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CAMPBELL DODGSON

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1867-1948

CAMPBELL DODGSON was born at Crayford, Kent, on 13 August 1867. He was the youngest of the eight children of William Oliver Dodgson, stockbroker, and of Lucy Elizabeth Smith. His father was descended from Jeremiah Butler of Basil-don in the parish of Otley, Yorkshire, through the latter's granddaughter, Mary, who married Thomas Dodgson of Otley. Jeremiah Butler, whose family was connected with that of the Butlers, Dukes of Ormonde, was born at Kilkenny in Ireland, came to England during the Revolution of 1688 and married Lydia Slater of Carlton near Otley. There was certainly some connexion between this family and that of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) though the exact link is not recorded.

The course of Campbell Dodgson's life was uneventful and can be briefly recorded. He went to Winchester as a scholar in 1880, proceeding thence to New College, Oxford, also with a scholarship in classics. He took a first in classics in 1890 and a second in theology in the following year. He was an excellent classical scholar and kept up his reading of Greek and Latin. He is mentioned at Winchester as one of a clever trio, who headed the 1880 roll for scholarship, the other two being Horace Joseph and the poet Lionel Johnson. He had at this time a quiet, rather sleepy manner and was known as 'the Dormouse' no doubt in reference to *Alice in Wonderland*, but he seems to have made no deep impression on his contemporaries at Winchester and Oxford. He was a man of simple habits. Though not athletic he was a great walker and an enthusiastic swimmer and continued to bathe in the Serpentine until late in life. He had a keen appreciation of music and was a devotee of Mozart and his operas. He was a shy and reticent, almost a taciturn man and was never communicative about himself or his early life.

He had at one time intended to enter the church but abandoned this idea and was appointed an Assistant in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum, taking up his duties there on 6 April 1893. Here he remained until 1932, being appointed Keeper in succession to Sir Sidney Colvin, on the latter's retirement in 1912, though Laurence Binyon his exact contemporary in the Museum, whom he had defeated in the limited competition for entry to the Department and who

had then served for two years in Printed Books, had been promoted Deputy Keeper (then called Assistant Keeper) before. (It is said that Dodgson had at one time been offered the Directorship of the Kupferstichkabinett at Berlin about this time but I can find no written confirmation of this story.) From his first appointment until his retirement in 1932 and beyond, the Department engrossed the greater part of his energy and his complete loyalty.

The outbreak of the 1914-18 war with Germany must have been a particularly severe blow to one who was connected by close ties to the scholars of that country, but he bore the break with characteristic stoicism. I remember one of his reactions to the situation, which exemplified, I thought, his selfless devotion to scholarship and to the Museum: 'What an opportunity', he said, 'to clear up the arrears in the Department.' (The contents of the Print Room had just been moved from their old quarters in the White wing of the Museum to their present position in the King Edward VII building.) But he soon realized the impossibility of making so humane a use of the 'emergency'. In July 1916 he applied to the Trustees for permission to undertake work for the War Office which would involve a month's complete, and subsequently partial, absence. In spite of this call on his time he was able to carry on the not inconsiderable work of the Department almost single-handed and to keep the register of new acquisitions, which continued to be numerous.

He had in 1913 married Frances Catharine, daughter of the Rev. W. A. Spooner, D.D., Warden of New College, Oxford, but there were no children of the marriage. He died in London on 11 July 1948.

He had been employed on his first entry into the Museum on a subject index of Italian and Netherlandish prints of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a work which gave scope to his considerable learning in ecclesiastical history and legend. He had also from the first kept the register of new acquisitions and there can be no question that the taste for German art, which he developed, was aroused by having to deal, in the course of these duties, with the important gift of German woodcuts and illustrated books made to the Department by William Mitchell in 1895. In the same year a complete catalogue *raisonné* of the series of early Netherlandish and German woodcuts in the Department was planned and entrusted to Campbell Dodgson. Knowledge of the subject in England, as represented by W. H. Wilshire's *Catalogue of Early Prints in the British Museum*, 2 vols., 1879

and 1883, was amateurish, and Dodgson, with a conscientious thoroughness which was to mark all his work, set himself to master its intricacies. He spent most of his vacations in Germany in study and soon became known and recognized in that country as an authority. The first volume of his *Catalogue of Early German and Netherlandish Woodcuts in the British Museum* appeared in 1903 and the second in 1911. This, as was at once realized in Germany and elsewhere, was more than a mere catalogue; it was practically a history of woodcut in Germany and the Netherlands during the period, though unfortunately the sections dealing with Switzerland, the Upper and Middle Rhine, and Cologne were never completed. A partial index to the work, published in Germany in 1925 without the knowledge of the author or of the Trustees of the British Museum, was a curious testimony to the prestige it enjoyed.

Dodgson had already been responsible for an official publication of the *Grotesque Alphabet of 1464* (1899) and, outside his actual departmental duties, was one of the founders of the Dürer Society which issued annual portfolios of reproductions from 1898 to 1908, most of the notes and descriptions for which were contributed by him. He was also one of the moving spirits in the launching of the *Burlington Magazine*, served on its advisory council from its inception in 1903, and became a director in 1906. He contributed no less than 105 articles and notes to the magazine, his first publication in the first volume being an article, in the form of a review of Dr. Pauli's catalogue of the engraved work of Hans Sebald Beham.

While pursuing these detailed and meticulous studies into the history of German graphic art, Dodgson did not by any means neglect the contemporary scene. He played an important part as a patron of young artists and a collector more particularly of the school of etching in England which emerged from the revival of the art inaugurated by Whistler and Seymour Haden and which reached the climax of its popularity in the 20's of this century. He was a lifelong friend of D. Y. Cameron and of Sir Muirhead Bone, the latter of whom speaks feelingly of the encouraging hand held out to him by Dodgson on his first arrival in London in 1901. He bought Henry Rushbury's first etching. This interest in his contemporaries was, I suspect, in its origin a self-imposed discipline, which, however, with time and cultivation became almost spontaneous. He felt that someone in his position should appreciate the art not only of the past but of his own day. Sir Sidney Colvin once reported of him that he was a

man of great ability who would succeed in any profession but that he possessed only a fair amount of natural aptitude for artistic studies in particular. This judgement passed on him in the early days of his association with the Print Room proved to be wide of the mark. If he had, as Colvin seemed to suggest, no natural aesthetic sensibility, he acquired something which served him, contemporary artists and the British Museum almost equally well.

Dodgson's keepership was marked by a series of important acquisitions, to some of which he contributed out of his own pocket (he was a man of considerable private means), as in the case of Albrecht Dürer's drawing 'Una Villana Windisch', acquired in 1930, for the purchase of which he subscribed £2,000. His benefactions to the Print Room, though rarely on this scale, were continuous and continued even after his death, for he bequeathed his own collections to the Department. He had, from an early stage in his career, set out to collect examples of contemporary graphic art both English and foreign with the intention of leaving this collection to the Print Room, and its composition was largely dictated by the gaps in the national collection. The bequest, which became effective in 1949, consisted of over 5,000 prints and drawings. In addition to the series of modern English etchers, like Muirhead Bone and Augustus John, a very fine representation of contemporary and later nineteenth-century French graphic art was included, as well as a few Old Master Drawings of importance. An exhibition of the principal acquisitions made for the Department during his keepership was held in the Print Room after his retirement in 1932, and a catalogue of this exhibition was printed. A small selection from the prints and drawings bequeathed by him was also shown in the Department in 1951-2.

After his appointment as Keeper, Dodgson found less time for research along his own special lines. He was, however, able to edit a series of reproductions: *Woodcuts of the XV Century in the John Rylands Library, Manchester*, 1915, and *Woodcuts of the XV Century in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford*, 1929. *Woodcuts of the XV Century in the . . . British Museum*, 2 vols., 1934 and 1935, and *Prints in the Dotted Manner in the . . . British Museum*, 1937, which formed part of the same cherished scheme for making known the primitive woodcuts in English collections, did not appear till after his retirement. He was also responsible for a succinct but authoritative chronological catalogue of Dürer's engravings, published in 1926, and his studies in German graphic art continued intermittently until almost the end of his

life. In a different field his book on *French Colour Prints* (1924), a subject which might have lent itself to superficial treatment, shows his accustomed careful scholarship and grasp. Meanwhile his interest in his contemporaries found practical expression in the production of detailed catalogues of their engraved work, not infrequently in the form of a supplement appended to the 'appreciation' of some more fluent critic. The earliest of such catalogues to appear was that of *Muirhead Bone's Etchings and Drypoints*, published in 1909. It was followed by catalogues of the graphic work of Charles Conder, 1914; of Augustus John, 1920; of Edmund Blampied, 1926; of Robert Austin, 1930; of F. L. Griggs, 1941; and finally in 1944, of Stephen Gooden. He was also responsible in 1919 for the foundation of the Prints and Drawings Fund of the Contemporary Art Society, which he administered until 1934. It was largely the same interest which led him to take over the editorship of the *Print Collector's Quarterly*, which he conducted from 1921 to 1936, and which under his direction became the medium for contributions of a high standard, but, though the subjects treated were largely contemporary, he was also able to include articles on early engraving by eminent continental scholars, like Max Lehrs and Max Geisberg.

Dodgson's work in the earlier part of his career had been partly bibliographical in character. Though he might publish an occasional article on some other subject than German graphic art, I doubt whether he would have laid claim to being an art-critic. He might well have called himself a 'Kunstforscher', for the term art-historian had hardly found acceptance in the English language until late in his life. By about 1925, however, he began to realize that the study of art could not, or should not, be so strictly divided into technical categories and began to extend his studies to drawings, primarily of German and then of other schools. He was one of the founders of the periodical *Old Master Drawings*, edited by K. T. Parker from 1927 to 1939, and contributed to it a number of short notes.

It is by no means easy to convey the importance of Dodgson's achievement. It was largely bound up in his character. He was a man of great integrity, so that his judgements were invariably honest. He was genuinely modest and was always willing to admit his own mistakes and to learn, not only from his elders and contemporaries, but also from younger men. He was entirely free from professional jealousy and never became involved in any of those squabbles which are not unknown among historians of art. He recognized from the first that the study of art

was not merely a question of appreciation and *flair*, but must be treated as far as possible as an exact science. No fact was too insignificant for his attention if he thought it might conduce to the solution of a problem and his catalogue of German woodcuts is a model of conscientious and meticulous research. It was obvious that in the classification of this, a complete knowledge of what was preserved in foreign collections, was essential. He was endowed with the patient tenacity, and possessed the means necessary to the realization of this comprehensive mastery of his material. However much absorbed, his detachment from the scene of his studies gave him a more dispassionate outlook than some of his German colleagues possessed and added weight to his judgement. These qualities did not include any great aptitude for generalization, as Dodgson would have himself admitted. He was essentially a recorder of concrete facts which he was able to marshal with clarity and precision. His style, at once simple and elegant, reflected his classical training. He was by no means eloquent in conveying by word of mouth his appreciation of the things he loved, but his obvious, if unexpressed enthusiasm for works of art had a way of reaching his audience. To the young artist especially his interest and his practical and generous encouragement were of substantial value and he seemed at ease in their society, as they were in his. The shyness, which at times made it difficult for him to express himself in his own language, largely disappeared when he found himself behind the shelter, so to speak, of a foreign tongue. He had a complete command of the German and French languages, both spoken and written, and his friends abroad seemed to have no inkling of the inhibitions which hampered his conversation in his own language. He was all his life a great traveller and was on terms of friendship not only with scholars of his own standing, but with students of a younger generation, who could always count on his sympathetic help. Nor were his friends abroad confined to the museum hierarchy; he was equally at home among the art-dealers of Amsterdam, Munich, and Paris, who respected him not only for his scholarship, but for the impartiality of his judgement. Though he prided himself on recognizing and understanding new forms of art, he never stood for any particular clique or fad. He was appreciated as a discriminating patron by contemporary artists in France, by Jean-Louis Forain, of whose graphic work he formed an all but complete collection, by Laboureur, by Raoul Dufy, by Marie Laurencin and by many others.

If I have described him as taciturn, I do not wish to convey

any idea that he was morose. This was very far from being the case, for he was the kindest and best-tempered of men, and when he set out to enjoy himself, as he did when entertaining congenial company at his fine house in Montagu Square, there radiated from behind his glasses a continuous and almost Pickwickian geniality. This charming boyish pleasure bubbled up from behind his reserve when he came to show one some discovery in his favourite field, or something he had acquired for the Print Room at less than its market value for, though the most generous of men, he delighted in securing a bargain for his Department.

Dodgson's services were recognized at home and abroad by the bestowal on him of honorary degrees both at Oxford and Cambridge; by his election to the British Academy (1939); by his appointment as Officer of the Légion d'Honneur (France) and Commander of the Order of the Crown (Belgium), and by the award made to him of the Goethe medal, of which honour he was one of the very few recipients outside Germany. The only official honour conferred on him in England was the C.B.E., given him for work in the intelligence department of the War Office in 1918. His services to scholarship and his public-spirited generosity remained without official recognition.

A. E. POPHAM

Authorities: *The Times*, 14 and 22 July 1932; *Burlington Magazine*, xc (1948), p. 293; information from friends, particularly from Mr. J. Byam Shaw; personal knowledge.