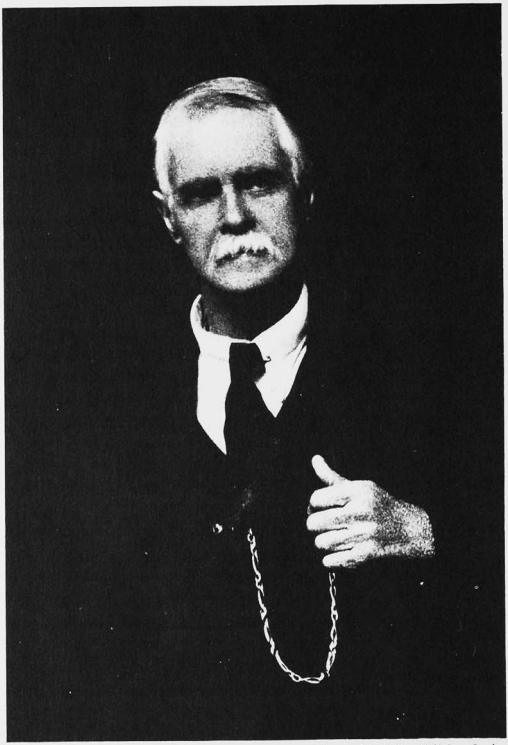

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GEORGE GORDON COULTON

1930

GEORGE GORDON COULTON

1858–1947

I

GEORGE GORDON COULTON was born on 15 October 1858, the son of a solicitor of Lynn in Norfolk. Both his father and mother were possessed of more than average character, and he had the healthy experience of being brought up as one of a family of eight. His schooling was that of the average boy of his class, except that between the Easter of 1866 and September 1867 he was a pupil in the Lycée at St.-Omer, and thus early began to obtain that knowledge of French civilization which was to underlie his later study of medieval culture in western Europe. After some years at Felsted, he went up to St. Catharine's College, Cambridge, in 1877, with a classical scholarship and greatly enjoyed the freedom and society of what was then a small college. He was an enthusiastic member of the Boat Club, and it is no accident that the most vivid incident he records on his return to Cambridge after thirty years' absence is a scene on the river:

> Now, the boats began to show round Grassy; and in a few minutes we were following them up the Long Reach. The sun, at that time of year and day, shines almost directly along the Reach; so that they were soon rowing directly into it. There they were in 1911 as I had watched them for three consecutive years in the old days, when my blood was warm within. The two boats plunged into the sun, and onward through that sea of glory. Victor and loser were alike transfigured; it seemed no human struggle; splendid young limbs swung splendidly through the bewildering flash of oars and the dazzle of sun among those quicksilver eddies, while the spray splashed higher and faster as the fight became more desperate, until the final pistol shots divided winner and loser. Here was all the old excitement of sunlight and breathless suspense. Heraclitus was a liar; into this same river these same eyes had plunged again with the same old fascination! And this was only part and token of the one great miracle . . . and I was once more a chartered freeman of this lost Paradise.

He made a number of close friends, and these 'College chums' remained among the dearest associations of his life. He was not a particularly hard-reading man at the University, but in his last year made a real effort to justify his scholarship, and was unfortunate in being prevented by illness from taking the Tripos.

He was forced to take an *aegrotat* degree. This was a severe blow, and he was correspondingly grateful to the Rev. Wilberforce Gedge who offered him a post in his preparatory school at Malvern Wells. When we visited it together for some days in 1922 he recalled a number of incidents of his stay there, and spoke of how much he learned as a beginner in the art of teaching from Gedge's firm but kindly advice.

While at Malvern Wells he decided to read for Holy Orders. 'The motives were certainly mixed: I thought then, as I do still, that I should have more chance of a Rectory than of a House Mastership, and should find preaching more congenial than class-work. But that was not all: the resolve was, on the whole, a step upwards rather than downwards.' In this frame of mind he was fortunate enough to find a place in the household of C. J. Vaughan, then Dean of Llandaff, and gained immensely by his contact with him. While still an ordinand he did not find it easy to subscribe to all the Thirty-nine Articles, and even a number of talks with Vaughan failed to remove all his scruples.

Enough was done, however, for him to be ordained deacon on 21 December 1883, and he accepted a curacy at Offley in the Chilterns, under A. E. Northey, and later moved with him to Rickmansworth. Parish life did not fully absorb him, and his real life seems to have been lived in his own private reading and in walking about the Chiltern country-side revelling in its quiet beauty. His personal contacts were uneasy and self-conscious, and he was only completely at home with a small group of friends.

In the summer of 1885 Coulton found himself at the parting of the ways. The course of reading imposed upon him for the examination for the priesthood forced him to examine his beliefs closely, and in the end he found it impossible to go on with his plans for a life in the Church, so he resigned his curacy and turned again to schoolmastering.

The same autumn saw him as an assistant master at Llandovery, under John Owen, afterwards Bishop of St. David's. He was happier there than he had been at Rickmansworth, for the work and his colleagues were congenial, and the Welsh country-side provided a constant refreshment and stimulus. Near by at Lampeter were Tout and Rashdall, and he was thus brought into touch with two men who were to do much for medieval scholarship, one of whom (Rashdall) was to provide the stimulus necessary to turn Coulton from a dilettante into a scholar.

Yet another turn in his fortunes came in the autumn of 1887 when he was asked to go as chaplain and teacher to a private school at Heidelberg, run by an Englishman, P. A. Armitage. Coulton jumped at the chance, and for the next sixteen months spent some of his happiest days in the lovely setting which Heidelberg provided. 'Nothing', he writes, 'has been to me since, and nothing can ever be to me now, quite the same as those days of wandering feet and wandering brain, among people whose sense of discipline had not yet been so fatally poisoned from above.' It is characteristic of the man that he contracted out of his liability to teach so as to give himself time for his own reading, and was happy enough with £50 per annum and his keep. This post, however, was something of a *pis aller*, and when the chance came of an appointment to teach French and German at Sherborne he took it, despite the difficult conditions that the school then found itself in. These Coulton has described in *Fourscore Years*, and he might have said much more of his own difficulties, for his predecessor had left nothing behind which would guide him, and Coulton had to build a technique and syllabus of modern language teaching from the foundations upward. He threw himself into this work with great energy, so much so that for the only period in his life he found himself with no time for private reading. He enjoyed, however, the companionship of several agreeable colleagues, and only left Sherborne when his serious misgivings about his clerical Orders forced him to abandon his clerical dress and with it his position on the staff.

This was in the spring of 1892, and after a brief stay at Sedbergh, made memorable by his first meeting with H. W. Fowler, he took over the Army Class at Dulwich, where he remained for the next four years. He worked very hard with his classes, and in the syllabus and the examinations for which he prepared his pupils found much which irritated and appalled him. Something of this he later put on record in his *Public Schools and Public Needs* (1901). We have still to reach a time when the study of modern languages is taken seriously in our great public schools, and it was impossible in the nineties for Coulton to do more than blaze a trail. He did so—but to his own physical detriment. This and other private affairs told on him so much that in the autumn of 1895 he was forced to resign, and in due course went to convalesce in the Eastbourne home of his old college friend, H. von E. Scott.

This was the turning-point in Coulton's career. Up to the

autumn of 1895 he had moved from one appointment to another and had pursued the particular interest of the moment without any clear, guiding purpose. Armitage, at Heidelberg, once said to him, 'My dear fellow, you have the biggest collection of perfectly useless knowledge I ever came across.' 'That', says Coulton, 'had tickled me with a pleasant self-conceit at the time', but that time had now come to an end, and as he struggled back to health 'a strange gulf opened between Past and Future'. He writes:

> Behind me, lay a sea which had nearly beaten out the swimmer's life; but upon which he can look back as irrelevant and impotent, now that he lies upon the shore. In front, a new land, long glimpsed in imagination, but now at last touched and recognised as his own. In proportion as physical forces returned, I seemed to see for the first time a clear and consistent plan for the conduct of life.

The most important single influence in helping him to plan his new life was Hastings Rashdall's history of *The Universities of Europe in the late Middle Ages* (1895). As he read it, he once told me, he felt that here was a work which rebuked his own casual attitude to his reading. He had for long been more interested in the Middle Ages than in any other period, and from boyhood had loved its architecture and art, but had never made any effort to organize his 'collections of perfectly useless knowledge'. Henceforth, all was done by rule. An elaborate series of categories or rubrics was devised, and everything he read was carefully annotated, and indexed under its proper rubric, important extracts being often made in a series of note-books.[1] All these note-books and indexes are now in the Library of the University of Chicago, and form one of the richest existing compilations of material and reference on medieval social and religious history. But what he called 'bread-work' was necessary if he was to follow his new aspirations with any success, and he was fortunate in finding just the arrangement he wanted in the private coaching establishment of his friend Scott. For thirteen years Scott and Coulton worked together in an harmonious, business-friendly agreement. Scott allowed him to do his work in his own way and at his own hours, and as his teaching rapidly became an easy routine, he was able to work

[1] These note-books were known as 'the B.M.'s'. Each consisted of about 200 sheets of quarto-sized paper, stitched into a stiff paper cover by Coulton. The first dozen or so contained notes mainly made from his reading in the British Museum—hence their title. They finally amounted to over 300 in number.

at full stretch on his own studies for the greater part of each day. In due course, he ventured trial flights as a university extension lecturer, and so began to organize some of his growing stores of knowledge.

On Boxing Day, 1902, he left London for winter sports at Adelboden, a confirmed bachelor of 44. When he returned from the most fortunate journey of his life he was virtually engaged to marry Miss Rose Ilbert, a member of a distinguished Devonshire family, and niece to Sir Courtenay Ilbert, Clerk of the House of Commons. The story of his courtship may be read in his own words in *Fourscore Years*, and as a result they 'found themselves pledged for life, on the last day of the month whose first day had found us not far advanced beyond ordinary pleasant acquaintance'.

Marriage at once brought to an end the easy-going scholar-cum-teacher's life he had adopted after joining Scott. The mere compilation and organizing of knowledge as an end in itself had to cease, and 'the humdrum necessity of earning money, now and without delay' had to be faced. In 1905, therefore, Coulton published the first of his *Medieval Studies*, and also his *From St. Francis to Dante*. This was the beginning of a continuous series of articles and books that were rapidly assembled under the stress of circumstances from his files, and his name as a cogent, well-informed student of medieval affairs began to be known. The rapid way in which he established his position in a few years may best be illustrated by noting that in 1911 he was appointed Birkbeck Lecturer at Trinity College, Cambridge—an appointment of distinction generally awarded to men well known in the academic world. No wonder that he received the news of his election with 'unspeakable delight'. It showed that the dilettante in him was dead, and that the scholar had taken his place.

To return to Cambridge after an absence of thirty years revived in Coulton his old enthusiasm for the University and all that it meant. Scott at Eastbourne was soon to retire, so, characteristically, Coulton burnt his boats, and with his wife and two young daughters came to Cambridge to try his fortunes as a free-lance lecturer, extension lecturer, and teacher. He was just beginning to make headway when war broke out in 1914, and the next few years were very difficult ones for him.

The return of the University to full strength and something over in 1919 brought him work in plenty, for not only was he in demand as a lecturer for the History Tripos, but the newly

formed English Tripos depended entirely on his teaching for the period 1000–1500, so that he was very fully occupied. All this work, however, had nothing of financial security in it, for the lecturer's fees in those days rose and fell according to the number of his pupils. It was a step forward, therefore, when in 1919 he was appointed to the one official Lecturership in English, left vacant by the death of G. C. Macaulay.

Thus at the age of 61, for the first time in his career, he could look forward to an assured annual income and to the reasonable expectation of finding congenial work in the University, sufficient for his financial needs. Any doubts about this were put at rest in May 1919, when, to his great astonishment and pleasure, he was offered a fellowship by St. John's College. This was undoubtedly the greatest moment in his academic life, and he never ceased to recall the 'singular generosity' of the College in electing a man whose claims on them were nil, and whose reputation was chequered by the dislike which many felt for some of his activities as a controversial historian, and still more for his unceasing and vigorous propaganda in favour of National Service.

The rest of his life (save for a brief interval) was passed in Cambridge, first as a very busy university lecturer and teacher, and then after his retirement from his lecturership in 1934 mainly in writing the numerous series of books and articles that flowed unceasingly from his pen until the day of his death.

In the late summer of 1940 he was prevailed on to accept an invitation to go as guest lecturer in the University of Toronto, and there he passed some years, until his anxiety to be back in England overcame everything else, and in May 1944 he returned. He soon settled down again to his old routine, in which he continued, so far as a growing inability to get about would allow him to do so, until his death on 4 March 1947.

II

To record the main facts in Coulton's life is sufficient to indicate that here was a man outside the usual run of academic figures; but to leave it at that would be to leave untold much that made him so outstanding to those with whom he came into contact.[1] It was impossible to be in his presence without being aware that here was a most unusual man. He was something above the average in height, which his slender figure

[1] Coulton died in his ninetieth year. I knew him for the last thirty years of his life.

emphasized; this, and his bright blue eyes, and the old-world courtesy of his manner, compelled attention. He received old and young with complete sincerity, and his readiness to learn, particularly from the youngest, was one of his most engaging characteristics. As soon as he felt that his visitor was a serious student there were no bounds to his generosity—his time, his learning, and his files were at their disposal. One of these student-friends, the late Professor Eileen Power, often recalled the way in which she was treated while still a Tripos student at Girton, when, in response to a question after a lecture, she was asked to call on him. She did so, and instead of being given a few references or a vague direction, she was treated to a penetrating analysis of her problem, furnished with advice for further reading, and then sat down for the rest of the afternoon to make free of his collections of extracts and references. That was the beginning for her of a practice, also followed by many other of his pupils, which towards the end of her life she acknowledged in a public lecture, by saying, 'I borrow this reference from Dr. Coulton, from whom, indeed, I have been borrowing all my life.'

Coulton was equally generous in the way he would lavish time and thought on the problems put to him by his pupils. He would listen carefully, put his finger at once on careless thinking or inaccurate statement, and then give his own views, adding a wealth of suggestions and advice for further reading which often kept his inquirer actively engaged for some time. The range of his knowledge, and the ready way in which he could produce just what seemed to be wanted, was astonishing. This made him formidable as an opponent, and an unwary antagonist would often find himself hopelessly out-ranged in fact and driven inescapably to admit what he had set out to deny. This massive erudition was the result of incessant toil. Once he had begun his 'new life' in 1895–6 his energies were continually directed towards the orderly acquisition and arrangement of material. Formidable works such as Dugdale's *Monasticon* were read and noted page by page, and in this way stores of material were garnered and indexed in a highly elaborate fashion. This enabled him to put his hand on a series of references at a moment's notice, and to turn up in his note-books the many passages that had been copied *in extenso*. The raw material being thus available, he could arrange and synthesize it without being hampered by constant search for references.

In the course of time his command over his material became so complete that he could trust himself over considerable areas

without immediate recourse to his files. He always astonished me on holiday by the number of words he had written at odd times on our travels while the idle apprentice just stood by and gaped about him. 'Give me ten minutes warning before the train comes in, my dear fellow,' he would say, and without further ado, on platform, or in dreary waiting-room, would put on his spectacles, and his pen would begin to fly over the paper. The main outline was clear in his mind: so that when he got home only a few names and dates, and perhaps an additional supporting reference or two, would have to be added.

It was this power of working at any time, knowing that his well-stocked mind would easily respond, that enabled him to produce the tremendous output which stands to his name. Reading for recreation interested him but little: as a method of relaxation he would consent to be read to, but even then it was works of biography, or memoirs, rather than fiction which held his attention, though Trollope and, to a lesser extent, Thackeray were exceptions. For recreation he liked nothing better than a walk 'betwixt wood and water', where his acute sense of form and colour could have full play. The purples of a hill-side, the bright-coloured pear-leaf in early autumn, or the bronze touched with gold of the spring poplars—all gave him exquisite pleasure, as did the yearly wonder of the spring flowers in the Backs at Cambridge, or still more the wild beauty of the Fellows' garden at St. John's.

If these things could be connected with some historic or literary association, so much the better. To go to Dijon and not to walk out to St. Bernard's birthplace of Fontaine-les-Dijon, three miles distant, or to fail to look out for a glimpse of St. Julien-du-Sault as the train rushed by—these were things inexplicable to him. He drank the wine of Arbois the more happily remembering that it was a certain 'petit vin d'Arbois' that Rousseau was accustomed to 'convey' from his host's cellar, and slept the more soundly to the lullaby of the stream beneath his window at Poligny because Ruskin (one of his heroes) might also have heard its murmuring as he and his parents paused there in their journeys on the old Geneva road.

These moments of piety (or sentiment) were, of course, not mere indulgences, but part of his complete acceptance of the past and absorption in it. For him it lived, perhaps more vividly than the present, although his interest and concern over 'our present discontents' was always acute and well informed. As he came to each town or building hitherto unknown to him his

whole resources of knowledge and imagination were brought to bear upon what he saw. After a few hours of poking about, pressing his way through unsavoury alleys or climbing the church tower to get a better view, he was usually able to discern what constituted the old town and where its wall or confines ran. These powers were perhaps shown to their fullest in his understanding of medieval architecture. On entering a medieval building he rapidly comprehended the peculiar problems its builders had tried to solve, and was soon able to explain in detail how they had succeeded or failed. It was an education to work one's way with him up some valley of Burgundy or Provence, and to follow his explanations of how a failure at a church lower down the valley had been turned to success in a later effort—by the same masons for the most part. His chapter entitled 'Wander-years' in *Art and the Reformation* is an imaginative piece of writing based on such investigations. The hours happily passed him by while he worked out the problems presented by an unusual piece of architecture—sometimes to the annoyance of those custodians who felt it their duty to follow him round. To placate one such, at the end of a long survey, he said in apology that the place presented certain peculiarities. 'Indeed,' he added, 'I don't remember such an unusual construction anywhere else.' The custodian looked him straight in the eye. 'Peut-être, Monsieur,' she replied.

It was on holiday when he was moving from place to place that he was at his happiest and fullest. In a long lifetime of travel he had acquired a technique of providing for his various needs which was as complete as it was sometimes embarrassing. Fellow travellers would watch with fascinated interest the brewing of some witch's potion (fondly believed by Coulton to have remarkable restorative powers), but would recoil violently when offered a draught of the fluid, despite the aluminium mug of venerable appearance and the completely unselfconscious manner in which it was offered to them. The passer-by would be stopped to ask the way to the nearest antiquarian bookshop (and Coulton never ceased to regret the natives' ignorance of the resources of their own towns), or more often would be requested to say where a *bon repas bourgeois* could be obtained. Time stood still for him in some ways, so that he would seek vainly for an hotel where he had stayed forty years before, or would lament that things had changed in a restaurant, which on enquiry it would turn out he had last visited in 1889.

Completely sincere, completely unselfconscious, he was once

described by a Parisian journalist, who saw him at the Congress Loisy in 1928, as follows:

> Imaginez-vous l'apparition la plus cocasse, la plus saugrenue! La figure écarlate; la taille démesurément élongée; les vêtements trop courts et trop étroits; le geste embarrassé; un col et une cravate à faire mourir de rire! — et vous avez l'honorable Coulton.

An exaggeration, of course, but this pen-portrait gives something of the externals as he must have appeared when on his travels to the passer-by. A more valuable vignette is given by Dr. H. F. Stewart, who tells how Coulton was once met by M. Paul Desjardins, owner of the Abbaye de Pontigny, who, recognizing or divining a kindred spirit, for he too was a humanist of no mean order, carried Coulton off to the Abbaye where luncheon was about to be served in the eleventh-century refectory. One of the famous Pontigny *Décades* was in full swing, and the participants, a goodly company, were already seated at the horse-shoe table round the central pillar which rose out of a pool where, upon occasion, fish for the evening meal might be seen swimming, unconscious of their doom.

'Veuillez aller, cher Monsieur, prendre place là-bas', said Desjardins, indicating a vacant chair across the floor, and Coulton plunged straight into the pool. Not otherwise damped, he enjoyed the refreshment of the meal and subsequent discussion; and, that over, took his leave, and incidentally someone else's hat. His visit was long remembered, and Desjardins never failed to enquire after 'ce savant Mr. Coulton, au visage couleur de brique, aux yeux bleu céleste', epithets appropriate to the good health that goes with holiday and a conscience void of offence.

Back in Cambridge after his vacation he would rapidly settle down to his university routine. He put a great deal into his lectures, so that the abler men found that they were getting not only facts and ideas, but stimulating comparisons between past and present, and pregnant asides and reflections on events, which had a vigour and sweep all his own. Naturally, much that he had to say was open to argument, and it was in part to give an opportunity for healthy discussion that he held his 'At Homes' most weeks of the term in his rooms at St. John's. These 'squashes' lived up to their name, for although he had generous quarters, these overflowed with books, papers, and all the impedimenta of an active scholar and controversialist, and additional floor space was not easy to come by. Few minded

the discomfort, for the intellectual fare provided was generous and stimulating. At times Coulton would open a discussion, but he preferred to let others make the running at first and only to intervene later. No one present at any such meetings will forget the scene: the packed room, the eager give and take of discussion, with Coulton, sitting on a hard chair, with his 'good ear' towards his guests, and his tall emaciated figure bowed with head in hands while he talked or debated. The remarkably apposite flow of ideas, his overwhelming resourcefulness in debate, his unusual power of illustrating the past from the present, his unexpected flashes of humour, and his boyish delight in telling some racy anecdote—these things made a deep impression which inspired many with something of his own passion for honest thinking and for the appeal by reasoned argument.

III

'Honest thinking' and 'the appeal by reasoned argument' were of the essence of Coulton's intellectual creed, and he wearied some and alienated others by his 'damnable iteration' on these points. Not only those opposed to him on theological or conscientious grounds, but many who shared his views in the main, deplored his controversial zeal and (as they thought) his lack of sense of proportion. It would be idle to deny that he loved a good fight, but apart from that, he was driven by a profound conviction that it was by facing facts, by contradicting false statements, and by helping the ordinary reader to appreciate the nature of the evidence put before him that the cause of Truth would best be served. If that meant reproach, scorn, obloquy, and much hard labour and financial sacrifice, he was prepared to shoulder the burden.

His general position is summed up in the words of the seventeenth-century monk, Jean Mabillon, who declared it his aim 'to proclaim certainties as certain, falsehoods as false and uncertainties as dubious'. This Coulton took for his literary profession of faith when he founded the 'Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought'. His first historical study had been entitled *The Monastic Legend*, and from then onward his object was to set out in an orderly, readable, and documented fashion the truth as he saw it. He always tried to write for the non-specialist, for he was much concerned by the modern 'separation of Academic History from daily life', although it may be doubted whether his ideal audience 'of professional men, or of the

better-educated artisans who read for instruction in their leisure moments', was ever as numerous as he supposed, or so well able to come to a decision on difficult historical matters as he was inclined to believe.

In this spirit he patiently amassed his facts and references and presented them in his own beautifully clear and pointed style, which was made the more effective by his personal interaction with his material. The idea that 'the historian's business is not to judge but to understand' was meaningless to him. With Acton, he held that it was a man's business 'to try others by the final maxim that governs your own lives', and was never afraid to draw his own conclusions from his evidences. This, not unnaturally, laid him open to attack, both from those whose religious outlook differed widely from his own, and also from his colleagues whose view of history was more austere than his. T. F. Tout, for instance, denied that vol. i of *Five Centuries of Religion* was history at all, but only 'an able and eloquent anti-clerical pamphlet on a colossal scale'. Since Professor Tout had little to say against the matter as opposed to the manner in which it was presented Coulton remained unmoved, saying, 'I am not greatly concerned whether . . . what I write is not, strictly speaking, history, so long as the stuff is reasonably true, and conveys to the public a reasonably clear impression of what men did and thought in the past.' This was characteristic of the man. A life-time spent in 'knocking about the world', as he often termed it, had left him unconcerned by matters which often seemed important to more orthodox minds. In fact he felt that university teachers of history had much to answer for because of their 'pedantic emphasis on "historical method" ', and he impenitently held his way when criticized for his strong expressions of opinion and for his uncompromising judgements. The cult of impartiality he abhorred, and felt that it was responsible for much false history. To him it often denoted the undecided mind which burked discussion of difficult points and shirked coming to a conclusion. No one could accuse him of these defects. Indeed, his enthusiasm for controversy made him the *enfant terrible* of historians, and caused many to combine a love for the man with a strong dislike for his controversial zeal.

Controversy is not a normal academic method of pursuing Truth, and Coulton had to pay for his unorthodoxy. He refused to see 'any *essential* difference between the partial and the so-called impartial man—between history and controversy', and stated his case in full in the Raleigh Lecture on History

which he delivered before the Academy in 1932 after his election as a Fellow. He was then 74, and what he said was the deeply felt conviction of many years, and he rejoiced at the opportunity of stating his case. His disappointment was therefore very great when, at the conclusion of his lecture 'the acting chairman . . . rose to say, "I cannot feel that controversy can *ever* be respectable", and left the chair'. It was a blow to his hopes which he never forgot, for although it only expressed publicly what private correspondence and friends had often enjoined upon him, his sanguine temperament had encouraged him to hope at least for a discussion of his views in the serene atmosphere of the Academy.

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that Coulton's controversial activities did no harm, not only to his reputation as historian, but also to his actual output. The latter is so remarkable in bulk and quality that it seems ungracious to wish it had been larger, but in fact a very great deal of his last 40 years of life was taken up by long and, at times, acrimonious disputes with opponents. Many of these were really not worth a tithe of the time and energy he devoted to them; but here he was adamant. He would freely admit to errors of judgement, taste, psychology, and the like in dealing with his opponents, but would admit nothing more. On the contrary, with advancing years he felt that his general policy had been right and that others ought to have joined him in speaking out.

His reputation as a historian will be judged in the main by his *Five Centuries of Religion*. Of this, three volumes have been published, and the materials for Volume IV will it is hoped be edited by his pupil and friend Professor G. R. Potter. When it became clear that Coulton was unlikely to conclude the whole of his work I urged him to set down his account of the conditions of monasticism in western Europe in the years preceding the Dissolution. This fortunately he did, and had passed most of the proofs before his death. It is hoped that the Cambridge University Press will be able to issue this (Vol. V) in the near future.

In this great work his merits and defects are clearly seen. Some of the finest passages he ever wrote are here, and portraits such as that of St. Bernard or St. Benedict are not likely to be bettered in our day. An overwhelming *catena* of evidence is produced to support every point (perhaps, as Rashdall told him, he 'expatiated too much'), and suggestive parallels and stimulating asides are constantly to be found. The accusations

that he failed to sort his evidences closely enough, or that he omitted evidence unfavourable to himself he was easily able to answer. He was on weaker ground when he had to defend his numerous onslaughts on historians and apologists, many of whom had remained unknown from the day of their death until he wantonly disinterred them. He also certainly erred from a psychological point of view in insufficiently emphasizing the good in the monastic system. Not that he ignored it; but a few pages of white have small chance of survival among hundreds of black pages.

Preliminary, and ancillary to this work, Coulton wrote many shorter 'Medieval Studies' which did much to clarify and often to re-state the topics with which they dealt. Larger works, such as *Chaucer and his England*, *The Medieval Village*, or *Art and the Reformation*, illustrate other sides of his encyclopedic knowledge of medieval life and thought.

A word must also be said on another side of Coulton's controversial activities—his advocacy of National Service. From some time in the last decade of the nineteenth century onwards, Coulton was unceasing in his advocacy of compulsory military service. He believed that it was a logical function of a democracy and that it rendered a useful educational service to the community in bringing men of all ranks of life together. Once he was convinced of these things he spent much time and energy in collecting evidence abroad, especially in Switzerland, as to the working of the compulsory system. He was a devoted member of the National Service League, and for some time the right-hand man of Lord Roberts, its president. Year in, year out, he lectured and disputed with all comers, and during the First World War and after gave much attention and criticism to pacifist organizations and peace-pledge movements. The drawing on the jacket of his autobiography, *Fourscore Years*, shows him at one of the happiest moments of his life with his articles on National Service in his hand, and the knowledge that the Militia Act of 1938 was only a few days distant from its passage into law.

IV

Let the last words about him include those of our greatest English medievalist, Sir Maurice Powicke.

'There is no one else like Dr. Coulton,' he wrote. 'The mould is broken. For its fellow we have to go back to the days of Roger Bacon and the *Romance of the Rose*, and it was not so common then as we are apt

to think. There is something lovable about this mixture of combativeness and shrewd, matter-of-fact, even tender, regard for common things —something lovable, but also something cruel, for the foe may be outside the pale, with no claim to regard.'

To this I would only add that such foes were few, since it was seldom that a meeting or controversy with him did not end with respect or even regard on both sides, so that he could (and often did) write to those with whom he was most in disagreement: 'Dominus custodiat introitum tuum et exitum tuum, ex hoc, nunc et usque in saeculum.'

H. S. BENNETT