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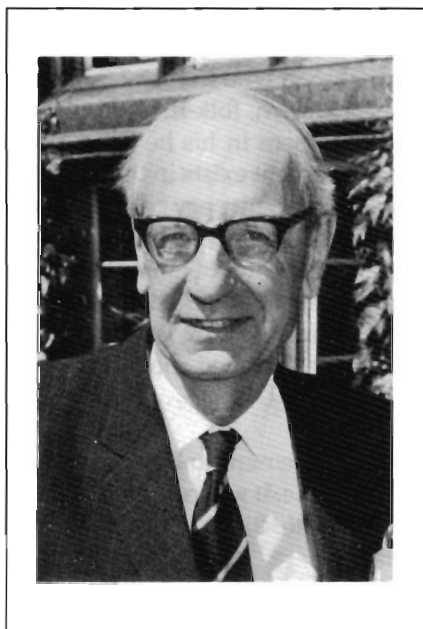
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## APPRECIATIONS

### NICHOLAS MANSERGH (1910-1991)



Professor Nicholas Mansergh was arguably the most distinguished Irish historian of his generation. He had a world-wide reputation as a Commonwealth scholar, writing or editing nearly 30 volumes in a lengthy career which culminated in his appointment as Master of St. John's College, Cambridge. Modest, humane and liberal in outlook, Mansergh was something of a *rara avis* in his time; interested in the history of the Commonwealth and yet an anti-imperialist. Indeed, he was keenly aware in his writings of the unspoken prejudices and biases which underpinned English rule in Ireland.

Philip Nicholas Seton Mansergh was born near Tipperary town in 1910. Troop trains leaving the town for the War in 1914-15 were among his earliest memories. After a brief period at school in the north, he went to the Erasmus Smith Abbey School in Tipperary. He was the youngest boy there when in troubled times the school abruptly closed. After the Civil War he went with his elder brother to St. Columba's College, Dublin, from 1923 to 1928. There Dr. S.J. Willis, the mathematics master, was an outstanding influence.

Going up to Oxford to read modern history, Mansergh's interests were initially rather more literary than historical, and he developed a strong interest as well in political science. At Oxford he came under the influence of R.B. McCallum (who coined the word "psephology" to describe the study of elections), and was supervised in research by W.G.S. Adams, who had worked in Plunkett's IAOS and who had been a member of Lloyd George's garden suburb. Mansergh was also influenced by the works of James Bryce on modern democracies. All three were Scottish liberals.

Looking back over 50 years later, Dr. Mansergh commented to the present writer: "It seems to me unmistakable that my two earliest books were written by someone who was a political scientist rather than a historian. My interest moved rather sharply from modern history to political science in a way that I think would not be possible now, because the techniques of the historian and the political scientist have so much diverged". His first book, *The Irish Free State: its government and politics*, published in 1934 when he was aged 24, gave Dr. Mansergh his earliest interest in the Commonwealth theme which he pursued all his life.

"The Commonwealth for my generation", he remarked, "had something in common with the Common Market nowadays. I was interested in the Commonwealth to see if it would provide a way forward in Ireland itself. An inherent weakness in the Anglo-Irish Treaty was that the Dominion settlement was not consistent with partition. I felt that Dominion status would not work, which was obvious enough by 1934; but I was not sure whether any alternative to Dominion status would work in the Irish case."

In 1936 his book, *The Government of Northern Ireland — a study in devolution*, was published. It contained many perceptive insights into what he called "the ice-bound polity of the Northern State." "When politics are viewed from the narrow window of an age-old conflict; when social and economic life is congealed by the icy gust of sectarian bitterness; when generosity of feeling must

always give way to party interest, then a position is created where men of first-class brains are not trusted and men of second-class brains have not the vision to see beyond the prejudices which history has formed about them."

In 1940 Dr. Mansergh published a seminal work, *Ireland in the age of reform and revolution*, which became a standard text in the universities and which was notable for bringing a European perspective to the study of modern Irish history. In the preface to the third edition — now available as *The Irish Question* since 1975 — he noted that local history was neglected in Ireland, where Dublin perspectives continued to prevail. Happily this is no longer the case. Irish history at national level is being thoroughly re-assessed through a close and oftentimes inter-disciplinary study of regional, county and local history. Mansergh himself contributed an essay entitled "Some reflections upon the local dimension in history" to *Tipperary: History and Society*, the book published in 1985 which led to the formation of the Society which publishes this Journal.

Dr. Mansergh was in Oxford until the war as a tutor in the school of Modern Greats and as secretary to the Oxford University Politics Research Committee. During the war years he served in the Ministry of Information where fellow Tipperary man Brendan Bracken was minister. Mansergh had for a time special responsibility for Anglo-Irish information services and cultural relations, and in 1944 he was appointed head of the Empire division.

Mansergh remembered Bracken as a man with a shock of red hair whose Irish background was counterbalanced by sharp, youthful impressions of Australia. Dr. Mansergh recalled having lunch with Bracken and two New Zealand politicians, S.G. Holland and F.W. Doidge, afterwards Prime Minister and External Affairs Minister, respectively. In the course of this lunch the New Zealanders asked Bracken how they would get their National (conservative) Party back to office in New Zealand.

As Mansergh recounted it, "Bracken came to life and said with great vigour — 'one thing is certain, you must spend money on schools, teachers and universities or you are lost if you don't.' Then suddenly and with splendid dramatic effect, he stiffened in his chair and pointed towards me and declaimed — 'Look, look at Mansergh there, he has a lean and hungry look, I tell you such men are dangerous.' Doidge clearly knew, but Holland I don't think realised that this was a quotation and he looked at me in considerable alarm."

"I had forgotten all about this when seven years later I was in New Zealand and spending an evening with the New Zealand historian, Freddie Wood. He started talking about the recent elections in which Holland had come to power. 'Old Holland had been going on about education and the universities before the election', said Wood, 'I didn't believe a word of it and I voted against him. But you know, since he's got in, the most extraordinary thing is that it has all happened and we can't understand why'. I feel I have a little place in New Zealand's story", commented Dr. Mansergh.

In 1947 Dr. Mansergh was elected to the chair of British Commonwealth relations at Chatham House, headquarters of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, undertaking teaching responsibilities in the University of London. In the same year he went on the first of many visits to India as an observer at the Asian Relations Conference. India before independence he found a tremendously exhilarating place. "It was the ending of imperialism in Asia and was compared in importance with the French and Russian revolutions. That no doubt was exaggerated, but as Pandit Nehru put it, there was some magic in the air as India moved to keep the 'tryst with destiny' at midnight on 14/15 August 1947.

"In December 1946 Nehru in moving the Objectives Resolution in the Constituent Assembly had declared: 'India is bound to be sovereign; it is bound to be independent and it is bound to be a republic'; but he had also taken the occasion to remind the Assembly that 'even in the British



Commonwealth of Nations today, Eire is a Republic and yet in many ways, it is a member ... So it is a conceivable thing.” Mansergh himself was convinced that a relationship on an external, but otherwise equal, basis would be of advantage to India and might be the solution to this problem.

He recalled: “When I came back from India I delivered a lecture entitled ‘The implications of Eire’s relations with the British Commonwealth of Nations’. Since the cabinet papers for this period have become available, I have discovered that at the suggestion of Stafford Cripps this paper was sent to Attlee, who referred it to a committee who were examining Commonwealth relations. The Canadians became interested and something of this kind did emerge. India became as a republic a full member state, with an acknowledgement of the King as the symbol of the free association and as such head of the Commonwealth — a further acknowledgement to Mr. de Valera for his pioneering of the way would not have been unfitting. My lecture was referred to in the *Sunday Independent* and prompted questions to Costello when he went to Ottawa — or so the Canadians told me — on the question of whether the External Relations Act should be repealed or not. The repeal took effect in April 1949, at which date the Indian republic membership which exists to this day was established.”

In 1953 Dr. Mansergh moved from Chatham House to Cambridge, where he was appointed Smuts professor of the History of the British Commonwealth. There he moved in the environment of scientists. One of his colleagues persuaded him to read the lives of mathematicians, “and it had an influence”, he asserted, “on my outlook. Among other things, I felt it enabled me to understand Mr. de Valera better! Some people detected a shift in my historical writing from that time. Possibly I did pay greater attention to exact analysis as against literary form.”

Mansergh maintained that accuracy and a first-hand source of information, not necessarily written, was fundamental to modern historical research. “James Bryce was a great believer in asking people who were working in the machinery of government how it seemed to them. So far as possible throughout my life, I have done that and I am very careful to make a note immediately after I have talked to someone, because one becomes only too conscious of tricks of memory.”

Dr. Mansergh had good insights into the governmental decision-making process. It was his experience that “great men are apt to think when they hold powerful office that there are all sorts of options before them, but when you look at it very closely there are very few and maybe just one. A skilful leader will always disguise this and pretend it is his decision. The constraints upon a political leader are so considerable that he is in a very strong position if ten per cent of the decision-making process is in his own hands. After all, ten per cent can be an awful lot.”

In Cambridge Professor Mansergh ran a special subject on the Anglo-Irish settlement which was taken by a large number of students reading for Part 2 of the Historical Tripos, and he supervised several research students of Irish history. For some years he was an external examiner for the NUI. From 1967, when Harold Wilson appointed him, he was editor-in-chief of the great tomes of documents from the India Office Records on the transfer of power to India in the 1940s.

In 1969 he published his famous work, *The Commonwealth Experience*, the title of which was suggest by his wife, Diana. Sir Keith Hancock described this book in *Mansergh’s Festschrift* as “a magisterial work, the scholarly distillation of four decades of intellectual endeavour in Oxford, London and Cambridge.” In 1969 his colleagues elected him Master of St. John’s, the second largest college in the Oxbridge group, and he resigned from his chair so as to have sufficient balance of time for his Indian editorial work. He served as Master for ten years.

In the *Transfer of Power, 1942-1947* series, Dr. Mansergh and his colleagues did not allow anything to come into the text which was written afterwards: “I like the record as it was — not history written, or rewritten, by its survivors.” The Indian work gave him a new sense of the vital importance of documentary source material in historical research as well as Indian friendships he valued. In the



1980s until his death Professor Mansergh divided his time between his home in Grenane outside Tipperary town, St. John's College, Cambridge, and the occasional trip to India — where he was several times visiting professor at the Indian School of International Studies in New Delhi.

Thomas G. McGrath

The death of Professor Nicholas Mansergh removes from the academic world one of its great historians. Born at a time when the powers of older landed families were already much curtailed by both the Land Acts and the growth of democracy, he was still young as Ireland moved to self-government, and his earliest work related to the infant governments of the two States into which this island was divided.

Education in the new Ireland before proceeding to Pembroke College, Oxford, he developed an interest in the changes taking place in the British Commonwealth during his lifetime. This interest was strengthened by his term as Assistant Director of the Dominions Office after World War II.

Perhaps one of Dr. Mansergh's most remarkable contributions to the changing of the Commonwealth was a lecture he gave to the Royal Institute for International Relations in 1947, in which he drew heavily on his knowledge of the Irish experience. He discussed the idea of external association as a possible key to the relationship between states. It had, he said, been suggested as a possible solution to the Dutch-Indonesian and Anglo-Burmese questions. In neither case was it acceptable, and Mansergh suggested that this failure arose from an improper understanding of what de Valera had succeeded in achieving under the concept.

Many years later I was invited by President de Valera to meet Mansergh at lunch at Aras an Uachtaráin. He took the opportunity to discuss many political events with de Valera, while I just ate and learned. However, I managed to get in one question; did that 1947 lecture change the Commonwealth so as to allow India to become a republic within the association? Mansergh's answer was simple; "I know that there were four British Cabinet ministers present — and I also know that they did not accept the advice of their officials!"

Professor Mansergh's continuing love of his native Tipperary and of Ireland is seen in many of his works from *The Irish Free State: its government and politics* in 1934 to the third edition of *The Irish Question, 1840-1921*, which appeared in 1975. In between he published numerous other works. As a professor at Cambridge and as Master of St. John's College he spent much of his time teaching, lecturing and writing on the whole Commonwealth experience.

He had a breadth of mind and an academic balance which enabled him to understand vital changes. Sometimes, however, the significance of a symbol was missed. When he reviewed my biography of de Valera in a fine article in *Studies* he jibbed at one suggestion. I had said that de Valera stayed in New Delhi with Lord Mountbatten on the eve of the end of British rule. Mansergh held that British rule had ended with the Indian constitution the previous year. For de Valera, however, the end came with the departure from India of the representative of the Crown!

Nicholas Mansergh in his academic life drew on the resources of his own Tipperary roots. His detachment never dimmed his love for these roots; rather it enlightened it.

Thomas P. O'Neill



## TIM LOONEY

Tim Looney was a magnificent local historian, a good organiser and penman, an active member of his trade union all of his working life and a loyal contributor to many parish and sporting activities. Tim never flinched from fighting for what he thought was right.

I knew him best as a researcher, as an explorer of the countryside all around him and as a lover of the documents that revealed the mysteries of the past. I knew him as a companion amongst the gravestones, the tumbled farmhouses and the deserted villages. Tim had a passion for unearthing the stone, the ruin and all the underground ways which helped him unravel the history of his region. He had an equal gift for imparting his knowledge, in his writings, his numerous field trips and lectures.

Tim was well-read, but never took the written word as gospel. He always asked awkward questions, looked at problems from different angles and came up with his own often stubborn interpretations. He was a very good teacher; he challenged my own assumptions and often forced me to look anew at the story of a place. Tim was mainly a self-taught man. I do not know where he got his great love for exploring and understanding the countryside; but it was an abiding passion. Tipperary and in particular the Cahir region will miss his qualities of leadership, patriotism and above all originality.

*William Smyth*

## SISTER ÁINE NÍ CHEARBHAILL

Sister Aine, as she was affectionately known in her adopted town, had been a tireless worker in Templemore Historical Society for some years before her unexpected death on 7 May last. She had a deep and lasting interest in Irish history, and had been instrumental in attracting many well-known speakers from outside the Templemore area to Society meetings. She had also served on the committee of the Co. Tipperary Historical Society.

A member of an old Thurles family, Sister Aine was educated in the Convents of Mercy there and in Templemore, and duly qualified for the civil service. She found her true vocation as a teacher, however, which she reluctantly gave up on her retirement. Like other members of her family she was a keen Gaeilgeoir.

Her attention to detail was phenomenal, and her talent for organisation was evident in the book launch she attended only four nights before she died. In whatever project she took up, she spared neither herself nor her helpers. *Ar dheis Dé go raibh a hanam.*

*Paul P. Walsh*

