

SIR ISRAEL GOLLANCZ¹

1863-1930

ISRAEL GOLLANCZ, the first Secretary of the British Academy, was born in London on 13 July 1863, the son of the Rev. S. M. Gollancz. He was educated at the City of London School, University College, London, and Christ's College, Cambridge. At each of these places he came under the influence of a remarkable teacher, who fostered his natural taste for the study of English literature. At school it was Edwin Abbott, at University College Henry Morley, at Cambridge W. W. Skeat. For all these teachers his respect amounted to affection; I remember his anxiety that Abbott should be elected to the Academy, and by procuring from Mrs. Skeat the gift of her husband's working library he founded the Skeat Library at King's College, London, to which the Furnivall Library was subsequently added by a similar gift.

His life, which was full of enthusiasms, had two which predominated over all others—English literature and the British Academy. The story of his career (apart from its domestic side, of which this is not the place to speak) is the story of his contribution to these two causes. Even during his undergraduate days he belonged to a small club which studied poetry and read it aloud, and he founded and conducted the Christ's College Magazine. It was at this time that he formed that intimate acquaintance with Skeat and his family which had so much influence on his future career. After taking his degree at Cambridge in 1887, his life for twenty years was that of a student and teacher of English literature. He began as a lecturer at Cambridge, unofficially under the guidance of Skeat. From 1892 to 1895 he was

¹ In preparing this memoir, I have been much indebted to Lady Gollancz, who furnished papers and information, and Mr. A. W. Pollard, to whom practically the whole of the portion dealing with Gollancz's work as scholar and teacher is due.

Quain English Student and Lecturer at University College, London. From 1896 to 1906 he was University Lecturer in English at Cambridge. Throughout this period he also undertook much University Extension lecturing both for Cambridge and for London. In 1903 he was appointed Professor of English Language and Literature at King's College, London, a post which he held to the end of his life, being then on the eve of retirement under the age regulations.

During the twenty years which mark the first period of his life he had not only been teaching, but had actively devoted himself to strenuous editorial work. The first-fruits of this activity was his resuscitation in 1891 of the late fourteenth-century West Midland poem *Pearl*, which (with the three cognate pieces with which it has been preserved in Cotton MS. Nero A x in the British Museum) had been edited in 1864 by Richard Morris, but the estimation of which Gollancz considerably advanced. His edition of it had the special distinction of being adorned by a drawing by Holman Hunt and a quatrain by Tennyson, and was marked by a scholarship which was a great advance upon that of the previous edition. This was followed in 1892 by a good piece of Old English work, his edition of Cynewulf's *Christ*, and in 1893 by an Elizabethan venture, an edition of Lamb's *Specimens of the Elizabethan Dramatists*. To *Pearl* and the cognate West Midland poems Gollancz constantly recurred. A revised text of *Pearl* appeared in 1897, in 1918 a version of it reset in modern English (sold for the benefit of the British Red Cross Society), and in 1921 it was included (together with a text and translation of Boccaccio's *Olympia*) in a series of *Select Early English Poems*, of which six parts were issued between 1913 and 1923, while two more remained incomplete.

In 1895 he published for the Early English Text Society the first part of his edition (unhappily never completed, though never formally abandoned) of the Exeter Book of Anglo-Saxon poetry; but in the previous year he had em-

barked on an enterprise which played a great part in his life. This was the Temple edition of Shakespeare, which he undertook for Messrs. Dent, and which occupied the years 1894-6. This was not the first venture in the production of handy volumes of the best literature at a moderate price, for Henry Morley had shown the way with his threepenny *Cassell's National Library*; but it aimed at a far higher standard of scholarship and external attractiveness. After the completion of the Shakespeare, Gollancz and his publisher utilized the great popularity achieved by its combination of the results of the best scholarship of the day with a novel and very pretty format, by producing a long series of 'Temple Classics', which had a great success, and only came to an end in 1907 when Gollancz suggested that the share in the success due to the format was being rather excessively remunerated in comparison with that due to his scholarship. Gollancz's contributions to the series (apart from his work as editor) consisted of editions of Vaughan's *Silex Scintillans*, *Childe Harold*, *In Memoriam*, and *Maud*. He found another adventurous publisher, also skilled in book production, in Mr. Alexander Moring, for whom he edited 'The King's Classics' and 'The King's Library' in 1903-8, but as an editor the years 1891-6 were his *anni mirabiles*, and the impression which he made by them was academically acknowledged by two invitations to return as a teacher where he had been a pupil.

These invitations led to the appointments, mentioned above, in University College, London, and at Cambridge; and to these was added in 1903 his professorship at King's College. Here he succeeded a very fine scholar, John Wesley Hales (who also had graduated from Christ's College, Cambridge), but one who was at his best with a small class of rather exceptionally good students. Gollancz had proved his capacity for advanced editorial work and advanced teaching; but his distinctive gift was that of a scholarly popularizer, and at King's College, London, he saw his opportunity. In those barbarous days teachers in the London Colleges, with a few favoured exceptions, were paid

mainly or exclusively from the fees they earned, and the fees which had been earned in the year preceding the vacancy of this particular professorship had been grievously small. Gollancz, though not thinking it right to apply for the post so soon after the abolition of the religious test, intimated that he would accept it if it were offered to him, but would not compete if it were advertised. He was appointed, and in a very few years under the same system was earning the full equivalent of a modern professorial salary. One very important feature in this remarkable development was the three years' Diploma course in English Poetry and Drama, followed by a fourth year of more specialized work, including language, which Gollancz started mainly for evening students who were earning their living during the day, most of them as teachers. He brought to it a great enthusiasm which he passed over to his students, even in subjects like Anglo-Saxon poetry which most of them could only read in translations.

He was very far from limiting his interests to the earliest periods of English literature. His colleague, Prof. R. W. Chambers, notes as the most marked characteristic of his work, alike as scholar and as teacher, his conviction of the continuity running through the whole of English literature. For him the West Midland poets formed a link between the poetry before the Conquest and the achievements of Chaucer and Spenser from which our modern poetry springs. This argument was embodied in a pamphlet on *The Middle Ages in the Lineage of English Poetry*, printed in 1921.

In making the venture of exchanging his work at Cambridge, where he would doubtless have succeeded Skeat, for a risky Professorship in London, Gollancz was doubtless actuated by a well founded belief in his own capacity to make his new post a success. But he had a very strong motive for moving to London in his Secretaryship of the British Academy which, as will be described below, had come into existence in 1902. Before passing to this second

predominant interest in Gollancz's life, it will be in place to add a few words, derived from the evidence of those who knew him best, as to his methods and influence as a teacher.

On this subject the testimony of his pupils and colleagues is singularly unanimous. He never troubled himself greatly to give information which could be obtained from books which his students were likely to possess or to have access to, though on his own special subjects, such as West Midland poetry, his lectures were exceptionally instructive. His main business was not to give facts but to arouse interest and enthusiasm in his students. In this he was remarkably successful, partly because of his own obvious enthusiasm for whatever he was talking of, partly from his ability to take his students into his confidence, carrying them with him till they lost the oppressive feeling of their own ignorance. A charming story is told by one of his Cambridge students who before he came under Gollancz had written to point out to him what he considered some flaws in the *Temple Shakespeare*. On his first visit as a pupil to Gollancz's rooms, to his surprise and confusion his letter was produced, and his new teacher went through it with him in the friendliest possible way, pointing out where the criticisms were wrong, and where they were right cheerfully admitting it. 'I always liked him from that time onwards for treating a beginner so seriously' is the commentary which came with the reminiscence, and undoubtedly this willingness to treat beginners seriously was one main element in the good work which Gollancz got out of his students and in the affection with which they regarded him. Probably a very large majority of his students were themselves either already teachers or in process of becoming teachers, and Gollancz thought it abundantly worth while to give them of his best, even though to do this and to be an efficient Secretary to the British Academy involved some sacrifice of the editorial career on which he had started so brilliantly in the 'nineties. He remained a keen scholar, but good as was his scholarship his gifts as a popularizer and organizer were greater,

and his memorial is in the work of his students and the British Academy.

To this latter branch of Gollancz's career it is time to turn.

The last years of the nineteenth century saw the beginning of the movement that eventually led to the foundation of the British Academy, with which the remainder of Gollancz's life was intimately associated. As is recorded in the first volume of the Academy's *Proceedings*, its origin was due to the need for some body which could represent this country in the humanistic sciences in the International Association of Academies, as the Royal Society represented the natural sciences. The initiative was taken in the course of 1899 by the Royal Society, in consultation with certain selected leaders of humanistic studies; but in June 1901, after prolonged consideration, the Council of the Royal Society came to the conclusion that it was undesirable that the Society should either enlarge its scope so as to include the humanistic sciences, or should itself initiate the formation of a new body. The humanists were accordingly left to their own resources, though with the entire good will and sympathy of the scientists.

Meanwhile certain younger scholars had begun to take a hand in the project, with a view to doing some of the spade work for their seniors. Gollancz at Cambridge was in communication with Jebb, who was one of the leaders, and offered his services. It so happened that at the same time the present writer had been discussing the subject with Bywater and Maunde Thompson in London; and through Jebb and Thompson we were put in communication with one another, and encouraged to discuss possible solutions of the problem. I was then living at Harrow, and Gollancz had an engagement there in the instruction of the Jewish boys in the school on Sundays. Meetings were therefore easy, and more than one conversation took place in my house and garden. Gollancz, always fertile in ideas, had at first the idea that a certain literary society, then somewhat inactive,

which possessed a Royal Charter, should be persuaded to commit hara-kiri and allow its defunct body to be re-animated by members suitable to form the desired Academy. He even went so far as to secure the assent of the existing members of the society. This project, however, did not commend itself on fuller examination, and it was decided that the only satisfactory course was to found a new society altogether. The leaders concurred, and on 28 June 1901 a meeting was summoned by Maunde Thompson at the British Museum, at which a resolution embodying this decision was adopted, the persons present being constituted a provisional General Committee. A sub-committee was at the same time appointed to draft detailed proposals, and to this sub-committee Gollancz offered his services as Secretary. In this capacity he did an immense amount of spade-work, and was in constant communication with the leaders of the movement, notably Maunde Thompson, Jebb, A. W. Ward, Reay, and Ilbert. The sub-committee drew up a list of first members of the new Academy, omitting their own names. The General Committee on 19 November adopted their report and list of names, with the addition of the members of the sub-committee; and with them Gollancz, as Secretary, deservedly became one of the original Fellows of the body which thenceforth was known as the British Academy, and to which a Royal Charter of Incorporation was granted on 8 August 1902. Of these original Fellows only five now survive.

Henceforth the Academy held the first place in Gollancz's devotion, and divided his main activities with his duties as Professor at King's College. He devoted himself heart and soul to its interests, and was indefatigable in devising means of magnifying its importance and increasing its usefulness. The infant Academy laboured under considerable difficulties. It had no pecuniary resources beyond the subscriptions of its members. Its reputation was still to make, and there were not wanting persons, young and old, who, in spite of the indisputable eminence of its members in their

respective spheres, looked somewhat contemptuously on its claim to represent British scholarship. It was dependent for a place of meeting on the kindness of the Royal Society. Its members being scattered over the British Isles, it was not easy to gather them at meetings for the reading of papers. For all these disadvantages Gollancz sought a remedy. He persuaded his friends to endow lectures to be given under the auspices of the Academy, and thereby at once increased its funds for the encouragement of learning, and provided occasions and audiences for meetings. He also seized any opportunity that presented itself for bringing the Academy into the public eye. A notable early example of this was the celebration of the Milton Tercentenary in 1908. Poetry as such did not come within the scope of the Academy, which has always disclaimed the functions of an Academy of Literature; but literary history came within its province, and as no society then existed with better claims to take the lead, Gollancz seized the opportunity to procure from influential quarters an invitation to the Academy to discharge this national duty. The result was a banquet given by the Lord Mayor (Sir George Truscott), a musical service at Bow Church, a performance of *Samson Agonistes*, a memorable poem by George Meredith and a Commemorative Ode by Mr. Laurence Binyon, and a series of papers by Fellows of the Academy and others. The whole was organized by Gollancz, to whom the whole credit of an undertaking which greatly increased the prestige of the Academy was due.

In the same year was founded the Schweich Fund, by a munificent gift of £10,000 from a friend of Gollancz who desired to remain anonymous, the first of eight foundations, all but one of which were directly due to his initiative and influence, and which now form a predominant part of the public activities of the Academy. The two earliest of the endowed lectures, apart from those established by the Schweich Fund, were the Warton Lecture on English Literature and the Shakespeare Lecture, which thus represented two of Gollancz's main interests. Notable among

the others was the Raleigh Lecture on History, founded by Sir Charles (now Lord) Wakefield as the sequel to the Raleigh Tercentenary organized by Gollancz in 1919; and to Gollancz's friendship with the same munificent benefactor was due Lord Wakefield's splendid gift of the whole cost of fitting up the rooms in Burlington Gardens assigned to the Academy by the Government in 1927.¹

In addition to these special benefactions which Gollancz was the means of securing for the Academy, the whole burden of organizing its business for nearly twenty-nine years fell upon him. As it happened that I was a member of Council, and permanently resident in London and therefore accessible, during nearly the whole of this period, I was brought into close association with him, and am perhaps in the best position to testify to the manner in which he spent himself in the Academy's service. He never missed a meeting of Council until the commencement of his final illness, and he retained in his hands the functions not only of Secretary but of Treasurer. He also superintended the issue of all the publications of the Academy. He was assisted by the devoted services of his sister, but his own labour was gratuitous; for until after the receipt of the Government Grant the Academy was not in a position to do more than make a small grant for secretarial assistance. All this work had to be done in such time as he could make available after discharging his duties as Professor at King's College; so that if publications were sometimes in arrear, and if the business of Council was not always methodically arranged, no one was inclined to be critical. The worst that could be said was that his zeal for the Academy was such that he could not bear to delegate any part of the duties of its management. His relations with all the successive Presidents under whom

¹ His zeal and skill in securing benefactions were not confined to the Academy. For King's College he obtained the Skeat and Furnivall libraries, already mentioned, and the Frida Mond Collection of Goethe books and relics. He also took a great part in bringing about the foundation and endowment of the chairs of Spanish and Portuguese.

he served were admirable; I remember particularly the testimony borne to his services by Lord Bryce when he handed over the Presidency to me. It was a special happiness to him to be associated subsequently with Lord Balfour in the negotiations which led to the gift by the Government of permanent quarters in Burlington Gardens, thus setting the seal on the status of the Academy, the establishment of which had been the goal of his efforts for a quarter of a century.

The completion in 1927 of the first twenty-five years of the Academy's life was celebrated by Gollancz by the production of a magnificent facsimile edition of the celebrated Caedmon Manuscript in the Bodleian, accompanied by a full introduction in which the many problems connected with the contents of the manuscript are studied and several original contributions are made towards their solution. It was an undertaking which at the time of the foundation of the Academy he had suggested as a suitable task for its energies, and he had been engaged on it intermittently for many years. It was a great gratification to him to be able to complete it for this occasion, and to dedicate it to the Academy. It thus serves as an embodiment in a worthy and beautiful form of his two great devotions to early English literature and to the Academy.

He did not take much share in the framing of regulations for the election of Fellows and their organization into Sections, a troublesome matter which occupied a good deal of time in the early years of the Academy's life, and in which Sir Courtenay Ilbert was the principal adviser; and the negotiations for the Government grant passed through other channels. But apart from these, it is difficult to think of any activity of the Academy in which he was not intimately concerned, if he was not the initiator of it. The Academy is not likely to forget the debt which it owes to its first Secretary.

The Knighthood which was conferred on him in 1919 was specifically in recognition of his services to the Academy, as well as of his distinction as a scholar.

Some important sections of his literary work still remain to be mentioned.

1. *The Early English Text Society*. With his Professorship at King's College and Secretaryship to the British Academy Gollancz was a very busy man, but in 1910 Dr. Furnivall, in the closing days of his life, nominated him as his successor in the Directorship of the Early English Text Society (to which Gollancz had, in addition to Part I of the Exeter Book, contributed in 1897 an edition of Hoccleve's Minor Poems from the Ashburnham Manuscript). The old man had ruled the Society as an autocrat for forty-six years, and though the names of members of a Committee were printed on its prospectuses it was said that it had only been allowed to meet once. Membership of the Committee was an honour conferred on some of the workers and helpers of the Society at the Director's pleasure. It is believed that some of these titular committee-men met after Furnivall's death and confirmed his nomination, and Gollancz managed the Society successfully for twenty years, not troubling the Committee to meet for any normal business, but occasionally summoning it when he needed help, or contemplated some use of the Society's funds a little out of the common. On one occasion, for instance, an interesting fifteenth-century manuscript, a miscellany of unedited English verse, had come into the market, and the Director was anxious to secure for the Early English Text Society the right of printing it. He arranged with a friendly bookseller to buy and hold it for the Society, and with the Keeper of Manuscripts at the British Museum that he would recommend the Trustees of the Museum to purchase it at a reduced price after it had been printed. To the members of the Committee Gollancz proposed that the publication should be connected with the name of Henry B. Wheatley, one of the founders of the Society and for many years its Hon. Treasurer, then recently dead, and that his friends should be asked to subscribe to it as a tribute to his memory. So the volume appeared, edited by Dr. Mabel Day, in 1917,

under the title 'The Wheatley Manuscript', its cost was somewhat reduced, and one of the Society's best friends was honoured; a characteristic example of Gollancz's deftness in combining several good objects so that each should be more easily attained.

The Wheatley Manuscript appeared during the War when the Society was reduced to great straits owing to the difficulties of communicating between England and the United States, from which it drew a considerable proportion of its subscriptions, and ultimately of a great increase in the cost of print and paper. The gift by the Carnegie Trustees of America of half the cost of its publications in two successive years saved its finances, and for the rest of his term Gollancz managed them so well that at the time of his death it had some three thousand pounds to its credit with its bankers. In the visit which Gollancz paid to the United States in 1923 he had procured its society new subscribers and recalled old ones, and his wisdom in abandoning the paper covers (which Furnivall throughout his Directorship insisted on retaining to save expense) in favour of substantial cloth had helped to increase the sales. An even greater asset to the Society than his good management of its publications was the cordiality with which he welcomed all students from a distance when they came to work in London. He interested himself in their researches, and every Saturday afternoon opened his house to all who cared to come.

2. *Shakespeare*. In addition to his 'Temple' Shakespeare Gollancz published studies on the history of the Hamlet Saga, and had a favourite theme for a lecture on the Merchant of Venice which, without ever writing it out for publication, he gave in a variety of forms, tracing the origin of the different strands in the play and trying to penetrate to an inner meaning, which has escaped its commentators.¹ In 1916, when the Great War prevented any full celebration of

¹ Three forms of this lecture were printed as an In Memoriam volume for private circulation after his death.

the Tercentenary of Shakespeare's death, he organized the publication of *A Book of Homage*, to which scholars and Shakespeare-lovers from the allied and neutral countries contributed, though few were able to give of their best. From 1908 onwards he was Honorary Secretary of the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre. He also took an active part in organizing the celebration of a Shakespearian Day in schools, and founded a Shakespeare Association, which met to hear papers and at the outset interested itself in publishing reports of the growth of appreciation of Shakespeare, both in the theatre and in the study, in various countries. In 1923 he organized a further celebration, this time in commemoration of the publication of the First Folio in 1623, arranging for a very successful series of lectures by Sir Sidney Lee, Dr. Greg, Prof. Dover Wilson, and others at King's College, which were subsequently published for the Association by the Oxford University Press. He also moved the Stationers' Company to take part in the celebration, and so interested them that he was admitted to its freedom. Shortly after this he took part in a visit of a number of professors and students of English to the United States, and in the course of it frequently spoke of the Shakespeare Association which, having enlisted the help of Dr. Page, he had planned on an Anglo-American basis. Eventually an independent Shakespeare Association was formed in the United States, but the English society benefited considerably by the donations to it which resulted from Gollancz's visit. Under its auspices some excellent lectures were given, but he was so busy with other things that he never quite succeeded in equipping it with a practical plan of work. Yet he was keenly anxious for its success, so keenly that when his friends came together in the autumn after his death, the first step to which their loyalty to him prompted them was to work out a constitution for the Association and give it a new start with Mr. Harley Granville Barker as its president.

3. *Tokyo University Library*. After the disastrous earth-

quake at Tokyo in 1923, another piece of work was laid on Gollancz and gallantly carried through. On the suggestion of the Foreign Secretary (Lord Curzon), the British Academy undertook the formation of a Committee to raise funds and invite gifts of books, as a contribution from this country towards the restoration of the University Library, the greater part of which had been destroyed by the fire that followed the earthquake. The organizing of this work, like every other undertaking of the Academy, fell almost automatically upon Gollancz; and when, on the completion of this stage (resulting in a gift of about 20,000 volumes to our ally), His Majesty's Government procured from Parliament a grant of £25,000 for the extension of the gift and the formation of a representative collection of English literature in the restored Library, it was naturally to Gollancz that they entrusted the administration of the grant. He threw himself into it with enthusiasm, forming advisory committees for the several departments of learning, co-ordinating the lists furnished by the committees, taking endless pains to procure all the books which the Japanese authorities particularly wanted (more especially a copy of the Catalogue of the printed books in the British Museum, which for long seemed unattainable), and in the end obtaining the consent of the Government to a scheme which a friend had proposed to him, by which among the books sent to Tokyo was a series of examples of English printing from 1520 to our own times. For this (after the earlier years had been represented by facsimiles) one or more books printed in every decade were acquired to illustrate the history of English printing and book-building during four centuries. These books were exhibited at the Foreign Office before being sent off and a special catalogue was printed as a record of the collection.

The fullness of the life which has thus been recorded speaks for itself; and it was vindicated by the glow of his own enthusiasm, by the circle of personal friendships that grew out of it, and by a happy home life. In 1910 he married

Alide Goldschmidt, who with a son and a daughter survives him. He continued in full activity and health till within a few months of his death. When he returned from his usual spring holiday in 1930, he was obviously a very sick man. At a great cost to himself he insisted on making all the usual arrangements for, and himself attending, the annual meeting of the Council for the election of Fellows on 21 May; but thereafter his illness made rapid progress, and on 23 June he died.

Distinctions which have not been already mentioned included the Fellowship of King's College (1917), Corresponding Membership of the Royal Spanish Academy (1919) and the Medieval Academy of America (1927), the Presidency of the Philological Society (1919-22), and the Leofric Lectureship in Old English at Exeter University College.

A fine bronze bust of him, the work of Mr. C. L. Hartwell, R.A., and the gift of Lord Wakefield, stands in the Council Chamber of the Academy, and a characteristic photograph hangs on the wall of the Lecture Room; but the whole Academy for the first thirty years of its existence is in a sense his memorial, and he would have desired no better one.

F. G. KENYON