

THOMAS BYRNAND TRAPPES-LOMAX
1895-1962

AN APPRECIATION BY THE EDITORS

*Qui voluptatibus dediti quasi in diem vivunt, vivendi causas cottidie finiunt. Qui vero posteros cogitant, et memoriam sui operibus extendunt, his nulla mors non repentina est, ut quae semper inchoatum aliquid abrumpat.**

(Pliny the Younger, writing about the premature death of an historian who had left uncompleted a vast work on the victims of the persecution under Nero. *Epistolae*, V, 5.)

There is a curiously close parallel between the occasion of Pliny's lament over his friend, cut off in the midst of his historical studies, and the sudden and untimely death of Brigadier T. B. Trappes-Lomax. Both men consecrated their energies to the task of making known the history of the victims of a persecuting government, and both were denied a span of life long enough for them to complete their labours.

Belonging himself to an old Catholic family, and educated at Stonyhurst, a school with traditions stretching back unbroken to 1592, Tom Trappes-Lomax early came to realize that the survival of Catholicism on English soil had been closely bound up, especially during the critical earlier period, with the history of particular Catholic families able and willing to shelter a priest. Except in those two or three predominantly Catholic areas where a priest could live and work unremarked and

* Men whose existence is given over solely to the pleasures of each day, complete their purpose in life with each day that passes. But men who take thought for those that come after them, and perpetuate the memory of themselves by their labours—for such men death, whenever it comes, must come too soon, since it always snaps the thread of some work as yet uncompleted.

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unmolested among the cottagers of the countryside, it was only the nobility and the country gentry with houses which could be more or less secluded from the attentions of spies and informers, who could offer a comparatively secure base from which a hunted priest could exercise his apostolic mission. That is why Tom Trappes-Lomax devoted unremitting labour to tracing the history of the houses which had formed the focal points of the Catholic resistance movement, and of their successive owners and tenants. Others have made such investigations for a particular family or neighbourhood, but Tom Trappes-Lomax did more : he set himself to plot the network of recusant families over the entire length and breadth of England and Wales.

The articles he published represent only a fraction of the material he gathered. His knowledge in the field which he made his own grew to be quite unequalled. A personal recollection well illustrates the astonishing range of information which he had always at his fingertips. We once asked him which houses might be likely to have preserved collections of early Catholic printed books. He sat down and wrote out of his head a list, many foolscap pages in length, setting down county by county the chief houses formerly used as Mass-centres, the families which had once possessed them, and in most instances the names of the present owners. By reason of this unique mastery of his material not only was he invited to make contributions to the Victoria County History series and to the proceedings of archaeological societies in widely-separated counties, but his help was invoked by countless individual enquirers, with all of whom he shared his knowledge without reserve.

He had a fuller picture of his own special field than any man of his time, but in recent years he had begun the process of relating his own researches to a wider historical context, and had become deeply engaged in a more general enquiry into the decline in numbers of the English Catholics after the Reformation and the ultimate reasons which underlay it. Here, however, as he himself was the first to admit, he sometimes found himself out of his depth, for he lacked both the training and the opportunities of a professional historian. He was at his best in the patient accumulation of evidence bearing on a specific problem. Over such problems he was indefatigable and pressed into service all the

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organizational talents which had made him a distinguished Staff Officer; when an operation was on, postcards would be dispatched to archivists, librarians, parish priests, bishops' secretaries, the Registrar General—in fact, to anyone who might be able to contribute information.

His great gift for friendship gave him a remarkable number of friends on whom he could call for help, and he always used his opportunities, not only for his own private researches, but also to help others in their enquiries and above all to further the good of the Catholic Record Society, which was so near his heart during the last years of his life. As Chairman for fifteen years until his death, he exercised a vigorous leadership which helped to rescue the Society from its post-war difficulties and to bring it to its present flourishing state. In the chair he combined kindness with firmness and decisiveness with patience; he had deep personal convictions wherever the interests of the Society were involved, but this never prevented him from exercising scrupulous fairness towards opinions different from his own, or from carrying out his duties as Chairman with impartiality and tact.

To the present editors who, twelve years ago, with some trepidation launched *Recusant History* into the world, Tom Trappes-Lomax was from the beginning a generous, staunch and enthusiastic friend. He was among the first to encourage the proposed venture and to promise his support, and his support was both moral and practical. Each of our first two numbers contained a full-length article by him, the first *The Berkeleys of Spetchley and their contribution to the survival of the Faith in Worcestershire*, and the second *The Englefields and their contribution to the survival of the Faith in Berkshire, Wiltshire, Hampshire and Leicestershire*. Both are positive and methodical contributions to our knowledge, and fine examples of their author's painstaking industry in his chosen field. The last number of *Recusant History* to appear before his death likewise carried a contribution by him. It was typical of his devotion to historical truth that in this final short article he was concerned to forestall possible false claims about the birthplace of a martyr, and typical, too, of his endearing modesty that when differences arose over the shape in which his researches should be presented, he deferred to the views of editors a generation younger than himself.