Walter Bird

SIR HERBERT BUTTERFIELD

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1900–1979

HERBERT BUTTERFIELD was a wide-ranging professional historian who wrote two important books about eighteenth-century English politics and a great many books and articles about significant landmarks in the history of modern Europe. He was a professor in the Cambridge History Faculty for over twenty years, was a successful editor of the *Cambridge Historical Journal* and at his best—between 1930 and 1950—was a commanding lecturer. Yet for most of his life he was far from influential in the running of the Cambridge History Faculty, even when he wanted to be. The centre of his academic life and loyalty lay not in the faculty but in his college, Peterhouse, and the centre of his intellectual life was not professional or 'technical' history, as he chose to call it, but a tension of which he was acutely conscious between historical thinking as a profession and historical thinking as prophecy, religion, or general culture. It is from this tension that his world-wide reputation developed. It is to it that any serious intellectual obituary must be addressed.

Butterfield was born in Yorkshire in 1900. His mother was a member of the Plymouth Brethren. His father had left school at the age of ten because of his own father's premature death, and had been unable to fulfil an ambition of proceeding to the Methodist ministry. The elder Butterfield was employed first as a clerk and then as chief clerk in a Keighley wool firm whose chairman gave both father and son a good deal of literary and intellectual encouragement. Butterfield himself was educated at the local grammar school in Keighley and entered Peterhouse as a history scholar in 1919. He took the two parts of the Historical Tripos, won a number of university prizes, and in 1923 was elected to a Fellowship which he retained until his death in 1979. He was a devoted servant of the college, was a well-liked and conservative Master from 1955 to 1968, and, while Vice-Chancellor of the University from 1959 to 1961, gave many evidences of the importance that he attached to the independence of colleges in their relations with the university and of universities in their relations with the state.

When Butterfield arrived in Peterhouse the Master was the

historian, Sir Adolphus William Ward, with whom, in his role as undergraduate librarian, Butterfield was accustomed from time to time to have lunch. Butterfield was taught by and admired his tutor P. C. Vellacott (later headmaster of Harrow and Master of Peterhouse) to whom, as a life-long Conservative, he dedicated *The Whig Interpretation of History*. His main mentor in Peterhouse, however, was Harold Temperley with whom his differences would have been fundamental and disastrous if Vellacott had not eased the way. It is clear that Vellacott and Temperley recognized Butterfield's quality and protected him against administrative drudgery.

As a young don Butterfield was a friend of Michael Oakeshott, of A. D. Nock (in Nock's Christian phase), and of Charles Smyth[1] who in the nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties gave public expression in Cambridge to an Anglican version of many of the Christian opinions that Butterfield was to express after 1944. Butterfield published his first books between 1924 and 1931 at the same time that Graham Greene, Malcolm Muggeridge, and Evelyn Waugh were publishing theirs. In addition he shared many instinctive sympathies with two of his intellectual contemporaries—David Knowles, whom he brought to Peterhouse in 1944 to succeed him as a College Lecturer on his own appointment to a University Chair, and Denis Brogan, who had come from Oxford to Peterhouse on election to the University Chair of Political Science five years earlier.

As a Fellow of Peterhouse from 1923 onwards, Butterfield examined in the College Entrance Examination and taught in supervision for six hours a week in about twenty weeks of the year for twenty years before being elected to the University Chair of Modern History in 1943. By this time he had been lecturing and examining for the History Faculty for nearly fifteen years and had written books, lectures, and articles about *The Historical Novel*, *The Peace Tactics of Napoleon*, *History and the Marxian Method*, *Bolingbroke*, *The Englishman and his History*, *Napoleon*, and *The Statecraft of Machiavelli*.

Although in these years Butterfield wrote only about history,

[1] Revd. Canon C. H. E. Smyth (1903–). Fellow of Corpus Christi College Cambridge 1925–32 and 1937– . University Lecturer in History at Cambridge 1929–32 and 1944–6. Dean of Corpus 1937–46. Rector of St. Margaret's Westminster 1946–56. Author of *Cranmer and the Reformation under Edward VI* (1926), *The Art of Preaching* (1940), *Simeon and Church Order* (1940), *The Friendship of Christ* (1945), and *Cyril Forster Garbett, Archbishop of York* (1959), etc.

he was, until 1936, as he had been from the age of seventeen in Yorkshire, a lay preacher in Methodist churches in Cambridge and the surrounding villages. His sermons have not been collected. Very little preaching material appears directly in the historical writings. But it is so unlikely that he did not make connections that there must have been, inside the historical thinking that he did in these years, a submerged dissenting Christianity which was fused with it and blew up with immense trails of light between 1944 and 1956.

In the seventeen years between *The Historical Novel* and *The Statecraft of Machiavelli*, Butterfield had sketched a doctrine about history. About 'technical history' his view had been that the past should be studied for its own sake, that often it was not so studied, and that it had fallen too much into the hands of political historians for health and comprehensiveness. He argued both that total history was desirable, and that it was impossible, and he urged the need to recognize that political and diplomatic history had been wrenched out of an immense sociological totality. He believed that scientific history aimed to transcend the assumptions of the present and yet could not do so, and that the choice of assumptions was a highly significant activity. He had been self-consciously transforming them in writing both *The Whig Interpretation of History* and *History and the Marxian Method.*

The object of *The Whig Interpretation of History* was to provide warnings against the abridged history of 'the textbook historian'. But the point about the textbook historian was that, unless he was an American, he tended to be 'the very model of the nineteenth-century country gentleman'. There was a social identification, a hint that the 'country gentleman' was in imperfect sympathy with the popular feeling of his time. It was implied that there had been insincerity in the progressive front which this sort of writer maintained and a wilful determination not only to despise opponents from the past, but also to have narrow views about the proper government of the present. He was not, however, identified exclusively as a social type; he was identified also by his intellectual characteristics—as the kind of man who 'sits on his mountain top' taking 'short cuts' through the complexity of the past and, by 'subtle . . . sleight of hand', insisting, often in ignorance that he was doing this, on 'organising history on an assumption'—the assumption that the past could not only be understood in the categories of the present but should also be judged by its standards.

The demand for judgement—the 'passionate desire to come to a judgement of values'—was dismissed, both because the judgements that were likely to be entered would be premature and partial and because they were delivered with certainty and bias against Tories and Catholics. The position from which they were delivered was described as that of 'God the avenger' and this was said to be objectionable because it was Man arrogating God's powers to himself.

This theme did not dominate the book, the argument of which was mainly technical—a set of maxims for the proper conduct of historical study. But it was present as overtone and through the implication that historians were Whig not merely because of defects of sympathy and understanding but when a defective theology bred a defective range of historical techniques. This line of argument was carried further in the article *History and the Marxian Method* which Butterfield published in *Scrutiny* in 1933.

History and the Marxian Method was the outcome of an unconscious compact which Butterfield had made with those of his pupils who were Marxists—a diplomatic attempt to keep them on the rails of orthodox historical study by widening the range of 'bourgeois history'. It accepted as the 'clue' to a great deal of bourgeois thinking the assumption that 'in the last analysis ideas . . . determine the course of history', and it accepted the Marxist allegation that this sort of analysis lay 'in the centre of our bourgeois system'. It presented Marxism as a valuable ally in the fight against Whiggery and Liberalism.

In the course of the nineteen-thirties the fight was continued in three ways; in a short life of Napoleon, in successful lectures on European history which broke up the political structure of liberal scholarship, and in *The Statecraft of Machiavelli* where the chapter on 'The Rise of the Inductive Method' supplied the germ of *The Origins of Modern Science*—the doubt whether the 'men of the Renaissance' with their 'cult of antiquity' could have been as 'revolutionary' as had been imagined, whether modern thinking was as free of dependence on 'authority' as liberal scholarship had supposed, and 'whether indeed the whole transition from mediaeval to modern in the region in question [was] not more banal, less magical and portentous than it seemed to be at first view'.

So far as Butterfield offered a positive public doctrine in the nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties, he did so in passing. It did not carry him very far, and the relativism he pointed at

all positions in teaching his Peterhouse pupils was pointed in public only at the targets which he and his contemporaries identified together—the humanistic Whiggism and elevated Liberalism of the generation before his own, the lapsed Protestant virtue of which he evidently supposed that the generation before his own had contained too many examples. It was as much in rejection of the intellectual aridity of the prevailing liberalism as in positive rejection of Liberalism itself that he made theoretical justifications of some aspects of Nazism in conversation and speculated on the prospect of stalemate between England and Germany in September 1939. It was in part as a reversal of this once the Phoney War had become a real one and in part as a high-level transformation act that Christianity began to impregnate the ideas with which he had been playing so far, turning them in the process into the sort of public doctrine that was elaborated first in *The Englishman and his History* in 1944.

The Englishman and his History was an avowedly 'Whig' book. It celebrated the 'song of liberty' and identified 'our liberties' with 'our national genius for compromise'. It described the modern monarchy in these terms, showed 'our greatest innovators' from the seventeenth century onwards trying to pretend that they were 'restorers of ancient ways', and pictured the English, when great rifts had occurred, like the Reformation or the Civil War, doing their best 'to play providence upon the tears and rents' and 'seeking by a thousand little stitches to join the present with the past'. This attitude was described as giving a 'tug at the heartstrings of every Englishman'. It was 'part of the landscape of English life, like our country lanes, our November mists or our historic inns' and had never been more vivid than in 'the great speeches of 1940'.

Butterfield did not deny that Whig history, especially in its formative period in the seventeenth century, had been false history—a 'controlling abridgement' which had 'erupted upon the world as propaganda'. But the bending of history, so far from being regretted, was now treated as a virtue, bent history having become a specific against vice. Bent history was said to have its uses in bending the present to the past and to have been used with special skill by Whig statesmen who had not only been 'much greater' and 'less partisan' than the 'Whig historians' but had also had so universal an influence ('like the influence of Shakespeare on English life') that no other tradition of English political thought existed.

Leavis is supposed to have described *The Englishman and his History* as the 'higher kind of advertising'; it is better described as an attempt to bring Asquithianism to the aid of the Churchill–Attlee coalition. In describing the content of 'Whig', that is to say English, politics in the past, it gave explicit instructions about the way in which they would have to be conducted if 'presumption', 'recklessness', and 'revolutionary overthrow' were to be avoided in the future. It made a systematic consecration in a way which only Rowse and Bryant among historians did so early of the deliverance of 1940/2, and it did this with a passion which did not diminish with the years. Butterfield was never a party Conservative, though he voted in the course of his life for all three parties. Amongst contemporary English politicians only Wilson and Powell met with any considerable measure of his approval and that for the reason that, like Churchill, they had a personally distinctive manner which transcended the rancour of the average party politician. It was no merely formal piety that produced the eulogy in Great St. Mary's Church, Cambridge on Churchill's death in 1965 when Churchill was seen as the man who, out of the 'richness' of his 'internal resources' and a 'magnificent assertion of the human will', had brought rulers and people together in 1940 and made 'all differences about politics and policies seem . . . irrelevant'. In offering 'thanks to that Providence which moves through the course of ages and is in the rising of the sun', the vital points Butterfield aimed to establish for 'those who would come afterwards' were how 'sad' those days were when 'the end of the tunnel' was 'invisible' and how much the education of the democracy had owed to the 'sense of humour' of a 'hard-hitting politician' who had 'set an example of the sort of tolerance and urbanities which are necessary for the conduct of democracy—that respect for the other man's personality without which democracy will crumble into a chaos of egotisms'.

The Englishman and his History led out in three directions—towards the history of historiography, towards the reconstruction of English history, and towards systematic consideration of Christianity. Of the first, and most obvious—the history of historiography—what needs to be understood is that, although taken up by Forbes, Pocock, Ben-Israel, and others and brought to a culmination in Butterfield's *Man on his Past*, it suffered the same defect as the history of political thought—that it had

either to become a history of the whole of thought, or to present a misleading abridgement which could only be enlivened when a propagandist, like the Butterfield of *The Englishman and his History*, the missing Butterfield of the abortive *Acton*, or the Wormald of innumerable unpublished lectures, proved something through its agency.

In relation to the second, *The Englishman and his History* looked like a high-level announcement of the way in which Butterfield proposed to write history in the future. Its emphases were logical extensions of the maxims which had been laid down in *The Historical Novel*, *The Whig Interpretation of History*, *History and the Marxian Method*, and elsewhere, and were to be repeated in an article on 'The Teaching of English History' in the *Cambridge Journal* in 1948. The acid test, however, was *George III, Lord North and the People* which, though it had merits that were unrelated to the maxims and in certain limited respects demonstrated their applicability, in general did not do so. It also left the impression that the requirements of doctrine were so extensive that the post-liberal rejection of 'insulated constitutional history' could not be turned into the 'organic' history Butterfield was demanding without breaking the political backbone, which the absence of economic knowledge and his manifest obsession with ideology and political power made him unable to do.

George III, Lord North and the People was the last serious statement that Butterfield made about the history of England. There were a few subsequent articles and lectures, and there were asides in most of the later works. But the book on the transition from 'aristocratic' to 'democratic' government, if it was ever conceived, was not written, and nor was the book, for which much work was done, on Charles James Fox. Even if *George III and the Historians* (1957) showed Butterfield at his best, using the historiography of the subject in order to contextualize Namierism, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that it was only in the third of the directions indicated by *The Englishman and his History* that he was really productive.

In the last chapter of *The Englishman and his History* Butterfield had pinpointed the 'massive breach' which had been produced in France when the 'scientific' movement of the seventeenth century had been transformed into the 'philosophe' movement of the eighteenth, and the 'national tradition' had been split from top to bottom' between secular liberalism on the one hand and Roman Catholicism on the other which, since 1789,

had stood 'howling at one another from different universes'. That the English had avoided this sort of breach was attributed to the traditions of aristocratic government. ('When the aristocracy was sent to the laundry', went an adage, 'the dye ran out into the rest of the washing.') But it was also regarded as a subordinate instance of a main thesis which connected the moderation of English political life with the 'influence' 'a thousand years of Christianity must have had' in the absence of the 'flood of militant anti-Christian tendencies' that had operated elsewhere.

In England, the argument was, there had been no breach with the 'Christian tradition', and for this reason both 'individualism' and 'love of country' had not been dangerous. England had not been torn from top to bottom by the pagan hatred that had been generated by secular liberalism, the Whigs had not turned into an anti-ecclesiastical party, and the Churches had not locked themselves away in 'political diehardism'. The line, therefore, between Christian and non-Christian positions had been blurred, 'Christian sentiments' had lingered on 'as a cement to the body politic' after the nation had ceased to be Christian, and 'even those who would have claimed to have jettisoned Christian dogma . . . remained tinged with it.' 'The skirts of a Christian tradition', went one metaphor, 'rich with wonderful pleats and folds, still trailed and rustled across the floor.' 'So the new and the old were allowed to mingle', went another, 'producing another piece of that English history which, like a weed, grows over the fences, chokes and smothers the boundaries—luxurious and wanton as life itself—to drive the geometers and the heavy logicians to despair.'

In the five years which followed his assumption of the Chair of Modern History in Cambridge in 1944, Butterfield wrote not only *George III, Lord North and the People* but also *The Origins of Modern Science* and *Christianity and History* which, like *George III, Lord North and the People*, were published in the same month in 1949, and were closely connected so far as *The Origins of Modern Science* described 'modern science' as a 'new civilization' which had destroyed the civilization of the middle ages. It was the relationship between Christianity and this new civilization which supplied the central theme of *Christianity and History*.

In *Christianity and History* the message of *The Whig Interpretation of History* was transformed as a moderate version was given of the attacks which Smyth had made when ten years

younger and in less favourable conditions ten years earlier. There were the same objections to the 'stiffnecked' who 'goad' man to 'greater wickedness' than they would otherwise commit. There was the same objection to the 'superficiality' of the 'idealists' and the 'spiritual impoverishment' of the 'self-styled prophets' of the last generation, along with the same claim that 'we create tragedy after tragedy for ourselves' if we adopt the 'lazy, unexamined doctrine of man' which rests on the 'recent' and 'very disastrous heresy' that one should 'have faith in human nature'. There was the same belief that the 'blindest of all the blind . . . amongst historians . . . are those who are unable to examine their own presuppositions' because they 'blithely imagine that they do not possess any', and there was a succession of restatements of the general truth that it was 'cupidity' that tied 'events' into 'knots', 'universal presumption' that made 'situations more frantic and deadlocks more hopeless', and 'one sin' that 'locked people up in all other sins' and 'fastened men and nations more tightly than ever in their predicaments . . . namely, the sin of self-righteousness'. These judgements were applied not only to men as objects of historical study but also to history itself. It was argued that the past was not a fight of 'the pure and righteous' against the 'diabolically wicked' but a manifestation of the fact that 'human nature is imperfect generally'. It was added that the historian 'must join hands with the theologian' in 'tearing the mask from human nature', and that the point in doing this was to show that all human actions, souls, and systems were under judgement, that they were all doomed to decay, and that humanism, liberalism, and secular idealism were as transitory as any others.

The breakdown of humanism, liberalism, and secular idealism was where Butterfield had come in, so to speak, in the early twenties, but he did not claim that the clock could be put back. Modern men should not *resent* the mediaeval achievement, but they could not restore it. Christianity could not regain its 'monopoly in society'; it had to fight on equal terms in explicit acceptance of the fact that 'freedom of conscience' was the 'first requisite for a Christian order.' In the future, he implied, it would be 'harder to be a Christian' because Christians would no longer be connected with power. But their motives would be more spiritual and could make the same sort of difference to the world that Christians had made in the first three centuries AD as their 'inner life' connected them with 'an other-worldly system', as the impregnation of their lives with

love enabled them to 'press against the frontiers' of the accepted moral order, and as the intermingling of their religion with the events of the world constantly generated 'new things' —'now a kind of art, now a form of science, now humanism, now liberty, now a theory of egalitarianism'.

In the course of *Christianity and History*, Butterfield had made it clear that he was aiming to show how Christians might 'mount their' picture of the twentieth century by envisaging the 'ordinary events of secular history'. In his later writings he took as his base the conception he had developed from *The Peace Tactics of Napoleon* onwards of a connection between eighteenth-century diplomacy, Christian understandings of human nature, the continuity of cupidity between Tsarist and Marxist versions of Russian policy, and the conduct of foreign policy in the nuclear age.

In examining this instance of a general thesis about Christian politics, Butterfield was highly selective. He did not consider domestic politics or policy in England and he ignored the problems raised by the existence of a politically active working-class movement. In discussing the Christian attitude to 'modern barbarism', for example, there was a certain amount about the 'overthrow of a customary order of things', the 'sudden rise to power of men and classes not yet trained and disciplined to the task', and the 'emergence in so many places of a younger generation under conditions that give them no chance to grow up into the values of a civilized world in *the way that we grew up into them*'. But it was not stated that this could be said of England and, by silence, there was an implication that it could not be.

It is not clear whether one should imply a deliberate gap or an unconscious one because of defects of understanding. Butterfield's criticism of non-lapsarian liberalism involved, of course, direct rejection of the anthropological assumptions of the new socialism of the thirties and a contrast, which he had not drawn in 1933, between Marxism and Christianity. At the same time, there was something deliberately uncontroversial about the way in which he accepted the post-war British consensus (except about foreign policy) and, like Popper and Berlin, from whom he differed in other respects, directed his criticisms at Marxist, Nazi, or Fascist messianism—perhaps because they seemed important in 1949 but presumably also on the assumption, which Popper and Berlin probably made too, that anything that the English seemed likely to do by way of further egalitarianism would operate pragmatically or empirically, and without upheaval.

Butterfield's later writings did nothing to soften these views; if anything, they strengthened them. On the one hand, in *Christianity, Diplomacy and War*, equality was accepted as a proper object of political action. On the other hand there was a 'Christian' recognition that external conditions play a part in developing human frailty and a concomitant willingness to encourage 'scientific' treatment of juvenile crime and those 'psychoanalytical cases which former ages would have dismissed as diabolically evil'. In general, however, the silence was eloquent except when questions were dodged, or were answered in such blatant affirmations as that offered about post-war England which was 'indeed' in 1953 the 'happiest of all the illustrations of the fact that civilization itself requires the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins'.

Until about 1950, Butterfield had taken the view that historical thinking could play a part in removing the blinkers that hampered international amicability. It was not until the essay *The Tragic Element in Human Conflict* that there was said to be a 'duty' incumbent on those who studied history in universities to 'seize upon the problem . . . where the difficulties are most challenging'. In *Christianity and Human Relations* political implications were extracted from the Christian principle that 'there are things which men do for love which they are unable to do . . . by the external pressure or the tedious insistencies of mere ethical command'. In the following years caution was swept aside. The Christian tradition was said to have 'condensed the experience' and to have accumulated the wisdom of European civilization. Though the form of wisdom, so far as it applied to international relations, was said to have been 'secularised' in the early eighteenth century and to have 'come down to us . . . rather as traditions of European diplomacy', it was still the case that Christians were especially competent to ask whether anything valuable was being thrown away when breaches were made with it.

In some respects it was recognized that the breaches made by the League of Nations and the League's apologists had been repaired, the United Nations Organization being so great an improvement that the existing danger was the Cold-War division of the world between the communist and the non-communist powers. This, however, was described as raising 'an unprecedented problem', requiring not only knowledge but also imagination and a certain 'giving up of ourselves' if thinking was to get out of the pre-Copernican stage it was now

in. It demanded a recognition of the 'power' of 'gentleness' and of the fact that the Christian had principles which called him to carry his thinking 'outside the framework . . . provided . . . by . . . party . . . régime or ideology'. It did not question the need for military defence in the short run. But its main hope was that a Christian international science could precipitate a 'starting-point of historical change' in the long run, as the communists had done in 1917, and could get a 'purchase' on history so as to move the mountains of prejudice and cupidity in which the international system had got locked.

Butterfield did not blame one side or the other alone; one of his targets was the self-righteousness which attributed to the liberal West a priority in virtue and to the Marxist East a priority in vice. He was clear that both had emerged from the same world—the post-Christian world that had been created since 1650—and that Christianity should stand out against its 'terrible heresies' about the nature of man which had 'opened the gates' to Evil, made men into 'victims of diabolical agencies', and obscured the 'ancient view' that 'the establishment of peace is the primary function and supreme blessing of the body politic'.

In reading Butterfield's writings in chronological order one becomes conscious, far more than when they were first published, that the writings of the nineteen-forties were the work of a liberal or dissenting mind persuading itself, and its fellow dissenters, that diplomacy and power-politics could be understood in Christian terms and justified according to Christian categories. In the writings that were published between 1944 and 1953, there was a balance between the positive doctrine and the attempt to educate liberals and dissenters in the broadest English sense. But at the same time that *Christianity, Diplomacy and War* was being written in response to the atomic bomb, Butterfield was overtaken by the arrival of the hydrogen bomb, and a doctrine which was realistically conservative in relation to power politics and international diplomacy was transformed into an emotionally taut commitment to a form of nuclear renunciation involving a massive capitulation to the dissent that Butterfield had been educating.

During his thirteen years as Master of Peterhouse, Butterfield found it difficult to maintain the pitch and tension of the twenty years that had preceded them. He resigned the Mastership prematurely in 1968 for this reason, and settled down in Sawston, a village just outside Cambridge, in order to write. Although

his output was reasonably high both during his Mastership and afterwards, and included a set of Gifford Lectures in 1965/7, it cannot be said that the last twenty years of his life added appreciably to what had gone before.

Butterfield was slightly below middle height and in the most active periods of his life was sparely built. He had a perceptible Yorkshire accent. After shaving, his face was often like a battlefield. When young, indeed until he became Master of Peterhouse, he dressed carelessly, combining a Shelleyesque beauty of feature with a great deal of hair and a certain tense volatility with a modestly attractive decisiveness of manner. He was married to Pamela Crawshaw for fifty years and had three sons, of whom one died young, one is a schoolmaster, and one is a lecturer at University College, Dublin, where, like Temperley and Oakeshott before him, Butterfield had been external examiner and made many friends, and from which he became a member of the Eire Government's Ó Dálaigh Commission on Higher Education.

Though Butterfield was a life-long Methodist and a governor of Wesley House, Cambridge, he played no part in Methodist life nationally. While continuing to worship in Methodist churches, he began, while Master of Peterhouse, to receive Anglican communion in Peterhouse chapel, and continued to do so in the parish church at Sawston after his retirement. At his funeral, an Anglican service in Peterhouse was followed by a Methodist cremation.

Butterfield was an enthusiastic pianist. He was a teetotaller and, until his seventies, a continuous smoker. He had a distinctive laugh, which at times was almost a cackle. He enjoyed gossip, both personal and institutional, and spoke with a sharp but well-disposed cynicism about the affairs that it disclosed. From the middle nineteen-fifties onwards, he was much in demand as a lecturer, travelled widely in America and the rest of the English-speaking world, and was the recipient of many honorary degrees. After delivering the first series of Wiles Lectures, which a private benefactress had established out of admiration for his writings, he was a valued member of the Wiles Board of Management at The Queen's University, Belfast. He served a term as President of the Historical Association, was elected to a Fellowship of the British Academy at the age of sixty-five, and was knighted in 1968. In the sixties and seventies he took great pleasure in the British Committee

for the Theory of International Politics of which he was the founder-chairman and where he worked in association with Martin Wight, Michael Howard, Geoffrey Hudson, and Lord Armstrong of Sanderstead, as well as with Adam Watson and Professor Desmond Williams of University College Dublin—the last two being pupils who became friends and who, together with Brian Wormald of Peterhouse, were the closest that Butterfield had to intellectual intimates.

Except in his years as Master of Peterhouse Butterfield's mode of living was modest. Though without snobbery or social affectation, he was not without class consciousness and was most at ease with those who aimed to be classless. He was capable of formality where this was appropriate, but was against grandeur and pomposity. Intellectually as well as socially, he disliked the high-hat and pontifical manner, and spoke feelingly against the 'G. N. Clark type of historian'. He rejected authority in historical thinking, attaching supreme importance to inventiveness, paradox, and interpretative deviance. Personally, he was modest and tolerant, was free of arrogance, and disliked the entrenched prescriptions of the progressive intellect. He felt a deep and irrational regard for rakes whom he much preferred to the 'virtuous and stiff-necked'. In correspondence much more than in speech he was capable of inimitable flashes of brilliance.

It may be that readers of this obituary will have received the impression that Butterfield's work was insubstantial. This is not what is intended. It is certainly the case that he was more persuasive negatively than he was positively, that his strongest impulse was an ineradicable dislike of received opinion, and that his fundamental attitude was a sort of entrenched, self-liquidating antinomianism, which was reconciled only partially and reluctantly to the necessities involved in the exercise of power and the public propagation of Christianity. If not a learned man in the profoundest sense, Butterfield knew a great deal and knew what to make of his knowledge. Many of his technical maxims were of great importance, and in three major respects showed the way to breaking the hold which Rankean dispassionateness has had on English historical thinking. These were his emphasis on assumptions, on the intimacy of the connection between assumption, research, and the structure of historical interpretation, and on the essential contestability of any claim to achieve objective, authoritative finality in historical writing. Even if he was unable to escape from

Rankeanism himself, Butterfield showed that escape was a possibility, and might have effected his own escape if he had been literate philosophically, coherent theologically, and less scrupulously modest than he was. He needed only a ruthless relativism, a coherent conception of God's transcendence, and an abandonment of scruple to free himself from disabling inhibitions. Unfortunately, none of these things turned out to be possible, and the ultimate judgement must be that, for all their intelligence, fertility and gaminesque hostility to 'technical historical study', his writings registered a capitulation to it. Butterfield, we may conclude, having discerned the type of 'single new fact' to which he attached so much importance in historical interpretation, neglected its implications in terms of 'total reconstruction', neglected to observe that, if the argument of Chapter One of *Christianity and History* was right, his conclusion should have been not that 'technical historical study has its place' but that 'technical historical study' insulated from religion or culture is an impossibility.

MAURICE COWLING