



Photograph by E. Drummond Young, Edinburgh

SIR HERBERT GRIERSON

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1866-1960

HERBERT JOHN CLIFFORD GRIERSON—'Professor Grierson' to generations of students—was born on 16 January 1866 in Lerwick, Shetland, second son of Andrew John Grierson and Alice Geraldine (Clifford) his wife. The Griersons had been in Shetland since the beginning of the eighteenth century, becoming lairds with the purchase in 1765 of the Shetland estate of Quendale which consisted of the south-west corner of the mainland. Here, on his father's property, Herbert Grierson spent most of his childhood summers. His education began with a governess at home, but he was soon sent for a short period to the Anderson Institute in Lerwick. Of the Lerwick period of his education he later remarked: 'I acquired the Lerwick dialect and also some swear-words.' His memories of this time later centred on fishing from the pier, boating, cliff climbing, and playing in the streets.

In August 1875 Grierson's father sent him to Cheltenham, to a school run by two sisters of his mother. Here his real education began, and he received a good grounding in Latin, French, and Geometry. After spending the summer holidays of 1877 at Quendale, he was sent to the Gymnasium in Aberdeen, a school founded in the 1840's on the German model with the intention of providing a wider education than that given by the city grammar schools. These latter schools had as their objective the Aberdeen University Bursary Competition, for which Latin, a little Greek, Mathematics, and English Grammar were required. The 'Gym' offered a wider course—Greek, Latin, Mathematics, English (which included History and Geography), French, and even some German, its objective being less the University Bursary Competition than the Indian Civil Service. But the school was already in decline when Grierson attended, though its standards remained reasonably high. In his own words, he 'drifted up through the various classes, acquiring very little solid knowledge, either classical or mathematical'—he found mathematics increasingly uncongenial—but reading on his own a great deal of fiction and poetry.

The idea of going on from school to Aberdeen University was casually suggested to him by a fellow pupil one day in his last

year at the Gym: the notion had never occurred either to him or to his father before. His father agreed with the suggestion ('having nothing better to suggest,' as Grierson much later remarked) and he spent the following summer in Lerwick preparing for the Bursary Competition. He should in fact have spent another year at school working for this; as it was, only the fortunate introduction of a new regulation enabling a candidate to offer Higher English (with prescribed books) and French instead of the single difficult Latin prose paper enabled him to do moderately well. He entered King's College, Aberdeen, in October 1883.

A few months after Grierson's ninetieth birthday, when we were talking together and he was reminiscing about his youth, I asked him whether his interest in English literature had first been stimulated at school. 'At school?' he replied. 'Why, the only English we ever did at the Gym was to memorize Dr. Bain's Grammar!' Dr. Bain was Professor of Logic and Rhetoric at Aberdeen; in his time literary studies there were still associated with logic, and the medieval *trivium* of grammar, logic, and rhetoric still determined in some degree the context in which English literature was approached and the limitations under which it was studied. Bain's successor, Professor Minto, was relieved of the logic and was expected to confine himself to rhetoric and to some rudimentary courses in English literary history. It was under Minto that Grierson studied English at King's College. 'I remember,' he told me, 'he gave us some lectures on the French predecessors of Chaucer and on the early miracle plays. The last word in my notebook is "Marlowe". He got as far as mentioning Marlowe, but he never discussed the plays.' There was, of course, no English School in any proper sense of the term at Aberdeen at that time. Students taking an Arts degree had to take Latin, Greek, Mathematics, and Physics as their main subjects, with a certain amount of logic, rhetoric, and metaphysics. One could read extra philosophy if one wanted 'philosophy honours', and this, after a period of pleasant drifting in which he did little real work but read a great deal of poetry, he eventually decided to do, on the prompting of a friend. This meant reading Plato and Kant on his own—there were no lectures for honours candidates—and Grierson did so, having been warned that he had better not tackle Kant without also having read Locke and Hume. He could have taken 'classical honours' instead of 'philosophy honours,' but the hard work at compulsory mathematics, his weakest subject, left him

insufficient time for the detailed work on Latin and Greek texts. Curiously, for one who was to prove himself so gifted in literature, he was never able to translate *into* a classical language, and the prospect of writing a Latin prose, both at Aberdeen and later at Oxford, filled him with dread.

At the end of his third year he obtained a temporary position as second house-master at his old school, the Gym; this required no teaching, only some general supervision of discipline after teaching hours, and it left him plenty of time for study. But a breakdown in health forced him to give up his intention of reading for honours in both Classics and Philosophy; he dropped Classics, and did well enough in Philosophy to win the Bain gold medal. (At that time the Honours course in a Scots university was a fourth year added to the old seven year Ordinary degree course.) He also won the Seafield medal in English, for which one had to sit a special paper. This was in 1887, when he graduated at Aberdeen with still no clear idea of where he was going.

The two years between his graduating at Aberdeen and proceeding to Oxford were confused and unsettled. He was unsuccessful in his attempt to obtain the Fullerton Scholarship at Aberdeen. He taught for a while at a girls' school (the Gym had by now closed down), tutored, and marked essays for Professor Minto. 'At the end of 1888,' he has written, 'I seemed to be doomed to become an inferior school-teacher.' But once again a friend came to his help with advice that proved decisive. This friend was himself a friend of J. A. Stewart, at that time Student of Christ Church (later White's Professor of Moral Philosophy), and had spoken to Stewart of Grierson. Stewart told Grierson's friend that the Holford Exhibition at Christ Church, generally confined to candidates from Charterhouse, would be open *pro hac vice*, as there was no suitable candidate from the school. So Grierson went to Oxford and sat for the Holford, which he won on the strength of his essay (on 'Fanaticism'), which impressed D. B. Monro, Provost of Oriel, the Homeric scholar.

At Oxford Grierson made something of a reputation as a talker (on political and theological rather than on specifically literary topics). 'The Griersons had a' a great volubility of speech', an old Shetland peasant woman once remarked. Much of his talking was done with Balliol men, fellow Scots among whom he made more friends than with men at his own college. He was very conscious of English class distinctions and sensitive about his relative poverty and lack of English social connexions.

Though he could be voluble, Grierson was all his life essentially a shy man, and was easily rebuffed. Yet he made good friends at Oxford, one of the most intimate being Patrick Duncan, later Sir Patrick Duncan, Governor-General of South Africa.

He got a Second in Mods, and turned with relief to the work for Greats, which he found much more congenial. His careful reading of Plato had a permanent influence on his thought, the *Republic* freeing him, as he was later to put it, from Sidgwick's *Ethics*. 'The *Republic* implanted in my mind the conviction that righteousness, justice (*dikaïosunē*) had its roots in our social nature, that no voice from Sinai or any other mountain would be intelligible or carry conviction unless something in ourselves gave assent willingly or unwillingly.' It was only in his final year at Oxford that he pulled himself together and did his best work (the same pattern he had followed at Aberdeen); he was staying with a friend in Aberdeen when, as he used to recall in later years, the telegram from his scout arrived with the words 'First Class'. His telling of this incident used almost always to be accompanied by a recollection of himself walking across Tom Quad after taking his degree wondering what on earth he was going to do for a living. He wanted to take up an academic career, but he knew he was not a good enough classic to be a classics don, and there seemed no other appropriate subject.

Fortunately, changes were afoot which were to offer him precisely the kind of career that would afford most scope to his talents. A Royal Commission on the Scottish Universities, at work in 1889-92, reconstituted the entire curriculum and among other innovations made English Language and Literature a full degree subject. At the same time, a Mr. John Gray Chalmers had given money to establish a Chair of English at Aberdeen, the patronage to lie with the Crown (in effect, with the Secretary of State for Scotland). In Aberdeen shortly before his final examinations at Oxford, Grierson had heard of these changes, and talked about their significance with Principal Geddes of Aberdeen University. From Geddes he learned that an interim lecturership in English would be established until the ordinance founding the Chair had gone through; if he got a First in Greats, Geddes told him, he would propose him to the Senatus for the lecturership. In due course he applied, with influential backing from Sidgwick in Oxford (who had been impressed by Grierson's knowledge of the poet Cowper, about whom Sidgwick was enthusiastic) as well as from Geddes, and on 30 September 1893 he received a letter from Geddes announcing his appointment

as Lecturer in English for the coming session, 'with the full knowledge that you are to be in the field for the Chair'.

So, almost by accident, Grierson was launched on his long and fruitful career as a university teacher of English. He was very conscious of the limitations of his knowledge in this field. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Cowper, Scott, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Morris, Rossetti, and Swinburne constituted at this time the bulk of his reading in English literature. But his study of Aristotle's *Ethics* at Oxford led him, when meditating on how he might organize his first lectures on Rhetoric, to look at Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, and it was in the study of this book and its careful application to the general problem of literary style that he developed those views on 'rhetoric and English composition' which he expressed so vividly in his lectures first at Aberdeen and later at Edinburgh and which, after his retirement, he published in 1944. He had to deliver his inaugural lecture as Lecturer in English at Aberdeen before he had completed his work on the *Rhetoric*; his subject was 'Style', and he drew heavily not on Aristotle but on Pater, to the disgust of the second Mrs. Bain who sent him an anonymous letter saying: 'Why Oxford? Why Pater? when everything was so much better at Aberdeen. All you need will be found in Bain's books and better.'

His first year at Aberdeen was tough. In addition to the Rhetoric lectures he worked up a historical course on English literature which began with Anglo-Saxon poetry and went on through French romance and allegory to Chaucer and then on to the more modern writers. He tried to arrange that the more difficult authors came on a Monday so that he could have the week-end to read them up in. He has described a lecture on Pope, prepared in a week-end of continuous reading and writing, which elicited the comment from an older student, who was attending the class for his own amusement: 'Well, we fairly took the guts out of Pope!'

All this time Grierson was canvassing for support in his application for the new Chair. He did not really expect to get it, as he was young and inexperienced, and there were known scholars of English, such as Oliver Elton, in for it. But he had good supporters—the two members of Parliament for Aberdeen, the M.P. for Kincardineshire, and some influential voices in Oxford—and to his own surprise, gratification, and, one might almost say, trepidation, he was successful, and was duly appointed the first Chalmers Professor of English at Aberdeen

in 1894, at the age of twenty-eight. No one knew better than he did how ill prepared he was to be a Professor of English: his great ambition now was to prove his fitness for the position by doing something impressive in English studies.

Grierson's career from now on became a triumphant vindication of his appointment to the Aberdeen Chair. He set himself with immense energy to master the whole field of English literature and to produce scholarly and critical work that would not only justify his appointment but also justify the academic study of English, which was viewed with considerable suspicion by the conservative. By the time of his appointment to the Regius Chair of Rhetoric and English Literature at Edinburgh in 1915, as the successor to George Saintsbury, he had won a great reputation for himself in the field of English studies and had also contributed significantly to the pioneer task of making English literature a central 'liberal arts' subject at university level. In large measure, Grierson's taking up English literature had been a matter of accident; but soon after he started lecturing it became clear that the subject was peculiarly his own, and that his combination of critical sensitivity, philosophical understanding, scholarly thoroughness, literary imagination and appreciation of technical craftsmanship in words was exactly what was required to make a great Professor of English. His tenure of the Chairs at Aberdeen and at Edinburgh marked an epoch in the history of the Scottish universities and of the study of English literature in Britain.

In September 1896 Grierson married Mary Letitia, daughter of Sir Alexander Ogston, then president of the surgical section of the British Medical Association. Being wife of a young Professor of English who had still his academic reputation to make was no sinecure, and Grierson has drawn a picture of his wife sitting for hours alone in the dining-room or drawing-room, sewing, while he sat alone in the study reading and writing. Grierson himself had no head for practical matters, and it was his wife who managed the financial affairs of the house (at least, after the occasion, early in his marriage, when he allowed himself to be defrauded of £200 by a dishonest lawyer, and so had to take on extra examining and some school-inspecting to help make good the loss); she also read and criticized everything he wrote, as well as performing the more regular duties of a housewife and (eventually) of the mother of five daughters. She was a devoted help-meet, up to her death in October 1937.

George Saintsbury was appointed to the Chair of English at

Edinburgh in 1895, with a high reputation as critic and literary historian, and Grierson, feeling very much his position as a junior, called on him in Edinburgh soon afterwards. There followed a visit by Saintsbury to Aberdeen, where he stayed with the Griersons (and gently pointed out at a dinner party that the maid was serving whisky under the impression that it was sherry: 'It doesn't at all trouble me, but it may trouble the ladies', he added). The result was that Grierson was enlisted by Saintsbury to write a book in the series 'Periods of European Literature' that Saintsbury was editing. Edmund Gosse had undertaken to do the first half of the seventeenth century, and had subsequently backed out, so now Grierson was to do it. He seized the opportunity of having a book published in an established series. Conscious of his lack of original scholarship in the field, and anxious not to serve up a mere re-hash of what had been done before, he determined to be thoroughly original and scholarly in at least one aspect of his subject. He had been told by Oliver Elton that Dutch literature was of the highest importance in the seventeenth century; he would therefore learn Dutch and do especial justice to the chapters on Dutch literature. This he did, and the Dutch chapters are the most original and impressive in the book, which appeared after much hard work in 1906. Grierson maintained his interest in and knowledge of Dutch throughout the rest of his long life, and was several times in Holland.

Grierson's next work was the result of a meeting with Professor Macneile Dixon when they were both on holiday in Lossiemouth in 1907. Together they planned an anthology of longer English poems read or suitable to be read at the universities, and it was published under their joint editorship in 1909 as *The English Parnassus*, a book which has held its place in school and university teaching for fifty years. But Grierson was already at work on a much more important project, which grew directly out of his work on the seventeenth century for Saintsbury. This led to his being asked to write the chapter on John Donne in the *Cambridge History of English Literature* which in turn led to the greatest of all his academic achievements, his monumental edition of John Donne's poems for the Clarendon Press, which appeared in two volumes in 1912. His work with Stewart in Oxford on the text of Aristotle had introduced him to textual criticism of manuscripts, and as almost none of Donne's poems had been printed during his lifetime the problems involved in settling Donne's text were not substantially different in kind. His task was to settle both text and canon, and in addition to

provide a commentary elucidating a notoriously difficult poet. It was I suppose a coincidence—or perhaps some obscure working of the *Zeitgeist*—that Grierson should have devoted so much critical and scholarly attention to Donne at a time when a major shift in English poetic taste and in the creative impulse in English poetry, closely related to a new interest in and admiration for Donne's poetry, was on the point of taking place. Coincidence or not, it is not easy to find a happier linking of the scholarly and the creative aspects of a literary culture: Grierson's Donne proved to be not only a masterly piece of textual editing but also an exciting event in the history of English poetry. And when, in 1921, he produced his anthology of *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century*, with an introductory critical essay which defined and explained the nature of that 'metaphysical' poetry that was coming so rapidly into favour and was having such an important effect on the younger poets, he put into his debt a whole generation of poets, critics, and students. It is worth noting that T. S. Eliot's influential and often reprinted essay on metaphysical poetry was written as a review of Grierson's anthology.

Looking back in old age on his years as an Aberdeen professor, Grierson used to say that they included the happiest years of his life. In spite of immensely hard work and periods of nervous strain and almost of breakdown, he was working in a community in which he felt at home (though a community which was always critical, especially of a professor of such a newfangled subject as English), and in which he was visibly making his reputation. He and his wife had numerous friends in the city and the county, and they felt that they belonged. His appointment to the Regius Chair of English at Edinburgh in 1915 was generally regarded (though not by Aberdonians) as a step upwards, and he welcomed it as such as well as a wider arena for his activities. But he also felt the greater coldness of the Edinburgh people ('East wind-y and West End-y', as he used often to quote), the greater formality of their entertaining and their greater sense of the numerous factors, including the locality of his house, which determined a man's social position.

By the time of his appointment to Edinburgh Grierson had made himself master of a very wide field of English literature, and the magisterial survey of the whole field which he gave there to his First Ordinary English class was a remarkable presentation of the development of English literary history in the context both of the history of ideas and of literary forms and

standards. The Scottish university practice of having the professor give a massive introductory survey of his subject sometimes has unhappy results, but for Grierson it was an opportunity to display not only the vast scope of his scholarship, and his ability to order an enormous amount of complicated material, but also that combination of authority and inquiry, of assured knowledge and humane speculation, that was one of his main characteristics as scholar and critic. For him the history of literature was bound up with the history of thought as well as with the history of sensibility. It was bound up also with changes in the way words have been used, in the shifting suggestions which give words what he called their 'colour' and thus help to make both poetry and rhetoric possible. Though this latter interest was mostly developed in his Friday lectures on Rhetoric, it also played its part among others in his general course on the history of English literature. Catching sight of an observation or reminder on the left-hand page of his large folio notebook (he kept the left side free for the jotting down of additional ideas), or perhaps suddenly thinking of some illustration or amplification or modification of what he had been saying, he would go off into an illuminating digression. Sometimes his students would wonder how he would find his way back to the main line of his discourse; but he always did; he would return, sometimes with great syntactical ingenuity, to the point from which he had taken off to digress, and then continue with the central argument.

There must be many of his former students who remember how, during these moments of digression, he used to turn slightly to the right, so that he was almost at right angles to his audience, and gently tug at his right ear lobe with his right hand. As one of his students during the latter part of his tenure of the Edinburgh Chair, I always thought that this ear-tugging was a sign that he was sharing a train of thought with his audience—thinking aloud, almost—and it indicated a certain shyness which was in curious contrast with his formal professorial manner. We thought him then—even his honours students, whom he met in smaller classes and with whom he would indulge more freely in these controlled digressions—very professorial, very stern, and very much above us all. And yet he had this oddly shy manner of almost apologetically withdrawing into his own speculations. He did not seem very approachable. When, as a fourth-year honours student, I first knocked at the door of his retiring room to ask him about something, the voice from within sounded sharp, even testy. 'Yes? What is it?' Many years later,

when I had got to know him well, he confided to me that he was always shy of his students and that his apparent sharpness of manner was the result of an uncertainty about what to say to them when they approached him in private. The annual party he gave for his honours students was, he told me, preceded by desperate attempts to memorize topics of conversation appropriate to particular students. He told me, too, something that I think few of his students would ever have guessed—that he never got over being nervous before giving a lecture and that he could never settle down to any writing before his day's lecturing was done. His predecessor, Professor Saintsbury, used to give his lectures in the afternoon, leaving the morning for his writing. But as soon as Grierson got a class-room of his own (at first he shared one with the Professor of Latin) he rearranged the timetable so that he lectured in the morning; otherwise his mornings would have been wasted, for he would have been too nervous to concentrate on writing in the morning when faced with the prospect of lecturing in the afternoon.

Another thing that all his former students must remember was his characteristically sing-song way of reading poetry. He would sustain an almost even pitch for several lines and then, at the first real pause in the sense, do a sort of audible loop, heightening and then lowering the pitch of his voice to come to rest always on the same cadence. No one who heard him read from *Paradise Lost* can have ever forgotten this highly individual quality in his reading of poetry. Some people did not like it—he once told me sadly that on a few occasions the students shuffled their feet in disapproval when he read a passage of poetry—but many others found it very impressive. He never changed his way of reading poetry—for which, incidentally, he had a remarkable memory. A few weeks after his 94th birthday, and only just over a week before his death, I was talking to him about the Burns Cult and he started to recite some of Burns's songs, all in exactly that same old cadence. It was a cadence more appropriate to Milton than to Burns, but still, it was a pleasure to hear the tones ring out in the old familiar way: I imagined myself back in Minto House in 1930.

Grierson's twenty years in the Edinburgh Chair of English were busy and fruitful. In 1915 appeared an important article on Milton in Hastings's *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*; in 1921 he brought out his influential anthology of metaphysical poetry; in 1923 he gave the Leslie Stephen lecture on 'Classical and Romantic' (published with other essays and addresses in

The Background of English Literature, 1924); in 1925 he published an edition of Milton in two volumes. Meanwhile, his growing international reputation led to his being invited to lecture on the Continent and in America. He gave the Messenger Lectures at Cornell University in 1926-7; they were published in 1929 as *Cross-Currents in English Literature of the XVIIth Century*, a contribution to the history of ideas as well as to the understanding of literature, with a characteristic interweaving of historical, philosophical, psychological, and aesthetic elements. It has remained one of his most popular works, and has recently appeared in an American paper-back series. In 1929 he gave a course of lectures at the University of Heidelberg, and it was while he was there that Cambridge University invited him to accept the degree of Doctor of Letters; he crossed over from Heidelberg in order to receive it. He spent the academic year 1932-3 lecturing at Columbia University, while J. C. Smith took over his classes in Edinburgh during his absence. On his return from America in 1933 he began his last two years as Edinburgh professor, resigning the chair in 1935. By this time he was well advanced in the elaborate twelve-volume edition of Scott's letters, in which he had the assistance of Davidson Cook, W. M. Parker and others: the first volume came out in 1932 and the last in 1937. It was the new knowledge about Scott gained from editing these letters that enabled Grierson to write his biography of Scott, supplementing and correcting Lockhart, *Sir Walter Scott, Bart.*, 1938. Among his other publications during his Edinburgh period were *Lyrical Poetry from Blake to Hardy*, 1928 (in the 'Hogarth Lectures' series) and *Milton and Wordsworth, Prophets and Poets*, 1937.

Shortly after retiring, Grierson was greatly surprised and flattered at being asked to stand as candidate for the position of Rector, traditionally a signal mark of esteem by the students, but very rarely bestowed on professors. He was duly elected, and served from 1936 to 1939. He was knighted in 1936, and his wife lived long enough to become Lady Grierson and to see him elected Rector: she died in October 1937, and for the remaining twenty-three years of his long life Grierson was always threatened with loneliness, which sometimes afflicted him with a great sense of desolation. But until the outbreak of war in 1939 he was kept busy. He was in America again in 1938-9, lecturing at Smith College and elsewhere, and war started soon after his return. For the next ten years he lived on at his old house in Edinburgh, 12 Regent Terrace, taking in boarders

sometimes to help with the expense and employing a house-keeper whom he described as 'efficient but *not* very economical'. Here he was visited occasionally by fellow scholars and by former pupils, but the lack of mobility imposed by the war restricted the number of his visitors. It was in large measure to keep himself from brooding during these difficult years that he wrote, together with J. C. Smith, *A Critical History of English Poetry*, published in 1944—not one of his best works, for he was writing, as it were, from memory and simply setting down what he had worked out many years before. But the writing of it was a pleasure to him; among other things, it gave him the intellectual companionship of his old friend J. C. Smith. Smith's death in 1946 and the departure for London in 1947 of another old friend, Joan Sergeant, left him very much alone. The decision to move to Cambridge, where his daughter and his son-in-law Professor Bruce Dickins (once one of his lecturers at Edinburgh) were living, was in the circumstances inevitable.

Grierson suffered for the last twenty-five years of his life and perhaps longer from arthritis, which made walking more and more difficult for him. Already in the early 1930's he had to sit down while lecturing. The last ten years of his life, spent at Cambridge, were made extremely troublesome by the fact that, while physically perfectly well in all other respects, he grew steadily less able to move about and was often in considerable pain. Eventually he had to move to a nursing home, Hope House in Brooklands Avenue, but he never really reconciled himself to this necessity. For a while he was able to make brief excursions from Hope House, hobbling on two sticks, but eventually he had to give these up. He was able to attend a party at the Garden House Hotel to celebrate his 90th birthday, and occasionally after that used to go out to dine or for a drive with a friend. I used to take him for a drive into the country on Saturday mornings, and I remember the shock to both of us when we realized one day that his increased stiffness and lameness made it impossible for him to get into the car. The last phase was, inevitably, sad; he was very conscious of having outlived all his contemporaries. Yet until the week before his death on 19 February 1960 he could exhibit liveliness and humour, and was in particularly good form when talking about his early life. Much of what I have written here I got from his own lips during the regular visits I paid him during his last eight years.

Grierson's work on Donne and the metaphysical poets has made him an important figure in the history of modern poetic

theory and practice. Yet this was partly accidental. There is a sense in which he was not modern at all. He was one of the last professors of English to come to his subject through classics and philosophy, with no formal academic study of English behind him. He developed his own approach to English studies—indeed, as the first Chalmers Professor of English at Aberdeen he had, so far as that university was concerned, to *invent* English studies. For him, literary criticism was not a technical exercise but a mature placing of a given work within the whole field of human thought and expression. He had nothing of the modern critic's view of a work of literature as a timeless structure of meaning. Literature was written by and for men in a given historical situation, and, while always sensitive to literary artistry and to the formal aspects of poems, novels and plays, he always saw them in the context of their time and place. Ultimately, for Grierson as for Coleridge, human knowledge was one. He objected to every kind of fragmentation and every kind of narrowness. His books, like his lectures, have the note of shared experience; they were the communications of a man who had something to report on the nature and meaning of works of literature he had both enjoyed and pondered. There is no trace of the exhibitionist in anything he ever wrote: there may be areas where his critical mind was less sensitive than we might have expected or hoped, but even here we cannot help responding to the integrity of the utterance. He never falsified his own literary experience, never played tricks on reader or audience. And he always assumed that his audience was intelligent and interested. I remember once talking to him of my experience as a professor of English in America and remarking on how cunningly some American academic teachers managed to arouse an interest in literature among students who arrived in a mood of indifference or hostility. His reply was characteristic. "If any one comes to me and asks, "Why should I read Shakespeare?" I always reply: "If you're not interested, don't." ' And he barked out that *don't* almost contemptuously. Grierson was no evangelist: he always assumed an interest in those to whom he talked. He was no pedant, either, and did not believe in mere erudition for its own sake. Literature provided insights into the human situation and criticism and scholarship provided insights into literature. Understanding and appreciation were always the end.

He was a modest man, always a little surprised at the fame he acquired, and in his later years sometimes reciting with incredulous and half-amused wonder his long list of honorary

degrees. 'Do you think,' he asked me only a few weeks before his death, 'that any of my books will live? Perhaps the *Donne?* And the *Cross-Currents?*' He seemed to be asking for reassurance that his life's work had not been in vain. That reassurance was not difficult to give. Grierson's work on Donne and on the seventeenth century will certainly live: not only does it combine important textual, critical, interpretative and historical scholarship; it also heralded one of the great critical revaluations of English literary history, which played its part in creation as well as in criticism. And so long as any members of the generations whom he taught survive, Professor Grierson will live in their memories as a great personality and a great teacher.

DAVID DAICHES