

FRANCIS DOMINIC ALLISON, 1892—1966

A TRIBUTE

by DAVID ROGERS

Very few readers of these pages will be aware that without Mr. F. D. Allison, whose recent sudden death we mourn, there would today be no *Recusant History* at all. In the years prior to 1950 an idea had been taking shape in the minds of the present writer and his fellow-editor, Mr. A. F. Allison, that there was a place, a need even, for a new vehicle for historical writing in the field of English Catholic history, in order to stimulate original research, to record its results and so gradually to build up a body of materials for the use of historians of the post-Reformation church in this country. Such a journal would not be aimed primarily at a popular readership—the work of popularising history for the ordinary reader ought, ideally, to follow and not precede the work of the specialist—but at the serious student, whether amateur or professional, who expected the highest standard of exact scholarship. As such it would have to grow slowly, making its way simply by the quality of its contributions, and so build up a raft of supporters which would keep the enterprise afloat.

Neither of the would-be editors was in a position to afford time or space to create and maintain the business administration of a new periodical, and the whole burden of this was undertaken from the very beginning by Mr. Allison senior. Among his business interests was a small publishing firm with the name of the Arundel Press, and through this he gave the new venture, with which he at once identified himself wholeheartedly, the services of an efficient office to handle subscriptions, correspondence, accounts and publicity, thus leaving the editors free to devote themselves to making the contents fulfil as nearly as possible their ideal. But that ideal could have remained merely a dream if the business management had not been in his safe hands.

The task of launching a specialist journal not sponsored either by an institution (such as a university faculty) supported from outside revenues, or by an established body with a built-in group of subscribing members, might well have seemed over risky to so practical a business man. But Francis Allison was not simply a business man and no more. Educated at Mount St. Mary's by the Jesuits (amongst whom he tried a vocation to the religious life before finding it in a deeply happy marriage), he retained from his schooldays onwards both a quiet, typically English loyalty and devotion to his Faith, and a lifelong pleasure in literature and the concerns of the spirit. While not claiming to be himself a scholar, he knew that true scholarship mattered. He also believed, with the two editors, that *Recusant History* (to give it the name it later adopted) should be kept within reach of all readers however modest their purses. He therefore undertook, as a service to learning and to the Church (which

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showed little interest), to underpin an originally somewhat precarious edifice with his own experience, money and enthusiasm. Over a number of years he virtually carried the infant journal, keeping the running expenses to a minimum by making all the services of the Arundel Press no part of the running costs. It was with pleasure that he watched the infant under his care grow in size and weight, advance from duplicator to the full dignity of print, and increase from two to three issues a year. When finally the time came to transfer the ownership of *Recusant History*, he could take satisfaction in handing over a periodical that was already standing on its own feet, a healthy teenager with a larger roll of subscribers than its new adoptive parent, the Catholic Record Society, had gained in half a century.

In time, through his involvement in *Recusant History*, Francis Allison had begun to take an interest also in the Catholic Record Society, of which both his editors were Council Members. It was not long before he was putting his gifts of energy, enthusiasm and business skill at the service of the Society, which in the aftermath of the war years found itself cluttered with arrears of untransacted business. Elected to the Society's Governing Council, first as Joint Secretary and later as Bursar, he set about overhauling its administration. Old subscription lists were reviewed, files re-opened, old questions brought before the Council for settlement; after a brisk though courteous bombardment, defaulting subscribers were brought to book or expunged from the rolls; the Society's bank balance took a healthy upward turn; carefully husbanded surpluses were judiciously invested, and in a world of steadily rising production costs the affairs of the Catholic Record Society were set, and maintained, on a sound financial and administrative footing. Obviously this could not have been a one-man achievement, yet equally obviously if Francis Allison had not been at the centre of the undertaking this much-needed overhaul might never have been carried through.

At Council meetings he was firm and forthright in his opinions, yet always conciliatory and constructive in his proposals and ready to shoulder extra work himself. He kept out of the limelight, while striving with gentle persistence that the causes he believed in should prosper. He was a loyal and generous friend, and during his last few years, when he took great pleasure in attending the annual Oxford conferences, a widening circle of new acquaintances came to look forward to his presence there, since all enjoyed his sincere and unaffected friendliness and his gay, often puckish, good humour. May he rest in peace.

THE EYRES OF HASSOP, EASTVELL, BURES HALL AND WARKWORTH,

DESCENDANTS OF ROWLAND EYRE THE CAVALIER

(Not all descendants through female lines are shown)

