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A. HAMILTON THOMPSON

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1873-1952

ALEXANDER HAMILTON THOMPSON was born, 7 November 1873, at St. Paul's Road, Clifton, being the elder son of the Reverend John Thompson, Vicar of St. Gabriel's, Bristol, and of Annie Hastings Cooper, elder daughter of Canon Cooper, subsequently incumbent of Almondsbury. His parentage and his birthplace were both to exercise an abiding influence on his career. Thus, as a loyal son of the Church, he gave much of his life to illustrating its antiquities, and, like his elder contemporaries Armitage Robinson and W. H. Hutton (who were both his friends), he reflected in himself many of the characteristics which distinguished learned Anglicanism in the days of Milman and Stubbs. Similarly, he never forgot the city of his origin. He always spoke of Bristol with a peculiar affection; among his earliest publications was a monograph on the parish of Henbury; and he was for many years a member of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society of which he became President in 1926. In view of the fact that most of his work was done elsewhere, his attachment to his birthplace deserves some note, since it was always a cardinal point in his teaching that among the most precious sources of history are the familiar monuments of a beloved countryside.

His boyhood appears to have been happy, and uneventful. In 1883 he entered Clifton College as a scholar, and moved up the school with credit, though not, as it seems, with any great distinction. In 1892 he proceeded to St. John's College, Cambridge, where three years later he took his Bachelor's degree with Second Class Honours in Classics. But he was apparently not very strong at this time, and after graduating he occupied himself for some years with private tutoring, partly on the Riviera for the sake of his health, which so much improved that until 1950 he was never again seriously ill throughout a busy and exacting life. Few observers at this period would, however, have been able to detect the latent promise within him. Nor could his future as a scholar have seemed more propitious when in 1898 he became an extra-mural teacher for the University of Cambridge. Yet it was while thus engaged, during the next twenty years, that he established himself in the very front rank of contemporary English medievalists, and as perhaps the most remarkable personality among them all.

The years 1898 to 1919 were crucial in the development of Hamilton Thompson as a scholar, and the fact that his great learning was acquired in circumstances of considerable difficulty imparts a special quality to his achievement. His appointment as an extension lecturer was a full-time one, and he used to give about five classes a week during the winter months, travelling up and down England for the purpose. The summer months were largely occupied in conducting school examinations at various centres. Such activities prohibited even a settled residence, and for some years after 1898 he lived partly at his father's new vicarage at Henbury, and partly in rooms at Chichester and St. Albans as the organization of his lectures demanded. It was in fact a career which might have proved overwhelmingly distracting had there not, in 1903, come a new influence into his life. In that year he married Amy, daughter of Alfred Gosling, and they settled for a time in Lincoln. Subsequently, they made their home at Gretton in Northamptonshire, selecting this situation as offering a central position for the conduct of his continuous lecture tours. Of the happiness of his married life, which was thus begun, I have not the privilege to speak, save in his own words. Over forty years later, after the death of Mrs. Thompson in 1945, there appeared in the forefront of her husband's greatest book the following beautiful dedication:

CONIVGI DILECTISSIMAE  
IN TERRAM VIVENTIVM INGRESSAE  
V ID. AVG. A.D. MCMXLV  
ISTAS DEDICAT PRAELECTIONES  
GRATISSIMVS NVNQVAM IMMEMOR

The two decades which followed his graduation at Cambridge certainly revealed his strength of character. At the outset of this period (as will be recalled) he was a young man in somewhat precarious health, and in possession of an indifferent degree. For twenty years thereafter he was engaged in arduous public work which took him incessantly up and down the English shires, and to this work he gave of his best. One, who remembers him well 'about 1910 or 1911', writes as follows:

He came to give a course of lectures on the Development of Gothic architecture in England under the auspices of the University College, Nottingham, and my wife and I attended these lectures. They were magnificent, for in those days his oratory was first-class, and the information he gave to the handful of students who attended this course was so wonderful that it laid the foundation of interest in medieval ecclesiology in this district. Both he and I were comparatively young men in those

days, and at the conclusion of this course I asked for more. But the authorities of University College were not willing to undertake the financial risk, so with great daring I raised a guarantee fund of £50 amongst my friends, and we got another course of lectures from him. . . . The effect of his lectures in this area was astonishing. Folk were thrilled by what was then a new approach to ecclesiology, and spellbound by his oratory, but these feelings were overwhelmed by the charm of his manner and by his pawky and rather caustic wit.

There cannot have been many extension lectures undertaken in similar circumstances which, after the lapse of more than forty years, have left such abiding memories in those who heard them.

Such work performed with continuous zest might well have absorbed all the vitality even of an active man, and prohibited the laborious preparation essential to works of pure scholarship. Yet Hamilton Thompson during these years contrived to make his constant travels in search of a living subserve his dominant interests. It was, for instance, during this period that he acquired his unrivalled first-hand knowledge of the parish churches of England—a knowledge so closely guarded by a retentive memory that it later proved astonishing to many of his pupils. At this time, too, he fostered that archaeological erudition which was to find expression in his work for the Society of Antiquaries. Perhaps most notably of all, it was in this period of perpetual travel, and miscellaneous contacts, that he developed his shrewd appreciation of human nature, which informed not only his learned works but also gave to his spoken comments on men and things a penetrating and astringent quality. In conversation, his wit (which was a perpetual delight) often approached cynicism, but it was never malicious, and it was always illuminating. Nor did it ever wholly mask his underlying kindliness. The spoken word is ephemeral, and such things are but inadequately represented in learned print. The opening sentence of his Raleigh Lecture to the British Academy may, perhaps, however, be quoted in this connexion:

I rejoice on this occasion to think that the modern archdeacon has succeeded in living down the reputation of his medieval predecessor—a reputation which was formidable and unenviable.

But more characteristic are the concluding words of his Ford Lectures to the University of Oxford on the fifteenth-century Church in England:

The evidence of facts cannot be overlooked, but to moralize from that evidence is out of place, and the lover of truth will never hesitate,

when the interpretation of facts is doubtful, to regard them in the most charitable light.

There spoke a man of the world out of a knowledge not easily to be acquired in Combination Rooms. But how firmly is the spectacular jibe repudiated! It is the critical judgement of a scholar: it is also the utterance of an urbane and sincere Churchman.

To have thus succeeded in turning difficulties to advantage may justly be claimed as a triumph of character, but it needed driving energy to give practical effect to the achievement, and it is therefore noteworthy that some of Thompson's most characteristic work was produced during this period of strain. His earliest recorded publication (1898) was a guide to Cambridge Colleges which speedily reached a third edition, but already archaeological papers were also beginning to come from his pen in a steady stream. The 'Village Churches of Yorkshire', the 'Saxon Churches of Lincolnshire', the 'Chantry Certificates for Northamptonshire' were, for example, the subjects of long and substantial papers by him during these years, and they took their place in a numerous company. None the less, at this time, he concerned himself almost as much with English literature as with English history. He edited several Shakespearian plays, he produced a printed text of the work of Suckling, and he engaged himself on many other ventures of a like nature. This interest, indeed, appears to have been strong within him as late as 1915, and his productions in that year invite some contemplation. They included a long chapter (with bibliography) on Charles Lamb which was the last of several contributions by him to the *Cambridge History of English Literature*. They included, also, two volumes of selections from the Romantic Poets. And, alongside of these, there appeared during the same twelve months a hundred pages of Nottinghamshire Chantry Certificate Rolls, a long edition of the building accounts of Kirby Muxloe Castle, and a continuation of his *History of Newarke Hospital in Leicester*. I cite no more of his publications in 1915 for these may be deemed sufficient. *Ubi magnitudo ibi veritas*. Hamilton Thompson (small in stature) would have smiled somewhat formidably at the application to himself of the Augustinian tag. I make it here, however, without apology.

He would (it is safe to suggest) never have been a significant literary critic. But his work in that field was not negligible, and it is not to be dismissed too complacently as a 'pot-boiling'

endeavour designed to sustain an effort of scholarship which long failed to find adequate endowment. Nevertheless, it was a medieval historian of a special type which at this time was in the making—a scholar whose expert acquaintance with physical antiquities was being brought to bear more and more constructively on the elucidation of the wider problems of historical growth. Two small manuals which he produced in 1911 and 1913 were in this respect to prove particularly important, and even today there are few professed scholars who have not something to learn from his *Ground Plan of the English Parish Church*, and his *English Monasteries*. But admirable as these were, it was elsewhere that might be detected in this period the emergence of a medievalist of the first rank. In 1914 there was published the first volume of his *Visitations of Religious Houses in the Diocese of Lincoln*—the beginning of a chain of volumes devoted to this subject which was to be continued at intervals for more than thirty years until it was concluded in 1947 by the labours of an old man. Henceforward, Hamilton Thompson was to be pre-eminently the student, the editor, and the expositor of the English episcopal registers of the Middle Ages.

He was forty-one at the outbreak of the First World War, and though his researches continued without interruption, his circumstances now changed. He taught for a while at Uppingham, and after the Armistice he was confronted with a new problem. It was about this time that University extension lecturing ceased to be possible for him as a full-time occupation, and in consequence he turned elsewhere. In 1919, he became Lecturer in English at Armstrong College, Newcastle upon Tyne, under his friend Allen Mawer. A long period in his life thus closed. It had been a time of incessant activity and continuous production. Despite its stresses, it had also (as may be supposed) been a happy period, and certainly in later life Hamilton Thompson never spoke of it as a time of any hardship. Nevertheless, it perhaps deserves note that one of the very few outstanding English medieval historians of his generation began his strictly academic career at the age of forty-six, as Lecturer in English at a University College in a north-country town.

His research had, however, already brought him into contact with many of the foremost scholars of the time, and it was not only as a scholar that his company was widely sought. Hamilton Thompson was a 'diner-out' of the old pattern, and a member of at least one London dining club. Indeed, the first impression received of him by one younger man was of a guest whose suave

wit could charm a company with grace, and without ostentation. Now, when formal conversation has ceased to be an art, such accomplishment is perhaps worthy of record, if only because it brought a fresh wind from another world into the somewhat fusty recesses of academic inquiry. Peacock (one of his favourite authors) doubtless had a word for it. But that word has become obsolete. Nevertheless, Hamilton Thompson at the dinner-table, when the talk was urbane without triviality, and intellectual without pedantry, is something to be gratefully remembered. It is a picture easily to be recaptured in the pages of the Victorian novelists he admired; but it has faded today; and its loss inspires nostalgic remembrance. At all events, it is essential to recapture some such image, if we are to visualize aright the figure of Hamilton Thompson at the time when in 1919 he was appointed Lecturer in English at Armstrong College, Newcastle upon Tyne.

He served that college well. After two years (by an easy transition) he was made Reader in Medieval History and Archaeology in the University of Durham, and many years later he was, in 1939, after his retirement from another post, to return once more to collaborate with his eldest daughter in the teaching of History in the north. His influence at Newcastle during the earlier period was, moreover, exercised not only through his formal teaching, but also by means of his wider contacts. For it was in the period immediately following the First World War that his connexions with local antiquarian societies so multiplied that at a later date it seemed as if 'he had been welcomed as a friend and guide by nearly every archaeological society, national and local in the land'. Yet though it was in the University of Durham that the life of Hamilton Thompson as a university teacher began and ended, it was elsewhere that it was to reach its culmination. In 1922 he was appointed Reader in Medieval History in the University of Leeds, and he proceeded in that university successively to the posts of Professor of Medieval History, and Professor of History.

The career which opened for Hamilton Thompson at Leeds in 1922, and which there continued for seventeen years, was very remarkable. It is not to be supposed that he took naturally, or with particular enthusiasm, to the details of academic administration, though he presided for many years over the affairs of the Brotherton Library, and was directly responsible for the acquisition of many of the fine collections relating to the history of medieval Europe which now grace its shelves. But he was not by temperament, or indeed by capacity, a good committee man,

and the chairmanship of boards was trying to his temper. None the less, he took very seriously the duties involved in the headship of the large university department which, in happy co-operation with his friend A. S. Turberville, he raised to distinction. For a long period at Leeds he was wont to keep what were almost office hours. Early each day he would arrive at his book-lined room at the university. In the morning he would take his classes and give interviews, but about 1 p.m. the door would be locked, and he would take his sandwich lunch in private, devoting the afternoon to writing. Then about 4 p.m. he would emerge once more, and in the event of his having an evening engagement, he would change his dress in his university room and not return until late at night to his home at Adel.

This exigent routine was marked also by a deep interest in his students. Of his formal lectures a general course on 'medieval life and thought' is still remembered for its illuminating introduction to the literature of the Middle Ages, and his seminar on Richard II introduced many young scholars to the happy discipline of research. If committees bored Hamilton Thompson, he was always at the service of undergraduates, and a long succession of grateful pupils could be cited as witness to his devotion to their interests, both scholarly and personal. He also brought the influence of his Chair to bear more generally on the life of Leeds. The Thoresby Society owed much to him both before and after he became its President. He was a member of the small 'Conversation Club' which, dating from the eighteenth century, carried the traditions of that period into a less humane present. He entered the fellowship of the 'Tykes', and he was a frequent and welcome speaker at the Leeds Luncheon Club which was then at the height of its prestige as a forum for political and topical discussion. The absence of pedantry which marked his work brought him into contact with many circles that might otherwise have been content to regard his learning with only a distant respect, and when in the autumn of 1940 he took his leave of the University of Leeds, it was at a ceremony which was in every way notable. No one who was present at that meeting will forget the warmth of affection which found expression in a very large company which, composed of many diverse elements, met together in a rare conjunction to do him honour. Leeds not only respected Hamilton Thompson as a scholar; it acclaimed him as a personality.

It was at this time, also, that he became involved with many official bodies. In 1933 he joined the Royal Commission on



Ancient Monuments, and two years later the Ancient Monuments Board. More exacting were the demands of several Diocesan Committees concerned with the restoration of ancient buildings, and at length he became an active member of the Central Committee for the care of Churches. These labours won for him in due course the C.B.E., and also an honorary Associateship of the Royal Society of British Architects. Few men who have made themselves master of an esoteric branch of learning can ever have been more diversely engaged. We may picture him, then, during his Leeds period, involved in a large number of contrasting, though related activities. There were always letters on church architecture to be considered, for his opinion was much in demand from private individuals. There were inquiries from young students to be sympathetically entertained. There were frequent visits to antiquarian societies, or perhaps a presidential address to be carefully prepared and delivered with zest, or, it might be, a lecture to a branch of an historical association. I well recall his coming from Leeds to Exeter on just such an occasion. On arrival his temper appeared somewhat ruffled from the long journey, but, once started, all difficulties disappeared. He so manifestly enjoyed himself in discussing Merovingian society as depicted by Gregory of Tours. Not (as might perhaps be suspected) the most congenial subject for a large popular audience, but his infectious gaiety swept all before him. His paper taught the serious much: by the less serious it is still remembered and savoured for its wit. The lecture (as must be confessed) lasted an hour and a half; but the audience shared the regret of the lecturer when it closed.

Turberville once observed to me that the most remarkable quality in Hamilton Thompson was his capacity for work. Certainly, in view of his commitments while at Leeds, it becomes the more remarkable that the period when he was thus engaged saw also the climax of his scholarly production. Long hours might be devoted to teaching; much entertainment might be given and received; widely scattered audiences might receive and welcome his addresses; but none the less, the transcribing hand continued to move inexorably up and down covering page after page of virgin foolscap with his beautiful handwriting. So also did the books and articles continue methodically to appear. The bibliography of his writings cites 230 items as published by him between 1922 and 1939, and while most of these were, of course, reviews and short articles, it may safely be asserted that there was not one of them which did not make some contribu-

tion to knowledge. Among them, moreover, are to be found the larger books in a steady sequence. Apart altogether from what may be called his most individual works—his studies and editions of Episcopal Registers—these years saw (among others) the publication of a large volume of Northumbrian pleas; a fine treatise on Bolton Abbey with an illuminating general introduction on the Augustinian Order; an edition of Durham Cathedral Statutes having particular reference to the sixteenth century; a history of Welbeck Abbey in the Middle Ages; a large quarto catalogue of muniments of Wyggeston's Hospital at Leicester; two outstanding contributions to the *Cambridge Medieval History*; and last, but by no means least, in 1939, his history of the Surtees Society and its publications, which is not only an abiding memorial of historical scholarship in the north, but also, in its appendixes, a model of bibliographical description. It was perhaps not surprising that in the preface, the author excused a certain delay in publication owing to the pressure of other business.

Production on this scale, and of this quality, challenges comparison less with modern conditions than with the methods and energy of the great antiquarian scholars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Nor were Hamilton Thompson's pre-occupations so very different from theirs. Abraham Wheloc in 1643 dedicated the first edition of the Saxon Bede: *Deo Tri-Uni, Ecclesiae Anglicanae, Academiae Cantabrigiensi*. Hamilton Thompson was likewise a devoted churchman; he also (in 1935) edited a commemorative volume on Bede to which he contributed a fine essay; and, finally, he too remained a loyal son of Cambridge, proud of the Honorary Fellowship which St. John's College conferred upon him. Here, however, the comparison should perhaps end. For this was a child of the nineteenth century, and proud of his inheritance. A Conservative of the old pattern, it was his privilege, and perhaps also his misfortune, to find himself to some extent an exile in his own, and the succeeding generation. His personal influence was none the less fecund. It was something, for many of us, to be introduced by him to the novels of Surtees, and when in private with him, it sometimes seemed as if, at any moment, Archdeacon Grantly might enter to make a third in the conversation. But if he brought Barchester to Redbrick, he also laboured constructively to make a great industrial city an integral part of the Republic of Letters.

He left his Chair at Leeds in 1939, but retirement seemed, at first, hardly to qualify his activity. In the midst of the upheaval

of the Second World War, he gave his services without stint as Lecturer in the University of Durham, and some of his most interesting work was to appear in the ensuing years. Prominent among this must be placed his Raleigh Lecture to the British Academy, on *Diocesan Organization in the Middle Ages*, with its special reference to archdeacons and rural deans. This was a magisterial study of the secular structure of the medieval church, and it was particularly notable for its lavish use of French material that was little known in this country. Many of his publications at this time—such as his continuation for the Surtees Society of his edition of the Register of William Greenfield, or the later series of his *Visitations in the Diocese of Lincoln*—were, however, developments of earlier undertakings, and this was to some extent true also of what is perhaps his most important single book, *The English Clergy and their Organization in the later Middle Ages*. This work, published in 1947, was a large expansion of the Ford Lectures which he delivered in Oxford in 1933, and it is now recognized as a definitive treatment of the difficult and controversial subject with which it deals. The critical moderation of its judgements derives from an unrivalled acquaintance with the original sources—both printed and unprinted—on which they are based. And it was in this book that Hamilton Thompson's life-long study of the episcopal registers of medieval England found its fullest and finest expression.

He was now at the height of his reputation. In 1928, at the age of 55, he had been elected a Fellow of the British Academy, and honorary doctorates were subsequently conferred upon him. Now, too, after his retirement, it became possible to assess how pervasive his influence had been: especially upon younger men and women. For Hamilton Thompson had both the modesty and the generosity of the true scholar. He did not suffer fools gladly; he could, when necessary, be formidable in repartee; he was not a man to trifle with in committee or elsewhere; and his tongue could effectively prick pomposity. But it was ever his practice to behave as a fellow-student among those who were in fact, if not in name, his pupils, and no man has ever been more lavish in allowing others to profit by his labours. The integrity of his research, so long sustained, thus came to serve as an example to a younger generation of scholars who admired deeply not only the extent of his erudition, but also the manner in which it had been acquired. They gratefully respected the help he had always been ready to give to any sincere scholar of whatever age

or station. Most of all, they revered the courage which was, in fact, the cardinal quality alike of his life and work.

Thus it was that for his 75th birthday, a large company of scholars, pupils, and friends, drawn from many walks of life, combined to present him with a bibliography of his writings in token of their admiration. That bibliography listed 413 items, and there were more than 300 signatures to the address which accompanied it. It was, in short, the occasion not only for a salute, but also for an appraisal, and this was admirably expressed by Sir Maurice Powicke who permits me to quote from the preface to the volume wherein he sketched what to many of us seemed an authentic portrait of Hamilton Thompson in his old age:

an historian whose every phrase sums up in limpid prose and with deliberate intention the significance of countless facts which he has assiduously noted; an antiquary and archaeologist—who has always stoutly maintained that no distinction should be drawn between the antiquary and the historian; an indefatigable lecturer and cicerone, who has shared with others his knowledge of cathedrals and monasteries, churches and castles, in every corner of England, so that he knows his Bradshaw as well as he knows his enlarged and annotated copy of the *Fasti* of Le Neve; a distinguished scholar, to whom every aspect of ecclesiastical history throughout the centuries is familiar; an ardent student of French and English literature who at one time wrote as much about his favourite authors as he wrote about history; and perhaps above all, an urbane and witty observer of human life, especially in the cathedral close, a talker and raconteur whose memory is always at the service of his experience, and a sound Churchman whose broad humanity keeps the balance even between devotion to his faith and the gay independence of a shrewd and kindly man of the world.

It was a worthy tribute to a fine gentleman, and to a signal achievement.

Now, however, twilight was falling fast: and he faced its lengthening shadows with characteristic fortitude. During the Second World War, the library which he had collected to solace his retirement was badly damaged by a bomb, and other more serious misfortunes were soon to follow. The death of his wife in 1945 was a blow from which he never fully recovered, and though he continued his research, this was now prosecuted with decreasing momentum. His own health was failing. He continued, none the less, to be at the service of his fellow scholars, and he remained always ready to discharge academic duties although these, in fact, now overtaxed his strength. As late as 1950, he

came from London to Bristol University to act as External Examiner, and on that occasion the manner in which he surmounted all physical difficulties in the effective discharge of his task excited the grateful admiration of all who were associated with him. It was perhaps the last public engagement he fulfilled. For his health now rapidly deteriorated; and after a long illness, very bravely borne, he died, 4 September 1952.

The time has not yet arrived when a final assessment can be made of Hamilton Thompson's permanent place among English scholars, though there can be little doubt that it will be adjudged a high one. To speak more precisely would, however, at present be difficult. So much of his work (like that of Round) is scattered in a large number of periodical publications, and the range of his interests was so wide that it would be hard to find a critic competent to pass judgement on the totality of his endeavour. Only its general character, and its essential quality, can here therefore be briefly noted.

The basis of his historical scholarship was certainly its fine actuality derived in the first instance from deep study, and keen appreciation, of the physical survivals from antiquity. For him the written, and the unwritten sources of history claimed an equal respect, and on them alone was he content to base his interpretation of the past. In this matter, moreover, it was not for him a mere lip-service to 'the transcendent value of original material' but an ardent quest which led him up and down England and France, and sent him to spend innumerable hours in immediate contact with manuscripts and records. The initial impression he made on many of his younger contemporaries was of one who had ever the transcriber's pen in his hands. The Public Records were his quarry, as also were the treasures in great libraries, and more especially those in diocesan and capitular muniment-rooms. It seemed an endless occupation, which, while it never suggested haste, none the less covered an enormous amount of ground. Hamilton Thompson's transcripts were things to be admired—their accuracy was astonishing, and their calligraphy matched (and sometimes surpassed) that of the originals they reproduced. How great was the store amassed can only be guessed for it was truly observed of him in 1948 that 'he has always more transcripts than he can print, more riches than he can display'. Let it be added that these wonderful transcripts were always at the disposal of others.

Such an approach brought him very near to the veritable countryside of medieval Europe. It has been remarked (and I

think with truth) that a prime characteristic of a great historian is a sense of place. This Hamilton Thompson possessed. His topographical knowledge sometimes seemed impeccable, and certainly it was always impressive. His lectures on English ecclesiastical architecture, on occasion, conveyed the impression that there was scarcely a field-path leading to a parish church, and scarcely a passage in a great cathedral, which he had not explored for himself, and which was not firmly implanted in his memory. His knowledge of France was naturally not of the same character, but it was nevertheless very extensive, and a chance question once revealed the fact that he knew all the names, and most of the boundaries, of the French *arrondissements*. This detailed, and carefully memorized, information might, of course, have led merely to a preoccupation with the trivial, or with the insignificant. With Hamilton Thompson it was made to serve as a sure foundation for historical interpretation.

These qualities made him particularly suited to become a great local historian, and as such many of his most notable contributions were made. Our knowledge of the ecclesiastical antiquities of many English shires owes much to him, and his range was wide. But as time went on, he tended (in this respect) to concentrate more exclusively on two regions. The one was the northern province with special reference to Yorkshire and the See of Durham; the other was Lincolnshire. Some of his work in this field has already been mentioned, but it deserves note that his activities here were never conducted in isolation but always in close association with many local scholars, some of whom became his intimate friends. Thus among Yorkshire antiquaries he always spoke with a particular regard for John Bilson, and his own studies were interconnected with those of St. John Hope, James Kitson Clarke, James Crossley, W. T. Lancaster, and many others. Likewise, in Lincolnshire, his contacts with scholars such as Canon Foster and Canon Srawley were particularly fruitful. He played, in short, a large part in the co-operative effort which brought antiquarian studies in these regions to a high pitch of excellence, and to him is due at least some of the credit for maintaining and enhancing the high reputation of such bodies as the Surtees Society, the Lincoln Record Society, and the Yorkshire Archaeological Society.

Hamilton Thompson's local studies always possessed a general significance, just as his investigations of English ecclesiastical antiquities were throughout controlled by a careful comparison between English and French usage. His meticulous concern for

detail thus never limited his interests, and it may be regretted that he so seldom allowed himself to indulge in wide general surveys. In truth, few men of his generation were better qualified to undertake such work, for his knowledge of continental, and especially of French, sources was very extensive. When he did permit himself to write of medieval Europe as a whole, the result was nearly always happy, and, in at least one instance, it may be judged as having been spectacularly successful. The wonderful chapter on 'Medieval Doctrine to the Lateran Council of 1215' which he contributed to the sixth volume of the *Cambridge Medieval History* is a masterpiece of restrained generalization. Its stimulus has now been happily appreciated by graduates and undergraduates for nearly a generation, and it remains as fresh and as informative as when it first appeared.

Nevertheless (as may be supposed) Hamilton Thompson was usually, and more especially in his later years, happier when engaged in more restricted investigations, though these in their turn were always related to general problems. Thus, his work, if viewed as a whole, was antiquarian as well as historical, and of equal importance to local and to national history. Indeed, his greatest achievement will perhaps be found to lie in his triumphant demonstration how arbitrary are the lines which divide these several studies. He was a zealous antiquary: but he never allowed his fellow-antiquarians to forget that their task was not only to discover, but also to impart meaning into, the monuments of the past. He was a life-long student and writer of history: but he forced his fellow-historians to be aware that their work must be based in large measure upon the physical survivals from antiquity. Similarly, his writings gave new emphasis to the inseparable connexion between local and national history, enforcing the lesson that the general historian can never afford to neglect particular manifestations of the processes with which he is concerned, while the local historian can only make his work of value if it is treated as part of a larger whole. In this way may Hamilton Thompson be regarded as having been a catalytic agent among contrasting groups of scholars. Yet (like a true catalytic) he remained himself unabsorbed. For there was always a guiding thread running through the whole of his production, a dominant motive which gave it at the last a final unity and a perfected pattern. He was, first and foremost, a historian of the medieval English Church.

*Anglia Sacra* was his *patria*; and he moved therein so much as a privileged senator that today it is even tempting to seek his

place in scholarship alongside that of Henry Wharton, of whom it was said (and by no mean authority) that he did 'more for English Church history than any one before or since'. Time alone can justify, modify or disprove the comparison, and there is no need to anticipate the verdict since its subject would have been the first to scorn a facile eulogy. Nevertheless, during the past months, while gratefully contemplating the life and work of Hamilton Thompson, I have sometimes been led to wonder whether these could be better summarized than in the words of Wharton's epitaph: 'He laboured much to increase and to illustrate letters. He wrote much, and toiled more, for the Church of Christ.'

DAVID DOUGLAS

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