

PLATE XVI



KEPPEL ARCHIBALD CAMERON CRESWELL

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1879-1974

WHEN in 1950 the President of the Royal Asiatic Society, Sir Gerard Clauson, presented to K. A. C. Creswell the Society's Triennial Gold Medal he said: 'Professor Creswell has not only got to the head of his profession; he has created it.' If, as I believe, that was said not by way of conventional hyperbole but as a considered summary of Creswell's achievement, implying that he had given the study of Islamic architecture a professional or, perhaps one might say, a scientific quality which it had previously lacked, it is of interest to ask what were the original or distinctive qualities in Creswell's work as an archaeologist or historian which prompted the President's particular choice of words.

The answer is to be sought partly in the content and style of Creswell's writing and also partly in the manner of his life; for the two are interconnected. He could not have accomplished the task he set himself, on the principles he had adopted in early years, without also adopting a programme and a style which governed the whole course of his life.

Archie Creswell—to give him the name by which he was known at home and among his friends—was born in London on 13 September 1879, in a small family circle which gave no apparent hint of the direction in which his career would lie or of the gifts that he would develop. His father, Keppel Creswell, was 38 years old at the time and connected with Lloyds. Nothing else seems to be known about him that might be relevant to his son's career. His wife, Margaret, was the daughter of a solicitor in Rugby. There was a daughter, Margery, Archie's only sister. They lived at 12 Regent's Park Road.

Keppel Creswell came of a Nottingham family. His father and grandfather had both been clergymen, successive vicars of the Nottingham parish of Radford, a living which between them they held for seventy-seven years, from 1803 to 1880. The first recorded ancestor, Samuel Creswell, was proprietor of the Nottingham Journal.

In the summer of 1891, before he was twelve, Archie went to Westminster School. His mother, a Roman Catholic, was

reconciled to the choice of an Anglican establishment by the hope that an ecclesiastical ambience, of whatever colour, might have at least a salutary influence. But heredity had transmitted from the vicars of Radford not the least inclination to the beliefs or practices of religion, and to the end of his days Archie would have none of them.

At Westminster he did well and there took the first steps toward developing the aptitudes that were to shape his future. One of these was mathematics. All his five years at the school were spent in the Mathematics or Science Set, and for most of the last three he held the first place in that set. He won five prizes of some sort for school work, including in his third year the Vincent Memorial Prize for English. It may be that he had already acquired that gift of terse and trenchant expression which is a conspicuous quality of his archaeological writing. One of the prizes gained at Westminster was a copy of George Rawlinson's *The Seventh Great Oriental Monarchy* (perhaps the whole set); and in later years Creswell attributed his early interest in the East partly to this book. Even earlier, as a small boy, he had been given a story book illustrated with pictures of eastern buildings; and this set him off, about the age of twelve, collecting pictures and descriptions from travel books which he entered in a scrapbook. So began his first enthusiasm for eastern architecture and a methodical approach to it which he never abandoned. His mathematical bent, too, was to be reflected in a constant reliance on measured dimensions as the foundation of archaeological investigation, in his interest in metrology, and in a habitual alertness for numerical or geometrical properties in the buildings he studied. The mathematics of a building could stir him to eloquence, as in the conclusion of his study of the Dome of the Rock, where he wrote:

Some of the ratios involved . . . especially that which the diameter of a circle bears to its circumference, which enters into the equation of movement of everything in space, nay, further, into the equation of movement of the very electrons of the atom itself, are fundamental in time and space, going down to the very basis of our own nature and of the physical universe in which we exist, and [he ends, returning to earth] may well appeal to us subconsciously.

Besides mathematics at Westminster Archie went in seriously for physical and muscular fitness. He won three prizes for gymnastics, and presumably then acquired that robustness and tolerance of fatigue which enabled him later to endure shattering journeys across semi-desert tracks and retain energy to

carry out forthwith, in conditions often of extreme discomfort, the meticulous archaeological surveys that his work required. This meant not only inspection and written records but also measured plans and photography; for besides being an indefatigable traveller he was a resourceful and accurate surveyor and a photographer of fully professional skill.

Leaving Westminster in the summer of 1896 Creswell entered the City and Guilds Technical College at Finsbury to study electrical engineering. He became familiar with the technicalities of architectural and mechanical drawing, and acquired that elegant and decisive draughtsmanship and calligraphy which must strike anyone examining the drawings by his hand that accompany and match his lucid and disciplined writing.

There followed some years of employment in the electrical firm of Siemens Bros.; then—rather unexpectedly—in the London branch of the Deutsche-Bank, where he was working in 1914. But throughout this period the real interest of his life was already Muslim architecture, in particular that of Persia. His serious application to the subject began in 1910, when he was thirty-one and started to collect a library. Sixty years later this was one of the most complete private collections on his subject, much of it sumptuously bound during his annual visits to London. In December 1912 he published his first article. It was not architectural at all; and few of us could have guessed that it would be contributed to *The Occult Review*, with the title 'A Comparison of the Hebrew Sephiroth with the Paut Neteru of Egypt'. It is impossible to guess what may have lured Creswell into this bizarre and unexpected field; but the point of the article was to propose a precise correlation of myths in the cosmogonies of ancient Egypt and the Qabalah. By the end of it Creswell's disciplined pen had characteristically organized, without a trace of irony or derision, the hotch-potch of weird fantasies into two equal and exactly balanced schemes, tabulated on the page in geometrical form, thus satisfying an intellectual drive for order and clarity which may be recognized in all his writings.

Clearly, however, this was a digression from the main current of Creswell's thought. In August 1913 he was corresponding with the Burlington Magazine on the chronology of a Persian tiled *mihrab*; and later in the year published in the same magazine his own first essay 'On the Origin of the Persian Double Dome'. Shortly after that he read a paper to the Royal Asiatic Society on 'The History and Evolution of the Dome in Persia',

which impressed his audience by its originality and grasp of building techniques.

In May 1914 Creswell decided to apply for appointment in the Archaeological Survey of India. His letter of application is the best source we have for this period, and is worth quoting extensively:

Muhammedan architecture has for a long time absorbed my thoughts and spare time. Besides the original studies, which I enclose, I have accumulated a considerable amount of notes; in the case of Persia and Mesopotamia alone, I have read, apart from architectural works, 140 books of travel and over 40 articles in the J.R.G.S. and J.R.A.S. From these I have extracted every architectural reference classifying the extracts under (1st) the town and (2nd) the particular building. In this way I have obtained 1100 sheets, in some cases 30 for a single building and over 100 for towns such as Isfahan and Meshed. These extracts at present cover the period from 1900 back to 1665 and have been invaluable to me, early writers often giving dated inscriptions which have since perished, besides other information as to restoration &c. I have also made a card index of dated buildings in Persia and Mesopotamia and Central Asia, arranged chronologically, which has also been invaluable, enabling me to look at card after card, visualize the buildings and so realize vividly the exact evolution of the style. I have 257 of these cards, my series being four times as extensive as any published up to the present. I have recently commenced a bibliography of Muhammedan Art and Architecture, a thing badly wanted, but it only extends at present to 400 cards.

At this point, reading the letter, one might gain the impression that the writer's interest lay more in the perfection of a bibliographical method than in enjoyment of the buildings themselves. But this would be a mistake. With unexpected warmth of feeling the letter continues:

I would give anything to get out to the East and see and work on buildings I have been dreaming about for years.

Then, with characteristic earnestness:

But there is one fact I must be perfectly frank about. All my interests and sympathies are with Muhammedan architecture, which makes a peculiar and special appeal to me beyond any other style; whereas the Hindu spirit and genius is a thing in which I have neither part nor understanding, and were my work to lie in that direction it would inevitably lack that keenness and driving force which only comes of a labour of love.

That is about as near as Creswell ever got to revealing an

emotional attitude to his subject. For all the avowed intensity and polarization of his feelings as between the Muslim and the Hindu spirit, it is probably true that what most moved him in architecture was not the thought of human motives or temperaments inspiring it but the spectacle and intellectual contemplation of physical forces and materials interacting in a well-planned or aptly enriched structure. So, to introduce the first volume of his *Early Muslim Architecture* Creswell chose as a motto two verses by G. G. Williams (from *Westminster School Epigrams*) of which the second reads: 'Man sets dead stones in counterpoise, by thrust and pressure marshals strife: wrestling, grim-silent they rejoice: thus to brute matter God gives life.'

It has sometimes been thought a shortcoming of Creswell's method and style of history that having achieved an exhaustive statement of the evolution of a form, or of a particular building or series of buildings, enumerating every example in precise chronological sequence, he would as a rule regard that as fulfilling his purpose and leave to others any profounder speculation on social, economic, or political causes. There are some grounds for that criticism, though it is by no means always true. The fact is that Creswell set out to write about architecture, not people. For him the truth to be established concerned buildings; human beings and their affairs were part of the evidence, not vice versa. In so far as human affairs gave the clue to an architectural problem, or contributed to the interest of a building, or even justified an entertaining digression, Creswell would make full use of them; but he was not concerned to reverse the direction of his thought.

Creswell did not get to India. War broke out in August, and it was war not India that in the end gave him what he desired. Selected on probation for appointment as an Assistant Equipment Officer in the Royal Flying Corps in April 1916, he was in due course posted to Egypt; and in Egypt, as it proved, he remained for virtually the rest of his life.

It is not known how long, if at all, he remained concerned with equipment. In April 1918 he was appointed Staff Captain in the Royal Air Force, and was twice mentioned in General Allenby's dispatches. In the New Year of 1919 he became M.B.E. (Military Division). But what made Creswell's future was getting appointed, with help from D. G. Hogarth, in July of 1919 as Inspector of Monuments in Allenby's military administration of Occupied Enemy Territory. To compile an inventory, his first task, Creswell (now an Army Captain) was stationed

initially at Aleppo, toward the extreme north of the area, then successively at Amman, Haifa, and Jerusalem. In this way, travelling by army transport, on horseback or by donkey, he was able to measure and photograph monuments from the Euphrates to the borders of Egypt. 'By May 1920', he writes, 'I felt I had got an adequate knowledge of Syrian architecture, and I drew up a proposal for a History of the Muslim Architecture of Egypt.'

Events had turned the focus of Creswell's interest from Persia to Egypt; but he was aware that his study must begin in Iraq and Syria, where the earliest stage was set. In the ten months he had spent in Syria and Palestine he had travelled over 5,000 miles, taken 960 photographs, made twenty measured drawings and written 300 pages of notes. It was characteristic of him to include these statistics in the proposal which he submitted shortly after to King Fuad I of Egypt. The work was to be, in Creswell's words, an 'exhaustive history'. It was to have plans, drawings, and photographs of 65 per cent of the monuments, with brief reference to the rest. There were to be chapters on the evolution of the mosque plan, of the minaret, of domes and pendentives and of the plan of the *madrassa*. Special chapters were to be included on the representation of living forms in Islam and on the military architecture represented by the walls and citadel of Cairo. There was to be a full bibliography for every monument compiled from the literature of both architecture and travel.

King Fuad was pleased to patronize a monumental work devoted to what Creswell described to him as 'one of the greatest and most interesting branches of Muslim architecture, which will make known in all parts of the world the glorious achievements, as well as the history and evolution, of modern architecture in Egypt'. Creswell received as a personal gift from the King a grant of £E 800 for three years to enable him to concentrate on his task without financial distraction.

He lost no time in getting demobilized. To make the most of a free passage home he got himself charged with confidential dispatches from Lord Allenby to H.M. High Commissioner in Constantinople; where a fortnight's delay, while the civil and military authorities debated which of them should undertake his further transportation, enabled Creswell to explore the monuments and other attractions of Constantinople. Having passed through Paris in time for an Oriental Congress, he was demobilized in London in mid July and was back in Cairo with

twenty-two cases of books on 13 October 1920. This he later called the most important date of his life.

At that time Creswell estimated that his book would comprise about a thousand pages in three volumes and would take him five years to prepare. But, as usual, the task proved greater than the estimate. Creswell had stipulated for the help of a draughtsman; but none was provided. Drawings in the archives of the Conservation Committee were to be at his disposal; but they proved so inaccurate that he had to re-measure and plan every building himself. Thus drawing, photography, and writing of the text all fell on his shoulders unassisted. Above all, renewal of archaeology in the Near East brought to light fresh and important monuments which had to be included. So, by 1928 the estimate of text had increased to 1,260 pages in four volumes; while by 1969 the work as actually published, expanded by doubling of its first volume in a second edition, had grown to 1,769 pages in five huge tomes. Materials for a sixth, dealing with the last two centuries of Mamluk rule, were destined to be left incomplete at his death.

These figures and dates are relevant, for the Histories (now divided into two, comprising respectively *Early Muslim Architecture* and *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt*) were the pivot about which Creswell's life revolved. Beside them, however, in 1961 he finished another major work, his *Bibliography of the Architecture, Arts and Crafts of Islam*. It is interesting that he began this in 1912, before he had seen a single Islamic building, and at a time when he 'saw no prospect of being able to visit the East and study its architecture on the spot'. That illustrates the innate bias of Creswell's mind toward method and bibliography for their own sakes; his passion for marshalling facts, drawing them up like a squad of soldiers, dressed chronologically in line with no gaps permitted. This was a built-in discipline inseparable from everything he did. It explains much of his character, his personal habits and even appearance, as well as his style of scholarship. It is typical that even haircuts were duly noted, with other commitments, in his engagement diaries. The drill was indispensable for the ultimate success of his work.

The Bibliography was a quite formidable accomplishment. It represents, he tells us, the work of about three months a year for thirty-nine years. The number of books and articles recorded is about 12,300; of periodical volumes examined 11,749; and of authors indexed 4,620. He made it a rule, with rare exceptions,



to catalogue no item which he had not examined himself. A Supplement appeared in 1973, the year before his death.

Over and above these major works, sixty other items are listed in the bibliography of his work incorporated in a volume of *Studies in Islamic Art and Architecture in honour of Professor K. A. C. Creswell*, published in 1969 by the Center for Arabic Studies of the American University in Cairo.

But the distinction of Creswell's life work did not, of course, lie in the number or bulk of his writings; it lay in a calculated philosophy which he practised with unfailing consistency. Archaeology for him was an empirical discipline directed strictly to measurable facts, the buildings themselves and their parts. The history at which he aimed was the pattern of their evolution, elicited from the facts by exhaustive scrutiny and meticulous chronology. He insisted on this, for an archaeological theory could be upset, as he had many occasions to show, by a single fact misdated or overlooked; and the evolution of a form could be completely misrepresented if not traced to its very beginnings. Therefore he would emphasize the first appearance of any significant feature, and authenticate it by seeking out and listing, in chronological order with dates, every relevant example. This could be tedious, but it was effective. Thus, having asserted (*Muslim Architecture of Egypt* I, 8) that 'before the fourth century mosque entrances were plain openings flush with the wall', and that the projecting entrance to the mosque at Mahdiya in Tunisia was the 'earliest monumental entrance known', he proceeded to enumerate nine earlier plain examples and four later monumental ones, all dated, to prove his point.

Conversely, Creswell had no use for *a priori* theorizing and would satirize it with devastating wit. G. T. Rivoira, with his faith in the priority of Rome in every advance, was a constant victim. He was unlucky to dispute, with ill-judged rhetoric, the second- to third-century date of some stone pendentives in the baths at Gerasa: 'What a singular phenomenon,' Rivoira exclaimed, 'so important a discovery would be . . . making its appearance in Syria, perfect and complete, in the days of the Early Empire!' On which Creswell commented: 'What a singular discovery Rivoira would have made if he had ever visited Qasr an Nuwayjis' (a second-century domed tomb near Amman with true pendentives) 'and looked inside!'

Skimped research by experts would also come off badly. When E. Diez rejected identification of the *mihrab* at Mshatta

because of its size, saying 'the breadth of the niche would be exceptional even in a very large mosque of late date (such a depth is hardly ever found anywhere)', Creswell promptly enumerated twenty-one of equal or greater breadth or depth, and commented: 'This wild statement is all the more remarkable in that Diez is the author of the article *Mihrab* in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, so he should have been better informed.' He devoted not less than fifteen pages, a veritable sledgehammer, to obliterate the old archaeological chestnut which identified the Umayyad Mosque at Damascus with the Church of John the Baptist. 'These two theories', he wrote (Dussaud's and Watzinger's), 'are alike remarkable for the complete disregard they exhibit for the evidence not only of the Muslim and Christian sources but for the architectural facts as well.' He proceeded then systematically to detail six architectural absurdities and at least a score of texts (in chronological order as always) which made nonsense of the myth but were ignored by its supporters.

These examples, which could be endlessly multiplied, are worth quoting not to show Creswell as the gadfly of foreign scholars, but to emphasize the principles that he himself followed: the pre-eminence of fact over theory, however brilliant; the importance of precise chronology; and the necessity of exhaustive research, both in architecture and literature, by even the most eminent. Two scholars in his field whom, perhaps, he most admired, who both adhered to similar principles, were L. A. Mayer and Max van Berchem. It was van Berchem to whom he dedicated his *Bibliography* in 1961 with the words: 'To the memory of Max van Berchem, perfect friend and perfect scholar.'

Creswell could adhere to the rule of exhaustive search by setting practicable bounds to his subject. The Muslim Architecture of Egypt, with its antecedent and collateral connections, was a theme which one man, if he started early enough, could hope to cover in a lifetime of exclusive concentration. Accordingly, from 1920 Creswell made Cairo his home and for the next half century applied his time and almost all his movements (including three months each year in England) to becoming intimately acquainted with every accessible monument and every relevant text. He never learnt to read Arabic; but thanks to friends, whose help he acknowledges, he somehow overcame what might have seemed an insuperable handicap. In Cairo he knew every nook and cranny, and would act as guide to young or old who showed some interest. In Syria, too, and Palestine

he would appear as surely as the swallows on the scene of any new find or project of conservation in the Muslim field. So in the course of years he gained a more detailed knowledge of Islamic monuments in the area than anyone else alive.

Living in Cairo, Creswell became if not exactly the discoverer certainly the first real explorer of its greatest single monument, the northern medieval wall and gates. Of these he wrote:

My own archaeological examination, during which I have traversed the whole length . . . and walked, crawled, or climbed into practically every tower, sometimes entering houses to do so, has revealed to me three distinct styles of work, and I maintain that portions of the work of Badr al Gamali and of the earlier and later work of Salah ad Din still exist.

What that passage omits is that Creswell himself measured and drew the whole of what his crawlings and climbings revealed. In much the same way, by visits repeated as often as necessary (which his way of life made possible) or by personal contact with excavators or officials, not only in Cairo but in the whole region from beyond Euphrates to the Atlantic, Creswell assured himself that his facts on every monument were as exact and up-to-date as possible. That and his tireless search of current and past literature were the foundations of his work, not likely to be seriously shaken or superseded by any other method or, for years to come, by any other single-handed scholar. Therein, perhaps, Creswell may be said to have 'created his profession'.

In 1931 Creswell joined the staff of the Fuad University of Cairo first as a lecturer and three years later as professor in a new Chair of Islamic Art and Archaeology. In this capacity he became in 1939 an *ex officio* member of the Higher Council for the Conservation of Arab Monuments. In 1949 he accepted trusteeship of the Palestine Archaeological Museum in Jerusalem, and for eighteen years shared with fellow trustees the delicate task of sustaining the perfect order and precarious independence of that stranded relic of British administration. His tenure of the University Chair was abruptly ended by the Egyptians in 1951 for reasons that are not recorded but were probably represented as allowable under a 'probationary' clause inserted in the two-year contracts under which for twenty years in succession Creswell had been employed. He felt justly aggrieved at this dismissal, the more so as for several years thereafter no successor was found to be appointed. Furthermore, continuation of his work, which the two Kings of Egypt had sponsored, depended in part at least on his university salary. Travelling

expenses were heavy; and he was in addition partly supporting his sister at home, a sufferer from arthritis. However, first the Rockefeller Institute and then the Bollingen Foundation came to the rescue with successive Fellowships, and the situation was saved.

Creswell was not a born teacher; his lectures consisted largely of readings from his own books or articles, replete with facts but too magisterial to encourage in a totally inexperienced audience any inclination toward independent inquiry. It is hard to say how far he may have instilled in his Egyptian students, many of whom would later seek appointment in the archaeological service, a scientific or disinterested approach to archaeology; probably not far. But they respected and may have liked him. He worked hard for their interests and careers, and some remained his staunch admirers. But a bulky recent work in Arabic on Arab Architecture by a former 'best pupil' contains no acknowledgement of debt to Creswell.

Undoubtedly his best service to Egypt was in the Council for Conservation, of which for twelve years he was an assiduous and energetic member. It was through this body that he bullied and cajoled the Ministry of Public Works and the Planning Authority of Cairo to carry out at a cost of £E 40,000 the great clearance, for a length of 420 metres, of the eleventh- and twelfth-century wall and gates of medieval Cairo, the greatest monument of the city and a monument, too, if fresh rubbish and shanties could be kept from it, of Creswell's initiative and pertinacity. He said later that 'the job would have been much harder if many of the officials involved had not been former pupils of mine'. That is the best testimony to his success as a university professor. Beside that personal achievement there is frequent mention in the proceedings of the Council, and in his own books, of other works of conservation or clearance, not only in Cairo (e.g. excavation of the Nilometer) but also in Palestine and Syria, carried out at his request by officials or archaeologists, compliant or sympathetic.

In 1952 the first volume of *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt* appeared, the substantive work on which he had embarked thirty-two years before. The two preliminary but equally massive volumes entitled *Early Muslim Architecture* had been published in 1932 and 1940 respectively. Then, in 1956, the Suez affair fell on Egypt. Creswell was now a timeless figure in the humbler streets of Cairo, a familiar spectre from some earlier generation, passing without thought of molestation

through the crowd. The authorities, however, decided that his safety could no longer be assured. He began to pack; then learnt that export of his library would be banned. Refusing to be parted from what he valued equally with his life, he resolved to stay in Cairo. An American colleague is said to relate—I cannot say with what embellishment—how, visiting Creswell on business at his flat in Hasan al Akbar, he was confronted by his host, then eighty-seven, seated within the door poised and ready to defend himself and his books *vi et armis* against any aggression.

Things, however, did not reach that extremity. The American University in Cairo offered indefinite sanctuary for the books, and Creswell decided to present them as a gift to the University. But he stipulated to retain absolute control of them, which he enforced by his own presence in the room where they were kept. Here, for as long as his life's routine endured, commuting between his flat and his library, an inflexible rule was enforced: the precise arrangement of books on the shelves was sacrosanct; their integrity from all marks perpetual; their inviolability by profane hands absolute.

It may be surmised that this régime, which effectually debarred students from using the library and prevented its incorporation in any catalogue, was a setback to the expectations of the University. However, it had also been arranged, on the initiative not of Creswell but of the University, for an Assistant's post to be provided to 'help look after the library' and take a share in teaching. Thus for the first time in his life Creswell found himself with an assistant, Dr. Christel Kessler, a graduate of the Free University of Berlin and a student of Islamics. Since it was far from Creswell's intention to delegate to any other person the least share of responsibility for management of his books or for organizing his archaeological papers, the main function of the assistant was to act as buffer and intermediary between prospective users of the library and its defender. It is right to add, however, that in the course of time some more normal and permanent means were found of at least partial accommodation to the minimum needs of a faculty library.

Simultaneously with the transfer of his library, Creswell himself was appointed as a Distinguished Professor, with stipend. He greatly appreciated this timely generosity of the American University, which solved a really awkward problem. There could be no truer measure of the depth and sincerity of his appreciation than the gift of his library; for in the past, especially during the early years of the war, he had been severely critical of

America and Americans. Numerous other honours, military, civil and academic, had already come to him, which are recorded in works of reference. He was elected Fellow of the British Academy in 1947. He became C.B.E. in 1955; and in 1970, at the age of ninety, he received from the Queen a Knighthood.

All who had travelled with him, who had enjoyed his high spirits or relished his often entertaining displays of inveterate prejudice, would agree that Creswell had a vein of eccentricity. He was something of a dandy in the fashion of a decade or so past, moving with military swagger in impeccably tailored close-fitting suits and hat set jauntily just right. His starched white collars, in whatever desert or climate or cramped conveyance he might be travelling, possessed a magical and, to less immaculate companions, mystifying immunity from dust and sweat. He was the master of casual encounters in the streets, of which his stick was the symbol if not the instrument. He would not be obstructed by lesser breeds. Once an Egyptian would have stopped him entering an overcrowded lift. Creswell seized the nearest occupant, hauled him out and took his place. But the manoeuvre was self-defeating; the lift would not start, for Creswell had ejected the lift attendant. The only point for Creswell, telling the story, was the servility of his victim. In cafés or restaurants he would exact perfection of service, even, it might be, to the embarrassment of his guests and beyond the capacity of the establishment. No bureaucracy or instrument of procrastination could repel his probing persistence in any cause he had taken up; and his causes were taken to the top.

These were well-known outward manifestations of Creswell's idiosyncrasy; some of them have been depicted before now in print.<sup>1</sup> But behind this confident and forceful character there were inner stresses and anxieties, which erupted at times and repelled some of his acquaintances. These are not easy to define, but should not be left out of account. The mildest and least mysterious was an exaggerated sensitivity to neglect or underestimation of his own work. Always meticulous and sometimes generous in acknowledging scholarly contributions or help received from others, he would be hurt, and not remain silent, if his own seemed to him to be overlooked. About 1955 a French acquaintance sent him his translation of 'Ali of Herat. In a letter of thanks Creswell called this:

your valuable translation, which I have spent the day studying. But I

<sup>1</sup> Sir Mortimer Wheeler, *Still Digging*, p. 160.

really am rather surprised at the footnotes . . . one would almost get the impression that scholarship did not exist outside France; in fact that nothing worth consulting existed except what has been written in French. Why do you avoid quoting English sources even in those cases in which the best source for a given piece of information happens to be in English?

He then lists twelve of his correspondent's footnotes where better references would have been to Creswell's own works.

He was convinced during his time at Fuad University that a conspiracy against him, and against the appointment of English staff generally, existed amongst French academics in Cairo, led by one who owed his own appointment partly to Creswell. He embodied his grievance in a four-page typed memorandum detailing evidence going back to 1931, when the person in question was instrumental in getting the post offered to Creswell reduced from Professor to Lecturer, and ending:

Since then he has done all he can to down me, to keep me off committees, to prevent my students from filling openings in his museum, to get control of the Arabic Monuments although he knows nothing about architecture, to control my activities at the University by means of a committee chosen by himself and T. H., and finally to boost F. as a candidate for my post. Tuesday's outrageous incident [unidentified] is simply the culmination of ten years underground hostility against an interloper in a field which he thinks ought to be entirely French. [He] is the spearhead of French anti-British influence here, and he is helped by numerous Egyptians with French wives. . . .

In 1939, a series of letters shows him pressing the British Embassy to stand by a clause in the recent Anglo-Egyptian Treaty by which the Egyptian Government, if it felt the need for foreign help, would give preference to British nationals. He was incensed and exasperated by the inertia of the Embassy when a vacant Chair of Philosophy was given to an elderly Frenchman without being advertised in England. He protested to the Embassy; but the reply, intended to be placatory, only made things worse; for it revealed that the writer actually thought that the Frenchman who had been appointed was English.

If the Embassy [commented Creswell], with about five Oriental Secretaries, instead of the one only which sufficed for over fifty years, are capable of describing a Frenchman as an Englishman, and then congratulating themselves that we are keeping our end up, well . . . the whole place needs overhauling from top to bottom.

In 1931, at a lunch party in Cairo, conversation with an

English Professor of Literature had touched on the subject of a conflict between police and Congress volunteer pickets in an Indian bazaar. Creswell wrote next day to the professor:

I am anxious to understand every point of view, but I am by no means clear as to yours. You said that nowadays one cannot go on breaking heads, yet you seem to deny that it was the Government's duty to suppress people who enforce their views *by this very procedure*. Now I don't want to run away with a false impression of your attitude, so I should be very grateful if you will give me your views on the following points. . .

Six weeks later, having received no reply, Creswell wrote again by registered post with a copy of the first letter. Eight months later, having still received no reply, he wrote a third time:

When I put forward my views at Graves Supérieur's, I did so with the greatest politeness, in spite of your vulgar interruption of 'rot'. My two letters to you were couched in the most polite terms, but you have not answered either of them. I consequently feel relieved of any further obligation to be polite, and now speak plainly. You made a number of remarks at Graves, but when asked to put your ideas in black and white . . . you declined to do so, because you saw that they led to a *reductio ad absurdum*. You are an unmitigated renegade and a disgrace to the name of Englishman. You were a poisonous influence at the Residency, as Lord Lloyd soon realized, and it's a damned good job that you are out of the country.

There was a happy ending, nevertheless; for a diary entry ten years later shows: 'F.' (the same person) 'to tea at 5'.

Creswell's acquaintances learnt to avoid disputing his views on political topics, or to expect a row. 'Surrender', as he called it, in India, Ireland, or any part of the Empire; support of Zionism, or trust of World Jewry; praise of the Soviet Union; black immigration into Britain; or moralizing attitudes by Americans—all of these, especially when accepted by politicians or journalists, would arouse Creswell's hackles and animate his pen or tongue. It happened during 1943 that an American sentry in Liverpool shot dead an unarmed British docker who had abused him. The sentry was tried by an American military court and acquitted; that was the end of the matter. Shortly after, in Cairo, one of a crowd of students panicked when an Australian soldier in a convoy threw a smoke bomb, and was run over by a tram. The British Ambassador immediately expressed his regret to the Egyptian Prime Minister, compensated the parents of the student, and ordered a British General to walk in the funeral procession. Later in the same year a West



Indian cricketer was turned out of a London hotel and eight Members of Parliament rose to demand that the hotel's licence be withdrawn. This conjunction of events infuriated Creswell. He wrote an abusive and sarcastic letter to each of the eight M.P.s:

There is something wrong at home when eight M.P.s can get excited over a slight put upon a West Indian and remain dumb when one of their own flesh and blood is murdered . . . I ask you, did the American Ambassador express his regret for the murder of that Englishman at Liverpool? Did an American General march in his funeral procession? No. But why worry? He was only an Englishman. . . .

A lecture published during 1944 in the *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, which 'records everything we have done to upset the Soviet, but suppresses many things the Soviet has done to upset us', greatly upset Creswell. He wrote four pages to the editor in refutation of what he called a 'mischievous and unpatriotic article', and sent a copy with a letter to the author. He got a dusty answer, ending: '*Ne sutor ultra crepidam*. In other words, stick to architecture.' Unabashed, Creswell replied with a brief page affirming and defending his own historical principles and ending: 'Finally, may I suggest that, after failure of your own effort to write accurate history, you stick, shall we say to gardening.'

So, while Creswell acquired some friends, there were also some who found him a menace. No one in Cairo knew or understood him better than the writer of a letter from which I think it is appropriate to quote some passages here. This was a senior and much respected official whom Creswell liked and trusted and to whom he sent copies of the lecture to which he had objected and of the ensuing correspondence. His friend replied with a hand-written letter of considerable length:

The lecturer certainly wrote you a rather curt reply; but are your own qualifications as a student of foreign affairs such as to justify the rather violent, aggressive, and provocative attitude you usually seem to take up on such matters where opinions necessarily differ very widely. Personally, I feel they do not, and about a year ago I ventured to express this view as a result of a harangue you gave us at a Committee Meeting of the Arab Monuments. I am certainly not prepared to deny that you are often perfectly right in your political opinions, indeed I frequently share them myself, but . . . if you could be less violent and less dogmatic I think you would persuade your listeners more easily. It is not so much what you say but how you say it which distresses

and, forgive the word, *bore*s them. One shuns conversation with you for one never knows where it is going to lead, and at a social gathering surely violent controversial argument is out of place. . . . Let me once again assure you that I am frequently in sympathy with your views so you need emphatically *not* look upon me as a political opponent whose eyes must be opened to the light. I am old, lazy, and hate controversy. Moreover I do rather feel that my career has given me somewhat more experience and knowledge of European politics than yours can have done.

Creswell grew old slowly. The second volume of *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt* appeared in 1959, when he was eighty; his *Bibliography* in 1961; and the second edition of *Early Muslim Architecture*, Vol. I, in his ninetieth year. There was much new matter to incorporate in this new edition, and much revision, especially of those chapters on the mosaics in Damascus and Jerusalem, for which he relied on contributions by his chief collaborator, Mme Gautier-van Berchem. He was well aware, by now, that time was running out; he was severely hampered and irked by deafness; and it took all his still great powers of persuasion, pertinacity, and drive to bring together and co-ordinate the component parts of this gigantic work, 732 pages long, before his strength gave out. There are detectable signs of old age, but he did it; and even lived to see one more work completed, the *Supplement* to the *Bibliography*, published in 1973.

Creswell had then reached the inevitable end of his powers. He had not achieved the whole compass of that 'exhaustive history' which he had outlined to King Fuad in 1920. In his uncompromising dedication to chronological order, he had advanced step by step from the beginnings of Islam, calling the roll of his monuments in proper sequence up to the reign of Al Malik an Nasir Muhammad. The fifty-four years of his life that he had given to the task had carried him so far; but they did not suffice for the further volume or volumes that were still needed to deal, by his meticulous method, with the many monuments of the later Turkish and Circassian Mamluks.

Creswell never married. In his ninety-fourth year his health failed him, and bachelor life in a Cairene flat became impossible. With the help of friends and officials in Cairo, not without difficulty, he returned to England for the last time in June 1973, and after a short time in hospital spent the last seven months of his life cared for—by a twist of fate—by monks. It was the Alexian Brothers in whose house at Acton he died on 8 April 1974. A short Arabic verse quoted in the text which he chose to

introduce his first Egyptian volume may be read as an epitaph to himself:

تلك آثارنا تدلّ علينا      فأنظروا بعدنا إلى الآثار

*These are our works, that tell of us; so, after our going, look at our works.*

R. W. HAMILTON

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