

## CHARLES LETHBRIDGE KINGSFORD

1862-1926

CHARLES LETHBRIDGE KINGSFORD was born on Christmas Day, 1862, at Ludlow. His father, the Rev. Sampson Kingsford, Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, who had been master at Rossall School, was at this time Head Master of the Ludlow Grammar School; he afterwards (1868-70) became Master of the Kensington Preparatory School and subsequently (1870) Vicar of St. Hilary, Cornwall, which remained the family home till 1890. His mother was Helen Lethbridge, a sister of William Lethbridge, mathematical master at Rossall, a lifelong friend of W. H. Smith, and later a partner in the firm of W. H. Smith & Son. Charles was the fifth child and third son.

All the boys—six in number—went to Rossall School. When Charles went there in 1875 Dr. H. A. James, now President of St. John's College, Oxford, had just been appointed Head Master. What struck his Head Master most about Kingsford was his devotion to work. What struck his contemporaries most was his complete indifference to any kind of games. They seem, however, to have been an unusually tolerant set and let the weakly boy read and sketch in peace. He was intensely loyal to his old school and took the deepest interest in all that appertained to its welfare. It is fitting that the names of Lethbridge and Kingsford should be associated with the new Art School at Rossall, and that towards the end of his life he was the representative of the University of Oxford on the Rossall Council. But his school life must have been rather solitary, and must have encouraged a natural tendency to withdraw into himself. He was from boyhood onwards uncommunicative and reserved.

In 1881 he went up to Oxford as scholar of St. John's College, and obtained a second in Mods, a first in Greats (1885), and a second (on a year's reading) in History. As his classical scholarship was not remarkable, his friends were disposed to attribute his first in Greats partly to a 'special subject' he took—the historical geography of Greece. At any rate, this choice shows the bent of his mind. Apart from his Schools work, the only outside interest which his friends note at this time was politics. 'He was a great politician in early days', writes one of them, 'and a rabid anti-Gladstonian at the time of the Home Rule Bills; but he slackened off later, though always imbued

with Conservative tendencies.' In 1888 he won the Arnold Prize with an essay on the Reformation in France, but does not appear to have published it.

In 1889 he joined the staff of the *Dictionary of National Biography*; and though his connexion was severed next year by his appointment to a post in the Board of Education, he continued for the next ten years to contribute to the Dictionary. Between 1889 and 1899 he wrote over 300 biographies. They range mostly from the eleventh to the fifteenth century (with a few outside these limits), and include historians and men of letters, bishops and chancellors, statesmen, soldiers, saints, monks, and friars. They are models of accurate condensation; their brevity must have delighted the editors; their thoroughness soon won the respect of historians for the initials 'C. L. K.'. The earliest notice thus signed is 'Garland, John, fl. 1230, Grammarian' (1889); it shows a maturity and a mass of recondite learning really astonishing in so young a writer. Among the most important biographies which Kingsford contributed were those of Henry V and Archbishop Peckham, both of which led to further researches. A few lines on John Stonor, judge, form Kingsford's first introduction to a family with which his name was to be closely connected. He had, however, not yet begun to concentrate on the fifteenth century or on London. The article on John Stow was not by him.

In 1890 he obtained a nomination as Junior Examiner at the Board of Education. He was Junior Examiner in the Elementary Branch from 1890 to 1898, and private secretary to the Secretary of the Education Department (Sir George Kekewich) in 1897 and 1898; in 1898 he was promoted Senior Examiner, and in 1905, Assistant Secretary, a post which he held till his resignation in January, 1912; for a short time in 1907 he acted as Assistant Secretary in the Welsh Department.

About his official work Kingsford was even more than usually reticent. A former colleague has kindly filled what would have been a blank by supplying the following reminiscences:

'When Kingsford entered the old Education Office in Whitehall as "Junior Examiner", he found himself a member of a very pleasant little society, consisting entirely of Oxford and Cambridge men, mostly graduates in high Honours. There had been, so far, little change or growth, since the passing of Mr. W. E. Forster's Education Act of 1870, in what was still officially known as the Education Department of the Privy Council. The business was practically confined to the field of Elementary Education, and lay chiefly in the administration

of the various Education Acts and the awarding of grants under what was known as "the Revised Code", a set of Minutes revised and altered annually. An examiner's work involved close and constant communication with H. M. Inspectors of Schools, and also detailed correspondence with multifarious School Boards and bodies of Managers of Voluntary Schools in England and Wales. Kingsford rapidly established himself as an acceptable colleague. He proved an able administrator with a soul not above detail, and won respect as a man of good judgement and impeccable accuracy. After being selected for the performance of various special duties, Parliamentary and other, he became in 1897 Private Secretary to the Permanent Head of the Office, Sir G. Kekewich, and filled with credit that rather difficult and delicate post, until he obtained promotion as Senior Examiner. A few years later he became Assistant Secretary, a position which he held until his retirement in 1912.

'While Kingsford's official work was done faithfully and thoroughly to the end, it would be affectation to claim that it was performed with the same keenness and enthusiasm after the revolutionary changes which followed the passing of the Education Act of 1902 and the appointment of Sir R. Morant as Permanent Secretary. Kingsford never concealed his dislikes, and there was much in the new atmosphere and constitution of the Office to which he strongly objected. The new methods . . . excited his . . . outspoken criticism, and led eventually to his voluntary resignation.

'Speaking generally it may be said that he was a useful official of more than average ability, excelling rather in the writing of minutes and the forming of decisions, than in personal interviews and utterances in conference. In the latter he was handicapped by indistinct speech, and a tendency to hasty and sometimes even tactless observations. He never allowed his considerable literary work to interfere in the least with his official duties, the claims of which he always regarded as paramount.'

Those who have served with Kingsford on committees in later years will be surprised to hear of his 'tendency to hasty and sometimes even tactless observations'. There he erred if at all on the side rather of caution than of hastiness, and his occasional caustic remarks were made with perfect good humour. Probably on the councils of learned societies he found himself in more sympathetic and congenial surroundings.

His literary output during the period of his official career was very great and fairly continuous, except for a break between 1898 and 1901 when his duties as private secretary and in preparing materials for the

Education Act of 1902 may well have absorbed all his energies. His first book, a scholarly edition of *The Song of Lewes* (1890) undertaken at the suggestion of York Powell, and a remarkable article in the *English Historical Review* (1890) on some political poems of the twelfth century in a Bodleian MS. ('perhaps the most ancient existing collection of popular Latin poems, satirical, religious, or political, of the Middle Ages'), were no doubt written before he joined the Board of Education. But besides his numerous contributions to the *D. N. B.* he published *The Crusades, the Story of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* in 'The Story of the Nations' Series, in collaboration with T. A. Archer (1894), and *Henry V, the Typical Medieval Hero* in 'Heroes of the Nations' (1901), an expansion of his article in the *D. N. B.* and probably the most popular of his books (a new edition appeared in 1923), though not altogether free from the 'austere style' of the Dictionary. Further studies on Henry V were the articles on 'The early biographers of Henry V' in *English Historical Review*, 1910, and the edition of *The First English Life of Henry V* in 1911, while the article on 'Sir Otho de Grandison' (*Transactions of the R. Hist. Soc.*, 1909) may be regarded as an outcome of *The Crusades*. This article is a fine piece of work; Kingsford's whole heart was in it, and his style sometimes approaches eloquence. A water-colour sketch which he made of the Castle of Granson forms an attractive link between his historical and his artistic interests. Another considerable mass of work is contained in more than thirty biographies (among them those of six kings of England) which Kingsford contributed to the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1910, 1911). With the exception of Henry V, William de la Pole, and two or three more, these were not the lives of people whom he had already dealt with in the *D. N. B.* In 1910 also he continued his work on Archbishop Peckham by his contributions to vol. II of the *British Society of Franciscan Studies*.

Before this time Kingsford had entered on a new field and begun the series of words which was to establish his reputation as a historian of Medieval London. In *Chronicles of London* (1905) he edited three fifteenth-century chronicles, and portions of a fourth, for the first time, and discussed with learning and acumen their relations to each other and to similar chronicles already published, and their influence on later literature. The masterly edition of *Stow's Survey of London* followed in 1908.<sup>1</sup> The Introduction is as entertaining as it is learned; the *Survey* is reprinted with all care 'as a venerable original'; and

<sup>1</sup> Additional notes to a *Survey of London* by John Stow (Oxford 1927) appeared after his death.

the notes are carefully chosen and wisely restricted 'to correct any errors of statement or fact which might be found; to trace as far as possible the sources of Stow's information; to supplement the text with fresh matter from Stow's own collections; to illustrate it, within a reasonable compass, by quotations from contemporary writers'. The notes occupy rather more than 100 pages; they are packed with well-arranged knowledge of topography, records, and literature. An edition of *Two London Chronicles from the Collection of John Stow* in the *Camden Miscellany*, vol. XII (1910) completes the list of Kingsford's publications while he was at the Education Office.

His resignation in January, 1912, involved considerable financial sacrifice, but he never regretted the step, which left him free to pursue his historical researches under conditions of less strain. From this time also he was able to take a useful part in the work of various learned societies. He had been a member of the Committee of the British Society of Franciscan Studies from its reconstruction in 1907. He served on the Council of the Royal Historical Society, 1909-23, almost continuously, and was Vice-President, 1924-6. He was on the Council of the Historical Association from 1912-19, chairman of the Publications Committee, 1913-14, and Hon. Treasurer of the London Branch of the Association, 1913-20. Elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1909, he served on the Council in 1912 and 1917, and on the Executive and Library Committees (1920, 1923), and was elected Vice-President 1920-3. He was also on the Council of the London Topographical Society 1914-21, and later Vice-President. He was elected Fellow of the British Academy in 1924, and shortly before his death he became Chairman of the Council of the Canterbury and York Society. He was also on the Committee of the London Library. To all these institutions he gave loyal service. His favourite among them all was the Society of Antiquaries. He liked attending meetings, and was a very welcome member of councils and committees because of his regular attendance, his even temper and modesty, sound judgement and perfect honesty. One could be quite sure that any advice he gave was given on the merits of the case without any ulterior motives.

With a strong sense of duty he combined considerable business capacity, which made him very welcome as a trustee both for public funds and in family affairs. He rarely refused duties of this kind when called upon, though he often found them irksome. No one recognized more fully the ties of kinship, or was more ready to help in time of trouble.

Kingsford never had any ambition to found a school. Though he

gladly gave and gladly accepted help, he was essentially a solitary worker; he had had no experience of teaching and guiding students, and he was not a good lecturer. He never held any University chair, but was twice appointed to deliver special courses of lectures at Oxford—first in 1910 and secondly as Ford's Lecturer in English History in 1923. The result of the first course was his volume on *English Historical Literature in the Fifteenth Century* (1913). If the lectures bore any resemblance to the printed text, one can hardly wonder at the dwindling of the audience, about which Kingsford jested rather ruefully. The book is closely packed and closely reasoned, and demands all the attention of a reader. 'History is a complex, not a simple thing', Kingsford said in reviewing a 'simplified history'. He had not that very rare gift of lucidity of style which can illumine without falsifying a complicated question or situation, and he always preferred the complexity of truth to a misleading simplification. The subject of this book is the literary development of the writing of history in England, with a critical examination of the works which came under review as historical sources, from the last monastic chronicles through the biographies of Henry V, the vernacular London Chronicles, and the English *Brut*, to More's *History of Richard III*, 'which is the first historical work of outstanding literary merit in the English language'. The volume ends with a survey of sixteenth-century historians, for 'it is only in the more finished product of the next age that the painful efforts of the fifteenth century showed fruit'. The chapter on 'the Chronicles of London' supplements or rather supersedes the introduction which Kingsford prefixed to his edition of *Chronicles of London*, owing to new material which had come to light, especially 'The Great Chronicle'. There are chapters on letters (official and private) and on ballads and poems as historical sources, while records are excluded. An appendix of original documents increases the usefulness of this unique contribution to English *Quellengeschichte*. One aspect of the subject was again treated by Kingsford in a pamphlet which he wrote on the fifteenth century for the series entitled *English History in Contemporary Poetry* issued by the Historical Association (1913).

On another side he added to the available materials by his edition of *The Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483* in the Camden Society publications (2 vols., 1919), with 'Supplementary Stonor Letters and Papers' (1314-1482) in *Camden Miscellany*, vol. XIII (1923), and 'Stonor v. Dormer' and others in the court of Star Chamber in the *English Historical Review* (1920).

His second set of Oxford lectures is represented in *Prejudice and Promise in Fifteenth Century England. The Ford Lectures 1923-4*,

published in 1925. In this he shows an easy mastery of his multifarious material and gives a freer rein to his humour than he generally allowed himself in print. The account, in the chapter on 'West Country Piracy: the school for English Seamen', of the leading pirates acting as royal commissioners to inquire into each other's piracies, is delightful. Kingsford had already touched on this and other subjects treated in the Ford Lectures in a paper on 'Some Side-lights on English History' read at the International Congress of Historical Studies at Brussels in 1923. His work is generally so thoroughly objective that one can rarely find any trace of personal feeling in it. In the Ford Lectures, however, especially in the last chapter, he does appear definitely as a righter of wrongs; his indignation at the injustice done to William de la Pole in his lifetime and by succeeding ages may perhaps have biased his historical judgement, but it does reveal a side of his character. It is probable that this sense of justice—the feeling that the fifteenth century had been unfairly treated—was one of the motives which led Kingsford to specialize on this period.

A sentence from the Ford Lectures may be quoted for its interest to collectors of historical details: 'There were one or more fraternities attached to most [London] churches. Altogether I have noted references to about 160' (p. 141). How did he file his information? He was very methodical, and one may be sure that his system was not too complicated. In a review he lays it down that 'the first purpose of a registry . . . is to make the documents quickly and easily available for administrative use. Practical experience teaches that over-elaboration tends to clog the machine.' But what method he used for his own papers does not appear; one of his card-indexes is now at the Society of Antiquaries.

He was a diligent and conscientious reviewer in the *English Historical Review* and latterly in the *Antiquaries Journal*. He was careful to avoid saying anything which would discourage a serious beginner. Irrelevancy evidently irritated his orderly mind, and his generous spirit resented the tendency among some writers to depreciate the great figures of history.

Kingsford was engaged for a number of years in preparing for the Historical MSS. Commission a report upon the manuscripts of Lord De L'Isle and Dudley, which included Robertsbridge charters, Sidney papers, &c. He contributed a paper on 'Some ancient deeds and seals' in this collection to *Archæologia*, vol. LXV, but the work was interrupted by the war and the first volume of the Report did not appear till 1925; a considerable part of the second volume was in type at the time of his death and further material was ready in manu-

script. He undertook at Lord Beauchamp's request the work of arranging and calendaring the deeds and papers at Madresfield, which run from the twelfth to the nineteenth century; it was a long task, admirably performed, and finished not long before his death; of this no printed record remains.

During the war Kingsford first served as a special constable, but was later (1917-18) able to turn to account his official training by acting as private secretary to Sir Arthur Boscawen at the Ministry of Pensions. It was probably as a result of the war that he turned his attention to more modern military history—writing at the request of his friend, Sir Lawrence Weaver, *The Story of the Middlesex Regiment* (1916) and *The Story of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment* (1921), and an article in the *English Historical Review* on 'The Highland Forts in the Forty-Five'. He had a good many of the qualities necessary for a historian of military affairs, notably a good eye for country.

While the war interrupted some of his historical activities, he continued his work on London. A good deal of London lore is contained in a paper on Medieval London read before the London Branch of the Historical Association and printed as Leaflet 38 in the Association's publications (1915).<sup>1</sup> In 1915 appeared his *Grey Friars of London* written for the British Society of Franciscan Studies; admirable as this work was, he was able to contribute a long article of 'Additional Material for the History of the Grey Friars, London', to *Collectanea Franciscana II* (1922) published by the same society. Most of the papers he read to the Society of Antiquaries, which are printed in *Archæologia*,<sup>2</sup> deal with London history and topography, and he wrote for the London Topographical Record (vols. X-XIII) a series of articles on 'Historical Notes on Medieval London Houses' and 'London Topographical Gleanings'. Finally, *The Early History of Piccadilly, Leicester Square, Soho, and their Neighbourhood*—rendered possible by the discovery of a map of this region made in 1585 for purposes of private litigation—is the last of the many debts which London owes to Kingsford's industry and insight.

In his last published work he returns to earlier periods. The chapter on 'The Kingdom of Jerusalem 1099-1291' in vol. V of the

<sup>1</sup> Another short paper, *From Temple Bar to St. Mary-le-Strand*, was published by The Homeland Association, London, 1925.

<sup>2</sup> They are (besides one already mentioned) 'The Feast of the Five Kings' (vol. 67), 'Our Lady of the Pew' (vol. 68), 'Two Forfeitures in the Year of Agincourt' (vol. 70), 'Paris Garden and the Bear-baiting' (vol. 70), 'Some London Houses of the Tudor Period' (vol. 71), 'Bath Inn or Arundel House' (vol. 72), 'Essex House, formerly Leicester House and Exeter Inn' (vol. 73), 'A London Merchant's House and its Owners' (vol. 74).

*Cambridge Medieval History*, 1925, was probably written a good many years ago. For the correction of the proofs of his article on 'John de Benstede and his missions for Edward I', which appeared in *Essays in History presented to Reginald Lane Poole* (1927), he made arrangements the day before his death. It is characteristic of the abiding loyalties which ran through his whole life that his last work should have been written to honour a scholar whose help he had acknowledged in his first published book.

Kingsford's latest work showed no signs of failing power, and his person too conveyed a suggestion of rugged health ('he looks', some one remarked, 'like a country squire, not like a Londoner'). Without warning he was struck down by a sudden seizure on November 6. He recovered consciousness but not strength. He was touched and characteristically surprised at the numerous inquiries made for him, and remarked with his quizzical smile: 'I am getting quite popular—it is rather late,' and one of his last actions was to send remembrances 'to all my friends at the Antiquaries and the Royal Historical Society'. He died on November 27, 1926, at his house in Kensington, and was buried at South Tawton, Devonshire, the home of his mother's family.

This paper is almost entirely concerned with his historical work. He married, at Dawlish on June 8, 1892, Alys, daughter of the late C. T. Hudson, LL.D., F.R.S. His life may truly be called a happy one.

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