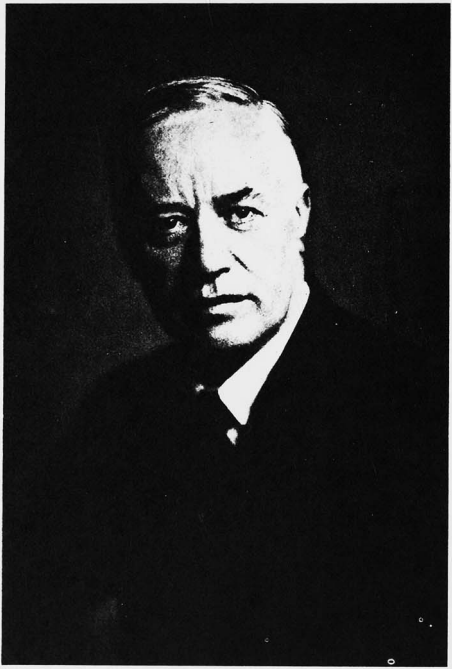

*Photograph by Walter Stoneman*

REGINALD HACKFORTH, 1946

# REGINALD HACKFORTH

## 1887–1957

REGINALD HACKFORTH, the youngest son of Joseph Purslove Hackforth and his wife Annie (*née* Glover), was born on 17 August 1887. Their family was already a large one, with two daughters and four sons of school age. The father, a good linguist, had for years been secretary and accountant of a City firm engaged in import and export business which involved him in much absence abroad; when at home, he found relaxation, of a sort, in planning and executing removals from one district of London to another, and at the time when his youngest son was born he was living in Tottenham. Before her marriage Reginald's mother had had some experience as a pianist, so that it was with great delight that she began to recognize the musical talent shown at a very early age by her small boy. Some music-making by the family and friends was a normal part of the Hackforths' home life, and soon the youngest brother was to be relied on as pianist or accompanist on all occasions. His own choice of music was always of a serious kind. Even as a very small boy he disliked show-pieces, and his mother, to whom he was devoted, later recalled how on occasions when he was required to play in public he would consent only to perform complete works of some size, such as a sonata or a suite.

Owing to his father's propensity for change of residence Reginald had already sampled a number of smaller schools before arriving at St. Dunstan's, Catford. From there he went to Alleyn's School, Dulwich, and finally in 1900 as a non-resident Queen's Scholar to Westminster, where he had W. G. Rutherford for one year and then James Gow as headmaster. These changes brought no serious delay to his education for he won a Minor Entrance Scholarship in Classics to Trinity College, Cambridge, at the age of 17 years and 4 months. He entered the college, where (as at Westminster) he had been preceded by his brother Edgar eight years before, in October 1905, and was not long in showing his ability. At the earliest possible opportunity, namely the following spring, he was elected to a Senior Scholarship, then awarded on an internal examination. In 1907 he was one of five candidates placed in the first division of the First Class of Part I of the Classical Tripos, in those days a severe test, which of itself qualified for the B.A. degree, and was not taken

by the majority of men until the end of their third year. Only a few, who wished to become classical specialists, were candidates for Part II. Hackforth took this in 1909, with Ancient Philosophy as his special subject, and was again in the First Class (undivided in this Part), which included the names of four other men who were to become lecturers in Cambridge: F. E. Adcock, W. H. Duke, A. S. F. Gow, and S. W. Grose. With the first of these he was in the same year bracketed equal as Chancellor's Classical Medallist, thereby improving on his previous year's performance in the examination for university scholarships, when Adcock had won the Craven and he the less valuable Davies Scholarship. It was a remarkable time for Cambridge classical studies, for Part II of 1908 included A. Y. Campbell, A. W. Gomme, D. S. Robertson, and Dorothy Tarrant, with the last two of whom he maintained a particular friendship.

While working for the Tripos Hackforth had already made up his mind that he would be a Platonic scholar. After a year in Cambridge, during which he began to research upon the authenticity of the Platonic *Letters*, he went in October 1910 to Manchester University as Assistant Lecturer under Professor Conway. A dissertation on his chosen subject was unsuccessful in 1911 at the annual competition at Trinity for fellowships, but he was offered a Lectureship and Fellowship at Sidney Sussex College, on which he entered in the Michaelmas Term, 1912. His teaching career was very soon interrupted by the outbreak of war. As a boy, although reasonably healthy, he had never been robust, and he was now told that his heart was unlikely to stand the strain of active service. In 1915 he found civilian work in the War Office concerned with enciphering and deciphering of secret telegrams; it distressed him that he should be in a sheltered place at home, but his efforts to enter the armed forces were frustrated until 1918, when he succeeded in joining the Artists' Rifles. When the war was over, after a short period when he was called back to the War Office to do cipher work connected with the Peace Conference, he returned to his college, where he remained responsible for all classical teaching until 1939, giving much time, thought, and patience to the problems it presented. Unfortunately, at a small college he did not have a great number of pupils capable of appreciating his scholarship, but even the less gifted could not fail to understand his fairness and generosity. All alike remembered with gratitude his kindness, and many the encouragement and advice he gave them. For his part, he once described them as being 'always the nicest people'. Besides his

college teaching he also delivered open lectures and was given one of the initial appointments when in 1926 the new Statutes introduced the system of university lectureships. His lectures, which were mainly on Plato and Aristotle, but also, especially in earlier years, on Thucydides, Demosthenes, Tacitus, and Juvenal, were well prepared, but delivered in front of, rather than to, his audience, from whom he would sometimes turn to speak through the window of his class-room. His modesty and his respect for the writers who were his subject made impossible any display of cleverness or even much use of the quiet humour that enlivened his more private talk, but the attentive undergraduate found him an illuminating guide.

Hackforth's going to Sidney Sussex had a happy consequence for his private life. He quickly became the friend of a young married Fellow of the college, George Ralph Mines, son of one of His Majesty's Inspectors of Schools, and a physiologist of outstanding promise, shortly to be called, at the age of 27, to a professorship at McGill University. He too was a keen musician, and it was at his house that Hackforth first met his sister Lily, then a student at the Royal College of Music. After the war they met again when she was teaching in Cambridge and in charge, at that time, of her brother's three children, of whom the youngest had been born posthumously after her father's accidental death at Montreal in 1914. They married in 1922, and first at Silver Street and then at Brooklands Avenue made a home for the young family; the two daughters in particular were bound to their 'uncle' by strong mutual regard and affection. The elder, Hilary, married and became the mother of two daughters whose frequent visits in recent years gave great delight; the other, Anatole, a well-known viola-player, has always counted Cambridge as her home.

During his later years many were unaware of Hackforth's own musical gifts. He was known as a constant attendant at the chamber concerts arranged by his wife, which gave Cambridge residents the opportunity of hearing a great range of works played by leading artists of many nationalities, and it caused him great pleasure when in 1956 the university recognized her services by bestowing on her the Honorary Degree of M.A.; he much enjoyed talking with these musicians in the green-room or at his house, where many among those who enjoyed hospitality came to be his friends. In his undergraduate days, however, and as a young Fellow, he had been much in demand as a pianist both in private life and at the University Musical Club, of which

he was Secretary in 1908. With the coming of broadcasting he no longer played in public, feeling that the enlarged opportunity to hear professional playing had reduced the importance of amateur performance. Nearly to the end of his life, however, although he never practised, he continued to play in his own home for his own pleasure and to the delight of the few who were privileged to hear him. Not only was he a natural reader of music, but his listening was so acute and his grasp so retentive that he was often heard playing from memory movements from orchestral or chamber works which he had recently heard, perhaps for the first time.

The years between the wars saw a steady growth in Hackforth's stature as a scholar. His first book, *The Authorship of the Platonic Epistles* (1913), had had less success than it deserved, coming with inadequate publicity from the Manchester University Press, then hardly established. In this country many scholars were committed to a belief, sanctioned by the authority of Ast and Zeller, that all the letters were spurious, and were not disposed to welcome his conclusion that five of the thirteen were clearly, and three possibly, genuine. When after the war the tide in all countries set against the indiscriminate condemnation of the letters, there was hardly a mention of Hackforth's book, of which few libraries possessed a copy. It is in fact a valuable and methodical study of the problem offered by each letter, showing sound and independent judgement. Its faults are mainly faults of arrangement; the cogent arguments lose force by being overlaid with other inconclusive discussions, and records of minutiae of language might have been relegated to appendixes. But whatever its immediate lack of success, after the war it earned him an invitation from the editors of the *Cambridge Ancient History* to contribute three chapters on the history of Sicily down to the time of Timoleon. Although the Platonic letters have a unique importance as a contemporary record of a small part of this period, the task to be undertaken involved the study of a mass of relatively unfamiliar ancient texts and of the criticism to which modern scholars have subjected them. Hackforth's contribution stands worthily alongside the work of professional historians in volumes IV (1926), V, and VI (both 1927). Some critics might wish that the *Cambridge Ancient History* had been conceived in a form which would have allowed him to explain more fully the nature of the sources, to indicate all the places in which speculation modified or imagination supplemented their story, and to attempt a clearer picture of the background even at the expense of some

of the day-to-day detail recorded by ancient writers. But the narrative has a smooth and lucid flow, there is enough colour to hold the attention, enough psychology to lend verisimilitude to the story unfolded. Hackforth's next book, *The Composition of Plato's Apology* (1933), was also essentially historical, being concerned to determine the date of the *Apology* and its relation to the speech actually delivered by Socrates. He leaned to neither extreme, regarding the work as neither simple fact nor simple fiction, but argued that certain sections of the work are identifiable as Platonic inventions. Although there is much that is hypothetical the book has a clearness, liveliness, and sanity which combine to make it the best general account of the problem. More strictly philosophical work appeared in articles in the *Classical Quarterly*, notably 'Hedonism in Plato's Protagoras' (1928) and 'Plato's Theism' (1936), and discussions of passages in the *Theaetetus* and *Philebus* (1938 and 1939). From 1927 to 1934 he was also one of the editors of the *Classical Quarterly*, his colleague being J. D. Denniston, with whom he worked most harmoniously and effectively: his good judgement was often shown in fields outside his own.

When F. M. Cornford retired in 1939 from the Laurence Professorship of Ancient Philosophy, of which he was the first holder, the choice of Hackforth as his successor was generally felt to be a well-merited recognition both of achievement and of capacity. For a moment it looked as if hopes might not be fulfilled. Early in 1940 he was overtaken by unexpected heart-trouble, and at one time his doctors gave up hope. But he slowly recovered, and although he was thereafter advised to live carefully, he was not prevented from producing a notable series of books and articles. He applied himself first, with Cornford's encouragement, to Plato's *Philebus*, a difficult, elusive, and at first sight disconnected dialogue, on which the student could find singularly little aid available. *Plato's Theory of Pleasure* (1945), a translation of the dialogue with commentary section by section, following the pattern set by Cornford for the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Timaeus*, and *Parmenides*, was immediately acclaimed at home and abroad, although its influence was restricted by the smallness of the edition, due to the paper shortage of the times. Election to the British Academy followed in 1946. Hackforth proceeded to treat two other dialogues in the same way. *Plato's Phaedrus* (1952) and *Plato's Phaedo* (1955) were equally well received. These three books may not be remarkable for any striking novelty of wide import. What they offer is a serious

attempt to exhibit the structure of each dialogue and to expose its themes, an explanation of the argument step by step, with elucidation of the philosophical problems involved, and discussion of how the matter is related to what Plato wrote elsewhere. Hackforth was all his life disposed to believe that Plato's thought developed, and indeed that he sometimes changed his mind; but he never had any sympathy for suggestions that the Theory of Forms can have lost its prime importance for him. In the execution of his plan Hackforth proceeded with unfailing lucidity, honesty, and modesty; no less remarkable is his sense of proportion and relevance. To his familiarity with the text of Plato he joined a wide knowledge of the writings of modern scholars; he is generous in acknowledgement of agreement, and avoids unnecessary polemics when he differs, showing skill in making his criticisms serve as a stage towards reaching his own conclusions. A further strength is his full appreciation that the dramatic and literary aspect of the dialogues is not to be separated from the philosophic, which cannot be properly understood unless the other is kept in view. He thought it no part of his business to refer to modern philosophic theories, but the cogency of Plato's arguments was a matter which occupied him perhaps rather more than it had done Cornford, to whose example he in general owed so much. This debt is acknowledged *passim*, but he was by no means *addictus iurare in verba magistri*. Both in his books and in articles (e.g. 'The Aviary Theory in the Theaetetus', *C.Q.* xxxii (1938), and 'False Statement in Plato's Sophist', ibid. xxxix (1945)) he showed his reasons for rejecting some of Cornford's solutions and preferring others. No doubt parts of his own commentaries will be criticized—in fact Professor Verdenius has already subjected the book on the *Phaedrus* to a detailed and friendly examination—but they are likely to remain for long the essential foundation for work on the three dialogues. The translations that accompany them have been widely and justly praised for their clarity, fidelity, and grace. There is, however, perhaps some truth in the remark of one critic that the style has some oddities and unevenness, and that the colloquial and the pedantic at times mingle uneasily. Some sentences that seem awkwardly phrased may be excused by a desire that Socrates should not talk like a twentieth-century Englishman; but the effect of colloquial speech is sometimes aimed at by phrases, e.g. 'sinning against the light' or 'an intellectual gold-mine' that are inappropriate to classical Athens. But no translation of Plato, particularly the later Plato, is likely to satisfy all demands. No one could fail to

recognize the great measure of success with which these versions attempt the task of reproducing the varying tones of the original, most diverse perhaps in the *Phaedrus*. To the translations are subjoined footnotes in which Hackforth briefly indicates his attitude to textual problems, and makes a considerable number of new emendations. Although such questions were subsidiary for him, he found them interesting, as is evidenced by his 'Notes on Some Passages of Alexander Aphrodisiensis De Fato', *C.Q.* xl (1946).

*Plato's Phaedo* was completed after Hackforth's retirement from his Professorship in 1952. He did not embark on any further large-scale work, but occupied himself with various articles: the most important of these, communicated to several of his friends, was found among his papers and will be published: in it he abandons the current belief, to which he himself earlier adhered, that Plato did not intend in the *Timaeus* a literal temporal creation of the world. In October 1956 his heart again began to give serious trouble, and after some months of illness, during which he was devotedly cared for by his wife, he died on 6 May 1957 at 4 Selwyn Gardens, the house where he had lived and had his study for eighteen years.

Perhaps Hackforth's most characteristic qualities were a genuine modesty and, in the best sense of the word, humility about himself, combined with an unwillingness to obtrude upon others. It was typical of him that he would disregard prudence over physical efforts rather than risk causing even a shadow of embarrassment. Nor was he one to offer advice unasked, although when it was obtained, it was invariably worth attention, whether in private or in college or university affairs. He had no desire to be a man of business, but he took his turn of duty as Praelector and later as Vice-master in his college (where the familiar use of the name 'Hack' testified to his popularity), as Secretary of the Board of Music, and as Secretary (1928–9) and Chairman (1938–9) of the Faculty Board of Classics. He was always ready to recognize merit and never malicious; but this did not detract from the shrewdness with which he judged character and attainment. Where principle was involved he was clear-sighted and determined. He possessed indeed a strength of character that might escape the superficial observer. Although he may have seemed diffident in his underestimate of his own intellectual powers, yet he adhered tenaciously and wholeheartedly to his scholarly ambitions. But there could be no mistaking the genuine feeling from which sprang his invariable

kindness, a kindness that was recognized by all and particularly valued by younger men who often benefited from his timely and unobtrusive help. His qualities won him the warm affection of his friends. They included a number of his junior colleagues, whom he unaffectedly treated as his equals, and to whom he would submit his ideas for criticism, both in writing and at the meetings in his college rooms of a circle which he started for the informal discussion of topics in ancient philosophy. This circle, which saw his last public appearance when he read, at a heavy cost to his strength, a paper that he had previously been obliged to postpone, continues to meet, remembering and attempting to perpetuate his kindly and unassuming spirit.

F. H. SANDBACH

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F. H. S.