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Nine a.m. on a January morning in 1946, not a promising time for new visions, but the European History class at Edinburgh University knew that this class would never be the same again. The new lecturer, freshly demobbed from the place on the 'war history' team to which he had been transferred from the RASC in 1942, was a master of synthesis, of the broad view, of the common social and political ideas which governed the evolution of diverse European states, and which, with the course in his hands, replaced the treaty-catalogue to which an older generation was addicted. He would confess that for parts of the course he was only a chapter ahead of the students, but in truth that book did not exist for him or us, the detail drawn and the insights arising from the wide reading which was his principal joy outside his family.

Denys Hay came to us tried and tested by sundry experiences which were not the lot of his later colleagues. Born on 29 August 1915 in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, he lost his father when he was one year old and was brought up in the home of his maternal grandparents. In Newcastle Royal Grammar School he flourished in the hands of talented masters, won a scholarship to Balliol College where Galbraith was still a History tutor, and duly achieved a first and a research Senior Demyship at Magdalen College. He had already shown, and been steered away from, an interest in the Italian Renaissance, but he now began his study of the *Anglica Historia* by the Italian Polydore Vergil, written for Henry VIII but in its day an historiographical masterpiece. A short- term post at Glasgow led him to an assistant lectureship at Southampton (1939), from which he was called up after a year. Of his war service he was more likely to tell of chasing incendiaries round the dome of St Paul's, than of maintaining vehicles or even researching collaborative war history.

Like other Scottish Universities, Edinburgh then sought its professors from Oxbridge, and it was then the briefest of these, Humphrey Sumner, who persuaded the demobilised Denys Hay to come to Edinburgh with the new History professor, Richard Pares, rather than return to Southampton. He was already married and father of two children, a solid inducement to settle in because of the schooling, but no-one who knew Denys in those early Edinburgh years would see his commitment to his teaching and research as just settling-in. Something about Edinburgh and its University suited him, engaged his affections, made him, not a Scot, but an Athenian in the northern *polis*. The riches of the University library were one factor, but the friendliness of a remarkably talented cohort of colleagues in Arts and Sciences, the buzz of intellectual debate – I remember him speaking (unexpectedly, to me) of the brilliance of John Baillie, the theologian – these were probably more important. They made him aware of the University's poor physical provision, and he was prominent in campaigning for the first staff common room; but he and Gwyneth made their own contribution by entertaining students and colleagues, in a way which cannot have been easy when there was a family to feed on a none-too-generous salary. He was also fortunate, though I don't think he saw this, in the maturity of those early student cohorts. He took strong exception to their duffel coats, though I could never discover why!

He had, of course, published articles before coming to Edinburgh. In 1950 the text of Polydore came out, and in 1952 the book of his which I most enjoyed on first reading, his study of Polydore. He had sent me as a student to more than one dull tome on historiography, from which I had escaped with relief, and nothing had prepared me for the doors which he now opened to Renaissance Latin, to the study of the classics, to rhetoric, to the early theatre; the bloody history of Lancaster and York seemed only incidental. Later (1977) he published a survey, *Annalists and Historians*, which shows how central to his scholarship, including teaching, was the understanding of men's interest in the past. He calls it an 'essay' but it is still the only survey which eschews doctrine, such as the centrality of providential history, and pleads for an understanding of the whole genre of historical writing, in whatever language it is written.

He did little work in British archives, dropping an early interest in booty and ransoms after publishing two often-cited papers. The reason? He was putting into publishable form the mature version of his studies of European history prepared for his classes in Edinburgh, first in a textbook (*From Roman Empire to Renaissance Europe*, 1953) and then in a work, *Europe, the Emergence of an Idea* (1957), which looked at the way 'Europe' came to be used in the 17th and 18th centuries, replacing 'Christendom' to describe an allegiance or outlook. Although this book suited a preoccupation of the time – and today – its author's long-standing interest in consciousness of Europe was made plain by his teaching European history as just that, and not as a sum of national histories.

By this time he was the first holder of the new chair of Medieval History, part of an expansion which was to transform the department (and he deserves much for the fact that it remained one department) by adding new specialisms, by curricular reform, and above all by attracting the finest scholars as new colleagues. I left the department at this time, and took only intermittent notice of what was no longer my business, but I could not so readily push aside the progress of Denys Hay's scholarship. Through involvement in the *New Cambridge Modern History*, to which he contributed important chapters, he returned to the study of the Italian Renaissance, publishing in 1961 the first overview in English of its political significance (*The Italian Renaissance in its Historical Background*, 1961) and, in that context, of its achievement in art and literature – and especially this last. This is probably his most influential work, and his subsequent scholarship in one sense elaborated it. Thus he became general editor of the *Longman History of Italy*, and contributed the Renaissance volume in collaboration with John Law, and gave the Birkbeck lectures in Cambridge on *The Church in Italy in the Fifteenth Century* (published 1977), a work for which he returned to archival research, this time in Italy. This is a vast field, for the study of which there are archives in every Italian city and many a small town, and he was first to point out how the ideas which he proposed required to be tested by further local investigations. Yet he remained temperamentally a 'generalist', as when he became general editor of a multi-volume history of Europe and again contributed his own volume to it.

This is in danger of becoming the 'title-dropping' which he deprecated. It certainly neglects the time he committed as editor of the *English Historical Review*, as President of the Historical Association, when he had to visit branches throughout the land, as Literary Director of the Royal Historical Society, or in the University as Dean and then, after a heart-attack in 1969 as Vice-Principal. It neglects the honours he was awarded, and his periods in visiting professorships in America and Italy – the last in 1980–82, after he had retired from the University of Edinburgh in 1980. He was less productive in his retirement (though the *History of Italy* volume came then), but with more time for the multitude of friendships he had made in Edinburgh, and among colleagues and former students world-wide. His family circle always counted for most; his pride in the achievements and happiness of their children was shared with Gwyneth, and multiplied when there were grandchildren to watch. The University was visited only occasionally for a

lecture or for the seminars which were endowed and bore his name; his early enthusiasm for a staff common room was not transferred to the Staff Club, which he eschewed in retirement.

He had a generous but not unlimited tolerance of human frailty. I recall that a pretentious scholar finally failed to produce the much-delayed, oft-promised volume in a series which Denys edited. Most unusually he was scathing in his condemnation. Then it struck me that it was not the failure but the pretentiousness which irked him. Again, his sense of fairness was always close to the surface: the thesis of a younger scholar was extensively plagiarised without acknowledgement in a major text-book by a senior historian; when this was drawn to Denys Hay's attention, although the scholar was not an Edinburgh colleague, he ensured that the author and publisher made full acknowledgement in reprints. Lastly, he was generous, of time certainly, but also in other ways, of which each friend has his own experience. I had many teachers, and in material ways some probably helped more to advance my career. But I never felt that I had a better friend than Denys Hay.

Having been ill since early in the year, he died in Edinburgh on 14 June 1994.

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