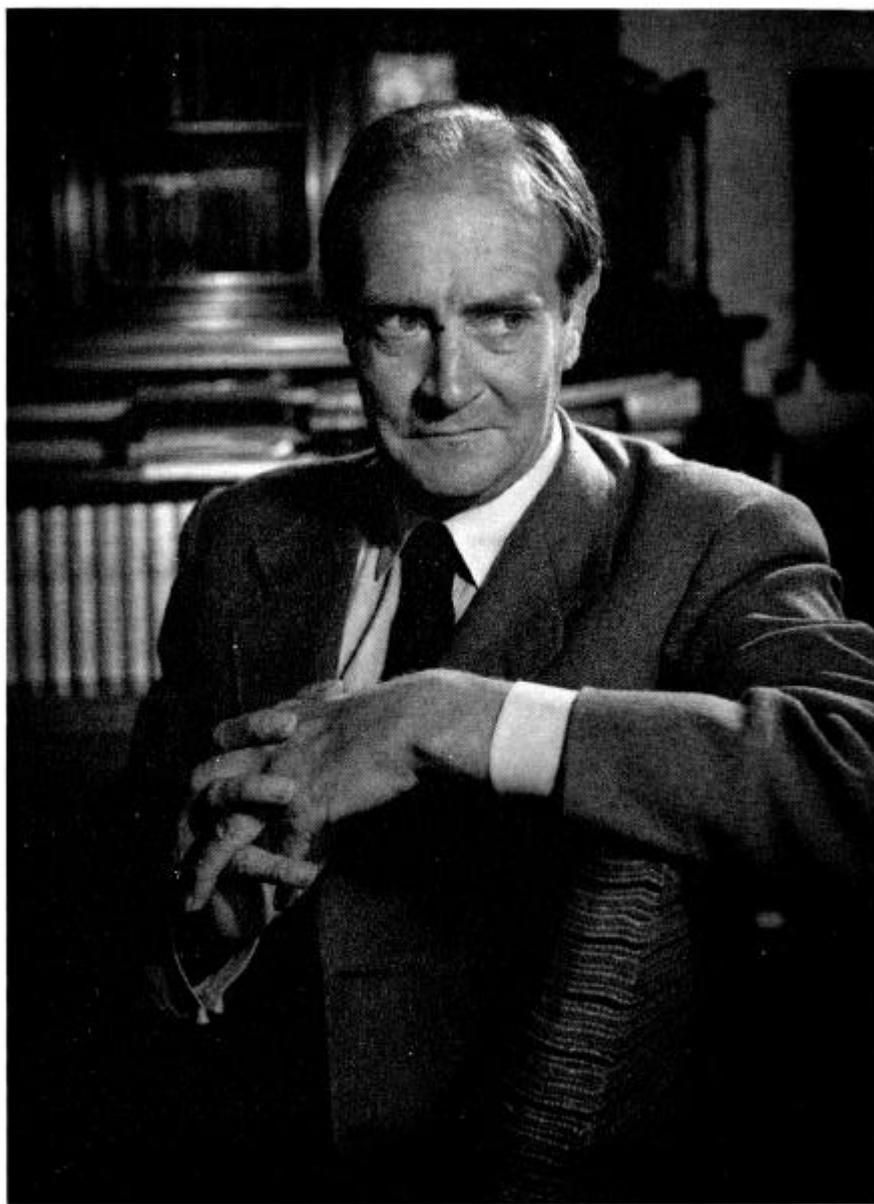


PLATE XLVII



D. J. ALLAN

*Studio Bolmarck*

## DONALD JAMES ALLAN<sup>1</sup>

1907-1978

**D**ONALD JAMES ALLAN died peacefully in Oxford on 19 June 1978. He had been a Fellow of the Academy since 1954, and held the chair of Greek at Glasgow from 1957 to 1971. In recent years he had taken a considerable interest in his own origins and beginnings, and left a brief memoir of his early days. His cousin and executor, Mr Roy Bangert, has kindly allowed me to use this (as was evidently Donald's intention), and it is the main source of the first part of what follows.

Donald's paternal grandfather, James Allan, was a Scot from Wamphray, near Moffat. He migrated to England around 1870, and became head gardener at Ashurst Park near Tonbridge. He remained very conscious of his origins, and (so his grandson heard) 'was in some demand as a preacher, and travelled far and wide on the Sabbath in that capacity'. That Donald himself spent the latter part of his working life as a professor in Scotland was thus in some way a return to an ancestral home; and he certainly came to think of it like that.

It was James Allan's second son who was Donald's father. This James Blashill Allan, a clerk in a solicitor's office in Tunbridge Wells, married (in 1901) Ethel, the second daughter of Robert William Bullen, a Norfolk man from Hunstanton who had come into Kent as village schoolmaster and organist at Fordcombe, near Penshurst. There were two children of the marriage: Phyllis, born in February 1906, and Donald, born on 22 December 1907. They remained close all their lives. Indeed, when Donald was a Fellow of Balliol before the war, his mother and sister moved to Oxford and the house in Bainton Road became their lifelong home; Phyllis, a greatly respected Headmistress in North Oxford, died there in 1970, shortly before Donald's retirement.

But to return. James Allan was consumptive. He retired from work in 1909, and died in 1913. So it was bound to be his

<sup>1</sup> I owe a special debt to Mr Roy Bangert for the use of many papers and documents, and much also to friends and colleagues of Donald's in Oxford and at Glasgow who have been kind enough to discuss their recollections of him with me.

mother who influenced Donald most. The daughter of a schoolmaster, she was clearly a forceful and persevering guide of her children's education. There were serious financial difficulties. The family moved to London in 1915, and Mrs Allan worked there. Donald was enrolled at an LCC school, St. Michael's Pimlico. The headmaster here was H. G. Todd. It was under his influence that Donald first began to climb the academic ladder. We hear of Todd coaching Donald, along with his own son Herbert, for the scholarship examination for Christ's Hospital. This was then, as between the wars, the summit of ambition for boys of LCC elementary schools. In the event, Donald did not sit for the scholarship, but was given a presentation to the school by one of the Governors. He entered the preparatory school in 1917.

About the same time, also, Mrs Allan gave up her work in London and moved to Hunstanton to look after her own father, who had retired to his native Norfolk. Donald's journeys to and from school became long and perhaps tedious. He drily observed that he knew Cambridge from the train long before he ever saw its colleges.

The excellence of the classical teaching at Christ's Hospital at that time was something that remained vivid in Donald's mind ever afterwards. He would recall especially F. H. Merk and his successor, F. Roydon Richards, afterwards Rector of Glasgow Academy, later to be a welcome auxiliary in Donald's tenure of the chair of Greek in Glasgow. Supplementing their immense competence was the civilized and imaginative scholarship of the Headmaster, W. H. Fyfe. Of other things in the school, Donald allowed himself to be critical. Interesting, and perhaps indicative of his cast of mind, is his dissatisfaction, in retrospect, with the kind of teaching of science which he encountered. This was chemistry as taught by Charles E. Browne, on the 'heuristic' method advocated by Professor Henry Armstrong, a very modern-sounding technique of individual experiment and 'co-enquiry' by teacher and pupil. The system had its triumphs; but Donald clearly felt it a waste of time, and regretted that he had not had a more conventional and more theoretical introduction to physical science.

At any rate, he went up to Christ Church, in 1926, as a classical scholar. His friends and contemporaries included Denys Page and Quintin Hogg: Greek verses from ΔΙΟΝΥΣΙΟΣ to ΔΩΝΑΛΔΟΣ on the latter's birthday survive, but not for publication. It was a brilliant period, and a highly competitive

one. Successes and setbacks in the Ireland and Hertford scholarships were keenly felt and long remembered. Donald had his share of success, and duly achieved good Firsts in Mods and Greats. He was destined for an academic career. Gilbert Murray, who had taken a personal interest in him even earlier, now proposed subjects of research. Cornford's recent 'From Religion to Philosophy' suggested that the time was ripe for looking at 'the unspoken assumptions' of Plato's philosophy; the work would involve 'anthropology and the evidence about primitive Greek beliefs' as well as an attentive reading of Plato. Donald kept the letter in which this suggestion was made, but did not follow it up. He embarked instead—with guidance from J. A. Smith—on an edition of the *de caelo*, plunging into problems of Greek palaeography and the medieval tradition of Aristotle. He studied at the Sorbonne and in Vienna, and began the close acquaintance with continental Platonic and Aristotelian scholarship which characterized all his later work. The interest in medieval Aristotelianism which also began with his work on *de caelo* likewise proved a lifelong concern; not only articles and papers, but still more his private communications with other scholars, made it clear that this was a field in which he could have made great advances. But other concerns, scholarly and administrative, put off the Latin *de caelo*, and *Aristoteles Latinus* is still without it.

Donald was elected to a Fellowship of Balliol, as tutor in philosophy, within a year of taking Schools. His old headmaster, W. H. Fyfe, wrote of his pleasure, but adding: 'My prophecies concerning you failed in one respect, for I used to pronounce you a very child of Mods. You wisely left your greatness to develop later.' In fact, the scholar was probably always stronger in Donald than the philosopher; he was above all an interpreter, especially of Aristotle and Plato, but to some extent also of Rousseau and Kant, and the questions that interested him were those that had a clear moral content and bearing on how one should actually live the kind of life in which one found oneself. In these pre-war years, he taught and lectured hard, and deepened his knowledge of Plato and Aristotle. The *de caelo* edition appeared in 1936, and received general acclaim for its learning and good judgement, not to speak of the elegant Latinity of its very useful *praefatio*. Much labour and much original thinking went into his translation of Julius Stenzel's *Studies on the Development of Plato's Dialectic*, with its long and illuminating introduction—a good deal more lucid than the

work it was expounding. By contrast he produced in the same year a modest little 'school' edition of Republic I, which in fact had a great deal of influence on the teaching of Plato in the next generation.

For a young college tutor these were remarkable achievements. At this stage in his life—and indeed later—he thought best with a pen in his hand. He found tutorial teaching much more difficult. This was partly because his interests, which were scholarly, historical, and continental, moved him further and further away from 'greatness' as it was then developing; but even more because his shyness and diffidence seemed to increase rather than diminish as his responsibilities grew. He was always to earn the regard of pupils and lecture-audiences for the directness and originality of his thought. But he was exceedingly unwilling to sugar the pill, often fell silent in tutorials (no doubt through attributing to the pupil's remarks a greater profundity than they deserved) and delivered his lectures, full of close argument and precise learning, in a diffident style that took away much of their effect. Not that he could not relax *in loco*; there are memories enough of his robust humour and abounding energy. But, though he was a born scholar and magnificent expositor, and at the same time the kindest and most conscientious of teachers, he seems, from this time on, to have given colleagues and pupils alike the sense of having put up a barrier which they had to surmount before coming to the Socratic gold within.

Five years (1940–5) of the 'Government Code and Cipher School' cannot have been wholly uncongenial to Donald's clear and rapid intelligence, though no doubt it was wearing enough. He returned to the swollen Balliol of the post-war years, to throngs of pupils, and to a certain amount of college responsibility, for he was Senior Tutor for a time. He was not entirely happy; and it was, in the event, a fortunate train of circumstances that led him, in 1948, to abandon his Fellowship and go to Edinburgh as Reader in Ancient Philosophy. This was a specialized position, and it gave him the opportunity not only to pursue his own interests without the wider teaching responsibilities of Greats, but also to organize and develop the study of Greek philosophy both in this country and abroad. In this cause he was responsible for two enduring achievements: the foundation of the Northern Universities' Ancient Philosophy Group and, arising from this, the initiation of *Phronesis*, of which he was an editor for nine years (1956–65).

We have moved ahead of time a little. Donald was much involved, as general editor, in the revision of Jowett's Plato translation which ultimately appeared in 1955; and it was early in 1950 that Gilbert Murray, as an editor of the Home University Library, made a proposal which, this time, Donald readily accepted: to write an introduction to Aristotle within the scope of the series. The volume appeared in 1952. It is a carefully planned critical description, less expository than L. Robin's longer and fuller *Aristote*, and also somewhat more literary and historical. The problems of Aristotle's lost works and his relationship to Plato come first; there follows a fairly systematic discussion on his physics, metaphysics, logic, and ethics. There is an apology for leaving out the *Poetics*, on which Donald added a chapter in the reissue of 1970. This was not just filling a little gap; he had become interested in the work, and was to publish valuable contributions to its interpretation. *The Philosophy of Aristotle* was in fact the only book (apart from editions and translations) that he attempted. Its concentration, freshness, and directness are memorable. An otherwise very unsympathetic reviewer pointed to its strength 'in the destruction of generalizations by new and unexpected details'. It remains a great achievement of synthesis; it is also, in style and arrangement, very characteristic of Donald's way of thinking. But he never again attempted this kind of thing; the rest of his work was to be in the form of articles, reviews, and conference papers. The specific task of criticism stimulated him: characteristic is his patient and not unsympathetic rebuttal of his old tutor Gilbert Ryle's *Plato's Progress* (*Philosophical Quarterly*, xviii (1968), 155 ff.). Even more stimulating were symposia and conferences. Here, his enthusiasm, friendly sincerity, and ready learning blossomed and displayed themselves. His contribution to the advancement of Platonic and Aristotelian studies was very largely made in discussions at Louvain, at the Fondation Hardt, in meetings of the Mind Association and Aristotelian Society (both of which he served as President), and above all in the Northern Ancient Philosophy group which he founded, and its younger southern counterpart. The list of his *kleine Schriften*, often occasioned by such gatherings, would be long and impressive. Many were concerned with late Plato or early Aristotle, or the *Ethics*; occasionally, as in his address to the Aristotelian Society (Suppl. vol. xxxix (1965), 1-18) on 'causation, ancient and modern', the philosopher reasserts himself over the scholar. But in his latter years—and he was very actively at work in

retirement—the scholarly problems of Aristotle's Dialogues and medieval Aristotelianism were his dominant concern.

Donald's move to Glasgow as Professor of Greek in 1957 was a happy one. He had indeed enjoyed Edinburgh. His years there had established his reputation as a scholar, he retained many friends there, and the Honorary D.Litt. which he received from the University of Edinburgh in 1977 was a source of great pleasure to him. But the happy and friendly Greek department at Glasgow gave him a new sphere of responsibility. It was small enough for him to know all his students, and he was full of concern for their welfare. His colleagues, who knew him to be a distinguished philosopher, seem to have been mildly surprised that he should take so large a share of linguistic and literary teaching. But Donald enjoyed Homer and Demosthenes, was a very good writer of Greek prose, and undoubtedly looked on all this as a congenial duty. Something of his old diffidence and difficulty in teaching seems, however, to have remained. It depressed him (as is clear from his diaries) when students did not come to lectures, and he obviously tended to blame himself. But many appreciated him. Bewildered at first, they later discovered him, as a colleague writes, 'to be what they had really come to University for'. Nor did he cut himself off from the social life of the department. He enjoyed the convivial and dramatic gatherings, the 'Alexandrians', the Music Club. A colleague recalls with pleasure his performance on the triangle in the Toy Symphony. Above all, he liked reading parties at The Burn and walking excursions in the hills. This was, after all, his own country, or at least his grandfather's. And he had always formed strong affections for places. Kent, Norfolk, and south-west Scotland were home countries, the Highlands and the English Lakes (which he knew intimately) adopted lands which he loved. He had favourite places of pilgrimage even in the Oxfordshire countryside. So it was natural that colleagues and students should find him an eager and welcome walking companion, and natural that he should habitually break his long car journeys to and from Oxford for walks in the Cumbrian hills or in the Border country.

The last three years of his tenure of the chair at Glasgow were filled by administrative duties as Dean of the Faculty of Arts. These he fulfilled with conspicuous devotion and ability, as anyone who knew him would have expected. Then he retired to Oxford, a little early, to pursue his interrupted work.

But his sister had died in 1970, and his return to the Bainton

Road house was sadder and lonelier than it should have been. He worked steadily and productively, visited Scotland often (he retained his flat in Glasgow, let to tenants), travelled a good deal, took part (successfully) in *Times* Crossword competitions, and generally led a quiet and, one likes to think, increasingly contented life. There were warnings of ill health in 1973, and he was in hospital for a time; but his death came quietly in the night, and he had been active and among friends till the end.

Donald would very properly be shocked to have the last words of the *Phaedo* applied to him. But they are not inappropriate. He is held by his friends in very great affection and respect; and he knew a great deal about what *ἀγαθός* and *φρόνιμος* and *δίκαιος* mean, in life as well as in the dictionary.

D. A. RUSSELL