THOMAS HODGKIN

1831–1913.

A MONTH before the meeting of the International Historical Congress in London, to which he had looked forward with keen interest and in which he had been appointed to preside over the mediaeval section, Thomas Hodgkin suddenly ended his long and strenuous career. Though well past fourscore years of age, he had kept up all his multifarious interests in learning, affairs, philanthropy, and religion with such keenness that it was with a real shock of surprise that his friends heard of his death. I have no claim of special intimacy, either with the man or with the subjects with which he specially delighted to deal, but I knew enough of both to feel at first hand a hearty sympathy with his character and standpoint, and there is perhaps some fitness that one who was called upon to take Hodgkin's place in presiding over the mediaeval section of the Congress should attempt to lay before the British Academy such tribute as he can pay to one of the most distinguished of its original members. In what follows I have ventured upon a slight expansion of the words which I read to the Congress when it met together under the shadow of Hodgkin's recent death.

Thomas Hodgkin was born on July 29, 1831, at Bruce Grove, Tottenham. He came on both sides of good Quaker stock, and his father, John Hodgkin, could trace his descent back as far as the history of the Society of Friends extended.[1] A lawyer by profession, John Hodgkin threw his whole heart into the ministrations of the Society of Friends, and his son was from birth inspired by conditions singularly uniform and constant. Moreover, Thomas Hodgkin's marriage with Lucy Anne Fox of Falmouth brought him into relation with another group of distinguished Quaker houses, so that there were few leading members of the society that were not connected with him by ties of consanguinity, affinity, or friendship. From this environment came that inheritance of strenuous endeavour, that

[1] See the pedigree of Hodgkin in *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 3rd ser., vol. ix, p. 88, prepared by Mr. J. C. Hodgkin. I must acknowledge my debt to Dr. Denby's memoir in *Ib.* pp. 75–80.

tradition of culture, religion, philanthropy, public service, and affairs, which were all through his life the chief factors in shaping his career, the guiding principles that inspired all his private and public conduct. He owed little to schools and universities, and nearly everything to himself. But environment and conditions were eminently favourable for the development of his serene, prosperous, genial, and vigorous career. After adequate schooling at Bruce Grove School at Tottenham, he attended classes at University College, London, and graduated B.A. in London University, with honours in classics before he was twenty-one. After some dalliance with the law in Lincoln's Inn, he adopted a business career, and learnt the profession of banking at Pontefract and Whitehaven. In 1859 he settled down at Newcastle-upon-Tyne as a partner in the new banking firm of Hodgkin, Barnett, Pease & Spence, of which he remained a partner until 1902, when it was absorbed in one of the great joint stock banks. In 1861 he married. For some thirty-five years in all he made his home at Newcastle. After 1894 he withdrew into the country and found more leisure from the daily task. But all his interests were aroused, all his chief work was planned when he was still engaged many hours a day at the bank which gave him prosperity and position. Thus, like Grote and Seebohm, he became a member of that remarkable group of banker historians of whose achievement English scholarship may well be proud.

It was only very gradually that Hodgkin began to devote the greater part of his fruitful leisure to the study of history. If we turn over the careful bibliography of his work prepared by Mr. Robert Blair,[1] we shall find that he began to write seriously soon after his settlement in Newcastle. His earlier occasional writings were, however, mainly literary, poetical, or theological, and largely contributed to organs controlled by the Society of Friends. He was nearly fifty when the first instalment of *Italy and her Invaders* was published, and he was well over sixty before his retirement from business set him free to devote his main energies to this study. But history was never his sole, perhaps never even his chief, pre-occupation, over and above his daily task. A devoted member of the Society of Friends, he took a leading part in all the religious and philanthropic activities of that communion.[2] He was all through his life a constant and indefatigable preacher in a church that recognizes no settled ministry, and something of the fervour of the prophet and

[1] See the *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 3rd ser., vol. ix, pp. 81–7.

[2] This aspect of his work is well illustrated in the sympathetic notices of Hodgkin in *The Friend*, March 7 and 14, 1913.

the lucidity of the expositor came from these ministrations to give colour and personality to his literary work. Many of his occasional writings expound the principles of the Society of Friends or glorify its heroes. He wrote the life of George Fox, the founder of the society, and he wrote also of that Inner Light to which Fox's followers look for their chief spiritual guidance. When nearly eighty he undertook a sort of missionary journey to Australia to bind together the scattered communities of Friends in the vast solitudes of a new continent.

Hodgkin was foremost in every good work at Newcastle, and developed his rare gifts of speech and writing in the public service of the community in which he lived. He was a straightforward, independent but decided politician. His gifts as a stimulating popular lecturer made him welcome in many literary and historical gatherings, especially in the north of England. He was for sixteen years one of the secretaries, and afterwards a vice-president, of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and remained till the last a constant contributor to its organ, *Archaeologia Aeliana*. He was for a generation closely connected with the administration of the Armstrong College, the University College of Newcastle, and secured in it a more adequate representation of historical science than is even yet allowed in the original foundations of Durham University of which Armstrong College now forms an important part. He was zealous for local history, urging strongly the need of systematic excavation along the line of the great Roman wall, and initiating a scheme for compiling a county history of Northumberland on a comprehensive scale. He was, too, an indefatigable traveller, and much of the charm of his historical works is due to the keen eye which saw and the ready pen which described the historic scenes in which he delighted to move. He was also a man of wide culture, delighting in literature and poetry, and reading and writing on the history of all periods with equal zest. His personality was one of singular strength, simplicity, and attractiveness. Holding decided views, and never afraid of expressing them, he was always kindly, considerate, courteous, and sympathetic. The charm of his manner, the sincerity of his devotion to the public weal and to scholarship, won him the admiration and affection of all brought into close contact with him. And beneath the fervour of the prophet and preacher, underlying the enthusiasm of the scholar for his science, there always lay the well-balanced judgement and shrewd practical wisdom of the experienced man of affairs. Altogether there was in Hodgkin a rare combination of qualities diligently and loyally cultivated throughout a long life of overflowing energy and ceaseless, though serene, endeavour.

Our main concern is with Hodgkin the historical scholar, who, in the scanty leisure of twenty years of a busy banker's life, surveyed in the solid eight volumes of *Italy and her Invaders* the whole course of the history of the Peninsula and of the tribes which laid violent hands upon it during the five centuries which elapsed between the first coming of the Goths and the coronation of Charles, the Frankish king, as Roman Emperor. Yet we cannot judge the scholar rightly did we not appreciate the varied nature of his life's work and the fundamental principles which animated it. The temperament, which responded to so many of the appeals that his environment made upon him, demanded in his historical work the same broad sweep of vision, the same keen perception of moral and spiritual forces, that animated his whole intelligence. Under such conditions it would be unreasonable to expect any elaboration of technical equipment, any such minute interrogations of the sources as alone can enlarge the bounds of knowledge, any such detailed familiarity with all the recent literature dealing with five memorable centuries, as might perhaps be demanded of the more professional and more specialized historian. But how much do we get to compensate us for all this! We have a scholarship that is always adequate; a presentation that is always clear, balanced, and coherent; a style that always carries the reader along and sometimes rises to a high level of sustained excellence; an eye for the essentials, the big things of history; a gift for historic synthesis that falls to the lot of few; a narrative always based on first-hand study of the best sources; and an insight into personality and character that is the note of the real historian. The same qualities come out even more clearly in such brilliantly successful popularizations of his great work as are his lives of Theodoric and Charles the Great, or his *Dynasty of Theodosius*. They are equally apparent in his *Political History of England up to 1066*, a remarkably bold and interesting attempt at solving the almost impossible problem of making a coherent narrative out of the scrappy and doubtful material that makes Anglo-Saxon history the despair of all save the sceptics, who deny everything, and the poets who reconstruct airy fabrics out of their own imaginations! And it may be regarded as a particularly noteworthy achievement of a man of seventy-five, who, so far as his published writings show, had seldom before specially devoted himself to the study of old English history! In all that Hodgkin wrote we may expect to find good old-fashioned narrative history of the best sort, scholarly but not too technical, literary yet precise, eloquent and elevated, stimulating and hortatory, wise in its judgements, redeemed from the excessive stateliness and stiffness of much historical narrative

of the last generation by reason of the broad humanity, the engaging personality and the living sympathy of the author. We do not go to him for criticism of sources, for the history of institutions, or administration, or for the economic and social standpoint of modern *Culturgeschichte*. But what we get is the best of its kind, and it is a kind that is becoming rarer, and, as I venture to think, a kind that will remain indispensable if history is to continue to go beyond the small circle of specialists and make its appeal to the intelligence and sympathies of the great cultivated public, which the modern professional historian is perhaps in some danger of forgetting. With him passes away one of the last of the leading historical writers of his generation.

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