The Achievement of P.S. Allen and the Role of CWE¹

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RÉSUMÉ: *La contribution de P.S. Allen et le rôle des "CWE"*

Pour juger de la réussite de P.S. Allen dans son édition des *Erasmi Epistolae*, il faut séparer son travail d'éditeur de son travail d'annotateur. En tant qu'éditeur, il a été le premier à publier le corpus presque intégral de la correspondance subsistant d'Érasme dans un texte fidèle et exact, avec toutes les lettres dans leur ordre chronologique, ce qui représente une œuvre monumentale. Sa réussite en tant qu'annotateur est moins impressionnante. D'un côté, il a donné des informations complètes et précises sur la publication des travaux d'Érasme; il a fourni un grand nombre de renvois très utiles et il a identifié presque toutes les personnes que le texte mentionnait ou auxquelles il faisait allusion. D'un autre côté, ses connaissances en histoire étaient plutôt faibles et par conséquent ses annotations historiques le sont aussi. Souvent, il n'a pas reconnu et identifié des citations et des références bibliques, des références aux ouvrages d'Érasme lui-même et des références à ces œuvres classiques qui n'étaient pas sur la liste standard des lectures scolaires. C'est la réussite éditoriale d'Allen dans l'établissement d'un recueil complet et précis des lettres qui a rendu possible la publication de la correspondance dans les *CWE*. En même temps, parce qu'il n'a pas accompli tout ce qu'il aurait pu faire comme annotateur, les annotateurs des *CWE* se retrouvent avec la tâche importante de parachever le travail d'Allen dans ce domaine.

As all serious students of Erasmus' correspondence will know, the *CWE* edition of the letters of Erasmus is essentially a translation of P.S. Allen's edition of the *Erasmi Epistolae*, which H.W. Garrod has described as 'one of the great monuments of English learning' and as 'perhaps the most accurate book in the world.'² Inasmuch as I have been, over the past several years, intermittently preoccupied with devising the annotations for *CWE* 9 and 10, which are based on Allen's volume V, and which contain the letters of 1522-4, it seemed to me that my contribution to the proceedings

might appropriately be an assessment of Allen's achievement as editor and annotator of Erasmus' correspondence. The main point which I shall make is that while Garrod's high estimate of Allen's work is still valid, that work has, nevertheless, certain shortcomings which the CWE annotators have the opportunity to correct.

For the benefit of those who have not worked extensively with the correspondence, let me point out that Allen's edition comprises eleven volumes published between 1906 and 1947. The last four volumes, numbers 8 through 11, were published posthumously, volume 8 being the last one which Allen himself completed before his death in 1933. The remaining three volumes, for which Allen had collected the materials, were prepared for publication by his widow, Helen Mary Allen, who had all along been his collaborator on the project, and H.W. Garrod, Fellow and Librarian of Merton College (the text was Allen's, the notes were theirs).

Let me lay the foundation for my assessment of Allen's achievement by giving a brief summary of his career, a summary based on Mrs Allen's edition of his letters³ and on the biographical sketch which Garrod wrote at the time of Allen's death.⁴ The son of a prosperous London banker, Allen was born in 1869 'in oppidulo suburbano quod Twickenham vocatur,' to quote the Latin version of Garrod's biographical sketch. After receiving a thorough grounding in the classics at school, Allen attended Corpus Christi College, Oxford, where he took his BA in 1892, having already decided to make scholarship his career. As it happened, the topic for the Chancellor's English Essay Prize for 1893 was Erasmus. Allen entered the competition and, although he did not win the prize, he did stumble onto his life's work, namely, a new critical edition of Erasmus' letters. During a summer spent reading for the essay, he realized, as had others before him, that no extant edition of Erasmus' correspondence had taken the letters sufficiently seriously as historical sources as well as literary compositions, and that none had succeeded in the effort (if any) to place the letters in chronological order. Moreover, numerous unpublished letters had been turned up in the two centuries since the great Leiden edition (1703-6). So a new edition of the correspondence seemed to be a major desideratum. Two continental scholars, Adolf Horawitz and Karl Hartfelder, the editors of the correspondence of Beatus Rhenanus, had undertaken the task, only to die before making any substantial progress.

Allen received encouragement from J.A. Froude, whose lectures on Erasmus he heard in 1893-4, but apart from that Allen was on his own, with no one to guide him in his initial efforts. Nevertheless, he managed to get a good start. He began by making a catalogue based on the Leiden

edition but including letters not in that edition and so arranged as to be capable of expansion to include any new letters that might be discovered. This catalogue, which Mrs Allen has described as nearly faultless in its accuracy,⁵ became the basis of his edition.

In the summers of 1894 and 1896 Allen made the first of his many journeys to continental libraries and archives in search of *Erasmiana*, very quickly winning the trust and admiration of the scholars whom he encountered there. In 1897, the regrettable necessity of earning a living forced him to go off to India to teach history at the Government College in Lahore. He soon found that India was hard on both his health and his Erasmus studies, so in 1901 he returned to England. An allowance from his father and a variety of academic odd-jobs enabled Allen and his wife to live modestly in Oxford and to work productively on Erasmus. In 1903 the Clarendon Press committed itself to the edition. For a while, however, it was not clear that the Oxford edition would be the only one. It was discovered that the Berlin Academy had commissioned Dr Max Reich to edit the letters of Erasmus. However, Reich obligingly died in 1904, having made no real progress. Then another German, Dr J.R.F. Knaake, who had edited Luther's correspondence, announced that he was going to do the same for Erasmus. But he too died, in 1905, before his project was off the ground. Meanwhile, the Dutch Historical Commission, upon learning that the Oxford edition of the correspondence would be complete, decided that its own edition would be 'superfluous.' With that, all of Allen's potential rivals were either dead or had stepped aside, although Allen was left for a time with the uneasy feeling that all Erasmus editors died before they could accomplish anything.

Meanwhile, after his return from India, Allen had resumed his annual summer expeditions to the continent, a series which continued unbroken, save only for the war years, until near the end of his life. Almost everywhere the Allens went, they were received with the greatest cordiality and the most generous co-operation. But there were exceptions. In July 1907 they arrived in Dresden, where, in Allen's words,

A most unusual reception awaited us [at the Hauptstaatsarchiv]. The 'Lesesaal' was open, but nothing could be done till the Director arrived at 10. So we went and inspected the Catholische Kirche and returned to find a martinet in a white waistcoat, who declared that it was absolutely impossible we should see any MSS without authorization from the Ministerium - that that couldn't possibly be accorded till tomorrow morning, and that then we must have a 'certification' from the English consul. You can imagine how we called heaven and earth to witness that

nowhere in the world had we met such treatment – Paris, Vienna, Rome, Munich, all cited as obligingly open. I proffered my letter of introduction from . . . the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University; but he wouldn't look at it. So we retired discomfited, to prepare our humble application. But a visit to the English consul further discouraged us, as it was declared there that no official introduction could be given without a letter from the Foreign Office in London, which could be got 'in 5 or 6 days.' So I returned to take my application to the Director and inform him that if he couldn't let us in as we stood, we should go without and record the fact in Erasmus! I sent in the application and an answer came out that we should have an answer tomorrow. However I expressed a desire to see him again, and when he emerged, he suddenly changed his mind – consented to read the Oxford letter and graciously said we might come in the afternoon. So we lost only a morning through his waywardness, and were grateful for that. May such conduct be no precedent.⁶

The most difficult task facing Allen was not that of beating recalcitrant Herren Direktoren into submission but rather that of deciphering handwritten documents. Erasmus' many hastily written drafts caused problems aplenty, but they were the purest calligraphic art compared with the scratchings of some of Erasmus' contemporaries and correspondents. One such was Bonifacius Amerbach, whose voluminous *Nachlaß* is in the University Library at Basel. In December 1906 Allen wrote to a friend:

We are wrestling with Boniface Amorbach's [sic] rough copies, which are really dreadful, and nothing less than inspiration is of any use. One sits in front of an indescribable tangle, where no letter has any resemblance to anything, and then in a flash illumination comes; or else it doesn't.⁷

Fortunately, the frequency and reliability of Allen's illuminations were sufficient to the task. Indeed, according to Garrod, he had no rival in the deciphering of difficult fifteenth- and sixteenth-century hands.⁸ He was also, I might add, remarkably adept at the conjectural filling-in of gaps created by the deterioration of manuscripts over the centuries.⁹

Allen's method of preparing his text for publication was essentially as follows. First, he made a fair copy in the library where the manuscript had been found. (In the case of letters published in Erasmus' lifetime for which no manuscript survives, Allen's fair copy consisted of the text cut out of the London edition of 1642 and collated with the earliest authorized edition.) This fair copy became the printer's copy. The first printer's proof was then corrected in the library where the copy had been made. By thus

eliminating intervening drafts, this method reduced to an absolute minimum the opportunities for error.

The publication of volume one of the *Epistolae* in 1906 was followed by the first formal recognition of Allen's achievements as a scholar: in March 1908 he was elected to a Research Fellowship at Merton College. This meant that he could move into better digs, that he no longer had to rely on odd jobs as an examiner and the like, and that he was now free to work uninterrupted on Erasmus. He held the Merton Fellowship until 1924, when he became President of Corpus Christi College, the post he still occupied at the time of his death.

So much for Allen's career. Now, what about his achievement? To assess it fairly, one must emphasize the distinction between his work as editor, which he did with amazing thoroughness and accuracy, and his work as annotator, which he did with comparable accuracy but not with the same thoroughness.

His accomplishment as editor was threefold. First, he unearthed 232 new, hitherto unpublished letters, thus giving us for the first time virtually the entire corpus of Erasmus' surviving correspondence. Only a handful of letters has come to light since. Second, he corrected thousands of errors in the texts of previously published letters and left astonishingly few errors of his own to be corrected by others. In the letters I have worked on, Sir Roger Mynors has corrected a few obvious misreadings of no great consequence, and I have stumbled across a single error of slightly greater consequence. At one point in the *Catalogus lucubrationum* (Ep 1341A), where Allen had to harmonize two texts, that of January 1523 and that of September 1524, he inadvertently repeated one short sentence and omitted another, also short. Still, nothing essential to the meaning of the letter was lost, although a fine sarcastic comment at the expense of the Louvain Carmelite, Nicholaas Baechem (Egmondanus), was.

Allen's third accomplishment as editor was to establish the date of each of the letters, an extremely difficult task in a large number of cases. One has the feeling that this was the task that Allen saw as his greatest challenge and from which he derived the greatest satisfaction. Certainly he devoted some of his best efforts to it, carefully, skilfully, and imaginatively sifting the internal and external evidence and writing lucid justifications of his conclusions in the introductions to the letters. Many of his datings are necessarily conjectural, but very few have been overthrown. In Allen's volume V, only one letter, Ep 1280, about the date of which Allen himself was uncertain, has been definitely redated. It is possible that a second, Ep 1412, will suffer the same fate. It is addressed to the curial theologian,

Silvestro Mazzolini, known as Prierias, and is clearly a response to a letter from him. Allen dates the letter at circa 19 January 1524, pointing out the strong verbal resemblances to other letters written to Rome at approximately the same time, but forgetting to mention that Prierias had apparently died in 1523, perhaps as early as the beginning of the year. At the moment it is still not clear whether the date of the letter or the date of Prierias' death will have to be revised.¹⁰ But even if Allen should be proved wrong, the list of his errors will still be almost uniquely brief.

If we turn to Allen's work as annotator, we find, as I said, comparable accuracy but not comparable thoroughness. Before pursuing this theme, I must pause to make a pair of preliminary observations. First, in order to make valid generalizations about Allen's performance as an annotator, I am forced to leave out of account one extreme, atypical case, namely the famous letter to Johann von Botzheim known as the *Catalogus lucubrationum*. Allen published it at the beginning of his first volume as part of the prolegomenous group of texts which also includes Erasmus' *Compendium Vitae* and Beatus Rhenanus' two biographical sketches of Erasmus. The CWE, by contrast, has published the *Catalogus* as Ep 1341A in its proper place in the sequence of the letters. One of the longest letters ever written (46 pages in Allen I), the *Catalogus* is the centrepiece of CWE 9 (pages 291–364). Allen's text of it is virtually unannotated: a grand total of 61 notes compared to the CWE's 432. Allen normally does much better than that, and my case against the adequacy of his annotations is based on his usual performance, not this unusual one.

Second, to pass judgment on Allen's annotations, one has to have some notion of the problems that Erasmus' letters present to an annotator. Because Erasmus often wrote hastily, quoted from memory, and had to take care not to get himself or others into trouble, the letters are full of puzzles great and small that have to be resolved: chiefly these are classical, biblical, or other citations and references that either are not quite accurate or not where Erasmus says they are; or else they are maddeningly vague references to persons, places, or events. 'Certain persons I could name' and 'Augustine somewhere says' are phrases of the sort that one encounters frequently. But these are just the routine annoyances of almost any job of textual annotation. The really fundamental problem for the modern annotator of Erasmus' correspondence is that Erasmus was a professional in so many different fields at once, and that he was so deeply involved in so many aspects of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century life and culture over such a wide geographical area. The ideal annotator would, therefore, be a classical scholar, a biblical scholar, a patristic scholar, a medieval scholar,

a Renaissance scholar, a Reformation scholar, a church historian, a secular historian, and a theologian, all in one. (The list may well be incomplete!) But no one today can even hope to be all or even most of those things. Thus anyone who wishes to do a decent job of annotating the letters of Erasmus must be prepared to venture far outside his own narrow field of specialization and must spend a lot of time and effort picking the brains of others. This Allen did not do, and that is why his annotations, although they meet a high standard of accuracy, are, on the whole, sporadic and thin.¹¹

To be fair to Allen, it must be pointed out that in three respects his annotations are in fact as thorough as they are accurate. First, with the notable exception of the *Catalogus*, Allen provides full and accurate information about the genesis, publication, and revision of Erasmus' works, wherever it is appropriate to do so. Second, on the basis of his incomparably detailed knowledge of the texts of all the letters, he provides an abundance of illuminating cross-references. I have had to add very few. More often I have had to eliminate ones that lost their point in a translated text. Third, on the basis of his extremely wide knowledge of the printed and unprinted sources, Allen identifies, sometimes definitely, sometimes tentatively, nearly all the persons mentioned or alluded to in the text. He does not solve all the puzzles, to be sure. Moreover, he occasionally makes blunders, as in Ep 1330, where he identifies Girolamo Aleandro as one of the four furies of Louvain who hated the humanities in general and Erasmus in particular. Allen unaccountably forgot that Aleandro had long since departed for Spain, that Juan Vives had reported this to Erasmus in Ep 1271, and that Aleandro was in any case not an enemy of the humanities, which Erasmus also knew. (The real fury, in case you are interested, was Jacobus Latomus.) The point here, however, is not that Allen occasionally erred but rather that he did not evade the issue: he did a thorough job, if not an absolutely perfect one.

Things begin to look different as soon as we move off into other areas. First of all, Allen's historical annotations are extremely spotty and reveal that his interest in history was shallow and his knowledge of it meagre. For example, if Allen had read a bit in the standard histories of the Reformation, and if he had made effective use of the published sources that he occasionally cites, he would have been able to provide fuller and clearer annotations for Willibald Pirckheimer's account of the proceedings of the imperial diet at Nürnberg in 1522-3 (Ep 1344). He would also have been able to explain why Erasmus thought that the imperial mandate of 6 March 1523 was a hopeful sign (Ep 1364); he would not have been

mystified by Bartolomeo Villani's report of rumours of the calling of a general council in Strasbourg (Ep 1372); and he would have been able to explain Erasmus' reference to Archduke Ferdinand's surprising severity against the Lutherans (Ep 1388). A somewhat more difficult case is Allen's failure to recognize that in Ep 1369, which he dates correctly at 1523, lines 38–52 were inserted on the eve of the letter's publication in the *Opus Epistolarum* of 1529. The lines in question are a catalogue of heresies which did not emerge until 1524 in some cases and 1527–9 in others. Moreover, the term *Anabaptistas* is used. Given the state of scholarship in the 1920s, Allen may be forgiven for not having known that Anabaptism wasn't invented until 1525 and that the Greek term 'Anabaptist' was not in common use before 1527. He may also be excused for not having recognized the heresies of Hans Denck and Ludwig Hätzer. But he should have recognized the views of Zwingli, Oecolampadius, and Karlstadt, or else have consulted somebody who would have. The point is that he was not interested and thus left the reader completely uninformed about both the date and the content of the passage. There are numerous other examples of the omission of historical information that would have aided comprehension of the text, but I think that the point has been sufficiently made.

Turning to other matters, one finds that Allen does not invariably identify biblical references or citations. Typically he does identify some but not others. In Ep 1406, for example, Otto Brunfels delivers himself of a sulphurous denunciation of Erasmus in defence of Ulrich von Hutten, employing rhetoric from the Psalms, Ecclesiasticus, Zechariah, Malachi, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Revelation. Allen identifies one of the references to the Psalms and the one reference to Revelation but misses all the rest. Similarly, Allen more often than not fails to identify patristic references. In Ep 1304, for example, which is Erasmus' preface to his edition of Arnobius the Younger, there are numerous patristic references whose clarification is important to an understanding of what Erasmus is saying: Allen ignores them all. He does the same in similar passages in Epp 1309 and 1400, which are also prefaces to patristic editions. He does somewhat better in Ep 1334, the preface to his Hilary of Poitiers, but still leaves many unfortunate gaps.

Allen also had his blind spots with respect to Erasmus' own works. He frequently fails to annotate obvious references to the *Adagia*. He is even more unreliable with respect to Erasmus' biblical and patristic scholarship. In Ep 1333 he fails to explain the meaning of the phrase 'in argumentis' (i.e., 'in my introductions'), a reference to the *argumen-*

tum preceding the paraphrase on John's first epistle. In Ep 1410 he fails to annotate extremely important references to Erasmus' *scholia* on Jerome's letters and to the annotation to Eph 5:32 in the *Novum Instrumentum*. Similarly, Allen failed to make full use of Erasmus' apologetic writings, which are found in volume IX of the Leiden edition. Specifically, he did not identify those passages in Ep 1334 which were condemned by the Sorbonne, even though Erasmus himself published the *censurae* along with his defence.

As if all this were not enough, Allen's classical annotations are woefully incomplete. He usually manages to identify direct quotations or paraphrases from the standard works of the standard authors familiar to any schoolboy at the time: Horace, Virgil, Cicero, Seneca, Juvenal, Terence – the ones that require no digging. But let Jean Lange in Ep 1407 misquote a line from Propertius, turning an erotic sentiment about Cupid being a god of peace into a pious sentiment about the love of peace being God, and Allen is silent. Moreover, he almost never annotates classical references that are not quotations or paraphrases. He expects that you will know all about the Caudine Forks, about the goddess Lucina, about *fetiales* and the *pater patratus* (although Erasmus himself was somewhat confused on the point), about the Allobrigians, about Apelles and the cobbler, about Thais and Thraso and Purgopolynices and Apollonius of Tyana and a thousand other persons, places and things. And he evidently expects that Erasmus' reference to Jesus as Apollo (Ep 1404) and Cuthbert Tunstall's to Luther's 'idiot philosophy that recalls the Stoics' (Ep 1367) will make sense to you without annotation. Allen does not even comment when Erasmus' classical references are wrong, as in Ep 1402, where he attributes to Homer a passage found in Apollonius of Rhodes, and where he also turns Lucian's *Complaint of the Consonants* into a debate among the vowels.

One could go on multiplying examples, but once again the point has been sufficiently made. Besides, I am already in danger of giving the false impression that my aim is to denounce Allen for the terrible crime of not having done more of my work for me. Let me then conclude with a pair of observations which place the limitations of Allen's achievement in a positive light.

First of all, Allen simply did not have the time, the inclination, or the learning to do everything equally well. Under the circumstances, we are fortunate that he chose to devote his best efforts to the text, the textual apparatus, the datings, and the introductions. That by itself was an enormous task, and he did it extremely well. It is far easier to update and supplement a basically accurate but incomplete set of notes than it is to

remedy an incomplete and unreliable text. Without Allen's text, the CWE correspondence volumes would scarcely have been possible.

Second, Allen's failure to do everything himself means that the CWE correspondence volumes have a contribution to make beyond the provision of a readable and accurate English translation. Thanks to Allen, there is no urgent need for a new redaction of the Latin text of the correspondence. However, those who use that text, both within and without the English-speaking world, do need the annotations which are being supplied in the CWE edition. This means that the CWE annotators have the great responsibility and privilege of continuing and completing Allen's monumental work.

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Notes

- 1 This is a slightly revised text of the paper that was read under the somewhat facetious title, 'Erasmus, P.S. Allen, and Me: Reflections of an Annotator of the Correspondence,' at the Conference on the Correspondence of Erasmus held at the University of Toronto, 20 May 1987. Despite the revisions, the paper retains its character as a text intended for oral presentation.
- 2 *Dictionary of National Biography*, fifth supplement: 1931-40 (Oxford 1949) 5-6
- 3 H.M. Allen, ed *Letters of P.S. Allen* (Oxford 1939)
- 4 'Percy Stafford Allen, 1869-1933,' in *Proceedings of the British Academy* XIX:381-407. A Latin version was printed in volume 8 of the *Erasmi Epistolae* v-xx
- 5 *Letters* 12
- 6 *Letters* 65-6
- 7 *Ibidem* 55
- 8 *DNB* 6 (cf note 1); *Proceedings* 396 (cg note 3).
- 9 See, for example, Ep 1311 in Allen V.
- 10 Since these lines were written, Ep 1412 has been redated to mid-January 1523 and appears in CWE 9 as Ep 1337A. Allen Epp 1438, 1508, and 1459 have also been redated and will appear in CWE 10 as Epp 1443B, 1477A, and 1498A respectively.
- 11 Those of Mrs Allen and Garrod, in volumes 9-11, are even more so.