



Photograph by Walter Stoneman, 1946

HAROLD MATTINGLY, C.B.E.

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1884-1964

THE portrait medal by Paul Vincze shows well the noble head which so fittingly matched the nature and achievements of Harold Mattingly. He was a life-long student of classical civilization, and *humanitas* was the keynote of his character. He was a scholar of great modesty but of immense erudition and accomplishment and at the same time a lively conversationalist and raconteur, whose interests were so far from circumscribed that he would talk as readily about the happenings of the day, the tennis prospects at Wimbledon, or the latest films, as about involved questions of Roman history or numismatics. The Terentian tag, *humani nihil alienum*, admirably described him, and the petty follies of humanity and even more political repression, war and threats of nuclear disaster were matters about which he was concerned and even grieved. His achievement, in brief, was that in his lifetime, largely by his own work, as well as by his inspiration and example, the study of Roman coinage was transformed from an unscientific recording of material into an increasingly exact historical apparatus of service to all students of Roman civilization.

Harold Mattingly was born at Sudbury in Suffolk on 24 December 1884 the son of Robert and Gertrude Emma Mattingly. The family had no connexion with the field of classical studies, in which Mattingly was so to distinguish himself, but was prominent in business and active in local government; Robert Mattingly was a Justice of the Peace and at one time mayor of Sudbury. In January 1896, just after his eleventh birthday, Mattingly together with his brother Sidney went to the Leys School in Cambridge. As he entered at a slightly earlier age than was usual he thus spent eight years all but one term at the Leys. This slightly protracted schooling was put to good advantage, and his name appears with regularity on the Boards of Honour. In the Classical Sixth he was taught by, amongst others, W. H. Balgarnie (the original 'Mr. Chips'). This legendary character, returning to help during the last war, taught Mattingly's son forty years after he had taught the father. Mattingly took the Schools Higher Certificate in five subjects with two distinctions in 1899-1900, and in the London Matriculation in 1901 he was bracketed fifth in honours. He delivered

the Latin and Greek speeches at Speech Day in 1900, and the Greek speech again in 1902 and 1903. In a foreshadowing of later activities we find him as secretary of the Literary and Debating Society and editor of the *Leys Fortnightly*. He was never the effete scholar, and, though he never won a place in any of the first teams, he played rugby for the third XV and lacrosse and cricket in the second teams. He was a finalist in the senior tennis championship in 1903, and tennis remained his favourite game. He used to recall that later in life he played with the young Fred Perry who was a member of the same West Hampstead club.

He had won an Entrance Scholarship to Gonville and Caius College in December 1902, and went up to Cambridge in the Michaelmas Term of the next year. He fulfilled the promise of his schooldays: he won a Battie university scholarship in 1905, a Craven university scholarship in 1906 and the Chancellor's Medal for Classics in 1907. In 1906 he had gained a First Class, First Division, in the Classical Tripos, part I, and the next year he gained the same class in part II.

In the early years of this century Germany was one of the great centres of classical scholarship, and Mattingly, having taken his B.A., went to Germany to continue his studies, as did many young classical scholars of that period. He had at first intended to study under Stein and might have been led on to research in the late Empire, but this proved hard to arrange and in the end he studied at Berlin under Eduard Meyer and under Ernst Fabricius at Freiburg, completing there his first work, *The Imperial Civil Service*, which was published in 1909. He won the Thirwall Prize at Cambridge in 1909 and in the same year was Drossier Fellow of Caius. It might have been expected that his college would have retained a brilliant young scholar who was articulate and whose mind possessed that distinctive ability to take the imaginative leap but, disappointed in his expectations in this quarter, Mattingly in 1910 entered the British Museum. His application to the trustees was supported by W. T. Lindrum, then Fellow and Classical Lecturer in Caius College, who wrote of him: 'I consider him the ablest pupil I have ever had. He has carried off in succession all the highest distinctions open to him in the university, and proved himself easily the first man of his year.' Mattingly's name is now so identified with the study of Roman coins that it is difficult to imagine him in any setting other than his old department, but his first appointment in the British Museum was in the

Department of Printed Books. He never enlarged much on his term there, but that the work there was not too congenial to a man of his temperament and training is clear from the fact that, after only two years, he took the opportunity of a vacant post in the Department of Coins and Medals to apply for a transfer, encouraged to take this step by his former tutor, W. T. Lindrum. However alien may have been the duties in Printed Books, Mattingly's ability to settle quickly to a task, and his industry, resulted in his first British Museum publication, *A List of Catalogues of English Book Sales, 1679-1900, now in the British Museum*, produced in collaboration with I. A. K. Burnett in 1915.

In this interim period Mattingly had maintained his interest in the ancient world by writing his *Outlines of Ancient History* (1914). This was the first of several works which he was to write in an endeavour to make available to the non-specialist something of the treasures of knowledge. Such books are a feature of modern publishing but half a century ago this was something of an innovation, but of this early work Mattingly used to say that its appearance was ill timed, for it coincided with the outbreak of war and was dedicated to Professor Eduard Meyer of Berlin.

Mattingly entered the Coin Room of the British Museum at an apt moment for Roman numismatics. Half a century ago the subject was far from being accepted as one of the ancillary disciplines of Roman history. The pioneer studies of Eckhel in 1792 and Mommsen in 1860 which had attempted a reasoned arrangement of the coinage in accordance with the evidence supplied from other historical sources were not followed up, except in a somewhat restricted field by Viennese numismatists, notably Otto Voetter around 1900. In the later nineteenth century Babelon's *Monnaies de la République romaine* and Cohen's *Médailles frappées sous l'empire romain* were useful compilations but arranged on no higher a scientific principle than that of alphabetical order. The international reputation of the Coin Room as a centre of research had been earned by the long series of volumes of the *Catalogue of Greek Coins* from 1873 onwards, but in 1910 Grueber (whose retirement caused the vacancy which Mattingly filled) published his great three-volume catalogue of *Coins of the Roman Republic in the British Museum*. This work, based on an unpublished arrangement of the Roman republic coinage by Count John de Salis, set a new standard of scientific cataloguing. It was from this auspicious beginning that Mattingly was to raise the study of Roman coinage to a new level.

Mattingly had only two years to settle to his new work before the outbreak of war brought interruption. Even in this short period he had already established the pattern of work which can be recognized throughout the term of his activity in the British Museum. The first stage of research into any given period of coinage produced a series of articles devoted to specific aspects of the coinage and its problems. These articles served the dual purpose of clarifying the problem in his own mind and at the same time propounding a solution which might elicit useful comment and criticism from others. The results of such research were then used in organizing the material for later, more definitive, publication in the Museum catalogue. So it was that as early as 1914 there appeared articles dealing with problems of the early imperial coinage, and these were followed, after an interval, by others in 1917.

In September 1914 Mattingly enlisted in the army and served with the London Regiment until he was discharged because of physical unfitness in 1916. His considerable linguistic abilities, particularly his fluency in German acquired during his two years of study in Berlin and Freiburg, were then made use of by the Postal Censorship Bureau where he served until his return to the Museum in 1918. In this period he suffered a nervous breakdown, something which was to be repeated during the years of the Second World War. This was undoubtedly brought on by the unremitting energy and industry with which he tackled whatever work he had in hand, coupled with emotional stress, for the events of these years affected him more keenly than most. These years, however, also brought him a share of happiness, for in 1915 he married Marion Meikleham.

Although Mattingly was not exactly the absent-minded professor he did sit rather loosely to the material things of life, relying on his wife for the organization of practical living. Her death in 1958 after a shared life of over forty years was borne by him with the philosophic acceptance of one with great faith and great inner resources. Their life was rounded out by a family of four, a daughter and three sons, whose careers in medicine and, appositely enough, in classical scholarship, were a source of satisfaction and pride. His wife shared to some degree in his interests: she wrote *The Children's Story of the British Museum* and *Marcus the Briton, a Romance of Roman London*. They had in common, too, an enthusiasm for bridge: he was an excellent player, but she was a considerable expert.

When, towards the end of the first war, he was recuperating

in Cumberland from illness, he came into contact with and subsequently joined the Society of Friends whose faith was to be his support, and of whose principles and ideals he was an embodiment. A letter from Dr. V. L. Ehrenberg of London University well illustrates this facet of his personality.

I met Mattingly for the first time at a congress in Zurich in August 1938. From that moment, when he realized the difficulties and dangers of my position in Prague, he and his wife offered their help, and that help came forward whenever and as long as it was needed, spontaneously and with generosity. I remember that soon after our arrival in this country, he took me to Cambridge to introduce me to men such as A. B. Cook, Charlesworth, and Seltman. He had very happy memories of Cambridge, and many friends there. Mattingly was a member of the Society of Friends, and he took the spirit and the obligations of that membership very seriously indeed. The main quality of his character was goodness or kindness, in a much deeper sense than people usually are 'kind'. For a time, he suffered from a heavy nervous strain, but that could not change his innate optimism. He loved people, and people loved him. In truth, he was really a man with a great simplicity of mind and heart. He was a believer, but anything but a narrow one. I think he saw in every human being the image of God, and that gave his feelings for others their strength.

Mattingly's long illness from 1917 to 1918 had, on a strict application of Civil Service rules and regulations, jeopardized his place in the British Museum, but, fortunately for his science, authority did not press the point and he returned to duty in the Coin Room in November 1918. He resumed at once the preparatory studies which the war had interrupted, publishing the results of his research in a stream of articles from 1919 to 1922. At this time, too, he conceived the idea of replacing Cohen's alphabetical record of Roman imperial coins by a series of publications which would present the coinage in a more meaningful manner. In this work he had as collaborator his friend, the Revd. E. A. Sydenham, and together they produced in 1923 the first volume of *Roman Imperial Coinage*. This pioneer volume, dealing with the period from Augustus to the Civil War of A.D. 68-69, presented for the first time in detail the coinage of each emperor, distinguishing the products of separate mints, and arranging the issues of each mint as far as possible on a chronological basis. The volume also included discussions of the historical background, the mint and denominational systems, and the range and interpretation of types. This complete but synoptic view of the coinage was the second stage in

Mattingly's grand design for the presentation of the imperial coinage.

The final stage was represented by the first part of the catalogue of *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum* which appeared also in 1923. The volume in collaboration with Sydenham had been, as it were, a trial-run for this fuller publication which was arranged on much the same principles and based on the long series of preparatory studies. The catalogue included not only all the British Museum material in detail but, where appropriate, pieces from publications, sale catalogues, and other collections. As valuable as the catalogue proper are the introductions (a general and a special for each reign), detailed discussions, informed by wide-ranging knowledge and scholarship. As the years progressed this pattern of publication persisted and volumes appeared with impressive frequency. By 1951 nine parts of *Roman Imperial Coinage* had appeared. All of these he helped to edit, and of those he did not himself write, the authors were selected and encouraged by him. The British Museum catalogue made similar progress, successive and ever larger volumes appearing in 1930, 1936, 1940, and 1950, bringing the account of the coinage up to the early third century A.D. These two series have become, and are likely to remain for long, the standard works on the subject, despite the fact that more detailed investigations of many sections have since been carried out and some necessary consequential revision indicated. This indeed is the prime index of the value of Mattingly's work. Not only did he in large part set a new pattern for research, but his publications also made widely available the material for further research, so that over the last half-century there has been a marked increase in the amount of published work on Roman numismatics and an equally marked increase in the use of numismatic evidence by other students of Roman civilization.

Mattingly's influence on Roman numismatics was not confined to the imperial series, and of almost equally fundamental importance is his work on the coinage of the Roman republic. The crux of this series is the chronology of the earliest Roman coinage and the date of the introduction of the denarius. The early chapters of his handbook, *Roman Coins*, published in 1928, are difficult reading, and reflect Mattingly's struggle to reconcile the facts of the coinage with the traditional early date for the beginnings of Roman coinage, supported at some points apparently by the literary evidence. In a series of papers, alone and in conjunction with his colleague, Dr. E. S. G. Robinson, the

traditional early dating of the first Roman coinage was disproved and the introduction of the denarius persuasively placed in the early second century B.C. Here again, Mattingly's research sparked off a whole chain of new studies. The results of some of these, coupled with recent archaeological evidence, suggest that Mattingly's views may require slight modification, but the general principle has won acceptance, even in Italy where the first publication of the theory in 1933 evoked strong criticism, inspired by the nationalism of the Fascist era which rejected anything which appeared to place later in time Rome's rise to greatness. The republican coinage occupied most of Mattingly's attention in the years after his retirement from the British Museum and to this subject most of his later writing was devoted. Although he did not collaborate with his old friend E. A. Sydenham in the publication of the latter's *Roman Republican Coinage* in 1952, Sydenham was at pains to acknowledge in the introduction how much the book owed to frequent discussions with Mattingly over a lengthy period of years.

Space prohibits a rehearsal of Mattingly's vast output. A volume of essays presented to him on his seventieth birthday contained a bibliography of some 350 books, articles, and reviews.¹ Not all of his writings were purely numismatic. He contributed a chapter to volume XII of the *Cambridge Ancient History* and his *Roman Imperial Civilisation* embodied the reflections of a lifetime devoted to the study of the Roman world. He had, some years earlier, published in America a similar study, presented in more popular form and entitled, *The Man in the Roman Street*. He wrote Latin with the same ease and the same felicity of phrase as he did English. *The Pirates* and three other Latin plays on Caesar's life were intended for use in schools to promote familiarity with both language and history. Much of what he wrote in Latin was for his own amusement, particularly translations of comic verse—passages from A. A. Milne and Lewis Carroll—but some of these did appear in the pages of *Greece and Rome*. He also enjoyed translating from Latin into English and his published translations include *St. John Damascene* and Tacitus's *Agricola* and *Germania*.

His published work represents only a fraction of the work which fell to his share as a busy museum official. In addition to

¹ *Essays in Roman Coinage Presented to Harold Mattingly*, edited by R. A. G. Carson and C. H. V. Sutherland, 1956. It is hoped to publish a supplementary bibliography of Mattingly's writings between 1956 and 1964 in the *Numismatic Chronicle*, 1965.

his duties in connexion with the Roman series he devoted time to the vast German coinage and to the arrangement and labelling of the extensive collection of medals. The reports of numerous excavations enshrine the results of many patient hours' work spent on deciphering and reporting on excavation coins. As his reputation grew, so demands for his assistance and advice increased, and there are few major numismatic works in his field published in the years from about 1925 onwards which do not make grateful reference to his services. He was in regular and frequent correspondence with an international circle of scholars and the benefit of his knowledge and experience was freely given to archaeologists, ancient historians, and all students of Roman civilization. In many other related fields of Roman studies his opinions were also valued and sought. It was, however, characteristic of the man that it was not only to the eminent and scholarly that he gave of his time and knowledge; he was equally helpful to any enthusiast, and particularly to the young enthusiast, as Dr. Michael Grant, Vice-Chancellor of the Queen's University, Belfast, recalled in an obituary notice in *The Times*.

What an experience it was for younger numismatists to be hospitably received at the coin department by Mattingly and invited to join him in this bracing atmosphere full of new ideas and possibilities. For, in spite of all his achievements, none was more conscious than he that the job is never done and that there are operations still to be waged upon the frontiers of knowledge.

In the years immediately after the last war he was one of the moving spirits in the organization of what were known as 'Coin Days', annual meetings held in London with a programme of lectures on coins, discussions, and exhibitions, all designed to foster and spread interest in the subject. This eventually prompted the establishing of the British Association of Numismatic Societies which now organizes an annual Numismatic Congress, held in a different centre each year.

He also played an active part in the affairs of the Royal Numismatic Society. He had been a Fellow since 1912, served frequently on the Council and ultimately was the Society's President from 1942 to 1948. The war years brought difficulties for all learned societies, not least for the Royal Numismatic Society which had to abandon its premises and store its library. The continuance of the Society's activities and its settlement in new circumstances in the years immediately after the war owed

much to Mattingly's enthusiasm and innate optimism. He was also an editor of the Society's journal, the *Numismatic Chronicle* from 1936 to 1952, contributing by his scholarship and careful industry to the maintenance of this periodical in the forefront of numismatic publication. All these services the Society recognized by appointing him an honorary Vice-President in 1953.

His contribution to numismatics in the more scholarly sense the Society also recognized by the award of its medal in 1941. This was only one of many honours and marks of respect which came to him. He was either a corresponding or an honorary member of the majority of the numismatic societies in the western world and of many of the classical societies, and from 1938 a Vice-President of the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies. In 1938 also the American Numismatic Society awarded him the Huntington Medal for his work on the Roman coinage. In 1946, just before his retirement from the British Museum, he was elected a Fellow of the Academy, and in the same year his old college of Gonville and Caius made him an honorary Fellow. After retirement Mattingly and his wife visited their daughter in New Zealand where he lectured widely and, as a consequence, was invited to serve as Visiting Professor in Classics at Dunedin in 1954-5 when he was awarded an honorary D.Litt.

Honours came to him from many sources, but not from his own institution. His work added much to the reputation of his department and the Museum, but neither his scholarship nor his seniority brought him the promotion to which they might have been thought to entitle him; and this was one of the very few things which even his forgiving nature took hardly. He retired as an Assistant Keeper, and, as such, was presumably not in the salary bracket appropriate to the honours customarily bestowed on retiring senior officials. This latter omission was however, remedied when he was made a C.B.E. in 1960 for his services to numismatics. This gave him real pleasure, for he rightly regarded this as much more a personal recognition than would have been a regulation honour on retirement.

After his retirement from the Museum and a visit to New Zealand Mattingly went to live in Cambridge. After a lifetime of museum work he obviously conceived that retirement should not separate him completely from museums and their facilities, and, indeed, between 1950 and 1953 he reorganized the whole of the Roman coinage in the Fitzwilliam Museum, amalgamating various college loans and minor gifts with the main collection and putting this in order. Following a second visit to New

Zealand, Mattingly finally settled in a small cottage in Chesham. There he had no ready access to a coin collection, but he was within reasonable distance of London and was able to put in a day in the British Museum whenever he wished, though in the past few years these visits had become less frequent. He was less dependent than most on museum and library facilities, for he had a prodigious memory for coins he had seen and books he had read, and his years in Chesham continued to be productive. He wrote his *Roman Imperial Civilisation*, extensively revised his *Roman Coins* for the second edition published in 1960, and continued to write smaller articles, some so recently that they are still in press.

Mattingly died in his eightieth year, but the sum of his work is more than commensurate with even such a goodly span of years. That he accomplished so much derived from a combination of intellectual ability, industry, and a tremendous gift of concentration. He had the ability to take up his pen and write, literally for hours, with scarcely a pause to marshal ideas or choose a phrase, and with scarcely a need to verify a reference. The open-plan arrangement of the Coin Room of the British Museum exposes its Assistant Keepers to the interruptions and distractions of the general activity, yet it was in these circumstances that the bulk of Mattingly's work was produced. There is a photograph in the department's files, taken shortly before the last war, and showing a general view of the Coin Room with just the openings of the bays in which were the desks of the Assistant Keepers. Just visible is the end of Mattingly's desk, an open coin-cabinet upon it, and by it mysterious white streaks. The late Dr. John Walker, a colleague of Mattingly at that time, used to relate that these white streaks were made by Mattingly's hand as he removed, catalogued, and replaced coins, all in the space of a photographic time-exposure.

Few scholars have had such a fundamental and wide-ranging influence on Roman numismatics, and he is worthy to be ranked in the tradition of great names such as Eckhel and Mommsen. His great volume of publication is his permanent memorial; but it is for his generous help, his interest and enthusiasm, his lively conversation and kindly friendliness that all who knew him personally will remember Harold Mattingly.

Quis desiderio sit pudor aut modus
Tam cari capitis?

R. A. G. CARSON