

INTRODUCTION

In the history of printing the sixteenth century may well be called the heroic age. All the new spiritual forces, which in this stirring time were breaking the old bounds, laid hold upon the new discovery as an instrument to serve them, even to do battle for them. It is not possible to see this religious renewal, without doubt the most powerful movement of the period, apart from the printing press, by Erasmus called an instrument almost divine and by Luther the second revelation. Hence the printed book in all its variety is a trustworthy mirror of all that is alive and at work in the sixteenth century. It reflects the permanent as well as the passing, elements of the modern as well as of the Middle Ages.

For this reason knowledge about sixteenth century bibliography is indispensable for anyone who concerns himself with this period. Unfortunately scientific information about this period remains greatly defective. This happens not only because thus far bibliographers have concentrated their efforts on the fifteenth century, but is also due to the fact that at the time of the religious wars of the sixteenth century many books were lost beyond recovery, even more than in the foregoing period. Also this period, with its profusion of clandestine books bearing false addresses and dates, presents the researcher with all but unsolvable enigmas. Every contribution to sixteenth century bibliography is thus most welcome, particularly if it pertains to the expression of a religious movement, which, however much oppressed and hampered in its development, has continued to live.

This now is the case with the bibliography of the works of Menno Simons by Mr. Horst, which I introduce to the public with great pleasure. The task he undertook was indeed uncommonly difficult, for few books at the time of their original appearance and for a considerable time afterwards, have been so intensely suppressed as has been the case with the works of Menno Simons. A number of editions, from documents known to have existed at one time, have completely vanished, while others are known only from a single extant copy. The fact that Mennonite principles in later times spread to

other countries and even to other continents likewise raised many problems for the author.

For the energy and devotion with which Mr. Horst carried out his work one can have only respect. With great accuracy he describes all the editions of the printed books of Menno Simons of which copies are extant as well as titles of works which have been lost. A look into the results of this work of bibliographical detection will help one to receive an impression of how deep has been the impress made by Menno Simons in the field of religious life.

If at a given point this work does not give all the answers, then it is certainly not to be charged against this untiring bibliographer. Especially in connection with sixteenth century imprints, which appeared without the name and place of the printer, it was not always possible to ascribe a particular press. Therefore question marks were necessary at certain places and sometimes tentative attributions were made, which no doubt will be subject to revision at a later date. These problems can be solved when first Dutch bibliographers succeed in compiling a general bibliography as complete as possible from data gathered from archival materials as well as from the results of modern methods of type investigation. If this work – recently begun – is completed, one hopes that a new edition of the work by Mr. Horst will eventually appear in which the question marks, which have to remain as yet, can be removed.

May the example of Mr. Horst be an incentive to compile bibliographies of similar excellence devoted to other figures in the religious life of the sixteenth century. This is indispensable for our knowledge of religious life in the sixteenth century.

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