HUGH TREVOR-ROPER

# Hugh Redwald Trevor-Roper
## 1914–2003

HOW TO RECALL, within the scope of this memoir, a life so crowded and varied, and writings so abundant and diverse? If my account is necessarily selective, and gives but brief attention to some well-known accomplishments and episodes, it may also have its unexpected sides. For he did not allow the world to know him well. Even his friends rarely if ever glimpsed some of the complexities and inner springs of character that emerge from private reflections in his voluminous papers, which are now in Christ Church, Oxford. In spite of his public profile, he lived, more than most men, predominantly within himself, through the inspiration, and under the burden, of his mind and temperament.

There are few signs of intellectual or literary interests in his family's past. The name Trevor-Roper (which he found an ungainly construction) derives from the eighteenth century, when the Ropers of Kent, the formerly recusant family that had produced the son-in-law of Sir Thomas More, inherited lands of the Trevors in North Wales and transplanted themselves there. Hugh's father Bertie, the youngest of thirteen children, grew up in a house close to the family's crumbling Jacobean mansion. He trained as a doctor and intended to work in India, but was told that his health would not survive there. Instead he moved to Northumberland, where he lived to the age of 94. His medical practice began in the village of Glanton, and sustained its rural base after his move, in Hugh's childhood, to the nearby town of Alnwick. It was at Glanton that Hugh was born, the second of three children, on 15 January 1914, to parents both in their late twenties. He and his brother Pat, the distinguished ophthalmologist who was two years Hugh's junior, remembered a grim household, where the expression of warmth or emotion was proscribed. There

may have been a streak of impishness in his father, who had a fondness for the turf, and whom a friend of Hugh remembers as having vaguely the appearance of a bookie. If so, marriage to Hugh's mother, Kathleen Davison, the censorious daughter of a Belfast businessman, repressed that trait. Hugh recalled bleakly silent car-journeys at his father's side as the doctor did his rural rounds.

His own early impishness revealed itself in exuberantly rhymed poems and playlets. Yet he remembered his childhood as unhappy. It was largely solitary. He was close neither to his mother nor to his sister Sheila, and was not particularly close to Pat. It was in his own company that he developed his love of the natural world, collected butterflies and moths, kept hedgehogs, tadpoles and caterpillars, and came to know 'all the wild flowers that grew in Northumberland, all the kinds of crustaceans, molluscs, sea-mice, marine spiders, etc. that crept along the coast', though his extreme short-sightedness precluded the same familiarity with birdlife. The other inner resource was reading. The family's was not a bookish home, but he devoured every encyclopaedia or work of human or natural history that he could find. He got through church services by studying the Prayer Book, the print held near to his eyes, and by calculating the dates of Easter down the ages. He came to know the Old Testament so well that, later, he could teach himself languages by reading it in them.

Having begun his education under an excellent governess he was sent first to a wretched preparatory school in Derbyshire, and then, for a longer period, to a better one at Dunbar. At thirteen he moved to Charterhouse, the public school in Surrey. There, though his intellectual capacity soon revealed itself, he was for long a withdrawn, even mousy figure. With time he emerged, 'like a chick from its shell' as he would remember, to become one of the school's conspicuous and respected personalities. Yet it was among books that he discovered himself. He had wanted to specialise in mathematics, but was told by the Headmaster that 'clever boys do classics'. Thus was he directed to the prime love of his mental life. 'How vividly', he wrote in adulthood, 'I remember each discovery' in Greek literature. First there was the day when, in his study at school, 'the vocabulary of Homer, as it were, broke in my hands'. Then came Theocritus, whom he first read 'amid the noise of grasshoppers and the smell of mown grass'. There was Pindar, 'whose majestic myths and magniloquent poetry transported me into a world so remote and elevated that one descended afterward with difficulty into the realm governed by the laws of gravity'. Greatest of all was Aeschylus, with his 'vivid, highly charged metaphors, swollen to bursting point by the presence of tor-

menting thoughts'. Homer he came to know by heart. Later he had his Virgil 'done up as a Prayer-Book' for company during chapel services. He would wake with classical poetry on his lips. In old age, when physical movement was impaired, he kept a Horace on both floors of his house, and with his failing eyes re-read his way through all of Cicero and Tacitus.

As a Classical Scholar at Christ Church from 1932 he won a series of prizes. A glittering career as a classicist awaited him. Yet in his second year he renounced that prospect and transferred to a degree in history, which had been an extracurricular addiction. The change was one of a series of repudiations that transformed him in the years of and immediately following his undergraduate career. Charterhouse, a worthy school pledged to Anglican piety and conventional virtue, had encouraged conformism of opinion and taste. At the time he conformed. The reaction came at Oxford. It can be explained partly by the confident worldliness of Christ Church—or rather of the secular half of the college, for the ecclesiastical presence was strong enough to nurture what became his fierce anticlericalism. Though none of his institutional allegiances was ever uncritical, he would always be a Christ Church man at heart, and it was there that he returned as a tutor after the war. On the two occasions when he was obliged to move to another Oxford college, first to a Research Fellowship at Merton in 1937 and then, twenty years later, to the Fellowship at Oriel that accompanied his appointment as Oxford's Regius Professor of Modern History, he did so with a heavy heart, though time would foster new affections.

In his first undergraduate year he ate at the Scholars' table, but cast envious glances at the jollier company of the Commoners, to which he thereafter gravitated. Hugh does not quite answer to the familiar caricature of the college's more boisterous undergraduates. He was not a window-smasher. Nonetheless he lived wildly and drank deeply. He also developed, with the income from his Classics prizes, the passion for fox-hunting that would consume a high proportion of his days until, in 1948, he broke his spine in the last of many falls from his horse. During the war, friends would urge him to renounce hunting and other frivolous intrusions upon a scholar's time. Yet he would hitch-hike in lorries in the icy dawn to get from London to the Bicester country, or use his military leave to hunt in Ireland, indeed would do anything to be among the sounds and smells of the chase, the changes of landscape and light in the fields and woods.

Alongside the social discoveries of his early twenties came intellectual and moral reappraisals. Having been taught, at Charterhouse, what to

think and admire, he now began to develop his impregnable independence and individuality of viewpoint. A seminal influence was the Victorian writer Samuel Butler, whom for a time he idolised, and who 'saved my life', for under his example 'I turned my back on the prim, traditional paths of classical learning'. Hugh began to distinguish morality, about which he was always fastidious, from 'the systems people make out of their repressions', from 'social and sexual conventions, religion, and all the apparatus of God and Sin'. By 1937 his interest in theological abstractions, and 'my high-church leanings', had surrendered to a cool rationalism and a sharp insistence on the concrete and the material. In his rebellion he cultivated for a time a waggish scepticism, even a veneer of anti-intellectualism.

In his Finals in 1936, for which he had not worked hard, he completed his double First. He did work hard for the competitive exam, later in the year, for Prize Fellowships of All Souls, but failed to win election; which he minded at the time. He had hoped to use the position to prepare himself for the exam for the diplomatic service, a career to which he would have been fitted perfectly by intellect and disastrously by temperament. Instead, still at Christ Church and now under the exiguous supervision of Claude Jenkins, the Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History, he embarked on the research that would produce his first book, *Archbishop Laud*, published in 1940. We do not know why, having taken undergraduate options on St Augustine and on very modern history, he settled on the seventeenth century for his research. Perhaps his choice reflects the influence of that leading historian of the period, Keith Feiling, who with J. C. Masterman was his principal undergraduate tutor in history, though Hugh respected him more in distant retrospect than at the time. Or perhaps the subject of Laud appealed to the 'high-church leanings' that he would surrender only in his third postgraduate term. He was awarded a University Studentship, taught for Christ Church and for Balliol College, and in his second year of research won his Merton Fellowship. During the war he remembered that 'golden period' of his graduate days, or one that seemed golden when 'viewed selectively from a colder, darker epoch', when he and his friends 'lived effortlessly', 'hunting foxes and hares, drinking and talking, reading new books and old books, walking hounds in the early summer mornings through Garsington and Cuddesdon and Coombe Wood, watching for the emergence of each new wild flower in those comfortable fields and hedgerows and water meadows, making new intellectual discoveries in those hours of infinite, astronomical leisure. How delightful to sit in a beautiful room' in Merton,

'south-facing through great bow-windows over the Christ Church Meadow, rook-racked, river-rounded, writing a book, after an early walk, amid pleasant interruptions . . .'

*Archbishop Laud*, though praised on its appearance for the industry behind it, is not, by later standards, a work of exhaustive research. Even so, it is startling to find that it was written, not only in less than three years from scratch, but with intermittent application and amid countless diversions. During the same period he spent months writing a novel on an anticlerical theme, which he tried to publish. He wrote a piece, which drew on archival work and appeared in *Country Life*, on the eighteenth-century foxhunting poet William Somerville, and a long unpublished paper on the authorship of *Prometheus Bound*. Or he would sit at a typewriter and compose 'wit, blasphemy and nonsense'. His talk was blasphemous too, imprudently so if he wanted a career at Oxford. Once Hugh's Anglican inclinations had been shed, it seems to have been only by discharging his new-found irreverence in other writings that he was able to preserve a measured tone in imparting what became the lesson of the book on Laud: that the conduct of the Church and churchmen is governed by the rules of this world, not of the next.

Even when we allow for the anti-intellectual posture, he does not look, in those years, like a major historian in the making. In the first year of his research he would easily 'weary of all this academic stuff'. 'I have been doing some work on my thesis lately', records the diary he kept in 1937–8, 'but have now given up through boredom of solitude and spend my time writing frivolities and reading Dostoevsky.' 'The Public Record Office', he decided after his first visit, paid between lunch and tea, to its reading-rooms in Chancery Lane, 'is no place for a gentleman. Dinge, incredible dinge, must, fust, and influenza germs.' In the absence of a postgraduate community, the habits of his undergraduate life persisted. The nocturnal peace of Oxford's quadrangles and back-streets would be shattered, on his return from the chase or from drinking expeditions, by his blasts on hunting-horns and bugles and trumpets. He lived restlessly, taking enormous walks, sleeping beneath open skies. He lived dangerously, too, swimming in choppy seas, driving too fast, charging at hedges on a horse as impetuous as he.

In September 1938 came the Munich crisis and its call to seriousness. Its shadow falls over his diary like the arrival of the messenger of death amid the festivities of *Love's Labours Lost*. Outrage at appeasement merged with despair for the future of Europe, of England, and of himself and his generation. He read *Mein Kampf*, as no one he knew did, and

acquired his preoccupation with Hitler's character and purposes. After
the outbreak of war he was drawn into Intelligence work by the accident
of his acquaintance with the Bursar of Merton, Walter Gill, with whom
he worked, in an office converted from a prison cell in Wormwood Scrubs,
in what would become the Radio Security Service (RSS), and with whom
he shared a flat in Ealing. Charged with identifying radio messages to
Germany from (non-existent) spies in England, the two men, through
Hugh's cryptographical skills and Gill's knowledge of wireless, made a
discovery on a different front, outside their remit. In early 1940 they inter-
cepted, and in the evenings at Ealing gradually learned to decipher,
messages, some between Hamburg and a ship off Norway, others from
Wiesbaden to Hamburg, which they identified as belonging to the radio
network of the *Abwehr*, the German Secret Service. It was from that seed
that the extensive penetration of *Abwehr* wireless by Bletchley Park would
grow.

Despite that achievement, Hugh had a contentious wartime career
ahead of him. He was embroiled in a series of vivid confrontations with
a number of his superiors, and developed a furious and lacerating con-
tempt for the professional capacities of cosily recruited *habitués* of
London clubland. He despaired at the competitive feuding of Intelligence
departments and at their failure to pool their knowledge. But by 1943,
when he became Major, his standing had improved, with the help of two
influential friends: Dick White (then in MI5, and later the head of SIS),
who wrote of Hugh in that year that no single officer in MI5 or MI6
'possesses a more comprehensive knowledge of the *Abwehr* organisation,
particularly on its communication side'; and Patrick Reilly, the future
diplomat, who was personal assistant to the head of MI6. Amid complex
departmental reorganisations Hugh was able to win a degree of inde-
pendence for himself, within SIS, as head of a small section which pro-
duced an imposing collection of research papers on German intelligence.
His colleagues in it, whom he had recruited over the previous two years,
were Charles Stuart—another Christ Church man, who was brought to
Hugh's notice by J. C. Masterman, and who after the war would be
Hugh's fellow-historian at the college—and the philosophers Gilbert
Ryle, a close friend of Hugh before and during the war, and Stuart
Hampshire. Reilly described the four men as a 'team of a brilliance
unparalleled anywhere in the Intelligence machine'. Forthcoming work
by Ted Harrison, including an article in the *English Historical Review*,
will bring out the extent and significance of Hugh's contribution to
Intelligence.

After the Normandy landings he spent much time at Allied Headquarters, first in France, then in Germany. At a press conference in Berlin in November 1945 he announced the findings of his conclusive report, which he had assembled in less than two months, on the circumstances of Hitler's death, a document produced to counter mendacious Soviet claims that the Führer was still alive. From it Hugh's classic study *The Last Days of Hitler* would emerge sixteen months later. Here as in so much else, he felt his life to have been governed by the power of accident. 'The whole business', he recalled shortly after the book's publication, 'began in a bottle; for it was when I was drinking hock with Dick White', at that time head of the Counter-Intelligence Bureau in the British zone of occupation, and Herbert Hart, another Intelligence officer with an eminent future, 'that my researches were first instituted. I was interested in the subject, and from a variety of casual sources had picked up a good deal of unsystematic information, some right, some wrong; and over the third bottle of hock I was drawing on this reservoir of conversational raw-material'—for among his friends the young Hugh was an incessant talker—'and was telling rather a good story, as I thought (though I have since discovered that it was thoroughly inaccurate), about the last highly charged days in Hitler's bunker. "But this is most important!" exclaimed Dick, his eyes popping, as they sometimes do, out of universal eagerness of spirit. "No one has yet made any systematic study of the evidence, or even found any evidence, and we are going to have all kinds of difficulty unless something is done."' Hugh was commissioned by White to do it, and promptly began his pursuit and interrogation of the surviving former inhabitants of the bunker. It was a time of high intensity, of exultant discovery (some of it achieved in bibulous company in mirthfully improbable circumstances), and of 'delightful journeys, motoring through the deciduous golden groves of Schleswig-Holstein, and coming, on an evening, when the sun had just set but the light had not yet gone, and the wild duck were out for their last flight over the darkening waters, to the great Danish castle of Ploen . . .'

*The Last Days* subsumes the excitement of the chase into a narrative of perfect proportions and pace, and into an enduring epitaph on a hideous tyranny. It is that rare artefact, a work of contemporary history written not merely for the present but for posterity. Readers of Tacitus, another recorder of a recent tyranny, notice echoes of him in Hugh's book. Yet it may have been only afterwards that Hugh himself became conscious of them. The Roman writer whose name the book invokes is not the historian of imperial tyranny but its satirist, Juvenal, whose spirit

lives in Hugh's portraits of Hitler's courtiers, of the 'parasites' and 'toad-ies' and 'flatulent clowns' of that 'monkey-house'. Even on that terrible subject it is the deflationary force of Hugh's comic instinct that pierces the awe of appearances.

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Wartime deepened Hugh, but the war itself was not the only cause. After his carefree life of the later 1930s he discovered adult unhappiness, and came to appreciate the aphorism of the first Marquis of Halifax: 'Content to the mind is like moss to a tree; it bindeth up so as to stop its growth.' In the preceding years, and in *Archbishop Laud*, there had been, as he regretfully recalled in 1943, 'no introspection', 'no hesitancy or doubt'. Two events of 1940, their impact heightened by the nation's crisis, were formative. The first, following a botched operation for sinusitis, was illness, 'which teaches sympathy and humanity to those who have for-gotten it'. Its legacy, for decades, was a 'private disease', which would suddenly incapacitate him for days on end. Nervous fatigue played its part in that as in other illnesses.

Secondly, he came to know the elderly writer Logan Pearsall Smith, 'the sage of Chelsea', and learned from him that only in a 'vocation', and in the pursuit of 'truth', could life acquire a 'meaning'. Smith's ideals were bound to an aestheticism that Hugh would later shed, but his influence would have enduring legacies. It fortified Hugh's courage, not only in holding solitary opinions, but in living by them. It inspired him to perfectionism of writing and, in its pursuit, to struggle, long hours, high aims. *Archbishop Laud* had been about the place of the concrete and the mundane in the supposedly spiritual world. In writing it, as he would (not without simplification) remember, he had 'neglected poetry and prose, read neither Gibbon nor Homer, but only studied, and stud-ied only essential monographs and laborious theses'. He had 'con-sciously ignored' the 'temptation' of style. Now Smith 're-interested me' in 'style and the world of sensation', and taught him to venerate 'style of living, style of writing, born of disinterested thought and sweat to ennoble and preserve the thoughts and memory of an else insignificant existence'. With Smith he rejoiced in shared literary discoveries and in the exploration of the properties and resources of language. From Smith, too, whom he fondly remembered as 'a rather wicked old man', he gained confidence in two deviant convictions: the necessity of

pleasure for the sustenance of thought and energy; and the value of mischief, even of malice, in penetrating the humbug of power and of conventional opinion. Hugh would never confuse seriousness with solemnity, or be susceptible to the notion, which he ascribed to 'censorious historians', that 'serious political ideals can only be sincerely held by public bores'. He knew that it is not earnestness that kills, but irony or ridicule—the spirit that informs *The Last Days*, a work written for Smith, though Smith did not live to read it.

But what form would Hugh's 'vocation' take? He was surely destined to be a writer, but was he bound to be a historian? During the war he compiled notebooks, indebted in form to those of Samuel Butler and to Smith's book *Trivia*, where he experimented with style and mood and subject-matter. They are the record of a vibrant, nervous, romantic sensibility, and of a young man as restless in mind as in body. There are reflections on religion, art, literature and the natural world, and descriptions of walking, fishing, hunting, of friends and companions. Gossip and frivolity mingle with existential meditation, high spirits with the melancholy he seeks to keep at bay. There are poems, in English and Latin. He made a specialism of the ballad form, where he achieved comedic lines that Hilaire Belloc or John Betjeman would not have disdained. In those years he was upheld by literature. Amid the 'fits of depression, dank, meaningless, infinite gloom' which 'increasingly overcome me', his notebook of 1945 records, he turned 'for relief to literature', where sometimes 'I find my own condition, elevated into a momentary sublimity by the magic art of Aeschylus, of Euripides, of Shakespeare, of Leopardi, of Housman, and of that brutal and lecherous old Psalmist-King'.

The notebooks pay less attention to his voracious historical reading during the war. They do, however, acknowledge his 'fond ambition' to 'write a book that someone, some day, will mention in the same breath as Gibbon'. Subjects for historical books piled in his mind and pressed on it, as they would through his life. At this stage he seems to have been as much attracted by the prospect of evoking the past as of analysing it. In 1943 he had his eye on the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and contemplated first a book on the Duke of Marlborough, then one on the France of Louis XIV. But there were two grander projects, neither of them bound to a period, both of them pointing to lasting preoccupations. One was about class, the other about religion. He envisaged a large work, to be called *A History of the English Ruling Classes*, where he would convey the shifts of atmosphere and values as the power and wealth of the aristocracy altered across the generations, from Tudor times

to the present. As often, his intellectual concerns were bound with per-
sonal ones. He half-wanted to join the aristocracy, half-wanted to beat it.
He disliked his own class, in the middle-to-upper layer of the middle class,
with its narrow, even 'semi-fascist' prejudices. He enjoyed and envied aris-
tocratic style and confidence, at least in their more eccentric forms. Even
in later life he liked, as he self-mockingly confessed, to 'listen, with guilty
pleasure, to the inane but comforting flattery of jewelled duchesses'. It is
no accident that he married the daughter of an earl, though there was
nothing calculating, and in professional and material terms there was
every risk, in that ardent and initially adulterous encounter. Yet he cen-
sured aristocratic rule when it took oppressive forms or separated itself
from public responsibility. During the war he noted with pleasure and
a touch of animus that the British aristocracy was now 'dead as the
mammoth and the mastodon'.

The second project was a study, across centuries and civilisations, of
religious revivals. Generally respectful of inherited religious allegiances,
he had less time for voluntarily acquired ones. He thought the historical
and intellectual propositions of Christianity, to which, 'if words mean
anything', its adherents commit themselves when they say the Creed,
absurd. His blasphemous instincts persisted into the war, when he
embarked on a fictional 'Vision of Judgement', in which God regrets dis-
patching his son to save humanity and even doubts his own existence. In
the post-war years Hugh aimed salvo after salvo at Catholicism. His
study of religious revivals contracted into an unfriendly study, undertaken
in 1953–4, of the Catholic revival of the nineteenth century. Though he
insisted on calling it a pamphlet, it runs, even in its unfinished form, to
nearly 55,000 words. Yet hostility and disbelief are not the total of his
perspective on religion. Atheism he thought an arrogant and banal
position, an affront to the numinous. 'Cosmic *enigmata*' tortured him
long after his rejection of Christian teaching in his early twenties. The
mistake, he thought, was to confuse religion with ethics, or alternatively
to transport its properties from the realm of myth to that of fact. 'If I had
a religion', he reflected in 1944—

> and I sometimes feel that I behave as if I were in search of one—I would be a
> pagan. For it is among meadows and hills, clear streams and woodland rides,
> that I find serenity of mind; in deep forests and dark caverns, among lonely
> crags and howling tempests that I feel the inadequacy of man; in the starry
> night and by the desolate seashore that the triviality of temporal existence
> oppresses or comforts me. If satyrs were one day to pop up and pipe to me
> among the Cheviot Hills; if a troop of nymphs were suddenly to rise with

seductive gestures from a trout-pool in the Breamish; if dryads and hamadryads were to eye me furtively as I hunted the tangled thickets of Hell Copse or Waterperry Wood; I would not feel in the least surprised—I already half assume their presence there. But if God were to speak to me through the mouth of a clergyman, or to appear to me in any of the approved Christian attitudes, then indeed I would begin to ask questions.

Christianity, like any other religion, was deserving of respect 'as an allegory, or harmless poetic belief, into whose historically consecrated shell successive generations have poured a philosophical or moral content'. But clericalism, dogmatism and fanaticism were different matters. His writings plead the claims of humanity, and of the life of the mind, against them. He could mock them to Gibbonian effect. What he could not do was convey the substance of religious experience, even in forms of it that he judged reputable. Lacking an explanatory framework, the allusions in his work to 'spiritual' qualities, or to 'genuine' religious sentiment, lack resonance.

The project on class contracted too, again into an unfinished book. Later he would look back on his '*Marxisant* phase'. He was always averse to Marxist determinism and to Marxist prophecy. Yet in his reaction against metaphysical assertion, and against insubstantial high-mindedness, he welcomed the materialism of Marxist explanation. In his younger writings he accepted the Marxist interpretation of the early modern period as a clash between declining feudalism and emerging capitalism. His study of Laud rested on that premise. So did his essay, published (in the *Durham University Journal*) in 1946, 'The Bishopric of Durham and the Capitalist Reformation', which centred on Thomas Sutton, the founder of Charterhouse, whom he had begun to study before the outbreak of war. In the late 1940s he contemplated a book on four rich men, whose patterns of getting and spending would illustrate the social and economic changes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: Sutton himself; the Duke of Northumberland of Edward VI's reign; Sir Thomas Bodley; and the Earl of Strafford's antagonist the first Earl of Cork. The project in turn was reduced into one on Sutton alone, on whom, by around 1950, he had written five chapters of a book. Perhaps there was an element of revenge in his demonstration that Sutton, who was embalmed in Charterhouse's memory as a paragon of Christian charity, had been a ruthless usurer, to whom a high proportion of the Elizabethan ruling order had been beholden. Hugh painstakingly and expertly reconstructed, in the dinge of the Public Record Office, Sutton's dealings with the nobility. The book was not finished, but from it there would emerge

the broader subject that in 1953 he explored in his long essay (published as a supplement to the *Economic History Review*), *The Gentry 1540–1640*.

Under Pearsall Smith's influence Hugh had told himself that the 'solid, austere research' which he had attempted in *Archbishop Laud* was 'compatible with faith in literary style'. Yet now he had moved into the area of historical study least hospitable to style, economics. 'I have read no books', he told his elderly friend the art connoisseur Bernard Berenson in 1950, 'only dry and dusty leases and records of debts and bills and docquets of inconceivable philistinism. What a price one pays to write history! But I hope to get back to literature soon.' He declared *The Gentry* to be 'dry' and 'dusty' too, 'of some interest to historians and economists, but fundamentally a piece of specialization which can give no pleasure'. The fact to be recognised was that 'the truth is often dull'. With time, as he wearied of economic in favour of intellectual history, a theme friendlier to literary self-expression, and as the romantic agony of the wartime notebooks abated, the claims of the cerebral and of the aesthetic learned to coexist in his mind. Yet as late as 1968 he confessed that 'I find more pleasure in good literature than in dull (even if true) history', and five years afterwards he complained to Frances Yates of the 'prolix and ungrammatical documents' that had becalmed his work on the Huguenot physician Sir Theodore Mayerne.

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*The Last Days of Hitler*, which has never been out of print, brought him instant fame. After its appearance, editors competed for his pen, hostesses for his company. He embarked on what amounted to a part-time career not only as an authority on modern Germany but as a book reviewer on a vast range of subjects and, for many years to come, as a visitor to foreign lands and a commentator on their politics. He had a secure job, as a scholar and teacher at Christ Church, his old college, in whose politics and administration he would soon become a leading force, though never in his career did he spend an unnecessary minute on bureaucracy. The world saw the confident part of him, and in convivial company he showed the effervescent one. He would surround his life, and its contentious episodes, with a wealth of anecdote, which, in indiscreet monologues and letters, he related and embroidered with exquisite artistry. He exulted in *la comédie humaine*, in his love of battle and of controversy, and in the zest of his writing and talk. His unsparing rationality seemed—as he

liked it to do—to be in control of his life and circumstances, so much so that even his friends mistakenly doubted his inclination or capacity for the passions and intimacies that defy reason's reach. Outwardly he was an imposing, often intimidating figure, resolute, fearlessly and at times mercilessly articulate, and ever ready to pass epigrammatic judgements, intellectual, moral and social, that came near to meriting a Boswell. He could be cold and disdainful. It was sympathetic observers who remarked on his 'penetrating and disapproving stares'—perhaps a maternal inheritance—or noticed, when some trivial or unwelcome point was put to him, 'the Trevor-Roper gesture of dismissal, that flap of the right hand'. He drew back from displays of weakness or softness in others. Yet on the rare occasions when the mask slipped—as when he surprised his stepchildren by breaking down while reading Turgenev to them—he would be paralysed by tears.

Fearful of being a burden to others, and perhaps of attracting their pity, he mostly kept to himself the depressions to which he would always be vulnerable. None of his letters seem more buoyant than the ones, published in 2006 as *Letters from Oxford*, that he wrote to Berenson between 1947 and 1959. Yet mid-way through that correspondence, and around the time of his fortieth birthday, he revealed in other letters, written to Xandra Howard-Johnston, Earl Haig's daughter, who would soon be his wife, the unhappiness into which, from high spirits, his mood would swing. Plagued by a sense of his own oddness and awkwardness, he felt blighted by his difficulty in making emotional contacts and by his involuntary retreats from the expression or reception of private feeling. He endured the kind of loneliness that is most oppressive not in solitude but in company. Though as a rule he loved cultivated landscape and disliked barren wastes, he went three times in the post-war years to walk in the desolate wilds of Iceland, where for days he would not meet a soul. Yet from that remote land he would write, to his friends in England, letters bursting with *joie de vivre*.

He had no small talk. Alert to falsity of mood or sentiment, and impatient of the second-hand opinion on which society feeds, he had no aptitude for feigning interest in platitudinous civilities, a deficiency which he keenly felt and which inhibited his relations even with the wide range of people he admired. He was more at ease in his compulsive letter-writing, where sentences could be formed at his own pace and human contact be essayed within protective limits. He was ebullient in relaxed company, but on his own terms. If he ever found equality in friendships, it was in the earlier part of his life, among his companions in his student

years and in the war, or, in the decade or so after the war, in his comradeship with the historians Robert Blake and Charles Stuart at Christ Church. Yet, spirited as those relationships were, he was more intensely drawn to inherently unequal relations with older men, especially Pearsall Smith and Berenson. Later he would be drawn to inherently unequal relations with younger ones. Even the people who knew him best experienced uncomfortable silences. A colleague compared talking to him at a party with putting money into one of those machines that occasionally disgorge a mass of coins to a lucky player: one conversational gambit after another would fail, until the interlocutor hit on a subject that would bring Hugh's face to life and prompt his gifts of anecdote and maxim. When he was Regius Professor, visitors to his office in Merton Street were placed in a chair facing the back of his desk while he slowly paced the room, hands behind his back, chin raised in lordly posture, invisibly craving, if he liked the visitor, the contact that his own manner deterred.

The difficulties of conversation were heightened by his distaste for slovenly or poorly enunciated speech. He disliked losing his syntactical way, for ideally, he believed, there should be no difference between the written and the spoken word. He hated the misuse of language, especially obscurity and murkiness of expression, which, in the ideological convulsions of his own time, had had such 'tremendous consequences'. Freddie Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic*, published in 1936, made a profound impression on him, and he got his undergraduate pupils to read George Orwell's antidote to argumentative dishonesty, the essay 'Politics and the English Language'. Behind that concern lay Hugh's classical training. 'At the back of my mind', he wrote to a friend, 'I see every sentence as demanding to be put into Latin. If it cannot be put into Latin, I know that it is, at best, obscure, at worst, nonsense.' In his reading he had a special affection for the classical orderliness and transparency of Dryden, and was most at home in the most classical of centuries, the eighteenth, the age of his heroes Hume—the person from the past, he once suggested, whom he would most have liked to know—and Gibbon, Hugh's model historian. Yet here too there were depths and complications, for alongside his classical inclinations lay more individual, and sometimes still keener, literary preferences. They drew him to styles of wrought intensity and exoticism; to the baroque and metaphysical intricacies of the seventeenth century; to 'the trinity of my stylistic devotion', Sir Thomas Browne, C. M. Doughty and George Moore; to the wild or grotesque comic fantasies of Cervantes and Carroll and Gogol and Bulgakov.

There was no want of orderliness in his own working habits. No historian of his own century, at least in his own country, surpassed him in swiftness and sharpness of perception. He could grasp the essence of a document with lightning speed, his eyes shining with concentration. Yet he was the most meditative of readers. He patiently took notes even on books which, in periods of the truancy that he judged essential to vitality of mind and to a sense of intellectual perspective, took him far in time and place from the subjects and commitments that crowded upon him. To ponder the lessons of a book that interested him he would make an index of its suggestive matter, or write an essay for his own eyes. He wrote his own publications, as he would always lament, 'painfully slowly'. Since he seems to have composed most of *The Last Days of Hitler* in less than a month, 'in the evenings', during his first term as an Oxford tutor, we might wonder what he imagined fast writing to be. Yet his prose was never hurried, never snatched from its hinterland of rumination. If the command and polish of his writing suggest ease of composition, the appearance is misleading. It gives no hint of his struggles for lucidity, for the imposition of form, for assurance of judgement.

The inside of a writer's head at the moment of composition is beyond historical recovery. Whence came Hugh's distinctive blend of poise and nervous energy? By what processes did his habits of mental discipline bridle and channel his restlessness of soul? Sometimes the restlessness seems an evasion of stillness, even perhaps of the pain that might be confronted in it. He was always drawn to motion, and with it to evanescence: to the changes of season, and to dayspring and dusk rather than 'the obvious noonday'. Shakespeare's lines, 'everything that grows | Holds in perfection but a little moment', were ever in his head. Then there are Hugh's recurrent aquatic metaphors, which commend fluidity and condemn stagnation. In his innumerable battles—with the historians Lawrence Stone and A. J. P. Taylor and Arnold Toynbee and E. H. Carr over their use of evidence or of language or over their argumentative premises; with the Catholics and Communists who, between them, occupied a place in the intellectual landscape of the post-war decades that is now hard to recall; over the Warren Commission's report on the assassination of President Kennedy; with some of the Fellows of Peterhouse, the Cambridge college of which he became Master in 1980; and a legion more—there was always an intellectual or moral purpose. Yet there was also the impulse to stir. Many of his campaigns assailed the comfort and complacency of closed or static institutions or systems of ideas. Delighted to give provocation, he himself was dependent on the stimulus of it. The errors of

Lawrence Stone's article of 1948 on the economic condition of the Elizabethan aristocracy led not merely to Hugh's comprehensive and pitiless (though not, as is commonly said, vituperative) assault on its statistical foundations in the *Economic History Review* in 1951, but to the rival interpretation advanced in his longer essay on the gentry two years later. Without Eric Hobsbawm's Marxist analysis of the revolts of mid-seventeenth-century Europe there would not have been Hugh's essay in *Past and Present* in 1959 on the 'General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century'. Without his exasperation at the insular conception of the subject among Scottish historians he might have made no study of that country's Enlightenment.

Combat upheld his spirits. During the post-war era they needed upholding. In the damp Oxford climate, especially in the torpor of the vacations, he would be crushed by lassitude and exhaustion. Sapped of the energy and morale on which his writing depended, he would ponder his unwritten and unfinished books and his want of fulfilment. Nothing of his dismay entered his writing of that time. His essays of 1951–3 on the aristocracy and gentry seem to exude self-esteem. So do the sparklingly didactic book reviews, written from the late 1940s and taking all history for their province, from which he gathered his *Historical Essays* in 1957. Beneath their brief, swift surfaces there lies a bewildering range of reading and reflection. Yet they scarcely satisfied him. He wanted to write books.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

By the late 1940s he had found a new theme for one, Oliver Cromwell and the Puritan Revolution. He gave courses of lectures on the subject, a medium he would often use to shape books or potential books in his mind. But the idea was sidelined for some years. First, in 1951–2, there were his duties as Senior Censor at Christ Church, which were enlarged by the absence of the Dean as the university's Vice-Chancellor. Then came a series of other literary projects. Together with the account of the Catholic revival there was a more ambitious undertaking, which had formed in his mind by mid-1953. It would, he told Berenson, be 'a major work', of which his essay on the gentry was 'in part a sample or prefiguration', on Robert Cecil, first Earl of Salisbury, the leading royal adviser of the late years of Elizabeth I and the early ones of James I, a study 'which (I believe) may explain a hitherto unexplained set of problems in English

history'. The problems, it is safe to guess, were ones which he was to explore in other works, finished and unfinished, in the years to come: those of the tensions between the swelling and parasitic Renaissance state, 'the court', and the taxpayers, 'the country', who bore the burden of it. Yet the book seems not to have been begun. Its place was taken by a long work, which did get going, on Max Weber's thesis on capitalism and the Reformation. Displacement had become a habit. Even as he wrestled with Weber, writing and tearing up successive drafts, fresh subjects were bubbling in his mind. He planned to revisit, during a period of sabbatical leave, the era of the proposed book on the Earl of Salisbury and to write on the succession problem in late Elizabethan England. Then, in 1956, he applied to give the Ford's Lectures at Oxford (for at that time the position was advertised), taking as his subject Anglo-Spanish relations from 1604 to 1660. He was thwarted by the opposition of Vivian Galbraith, whom he would succeed as Regius Professor the following year. Hugh's reflections on Protestantism and capitalism were eventually condensed into the essay that gave the title to his volume of essays *Religion, The Reformation and Social Change*, but there was still no book.

That omission was much remarked on, not least during the months of public speculation about the succession to Galbraith. In the public mind the leading contenders for the Regius chair were Hugh and A. J. P. Taylor, though the Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, first offered it to the eighteenth-century historian Lucy Sutherland. Hugh felt Taylor's claims to be stronger than his own. The two men had been allies, even fellow *enfants terribles*, against the establishment of Oxford's history faculty. For all their differences of character and principle, they shared a breadth and incisiveness of historical outlook, an eagerness to communicate it beyond the academic world, and, albeit in contrasting forms, a mastery of literary style. Taylor was aggrieved by Hugh's appointment to the Regius chair, and in 1961 the two men would do battle over Taylor's book *The Origins of the Second World War*, a work which offended Hugh's conception of the responsibility of historians to their evidence and which permanently dented his respect for its author. Yet with time Taylor showed great magnanimity. After the breach, as before it, there was no more generous an admirer of Hugh's writings.

Early in 1957, the year that would see his translation to the chair, Hugh returned to the Puritan Revolution. In 1954–5 he had written, with a facility he thought he had lost, his essay 'Oliver Cromwell and his Parliaments' (published in *Essays in honour of Sir Lewis Namier*, edited by Taylor and by Richard Pares in 1956), but only now was the larger

project resumed. By December 1957, at the end of his first term as Regius, he was 'desperately trying to write what I know will be a very long book', which 'weighs heavily on my conscience'. Publishers, eyeing the tercentenary of Cromwell's death in 1958, had wanted him to write a biography of him, a financial opportunity to which Hugh, who often lived beyond his means, was not averse. Yet he found it easier to sign potentially lucrative contracts than, when it came to the writing, to set scholarly seriousness aside for them. The claims of 'this piddling anniversary' made way for a larger study, which would relate the course of the revolution to its social and political origins from the late sixteenth century. Again there was a great deal of rewriting. For a time he envisaged three volumes, to amount to about 300,000 words. The first of them, which was to trace the origins of the wars and to be called *The Crumbling of the Monarchy*, would be the longest. Initially he expected it to be about 100,000 words, but it gradually grew, for the work for that first volume was the heart of the project. In what he for a time expected to be more or less its final form, the account of the origins of the war, and of the events of 1640–2, amounts to around 200,000 words. By contrast his plans for the years after 1642 contracted. Drafts survive of his writing on that period, though it is hard to tell at what stage of the project they were written. In length they would have warranted a second volume but not a third. By early 1961 he had resolved to treat those years much more briefly, in about 30,000 words, which would constitute the last of six parts of what he now expected to appear as a single, long volume, provisionally to be called either *The Crisis of English Government 1640–1642* or *Reform or Revolution? 1640–1643*.

Yet no subject, even one on which he was so intensively engaged, could monopolise his attention or restrict his curiosity. Somehow, even as he struggled with the Puritan Revolution, he found time for other learned writing. In 1959 there appeared his essay 'The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century', a work of dazzling range and startling interpretative ambition which at last gave Oxford a leading voice in the European historiography of the period. It appeared in *Past and Present*, where it stimulated an amicable and distinguished debate. The essay projected on to Continental history, to which he had not hitherto given prolonged attention, the thesis of a conflict between 'court and country' that also supplies the connecting argument of the attempted book on the Puritan Revolution. Together with his essay on the Weber thesis, which complemented it in his mind, the piece on 'The General Crisis' shifted attention away from the economic creativity which Weber and others had detected

in Protestantism, towards the economically inhibiting bureaucracies of the Renaissance state. Royal courts, Hugh argued, had provoked not only material grievances but moral and political dissent and, eventually, the revolutions that swept through the Continent, as through Britain, in mid-century.

Thus in England, as he concluded in his projected book on the Puritan Revolution, 'the machinery of government . . . had become a social and economic burden both on the country and the crown: a burden so heavy that the country sought desperately to reduce it, so wasteful that the crown could no longer sustain it unchanged'. In February 1961 he sent the typescript of the book, in its single-volume form, to the young historian John Elliott, whose shrewd criticisms brought home to him the need for surgery. Hugh worked anxiously on the project again that summer and autumn, adding or restoring extensive material on the post-1642 period. That is the last we hear of the writing. Much of the book, as of his work on Weber, was condensed into fertile essays. There was the classic study 'Three Foreigners and the Puritan Revolution' (1961), which was followed by 'Scotland and the Puritan Revolution' (1963) and 'The Fast Sermons of the Long Parliament' (1964). His emphases, in the book or the essays or in both, on the circle of the social reformer Samuel Hartlib; on the British dimension of England's civil wars; on the role of the politics of the city of London; on the provincial horizons of the lesser gentry; on the parliamentary leadership supplied by the peerage: all those themes either influenced or foreshadowed research by others, that massive enterprise which had been set in motion by the gentry controversy and which would gradually devour the hypotheses that had generated it. Yet he was tormented for some years by his failure to publish the book. What had gone wrong?

The problem of which he was most conscious was one of form. There were, at that time, two ways of writing about the Puritan Revolution. There was the tradition of narrative, which was ably and engagingly represented by C. V. Wedgwood's books of 1954 and 1958, *The King's Peace* and *The King's War*, but which lacked the analytical and sociological dimensions for which Hugh strove; and there were the approaches of R. H. Tawney and Stone and Christopher Hill, which were indeed analytical and sociological, but which, treating events as the logical outcome of long-term social and economic developments, barely paused to describe them. Determinism—in either its hard or its soft forms—affronted Hugh morally, by eliminating the freedom of the will and the responsibilities it brings. It affronted him intellectually, by its insensitivity both to the

dependence of the course of events on political decision-making and to those pressures of mood and circumstance under which the decisions are taken. For there was, he maintained, nothing inevitable about the revolution or about its course. The parliamentary leaders were not revolutionary in their aims, but conservative. In church, state and society they looked backward, to an idealised image of the reign of Queen Elizabeth. There was indeed a crisis in 1640–1, born of deep-seated social grievances, the grievances of 'the country', which had grown up over half a century and which Hugh's book explored. Yet the crisis, he maintained, could have been resolved by the reforms and projected reforms of the early phases of the Long Parliament. What happened after the summer of 1641—the drift to war, the struggle for victory, the destruction of the constitution, military and sectarian rule—was not a logical consequence of earlier long-term developments. It was the outcome of the decisions and qualities of politicians and of chance and personality. Revolution, once launched by those forces, bred its own momentum. A struggle for reform and settlement became one for sovereignty. Those claims, which to many historians would now seem barely contentious, boldly confronted an orthodoxy of the time. To substantiate them he needed to write a narrative that would reveal the separate stages of the movement towards civil war and convey the pressures under which the politicians acted. He had to find a way of doing what no one else was attempting: of bringing analysis and narrative together.

It looks as if Hugh, when he intended to carry the story into the post-war years, planned to take it up to the death of Oliver Cromwell in 1658. In drafting the later parts of that project, he confronted two problems, one of scale, the other of sympathy. Was he attempting a rounded narrative of the revolution, akin to those written on seventeenth-century history by Macaulay and S. R. Gardiner? Or was the material on the years after 1642 essentially an extended epilogue to the account of the earlier years, one intended to bear out, by an examination of the course of the revolution, his analysis of its causes? The drafts on the period 1642–58 fall between those stools. Besides, his heart was not quite in them. Other historians, making an equation, one to which he was always resistant, between revolution and progress, portrayed the civil wars as a cause or symptom of an advance towards the modern world. To Hugh they were mostly a series of 'blind ends and wearisome repetitions', the product not of enlightenment but of fanaticism. He sympathised with the aristocratic reformers of the early stages of the revolution. In the Earl of Bedford he found something like a hero. From his parliamentary base the

earl had tried to address the structural and financial problems of the monarchy which, under James I, the Earl of Salisbury, the focus of Hugh's earlier project for a major work, had attempted to solve from his base in high office. But the essentially constructive movement of reform led by the nobility had thereafter yielded to 'the grim, repellent, joyless face of militant, middle-class English Puritanism' and to the hideous and needless destruction that it wrought.

In the form in which he sent it to John Elliott, the book was essentially on the causes, long-term and immediate, of the civil war. It could easily have been published more or less as it then stood. Had it been, it would have been likely to earn, alongside some professional hostility and scepticism, wide acclaim both inside and outside the academic world. Its combination of narrative power and analytical sophistication is what the study of the Puritan Revolution has lacked over the succeeding half century, when the story-tellers and the academic specialists have gone separate ways. Yet the text, full as it was of luminous insights, had limitations, which would have looked increasingly significant with time, and of which, we may guess, he was at least partly aware. The writing is over-rhetorical and has more brilliance than depth. The content, which might have worked as part of a grand, evenly paced narrative of the whole revolution, lacks a sense of roundedness. That is partly because the thesis of 'court and country' provides too restricted an explanatory foundation for both the constitutional and the religious demands of 1640–2; and partly because the narrative, which strains to catch the epic quality of the events of those years, commands too small a range both of evidence and of sympathy. From a more recent perspective, the text seems, in its inspection of the social and economic origins of the war, to have more in common with the works it opposed than with later writing on the period. It is no less distant from subsequent interpretation in the scale of its argument and the breadth of its vision.

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There had now been at least five uncompleted books, and there would be at least five more. Yet the demise of the work on the Puritan upheaval, far from defeating him, was followed by a period of astounding productivity and versatility. There survives from 1963 a notebook in which we can sense him taking stock. In place of the self-consciousness and the stylistic experiments of the earlier, wartime notebooks we now find mature and

deepening historical reflection. He gives the impression, after his long
immersion in Puritan fanaticism, of coming up for air. He was also mov-
ing away from economic explanation to the history of ideas. In them-
selves, economic documents had ceased to have much interest for him by
the time he published *The Gentry* in 1953. The book on the Puritan
Revolution had itself rested on, rather than developed, the economic
conclusions he had reached in that essay, and the same would have been
true of the projected book on Salisbury. By 1963 it was intellectual his-
tory—a dimension of the past to which he now regretted having given
too little space in his essay on 'The General Crisis'—that commanded his
enthusiasm. A new subject was beckoning him, the Enlightenment of the
eighteenth century. In 1965 he made the historiography of the
Enlightenment the subject of his Trevelyan Lectures at Cambridge, which
in the following year he tried unavailingly to find time to get into book
form. Also in 1965 there appeared *The Rise of Christian Europe*, the tele-
vised lectures he had given at the University of Sussex two years earlier.
They gave scope to his enthusiasm, which went back to his teenage years,
for medieval history, to which he now brought the boldest, though to
many medievalists not the most palatable, of his exercises in broad syn-
thesis. After that diversion he returned to historiography, extending his
enquiries back from the eighteenth century to the sixteenth, as, later, he
would carry them into the nineteenth. In 1965 he worked on the
Elizabethan historian William Camden, who would be the subject of
his Neale Lecture six years later (which in turn would be reprinted in his
*Renaissance Essays* of 1987). In 1966 came his long essay on Camden's
Scottish contemporary George Buchanan (published as a supplement to
the *English Historical Review*), and the reflections on Sir Walter Ralegh,
and Ralegh's *History of the World*, that were contained in a long review
(in *History and Theory*) of Christopher Hill's *The Intellectual Origins of
the English Revolution*. 'A whole book', Hugh had ominously written in
his work on the civil wars, 'could be written on the cult of Sir Walter
Ralegh in the 1620s and 1630s', and he seems to have thought of writing
it. In 1967 there followed (in the series of *Studies on Voltaire and the
Eighteenth Century*) his seminal essay on the Scottish Enlightenment,
which—as is emphasised in the shrewd assessment of its impact by Colin
Kidd in the *Scottish Historical Review* for 2005—placed its subject on a
map of European rather than merely native history.

Yet those manifold pursuits were not, in that period, his only or even
his principal ones. Even among them he produced his account, the length
of a short book, of the witch-craze of the sixteenth and seventeenth

centuries, a work that pleased him more than any since *The Last Days of Hitler*. It was written to round out the collection of long essays of 1967, *Religion, The Reformation and Social Change* (in the wake of which he was elected in 1969, at the age of 55, a Fellow of the British Academy: a conspicuously late appointment, though he was not one to covet academic honours). In that book, too, there was published his essay 'The Religious Origins of the Enlightenment', perhaps the highest achievement of a volume that shows him at the peak of his powers. It applied to intellectual history the preoccupation with the relationship of Protestantism to progress that his work on the Weber thesis had brought to economic history. Developing a theme he had explored in an essay on Erasmus in 1954 (subsequently republished in his *Historical Essays*), he insisted that the intellectual advances of and after the Renaissance were to be traced, not to ideology or dogma, but to a tradition of tolerant scepticism that rose above them. He would return to that argument in a number of later essays, as he would in the Wiles Lectures that he gave at Belfast in 1975 on 'The Ecumenical Movement and the Church of England, 1598–1618'. It was a condition of the Wiles Lectures that the lecturer should make a book of them and be paid his fee only once the book was written. Yet that inducement could not extract a finished text from him.

The productivity which marks the years 1965–7 scarcely abated over the succeeding three years. If anything the fare becomes more varied still. He now wrote the most searching of his essays on Macaulay (published in 1968, and subsequently reprinted as the introduction to Penguin's abbreviated edition of Macaulay's *History of England*), a historian on whom, as on Gibbon, he often wrote; his published lecture *The Romantic Movement and the Study of History* (1968); a reflective piece *The Past and the Present*, delivered as a lecture in tense circumstances at the London School of Economics amid insurrectionary students whose principles it did not flatter (and republished in the journal *Past and Present* in 1969); his short book *The Philby Affair* (1969); the pseudonymous commentaries, modelled on the prose of John Aubrey, on Oxford life during the same disturbances, which appeared in brief book form as *The Letters of Mercurius* (1970); and another published lecture *The Plunder of the Arts in the Seventeenth Century* (1970). The last gave voice to a theme that, through the inspiration of Jacob Burckhardt and Émile Mâle and Bernard Berenson, had long attracted him, the relationship of the art of the Renaissance to the social and political circumstances of its production. The preoccupation runs from

his essay on Rubens in 1954 to his book of 1976, again the product of lectures, *Princes and Artists*.

By 1970 yet another large project was under way: his study of Sir Theodore Mayerne. Mayerne brought many of Hugh's interests together: the Calvinist International, to which the physician belonged; the relationship between English and Continental history; art history; medical history; and, behind medicine, the cosmological systems within which its practitioners had placed it. The book also returned to a theme of his collected essays of 1967: the end of the Renaissance and the break-up, in the 1620s, of its intellectual assumptions. Even to conceive of the book was a feat of courageous originality. Mayerne had been known only to specialists. In the broader patterns of his life, which they had missed, Hugh saw a means to capture the spirit and experience of a whole age. The archival evidence, in numerous countries and languages, presented severe challenges. Only in 1994 would he give up hope of finding Mayerne's personal papers, which, had they turned up, might have transformed the subject he was having to undertake without them. Mayerne's medical papers, on the other hand, survive in abundance. Hugh worked through them in 1971–2 and found that 'the subject widens at every touch'. By early 1973, however, the book was 'at a standstill'. As usual, other commitments, this time the Wiles Lectures and *Princes and Artists* among them, crowded upon him. 'My general philosophy, the more you do, the more you do', he blackly reflected, had reached 'a point of self-cancellation'.

It was in that burdened state that he took on yet another fresh adventure, which he knew to be a diversion but could not resist. This was his study of Sir Edmund Backhouse, the fraud and fantasist of early twentieth-century Peking, whose unpublished memoirs came into his hands in 1973, and whose biography he would publish in 1976 as *A Hidden Life* (or, in another edition, *The Hermit of Peking*). Never were his spirits more elated than in his discovery of the farcical yet triumphant deceptions of Backhouse's life, and of his preference for fantasy over fact, a human trait more widespread, Hugh decided, than is generally recognised. In principle Hugh had doubts about biography as a form, for 'you have to do the flats'. Yet a high proportion of his writings, most conspicuously those on Laud, Hitler, Backhouse and Mayerne, centred on individual lives.

In 1977 he had a further project in mind. He gave a series of polished lectures in the United States on history and historical philosophy, from Chinese and classical writing through to modern times, and wanted to

make a book of them. But by 1978, when 'I have so many books to finish', he had returned to Mayerne. Most of the book, which would be posthumously published with the title *Europe's Physician* (2006), had been written by the end of 1978. In its depth, and in the variegation of its texture, it is the most substantial of his works. A more equable tone, one that drew less attention to its author's cleverness, had entered his writing. Yet the book stalled for a second time. Even with the end in sight, 'gloomy thoughts rise in my mind as I contemplate this bulk of paper. Is it worth it?' His attention was turning, we cannot be surprised to learn, to still another subject. This one, too, grew out of a lecture-series. If the theme of the Backhouse book had been the power of fantasy, that of his new study was the power of myth, which, as he had observed in *The Last Days of Hitler*, 'is a far more common characteristic of the human race . . . than veracity'. Now he tackled the mythopoeic tendencies of the Scots, a nation he had always viewed with a certain Northumbrian disdain. His opinion had not been improved since his and Xandra's purchase in 1959 of an elegant early nineteenth-century house, once the residence of Sir Walter Scott, across the border at Melrose, where, until Hugh's retirement from Peterhouse in 1987, when they sold the property, they would spend the greater part of the university vacations. The theme of the book is the obstinate readiness of the Scots to prefer fictitious accounts of their past to true ones. The work explored first the Scots' invention, during the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance, of an ancient free constitution; then the manufacture of the poetry of Ossian in the eighteenth century; and finally the fabrication, in the nineteenth century, of the traditions of the kilt and the tartan.

Need one add that that project, too, was suspended? Two events diverted him. First came his elevation to the peerage, as Lord Dacre of Glanton, in 1979 and the comedy of an intricate heraldic contest, which he savoured to the full, over his choice of the 'ancient, musical, romantic' title of Dacre, which members of the Roper family had briefly held in earlier generations. Then, in 1980, he began his seven contentious years as Master of Peterhouse, Cambridge, a reign that is penetratingly recounted, with an interlinear delicacy that he would himself have relished, in the *Peterhouse Annual Record* for 2002–3. He challenged what he saw as an introverted oligarchy among the Fellows, which was accustomed to running the college while a weak Master and the rest of the dons looked on or away. He found supporters among the wider Fellowship—especially its distinguished scientists—who welcomed his efforts to bring more intellectual life and breadth to the college. But the tenacious resistance to him,

though eventually it was worn down, produced acidic and widely reported trials of strength. His opponents had been his kingmakers, who in choosing him had hoped for a *roi fainéant*. Perhaps the commitment he brought to his reign surprised him too, for always a side of Hugh yearned for the imagined bliss of writing in undisturbed tranquillity. He could have acquired such leisure merely by seeing out his term as Regius Professor at Oxford and retiring in 1981. When problems mounted at Peterhouse he sighed to remember how, just after he had accepted the position, he had been offered a grand, undemanding, lucrative post at the European University in Florence. Yet we can be sure that that institution would have been no less vulnerable than Peterhouse to his reforming instincts.

The book on Scotland, which is due to be published in 2008 by Yale University Press as *The Invention of Scotland: Myth and History*, came as close as any of his unfinished works to completion. It has been wondered whether it was the affair of the Hitler diaries in 1983, the fabrication of which he failed to detect, that brought the project to a close. In reality he had already dropped the book by 1982, and was by then thinking in yet other directions. He was planning further volumes of collected essays, for which he intended to revise some writings and add fresh ones. Among the latter would have been a long piece (which is also to be published posthumously, in a volume of essays, due from Yale University Press in 2009 as *History and Enlightenment*, on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historiography and its intellectual background) on Conyers Middleton and eighteenth-century deism, the subject of his Leslie Stephen lecture at Cambridge in 1982. Nonetheless the episode of the Hitler diaries shook and distressed him. He knew that, on that fateful afternoon in a Swiss bank vault when the forged documents were shown to him, he had yielded not only to the rational arguments for their authenticity, which, on the evidence then available to him, were reputable enough, but more decisively to an 'irrational' impulse which afterwards he could not comprehend. When, ten years earlier, he had been handed the manuscript memoirs of Sir Edmund Backhouse, he had at first taken the authenticity of their narrative, which at that time no one had cause to doubt, for granted. He penetrated the fraud only after weeks of thought and investigation. This time he allowed himself to be bounced into an instant verdict. He went to Zurich, on behalf of *The Times* of which he was an Independent Director, under-prepared and in a sceptical and grudging frame of mind which brought out the loftiness in him. Perhaps he relied too heavily on a sureness of instinct that, by his seventieth year, had

begun to falter. He had been spending the Easter vacation at Melrose, distancing the cares of the world, and especially of Peterhouse, by truant reading, his mind far from Hitler. He returned to that seclusion after the journey to Switzerland, and seems to have thought little about the diaries during the ten days or so before his reluctant return south, when there began the rapid sequence of events that led to his public validation of the documents.

The episode, a media event, would occupy a grossly disproportionate place in public perceptions of him, as it would in the headlines that announced his death. Nonetheless it had a dimension of dramatic tragedy. 'Pride', he had observed in 1941, 'is my chief fault, and will be my undoing.' Now, with symmetrical irony, that flaw mocked his greatness. He had made his name by his detective-work on Hitler, and the exposure of fraud had been a *motif* of his life and writing. The public sensation over the diaries occurred at the exact time of year, in late April, of the decisive events in the Führer's bunker that he had magisterially reconstructed in *The Last Days*. The remorselessness of misfortune, which declared itself in accidents of circumstance and timing, reached its climax during a performance of *Don Carlos* at Covent Garden, when his conclusions about the diaries gradually dissolved in his mind. He remained trapped in his seat while his authenticating article rolled from the press.

He recovered from the episode, for he did not lack resilience. Soon the collected essays, which were intended to appear, in chronological sequence, in five volumes, were under way, though he would complete only three, which reached the early eighteenth century. Two were essentially collections of previously published essays, fuller and deeper than the *Historical Essays* of 1957, which had been mostly book reviews, but scarcely less remarkable in their range: *Renaissance Essays* (1985) and *From Counter-Reformation to Glorious Revolution* (1992). By contrast the third volume, *Catholics, Anglicans and Puritans* (1987), consisting of five fresh long essays, amounted to a new book. Having earlier moved from English to Continental history, he here concentrated on English intellectual and religious history between the accession of James I and the restoration of Charles II. The most striking contribution, on the intellectual circle that met at Lord Falkland's house at Great Tew in Oxfordshire in the 1630s, resumed his exploration of the Erasmian tradition.

In the year of the book's publication, the Dacres moved, on Hugh's retirement, to a Victorian rectory at Didcot, south of Oxford, a handsome house in an unhandsome town. At Cambridge, Xandra's aesthetic

sense had brought interior elegance to the Master's Lodgings in Peterhouse, a fine Queen Anne house, and she had found a role for herself in the sponsorship and encouragement of music, a world in which she had high connections. She was less fond of Oxford, where Hugh would have liked to return. The convenience of access to London and Oxford by train persuaded them to settle on the apparently incongruous setting of Didcot, the Thebes of the Thames Valley as he called it after he had formed cultivated friendship in nearby Long Wittenham, which he correspondingly termed its Athens.

Old age brought him disproportionate wretchedness. Xandra, who was seven years his senior and to whom he was devoted, contracted Alzheimer's Disease and died with her mind lost to the world and to him. He himself developed cancer, which took distressing forms and would eventually claim his life. Depression, which over the years had become less frequent but which was never far away, returned. Yet he had impregnable stoicism. He brightened—now as always—when visited by friends, from whom he concealed the extent of his afflictions. He drew heart from the frequent company and the practical assistance of his stepchildren James—himself an Oxford historian—and Xenia (their younger brother Peter living far away). When Hugh succumbed to Charles Bonnet Syndrome, a rare eye condition that induces frightening hallucinations, he would describe its symptoms with the urbane humour that—now as always—seemed to put the difficulties of life in their place. His mental energy and discipline rose to the challenges of near-blindness, among them the increasing dependence of his writing and lecturing on his powers of memory. He had plans for new projects and worked on unfinished ones. Writing a short life of Thomas Sutton for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, he revisited his faded notes from half a century earlier and struggled, far beyond the demands of the commission, to reconstruct his subject's complex finances. In the last year of his life, aged 88, he published, in a collection edited by David Stafford on Rudolf Hess entitled *Flight from Reality*, a vintage essay on Hess's flight to England, a study he somehow brought together from drafts which had inevitably got muddled with each other and with the bills and circulars and letters that piled around him. Having defiantly remained at home until the last weeks, he died in the Sobell House hospice in Oxford on 26 January 2003.

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Who would categorise his writing, or place it in a school of thought? He has, it is true, often been called both a Whig and a Tory historian, a distinction he shares, perhaps fittingly, with Hume. There is truth in both descriptions, provided we do not take the first to imply generous illusions about the motives of Whig politicians and writers, or the second a liking for the Establishment, with the complacent side of which he was often at odds. Not many Tories make donations to *Private Eye*, as he did when its survival was imperilled by a lawsuit. He was a Whig insofar as he believed in a plural, liberal society, in constitutional checks and balances, and in social counterweights to centres of power. He believed that there had been advances, however uneven, in civility and freedom between the seventeenth century and the nineteenth, and that they mattered. He disliked authoritarian or absolute power, and thought it had been a real threat in seventeenth-century England. The word Whig has acquired some wide meanings. He was a Whig if one means by Whiggism, as many now apparently do, a commitment to the study of developments over time. By the same token he was a Whig if it is Whiggish to deny that historical investigation can or should be value-free, or to reject the supposition that scholarship, to be objective, must be separated from the concerns of citizenship. He was a Tory insofar as he recognised the power of traditional institutions, if they are kept up to the mark, to channel constructive human characteristics and restrain destructive ones. His unfinished work on the Puritan Revolution is in the spirit of Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion*, but not of the uncritical and reactionary Toryism which has sometimes drawn support from that work. Hugh took the Tory whip in the House of Lords, but was ready to defy it, especially in the party's ideological moods (though he was neither a confident nor a frequent speaker in the upper house). Toryism, to his mind, had never had an ideology and did not need one.

Neither the Whig nor the Tory label, nor any other, captures his idiosyncratic essence. In everything he was his own man. The historians of his own time whom he most admired were not the panjandrums of the academic community but figures eccentric to it, whom he discovered for himself: above all Gerald Brenan and Frances Yates, neither of whom had been trained as a historian. On other fronts, too, he stood outside or against the movements of his time. 'I like a various world', he wrote in 1967, 'full of social, political, intellectual differences. . . . Must we have an identical pattern of thought and behaviour, of food, habits, speech,

political totems, value-judgements, cant, from China to Peru?' Or as he
remarked six years later, 'As institutions, free-trade areas, units of gov-
ernment, become larger, reform becomes ever more difficult because there
is an ever-growing bureaucracy with a built-in tendency to inertia, medi-
ocrity, conformism, dullness. Only small institutions can be turned
round.'

His historical writing likewise rowed against the tide. He defied the
advance of professional specialisation, which induces the progressive
contraction of horizons, and which strips history of that comparative
dimension without which it cannot yield general lessons. Prolonged con-
centration on a single era, he maintained, can accumulate knowledge but
not wisdom, can refine understanding but not transform it. He was not
drawn to the notion of mastering a field, or of pushing understanding to
the very limits of the evidence. Yet there were tensions in his thinking, for
scholarship itself he revered. He applauded it when he could, despised
betrayals of it, and believed that the intensive practice of it in recent times
had raised standards. He also saw, as in the work of Frances Yates, that
fertile broad hypotheses can arise from the close and single-minded
inspection of detail. A second argument against specialisation was that it
cuts historians off from the laity, whose outlooks and choices it is the
function of a humane subject to inform, and who, if deprived of that
guidance, are liable to turn instead to historical writing, even to histori-
cal ideologies, which break free of scholarship and thus of truth. Histo-
rians, he enjoined, should study problems, not periods. To divide the
past into regions of time, or to separate any branch of history—polit-
ical, economic, intellectual, cultural—from the tree, was to court in-
trospection, pedantry, antiquarianism. There was a further danger of
specialisation of period. It isolated the past from the present, which—at
least from the early 1940s, when he felt himself to be living through
Europe's Peloponnesian War—he instinctively saw in historical terms. In
analysing any contemporary problem his first instinct was to set it within
a historical framework that took the reader beyond the narrow perspec-
tives of the present. His mind lived at least as much outside his own time
as within it.

He knew, of course, that historical parallels are always partial and
imperfect and can be misleading. He never over-pressed them.
Nonetheless his inclinations were with the sociologically minded 'philo-
sophic historians' of the eighteenth century, whose premises met most of
his own philosophical requirements. Like Gibbon he roamed the past for
analogies, and for contrasts, that would illuminate one age by the light of

others, the art which specialisation gainsays. In answering the claim of Tawney and Stone that the economic transformations of the sixteenth century had produced the rise of the gentry at the aristocracy's expense, he noticed in passing that the phenomenon, if true, would have been a historical exception. For 'who survived better the economic crisis of the Roman Empire, the great magnates or the small landowners? Who weathered the crisis of the fourteenth century better, the great landlords or the gentry? Whose economic condition proved stronger in sixteenth-century Spain, the nobles or the *hidalgos*?' A Gibbon, presented with the same phenomenon, would have asked such questions automatically: to Hugh's adversaries they had not occurred. Or, through a comparison between the political calculations that produced the renewal of European war in 1621 and the manoeuvres that provoked war in 1914, he would turn a study of the early seventeenth century into an investigation of the general question, 'Why do great wars break out?' Comparisons between the seventeenth century, which he had studied before the Second World War, and the twentieth, whose darkest period came during it, recur through his writing. His mind dwelled on parallels between the ferocity of Calvinism, or its appeal to the casualties of economic change, and corresponding features of present-day ideologies; between the seventeenth-century persecution of witches and the modern persecution of Jews; between the shattering experiences of the 1620s and those of the 1930s. The post-war struggle of Communism and capitalism likewise took his mind back to what is now called the early modern period. Dismayed, in 1950, by the confrontational anti-Communist stances at a congress, promoted by the CIA, which he attended in Berlin, he wrote on his return an essay on the productive co-existence, even amid fear and hostility, of the great power-blocs of the sixteenth century, Christendom and the Turkish Empire. His interest in Erasmus had its scholarly origin in his admiration for the work of Marc Bataillon, but it was also spurred by Hugh's own wish, amid the crude antagonisms of his own century, for a humane and sophisticated middle way.

His analogical instincts asserted themselves in his constant flow of metaphor. 'I can't understand anything', he observed in 1942, 'that I can't present to my imagination in a pictorial form; and when I comprehend anything vividly, it is always in the terms of some visual image.' The translation, often the playful translation, of concepts into images was an inherent feature of his speech and writing. Even inanimate objects acquired mobile personalities in his mind. In describing the doomed social vision of the secular technocrats whom he met on his visit to Iran in 1957, he

imagined 'pylon nodding to pylon in the Persian hills'; he observed of Sir
Theodore Mayerne's castle in Switzerland that 'the slit eyes of its great
cylindrical dome squint malevolently over a fresh and delightful land-
scape'; during the eleventh-hour revision of his study of Backhouse, when
a late discovery took over the centre of the book, he envisaged, in an
impromptu conversational aside, his other chapters 'turning on their foot-
notes' towards the new material. Watching, in a pub, a darts-player aim-
ing at the outer rim, he thought instantly of the mind of the former
Warden of All Souls, John Sparrow, which 'unerringly finds the exact
periphery of any intellectual problem'. Metaphor carried two twined
temptations that ran through his intellectual and literary life: the impulse
to improve life into art; and the lure of caricature or satirical distortion,
which, while it gave force to general truths, could be unjust to his partic-
ular illustrations of them. Yet it served his purpose of bringing the past alive,
and of taking the reader's imagination into remote minds and settings.

For Hugh blended—as what other historian has done?—the general-
ising concerns of eighteenth-century philosophic history with the insist-
ence of the Romantic movement, which reacted against them, on entry
into the feel and texture of each age. Acutely sensitive to mood and
atmosphere in the world around him, he brought the same antennae to
the past, where he was rapidly at home in fresh territory. The challenge to
a historian was to reconstruct, in any time or place, the distinctive expe-
riences of the generations to be found there: experiences which consti-
tuted, he submitted, 'the real motor of history', but which the dry
dissections of both determinist and academic history pass over. He
often remarked on the formative impact, on his own generation, of the
1930s—of mass unemployment, the rise of fascism, the Spanish civil war,
above all of the 'electrical moral atmosphere' of Munich—and asked
how that memory could be conveyed, across the intervening 'great gulf',
to the succeeding age. Mental processes, he knew, could not reconstruct
the preoccupations of earlier times without the aid of feeling and
imagination.

The volume of his writing, both published and unpublished, is almost
exhausting to contemplate. The books, essays, reviews, letters and private
reflections amount to millions of words, very few of them lacking dis-
tinction of mind and style. Yet he had no interest in quantity of produc-
tion, or in publication for its own sake. The courtesies of lucidity and
guidance that, he insisted, are owed to the reader exercise a sovereign
claim in his prose; and yet he wrote it as much for himself as for an audi-
ence, indeed took secret delight in interlinear allusions to which few if any

readers could be alive. When asked, in the later part of his life, why he had not published more long books, or a very long book, he would recall the comment of Burckhardt, whom he revered, on the heap of tomes erected by the Swiss historian's German contemporaries: 'they forget the shortness of life'. Who, Hugh asked, had time to read so many volumes, the essence of which, in any case, could often be reduced into essays?

Yet he had tried to write many more books than he had published. He had tried to write a very long one, and a side of him seems to have accepted, at least until his book on the civil wars had been abandoned, that that is what major historians do. There are, I think, three explanations of the pattern of non-completion. One was his literary perfectionism. Another was a hidden want of confidence. Though he cared nothing for the world's opinion, he did respect informed and intelligent judgement, to which a historian who spread himself so widely could easily be vulnerable. Thirdly, and perhaps most profoundly, there was the tug of temperament. Solitude, delicious at moments of intellectual animation and discovery, oppressed him at ones of tedium and inertia, of which the final preparation of a book, requiring as it does the checking of references and the resolution of small uncertainties, brings its full measure. Always he needed, and found, the stimulus of fresh engagement. In the 1960s his elderly friend the historian Wallace Notestein urged him, repeatedly and forcibly, to set all other commitments aside and produce a multi-volume work by which posterity would know him. 'The trouble is', replied Hugh, 'I am interested in too many things', and 'by the time I have written a chapter I have got interested in something else.'

His essays made a virtue of that predicament. The English historical essayist whom Hugh most resembles in eloquence of persuasion is Macaulay. Macaulay could not match Hugh's scholarly equipment: Hugh does not surpass, and does not always equal, the commanding force of Macaulay's mind. But Macaulay's hammering judgements, the over-insistence of his partisanship, and the complacency of his Englishness look crude beside the nuances of Hugh's arguments, the musicality of his prose, and the internationalism of his perspective. Macaulay's accumulating certainties overpower the reader: Hugh's nib prises apart what unobservant or conventional opinion conflates. Who that surveys the breadth and penetration of his essays would say that he would have given more stimulus and lasting insight to the world if he had written on fewer fronts? Now that the essay, which addresses a lay audience, has yielded in historical writing to the article, which does not, his union of argument with artistry seems to speak, with much of his historical philosophy, from a

past world. Yet if the form has been lost, the mind and the reflective power behind it remain easy to meet and to learn from, even where time has overtaken his factual or interpretative premises. Of the writings of the first half of his life, the ones written long enough ago for some provisional assessment of their durability to be made, it is the long books and the studies intended as preliminaries to them—*Archbishop Laud*, and the published and unpublished work on the origins and course of the Puritan Revolution—that now seem largely confined, together with the rival interpretations of the mid-seventeenth century against which he contended, by the era in which they were written.

The essays, it is true, are inevitably uneven, not only in length but in depth. Many of them derived from invitations to mark centenaries or other commemorations. There was a pattern to his responses to those requests. First came pleasure at the prospect; then, when the work had to be done, irritation at having yielded to the timetables of other people, and so having interrupted his own; finally gratitude at having been made to re-read half-forgotten books and to explore their contexts. Even at the most congested times, when he was despairingly seeking to finish the writing of books, he would take on a breadth of commitments, literary and non-literary, outside them. During the most anxious time of all, the crisis in 1960–1 when he was 'fighting for every moment of time' to complete his book on the Puritan Revolution, he wrote the essay 'Spain and Europe 1598–1621' that would appear in Volume IV the *New Cambridge Modern History*; compiled a long, carefully prepared series of undergraduate lectures on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish history; conducted the colourful campaign by which, through mass mobilisation among the electorate of Oxford's MAs, he secured the choice of Harold Macmillan as Chancellor of Oxford University, an episode compared by Macmillan himself to an eighteenth-century parliamentary election; reported for *The Sunday Times* on the trial of the Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann in Israel; and fought with Taylor over *The Origins of the Second World War*. In 1965, when the subjects that had replaced the Puritan Revolution were competing urgently for his attention, we find him working, against the resistance of the Home Office, for a review of the case of James Hanratty, 'the A6 murderer', who had been convicted on what seemed doubtful evidence, and with whose life he had a distant and accidental connection.

If it is too easy to say that he should have written more books, so is it to suggest that his taste for controversy diverted him from more important activity. For beside the claims of posterity there were those of public

spirit, which demand a historian's engagement with his own time and with the struggles for truth and opinion on which the course and health of public life depend. In the years of James Callaghan's premiership he suspended his own scholarly projects to combat, with historical arguments, the pressures to weaken the Anglo-Scottish Union, and to counter the initial defeatism of the Tory Opposition in the face of them. To him that seemed the right priority. He detested the evasion, whether in national or in academic affairs, of the responsibilities and realities of politics, where the choices and exertions of free actors shape the surrounding world. It is the failing that prompts the concluding passage of *The Last Days of Hitler*, where judgement is passed on Albert Speer, who, 'supposing politics to be irrelevant', went along with them and so became 'the real criminal of Nazi Germany'. Hugh delighted in demonstrating that the seemingly inevitable can be confounded: a serious point even in the sport of securing Macmillan's election at Oxford against the apparently unassailable wishes of the university's leaders. He contended against the 'cowardice dressed as virtue' that he saw stalking both the political and the academic world, for in invocations of liberal principles he detected 'an unhappily common confusion of thought' between 'a positive belief in certain basic principles (such as freedom of enquiry, belief and teaching) and a general willingness to make concessions and compromises—which may even be at the expense of such principles'. He was unimpressed by the pretence which enables fragmented academic communities, to the cost of their collective standards and their steadfastness, to live and let live: that all academic disciplines or subjects, or all subjects within a discipline, can be assumed to be of equal stature or significance. And he at least would not have left unresisted the carnage that is now wrought by the agencies of the state on the values and language of scholarly learning.

Another diversion from the writing of books was the reviewing of them, sometimes at length, sometimes briefly. Yet even his shortest reviews impart to a lay readership something of the reflective wisdom below their surface. Often he would detect in a book a significance to which its own author had not been alert, and place it on an intellectual map that might otherwise not have included it. Most of his reviewing was benign. Not all of it was. Here as elsewhere he courted controversy. Yet he knew that only platitudes command general assent, that the truth is often uncomfortable, and that debate is an essential instrument of its advance. Then there were the battles to fight within Oxford. He half-loved the Oxford of the 1950s, but half-despised it as a village. With a few honourable exceptions its historians knew little if anything of the

historiographical revolution which, through Pirenne and Febvre and Braudel and others, had been achieved on the Continent, and to which he was drawn in the post-war years. He tried to raise funds for a research institute in Oxford that would import that trend, and conducted a long struggle to create a post in the university for a protégé of Braudel, the fiscal historian Frank Spooner, whose gifts Hugh, in his eagerness, idealised. Thwarted on that front, he had lost the taste for such initiatives by the time he became Regius Professor. Instead he would keep to the familiar paths, and the pleasures, of electoral intrigue, striving to bring in forces of vitality to college fellowships, and hoping to have, as his professorial colleagues, 'two historians of eccentric genius': Richard Cobb, whose appointment he helped to achieve, and Peter Brown, over whom he was outmanoeuvred.

Other distractions from his writing were less conspicuous. He took tireless, unobtrusive trouble in fulfilling a range of professional responsibilities, and often in going well beyond them. In his labours for the proper care of collections of manuscripts, or to secure the access of historians to them; in his careful and penetrating reports for editors and publishers (even if, amid the press of his commitments, he was often behind with them as with much else); in his patient advice to authors with books to write or rewrite; in his endeavours on behalf of scholars whom the sun of preferment had not touched or whose work lay off the beaten track; in his courtesy towards, and encouragement of, the writers of innumerable unsolicited letters and enquiries—in those exertions we see the most affecting and attractive side of his character. We see it too in his kindnesses to his graduate students. As a teacher of undergraduates he had been mindful of the perils of over-attention, to which, in any case, he was not much tempted. It was the general stamp and style of his mind, and the broadening of their own mental landscapes, that his undergraduates remembered. Some of them saw a lot of him outside tutorials, for he enjoyed youthful company. Something of the undergraduate always persisted in him, not least in his taste for spoofs and pranks. He liked the openness of youth to experience and discovery, and, remembering juvenile confusions of his own, was ever-tolerant of youthful failings. The youthfulness of graduate students refreshed him too. He loved to take refuge from committees and administrative papers to discuss their work. 'There is', he wrote in his affectionate preface to the published version of the thesis of his pupil Felix Raab, who had been killed in a climbing accident, 'no better way of learning about a subject' than through the enjoyable supervision of a graduate student.

I met Hugh, and became his pupil, in 1967. During my first term of research, a dismal period both personally and intellectually, a professor who was visiting Oxford, a leading authority in my chosen field, a man of great kindness but not always of light touch, gave me lunch in the Cadena Restaurant in the Cornmarket. As we consumed our salad and milk, his face lengthened and he became ever gloomier about the technical challenges of my chosen subject. Early that evening, heavy with melancholy in the autumn mist, I happened to meet Hugh in Broad Street. 'Oh', he said of the professor, 'he's a pessimistic man. I'm optimistic. Come and drink a bottle of wine with me.' He took me to his home in St Aldate's, gave me excellent Riesling, and talked, not about my thesis, but about books and ideas far removed from it. I emerged into the chill air, exhilarated and slightly tipsy, with a sense of fresh horizons and fresh hope. 'I'm going to China tomorrow', he said as I left, 'so you won't see me for a while. But you'll be all right.' After his return he sat by my side and went through the first work I had written for him. Three hours passed, and supper-time came and went, before I again emerged gladdened in heart and mind. Later, when, still a graduate student, I had left Oxford, I began to receive, to my puzzlement at the privilege, long letters from him, full of gorgeous and scandalous comedy but also of delicate intellectual guidance. How the sight of his writing on an envelope would lift my morale! I had no means of knowing that his own morale—a noun he used with telling frequency—could so need lifting, or how dependent he was on communication with people from whom he had so much less to learn than from himself.

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'The trouble with controversies', Wallace Notestein warned him, 'is that they will take you far away from history. Historians need leisure and quiet almost as much as poets.' In reply Hugh gravely, but not too gravely, promised to follow 'your sage advice'. Yet just after receiving it, he went on, he had found himself reading another letter, this one composed three and a half centuries earlier, 'which reminded me (somewhat wryly) of our correspondence'. It too was written by an older to a younger scholar. In it, in 1615, Jacques-Auguste de Thou had offered paternal advice to Hugo Grotius, Hugh's 'new historical hero', through the seven volumes of whose correspondence he was working his way. 'There is one thing that grieves me', the venerable de Thou told Grotius, 'and that is that you

spend too much of your time in controversy. I beg you leave that arena, and get on with that great *History*, to which we are all looking forward.' Grotius had replied with proper humility, defending his controversial writings, which had been written in truth's cause, but conceding the older man's point: 'persuaded by your authority . . . from now on I am resolved to shun all unnecessary controversies. I am going to finish my *History*.' Hugh's reply to Notestein continued: 'A fine moral tale, a noble example, I said to myself, as I put your letter into the volume to mark the place.'

But then, he added, his eye had been caught by Grotius's next letter, composed on the same day to a Dutch preacher. 'In spite of many preoccupations which distract me', the newly reformed Grotius had written, 'I could not resist the temptation to read' a recent treatise by the theologian Faustus Socinus; and 'when I saw that nobody had answered his rotten arguments, I thought it my duty to enter the fray. In great battles, even a skirmisher is of use. . . .' In accommodating the rival claims of scholarship and controversy, Hugh was true to himself. The contention between them was the source, not only of his permanent frustrations, but of the prodigious range of his achievement.

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