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CARDINAL GASQUET AS AN HISTORIAN

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CARDINAL GASQUET AS AN HISTORIAN

MANY of those present today may have felt, when they first read the title of this lecture, that the subject was an insignificant one; they would agree with the latest historian of the Tudor age that Gasquet's work 'is best ignored'.[1] By way of dialectic, let me remind you that H. A. L. Fisher pronounced his book on the monasteries 'far the best treatise on the subject—a very learned and careful work';[2] that T. F. Tout could write of his *Henry III* as 'in many ways a well-informed, painstaking and important book';[3] that J. Willis Clark, the historian of Cambridge architecture and of medieval libraries, dedicated one of his principal works to Gasquet with the words *magistro discipulus*;[4] and that Lord Acton not only invited him to write a chapter for the *Cambridge Modern History*, but mentioned Gasquet, along with Bishop Stubbs and Felix Liebermann, as a representative historian in his celebrated letter to his contributors.[5] I have often been asked for an opinion on Gasquet's work; what follows is an attempt to present it.

Francis Neil Gasquet was born in London in 1846. His father, a naturalized Englishman, was the son of a distinguished French *émigré* naval officer, who had been taken off by the British fleet when Toulon was abandoned in 1792. His mother was a Yorkshire woman, and it may be said at once that in character, tastes, looks, prejudices and failings Gasquet was typically

[1] G. R. Elton, *England under the Tudors* (1955), p. 484.
[2] *The Political History of England*, vol. v (ed. 1934), p. 495.
[3] *E[nglish] H[istorical] R[eview]*, xxi (Oct. 1906), p. 782.
[4] *The Care of Books* (Cambridge, 1901). The dedication runs: Francisco Aidano Gasquet/Monacho Benedictino/ D.D./ Magistro Discipulus. The writer was for long Registrary of the University and Fellow of Trinity College.
[5] This letter, dated 1898, is printed in *Lectures on Modern History*, ed. Figgis and Laurence (1912); see p. 318.

English. His father was a successful London physician, and as a small boy Frank acted as train-bearer to Cardinal Wiseman and served the Mass of the convert Dr Manning at Bayswater. In 1862 he was sent to school at Downside. The school and monastery were very different from what they have become within the past sixty years. Catholics were until 1871 banned by a religious test from entering Oxford or Cambridge, and *de facto* prevented till the mid-nineties from going there by Archbishop Manning. In the Catholic educational system and curriculum there was as yet not a breath of influence from the public schools or public examinations. Downside was a small and stagnant school of some sixty boys of all ages from twelve to nineteen, who existed from October to July without holidays at home; it was staffed entirely by nine or ten monks, all under thirty years of age. The boys came mostly from the upper-middle-class homes, with a fair sprinkling of the old Catholic county families—Stourtons, Petres, Smythes, Throckmortons, Berkeleys, Vaughans, Fitzherberts—and a seasoning from the Anglo-Irish landowning class; the monks themselves had almost without exception passed through the school, and there was consequently a family solidarity throughout school and monastery. The teaching was poor, and by contemporary standards at Winchester or Shrewsbury the scholarship was rudimentary and the intellectual attainment contemptible, but a long tradition from the past and a succession of notable men, together with the possession of a library fairly strong in patristics and church history, gave an atmosphere of culture and breeding of a peculiar cast but of very real power, and for some years at that time a young aristocrat of means, the newly ordained Lord Petre, acted as guide and philosopher to the senior boys and as a fairy godmother to the community.[1] The outlook was still that of a proud people aloof, and on the defensive. Downside had educated many a Catholic

[1] Lord Petre (1847–93) was in residence at Downside 1874–7; a brief account of his influence and benefactions, by Abbot Cuthbert Butler, is in *D[ownside] R[eview]*, xiv (July, 1914), p. 60.

squire and bishop; Ullathorne, the apostle of Australia and later Newman's bishop in Birmingham, was one of them, and shortly before Gasquet's time Roger Vaughan, later archbishop of Sydney, and Herbert Vaughan, later cardinal archbishop of Westminster, had been at the school. While still at school Gasquet decided to try his monastic vocation; he passed successfully through the noviciate at Belmont, and in 1867 returned to Downside and began almost at once to teach in the school.

At that time, as also for the two previous centuries, the English Benedictines were principally occupied in parish work all over England. The monasteries were not autonomous, and the monks were at the disposal of the common president, who drew his parish priests from the priories at the age of thirty or so. It should be added, and remembered, that Gasquet, once he had returned from Belmont, neither then nor at any other time had any experience of full monastic life in its traditional form. The regime at Downside in the early seventies was physically austere, unworldly and laborious, but there was a minimum of solitude and liturgical observance, monks and boys were very much on top of each other in their narrow quarters, and the life, if hard, had neither the difficulties nor the spiritual advantages of the unchanging conventual round of observance, silence and personal solitude. Gasquet took the life as he found it, and threw himself into it with zest. We hear of him as 'revelling in work' and as 'eaten up with activity'. After ten years he was elected prior of Downside. It was the first of many strokes of fortune that were to determine his career. Normally, the prior was appointed by General Chapter, with a preference for a 'safe' man, but if the prior died in office or resigned the community elected, and this happened in 1878.[1]

The period that followed was in some ways the most fruitful in his life. The prior in those days had many of the duties of

[1] The prior who resigned was Dom Bernard Murphy, to whose initiative and foresight the lay-out of church and monastery at Downside was primarily due; Gasquet, here as elsewhere, came in on the flood.

bursar and headmaster. Though he had under him only a dozen able-bodied men, they were in many ways a remarkable group. Besides Gasquet himself, there were Edmund Ford, later first abbot of Downside and the inspiring leader of a generation, the young Cuthbert Butler, scholar and second abbot, and Gilbert Dolan, whom all his contemporaries ranked high.[1] The last survivor of that age, the distinguished antiquary Ethelbert Horne, died a nonagenarian in 1952. To him the reign of Prior Gasquet was always the golden age. The prior was vigorous, versatile, ever planning, building and teaching. It was in those years that the church and monastery of Downside took the shape that can still be recognized. It was then, also, that an event of a very different kind took place, the meeting of Gasquet and Edmund Bishop.

Bishop, who had recently become a Catholic, was already a scholar of note. As a young man he had acted as private secretary to Thomas Carlyle, and had then obtained a post in the Education Office which left him a fair margin of leisure for his own work.[2] He was a born scholar, a self-taught polymath of the family of Muratori or Leopold de Lisle. With wide sympathies, a prodigious memory, a passion for accuracy and truth, he had ranged far and wide among the great works of scholarship of the past and among the medieval manuscripts in the British Museum. His forte was early medieval church history, with a bias, which later became a passion, towards liturgy, but liturgy widely understood so as to become almost Christian social history. He had a genius for finding and noting the significant manuscript or out-of-the-way text, and had already been used by Mommsen as an editor for the *Monumenta*. Felix Liebermann and the French Comte Riant were his friends and admirers, and later Duchesne, Batiffol and André Wilmart. At the same time

[1] He was the anonymous editor of Benet Weldon's *Chronological Notes on the English Benedictine Congregation* (1881).

[2] For Bishop's own account of his early years see *D.R.*, xxxii (Jan. 1933), pp. 97–113.

he was physically frail, highly-strung, fastidious, sensitive and lonely, both as a free-lance scholar and as a recent convert. He came to visit Downside and was greeted by the young prior in the parlour of the old manor-house. The attraction was mutual. Gasquet, self-taught in another way, recognized at once the wide learning and intellectual stimulus of Bishop, while the recent convert found a young superior of congenial tastes, who had been bred and had lived in the traditions of Catholic religious life, and who had all the vigour, boldness and drive that he himself lacked. Thenceforward, Bishop was a regular visitor at Downside for almost forty years, and the associate of Gasquet in much of his early work.

For the moment, however, this could not have been foreseen. Normally, in a few years' time, Gasquet would have been posted to parish work. It was now that a second unforeseeable event took place. In 1884 Gasquet fell seriously ill, partly from strain and overwork. His heart, already damaged by a previous illness, showed signs of failing compensation, and it was thought that he had not many months to live. He resigned, and retired as an invalid for care and medical attention to his mother and home in London.[1] Here, as he slowly mended, he began a course of reading on Tudor history, and, as his health improved, began to visit the British Museum, and conceived the idea of a work of research on Tudor monasticism. In this he was certainly inspired by Bishop, who remarked years later, 'I pulled Gasquet out of his coffin'. He was, however, in the position of a mouse closely observed by a cat. The abbot-president, who had a poor opinion of historical studies, was only waiting for a certificate of fitness in order to send Father Gasquet out to a parish—one had even been selected as a quiet spot for an invalid, the chaplaincy to the Smythe family and their tenants at Acton Burnell in the depths of Shropshire. Gasquet, however, had a friend at court.

[1] Gasquet himself, many years later, wrote: 'It seemed at the time that I was at the end of all things, and that my life's work was over' (S. Leslie, *Cardinal Gasquet* (1953), p. 32).

Cardinal Manning was in general little enamoured of religious; it was, indeed, profanely said that in his priority of dislikes they followed close on the heels of his especial *bête noire*, the brewers. He had, however, known Gasquet well as a boy, and more recently Gasquet's brother had married his niece. It was, moreover, only two years since Leo XIII had thrown open the Vatican archives and addressed his celebrated letter on historical studies to Cardinal Hergenröther.[1] Manning therefore offered to write a strongly worded letter to the pope begging him to protect Gasquet from the fate that threatened. Leo responded with alacrity; the president was bidden to hold his hand, and Gasquet was given leave to reside and work in London. In the event, he was never again to live the monastic life as a member of a community. After spending a few years with his mother he settled first in Great Ormond Street and later in Harpur Street, where he was joined by Edmund Bishop.

During the next half-dozen years Gasquet, now restored to health, threw himself into his new work with all his old energy. The future in 1886 must have seemed dark indeed. His successful work at Downside was ended and could never be resumed. His present work was temporary and if he failed to make a success of it the only future would be Acton Burnell or its equivalent. Between him and achievement of any kind lay an uncertain number of years at the British Museum or Record Office. Those who have lived laborious days at either of those great workshops, even when surrounded with the present amenities and a *décor* superior to that enjoyed by the Victorians, will know what moments and days of doubt and heart-searching inevitably occur. And Gasquet was a man of forty when he began his work. Those years indeed claim our respect.

Let us recall for a moment the historical landscape of the mid-eighties. In the academic world Stubbs at Oxford had inaugu-

[1] *A[cta] A[postolicae] S[edis]*, xvi (1883), pp. 44–55. The brief *Saepenumero*, of 18 August 1883, was addressed to Cardinals de Luca, Pitra and Hergenröther.

rated with brilliance the epoch of the historian trained upon chronicles and charters; Gairdner, succeeding Brewer, was working steadily through the Tudor papers, and Gasquet at the Record Office may have sat next to Maitland or S. R. Gardiner, but the shift from the prize essay to the seminar, from the literary text to the record, from the Reading Room to the Public Record Office, was still a thing of the future, and the vanguard of the academic historians was still absorbed in constitutional history. We can only dimly imagine an investigation of the Tudors unassisted by Pollard and the complete *Letters and Papers*, but when Gasquet began his work Pollard was a schoolboy and Gairdner had only reached 1535. Gasquet was in fact the first to explore methodically not only the whole of the relevant Cromwell papers, but also the accounts and particulars and pensions of the Court of Augmentations, and the pension list of Cardinal Pole. How much he was helped by Bishop, and how much by Gairdner, who respected his early work, we have no means of knowing, but Gasquet, then as later, had a real gift both for hard work and for discovering and appreciating the value of documents. He did not confine himself to the British Museum and P.R.O. He visited Oxford, Lambeth, Peterborough, Wells, Hereford and other libraries, and solicited access to private collections, such as that of the difficult Lord Ashburnham. He did not shrink from a day of seven or eight hours with the records, and living as he did in Bloomsbury he wasted no time in travel. The result, after less than three years' work, was the first volume of *Henry VIII and the English Monasteries*.[1] The success of the book was immediate and lasting; it became at once, and remained for more than a decade, an historical best-seller. Less than two years later the second volume appeared, to be greeted with equal or even greater applause.

This success won for Gasquet immediate recognition both among his own co-religionists and among the wide reading public. Seventy years ago history was not the academic preserve

[1] Two vols., 1888, 1889.

it has since become, or perhaps we should say that the various currents that now have merged still ran apart. In those days the Society of Antiquaries, the Camden Society, the P.R.O. and the British Museum were all in a measure learned, without being academic. Gasquet, not altogether through his own fault, always remained a stranger to the world of Oxford and Cambridge, with great loss to himself, but the other foci of learning welcomed him from the start. He got to know James Gairdner, S. R. Gardiner, W. H. Hunt, Dr Jessop and Dr J. C. Cox. His value was recognized in the small but enlightened Catholic educated world; there was now no longer any danger of a call to Acton Burnell. Leo XIII commissioned Manning to bestow the Roman doctorate of Divinity on him. He was always a hard worker, and he followed up his first success by two other books of considerable value—*Edward VI and the Book of Common Prayer*[1] and *The Eve of the Reformation.*[2] The former, largely the work of Bishop, was a pioneer study of lasting value which can still be read with profit; in the latter he was able to collect and publish a multitude of facts from his researches.

The work on the Book of Common Prayer was another instance of Gasquet's good fortune. When, two or three years later, the question of Anglican orders came up in the Roman Curia, Gasquet seemed the obvious choice as one of the representative Catholic historians from England—and if by Gasquet we understand the partnership Gasquet-Bishop the choice was undoubtedly reasonable. We are not concerned with that controversial issue, save to note that it took Gasquet to Rome, where he made the acquaintance of Leo XIII, and won the friendship of the brilliant young Monsignor Merry del Val. One thing led inevitably to another. A domestic controversy among the English Benedictines, in which Gasquet had taken little part, was now

[1] *Edward VI and the Book of Common Prayer*, 1890. In this Gasquet did little more than assemble Bishop's notes and overlook some slips and misprints. But he doubtless had taken part in the discussion of the arguments to be used.

[2] *The Eve of the Reformation*, 1899.

settled by Rome in the way which he and his old colleagues at Downside had desired. The priories became independent abbeys, and when the pope needed a generally respected figure to pilot the new constitutions and serve as abbot-president, Gasquet was to hand and was duly appointed; his re-election was a normal piece of routine till 1914. The wheel had come full circle: the quasi-rebel of 1885, who had held the abbot-president off with a papal brief, was now himself president and wielded authority from Harpur Street.

The early years of the century were in many ways Gasquet's apogee. He was president of the English Benedictines, his books were still selling and his reputation as a scholar stood high. His name had been mentioned as that of a future cardinal, and the papal choice had been anticipated (if that is the right word) by the committee of The Athenaeum, who in 1903 brought forward his name for election under Rule II. In that same year he came within an inch of a still higher distinction.[1] On the death of Cardinal Vaughan the Westminster chapter, in forwarding the customary three names to Rome, chose those of Merry del Val, an English-born Spanish aristocrat, Gasquet and Hedley, the Benedictine bishop of Newport, in that order. When the names passed to the meeting of the English bishops there was some demur at Merry as a foreigner and the name of Francis Bourne, the young bishop of Southwark, was added by a single vote at the last minute. All this was an open secret, and for some weeks it seemed to all, and to Gasquet himself, that he would shortly become the fourth archbishop of Westminster; Hedley was infirm, and the death of Leo XIII a few weeks after that of Vaughan called Merry del Val to a higher sphere of work. The committee of Propaganda would indeed probably have endorsed the English choice but for an unpredictable occurrence. When the discussion came on at Rome, it so happened that

[1] For this episode, see the letters and Gasquet's contemporary memorandum in Leslie, *op. cit.*, pp. 80–9. Vaughan died 19 June, Leo XIII 20 July, 1903.

Cardinal Moran of Sydney was in Rome on his election visit. Moran, who like his fellow countryman and successor, Archbishop Mannix, was a redoubtable fighter, had succeeded at Sydney the English Benedictine and Downside monk, Roger Bede Vaughan, brother of the late Cardinal; he was himself no friend of monks—Gasquet somewhat ungallantly described him as an aged cuckoo in a Benedictine nest—and he intervened with great warmth in the Roman debate.[1] Persuaded or exhausted, the cardinals by the majority of a single vote, it was said, voted for Bourne, and the recently elected Pius X who knew not Gasquet confirmed their choice. The story ran that when Gasquet next visited Rome, the Pope alluded to his narrow escape from the purple. 'Yes, Your Holiness,' Gasquet is said to have replied, 'the Holy Spirit decided otherwise.' 'The Holy Spirit?' remarked St Pius, 'I thought it was Cardinal Moran.'

Though disappointed at Westminster Gasquet's star did not set. Rightly or wrongly, Rome had the idea that he was a scholar, and when Pius X decided to set up a pontifical commission of Benedictine monks to revise the text of the Vulgate his name presented itself as that of a suitable head. In 1912 he was appointed to the post and left Harpur Street for good. In April 1914 he received the red hat that he had long been expecting, not so much a token of his achievement as a scholar as a recognition of services rendered to the Holy See and of the importance of his new post, for which, indeed, many of his qualities served him well. With the remainder of his life, and his valiant activities at Rome on behalf of the allied cause in World War I, we are not here concerned.

It will have been seen that from 1888 onwards Gasquet's progress from one success to another and one distinguished position to another had taken him further and further from the interests and leisure of his few years of research. It may be

[1] For Vaughan and Moran, see *Dictionary of National Biography*. Gasquet's *mot* is in Leslie, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

added that in 1901 he had lost the companionship of Edmund Bishop. These circumstances, and the positions of authority and respect in which he found himself, undoubtedly affected his work and his character. He was, in the three different fields of scholarship, the monastic life, and the wider affairs of the Church, advancing steadily from one office to another in which his expertise did not correspond either to his eminence or to his reputation. To appreciate this we must return a little to consider his historical work.

Why, may we ask, did Gasquet's early work, and in particular *Henry VIII*, enjoy such great and lasting success? Though well written it is not a literary masterpiece. Nor, as Creighton in his first review pointed out,[1] and as recent critics have repeated, was it an epoch-making revision of a verdict of history. A very long tradition in English scholarship and English sentiment, stretching from Spelman and Selden, through Fuller, Dugdale and Burnet to Hallam and the editors of the *Monasticon*, had provided severe critics of Henry VIII and Cromwell, and had more than suggested that the Dissolution was a mere pillage. The contemporary Anglo-Catholic historian, Canon Dixon, was reaching and expressing conclusions almost identical with those of Gasquet. Moreover, the Romantic and Tractarian movements had combined to give a large section of cultured England nostalgia for the medieval world. Anyone who reads a succession of the articles on monastic remains published in the national and regional journals of the day will be impressed by the almost universally favourable tone adopted towards the

[1] *E.H.R.*, iii (April, 1888), pp. 376–9. Creighton remarked that 'there is nothing new in Father Gasquet's first volume', and 'Father Gasquet's book is more distinguished by good intentions than by erudition.' As however he made no attempt at a thoroughgoing criticism, his notice must be considered ungenerous. Gasquet, perhaps rightly, considered that Creighton was reacting against his account of the religious revolution. An unsigned notice (presumably also by Creighton) of the second volume, in *E.H.R.*, v, 811, is more favourable: 'The second volume of Father Gasquet's book shows a marked advance upon the first—his book is likely to be the standard authority on the subject for some time to come.'

monastic life. Dr Augustine Jessop and Dr J. C. Cox and the more scholarly W. Hunt were typical of their class.

All this is true, but it is not the whole truth. When Gasquet began to write, the Tudor historian for the wide reading public was Froude, and Froude was an eloquent, powerful and radically unfair critic of the traditional religion of the Middle Ages. Moreover, the quantity of fierce and irrational prejudice against all Catholic institutions, and against monasticism in particular, was still very great. There was, therefore, a live issue for readers, and a 'Cause' for Gasquet to champion.[1]

At the same time, the door was not shut against him. Gasquet, himself a monk—and English critics have ever been indulgent to Benedictines—had many of the qualities and foibles of the normal Englishman; he was good-humoured, moderate, patriotic, and had more than a dash of both sentimentality and philistinism. Even as a historical writer he had strong points. He had not only gone to the original records, but he had woven them into his narrative, and cited their racy phrases. He had a genuine appreciation of the power of words to transmit atmosphere and character. Compared with his pages, Dixon's careful distillations and even Froude's sophisticated cadences seem frigid. Moreover, he touched a whole series of topics, social, economic and artistic which the academic historian still eschewed.

Many of Gasquet's good qualities appeared also, if to a less degree, in several of his other books written between 1890 and 1900, such as his booklet on the Great Pestilence and his two volumes of collected studies, *The Eve of the Reformation* (1899) and *The Old English Bible* (1897). The first of these was in its original form submitted to Lord Acton in response to an invitation to contribute a chapter to Vol. I of what Gasquet characteristically referred to as '*The Modern History of Cambridge*'.[2]

[1] Cf. Gasquet to Bishop, 29 Feb. 1888 (Leslie, *op. cit.*, p. 145): 'It's the Cause, not me.'

[2] In an autobiographical note printed by Leslie, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

Acton returned it for revision, and we can comprehend his reasons; between his ideas of impartial history and Gasquet's there was a gulf, and neither was prepared to bridge it, but in the event the gap was never adequately filled, and Gasquet's essay has ever since been used as a quarry. He was among the first to see the value of wills, library catalogues, inventories, and guild records as evidence for religious history.

In addition to his real gifts as an interpreter and a historical antiquary, Gasquet had a flair for discovery. He was the first to emphasize the importance of the medieval bishops' registers, even though their contents did in fact aid in his undoing. He had read and transcribed the Norwich visitations before they were printed. He was the first to make consistent use of the Augmentations accounts and Pole's pension book, to appreciate the value of surviving medieval books as evidence of the tastes and interests of their scribes and owners and to indicate the riches of medieval sermon literature. Again and again during his career he was able to throw a crucial new document into the arena. He found a bundle of the commissioners' reports of 1536 which Gardiner had missed and which did not appear in the relevant volume of *Letters and Papers*.[1] In the matter of Anglican orders he unearthed the brief and bull of Paul IV and part of Cardinal Pole's Register, and he printed in his sole contribution to *The English Historical Review* an important letter of Roger Bacon, and drew attention to his significance as a critic of the text of the Vulgate.[2] He disposed of one of Froude's worse mistakes by a reference to a Hereford register, and went a long way towards settling the Wallingford problem by his discoveries at the British Museum and in the Vatican library.[3] He found and

[1] Printed in *Dublin Review*, cxiv (April, 1894), pp. 245–77.

[2] *E.H.R.*, xii (July, 1897), pp. 494–517. Gasquet identified the piece as the introduction to the *Opus Maius*.

[3] For the literature of the Wallingford affair see M. D. Knowles, 'The Case of St. Albans Abbey in 1490' in the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, III. ii, 144–58; for the Hereford register, the same writer's 'The last Abbot of Wigmore' in *Essays presented to Rose Graham* (1950), pp. 138 ff.

printed the earliest life of Gregory the Great.[1] He discovered and published an important pre-Conquest psalter.[2] He noted in his *Henry III* a large number of unpublished papal bulls.

Yet in any appraisal of Gasquet's work one unknown factor, one *x*, remains to perplex the calculator. How much did he owe to Edmund Bishop? That the debt was great was common knowledge to all who knew the two men personally, and Gasquet both in print and in private letters acknowledged it. It was, however, felt, even at the time, that this acknowledgment was less explicit and less generous than might have been expected. Gasquet was not a humble man, nor was he in personal relationship a notably generous man. We know from his letters that the manuscript of *Henry VIII* was submitted piece by piece to Bishop and ruthlessly criticized. What we do not know is how much the book owed to Bishop's own transcripts and notes, and how far Bishop saved Gasquet from endless delays by naming or suggesting documents that should be consulted, or even by time spent at the Museum on Gasquet's behalf. It seems certain that the introduction to the English translation of Montalembert's *Monks of the West*, one of the earliest and most successful of Gasquet's productions and one which, translated into Italian, had a considerable influence over Leo XIII and others during the recasting of the English Benedictine constitutions, was almost entirely the work of two 'ghosts', Edmund Bishop and Dom Alphege Cody.[3] It is also arguable—and it has been argued—that after Gasquet and Bishop ceased to live together in 1901 Gasquet's work never again reached its earlier standard. There were those, also, forty years ago, who thought that Gasquet had taken advantage of Bishop's good nature and had not

[1] *A Life of Pope Gregory the Great* (1904), from MS Sangallen, 567.

[2] *The Bosworth Psalter* (1908).

[3] So at least the present writer was more than once told by Abbot Cuthbert Butler, who weighed his words. Gasquet's account (in Leslie, *op. cit.*, p. 33), especially when all allowances are made for his constitutional inaccuracy, does not seem altogether incompatible. See also *D.R.*, lii (July, 1934), p. 401, note.

acknowledged his help in sufficient detail. They had not, perhaps read the dedication of one of his books to 'My old and tried friend Edmund Bishop, to whom I owe more than words can express'.[1] All that can be said for certain is that Bishop never voiced and probably never felt any grievance. His was a mind of the type that can amass knowledge more easily than write books; his health was never robust and his mind worked inwards. He gave freely what he would never have used himself. Nor was the giving all on his side. Gasquet provided companionship, a home, affectionate care and, in the event, a share in vivid enterprise; he was also the occasion of many lasting friendships and a second home at Downside. When all is said and done, it is certain that, from first to last, Bishop admired Gasquet and loved him. When he was dying, he dictated a letter to the Cardinal. 'He says', wrote the amanuensis, 'that you have had his love so long that he isn't going to send it any more.' Gasquet replied to the dead man's niece: 'What I owe to him no one can tell except myself, and you may be sure that he will not be forgotten for a single day as long as I live.'[2]

Thus far I have tried to put before you the positive and admirable qualities of Gasquet's work. We have also to consider its defects.

In the first place, he was handicapped from the start through no fault of his own. He had never passed through an exacting mental discipline of any kind. He was tolerably well read in some parts of English history, but had no academic training in medieval history, or in constitutional or economic history, still less in critical method. He taught himself to read late medieval manuscripts and Tudor court hand, but he was not a trained palaeographer and a transcription by him was rarely immune from error. He had a good working knowledge of Latin, assisted by his daily acquaintance with the missal and breviary, but he

[1] This is the dedication of *Henry III and the Church* (1905).

[2] Leslie, *op. cit.*, p. 51. See also Gasquet's tribute to Bishop in *D.R.*, xxxvi (Oct. 1917).

had not the solid, instinctive foundation given by the Tripos or Classical Moderations, or even by a good classical fifth form, and he could and did make egregious mistakes with notable frequency. Moreover, he made no effort to make himself familiar with contemporary scholarship. It may be doubted whether he was at all aware of the significance, for example, of Pollard or Maitland. All this was his misfortune, and was in part due to the existing deficiencies of Catholic education. Unfortunately Gasquet had other failings, both technical and psychological.

He was in the first place unusually inaccurate. Lack of training may help to explain his constant failure to adopt an adequate and consistent system of references, but it does not excuse his inveterate habit of giving no reference at all, or the wrong one, on crucial points. His inaccuracy in details can only be appreciated by one who has had frequent occasion to use his books. Only the other day I noticed that throughout his account of Abbot Hobbes of Woburn he gives him a wrong Christian name, though he had the original documents and Froude's printed page before him. Nor had the mistake been corrected twenty years after it had been made.[1] A few days later a still more curious error turned up. Sir John St Clair or Seynclere, a well-known Suffolk magnate, figures in the case of Abbot Marshall of Colchester. Gasquet printed the name as 'John Seyn, clerk',[2] and continued to do so through all the many subsequent editions, though both *Letters and Papers* and the *V. C. H. Suffolk* had printed correct transcripts in the meanwhile.

We all make slips from human frailty, and most of us also from real carelessness, and we expect indulgence within reason. Gasquet's inaccuracies in his early books were many, but they could be numbered. But from *c.* 1900 Gasquet's pages crawl with errors and slips. His three-volume edition of Premonstratensian documents for the Royal Historical Society must be one of the worst-edited contributions to the Camden series. The plan and execution of the edition are alike faulty. When the volumes first appeared, more than fifty years ago, Mr Charles Johnson, who was then younger than he is now, ventured to put readers on their guard.[1] Some years later, Coulton printed a list of mistakes in the work, and later deposited a revised list in the Library of the University of Chicago. More recently still, Mr Colvin has deposited *his* list in the Bodleian.[2] I have grave doubts whether the consolidated total has achieved a full enumeration. Towards the end of his life, indeed, Gasquet's capacity for carelessness amounted almost to genius. He could refer, in a tribute to Edmund Bishop (of all places) to Gibbon's *Rise and Fall*,[3] and he could print a stanza of *In Memoriam* in five or six lines of type without any ascertainable metre or rhyme.[4]

In many cases this was just deplorable inertia. We all know that few tasks are more tiresome than reading proofs or than keeping notes of every correction that is sent to us and then, on the sudden demand of a publisher, going through a big book to correct errors and supply omissions without altering the pagination. In justice to Gasquet it should be remembered that many of his mistakes were not pointed out until years after the books first appeared. If J. H. Round or Mr H. G. Richardson had tackled his first volume in *The English Historical Review* Gasquet might have become a far better scholar—or he might have retired to Acton Burnell. In any case, Gasquet never revised. Not till years after *Letters and Papers* had reached 1540 did he consent to adapt to the printed text his own often inadequate references to the original documents. He never wove into his

[1] 'Richard' for 'Robert', *Henry VIII*, ii, 192; still thus in ed. 1906, p. 289, and so in all edd.

[2] *Henry VIII*, i, 398, 'John Seyn, a clerk'; ii, 383, 'a cleric John Seyn'. The same mistake is repeated in *The Last Abbot of Glastonbury*.

[1] *E.H.R.*, xix (Oct. 1904), p. 770.

[2] Colvin also prints a select list of errors in *The White Canons in England* (1951), Coulton's first draft is printed in *Medieval Studies* (1 series, 1915), pp. 79–132.

[3] This was in the tribute referred to above, p. 15, n. 2.

[4] In the privately printed booklet *Religio Religiosi*.

original narrative his own remarkable discovery of the additional reports of the 1536 commissioners. He never changed the wording of his appeal to unpublished bishops' visitations even after many of them had been printed and had provided evidence against his thesis. He never took any notice of articles and monographs which his own work had inspired; he never, for example, gave any hints, even in the latest editions of *Henry VIII*, that Mary Bateson had printed Robert Ashe's examination in full, or that Savine had dealt with the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*.

More serious was his inability to grip a problem or argument and to shed light on dark places. Gasquet had inherited from his Provençal ancestors little of the Gallic lucidity of thought. One or two of his later compositions give one the mental impression of being lost in a maze or engulfed in a nightmare. If anyone thinks these expressions too strong, let him read slowly and carefully the little book on Abbot Wallingford, which incidentally furnishes specimens of almost every kind of technical error.[1] Yet in spite of that, the booklet settles from documentary sources problems of identity and chronology that had led astray the editors of Dugdale, Froude and James Gairdner himself. You have in it an epitome of the splendours and distresses of Gasquet's achievement. More serious still, perhaps, was a lack of fidelity as an editor, shown particularly in his transcription of the Acton correspondence in *Lord Acton and his Circle*.[2] Besides technical inaccuracies of many kinds, Gasquet consistently omitted or even altered without indication passages or phrases which might, he felt, cause personal offence or exhibit Acton's critical or petulant attitude towards venerable ecclesiastics. Thus he would print 'Newman' where Acton had written 'old Noggs', and the forthright remark that 'Pius IV was an ass' appears in the anodyne form 'Pius IV was no good'.

[1] *Abbot Wallingford; an inquiry into the charges made against him and his monks* (London, no date; actually 1912).

[2] *Lord Acton and his Circle*, 1906. For Gasquet's treatment of Acton's text see H. Butterfield and A. Watkin, in *Cambridge Historical Journal*, X. i (1950), 'Gasquet and the Acton-Simpson Correspondence', pp. 75–105.

Beyond all this, there was a root of something in Gasquet which led him to ignore even the most cogent evidence against anything he had written. It was this that led Coulton to his most serious charge of intellectual dishonesty. The affair of the *Old English Bible* is of course the palmary instance. There is no need to repeat the facts of that case; they have been repeated again and again by Coulton, and accepted, at least tacitly, by all subsequent writers on the subject. I may be allowed, however, to mention a similar instance which escaped the vigilant eye of Coulton. In *Henry VIII* Gasquet presented the last abbot of Colchester as a martyr to the faith for opposing the Royal Supremacy. In this he followed both the chronicler Hall and an old Catholic tradition, which seemed to derive support from the evidence given against the abbot which Gasquet turned up, and there is no reason to doubt his good faith when he wrote in 1889, after giving this evidence: 'Nothing more is known of Abbot Marshall's last days but the fact of his execution.'[1] He repeated this sentence verbally in his chapter on Abbot Marshall in *The Last Abbot of Glastonbury*.[2] When, however, Gairdner's volume of *Letters and Papers* covering the latter part of 1539 appeared in 1895, it contained a long document in the abbot's handwriting in which he denied his opposition to the Royal Supremacy, revoked anything he might have said in support of papal claims, and begged for pardon.[3] This has naturally been accepted by subsequent writers, including the Catholic martyrologist, Dom Bede Camm,[4] as rendering Abbot Marshall's claim to the title of martyr unprovable, if not positively disproved. Yet Gasquet continued to allow his chapter in *The Last Abbot* to be reprinted unchanged, and the sentence quoted above duly appeared in the posthumous edition of 1934. As for the parallel passage in *Henry VIII*, this also remained unchanged until 1906, when Gasquet substituted the following paragraph

[1] *Henry VIII*, ii, 384.

[2] First ed., 1895; cf. ed. 1908, p. 105.

[3] *Letters and Papers of the reign of Henry VIII*, XIV, ii, 459.

[4] Dom B. Camm, *Lives of the English Martyrs* (1904), I, xviii–xx, 396 ff., 409.

without any reference to *Letters and Papers*: 'Under the stress of imprisonment in the Tower . . . Abbot Marshall's courage appears somewhat to have failed him for the time. . . . His excuses, however, as we know, were made in vain and in the end . . . he laid down his life for conscience sake.'[1] The point is more important than it appears. Gasquet's book on the three abbots was part of a process of historical examination which issued in a petition to Rome for a recognition of an ancient cultus of these men as martyrs for the Catholic faith. In 1897 the Congregation of Rites accepted the petition and confirmed the cultus. An equipollent beatification (as it is called) of this kind lacks the solemnity and finality of a canonization, and further inquiry would be necessary before the case could be carried further. Meanwhile, however, largely as a result of Gasquet's work, the abbot of Colchester is venerated as a martyr. Gasquet was at the time the one man in England qualified to enter a firm caveat for the sake of historical truth, and to warn his readers of his earlier ignorance. Instead, he persisted to the end in a *suppressio veri* which in the circumstances carried with it more than a trace of *suggestio falsi*.

Lord Acton may have been mistaken in asserting that the historian always has the last word in judging his fellow-men, but it is undoubtedly true that no historian can be false to his calling and escape down the ages without a whipping. Sooner or later the slip, the suppression, the incautious statement will come home to roost. Thucydides, after twenty-three centuries, has been convicted of bias against Cleon, and Bury noted that Gibbon tripped over the name of the city from which Gregory Nazianzen took his name. In Gasquet's case the triumphal car had a good start, but Vengeance came limping after in the person of George Gordon Coulton.

In the first years of the twentieth century, as we have seen, Gasquet's reputation both as an historian and as a churchman stood at its height. Even the long-hostile academic world had at

[1] *Henry VIII*, ed. 1906, p. 395.

last capitulated. In 1906 the brilliant Tudor volume of H. A. L. Fisher appeared; it was clearly influenced by Gasquet, as were the earlier works of Gairdner on the same period. At almost the same moment, however, the sharpshooting that was to shake his reputation had begun. The first telling shot had been fired in 1901 by Mr Arthur Ogle in the matter of the *Old English Bible*,[1] and in the same year the then obscure Mr Coulton wrote his first and most polite letter to Gasquet, who was ill-advised first to ignore, then to evade, and finally to slight his formidable critic.[2] With the details and fortunes of the relentless guerrilla warfare of the next forty years we are not concerned. The academic victory lay certainly with Coulton. Obscure he may have been in 1901, but when he died in 1947, a Fellow of St John's and of the British Academy, recognized by all as one of the most learned medievalists of the day, Gasquet's writings had been blown upon and all but driven into oblivion.

Coulton had, very deeply engrained, two atavistic prejudices which ever since the days of Wyclif have possessed a large section of his countrymen, the one a fear and distrust of ecclesiastical potentates in general and of Romans in particular, the other a conviction that monasticism is an unnatural institution which of itself always leads inevitably to disaster.[3] To these he added an

[1] *Church Quarterly Review*, li (Oct. 1900, Jan. 1901), pp. 138 ff., 265 ff.

[2] Gasquet returned no answer to Coulton's first letter; he refused the moderately worded and reasonable request of his second with the excuse that doctor's orders forbade him to undertake extra work. A few years later in the preface to a cheap edition of *Henry VIII* (1906) he used the words 'any would-be literary *chiffonnier*'. Coulton (perhaps rightly) saw a personal allusion, and it rankled.

[3] Coulton on more than one occasion implied that modern religious were only respectable because they were closely observed by the Press and the police, e.g., *Medieval Studies* (1 series, 2 ed. 1915), p. 63. 'These [monks and nuns] whom we see in modern England are a small minority [*sc.* of the population], living amid a healthy public opinion, and under a system of law and police such as no man ever dreamt of in the Middle Ages.' He goes on, however, to express his fears 'lest the convents should become sweating-houses of cheap and insanitary labour, in the absence of such proper supervision as our law enforces in the case of other workshops'.

almost emotional attachment to a particular point of historical accuracy, viz., the ability to support one's assertions by exact references to authorities, accompanied by a readiness to alter or withdraw publicly from any error once it had been indicated. No one would wish to deny the desirability of such behaviour; Coulton's idiosyncrasy lay in making of this particular manifestation of honesty in this particular field of accuracy the touchstone of the whole man. To this it should be added that Coulton had in full measure the distinctive qualities of the controversialist: persistence, love of the reiterated question, the ability to focus attention on a single tree in the forest, a desire for printed acknowledgment, and great self-assurance. But it should in fairness be remarked that, unlike many controversialists, he was courteous and generous in personal intercourse; he had moreover immense learning and was, at least on the surface of his own chosen field, almost always right.

On the wider view he was unfair to Gasquet. He ignored altogether—as controversialists often do—the real merits of some of his books and, still more, the numerous discoveries which he had made; he also ignored the judgments of values and institutions with which he did not agree, but which were none the less defensible. Many, indeed, will feel still that Gasquet's judgments on the later Middle Ages and Tudor characters were truer and more humane than Coulton's. But in the particular points of factual accuracy which he selected for criticism Coulton was almost invariably right. His long catalogue of Gasquet's errors is substantially correct—indeed, the only criticism that might be made against it is that it is unconscionably short. His mistake lay, I believe, in attributing these errors, and an unwillingness to correct them, to a studied policy of ecclesiastical discipline and apologetics, and to a callous, even cynical, disregard of the demonstrated truth. The Gasquet he attacked—the suave, polished, successful hierocrat, lying for the sake of his Church and rewarded for so doing—was to that extent so much a caricature of the real Gasquet—patriotic, 'broad-brow', often

indiscreet, often critical of persons and policies within the Church—that it diverted many of Gasquet's friends and apologists from meeting or admitting the detailed charges.

Having said so much, however, it must be frankly confessed that for many of Gasquet's mistakes, and still more for his failure to admit and correct them, no defence can be offered. They may be explained, but they cannot be excused. His apologists repeated, and with truth, that he was a busy man, who had been called from his historical work to a succession of administrative offices, and who had therefore lost touch with his old trade and with the advances made by younger scholars. They added, what was also in part true, that Coulton was inspired by an anti-Roman bias that had an element of the irrational in it; if you gave him an inch, 'the old idiot' (as Gasquet called him) would take an ell. They might have added that Coulton did not show the same passion for outraged truth when writing of historians such as Froude, whose *Short Studies* and *Henry VIII* were still in print in cheap editions fifty years after they had been shown to be erroneous and biased on many important points. All this may have been true, but it was beside the point.

How then, shall we explain Gasquet's behaviour?

First, we must realize that Gasquet had never passed through the gymnastics of a training in critical method. Like all other disciplines, the object of such a training is to render a course of action more secure and more easy by means of correct habits and a mental awareness which prevent or detect errors. Had Gasquet employed as a matter of course the automatic signalling system of a scientific and critical method he would have avoided not only his inaccuracies, but also many of his failures to attain the truth.

Next, we must say that he rarely approached an historical topic with an open mind; in other words he rarely approached it as an historian. Either he wrote to convince others of what he believed to be the truth, or he set out a discovery which he held to be significant. In other words, he started with a conviction or

a fact, and went to other documents to find confirmation. He had little or no sense of history as a stream of eddying currents or a web of many threads, nor did he think of his craft as an exercise of patient and passionless mental discipline.

Thirdly, his mind was not naturally clear enough to compensate for his lack of training. He felt no inclination to get at the roots and difficulties of a problem; he never shook it out, so to say; instead he tended to tangle the skein beyond hope of unravelling. Evidence, whether old or fresh, did not impinge upon his consciousness with the cogency which it in fact possessed. In his later writings he sometimes dismissed a critic with rotund avuncular platitudes which exasperated those who had pointed to undoubted mistakes.

Finally, behind all this, there was a further reason. Gasquet was not an intellectually humble man and he showed little insight into his own limitations of knowledge and training. His successes and offices had done nothing to help him in these ways. The circles in which he moved accepted him for what he appeared to be; no criticism of equals or superiors troubled his equanimity. He lacked that passion for absolute intellectual chastity, which is desirable in any man, but in an historian is as much an occupational requirement as is absolute integrity in a judge. He did not primarily seek for truth without fear or favour. He held obstinately to what he had thought and when he should have recognized the force of fresh evidence he ignored it, probably quite unaware that a great issue was at stake.

It was here, I think, that Coulton was in error. He simplified the matter even to crudity. Gasquet was a liar (as he did not hesitate to imply),[1] and he was a liar because he was an ecclesiastic. Gasquet's fault (if we are to use the word) was, I would submit, on another level altogether. It had nothing to do with his being a Catholic or a cardinal; he might just as well have been a Nonconformist or an agnostic. It did not differ in kind from the conduct of a politician or a diplomat who defends all

[1] See *The Gasquet Scandal* (1937) and *A Premium upon Falsehood* (1939).

his past actions and remains silent about his failures of judgment or policy in spite of quotations and challenges in debate—as it might be Asquith upholding his conduct of Irish affairs or Bethmann-Hollweg justifying his tenure of office. It was the fault of a man who saw only one side—his own side—and who was blind to all else. It was not without reason that Pope Benedict XV, harassed by Gasquet about some alleged German misdemeanour, exclaimed: 'Audi alteram partem.'

In the course of this lecture some severe things have been said about Gasquet. Let me end by endeavouring to assess his place in historiography.

It must be said at once that he initiated no new discipline and founded no school. It is a glory of academic scholarship that it lives on in assured knowledge, in germinal ideas, and in the living mind of the disciple. Gasquet had few germinal ideas and formed no school. In the strict sense of the word, indeed, he was not a scholar at all. He did not use the tools, or pursue the ends, of an accomplished scholar. Abbot Cuthbert Butler once remarked, when Gasquet was still living, that Downside had produced only two scholars, Dom Hugh Connolly and himself, and the judgment was both characteristic and true.[1] Nevertheless, Gasquet's influence on others was not inconsiderable. Even if he did not, in James Gairdner's oft-quoted words, 'dispel the charges against the monks for ever', he certainly put the Tudor monasteries boldly on the map, and killed what was certainly the popular opinion that they were merely abodes of vice and rich living. It is largely due to him that so much research has been undertaken upon a relatively small topic. But for Gasquet, we should not have much of the work of Savine, Mary Bateson, Archbold, Hibbert and a whole group of recent young scholars, while if the merit of an action can be seen in the reaction it

[1] I remember as a boy asking Abbot Butler, shortly after Gasquet had been created Cardinal, whom he considered to be the greatest Old Gregorian. The answer was unhesitating: 'Ullathorne. Cardinal Gasquet is the most distinguished, but Ullathorne was the greatest.'

provokes, we must add Baskerville to our list. In other fields, also, J. W. Clark, M. R. James, Professor Owst and many other scholars and antiquaries have received from Gasquet an impulse of one kind or another. Over and beyond this, Gasquet, as we have seen, discovered and in part exploited more original documents than many a faultless academic historian.

These are not small achievements, and they cannot be cancelled out or reduced to zero by an enumeration of his numerous errors and failings. If it is perilous to accept Gasquet uncritically, it is foolish utterly to neglect or despise him.

In the letter of Leo XIII, to which reference was made earlier in this lecture, and which helped to found Gasquet's fortunes, there occur the following words, which I am not aware that Coulton ever quoted in his flight of pamphlets. They might well have served as a text for this lecture—a text by which to judge both Gasquet, his critics and his apologists. 'Above all,' wrote the Pope, 'the historian should ever bear in mind that the first law of history is that he should never dare to write what is false and that the second is that he should never lack courage to say what is true. The third law is that he should never write to win favour or to satisfy his spleen.'[1]

Gasquet, at least in middle life, was an unusually handsome man. To one who looks on his portrait, after reading a page of Coulton, the well-known words of Macaulay upon the portrait of Warren Hastings seem to haunt the mind. 'He looked like a great man, and he did not look like a bad man.' Gasquet was not a great man; he had neither the power nor the depth of greatness. But to those who knew him he was not, in any normal sense of the words, a bad man.

[1] *A.A.S.*, xvi, 54. 'Illud in primis scribentium obversetur animo primam esse historiae legem ne quid falsi dicere audeat; deinde ne quid veri non audeat; ne qua suspicio gratiae sit in scribendo, ne qua simultatis.' The Pope made his own the words of Cicero, *de Oratore*, 2, 15, 62.