose, and (like the earlier version) expresses the wish that the fruits of theology should be communicated to the people, insisting that one-quarter of the fellows shall preach publicly in English. The final version of 1530 is evidently influenced by the Oxford foundations of Foxe and Wolsey, adding four fellows to lecture in the branches of mathematics, and adding Arabic and Chaldaic to the list of permitted tongues. More important was the establishment of permanent Greek and Hebrew lectures, the former for juniors and the latter for seniors. Although the Greek lecturer might be a layman, the Hebrew lecturer was definitely to be a priest and theologian, a provision that seems to reflect the reservations felt by many like Colet and indeed, Erasmus himself, about the influence of Hebrew study on Christian doctrine and spirituality.

A further undertaking of this partnership was the conversion of Godshouse, a Lancastrian foundation intended in part to produce schoolmasters, into Christ's College, in effect a seminary for a new generation of clergy, whose fellows were given preference in the selection of the Lady Margaret Preacher.

Fisher was also the chief sponsor of Erasmus's arrival in Cambridge in 1511, to succeed him in the Lady Margaret Readership.[20] This was a consequence perhaps of

[19] See Leader, *The University to 1546*, 284-291; McConica, *English Humanists*, 79-80.

[20] At the same time, Erasmus lectured on the Greek language, from 1511 to 1514, also on the initiative of John Fisher and with a special stipend. His lectures in theology were on St Jerome's epistles, which he was currently editing, and on the *Apology* against Tyrannius Rufinus; cf. Leader, *The University to 1546*, 295.

Erasmus having taught Fisher's kinsman, Robert, in Paris, although there were many other contacts between the two men. By 1513 their growing friendship is attested in their correspondence and in their common concern about scripture and 'good letters', and it appears that Erasmus intended originally to dedicate his *Novum Instrumentum* to Fisher. By 1517, Fisher commented to Erasmus on his pleasure in working through the new Greek text and signed himself, "discipulus tuus". It was an attitude that endured to the end of Fisher's life.

At Oxford, the paramount institutional establishment of such humanist policy was the work of the other two ecclesiastics already mentioned, Richard Foxe and Thomas Wolsey. Space will permit only a brief outline of what was done, and it must be emphasized that their initiatives, like those of Fisher at Cambridge, were entirely congenial to the preoccupations of the late medieval university: pastoral care, preaching, and a more historical approach to theology. The influence of Erasmus, however, clearly provided the defining edge to such interests, as these powerful ecclesiastics were able to provide the means to achieve them.

Richard Foxe, as has been mentioned, established his career in the wake of Henry VII's success, becoming both the king's secretary and keeper of the privy seal by 1487. On resigning the privy seal in 1516 he brought forward his protégé, Thomas Wolsey, as his successor in that office. From 1501 until 1528 he held the rich and influential see of Winchester, and by 1505 he was a patron of Erasmus, who in the following year dedicated his translation of Lucian's *Toxaris* to Foxe as a New Year's gift. He was an intimate of the circle of Fisher, Erasmus and Thomas More, and Fisher dedicated to him his *De veritate corporis et sanguinis Christi* of 1527. More reported Foxe's opinion that Erasmus's translation of the New Testament was worth ten commentaries.[21]

Foxe's foundation of Corpus Christi College (1517) preceded Fisher's second revision of his statutes for St. John's Cambridge, and seems to some degree to have influenced them. However Corpus, unlike St John's, was expressly designed to provide a home for the new learning in the university, the formation of a reformed clergy being a less explicit objective than it was in the foundations of Lady Margaret Beaufort and John Fisher. Indeed, the texts assigned to the lecturers in Foxe's final statutes suggest a more expressly lay and secular approach. Founded in the same year as the trilingual college at Leuven, it was intended that the humanity reader at Corpus, along with the Greek lecturer, should provide lectures for the whole of the university from a wide variety of authors. The Greek lecturer in particular was to read three days a week from an approved grammar, with some part of Lucian, Philostratus, or the orations of Isocrates. On alternate days a variety of authors could be proposed, including Aristophanes, Euripides, Sophocles and Thucydides. During vacations, the humanities reader was to give special instruction in Valla's *Elegantiae*, the *Noctes Atticae* of Aulus Gellius, and Politian's *Miscellanea*. A third reader, in theology, was to lecture from the Latin and Greek doctors of the church, especially Jerome, Augustine, Origen and Chrysostom.

[21] Allen Ep. 502, 19-23.

The omission of Hebrew from Foxe's provision diminishes the claim of Corpus to rival the trilingual college at Leuven, but it is likely that the provision for Hebrew at Fisher's St. John's too was, for some time, a fairly nominal one. In any event, Foxe's arrangements must be placed alongside the almost simultaneous project of his protégé, Thomas Wolsey. Within a year of Corpus receiving its statutes, the university was informed of Wolsey's decision to found lectures ("sex lectiones publicas") at his own expense, and lectures at least in theology and humanity seem to have begun in the autumn term of 1518.

Shortly afterward, Wolsey initiated a collegiate foundation of his own in Oxford which characteristically, would eclipse any of those founded to date. At this point in his career he was archbishop of York, had been created a cardinal in 1515 by Leo X, and in the same year became chancellor of the realm. In 1518 he was made papal legate. He was, in a word, an immensely powerful figure. Wolsey appointed some of Erasmus's friends to his Oxford lecturerships — Thomas Lupset, Juan Luis Vives, and John Clement — and while it is difficult to conceive of him as a kindred spirit with these men, his credibility as a reformer cannot be doubted. In 1524 he swept aside his earlier scheme of public lectures to found his own Cardinal College. There is no evidence that he intended to emulate the trilingual ideal, but the college's six public lecturerships quite plainly showed the influence of the humanistic programme of studies. The professorships were in the three higher faculties of theology, canon law and civil law, along with philosophy and humanity in the arts faculty. The reader in humanity was to lecture on both Latin and Greek authors. Cardinal College had scarcely begun to function when Wolsey's fall from royal favour put its very existence in jeopardy, but when in due course it was revived with the statutes — singularly — of a cathedral church, the royal establishment included three public lecturers in theology, Hebrew, and Greek.

Much more could be said about the pathways by which the influence of Erasmus penetrated England, but they would have to do with other patrons and coteries which owed their existence, directly or indirectly, to the highly-placed court circles outlined here. What is distinctive is the institutional establishment of an Erasmian reforming outlook in both of the universities, the recruiting ground of an educated clergy — and even of some laity — for the service of church and state. I have argued that their designs were influenced by Erasmus, which I think is unquestionable. But it might equally be said that it was the outlook of these patrons which created the Erasmus known in England.

That outlook in turn derived from fifteenth-century antecedents in the universities and in the court. I have hinted at the shift in theology which is detectable in Oxford, about which we are much better informed than we are about developments in late medieval Cambridge. The dynastic continuity is even more striking. Amongst the antecedents of Lady Margaret Beaufort we must recognize the humanistic patron, Humfrey duke of Gloucester, the fourth son of Henry of Bolingbroke who was destined to be the first Lancastrian king of England as Henry IV. It was a tradition of patronage shared by two of his brothers, as it was shared by Duke Humfrey's leading rival and political opponent of the blood royal, the rich and powerful bishop of Winchester, Henry Beaufort. Beaufort, of the Lancastrian line as the son of John of Gaunt

(although illegitimate at birth), was the grand-uncle of the Lady Margaret, who as we have seen, not only provided England with its first great royal patron of Erasmian humanism, but provided her son, Henry VII, with the crucial Tudor claim to Lancastrian lineage.

In light of the foregoing it is scarcely remarkable that Robert Joseph, O.S.B., enjoying his Oxford studies in the 1520s had ready access to the works of Erasmus. John Dorne, the Oxford bookseller whose accounts in the same decade happily survive, sold more works by Erasmus than by any other author. It was, after all, the decade in which Oxford was stirred and stimulated by the initiatives both of Foxe and of Wolsey. Nor is it surprising that within the university a paper war broke out between the advocates of the new studies — dubbed the 'Greeks' — and the adherents of tradition, dubbed the 'Trojans'. Nor that the most highly-placed layman among Oxford's former students, Thomas More, wrote from the court temporarily in residence at nearby Woodstock to rebuke the Trojans, and to intervene decisively in favour of the defenders of pagan learning as a preparation for Christian scholarship.

Thus, the Tudor perception of Erasmus — the 'Erasmianism' received in England — was essentially twofold. First came Erasmus as the magisterial schoolmaster, the architect of the new, humanistic curriculum adapted from Italian precedents Second in order was Erasmus as the proponent of the 'philosophia Christi', the restorer of Scripture, the spiritual director of the devout layman active in the world. He was not seen as a revolutionary figure, and his views and scholarly imperatives arrived with the ground well-prepared for an English reception. His pastoral bent, his laicism and sceptical attitude to monasticism — not to mention to the achievements of scholastic logic and theology — were all congenial to the sponsors of the religious settlement as it was to emerge shortly in the last years of the reign of Henry VIII, a settlement whose content it was so largely to define.