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THE MONSTERS AND THE CRITICS
and Other Essays

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It might be held characteristic that, though I have occupied two chairs (or sat uneasily on the edge of two chairs) in this university, I have not yet delivered an inaugural lecture: I am now about 34 years behind. At the time of my first election I was too astonished (a feeling that has never quite left me) to gather my wits, until I had already given many ordinary lectures as required by statute, and it seemed to me that an inaugural that would not inaugurate was a ceremony better omitted. On the second occasion, my ineffectiveness as a lecturer was already well known, and well-wishers had made sure (by letter or otherwise) that I should know it too; so I thought it unnecessary to give a special exhibition of this unfortunate defect. And, though twenty years had then gone by, during which this matter of the overdue inaugural had been much on my mind, I had not yet discovered anything special to say.

Fourteen more years have now passed, and I still have nothing special to say. Nothing, that is, of the kind proper to inagurals – as far as I can judge by those that I have read: the products of minds more sanguine, or more efficient and magisterial than mine. The diagnosis of what is wrong, and the confident prescription of the cure; the wide view, the masterly survey; plans and prophecies: these have never been in my line. I would always rather try to wring the juice out of a single sentence, or explore the implications of one word than try to sum up a period in a lecture, or pot a poet in a paragraph. And I am afraid that what I would rather do is what I have usually done.

For I suppose that, at any rate since the golden days long past when English studies were unorganized, a hobby and not a trade, few more amateurish persons can 'by a set of curious circumstances' have been put in a professional position. For thirty-four years my heart has gone out to poor Koko, taken
from a county jail; though I had one advantage over him. He was appointed to cut off heads, and did not really like it. Philology was part of my job, and I enjoyed it. I have always found it amusing. But I have never had strong views about it. I do not think it necessary to salvation. I do not think it should be thrust down the throats of the young, as a pill, the more efficacious the nastier it tastes.

But if the ranks of Tuscany should feel inclined to cheer, let me hasten to assure them that I do not think their wares are necessary to salvation either; much of what they offer is peddler’s stuff. I have indeed become more, not less, bigoted as a result of experience in the little world of academic English studies.

‘Bigoted’ is for the Tuscans. Speaking to the Romans, defending the city and the ashes of their fathers, I would say ‘convinced’. Convinced of what? Convinced that Philology is never nasty: except to those deformed in youth or suffering from some congenital deficiency. I do not think that it should be thrust down throats as a pill, because I think that if such a process seems needed, the sufferers should not be here, at least not studying or teaching English letters. Philology is the foundation of humane letters; ‘misology’ is a disqualifying defect or disease.

It is not, in my experience, a defect or disease found in those whose literary learning, wisdom, and critical acumen place them in the highest rank – to which so many in the Oxford School have in various ways attained. But there are other voices, epigonal rather than ancestral. I must confess that at times in the last thirty odd years I have been aggrieved by them; by those, afflicted in some degree by misology, who have decried what they usually call language. Not because they, poor creatures, have evidently lacked the imagination required for its enjoyment, or the knowledge needed for an opinion about it. Dullness is to be pitied. Or so I hope, being myself dull at many points. But dullness should be confessed with humility; and I have therefore felt it a grievance that certain professional persons should suppose their dullness and ignorance to be a human norm, the measure of what is good; and anger when they have sought to impose the limitation of their minds upon younger minds, dissuading those with philological curiosity from their bent, encouraging those
without this interest to believe that their lack marked them as minds of a superior order.

But I am, as I say, an amateur. And if that means that I have neglected parts of my large field, devoting myself mainly to those things that I personally like, it does also mean that I have tried to awake liking, to communicate delight in those things that I find enjoyable. And that without suggesting that they were the only proper source of profit, or pleasure, for students of English.

I have heard sneers at certain elementary kinds of linguistic ‘research’ as mere spelling-counting. Let the phonologist and the orthographer have their swink to them reserved! Of course. And the same to the bibliographer and typographer – still further removed from the living speech of men which is the beginning of all literature. Contemplating the workings of the B.Litt. sausage-machine, I have at times dared to think that some of the botuli, or farcimina, turned out were hardly either tasty or nourishing, even when claimed to be ‘literary’. But, to use a perhaps more apt simile, the twin peaks of Parnassus are approached through some very dim valleys. If scrambling in these, without any climbing, is sometimes rewarded with a degree, one must hope that one of the peaks at least has been glimpsed from afar.

However, that is not a matter which I wish to explore deeply: that is, ‘research’ and ‘research degrees’ in relation to the ordinary courses of learning – the so-called ‘postgraduate’ activities, which have in recent years shown such rapid growth, forming what one might call our ‘hydroponic’ department. A term which, I fear, I only know from science-fiction, in which it seems to refer to the cultivation of plants without soil in enclosed vehicles far removed from this world.

But all fields of study and enquiry, all great Schools, demand human sacrifice. For their primary object is not culture, and their academic uses are not limited to education. Their roots are in the desire for knowledge, and their life is maintained by those who pursue some love or curiosity for its own sake, without reference even to personal improvement. If this individual love and curiosity fails, their tradition becomes sclerotic.

There is no need, therefore, to despise, no need even to feel pity for months or years of life sacrificed in some minimal enquiry: say, the study of some uninspired medieval text and its fumbling
dialect; or of some miserable 'modern' poetaster and his life (nasty, dreary, and fortunately short) – NOT IF the sacrifice is voluntary, and IF it is inspired by a genuine curiosity, spontaneous or personally felt.

But that being granted, one must feel grave disquiet, when the legitimate inspiration is not there; when the subject or topic of 'research' is imposed, or is 'found' for a candidate out of some one else's bag of curiosities, or is thought by a committee to be a sufficient exercise for a degree. Whatever may have been found useful in other spheres, there is a distinction between accepting the willing labour of many humble persons in building an English house and the erection of a pyramid with the sweat of degree-slaves.

But the matter is not, of course, as simple as all that. It is not just a question of the degeneration of real curiosity and enthusiasm into a 'planned economy', under which so much research time is stuffed into more or less standard skins and turned out in sausages of a size and shape approved by our own little printed cookery book. Even if that were a sufficient description of the system, I should hesitate to accuse anyone of planning it with foresight, or of approving it wholeheartedly now that we have got it. It has grown, partly by accident, partly by the accumulation of temporary expedients. Much thought has gone into it, and much devoted and little remunerated labour has been spent in administering it and in mitigating its evils.

It is an attempt to treat an old trouble and a real need with the wrong tool. The old trouble is the loss of the M.A. as a genuine degree. The real need is the desire for knowledge. The wrong tool is a 'research' degree, the proper scope of which is much more limited, and which functions much better when it is limited.

But the M.A. has become a reward for a small 'postgraduate' subscription to the university and to a college, and is untouchable. Meanwhile many of the better students – I mean those who have studied English for love, or at least with love as one of their mixed motives – wish to spend more time in a university: more time in learning things, in a place where that process is (or should be) approved and given facilities. What is more, such students are still at a time of life, soon to pass, and the sooner the less the
faculty is exercised, when the acquisition of knowledge is easier, and what is acquired is more permanent, more thoroughly digested and more formative. It is a pity that so often the last of the growing, feeding, years are spent in the premature attempt to add to knowledge, while the vast existing storehouses remain unvisited. Or if they are visited, too often this is done after the manner of research-mice running off with little bits nibbled out of unexplored sacks to build up a little thesis. But alas! those with the more eager minds are not necessarily those who possess more money. The powers that hold the purse-strings require a degree; and those who allot places in an overcrowded university require one too. And we have only a so-called research degree to offer them. This is, or can be, better than nothing. Many would-be learners do well enough at minor research. Some take the chance of using much of their time in reading what they wish, with little reference to their supposed task: that is, in doing on the side, hampered and left-handed, what they should be doing openly and unhindered. But the system cannot be praised for this accidental good that may in spite of it occur within it. It is not necessarily the swifter or wider mind that it is easiest to ‘find a subject’ for, or to bring down to brass tacks and business to the satisfaction of the Applications Committee. The ability to tackle competently and within approved limits a small subject is, in the early twenties, as likely to belong to a small and limited mind as to a future scholar with the hunger of youth.

If the reform that I always had at heart, if the B.Litt. regulations could have been altered (as I once hoped) to allow an alternative approach by examination, to reward reading and learning at least equally with minor research, I should have left the English School more happily. If even now the School could embrace the newer B.Phil. (an unnecessary and inappropriate additional degree-title), I should regard it as a far greater advance than any remodelling or ‘new look’ given to the Honour syllabus.

As far as my personal experience goes, if I had been allowed to guide the further reading and study of those for whom the Honour School had opened vistas and awakened curiosity, I could have done more good in less time than in the so-called supervision of research, done by candidates who had essential territories yet to explore, and who, in the breathless march from
Prelim. to Final Schools, had also left much country in rear, only raided and not occupied.

There are always exceptions. I have met some. I have had the good fortune to be associated (the right word) with some able researching graduates, more of them than my small aptitude for the task of supervisor has merited. Some of them took to research like otters to swimming. But they were the apparent exceptions that prove the thesis. They were the natural researchers (the existence of whom I have never denied). They knew what they wanted to do, and the regions that they desired to explore. They acquired new knowledge and organized it quickly, because it was knowledge that they desired to have anyway: it and the particular enquiry were all of one piece; there was no mere mugging up.

I said that I did not wish to explore the matter of the organization of research deeply; but I have nonetheless spoken (for such an occasion) too long about it. Before I stand down finally, I must say something about our main business: the Final Honour School. Not that the topics are unconnected. I think that the possibility of taking a higher, or at least a further, degree for learning things, for acquiring more of the essential parts of the English field, or for digging deeper in some of them, might well have good effects on the Honour School. In brief: if the abler students, the future scholars, commonly took a third public examination, it might no longer be felt necessary to arrange in the second public examination a four-year syllabus for the reading-time of two years and a bit.¹

It is in any case, I suppose, obvious that our Honour syllabus is over-crowded, and that the changes that come into force next year have not done much to cure this. The reasons are various. For one thing, related to the situation of the M.A., three years is supposed, in this land, to be quite long enough to play with books in a university, and four years is extravagant. But while the academic vita is shortened, the ars gets longer. We now have on our hands one thousand and two hundred years of recorded English letters, a long unbroken line, indivisible, no part of which can without loss be ignored. The claims of the great nineteenth century will soon be succeeded by the clamour of the twentieth. What is more, to the honour of English but not to the convenience
of syllabus-planners, some of the earliest writings show vitality and talent that makes them worthy of study in themselves, quite apart from the special interest of their earliness. So-called Anglo-Saxon cannot be regarded merely as a root, it is already in flower. But it is a root, for it exhibits qualities and characteristics that have remained ever since a steadfast ingredient in English; and it demands therefore at least some first-hand acquaintance from every serious student of English speech and English letters. This demand the Oxford School has up to now always recognized, and has tried to meet.

In such a range divergence of interests, or at any rate of expertise, is inevitable. But the difficulties have not been helped, indeed they have been bedevilled, by the emergence of two legendary figures, the bogeys Lang and Lit. So I prefer to call them, since the words language and literature, though commonly misused among us, should not be thus degraded. Popular mythology seems to believe that Lang came from a cuckoo-egg laid in the nest, in which he takes up too much room and usurps the worms of the Lit chicken. Some believe that Lit was the cuckoo, bent on extruding her nest-fellow or sitting on him; and they have more support from the actual history of our School. But neither tale is well-founded.

In a Bestiary more nearly reflecting the truth Lang and Lit would appear as Siamese Twins, Jekyll-Hyde and Hyde-Jekyll, indissolubly joined from birth, with two heads, but only one heart, the health of both being much better when they do not quarrel. This allegory at least resembles more closely our older statute: Every candidate will be expected to show a competent knowledge of both sides of the subject, and equal weight in the examination will be attached to each.

What the 'sides' were was to be deduced from the title of the School which we still bear: The Honour School of English Language and Literature. Though this becomes in the running headline of the Examination Statutes: English Language, etc. And that I have always thought a more just title; not that we require the etc. The full title was, I think, a mistake; and it has in any case had some unfortunate results. Language and Literature appear as 'sides' of one subject. That was harmless enough, and indeed true enough, as long as 'sides' meant, as it should, aspects and
emphases, which since they were of 'equal weight' in the subject as a whole, were neither of them normally exclusive, neither the sole property of this or that scholar, nor the sole object of any one course of study.

But alas! 'sides' suggested 'parties', and too many then took sides. And thus there entered in Lang and Lit, the uneasy nest-fellows, each trying to grab more of the candidates' time, whatever the candidates might think.

I first joined the School in 1912 – by the generosity of Exeter College to one who had been up to then an unprofitable exhibitioner; if he learned anything at all, he learned it at the wrong time: I did most of my undergraduate work on the Germanic languages before Honour Moderations; when English and its kindred became my job, I turned to other tongues, even to Latin and Greek; and I took a liking to Lit as soon as I had joined the side of Lang. Certainly I joined the side of Lang, and I found the party-breach already wide; and unless my recollections are mistaken, it went on widening for some time. When I came back from Leeds in 1925, WE no longer meant students of English, it meant adherents of Lang or of Lit. THEY meant all those on the other side: people of infinite guile, who needed constant watching, lest THEY should down US. And, the rascals, so they did!

For if you have Sides with labels, you will have Partisans. Faction fights, of course, are often fun, especially to the bellicose; but it is not clear that they do any good, any more good in Oxford than in Verona. Things may to some have seemed duller in the long period during which the hostility was damped; and to such they may seem livelier if the smoulder breaks out again. I hope not. It would have been better if it had never been kindled.

Removal of the misunderstanding of words may sometimes produce amity. So though the time left is short, I will now consider the misuse of language and literature in our School. I think the initial mistake was made when The School of English Language and Literature was first adopted as our title. Those who love it call it the School of English or the English School – in which, if I may intrude a Lang remark, the word English is not an adjective, but a noun in loose composition. This simple title, School of English, is sufficient. And if any should say 'English what?', I would answer: 'For a thousand recorded years English
as a noun has meant only one thing: the English Language.'

If the title then is made explicit, it should be The School of English Language. The parallel formula is held good enough for our peers, for French and Italian and others. But lest it be thought that this is a partisan choice, let me say that actually, for reasons that I will give, I should be well content with Literature – if Letters is now too archaic.

We hold, I suppose, that the study of Letters in all languages that possess them is 'humane', but that Latin and Greek are 'more humane'. It may, however, be observed that the first part of the School of Humaner Letters is stated to be 'The Greek and Latin Languages'; and that this is defined as including 'the minute critical study of authors ... the history of Ancient Literature' (that is Lit) 'and Comparative Philology as illustrating the Greek and Latin Languages' (that is Lang).

But of course it can be objected that English, in an English-speaking university, is in a different position from other Letters. The English language is assumed to be, and usually is, the native language of the students (if not always in a Standard form that would have been approved by my predecessor). They do not have to learn it. As a venerable professor of Chemistry once said to me – I hasten to add that he is dead, and did not belong to Oxford – 'I do not know why you want a department of English Language; I know English, but I also know some chemistry.'

Nonetheless I think that it was a mistake to intrude Language into our title in order to mark this difference, or to warn those who are ignorant of their own ignorance. Not least because Language is thus given, as indeed I suspect was intended, an artificially limited and pseudo-technical sense which separates this technical thing from Literature. This separation is false, and this use of the word 'language' is false.

The right and natural sense of Language includes Literature, just as Literature includes the study of the language of literary works. Litteratura, proceeding from the elementary sense 'a collection of letters; an alphabet', was used as an equivalent of Greek grammatic and philologia: that is, the study of grammar and idiom, and the critical study of authors (largely concerned with their language). Those things it should always still include.
But even if some now wish to use the word ‘literature’ more narrowly, to mean the study of writings that have artistic purpose or form, with as little reference as possible to grammatic or philologia, this ‘literature’ of theirs remains an operation of Language. Literature is, maybe, the highest operation or function of Language, but it is none the less Language. We may except only certain subsidiaries and admixtures: such as those enquiries concerned with the physical forms in which writings have been preserved or propagated, epigraphy, palaeography, printing, and publishing. These may be, and often are, carried on without close reference to content or meaning, and as such are neither Language nor Literature; though they may furnish evidence to both.

Only one of these words, Language and Literature, is therefore needed in a reasonable title. Language as the larger term is a natural choice. To choose Literature would be to indicate, rightly as I think, that the central (central if not sole) business of Philology in the Oxford School is the study of the language of literary texts, or of those that illuminate the history of the English literary language. We do not include some important parts of linguistic study. We do not teach directly ‘the language as it is spoken and written at the present day’, as is done in Schools concerned with modern languages other than English. Nor are our students expected to compose verses or to write proses in the archaic idioms that they are supposed to learn, as are students of the Greek and Latin languages.

But whatever may be thought or done about the title of our School, I wish fervently that this abuse in local slang and of the word language might be forever abandoned! It suggests, and is used to suggest, that certain kinds of knowledge concerning authors and their medium of expression is unnecessary and ‘unliterary’, the interest only of cranks, not of cultured or sensitive minds. And even so it is misapplied in time. In local parlance it is used to cover everything, within our historical range, that is medieval or older. Old and Middle English literature, whatever its intrinsic merit or historical importance, becomes just ‘language’. Except of course Chaucer. His merits as a major poet are too obvious to be obscured; though it was in fact Language, or Philology, that demonstrated, as only Language could, two
things of first-rate literary importance: that he was not a fumbling
beginner, but a master of metrical technique; and that he was an
inheritor, a middle point, and not a 'father'. Not to mention the
labours of Language in rescuing much of his vocabulary and
idiom from ignorance or misunderstanding. It is, however, in the
backward dark of 'Anglo-Saxon' and 'Semi-Saxon' that Language,
now reduced to the bogey Lang, is supposed to have his lair.
Though alas! he may come down like Grendel from the moors
to raid the 'literary' fields. He has (for instance) theories about
puns and rhymes!

But this popular picture is of course absurd. It is the product of
ignorance and muddled thinking. It confuses three things, quite
different. Two of them are confined to no period and to neither
'Side'; and one though it may attract and need specialist attention
(as do other departments of English studies) is also confined to
no period, is neither dark, nor medieval, nor modern, but
universal.

We have first: the linguistic effort and attention required for
the reading of all texts with intelligence, even those in so-called
modern English. Of course this effort increases as we go back in
time, as does the effort (with which it goes hand in hand) to
appreciate the art, the thought and feeling, or the allusions of an
author. Both reach their climax in 'Anglo-Saxon', which has
become almost a foreign language. But this learning of an idiom
and its implications, in order to understand and enjoy literary or
historical texts, is no more Lang, as an enemy of literature, than
the attempt to read, say, Virgil or Dante in their own tongues.
And it is at least arguable that some exercise of that kind of effort
and attention is specially needed in a School in which so much
of the literature read seems (to the careless and insensitive) to be
sufficiently interpreted by the current colloquial speech.

We have second: actual technical philology, and linguistic
history. But this is confined to no period, and is concerned with
all aspects of written or living speech at any time: with the
barbarous forms of English that may be met today as much as
with the refined forms that may be found a thousand years ago.
It may be 'technical', as are all departments of our studies, but
it is not incompatible with a love of literature, nor is the acquisition
of its technique fatal to the sensibility either of critics or of
authors. If it seems too much concerned with 'sounds', with the audible structure of words, it shares this interest with the poets. In any case this aspect of language and of the study of language is basic: one must know sounds before one can talk; one must know one's letters before one can read. And if philology seems most exercised in the older periods, that is because any historical enquiry must begin with the earliest available evidence. But there is also another reason, which leads to the third thing.

The third thing is the use of the findings of a special enquiry, not specially 'literary', for other and more literary purposes. Technical philology can serve the purposes of textual and literary criticism at all times. If it seems most exercised in the older periods, if the scholars who deal with them make most use of philology, that is because Philology rescued the surviving documents from oblivion and ignorance, and presented to lovers of poetry and history fragments of a noble past that without it would have remained for ever dead and dark. But it can also rescue many things that it is valuable to know from a past nearer than the Old English period. It seems strange that the use of it seems by some to be regarded as less 'literary' than the use of the evidence provided by other studies not directly concerned with literature or literary criticism; not only major matters such as the history of art and thought and religion, but even minor matters such as bibliography. Which is nearer akin to a poem, its metre or the paper on which it is printed? Which will bring more to life poetry, rhetoric, dramatic speech or even plain prose: some knowledge of the language, even of the pronunciation, of its period, or the typographical details of its printed form?

Medieval spelling remains just a dull department of Lang. Milton's spelling seems now to have become part of Lit. Almost the whole of the introduction in the Everyman edition of his poems, which is recommended to the students for our Preliminary, is devoted to it. But even if not all of those who deal with this facet of Milton criticism show an expert grasp of the history of English sounds and spelling, enquiry into his orthography and its relation to his metre remains just Lang, though it may be employed in the service of criticism.

Some divisions in our School are inevitable, because the very length of the history of English letters makes mastery all along
the line difficult even to the widest sympathy and taste and a long life. These divisions should not be by Lang and Lit (one excluding the other); they should be primarily by period. All scholars should be to an adequate degree, within any period to which they are devoted, both Lang and Lit, that is both philologists and critics. We say in our Regulations that all candidates taking papers in English Literature (from Beowulf to A.D. 1900) 'will be expected to show such knowledge of the history of England as is necessary for the profitable study of the authors and periods which they offer'. And if the candidates, the teachers too, one may suppose. But if the history of England, which though profitable is more remote, why not the history of English?

No doubt this point of view is more widely understood than it once was, on both sides. But minds are still confused. Let us glance again at Chaucer, that old poet out in the No-man's land of debate. There was knifework, axe-work, out there between the barbed wire of Lang and Lit in days not so far back. When I was a young and enthusiastic examiner, to relieve the burden of my literary colleagues (at which they loudly groaned), I offered to set the Chaucer paper, or to help in reading the scripts. I was astonished at the heat and hostility with which I was refused. My fingers were dirty: I was Lang.

That hostility has now happily died down; there is some fraternization between the barbed wire. But it was that hostility which, in the reformed syllabus of the early thirties (still in essentials surviving), made necessary the prescription of two papers dealing with Chaucer and his chief contemporaries. Lit would not allow the greedy hands of Lang to soil the poet. Lang could not accept the flimsy and superficial papers set by Lit. But now, with the latest reform, or mild modification, that comes into force next year, once more Chaucer is presented in one common paper. Rightly, I should have said. But alas! What do we see? 'Candidates for Courses I and II may be required to answer questions on language'!

Here we have hallowed in print this pernicious slang misuse. Not 'his language', or 'their language', or even 'the language of the period'; just 'language'. What in the name of scholarship, or poetry, or reason, can that here mean? It should mean, in English fit to appear in documents of the University of Oxford,
that certain candidates may be asked questions of general linguistic import, without limitation of time or place, on a paper testing knowledge of the great poetry of the Fourteenth Century, under the general heading ‘English Literature’. But since that is lunatic, one must suppose that something else is meant.

What kind of question can it mean which no candidate of Course III need ever touch? Is it wicked to enquire, in paper or viva voce, what here or there Chaucer really meant, by word or form, or idiom? Is metre and verse-technique of no concern to sensitive literary minds? Must nothing in any way related to Chaucer’s medium of expression be ever allowed to disturb the cotton wool of poor Course III? Then why not add that only Course I and II may be required to answer questions that refer to history or politics, to astronomy, or to religion?

The logical result of this attitude, indeed its only rational expression, would be this direction: ‘Courses I and II may be expected to show knowledge of Chaucer in the original; Course III will use a translation into contemporary English’. But, if this translation, as may well happen, should at any point be erroneous, this may not be mentioned. That would be ‘language’.

I have once or twice, not so long ago, been asked to explain or defend this language: to say (I suppose) how it can possibly be profitable or enjoyable. As if I were some curious wizard with arcane knowledge, with a secret recipe that I was unwilling to divulge. To compare the less with the greater, is not that rather like asking an astronomer what he finds in mathematics? Or a theologian what is the interest of the textual criticism of Scripture? As in Andrew Lang’s fable a missionary turned on a critic with the words: ‘Did Paul know Greek?’ Some members of our School would probably have said: ‘Did Paul know language?’

I did not accept the challenge. I did not answer, for I knew no answer that would not appear uncivil. But I might have said: ‘If you do not know any language, learn some – or try to. You should have done so long ago. The knowledge is not hidden. Grammar is for all (intelligent persons), though not all may rise to star-spangled grammar.’ If you cannot learn, or find the stuff distasteful, then keep humbly quiet. You are a deaf man at a concert. Carry on with your biography of the composer, and do not bother about the noises that he makes!’
I have said enough, perhaps more than enough for this occasion. I must now get out of the chair and finally stand down. I have not made any effective *apologia pro consulatu meo*, for none is really possible. Probably my best act in it is the leaving of it – especially in handing it on to its elected occupant, Norman Davis. Already one of the chair-borne, he will know that in the cozy cushions, which legend furnishes for professorial seats, many thorns lurk among the stuffing. He can have those too, with my blessing.

If we consider what Merton College and what the Oxford School of English owes to the Antipodes, to the Southern Hemisphere, especially to scholars born in Australia and New Zealand, it may well be felt that it is only just that one of them should now ascend an Oxford chair of English. Indeed it may be thought that justice has been delayed since 1925. There are of course other lands under the Southern Cross. I was born in one; though I do not claim to be the most learned of those who have come hither from the far end of the Dark Continent. But I have the hatred of *apartheid* in my bones; and most of all I detest the segregation or separation of Language and Literature. I do not care which of them you think White.

But even as I step off – not quite the condemned criminal, I hope, that the phrase suggests – I cannot help recalling some of the salient moments in my academic past. The vastness of Joe Wright’s dining-room table (when I sat alone at one end learning the elements of Greek philology from glinting glasses in the further gloom). The kindness of William Craigie to a jobless soldier in 1918. The privilege of knowing even the sunset of the days of Henry Bradley. My first glimpse of the unique and dominant figure of Charles Talbut Onions, darkly surveying me, a fledgling prentice in the Dictionary Room (fiddling with the slips for WAG and WALRUS and WAMPUM). Serving under the generous captnacy of George Gordon in Leeds. Seeing Henry Cecil Wyld wreck a table in the Cadena Café with the vigour of his representation of Finnish minstrels chanting the *Kalevala*. And of course many other moments, not forgotten if not mentioned; and many other men and women of the Studium Anglicanum: some dead, some venerable, some retired, some translated elsewhere, some yet young and very much with us.
still; but all (or nearly all – I cannot say fairer than that and remain honest) nearly all dear to my heart.

If then with understanding I contemplate this venerable foundation, I now myself fróð in ferðe⁴ am moved to exclaim:

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\begin{align*}
Hwéð cuóm meárh, hwéð cuóm magó? Hwéð cuóm \\
mádóümgysa?
\end{align*}
\]
\[
\begin{align*}
Hwéð cuóm symbla gesetu? Hwéð sindon seledréamas?
\end{align*}
\]
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\begin{align*}
Éalá, beorht bune! Éalá, byrnwiga!
\end{align*}
\]
\[
\begin{align*}
Éalá, péodnes práym! Hú seo próg gewát,
\end{align*}
\]
\[
\begin{align*}
genóp under niht-helm, swá heó nó wére!
\end{align*}
\]

(Where is the horse gone, where the young rider? Where now the giver of gifts? Where are the seats at the feasting gone? Where are the merry sounds in the hall? Alas, the bright goblet! Alas, the knight and his hauberkerk! Alas, the glory of the king! How that hour has departed, dark under the shadow of night, as had it never been!)

But that is ‘Language’.

\[
\begin{align*}
Ài! laurië lantar lassi súrinen!
\end{align*}
\]
\[
\begin{align*}
Yéní únótímé xe rámar aldaron!
\end{align*}
\]
\[
\begin{align*}
Yéní xe lintë yuldar váñer –⁵
\end{align*}
\]
\[
\begin{align*}
Sí man i yulma nin enquantuva?
\end{align*}
\]

(Alas! as gold fall the leaves in the wind!
Years innumerable as the wings of trees!
Years like swift draughts of wine have passed away –
Who now will fill again the cup for me?)

But that is ‘Nonsense’.

In 1925, when I was untimely elevated to the stól of Anglo-Saxon, I was inclined to add:

\[
\begin{align*}
Néarón nú cynningas ne cáséras \\
ne goldgiefen suylce iú weórón!
\end{align*}
\]

(There are not now any kings or emperors, nor any patrons giving gifts of gold, such as once there were!)
But now when I survey with eye or mind those who may be called my pupils (though rather in the sense 'the apples of my eyes'): those who have taught me much (not least travaile, that is fidelity), who have gone on to a learning to which I have not attained; or when I see how many scholars could more than worthily have succeeded me; then I perceive with gladness that the duguð has not yet fallen by the wall, and the drem is not yet silenced.  

NOTES

1 An alternative would be the provision, beside the ordinary Preliminary, of an English Honour Moderations, which would enable the able or more ambitious to spend four years in reading. It would, I think, be less useful in the English School, the variety and scope of which is little exhibited or understood at earlier stages. Our need is rather to provide for those who first at a university discover what there is to know and do, and what are their true bents and talents. [The suggestion is that in addition to the Preliminary Examination (at that time taken after two terms' work) there should be, as an option, a sterner examination ('Honour Moderations', in which candidates would be classed) taken after two years: the whole course for such candidates thus taking four years. In the event, the ingenious decision was that all students reading English should take an examination called 'Honour Moderations' after one year, the whole course taking three years as before. – Ed.]

2 Courses I and II: options in the English School at Oxford allowing the student to concentrate on earlier periods. These courses, taken by relatively few, are largely Lang; while Course III, taken by the great majority, is very largely Lit. [Ed.]

3 'star-spangled grammar': the reference is to enquiry into the forms of words before the earliest records; in those studies the conventional practice is to place an asterisk before hypothetical, deduced forms. [Ed.]

4 fidē in fērō: having at heart the wisdom of experience.

5 vēnīr was the reading of the text of Namērī (Galadriel's lament in Lórien) in the first edition of The Lord of the Rings; it was changed to asvēnīr for the second edition (1966). [Ed.]

6 These lines are from The Seafarer; the other Anglo-Saxon verses and references are from The Wanderer. [Ed.]

7 duguð: the noble company (in a king's hall). drem: the sound of their glad voices and the music of their feasts.