

Wallace K. Ferguson: A Tribute

Last year, the community of Renaissance scholars, and the Renaissance Society of America in particular, suffered a serious loss with the death of Wallace Ferguson, one of the leading Renaissance historians of his generation, and one of the founders of the Renaissance Society of America, a member of its Board from 1954 to 1965, and its President from 1965 to 1967.

Wallace Klippert Ferguson was born in Peel County, Ontario, on 23 May 1902; he received his B.A. at the University of Western Ontario in 1924, and his Ph.D. at Cornell in 1927. He taught at New York University 1928–56, at the University of Western Ontario 1956–72, and died in London, Ontario, after a long illness on 19 January 1983.

His important scholarly contributions cover the period of the Renaissance and Reformation in most of its aspects: political, economic, religious and intellectual. He published several works of synthesis which are both reliable and influential: *A Survey of European Civilization*, volume I (1936, revised 1947, 1958, and 1969); *The Renaissance* (1940, revised 1969); *Europe in Transition, 1300–1520* (1962). His masterly history of the interpretation of the Renaissance (*The Renaissance in Historical Thought: Five Centuries of Interpretation*, 1948) was a major and definitive contribution to the continuing debate about the so-called problem of the Renaissance; it was widely acclaimed and also translated into French and Italian. A number of substantial papers, many of them dealing with broad problems of Renaissance history and historiography, appeared in various periodicals between 1927 and 1963; eleven of them were collected in his *Renaissance Studies* (1963, repr. 1970). To this collection we must add an article on Jansenism (1927), a note on an unpublished letter of John Colet (1934), and a lecture on Erasmus and Christian Humanism (1963), as well as many book reviews, introductions, and short notes.

A central place in Ferguson's work belongs to Erasmus, on whom he was a major expert and to whom he dedicated a number of important articles. Erasmus accompanied Ferguson from the beginning to the end of his career. One of his first publications, based on his dissertation, was an edition of those works of Erasmus, many of them

previously unpublished, which were not included in the Leyden edition of Erasmus' collected works (*Erasmi Opuscula: A Supplement to the Opera Omnis*, The Hague, 1933). During his later years, Ferguson was one of the chief planners and editors of the *Collected Works of Erasmus*, a collection of his major writings in English, with ample historical notes, which has been published by the University of Toronto Press since 1974. Ferguson himself supplied the historical annotation for the first two volumes of Erasmus' *Correspondence* (1974–75) with which this monumental project started.

In addition to the Renaissance Society of America, Ferguson was active in the Committee on Renaissance Studies of the American Council of Learned Societies, the New England Renaissance Conference, the New York Renaissance Club, the Columbia University Seminar on Renaissance Studies, the North Central Renaissance Conference and also in the American Historical Association and in the Canadian Historical Association (of which he was President in 1960–61). He was on the editorial board of several scholarly journals and of the *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and a recipient of the medal of the Canada Council. A Festschrift dedicated to him contains a short biography (pp. v–vii) and a bibliography of his writings (*Florilegium Historiale: Essays Presented to Wallace K. Ferguson*, ed. J. G. Howe and W. H. Stockdale, University of Toronto Press, 1971, pp. 400–401).

Wallace Ferguson will be remembered by his friends, colleagues, and students for his learning, his wit, and his generosity, and for a disinterested concern for historical scholarship and for a moral and intellectual integrity that have become rather rare in recent years. His solid and substantial contributions to the study of the Renaissance, and especially of Erasmus, will be used and admired as long as these studies continue to be seriously pursued.

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