

## CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor of *PHILOSOPHY*

DEAR SIR,

One of the doubtful privileges of growing old is that one can observe the process by which legend substitutes itself for history. Writing in your current issue on *Russell's Philosophical Development* Mr. Anthony Quinton gives a picture of the late Professor R. C. Collingwood which will surprise those of us who were acquainted with the man himself. In particular, he described Collingwood as "a pure example of the obscure and ineffectual don". From the context, as well as from ordinary usage, this appears to mean that Collingwood was obscure and ineffectual as a don—one who (if I may quote further) "made out that he was too busy to answer criticism or to take part in college administration or university politics".

If this is the meaning, such a view bears little resemblance to the facts.

As a don, that is, as a teacher and lecturer, Collingwood, almost from the start, had the reputation of being one of the most effective in Oxford. Though frail in body, he bore an unusually heavy load of teaching and research in ancient history as well as in philosophy, and his devotion to hard work may well have contributed to his early death. He served his college well through difficult times, and in the circumstances he had every right to avoid controversy and the routine of academic administration. I cannot say what he did at college meetings, though I never heard the slightest suggestion that he avoided them; but I can say from personal experience that whether as a member or as chairman of a Board of Faculty he was neither obscure nor ineffectual: he was always effective and at times even formidable. In any case it would be a little less than charitable to describe a don as ineffectual merely because he was not one of the few who became prominent in university business.

Mr. Quinton, it is to be presumed, can hardly mean that Collingwood was obscure and ineffectual because he did not seek to be a politician or a publicist, but devoted himself to his academic duties with conspicuous success.

Collingwood had his weaknesses, as we all have, and some of these became greatly exaggerated after a succession of serious illnesses. But being ineffectual was not one of them, and I should be sorry to see Mr. Quinton's picture of him accepted without a challenge. We may perhaps leave ineffectual dons to Hilaire Belloc, who was disappointed in his ambition to become one of them.

H. J. PATON.

January 31, 1960.

To the Editor of *PHILOSOPHY*

I am sorry that my remarks about the late Professor Collingwood should have seemed to express the view that Collingwood was "obscure and ineffectual as a don". The point of the remark is to be seen in the corresponding remark about Lord Russell: "an influential public figure too lively and multifarious to be contained for long in the university". Collingwood's activities were entirely concentrated within the academic world and in that

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world they were of an exclusively academic kind. I certainly never meant to suggest that Collingwood was lazy or that he neglected his duties: the volume and quality of his published work would plainly dispose of any such accusation. Nor did my borrowing of Belloc's phrase imply an endorsement of the point of view about academic life that it was intended to express by its author. My authority for Collingwood's refusal to answer criticism is his own *Autobiography* and for his lack of concern with administrative questions the Master of Pembroke's obituary of Collingwood in the *Proceedings of the British Academy* for 1943.

ANTHONY QUINTON.

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Oxford.*

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