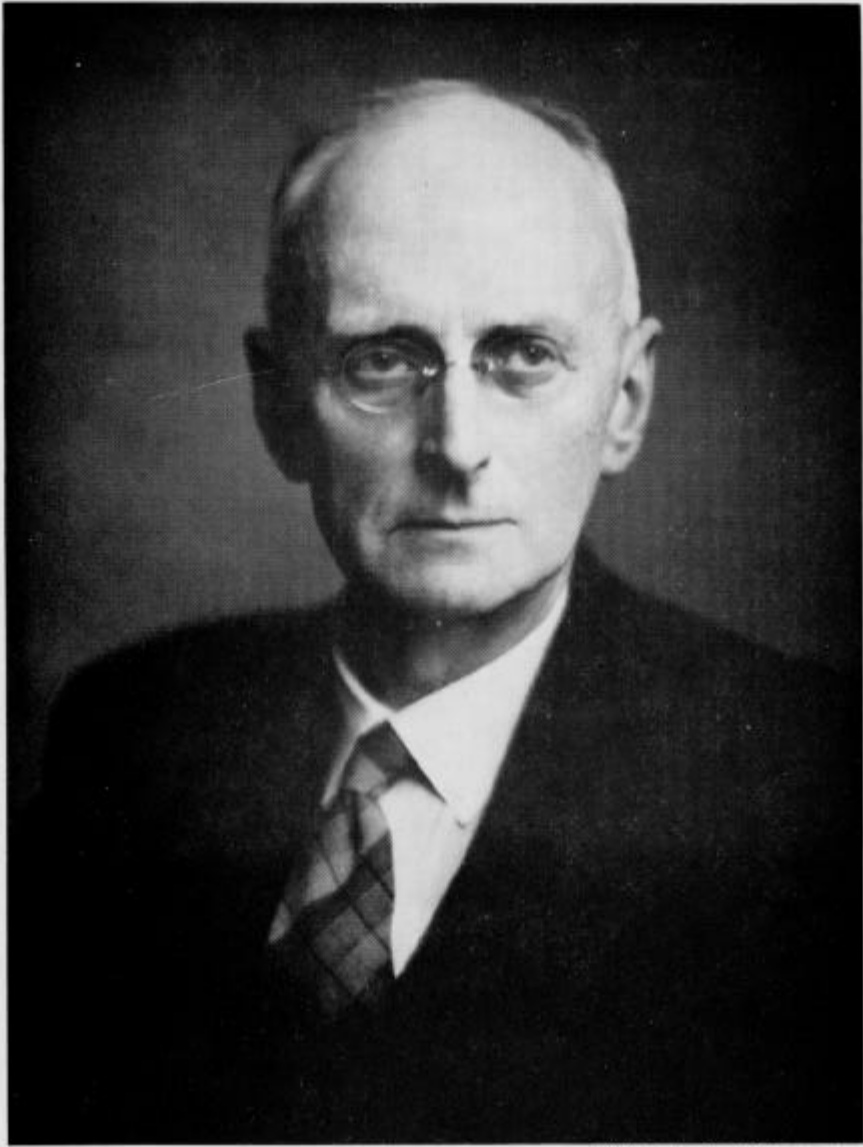


PLATE XCVIII



Photograph by Walter Stowman, 1947

ERIC ARTHUR BARBER

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1888–1965

ERIC ARTHUR BARBER was born on 18 October 1888 at 'Eversleigh', Wellington, Shropshire, the home of his parents, Arthur Mitchell Barber and Edith Mary Barber (*née* Ferguson). He was the eldest of six children, two boys and four girls. His father's family had founded and owned the Wellington firm of auctioneers and valuers known as 'Barber and Son', which had enjoyed great prosperity. His mother's family, who came from Scotland to London, were cloth merchants of standing in the City. The immediate family circle was wide and happy and in his last years Eric Barber often looked back with pleasure on his early childhood days.

In September 1896 he was sent as a day-boy to The Old Hall, Wellington, and in January 1898 as a boarder to The Limes, Shrewsbury. From there he was transferred to a new school, Mill Mead, founded by W. Deedes on the outskirts of Shrewsbury, where he made rapid progress in both Latin and Greek and rose to be Head of the School.

In March 1901 he competed for Entrance Scholarships at Shrewsbury School, and came out top of the list, being awarded the Old Salopian Scholarship. He joined the school the same year and became a member of Rigg's Hall; he rapidly moved from the lower fifth to be top in the annual examination of the sixth, becoming Head Boy in September 1904 just before his sixteenth birthday.

Education in the sixth at Shrewsbury in 1902–6, the four years Barber spent in the form, was mainly classical, and in this he distinguished himself. He owed much, as he later often acknowledged, to the inspired teaching and guidance of the Revd. E. W. Huntingford, a Wykehamist and former Postmaster of Merton College. A certain number of hours were also spent on mathematics, to which Barber never felt drawn, and Sunday afternoons were given to Divinity, which meant the Greek Testament, and sometimes to Tennyson's 'In Memoriam'. There was no instruction of Modern Languages, Modern History, or English Literature. Barber had also a certain aptitude for most games, but never advanced beyond a limited proficiency in any

of them. However, he represented his House in cricket, association football, and running.

In March 1906 he sat for the Classical Scholarships Examination held by New College, Magdalen, and Corpus Christi Colleges and was awarded the first scholarship by New College, taking up residence in October 1906.

Dr. Spooner was then Warden, and the Classical Tutors were H. E. Butler and H. L. Henderson, but their teaching was notably assisted by that of Gilbert Murray, who had recently returned to Oxford and was living there as a private person. Barber went to Butler for Latin and Murray for Greek and his industry and ability were rewarded in March 1908 when he obtained a First Class in Honour Moderations. He was also honourably mentioned for the Hertford Scholarship in the following term. In Moderations his Special Books, besides Greek Tragedy, were Theocritus and Catullus with Propertius, on all of whom he was later to lecture and write.

In Trinity Term 1908 he started reading Greats, but his real interest remained with literature and before long he decided to offer 'Alexandrian Poetry' as a Special Subject. It was indeed largely due to a good mark in this, for Barber always disliked philosophy, that in July 1910 he was placed in the First Class of Greats, having previously secured the Second Craven Scholarship and won the Ireland. His continued interest in Hellenistic Literature led him to submit in 1911 an essay on 'Some Aspects of Alexandrian Poetry', which won the Charles Oldham Prize of that year.

As no Modern Languages were taught at Shrewsbury during the years Barber had spent there, it was not until after Moderations that he began to learn French and German. To perfect his knowledge of German he visited Germany in 1909 and returned there in the following summer. He was very favourably impressed by what he saw during those two visits, and even termed himself a 'Germanophil' at the time. His continental travels also took him later to Greece, where in the company of Maurice Platnauer, who had succeeded him as Head Boy at Shrewsbury, he visited the main archaeological sites.

In September 1910 Barber went as a temporary master to Winchester College, but was soon back in Oxford to sit for Fellowship Examinations at Merton and Magdalen Colleges. He was elected to the Prize Fellowship at Merton College (then worth £200 per annum) for seven years; his election was in fact announced to him as he was writing his Magdalen College

Fellowship Examination Papers in the Hall there. He was subsequently elected to the Derby scholarship.

Thus in January 1911, after a year of academic triumphs, he came into residence at Merton. Nevertheless in Trinity Term 1911 he obtained leave of absence to join Marburg University, chiefly because the professoriate there included Theodore Birt and Ernst Maas. However, he found Marburg rather disappointing and so Michaelmas Term 1911 saw him back at Merton, where he continued his work until Hilary Term 1912, when he was invited to join Exeter College to assist L. R. Farnell in the classical teaching.

At Exeter, where Dr. Jackson was still Rector, Barber was received with warmth. He was appointed a College Lecturer in the following term and then took up residence in Exeter College, but it was not till October 1913, when he was made a Tutorial Fellow and a Moral Tutor that he resigned his Merton Fellowship.

When the First World War broke out the college asked Barber to act as Sub-rector. Meanwhile he had joined the O.U.O.T.C. and, after having applied for a commission in the Shropshire R.H.A., he was commissioned in 1915 as 2nd Lieutenant in the 3rd/4th battalion of the King's Shropshire Light Infantry. He was soon promoted to Lieutenant and in the late summer of 1916 he and other officers, who had been classified medical grade 'B', were sent to a battalion of the Yorkshire Regiment, which proceeded to Chelmsford, where it formed part of the East Coast Defences. Despite unwelcome duties as Catering Officer, Barber took the opportunity to attend courses in Modern Greek at King's College, London, arranged by the army authorities and, as a result of this, was posted to the Postal Censorship at Liverpool, being mainly concerned with letters in Modern Greek and German. He remained there more than a year, till he was transferred to the London headquarters of the Censorship.

Meanwhile application for his services had been made by the Intelligence Branch of the British G.H.Q., Salonika, and in February 1918 he went to Salonika and was attached to General Headquarters, where he was employed in various intelligence jobs till he was sent to hospital in September with a bad attack of malaria. He had just rejoined his unit when the armistice was declared, and he was demobilized on 7 May 1919, after having been mentioned in Dispatches for his services with the Salonika Expeditionary Force.

Barber returned to Oxford in Trinity Term 1919, where he was reappointed Sub-rector at Exeter College, an office which he held with great success during the difficult post-war years. He at once resumed his scholarly and teaching activities, and lived in college till 1924. In that year he married Alice Madeleine Gaudard of Vevey, Switzerland, whom he had met in 1921 as a nurse in the Acland Home, when he was undergoing an operation. Barber's restrained nature combined with his deep devotion to scholarship and teaching had created the impression among his friends that he was a confirmed bachelor, but soon in his happy home life those who had known him earlier could hardly believe that he had ever been one. There was one child of the marriage, Giles Barber, born in 1930, who survives him and is at present an Assistant Librarian at the Bodleian Library and a Fellow of Linacre College.

After having been made Senior Tutor and for a time Dean of Exeter College, Barber was elected Rector on 26 September 1943, an office which he held with great distinction till 1956, when his failing health obliged him to retire. But even after his retirement to his new home in North Oxford it was not to a life of idleness or leisure that he turned. He undertook with all his characteristic thoroughness and conscientiousness to edit a Supplement to the *Greek-English Lexicon* of Liddell-Scott-Jones, which in spite of his declining health he saw through to completion. It was a great joy for him and his friends to learn a few days before his death on 24 May 1965 that the manuscript had gone to the press.

Eric Arthur Barber was a born scholar. Endowed with a memory of extraordinary accuracy, a penetrating critical faculty, and a voracious appetite for scholarly work, he won an international reputation in the fields of Alexandrian Literature and of Roman Elegy. He combined the 'elegance' of the old Shrewsbury tradition with the learning of a more modern type.

He wrote with astonishing ease both classical languages, and delighted in composing Greek and Latin verses. Many are the elegant epigrams he wrote upon various occasions, from the deaths of kings and queens (as, for example, the one published in the *Sunday Times* on the death of Queen Mary), to the birthdays of friends, or the publication of one of their new books. One of his most brilliant efforts in verse composition was the translation of Catullus' 'Come Berenices' into a Callimachean 'original', into which the then known fragments of the original were incorporated. This he contributed to *Greek Poetry and Life*, the

volume of essays presented to Gilbert Murray on his seventieth birthday, and he was much amused when one of the most distinguished Oxford scholars suggested only one 'improvement' which happened to be in an original Callimachean fragment that Barber had included in his Greek version.

As already in 1910-14, his first interest after World War I was in Greek rather than in Latin authors, and in later Greek rather than in classical. Many of his publications were in collaboration with other scholars. Thus, together with J. U. Powell, whom he met for the first time as his assessor in Greats, he edited the first two series of *New Chapters in the History of Greek Literature* (Oxford, 1921, 1929)—the first of which was also translated into Italian—to which Barber also made significant contributions of his own, and he became a co-editor with Gilbert Murray, Cyril Bailey, T. F. Higham, and C. M. Bowra of *The Oxford Book of Greek Verse* (1930). Besides the various articles which he published in learned journals, he also wrote the chapter on Alexandrian Literature in volume seven of the *Cambridge Ancient History*, and the section of 'Alexandrian Literature' in *The Hellenistic Age* (Cambridge University Press, 1923). Some years later he wrote the articles on Alexandrian Poetry and on all the important Alexandrian poets in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, as well as the section 'Hellenistic Poetry' in M. Platnauer's *Fifty Years of Classical Scholarship* (Oxford, 1954). Nor should the many contributions he made to R. Pfeiffer's monumental edition of Callimachus be omitted, or his articles (some in collaboration with Paul Maas) on the same author published later in the *Classical Quarterly* and the *Classical Review*.

Though he continued to review for the *Classical Review* most books on Hellenistic poetry until after World War II (and those reviews include significant observations on great books like U. v. Wilamowitz Möllendorff's *Hellenistische Dichtung*, or R. Pfeiffer's *Callimachus*), and was one of *Gnomon's* reviewers in that field, he was also deeply involved in Latin literature, as his long review of O. L. Richmond's *Propertius*, published in the *Journal of Roman Studies* in 1929, shows.

This led to the Butler and Barber edition of *The Elegies of Propertius* (Oxford, 1933), which owes to Barber himself a greatly improved text and a masterly introduction. Twenty years later, after a thorough examination of Roman elegy—Barber had also worked on a full critical edition of Catullus, which unfortunately he never concluded—he crowned his Propertian studies by editing that poet's works in the series of Oxford

Classical Texts. Nor do Barber's publications contain anything like all his scholarly work, for he made significant contributions to the writings of others, and much remains in the notes of his highly annotated working library.

Barber's pre-eminence as a scholar is attested not only by the fact that he was among the first—though still very young—to be appointed when the University Lectureships in Greek and Latin Language and Literature were instituted in the mid-twenties, but also that in 1936 he was made a Fellow of the British Academy, and in due course Honorary Fellow of Merton, New College, and Exeter College, Oxford, as well as Honorary Litt.D. of Trinity College, Dublin. Moreover, he was repeatedly elected a member of the Board of the Faculty of Literae Humaniores as well as the General Board; he represented the Oxford Philological Society on the Classical Journals Board, and acted as its honorary Secretary and as its President. He was also elected President of the Oxford Branch of the Classical Association. In fact, so great was his ability in both Greek and Latin, that he was considered for both the Chairs of Greek and Latin at Oxford, when they fell vacant, and it was his distinction on both sides—so it was rumoured at the time—that had militated against his success. Nor should the services which he rendered to classical scholarship after his retirement be underrated, for the compilation of the supplement to the *Greek-English Lexicon* of Liddell-Scott-Jones was a significant and exacting undertaking.

Barber was not only a scholar of international reputation and a pioneer in Britain in the field of Alexandrian Poetry, but also an admirable teacher and tutor. Except for the years 1915-18, he lectured regularly in the Sub-Faculty of Greek and Latin Languages and Literature from 1912. His staple lectures were on Theocritus, Propertius, and the Histories of Tacitus. From time to time he also lectured on Virgil, Thucydides, Callimachus, Plautus, Catullus, on Greek and Latin Syntax, on Alexandrian Poetry, and on the Greek Influence on Roman Poetry. He delivered his lectures at little more than dictation speed, for which many of his audience were grateful, for they missed nothing of their admirable accuracy and penetrating criticism, usually textual criticism. The less gifted, however, tended to become impatient, and were apt to call them 'dry'.

And not only as a lecturer, but even more so as a tutor Barber was first-rate. It was rarely that Exeter could not boast a number of First Classes in 'Mods' out of all proportion to the size of the college. In fact out of 128 pupils between the wars

twenty-one got Firsts. For Barber really enjoyed teaching and it was reluctantly that some years after his election to the Rectorship of Exeter College he was obliged to give it up because of the pressure of work. Many are his pupils who remember his exacting and scholarly tutorials, and who later corresponded with him expressing their gratitude, or sought further guidance and advice.

The respect that the Fellows of Exeter College had for Barber as a scholar and as a colleague led to his election to the Rectorship on the death of Dr. R. R. Marett in 1943. His complete integrity, his long experience in all sides of college and university life, made Barber an excellent Head of a College. Conservative in his views, but also forward looking, by no means 'old-fashioned', he was able to strike the happy compromise necessary to tackle the many difficult problems and the increasing changes in Oxford life that the Second World War brought in its wake. His outstanding honesty and silent humanity always found an 'equitable' solution without any trace of 'favouritism' or 'snobbism'. Some found his apparent reserve, which in his later years was combined with an ascetically austere appearance, forbidding, and his wry humour was often disconcerting. But when one had penetrated deeper, one always discovered the kindest of natures combined with a deep sense of responsibility and a warm interest in the young. 'If', as it has been said, 'the world did not come up to his high standards, he shrugged his shoulders, but bore it no malice.' The generous hospitality he extended to so many both younger and older people in Oxford, helped by the charm and kindness of Mrs. Barber, brought the Rector's Lodgings at Exeter College back to life when at the end of the war they were renovated and made more suitable for modern times. And entertaining in the immediate post-war years was by no means a simple matter.

Barber had little to do with University politics. He was content with the administrative duties in his own college—he continued to the end to write nearly all his vast correspondence in longhand and carried in his head the names of all the Exeter undergraduates who were in residence—and with his scholarly research and his own home life. It was with profound sorrow that his colleagues saw him resign in 1956, owing to his failing health. It is indeed fortunate that his handsome and aristocratic appearance has been retained in the excellent portrait, painted by Annigoni in 1954, which now hangs in the Hall of Exeter College.

C. A. TRYPANIS