



allow Gregor into the position of Senior Project, but not before working  
P. N. S. MANSERGH *Bassano & Vandyk Studios*  
his colours at both rugby and cricket. Though not proud of being clearly  
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## Philip Nicholas Seton Mansergh 1910–1991

TO DISTINGUISH a Kerry cow from a Dexter is not difficult, but few historians will be able to do so, and fewer still will be drawing on personal experience of dairying. Nicholas Mansergh, historian of the Commonwealth and of Ireland, political scientist and administrator, tennis player, teacher and editor, remained also a farmer throughout his life, keeping an invaluable contact with his native Tipperary and with practical rural realities. His distinguished academic career spanned the years from 1932, when he graduated from Pembroke College Oxford, to 1991 when, having retired from the Mastership of St John's College Cambridge and completed his great task of editing the documents of the transfer of power in India, he finished his final book, to be published posthumously. During this long period he wrote continuously and influenced men and events to an unusual degree.

Born on 27 June 1910, close by Tipperary town, at Grenane, seat of a long established Anglo–Irish family, Nicholas was the younger son of Philip St George Mansergh, a pioneering railway engineer in Australia and Eastern Africa, and his wife (and cousin) Ethel Marguerite, who bequeathed her son a deep love of poetry, a recreation which lasted throughout his life, Mansergh grew up in an increasingly disturbed Ireland with early memories of secretive and violent activities, for which his native county was historically renowned and which might have been expected to have had damaging repercussions for his family, had not the high respect of both communities long been earned. His early education was partly local, at the town's Abbey School, after a short foray to a preparatory school in the North, but it included some months in Lausanne with his grandmother, before he proceeded, like his brother, Gregor, before him, to St Columba's College, Dublin, in September 1923. There he was to follow Gregor into the position of Senior Prefect, but not before working up through the ranks, gaining the editorship of the school magazine, and his colours at both rugby and cricket. Though not broad of build he clearly

used his six foot three inches to advantage, something he was to do formidably at tennis in the coming years, at county level for Oxfordshire, and in the Irish rankings. In October 1928 his father died, leaving to Nicholas the adjacent family property of Friarsfield, which was to remain his Irish base throughout a life largely to be spent working in England. In December of that year he left school, a gifted all-rounder, with an assured written style, with interests in literature and modern languages as well as sports, and with academic ambition unusual in a family hitherto distinguished by military and ecclesiastical achievement.

Mansergh knew no one in Oxford and the Pembroke College that he entered in October 1929 was small, conservative, of low academic rating and ill-equipped to offer the broad training that the young student was seeking in the 'upstart' discipline of Modern History. That he emerged in 1932, after a viva for a first, with a second class degree was a disappointment to him, but it was a spur to endeavour and was, in the circumstances, an achievement. The influence of several individuals and their recognition of his potential stood him in good stead as he proceeded to postgraduate research. Foremost of these was R. B. McCallum, whose life of Asquith was to be published in 1936. Given the impossible task of tutoring the whole History syllabus single handed, he chose instead to be highly selective, but in the process shared his Liberal enthusiasm and interest in political science, his great cultivation and his love of France. The attraction of political science was further enhanced by the then Gladstone Professor of Political Theory and Institutions, W. G. S. Adams, who had worked closely with Sir Horace Plunkett in Ireland, who had been adviser to Lloyd George on Irish Affairs, and who was to become mentor, patron, and friend of the young Mansergh. Adams, who was also something of a farmer, willingly agreed to become Mansergh's postgraduate supervisor.

Oxford, if not Pembroke, was an exciting place in the 'thirties, where the writing, lectures and presence of R. C. K. Ensor, Alfred Zimmern and Denis Brogan inspired. The example of James Bryce, whose *Holy Roman Empire*, completed at the age of 26, Mansergh had received as a school prize, and whose later work on *Modern Democracies* greatly appealed, served both as an encouragement to publish and a further pull towards political science. That his friend and fellow Irishman, George Ramsay, was able to continue at Oxford was further incentive to Mansergh to develop his scholarly talents. He embarked on a B.Litt., obtained in 1933, and then a D.Phil., awarded in 1936. He published both; the first, expanded into a perceptive study of his home country, as *The Irish Free State: its Government and Politics*, in 1934; the second, a political analysis of the rest of the island, as *The Government of Northern Ireland: a Study in Devolution*, in 1936. He had already assisted Lord Parmoor with his

memoirs, also published in 1936, and in the following year he was appointed tutor in Politics at Pembroke and became Secretary, under Sir Arthur Sallter, to the Oxford University Politics Research Group. He had proved himself and had established himself at Oxford. He was not destined to sit back on his laurels.

On behalf of the Politics Research Group, Mansergh edited, jointly with R. V. Vernon, *Advisory Bodies*, published in 1940. It was an examination of the uses of such bodies in relation to central government, and Mansergh contributed both a foreword and a chapter dealing with their relevance to the reform of the machinery of government. Meanwhile the historian within him sought expression in lectures on the international events culminating in the First World War; and in a masterly study of Anglo-Irish relations since the 1880s, entitled *Ireland in the Age of Reform and Revolution*, also published in 1940. He had thus written, before the age of thirty, three substantial books on Ireland, as well editing *Advisory Bodies*, writing an article on local self government in Northern Ireland, and a *DNB* entry on Lord Parmoor.

The Irish books were all pioneering studies. Described in a foreword by W. G. S. Adams as 'an honest and thoughtful effort to interpret the growth of institutions and of ideas today in the realm of the Free State', the first book analysed the tortured emergence of the state, its first dozen years of evolution, its institutions and personnel, its political parties and judicial system and its principal preoccupations. It remains an invaluable snapshot of independent Ireland in 1934, and it gave prescient warning of the dangers of Departmental dictatorship, unless curbed by a vigilant public, of which there was at that time all too little evidence. *The Government of Northern Ireland* contained an historical introduction (there had already been expressed the Southern Protestant's disquiet at Partition in the first book) and a thorough analysis of the electoral and legislative practices, and the executive, financial, party political and judicial realities of this unique British experiment in devolution. Had it lessons for the wider kingdom? Despite being too small to supply general conclusions, being too limited in devolved powers, especially financial, and not of itself forming an economic unit, it was worth watching and perhaps, in time, emulating elsewhere. Once again this study stands the test of time, for all the evidence of youthful exuberance and admiration for Beatrice and Sidney Webb, but it was his third book that was to give the greatest evidence of his developing powers.

*Ireland in the Age of Reform and Revolution* provided a series of essays commenting on the last phase of the Union, 'when Repeal had become the open expression of Irish aspirations'. It drew on contemporary sources both in its introductory tour through the early years of the nineteenth

century, where continental as well as more local observers were harnessed, and in its more central discussion and superb portraits of English statesmen, the Ulster Question and, in more detail, 'The character of the Irish Revolt', which contained illustration of American as well as European reactions. This remarkable book was to be revised and retitled, appearing as *The Irish Question, 1840–1921*, in 1965, with a further revision in 1975, incorporating then a preface on revisionist themes which must serve, by its emphasis on the Irish historiographical revolution since 1940, to underline for the reader just how advanced were Mansergh's own early contributions. Here was style and scholarship, wide learning and shrewd application enough to indicate the arrival of a major historian. The World War, now begun in earnest, was nearly to divert him from that calling. It did alter his direction but it also added new influences and broadened his experience.

Meanwhile, it is worth noting that, unlike the first two books, dedicated to his parents, to the memory of his father and to his mother respectively, this third book was dedicated to his new wife, Diana. In May 1938, the need for a mixed-doubles partner had led him to the Norham Gardens Lawn Tennis Club, by the gate of Lady Margaret Hall, where Diana Mary Keeton, therein an undergraduate, was prevailed upon to volunteer. They were married in December 1939, and were to have five children and their partnership was to last in the fullest sense for fifty one years until his death. Diana, whose father had been headmaster of Reading School, happily entered into his work, shared the challenges and hardships of government war service, kept the growing family contented and domestic responsibilities under control when oversea travel was necessary, and researched for, advised on, and indexed future publications, as well as preserving her place on court for the more convivial aspects of tennis competition; a true partner.

Early in 1941 Mansergh moved to the Empire Division of the Ministry of Information, to serve as its expert on Irish matters. He survived the July 1941 'purge' of his Tipperary 'neighbour', Brendan Bracken, who was made Minister in that month, and in 1944 his distinction as an administrator was recognized by his being made Director of the Division. He was awarded the OBE in 1945, and in 1946, when the responsibilities of the Ministry were transferred to the Dominions Office, he was appointed an Assistant Secretary. The dangers and difficulties of the war years were lightened by new opportunities and friendships; the opportunity, for example, of lively correspondence with the British Press Officer in Dublin, John Betjemen; and of friendships, for example with the redoubtable Australian historian, W. K. Hancock, who moved from his Chair at Birmingham to the War Cabinet around the same time that

Mansergh moved to Information. Hancock had already drawn heavily on Mansergh's Irish books when preparing his magisterial *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, begun in 1934 and published in two volumes, the first in 1937, the second in two parts, in 1940 and 1942. He had recognized the objectivity, political shrewdness and perceptive originality of this young historian, his 'precision, patience, scholarly insight and human understanding', but he discerned also that capacity to reconcile loyalty to 'two soils' that he himself had acquired. (See *JICH* 8, No. 1, Oct. 1979, pp. 4–6.) Their affinity was natural.

The nature of Mansergh's work and his association with Hancock must surely have played their part in the next turn of his career. And perhaps the publication of *Britain and Ireland* in 1942, in the Longman's 'Pamphlets on the British Commonwealth' series, was itself a portent. This 96-page paperback gave an overview of Irish history and of Anglo-Irish relations which sought, at a time of strain, to aid greater understanding and not merely to supply information. It ended with an eloquent explanation of the Irish perception of neutrality, and a plea for goodwill in order to reconcile 'political aspirations with strategic and economic realities' (p. 94).

Mansergh could have proceeded after the war to achieve distinction in the civil service but he wanted above all to continue his writing and so chose instead to return to academic life, accepting appointment to the newly established Abe Bailey Research Chair in British Commonwealth Relations at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, in 1947. He was 37 years old and at the height of his powers. His principal task was to carry forward the story of Commonwealth evolution, begun by Hancock in an era of expanding dominion autonomy after the twentieth century's first global conflict and now being further transformed, in nature as in name, at the end of the second such disaster.

Also in 1947 he attended in New Delhi the first inter-Asian Conference, which hailed the dawn of a new era and the ending of Western political domination. This provided a timely insight into the mood of the emerging non-settlement members of the Commonwealth-to-be. Before he completed his Survey volumes Mansergh had visited every overseas sector, gaining at first hand the perspective from the periphery so necessary to counter traditional centrist thinking. But he had already acquired the imaginative capacity to embrace such perspectives when he wrote his first account of the new association *The Commonwealth and the Nations*, published in 1948. His opening reflection that 'the ideal of the Commonwealth remains the government of men by themselves' (p. 24), and his expressed faith in discussion as 'the great essential of democracy' (p. 26) were followed by an account of the long march of Britain's empire,

a survey of dominion conceptions of Commonwealth, and then his own observations of the Delhi 'watershed': a *tour d'horizon* as Asian leaders took stock and the West prepared to withdraw from the East. What a pity, he remarked, that the transfer had not occurred a generation earlier, and he drew attention to his revered Bryce's comments in a letter home in 1888, regretting the lack of imagination and sympathy evident amongst civil servants then in India, their remoteness from opinion there as in England; the inappropriateness, in other words, of a system whereby the government of men was not by themselves. A chapter on 'Britain, Russia, and South East Asia' and two on Ireland, its development from 1916–48 and the implications of its contemporary relationship with the Commonwealth, completed the book, which marked his adjustment to his new responsibilities.

In 1949 he published *The Coming of the First World War: a study in the European balance, 1878–1914*, based on his pre-war Oxford teaching, which he managed to refine for delivery as the Lady Ardilaun Lectures at Alexandra College, Dublin, in 1944. It dealt with 'a period of which our knowledge is great, but our understanding by comparison slight' (p. vii) and it provided a commentary on ruthlessly selected events of an era when Europe as a community of nation states moved to a collection of competing interests. Subsequent requests by the publishers for revision were refused through pressure of other work, but are evidence that this book too stood the test of time. By now, however, he had his *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs* well under way, and in 1952 it was published, subtitled *Problems of External Policy, 1931–39*. The following year, on the eve of his departure for the newly created Smuts Chair in the History of the British Commonwealth, at Cambridge, he published two volumes of *Documents and Speeches on British Commonwealth Affairs, 1931–52*, and in 1958 his second *Survey*, subtitled *Problems of War-time Co-operation and Post-war Change, 1939–52*. In 1963 he completed his massive contribution to the publications of the RIIA with a further volume of source material, this time entitled *Documents and Speeches on Commonwealth Affairs, 1952–62*, the adjective 'British' having been dropped formally in 1949.

It is difficult to overestimate the value of this total achievement. In his first *Survey*, Mansergh set out to continue the work begun by Hancock but inevitably he concentrated on different characteristics as the Commonwealth association, changed by the 1931 Statute of Westminster, reflected the complete autonomy of its members. The domestic affairs of these members he largely excluded, though greater attention was deemed necessary for Ireland and South Africa, and international relations were expanded. By the time of writing the war had transformed realities, but it

was still necessary to chart the developments of the 'thirties, the impact of the new dynamic of equality and the dominion baptism in external affairs, and to identify those deeper impulses of action that dictated policy. In the early 1950s it was possible to pay tribute to the Dominion contribution to the winning of the war, but it was also necessary to point out that their role in attempting to prevent it was not so glorious. And in the final chapter, Mansergh, regretting that from the early 'thirties 'the predominant reaction of the English-speaking world was not a resolve to master events, but to seek seclusion from their impact' (p. 415), discerned that 'the policies of the Dominions were peculiarly susceptible to the *malaise*, to the divided counsels that were the affliction of the time', and observed that there was 'no superimposed authority' (p. 417) which could disguise the infirmity of their will. Happily, in the eventual crisis, the Commonwealth countries remained true to basic principles and were thus able to astonish the world.

In this, his first account of a still small association of like-minded states, coming to terms both with their own past history and with unprecedented contemporary economic and political challenges, Mansergh not only steered a lucid path through attitudes and events but set out something of his own stall as an historian. Even a contemporary historian, he maintained, must retain a moral function. 'Discrimination and judgement are also part of the historian's duty. The historical approach demands detachment, but detachment can be achieved only too easily by merely recording passively what happened'. Here, as in all he wrote, he observed, selected and explained, but never hesitated to inform his writing with his own humane and liberal judgement.

His second *Survey* allowed him fuller opportunity to elucidate the new Commonwealth whose birth he had himself witnessed; the Commonwealth which, having found its finest hour and won through to victory in war, had then come to terms with altered circumstances, and which, by 1952, had emerged as a multi-national and multi-cultural phenomenon, greater in numbers and transformed in character: a 'concert of convenience' still, not yet that developed 'lattice-work' of co-operation that was to emerge in the 'sixties (J. D. B. Miller, *Commonwealth Survey 1953-69*, p. 524) but something new in the world that required careful charting and exposition from its historian.

The Dominions that had weathered the war had done so in co-operation but without developing centralising institutions. Ireland had remained aloof, and its policy of neutrality was given full consideration. The real difficulties of consultation between the allies, who faced crises marked by urgency and the need for secrecy, were discussed, along with the debates and solutions they occasioned in all theatres throughout the



war years. Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meetings, initiated in 1944, pointed the way ahead, a way then described in detail as the 'Problems of post-war change' were addressed. Asian events dominated this phase and the first-hand experience of the author illuminated the great decisions of Indian partition, independence and Commonwealth membership, the participation of Pakistan and Ceylon and the secession of Burma. Ireland too withdrew from its by now somewhat ambiguous membership and the circumstances of Prime Minister Costello's decision to move to republican status outside the Commonwealth were recounted fully, with, however, only minor reference to the author's own influence upon the thinking of decision makers, a point to which we will return. The final part of the book dealt with that primary state preoccupation: 'ensuring peace and upholding the rule of law in international society' (p. xxx). Interdependence was the new reality as various world and regional alliances were constructed. Each member state was then reviewed, with the 1947 Commonwealth Relations Office and the 1949 Declaration of London expressing recognition at the centre of the nature of the new partnership. The future would be faced optimistically thanks to the wide extent and closeness of Commonwealth co-operation which would do much to bring understanding between East and West.

The three volumes of source material which accompanied the surveys provided invaluable, detailed illustration of all that Mansergh had outlined. The first mirrored the chapter preoccupations of the first *Survey*, and included 'statutes and the judgements of the courts interpreting them, the statements issued after meetings, formal and informal, between the representative statesmen of all or some of the Commonwealth countries, passages from the reports of Royal Commissions, and extracts from the speeches made by leading personalities, on critical occasions in the development of the Commonwealth' (*The Times*, 8 October 1953). The second spread its net much wider to encompass world-ranging events, especially in Asia, while the third volume, covering the decade 1952-62, continued the same purpose 'namely to bring together the more important documents and speeches on Commonwealth Affairs for the years with which it deals' (p. 1), the criteria of selection being those of long-term importance and illustrative of all members. The Commonwealth had now expanded again, with the advent of African and Caribbean members, 'British' had been dropped, but so, and this Mansergh regretted, had 'of Nations'.

Much of this later work had been carried out from the new vantage point of Cambridge, whither Mansergh had moved in 1953, though he remained a Councillor of the RIIA until 1957. His period as Smuts Professor was to see no diminution in the quality and volume of his writing,

though new teaching responsibilities in the undergraduate tripos, primarily lectures on Commonwealth history but including also, for four years, a highly popular special subject on the Anglo-Irish Settlement, 1912–25, and postgraduate seminars and supervision claimed an additional portion of his time. His teaching was regarded very highly by his students.

In 1955 he published *The Multi-racial Commonwealth*, an account of the proceedings of the Fifth Unofficial Commonwealth Relations Conference, held at Lahore, Pakistan, from 17–27 March 1954. It was an opportunity to affirm what he had already been formulating in his survey preparation and what he had outlined in *The Commonwealth and the Nations*, in 1948. He did not attempt to hide the differences of world view evident in the preparatory papers and in the Conference discussions, nor the economic inferiority complexes and anxiety neuroses of some members, nor the divisive issues such as race conflict in South Africa and clashing loyalties in Kashmir, but he was happy to quote an Indian delegate who described the new association as ‘perhaps the greatest experiment in all history’ (p. 141), and the Prime Minister of Pakistan, who, for one, felt that the Commonwealth had the dynamism and adaptability necessary for success.

Mansergh had been made a Professorial Fellow of St John’s College earlier in 1955 and from that congenial base, and from his home in Little Shelford, he continued to write, to teach and to travel. He had already spent valuable periods as Visiting Professor in Canberra, in 1951, and in Toronto in 1953. To these he soon added Duke University, distinguished in the United States by its Commonwealth Centre, in 1957, and the Indian School of International Studies, New Delhi, in 1958, the year of publication of his second *Commonwealth Survey*. He was to visit both these institutions again, Duke in 1965, and in 1966 and in 1980 New Delhi, where he had been a trusted consultant to the Indian School of International Studies (now Jawaharlal Nehru University) since 1958, as well as Visiting Professor in 1980. He was also to complete a six-year term on the General Advisory Council of the BBC (1956–62), carry further his contribution to and membership of the Editorial Board of the *Annual Register* (1947–73) and make his liberalizing influence felt as a member of the Advisory Council, Public Records (1966–76).

In 1960 he received a D.Litt. from his former university, began a two-year stint as Chairman of the History Faculty Board, and gave the Reid Lectures at Acadia University, Nova Scotia. These he devoted to the unfolding tragedy of South Africa. Published in expanded form in 1962 as *South Africa 1906–61: the price of magnanimity*, the book drew on newly released Cabinet papers to show more clearly than before the processes leading to Campbell Bannerman’s gesture of reconciliation towards the

defeated Boer Republics and of the high price eventually paid by English-speaking South Africans and, above all, by the non-European majority. Aware of the real situation, the British Liberal government, 'its eyes . . . open but its hands . . . tied' (p. 71), had convinced itself that matters were best left to the Union authorities on the spot. The High Commission territories at least were protected and security was sought, in vain as it turned out, for the Cape franchise. The implications of what was magnanimous in the settlement did have beneficial repercussions elsewhere in the colonial Empire, in time, and even in 1961 Mansergh could offer hope that one day the native peoples' hour would come. In the short term, however, there could be no place for apartheid South Africa in a Multi-racial Commonwealth.

In 1967 Mansergh was appointed Editor in Chief, India Office Records, thus beginning the remarkable venture that was, in twelve volumes published between 1970 and 1983, to make available in extraordinary detail the documents relating to the transfer of power in India, over the years 1942–7. This was to prove the culminating achievement of an editor sufficiently experienced, esteemed and confident to lay down the ground rules and to insist that if the task was to be undertaken then it must be handled with completeness and to the highest scholarly standard. A tribute from one of his editorial assistants, David Blake, makes clear that he had to override traditionalists to include Cabinet papers and papers of the Cabinet's India Committee, as well as departmental papers of the India Office. The enterprise, as Prime Minister Wilson said when announcing its inception in Parliament (30.6.67), was to be modelled on the Foreign Office series of *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, from 1919 to 1939, but Mansergh's insistence made it altogether wider ranging and more complete and his volumes also included extracts from the private papers of the last three Viceroys of India. Here Mansergh was at his decisive best. Familiar with the editorial methods employed in the official series of British, French and German documents from the period of the First World War, he had himself assembled three volumes of Commonwealth documents. So he knew what he wanted and ensured that his small team of helpers was unhindered in delivering it. His aim, 'to make available to scholars in convenient printed form the British historical records relating to the Transfer of Power in India' (Vol. 2, p. viii), was triumphantly achieved and widely acclaimed. The long, onerous task, completed by a man advancing in years and travelling once, twice and sometimes three times per week from Cambridge, was accomplished with the integrity and humanity that was an essential part of him and, as is also made clear, with the by now legendary courtesy to and consideration of his staff, unassuming good humour, tolerance and impartiality. (See The

British Library, OIOC, *Newsletter*, No. 46, Spring/Summer 1991, pp. 12–14).

It was a great undertaking but it was accomplished at a time of many other responsibilities and achievements. In 1969 Mansergh published *The Commonwealth Experience* a distillation of all that he had learned through close attention to archival material, wide travel, numerous contacts and personal observation of the yet continuing and increasing association of states. Its fifteen chapters swept the reader from the 1839 Durham Report through the emerging Commonwealth which struggled from the embers of two world wars, to the contemporary phenomenon, of which he had become the outstanding interpreter. It began and ended with reflections on the Commonwealth in history and its own historical experience and prospects. Throughout, its author insisted that there was little theoretical or inevitable about what had occurred, rather a succession of distinct developments which had led in the end to an essentially liberal concept. It is a *tour de force*, yet despite its great breadth and its wealth of detail, Mansergh made a major two-volume revision, published in 1982; so much else had been learned, so much more could now be said.

Later in 1969 Mansergh was elected to the Mastership of his college. In so doing the Fellows of St John's knew what they could expect: they wanted and got a 'safe pair of hands': a wise and above all fair-minded head, able and willing to relate to all college members, to undergraduate and research students, to the wide range of college staff, and even to the crustiest of elderly colleagues; a reconciler of interests, but also one determined to move with the times. No doubt he had the historian's weakness of seeing all sides to a debate, thus prolonging Council meetings, but the reward was often a greater degree of consensus. He was a strict follower of constitutional procedures and much respected for this. He gave up his Smuts Chair, with regret, in 1970, in order to devote himself to the college and to continue his Indian editing. But he did take on, until 1973, the Chairmanship of the Board of Graduate Studies.

The following year he became an honorary Fellow of Trinity College Dublin (he had been so honoured by Pembroke College Oxford in 1954) and in 1973 was elected to a Fellowship in the British Academy, where, amongst other activities, he played a key role in its Research Project on British Documents on the End of Empire. An adviser in the early stages, he acted as the Academy representative on the managing committee.

The ten years of his Mastership of John's witnessed controversy as well as change, and it would not have been good had it been otherwise as students of the post-'68 generation sought to assert themselves and as Cambridge as a whole moved unevenly towards co-educational college living. They were not easy years and the qualities of liberal humanity and

fair-minded tolerance that were Mansergh's served his college peculiarly well: interests *were* reconciled; the college *was* held together while solutions were found. His successor's additional tribute, that Mansergh had 'presided over their affairs with dignity and sagacity and with gentle but constant attention to the performance of his many varied duties' (*The Eagle* (St John's College, 1991, p. 38) could be endorsed by all.

These years did not disrupt his postgraduate teaching, his great editorial undertaking, nor his continued research into Irish and Anglo-Irish affairs. *The Irish Question*, still in great demand, was revised and reissued in paperback in 1975, while the Indian transfer volumes rolled off at the rate of one per year. The delivery of the Smuts Memorial Lecture in 1976, published in 1979 as *The Prelude to Partition: Concepts and Aims in Ireland and India*, enabled him to combine both interests. He drew parallels between the intense triangular relationships that characterized the pursuit of independence and unity in both countries, pointing out that nationalists were ready to sacrifice for the goal of independence but not for unity, which they too readily assumed to exist, with disastrous consequences. Mansergh's text is fresh, his argument cogent, his detachment Olympian, as similarities and differences are laid out and the conceptual constraints inhibiting success on all sides are emphasized. Here is the doyen of Commonwealth history at his perceptive best, hinting at what was yet to come.

In July 1979 Mansergh finished his term as Master and resumed his Fellowship. He marked the occasion quietly and unobtrusively in his own fashion by sending a capital sum to his old school, St Columba's, to provide an annual travel prize with which a pupil could pursue an academic or cultural interest on the continent of Europe, or indeed elsewhere, as a preparation for university. The occasion was marked more publicly by the organization of a *festschrift* by two of his former research students which was published both as a volume in its own right (N. Hillmer and P. Wigley, eds, *The First British Commonwealth*, London, 1980) and as a special number of the *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* (vol. 8, No. 1, October 1979). It contained a warm and perceptive appreciation from W. K. Hancock, ten wide-ranging chapters willingly contributed by ex-students and colleagues from around the world, and a bibliography of Mansergh's writings. Happily this latter list was to prove by no means the finished record of his publications: the major revision that was to lead to the expanded, two-volume edition of *The Commonwealth Experience* in 1982 was already under way; the last volume of *The Transfer of Power* would be published in 1983; and there was the final book, yet to be written, to bring to completion his Irish scholarship. This, in the event, would appear only after his death, in 1991, as *The Unresolved Question: the*

*Anglo-Irish Settlement and its undoing, 1912–1972*. It must be assessed in the context of his whole contribution to this field, for Mansergh, recognized throughout the world as the leading Commonwealth historian of his day, and acknowledged as one of the finest historians of Ireland, has an even stronger claim to honour in this latter field than has generally been admitted.

Before asserting that claim, however, mention should be made of his visit to India in 1987. It was a retrospective Conference held to mark the fortieth anniversary of that earlier Asian gathering on the eve of Indian independence, and given his rapport with the Nehru family and the close interest he had taken in the affairs of the sub-continent for so long, it provided a suitable conclusion to his many overseas travels. More time, at a slower pace, could be spent now at Little Shelford and Friarsfield, where he could indulge his final recreation, lawn *mowing*. It was characteristic that he should have made so small an alteration to his *Who's Who* entry when active lawn *tennis* ended. He did enjoy cutting grass, after all, and he had lawns both in Cambridge and Tipperary the care of which was sufficient to ensure time for reflection between writing sessions.

And writing he still was. Now was the opportunity to draw together the many aspects of modern Irish history that he had for so long studied and upon which he had written and lectured in so many contexts. When he came to Cambridge as a Commonwealth historian, he had already written extensively on Ireland. To his first three books, and the lesser known *Britain and Ireland* (1942), he had added a string of important lectures, chapters and articles. Further augmented in time, these were to amount to a formidable and pioneering contribution to Irish history. This work, including the Irish chapters in *The Commonwealth and the Nations* and in both *Surveys*, the extensive Irish material set out in the three volumes of *Speeches and Documents* and the revision of his third book into *The Irish Question*, all preceded J. C. Beckett's *The Making of Modern Ireland, 1603–1923* (1966), the first major study of modern Irish history by a noted historian, and his further chapters in *The Commonwealth Experience* preceded F. S. L. Lyons's classic *Ireland since the Famine* (1971), the first to bring the narrative up to the late 1960s.

The *Surveys* dealt with Ireland in the 1930s, with wartime neutrality, increasing co-operation with London and discord with America, with Ireland's withdrawal from the Commonwealth and all that that entailed, and finally a perspective view on the period of Ireland's relations with the Commonwealth from 1921–49. During the years when the *Surveys* were being prepared, Mansergh had been able also to offer his own informed analyses and in a notable lecture to the RIIA in December 1947 he had undoubtedly influenced British and Dominion thinking. Published in

January 1948, his lecture was quoted later that year by the Irish *Sunday Independent* of 5 September (which helped precipitate Ireland's withdrawal crisis), as confirming Costello's view that no advantage remained to Ireland's continued Commonwealth membership. There is little doubt that in the more important field of Commonwealth development this lecture had even greater influence. Analysing the implications of Dominion status for a nationalistic and self-conscious nation, and the lessons of Ireland's experience, Mansergh spelled out in no uncertain terms the greater value for the future of an association based on shared values and perspectives, without the clutter of dated imperial terminology. Upon such an association, which would attract the energy of Asian peoples in a way that Dominion status never could, growth in community and in joint action could occur. Though Ireland was soon to go its own way, British and Asian leaders were here guided to an accommodation; to a Commonwealth capable of embracing republican membership.

The 1950s and '60s witnessed a stream of lectures, to the RIIA, on the Radio Eireann Thomas Davis series, and elsewhere, that dealt with Ireland outside the Commonwealth, with John Redmond, Irish external relations (1926–39; and 1945–51), the Irish Dominion settlement, and the Conservative Party and the Union, 1886–1916. The 1970s added more; notably on the genesis of the 1920 government of Ireland Act; review articles on de Valera and Eoin MacNeill; Northern Ireland; and a foreword to vol. 3 of the *Whitehall Diary* of Thomas Jones. At Cambridge he delivered for four years a highly lucid, closely structured and thoroughly informed lecture course on the 1921 'resolution' of the Irish Question, dealing in detail with the years 1912–25. He had combed the records, especially those of the British Cabinet, but also documents in America and in Ireland, and he had asked questions about partition, the fragile nature of the compromise settlement reached in 1921, and the subsequent impact of Ireland in its Commonwealth context. He had led the field, but from the late 1960s there had flowed a swelling stream of writing on twentieth-century Ireland, as the archives opened, and as the resurgence of northern violence drew attention to continuing Irish problems. Mansergh kept extraordinarily well informed and up to date. His final contribution would be to tackle what had clearly been exposed as an *Unresolved Question*.

It proved a worthy conclusion; a comprehensive overview of Ireland's twentieth-century experience illumined by close attention to detail, mastery of sources, and complete understanding of the personalities and the pressure of events. The events themselves were well known and there seemed little more to be said. Mansergh said more, and said it with his customary style; assured, lucid, balanced. He re-examined the post-1906 Liberal dilemma in dealing with Ireland; the 1912 crisis as Unionist muscle

was flexed; the impact of wartime events; and the tense, tightrope settlement that emerged, in which Bonar Law proved so crucial to the cause of Protestant Ulster; the Commonwealth phase of independent Ireland; and its undoing during the thirties by the unilateral activist, de Valera, and in the forties, unexpectedly, by an exasperated Costello. The narrative is compelling, the mastery of detail remarkable. Here indeed is a beacon for all who seek understanding of how and why Irishmen wished to be free of Englishmen and how their ways both parted and converged in recent times. Of the other part of the equation, the six North-eastern counties, whose devolved polity, founded on the Act of 1920, was undone only in 1972, there is outline and explanation, but it is more rudimentary and it is briefer, as though the author was reluctant to let this noisome Ulster tail wag his carefully crafted Irish dog. It is with a sense of relief that he concludes his book with more 'perspectives', a final chapter of reflection appropriate to a scholar at the close of a career of research and exposition; reflection on the conflict of nationalism and imperialism; on the inconsistencies of the settlement reached; and on the subsequent phases of adjustment, three-fold in the south, singular but more protracted in the north. *The Unresolved Question* is the copingstone of achievement of one of the most accomplished modern historians of Ireland.

Nicholas Mansergh died in Cambridge on 16 January 1991. He was buried ten days later in his native Tipperary, attended by representatives of church and state (including *An Taoiseach*), of the world of learning, and of the local community, as well as family and friends. His outstanding scholarly record as well as his broad, liberal humanity remain to inspire those who would follow him in service of all parts of 'these islands'.

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*Note.* I am indebted to the writers of the many obituaries published in honour of Nicholas Mansergh, to a selection of his former colleagues, friends and students and to his family, including his brother, Gregor, but above all to Mrs Diana Mansergh who most generously supplied information on all aspects of her late husband's career.