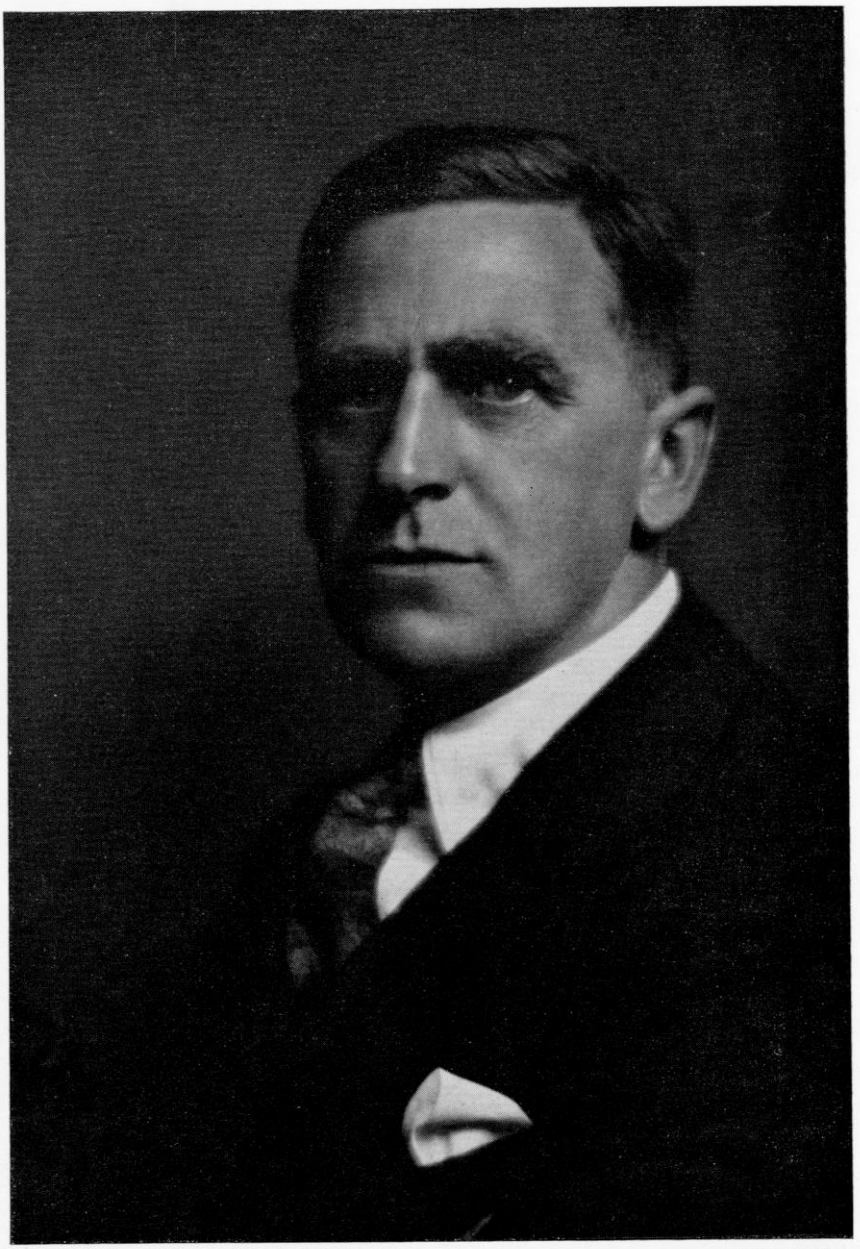
PLATE XI



Annan and Sons

PETER ALEXANDER

PETER ALEXANDER[1]

1893–1969

PETER ALEXANDER was born on 19 September 1893 at 3 Great George Street in Hillhead, a western district of Glasgow. This was within sound of the quarter-hour chimes of the University with which his entire adult life was to be associated, and even of the five-minute class bell (misnamed the 'hurry bell') which had been brought from the University's ancient site in the High Street at the removal to Gilmorehill in 1870. Almost all his Glasgow homes were to be within a mile of his birthplace: two in North Kelvinside close to where his mother's family had long lived at 107 Queen Margaret Drive; in Kirklee Circus; and finally in Dowanhill, where he and another FBA lived in the two halves of a semi-detached house. In his undergraduate days his address was his paternal aunts' home at 44 Prince's Street, south of the river in Pollokshields. Those who knew him will not find it fanciful to see a relation between this faithfulness to his origins and that love of continuity and stability which was with him a ruling principle. He would never himself have put it so solemnly; it was a matter of instinct. *Carpetbaggers* came to be his word for academics who were for ever on the move from post to post; and he had no love for whipper-snappers who no sooner arrived in Glasgow than they set about rewriting the *University Calendar*. One small incident sums up this side of him. As part of the general refurbishing with which the University marked its fifth centenary in 1951 a shining new desk was installed in the English Literature sideroom to replace the aged oval table at which for thirty years P.A. had written up registers, entered marks, and made out class-tickets and degree pass-lists. After the re-arrangement this entailed he was observed sitting at the desk gazing forlornly at the unfamiliar wall, an exile from his past.

His origins meant much to him, though he spoke little of them. He came of a family of teachers. His father Robert, encouraged by *his* father John (tailor and clothier in Maryhill), after qualifying at the Training College run by the Free Church of Scotland, taught

[1] I am much indebted to Professor Alexander's sons Dr Donald Alexander and Professor Nigel Alexander, and to several of his friends, especially Mr Seàn Purser, Professor Lionel Stones, and Professor H. D. F. Kitto.

in several of the Church's schools, mainly in the west of Glasgow: Milton, South Woodside, Burnbank, Grove Street (later Jubilee School), being headmaster of the last three. While at South Woodside in 1873–9 he attended the then compulsory seven Arts classes at the University—Humanity (Latin), Greek, Logic, Moral Philosophy, Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, English Literature—and graduated MA in 1880. He died aged fifty-six, it seems on holiday, on 2 July 1900 at Craigard, Strone, near the Holy Loch in Argyll. It is not clear whether his death was related at all to an accident in which the family (Peter had a sister, Ann, two-and-a-half years his junior) was thrown from an overturning pony-trap while on holiday in Islay in the previous August. His widowed mother, Christina Cameron McDonald Munn before her marriage, returned perforce to teaching, but being uncertificated was not permitted to teach in Glasgow. After a spell at Slamannan (Stirlingshire) she took up in 1904 a post at Temple near Anniesland on the western outskirts of Glasgow and remained there till her retirement on 26 November 1929. She died aged eighty-six on 22 October 1949. The welfare of the two children had been entrusted to a Glasgow merchant named Dunlop, of Kirklees, and his sister, and they were brought up by three maiden aunts. His father's last surviving sister, Susanna, died on 7 May 1918. Ann Alexander, incidentally, became an art teacher in Hillhead High School and an artist of talent. In 1927 she brought out with help from her brother *Women of the Morte d'Arthur*, illustrated with twenty-eight of her own drawings.

Researchers into formative background influences, whom P.A. would not have refuted though he would not have thought it proper to help them, would find Robert Alexander's brothers Thomas and Peter (Glasgow graduates) of some interest. Tommy Alexander (1848–1933) was Professor of Civil Engineering successively at the Imperial College of Engineering in Tokyo—founded by his Glasgow contemporary Henry Dyer in 1873—in 1878–87, and at Trinity College, Dublin, till 1920, and the author of five works on mechanics; his nephew specially liked the title *On Two-Nosed Catenaries*. Through him there arose in later years a friendship between the nephew and the marine engineer William Glendinning Riddell, some twenty-eight years his senior. The older man's conversation and writings—the autobiographies *Adventures of an Obscure Victorian: Experiences of an Engineer Afloat and Ashore* (1932) and *The Thankless Years* (1948)—became a quarry for pithy anecdote and for illustrations of critical truths. The rigorous professionalism of the engineer was seen as a paradigm

of integrity, both personal and artistic. 'I may often be wrong and I might even tell a lie about something else, but not about engines'. The critic who has perhaps, after Bradley's noble Academy lecture of 1912, done most to illuminate for us the tragic issue in *Coriolanus* ('an intolerable play', Strachey glibly called it) did not hesitate to compare the 'honour' of the Shakespearean tragic heroes with that of the engineer. He delighted too in analogies between craft and craft. Students who heard him lecture on *Gulliver's Travels* in the 1920s remember getting, not a dull disquisition on Swift's politics or on the ideals of the satirist, but a zestful analysis of a perfectly designed machine the principles of whose operation had been realized with completeness and economy. He never himself used the new vogue-word *thrust*, but the idea will be seen to inform much of his exposition of the dramatic logic which drives the action towards the triumphantly 'right' ending of a Shakespearean play, and authenticates it.

His uncle Peter (1836–95) was known to generations of late nineteenth-century Glasgow students as the teacher who 'got them through their maths and nat. phil.'—despite Sir William Thomson (Lord Kelvin). 'Pin your faith to Peter' was the watchword when Kelvin's discourses were specially mystifying or William Jack (Professor of Mathematics) more than usually baffling. Lucidity, warmth, humour, modesty, untiring helpfulness: he had the true Alexander qualities, and they won affection and respect from the young. After some twenty years of various teaching he became Professor of Natural Philosophy at Anderson's College of Medicine and lecturer in mathematics at Queen Margaret College (founded in 1883 for women students); his private tutorials were given in a room above Stenhouse's bookshop at the foot of University Avenue. His namesake-nephew never knew him except by posthumous fame, but by the time he left school he had read at least some of his uncle's works, which included papers on Fourier's theorems and on kinetics and a systematic *Treatise on Thermodynamics* (1892).

Young Peter was sent after his father's death to John Watson's School in Dean Village, Edinburgh. His letters to his mother contained, besides schoolboy requests for jotters and pencils, diagrams explaining rugby matches and particular praise for a master called Langhorne. He went in 1907 to Whitehill Higher Grade School in Dennistoun, in the east of Glasgow, the nursery of many of his future university colleagues. In Forms IV–VI he was enrolled as a Junior Student under the old pupil-teacher scheme by which those looking forward to a career in school teaching had

regular opportunities of practice on lower classes under supervision. In each of the years 1910 and 1911 he was awarded the Whitehill School Club Prize.

In October 1911 he entered the University of Glasgow, enrolling in Humanity (Latin) under Professor J. S. Phillimore, reading the *Eunuchus* and *Heautontimorumenos* of Terence, Apuleius V, and some Catullus, Cicero, and Pliny's Letters; and in Mathematics under Professor G. A. Gibson. Nothing illustrates better the irony with which he habitually treated his own life and doings than the reason he was fond of giving for taking up English in place of mathematics, in which he had excelled at school, was intensely interested, and had intended to specialise at the university. On his way to the Ordinary Degree Examination in mathematics in June 1912 he was kicked by a horse. It is typical of the story that it never made clear whether the accident actually prevented his sitting the examination or was felt to be an omen. At any rate unlike Hamlet he did not defy augury, and in the following session joined the classes of English (coming ninth in the 140-strong men's section) and Moral Philosophy. Nevertheless the quality of Alexander's work, in small matters and in great, can be fully appreciated only if we take account of the importance for him of mathematical ways of thinking. He applauded mathematical precision wherever he found it in literature, in Poe and Henry James as in *Titus Andronicus* or *Cymbeline*. To those (a growing number) who thought of literary criticism as a free-for-all he offered the analogy with geometry or algebra. A problem susceptible of several solutions is bogus. If five critics offer five mutually exclusive interpretations of *Hamlet*, then, since it is not a bogus play, four at least are simply wrong. In practice he tended to think it likely that all five were. No wonder that, despite disagreement on other grounds, he so delighted in the scathing picture of *Hamlet* criticism which C. S. Lewis gave the Academy in his 1942 lecture. He was merciless to scholars who used sham mathematical methods or metaphors. Spedding's assignment of parts of *Henry VIII* rests on a failure to identify the essentials of the question and to set it in the system which forms its whole context. His words could be a salutary warning now that the computer has become a latter-day Spedding. A defender of Isabella's compliance with the Duke's scheme in *Measure for Measure* incautiously spoke of it 'completing the equation': as if one could change the value of the unknown half-way through. 'An action designed merely to leave us with a play destroys all dramatic integrity.' Incidentally this is a play to which he was coming late

in life to do justice, having earlier resisted its praise by R. W. Chambers and F. R. Leavis.

From Professor Gibson he learned to take an interest in the history of mathematics, especially the Scottish mathematicians; and he pretended to be looking forward to a retirement spent in tackling some of the famous problems that had exercized the masters. He once persuaded a less than eager colleague to read over the weekend a book on the square root of -1. He would not, any more than the founders of the Royal Society, have denied a connection between mathematics and the notable tautness of his own manner of writing and arguing. His mid-course switch of allegiance was therefore no U-turn. To understand the nature of beauty, he would tell his students, read G. H. Hardy's *A Mathematician's Apology*. Like Hardy he was an enthusiast for chess, that excercise in pure mathematics: though he protested that all his serious play had been before he was sixteen. Still, he was a much valued member of the University staff Club in inter-university matches. In his supervision of research the Ph.D. project which gave him by far the greatest pleasure was on *Through the Looking-Glass*, and for several years his talk dwelt much on the excitements of spherical chess. Stories about chess were among his favourites, especially one (told by his Irish colleague Seàn Purser) of an Irish king who in flight from his enemies took refuge in an oak-tree, under which two of his pursuers sat down and began to play on their portable board. At a critical juncture in the game the king could not resist dropping an acorn to indicate a knight's move—so betraying his presence since only one man in Ireland could have been acute enough. And there was the Russian Grand Master who on a train journey invited a fellow-passenger to a game, offering him three pawns as a start. To the stranger's protest: 'But you don't know me; how can you be sure you can give me such an advantage?' he replied: 'My not knowing you is assurance enough'. His other pastime, golf (in which also he played for the University staff), yielded as much pleasure but no stories.

In 1912 the English Literature department consisted of Professor William Macneile Dixon and Dr John Semple Smart, who was also Queen Margaret College Lecturer.[1] There were two

[1] QMC was originally an independent institution for the Higher education of women, named after the wife of Malcolm Canmore, King of Scots. It was incorporated into the University in 1892, but remained in some degree independent until 1935. Between those years many lectures had to be given both at the seat of the University and at QMC.

assistants: Muriel Gray, a specialist in late medieval (especially Scottish) poetry, and Spenser—a very fine scholar but too soft-spoken and diffident for the rough-and-tumble of large Glasgow classes; and John Peddie who later became Secretary of the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland; and Maud May gave tutorials to women. Dixon and Smart impressed Alexander deeply and it seems that at this stage he heard both on Shakespeare. The texts were *Macbeth*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*. He was fortified by these lectures against the Strachey view of the final plays as the work of a bored and exhausted old man; he himself taught *The Tempest* to his Ordinary Class until his last year. But much more important, his study of *Macbeth* in 1912 began that preoccupation with the problem of tragedy which was at the centre of all his criticism. He perceived in this extreme case Shakespeare's discovery, of (as he later wrote) 'amidst human failings, the fixed point on which his art could exert its purchase'. The play satisfies us neither by being the story of a villain getting his come-uppance nor by giving us a wallow in gloom; but in the spectacle of despair such as Macbeth's there is hope for man, and for the spectator that exaltation which it is tragedy's particular task to provide—whether or not Aristotle meant this by *catharsis*. In 1912–13 the syllabus included the Age of Dryden and Pope (he professed amazement in later life at colleagues who actually *chose* to teach Dryden); and in a course on the French Revolution in English literature he was introduced to Burke by Dixon. Thanks to the Irish professor a strong emphasis was always laid, in the Glasgow school, on Burke. But Alexander as an *anima naturaliter Burkeana* found the subject congenial and it came later to be a frequent essay topic for his own Honours students. It may then seem odd that in his second year in English, 1913–14, he chose the Language rather than the Literature class (taking fourth place in it). The reason was in the first instance prudential: a step towards Honours. But he never regretted it. Like many more reluctant students he was totally won over by the magisterial clarity of the teaching of Ritchie Girvan (eventually to become the University's first professor of English Language in 1947).[1] To his dying day he never lost—though he may have forgotten much of what he had learned, which had in any case grown a little old-fashioned—his conviction of the indispensability for all students of English of a thorough grounding in Old and Middle English and of an ability

[1] To Girvan's *Beowulf and the Seventh Century* (1935) one celebrated archaeologist attributes the beginning of the interest in Sutton Hoo that later made him famous.

to read the literature of our first centuries. He also never lost his sense of having grown up in the shadow of greatness (his own phrase), and it was thanks to this that throughout his teaching life Glasgow knew nothing of the mindless antagonism between Language and Literature which has bedevilled some universities.

In successive sessions he took the two philosophical classes, Logic and Moral Philosophy, which have always formed a basic element in Scottish Arts courses. His reaction to Sir Henry Jones, FBA, who described himself as a 'spiritual realist', was equivocal, and he claimed to remember only that the class opened each morning at 8 a.m. with prayer: a practice which lasted into the 1920s. (He recalled that Adam Smith on his translation to the Chair of Moral Philosophy in 1752 petitioned Senate to be exempted from the practice—without success). Jones was at least a lover of the poets—Goethe, Wordsworth, Browning—but his brand of Hegelian idealism was not a creed suited to a mind as pragmatic as Alexander's; and he was not the only student of Jones's to resist instinctively his flamboyant Welsh eloquence. One such remarked that to hear all opponents of one's teacher's views put down with vehemence as mad or bad or both, automatically made the hard-headed Lowland Scot suspect that the opponents might have a point. The prescribed texts were the *Republic*, *Sartor Resartus*, and Jones's own Sydney lectures *Idealism as a Practical Creed.* Carlyle was a prophet idolized by Jones, but the lectures on him were that year given by an elderly stand-in assistant who merely read lengthy extracts from the works with, after each, the solemn remark: 'Gentlemen, there is a great deal in that'. The Logic Class (1913–14) of Professor Robert Latta the Leibniz scholar was altogether more solid and less heady. It included, besides formal logic and general philosophy (Mill's *Logic* in extract), some traditional psychology. But psychology of any vintage was little to P.A.'s taste. When as a professor he would at the end of the session question his prizewinners as to their other subjects he would say to anyone who incautiously admitted having taken Psychology: 'My dear boy, you know by now that only the poets can teach you that'. One highlight of his year in Logic was a course given by Archibald A. Bowman, later to become one of this century's outstanding holders of the Glasgow Chair of Moral Philosophy.[1] He took in the same year European History (to 1453) under Professor Dudley J. Medley, whom he

[1] Holders of this chair have included Francis Hutcheson, Adam Smith, Thomas Reid, Edward Caird, A. D. Lindsay, Oliver Franks.

remembered for his friendliness and humour. He earned distinctions in all three 1913–14 classes.

So, until 4 August 1914, he was all set to complete his Honours course in one more year. By the end of that month he had attended in the Bute Hall a large meeting of students under Principal MacAlister's chairmanship and addressed by Cameron of Lochiel, and with hundreds more had enlisted as a Private in the newly raised 6th Battalion the Cameron Highlanders. On 26 June 1916 during a brief leave he returned there to take his MA degree. In the following month he was commissioned as second lieutenant in the Royal Field Artillery. It is said that he mistakenly turned up for the commissioning in a kilt of Cameron tartan: an impropriety forgiven him as due to some sort of excessive zeal. He took such things lightheartedly,- but in his professorial days a punctilious Clerk of Senate was less forgiving, and with mock-contrition P.A. would report having had a rebuke after a graduation or other formal occasion. One offence involved brown shoes. On the whole he was reticent about his war years, all of them spent on the Western Front, and in the latter part as liaison officer with a French regiment. As a Scot he was amused to note the frugality of his French counterparts in the matter of quantity and size of shells used in an engagement; his own compatriots blasted away with their best while it lasted. He was struck too by the art and resourcefulness of the French cooks (but not by their squeamishness) with whatever the trenches offered; and he was not thinking of *ris de veau*. His attitude to the splendours and miseries of military life was as usual equivocal and quizzical and often puzzled the unimaginative. In personal relationships he was the most pacific of men; yet it would have been totally inconceivable, in either of the wars, for him to choose anything but active service. For all his charity and deep understanding of the workings of conscience he found it impossible to sympathize with the scruples which had kept one of his contemporaries, a good scholar, at home out of the conflict. Perhaps only a man of his temperament could have responded as he consistently did to plays in which the soldierly is the type of honour in general in all its manifestations: *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Coriolanus*. And his patriotism was as ardent, if not as articulate, as his admiration of the bravery of the young.

He ended the war as a Captain, and in 1919 returned eager to make up lost time. He took the Honours Examination in September 1920, with the most distinguished First of the year and the valuable George A. Clark Scholarship, a four-year graduate award founded in 1872 by the Paisley family of the present

Lord Clark, the art historian. His immediate predecessors in it were William L. Renwick (later FBA) and Allardyce Nicoll.

Despite his sociable nature he was too busy in his final year to consort much with the others in his class, most of them now younger men, but he and John M. Lothian (later to become Professor in Saskatchewan and eventually in Aberdeen) exchanged ideas about their work. He once asked leave to read an essay of Lothian's on Cowper. When Lothian admitted this to their tutor J. S. Smart the latter spoke with qualified sternness: Alexander is perfectly capable of writing first-rate essays without borrowing anyone else's. Smart became by far the strongest influence on Alexander, who never tired of acknowledging that his whole career had been shaped by his revered tutor. The other Senior Honours tutor was Geoffrey Langdale Bickersteth (later Professor at Aberdeen) who had just joined the department.

His first year as Clark Scholar was spent partly on 2 and 3 *Henry VI*, which had been the subject of his Honours dissertation, and partly (also at Smart's prompting and under his guidance as to where to learn the best Italian) in travel in Italy. He had chosen the Honours papers in Italian literature which since 1914 could be substituted for those in British History, though he had not been seduced by the wilder notions of the eccentric lecturer in Italian, Ernesto Grillo, on Shakespeare's stay in Italy, and so on. The real profit from his own stay in Italy was the increase in his knowledge of art, both architecture and painting. Titian was for him the master Italian; but Rembrandt was the supreme artist, with Claude a good third. Of the English, Constable was supreme, and he made much of him when teaching Wordsworth, often prescribing C. R. Leslie's *Memoirs*. He read and talked much on painting, but as with literature it was the human or 'moral' content that interested him and he professed to regard the technical aspect as a quaint sort of mystery. In this he did scant justice to his own insight and understanding in these matters.

His plan now, this time at Dixon's instigation, was to spend a couple of years in France. He had fixed up a lecteur-ship at a lycée in Vendôme, from which he would go on to the Sorbonne as Renwick had done before him; but in June 1921 Renwick, who had been in the Glasgow department since the previous October, was appointed to the Joseph Cowan Chair at Armstrong College, Newcastle upon Tyne, and urged him to get his foot on the bottom rung of the academic ladder by applying for the vacant post. He was now almost twenty-eight. He was appointed lecturer as from October 1921.

He always felt he had missed something much to his taste in not extending the knowledge he had acquired in the war of France, French, and the French. Favourite writers like Molière, Stendhal, Proust kept recurring in his lecturing and writing; Racine left him cool, since he knew of a richer tragic vision. He had a very high, some might say an idealized, view of French education. When in the early 1950s the other three Scottish universities proposed, to Glasgow's disgust, to dispense with Higher English as an entrance requirement, and by statute the quarrel had to be referred to the Privy Council, Alexander and Principal Hetherington were summoned to St. Andrew's House in Edinburgh to argue the Glasgow case. Alexander invited Her Majesty's Counsellors to imagine the incredulous response a comparable proposal would meet from all Frenchmen. Alas—sensing here perhaps a sentimental invocation of the 'Auld Alliance'—they declined to imagine it or even to see its relevance.

A photograph of the 1921–2 Senior Honours Class shows at the end of the front row an unbelievably earnest Peter Alexander, no doubt feeling his new exalted position. The earnestness is put in perspective by his own account of his beginnings as a teacher of the Ordinary Class. Remembering that Sir Henry Jones had begun his first lecture by recalling Hegel's first lecture to his Heidelberg students he resolved on a high opening note. Arriving on the rostrum to find that Janitor Angus Macdonald had (by collusion?) neglected to switch on the lights, he repaired the omission and announced his text for the day: Goethe's dying words 'Mehr Licht'. Since the equivalent in Scots sounds almost the same, for weeks to come his appearance in class was greeted with happy calls for 'mair licht'. The possibility that all this had been foreseen is irresistible. What might not have been foreseen was the response to the content of the course. He had inherited from William Renwick a twenty-lecture assignment on Spenser. Renwick could of course have given twice as many without effort, but his successor's interest in the Poet's Poet was at this stage minimal, and he thought a few introductory lectures on Chaucer, a writer much more to his liking, would gain him time. By the fifteenth lecture even the Ordinary men's class began to hail his entrances with 'What about Spenser?' To have got the Ordinary Class to cry out for Spenser he always counted among his greatest triumphs. It was one he did not risk repeating. The course was in future renamed 'Chaucer'; he gave it intermittently till the year of his retirement, developing a defence of the poet against Arnold's charge of lacking high seriousness. In the meantime his interest in

Spenser grew, and a frequent exercise for his Senior Honours students was that of elaborating the suggestions made by Lamb in 'On the Sanity of True Genius'. When in 1936 he read the last chapter of *The Allegory of Love* he felt that at last here was, better put, what he had been trying to say and to elicit from his students.

Just how unsolemn was his attitude to his own teaching is illustrated by the story he enjoyed telling of a paper he was asked to read early in his career to the Royal Philosophical Society of Glasgow. He chose his favourite novelist Hardy. The audience according to him numbered six including a man taking notes for the *Glasgow Herald.* The President in introducing him sketched the talk he would give were he the speaker. The Treasurer in proposing the vote of thanks (a task he clearly felt to be an uphill one) outlined the paper he would have given. The Secretary then announced that the next meeting would be held in the big hall as the speaker was expected to attract a large attendance. And all the way home his aunt took issue with the theological views she alleged he had expressed. Not dissimilar was his experience when reading to the Edinburgh Branch of the English Association in 1931 his essay in defence of the integrity of *Henry VIII.* He was not too absorbed in the Fletcherian heresy to miss noticing that the chairman, H. J. C. Grierson, had after a little allowed his eyes to close (it *is* rather a long piece) and that he was visibly startled by the applause at the end.

The art of lecturing, on the other hand, was to be taken seriously. 'For the exposition of critical topics a lecturer requires a machinery, almost as the dramatist requires his plot and characters', and he always reminded younger colleagues that an Ordinary lecture was essentially a performance. Like a good actor he was acutely conscious of the quality of his audience and one could watch him gauging in the first minute the level at which to pitch what he had to say. For the men's and women's sections (which he kept separate till the end of his teaching life since that was how it had always been) he developed over the years two entirely different modes, and the kinds of rapport he established, the variations in badinage, often made the two deliveries scarcely recognizable as the same lecture. He needed an audience; and when in the 1950s the Honours classes became a sprinkling of students in the three front benches he could only, he said, appeal to Heaven—except that then his eye was chillily caught by W. P. Ker's portrait on the back wall. Learning the hard way he very early mastered the technique of coping with the high spirits of the men's class, which was particularly boisterous in the decade or so

after the First War and which daunted at least one newcomer to the department into fortifying himself with a double brandy before a class—hardly surprising, since P.A. had on his first day mischievously suggested as they went in together from the sideroom to enrol the class that they had better dispense with gowns in case they had them torn from their backs. In reality it was all normally good-natured and good-humoured, and with a régisseur as adept as Alexander became the interjections were often genuinely funny. Those were the days of enormous bundles of class exercises to be marked by a staff of perhaps five. One day while speaking about Shakespeare's plays on the stage he began a sentence (with impeccable timing), 'Charles Lamb once wrote an essay—'; 'Did he ever get it back?' came from Bench 12.

Not many of P.A.'s hearers ever appreciated the labour and thought which had gone into arranging and digesting the materials so that they came over in the most telling perspective. He was, like his beloved Sir Thomas Browne, a master of cunning obliquity, by indirections finding direction out; and not everyone recognized that entertainment was instruction too. He had in fact made a discovery about Elizabethan dramaturgy which few scholars have the opportunity of making. Since in Scottish universities there is no departmental selection of students there is inevitably in a first-year class of many hundreds a great range of ability and interestedness, as great as that between the groundlings and the Inns of Court men in the sixpenny seats (or wherever). In this microcosm of an Elizabethan theatre the lecturer faces the technical challenge that Shakespeare faced: to hold the attention of very different hearers not alternately (that way disaster lies) but simultaneously. The notion put forward by critics like Bridges that Shakespeare's recipe was to mix slapstick, bawdy or melodrama with his poetry so that there was always someone interested (and many bored) is seen, when one faces a large Ordinary class, to have no relation with reality. If you avoid being despised by the brightest only at the expense of being incomprehensible to the dullest you simply don't survive.

One pleasing feature of the Ordinary English Class at that period was the community singing which filled the interval before the lecturer's arrival. In Alexander's honour the repertoire included 'Old soldiers never die' and 'O Sandy dear we love thee well, Do we . . . '. Historically the most interesting item was one encouraged by Dixon: 'Ye mariners of England'. This had obvious advantages: opportunities for vigorous pedal-work on 'sweep' and 'deep', and stanzas so long as to keep the lecturer cooling his heels

in the wings; but its popularity went back ultimately to the victory of the students of 1828 in electing Thomas Campbell (himself a Glasgow student in the 1790s) Lord Rector for a third term against the Senate's opposition, and defeating the rival candidate Sir Walter Scott. Campbell was a favourite with Dixon, who on 20 June 1928 delivered an oration in his memory at the Commemoration of Benefactors.

The sixth and only fully appreciative hearer at P.A.'s Hardy talk was Mrs Alexander. On 15 June 1923 he married in Edinburgh Agnes Effie Macdonald (Nan to her friends) who had been his fellow-student in Senior Honours. She won First Prize in the Language Class, Peter the Second. She was the daughter of the Revd Angus Macdonald, minister of the United Free Church of Scotland (often abbreviated as UF) in the little Kincardineshire fishing village of Johnshaven near Montrose. The wedding was conducted by two UF clergymen: the Revd Sir George Adam Smith, Principal of the University of Aberdeen, and the bridegroom's kinsman the Revd John Alexander. It will not be disrespectful to this happy event to use it as the occasion for dwelling on a strand in Peter Alexander's life of which readers of his works might remain unaware. He gave on 21 November 1950 a lecture on the teaching of literature in the University, the fifth in the series organized to mark the five hundredth anniversary of its foundation on 6 January 1451, and published in 1952 as *Fortuna Domus*. In it he expressed pride in having as his immediate predecessors in the Regius Chair three sons of the manse: A. C. Bradley, W. A. Raleigh, W. Macneile Dixon. He once modestly claimed to be the next best thing, a son-in-law of the manse—though Nan's father had died before the marriage. He would not in later years have claimed great assiduity as a churchman, but he was faithful to the church of his fathers. In discussion with Ritchie Girvan on where the pure primitive tradition of Christianity was best preserved they agreed on the Church of Scotland: as long, said P.A., as you mean the UF. Girvan, who was a staunch elder of the Auld Kirk (the established Church of Scotland) 'a little checked at this hardihood of assertion', to borrow Lamb's words on Coleridge's reaction to Wordsworth on Shakespeare. In any case by then the Disruption had been healed by the Union of the Churches in 1929. He delighted in the quirks of ecclesiastical difference. His great friend William Rennie of Greek told gleefully of his first encounter as a young Fellow of Trinity, Cambridge, with the Master. 'Of course, Mr Rennie, as a nonconformist you will not wish to take part in chapel services'. 'On the contrary,

Master, as a member of the same church as the King in Scotland I shall take full part in chapel'. C. J. Sisson on hearing this anecdote was reminded of the agonized words of his High Church vicar who had come from County Durham to Edinburgh to attend Sisson's graduation (he had read English under Saintsbury). As they strolled along Princes Street past St. John's Episcopal Church the vicar clutched his young friend's arm: 'Charles, I have just realized that in this country I am a Dissenter'. Peter Alexander's reply was a confession that as a student of our earlier literature he had often wished he had grown up in a Cotswold village hearing, Sunday after Sunday, the noble language of the Anglican liturgy. He was more ready than most of his countrymen to recognize how much in the literature which was his professional subject was, at a profound level as well as in countless details, foreign. When as a lad he first visited England and an English church he was shaken to see inscribed on the wall not only the Ten Commandments, which he had assumed everyone knew, but also the prohibition against marrying one's grandmother. Among what kind of people had he fallen? His knowledge of the Bible was intimate, and without such knowledge (he felt) Shakespeare's capacity for tragic thought was beyond the critic's reach. He was at home in the language of theology even beyond that of the Westminster *Shorter Catechism* he had learned as a boy. Without blasphemy he would categorize a critical error as the sin against the Holy Ghost, and wonder whether 'it were a mortal sin to misinterpret Shakespeare'. The *Observer* reviewer who attributed all the religious allusions in *Richard II* to an interpolator since the pagan Shakespeare was incapable of them, must still be squirming if, as is to be hoped, he read Alexander's comment. And what did he make of Hamlet's 'fall of a sparrow', or Kent's 'promised end'? Late in life P.A. was outraged by the importation into literary criticism of the new 'Realistic Theology' from Germany, the notion that all human acts are involved in evil and that the very effort to avoid sin is itself a sin—Brutus becoming 'a study in original sin': a notion which makes tragedy as he understood it impossible. One last memory: he once heard Ritchie Girvan put down a critic of the examination system who was maintaining that only God could judge, by saying from his full height: 'In this particular field I find myself adequately equipped to deputise for God'. *Sound* theology, this.

The first book for which Alexander was responsible, *Shakespeare Truth and Tradition* (1928), was an act of piety in a different sense. J. S. Smart had just before his death at fifty-seven on 23 March 1925 asked him to copy and arrange the scattered pencilled notes

he had prepared towards the book. Incidentally P.A. checked for *Review of English Studies* October 1925 the proof of the article in which Smart defended Milton against the charge of having interfered with the printing of *Eikon Basilike* in order to blacken Charles; and when in the *TLS* in February 1962 Smart in turn was accused of using the evidence improperly his old pupil and friend came to his defence. By all accounts Smart was, though shy and diffident and subject to the ballyragging of the men's class, an incomparably effective lecturer, and this shows in the cogency with which he disposes of the various kinds of nonsense (deer-stealing, horse-holding, etc.) that had become part of Shakespearean biography. Much of this Alexander's own researches were to amplify; but the influence on him of the book and of his discussions with Smart went much deeper. The removal of error, he was fond of telling his students, is the first step on the path to truth. All his most characteristic writing is in this sense polemical, its style sharpened and its ordonnance focused by the demands of the war on the enemy. Controversy, though he did not court it, stimulated his most pungent wit. He consciously acted out the role of the Red Crosse Knight in the Wandering Wood; and the monster Error was always in one shape or another some injustice to Shakespeare: shabby stories or shallow interpretations. Even the form of his sentences was, as we should expect in so fine a stylist, determined by the mode of attack. Most pages yield examples of such structures as 'To talk with Wyndham Lewis about Coriolanus as a boy of tears is to look at him with the eyes of the man who was about to murder him'; or 'To speak of Othello as culpably naïve is to echo the villain of the piece'. The damsel Truth he was defending was the integrity of Shakespeare's *œuvre*. The editors of the First Folio, Shakespeare's daily working companions for close on twenty years, knew best which plays were his, his in their entirety, and no one else's. That they rejected several plays unscrupulously ascribed to him on title-pages, and *Pericles* because only a partially Shakespearean version was available, authenticates what they did include; and allowing for their not being trained in twentieth-century textual criticism they clearly had a conscience about the quality of texts. Hence Alexander's onslaught on the 'conjectural history' composed by the disintegrators of *Henry VIII*; and his relation of both Quarto and Folio texts of *Troilus and Cressida* to Shakespeare's own papers. To this play, by the way, he returned forty years later to counter the suggestion that it had been performed at the Globe in 1602–3 and to uphold the truthfulness of the preface to the second issue of

the 1609 Quarto as to its never having been put on in the public theatre. A Queen Margaret College lecturer, experienced in talking to audiences of women, knew that the Epilogue could have been aimed only at a male audience.

The foundation of all his textual discovery was laid when in the *TLS* (9 Oct. and 13 Nov. 1924; 16 Sept. 1926) he argued for adding three 'Bad Quartos' to the five (and a hypothetical sixth) recognized by A. W. Pollard in 1909, transforming *The Contention betwixt the two Famous Houses of Yorke and Lancaster* (1594), *The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke* (1595) and *The Taming of a Shrew* (1594) from being source-plays respectively of 2 and 3 *Henry VI* and *The Taming of the Shrew* into pirated and garbled versions of Shakespeare's plays. Not everyone was persuaded by him that *A Shrew* is a report of *The Shrew* as we have it; he returned to the question some forty years later, exploring *A Shrew*'s relation to other plays and its preservation of Shakespeare's original ending.

But the epoch-making sequel was his elaboration of the first two articles as *Shakespeare's Henry VI and Richard III* (1929). The dramatist is no longer seen as starting his career by 'botching' other men's plays (always in any case an implausible idea). We are freed now from the stubborn old belief, due to a misunderstanding of the pirated texts, in plays full of interpolations by other hands. The dying Greene's embittered attack on Shakespeare as an 'upstart Crow' in 1592 is not now construed as a charge of plagiarism. The elimination of Shakespeare the hack enables us to take seriously Aubrey's report that before coming to London he had been, not a butcher's boy killing calves 'in a *high style*', but a 'Schoolmaster in the Country'; and he may well have brought with him some such works as the Senecan *Titus Andronicus* or the doubly Plautine *Comedy of Errors*. In any case his beginnings as actor and playwright must be pushed back to the mid-1580s—so the so-called 'lost years' are virtually filled—to account for the established status he has achieved, and his fame among 'divers of worship', by 1592. Gone is the eighteenth-century picture of the untutored product of barbaric rusticity, ignorant of 'the Rules', the child of fancy warbling his native woodnotes wild. Released from ancient assumptions we can look with fresh eyes at other plays long taken to have been Shakespeare's sources: *The Troublesome Raigne of King John* (1591), *The Famous Victories of Henry V* (1588?), *King Leire* or *Leare* (1594), the *Hamlet* known from 1589 (the *Ur-Hamlet* that has so muddied criticism) which is most likely to have been Shakespeare's own first version. Shakespeare thus becomes at least in part the tutor rather than the pupil of Marlowe

(and Kyd?). Only in the field of the sciences are we accustomed to so radical a change of outlook resulting from the removal of one error. Alexander's work is wonderfully of a piece: scholarly pioneering in biography, theatrical and publishing history, textual criticism, is all inseparable from demonstration of a technical mastery in drama so long ignored or denied in favour of 'a kind of mere light of nature' as Rowe put it. 'Shakespeare's judgement', in Coleridge's saner phrase 'equal to his genius'; and genius turns out to be not a superiority or indifference to rules but the discovery in the craft of the theatre of a coherent set of principles capable of articulating a poet's vision.

Not for nothing is the book in which all this and more is expounded entitled *Shakespeare's Life and Art* (1938). One popular aspect of its teaching was enshrined, on its publication on 20 January 1939, in a *Glasgow Herald* cartoon showing its author shrinking in horror from a proffered side of bacon on a platter. Both it and his second general book, *A Shakespeare Primer* (Nov. 1951) have titles reminiscent of works by Edward Dowden: deliberately, since though Dowden's division of the dramatist's career into four phases is retained, with modified chronology, his fanciful labels 'In the Workshop', 'In the World', 'In the Depths', 'On the Heights', were replaced by decisive milestones in Shakespeare's theatrical life: joining the new Chamberlain's Men on the re-opening of the London theatres after the two year plague, June 1594; opening of the Globe, late spring 1599; acquisition of the Blackfriars, 1608. The *Primer* is because of its unassuming title a quite unjustly neglected book. All Alexander's typical wisdom and discernment are there, concisely displayed in a rich context. All these fruits his students had been enjoying without recognizing their privilege for many years before they became public property.

After Smart's death P.A. was appointed, on 9 June 1927, to the Queen Margaret College Lectureship at a salary of £600. The QM Class, though this was not the lecturer's sole concern, was then so large (on average 400) that it met (at 3 p.m.) in the Bute Hall, where rumour has it that everything had to be said twice, once to the right, once to the left. On Macneile Dixon's retirement on 30 September 1935 Alexander was appointed Regius Professor of English Language and Literature, the fifth incumbent (the first was John Nichol, 1862–89). The QM Lectureship lapsed, and by coincidence the handsome Queen Margaret College building was sold at the same time to the BBC, and it is now their Scottish headquarters. In characterizing his predecessors and their merits

in the *Fortuna Domus* lecture he gave the fullest explicit statement of his credo as teacher of his subject—the nearest we have to an inaugural lecture from him, since these are not customary at Glasgow. Two asides do not appear in the printed version. Those were the days of paper famine, and he confided that as he was composing his lecture the salvage collector had called at his house; he had wondered whether he might best serve the nation's needs by offering him the sheets of his draft. More serious was his reference to a Glasgow Shakespearean predecessor, a pupil of Adam Smith's, William Richardson, Professor of Humanity from 1773, who in 1774 became the first critic to publish a collection of studies of Shakespeare's characters—*A Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of Some of Shakespeare's Remarkable Characters*—beating Maurice Morgann by three years, and producing two more volumes in 1784 and 1789. He had earlier been First Secretary in the British Embassy in St. Petersburg, and while there (so P.A. had been told by the University Librarian, the last man to retail undocumented gossip) had been one of the lovers of Catherine the Great. A professorial colleague to whom he mentioned the story pooh-poohed it, no doubt because the reputation of a Glasgow chair was felt to be at risk: 'What interest could the Empress Catherine have in a lad from Aberfoyle?'—the most naïve remark P.A. had ever heard. This interpolation in the lecture was prefaced by one of his favourite throw-away phrases: 'My wife says I'm not to tell this story'. A girl student not fully alive to Alexandrian irony once asked a member of the department whether Mrs Alexander was really the tyrant she was constantly made out to be. She was only in the sense that she insisted on feeding all the stray cats in Dowanhill, and her husband was often to be met at the fishmonger's first thing in the morning buying the best fish, saying 'They turn up their noses at the second-best.'

Of his predecessors he singled out Bradley for a characteristic tribute: he had attacked the critical problem 'at its most difficult point, the bastion that towered over all the outworks as the key to the position. In tragedy the poet makes no concessions to the weakness or longings of mankind. Here is no wish-fulfilment'. This austere region of literary study sorts out the Philistines from the true understanders. The poets, as Dixon put it in his too little known book *Tragedy* (1925), teach us reverence in man for 'the quixotry, the inexplicable preference, even to his own hurt, for the noble and magnanimous, the high and honourable things'. Honours students were regularly set the exercise of comparing the views of tragedy offered by Bradley, Raleigh, Dixon, and Smart in

Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association 8 (1922). Inevitably though unintentionally the impression was given of a specifically Glasgow school of thought on the subject. Pupils sitting the Glasgow University Bursary Competition would sometimes in their Shakespeare answers betray their embarrassment. We have heard, they would say, that the Glasgow English Department doesn't believe in the tragic flaw. This was clearly some shocking form of agnosticism. That *some* of their teachers were products of the department seems to have complicated matters.

Alexander was faithful to the tradition he had inherited on its practical side too. The Professor was expected, as far as the timetable allowed, to do the bulk of the lecturing to the first and fourth year classes. The first-year work was very heavy, and Bradley had terrified his successor Walter Raleigh in advance by telling him that for ten years, four days a week, he had given his Ordinary Class the equivalents of *Fortnightly Review* articles; we know that this was no idle boast. Because of the need to repeat lectures to different sections of the class, Alexander did less than this; but he taught Shakespeare, and in alternate years Chaucer and the Age of Wordsworth. He still late in life wished he could 'get something down on paper about Wordsworth'. That he did not is, as accounts of his lectures make clear, a loss to be regretted. The fourth-year class had from him their instruction for the two Shakespeare papers, the textual/bibliographical and the general interpretative. When it came to tutorials he spared himself equally little: he was a severe and so a very helpful critic in matters of arrangement and presentation. Many a student who thought he was not bad at writing was healthily sobered by having his essay dismembered and put together nearer to the heart's desire. Writing means sweating blood and tears; know your goal before you write a word; don't jolt the poor reader about like an old-fashioned wagonette (or pony-trap?)—he preached, and practised, these precepts. And they were delivered with the genial firmness of a Scots dominie, such as his father must have been. A former Honours student, who turned to History after graduating in English, and ultimately became a Professor of that subject has testified that it was to P.A., rather than to any of his later history tutors, that he owed his best instruction in reading sources and planning how to use them. The same man also found that P.A.'s guidance in matters textual, based on Housman's *Application of Thought to Textual Criticism* (1921), had proved of incomparable value in his later work in fields vastly removed from English literature.

For his colleagues the week's high points were the days on which he was not lecturing at noon and they congregated in the sideroom. Sometimes he rushed off to the bank to meet, as he explained, the wants of his rapacious family, or (when his boys were at school) because he had an essay to finish for Monday; 'and we must do better this week; we got four out of ten last time'. Normally, though, he answered his letters, or such of them as were going to be answered, and then began the symposium, the banquet of talk enlivened from his inexhaustible store of academic anecdote, his inexhaustibly fertile fancy, and his satiric wit which was quite without malice and was pure enjoyment of its recreated (or invented) object. There was the Professor of Chemistry who in all his forty-one years in the University had done nothing to impede the study of his subject; the Professor of Geology with the little black book in which he entered the names of students who were not going to pass; the lordly Sir William Macewen, Professor of Surgery, and his royal 'we'. Medicals indeed were frequent targets. One had better keep out of their hands, but the warning was to choose the right day for being in an accident anywhere near the Western Infirmary; on a Thursday it would be better to be finished off in the accident. With friends like William Rennie or J. S. Smart he had a wholesome teasing relationship. P.A. and Smart had once been at a party where the honoured guest was John Drinkwater. The hostess told Smart that the poet had kindly agreed to read a few of his poems and would like Smart to suggest two. Smart had never read even one but hit on the device of pretending, as a student of poetry, to be curious to know what the poet's own choice would be. P.A. himself was not always well prepared for such situations. A tiresome Macaulay enthusiast once wondered if he agreed with her that Chapter 16 was better than the vaunted Third. 'Read the 1847 Commons speech on Education', he said; 'the best thing he ever did'.

Traditionalist though he was he was proud of having very early in his career radically changed the Honours Degree structure. As set up by Bradley in 1892 it had been named 'English Language and Literature and British History'. In 1923 when (as he put it *sotto voce*) no one was looking he arranged that the two papers in British History—the Puritan Revolution 1558–1660—must in future be passed before the Honours Examination, in effect in the candidate's second or third year. With prescribed texts like Hooker I–IV, Lord Herbert of Cherbury's *Life*, and Clarendon I–III, candidates had been much distracted from their main subject in their fourth-year Finals. Some thirty years later the total

abolition of the requirement led to a coolness (mild word) between the Professors of English and History. But administration, on this and other levels, did not deeply interest him, and the least happy years of his academic life were those of his Deanship of the Faculty of Arts, 1952–5. Stern decisions on matters of regulations did not come easily to him; still less did chairmanship of endless meetings. He several times earned his colleagues' gratitude by cancelling the monthly Faculty meeting when there was no immediate business.

By September 1939 he was again a soldier. At the time of Munich he had unearthed his uniform from the box where it had lain for years, and the spectacle of decay it presented occasioned one of his typical exercises in macabre fantasy, well worthy of an admirer of *Urne Buriall*, and indeed culminating in a praise of cremation and of scholars who had chosen 'cremation tickets' as farewell testimonial gifts. In October 1939 he came, in uniform (a new one), to address the first meeting of Senior Honours, the last time they were to see him. As he went into the classroom he murmured *cedit toga armis*. For the next nine months, stationed near Glasgow, *arma* took the form of superintending gunnery training, and the jargon of the manual brought him much needed joy. 'Naming of Parts: This hole is known as the aperture'. He was so often moved by the state of his unit to say everything was in a state of *chass* that at last a subaltern, eager to use this unique opportunity for self-improvement, asked respectfully whether, sir, that was really how the word was pronounced.

In early summer 1940 he was posted to the Near East, a fate he had (for all the horrors of the Western Front) been thankful to be spared in 1914–18. As he left for Egypt in the deepest gloom his mother sadly said: 'They'll ruin your socks and things, washing them in salt water'. For a spell he endured dirt, flies, heat, and rumours of court intrigues in the Canal Zone. Then his unit was transferred to the demi-Paradise of Cyprus, where as in the Golden Age Nature yielded unbidden her gorgeous bounties, or at any rate her oranges which hung by his bedroom window. There had to be a serpent. It embodied itself in a series of army psychiatrists who visited the unit periodically on the pretence of being concerned about its morale. Each warned the OC about the one before, who (it was well known) was as mad as a coot. One of them submitted the men to an 'association test': what do the following words suggest to you? In the previous week an ENSA troupe had put on an extremely well received show, and opposite the word 'dance' 95 per cent of the men wrote 'cabaret'. The psychiatrist sent in a report warning that there was something

morbidly amiss in the unit. He would no doubt have been even more seriously disturbed had he heard about their production of *Othello*, an obvious play for the island—or so it seemed until Alexander discovered that the cast would have to be all-male, since no local girl (though chaste as the icicle that hangs on Dian's temple, and playing a role as chaste) would ever have found a husband after being publicly subjected to the words Othello directs at his wife. It was a nice lesson in the ticklish relation of art to life, and Alexander treasured it alongside the famous part played in the Paris riots of 6 February 1934 by *Coriolanus* at the Théâtre Français; to say nothing of the Chinese critic's remark that no countrywoman of his would have kept her reputation if she had greeted a guest as Lady Macbeth greets hers—and he wasn't thinking of the guest's subsequent treatment.

When the Farouk I University was set up in Alexandria in 1942 the military authorities took it into their heads that Major Alexander (as he now was), being on or near the spot, might occupy the Chair of English there. The suggestion was outrageous, and he made it clear that if the Army was going to spare him it was his own university that must have him. He returned to Glasgow in September 1943. A new complexity had been added in his absence to the Ordinary Class by the Admiralty's arrangement two years before to send to the University successive groups of Naval Cadets who were doing navigational training on the Clyde and who (someone thought) would benefit from the culture to be picked up at lectures on Chaucer, Spenser and Shakespeare. To draw a veil over this ploy, which lasted till the end of the war, will be the kindest policy. More rewarding was a later scheme by which GIs, before going home, sat in on certain classes.

The next twelve years were perhaps the busiest in Peter Alexander's life. In the 1945 lecture on Shakespeare's Punctuation he offered the British Academy a flawless example of his art. Few of his hearers could have guessed with how heavy a heart he had written the exordium in which the gallantry of the soldiers then establishing the Normandy bridgehead is put alongside that of their forebears in earlier centuries. His eldest son Peter (Sandy), a second lieutenant in the Royal Tank Regiment, was killed in Normandy aged 20 in July 1944. It was a blow from which his parents never truly recovered. The lecture was delivered two weeks before VE Day. The problem, posed at the outset, of the Folio's comma in Macbeth's 'making the green one, red' is solved as in a good detective story only in the last minute, after a series of vast concentric pincer-movements through the principles of

classical and New Testament textual criticism, the nature of certain Shakespeare Quartos, the pointing of Mercutio's 'I have it, and soundly, to your houses', and of Hamlet's 'What a piece of work is a man' (on which he had already fought several battles with Dover Wilson), has shown the comma to be not grammatical but rhetorical, emphasizing 'one' as adjective, 'uniform'. In the 1920s, inspired by Percy Simpson's work, he had drafted a set of articles on the punctuation of individual plays, which he soon realized no one would print. In June 1951 he tried to repay his debt to Percy Simpson by having the University confer on him one of its specially honorific Fifth Centenary LL.D.s, an honour which is known to have given the veteran Jonson scholar (who had taught several Glasgow lecturers) a glow of pleasure for years to come.

In mid-1951 appeared his one-volume Tudor Shakespeare, the first *Complete Works* to be based consistently on the findings of modern textual scholarship and to include the Hand D scene from the *Sir Thomas More* MS. The task, undertaken accidentally as a result of the candour with which he had replied to Messrs Collins's request for his opinion of the Shakespeare which they had published since the early 1860s, took him more than seven years, during which his study lights were often seen burning between 3 and 4 a.m. As an arithmetician and with no grudge he worked out in 1951 that the toil had brought him a farthing an hour. What he had learned from it was beyond computation; and the caseroom staff down in Cathedral Street, on whom in the manner of an Elizabethan author he regularly dropped in to stress the importance of commas, acknowledged the pleasure with which they too had learned. He admitted that the hardest part was resisting the well-meant zeal of the high-power publicity department which went into action before publication. The reprinting of the edition in the more readable four-volume form in 1954–8 was used as an opportunity of incorporating editorial changes of mind, especially in the difficult *Richard III*, and of including separate introductions to the plays.

In the spring of 1953 he delivered the Lord Northcliffe Lectures at University College, London, published in 1955 as *Hamlet Father and Son*. They were prepared under great pressure but they were the fruit of forty years' continuous reflection on the play in the whole context of the theory of tragedy. The assignment was congenial. Macneile Dixon was the first to lecture on this foundation, and Ritchie Girvan's *Beowulf and the Seventh Century* was delivered on it. Olivier's film version of the play made it a

topical subject; and it was a Glasgow pupil of Dixon's (indeed of Smart and Alexander too) who, advising the maker of the film and forgetting or rejecting his master's teaching, allowed the spectators to be told, before they had seen a single frame, that they were about to watch 'the tragedy of a man who could not make up his mind'. As if that were not enough the speech of Hamlet on 'the stamp of one defect' was wrenched from its dramatic context and used as a Prologue which solemnly claimed to make plain what the story is about. Here were goads in plenty. Here was the most sinister Error-monster for the champion of Truth to destroy. The combat is conducted with a wit and a learning that embrace not only Hellenic drama but Raymond Chandler and the hard-boiled story as well. Aristotle and Bradley, so far from being available as witnesses on the film's behalf, are shown so to present the concept of *hamartia* as in effect to refute it. Shakespeare's vision of a generous spirit who can no other and who so triumphs as to earn in valediction nothing less than the soldier's music and the sad requiem of angels' song, is given supreme artistic form by a simple modification of perspective in the ancient story—the justaposition of Wittenberg and Germanic saga, university and the heroic past.

In writing *Hamlet* Shakespeare mastered the tragic idea; in *Coriolanus* 'the demonstration is reduced to its simplest elements'. *Macbeth* first clarified it for Alexander, and made him un-learn the cosy old dogmas. Year after year he struggled with students who, having dutifully looked into the abyss of 'Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life, And thou no breath at all?' would say 'But Lear started it all'. His sharpest scorn was reserved for the reading of Othello's last speech as that of a self-deceiver who, having made a sorry mess of things, is 'whistling to cheer himself up'. He was fond of comparing this moment with the way in which another master of his art treats such an issue. In Scott's *The Two Drovers* Robin Oig, who has killed his friend without rancour but in obedience to an irresistible demand (as he sees it) of honour, accepts his sentence without demur but shrinks with abhorrence from the vulgar charge that he is a cowardly and treacherous assassin. The clear-eyed Othello has with no mercy for himself faced what he has done: 'This look of thine will hurl my soul from Heaven / And fiends will snatch at it.' Now his willing submission of himself to that penalty must be set in its whole context, and so the memory of the Turk at once looks back to his life of faithful and fearless action and forward to his exaction of the death sentence which is his due. Robin Oig had the Carlisle judge to set the record

straight; Othello must do it for himself. They are both 'transformations of moral vision into perfect dramatic form'.

For the Shakespeare 4th Centenary in April 1964 P.A. published three books: a collection with prefatory comment of ten of the Academy's Shakespeare lectures, theatrical, textual, interpretative, *Studies in Shakespeare*; a volume bringing together *Alexander's Introductions* of 1954–8, with Ernst Honigmann's concise account of the Elizabethan stage; and a replacement in the Home University Library of Masefield's old *Shakespeare*. This last is the most densely packed of all his books, both with fact and illuminating comment. 'I put it all in', he said, 'to remind me of what I knew at the time'; but like the work of the master himself (we may venture to say) much of it is for all time, though new discoveries may perhaps affect the London chapter especially.

But by this time he had retired, on 30 September 1963, from the department in which he had served for forty-two years. (On retiring he presented a much prized coin to the University's Hunterian Museum.) Against this event the Alexanders had earlier bought a flat on the Scores in St. Andrews, with a magnificent prospect of sea and golf course; but they were destined to make relatively litte use of it in retirement. In 1963–4 he was Berg Professor of English at New York University in Washington Square. That crossing the Atlantic (as he had often already been invited to do) had changed him not a whit, though now a carpetbagger himself, is suggested by an overheard conversation between him and one of his American students. In an effort to replace waffle with precision he had set the class an essay on the Prayer-scene in *Hamlet* as defining the theme of the play. Miss Brown came to say that she had decided to write instead a comparison of Shakespeare and Aeschylus. 'Of course, Miss Brown, you read Greek with ease?' Miss Brown had not a word of Greek. 'Then I think you will write on the subject I have suggested.'

Session 1964–5 he should have spent entirely at Trinity College, Dublin, but he broke a leg while travelling back to Scotland at Easter and so missed the third term. So far he had immensely enjoyed the academic friendliness both of Trinity and University College. In 1965–7 he was back in America, at the Stony Brook (Long Island) campus of the State University of New York, on the site to which it had moved three years before.

On 18 June 1969 he died in a Dunbartonshire hospital after a painful illness. His wife survived him by some nine months, his sister by three. His surviving sons are both university lecturers:

Dr Donald Alexander as Reader in Medicine at Glasgow, and Professor Nigel Alexander in the Chair of English at Queen Mary College, University of London.

The biographer of someone who consistently declined to co-operate with *Who's Who* might seem to be in a position both difficult and invidious. The annual request for up-dated information used to sink deeper and deeper in the in-tray until the end-of-session clearance. No mere biographical facts, however, could make it any easier to capture and convey the quality of the man: the warmth and simplicity, his response to openness and generosity wherever he found them, the truth-loving core which determined his estimation of himself no less than of others, his untiring (some would say excessive) patience with lame dogs, an approach to people that was at- once genial and quizzical, those vigorous prejudices that melted away on first-hand acquaintance with their objects, a seriousness that went with seeming flippancy about what he took to be unimportant, a fatalistic outlook more often expressed perhaps than meant. No photograph does justice to those piercing clear blue eyes under their shaggy eyebrows. Do we owe to them his extraordinary powers of vivid description of persons and things? Sanity and a scorn for fancy notions were the keynote of his criticism; he deplored the reductionist trends he found in some of the places he visited as examiner, the intolerant narrowing of the richness of literature to an approved 'canon'. In his own field a professional to the fingertips, he nevertheless fought shy of what he saw as the industrialization of the academic study of literature. To a member of an interviewing committee who said of one candidate that 'he is only an MA' he replied: 'and what more would a gentleman wish to be?'. This is what it meant to have been brought up by Dixon and Smart. No words sum up better both the man and the critic than those he used to introduce the *Primer*: 'the kingdom inherited by Shakespeare's characters is not the "bare boards" of the Elizabethan theatre, or indeed the stage of any theatre made with hands, but the imagination of men. If the theatre is not first in the heart of the author, neither actor nor producer can create it in our hearts, the only theatre to which we have access.'

In 1951 the British Academy elected him Fellow; in 1964 the Queen made him a CBE; in 1966 the University of Aberdeen conferred on him the degree of LL.D. These are great and appropriate honours; but if you seek his monument the advice will be, not so much *circumspice*, as (echoing Milton's tribute to Shakespeare in the Second Folio): look in the hearts of those he taught.

J. C. Bryce

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