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SIR EDMUND CHAMBERS, K.B.E., C.B., 1926

## SIR EDMUND KERCHEVER CHAMBERS

1866-1954

EDMUND KERCHEVER CHAMBERS was born at West Ilsley, Berkshire, on 16 March 1866. He was descended on both sides of his family from incumbents in the Church of England. His mother was the daughter of the Reverend Thomas Kerchever Arnold (1800-53), Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, the projector of *The Churchman's Quarterly Magazine*, and editor of many classical school-books. His father was the Reverend William Chambers, Fellow of Worcester College, Oxford (1851-65), Curate of West Ilsley from 1865, and from 1881 till 1907 Rector of St. Mary Blandford.

Educated at Marlborough under G. C. Bell, he went up to Corpus Christi College, Oxford, as a classical scholar in 1885, the year after another distinguished English scholar from Marlborough and Corpus, his life-long friend Oliver Elton, took his first in Greats. Like Elton, he came under the influence of a great teacher, Arthur Sidgwick, to whom Gilbert Murray has recently paid tribute. Nor was the debt merely intellectual. He writes of his walks on the ridge over North Hinksey and on the Cumnor hills, 'pursuing *lepidoptera* with Arthur Sidgwick of beloved memory'. He was placed in the First Class in both Honour Moderations and Greats, and in 1891 was awarded the Chancellor's English Essay Prize for an essay on 'The History and Motive of the Principal Literary Forgeries'. In this year *The Oxford Magazine* was complaining that the subjects set for this prize were too large for any man to do more than master superficially what had been written on them. Certainly, Chambers's essay (published by B. H. Blackwell) cannot be condemned for lack of matter. With characteristic thoroughness he pursued his subject from the Orphic forgeries to the pseudo-Chaucer, from *Phalaris* to George Steevens and J. P. Collier. If he read this essay in later life he must have winced at the statement that *Pericles* was included in the First Folio of Shakespeare.

He did not go down after taking Greats in 1889, but remained in residence till 1892. Traces of his activities are found in *The Oxford Magazine* and in *The Pelican*—the earliest of the Oxford college magazines with a continuous history to this day. It was founded in 1891 through the enterprise of Arthur Sidgwick and owed much in its earliest years to three young co-editors who

were all to become men of distinction—P. S. Allen, W. M. (now Lord) Hailey, and Chambers. For *The Pelican* he wrote verses over a number of years—some of which he collected in the privately printed *Carmina Argentea* (1918)—and also essays, skits, and reviews. One of these skits he was willing to reprint in *Shakespearean Gleanings* (1944): it betrays an intimate knowledge of the text of Shakespeare. We find him President of the Pelican Essay Club, joining in discussions on 'Some Problems in Elementary Education' and on Robert Proctor's paper on the successors of Caxton, himself reading a paper on 'The Arthur Saga'. Not so characteristic is his one recorded speech at the Union when he moved 'That the popularity of Mr. Rudyard Kipling is a sign of the incompetence of public taste'. He did some extension lecturing, and, recommended no doubt by Sidgwick, champion of women's education and other liberal causes, for four terms (1891–2) he lectured mainly on Elizabethan literature for the Association for the Education of Women in Oxford. To 1892 belongs his first work, an edition of *Richard II* in the Falcon Series. It was reviewed in *The Pelican* together with Elton's *King John*, the reviewer observing that the purchaser of Chambers got more than twice as much information for his money than the purchaser of Elton.

He had been encouraged by Sidgwick, Thomas Case, W. L. Courtney, one of his examiners in Greats, and Nettleship—'I think him a very good classical scholar'—to try for a fellowship, but he was to be disappointed. Perhaps it was as well, for his interests, like Elton's, had already turned from classical studies to English, and there was no English School at Oxford before 1894 and no university post there for the teaching of modern English literature before 1900 when Ernest de Selincourt became university lecturer. In 1892 there fell vacant a junior examiner-ship in the Education Department, one of the few departments in which appointments were made direct and not by examination, and his application was successful. While he would undoubtedly have preferred a life of scholarship, he had already shown an interest in problems of education. In 1890 he had applied unsuccessfully for the Secretaryship of the National Home Reading Union, and a testimonial from Michael Sadler, then secretary to the Oxford Delegates for University Extension, testified to the great interest Chambers took 'in the attempts to popularise higher education for busy adults'. This was the same man who thirty years later was to earn the gratitude of Albert Mansbridge and the Workers' Educational Association. When

he revisited his old rooms in Corpus in the Easter Vacation of 1893 his mood was not despondent. He remembered

hours spent in converse with dear friends, in the rifling of countless books. Now the place seemed given over to the dead, and I was tingling with life. I felt myself a stranger here, another personality from the boy that was then. A few months ago I had crept away from Oxford, a weary scholar, chagrined by defeat; now I came back renewed, strong in young hopes, refilled with the lust of living. . . . Ghosts of buried ideals and old ambitions, aspirations that I never realized and shall never want to realize, here where they were born and died, they stared at me reproachfully, relentlessly.<sup>1</sup>

The mood of exultation was not perhaps unconnected with the announcement of his marriage on 5 September 1893 to Miss Nora Bowman, younger daughter of J. D. Bowman of Newton House, Teddington, and late of the Exchequer and Audit Office, a marriage which brought him great happiness. To her 'unfailing sympathy, encouragement and patience' he owed much, and to her he dedicated all three of his major works.

When Chambers became a civil servant the best known of those who wrote 'on the by' (in a phrase of Ben Jonson's) were A. B. Walkley of the Post Office, also a Corpus man, and Austin Dobson and Edmund Gosse of the Board of Trade, the two last made immortal by Max Beerbohm in the cartoon which shows them taken unawares by their President, Joseph Chamberlain, while composing a *ballade* in office hours. An article on the Home Civil Service in *The Pelican* of June 1903, which may or may not be by Chambers, pointed out that Gosse and Walkley occupied positions in their departments which were 'respectable without being exacting', and adds: 'but it may be doubted if they could do really onerous public work without a sacrifice of their literary reputations'. In early days, before he was engaged on 'really onerous public work', and when he could spend the greater part of each day at the British Museum, Chambers did much higher journalism and editing of texts. He contributed articles and reviews to such periodicals as *The Academy* and *The Athenaeum*, for a few months he was dramatic critic to *The Outlook* (1904-5) and *The Academy* (1905), and he edited many editions of the English classics, especially Shakespeare, for use in schools. In 1904 he undertook an edition of all Shakespeare's plays for the Red Letter Shakespeare (1904-8), the introductions to which

<sup>1</sup> Printed as 'Ghosts' in *The Pelican*, vol. ii (June 1893), and reprinted as 'Oxford Revisited' in *A Sheaf of Studies* (1942).

he collected in *Shakespeare: A Survey* (1925). Mr. Kenneth Sisam once asked him how, with all the duties of a civil servant, he found time to do so many introductions: 'If one had the subject-matter in hand,' he answered, 'a long lunch-hour would see most of an introduction written.' In 1896 he published editions in the Muses' Library of the poems of Donne and Vaughan, but these were tasks which demanded more leisure than he could give them.

Of later date—and in mentioning these *opuscula* chronology may be disregarded—is the anthology of *Early English Lyrics* (1907) chosen by him and his friend Frank Sidgwick (son of Arthur Sidgwick), and published by another friend, A. H. Bullen. Many readers are grateful to this book for their introduction to the beauties of medieval English lyric. His essay 'Some Aspects of Mediaeval Lyric' is both learned and illuminating; while not neglecting detail it takes a wide sweep, and it admirably fulfils the function of helping the reader to a better reading of the poems. If in so many of his books he leant to erudition and historical scholarship, it was not because he lacked the critical sensibility to do otherwise. Another work which retains its value is his edition of Aurelian Townshend's poems and masques (1912). Nor should the part he played in the foundation of the Malone Society (1906) go unrecorded. He was its first president, and he remained president till 1939. To the early volumes of its *Collections* he contributed valuable papers on dramatic records.

That 'Great things always begin small, never with a flourish of trumpets' was the rooted belief of his revered chief, R. L. Morant. Most men in office, if they sought any literary outlet for their energies at all, would be content, and more than content, with such miscellaneous labours as Chambers undertook before he resigned from the Board of Education in 1926. But almost, if not quite, from the time he left Oxford he was working at 'a little book about Shakespeare and the conditions, literary and dramatic, under which he wrote'. This little book grew into the two volumes on *The Mediaeval Stage* (1903), the four volumes on *The Elizabethan Stage* (1923), and—the coping-stone only placed in position in 1930—the two volumes on Shakespeare.

As Chambers is a man of two careers, a consideration of these three great works, by which he will be chiefly remembered, must be preceded by an account of his work at the Board of Education. This has been generously and fortunately supplied by Professor Dover Wilson (pp. 271-7).

"Anonymity being the constitutional and salutary principle of the British civil service, it is generally very difficult to discover after an eminent official's death exactly what the nation owes to him, or even much about his personality. No one, of course, denies the importance of Robert Morant or challenges his claim to have been the chief architect of our system of state education; yet the true nature of the man remains an enigma which different persons interpret differently. And the writer of the following account of the departmental labours of Chambers, who was for sixteen years Morant's colleague, and helped to determine the decisions of the Board of Education for fifteen years after Morant left it, found when he came to the point that he had little to go upon save memories, many years old, memories of intermittent personal contacts, and of conversations with others now dead, whose work brought them into closer touch with him than he had enjoyed. That it is not still more unsatisfactory is due to three or four other officials past and present who supplied the table of dates below, and after reading the document in draft offered their comments and criticisms.

Chambers entered the department in 1892; Morant in 1895. Their duties, however, were at first very different: Morant, as assistant to Sadler, later Sir Michael, in the Office of Special Enquiries and Reports, being mainly concerned with foreign education and educationalists; Chambers as a 'junior examiner' dealing with the day-to-day correspondence relating for the most part to the board schools and voluntary schools which supplied the elementary education of England at that date. It is not therefore likely that they saw much of each other until the Acts of 1899 and 1902 transformed the whole system. By the first the Education Department was given greatly enlarged powers and became a Board, and by the second the control of elementary education was transferred from the School Boards to the county authorities, which were charged at the same time with the provision of secondary schools, technical schools, and other forms of higher education. And in 1903 Morant was appointed Permanent Secretary to this newly constituted Board, the chief function of which was the supervision of these newly constituted local education authorities, while it was during his brief tenure of office (1903-11) that the English system of state education, with its four main branches of elementary, secondary, technical, and universities and teacher-training, took the shape it now bears. The speedy and successful erection of this vast administrative structure could only have been carried through

by a man of immense force of character, such as Morant possessed. But the task also demanded powers of imagination, of improvisation, and of strategic foresight comparable with those displayed by military genius. That Morant was in great measure gifted with these too cannot be doubted. But when he took command in 1903 he found in Chambers an able lieutenant who made himself responsible, I have always understood, for the creation of the requisite administrative machinery of the central office. The following table setting forth the bare facts of Chambers's official career lends support to this belief, since it shows him promoted shortly after Morant's appointment and then moving round from branch to branch and advancing steadily in rank as he did so, while it is legitimate to attach special significance in this connexion to the ten months in 1904 when he acted as Chief Clerk, a post now known as Director of Establishments. It is symptomatic also of a keen interest in bureaucratic machinery that in 1921 a staff committee of Principal Assistant Secretaries and Chief Inspectors was set up, probably at Chambers's instigation, to co-ordinate the work of the Board. He was in the chair as Second Secretary, and the member of the committee to whom I owe this information was specially impressed by his zeal for neat classification.

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Branch</i>	<i>Date</i>
Temporary Examiner	Elementary	21.11.1892
Junior Examiner	"	1.1.1893
Senior Examiner	"	1.1.1903
Senior Examiner	Elementary (R) <sup>1</sup>	18.7.1903
Senior Examiner (and acting as Chief Clerk, Whitehall)	"	1.1.1904
Assistant Secretary	"	1.1.1904
Assistant Secretary	Secondary	1.2.1907
Assistant Secretary	Technical	14.6.1909
Principal Asst. Sec.	"	1.4.1910
Principal Asst. Sec.	Day Continuation	9.1.1919
Second Secretary		1.1.1921
Resigned		16.3.1926

That Morant greatly appreciated his work is evident from the following extracts from letters to Chambers, and that Chambers greatly appreciated praise from his chief is shown by the fact that he preserved these letters. Clearly the two were on intimate terms officially.

<sup>1</sup> Training of Teachers, Higher Elementary Schools.

(i) 1907. 'I must write you a line to say how I *delighted* in the perusal of your Notes for S men on P.T. matters. To have been able to produce such a comprehensive and thoroughly clear document on such complex regulations shows (if I may say so) not only a most welcome but rare appreciation of how our work should be and can be organised, but also the effective way in which you have evolved and worked the P.T. Regulations themselves since their inception . . . Your Memorandum is a *model*: and also a proof of high qualifications, of effective zeal in having worked up the P.T. Division in E, and of coming success in doing great good in S in similar directions, but under vastly greater difficulties.'<sup>1</sup>

(ii) 1909. 'No one has so unquestionably merited every improved recognition that can possibly be obtained, as *you* have.'

(iii) 1911. 'You were one of those . . . who *most* earnestly and effectively "did things" from 1903 onwards for which such an absurd amount of credit has been attributed to *me*. . . How deeply I wish I had you *now*,<sup>2</sup> I can't say.'

(iv) 1912. 'I shall *never* forget your steadfast persistence and hard work and loyal devotion and splendid brainwork. I wish we could have had it in my new work.'

There is affection here and a realization that the affection was reciprocated. Their attitude towards their duties is, I think, well expressed in a note by Chambers prompted by the death in 1917 of Hugh Sidgwick, friend and colleague. After speaking of 'the singular imperturbability with which he could dispatch a number of different matters at the same time without ever allowing himself to be rattled', it goes on: 'This was partly due to the spirit with which he entered into the great game of administration, although one was conscious that behind this there lay the perfectly serious intention to do everything as well as it could possibly be done and to high ends.'

I did not enter the service of the Board until a year after Morant left it, and though for eleven years a member of the same branch (Technical<sup>3</sup>) as Chambers, I was an inspector in the country, and thus very seldom brought into personal touch with one whose work lay wholly at Whitehall and who had by that date already attained the lofty grade of Principal Assistant

<sup>1</sup> 'S men', officials dealing with Secondary Schools. 'P.T. Division in E', the division of the Elementary Branch concerning Pupil Teachers.

<sup>2</sup> On leaving the Board Morant became Chairman of the Insurance Commission for five years before being appointed the first permanent secretary to the Ministry of Health.

<sup>3</sup> A label which covered not only all types of technical instruction but all forms of instruction in the evening, including that given in evening continuation schools, W.E.A. classes, and university tutorial classes.



Secretary, that is to say the head of a branch directly responsible to the Permanent Secretary himself. Moreover he was a painfully shy man; a shyness interpreted as Oxford hauteur by ruffled deputations from the provinces, and as sardonic cynicism by some of his colleagues. With others he was no doubt more at home, and one of them must have been Frank Pullinger, my own chief, a man scarcely less brusque than himself. For the two had been exact contemporaries at Corpus, there being but three days' difference between their ages. And they now presided together over the Technical Branch, Chambers as head in the office and Pullinger as chief inspector—not the only instance of a college friendship helping to make English history.

To most of his juniors, however, Chambers presented a different manner. His appearance of contempt may be illustrated from an incident in which I was involved. Shortly after being appointed, in 1924, a professor at King's College, London, I called at the office for one or two personal leave-takings, of Chambers among others. Seeing my head poking round his door, 'What do *you* want?' he wearily asked. 'I've come to say good-bye,' I said. 'Oh, where are you off to?'—'London University.'—'London University, umph; English, I suppose?'—'No,' I replied, hoping he would be pleased, 'Education.' At this he almost leapt from his chair, all lethargy vanished. 'Education,' he snorted, 'a *disgusting* subject!' He was then Second Secretary to the Board of Education.

This outburst was probably caused by dislike for what as Assistant Secretary (Elementary, R) he had discovered went on in some training colleges and university departments of education. I suspect, however, it may also have been partly due to the distaste of an exact scholar and a hard-boiled official for the somewhat nebulous ideas about education ventilated by Michael Sadler while in the department from 1895 to 1903, at which date he had resigned owing to differences with Morant. Sadler was a great man in his way, but it was a way which neither Morant nor Chambers could have much sympathy for.

I only once saw Chambers and Sadler together. But the meeting left no doubt in my mind that Chambers had been of Morant's party at the time of the split in 1903. The occasion was a dinner at Sheffield University following a conference concerning university tutorial classes, and the time was late in 1916, during the interval between the fall of Asquith's government and the announcement by Lloyd George of the names of his new ministry. Sadler, then Vice-Chancellor of Leeds University, sat

at the foot of the table, with Chambers and myself on either side of him. Fisher, the host of the evening, presided at the other end, but moved down to join us after drinking the king's health. Who was to be the new President of the Board, was a question in the minds of all present. And Sadler, eager and charming as ever, began telling us what he would do if the choice fell upon him. 'What we need', the theme ran, 'is *research* in education. We ought to set aside some administrative county or county borough as our laboratory, and carry out there all sorts of experiments in teaching and organization. For only so can we hope to arrive at positive results.' Chambers's face as this went on was an interesting study. At last he could stand it no longer. 'What would the *parents* say?' he blurted out, and the question brought the topic to an end. Fisher kept silence, smiling his Chinese smile, and a few days later we read in the newspapers that it was he whom Lloyd George had chosen, as he knew as we sat there.

I tell these stories about Chambers the more readily as I received positive testimony from those who knew him better than I did that they reflect only one side of his character, that he could be geniality itself with juniors who succeeded in getting behind his shyness, and that the sardonic mask he habitually wore concealed a genuine enthusiasm for education and more liberal notions on the subject than those held by many other officials of the Board. Yet his forbidding manner with deputations from local education authorities and other bodies was perhaps one of the reasons why in 1925 he was not offered the post of Permanent Secretary.

One cause in which he took a particular interest was that of the Day Continuation School. Section 10 of Fisher's Education Act, an Act which the Commons passed while the Germans were breaking through the Western Front early in 1918, envisaged the provision of part-time schooling for all boys and girls between the ages of 14 and 18; and the Board put Chambers in charge of a special branch or department for dealing with the Day Continuation Schools that would accordingly be set up. It was a development in which I was myself much concerned, having been instructed to draw up a special memorandum about their curriculum.<sup>1</sup> But we won the war; and as one of Chambers's juniors bluntly put it, 'the Day Continuation Schools died

<sup>1</sup> This received the approval of Chambers and was printed under the title of *Humanism in the Continuation School* as Educational Pamphlet, no. 43 (Board of Education).

under the stroke of the Geddes Axe'.<sup>1</sup> Hopes for them were not, however, given up in the Board until about 1921. And but for the untimely death at the end of 1920 of Frank Pullinger, a stout defender, and probably with Chambers the originator, of Section 10, they might have come into being. As it was, timidity triumphed and the nation lost a golden opportunity. For these schools would have kept a whole generation of the adolescent population under the public eye, including the eye of the doctors, and so saved us from some at least of our modern evils, much juvenile crime at any rate. And, perhaps of even greater permanent importance, they would have compelled industry and education to face each other for the first time, to the incalculable advantage of both. Chambers appreciated these issues, and the shipwreck of the scheme must have been a bitter disappointment to him as it was to others.

On 1 January 1921 a Principal Assistant Secretary for Day Continuation Schools being no longer required, he became Second Secretary of the Board. During his last five years of service he gave much attention to Adult Education, though indeed it had been one of his main interests since the early days of the Board, an interest he shared with Morant himself. I feel confident, for example, though I cannot now remember who told me, that he was the official whom Albert Mansbridge, founder of the W.E.A. in 1903, interviewed nine years later when he went to enlist the Board's support on behalf of the University Tutorial Classes into which that movement had begun blossoming in 1908. The upshot of this meeting was (i) the promise of a very substantial grant per class (provisionally endorsed by a corresponding promise from the Treasury which I understand Chambers secured on the spot, while Mansbridge waited, by just walking into the next street); (ii) the issue in June 1913 of a highly ingenious series of special regulations for the conduct of these classes, regulations which, embodying the best features of the classes already in being, established them as a standard for the future; and (iii) the appointment in 1912 of two special inspectors, Alfred Zimmern and the present writer, to see that the regulations were observed. Thus, though his Day Continuation Schools branch never came into being, Chambers's hand helped to shape one of the most important educational experiments of our age. Every university in England and Wales became committed to it and a large proportion of the lecturers in the Faculty of Arts took tutorial classes, while since 1908 tens

<sup>1</sup> Charles Douie, *Beyond the Sunset*.

of thousands of working men and women, the intelligentsia of the working-class it may be said, have passed through them. The University Tutorial Classes did not save the country from a social revolution; one was due and after a Second World War was seen to be inevitable. But it is certain that but for them the revolution would have been far more extreme, and perhaps violent. And Albert Mansbridge, prophet of Adult Education, might have been speaking for the nation as a whole when he wrote congratulating Chambers on his knighthood in 1925: 'You have earned it well. I, and many others, hold all you have done in never failing gratitude.'"

J. D. W.

Testimonials written for young pupils do not always stand the test of time, but when in the very early nineties the senior members of his college wrote that he thought with definiteness and precision (T. Case), that he had the not very common merit of 'seeing the point' (T. Fowler), and that he gave every sign of a natural gift of organization (A. Sidgwick), they hit on three gifts, which—if we add to them great power of application, and exceptional quickness of mind and pen—go far to explain both the quantity and quality of his contributions to scholarship.

*The Mediaeval Stage* (1903) had taken shape in his head, and some of it on paper, by 1898, when it was accepted by the Clarendon Press. He was convinced that any history of drama which does not confine itself solely to the analysis of genius must start from a study of the social and economic facts upon which the drama rested; and his work is the first to provide these facts in so far as they affect the English stage. Only in the last and shortest of the four books into which the work is divided—the Interlude—was he traversing well-trodden ground. The third book on the religious drama from its beginning in the liturgy immensely improves on earlier histories of the kind, while the first two books on minstrelsy and folk drama, impressive in their wide sweep, are the first consecutive histories that we have. The book on the folk drama is nearly twice as long as the long third book. It is out of scale, and he knew it. But where is the fun of scholarship if a man is not permitted to develop a new interest that has taken hold of him? No doubt he would have had an answer to anyone who objects that he writes about religious drama and leaves out religion. And no doubt he had an answer for his friend Elton who wrote a laudatory review praising the clear and serried style and the occasional happy efflorescences

(*The Pelican*, vii, 1903), and expressed the hope that when Chambers came to the stage of Marlowe and Jonson he 'would not bind himself against appreciating the plays as literature'. He was not to be diverted from the work that he was born to do.

More than fifty years old, the work is still required reading. Karl Young in 1933 greatly added to our knowledge of the liturgical drama (*The Drama of the Medieval Church*), and in 1955 Hardin Craig gave a new synthesis of the matter covered in the third and fourth books (*English Religious Drama in the Middle Ages*), but both acknowledge their debt. Young's tribute must have pleased him: '...that master of dramatic history... I cherish my memory of his courtesy, years ago, to a youthful investigator, and I take pleasure in pointing to my use of his *Mediaeval Stage* in most of the chapters that follow.'

In the preface Chambers wrote of his 'want of leisure and the spacious life' and drew a picture—which was perhaps romantic even in 1903—of Oxford scholars at liberty from morn to eve to 'class' their documents and 'try' their sources, 'disturbed in the pleasant ways of research only by the green flicker of leaves in the Exeter garden, or by the statutory inconvenience of a terminal lecture'. During the twenty years when he was writing *The Elizabethan Stage* (1923) his administrative duties became increasingly responsible, and he had more reason than ever to deplore his want of leisure. Night after night, after a heavy day at his office, he would retire to his study immediately after dinner in order to make a little progress. His library when it came to be sold was found to be not considerable. The work that he did at this time, when visits to the British Museum were infrequent, is an impressive tribute to the resources of the London Library.

A notice long pinned up in a cupboard in his house at Lansdowne Crescent read: 'Shakespeare and the Stage. Writing began 31 July 1904.' The first intention seems to have been to treat Shakespeare in the same work with his contemporaries, and this may explain why he chose to stop at 1616 instead of the more logical date of 1642. Later he had regrets, but by that time the decision not to push on to the closing of the theatres had long been irretrievable. Fortunately a worthy sequel has been supplied by another hand.

Chambers's achievement appears the more outstanding when compared with the only two extensive chronicles of the stage before his—Collier's and Fleay's. Their work had been supplemented or corrected in detail by scores of writers—Chambers

himself so encrusted with marginalia a copy of Fleay's *Chronicle History* that he was forced to buy another—but what was wanted was one work which would order and estimate all existing knowledge and theory. His work is one of consolidation, not discovery. He was well aware that valuable information lay dormant in the Public Record Office and elsewhere, but for the most part he had to be dependent on secondary authorities. Consolidation was impossible, however, without interpretation, and he was as much a master in weighing evidence as in assembling and ordering it. Although the literature to be surveyed was vast, he missed little and the materials seemed almost to sort themselves into a logical form—whether he was writing on the Court (Book I), the control of the stage (II), the dramatic companies (III), the theatres (IV), or was supplying a dictionary of the playwrights (V). Detail he was used to in his daily occupations—one of Morant's sayings was that 'no detail is insignificant'—and the reader may suspect him sometimes of pursuing detail for its own sake: yet anyone who has had occasion to make frequent use of the Court Calendar in Appendix A tracing the movements of the Court from 1558 to 1616 must wonder at the patience and accuracy with which it is compiled from far-flung sources. 'The great qualities that stand out in it', wrote Sir Walter Greg in a review, 'are the grasp of all relevant evidence, the orderly planning, the almost unfailing lucidity of exposition, and last but not least a caution which may be described as monumental.'

Though no professional historian, though (as he deplored) Oxford maintained in his day no *École des Chartes*, he made himself a master of the many records he had to interpret. This appears not merely in the three great works but in the little book *Sources for a Biography of Shakespeare* (1946) which gives the substance of the lectures he delivered at Oxford (1929–38) to students working for the Bachelorship of Letters. For the history and function of the great medieval offices of state he could depend on Tout and others, but for Elizabethan times he had often to find his own way. It was a help to him that he was himself a government official. When he praises an Elizabethan for a capable summary, or sound administrative sense, it is praise indeed. Also he knew how to make allowances for departmental jealousies and disputes, and for the disinclination of government officials to make sweeping reforms. The Second Secretary of the Board of Education was not useless to the historian of the English stage.

Soon after his retirement he went to live at Eynsham near Oxford, where he resided until he moved to Beer in Devonshire in 1939. For ten years he became a frequent visitor to Bodley, especially while at work on the last stages of his *Shakespeare* (1930). Now at last he had the leisure he had often craved. The *Elizabethan Stage* was marred to some extent by inaccuracies and inconsistencies inevitable in a work written in odd snatches of time and over many years. The *Shakespeare* is carefully composed and designed to scale. It is 'a study of facts and problems'. All the material facts and problems are considered here, the poet's life, his life as a man of the theatre, the transmission of his text in manuscript and print, the canon, the chronology; and the whole of Volume II is taken up with *pièces justificatives*. Aesthetic judgements must enter into a discussion of authorship, chronology, and so on, but they are subordinated to the main purpose. While the book is brightened by flashes of sardonic wit, the style is not allowed to effloresce. The last paragraph of the biography begins 'Death took place on April 23' and ends 'There are no existing descendants of Shakespeare'.

His caution remained 'monumental'. He had to a high degree a faculty which Macaulay denied to Niebuhr, that 'by which a demonstrated truth is distinguished from a plausible supposition', and he made short work of the many implausible suppositions. ('One cannot be expected to argue whether Lord Buckhurst was or was not Sir Toby Belch.') His conservatism is shown in his opposition to those who would parcel out the plays among several dramatists and to those who detect in the plays strata belonging to different dates and find therein evidence that Shakespeare was revising old plays whether his own or another's. This was the theme of his Shakespeare Lecture to this Academy, 'The Disintegration of Shakespeare' (1924). Because we come to regard him as the very pink of orthodoxy and paragon of caution we are the more startled on the very rare occasions when his caution seems to desert him, as when he accounts for the transition from the late tragedies to the late comedies by supposing a religious conversion following a nervous breakdown or an attack of the plague. No book on Shakespeare can be expected to last for ever, but after a quarter of a century this one remains invaluable.

He did not abandon Elizabethan studies after 1930, but wrote several papers which he collected, with older matter, in *Shakespearean Gleanings* (1944). Also he chose with admirable taste (though he left out Gavin Douglas) the *Oxford Book of Sixteenth*

*Century Verse* (1932); and in *The English Folk-play* (1933) he presented the new evidence which had come to light since he wrote on the Mummers' Play in *The Mediaeval Stage*. And the essay which gives the title to *Sir Thomas Wyatt and Other Studies* (1933) is in his best manner. But he turned also to nineteenth-century poetry. His tastes in English poetry were for medieval lyric, Elizabethan and early seventeenth-century poetry, and the romantic poetry which persisted down to his own day and of which his own poems are late examples. He called himself 'an impenitent Victorian'. To more recent developments in English poetry he was not indifferent but hostile, and like Arnold he was blind to the merits of eighteenth-century poetry.

In answer to a letter praising his Warton Lecture on Arnold (1932) he wrote: 'It is rather pleasant to be getting back to critical work after so many years of indigestible erudition.' But the critical work which he got back to shows few signs of that critical sensibility which makes memorable his essay on medieval lyric. His paper on Coleridge's *Annu Mirabilis*, contributed to the English Association's *Essays and Studies* in 1934, 'will be a little dry', he confessed, 'to anyone less interested than I am in the balancing of complicated evidence', and while his book on Coleridge (1938), awarded the James Tait Memorial Prize for the best biography of the year, is a valuable study of the facts of his author's life and character, the poet and the critic are wholly neglected.

His gifts are shown in a better light in *Arthur of Britain* (1927). He had already published an essay on Sir Thomas Malory and his *Morte Darthur* (English Association, 1922), praised by Professor Eugène Vinaver as 'a valuable study of its genesis and structure', and now he turned to those *Arturi regis ambages pulcherrimae* on which he had written a paper in his Oxford days. Here if anywhere was a chance to balance complicated evidence. There was little or nothing of value in the vast literature which has collected round King Arthur which he had not read, and his book is a synthesis and reassessment solidly based on the available records.

But the flames which once burnt around the memory of Arthur have long ago sunk into grey ashes. He wakes no national passions now. He has been taken up, with Roland and with Hector, and with all who died fighting against odds, into the Otherworld of the heroic imagination. His deeds are the heritage of all peoples; not least of the English folk against whom he battled. To this outcome many men have worked; the good clerk Wace, Chrétien de Troyes, the unknown author of the



*Lancelot* and the *Mort Artu*, our own Thomas Malory. But most of all are we bound to praise that learned and unscrupulous old canon of St George's in Oxford, Geoffrey of Monmouth. And withal we still do not know where is Arthur's grave.

*Ubi nunc fidelis ossa Fabricii manent?*

This peroration is a good example of how when moved by his subject he sometimes allowed his prose to rise from a good expository level to a controlled eloquence.

Less satisfactory is his *English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages* (1945). The editors and publisher of the *Oxford History of English Literature* were willing to diverge from the general plan of the series in order to entice him to return to subjects which he had once adorned: medieval drama and lyric, the ballad and folk-poetry, Malory. He was working on the book when war broke out, and he put it aside, to find when he returned to it that it had gone cold on him. It is concise and erudite, or it would not be his, but it is dry.

It was characteristic of him that he could not live in a place without discovering all that could be discovered of its history and its legends. A learned article on the symbolism of the pelican is an early example (*The Pelican*, December 1891). A late one is his contribution to 'that characteristic Oxford quest', the site of the 'signal-elm' in 'Thyrsis': the quest was pursued during his Eynsham days when Arnold's line 'In the two Hinkseys nothing keeps the same' was already acquiring a sinister meaning. Also belonging to his Eynsham days are his elaborate study of *Sir Henry Lee* (1936), the Ranger of Woodstock, and his one work on medieval local history, *Eynsham under the Monks*, contributed to the Oxfordshire Record Society in the same year. But his interest in places was not merely antiquarian. He was strongly imbued with their sentiment. The one poem of his which has been much anthologized begins:

I like to think how Shakespeare pruned his rose,  
And ate his pippin in his orchard close.

Nor did his enjoyment of natural beauties depend upon their human associations. He acquired in his school-days a considerable acquaintance with Natural History, fostered by the many holidays spent at Helmside, Grasmere, the house of his grandmother, Mrs. Kerchever Arnold. The flower-garden and the English countryside were tastes which he shared with his wife. And they were great walkers.

Then, of the memories poor Time may save,  
I know of three that most will visit me—  
The vale where Rotha rolls her waters brown  
To that still lake that laps by Wordsworth's grave,  
Green meadows and grey walls of Oxford town,  
And Cornwall sleeping by a halcyon sea.

Gardening and walking, these were almost the only recreations of his later years. The time he might have spent in play—and, for that matter, in church-going—he gave to scholarship. During his one visit to the United States—as a member of the Bodleian Library Commission in 1930—he was taken to see a baseball match. The difficulty of writing authentic history is shown by the report of one observer that he was visibly bored and of another that in the hotel the same night he was displaying to a disguised reporter a real enthusiasm for the game and that baseball was one of the few institutions in the United States of which he expressed appreciation. The only certain evidence of athletic prowess is that in a college match against Balliol on 23 January 1888 he scored a try.

Mr. Sisam contributes these valuable reminiscences:

I knew E. K. C. only in his years of retirement at Eynsham. In person he was tall and slim, with a scholar's stoop; his face alert and inquiring; his hair, even in age, a vigorous blue-black. He dressed carefully, favouring tweeds of a tint that would have pleased William Morris, and brightly coloured ties; and his buttonhole was seldom without a choice flower.

He had the reputation of being a formidable man, and sometimes played up to it. His humour, ranging from sub-acid to caustic, was quite impersonal, but none the less shattering to those whose bubbles he pricked. In purely personal relations I found him so gentle that it was hard to credit the depth of his wrath when some active form of stupidity aroused it.

When he was working one noticed first the extraordinary pace of his mind, which was more outstanding in a company of quick thinkers. He had besides the power of regular, sustained, and orderly work, so that he finished whatever he undertook. The information he needed seemed to drop easily into his hands. When he was writing his study of Coleridge, I chanced to say it was a pity that J. L. Lowes could not find a 'lost' Coleridge Diary that might have been enlightening. 'I have it in my pocket', said Chambers, and produced it: he had guessed who was likely to have inherited it, inquired, and had the Diary almost by return of post. When he visited the Chicago University Library with the Bodleian Library Commission, he was asked to tea in the English Department with Professors Baskervill and Manly, who had prepared a surprise problem for him. A few months before they had bought what

is still the only known copy of an edition of Greene and Lodge's *Looking Glass for London and England*, but had made no progress towards explaining the circumstances in which some early marginalia had been added to it. Chambers turned the leaves slowly for perhaps two minutes, stopped at the name 'Reason', and then, with a trick he had of letting his spectacles slide down his nose so that he peered out over them unexpectedly: 'I recollect that an actor named Reason was a member of a company touring the provinces early in the seventeenth century. I expect you will find this was one of their prompt-books.'

He liked to have three learned works on hand at once, in different stages of preparation and preferably on unrelated subjects. He had no difficulty in keeping them in their separate compartments, and at lunch-time (which was the end of hard work in his years of retirement) they were all laid aside completely. He had the old civil servant's habit of leaving a clear desk. I remember that Karl Young, who made an afternoon call when the *Shakespeare* was far advanced, was astonished to see no sign, in paper or proof or displaced book, that any work was going on in Chambers's study.

His services to education and to scholarship earned him many honours: C.B. (1912), Hon. D.Litt. Durham (1922), F.B.A. (1924), K.B.E. (1925), Hon. D.Litt. Oxford (1939). He was also Foreign Member of the Royal Society of Letters of Lund (1928) and Corresponding Fellow of the Mediaeval Academy of America (1933). He was disappointed not to be elected to the Professorship of Poetry at Oxford in 1938. Election is by Convocation, a very large body, and in such an election energetic canvassing can produce unexpected results. He lost a three-cornered contest by a few votes. The distinction which gave him perhaps the greatest pleasure was his election to an Honorary Fellowship at Corpus (1934). This had been one of the ambitions of his later life, as the failure to secure an ordinary Fellowship had been one of the disappointments of his youth. In accepting the honour he wrote: 'The College has had a great part of my affection for just half a century now, and the new link encourages me to believe that I have done what I could to be faithful to its traditions.'

Old age struck first his active mind. In his eightieth year a serious illness affected his memory and the coherence which was so characteristic of him. But the habit of work persisted. His last book was on Arnold (1947), a poet to whom he was devoted. He liked to remember that 'Thyrsis' appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine* a fortnight after he was born and that in the week he came up to Corpus Arnold was staying there 'with Thomas Fowler of genial memory' and taking his last walk 'in the happy

combes of Hinksey'. But after his illness he could only give the dry bones of a book. An anthology of Wordsworth's poems was not completed. He died at Beer on 21 January 1954.

F. P. WILSON

Bodley's Librarian has allowed me access to Chambers's papers in the Bodleian Library. For help and advice I am indebted to Professor Nichol Smith, Mr. Kenneth Sisam, and Professor Dover Wilson.