

Lampada Tradam

I

ONE MONDAY AFTERNOON, sixty-four years ago, a tall thin youth with a suitcase set foot for the first time in the late Victorian building on the wrong side of the tracks from Trinity Great Gate. There it was: a Balliol-type neo-gothic arch, then another one ahead, with a lantern over it; over that a shield with a motto—the arms of William Whewell, for whom the two courts are named. The motto is *Lampada Tradam*. In case of any slight difficulty in this home of science and mathematics, there is a carving over the shield of a hand holding out a torch.

I doubt if the motto meant anything to me on that day in 1943, even if I noticed it at all. Nowadays, it often catches my eye as I go to my room at K8b Whewell's; and the image of carrying and handing on the torch is something I have much in mind tonight.

My story begins in the Midlands: sometimes sodden, it is true, not always unkind. It then moves to late wartime Cambridge, and three years as an undergraduate. Next, early post-war London, at University College. There I was for nearly twenty years, to 1966, when a Visiting Lectureship at Harvard marked an interval. Then nearly another twenty years, punctuated by other short appointments abroad, until I came back to Trinity in 1984. On the first night that I dined here as Regius Professor of Greek, the two people who read the Grace were Patrick Duff and Tress Nicholas. They were the two who read it all those years earlier on the last night I dined as an undergraduate. This I remember well, for Patrick was my Tutor. The rest is from then till now.

Before we go on, let me say how grateful I am, to you, Master, for this occasion and your words—grateful too to Trinity at large, for the past, the present; and for all that I have carried with me in the years between. There are things learnt in College, both as student and as person, that do not develop their

full value at the time, but only later. I would not want it otherwise. One cannot and should not know in advance what ways the torch may light up.

II

I SHALL SPARE YOU an emotive account of childhood in a not very fashionable Birmingham suburb. The early 30's had not been easy times for my father, as for many others in Midlands heavy industry, with salary cuts rather than bonuses the order of the day. But by 1937, the first family car was somehow acquired; I had my scholarship to King Edward's School; there was talk of moving to a new house, sustained with hope by my mother, who fought for years with a long-term malady that eventually won. 1939 put paid to that dream. There were air-raids; there was Latin verse to write in the cellar to an accompaniment of earth tremors and the crack of guns replying; the way across town to school could be through rubble and fire-hoses; eventually came the bomb that gave us time to get out, but blew the house to pieces when it went off. With it went away a sheltered and rather happy time. It was not that the family had much less than an average share of worries, illnesses, bereavements and so on; but that my parents took care (I can hardly guess what care) to shield me from them.

My school administrated me into Classics, not without some unease from my father, who had French (like my mother) and a little German and thought rather of Modern Languages. The beginnings of Chemistry and Biology I could cope with; not so well with Maths or Physics—but the two people who left me standing in these subjects both went on to Cambridge Fellowships and to Chairs of Pure Mathematics and Civil Engineering. The boy a year below me who made everyone else look ordinary at English turned out to be the sensation of post-war undergraduate Oxford, that critic and man-of-the-theatre to be, Kenneth Tynan. I could name others with a wide range of different careers—all, like us, the

products of a system of education of which King Edward VI and his advisers could well be proud.

As to me, the school tolerated a conspicuous lack of skill at gymnastics or any game involving a ball. I could shoot a bit (not very well) with my one good eye, but when it came to the assessment of Leading Cadet Handley for Aircrew, I was fine at navigation, but failed on eyesight; and that was that. So I took up my scholarship to Trinity, to put in a year, and then another; and by the time it came to the crunch, they were doing what they could to keep recruitment to the Forces down. I never got my turn in RAF Intelligence learning Japanese or whatever.

III

IN 1943, thirteen of us went from KES to Cambridge—and the school had a half holiday on the strength of it—but we were not in the class of Manchester Grammar School. They sent a dozen mathematicians in that year to Trinity alone. I was one of only two regular classicists, the other being John Healey, who, like me, eventually made his way to a Chair in London. In my second year I was alone, John having been called up. So arose the remark, in fact perfectly accurate as far as I know, that with Eric Handley Classics at Trinity sank to the lowest level ever known. Mr Gow, as my supervisor for all three years, consoled himself (if that is the right expression) by taking in other Colleges' washing, and gave us each week two twenty minute supervisions and a translation class. Any enthusiast for the by-ways of the old world of academic life is cordially recommended to A.S.F.Gow's *Letters from Cambridge, 1939-1944*—well worth a venture, if you see it on a bookstall.

Wartime Trinity had its oddities, well recalled by John Bradfield, Richard Glauert and others of our generation. There was a wheezy old man in Whewell's who cleaned shoes of a morning, and bedmakers who came in afternoons as well

as mornings, to see to the fire and do the tea things. There was however precious little coal—you collected it yourself from the Old Brewhouse—and there was almost no milk for the tea. Patrick Duff recalled for ever that by coming up at 16, I caused him to certify that I was an infant, and could so have extra. Rowing, even at my level, was hard work with restricted food. There were those who scrounged cartons of dried egg to make omelettes. For all that, First and Third gave me much satisfaction, even if today our pace would get us nowhere. Perhaps being in a crew, and sometimes stroking one, taught me something about teamwork that would come in handy later. I also took up fencing in a small way, a sport that develops quite different qualities, some of them not unuseful in academic life, as I later found.

What I learnt from lectures and classes by Donald Robertson and Roger Mynors has been with me ever since. In many ways my most inspiring teacher was Robert Getty, University Lecturer in Palaeography. Of the six students in his class, five went on working in some way in the subject after Cambridge. Robert Getty had the idea that I might make a University Teacher, and recommended me to Professor Mariott Smiley at University College London. Trinity was not keen to have me for research. 'I shouldn't have thought,' said Mr Gow, 'that you were the sort of person who enjoys grubbing around in libraries'. He was quite right: I don't. Years later, Sterling Dow introduced me for a talk in Harvard by saying: 'Eric Handley reminds me of the man who was caught robbing banks. When they asked him why he robbed banks, he said "That's where the money is"'. Eric Handley works on Menander'. End of Introduction. I like solving problems, and helping others to solve them— that very much more than grubbing around, if grubbing around means painstakingly retrieving data and hoping that the result will add up to something. Much of this is no doubt a personal defect. It may have something to do with a wartime youth in which it was all too clear that the most elaborate compilations, people's labours of a lifetime, along with the people themselves, could all be swept away in one bang.

IV

I TOOK TO LONDON from here something of the art of living in a room of one's own (until Cambridge, I had rarely been away from home independently). Buying a theatre ticket or taking myself off to a concert or a restaurant was an adventure for which I soon developed a taste. A biochemist friend of mine from Trinity took on some secret work at Woolwich Arsenal, and we used to meet once or twice a week for something cheap and solid to eat (you could do that in London then) and afterwards a gallery or a cinema seat somewhere. There was not much to come and go on. At Trinity, a combination of scholarships gave me just over £300; I was appointed in London on a salary of £250 paid two-monthly in arrears. I caught up by teaching on a vacation course that was astonishingly well paid. I have often done so since, in the Greek Summer School at Bryanston and elsewhere, with great enjoyment, but relatively much less money.

The academic scene was a wonderful one in which to be young. Its official historians say that University College London suffered more from wartime damage than any other British University. The Main Building was burnt to a shell, much of the Library was lost to damage by fire, water and makeshift storage; departments were still sorting themselves out after being scattered from base, and coping with staff back from five or six years in the forces as well as with novices like me. The challenge of reconstruction was powerful, and it was powerfully met, often by improvisation and with limited resources. As in other Universities at that time, the undergraduates were a mix between school-leavers with everything to learn, and ex-service types, men and women whose academic attainments had been mothballed, but who made up for it in other ways. An essay on the Greek trireme has a certain edge to it if its author has driven a destroyer round the Mediterranean. Senior colleagues were memorably friendly and supportive. Not least of these were the two Professors who had appointed

me, one of them to depart soon to retirement, the other to be Master of Birkbeck and Vice-Chancellor. No-one lived in the College, of course, and few nearby; but we regularly met and talked over morning coffee, or lunch; or tea with watercress sandwiches, especially before committees. One sees now what a lot of time and paper it saved.

I was a slow starter. All else apart, I had to learn how to teach as well as how to research. With a prospect of lectures on Palaeography for the English Department, there was a good excuse for studying some more manuscripts, like those I had seen in the Wren and in St John's. There were (and are) interesting unpublished fragments in UC Library; I tried Plautus, Terence and others in the British Museum, and during a memorable month in Paris – my first time abroad. Some of this has been useful since, to me or to other people; it would not have done much in a Research Assessment Exercise. The three people who encouraged me along the track I have since followed are T.B.L. Webster, Otto Skutsch and Eric Turner, all polymaths, but all with expertise that particularly appealed to me: namely, in the ancient theatre and its drama, in early Latin literature, especially Comedy, and in Greek Papyri. So it was that in this and other good company, my first twenty years of career came to a nodal point with an invitation to Harvard, I think set up from here by the then Regius Professor of Greek, Denys Page.

I leave out much else, like marrying Carol; helping, as Vice-Warden, to run a student Hall of Residence; doing up, with Carol, often in the evenings, the house in London NW5 which was to be our home for so long. It was during my Vice-Warden days that I wrote, with John Rea, a monograph on a lost play by Euripides, the *Telephus* of 438 BC, of which we had some new fragments on papyrus. It won me a share of a prize, which Carol insisted I should spend on my first serious camera.

THE IMPORTANT EVENT OF THE 1950's, apart from the ascent of Everest, the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, and the decipherment of the Linear B script by Michael Ventris, was the recovery, towards the end of the decade, of a lost play by Menander from a papyrus codex bought for the Bodmer library in Geneva. I was invited to edit it with a commentary. It took four years, and Harvard joined Methuen in the publication. The task, as I saw it, was to cope with the technical challenges of the work while trying to open up for myself and for other new readers what fresh insights this text had to offer. It is an experience from which I have never wholly recovered. I learnt to appreciate ever more deeply that characteristic product of British Classical scholarship, the compact linguistic and literary commentary. Any sense that I was at the end of a long line is countered by the current resurgence of editions of this kind for a less well-spread but rather more demanding population of readers. It is notable that Cambridge has played a prominent part in this development, piloted and supported by good colleagues and friends that I am happy to see here. Works of this kind date, of course, but sometimes they bridge generations. We could think of an outstanding classical commentary by a great figure in this College, the edition of Sophocles by Sir Richard Jebb, which has recently reappeared with a preface by Pat Easterling.

Harvard, 1966. I owe it a lot for new challenges, and much kindness. Roger Dawe came there as a visiting lecturer a year later: we both bounced back, and here we are. There was some temptation to stay. It was good to run a seminar on yet more new Menander (the bibliography at the time consisted of just twelve items, all of which we had on file). In the end, I thought London would give me more opportunities. In quite rapid succession, I found myself elevated from Reader to Professor, elected a Fellow of the British Academy, and appointed Director of the Institute of Classical Studies. When Tom Webster retired from the established Chair of Greek at University College and went to Stanford, I stepped into his shoes while staying with the Institute. This, as I

sometimes thought, was not so much holding a wolf by the ears: it was holding two wolves by one ear each. Without strongly supportive colleagues, the situation would have been truly rugged.

VI

THE MAIN ACADEMIC EXCITEMENT at this time was, for me, still more Menander. Thirteen fragments of a papyrus roll somehow went together to give about a hundred battered lines of the play *Dis Exapaton*, 'The double deceiver'. It was unique, and still is, in giving by far the longest piece of text that can be compared directly with its Latin version by Plautus in his *Bacchides*. Hence the value of my apparently mis-spent latinizing youth. A number of cats were released into an old-established academic dovecot, and in the process there were confirmed several brilliant hypotheses in Eduard Fraenkel's *Plautinisches im Plautus* of 1922. The essential text was given in my London Inaugural; some more lines were given to Harry Sandbach to print in his Oxford Text of Menander; but it was not until I had come here, and retired, and learnt how to use a computer for typesetting, that I could produce definitive copy down to the last dot and bracket for a volume of *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* in 1997.

'What kept you so long?', anyone might ask. Other tasks, and other opportunities. The Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton had me as a Visiting Member in 1971 (I was again there at Princeton University ten years later); there were conferences abroad, and visiting appointments at Stanford and Melbourne. Eric Turner involved me in the Foreign side of the British Academy; I became Foreign Secretary in 1979, to stay that way for nine years. At home, we set up a complete reform of the degree system for Classics in University College, which has survived, and been modified, and spread. The Institute of Classical Studies, like the Festival of Britain, was a child of the early 1950's, and inspired by similar optimism. My long lap there came in the middle of its fifty-odd years to date. It used to be said that if you drank enough morning coffee there, you

would be like the man with the chair in the Place de la Concorde: you would in the end see everyone—every active Classical scholar in the world. Membership was, and is, as open as that. We let in people; and we put out publications—some 50 in my twenty years as Editor, and much more elaborate and sophisticated ones since. One waits to see what the twenty-first century will bring; I am pleased to have been a party to the trials and successes of the twentieth.

Through the Academy, I became involved with the Union Académique Internationale, in which I ended up as a Vice-President. Different views are held in the Academy of the value of such links with international research projects. Some say that the whole thing is just an excuse for downing strong beer and moules marinières in Brussels. One local result of these contacts was that Trinity agreed to include the Prague Institute of Classical Studies, and several similar places in different fields, in a programme of library grants for East European countries, and earned some benefits and much warm gratitude for that.

VII

I AM RUNNING AHEAD OF THE GAME. The move to Cambridge was not wholly probable, and required some thought, not least in that Carol needed to decide whether she had, after thirteen years, done enough as Head of Camden School for Girls, and how would it be to be a housewife in Cambridge. (It was a little while before the Faculty of Classics and two of the Colleges discovered that she could teach Greek too). I had a year here on my own as an imitation bachelor don before we set up house in Little Eversden. Academically, I had rather more time for work on new texts from papyri, but there were also opportunities to lecture on subjects that I never had time or scope to work up in London, and to take part in conferences and other joint activities that were harder to handle with my former two part-time posts. In one very good sense, my job in London

continued, in that under Neil Hopkinson's management in Trinity I went on taking personal pupils in supervisions. When I was packing up, I nearly threw away all my Latin teaching materials to save space. It was as well I didn't. I had hardly set up shop in Whewell's before Neil asked me if I would mind taking people for Latin as well as for Greek; and so it has gone on.

All of these activities have led to occasional ventures into print. Currently, thanks to Natalie Tchernetska's discovery during her Fellowship here of parts of lost speeches by the orator Hyperides, I am involved together with Pat Easterling in organizing a day-long seminar in December at the British Academy, with a public presentation to follow. We expect to have over 300 lines of text to add to the next edition. There are some new scraps of Greek drama awaiting the pleasure of the editors of *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*. While not claiming immortality, I am hoping to survive long enough to help with the proofs. And just this week I have been writing up notes on some inscriptions that were excavated in Cyprus this Spring.

One thing that never quite caught on in Cambridge were lectures on Greek theatres, and on depictions of scenes of plays, of actors and the masks they wore. Fortunately, I have had other outlets, from Sydney to San Francisco by way of Athens, Budapest, Freiburg, Toulouse, Helsinki and Dublin. I took the chance of writing a short illustrated book with Richard Green in Sydney, known here in 1997 as a Visiting Fellow Commoner and this year as a Visiting Scholar. Lucan once said, according to Martial, that some people thought he wasn't really a poet, to which Lucan replied 'My bookseller thinks so'. The British Museum Press was the publisher, and did a reprint in 2001, with some updating; brave people have translated us into German and into Greek. Though hardly to be found on every station bookstall, it is the nearest I shall ever come to a popular success; this without mentioning the American edition, published deep in the heart of Texas.

There was a blot on this pleasant landscape. Half way through my tenure of the Chair, I had just as Chairman helped to pilot the Faculty to the completion of plans for Stage III of its building on the Sidgwick site. I then had an enforced four-and-a-half months' sabbatical in Addebrooke's (and what was then the Evelyn) for surgery and a rather too anxious convalescence. The fact that I am still here is a great tribute to those who cared for me, not least the eminent consultant who operated, twice; and, more than I can say, to Carol. She visited every single day, often when I seemed to be little more than a carcass; she provided roast pheasant and salad for supper when I was better; above all she gave me the sort of personal support in dark times that made it seem worth staying alive for. So I did live to tell the tale; and thank you all for listening to it for so long.

E.W.H.

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