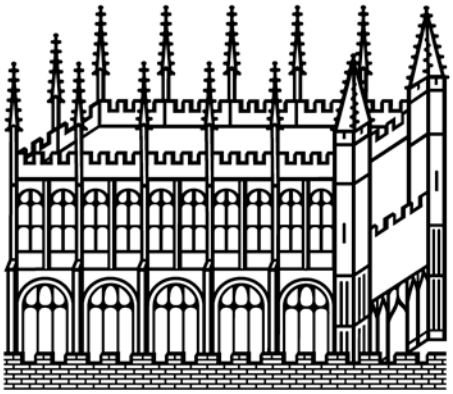

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Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson

FELLOW OF KING'S

1887–1932

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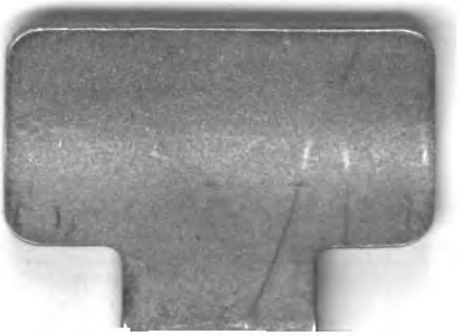

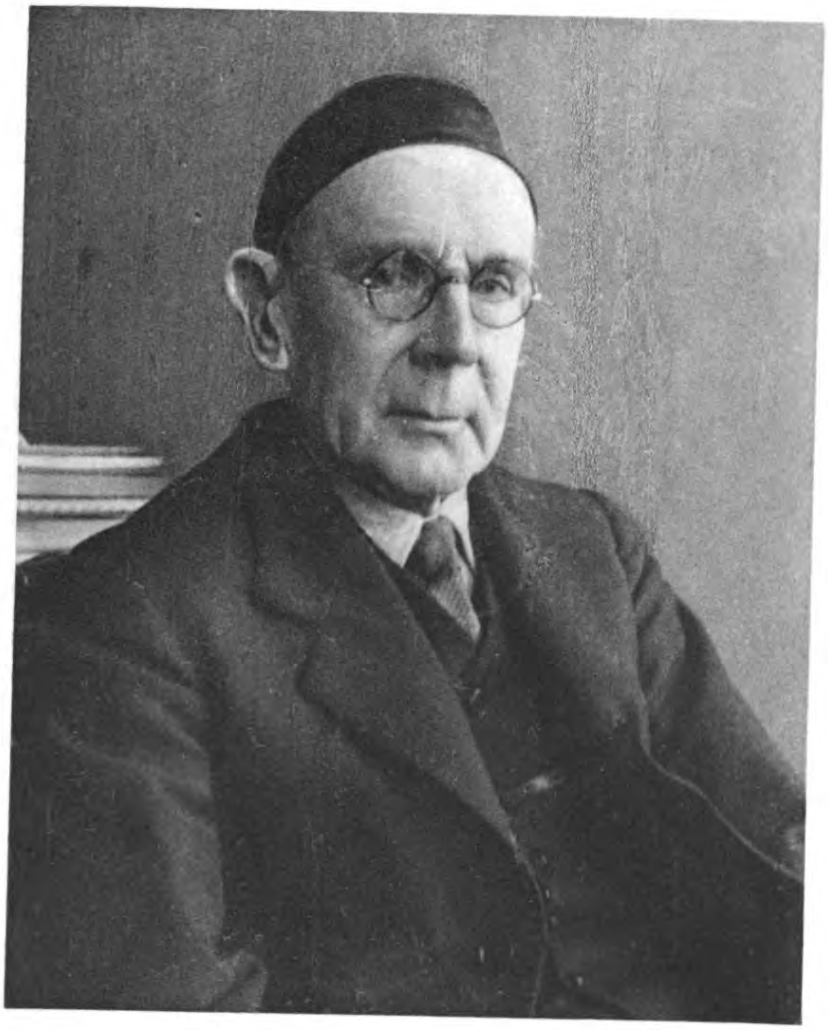

GOLDSWORTHY LOWES DICKINSON

6 August 1862 *3 August 1932*

FELLOW OF THE COLLEGE

1887–1932

KING'S COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE
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GOLDSWORTHY LOWES DICKINSON

I

Dickinson was the son of Cato Lowes Dickinson who had a considerable reputation as a portrait painter in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Cato Dickinson was the friend of Charles Kingsley and Frederick Denison Maurice and the members of the Christian Socialist movement. Dickinson's mother, who died when he was nineteen, was a deeply religious woman. Dickinson, though he afterwards ceased to be a believer in Christianity, was, none the less, deeply affected by the ideas of social service and devotion in which he had been brought up. He regarded his work mainly in the light of its direct social utility, and this remained all through life the dominant and determining factor in his work. But it was no easy matter for Dickinson to discover the lines along which he could fulfil this

conception of his life. His gifts and his inclinations were numerous, for his whole nature was coloured by a passionately romantic imagination. He had an intense love of music and sufficient facility as a pianist to make his playing full of character and charm. After middle life he had to give up this, which had been one of his great pleasures, on account of his lack of nervous control. But to the end of his life music was probably the art which appealed to him most intensely, and he often felt that had his specific gift for music been adequate it would have been through it that he could best have realized his ideal.

With poetry the case was different. Here, not only had he an intense feeling for the great romantic poets, especially for Shelley, but sufficient poetical gifts to make it at least conceivable that his message to the world would have taken that form.

His other preoccupation in youth was metaphysics. He owed his fellowship to a study of Plotinus

which was thought highly of, so that he might well have hoped to make serious contributions to philosophy. Indeed for many years he continued to take a deep interest in metaphysical speculation—though with a growing despair of ever finding positive results along these lines—and in any case he decided against it as being too remote from those social problems which pressed upon him so urgently, to justify him in making it his life-work. Thus it came about that, having marked aptitudes for the life either of an artist or a philosopher, he rejected both in favour of some activity through which he could directly influence life and conduct. None the less the work in which he finally found his vocation was always coloured and enriched by those strong inclinations.

A little before Dickinson took his degree the University Extension Movement had been started, and this naturally attracted him as a possible field in which his own University studies and his wide

sympathies in literature might be brought directly to influence a large circle, to educate the middle classes and inspire them with his own ideals. A short trial showed him his own extreme ignorance of the world and taught him how easily its prejudices were shocked by the statement of what seemed to him elementary and demonstrable truths. The idea of influencing the world by administering shocks to its prejudices was utterly foreign to his nature. In later life he sometimes was half envious of Bernard Shaw, wondering whether his was not after all the best way to influence the world. But even if he had judged it the best in his youth he was quite incapable of putting it into practice. His real weapon was the persuasive power of a studiously moderate statement of his point of view with a willingness to come to terms with his opponent wherever possible upon the common ground of reason. One must add, however, that he could state his position with great eloquence, that, however moderate, he was never cold or in-

different, and that his sympathy was quickened by a delightful sense of humour which he was capable of turning against himself.

The most direct and immediately useful service to man being, as he conceived, the purpose of his life, when he gave up Extension lecturing he turned to medicine as a possible career. He knew beforehand that the study of medicine would not be congenial to one of his rather hypersensitive nerves, but he faced the ordeal courageously. What he had not gauged was his inaptitude for it. He had little facility with his hands, as many can testify from their vain efforts to decipher one of his cryptographic scripts. Even the typewriter, to which he took in sheer despair in later life, became, under his hands, a strangely erratic engine. No wonder then that it was not only his extreme disgust which rendered his dissection of an earthworm a hopelessly unintelligible mess in which nothing in the least resembling the illustrations of his text-book could be discerned.

After about a year's work Dickinson saw that he was again frustrated, and he finally turned to literature as the best means to accomplish his unswerving purpose. At last he had judged rightly, and though all through his life until nearly the end he was liable to fits of extreme depression and discouragement he never doubted that he had chosen the only possible course. The history of political institutions, chiefly from the point of view of their effect upon the material and moral happiness of the governed, was his main subject, though he branched off from it in many directions. For a short time he attended lectures at the Sorbonne, but he generally worked alone. Though history was Dickinson's main study he did not aim at writing histories or at historical research. History was of value to him primarily for what could be gathered from it about the human predicament, what were the forces in man which made for social progress and what were the obstacles. Sometimes he embodied the results of his studies in poetic drama,

as in *From King to King*, sometimes he gave them a more purely expository form. Undoubtedly these studies immensely widened his outlook and made him peculiarly open-minded and willing to see that in every conflict there was something admirable on both sides. Thus, starting with a strongly democratic bias, his study of English political history led him to express something like admiration for the influence of the House of Lords. Though he was eloquent and impassioned, though he scarcely aimed at a scientific detachment, he was never in the least a partisan. It was natural then that he should find in the dialogue or the symposium a peculiarly suitable medium for embodying his reflections on good and evil in human affairs, and in *The Meaning of Good* he showed himself from the first a master of this method. It was a method to which he returned more than once and which he employed, perhaps more strikingly than ever, in one of his last works, *After Two Thousand Years*.

Since it was always Dickinson's endeavour to discover what was the best way of life possible to man and to persuade others to consider what modifications might be introduced into their own way of life, he adopted at times the plan of laying before them some alternative conception. *The Greek View of Life*, which he wrote relatively early in his career, was one such. It reached a very wide circle of readers and probably had considerable influence, but a greater, certainly a more startling, response attended the publication of the *Letters of John Chinaman*. This had originally been conceived as 'Letters of a Houhnym' and merely as an attack on the squalor and ugliness of certain aspects of English industrialism. But he was led to find a better fulcrum for his leverage in Chinese civilization, which he proceeded to study in translations and books of travel. It was a triumph of his imaginative sympathy that, without direct contact, he was able to construct so convincing a picture. Indeed, some people con-

versant with China attributed the book, which was published anonymously, to a member of the Chinese Legation, whilst Bryan, the American politician, vigorously attacking the book, was led to pity the poor Chinese author for never having known the blessings of Christian home life. The book had a double effect. Though it was less a direct attack on our own shortcomings than a eulogy of certain aspects of Chinese civilization, it shocked people out of their self-complacent sense of superiority, and it also revealed to the Chinese the existence of a European who understood how much dignity and beauty their agelong tradition fostered.

Dickinson's studies of Chinese civilization had given him a vivid interest in the Far East, and he took advantage of an A.K. Fellowship to make a tour through India and China. India remained something of a mystery to him, but he found in China a warm response to his own sympathy. His visit led to lifelong friendships with some Chinese writers

and students, and in after years his rooms became a place of pilgrimage to Chinese in England, and through him some of these became friends with a wide circle of Englishmen.

The outbreak of the Great War was an almost paralysing shock to Dickinson. He had as it were staked everything on the belief that human beings were fundamentally reasonable, that the appeal to reason must find a response. And the urgency of this belief had led him to underestimate, even in his readings of past history, the factors of unreasoning passion and the violence of the instinctive life. Though he had few near personal friends involved in the worst dangers his suffering was intense and prolonged. It seemed to him the destruction of all that he had hoped and striven for. But, though his constitutional melancholy deepened, he did not give up entirely. Already, before the end of 1914, he had begun to plan with Lord Dickinson and Lord Bryce the outlines of a scheme which led directly to the

idea of the League of Nations. It is not often recognized how large a share of the preliminary work in that he undertook, nor how crucial his stimulating faith in its possibilities was. For many years from this date his chief work was concerned with the question of war, and he undertook and carried through what was perhaps the most arduous and the most uncongenial task of his life; namely the study of all the then available documents about the diplomacy of the ten years which led to the war. The book in which he embodied his results, *The International Anarchy*, is in some ways his finest accomplishment, though it failed of the recognition it deserved. Appearing as it did not long after the War it was hardly to be expected that many English readers would follow with patience a writer who had so completely detached himself from all national prejudices, who was able to state the case for and against each of the contending parties with the same complete impartiality. His penetrating judgment

which, though of necessity sometimes based on incomplete data, has been proved well founded by subsequent publications, and the perfect lucidity of his exposition, together with the restraint which he imposed on himself, give to the book its peculiarly impressive weight and authority.

The influence of Dickinson's books was widely spread throughout the English-speaking world, and his correspondence with distant readers was considerable. But what was perhaps most distinctive of him was the range and variety of his direct personal influence. His sympathies were at once so warm and so catholic—his intimates were sometimes tempted to call them indiscriminate—that friendship might almost be said to have been his chief activity. Differences of age, of race or of outlook were no barriers to Dickinson's warmth of affection and penetration of sympathy. And it was in and through the College that this exercised its persuasive power. Generation after generation of under-

graduates passed into and out of this sphere of radiation, and on almost all it left its mark. His closer friends have been surprised at the number of those who have written to say how crucial and stimulating for their whole lives even a short experience of his mind and character had been. One cannot doubt that Dickinson fulfilled far more completely than he would ever have admitted to himself that ideal of devoted service to mankind which he had put before himself in youth.

ROGER FRY

II

Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson came up to King's from Charterhouse as a Scholar in 1881, was in the first class of the Classical Tripos in 1884, and was elected in 1887 to the Fellowship which he held, with some intervals of travel and of lecturing elsewhere, as a resident at King's throughout his life. Most of his books were written here, and he always gave to Cambridge both his love and his devoted service.

His Fellowship dissertation was a study of Plotinus, highly praised, I have been told, by Westcott, who had lately joined the College as a Professorial Fellow. Dickinson never lost his interest in the classics, particularly Plato, nor his memory, half humorous, half sorrowful, of the way in which they are taught. It was in part that memory that made him an opponent of 'compulsory Greek', but also a feeling that compulsory Greek, like compulsory worship in Chapel,

was a sort of blasphemy. How important he thought Greek studies is shown by the address read for him at the Cambridge Summer School in his last illness, and by the startling question which he asked the School, and characteristically did not answer for them—'Can the Greek spirit, rising again more splendid and more potent than before, accomplish the salvation of mankind?' He asked it seriously, with no thought of hostility to science or to orthodox religion—though of course he wasn't orthodox. 'What we have to do', he said, 'is to reconcile the antagonists—to apply ethics to science and science to ethics.' And he thought that on the success of this enterprise depended the future of civilization.

At King's, when Dickinson became a Fellow, Oscar Browning, with others less ebullient, was busy building up a historical school, which he hoped would be 'a school of statesmen'. He never did a better thing for Cambridge or for the accomplishment of that ideal, than when he asked the College to make

Dickinson a member of the staff. For twenty-four years (1896–1920), as a College Lecturer, and always informally throughout his life, Dickinson in his studies and his teaching did what O. B. (whose ideal was higher than his practice) knew was needed most. He interpreted the past to the present not merely as a bundle of intricate problems, nor merely—though this was an attractive aspect of his teaching—as a means of making friends with men and women of all ages, but above all as the story of the ways in which, unconsciously and consciously, men have so arranged society as to hamper or promote the nourishment in freedom of the spirit and the growth of men and women in happiness, wisdom and love. He never thought democracy a panacea. Indeed at one time he looked with a faint hope for guidance to enlightened aristocracy. The War convinced him that unless the causes of war are removed or mitigated, other efforts are in vain. With an heroic determination, at a time when he had earned retirement and

might well have sought rest, he threw himself into the study of a thankless, overwhelmingly difficult and, to him, depressing problem, the diplomatic origins of the War. The result was a model of research, which no one can read without admiration for the patience and the diligence with which the threads are disentangled, for the deep sympathy and understanding which have saved the writer from unfairness both in thought and in expression, and for the self-restraint which has controlled his tragic indignation. He undertook the task, in spite of ill health and discouragement, because he passionately longed to help the younger generation to avoid the repetition of the horror which he knew far better than most people is inevitable if no order takes the place of the present anarchy. For the same reason he worked hard for the League of Nations, though he knew its faults and sometimes almost despaired when he saw its futile gestures. Whether or not his dream of international good government and friend-

ship is to be realized, the task was done and the message delivered. It may well be that his *International Anarchy* may be recognized by future generations as the greatest contribution Cambridge ever made to historical research.

He died on August 3, only three days before completing seventy years of age, but no one, least of all his younger friends, could think of him as old. He was in the plenitude of his powers, and his influence was still growing. Not only were the wisdom and the beauty of his writing more and more widely recognized, but a great audience of men and women of all sorts listened to his wireless talks with delight, and thought of him as a friend. What the Vice-Chancellor said of him in the Senate House is true. 'Eminent as an author, a scholar, and a publicist, his genius for friendship was not less responsible for his great influence.' It was not only historical students, nor only members of his own College who were won by his singularly charming personality,

gentle, unselfish, modest, humorous, keen in apprehension, abnormally sensitive, yet wonderfully gay. His delight in beauty and his simple and spontaneous affection were for all who knew him a chief cause of their own love of Cambridge. He had the teacher's supreme gift, the power of imparting something of his own joy and faith to others, and he had it because of the affectionate insight which could see in others that they too had something to give. With him dull people were not dull, because he found them interesting. Sometimes perhaps his genius for discovering the good deceived him. Anyhow, he saw the truth of people more, and helped them more, than conscientious critics who are numerous and always ready to assist. He never talked or taught or wrote as from a vantage-point of greater knowledge. He hailed you as a friend, assuming your good will, inviting you to a comparison of notes, a partnership on a delightful voyage, searching for truth, suggesting, not imposing, lines of thought, opening vistas,

hinting at visions of more things and better than can be proved. He was scrupulously fair, if you disagreed, stating your case indeed against himself far better than you could have stated it, and often laughing at himself for the inadequacy of his own expression. His talk was of things that matter, linking his immediate theme and purpose with the goal, the good which is also happiness, to which, as he instinctively and deeply felt, the clue is only to be found by free enquiry, by the use and nourishment of the imagination, by the contemplation of beauty, and, above all, through affection.

J. T. SHEPPARD

III

Do you name your hope?
I do not name mine.
Do you label it faith?
I do not label mine.
Only stretched on the grass, on the verge of the shadowing hill,
Below me the shimmering levels bathed in an August sun,
A cheeping bird in the bush, and the bee in the flower,
And the wind in the wood, a multitudinous murmur,

Only this I know:

Not Dante rapt in a maze of carolling flames,
Not Wordsworth tranced in the soul of the world,

Nor Blake, nor Shelley, nor Whitman, nor all the
poets and seers,
Were richer in hope than I, nor of heart more
faithful,
Though I will not name my hope nor label it faith.

G. L. D.

IV

WORKS OF
GOLDSWORTHY LOWES DICKINSON

Savonarola. A Poem (Chancellor's Medal)	1884
Jacob's Ladder. A Poem	*N.D.*
From King to King. A Tragedy of the Puritan Revolution	1891
Revolution and Reaction in Modern France	1892
The Development of Parliament during the Nineteenth Century	1895
The Greek View of Life	1895
The Meaning of Good. A dialogue	1901
Letters of John Chinaman	1902
Religion: a criticism and a forecast	1905
A Modern Symposium	1905
Justice and Liberty. A political dialogue	1908
A Wild Rose and other Poems	1910
Religion and Immortality	1911
Albert Kahn Travelling Fellowships. Report to the Trustees	1913
Appearances. Notes of Travel, East and West	1914

An Essay on the Civilization of India, China and Japan	1914
The War and the way out	1914
After the War	1915
The European Anarchy	1916
The Choice before us	1917
The Magic Flute. A Fantasia	1920
War: its nature, causes and cure	1923
The International Anarchy, 1904–1914	1926
Goethe and Faust. An Interpretation (with F. Melian Stawell)	1928
After Two Thousand Years. A dialogue between Plato and a modern young man	1930
Plato and his dialogues	1931
J. McT. E. McTaggart (with chapters by B. Williams and S. V. Keeling)	1931
The Contribution of Ancient Greece to Modern Life	1932
An edition of 'Carlyle's French Revolution'	1897
An introduction to 'Problems of the International Settlement'	1918
An introduction to 'Documents etc. relating to Peace Proposals'	1919

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