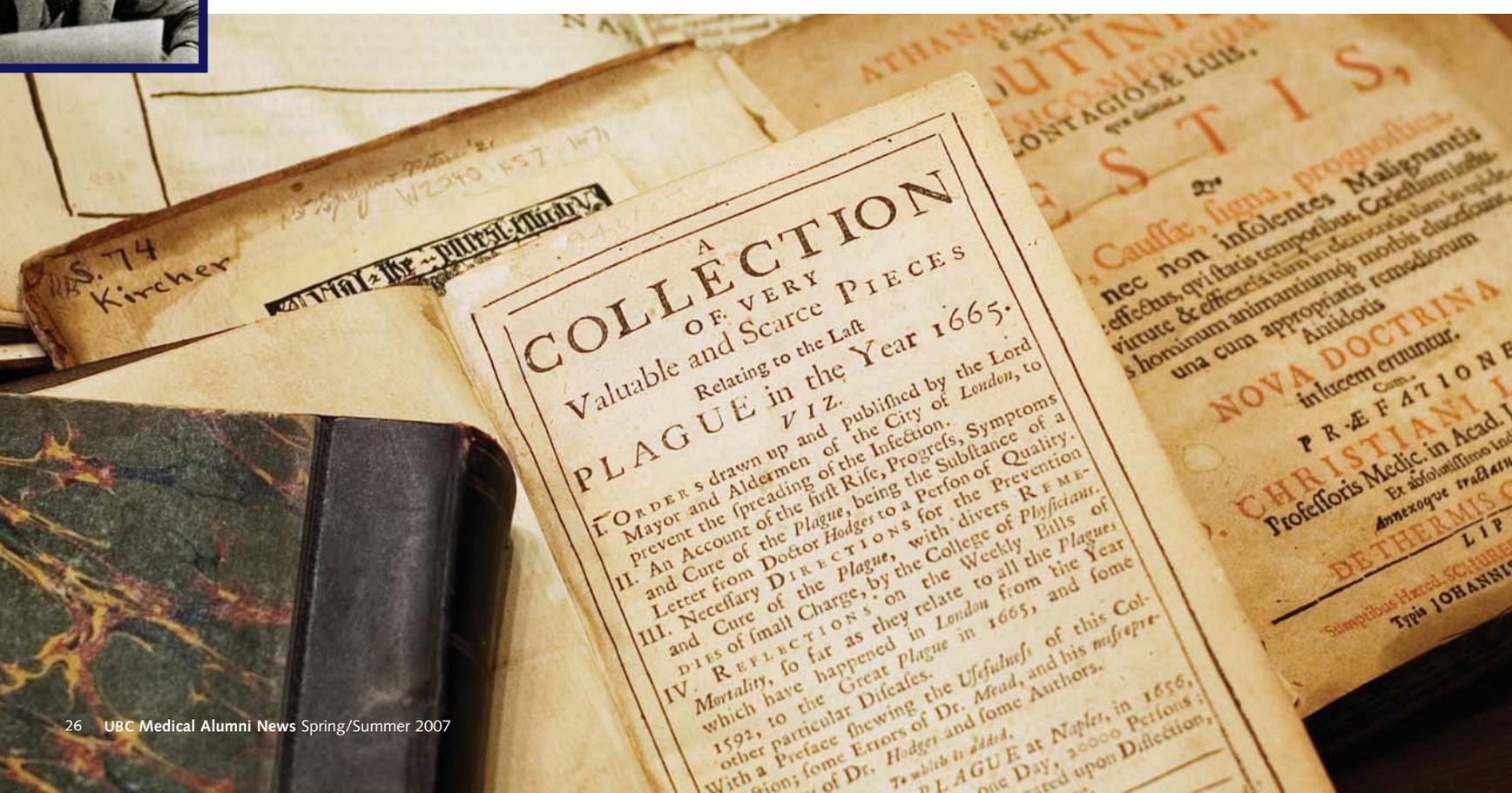




# The D O L M A N C O L L E C T I O N

by Shawn Conner



“HE HAD NICE TASTE IN BOOKS,” SAYS STANTON, “ESPECIALLY ONES ON MICROBIOLOGY, HIS PRIDE AND JOY. THE COLLECTION . . . [IS] PRICELESS IN THE SENSE OF, IF YOU WERE TO TRY TO RE-COLLECT IT, THERE WOULD BE A STAGGERING COST IN TIME AND [MONEY].”

In his corner in the Rare Books and Special Collections room of the new Irving K. Barber Learning Centre on the Point Grey campus, Ralph Stanton scrolls through a list of books on a computer monitor. Names both famous—Florence Nightingale and Louis Pasteur—and forgotten go past. These tomes, some of which date as far back as the 16th century, have titles like *Tractatus de peste, divisus in partes duas, quarum prior continet speculationem physicam* and *A Treatise on Cholera*. A few are about arctic exploration. All have one thing in common—they are part of the Dr. C.E. Dolman collection.

Born in Cornwall, England, in 1906, Dr. Claude Dolman came to Canada in 1931 to work as a research assistant and clinical associate at the University of Toronto’s prestigious Connaught Medical Research Laboratories. In 1935 he was offered the position of associate professor and acting head at the department of Bacteriology and Preventive Medicine at UBC. From 1936 until 1965, he was both professor and head of the department (renamed Bacteriology and Immunology in 1951, and later, Microbiology & Immunology.)

“He had nice taste in books,” says Stanton, “especially ones on microbiology, his pride and joy. He was an important scholar in his field, and understood it, from its origins to the present day.”

Books on early forays into vaccination and immunology made up the first volumes Dolman donated to UBC in 1994. In 2004, a decade after Dr. Dolman’s death, when the family house in Shaughnessy was about to be sold, librarians Stanton and Lee Perry were invited to look at what remained of the collection. The two found over 400 books of interest.

Stanton finds it gratifying to be reuniting so much of the original Dolman collection—if not physically, then at least in the UBC library database. “It’s something librarians like to do,” he says. “The books

don’t sit in one case anymore—but you can re-create the collection through the catalogue. You can see it there, and understand it.”

It’s not clear what, exactly, marked the turning point when Dr. Dolman became a serious collector. Stanton figures Dolman acquired his books while travelling, and through rare books dealers in London, as well as other collectors. All that scouring of bookshelves, of making contact the old-fashioned way—before the Internet made collecting easier—represents countless hours of passionate commitment. “The collection will get a price put on it eventually,” says Stanton. “But it’s priceless in the sense of, if you were to try to re-collect it, there would be a staggering cost in time and [money].”

Lee Perry presides over the Charles Woodward Memorial Room of the Woodward Biomedical Library. She recalls that, after his retirement, Dr. Dolman would come to the library to research a book he was writing on Theobald Smith, a pioneering American microbiologist. (Medical historian Richard Wolfe finished the book, *Suppressing the Diseases of Animals and Men*, posthumously. It was published in 2003.)

“He would spend hours on the bibliography,” recounts bibliographer/reference librarian Perry. “He worked with a lot

of German sources, many of which didn’t use initials, just last names. It was a great challenge for a librarian.”

Looking through the titles and publication dates in the Dolman collection online, one can literally see the history of the field of immunology. Researchers in the 1700s and 1800s, for instance, were searching for the causes of and treatment for smallpox, rabies, diphtheria, and syphilis. In the early 20th century it was diphtheria and tuberculosis.

This priceless collection of rare books, written by the greatest medical minds of their time, is just part of Dr. Dolman’s legacy at UBC. In 1946, at the request of UBC president Norman Mackenzie, Dolman surveyed 22 American and all 11 Canadian medical schools for his *Report on a Survey of Medical Education*. In it he recommended that BC settle for nothing less than a first-class medical school on the UBC campus.

Having seen a few books from the Dolman collection, this writer is struck as much by their physical beauty and undiminished lustre as by their age. An English volume contains pages of precise illustrations of microbes. In a German one, the text is printed in an archaic, almost medieval-looking font. No matter what the language, however, the knowledge, work and history within these pages is unmistakable, and humbling. ■