

PLATE IX



Photograph by Ramsey & Maspratt, Cambridge

HELEN MAUD CAM

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1885-1968

HELEN MAUD CAM was born on 22 August 1885 at Abingdon in Berkshire, the fourth of nine children of the Reverend William Herbert Cam and his wife Katherine. Her father, who came from Dursley in Gloucestershire, went, after taking a First in Greats, from New College in 1873, to Wellington College as an assistant master and then, as Headmaster to Dudley Grammar School and Roysse's School, Abingdon. At Abingdon he also held the post of Sunday Lecturer at St. Nicholas's. It was at Abingdon that Helen spent her early childhood. In 1893 Mr. Cam became rector of Birchanger in Essex, near Bishop's Stortford, and later (1911) moved to another New College living, Paulerspury, near Towcester, Northamptonshire. Helen's mother, the daughter of George Erving Scott, belonged to a gifted family which had lived for several generations in Somerset. Two of Mrs. Cam's brothers, George Rodney and Walter Scott, became Fellows of Merton College as young men, spent their later years in Oxford, and took an interest in their sister's lively children. As a girl Helen visited her uncle at St. Alban's Hall, Oxford, and made an attractive water-colour sketch of it in 1905, which is reproduced in the Victoria County History. The Cams and the Scotts drew together in the later years. In 1926 Mr. Cam retired from Paulerspury and came with his wife to live in Keble Road, Oxford, where he died in 1927. Here Helen spent many vacations until her mother's death in 1949 at the age of ninety-two.

Helen and three of her sisters were educated at home by their parents, an arrangement which in the conditions of the late twentieth century is never likely to be common or successful. But in the 1890s, in the Cam household, it was extraordinarily rewarding. In 1964 Helen recalled, in a delightful radio broadcast talk, the way in which Mr. and Mrs. Cam dealt with the task.¹ These parents were wise, liberal educators; the children responded in their various ways, and made their mark afterwards in different walks of life in various parts of the world. Helen was studious, a voracious reader, taught to look things up for herself

¹ 'Eating and drinking Greek', *The Listener*, lxxi (21 May 1964), 836-7; reprinted in *Girton Review*, no. 184 (1969), 11-14.

and think things out for herself. 'We were expected to use our minds', she wrote, sixty years later. She took pleasure out of doors too, was interested in botany and birds, painted water-colour sketches. What is more, she acquired in her home the keen sense of public duty which stimulated her later to go beyond the limits of her strictly academic work. To her study of history, modern as well as medieval, she brought from home a strong sympathetic humanity, of a 'no-nonsense', unsentimental brand. The terms in which she dedicated her essays on *Liberties and Communities* (1944) to her parents—'my first and best teachers'—explain much; for she quoted Edmund Burke: 'We begin our public affections in our families. No cold relation is a zealous citizen.' Throughout her life she remained attached to the Church in which she had grown up and was a sincere and devout Christian. A generous giver to 'good causes', she enjoyed also giving to her friends and pupils the books which gave her pleasure.

Helen Cam left home for academic training when she was nineteen, in 1904. She would gladly have gone to Oxford, where her father had graduated and where her maternal uncles lived. But Oxford did not offer her a scholarship and she went instead to London University, as a College Scholar at Royal Holloway College. She read history at Holloway, where a revered teacher was Margaret Wade Leys, and where a fellow student who became a life-long friend was Fanny Street. At Holloway she was awarded the Driver Scholarship in 1906, and also won a University Exhibition and the Savory Prize in Divinity. During her undergraduate career she entered into all the civilized activities of the college. In 1907 she was placed in the First Class in the London final examination. Her undergraduate career has left little easily recoverable record, but it is interesting to find her in 1905 addressing the newly formed Historical Society on 'the origin of the Old English village'. An undated memorandum in one of her notebooks reveals the medieval bent and ambitions of the young student, at this time or shortly after. It is headed: 'Subjects for investigation'. The list follows: 'The continental relations of the Anglo-Saxon kings. A series of maps of Royal forests in England. A translation of the correspondence and writings of Pius II. A history of the Caucasian region. A history of Birchanger. Heresies before Wiclyffe. The history of Aliens in England. The reasons for the peculiar character of the English Peerage.' Evidently the wish to become a professional historian was already implanted by the time Helen graduated.

In those days England offered fewer opportunities to women medievalists than it offers today. A year after graduation Helen was able to visit the United States. Her younger sister Norah had already spent one year as an undergraduate at Bryn Mawr, when Helen joined her in 1908 with a fellowship in History. At Holloway her course had included English Literature; in the Bryn Mawr graduate school she worked at Anglo-Saxon with Carleton Brown. She also took courses in American history and in 'auxiliary sciences'. Companions in graduate school were Lily Ross Taylor, late Professor Emeritus of Bryn Mawr, and Helen Sandison, Professor for many years at Vassar. It may have been during this year, 1908-9, that Helen met Nellie Neilson of Mount Holyoke, who also became a cherished friend. In later years (and especially forty years later) she recalled her Bryn Mawr days with pleasure. The place had stimulated her taste for travel and her liking for Americans and the American scene.

She worked at Bryn Mawr on a topic not wholly removed from the first of her proposed 'subjects for investigation' in the field of Anglo-Saxon and Frankish history. This resulted in a thesis for the Master of Arts degree at London, presented in 1909, which took final shape in *Local Government in Francia and England, 768-1034*.¹ A short book, by a novice, this calls for an interruption of the narrative because it gives a foretaste of the scholarly qualities on which Helen Cam gradually established her reputation. The preface states that Mr. H. W. C. Davis of Balliol had given help at the outset of the work. He it was, perhaps, who had induced Helen to make this interesting, if somewhat unrewarding, comparative study. One should not claim too much for a work written in the space of a year or two; but in it Helen displayed her mettle. Little more than a decade separated her study from the major works of Brunner, Maitland, and Viollet, and in 1909 Vinogradoff's work *English Society in the Eleventh Century* was brand new. She used them judiciously, and read widely in the printed sources, continental and English. Unfortunately, in her search for the interplay of influences between Francia and England she drew a blank. And she had the honesty to say so. 'The whole results of the investigation here attempted', she admitted, were negative.² But this did not justify the neglect by historians of a serious, exact inquiry. Helen Cam had tackled a big problem and arrived at a negative

¹ Published by the University of London Press, 1912.

² *Local Government*, p. 156, cf. pp. 64, 98, 127, 147 n. 4, 154-5.

conclusion. To do so, she had made a careful and a useful analysis of the evidence on local government and military matters. Yet she could not complain of a cold reception: there was no reception at all. I do not find that the book was reviewed in either England or France, nor did the French and English pundits refer to it in their footnotes and bibliographies. It appeared in the second edition of Gross's *Sources and Literature*, and in a book-list by W. J. Corbett in the *Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. iii, ten years later. That was all.¹ One cannot but regret that for the next fifty years the study of Anglo-Saxon institutions, concentrated on this island, seldom showed that concern with continental institutions which, under the influence of Maitland and Vinogradoff and Chadwick, had seemed to promise much in the first decade of the century. As for Helen Cam's opinion of the book and of its treatment in the learned world, we have no direct knowledge. I have found no single reference to it in her later writing. It must have meant much to her in the making. It is difficult to believe that she was not mortified when it was ignored. But she did not abandon the field. Although most of her research was to be in English records, she often looked across the water. Her first review in *The English Historical Review*² was of Einar Joranson on *The Danegeld in France*, where she suggested that a comparison with the English levies might prove rewarding; in 1933 she read at Warsaw a paper on 'Suitors and *scabini*';³ and in 1952 she touched on the contrast between continental and English developments when addressing the Mediaeval Academy of America on medieval franchises.⁴ Private correspondence shows that in her last years she kept up to date in her reading on Carolingian history.

Local Government got no publicity in 1912 and after; yet it may have benefited its author materially. The three years which followed her return from Bryn Mawr had been spent as a school teacher at Cheltenham Ladies' College. Now, in 1912, her old college appointed her to an Assistant Lecturership in History, and later to a staff lecturership. Holloway remained her home until 1921. During the London years she laid the foundations

¹ It received a brief complimentary notice by L. M. Larson in *The American Historical Review*, xviii (1912-13), 618.

² *English Historical Review*, xl (1925), 117-18.

³ *Speculum*, x (1935), 189-200, reprinted in her *Liberties and Communities*, pp. 49-63.

⁴ *Speculum*, xxxii (1957), 429-30, reprinted in her *Law-finders and Law-makers*, pp. 24-5.

for some of her best contributions to medieval scholarship. She was becoming familiar with the resources of the Public Record Office, and was one of the generation trained in palaeography and diplomatic history by Hubert Hall and Hilary Jenkinson at the London School of Economics. At the same time she earned the reputation of a keen and exacting teacher, impressive for her erudition and her wide interests. Students nicknamed her 'auntie', which suggests that even at this early stage she had the serious and matronly mien which distinguished her in later years. Although, with her rigorous standards and demonstrative behaviour, she may have overawed some of the less forthcoming of her students, pupils' surviving letters to her show a response which she can have evoked only by kindness and sustained interest in them. She retained a warm affection for Holloway to the end of her days, and was one of the prime movers in launching the Royal Holloway College Jubilee Research Fellowship in 1934. The project was realized in 1937 with the first election of a Fellow, but ten years later Helen Cam again was behind an appeal to augment the fellowship.

In 1921 Eileen Power, Director of Studies in History at Girton College, Cambridge, left to become Lecturer, and later Professor, of Economic History in the London School of Economics. She was succeeded as Director of Studies in History (and Law) at Girton by Mary Gwladys Jones, an old Girtonian and a gifted teacher, whose historical interests lay more in the modern field. Miss Jones was instrumental in getting Helen Cam appointed in the same year as Pfeiffer Research Fellow. She held that fellowship until 1926, when she became Lecturer in History. Later, she succeeded her friend Miss Jones as Director of Studies both in Law and History and became Vice-Mistress of Girton in 1944. Although in the early years at Cambridge Miss Jones spared her friend and colleague much of the burden of teaching in order to allow her research to prosper, Helen Cam presumably participated in teaching medieval history, which had been Eileen Power's special province. It must have been a severe test, after nearly a decade at London, to follow in the steps of this brilliant, beloved, and inimitable young don. But Helen responded to the situation. Maybe she was not equally successful as a teacher with all sorts and conditions of undergraduate. Maybe, in the early stages of her Cambridge career, she found it difficult as a newcomer to adapt to the routine of supervising and to an academic society in which the position of women was so unusual. But her enthusiasm for, and fierce

concentration on, historical problems taught her pupils what was involved in historical study. Her formidable cross-examinations challenged students to think critically. She was generous with her time and her books. She had a personality and a presence which made a deepening impression as her confidence was encouraged by success. For over twenty years she was guide and friend to many young Girton historians. Her learning commanded the respect of her colleagues in the Faculty of History, and her scholarly influence extended outside her own college in the directing of postgraduate research. She held a University Lecturership in History from 1929 to 1948, she sat on the Faculty Board of History from 1941 to 1948, and was an examiner for Part I of the Tripos during the Second World War. She took the title of Litt.D. of Cambridge in 1936. In this middle period of her life she rendered great services to both university and county of Cambridge, and at the same time completed a large part of her most notable scholarly writings. During these years Oxford and Oxford scholars saw much of her, too, for she often spent vacations in Keble Road, and then the Bodleian became her base. There she was to be seen, as one passed by the carrels of Duke Humphrey's Library, sitting squarely by a window—sharp eyes, sharp nose, heavy eyebrows—intent on her books, looking rather like a broody hen in a nesting box, placid and comfortable, but ready to peck if the occasion demanded. Some of her best articles must have been hatched there.

The year in which Helen Cam went to Girton was marked by the publication of *Studies in the Hundred Rolls: Some Aspects of Thirteenth-century Administration*. With Ludwik Ehrlich's *Proceedings against the Crown* it formed volume vi of Paul Vinogradoff's *Oxford Studies in Social and Legal History*. How Helen came into contact with the formidable Corpus Professor of Jurisprudence at Oxford does not appear.¹ She certainly prized the association, and a signed copy of Henry Lamb's portrait of Vinogradoff hung in her study at her death. We do not know whether it was he who encouraged her to advance in time to the thirteenth century from her first work on Anglo-Saxon local

¹ A single, somewhat peremptory note from Vinogradoff about the book survives among Helen Cam's correspondence, dated 29 January 1920: 'Dear Miss Cam, You have had your monograph back from the Press for settlement of various details. It is time to start with the printing of the VIth volume. I hope you have completed your revision and will send the MS back in a short time to have it set up. Yours very truly, P. Vinogradoff.'

government. Be that as it may, the work was sponsored by Vinogradoff, and was greeted by that austere critic, James Tait, as 'an illuminating investigation'.¹ It threw light both on the documents and on the historical circumstances. By exposing the nature of the Hundred Rolls and the defects of the Record Commission volumes, it made possible their scientific use. In the process, it identified the 'rotuli ragemannorum' and cut through the errors of generations over the so-called Statute of Ragman. Since then, thanks to others of Miss Cam's generation—Mr. Richardson, Sir Goronwy Edwards, Professor Plucknett, and others—historians have a much clearer notion than their predecessors had of what an Edwardian statute was or was not. But this was no commonplace in 1921. Credit goes to Helen Cam for putting the record straight in this case. Besides this, her book displayed the Hundred Rolls as a source not only for feudal privilege but equally, or more, for local royal administration. She was herself to exploit them for the purpose in years to come.

The study of hundredal structure inevitably led back to origins, and among the learned articles which Helen Cam wrote during the next twenty years several of the most important enlarged on her prentice work. A fine paper entitled 'Manerium cum hundredo', read at the International Congress of Historical Sciences in 1928,² was followed by one on 'Early groups of hundreds', contributed to the volume in honour of James Tait in 1933.³ Meanwhile, she produced in 1930 a full-length book: *The Hundred and the Hundred Rolls*, with the subtitle, 'an Outline of Local Government in Medieval England', in Methuen's Antiquary's Books. The general character of the series was not designed to secure for the work the attention that it deserved from the professional historian. Still, it was praised by Charles Johnson in *The English Historical Review*, by W. S. Holdsworth in *The Law Quarterly*, and (rather condescendingly) by Carl Stephenson in *The American Historical Review*. In 1953 Powicke could advise readers of *The Thirteenth Century* that Miss Cam's book gives 'the best account of local government, supplemented by the papers included in her *Liberties and Communities in Medieval England* (1944)'.

¹ *Eng. Hist. Rev.* xxxvii (1922), 573.

² *Eng. Hist. Rev.* xlvii (1932), 353-72, reprinted in her *Liberties and Communities*, pp. 64-90.

³ *Historical Essays in honour of James Tait*, ed. J. G. Edwards, V. H. Galbraith, and E. F. Jacob (Manchester 1933), pp. 13-25, reprinted in *Liberties and Communities*, pp. 91-105.

These selected essays contained in *Liberties and Communities* show not only the extent to which Helen Cam had dedicated herself to the study of local institutions (including much work on the town and county of Cambridge), but also how this was leading her on to study the medieval parliament. She approached the subject by way of county representation. A brief note on parliamentary writs *de expensis* of 1258 had appeared in 1931.¹ Two other papers, both of 1939 and printed in *Liberties and Communities*, discussed the relations of parliamentary representatives with the communities they represented. The same concern was evident in an important lecture delivered in wartime to the Royal Historical Society: 'From witness of the shire to full parliament.'² Then, in 1945, she delivered the Raleigh Lecture on 'The Legislators of Medieval England'.

Interest in parliamentary origins had already, before the war, brought her into close touch with the International Commission for the History of Assemblies of Estates. This introduced her to scholars of many countries, and engaged so much of her energy in her sixties and seventies that it calls for special attention here. She had acted for many years as secretary of the English branch of the Commission when in 1949, on the death of François Olivier-Martin, she was elected President of the Commission, and she held that post with great distinction for eleven years. One who was a colleague of hers on the Commission writes: 'We had come under the rule of a great abbess!' Always a capable organizer, she set to work in a business-like way to gain the confidence of Unesco and its financial support for the Commission's publications, and to extend the membership, aided in this by numerous personal contacts with American scholars at work in the field. Her presence could always be counted on, at occasional meetings as well as the quinquennial congresses, an urbane but firm chairman. During her term of office the scope of the Commission's scholarly activities broadened. In its early days it was preoccupied with the theory of representation and 'corporatisme'. Now, as was to be expected from Helen Cam's down-to-earth approach to historical problems, electoral processes and the actual working of parliamentary assemblies received greater attention. She left the imprint of her personality equally on the Commission's structure and its publications.

¹ *Eng. Hist. Rev.* xlvi (1931), 630-2.

² *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th ser., xxvi (1944), 13-35, reprinted in her *Law-finders and Law-makers in medieval England* (1962), pp. 106-31.

When she retired from the Presidency she received a truly international tribute for her seventy-fifth birthday, in the shape of two volumes, *Album Helen Maud Cam*, published for and presented to the Commission (1960-1). This *Festschrift* comprises thirty-six essays by scholars of thirteen countries on the theory and practice of representation, ranging from village assemblies in medieval England to Ockham and the general council. Professor Caroline Robbins contributed a short appreciation of Helen Cam and a bibliography of selected writings.

Meanwhile, in 1948, there had been a great uprooting. At the age of sixty-two Helen Cam resigned her Girton Fellowship and her University Lecturership. She crossed the Atlantic to become the first holder of the Zemurray Radcliffe Professorship of History in Harvard University. It was a brave thing to do, and it worked. She occupied the chair for six years. To her English friends it was evident that she found the experience exhilarating; in Harvard and Radcliffe she was warmly welcomed and found friends and admirers. Professor Giles Constable has written of these six years: 'Students from many fields were attracted to her lectures not only by her mastery of her subject-matter, but also by the enthusiasm with which she tackled even the most recondite historical problems. There was something of a 'Cam cult' among undergraduates, and the *Crimson* in a profile written shortly before her retirement said that "her intense activity and interest have helped close a wide gap of age and culture".' For all her willing involvement in the new society she had entered, Helen Cam continued to pursue her researches and to write. Her published writings show that she was still concerned above all with local government and parliament, but they include a small book commissioned for Hutchinson's University Library: *England before Elizabeth* (1950). No one would regard it as a major work. There is nothing subtle about it; it seems somewhat commonplace beside Powicke's essay in the same genre, a more difficult but more imaginative work aimed likewise at the general public. Nevertheless, *England before Elizabeth* is the work of an acute scholar and teacher, written with conviction. The author stresses the permanent legacy of feudalism, the tradition of the common law, and (believing as she did in the concrete and the precise) furnished her book with a table of dates and sketch maps.

The return to England and release from academic chores in 1954 meant no diminution of Helen Cam's historical activities.

She settled down to life in retirement with her sister Norah in Kent, working in her study and cultivating her garden in Grassy Lane, Sevenoaks. Retirement did not preclude travel in and out of England. She was often to be met in London and Oxford and Cambridge, at gatherings of historians, addressing historical societies, or pursuing her researches. News of a manuscript which bore on her work in a college library was enough to bring her promptly out of her lair when she was nearly eighty years old. It was in her eightieth year that she gave the annual address of the Selden Society in 1965, in commemoration of Magna Carta. These years of retirement saw the publication of her very substantial contribution to the Victoria County History on the city of Cambridge.¹ In 1962, as in 1944, she gathered together a dozen of her more recent essays, under the title *Law-finders and Law-makers in Medieval England*. They were dedicated 'to the Historians of Harvard, my friends and fellow-workers, 1948-54'. They show that, besides valuable work in the fields so familiar to her of hundred and parliament, she was paying special attention to London history. Two of the essays were preparatory to a comprehensive and critical edition of the records of the London eyre of 1321.² The edition proved to be her last and one of her most important works of scholarship, published posthumously by the Selden Society in two volumes in 1968 and 1969. When she died on 9 February 1968 she had completed text and translation of the documents and a long introduction, having lost consciousness while working on the book. It remained for the Literary Director of the Selden Society, Professor S. F. C. Milsom, to supply additional apparatus and indexes and to adorn the edition with a memoir of its editor.

Helen Cam's contribution to historical scholarship lay in local government, and in the relations of communities to the central government through the courts of justice and the commons in parliament. Its most important contact with politics was in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Here, it can safely be said, she encouraged the political historians to give a new hard look at the realities of politics under the first three Edwards.

¹ *A History of the County of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely*, vol. iii (1959), edited by J. P. C. Roach, pp. 1-141. This had been completed in 1951 (cf. *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, liv (1961), 13).

² She had reviewed W. C. Bolland on the General Eyre with devastating thoroughness in *History* in 1923, and had published three short papers on related subjects in the next two years.

In her first major work, *Studies in the Hundred Rolls* (1921) she remarked (p. 7) that 'the history of administration in England has yet to find its Stubbs and its Maitland'. When she wrote that, Tout had just published the first volume of his *Chapters on the working of the central offices*. Helen Cam's book marked the beginning of fifty years' work devoted to local administration. Just as Tout stimulated studies in his sphere so, over the years, Helen Cam became the most notable proponent of studies on shire and hundred. Her book of 1930, *The Hundred and the Hundred Rolls*, did not pretend to be a comprehensive treatise. Nor did she ever produce another monograph. But her influence over other scholars was wide and deep, and her own output of lectures, articles, and reviews was impressive. They showed historical interests not limited in time by her particular familiarity with Edwardian government. A critical examination of Jolliffe's *Constitutional History of Medieval England*¹ began by applauding in it a quality which characterizes her own work: 'From first to last we are confronted by actualities, not legal antiquities.' She proceeded, in six pages, to submit the book to searching criticism, and ended 'torn between admiration and exasperation' (like others of its readers). Her reviewing, as in this case, ranged over very wide fields, but the most significant of it bore on local institutions. After 1925 *The English Historical Review* sent her almost all important books on medieval local government for the next thirty years and more. As a reviewer she was never discourteous, always conscientious, and usually severe. Like some others she became a shade more indulgent or less vigilant in her latter years. In her own books and essays she applied the rigorous standards she demanded of others. Most of her scholarly writing, already mentioned, was based upon analysis of legal institutions, but the law was used to elucidate patterns of human behaviour. The use of legal records to this end can lead to dubious deductions and strained comparisons; but Helen Cam, if she did not always avoid the dangers, went cautiously to work in the spirit of Maitland. Without his extraordinary genius and without his formal training in the law, she carried on in her writings his tradition, 'the Maitland tradition', as she herself described it in 1923: 'the habit of seeing and stating the general problem in terms of the ordinary individual'.² Her abiding conviction was that legal institutions provided the key to political and social growth. 'If one is seeking to make the acquaintance

¹ *Eng. Hist. Rev.* liv (1939), 483-9.

² Reviewing Bolland in *History*, n.s. vii (1922-3), 298.

of the ordinary men and women of the past', she asserted in 1956, 'there is nothing to equal the legal records for bringing them to life.'¹ No wonder that Maitland was her hero! In 1952 she recalled reading *Domesday Book and Beyond* for the first time in 1905: 'an experience as exciting as it was educative'.² In 1957 she prefaced his *Selected Historical Essays* with a perceptive memoir.

When Helen Cam went to Cambridge in 1921 she found particularly sympathetic the outlook of Gaillard P. Lapsley, who had come from law to history under the influence of Charles Gross at Harvard and who, having settled in Trinity College since 1904, seemed to be the Cambridge scholar nearest in succession to Maitland. In her early book on *Local Government* (p. 111) the young Helen Cam had written, apropos of early private jurisdiction in England, 'one can venture to do little more than tread cautiously in the footsteps of Maitland': surely a mark of wisdom in a beginner in the year 1912. Thirty-three years on, her Raleigh Lecture analysed the processes of legislation in the later Middle Ages: 'It is only possible [she said] to attempt such a survey by standing on the shoulders of others', and she went on to name Maitland and ten other scholars, dead and living, 'on whose work I have relied' (p. 4). She was always punctilious to acknowledge debts. This trait might indeed lead one to underestimate what she contributed of her own, set forth in a literary style which was exact but unpretentious and unexciting. Her mature quality as a scholar in the Maitland tradition—or rather, one of the Maitland traditions—can best be seen in her essays republished in the two volumes of 1944 and 1962. It must, of course, be granted that all her concern with medieval law, all her admiration for Maitland, did not turn her into a genuine specimen of that rare bird, the legal historian. Like other historians who approach the law from outside, without professional training and with *arrière pensée*, she may not always have seen the juristic implications of a process or a judgement. Like others she went to legal sources with a further object in view. These essays, where so much turns on legal matters, are none the less impressive for what they achieve within the limits the author set. They are marked by close scrutiny of evidence, cautious judgement in proceeding from the particular to the general. She feels her way from record to record, builds up a map of England bit by bit to show the distribution of the hun-

¹ *Law as it Looks to a Historian* (Founder's Memorial Lecture, Girton College, Cambridge, 1956), p. 15.

² *Law-finders and Law-makers*, p. 23.

dredal manor, or works through the Curia Regis rolls to construct the mixed pedigrees of freemen and villeins. Facts are viewed in a broad setting. The machinery of government is examined with the object of government in mind. Conclusions are firmly stated, qualified, defined.

Helen Cam saw the historical process within a pattern of beliefs. 'In the long view [she said] it is more important that human beings should learn to get on with each other than that they should be more comfortable materially and safer physically.'¹ This belief gave the colour and life to her study of legal institutions. There she found—'perhaps more fully than in any other aspect of history'—the embodiment of 'the slow advance of erring and straying humanity in its persistent endeavour to subdue chaos to order, discord to harmony, and self-interest to justice'.² There her powers of exact examination and analysis stood her in good stead. Her findings, within this field, were of durable value. Perhaps some of the broad conclusions she deduced from them will wear less well. But what of that? Every historian has a pattern of beliefs, not based entirely on historical studies, determining in some measure the nature of those studies. Greater historians than Helen Cam, including the greatest, have this in common. She herself pointed to a clear example in her judicious study, 'Stubbs seventy years after'.³

Helen Cam was determined to communicate her enthusiasm for serious historical study to those she taught at London and Cambridge and Harvard. She could be an exacting teacher and strict critic, but not overbearing. 'Judgment might be severe', writes one of her pupils, 'but it was impersonal; no one was more ready to respect the personalities of students.'⁴ While Helen Cam was a Fellow, Girton was fortunate to have a sequence of gifted research students in medieval history, some of them Cambridge graduates, others from elsewhere. Some of them became academic teachers, others authors, others archivists; one and all they remained disciples and friends of Helen. It has already been said that her influence on medieval research in Cambridge was not confined to Girtonians; many others who were growing up in the thirties and forties came under her

¹ *Law as it Looks to a Historian*, p. 25.

² *Law-finders and Law-makers*, p. 187, from the peroration of her inaugural lecture at Harvard.

³ *The Cambridge Historical Journal*, ix (1948), 129-47, reprinted in *Law-finders and Law-makers*, pp. 188-211.

⁴ *Girton Review*, no. 184 (1969), 32.

influence even if not formally under her supervision. At Harvard the stimulus of her teaching was equally felt. And when she retired it was not to concentrate exclusively on her own work. She was always accessible to the young medievalist. Characteristically, in the last year of her life she was prepared to turn from the proofs of *The Eyre of London* and welcome in her study at Sevenoaks a student on the threshold of research; he came away armed with advice about thirteenth-century franchises and a bundle of Helen Cam's notes on loan, to help him on his way.

Dedicated scholars often adapt themselves to teaching in a university, but many are reluctant to venture further. For Helen Cam teaching at all levels was her *métier*, a social duty which she liked and performed well. She lectured up and down the country, not only on historical subjects. At Girton she taught for a time in the village Sunday School. When she was at Holloway she produced for the Young Women's Christian Association a guide for novel readers. In this period, with her colleague Fanny Street, she took up enthusiastically Albert Mansbridge's idea of a residential Working Women's College. It received much support from the Y.W.C.A. Education Committee on which they both served, and when it was founded in 1920 Fanny Street became its first principal. For the rest of her life Helen Cam was a devoted and energetic supporter of Hillcroft College, encouraged Holloway to support it, and was still taking an active interest in its working when she was eighty years old. She left legacies to it of money and books. Her general involvement in educational matters, shared at Girton by her friend Miss M. G. Jones, appears from an article she contributed to a war-time number of the *Girton Review*.¹ It reports that

during the Michaelmas Term (1941) a circle of fellows and undergraduate students of the College met in Miss Jones's room to discuss problems of Educational Reconstruction in post-war England. . . . On the third evening Miss Cam discussed the social aspects of educational reconstruction, directing attention to the stereotyping of class barriers by the existing system of schools, entry to which depends more on income than on intellectual capacity, and raising the question, ignored in the Spens Report, of the place to be filled in the post-war world by the public schools. Specific suggestions from various educationalists for modifications in the system, with a view to securing equality of opportunity to choose between various types of educational facilities, led to what was, perhaps, the liveliest of all the discussions.

¹ *Girton Review*, no. 118 (1942), 10-11, signed 'H. M. C.'

The final comment on these meetings is: 'We learnt a good many new facts and were provoked to seek for more, both in books and in the world about us.'

By a natural transition we come to Helen Cam's concern with politics and social questions. Correspondence in 1919 and 1920 shows her to be involved in discussions of socialism at Holloway College and in arranging for Labour Party speakers to come to Egham. During her twenty-seven years at Cambridge she was an active member of the Girton Labour Party. She represented the Women's Section at the National Conference of Labour Women in 1925 and in later years, and advocated representation by the other local parties within the county. From 1925 to 1935 she sat on the Executive Committee of the Cambridgeshire Trades Council and Divisional Labour Party. In 1928 she was sponsored by the Committee as a candidate in the County Council election, but was not returned. In the early thirties she served, as the nominee of the Executive Committee, on the County of Cambridge Juvenile Employment Subcommittee. She is remembered in the village of Girton as a popular figure who took a keen interest in local affairs and did real hard work for the Labour Party.

Considering the span of Helen Cam's life, it is impossible not to reflect on the changes which she saw in the status of women in academic and public life. She participated in the changes. Future generations may need to be reminded that when she came to Cambridge in 1921—an established scholar in her mid thirties—it was to a women's college which had no standing in the University. In the very month of her arrival a disgraceful scene signalled the defeat of an attempt to admit women to membership of the University and its boards and syndicates. As a concession to the times (when all the other universities in England admitted both sexes) Cambridge agreed that women students of Girton and Newnham might be given titles of degrees. Members of Girton and Newnham were admitted to the University Library in 1923. In 1926 modernity crept in to the extent of making women eligible for professorships and lectureships, and for membership of faculties and boards. But it was only on the eve of Helen Cam's departure for America in 1948 that the University voted for the admission of women to fully equal status with men and constituted Girton and Newnham as colleges of the University. In the earlier days of the campaign for women's parliamentary suffrage, Helen Cam was an active but not a militant suffragist. Not given to violent display,

she steadily promoted the participation of women in affairs. Throughout her life she was associated with specifically women's undertakings, but did not stop at that. She learnt to move easily in predominantly male societies, such as the Royal Historical Society and the Selden Society and the British Academy were when she joined them. She was the first woman to be invited to deliver the Raleigh Lecture of the British Academy, the first woman to be appointed to a professorial chair at Harvard. In her younger days she had not been noted for moderate utterance and tact; age and experience mellowed her manner, as it also brought about a closer attention to the niceties of dress. Those who knew her in late life found her robust and persistent in argument, never truculent. In the councils of learned societies her interventions were few, well-timed, brief, and to the point. So she earned general respect for her poise and her judgement as well as for her scholarship.

Helen Cam had the capacity to keep alive many interests and use various talents, not wholly absorbed by any one. However earnest she was in the pursuit of learning, in teaching, in politics, and in good works, these things did not prevent her from enjoying travel in several continents, from reading a prodigious quantity of literary classics and 'thrillers', and corresponding with friends in Europe and America. She developed her gift for sketching—one of those Victorian accomplishments less common today—in Burma and Hungary and the United States as well as Oxford and Cambridge. To the end of her life she retained zest for study and literature and friendship. It was characteristic that as late as 1965 she should go with her sister Norah to the International Congress of Historical Sciences at Vienna and renew Austrian contacts established in the early twenties; and it came naturally to her to continue the journey as far as Budapest in order to stay with a Hungarian scholar whom she had met in Dublin through the International Commission on Estates. It came naturally, also, to respond with warmth to the hospitality she and her sister received from their new Hungarian friends, exchanging books and maintaining a lively correspondence on family matters, the history of estates, and the un-historicity of a famous poem by János Arany on Edward I's burning of the Welsh bards. She was already eighty years old when she visited Budapest. Next year she was at a congress in Sicily, and in October 1967 spent a strenuous month in the United States, revisiting old friends.

It is difficult to describe Helen Cam without dropping into

conventional expressions; for many of her virtues were of the best plain conventional sort: accuracy as a scholar, probity, forthrightness, freedom from malice, and so forth. She took them seriously and held on to them firmly. But they did not de-humanize her as they de-humanize some 'do-gooders'. She remained the valued friend of many whom she never tried to influence. She enjoyed doing good, but she also enjoyed conversation, creature comforts, and social occasions. Moreover, she always retained a self-deprecatory humour and the capacity to laugh at herself. When as a young woman she started to make a list of her writings in a notebook, she headed it: 'H. M. C. Publications' and then added 'Pure Swank'! In her latest years, when she had become something of an institution in historical circles, a stately figure seen often at public gatherings, the stateliness never concealed the open heart with which she greeted old friends and acquaintances, the alert eye, the lively talk, spiced with a tart wit.

Many academic honours came to Helen Cam late in life. She was nearly sixty when she was invited to deliver the Raleigh Lecture of the British Academy in 1945, and in the same year was elected to its Fellowship. At that time this body had only twice opened its doors to a woman. It was fitting that Helen Cam's election followed soon after the death of the first of them—Beatrice Webb. In the United States the Zemurray Professor's reputation brought her honorary Doctorates of Law at Smith College, the University of North Carolina, and Mount Holyoke. Honours later received at Oxford gave her peculiar satisfaction, all the more because she had failed to win a scholarship there in 1904: she became a Doctor of Letters *honoris causa* in 1962 and an Honorary Fellow of Somerville College in 1964. Over many years she was associated with learned societies on both sides of the Atlantic, a Vice-President of the Selden Society from 1962 to 1965, an Honorary Vice-President of the Royal Historical Society since 1962, a Corresponding Fellow of the Mediaeval Academy of America, and a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She received recognition outside academic circles for her historical work and public services when she became a Commander of the British Empire in 1957.

C. R. CHENEY

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Reference has been made to the list in *Album Helen Maud Cam*, vol. 1, of articles, lectures, speeches, and books on historical subjects published before 1960. Since then Helen Cam collected nine of the essays there listed in *Law-Finders and Law-Makers in Medieval England: Collected Studies in Legal and Constitutional History* (London, Merlin Press, 1962), together with an introductory essay on 'The rule of law in English history'; the revised version of a paper on 'The quality of English feudalism' read to the Anglo-Soviet Conference of Historians in London, September 1958; and 'The law-courts of medieval London', reprinted from the Festschrift Werner Näf, *Schweizer Beiträge zur allgemeinen Geschichte*, Band 18/19 (1960/1), 162-9. Since 1962 there have appeared *Magna Carta—Event or Document?*, a lecture delivered to the Selden Society, 5 July 1965 (Selden Society, 1965), and (posthumously) *The Eyre of London 14 Edward II, A.D. 1321*, ed. by Helen M. Cam in the Selden Society series of Year Books of Edward II, vol. xxvi, parts i and ii (Selden Society, vols. 85-6, 1968-9).

It should be noted that neither here nor in the 1960 list appear Helen Cam's numerous reviews of historical works in learned journals nor a very large number of writings of a less specialized character, many of them unrelated to medieval history.¹

¹ A personal appreciation by Caroline Robbins (with a portrait frontispiece) accompanies the bibliography in vol. 1 of *Album Helen Maud Cam* (1960). The following memoirs have appeared since her death: (i) in *The Times*, 12 Feb. 1968; (ii) Memorial minute adopted by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University, 12 Nov. 1968, printed in *Harvard University Gazette*, lxiv, no. 13, 7 Dec. 1968, by Giles Constable; (iii) 'In memoriam: Helen Cam, 1885-1968', *Girton Review*, no. 184 (1969), 32-6 (with another portrait) by Janet H. Sondheimer; (iv) a memoir by S. F. C. Milsom in vol. ii of Helen Cam's *The Eyre of London* (Selden Soc. Publ. lxxxvi, 1969).

This memoir owes much to these, and its writer must also thank their authors and many others of Helen Cam's colleagues and friends for their kind response to particular inquiries. He wishes to thank particularly the Mistress and Librarian of Girton College, to which Helen Cam bequeathed many of her books and papers, the Hon. Mrs. H. N. Pease, of Girton, Dr. György Bónis, of Budapest, and Professor J. S. Roskell. Finally he acknowledges his special obligation to Miss Marjorie Cam, for information about her sister which he could not have obtained elsewhere.