



RAGNHILD HATTON

Ragnhild Marie Hatton 1913–1995

THE DEATH ON 16 May 1995 of Professor Ragnhild Hatton has deprived us of one of the foremost historians of early modern Europe. Ragnhild Marie Hanssen was born on 10 February 1913 in the Norwegian port of Bergen, a centre of trade and shipping which had always had far-flung international contacts and been exposed to a wide range of foreign influences. This relatively cosmopolitan background was to influence permanently the tone and direction of her life, making her always markedly international in her interests. Yet though she spent the whole of her working life in Great Britain (apart from numerous though usually relatively short visits to the United States in her later years) she retained always many of the characteristics—forthrightness, good humour, and generosity—of her Norwegian ancestry. She came from a well-to-do family with shipping interests. After ten years at a Norwegian private school for girls and three at the Bergen Katedralskole, where she was a gold medallist, she entered the University of Oslo in 1932 and graduated from it with a master's degree in 1936. By then, although she had at first contemplated a career in medicine, it was clear that history was to be her dominant intellectual interest. In the same year she married Harry Hatton. This not merely made her a British subject by marriage but was the beginning of a partnership whose obvious happiness impressed all who knew her and which was broken, after more than half a century, only by the death of her husband in 1989. The marriage was soon followed by the birth of two sons.

The demands of motherhood and the disruption of the war years

meant that an academic career had to be postponed for a considerable time; but her deep interest in her subject and the energy and drive which she possessed in such full measure (and which sometimes threatened to intimidate those whose acquaintance with her was relatively superficial) ensured that her gifts then found full if slightly belated expression. In 1949 she was awarded a Ph.D. by the University of London; and throughout her life she was to feel and express gratitude to two of her teachers at University College: Professor G. J. Renier who supervised her graduate work, and Professor Mark Thomson. Both of these were strong (in the case of Renier it might perhaps be said eccentric) personalities; and both had considerable and enduring influence on her. In the same year she was appointed to an assistant lectureship in the London School of Economics, the institution to which she was to contribute so much and to which she remained faithful for three decades until her retirement in 1980.

LSE was then entering a period of vigorous expansion; but like British academic life in general it had still not recovered completely from the effects of the war. Moreover, neither the field in which the young assistant lecturer was beginning to be a specialist, the history of early modern Europe, nor the general approach to history which she was beginning to develop, wide-ranging and with strong cultural and biographical interests, had as yet put down roots in the school, in spite of all its intellectual energy and open-mindedness. In economic and social history there was already a distinguished record of achievement founded on the work of outstanding scholars—R. H. Tawney, Eileen Power, T. S. Ashton, and the younger F. J. Fisher. The international relations of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were in the capable hands of Sir Charles Webster; but though a commanding figure he was a somewhat remote one, often taken away from the school by government business. (However Professor Hatton found him noticeably, even surprisingly, understanding of the problems facing a woman teacher who was also bringing up a young family: she always remembered him with affection.) There was much first-class teaching at LSE; but a rounded and balanced history degree of the kind available in British universities in general and in other colleges of the University of London was still only a small element in the work of the school. It was an important aspect of Ragnhild Hatton's achievement to play a leading part in developing the role of political, diplomatic and intellectual history at LSE and to make it one of the leading centres in Britain for the study of the history of international relations. Her progress up

the academic ladder was steady—Lecturer in 1950, Reader in 1958, and finally Professor of International History in 1968.

She contributed to LSE and to the world of historical studies both through teaching and through research, writing, and publication. In the essential and often time-consuming tasks of administration also she took her full share. She was a conscientious member of LSE committees and of the university Board of Studies in History. In 1968, when student unrest seemed for a moment to pose a significant threat to the functioning of the college as a teaching organism, she was one of a small group to whom the then director, Sir Walter Adams, delegated considerable powers to act, if necessary, on his behalf—a convincing tribute to the reputation for balance and common sense which she had by then earned. In 1974–8 she acted as Dean of the Faculty of Arts, an essentially honorary post in whose ceremonial aspects she none the less took much pleasure. Yet to her, all this was always secondary. She was a remarkable teacher and an outstanding scholar and writer. It was in these fields that she made and deserved her reputation.

As a teacher she conveyed above all an impression of energy, an energy which at times could appear almost overwhelming. A striking appearance, a loud voice, a ready smile and great personal charm, a considerable physical presence, and an obvious desire to communicate the information and ideas which so fascinated her, all combined to give her some of the aura of a Valkyrie, though always a benevolent one. More than any other university teacher I have known, in an experience extending over four decades, she obviously and strenuously wanted her students to learn. She even resorted occasionally to the dangerous expedient of lending them books of her own (which were almost always, though I think not quite invariably, returned). With her graduate students in particular she took immense trouble. Draft chapters were read and corrected with great care and returned, with a speed few supervisors then or now could match, accompanied by copious comments and suggestions for improvements, usually typed in her own distinctive and somewhat erratic style. She had also an ability to treat every aspiring young doctoral candidate as an individual, with needs and problems of his or her own which called for individual treatment. Over the years, as they became established in the academic world and built up significant bodies of published work of their own, her better graduate students came to form what can, without excessive stretching of the term, be called a definable school of writers on the history of early modern Europe. They included H. M. Scott, Derek McKay,

H. L. A. Dunthorne, and Peter Barber. Her interest in and kindness to students in a non-academic context also impressed all who knew her. For many years she and her husband did much to encourage the LSE sailing club; and her hospitality was remarkable and widely renowned. The charming though rather inconvenient house in Campden Street which she and Harry occupied for most of their married life saw much generous entertaining, in which her very considerable talents as a cook played an important role, and from which her colleagues benefited at least as much as her students.

Yet it is, inevitably, as a researcher and writer that she will be remembered by those who did not know her personally. In some ways she was a thorough subscriber to the now dominant drive towards specialisation in historical research. She had an active interest in the history of the Baltic in the nineteenth century, supervised a number of graduate students working in the area and probably contemplated a book on the movement for Scandinavian union which was strong in the middle decades of the century. But it is by her writing on the half-century from 1680 to 1730, the period which she made her own and on which she became an acknowledged expert, that she will be remembered. Within that period she ranged remarkably widely. At different times she threw light on the history of many different parts of Europe and several very different leading individuals. Her interests embraced the whole continent: she never confined herself to a single country or even any single region of Europe. Her Norwegian background gave her, as the native of a small and traditionally neutral country, a freedom from national prejudices and the ability to take a cosmopolitan and supra-national view of the great-power struggles which bulked large in much of her writing. Her command of languages, to which her Nordic origins again undoubtedly contributed, was wide, impressively so to colleagues too often confined to French and a little barely-adequate German. Her range of personal contacts with European and American scholars was remarkable and hardly to be equalled by any other of her British academic contemporaries: the seminar in the international history of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which for many years she conducted at the Institute of Historical Research allowed her to bring to London many foreign scholars who would otherwise have remained mere names to her graduate students and even her academic colleagues, an interchange which had stimulating effects on both sides. Her generous and outgoing personality made her a significant link between a British historical world still often somewhat insular and a

wider one; and many of the scholars she invited to London were or soon became her personal friends. Moreover, though her teaching at LSE was concerned with international relations and her own interests drew her in that direction, the seminar interpreted that term in a very liberal sense, so that a remarkable range of topics in government, political ideas and even the history of religion figured in the papers it heard and the discussions which followed.

Her first published book, *Diplomatic Relations between Great Britain and the Dutch Republic, 1714–21* (London, 1950), a printed version of her Ph.D. thesis, was merely a foretaste of what was to come. A relatively narrow subject treated in great and meticulous detail, a text dense with information and lavishly equipped with footnotes, published in a small edition for the Anglo-Netherlands Society, the book is a good example of the printed thesis, a genre more common in the 1950s than the harsh realities of publishing make it today. Yet even here there were indications of the width of view which was to mark all her work. As well as diplomatic relations in a limited and conventional sense, the study of negotiations, treaties and alliances, the thesis gave considerable attention to the way in which the relations of states were influenced by the physical difficulties of communication between them in that age, and by their efforts to gather intelligence on each other's policies and dominant personalities. Information-gathering of this kind was a subject which never ceased to interest her. Four years later there appeared in Stockholm a small documentary publication, *Captain James Jeffereyes' Letters from the Swedish Army, 1707–09*, which again was of specialised and rather limited interest, though presented with the thoroughness and scholarship which was to mark all her writing.

Already, however, she was hard at work on the book which was to make her name, the magisterial biography *Charles XII of Sweden* (London, 1968; New York, 1969). Charles, the warrior-king of Sweden and perhaps the most spectacular and dramatic ruler of his age, has also been the most sharply criticised. For generations he had inspired a very extensive and often highly polemical literature in Swedish; but no large-scale and up-to-date treatment of his life existed in English and even Swedish historians had tended to shy away from the perils and temptations of a full-scale biography. The book therefore filled an important gap in the historiography of the early eighteenth century, and its appearance was an event of importance. Professor Hatton made no secret of her admiration for the king, and may now and then have been somewhat too willing to give him the benefit of any doubt as to

the wisdom of his actions—for example, in her discussion of the peace proposals made to him in 1707 by his great adversary, Peter the Great of Russia, and his rejection of them. Nevertheless, she was always fair in her judgements, neither ignoring the arguments of Charles's critics nor glossing over his failings and weaknesses. In particular she showed that he was a good deal more than the unreflecting and narrow-minded militarist of most conventional accounts and that he had a real interest in improving the Swedish administrative system which, in more favourable circumstances, might have allowed him to rank as an early 'enlightened despot'. Large in scale, balanced in its conclusions and based on extremely wide knowledge of the huge Swedish historical literature, this book broke new ground in the English-speaking world and established Professor Hatton's reputation as one of the leading historians of early modern Europe. Its appearance in a Swedish translation (not, a little surprisingly, until 1985) was an inevitable recognition of its importance.

Almost simultaneously she showed the range of her interests and knowledge by publishing another book, very different in scale and subject-matter, her *Europe in the Age of Louis XIV* (London, 1969; French trans., Paris, 1970). Some good judges consider this her best book, or at least her most characteristic one. A brief treatment of a very large subject, it shows more than anything else she wrote the breadth of her interests. Its discussion of the cultural life of the age, stimulating and penetrating given its small compass and one of the best sections of the book, is supplemented by a wide and varied selection of illustrations, most of them chosen by herself. The depth of reading in a wide range of languages on which the book is based is again unmistakable and very impressive. As one reviewer pointed out, it is 'that rare thing, a truly European history of Europe'. In its structure and emphases it also reveals her personal interests and even idiosyncracies. Throughout it shows her concentration on the individual, whether monarch or peasant, on his beliefs, assumptions and reactions to the demands of his age, rather than on the over-arching impersonal forces which to so many scholars now seem the essential motor driving history. A view of history which was impersonal and purely analytical, and therefore almost inevitably to some extent quantitative, never held any attractions for her: it is noticeable that the book, though it shows her interest in social history and the day to day life of individuals, pays little attention to economic history. It can be argued that in this respect her view of her subject was traditional, even old-fashioned. She realised that the

Annales school in France and its admirers had made important contributions to the way in which history was studied and written, for though she wrote little on historiography she thought deeply about it; but for her the detective work which is an essential part of the historian's craft was at its most absorbing when it was applied to the life of a specific individual.

The same strengths and limitations can be seen in her next book, *Louis XIV and his World* (London, 1972). Here again personalities, sketched vividly but with balance, are central, while the more impersonal forces which made up the environment in which they had to act receive much less attention. The book, understandably in view of its title, is focused very much on Louis himself, and his personal and family life; and once more, as in the case of Charles XII, Professor Hatton's sympathy with the central character in her story is apparent. This sympathy never becomes partisanship; but it may be argued that in her discussion of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 she is again inclined to give Louis the benefit of any possible doubts, and that she perhaps overstates his moderation in the complex negotiations of 1698–1700 over the Spanish Succession. Nevertheless, wide-ranging knowledge, a continual search for fairness and balance, and warm human sympathies are evident throughout. In one important respect, moreover, she helped to spread a more realistic view of the Sun King. She was one of the first historians in the English-speaking world to throw doubt on the traditional view of the French monarchy in the seventeenth century as increasingly absolutist, and to stress the gulf which usually existed between the claims of royal propagandists and the limits which local, corporate and traditional rights set to the effective exercise of royal power. The book also showed that her interests were now broadening to include a notable one in the courts of rulers and their political and social significance. It was only fitting that she was asked, a few years later, to write the chapter on Louis in the composite volume edited by Professor A. G. Dickens, *The Courts of Europe: Politics, Patronage and Royalty, 1400–1800* (London, 1977).

Her work on Louis XIV, to her considerable pleasure, allowed her to indulge an interest which meant much to her—that in the use of illustrations, very often chosen by herself, as a means of making a period or a personality come alive for the general reader and even for the relatively expert one. She always believed, as she said in a published lecture, that 'much can be forgiven for good illustrations' and spent much time and effort in seeing that, when publishers permitted,

her own were as good as possible. To her, one of the joys of the biographical approach to history, as she openly admitted, was that it gave her an excuse for visiting many possible sources of illustrations—galleries, palaces and collections of all kinds. Artefacts (a term she disliked) such as pictures, ceramics, tapestries, and jewellery, were to her important guides to the assumptions and outlooks of the groups which ruled early modern Europe. The economic pressures which, as time went on, forced even those publishers willing to contemplate the inclusion of illustrations in their books to reduce their number and increasingly to shy away from the use of colour were a source of real regret to her.

Professor Hatton's last large-scale work, her *George I: Elector and King* (London and Cambridge, Mass., 1978; German trans. Frankfurt, 1982) has many of the characteristics of her earlier publications. Like her *Charles XII*, it is a biography, but a biography of a ruler whose historical importance had not hitherto been reflected in the treatment of him by English-speaking historians (or indeed in the case of George I by historians writing in any language). Her desire to present a full and balanced picture of a distinct personality can be seen in the fact that a large part of the book, well over one-third, deals with George as elector of Hanover, before he rose to a new level of importance by becoming king of England in 1714. Again, the width of view and depth of research are unmistakable; and in this case the use of a wide range of archives, in different countries and languages, is particularly important. George I was never popular with his English and still less with his Scottish subjects; and until the appearance of Professor Hatton's book this meant that his reputation had been influenced excessively by the comments, usually unfavourable and sometimes downright spiteful, of contemporary writers of memoirs and diaries. From this her work rescued him once and for all. As with Charles XII and Louis XIV, her sympathy with her subject, that continual and often fruitful temptation of the biographer, is apparent; but as always it is kept within bounds and tempered by an essential objectivity and sense of balance. In one important respect in particular this sympathy had a constructive result. Professor Hatton showed convincingly that in Britain George ruled as well as reigned and was far from being as ineffective, as much of a nonentity, as traditional accounts had tended to make him.

Her books, therefore, make up an impressive body of work, the product of sustained effort and meticulous research extending over four decades. But she was also an energetic and painstaking editor of the work of others: none of her contemporaries in the historical world

did more to inspire and see into published form collections of essays by different authors, always of high quality and usually focused on a relatively well-defined theme or issue. The first of these, *William III and Louis XIV: Essays 1680–1720 by and for Mark A. Thomson* (Liverpool and Toronto, 1968), which she edited together with her friend Professor John Bromley, was a generous albeit posthumous payment of the debt which she always felt she owed Professor Thomson. This collection also included one of the most important of her own essays, 'Gratifications and foreign policy: Anglo-French rivalry in Sweden during the Nine Years War'. In this she showed that the presents and payments to ministers and favourites given by foreign governments, so widespread a feature of international relations in early modern Europe, which had usually been written off by historians as mere crude bribery, were in fact something considerably more subtle and nuanced and a more or less recognised part of the diplomacy of that age. Two years later there appeared the more wide-ranging and less clearly focused *Studies in Diplomatic History: Essays in Memory of David Bayne Horn*, co-edited with Professor M. S. Anderson (London, 1970), and this in turn by two further collections; *Louis XIV and Europe* (London, 1976) and *Louis XIV and Absolutism* (London, 1976). Both of these were important, most of all in making accessible to the English-speaking world work by French scholars which might not otherwise have been given the attention it deserved. The second in particular brought together essays, some of them commissioned for the volume, by an impressive range of experts. These threw light not merely on such general questions as the definition of absolutism and its development in seventeenth-century France but also on the court and intellectual development of Louis, the administrative mechanisms through which he ruled and different aspects of the economic history of his reign. Such a collection illustrated once more Professor Hatton's width of interest within her chosen period, her truly European outlook on her subject, and her remarkably wide range of European academic contacts. Her most ambitious undertaking as an editor, however, was to inspire and supervise from 1975 onwards the series 'Men in Office', published by Thames and Hudson, in which eight volumes appeared over the next five years and a ninth in 1983. Here again her personal approach was clearly visible. Each volume was biographical and made extensive use of illustrations. Each dealt, at moderate length but with wide perspectives and using materials in a variety of languages, with an important figure in the history of early modern Europe: the Emperor Charles V;

Philip II of Spain; Frederick the Great; Peter the Great. (*George I* was originally meant to form part of this series but became too long and detailed to fit easily into it.) The authors she coaxed into writing for this series, French, German, Spanish and American as well as British, showed once more how international her range of scholarly contacts now was. Her achievement as an author was very substantial; but she might well have produced more, and at least equally important published work of her own if she had been less active as an editor. Her long-standing interest in Louis XIV might have been the foundation of a biography to compare with her *Charles XII*, while she hoped for many years to produce a large-scale study of the 'northern crowns' which would place the Scandinavian states and indeed the entire Baltic area in their European context, and show their importance in the whole European picture during the period which she had made her own. She left at her death a considerable body of unpublished writing in various states of completeness; and it is gratifying to think that some of this at least may eventually appear in published form.

Her middle and later years saw her importance as a scholar become increasingly widely recognised and the range of her circle of international academic contacts widen. From 1964 onwards she visited the United States frequently and with great enjoyment, combining the holding of a series of visiting professorships (notably at Ohio State University and the University of Kansas) with travel in which she was accompanied by her husband. This introduction to American academic life owed a good deal to her oldest friend, Professor Andrew Lossky, whom she had first known as a fellow graduate student in London in the later 1930s. She became a foreign fellow of the American Historical Association in 1979 and received an honorary degree from Ohio State University in 1985. The Scandinavian directness, even bluntness, and the outgoing and good-humoured approach to life which so marked her, made it easy for her to fit into a North American environment and she looked forward very much to her visits and the new friendships to which they led: as they became more frequent in the 1970s and early 1980s they were to her a source of real and lasting pleasure. Four years after her retirement, in 1984, LSE, to which she had contributed so much over so many years, made her an Honorary Fellow. The cosmopolitanism and international outlook which marked all her work meant that formal recognition in several European states also came in growing measure, notably and understandably from Scandinavia. She had become a Corresponding Member of the Swedish Vitterhetsakademi as early as

1954, while in 1983 she was made a knight, first class, of the Royal Norwegian Order of St Olav. To be honoured in this way by her native country gave her particular pleasure, which was shared by her Norwegian relations. In 1986 she became a commander of the Swedish Royal Order of the Northern Star: two years earlier she had also received the French *Palmes Académiques*. The last of this catalogue of formal recognitions of her work was her election as a Senior Fellow of the British Academy in 1993.

The years which followed her retirement were clouded by the long illness of her husband, who died in 1989. This ended an exceptionally close and happy companionship of more than half a century. Throughout the whole of their life together Harry shared to the full his wife's efforts, hopes, and successes, and gave her never-failing support and encouragement. They were well matched in their determination to enjoy life and their liking for travel and good food; while the fact that she never learned to drive meant that he became a valued source of practical help by acting on numerous occasions as her chauffeur. Harry, who had been intended for the Navy and was a keen and adventurous sailor, inspired his wife with some of his own enthusiasm for the sport, though she never pretended to his expertise in it. To the students and colleagues, so many of whom enjoyed their hospitality, either in London or at the cottage they acquired at Paglesham, near Burnham-on-Crouch, the strength of their marriage and their devotion to one another was unmistakable.

Ragnhild Hatton's life, therefore, was rich and productive both personally and intellectually. With her death we have lost an outstanding historian. We have also lost a teacher who inspired her students through the help and encouragement she gave them in lavish measure and the high standards she set them. Most important of all, we have lost someone whose generosity, good humour and even occasional quirks and idiosyncrasies earned her the warm affection of a host of friends.

MATTHEW ANDERSON

University of London

Note. I am most grateful for the help given by Dr Hamish Scott and Dr Robert Oresko in the writing of this memoir.

There is a very complete bibliography of her work in Robert Oresko, G. C. Gibbs, and H. M. Scott (eds.), *Royal and Republican Sovereignty in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Memory of Ragnhild Hatton* (Cambridge, 1997).

