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**Erasmus, Desiderius. The Correspondence of Erasmus, Letters
2082 to 2203. Ed. James M. Estes and trans. Alexander Dalzell**

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Erasmus, Desiderius.

***The Correspondence of Erasmus, Letters 2082 to 2203.* Ed. James M. Estes and trans. Alexander Dalzell.**

Collected Works of Erasmus, Vol. 15. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. Pp. xxi, 403. ISBN 978-1-4426-4203-4 (hardcover) \$175.

During the first seven months of 1529, the period covered by the letters in this volume, Erasmus seems to have resigned himself to many of the unhappy circumstances that had, over the previous decade or so, transformed him from the undisputed prince of humanists into an embattled and controversial figure. This is not to suggest that he in any way gave up on the causes that were dear to his heart, or that he took on a more conciliatory attitude to his critics of both the conservative Catholic and reform stripes. Far from it. The hopelessness and despair, however, so evident especially in the correspondence of the previous year, are replaced in this period with a sober sense of moving forward and making the best of a bad situation. This resignation is most visible in his decision, after at least eighteen months of deep brooding and strategic soul-searching, to leave his beloved Basel. He refers to the city in a number of letters as his “nest,” and makes clear his disappointment at leaving the place where he had spent one of the most productive periods of his life. Here he had worked closely with the printer and entrepreneur Johann Froben to disseminate his works across Europe, while benefitting from a house and garden at Froben’s expense. Here he had a household full of bright and devoted young scholars, and a secure base in easy communication with all parts of Europe. Froben died in August 1527, and Erasmus continued to work with the firm, with his son Hieronymus at the helm of the business.

As distressing as the death of the elder Froben was, it was not enough to make Erasmus leave Basel. Rather, it was the progress of the Lutheran reformation in that city, under the leadership of Johannes Oecolampadius, which made it impossible for him to remain in the city without seeming to give his support to the reform faction as it gained strength in 1527 and 1528. A series of iconoclastic riots and the abolition of the Mass in 1529 marked the triumph of the reformers, forcing Erasmus to decide once and for all on a new home. He had plenty of offers, both in foreign territories (England, France, Poland) and in German ones (Cologne, Aachen, Speyer). He settled on Freiburg im Bressgau, a small university town within the Hapsburg domains, but still close

enough to Basel to carry on his collaboration with the Froben press. The move, which he clearly dreaded, actually turned out better than he had thought. The letters after his move in April (delayed for some weeks due to a bad cold he suffered in March) express his relief that the weather there was more agreeable to his health and constitution.

Many of the controversies that had occupied his time in Basel followed him on his move north. In the letters, Erasmus makes reference to a series of ongoing disputes with his Catholic critics, among them a group of Spanish monks, the executive officer of the Paris faculty of theology, Noël Bédá, and Alberto Pio, the Prince of Carpi, then in exile in Paris. Erasmus himself reopened a controversy that had fizzled out five years before with one of the editors of the Complutensian Polyglot Bible, Diego López Zuñiga. Other recurring controversies include those with French scholars who were offended by Erasmus's estimation of Guillaume Budé in his *Ciceronian Dialogue* and his long-standing feud with Heinrich Eppendorf.

Despite these disputes, and his preoccupation with moving and settling into a new "nest," Erasmus was able during this period to complete two long-standing projects: a revised edition of Seneca, and the ten-volume works of St. Augustine. Likewise he penned one devotional and one educational work, *De vidua Christiana* (*On the Christian Widow*) and *De pueris instituendis* (*On instructing boys*).

For scholars who have devoted so much time and effort to reconstructing Erasmus's correspondence over the last century, it must no doubt be frustrating to read the final letter in this volume, the preface to his *Opus Epistolarum*, the largest collection of his correspondence published during his lifetime. He reveals to the reader not only that "none of my works gives me less satisfaction than my letters" (377), but that several letters he would have liked to include were now lost. Furthermore, he makes plain that he has no interest in publishing the letters in chronological order or organizing them by subject matter. How much effort would modern scholars have been saved if he had been more fastidious on this matter?

The volume contains 123 letters, about two-thirds of which are by Erasmus, and one-third addressed to him.