

SOME MEMORIES OF CHRISTOPHER

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Anne is not here, thanks to a *contretemps* with a surgeon. She is getting better. Chagrined as she is to be absent, she is most deeply gratified by the honor the Society is doing her father at this meeting, and she will be moved by what has been said.

I find it hard to think of Christopher alone, all by himself. Gardening can be a fairly solitary business. I often saw Christopher doing solitary things, squatting to gather *fraises de bois*, mending the net around the raspberries, propagating his cuttings, and so forth. Still, he was always in partnership with those two other knowledgeable and zealous gardeners, Elisabeth and Simon.

Inevitably, both also had parts in the numismatic side of things. Simon, of course, assisted in photographing great numbers of coins, to Christopher's exacting specifications. For all her celebrated *bon mot* about Christopher's pennies, "his little miseries" (or, in a kindlier variant, his "penny pals") Elisabeth still was his mainstay in the care and feeding of numismatists. On one family excursion to the country, I believe, Elisabeth did, with a flick of her cane, discover one of those little miseries, rather a significant coin of Alfred the Great. The moment had special piquancy, since someone else, rather more scientifically, had scanned the terrain with a metal detector and found nothing.

Like gardening, scholarship can be very lonely. But, right from the beginning, Christopher found it a shared adventure. He was not happy as a schoolboy at Marlborough, no happier than either of his brothers. And still, instead of running to the other end of Sussex, he and Elisabeth settled their family in a village neighboring that scene of old pain, and, several times each week, they went there in the normal rhythm of life. Eventually, both Simon and Julia's children, Amanda and Christopher, attended Marlborough. A deep logic unfamiliar to me worked itself out over the years between early aversion and late attraction, one of many improbabilities in Christopher's life, most of which also had happy endings.

Peter has spoken in some detail of a portrait-painter, John Shirley Fox, who lived in Marlborough during Christopher's boyhood, and who with his wife befriended him. I too believe that Shirley Fox is the key to how the improbable logic of his life brought Christopher to live in this part of Wiltshire. Shirley Fox introduced Christopher to numismatics, but also to a friendly home in an inhospitable place. His exacting, scholarly study of coinage would perhaps not have sufficed to give Christopher a life-long dedication, if he had not also introduced him to fly-fishing (and tying) and walks in the Wiltshire hills. Shirley Fox also re-enforced the love of art which Christopher shared with his brothers, and which came to light in the sense of form and color with which he shaped his garden, and the rest of the space around him.

I like to think that this kindness, which did nothing less than save

Christopher's life at the beginning, multiplied times without number in the many ways in which Christopher gave other, often younger, people, the key, the "Open Sesame," to the indescribably amazing wonders of numismatics, not as a game of solitaire, but as a *compagnonage* of life, including other shared pleasures such as tying and wetting flies, climbing up for the view from Martinsell, swapping stories over a good dinner, and, after that, an hour or two with the index files.

Geniality and kindness, but, without getting too sentimental about it, so too were requirements of the most demanding sort, which Christopher laid first and foremost on his own shoulders. The temperament he was born with, sharpened by the stormy, heroic years of world wars and the Great Depression, gave him an exacting honesty. Falsehood—in numismatic forgery and in other varieties—was important to identify, analyse, and put in the general picture. Poor workmanship and overstated conclusions, beyond what the evidence could sustain, were other kinds of falsification. In itself, it was repellent, but worth understanding and putting to rights, with tact when possible, always respecting the rights of all concerned to disagree.

In addition to honesty, Christopher asked much of himself in the way of duty. This was true right down to his last public lecture, at the University of Kansas. He came to Kansas to visit Anne and me, and our family, but medievalists on the faculty were eager to hear, and to have their students hear, what he might say about medieval coins. He agreed well ahead of time. Yet, before he arrived, illness had set in. He arrived rather the worse for wear, with Judith's strong and tender help.

Though no one yet knew what the matter was, there was no need for him to aggravate his distress by the rigors of talking before strangers. He insisted that the talk was a duty faithfully to be discharged. He did not like heat. The weather was witheringly hot. He put on his black wool suit, with waistcoat, and, without a hint of his own discomfort, he kept the audience amused with his stories, spellbound with the ingenuity of his detective work, warmed by the idea that they could walk alongside him into the charmed and perilous landscape he was opening to them, to some, for the first time. His gardener's zeal for propagating his best stock never failed him, and that is a way of saying also, his gift for companionship. Courage and gallantry were also part of what he offered to the end.

All these words—honesty, duty, and the rest—sound offputtingly stiff. Of course, Christopher did observe the formalities when occasion required, but he also had a prankish side, sharpened one thinks by being a child of the rectory. There is something prankish in the improbabilities, mostly unintended that ran through his life, and brought him to settle near Marlborough and give his last public lectures to people in a distant country who were not numismatists but wished to welcome him and learn more about the pursuit to which he had devoted his scholarly life. Hugh has spoken about another oddity. Christopher seemed firmly rooted in the past. He lived in a house built by stages in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; his worship was of the 1662 variety; the words he chose and the ways he used them were sometimes picturesquely *ancien régime*; and his general

comportment savored of a by-gone age of enlightenment. In his manner of life and working methods, he was, after all, a late-blooming variety of the seventeenth and eighteenth century scholar of leisure, Sir Robert Bruce Cotton and others, including Edward Gibbon, who created the science of numismatics and the whole age of erudition, unparalleled in its magnificence, outside the walls of academe when nothing progressive was going on inside them.

The oddity is that, with all his affinities for the past, he built for the future. As gardener, banker, historian, and family anchor, he built for days yet to come. Risk-taking was part of the job, trying to outwit sheer dumb luck. I think that he relished the challenge of trying to subvert the randomness of things, and that that was one reason he so much loved travel. He knew that some time, somewhere, despite all best efforts, you might be separated from your gear, and have to cope. He relished challenges, but did not rush to seek them. And so he prepared meticulously and acted prudently, quite ready when necessary to sail all sheets to the wind.

The risk-taking side of Christopher, always ready for another trip, came into play exactly forty years ago this year the day he took a new lease on life and retired to devote himself more fully to activities closest to his heart, including numismatic study. As it happened, he couldn't get right down to his index files. The summer he retired brought two weddings to the family within a few days of each other. The *Marlborough Times* got it right with its headline: "Ramsbury Family has Busy Week." As we approach our fortieth wedding anniversaries, Simon and Julia, and Anne (*in absentia*) and I bring assorted, and happy memories to this meeting, another reason we thank the Society from the bottoms of our hearts.

Perhaps you will pardon me for mentioning one fact as a footnote to the other things that have been said. I have in mind an atypical act, but still within the ambit of Christopher's charity toward young scholars—shared, I quickly add, by Elisabeth. When people ask Anne and me how we met, we delight in saying that we had an old-fashioned arranged marriage, one result of the abundantly fruitful collaboration between those two improbable partners, Christopher and Michael Dolley. Other collaborations, and the coinage of the tenth century, came later.