



JAMES TAIT

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1863-1944

MY first mental picture of James Tait belongs to October 1896, when he was thirty-three years old. It was the custom in those days in the Owens College in Manchester to open a new session with a formal lecture. Tait had just been promoted from his assistant-lectureship to a lectureship in ancient history, and the principal, A. W. Ward, paid him a compliment by inviting him to give the lecture. Ward opened the proceedings and then introduced Tait as 'one of the most distinguished of our sons'. I do not now remember what the lecture was about, but I can still see the lecturer. I was much interested, for I had just entered the College and I knew that this man would be one of my teachers. I saw a serious, reticent young man, determined to go through with his task, a man of firm, well-defined features, sturdy in build, rather tall, shy but composed.

I

Reticence, composure, self-reliance, were throughout qualities of James Tait; but he was not imperturbable. Underneath he was sensitive, anxious and, until success and a competence were assured, easily worried. Like scores of other boys who have entered the new colleges and universities he had to make his own way in the face of a hazardous future. He had also, like many others, to stand up against the solicitude of relatives who had little knowledge of the academic world and wished to see him settled in a way which they could understand. He was born in Manchester on 19 June 1863. His father, Robert Tait, was a seed merchant and James was his second son. James described himself as privately educated, but he cannot have been badly educated. His sufficient acquaintance with Latin and his love of English literature show that he had not lacked the stimulus at home and school of books and ideas; but it is clear from letters which A. W. Ward wrote to him that his college career was beset with perplexities. He entered the College when he was sixteen (1879), just before the Victoria University, with the right to confer degrees, came into existence.¹ For two years he

¹ A supplementary charter of 1883 gave the power to confer degrees in medicine and surgery. University College, Liverpool, was admitted to the University in 1884, the Yorkshire College, Leeds, in 1887. The first honours

attended classes in various subjects. He must have made a favourable impression upon Ward, the professor of history, who had a large class of a hundred or so; for on 31 July 1881 the professor wrote to him a wise, balanced, and on the whole encouraging letter in reply to a request for advice:

I have no doubt but that your abilities are sufficient, with continuous application and systematic study, to qualify you for success as a teacher of literature or history.¹ And I should say that under the circumstances you could not do better than work for one of the Honours Schools of the Victoria University. . . . Possibly you might go in for History first and the other [English] afterwards. Possibly you might prefer to pass on from us to Oxford or Cambridge or to a foreign university.

And this brings me to another aspect of the question. It is never desirable, I think, to look too far ahead—and in education especially, so long as one is working hard and with a real love of one's subject. The question of what is likely to pay need not always be before one's eyes. Still, it is well to form some general idea of the future and its possibilities.

After discussing alternative plans which might be adopted after the boy had taken Honours, his mentor proceeds:

Do not commit the very natural error of supposing that literature is to be relied upon as a supplementary resource. Only one kind of literary employment can be made to answer in that way, viz. journalism; and to be a journalist is in nine cases out of ten to relinquish being a man of letters. To succeed in the time of which you are thinking, you will either have to serve an apprenticeship as an assistant which may be long and which may not be all delight—or you will have to give up some time to hard work which may enable you by rapid distinction as a writer to obtain a fairly independent position more speedily.

Lastly, remember that though we look forward to great progress in the next few years, yet at present there are not many Professorships or Lectureships, assisting or otherwise, in History and Literature open to competition, and it is just possible that the progress may not be immediate or that it may be interfered with.

In case you should think me inclined to pessimism, I will add that if a man can (in more senses than one) afford to wait, and if he is willing to be passed in the race at first by many of his contemporaries in so far as position and money and even reputation are concerned, he cannot do better than choose the line of life of which you are thinking. If you decide on trying with that end in view you may trust to me for giving you what help I can towards it.

examination in History was held in 1882. On the early history of the History School see T. F. Tout, *Collected Papers*, i, 61–76.

¹ Ward had been appointed Professor of History and English in 1866. In 1880 he surrendered part of his duties to a new professor of the English Language, but he continued to be professor of English Literature.

Tait kept this letter, as well he might. I have quoted from it freely for several reasons. Tait had not yet made up his mind whether to specialize in history or in English, but he already wished to devote his life to one or other of these subjects. He laid his hopes and fears before Ward. Ward's reply shows the regard in which he held his pupil, and also the purpose which had directed the University from stage to stage and established the firm tradition into which Tait and his contemporaries entered, and which he, more than most, was to do so much to maintain. But the most impressive thing about this letter is the grave and patient courtesy with which an eminent Victorian, conscious of important movements in a great age, wrote to a promising lad of eighteen. His prudent counsel is shot through and through by the encouragement of a priest who admits a neophyte to a temple. He takes the boy's capacity and desire to rise to his opportunities for granted. He treats him almost as an equal. 'There are not many professorships.' At the age of seventeen I saw Ward for three minutes, when he admitted me to the College. I never saw him again except at a distance, but in that short interview he gave me exactly the same impression as his letter to Tait conveys. He made me feel that I was entering a new world. The new universities were created in this spirit of high endeavour and companionship. Practice kept pace with precept. Ward, we must suppose, lectured about history with the same dignity with which he wrote. If history was to be taught, this was the only way to teach it, for this was what it meant. There could be no condescension. And the seriousness was so much a matter of course that it had its effect. Spencer Wilkinson, John Holland Rose, J. P. Whitney had felt it a few years before Tait went to the Owens College. The names of Thomas Alfred Walker, the historian of the law of nations, and Robert Dunlop, the historian of Ireland, appear on the first honours list in 1882, the year after Tait joined the History School. William Arthur Shaw was Tait's contemporary, George Arnold Wood, later the honoured and beloved professor of history in the University of Sydney, and one of Tait's closest friends, was a year or so his junior. So the work of Copley Christie and A. W. Ward came to fruition. The way was prepared for the notable partnership of Tout and Tait.

Tait entered the History School in 1881 and graduated with first class honours two years later. He then sat for a scholarship at Balliol and was elected to an exhibition, apparently in the end of the same year, 1883, for a letter from A. L. Smith, his future

tutor, implies that he was expecting to go into residence in the coming Hilary Term. In fact he did not begin to reside until October 1884. In order to be excused from Responsions he had to pass a test in Greek and Algebra. This he did on 30 September. He was matriculated on 15 October, the day on which Freeman gave his inaugural lecture as Regius Professor. I give these details as an act of *pietas*, for Tait carefully preserved the certificates. In 1887 he was again placed in the first class in history. His examiners were York Powell, A. L. Smith, Richard Lodge, and S. R. Gardiner. The signatures on that certificate—for in those days the examiners testified to the achievement of each candidate separately—give it palaeographical interest. Other firsts in this year included two Balliol friends, Owen Edwards and J. W. Allen.

In writing about Tait I must pick my way carefully and avoid broad sweeps. At this time his habitual reserve was growing upon him. It disturbed his father and was noticed by Ward. The two men had exchanged letters about James's future. He wrote a good deal of poetry and would seem to have been especially drawn to the English poets of the early seventeenth century. There may have been a religious crisis before he gradually settled down into a quiet agnosticism. He was always scrupulously careful to respect religious beliefs and practices in others. As often happens he was probably more free and easy with his companions in college than, in spite of his steady domestic affections, he could feel at home. Certainly the few letters which he kept from his Balliol friends, J. W. Allen, Raymond Beazley, George Gregory Smith (*decus Scotiae*, as Beazley called him), and especially Thomas Seccombe, do not suggest reserve, though they reveal deep respect. Unhappily no letters from George Arnold Wood, who followed him to Balliol as a scholar in 1885, seem to survive, for he was, I think, Tait's closest friend until the oceans separated them and Seccombe took his place. Wood was the subject of a story which the group of friends long remembered. One day, A. L. Smith started an inquiry into their ideas about the greatest book ever written. Some said the *Iliad*, some the *Divine Comedy*, and so on; but Wood, 'fearing nought', exclaimed with a firm voice 'John Morley on Compromise.' Wood used his good offices in 1887 to get Tait elected to the Russell Club.

The earliest of the little diaries or rather note-books of miscellaneous jottings which survive from Balliol and later Manchester days tells us something about Tait at Oxford. A

reference to 'Freeman's pedantry' in calling Rochester 'Hrofesceaster' suggests that he attended the professor's lectures. Then come a note on the genealogy of his cousins, the Cases, of Liverpool, a description of the Tait family arms with the motto 'pro Rege et Patria', a quotation from Pope, and the characteristic entry heavily underlined 'May 6. 1886. Lent Crum my notebook on Ed. ii—Hy. vii. See it is returned.' These entries are followed by memoranda of a week-end in London with an uncle and a quotation from Machiavelli, 'you must either crush or you must conciliate'. After term began he attended meetings of the Society for the Promotion of Religious Unity including one in the Lincoln Common Room where Dr. Fairbairn discoursed on 'Theology as an Academic Science'. Tait notes the speaker's contention 'that every theological student should take the arts course before going on to theology'. On 31 May Tait was elected a member of the Seminar 'of which I am one sixteenth'. This was a small group of dons and undergraduates who met to discuss historical subjects. W. H. Hutton read a paper on the *Utopia* with York Powell in the chair. 'Carlyle, Wells, C. H. Firth, Y. P. spoke', and Tait notes the main points of the discussion. These are followed by a well-known story of Jowett, told apparently by H. Stuart Jones:

Jones loquitur: Tatham said logic was a science, Nettleship maintained it was an art. I asked the master which was right and he said 'It's neither, it's a dodge'.

A list of books shows that Tait, as early as 1886, was taking a special interest in the occupation of northern France by the English in the fifteenth century, but he was still more interested for the moment by a lecture given by Herkomer in the Sheldonian on 'Notoriety in Art' (17 June) and three days later by the speeches given in Wadham Hall at a meeting of the Layman's League for the Defence of the National Church:

Sir W. Anson, T. H. Warren (Magd.) R. E. Prothero (All Souls) Henson. Anson clear and fairly good, W. confused, involved and Latinistic, P. vigorous and stumpy, Henson very fiery and incisive. The makings of an orator in him. 'The besetting sin of Oxford men is—*slackness*, the slackness of too many interests, that of dilettantism, the slackness of no interests at all—that of the cynic and the simpleton'.

A jumble of quotations, references to books, stories, a journal of a holiday in north Wales, a list of Anglo-Saxon kings and bishoprics, follow. Then comes on 20 January 1887 a passionate little outburst on his longing for spring, stirred by a day as

balmy as May. Only then and in summer 'do I live in any true sense, it is only then that I lay in the poor little stock of health and strength which scarcely suffices to carry me through the damp chills and blood-curdling frosts of the other half of the year'. (As a matter of fact, Tait was never ill in his life.) The rest of the note-book contains memoranda of his first holiday in Germany, with sketches, lists of German books that he needed, and so on. Some of the sketches of mountain scenery and of churches show power and feeling.

A letter from one of his friends, written in the Michaelmas Term of 1887, after Tait had gone down, links Tait's Oxford friendships with his new life in Manchester. Wood had shown the writer a letter from Tait, 'and I was so pleased with it', says the latter, 'that I was seized with an irresistible desire to get one from you for myself. The very house where I am now installed (16 St. John Street) is haunted by memories of you . . . I have not yet ventured upstairs into your old room, but on leaving my own to go out I often catch a glimpse of your figure vanishing round the staircase corner and the other night, coming back from college in the dark, I had a most distinct vision of you in [St.] John Street, walking along in front of me'. And after a reference to Tait's 'first', his friend continues:

I must insist upon congratulating you on the place you have got more recently—though indeed Wood tells me that you wrote to him some time back about it in a discontented state of mind! This I don't understand at all and it seems to me you have got a pretty good start. Doubtless eleven lectures (is it?) a week must be trying—especially as I am told that you have to lecture on Greek history! I was aware that your knowledge of modern history was unfathomable, but I did not know you embraced the ancients also.

This sprightly passage takes us back to Manchester, where in July 1887—a month after his success in the Schools at Oxford—he was recommended by a committee of Senate to fill a vacant assistant-lectureship in history and English. There were other candidates and Tait had submitted testimonials from Jowett, A. L. Smith, Arthur Johnson, and C. H. Firth. The Master writes that he was 'led to believe that he is a young man of considerable ability and of great attainments', his tutor that his knowledge was very great for his age, that he had patience, good sense, and clear judgement and had had a good influence upon his contemporaries, Johnson that, in examining him in his two attempts to get a scholarship, he had been 'struck by the soundness and accuracy of his knowledge'. Firth writes as president of

the Oxford Historical Seminar, and is more helpful: 'He read us a most excellent and careful paper and frequently took part in our discussions.' The reference to the paper read to the Seminar helps to explain a passage in a later testimonial (1891) from Gregory Smith. Were it necessary to emphasize his high literary qualifications, 'I should point to some of his Oxford essays, but especially to the admirable paper on "The Spasmodic School of Poetry" which he published at Manchester.' I have not seen this last paper, and Tait never referred to it, but Gregory Smith's tribute shows that Tait was not wholly wedded to history.

The letter in which Ward told Tait of his appointment was kind, but rather alarming. The professor sketched a programme of lectures under headings of day and evening classes and the 'Women's Department'. The work was not so formidable in fact as it seemed to be on paper, but the prospect of his duties may well have reminded him of Ward's words six years before about the apprenticeship 'which may be long and may not be all delight'. He was not unduly ambitious, but he wanted to be settled, to know exactly how he stood in the world. His quality was revealed to his colleagues a year after his appointment. Ward was away ill during the greater part of the session 1888-9, and Tait was made responsible for the historical side of the department. This experience, and the strain which it must have involved, doubtless decided him to apply in 1889 for the chair of history and English language and literature in University College, Cardiff. He had as yet nothing or little to show and was unsuccessful. Then came Ward's appointment as Principal and the election of a new professor of history. Tait was one of the three selected candidates, but again was unsuccessful. The new professor was T. F. Tout, who was Tait's senior by ten years and already a scholar of repute with professional experience. Tait, as we learn from one of Seccombe's letters, talked at this time (1890) of going to Sydney, by which is probably meant making an application for the chair which Wood got. Encouragement came from an unexpected quarter. Tout's prize fellowship at Pembroke College, Oxford, fell vacant in this very year. Tait sat for it and was elected.¹ In the following year

¹ Tait was not required to reside. He inquired about rooms and was informed (19 January 1892) that, although he might be allowed to hire rooms, he would not be entitled to rooms rent free unless he were a bona fide resident. He stayed in college from time to time. In 1898, after his fellowship had expired, he was invited to accept nomination by the college

he made a more determined effort to get a chair. He applied for the chair of history and English at the Queen's College, Belfast, with strong support from Ward, Sidney Lee, Gregory Smith, and R. L. Poole, who had been greatly impressed by him while he acted as external examiner in Manchester and placed 'entire confidence in his knowledge and judgement'. Again he was unsuccessful. The only thing left was to work hard and to see others pass him in the race, as Ward, in that wise letter of his, had said. His time would come. He settled down with his new chief, began to write regularly, and at last, in February, 1896, he got his promotion. 'I enclose you', wrote the Principal in his grand manner, 'certain resolutions of the Council which affect your position here, I hope in a way that will not be unacceptable to you. . . . Let me express a hope that you will accept the appointment and my pleasure in having been able to be instrumental in obtaining whatever recognition it involves of your services to the College and the History Department. The arrangement is one of which Tout and I most cordially approve'. This appointment, a lectureship in ancient history, to be held concurrently with his assistant-lectureship, really meant that the long partnership with Tout in a reorganized history school had begun. Six years later, in the year of the college jubilee (1902) he was made professor with the title 'professor of ancient and medieval history'.

II

Tait had worked very hard during his apprenticeship. A link between his duties as a teacher and his aspirations as a scholar was Freeman's library which Christie and his co-legatees presented to the Owens College in 1892. They were anxious that a special catalogue of the collection should be compiled and published; and in August Ward invited Tait to undertake this task. 'As you are so thoroughly conversant with the kind of literature of which Freeman's library in the main consists, I can hardly think that the task will be an over-laborious one to you.' Tait immediately complied and had finished the catalogue by October in the following year. It was published in 1894. From one of Ward's letters it would seem that the plan had been to distribute the books in the College library, each in its appropriate class and section, but this idea—obviously inconsistent

as proctor. Mr. Athelstan Riley, who was found not to be qualified, was also considered. Since his election as proctor would, of course, have involved residence, he had to refuse the suggestion.

with the preparation of a separate catalogue—fortunately came to nothing, though later developments have recently made it advisable to act upon it. For a few years the Freeman collection was kept in a lecture room, but when the new university or Christie Library had been completed, it was given a special room there. The 'Freeman Library' was an inestimable boon. It was the centre of the History School, a study and lecture room for undergraduates in their last year, and a home of graduate research. Tait's catalogue lay on the table. Generations of students became familiar, or had the chance to become familiar, with the working library of a famous historian. And it is easy to imagine how much Tait must have learned from his work on the catalogue, and from his later access, as in a private study, to the books which a young scholar might require. As the years passed, additions were made to the library, and all of us who were medievalists began our investigations there and had constant recourse to it later.

In 1891, the year in which Seccombe was made an assistant-editor, Tait began his connexion with the *Dictionary of National Biography*. His first articles had at once satisfied Sidney Lee who, as early as May, suggested that he might consider appointment to an additional assistant-editorship, and later testified to his 'very thorough research and clear literary style'. In the next year he began his lifelong connexion with the *English Historical Review*. He wrote long notices of the first volume of Karl Lamprecht's *Deutsche Geschichte* and of Sir Charles Oman's *Warwick the Kingmaker*. His sound and independent judgement is apparent in his scepticism about Lamprecht's theory of tribal origins and of early kingship. And his quality as a critic shines out in a later review (January 1895), of Mrs. Green's *Town Life in the Fifteenth Century*. This is the work of a mature scholar. It anticipates much that he had to say in his erudite study of the English borough forty-one years later, and it has all the freedom and verve of his best days. Tait's early training is a very important clue to the significance of his historical work. He was anything but a narrow specialist who gradually emerged as the author of a treatise. He began his work as a historian with an unusually wide range of knowledge and a keen appreciation of literature. As a boy of nineteen he had won the approval of T. Northcote Toller, the first professor in Manchester of English language. He was awarded the Shakespeare Scholarship, given for proficiency in English language and literature. He had traversed the whole range of history, ancient and modern, had

taught himself to read German as well as French, and was already a traveller of some experience. On the other hand, he had little time to spare for independent work. Apart from a short note in the *English Historical Review*¹ his literary activity was confined to reviews and to articles for the *Dictionary of National Biography*; but this was precisely the opening which he needed. In the *Review* he was encouraged to apply his mind, with its stores of well-ordered knowledge, on new books about a variety of subjects and to make sure where his true interests lay. There also he could, as occasion served, practise his gift for clear, vigorous and sometimes very neat terse prose. In the *Dictionary* he could prove his power to handle original material, in all its complexity, in articles which, as more important subjects were entrusted to him, offered ever-increasing opportunities. His activity in these years 1891-1901 is astonishing, especially when we remember that he was lecturing on ancient and medieval and Tudor history and taking a responsible part in the life of the History School and of the College. Yet it was, in a sense, a cover, behind which he could probe into Domesday Book and chronicles and local records. It strengthened his grip on history and satisfied his desire to express himself, and at the same time it gave him a greater sense of freedom for quiet investigations on matters to which he was not yet ready to commit himself. In fact, a rare opportunity to show what was in him came in 1897. This was the publication of Maitland's *Domesday Book and Beyond*, which R. L. Poole, with his usual insight, offered him for review.

'I was really amazed', wrote Seccombe, 'at your last review in the Historical and could only exclaim (for expletives failed me) "Good Heavens!" as Archdeacon Grantly remarked when he heard that his father-in-law was going to give up £800 a year for a scruple of conscience, and again "Good Heavens."' ²

The editor's praise was characteristic:

I admire the review very much and am sure Maitland will be all the more pleased because you are critical. He has suffered from too much adulation. This is the first serious review the book has received.

The review³ established Tait's position as one of the best historical scholars in England. It does not, if carefully read, reveal him

¹ 'On the date and authorship of the *Speculum Regis Edwardi*', *E.H.R.* xvi (1901), 110-15. This work, usually ascribed to Archbishop Islip, Tait tentatively ascribed to an earlier archbishop, Simon Meopham.

² Letter of 4 Dec. 1897. By a slip Seccombe wrote 'brother-in-law' instead of 'father-in-law'.

³ *E.H.R.*, xii (1897), 768-77.

as a past master of Domesday problems. This, as the previous pages should have shown, was physically impossible. It revealed something much more important, a scholar so sure of his ground as a student of history that he could submit a fine and carefully wrought book by the most brilliant man in the historical world to independent scrutiny, and shake or even destroy its two main contentions. With the courtesy of a just and modest mind, Tait used his own criticism to confirm the author's point of view:

We cannot now enter into a discussion of the remoter and wider question, or analyse as we should have liked to do the remarkable chapters in which Professor Maitland subtly unfolds the complicated and obscure processes which may be supposed to have gradually dimmed the lustre and impaired the fulness of early English freedom even before the Normans came to complete the degradation of the free villager. Suffice it to say that, so far as we are capable of forming a judgment, he seems to have made out a case which the supporters of the 'manor theory' will find it hard indeed to meet. It may be thought that if, as we think, his explanation of the Domesday manor as a unit of assessment will not hold good, the strength is taken out of his case. On the contrary, for he has certainly proved that 'manerium' in Domesday often means something which cannot be the 'manor' in the sense in which it is used in the controversy [between the Romanists and Germanists]. Our own view is that the term was far less precise than even he supposes.

Maitland's letter of thanks must be set out in full:

Downing College
Cambridge

20 Oct. 1897.

Dear Sir,

Will you allow me to take an unusual step and to offer you my warm thanks for the review of a book of mine which you have contributed to the *English Historical Review*. If the step is unusual (and I have never done anything of the kind before) the occasion also is unusual and in my experience unprecedented, for I have never seen a review of anything that I have written which has taught me so much or gone so straight to the points that are worth discussing. I can not refrain from telling you of my gratitude. If ever I have to make a second edition of that book I shall have to alter many things in it in the light of your criticisms. Certainly this would be the case in the matter of the boroughs, and I must confess that you have somewhat shaken one [of] my few beliefs in the matter of the *manerium*, namely that this term had *some* technical meaning. I can't give up that belief all at once, but may have to do so by and by.

So repeating my thanks

I remain

Yours very truly
F. W. Maitland.

Tait enlarged his acquaintance as his work was more widely known. In 1897 he was asked to examine in the Oxford History School. C. H. Firth, a staunch supporter, welcomed his appointment with the grim remark: 'You will find the work laborious but instructive and will think better of your Manchester candidates after seeing our 4th class men.' His contributions to the *Dictionary* brought him in touch with other scholars, for he took trouble to submit his articles, if he were in any doubt, to those who might be able to help him. Also, he began to receive invitations to write books and articles. Early in 1897 York Powell asked him to contribute to an Oxford school-book, and Lord Acton offered him a choice of chapters for the Cambridge Modern History. Would the siege of Vienna appeal to him? 'Besides Klopp's great volume, a series of works and documents came out for the centenary, and are chronicled in the *Jahresberichte* for 1883, 1884. Through the immense addition of knowledge it has become a new topic.' In the course of the next ten or twelve years he was frequently approached by editors. Two wanted a book on the medieval West, the editor of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* suggested the article on feudalism, Hoops in 1909 asked for articles on the settlements in England and on roads and communications down to about A.D. 1000 for his new *Reallexicon*. Tait resisted these and other temptations. He had had enough of this kind of work and in any case was now co-operating with Round and Farrer in the Victoria County Histories, a much more congenial and original field. One invitation, however, he did accept. Sir Paul Vinogradoff enlisted him as a supporter of the international 'Zeitschrift für Social- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte' and followed this up by a suggestion that he should write a critical survey of the work so far done in the Victoria County Histories on Domesday Book (22 February 1903). This paper was written during the next six months and appeared in the form of a review of the volumes published between 1900 and 1903.¹ As Tait pointed out, 'the comparative study of the various sections in detail'—he was referring especially to Round's 'admirable introductions' to the shire surveys—'brings out features which elude a partial or superficial examination'. And he proceeded to criticize Round's interpretation of 'inland'.

Something should be said about Tait's relations with J. Horace Round. For some years (1903-8) he spent a good deal of time on Domesday Book. He was responsible for the intro-

¹ Vol. ii (1903-4), pp. 463-71.

duction to the survey of Shropshire (1908). This interest is reflected in some of his reviews, in three short articles on hides and virgates, and, less directly, in the increasing attention which he was giving to the history of the English boroughs. It also brought him into closer relations with Round. Tout, in his racy and diverting way, used to tell how he once tried to bring the two men together in the compartment of a train on the London and South Eastern Railway. His efforts were unhappy. Round, addressing Tout, foretold how he would deal with some ideas about place-names in the Wirral, while Tait, whose ideas they were, sat glum and hostile in a corner. There is a core of truth in this anecdote¹, but the general impression which it conveys is erroneous. Tait certainly took a detached view of Round and his controversies. His obituary notice of him in the *English Historical Review* shows this; and, long before, in 1897, he had gone out of his way to call Hubert Hall's attention to some doubtful points in Round's first broadside against Hall's edition of the *Red Book of the Exchequer*. Hall was very grateful for this unexpected support from a stranger. As he wrote, 'When one is isolated it is cheering to have an ally.'² But, while his keen sense of justice forbade him to approve Round's extravagances, and his sound learning enabled him to express his own views without any undue deference, he corresponded with him at intervals for a quarter of a century, and kept several of his letters. Round, as one would expect, had a high regard for Tait. He had greatly admired his map of northern France in 1066, the earliest of four maps of great value contributed to Poole's *Historical Atlas of Modern Europe*. In a letter to Poole, dated 19 January 1898, he says 'I was greatly pleased with the way of shewing the places where English families came from, which seems to me both clear and remarkably accurate. He was wrong in the *E.H.R.* in questioning Bémont's derivation of the Balliols from Picardy. Some may have come from a Norman Bailleul, but the Balliols (yours and mine) came from Picardy. I have an important charter proving both this and their early pedigree.' Poole passed the letter to Tait, who kept it with the letters which

¹ Cf. a sentence in Tait's obituary notice of Round in the *E.H.R.* xliii (1928), p. 576: 'He accused Green of misstating the extent of the Norse settlement in the Wirral peninsula, when Green was perfectly right.'

² 5 May 1897. The reference is to Round's paper 'The surrender of the Isle of Wight', in the *Genealogical Magazine* I (1897), 1, the subject of a hotly disputed series of charters in the Red Book. They deal with the quit-claims of the Isle by Isabella de Forz to Edward I.

he later received from Round. I quote a few passages from these:

I write to thank you for your review of my book [*Peerage and Pedigree*] in the *E.H.R.*, which is peculiarly welcome. Knowing the value of your criticism, I am not surprised that this review is worth more than any other I have had. The reviewers have been more than kind but me[re] uncritical praise is not what one wants. I was particularly anxious for a critical estimate, whether favourable or not, of the *legal* portion of the book, but . . . I failed to get this. So you have supplied precisely what I wanted to have. [1910.]

[In the course of an answer to an inquiry from Tait about the parish of St. Nicholas in Colchester] Do you think that Chester herald was especially connected in any way with Cheshire? [1917.]

He wrote a long and interesting letter on 2 June 1919:

I read in *The Times* of your partial retirement from your valuable work at Manchester, and I trust that your eye trouble may be less of an anxiety to you, if you are able now to secure more rest. Indeed I rather gather from the notice that, if all goes well, you may even be able somewhat to increase your important medieval research.

I have now been virtually confined to bed by nervous breakdown and my old head trouble for more than seven months and have been wondering if I shall ever be able to pass through the press the two or three volumes which I have long had by me in manuscript. But the publishers are eager at last to bring out the one on family history.¹

The most important paper in your own line of those which I had in hand was a study on borough origin, which is destined for a special volume of local studies to which I attach importance. I have hoped to get one of the University Presses to take it up, but Poole never seems hopeful about their touching anything in these difficult times.

Hitherto I have not dealt (or at least published anything on it) with this question beyond reading a paper on 'The Garrison Theory' at the London historical congress, but, simply as a matter of historical evidence and truth, I felt very strongly about Ballard trying to set Humpty Dumpty on the wall again by adducing the evidence of Castle Guard. For even Maitland admitted that this had nothing to do with the 'garrison theory'. So I told Poole that I did not think he ought to have let Ballard re-open the question on such grounds. I am very glad that Plessis-Dutaillis [*sic*] wrote so clearly and emphatically on the subject.²

¹ The last book published by Round was *The King's Serjeants* (1911). *Family Origins* was published with a memoir and bibliography by William Page in 1930, after the author's death.

² The paper was read at the International Historical Congress in 1913. Ballard's paper is in *E.H.R.* xxv (1910), 712-15. Cf. Tait, *The Medieval English Borough*, p. 26. Round's other allusion is to Ch. Petit-Dutaillis, *Studies and notes supplementary to Stubbs' Constitutional History down to the Great Charter*, Eng. trans. (1908), pp. 78-83.

I wish to thank you for your review in the *E.H.R.*, of my *Magna Carta* paper last year, which was really too favourable.¹ I had selected the subject as being to my thinking one of the most difficult still to be solved in the Charter, but I could not satisfy myself about it, partly because I had to write the paper before and after a serious operation.

I believe you would be greatly interested in my Borough paper, if I have the health and strength to finish it, because it is based on special knowledge and information, not on mere hypothesis.

Please excuse an invalid's scrawl.

The last letter to Tait, dated 19 May 1925, was written from bed, when he was 'absurdly weak'. It is a reply to a friendly letter about the article 'Liber burgus' which Tait had prepared for the volume of essays presented to Tout, and about William Farrer's work 'left unfinished. It is a warning', adds Round, 'to those of us who are getting old.' He quotes an entry about the liberties of Colchester from the proofs of the Pipe Roll of 2 Richard I, and refers to letters which Farrer had written to him about his difficulties in selecting the method to be used in his work *Honors and Knights' Fees*. The letter ends 'I cannot write more'.

Round wrote to Tait as to a scholar whose interests in Domesday problems, feudal institutions, borough origins, royal and private charters, and local history coincided with his own. The elder man was more nimble and discursive, as he pounced with furious intensity on every significant detail; the younger was cooler, took a wider view and, without the genius of the other, had surer ground beneath his feet; but both were concerned to explain the nature of medieval society, not merely to add to knowledge here and there. The field of their operations was one. It is a mistake to say that Tait was first a Domesday, then a local, then a borough specialist. All these interests were expressions of a single desire, the elucidation of English society. They gradually transcended the more political interest which had first attracted him and had been fostered by his work for the *Dictionary of National Biography*. At one time, like Sir Charles Firth before him, he had thought of working on the English occupation of northern France during the later stages of the Hundred Years War. Firth, indeed, handed the subject over to him and gave him some of his books. Tait soon deserted this plan and became absorbed in the history of England in the

¹ 'Barons and Knights in the Great Charter', in *Magna Carta Commemoration Essays*, ed. H. E. Malden (1917), pp. 46-77; see Tait in *E.H.R.* xxxiii (1918), 263.

later fourteenth and in the fifteenth century, especially during the reign of Richard II, which he chose as a special subject for his honours students. He maintained this interest to the end of his life, but it became a secondary interest. After he had closed his long list of articles in the *Dictionary* with the life of William of Wykeham (1900) and printed in 1902 his well-known essay¹ 'Did Richard II murder the Duke of Gloucester?'—known to his pupils as 'Prof. Tait's detective story'—he published apart from reviews only one work in the period. This was his edition of the *Chronica Johannis de Reading et Anonymi Cantuariensis*, 1346–1367 (1914) a good, solid, definitive book, profusely annotated, but not a work of outstanding importance. Everything that Tait wrote has lasting value, but his finest contributions to learning must be sought elsewhere.

To return to the interests which he shared with Round, then with William Farrer, and rather later with Professor Stenton, Tait found a congenial field for their exercise in the history of Lancashire and Cheshire. Although no hard and sharp lines can be drawn, his life as a scholar, after what I may call the *D.N.B.* period, falls roughly into two halves, a middle period, lasting from about 1900 to 1924, and a later and overlapping period which began soon after he resigned his professorship in 1919 and culminated with the publication in 1936 of his book on the medieval English borough. In the middle period the emphasis lies on his work for the *Victoria County History of Lancashire* and the Chetham Society. Throughout this time he enjoyed the literary companionship of his friend William Farrer. Tait's fine obituary notice of this remarkable man² is his best bit of writing. It betrays the warmth of feeling which made him such a firm and loyal friend. And, with unusual care and freedom, it brings out the significance in Farrer's work of those qualities which he himself possessed in a still higher degree. Except in his indifference to municipal history—for Farrer, a country gentleman and sportsman, avoided cities and everything to do with them as much as he could—Tait found in him a kindred spirit. Farrer

¹ *Historical Essays by members of the Owens College, Manchester* (1902), pp. 193–216. Twenty-one years later the late A. E. Stamp, Deputy Keeper of the Public Records, produced evidence which cast doubt on Tait's conclusions; *E.H.R.* xxxviii (1923), 249–52; cf. R. L. Atkinson, pp. 563–4; but in 1932 Mr. H. G. Wright, in an able paper, showed that other evidence confirmed them; *E.H.R.* xlvii. 276–80; cf. Tait's review of A. Steel's *Richard II*, lvii (1942), 382.

² Printed in the *E.H.R.* for January 1925, xl. 67–70. Another brief memoir of Farrer, based in part upon this, appeared later in the year as the preface to the third volume of *Honors and Knights' Fees*.

was not a local historian of this place or that, but studied local history as a key to the history of England. 'Like Robert Eyton, the historian of Shropshire, whom he took for his model, his historical curiosity carried him far beyond the bounds of merely local antiquities. As Eyton became the pioneer of Domesday study, Farrer's real distinction lies in his detailed researches in the lower ranges of the Anglo-Norman feudal hierarchy. His *Honors and Knights' Fees*, so far as it goes, supplies the under side of Dugdale's great work on the *Baronage of England*.' Tait pointed out how the arrangement of Yorkshire charters (in his *Early Yorkshire Charters*) under the Domesday fiefs 'gradually shifted his main interest from the documents to the general Norman distribution of baronial estates upon which they cast only a broken and local light'.

Some years before he transferred his attention to this wider subject Farrer had secured Tait's co-operation in the *Victoria County History of Lancashire*, in which he had merged his earlier plan to prepare a history of the county to the death of Queen Elizabeth. In 1895 he had bought the collections of J. P. Earwaker and 'he spent large sums in completing them'. A man of means, he was able, after he had 'taught himself the technique of research' to work from transcripts of public and other records, and his great collections were at the disposal of his colleagues, in so far as they were not already printed in his numerous books.¹ Tait's interest in the history of Lancashire and Manchester was finding expression at the same time. He gave two public lectures, as I well remember, on 'Manchester under lords of the manor' on the Warburton foundation, and a few years later his first book, *Mediaeval Manchester and the beginnings of Lancashire*, which had grown out of these lectures, was published by the new Manchester University Press as the first volume of its historical series (1904). In the interval Farrer's publications, especially his *Lancashire Pipe Rolls*, had appeared. They had, in Tait's words, 'put the study of Lancashire history in the middle ages on an entirely different footing', and the necessity to take full account of them was one of the reasons for Tait's delay in publication. 'My debt', he wrote in the preface, 'to Professor

¹ Most of Farrer's transcripts are now in the City Library or in the John Rylands Library in Manchester. His Yorkshire material was secured by the Yorkshire Archaeological Society, which has sponsored the continuation of his *Early Yorkshire Charters* by Mr. Charles Clay. His library, which, in Tait's words, 'may well have been the finest private library in the country of books on local and feudal history', was unfortunately sold and scattered.

Maitland, Miss Bateson and Mr. Farrer is apparent on almost every page.' This book is both a piece of baronial history and a study in borough origins. The growth of a town as distinct from the manor of Manchester raises many problems, and, assisted by Miss Bateson's recent investigations, Tait sought to 'reconcile Manchester's possession of burgesses, a borough court and a borough reeve with the formal decision of 1359 that she was no borough but only a market town'. The gradual process by which the county of Lancaster came into existence, by the amalgamation of districts within the wider honour of Lancaster created by William Rufus, was traced through a careful analysis of baronial charters. How tricky inquiries of this kind can be is illustrated by an attempt made by a competent young scholar over thirty years later to question Tait's crucial distinction between the district 'between Ribble and Mersey' and the honour as it was in Stephen's reign. The critic overlooked the fact that the place which is the subject of two precepts of King David of Scotland and the place from which he dispatched them were not, as one might well think, in the district south of the Ribble, but places of the same or similar names in North Lancashire and Cumberland.¹ It was always dangerous to challenge Tait on a point of this kind.

The book has been rightly regarded as a model. Mary Bateson spoke of it with enthusiasm. Its influence has been far-reaching, though not far-reaching enough. Tait, for example, in his discussion of the barons of Manchester, called attention to the fact that 'barons who held of mesne lords and not directly of the crown were commoner in the first age after the Norman conquest than is usually supposed'. But the subject was still generally ignored until Professor Stenton explored it in his masterly way in the third chapter of his *First Century of English Feudalism* (1932). More important at the time, however, was Farrer's desire, which the book must have intensified in his mind, to have Tait's co-operation in the preparation of the *Victoria County History of Lancashire*. The great book in eight volumes, 'as near to the ideal county history as can be expected in a world of compromises', appeared at the average rate of a volume a year between 1906 and 1914. Farrer himself, of course, wrote or directed the sections whose subjects he had made his own. Tait wrote in the second volume (1908) the important sections on the political history to the reign of Henry VIII, the ecclesiastical history to the Reformation, and the

¹ *E.H.R.* 1 (1935), 670-80, with Tait's correction in li (1936), 192.

detailed histories of every monastic house, priory, and cell except the account of Furness abbey, which he asked me to undertake. It was a privilege to be introduced to the study of local history under such auspices, to have the run of Farrer's transcripts, and to see something of the two men at work.

Tait was as interested in Cheshire as he was in Lancashire. He busied himself with plans for a Victoria County History of Cheshire, and made friends with the two men, Fergusson Irvine and R. Stewart-Brown, who were almost as capable as Farrer himself to direct the enterprise. This plan came to nothing, but it encouraged Tait to turn his attention to the county and to use the Chetham Society, just as Stewart-Brown and Irvine used the Record Society for Lancashire and Cheshire, as a medium. The Chetham Society was founded in 1843 for the publication of 'remains historical and literary connected with the palatine counties of Lancaster and Chester'. In forty years, under the guidance of its main founder and president, James Crossley, it issued more than a hundred volumes. In 1883 a new series began after the Society had surmounted a crisis and with it began also a very much closer connexion than had existed hitherto between the Society and the Owens College. The new president and 'second founder' was R. C. Christie, then professor of history and other subjects in the College. In 1901 he was succeeded by Ward, and in 1915 Ward was succeeded by Tait, who held office for ten years.¹ Tait took this pleasant duty very seriously. Having got the chronicle of John of Reading off his hands, he had already set to work on the *Domesday Survey of Cheshire*, published by the Society in 1916. Other contributions which he made to its publications were the first (and only) volume of *Lancashire Quarter Sessions Records*, an edition of the Quarter Sessions Rolls 1590-1606 (1917), *The Chartulary or Register of the abbey of St. Werburgh, Chester*, in two volumes (1920-3), and *Taxation in Salford Hundred, 1524-1802*, an edition of the records of four lay subsidies, 1524, 1543, 1563, 1600, of the hearth tax of 1666, and of the land tax, 1780-1802 (1924). This last volume owed its being to a suggestion by Farrer.

¹ Tait was invited to contribute an account of the Society to the hundredth volume in the new series *Chetham Miscellanies*, vol. vii, shortly after the election of Professor Jacob as president and Dr. Tupling, lecturer in local history, as vice-president, the first time that both offices had been held by members of the University staff. This retrospect gives a full account of the work of the Society and of the share in it of members of the University.

In his edition of the Cheshire survey, originally intended for the abortive Victoria County History, Tait was following up his work on the survey of Shropshire (1908). In his introduction¹ he emphasized exceptional points, rather disappointing, as he says, to the student of the status and organization of a palatine earldom, but important to the student of borough customs and of the salt industry. In 1086 the shire comprised much of the Welsh borderland, all the later county of Flint except Faenol, and in 1925 Tait reprinted the entries relating to Flintshire, with a special introduction and map, for the *Flintshire Historical Society's Journal*.² In his edition of the *Chartulary of St. Werburgh's*, one of the most valuable of his books, he broke new ground, for which his comprehensive history of the Lancashire monastic houses had prepared him. He spent much time and trouble in tracking down the copies in royal *inspeximus* or made by seventeenth-century antiquaries, of the original charters, 'of which summaries only, with the witnesses omitted, are usually given in the register of the abbey' (Harley MS. 1965) and he met with a good deal of success. He examined the life of St. Werburgh and the history of the foundation to distinguish fact from legend. And he attempted to sketch from the charters the administrative system of the palatine earldom in the twelfth century. His elaborate discussion of the charters of earls, including the 'great charter' issued by Ranulf III to his barons, is perhaps the most valuable part of the book. He put the early history of the shire and earldom on as firm a foundation as the evidence admits and brought to bear upon his task, at the height of his powers, his unrivalled knowledge of feudal institutions, social conditions, and local topography.

Tait's work upon the quarter session rolls and taxation returns of Lancashire, to which should be added his edition of a few scanty port moot records of Salford in the sixteenth century,³ took him farther afield than he was wont to go. Here he was a pioneer in a subject which has received much attention in recent years, the history of local government and local judicial administration in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He was able, moreover, to examine the matter with knowledge of the medieval background; for example, of the intimate relations between the hundred and town of Salford. No student of the history of the justices of the peace and of early modern taxation can afford to neglect his luminous introductions to these volumes.

¹ For a few criticisms see F. Morgan in *E.H.R.* xxxi (1916), 632-6.

² xi. 1-37.

³ *Chetham Miscellanies*, vol. iv (1921), no. 5.

In 1919 Tait resigned his chair and, subject to the need to avoid strain on his eyesight, was free to devote his working time to historical work. During the next five years he pressed on with the *Chartulary of St. Werburgh's* and prepared his book on taxation in Salford Hundred for the Chetham Society; but two other interests, in place-names and in medieval boroughs, took a more purposeful place in his mind than they had had before. In 1923 he accepted an invitation to become the first President of the English Place-name Society, founded by the late Sir Allen Mawer and Professor Stenton. Professor Stenton, in the annual report of the British Academy for 1944-5, has paid an authoritative tribute to Tait's work for the Society, and I cannot do better than repeat his words:

He took an active part in the discussions which preceded its establishment, made suggestions of the highest value towards the determination of its plan of work, and contributed to our Introductory Volume an article on the feudal element in place-names, of which the importance becomes steadily more apparent with the passage of time.¹ In those early days he brought to our help the support of an historian, eminent among English medievalists, who was one of the first modern scholars to appreciate the significance of place-name studies as an aid towards the solution of historical problems. It would be hard to over-estimate the value of the service which Professor Tait rendered to the Society through his unique combination of feudal and agrarian learning, and the balanced judgement with which he always approached the practical difficulties incidental to our work. His interest in the studies of which he was a master was maintained until the end of his life, and although he felt himself compelled, by advancing years and by the distance from London at which he resided, to resign the Presidency in 1932, his advice continued to be at our service.

Tait's interest in boroughs, like the strong attraction which place-names had for him, began early, and, as we have seen, sprang naturally enough from his study of Domesday Book and feudal institutions. The steady impetus which it received about 1921 was due to a casual suggestion. The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press were looking for an editor to prepare the second volume of Adolphus Ballard's *British Borough Charters* for publication. They approached Tait, who came to an arrangement with them in the spring of 1921. He had the book ready by the summer of 1923. Although Ballard had left the text nearly complete, Tait put much work into the volume. In a long intro-

¹ 'The Feudal Element', the sixth chapter of the *Introduction to the Survey of English Place-Names*, edited by A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton (1924), pp. 115-32.

duction, he anticipated in tentative outline the problems and developments with which he was to cope during the next twelve years; also, his work on the book suggested to him the theme of his lecture to the British Academy in May 1922 on the study of early municipal history in England.¹ As he wrote later, the invitation to complete Ballard's book 'induced me to lay aside other plans of work and confine myself to municipal history'. The Academy lecture, the best introduction in our historical literature to a difficult subject, was followed in 1925 by his paper *Liber Burgus* in the essays presented to Tout, and by four other papers contributed to the *English Historical Review* between 1927 and 1931. As he approached his seventieth year he worked more slowly and wrote less than in earlier years. His book on *The Medieval English Borough* appeared in 1936.

In each of his books Tait made it his practice to explain exactly, in a lengthy preface, how and why he had come to compose it. He regarded himself, not as an isolated worker who had staked out a claim to a subject, but as the modest continuator of a noble succession of scholars whose traditions it was his duty and privilege to maintain. His preface to *The Medieval English Borough* is especially instructive. During the greater part of the century which followed the Municipal Corporation Act a true understanding of the medieval borough had been prevented, as he points out, by the influence of Merewether and Stephens, whose big book had appeared in the same year (1835). The false trail which they set had been deserted by Charles Gross, F. W. Maitland, Mary Bateson, and others, but hopes of an adequate history were deferred 'by the early death of nearly all the leaders in these investigations'. Tait, after his decision to finish Ballard's book on the municipal charters of the thirteenth century, had decided to resume, at any rate for the later twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, the work which these distinguished scholars had left unfinished. He worked for a decade upon half a dozen papers. He would probably in any case have collected them in a volume; but whatever his plans may have been, they were revised by the appearance in 1930 of a revolutionary article by an American scholar, Carl Stephenson, upon the Anglo-Saxon borough. Professor Stephenson already had behind him a fine record of stimulating and forceful work, part of the abundant harvest of the seed sown by his master, Henri Pirenne. He writes with energy and clarity. He looks at his

¹ Reprinted, after some revision, from the Proceedings of the Academy in *The Medieval English Borough*, pp. 339-58.

subject all round, with a wide comprehension of the medieval history of Europe. When he turned his attention to England he approached the history of the Anglo-Saxon and Norman boroughs with the outlook of a continental scholar. He saw in our island an outlying product of western civilization, subject to the same influences which had shaped the municipal destinies of the Low Countries. In Tait's view he both exaggerated the bearings of Pirenne's views and misunderstood the structure of Anglo-Saxon England. He suffered from a 'tendency to interpret ambiguous evidence in the light of a theory'.¹ He virtually made the Norman Conquest, with the mercantile elements alleged to have come for the first time in its train, the starting-point of English urban development. He was a victim of the garrison theory and misunderstood Domesday Book. 'Hence', says Tait, 'my attention was diverted to the pre-Conquest period.' In the meanwhile Stephenson was at work upon a larger survey, his *Borough and Town: a study in urban origins*. He came to England to pursue the detailed topographical study on which he rightly insisted,² and in the course of his inquiries stayed with me in Oxford. I suggested that he ought to meet Tait, whose work he very properly appreciated, and hoped to bring the two men together, but it was not possible to arrange a meeting. I got the impression that Tait was biding his time. In the summer of 1933 he was, as usual, on holiday in Eskdale with his friend Mr. H. L. Joseland, and joined us in some of our family excursions. We still retain a vivid memory of one walk, when the professor, in the service of historical truth, did violence to a perfect day. He was not his care-free self. On the top of Bowfell he sat apart on a rock to eat his lunch. The grandest scenery in three counties, from Skiddaw to the Pennines and the sea, was around us; but Tait seemed to take no notice. I had a sudden thought and, going over to him, engaged him in conversation. I asked him if he had read Stephenson's book. At once his tongue was unloosed. He lifted up his voice and talked for twenty minutes. Snatches of speech were wafted to the scandalized ears of the other members of the party. 'He says that the burgesses of Colchester. . . , the *bordarii* of Norwich. . .'. Tait had been thinking out his review.

¹ From Tait's review of Stephenson's *Study of Urban Origins in England*, in *E.H.R.* xlviii (1933), 644.

² It was not pursued far enough; see Helen Cam, 'The origin of the borough of Cambridge: a consideration of Professor Carl Stephenson's theories', in the *Cambridge Antiquarian Society's Communications*, xxxv (1935), 33-53.

The *Medieval English Borough*, therefore, consists of two parts, the first on the Anglo-Saxon period, largely concerned with a detailed examination of Stephenson's theories, the second a revised version of the papers written between 1922 and 1931. Although Tait had not been able to write his projected chapters on borough jurisdiction and the history of formal incorporation, the book is the most comprehensive study in existence on the origin, history, and developments of the English borough in the middle ages. It puts the whole subject on new and firm foundations. Perhaps its most important contribution is the study of the town councils, which finally dissipated the democratic *aura* with which former historians, before the days of Gross and Miss Bateson, had mystified the story. Tait will be mainly known, to many only known, by this book, the only book which he ever wrote on a large scale about a great subject. This outcome will not altogether do justice to him either as a scholar or as a writer, for the book is not easy, is written in his more austere manner, abounds in detailed disquisition of a learned and critical kind, and lacks those lighter touches which make some at least of his earlier work so readable and attractive. It is a pity that he never tried his hand at sustained biography or narrative. His chief efforts in this kind, the life of Richard II in the *Dictionary of National Biography* and his political and ecclesiastical history of Lancashire in the *Victoria County History*, had to be compressed to the scale of the volumes in which they appeared. There is nothing elsewhere in his writings so intimate as his little sketch of James Crossley, the first President of the Chetham Society: Crossley presided at his last Council meeting on 20 April 1883 and signed the minutes of the previous meeting in his large, firm handwriting. He died on 1 August partly as the result of an accident in London a few months earlier. . . . He was the very reverse, Raines said, of the general editor who is reported to have said: 'I'd sooner drive a team of tigers than a team of editors.' His Johnsonian figure and fresh complexion even in his last years were familiar to me in my youth when living in Cheetham Hill and passing his book-crammed dwelling, Stocks House, Cheetham, on my way to Owens College and, if my memory does not deceive me, I once came upon him seated in the small shop of a second-hand bookseller in Oxford Street, which he seemed nearly to fill, turning over books which the proprietor was submitting to him.¹

Charles Haskins, the American historian, said to me in 1919, 'What has Tait written except reviews?' After I had recovered

¹ 'The Chetham Society: a retrospect', in *Chetham Miscellanies*, vii. 10, 11.

from my astonishment, I told my friend what Tait had written. He was reassured, but not so impressed as he might have been. Haskins, in a wider field, was as thorough, as scrupulous, as minute, and as impeccable a scholar as Tait himself, and, unlike Tait, he believed in periodic stocktaking. He republished his learned papers (as Tait did in the case of the boroughs) in convenient books and followed them up with more general and popular books on the Normans in European History, the Renaissance of the Twelfth Century, the Rise of Universities. With a few exceptions, everything that he wrote is easily accessible in handy volumes. In his own very different way Tout did the same and, in his later years, embarked on a great big book, compared to which, as Tait once said in a characteristic understatement, his own output was 'a mere hiccup'. Tait will never be known as he deserves to be known; but all serious students of our medieval and local history will read his work with increasing gratitude.

Before I leave this survey of Tait's historical work, I must refer to the loss to English learning due to his failure to continue his studies in Magna Carta. Tait, being but mortal, had his heavy days and even his bad days, but his note on '*waynagium* and *contenementum*' (1912),¹ was written on his very best days. Poole wrote, 'I rejoice to have the Wainage and Contenement which will be very much in place in this Review. Wainage had long troubled me, and your explanation seems for the first time to account for the facts. Contenement I had blinked at, feeling certain that I did not really understand it and silently suppressing the *con.*' Tait intended this masterly piece of exposition to be the first of a series of studies, but it had no successors. Nothing that he wrote gives a better idea of his range and insight. His vindication of Spelman's gloss on *contenement*, '*aestimatio et conditionis forma*' (1626), and his exposition of the underlying idea common to it and to the word 'wainage', as used in the Great Charter, brings us to the heart of thirteenth-century thought about the social order. A series of studies of this quality would have been a boon indeed. But first the Chetham Society and then the boroughs stood in the way.²

¹ *E.H.R.* xxvii (1912), 720-8.

² For a wider appreciation of Tait's work than I have attempted here, the reader should turn to the admirable memoir by Professor V. H. Galbraith in the *E.H.R.* lx (1945), 129-35.

III

Tait's life was given to Manchester and the University. His partnership with Tout made the Manchester School of History. The epigram that they were 'dual manifestations of a single personality' is at any rate a tribute to a common devotion to a single purpose. It is unnecessary here to repeat a story which has already been told, and rightly told, in the memoir of the senior man.¹ While Tout took the lead, Tait kept the balance. His sagacity was never at fault, his reliability was taken for granted, his loyalty was unflinching. And, if Tout made himself a Manchester man, Tait was a Manchester man already, deeply rooted in the life and traditions of the city and university. After his appointment as a lecturer in 1896 he settled down. None of us knew anything about his earlier restlessness. He was a part of the place. His lectures, as Professor Galbraith has remarked, were dry but not dull; yet I doubt if his pupils minded very much whether they were dull or not, for he was Tait, the man with whom they felt safe, the constant sharer in their activities, their companion on walks and excursions, their minstrel. If he lived remote, he was always accessible. If he expected too much, he at least 'delivered the goods'. His retirement from his chair in 1919 seemed for a time to be a disaster, but did not in fact make so much difference as was feared, for his colleagues, the conference of teachers and research students, and for some years the undergraduates, saw almost as much of him as before. Personally I could never forget the help which he gave me after I had taken over some of his duties, and my successor, Professor Jacob, has on more than one occasion expressed his obligation to him for his wise counsel and constant aid.

Tait had become professor two years before the Owens College ceased to be combined with the colleges at Liverpool and Leeds and was merged in the Victoria University as an independent University of Manchester. He took his part in the discussions which preceded the change, and was always a force behind the scenes in academic life; but his most important contribution to University administration was made in the day-to-day work of faculty, senate, and council, on the committee of the University Press, of which he was chairman from 1925 to 1935, and in more incidental ways, especially as the chairman of the committee which was concerned with the erection and

¹ *Proceedings of the British Academy*, xxv (1929), 491-518, reprinted, with articles by Tout, in *The Collected Papers of Thomas Frederick Tout*, i (1932).

internal arrangements of the fine arts building, the home of the Faculty of Arts (opened in 1919). His closest friend and companion in Manchester happened to be the man who, with his long and detailed experience of academic administration, exercised a unique influence in the life of the University. This was Edward Fiddes, who had first come to the Owens College from Peterhouse in 1890 as a lecturer in classics. In 1895 he was appointed secretary to the Council and Senate. Later he became Registrar and then for some years Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor. On his retirement from this office, his invaluable services were retained by his appointment as Professor of American History, a subject which had long engaged his attention but to which he was not required to give much time. I imagine that there were few problems of university politics which Fiddes did not discuss with Tait. The presence of the two men in and about the University was beneficent, whether they were in office or not, especially during the changes which began with Tout's retirement in 1925.

Tout and Tait, on first acquaintance with them, seemed as different as two men could be; but they relied on each other. Disagreement carried too much discomfort to be frequent or prolonged. The relations between them are mischievously hit off by a remark, attributed to Tout but, I suspect, shaped by Fiddes, their common friend: 'The worst thing about Tait is that, if one loses one's temper with him, he sulks for a week.' The affection which long and tried association and mutual esteem had forged between them is more positively expressed in the letter written by Tout to his colleague on 17 November 1918—a few days after the armistice—when Tait had told him of his intention to retire—

Your letter is a great blow and I shall feel very lonely if I survive after October. We have had a very happy and harmonious dyarchy for nearly thirty years, and despite our both being constantly pulled in other directions we have no reason to be ashamed of the school of mediaeval history that we have established. What the effect of your withdrawal will be on that fills me with alarm, and I hope you will still see your way to taking some sort of hand in the research side of your work, for without that I should feel lonely indeed, so lonely that I should feel rather disposed to follow your example. But I can't even attempt to persuade you that you are acting unwisely in getting rid of the ordinary pass and honours grind, for it is clearly best both for knowledge and for yourself that you should henceforth put your whole energies into the kind of historical work that you like best. That you may have many years of health and eye-sight to do so, will be the wish of all your friends.

What Tait felt about Tout may be read in words which he wrote after his death:

The passing of his sturdy and vivid personality after more than half a century of strenuous work and ungrudging service to his day and generation leaves English medievalists bereft of their acknowledged head and wisest counsellor. For them his memory will remain green, and for those who come after and knew him not he has left a more enduring monument.¹

In 1920 Tait was made an honorary professor and Litt.D. of the University. In 1921 he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy. In 1933 he was elected an honorary fellow of Pembroke, and was given an honorary D.Litt. by the University of Oxford. I still feel keen regret that he could not see his way to accept an invitation in 1929 to deliver the Ford Lectures in Oxford.

In the year 1933 Tait had his seventieth birthday. The event was commemorated by the preparation of a splendid volume, *Historical Essays in Honour of James Tait*, edited, with a drawing by Ronald Allan and a bibliography, by J. G. Edwards, V. H. Galbraith, and E. F. Jacob. The book was given to Tait after a dinner on 19 December. Lord Crawford, the Chancellor of the University, presided. It was a happy occasion. Tait and the editors received many letters. An old Balliol friend, Mr. H. D'Arcy Hart, the painter, who had succeeded to Tait's former rooms in St. John Street in 1887, was 'very proud to have had the early friendship of so distinguished a historian'. One old pupil wrote of an affectionate esteem felt for thirty-two years, not long in the mind of a historian, 'yet how much of kindness and loyalty can be comprised in so short a time'. A Liverpool colleague wrote of 'a man of whom nobody has ever spoken ill or—rarer still—ever had occasion even to think ill'. 'Many others like myself', wrote a fellow-medievalist, 'would have endorsed the remark made last night, that we were all your pupils.' Among the thirty-four contributors to the book were most of the English medievalists, also Eilert Ekwall, Robert Fawtier, F.-L. Ganshof, Martin Weinbaum, James F. Willard. Edward Fiddes, very fittingly, wrote for it an essay on the university movement in Manchester between 1851 and 1903.

During the greater part of his life as a teacher and for about six years after his retirement Tait lived in Fallowfield. Many of

¹ *E.H.R.* xlv (1930), 85.

us could not pass 9 Beaconsfield without recalling, as some of the most satisfying of our lives, the hours we spent in his sitting-room, among his books. In 1925 he bought a house at Wilmslow, where he lived with one or more of his sisters for twenty years. He continued to spend every Thursday afternoon in Manchester and to take tea in the Senior Common Room at the University. He served on committees, was for three years a Governor of the John Rylands Library, and for a longer period a member of the Art Gallery Committee in the city. If he did not attend the Hallé Concerts so regularly as he had been wont to do, he had his piano and, though not a trained pianist, frequently played upon it. He had his garden and fruit-trees, his favourite cat, his regular clock-like walks, his carefully arranged holidays in Langdale and Eskdale, and above all his study. 'He was', writes Miss Beatrice Tait, 'as methodical in the home as in his work. He rarely gave advice unless sought for and it was always worth having. He considered the matter from every angle, then gave his opinion. He was very rarely angry and I always admired him for apologizing when on consideration he felt he was in the wrong; not an easy thing to do, but it proved the kind of man he was.' And in another letter she says 'One of his many good qualities was his generosity to anyone he knew who was really in need of financial help, provided of course the case was genuine.'

Tait had travelled much in his early and middle life. After 1887 there was hardly a year in which he did not roam, generally with one or two friends, in Germany or France, or, if this were not practicable, in England and Wales. I have before me as I write half a dozen of the note-books in which he described and sketched, in the manner of Freeman and quite as well, towns and buildings, with plans and architectural details. Few historical scholars have known England so well as he knew it. He liked to wander about London—where he always found time, if he could, for the Zoo—and to identify places of literary or historical interest, not antiquities only, but streets and houses associated with famous men or with the characters of Dickens and other novelists. His reading was very wide, especially in biography. He read a lot of novels but few of the very modern except detective stories. He constantly returned to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and liked to regale his friends on his walks with titbits from the previous day's reading. In his youth he was attracted by Walt Whitman, as passages copied into his note-books show; they come between his careful little accounts of

expenses. In later life he read less poetry. He preferred the company of poets as revealed in their lives. Scott's life and letters were often read, and the lives of historians, especially of Freeman, whose realism and range appealed to him. He never allowed himself to write essays as well as to sketch in Freeman's way; but I believe that he might have done it with success. Seccombe was delighted by an account which he wrote in the college magazine of a holiday which they had together in the Black Forest. His letters, if they could be put together, would be found to be full of raw material. He must have given of his best in them, for so many people used to consult him, as he liked to consult others, about historical and topographical details. When he ceased to wander far afield and settled down to regular holidays in the Lake country, especially in Eskdale, he gradually mastered the history of the district. With the aid of the very full verdict of an Elizabethan jury of twenty-four, known in local usage as the Twenty-Four book, he traced the site of every vanished farm in Eskdale, and followed up every sheep-walk, which, so far as they remain, are still the same.

Indeed, Tait's constancy to all his historical interests was very impressive. A list of his writings after he reached the age of seventy shows every one of them.¹ There are, of course, his big book on the boroughs, and reviews of books of borough records or about borough problems, but there are also his note on 'Common Assizes in the Pipe Roll and the *Dialogus de Scaccario*', his very important paper on knight-service in Cheshire, his retrospect over the history of the Chetham Society, illuminating reviews of an edition of unpublished parliament rolls, of new volumes of the Victoria County Histories, of Professor Galbraith's edition of *The St. Alban's Chronicle* (1406-20); also, two years before he died, his masterly review of Mr. Steel's *Richard II*. He wrote to me in November of that year, 1942, 'I am pegging away every morning and occasionally afternoons at Part II of *A Middlewich Chartulary* for the Chetham, Mrs. Varley having gone into full-time war work. I think I told you that it includes the lost deeds of B.N.C. relating to a little estate they bought in Middlewich in 1533.' This volume appeared in 1944. And there is still more to come. Tait, stirred by recent Domesday discussions and instigated by Galbraith, returned like an old war-horse to an old battle-ground, and plunged into the minutiae of the Herefordshire Domesday.

'Iuvat eum, ut fertur, per montes vagari; eundem iure dixeris

¹ The list is given as an appendix to this memoir.

per ardua investigationis culmina prospere tulisse vestigia.¹ Tait was a historian who took broad views. He was much more than a delver. He raised up his eyes to the hills in more senses than one. In the summer of 1943 he made with me his last ascent of Scafell. He kept a record of all the hills, of 2,500 and more feet above sea-level, which he had ascended in Great Britain. He wished to add one more, to reach, I think, the total of thirty-five. He had never been on the top of Grey Friar, overlooking the Duddon valley, so one day we crossed the moor between Eskdale and Birks Bridge and took the hill from the rear. Then we descended to Cockley Beck and trudged home over the Hard Knott pass. For his Easter holiday in 1944 he went as usual to Langdale with his friend Joseland. His former companion on these Langdale walks, Edward Fiddes, was dead, but Tait clung to his routine. One day, although Joseland was compelled to pause and return, Tait insisted on pushing on alone to the top of Pike o' Blisco. On his way down by a different route, he had a bad fall and lost his eye-glasses. Unable to see clearly, bruised and shaken, he took some hours, in the increasing darkness, to grope his way down to the dale, where he was found by a search-party. For a time he seemed to be little the worse for his experience, but it had been too severe. He died suddenly at Wilmslow in the early hours of 4 July 1944, a fortnight after his eighty-first birthday.

In order to make room for some younger scholar, he resigned his Fellowship of the British Academy in 1943. The Council feels that this act of generosity should not stand in the way of a memoir. I have tried to write about him as I think he would have preferred, step by step, under the guidance of documentary evidence² as well as of personal recollections, and in more detail than is usually required. Tait's life and work added distinction to the university in which he found his first opportunities and to the historical movements in which he took so large a share. He is part of their history, and they in their turn add significance to him. I trust that I have been able to do justice to a fine scholar, a faithful friend, and a good man.

F. M. POWICKE

¹ From the oration delivered by Dr. Cyril Bailey, the Public Orator, when Tait received his honorary degree at Oxford on 9 May 1933.

² I am indebted to my friend Dr. Moses Tyson, the librarian of the University of Manchester, for going through Tait's papers, now the possession of the University, and allowing me to use those which seemed likely to be most helpful.

APPENDIX

In continuation of the bibliography compiled by V. H. and G. R. Galbraith for the 'Historical Essays in Honour of James Tait'.

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1935. Review of E. E. RICE, *The Staple Court Books of Bristol*, *E.H.R.* 1. 329-31.
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1938. Note, 'Common Assizes' in the Pipe Rolls and 'Dialogus de Scaccario', *E.H.R.* liii. 669-75.
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 Review of ANTHONY STEEL's *Richard II*, *ibid.* 379-83.
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