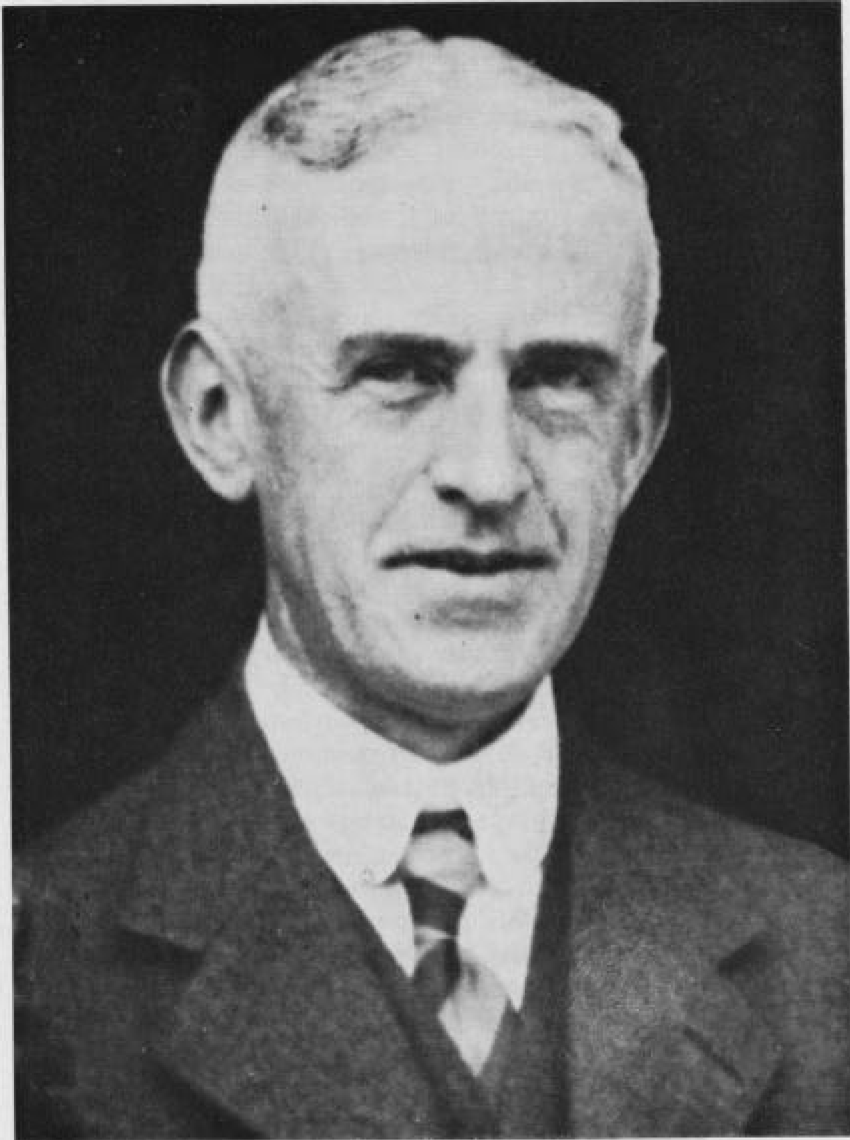
PLATE XXXV



*Photograph by the 'Glasgow Herald and Evening Times'*

ANDREW BROWNING

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# ANDREW BROWNING

1889–1972

ANDREW BROWNING was born in Dennistoun, Glasgow, on 28 March 1889. His father, Daniel Browning, the managing director of a firm of picture-frame makers, was a man of many talents. His obituary in the parish journal well describes some gifts which he transmitted to his son, in saying that he was 'versed in all forms of procedure, methodical and punctilious in their application, brilliant in exposition, and having at his command a rare gift of reasoning in speech'. He was a justice of the peace, widely active in public affairs, and stood as a Liberal candidate in the general election of 1918. In the fine stone-built house at 4 Clayton Terrace (a part of Glasgow which now stands high in the regard of admirers of Victorian buildings) he collected a library of four or five thousand volumes. His wife's wedding-present to him was a set of Richardson's novels. One can understand why Andrew was often a little surprised to find undergraduates whose homes had not supplied them with what he called an elementary knowledge of English Literature. His mother, Agnes McDougald, had high intelligence and strong character, and he greatly revered her. His brothers Robert (b. 1884), Daniel (b. 1886), and David (b. 1894) were all able men. Robert took Honours in Mathematics, and qualified in Law, before finding his role in life as a journalist; Daniel was a promising scientist, who died young in an accident; and David took a first in Classics at Glasgow, read English at Balliol as a Snell Exhibitioner, and is well known for several excellent books of lexicography and reference. Andrew went to Whitehill School, Dennistoun, a nursery of talent in the best Scottish tradition, which only a few years later taught Peter Alexander, who became Professor of English at Glasgow and a Fellow of the Academy. Browning left school in 1907 as the principal prize-winner of the final year, with Scottish Leaving Certificate passes in Higher Greek, Latin, French, German, Mathematics, and English, and already trained to write the beautifully neat Pitman's shorthand which he used in academic work for the rest of his life. Of History he would have been taught little at school: such was the fashion in Scotland then, and in much later days. There is, however, a story which

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he once told, that as a small boy he read an account of the Crusades, in which the Christians 'slew 8,000 Paynim in a single battle for the loss of only one of themselves'. Even at that tender age he thought that it could not be genuine history, and he determined, there and then, to devote himself to the pursuit of the true facts about the past. However much this story owes to afterthought, it corresponds perfectly with his mature interests and abilities, which lay in the discovery of truth amid prejudice, exaggeration, and error, and the exposition of it by the clearest possible means.

In October 1907 he entered the University of Glasgow. History had been recognized there, in the Faculty of Divinity, since the first professor of Ecclesiastical History assumed office in 1721.[1] In the Faculty of Arts, however, which until the end of the nineteenth century was dominated by classical, philosophical, and mathematical studies, there had been no formal instruction in post-classical History until the Chair of History (founded in 1893) was occupied in the following year by Richard Lodge. Opportunities of employment for History graduates in Scottish schools were still so few that the early success of the Glasgow History department in attracting students, some of them destined to become scholars of real note,[2] had been rather remarkable. Browning at once made his mark. His teachers were able men, in diverse ways. The professor, Dudley Julius Medley,[3] has been underestimated by those who attach supreme importance to published work. His lectures to the first-year class were the main reason why so many good students came to realize that History in a university was something well worthy of their best efforts. He had, in fact, the best qualities of a good Oxford college tutor. Not only so, but his practical judgement was so good that Browning continued to consult him after he had succeeded him in the same chair in 1931. Two junior colleagues of Medley whom Browning specially remembered, K. K. M. Leys[4] and E. S.

[1] The title of the inaugural lecture of 1721, 'On the Credibility of History', had inevitably a special appeal for Browning.

[2] e.g. J. L. Morison (1875–1952), a member of Lodge's first Honours Class, later Professor of Modern History in the University of Durham.

[3] Undergraduate at Keble College, Oxford, 1880–3; subsequently lecturer and tutor at Keble. Professor of History at Glasgow, 1899–1931. T. F. Tout was a rival candidate in 1899.

[4] Undergraduate at Glasgow, then at Merton College, Oxford, from 1900 to 1903. On staff at Glasgow, 1904–9. Fellow of University College, Oxford, 1909–42.

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Lyttel,[1] were, like Medley himself, graduates of Oxford, though Leys had first studied at Glasgow. A powerful influence of a different kind came from W. S. McKechnie, a Glasgow graduate in Law who was lecturer in Constitutional Law and History (a post independent of Medley) and had recently published his celebrated *Magna Carta* (1905). Browning won first place in every class in the History and the Constitutional departments, and greatly distinguished himself also in the non-historical subjects which had to be taken as part of the degree course. He was the best student, in fact, that the History department had ever had, and his record was scarcely equalled for another twenty-five years. A surviving essay, dated 23 March 1911, entitled 'Did Queen Elizabeth ever intend to marry?', was probably kept because he later thought that it showed the best that he could do at that stage of his life. It confirms the recollections of some of his contemporaries that his technique and style reached maturity when he was still an undergraduate. Without ever citing what modern writers had thought on the subject, he applied his logic to the intrinsic problems of the matter, so that he almost seemed to be reading the thoughts of the Queen herself. The essay of this young man, who was himself destined never to marry, concludes as follows:

> If Elizabeth ever intended to marry, why did she not do so? There never was any lack of suitors of all characters, appearances, and opinions. They stood in queues at the palace gate, and Elizabeth's councillors and people clamoured that they—some of them, or any of them, they could never agree—should be admitted. But Elizabeth never intended to marry. Her main feelings were vanity, love of power, and desire for her country's welfare. These were all better served by suitors than by husbands.

Already in this essay can be seen the qualities which were to win the Stanhope Prize at Oxford two years later.

In the late autumn of 1911[2] Browning gained 'an excellent first' at Glasgow. After a year at home, working, for part of the time, as an 'assistant' to Medley in the marking of undergraduate work, he went to Balliol, in October 1912, as the senior Brackenbury scholar in History (his junior colleague was B. H. Sumner, the future Warden of All Souls). His career at Balliol

[1] Undergraduate at University College, Oxford. Stanhope Prize, 1908. On staff at Glasgow, 1909–10. Professor at Southampton, 1911–34.

[2] Honours examinations at Glasgow were at this period held in the autumn, not in early summer.

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was unusual. The balance of his Honours course at Glasgow had been decidedly 'pre-modern', and Browning went to Oxford with interests mainly medieval, and was already well able to read manuscripts. So in 1912 he began work on an edition of Glanville's *De Legibus Anglie*, for the degree of B.Litt., under H. W. C. Davis. In later years, with the examples of both himself and Davis in mind, he used to argue that medieval research was an exceedingly good foundation for a career in Modern History. In October 1913, however, he changed course. 'At the request of the college authorities' (as he later wrote) 'I desisted for the moment from my research-work, and devoted eight months to a course of study for the B.A.' The reason is not known, but perhaps Balliol was afraid of gaining too few firsts in History in 1914. Browning did not disappoint the college: his lowest mark, and that came in only one paper (Political Thought), was *αβ*. Among the other firsts of that year were V. H. Galbraith, his closest friend at Balliol, and Harold Laski of New College, whom Browning admired, despite their manifest differences of outlook, and who admired Browning in return, and in later years spoke of him as 'one of the best historians in Britain'. In 1913 Browning had won the Stanhope prize for an essay on *Thomas Osborne, Earl of Danby and Duke of Leeds*. It turned his interests for the first time to the seventeenth century, and probably caused the choice of 'The Revolution of 1688' as his Special Subject in the examination of 1914. *Danby* was to grow upon him, as the years passed, until the book became his main interest, and the subject of his *magnum opus*. But the end of that story lay, in 1914, beyond two wars, and nearly forty years onward.

Browning's character had many paradoxes. He believed almost passionately that documents were not an end in themselves, but only the beginning of an historian's labours, yet three of his five major volumes consist of admirable editions of texts. He was shy by nature, yet his department was noted for its uncommon friendliness to both staff and students. He was a bachelor, and nervous of women, yet had a number of cordial, though cautious, friendships with those who reached his rather high standards of intelligence and good looks. Most remarkable of all, perhaps, his intensely local Glasgow patriotism, though it utterly excluded any appreciation of the virtues of Edinburgh, allowed him to settle most happily in Balliol. Few of the stream of Glasgow men who have taken the high road thereto, since before the time of Adam Smith, can have had such a love of the place, though he would have refused to countenance the word

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love as a description of his own feelings for anything. He had pictures of the college in his bedroom, remembered it generously in his will, and always spoke of it with an unmistakable flicker (which with him meant a great deal) of warmth. One of his very last letters praises the college's tradition of undergraduate teaching. The college, though it rarely saw him in later years, liked him and his eccentricities. When he retired in 1957, the senior tutor sent him a postcard hoping that Balliol would see more of him in future, and added, rather daringly, 'it might be far from a bad thing, on both sides perhaps, if we did'.

On the purely academic side, of course, the Oxford of 1912–14 could hardly have failed to appeal to him. Later, he described the main influences outside his own college as being C. H. Firth, Paul Vinogradoff, Ernest Barker, A. G. Little, and Falconer Madan. In college, after suspending his work on Glanville, he worked for the Honours school under Davis and A. L. Smith. Smith gave him and Galbraith tuition together, and Galbraith well remembered, long afterwards, the unfailing first-class quality of the essays read by Browning on European History from 919 to 1273. Some of them survive, with careful shorthand notes (in Browning's hand) of Smith's comments. They are of much interest as evidence of the standards and the methods of those days. The style has much of Macaulay in its clarity and use of antithesis, but it avoids his tendency to exaggerate. Yet though Browning greatly admired Smith,[1] his chief debt was to Davis, and he made no doubt about it.[2] There was some considerable resemblance between pupil and master, for much of what has been said of Davis[3] reminds one of Browning: the knowledge that seems limitless, the natural reserve, the piercing eye bent upon the inquirer, the dedication of talents to pursue the one thing that is needful. Happily, Browning has left on record something of what Davis taught his pupils about the way to study History:

> Nearly twenty years ago [i.e. in 1914] I paid the customary visit to my tutor, the late Professor H. W. C. Davis. Mr. Davis, as he then was, was never a man of many words, and his parting advice to me was short and to the point. Study and research in history, he assured me, were valueless, and apt to become seriously misdirected, unless accompanied

[1] See Browning's remarks on Smith, quoted in H. W. C. Davis, *Balliol College* (ed. of 1963 by R. H. C. Davis), p. 239.

[2] In the paper cited immediately below, Browning refers to his relation with Davis as that of a pupil to a 'great master'.

[3] J. R. H. Weaver, *H. W. C. Davis* (1933), p. 25.

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by teaching; teaching of history was bound to be uninspiring, empty of all genuine content and even definitely mischievous, unless accompanied by study and research.[1]

Throughout his career Browning continued to hold (in his own words) that 'study and teaching, investigation and practical application in history necessarily go together, that history is not a pure academic subject, but must have some message within the grasp of ordinary men and women if it is to justify its existence'. From this sprang the peculiar strength of his teaching, and also his fears that professional historians might kill their subject by 'sitting in isolation, writing for steadily diminishing audiences, as if there were something shameful in making things so clear, interesting, and to the point, that ordinary mortals should care to read about them'.[2] These views were, no doubt, in origin essentially his own, but his work with Davis had given them a new force. At no time did it ever seem to cross his mind that many writers were obscure or dull because they could not help it; or if it did, he thought that they had no business to publish their work at all.

In October 1914 he returned to Glasgow as assistant to Medley. He travelled twice to Oxford, within the next couple of months, to compete for fellowships at All Souls and at Magdalen, but without success; the fact that he tried, when he already had a post at home, perhaps shows a wish to continue to work under the influence of Davis, and if he had been elected he would perhaps have never ceased to be primarily a medievalist. When he did start work at Glasgow, the Great War at once radically changed his position. Since poor eyesight for long frustrated his efforts to join the Army, he was appointed, late in 1914, to take over the lectures of a colleague who had been called up, and he had to write a year's course, at the shortest notice, on British History to 1485, instead of performing only the usual duties of an assistant, which were marking and tutorial work. When McKechnie was elected to the chair of Conveyancing in 1916, Browning took over also, as a stopgap, his lectures in Constitutional Law and History. In the evenings he gave help to the depleted editorial staff of the *Glasgow Herald*. It was he

[1] From an unpublished lecture, 'The Study of History', written about 1933. It is characteristic of Browning that the only criticism of Davis which was ever heard from him was that Davis countenanced the use of the nickname 'Fluffy' for himself, a liberty which doubtless struck a former Glasgow undergraduate, in 1911, as very peculiar.

[2] From the same lecture.

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who wrote the leading article for 20 May 1916, which celebrated the first introduction of 'summer-time' on the next day, with an explanation of the technical problems of chronology. This was indeed to make History come 'within the grasp of ordinary men and women'. He always did that kind of work extremely well. In later years, when students asked for good examples of essay-writing, he would often, in all seriousness, suggest looking at the leading articles 'in one of the better newspapers'. At last he was called up in 1917, trained as a gunner, and commissioned in the Royal Garrison Artillery. He served for the rest of the war in an A.A. unit at Gosport. Not until January 1919 did he return to the University of Glasgow, where he found almost all the permanent staff of the History department to be dispersed on war-service, and had 'to start lecturing on stuff that I had never lectured on before, within ten days'.

Though Browning at the time disliked military service, and was appalled by the waste of talent which resulted from the indiscriminate drafting of university graduates into the infantry, he fully realized that his Army experience had taught him much that was of great value in his work. An obvious fruit of the war was the interest in military history, and in tactics, which appears in such places as the discussion of naval warfare in his *Age of Elizabeth,* a remarkable school book written at the invitation of John Buchan. But it was also salutary for him to live, for the first time, at close quarters with quite ordinary men; as may be seen in these two extracts from an unpublished lecture on *Civil and Military Authority under the Later Stuarts*:

> A certain Sergeant Baldock, the lineal ancestor, no doubt, of the sergeants whom many of us met during the war, feeling himself rather chilly, seized upon the coals intended for the use of the main guard, and proceeded to employ them to make a fire for himself. The guard not unnaturally objected . . .[1]

> Soldiers were, and are, very like schoolboys, who delight in nothing more than in picturing their master being subjected to the same punishments as too often fall to their own lot.

His return to Glasgow after the war marked the end of his modest wanderings. Though he applied for chairs in Belfast, London, Sheffield, and Aberdeen before his eventual succession to Medley's chair in 1931, all the rest of his life was, in fact, to be spent where it had begun. Since he enjoyed none of the variety which arises from changes of post, or from family life, his main

[1] Cf. *Memoirs of Sir John Reresby* (ed. Browning, 1936), pp. 479–82.



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stimulus came from the comings and goings of colleagues and students. Fortunately, the years between the wars supplied him with many of each who were both able and congenial. His knowledge of everything that he needed to know about them was wide, accurate, and sympathetic, and his willingness to take trouble on their behalf was without limit. By the end of the Great War Medley was over sixty, and not in good health. Browning thus held a large share of responsibility for a department with more than six hundred students, arranged in a series of classes, which spread over four years of study. The administration was a serious task, but a colleague of the early twenties well remembers that when Medley was ill, and Browning had to take over not only the running of the department, but also the lectures to Medley's classes, 'we juniors got the impression that he did it all very well, and all in his stride'.

After his appointment to the chair in 1931, he reorganized the classes to some extent, but followed still the old and excellent tradition by which the professor himself gave a full course of some 75 lectures to the first-year class. Custom then made it necessary for the professor also to conduct most of the departmental administration, but what he did leave to his staff he also knew perfectly well how to do himself, in the same way as he was able, if need be, to lecture to any class in the department. Naturally, his omnicompetence caused some nervousness in his juniors, especially since, as one of them has said, 'he was not exactly severe, or austere, or forbidding, but one hesitated to indulge in extravagant or fatuous remarks in his presence'. He proved to be very far from conservative in his view of the work of his department. As professor of 'History' he felt that he had a duty to promote interest in any branch of the subject which was not clearly (like Scottish History) the province of some other department, provided that it could be well taught, and that students were available. He was a pioneer in the promotion, in British Universities, of the study of History after 1914. He held that University historians ought all to have two 'periods': one known in original sources, and a secondary period which they knew well enough to teach, or might sometimes even be able, because less burdened with detail, to teach better than their first love. He made himself a very competent authority, in the second sense, on the History of the U.S.A., and after the Second World War, was anxious to secure an American citizen as a permanent lecturer on that subject in his department, though in the end he had to admit that practical difficulties made it wiser to look at

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home for an incumbent. Another of the paradoxes of his character was that though he had never once left the British Isles, he was anxious that European History be taught from a continental point of view, and especially that the Central and Eastern viewpoint be given weight; the result was the appointment of a distinguished scholar, with continental family connections, to a new lectureship in East European History. Though Ancient History could not be taught in his department, he was personally very well informed on the subject, and believed that the study of medieval and modern history, in his own time, had been damaged by the neglect of it among historians in general.

Naturally, his great catholicity of knowledge, combined with sound judgement and with an ability to make up his mind quickly, without being affected by inessentials, made him not only an extremely good examiner, but also an admirable critic of a draft. He disliked literary flourishes and mannerisms, and discouraged the use of pretentious phrases which the writer did not himself completely understand. In the margin of an essay by a first-year student, who had observed that the English archers at Crécy decimated the French cavalry, he wrote dryly: 'If they had only been decimated, the French would not have taken very much notice.' The general lesson behind this etymological note did not pass altogether over the head of the student.

Browning's circumstances at Glasgow affected both the nature of his research, and its subject-matter. After the First World War, as he once explained in a rare moment of confidence, he found it hard to resume his medieval studies because, until D. C. Douglas and G. O. Sayles became lecturers at Glasgow in 1924, he had no colleagues with whom he could share such interests; and it so happened that Davis's mind had turned, after the war, to quite modern history, and thus to resume the old relation with him was not easy. And so from the very early 1920s Browning not only conducted an Honours course at Glasgow on 'The English Revolution', but made himself, within a few years, a leading authority on the later seventeenth century in England. The slight essay of 1913 on Danby clamoured to be made into a big book, and soon there developed also a plan to re-edit the *Memoirs of Sir John Reresby*, which was available only in bad printed texts. For so scrupulous a writer these tasks were bound to be lengthy, and a cause of anxiety. The delay over *Danby* became something of a joke among his friends, though nobody doubted that the book would, in the end, be worth waiting for. It was presented in typescript for a D.Litt. at Glasgow in 1930, under

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the older regulations which did not demand publication. Sir Richard Lodge, the examiner, declared that it established Browning as 'one of the soundest and most eminent of the younger school of historians'. Thereafter publication was delayed, by one cause after another, until the Second World War was upon him, and for a time he found himself once again in the Royal Artillery. That was not the only complication. In all matters concerning books he was a perfectionist, and he hated the idea of his chief work appearing on inferior wartime paper. He had arranged to publish it (since he had private means) largely at his own expense, and he tried, early in the war, to lay aside a worthy kind of paper. To his great annoyance, the paper was not available and eventually he published separately, in 1944, volume ii of *Danby*, which contained only the *Letters*, in 620 pages. Since the preface contains not a word of explanation, or anticipation of a sequel, bibliographers may well be as puzzled as were those who, in 1944, had the leisure to read the isolated volume.

At the end of the war Browning's former colleague in Glasgow, D. C. Douglas, Professor of History at Bristol, asked him to contribute the volume on the period 1660–1714 to the series of 'English Historical Documents' which Douglas was editing. Though Browning had every reason to expect an extremely busy period in his department after the war, he not only agreed, but (says Professor Douglas) 'gave the whole project, which was then very much in the balance, the support of a senior scholar'. The labour involved in his volume of 1000 pages, as his notes and drafts clearly show, was immense. The book is much more than a mere edition of texts, for its 75 pages of introductory materials contain his only published general comments on the later seventeenth century as a whole. To finish it, and see it through the press, by 1953, was a considerable achievement. Yet within the same period he published also volumes i and iii of *Danby*, which were received by specialists on the period with the utmost respect.[1] He was to publish no further books, and little else in any form, except for a masterly article on Macaulay, printed in the *Historical Journal* for 1959, which drew a letter of congratulation from G. M. Trevelyan, and with good reason, for in some ways it shows his highest intellectual powers.

Any assessment of Browning's scholarship, however, must be

[1] The most important reviews of *Danby* are in *Eng. Hist. Review* lx, 408–10, and lxvii, 268–71, by Sir George Clark, and in *Times Literary Supp.*, 10 Feb. 1945, 69, and 26 Oct. 1951, 669 (a front-page article).

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grounded mainly on *Danby*, *Reresby*, and 'English Historical Documents'. These are the works, no doubt, which won him the Fellowship of the Academy in 1955. Their merits were appreciated from the first, and time has not caused any change of opinion. Fresh discoveries make it desirable that more work be done now on *Reresby*, and perhaps another editor would make a different selection of 'Documents', but it is generally agreed that *Danby* should never need to be done again. 'Within its limits', Dr. E. S. de Beer has said,[1] 'it comes as near finality as may be.' There are some limitations. 'The book pays little or no attention' [de Beer continues] 'to Danby's departmental work as Lord High Treasurer, and contains nothing about his relations with the City of London magnates. But the general collection of letters and papers in volume ii is a major addition to the published sources of the period. For readers and teachers the book is indispensable.' It is fortunate for the criticism of Browning's work that Professor K. H. D. Haley has recently gone over many of the same materials for his study of Shaftesbury, and has thus had the opportunity to observe Browning's methods in detail. 'Each time I have had the occasion to refer back to *Danby*' [says Haley] 'my admiration for it, as a piece of political narrative, has grown. I have had occasion to go over the same sources and have always been impressed by the skill with which he has handled them, digesting a mass of material, interpreting it with perfect judgment, fitting it into its context, and constructing from it a paragraph written with the greatest economy, with scarcely a word wasted. If I have ever ventured to disagree with him on some minor point of interpretation, it has only been with the greatest trepidation.' So much for the more detailed side of the work; yet there still has to be noted the restraint of the work as a whole. 'Many biographers' [Haley continues] 'devoting so much time to their subject, would have been tempted to exaggerate his qualities and importance, but not Browning. His summing up of Danby's character and limited ideals is as sane, well balanced, and dispassionate, as everything else in the book.'

So much will be readily agreed, yet many of those who knew Browning in person probably feel that his books fail to display his full intellectual powers. Nowhere in *Danby*, nowhere even in the many pages of stimulating comment interwoven with the texts in 'English Historical Documents' are there shown the gifts which made his lectures to students so memorable, nor are

[1] The opinions of Dr. de Beer and Professor Haley are quoted from private letters written to E. L. G. Stones.

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they to be found in the books, excellent as they are, written especially for schools and university classes, save, to some extent, in *The Age of Elizabeth.*[1] His former students speak with one voice about his remarkable lectures. 'For sheer mastery, and lucidity of expression, they were unrivalled', says one of them who has had wide experience of the art. That would be expected of the author of *Danby*, but the writer goes on to say that 'the dry wit was used in a way that not only delighted the audience but also illuminated the subject'. 'I can still remember', says another, 'in my first year at Glasgow being excited by his words on the implications of free will *versus* inevitability. Indeed, I have never heard anyone to touch him as a lecturer. In the Special Subject we all realized that we were being taught by a great scholar.' The first-year class at Glasgow always contained a large number of students for whom History was in the first instance merely a stepping-stone to honours in some non-historical subject, or to a general degree, but a considerable number of these were so interested by Browning's lectures that they abandoned their original plans and were won over to the History degree. This was at a time, moreover, when Browning's competitors, so to speak, at Glasgow were lecturers so memorable as A. D. Lindsay or A. A. Bowman in Philosophy, and W. MacNeile Dixon in English.

Since the effect of his lectures was due as much to style as to delivery, it may be partly recaptured by quotation, though more than a couple of sentences would be needed to illustrate more than its very obvious features. Those who have ever heard him would have little difficulty in recognizing the author of this passage:

The obvious objections to adopting the Maid of Norway as Queen of Scots in 1286 were that she was an infant, that she was a foreigner, that she was a woman, and that she was not there. In normal circumstances it is difficult to believe that her claims to the throne would have received any serious consideration . . .[2]

or of this:

All that kept England and Scotland apart at the beginning of the sixteenth century was simply a tradition, and with the growth of the

[1] This book shows his powers of analysis and clarity of expression, but does not contain much that is inherently memorable. His *Britain as a European Power* (1921), though interesting in its plan of showing Britain as part of Europe, is rather disappointingly dull.

[2] From an unpublished lecture which, it is hoped, may be printed as an appendix in a forthcoming edition of the sources for the 'Great Cause' of 1291–2.

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spirit of enquiry which was one of the great features of the Renaissance, the tradition was required to justify itself, and failed . . .[1]

The appeal to reason, a thing strange to many beginners in History, is strong enough here, but there is also a quality which suggests the conversation with Davis in 1914:[2] a conviction that his business lay not only with the specialists for whom, in the main, he wrote *Danby*, but with ordinary, intelligent men and women. There is also a power to provoke thought about familiar things, without ever abandoning a commonsense view: exactly the power that Browning himself noted in A. L. Smith, when he said of his tuition that 'in a few sentences he could draw my attention to some aspect or interpretation of facts or developments which had simply not occurred to me before, almost as if he had suddenly opened an unnoticed window, and disclosed an unexpected view of a perfectly familiar scene.'[3]

His closest friends hoped that he might live to write a general work which would epitomize the results of his years of teaching on 'The English Revolution', and would show in abiding form the powers so evident in his lectures and informal instruction. Unhappily, though his retirement lasted from 1957 to 1972, he lost the power of concentration, and spoke rather pathetically of being surrounded by unfinished pieces of work which he knew he would never live to accomplish. What he might have written may be guessed from an unpublished paper of the 1930s entitled 'James VII', which is particularly poignant, since it shows what he could do in the analysis of political figures of the first importance, as Danby can hardly be said to be. It may be guessed even from so short a piece as the centre-page article written for *The Times* in 1958, for the 300th anniversary of the death of Oliver Cromwell; here is a leading article which may indeed be commended to undergraduates.[4] The unfulfilled promise is perhaps most strongly felt in the Macaulay article of 1959,[5] where there is a hint of the sardonic humour which though always present in the lectures, is extremely rare in his published work. For example:

Every schoolboy, by a kind of just retribution, knows Macaulay's *Essays* . . .

or

Unfortunately criticism, once fairly (or unfairly) started on its way, is

[1] From another unpublished lecture.
[2] Above, p. 431.
[3] Davis, *Balliol College*, p. 239.
[4] *The Times* newspaper, 3 September 1958.
[5] Above, p. 436.

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apt to percolate down to lower and lower strata in the intellectual world. . . . The third or fourth-rate writer is always glad of an opportunity to disparage his more gifted brother . . .

In this essay alone, his last published work, he sets down, as he was accustomed to do with his students, something of his general thoughts on historical writing from ancient until modern times. One senses a note of autobiographical melancholy when he remarks on the tragedy of an historian's overestimating what he can accomplish in his lifetime, and on Macaulay's good fortune in enjoying a happy life full of family affection and after death receiving 'a most sympathetic and convincing biography'.

Browning resigned his chair in 1957, two years before reaching the age-limit of 70. The second war had greatly tired him. In August 1939 he became a captain in the 74th A.A. Regiment, stationed in Glasgow. When term began, he appeared for his lectures in uniform, during off-duty hours at the gun-operations room. The main disadvantage, he said, was that military discipline prevented him from carrying an umbrella. Though he was released in November 1940, it was only to face shortages of lecturing staff, as his colleagues were called up, and to be deprived of his housekeeper when air-raids began in Glasgow. After the end of the war he was severely tried, not only by the need to rebuild the department as it faced the large numbers of demobilized students, but by illness, and by inevitable changes in the University, with many of which he had little or no sympathy. As an administrator he was exemplary. In particular he was an excellent Dean of the Faculty of Arts (a colleague describes him as 'patient, firm, fair, and thorough') and an outstanding convener of the committee of the Senate and Court responsible for the University Library. Yet he confessed to increasing disillusion with the trend of affairs, and in the end it needed only a collision with the Principal of the University over a relatively minor matter of administration[1] to make him decide that he had had enough. Having made the decision he proceeded to cut him-

[1] Since a newspaper obituary has suggested that the dispute arose because Browning would not accept the division of the chair of History at Glasgow, it ought to be said here that there is no truth in the statement. Browning was a strong advocate of division, but he wanted three chairs, of Medieval, Modern, and 'Contemporary' History, in order that justice might be done to the history of quite recent times, whose study in universities he had always striven to promote. He failed to obtain what he advocated, but he resigned because of a dispute on another matter, of purely administrative policy.

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self off very firmly from the University, by making himself something of a recluse in his large house at Helensburgh. In part this decision arose from a laudable wish to leave his successors (his chair having been divided into separate chairs of Medieval and Modern History) entirely free from the embarrassment of being watched by himself at close quarters after he had gone. His colleagues arranged a farewell party, at which he was given what he had chosen as a gift, a pair of binoculars made by the famous Glasgow firm of Barr & Stroud, with which to watch the ships on the Clyde from his house in Helensburgh. Thereafter they saw him far less often than they had hoped to do. He died on 8 May 1972, during a minor fire in his bedroom, but probably after a seizure had made him unconscious of it. He left his library of some 12,000 volumes to the University of Stirling, choosing a 'young' university because in an older one so many of the books would be duplicates. His research papers he left to a former colleague at Glasgow, Professor C. D. Chandaman of St. David's University College, Lampeter, with whom he had a long association in the study of the seventeenth century. They include extensive indexes of matters relating to parliamentary history. In his will he included specific legacies to the British Academy and to Balliol College, and named the Royal Historical Society as inheritor of his copyrights, and as his residual legatee.

Browning was a handsome man, with a thin aquiline face. He looked taller than his real height of about 5 feet 8 inches, and in most gatherings he stood out as one of the most distinguished men present. He disliked being photographed, however, and the only picture available to accompany this memoir is an enlargement from a group. By nature he was shy, and a student of 1914 remembers him as painfully nervous, though of course many brave men have quailed before a large first-year Scottish University class. Experience enabled him to overcome this, and in later days his sang-froid was extraordinary, especially as chairman of a difficult committee. His accent was distinctly Scots, with a musical but somewhat nasal tone which lent weight to his epigrams. His dress remained the same as habits grew less formal, so that a future Fellow of the Academy whom he interviewed as a young man at Oxford in 1937, remembers being astonished by his high stiff collar and suit of old-fashioned cut. When he became a professor in 1931, he moved at last from the family home at 4 Clayton Terrace to a large semi-detached house near the University where, until domestic difficulties

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began during the Second World War, he lived in austere comfort, tended by a housekeeper and uniformed maids, and giving dinner parties which, for all their formality, his guests found very enjoyable. He was an excellent host, because his great natural kindness enabled him to anticipate most of the wants of visitors, including even alcohol and tobacco, neither of which he touched himself. His pleasure on a great Glasgow occasion, like the fifth centenary of the University in 1951, when he was one of the most senior professors, and entertained Sir Maurice and Lady Powicke at his house for the whole week, was so deep and natural that it was a joy to his guests to share it with him. The same kindness of nature explains his happy relations with the children of his friends. For many years he was a welcome guest on Christmas Day at the house of the widow of one of his staff who had been killed during the Second World War, and in the company of her family he came as near to genuinely unbending as was possible for a man whom nobody except his own family ever dared to call by his Christian name. To the children of another family he was greatly devoted, and he kept an unobtrusive watch over that household during the Second World War, when its head was absent in the Far East, and unobtrusively intervened to help, when need arose.

With undergraduates things could never be quite so straightforward. He had no natural affinity with people who were idle, untidy, or muddled. He had a considerable fund of excellent stories, most of them perfectly true, about the confused minds of students, and he enjoyed telling them to his classes, with the result that individuals felt stupid in his presence, and these were not necessarily the least clever among them. This, however, was a purely superficial barrier. He continued the admirable tradition of Medley in never being too busy to discuss any genuine problem of either academic or of personal life. He was exceptionally shrewd in his advice. He inherited his father's aptitude for business, and was often heard to lament the dearth of practical common sense among the learned. In time of doubt or difficulty, he gave a clear and consoling impression that he had himself passed the same way before. To a former student, whose father had died before he had finished at Oxford, he wrote first with help to find employment and then added: 'Please do not waste your time on vain regrets. If your father has done much for you, the best way to repay it is by passing it on to men younger than yourself.' He used to say that academic life was peculiar since a professor really had no employer (he was speak-

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ing of the life that he had known, when a chair was truly a freehold). 'Even a doctor, in a sense, has his patients as employers: we have none.' Yet he did behave to his students with a dedicated responsibility rather like that of a doctor to his patients.

He had no ear for music, and appeared, indeed, though his own writing shows such a subtle sense of literary style, to have little use for any of the arts. Of religion he hardly ever spoke, except to condemn the effects of religious prejudice on the writing of history. He seemed to need no relaxations except for golf, which he played very well from his earliest years; but he played it very seriously, and knew the rules rather too well for the comfort of his opponents. He had a great interest in, and knowledge of, the railways of Great Britain, and more particularly those of Scotland, in an era long before the subject had become fashionable. Many excellent stories have long been told about him, but few of them can be appreciated by those who did not know the man himself. If heard in isolation, with no knowledge of the shyness which made him ward off any display of emotion by phrases of sometimes inappropriate wit, they may give a very one-sided impression. There is a tale of a temporary member of his staff, who entered the room one morning during the Second World War, and revealed, with some excitement, that her husband had been mentioned in dispatches. Browning's only comment was to say 'Favourably, I trust'. It sounds very unchivalrous, but it was not meant unkindly, for he was often embarrassed when he had to congratulate anyone on the success of a relative. He was on safer ground when dealing with groups, rather than with individuals. Every year he arranged a prize-giving ceremony in the department. It was for him a great event, full of personal memories, and perhaps the nearest thing, in his later life, to a family occasion, but he probably feared that he might show sentiment, and entrenched himself behind a barrage of uncomplimentary jesting. One such meeting he chose to open thus: 'Those of you who were present at this ceremony last year will notice that there is a larger number of students present today. This does not mean that students are getting cleverer, but merely that the brains are spread a little more thinly.'

Among his happiest hours, perhaps, were those spent in the company of his staff who, though very well aware of his foibles, were greatly devoted to him. They had the highest regard for his character, as well as for his learning; and he was, on the whole, fortunate in them too. The department attracted, over

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the years, a number of distinguished scholars, a considerable proportion of whom later became professors, and four of them Fellows of the British Academy. He was inclined to fuss too much over detail, and to worry excessively about the possibility of arousing opposition in other departments, but in general he believed in choosing good men and allowing them to work in their own way. If the work was well done he did not interfere. His support was steady and ungrudging. As one of his staff has said: 'Loyalty was one of his special qualities. You knew where you were with him, both when he approved and when he disapproved of what you did.' To which it should be added that he was unselfish in doing more departmental work than he need have done, in order to free his staff, especially in the years after 1945, when they had lost so much time on war service, to pursue their researches. Until his latest years as professor, when he was weary of the routine, he managed to invest the department with an air, as one of his staff put it, of subdued bonhomie. This, and the fact that the department was the centre of his whole life, made it especially sad that he left the University prematurely, and after a dispute. Yet by then he had achieved, in his own very individual way, a high reputation, both among those who knew him well in Glasgow (where alone was it possible to do so) and among those scholars elsewhere who knew him only by his writings. He has his own unique place in the affections of the former and in the esteem of the latter, and though sometimes his friends were inclined to think that his life was solitary and lacking in variety, he himself was modestly content with it as it was, and with his reputation among those whose judgement he valued.

E. L. G. STONES

## NOTE

Very few of Browning's letters seem to survive, but the loss has been compensated by the great kindness of his relatives, former pupils and colleagues, and friends, who have provided me with much indispensable information, and by the survival of his applications for several professorial chairs, and of a number of other papers which give details of his career, and reveal much of his attitude to historical scholarship. I hope that those who have given help will excuse the omission here of what would have been a very long list of their names. The papers, apart from those connected with his researches upon the later seventeenth century, which were bequeathed to Professor Chandaman, have been deposited in Glasgow University Archives. His copyrights were assigned to the Royal Historical Society, to whom I owe permission to

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quote from published and unpublished works in the present memoir. I am also indebted to the University of Glasgow for access to, and permission to use, official records.

The following list of Browning's publications (excluding reviews, and contributions to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* [17th edition] and to the Historical Association's *Annual Bulletin of Historical Literature* between 1930 and 1950), has kindly been supplied by Dr. Doreen J. Milne, to whom I am most grateful for making a search which proved to be a much more complex task than might have been imagined.

### (*a*) *Books*

*Thomas Osborne, Earl of Danby and Duke of Leeds.* The Stanhope Essay, 1913. Pp. 107. Oxford, 1913.

*Britain as a European Power.* Pp. 304. London & Glasgow, n.d. (1922, reissued 1928).

*The Age of Elizabeth.* Pp. 252. London, 1928; new edition, revised. Pp. xi, 292. London, 1935.

*Europe in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.* Pp. 222. London, 1931. (A History of Europe, vol. 2).

*Memoirs of Sir John Reresby.* The complete text and a selection from his letters. Edited with an introduction and notes. Pp. xlv, 626. Glasgow, 1936.

*British Political Institutions.* Pp. 52. Glasgow, 1943.

*Thomas Osborne, Earl of Danby and Duke of Leeds 1632–1712.* Vol. i, *Life*, pp. xi, 568 (1951); vol. ii, *Letters*, pp. xi, 620 (1944); vol. iii, *Appendices*, pp. 348 (1951). Glasgow, 1944–51.

*English Historical Documents 1660–1714*, edited with an introduction. Pp. xxxii, 966. London, 1953 (English Historical Documents, vol. viii).

With D. B. Horn: *Modern Europe 1648–1714.* Pp. 287. London, 1931 (A History of Europe, vol. 3).

### (*b*) *Articles and Lectures*

'The Stop of the Exchequer'. *History* xiv (1930), 333–7.

'Parties and Party Organisation in the reign of Charles II'. *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th series, xxx (1948), 21–36.

'History'. *Fortuna Domus: a series of lectures delivered in the University of Glasgow in commemoration of the fifth centenary of its foundation* (University of Glasgow, 1952), 41–57.

'Cromwell's Death and Life'. *The Times*, 3 September 1958, 11.

'Lord Macaulay 1800–1859'. *Historical Journal* ii (1959), 149–60.

With D. J. Milne: 'An Exclusion Bill Division List'. *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* xxiii (1950), 205–25.

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