



G. DONALDSON

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Gordon Donaldson 1913–1993

AFTER A LONG AND PAINFUL ILLNESS, bravely borne, Gordon Donaldson, Fellow of the Academy since 1976, died in Cameron Hospital, Fife, on 16 March 1993, aged seventy-nine.

The foremost Scottish historian of his generation, Donaldson was born in Leith (now in Edinburgh) on 13 April 1913, son of Magnus Donaldson, a post office worker, and Rachel Hetherington Swan. He received a classical education at the Royal High School of Edinburgh at a time when traditional standards were still maintained by a distinguished rector, William King Gillies. Edinburgh High under Gillies adhered to the Scottish ideal of the broad curriculum, and this was probably the source of Donaldson's ability in a wide range of subjects. As well as English, History, Latin and Greek, he also studied Physics, Chemistry and Astronomy; but the classics were central to the curriculum, as the school's motto, *Musis respublica floret*, made clear. It was an outstanding school in a city that was famous for schools. The young Gordon Donaldson took full advantage of the opportunities it presented, and, a precocious and diligent pupil, he was adjudged dux of the school in his final year. Fellow pupils, however, have testified that in spite of his scholastic success and his indifference to sport, he was popular and well liked.

His teachers urged him to concentrate on the classics at university, but, though he had excelled in those subjects, his own inclination was towards the study of history. With a determination to go his own way

that was to characterise the grown man, the young Gordon Donaldson chose to specialise in history at the University of Edinburgh.

As an undergraduate Donaldson remained immersed in his studies. The social and sporting side of university life had little appeal for him, and this perhaps was unfortunate, confirming as it did his natural propensity towards reclusiveness. Yet once again there is much testimony to the fact that, in spite of his shyness (which he never entirely lost) and his outstanding scholastic success, he was on the best of terms with his classmates. Thus was early demonstrated a paradox in his nature: although of a rather retiring disposition he could, in the right circumstances, be a congenial and amusing companion. But he concentrated mainly on his studies and had a brilliant undergraduate career. He took the class medal in every course in history bar one; and that course he topped only to be denied the medal because the lecturer in charge felt that honours should not be monopolised by one student. But for this piece of rough academic justice Donaldson would have made a clean sweep of the medals and prizes. Curiously enough, though, as a professor he favoured the idea of making prizes go round, doubtless to stimulate the efforts of the students.

In his work for the Honours degree in History, however, something was stirring in him that was profoundly to influence his subsequent career. The fact is that the History Department was then dominated by English History, and the further fact that it was called British History made no difference. There was, indeed, a small department of Scottish History, but highfliers tended to steer clear of it. Scottish History was regarded as a backwater, attractive only to dyed-in-the-wool Scottish nationalists and dullards. With typical astuteness the young Donaldson saw that this was not really the case and that the Scottish History Department offered instruction of a very high quality that was not to be found elsewhere. The Fraser Professor of Scottish History and Palaeography at that time was a famous record scholar, Robert Kerr Hannay, who had spent years as an archivist in the General Register House in Edinburgh before securing his university chair. Any student who was drawn to the records, as Donaldson was even this early, could not do better than be taught by Professor Hannay. He therefore took Hannay's Special Subject, which covered the history of Scotland from 1542 to 1567. It was that course, and Hannay's inspired teaching, that determined Gordon Donaldson's future career. This it did in two vital respects: first, it introduced him to record scholarship, for which from the first he showed a great appetite and a wonderful talent; and sec-

only he was to build on that Special Subject course and make the period of the Reformation his own.

It came as no surprise to anyone when in 1935 he obtained a brilliant First Class in his final examinations for the degree of MA with Honours in History. The History Department professor and lecturers were all adamant that he should go on to further study in history. But doing what, and where? The main weight of opinion among his teachers was that he should follow the traditional path in such cases and read for the BA in History at either Oxford or Cambridge. This was sound advice, and if it had been followed it would undoubtedly have benefited him socially as well as educationally. It would have opened up a new world to him, not only as regards future prospects but in terms of personal development. College life might have drawn him out of his shell and emphasised the importance of social as well as scholastic qualities. He would probably also have benefited greatly from the tutorial system of instruction which was then virtually unknown in the Scottish universities. Having to explain his ideas and justify his opinions to an expert devil's advocate of a tutor might have curbed his tendency to throwaway dogmatic statement from which no appeal was allowed. On the other hand, at that stage he desperately wished to undertake research. The idea of research fascinated him, as it does still so many very recent holders of distinguished first degrees. But the supervision of research at Oxford and Cambridge was then rather lax. One of the lecturers in the History Department, David Horn, a prominent diplomatic historian but not an Oxbridge type, convinced Donaldson that the best place for him was the Institute of Historical Research in London. Luckily a bursary was available to help him on his way, and to London he went, there to work under the supervision of a great Tudor historian, Professor J. E. Neale.

Gordon Donaldson spent three industrious and happy years at the Institute researching ecclesiastical problems in England and Scotland in the late sixteenth century. Neale's seminars left a deep impression on Donaldson, reinforcing as they did the influence that Hannay had already exerted on him. In 1938 he graduated Ph.D. for a thesis entitled 'Relations between English and Scottish Presbyterian and Episcopalian movements to 1604', which was based on thorough examination of the record evidence and other primary sources. Such thoroughness was to be the hallmark of his best later work. The rationale behind it was simple but profound: wherever possible hard evidence had to be adduced, and the best provider of hard evidence, it seemed to Donald-

son, was the record sources. Many years later, in a newspaper interview in 1983, Donaldson stated that he was 'definitely a records man', and that he always strove to base his historical work on record evidence. This was not always the case; but, undoubtedly, this was the formula that brought him to fame.

The fascination exerted by the records was one of the reasons why he did not immediately enter university teaching. The pull of the records was too strong, and he applied for a vacant assistantship in the Record Office section of the General Register House in Edinburgh. This, the Scottish equivalent of the Public Record Office in London, was the mecca of Scottish historians, being the great storehouse of so much of the raw material for the study of Scotland's past. His first application was unsuccessful, but shortly afterwards he was appointed to fill another vacancy that had providentially arisen. In the Register House Donaldson was in his element. He soon became a noted archivist and an extremely learned and skilful Scottish record scholar, as well as becoming known as an expert palaeographer. His expertise in palaeography was legendary, and to the end of his life lawyers consulted him about ancient documents on which legal issues depended. He was able with ease to solve palaeographical problems that had baffled other experts in the craft. Perhaps only those who have struggled with diabolical sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Scottish hands can appreciate the extent of his achievements as a palaeographer. To the consternation of neophytes he would in all sincerity pronounce scripts that were apparently indecipherable as beautiful. It was a peculiar use of the word 'beautiful', for aesthetically they were anything but things of beauty.

At this point it is important to note that, in spite of his later highly successful academic career, the records remained his great and abiding love. He was seldom absent for long from the Register House. He became a fine historian with a remarkable spread of interests and an intimate knowledge of the whole sweep of Scottish history. But he always regarded historians who worked outside the record tradition as somehow lacking the divine spark. He had, indeed, a knack of making his unrivalled knowledge of the records contribute to the understanding of most facets of Scottish life, past and present, in ways that came as a revelation to others less steeped in the records and less skilled in their use.

A new and grimmer world dawned on 3 September 1939, but, as it happened, the war years confirmed his devotion to the records and

increased his expertise in their use. Gordon Donaldson was never very robust and a low medical category kept him out of military service. Instead he 'did his bit', as the saying went, by helping to preserve the early records of Scotland which were evacuated after Dunkirk to a safe place in the Highlands, Morenish Lodge, near Killin in Perthshire. Many years later Donaldson, in an interesting and amusing article in *The Scottish Historical Review* for 1974, described the wartime adventures of the records and the part he had played in safeguarding them. The shooting lodge in which the records were stored and the staff were billeted was of rather flimsy construction, and floors had to be strengthened to take the weight of so much heavy material. The lodge, indeed, lacked all sorts of facilities and was subject to all sorts of mishaps, from leaking roofs to electrical failures. Difficulties were ingeniously surmounted; and all this while Gordon Donaldson continued to build up his awesome knowledge of the public registers and state papers of Scotland. Later he liked to jest pawkily that he was the only person ever known to have read the massive manuscript Register of the Privy Seal in bed! There was a solemn undertone of truth to the amusing tale. His wartime sojourn with the records at Morenish probably had something to do with the fact that he was later to edit, impeccably, several volumes of the vitally important Privy Seal, as well as other important record material. As an indication of the wide range of his interests, too, in 1950 he had published *A Handlist of MSS. in the British Isles relating to Malta*.

Over the war years, however, as well as imbibing record lore, Gordon Donaldson was also reading and reflecting about the history of Scotland. He was one of many who concluded at that time that the subject had stagnated for far too long and that new initiatives were needed. These views were strengthened by the upsurge of interest in the subject that soon became evident in the Scottish universities after 1945. As a result, in 1947 Gordon Donaldson again followed his star when he left the employment of the Register House to take up a lectureship in the Scottish History Department of the University of Edinburgh, enticed thereto by the recently appointed Fraser Professor of Scottish History, William Croft Dickinson, a leading medievalist and gifted poacher of talent. Dickinson, a man of great vision and energy, was determined to build up his department and do everything he could to further the renaissance in Scottish studies that he too felt to be overdue. He was a superb lecturer, and through his inspired teaching, and learned but highly readable publications, Dickinson, an English-

man born but educated at St. Andrews and very Scottish in feeling, undoubtedly laid the foundations for the future eminence of the Scottish History Department at Edinburgh. Among his other achievements, it was Dickinson who revived and edited *The Scottish Historical Review*, which had foundered in 1928.

Dickinson and Donaldson made a formidable, if disparate, team. They realised that a large part of the problem in the teaching of Scottish History lay in the existing textbooks, which had outlived their usefulness, reflecting as they did the scholarship of the nineteenth rather than the twentieth century. Their first joint venture was to produce a *Source Book of Scottish History* in three volumes (1952–4), which illustrated the whole sweep of the subject up to 1707. This was a work of seminal importance that was to serve several generations of students as an introduction not only to the history of Scotland but also to the sources on which understanding of that history had to be based. It was, and remains, one of the best publications of its kind, valuable not only for its excerpts from the vital primary sources but also for the condensed and highly insightful commentaries that introduced each section and which taken together constituted an admirable précis of the history of Scotland up to 1707. Donaldson played a large part in this venture, particularly in volume III, which covered the period from 1567 to 1707. His characteristic and concise prose figures in most of the commentaries in this, the most substantial of the three volumes. That the three volumes of the *Source Book* are now out of print illustrates the continuing difficulties confronted by teachers of Scottish History. Donaldson tried to make good this deficit by publishing in 1970 his one volume, *Scottish Historical Documents*, but, for all its excellence, it lacked the depth of treatment of the old *Source Book*.

Active in this and other ways, Dickinson and Donaldson set about building up a department that became noted for both teaching and research, and whose fame spread far beyond the confines of Edinburgh University. Gordon Donaldson shone as both teacher and researcher, and he made an immense contribution to the post-World War II renaissance in Scottish historical studies. For distinguished publications he became Reader in Scottish History in 1955, and in 1963, on the death of W. C. Dickinson, he was appointed to the Sir William Fraser Chair of Scottish History and Palaeography.

As head of department Donaldson guided it, firmly but affably, to even greater heights. Dickinson had laid the foundations but Donaldson completed the edifice. He it was who instituted a very successful

honours degree in Scottish Historical Studies in which the handling of primary sources was a requirement throughout. Significantly, many of the key positions in Scottish archives, libraries and museums are now held by Donaldson's former pupils. For a man who was the soul of modesty he took a very immodest, if understandable, pride in this fact, which he ranked as one of his main achievements. This was also, in part, the outcome of his putting postgraduate research on a firmer and more organised basis. His fame as a teacher and supervisor soon drew postgraduate students from both home and abroad. Indeed, at times the Scottish History Department looked like a miniature United Nations. The mixing of students from diverse backgrounds in a department that was noted, not only for its intellectual rigour but also for its easy and friendly atmosphere, produced much that was of scholastic and social value. Worldwide friendships were forged in Donaldson's stimulating seminars, fruitful links that endure to this day. His own experience at the Institute of Historical Research in London must have contributed greatly to the success of his direction of postgraduate studies in Edinburgh, for, before his time as a professor, such experience was not to be gained in Scottish universities, where research, if encouraged at all, was supervised in a very lax and irregular manner. Under Donaldson postgraduate seminars over the full three terms of the session became mandatory.

As far as the general running of his department was concerned, Donaldson was a very good administrator. He was prompt in dispatch of business leaving his colleagues to perform their allotted tasks. He was also easy to get on with; indeed, his system could not have functioned otherwise. Yet his style of management could be misunderstood and misrepresented. This arose from the fact that by temperament, though rarely in practice, he was authoritarian. The solution to this conundrum is quite simple, but was perhaps only appreciated by those who were closely associated with him. Though he invariably began a discussion by making his own position clear, he always listened to others, took their views into account, and sought consensus. Those who judged him from his casual conversation, or from his occasional somewhat querulous letters to the press bearing down on 'socialist errors' and 'trade union inanities' (such as 'a day of action' to denote a strike), could only see him as a blimpish authoritarian Tory. Dedicated Tory Unionist though he was, there was nothing blimpish about him. To the students he was always open and accessible, ready to listen to their problems, and helpful with suggested remedies. He was, in fact, a very

good-hearted and generous man, as many could testify from personal experience. But, with little or no justification, the legend persists that he was an unreasonable and unreasoning curmudgeon. In the mid-1960s, for example, he was stigmatised in certain quarters as 'the anti-education professor' because, as university representative on the Education Committee of Edinburgh Corporation, he condemned the move towards comprehensive schooling. In fact, he was right, for this was an English problem that was needlessly foisted onto Scotland to suit the propaganda needs of the Labour party. On the strength of his opposition to the unnecessary turmoil and consequent upset in Scottish schooling that this furore caused he was derided as élitist and anti-social. None of his critics, however, has ever paused to consider why in the student disturbances of the late 1960s, nothing untoward happened in the Scottish History Department at Edinburgh, whereas all sorts of disorders, some serious, broke out elsewhere. The truth of the matter is that under Donaldson, the Scottish History Department at Edinburgh University was already, and remained, a practising democracy, and there was no need for it to be trammelled with unwieldy committees swathed in red tape.

In spite of a full teaching load and the time-consuming administrative duties that inevitably fall to the lot of professors as heads of university departments, Gordon Donaldson contributed enormously to the advance of his subject by his publications. They are far too numerous to list here in full. Suffice it to say that his many books and articles in learned journals gained him a world-wide reputation as a scholar of rare quality. This was recognised as early as 1957–8 when he was asked to deliver the Birkbeck Lectures in Ecclesiastical History at the University of Cambridge. He was delighted by Cambridge, and Cambridge by him. He cherished in particular the friendship with Dom David Knowles that began at this time. They were, of course, kindred spirits in many ways. His Birkbeck Lectures on the Reformation in Scotland, of which the quatercentenary was approaching in 1960, were excellently delivered and very well received, and in 1960 a revised and expanded version of them was published by the Cambridge University Press as *The Scottish Reformation*. Among the many other publications dealing with the Reformation in Scotland that were published in the quatercentenary year Donaldson's book was outstanding. It was based on a thorough exploration of the sources, and for the first time it brought before the public the hazardous and complex development of the reformed Church of Scotland after its inception in 1560. Hitherto

most people had clung to the mistaken belief that the national church set up by John Knox and his brethren was presbyterian from the beginning. Donaldson proved that this was far from being the case. He showed that the early years of the reformed Church of Scotland were fraught with all sorts of difficulties and uncertainties, and that as a matter of cold hard fact the presbyterian movement did not arise until the 1570s, and was then confronted with over a century of hard struggles before it finally triumphed in 1690. Many found all this hard to take in and clung obstinately to their entrenched positions. But the sheer weight of evidence that sustained Donaldson's arguments soon made his book indispensable. And so it has remained. The weightiest criticism made of Donaldson's *Reformation*, as it was dubbed, was that it was excessively institutional in treatment and paid little heed to the theological basis of the Reformation in Scotland. Donaldson himself was aware of this defect. His great concern was with polity, and this was best illustrated by the record evidence. Later he sought to explain the theological content of the Reformation struggle in a short, and altogether too packed, book called *The Faith of the Scots* (1990). This was an arresting little book in some ways, but it was too skimmed in treatment and too idiosyncratic in its elliptical deliverances to secure the ends its author had hoped to attain. Neither stylistically nor factually could it measure up to his earlier conspectus of Scottish ecclesiastical history, *Scotland: Church and Nation through Sixteen Centuries* (1960), which was remarkable for its comprehensiveness and concise clarity of exposition.

After *The Scottish Reformation* Donaldson's next major contribution to learning was a volume in the series known as *The Edinburgh History of Scotland*. This series was very much his brain-child. He planned it along with the late Ian Grant, a prominent Edinburgh bookseller who was then associated with the Edinburgh publishing firm of Oliver and Boyd which specialised in books of Scottish interest. The aim of the series was to produce in four volumes a complete new history of Scotland which would incorporate the results of modern research and supersede Peter Hume Brown's three volume *History of Scotland* in the old Cambridge historical series of the 1890s, and which in the early 1960s still had to serve as a basic student text. Donaldson enthusiastically backed the new venture, became its general editor and persuaded the other three authors to participate. His drive and enthusiasm surmounted all difficulties and kept flagging authors going when defeat seemed an honourable option. When completed in 1975

the series provided Scotland with a serviceable general history which still holds the field. Gordon Donaldson's volume, *Scotland: James V to James VII* (1965) was the first to appear, and it set a very high standard. It has become the received general treatment of its period and shows no sign of being superseded. The coverage of the sixteenth century is particularly good, and taken together his two greatest books, *The Scottish Reformation* and *Scotland: James V to James VII*, reflect his intimate knowledge of the fascinating era of Renaissance and Reformation.

Many other books on other topics followed, but those just mentioned are the works for which he will be remembered, though, curiously, he did not rate them his finest. Authors are not always their own best critics, and for some reason he gave the palm to his general history entitled *Scotland: the Shaping of a Nation* (1974), which outlined the nation's development in topical chapters rather in the style popularised earlier by R. S. Rait. It was an interesting and well-informed treatment, unimpeded by references, and in that book he seems to have revelled at being released from the shackles of an *apparatus criticus*. Unfortunately, at times, and on predictable topics, he allowed this freedom to go too far, and some of his opinions gave offence to many. The same tendency to harsh, even outrageous, strictures in the absence of any reasoned appraisal of the evidence undoubtedly marred some of his late publications. As he advanced in years, too, he came increasingly under the spell of Mary, Queen of Scots. 'The Daughter of Debate', as Elizabeth prophetically described Mary, seems to exert a fatal fascination over bachelor historians. Donaldson's book, *The First Trial of Mary, Queen of Scots* (1969), for the first time in his works showed strong Marian leanings and was not always fair to other parties involved in Mary's downfall. His last piece of major research, *All the Queen's Men* (1983), also showed some Marian bias, and in 1987 he gave several addresses commemorating Mary on the quatercentenary of her execution, including one in Westminster Abbey. Perhaps in letting his emotions show in this way Donaldson was trying to overcome the criticism sometimes made of him that he was merely a Dryasdust archivist at heart.

It would, however, be mistaken to conclude that Gordon Donaldson's contributions to the advancement of Scottish history were made only via his numerous publications. That was very far from being the case. Although he often suffered from poor health he was a man of extraordinary drive and energy. A lifelong bachelor, he enjoyed the

friendship of women but never seems to have formed any romantic attachments. He characteristically jested that he thought too highly of women to subject one to the bondage of marriage. His family dwindled and latterly he was left virtually alone to make what he could of his time. He chose to devote most of it to the furtherance of Scottish history. This he did, not only by his teaching commitments and his massive list of publications, but also by the service he gave to the numerous learned bodies associated with the subject. He served as a member of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland from 1964 to 1982. He was on the Scottish Records Advisory Council from 1964 to 1987. He was president of the following societies: the Scottish Ecclesiological Society, 1963–5; the Scottish Church History Society, 1968–72; the Scottish Record Society, 1981 until his demise; and the Stair Society, 1987 until his demise. He also edited *The Scottish Historical Review* from 1972–7.

His contributions to all of those important bodies was immense, but of particular value were the services that he performed for the Scottish Records Advisory Council. Here his expertise was outstanding, and many of his recommendations bore fruit. His great concern was for the dissemination of historical information, and he believed that archives and archivists should make this their slogan. He argued that records should be held locally wherever possible, and was actively associated with the National Register of Archives (Scotland) from its beginning in 1946. Even after he left the Register House he carried out a large number of surveys of privately held historical manuscripts, and when other pressures caused him to give up this fieldwork he became an invaluable member of the Register's advisory directorate.

He was the recipient of many honours. Shortly before his retirement from his chair in 1979, he was appointed Historiographer to HM the Queen in Scotland, a post of great honour for which he was uniquely qualified. In 1976 he had been awarded the honorary degree of D.Litt. by the University of Aberdeen, and twelve years thereafter he was made a Doctor of the University by Stirling. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1976, and of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1978. Ten years later he was honoured with a CBE. The last honour he received was particularly gratifying to him. In 1992 he was awarded the St. Olav's Medal of Norway in recognition of his work in promoting professional and cultural links between Norway and Scotland.

He had already stressed the importance of the connection between the two countries in a book entitled *A Northern Commonwealth: Scot-*

land and Norway (1990). His interest in Scandinavia stemmed from his connection through his father's family with Shetland. He frequently visited the Northern Isles, and particularly Shetland, on which he wrote with great enthusiasm. He published an interesting little volume of reminiscences, *Isles of Home: Sixty Years of Shetland* (1983), as well as books and articles on Old Norse themes. A notable early work of his was *Life in Shetland under Earl Patrick* (1958), and a little earlier, in 1955, he produced for the Scottish Record Society an edition of *The Court Book of Shetland 1602–04*.

Indeed, in many ways, Gordon Donaldson saw himself as a Shetlander rather than a Scot, and the romantic element in his makeup (which was real, though usually muted) was for the Viking rather than the Celtic heroic tradition. A former student used to relate gleefully how during a students' rag week he once borrowed Gordon Donaldson's Viking outfit, horned helmet and all! For the Celtic tradition, on the other hand, Donaldson had a thoroughly Teutonic disdain which he made little effort to hide. We sometimes teased him about his irredeemably Gaelic name, Donaldson, whose tell-tale origins could not be obliterated by Anglicisation. He took it all in good part, and usually managed a devastating Parthian shot in reply. On one such occasion he reminded me that the earliest recorded use of the name Ferguson was by a ninth-century Viking chief, Gothfrith Fergusson, who was presumably one of those curious half-Norse and half-Gaelic buccaneers of the northern seas. It was a smart 'tu-quoque'.

Yet, cool in many ways though his attitude to Scotland was, he would bristle at any attempt to replace Scottish ways with English ways. Magna Carta, he would insist, was no part of Scotland's heritage, and if the English prized it they should thank the king of Scots, Alexander II, for helping to secure it for them. Another thing that was guaranteed to have him flare up was any attempt to misrepresent such notables as David Hume or James Clerk Maxwell (and, indeed, many other Scots), as great English thinkers. His concise prose, spoken or written, could expertly demolish such delusions.

Another important aspect of Gordon Donaldson's life, which perhaps was not very well known to the generality, was his deep Christian faith. This explained much that was apt to puzzle those who had no close acquaintance with him. His parents were Church of Scotland but derived from the old dissenting United Presbyterian tradition. Early in life Gordon grew dissatisfied with the Church of Scotland and was increasingly drawn to the Episcopal Church, which seemed to him

more sound historically. It was, of course, typical of the man that the Episcopal Church's appeal to him seemed to be vindicated by history. It is typical, too, that, having early convinced himself of the rightness of his conversion, he thereafter seems to have felt a constant need to justify it to others. The curiosity is that he retained a good deal of the evangelical presbyterian outlook and never became, in the Anglican sense, high church or Anglo-Catholic. For years he acted as a lay reader in the Episcopal Church in Scotland and helped with supply preaching to enable many small and remote congregations to survive — and not least in his ancestral Yell in Shetland, the second most northerly island of the British Isles.

Donaldson was active in many Christian spheres. He was a firm believer in ecumenism and worked hard to try and secure a union of the Church of Scotland and the Episcopal Church. He took part in inter-church discussions from 1950 onwards and deplored the obstinate tactics of die-hards on both sides. He was bitterly disappointed when the proposed 'bishops-in-presbytery plan' of 1957 was rejected by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1959. In spite of his disappointment at this set-back Donaldson continued to labour for union until in 1985 the talks stalled. But he remained convinced of the need for ecumenism and ultimate church unity in a world where Christianity seemed increasingly at a discount. His attitude to the materialism of the age, however, was ambivalent. He was Thatcherite in his insistence on free-market economics and self-help, and slated those Christians who argued for social welfare. The true purpose of the Christian faith, he held, was to save souls. Yet in his own personal life he detested and despised the selfish greed and hypocrisy that free-market economics brought in its train. To the end he remained nineteenth century in his standards of value, including in those standards the moral economy that had been championed by the great Scottish presbyterian ecclesiastic, Thomas Chalmers.

Gordon Donaldson was a complex man of many talents and had a varied career, each aspect of which added to his stature as a scholar. Knowledge of the sources, skill in marshalling his points, and a clear incisive style ensured the success of his books. His classroom lectures were rather dry and pedantic, and his passion for statistics could be tiresome. But in set-piece occasional lecturing on topics of his own choice his style was of a very high order, and his sure grasp of detail, clarity of exposition and pawky humour make him much sought after as a speaker both at home and abroad. He had the true teacher's

gift — the ability to enlighten and entrance the uninitiated, while advancing the knowledge and understanding of the more expert. Few can have had this gift in such a high degree or used it to better purpose.

As a person to meet he sometimes appeared brusque in his manner, but he was not, as some too hurriedly concluded, arrogant. He took a pride in his work, that was all; and although he undoubtedly enjoyed being a public figure and liked to see his work appreciated, he was at the same time a modest and very private person. Certainly, on first meeting him he could appear cold and formal; but closer acquaintance revealed a man of great sensitivity, much kindness, and considerable charm. That last quality made him a hard man to refuse, and by sheer charm he could achieve results with people whom others gave up as too difficult. The high regard in which he was held by his colleagues and ex-pupils was very evident in the Festschrift volume, entitled *The Renaissance and Reformation in Scotland* (eds. Cowan and Shaw, 1983), which was put together to honour his long tenure of the Fraser Chair when he retired in 1979. Even more revealing of the widespread veneration felt for him was the crowded attendance at his funeral service in St. Mary's Cathedral in Edinburgh on 22 March 1993.

Gordon Donaldson's last, prolonged and painful struggle with cancer was borne with truly Christian fortitude. Anyone who was ever inclined to question the sincerity of his faith would find their answer there. There was a sad irony at the last. Moves were afoot to help him to celebrate his eightieth birthday, but sadly, a bare month before that event could take place, on 16 March 1993 he died in a hospital not far from his last retirement home at Dysart in Fife on the shores of the North Sea that meant so much to him. He had hoped on his retirement in 1979 to settle in his beloved Shetland but sensibly concluded that, with so many books still to write, Shetland, though a Shangri-La in every other respect, was just too remote. A few years before his actual retirement from the chair he moved from the Hermitage area near Leith Links to a historic house near Preston Tower in East Lothian, but after his retirement the pull of the sea was too strong and he moved to Dysart in his mother's native Fife. He loved the sea and was an enthusiastic small boatman who indulged his hobby for messing about with boats for many years when he had a holiday home at Benderloch in Argyll. There he also, crofter style, cut peat for fuel. He was, in fact, knacky, had considerable manual skills, and excelled at a wide range of 'do-it-yourself' activities. To the end he retained a zest for life and a keen interest in affairs.

Shortly before his death he stated in a radio interview that 'Someone said I combined the enthusiasm of youth with the wisdom of age. I would like that as my epitaph'. It would be hard to think of a fitter one.

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Note. Additional information can be found in Ian B. Cowan and Duncan Shaw, eds., *The Renaissance and Reformation in Scotland: Essays in honour of Gordon Donaldson* (Edinburgh, 1983), which, as well as biographical material, contains a very full bibliography of Donaldson's publications to 1981, a comprehensive list which shows the extraordinary range of his interests. His main publications thereafter have been noted above.