

VISCOUNT DILLON

1844-1932

HAROLD ARTHUR DILLON, C.H., M.A., D.C.L., born 24 January 1844; died 18 December 1932; succeeded his father in 1892; married, first, Julia, daughter of the late Isaac Brock Stanton, 1870; second, Margaret folkes, widow of the Rev. J. E. Philipps, 1926.

Lord Dillon was educated at a private school at Eltham, in Kent, and entered the army as Ensign in the Rifle Brigade in 1862; he served in India and Canada and retired in 1874, when he joined the Oxfordshire Militia, from which he retired in 1891. He was President of the Royal Archaeological Institute, 1892-8; President of the Society of Antiquaries, 1897-1904; Chairman of the Trustees of the National Portrait Gallery, 1894-1928; Trustee of the British Museum, 1905-32; Trustee of the Wallace Collection, 1918-31; Curator of the Tower of London Armouries, 1892-1913; Fellow of the British Academy, 1902.

After his retirement from the Rifle Brigade, Lord Dillon became interested firstly in more modern military subjects such as equipment and dress, but as a natural consequence his researches led him farther back into the history of arms and armour, medieval costume, and kindred subjects. The industry and energy which he brought to bear upon his studies were immense. In those days photographs and facsimiles were not so common as they are at the present time; he therefore copied or traced numerous illustrated works and illuminated manuscripts, and made a large number of brass rubbings as helps to illustrate and explain the particular subject in which he was interested. He traced every detail in the Rous Roll and 'The Romance of Alexander'; and made drawings of almost unnoticed details such as spurs and sword-hilts and armour from pictures in British and foreign Galleries. He made copious notes from the calendars and State papers and other documents in the

Record Office and the British Museum relating to arms, armour, condition of life, and individuals. He did most valuable work as Secretary to the Commission on Westminster Abbey, and was the guiding spirit in the great Tudor and Stuart Exhibitions at the New Gallery. Though other antiquaries, such as Baron de Cosson and Waller, had studied some particular side of medieval life, Lord Dillon had studied them all, and there were few exhibits in either of the collections which he had not known personally and recorded in his notes. His papers in the *Archaeological Journal* and in *Archaeologia* are very numerous, but besides this he wrote papers of interest and value which dealt with the arms and armour in pictures, on monuments, and in Shakespeare; on tournaments, military equipment, and on soldiers' arms, equipment, and life, in periodicals ranging from *Archaeologia* to the *Boy's Own Paper* and other ephemeral publications, and he had to admit that he himself had entirely lost count of his work in this direction.

On being appointed as first Curator of the Tower Armouries, an appointment which was held by his ancestor, Sir Henry Lee, under Queen Elizabeth, Lord Dillon brought order out of what had become a somewhat chaotic collection. It is true that Samuel Meyrick had brought his expert knowledge to bear on the Armouries in 1827, but after this the collection had been in the hands of War Office storekeepers and, as a natural consequence, much of Meyrick's work had been lost; labels had been misplaced, suits had been wrongly mounted, and erroneous traditions had been established to please and amuse the visiting public. His happiest days at the Tower were those when he took several of the more important suits of armour to pieces, particularly those of Henry VIII, and tried them on himself so as to have a practical knowledge of how the rivets and the joints of the harness worked. In so doing he found that in the dark ages many of the suits had been wrongly assembled, and was thus able to rectify many of the serious blunders which had lasted from the days of Meyrick

onwards. In those days the typewriter was not a favoured instrument in Government Departments, and every inquiry at the Tower was answered by Lord Dillon in his own handwriting.

He made a practice of touring Europe at least once in the year, solely with a view to acquiring more knowledge and experience, and on one of these journeys he discovered the 'Armourers' Album', which contains a number of water-colour drawings of suits of armour, with the names of the owners. Acting on his advice, the British Government purchased this Album for the Art Library of the Victoria and Albert Museum, and from the drawings Lord Dillon was able to identify a number of very fine suits in the Tower, Windsor, and in private collections. He had no use whatever for the dealer or for the collector as such, for the price and intrinsic value left him entirely cold. But if there were some detail which helped to identify the piece as of definite historical value his interest was at once aroused. In one particular case, where it was proved that the suit of Henry Lee, in the possession of the Armourers' Company, could only have been made for one particular tournament on 17 November 1590, his enthusiasm was delightful to witness.

He was no collector, for he considered that as Curator of the Armouries of the Tower his interest should solely be in the objects under his care, and that it was inadvisable, if not dangerous, to collect for himself. Once, however, he acquired for a few shillings a bundle of Oriental daggers, amongst which was a very rare fifteenth-century weapon known to collectors as a kidney dagger; it was a source of very great delight to him to be able to dispose of this dagger for a very large sum, the whole of which he devoted to War charities.

As Chairman of the National Portrait Gallery, Lord Dillon's knowledge was of the greatest possible value to the Trustees, for his interests were so varied and his memory was so reliable that he could place on record the names of wellnigh forgotten benefactors to humanity whose portraits

should be preserved in the National collection. As Trustee of the British Museum he was never content to give formal approval without knowing precisely the details of the proposition; he habitually examined the monthly accounts in detail on behalf of the Trustees; and (after ascertaining the facts of the case) he was always anxious to support the responsible officers. In all the institutions with which he was connected he was always ready to champion the cause of the subordinate staff.

With the exception of the nominal fee he received as Curator of the Armouries, all his work was gratuitous, and he invariably returned any fees for expert advice which correspondents sent to him. On his journeys on official business he caused serious heartburnings to the financial branches of the various Government Offices, for he invariably travelled 3rd and refused the 1st class fare to which he was entitled, and made no claim for subsistence as he never took lunch.

In his writings he was not a stylist; he was out for facts and not literature, and in arms and armour it was the offensive or defensive character which interested him far more than any artistic decoration which might be superimposed. In a famous trial connected with a suit of armour, Counsel suggested, with reference to some of his evidence, that it was merely his opinion; Lord Dillon replied, 'My opinions *are* facts', and this was invariably the case. He would never make a statement without being quite certain of his facts, and he laid down as one of the traditions in the Tower that if it was in any way possible to answer a question, this should be done, no matter what the cost in time and trouble, and on subjects of which he was master he disliked using the words 'I don't know'; indeed in one case it took him over a year of research to give a correct answer. He was a stern disciplinarian to others and to himself, for he considered that the word 'duty' meant a debt with interest on the debt, that is, that the salaried officials should do a little bit more than they were actually paid for. He

was always the first to acknowledge the source from which he drew his information, for he held that the words 'Thank you' were of untold value and cost nothing.

He was very proud of his collection of pictures, and presented six of these to the National Portrait Gallery, the most important of which are Archbishop Warham, by Holbein, and a full-length portrait of Queen Elizabeth standing on a map of Oxfordshire. He also presented a fine collection of china to the British Museum.'

Lord Dillon was descended from Sir Henry Dylon, who went to Ireland with the Earl of Moreton (King John) in 1185, and his descendant Theobald was created Viscount Dillon in 1621. The 7th Viscount Theobald raised the famous Dillon Regiment for James II, which at a later date went over to French service. Lord Dillon was intensely interested in the family regiment and carried out much research, both in France and in this country, as to its history. Through Henry, the 11th Viscount, who married Lady Charlotte Lee, he traced his lineage back to the Earl of Lichfield, to Sir Henry Lee, Champion to Queen Elizabeth and Master of the Armouries, and to Barbara, Duchess of Cleveland. He was very proud of the Royal (Stuart) Arms as one of his quarterings, and his Stuart descent showed itself in his fine profile and flashing eyes.

In spite of his long descent and famous forbears he was a democrat at heart and considered that more valuable information was to be obtained in a 3rd class smoking carriage than in a Pullman car.

A delightful travelling companion he hated fussiness and more than once had a battle royal over the propriety of opening or closing the window of a railway carriage. Needless to say, he always won, and the rest was silence! His life was Spartan in simplicity. For many years he would leave Ditchley in an open car in all weathers, with no breakfast, at 7.30 to catch his train at Charlbury; a cup of tea and a biscuit in an Aerated Bread shop sufficed him for lunch, up 180 steps to his office in the Tower, and so home in the

evening to dinner as his first and only regular meal. He never carried an umbrella or gloves, and his seat in the train was always recognized by the walking-stick, made by himself, with a deer-antler crutch, and woe betide the inexperienced traveller who moved it.

It was by no means uncommon for Lord Dillon, after his work at the Tower, to walk to Farringdon Street, browse among the bookstalls in that fascinating neighbourhood, and then walk the whole way to Paddington Station, a feat which would strike terror into the heart of the modern Londoner.

He was thoughtful of others in unexpected ways, doing little kindnesses here and there which found no place in the subscription lists of charities. During the dark days of the War he invariably carried two tobacco tins to Paddington Station, and having walked half-way round the station produced flowers for the girls in the refreshment room, for these were expensive in war-time, and in those dreary days this little attention went far to brighten the gloom of Paddington.

Every journey from London to Ditchley brought books of all kinds for his library, ranging from giant illustrated folios on armour to dips in the 1*d.* boxes in Farringdon Street. The whole of life was intensely interesting to him, whether it was Queen Mary's psalter, a boy scout's book on knotting and splicing, a text-book on explosives, or the 'Handy Guide to Coffin-making'. All of these he read voraciously and, having read them, remembered not only the subject of the book, but the space it occupied in his library and the colour of the binding.

To students of arms, armour, costume, and the life of former ages his work will always be valuable, and to those who had the privilege of knowing him intimately his memory will be very dear.

He was one of the original Fellows of the British Academy founded in 1902, and was proud of his membership, though he took no active part in its proceedings. His gratuitous

work for the Government on various Boards of Trustees and Committees on which he served was recognized by the degree of Honorary Doctor of Civil Law of the University of Oxford, and by the bestowal of the Order of the Companion of Honour by the King in 1921, the motto of which might have been designed as his epitaph: '*In action faithful and in honour clear*'.

C. FFOULKES.

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