

ROBERT GROSSETESTE, BISHOP OF LINCOLN¹

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THE great man to whom I invite your attention this afternoon died in October 1253. His memory, in this seven hundredth year after his death, is to be celebrated at Lincoln and made the occasion of a volume of essays about his work as a teacher, scholar and ecclesiastic. In pre-Reformation days it was a living memory throughout the West; it was revived, in certain learned quarters, in the seventeenth century, and again in the first considerable biography of him by Samuel Pegge (1793). It naturally received fitting and intelligent recognition during the great historical renaissance in the nineteenth century. The life of Grosseteste published in 1899 by F. S. Stevenson took account of the new learning; but Grosseteste is really coming to his own in our time, as the true significance of his work as a scholar, notably in the history of scientific method, and as a churchman, is revealed. The definitive life of him has still to be written, and can only be written by a very learned, versatile and penetrating scholar indeed.

I do not mean to suggest any contrast between the man whom we can now see and the man seen more clearly by his contemporaries. I mean that we can now better realize the nature of a man who was felt by all, whether they admired or disliked him, to be a portentous person, a man of universal genius. Grosseteste lived in the open. He was not one of those who have to be discovered, or whose discovery is due to the moods and fashions of an age which is better able to appreciate, and can easily overrate, the merits of genius misunderstood or disregarded while it was struggling to express itself. Grosseteste could not and need not be admired or detested or, except in one regard, be appreciated by us today more than he was in his

¹ A lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library on Wednesday, the 14th of January 1953.

own day. The exception, indeed his significance in the history of science, is only an exception because scientists here and there today are becoming more interested in the history of science and can marvel at the clear-headedness and insight of a man outstanding in the medieval schools. Natural science today has nothing to *learn* from him except a better understanding of movements of thought which it has been wont to despise, and a humble sense of gratitude to any fine mind in any age which has helped to produce it. From this point of view the realization that Grosseteste had a truly scientific mind is in itself part of the historical process which sweeps away the mist and prejudice between us and any period in the past. The historian is not concerned to make a hero of Grosseteste or to pick him out to the disadvantage of his fellows: this would be to falsify history. The historian's duty is to make Grosseteste live so clearly that we can better understand the age in which he lived, thought and strove to make men what he believed they ought to be. He was a man of his age in the sense in which Dr. Johnson or Sir Walter Scott was a man of his age, and like them the more impressive because he never thought of himself as anything else.

Grosseteste was probably not a nickname, but a casual family name, on the way to being what we call a surname. His future designation in scholastic circles was *Lincolniensis*, an appropriate recognition of his identification in his lifetime with his duties as a bishop, though from the scholastic point of view his reputation had nothing or little to do with his ecclesiastical status. He was a Suffolk man, born in a humble tenement in a village called Stow, one of the simple common rural names for any village or small market town. What could be more English than "Bob Fathead of Stow"? Many years later, when he was having a violent dispute about his rights of episcopal visitation with his dean and chapter at Lincoln, the canons were unmannerly enough to make it a grievance that they had a man of such low origin as their bishop. Grosseteste would never have said this kind of thing of anybody. He had good manners, not just in the conventional sense of decent and polite behaviour, as expected in table manners in courts and

monasteries, but as the outcome of the habits learned in a good home or rooted in respect for the rights and duties of the individual, whoever he might be. Quite apart from the fact that, though he was the most outspoken of men, he did not indulge, as most controversialists did, in sheer rhetorical abuse for its own sake, he early acquired a deep respect for the structure of society, and a firm belief in the personal obligations which his place in it imposed upon every man. His lesser writings and verses on such matters as the rules of husbandry composed for the widow of the Earl of Lincoln, and on the way a serving boy or page should behave in hall reveal these traits. The boy standing by his lord's table must be *vultu simplex*, not looking about everywhere; he should keep his nose clean, not scratch himself or break into laughter in the presence of his lord. Another work, the *statuta familiae* or household regulations, which survives in one manuscript, and in a fifteenth century English translation, reveals a practical and observant mind, directed by the same love of order. "When your bailiffs come before you, speak to them fairly and gently in the open and not in privacy. Show them merry cheer and ask them how the men and tenants fare, how the corn has done, and the stores increased. Ask such things openly and they will dread you the more." The gentlemen and yeomen of the household should wear their robes in the lord's presence and especially at meat, and not appear in old shabby robes and shoes. In hall the household should sit together, not in little groups scattered about the tables. Alms should be distributed wisely and temperately to the poor, the sick and feeble and beggars, not to boys and knaves or wasted on the dinners of grooms. The officers of the household should be instructed to welcome friends and strangers whom they know would be acceptable, in such manner that the visitors may know that they are welcome and that the lord is pleased that they should come. The lord should always dine in hall if it is possible, for the sake of discipline and worship.

I lay stress upon Grosseteste's orderly, stern but gracious spirit because it was innate in him and directed everything that he did both as a thinker and a director of souls. It was

grounded in instinct and habit, yet trained by reason. Above all, it had the quality which was inconsistent with laziness and pomposity. Grosseteste always looked to the end, not the means. He believed in and understood the society in which he found himself, without a trace of easy-going acceptance or prejudice. It never occurred to him to reject the good because it might disturb existing conventions or traditions. Thus he was one of the first to welcome the followers of St. Francis and St. Dominic, not only because he admired them, but also because he saw in them the helpers of whom a bishop who meant business was most in need. He was shocked when he was told that his friend Alexander of Stavensby, of all people, Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, formerly a teacher who had lectured to St. Dominic and his disciples at Toulouse, had publicly reviled the Franciscans when he heard that they were about to settle in his diocese at Chester. There was room, Grosseteste declared, for both orders in Chester. "This incredible thing, if it is true, I believe can only have proceeded from some sudden disturbance of your mind, not from deliberate conviction" (*Epistolae*, p. 121). Grosseteste always acted with deliberation. That is why his anger could be so terrible.

The letter which I have just quoted was written soon after Grosseteste became Bishop of Lincoln. He was already well over sixty years old. I have always found it hard to believe that the busiest and most active bishop of his time did his hardest work when he was between sixty-five or -seven and eighty-three or -five years of age. Yet, to use his own words, this incredible thing seems to be true. During these eighteen years he made himself a power to be reckoned with in England, twice visited the Papal Court at Lyons, on the second occasion (1250) haranguing the Pope and cardinals, was in touch with everybody and wrote or supervised much of his literary work. The fact is significant. As a bishop he was reaping the harvest of long experience and mental discipline. He had nothing to fear, a great deal to say, and the virility to act strenuously upon his convictions.

The facts could only be disputed on the assumption that the Master Robert Grosseteste who attested one of the charters of

St. Hugh of Lincoln between 1286-9, and was the subject of one of Gerald of Wales's glowing appreciations sometime in the nineties (1190-9), was somebody else, a most unlikely assumption. The evidence itself points the other way. The undated charter of a Bishop Hugh of Lincoln in confirmation of the rights of the priory of St. Andrew at Northampton has been shown, by examination of other witnesses to it, to have been issued by St. Hugh and before the end of 1189. Master Robert is the last witness, and was probably one of the bishop's clerks. Grosseteste may well have studied in the episcopal school at Lincoln, and have attracted the great bishop's attention. The letter of Gerald of Wales praises Robert as a prodigy of remarkable proficiency in the liberal arts, wide learning, and dexterity in legal and medical matters. It suggests a young master of arts who was taking, in his pre-theological days, the whole of knowledge as his province. It refers to him also as then a clerk of William de Vere, Bishop of Hereford (d. 1199), and it is worth noting that the great baronial family to which Bishop William belonged had wide estates in Essex and held lands in Suffolk of the abbey of Bury St. Edmund's, and that all the various Stows in Suffolk were fairly near to Bury. The ways in which an able boy might reach the schools or enter the households of the great are familiar; many examples could be given; Grosseteste may have owed his chance to a local family or a friendly abbot.

His career is known with certainty from his appearance in Oxford after the year 1215. Those who have given minute attention to his earlier writings have satisfied themselves that they date from about 1200 onwards, and were the outcome of teaching and study at Oxford, and, as no evidence can be adduced to the contrary, we may agree with Father Daniel Callus that Grosseteste lectured in the budding university between 1200 and 1209, left England, like so many other scholars, during the Great Interdict, and returned to Oxford about 1214 after the quarrel between King John and Archbishop Stephen Langton had been composed. It is indeed unlikely that a scholar who became one of the first chancellors of the University, after its formal recognition and the provision of an

official head, and whose scientific and philosophical reputation was already so high, had no previous experience of the foremost school in England. Whether, during his absence in France, he was a theological student in Paris and proceeded to the higher degree of master or doctor in theology is uncertain, but the fact that a chancellor in Oxford had to be a master in theology makes it likely that he qualified for the degree there or continued his studies for a year or two in order to qualify for it after his return to Oxford. However this may be, he did not desert his philosophical studies. One of his works, his marginal glosses on Aristotle's *Physics*, was jotted down at the end of his Oxford career (1230-5) in the years when he was acting as *lector* to the lately established house of the Franciscans; but by this time he was especially immersed in the Biblical teaching and expositions required of a theologian. In 1235 he was elected Bishop of Lincoln, the largest diocese in England, stretching from the Humber to the Thames, and comprehending Lincoln in the north and Oxford in the south.

Here I turn to Grosseteste's work as a scholar and the problems to which his enormous output gives rise; and I should say something if only for the reason that he maintained most of his multifarious interests to the close of his life, and that his interest in scientific method was, to say the least, analogous to his ordered activity as a public man. The study of the writings of a medieval scholar can be very difficult and exciting. Bibliographical problems about authenticity, transmission and dating may lead to significant contributions to history and open up new vistas of learned society. As any bibliographer who starts with printed books would tell us, similar results may follow from the study of a modern writer, Boswell, for example, but how much more difficult and exciting the pursuit becomes where everything is in manuscripts scattered about in the libraries of Europe from Scotland to Naples and Spain to Poland, manuscripts as often as not anonymous, hard to read and with a perplexing history of their own. In that world there are no publishers, few precise ascriptions and fewer dates. Now in no case is this study more difficult, more exciting and more rewarding than in that of Grosseteste's writings. Twenty-three years ago I pecked

at the surface when I stumbled on the problem of his work on Aristotle's *Ethics*, and I was never more interested in my life ; though, I should add, I have never dared to peck again.

Grosseteste found many admirers. One of the greatest was Roger Bacon, who, while Grosseteste was bishop, was buying books and lecturing in Paris on the same sort of things that had interested the bishop in his youth ; and, twelve years after the bishop's death, began, in A. G. Little's phrase, to pour out his soul in reply to the Pope's command in three great works (1265-8). Bacon was profoundly influenced by Grosseteste, notably by his discussion of scientific method and, it is now believed, was one of the transmitters of his views. He also says that Grosseteste knew very little Greek and Hebrew, a remark which has complicated a difficulty not yet resolved, though the present tendency is to say that Grosseteste may have known the Hebrew alphabet and was certainly active in promoting the knowledge of the Hebrew text of the Psalter, while on the contrary he was acquainted with Greek, could use the Septuagint, and had a greater share in his translations from the Greek than is usually allowed. Another great admirer was John Wyclif, who frequently by his quotations gives useful indications about Grosseteste's works and whose influence upon Bohemian scholars may explain the existence in Czecho-Slovakia of one important manuscript. A third admirer was more of a bibliophil. This was Thomas Gascoigne, chancellor of the University of Oxford in the middle of the fifteenth century. Gascoigne loved to collect books and to make notes in them, and to examine books in libraries. He took special pleasure in the books left by Grosseteste to the library of the Oxford Franciscans and described what he saw there. His observations have prompted scholars to study the evidence contained in the books once possessed by Grosseteste, and in particular notes in these and in other books in the bishop's own handwriting.

Here are two examples of the value of such investigations. First, they have gone to confirm the statement of William of Alnwick, a Franciscan scholar who wrote in the early fourteenth century, that Grosseteste commented on Aristotle and other writers in two ways ; he jotted notes in the margins (these were

sometimes collected later), and he commented in continuous form. William of Alnwick argued that the bishop's authentic thought, that is what should be accepted as his definite opinions, is to be found in the continuous commentaries, not in his unsystematic annotations: "Hence the sayings of the lord *Lincolniensis* which he wrote *authentice* when he commented on the books of the blessed Dionysius and in his *Hexameron* and in his exposition of the *Posterior Analytics* [of Aristotle] are authentic, while not all that he wrote down on schedules or in out of the way places (*in abditis*) should be accepted as authentic." My second example is the discovery by Professor Harrison Thomson of Grosseteste's compilation of a long list of symbols to signify over four hundred topics, arranged under nine main heads or "distinctions", taken from the Bible and the Fathers. In a Lyons MS. the list of signs is followed by a concordance (intended to receive additions and to be "constantly growing") of the passages relevant to each sign; and sure enough at least two books survive, in one of which the margins are dotted with these signs or figures in the bishop's own hand, and in the other in another hand, possibly that of his friend Adam Marsh, the Oxford Franciscan.¹ Gascoigne himself possessed the former book, now Bodley MS. 198, a gift to him from the Oxford Franciscans, and calls attention to Grosseteste's notes. Obviously, the bishop, an omnivorous reader, had compiled a handy concordance to enable him to lay his hands on reference to any particular topic discussed in the books which he had read. The margins of the concordance itself show that he extended his references to authors other than the Fathers, to Aristotle, Boethius, Cicero, Horace, Seneca, Ptolemy and the Christian poets.

Grosseteste read books through; he did not depend upon collections of extracts. For instance, the view, based upon the very exacting judgement of Roger Bacon, that he was not thoroughly familiar with Aristotle, is misleading. He was not a profound Aristotelian, like his contemporary John Blund and the great scholars of Paris and Oxford later in the century, but he studied many of Aristotle's writings, especially the *Posterior*

¹ *Speculum*, ix (1934), 139-44.

Analytiks and the scientific books, and as bishop he directed, with the aid of Greeks in his household, the first complete translation of the *Ethics*, of which only the first three books had previously appeared in a Latin version. If this enterprise is considered in the light of intellectual developments current in the second half of the thirteenth and in later centuries, it is seen to have been a very precious gift to learning. It and Grosseteste's own notes on the *Ethics* aroused widespread interest abroad. Adam Marsh took much trouble to arrange for the transmission of a manuscript containing some of his friend's work on the *Ethics* to a distinguished scholar and preacher in Provence who had heard and clamoured for it. The book was to be transmitted to Provence by Queen Eleanor's physician. As we should say now-a-days, it was to go in the diplomatic bag.

As I have said already, Grosseteste's name was never forgotten; but his place in history, both as a scholar and as a bishop, has not been understood until our own day, and probably not yet fully or quite fairly. The foundations have been laid by Ludwig Baur's edition of his philosophical works (Münster, 1912) and by Professor Thomson's valuable and almost incredibly industrious survey of the manuscripts of all his writings (1940). A book by Mr. A. C. Crombie, a scientist who is devoting himself with knowledge and ability to the history of scientific thought, will shortly appear on Grosseteste's scientific importance.¹ The fine edition of his letters by H. R. Luard, which appeared as long ago as 1861, has come to its own as historical scholars examine more carefully Grosseteste's place in the busy and intelligent society in which he moved. We hear little or nothing nowadays of Grosseteste as an anti-papal defender of a local national church and a forerunner of King Henry VIII, partly because the capacity of medieval man for energetic criticism of his surroundings no longer surprises us even in the most convinced believer in papal authority. The more sensitive a man was to the obligations of the Catholic faith, the more keenly he would feel the responsibility of the individual,

¹ Since this lecture was delivered the book has appeared from the Clarendon Press, Oxford, under the title, *Robert Grosseteste and the origins of Experimental Science, 1110-1700*.

a fact which could lead to the Inquisition but could also lead, in a society of loose texture, to much more freedom of expression than is possible in most of the world today. Just as, within the Christian society as a whole, the problem of the relations between spiritual and secular authority provoked freedom in discussion, so, within the ecclesiastical system, decisions about policy, the definition of doubtful questions of law, the search for the wise direction of tendencies in thought, discipline and religious life from the parish to the cloister, could only be kept alive in the intelligent exercise of debate, and this implied personal responsibility. The repression of heresy and error was in Grosseteste's time secondary to the exploration of an exciting world of spiritual and mental experience, shared by all who were capable of feeling it and whose minds were open to it. The Manichean heresy, so threatening in Languedoc, was a disease to be stamped out, not a warning that the search for truth in free debate was pernicious. The schools in particular were regarded as essential to the well-being of the Church. They were a source of light, a spring of energy, a nursery of popes, cardinals and bishops, a training ground for theologians, preachers, jurists and medical experts. Attempts to restrain their activity were jealously watched, and were usually unsuccessful. Even St. Bernard had not been able to halt the theological movement which distressed him. Not long after Grosseteste's death an attack upon the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas stirred a kind of civil war in the universities of Paris and Oxford; the suggestion that he propounded views dangerous to the faith, like those of the extreme Joachimites or the thorough-going Averroists, was regarded as outrageous. As we all know, the Thomistic debate continued and still continues at a more decorous level.

Grosseteste, as a young and inquisitive scholar, lived in the earlier stage of the impact of new learning upon the schools whose form it had helped to shape and enliven. Theologically he was an orthodox student of the Fathers, and particularly of St. Augustine. Here he was an adventurer only in the onerous responsibilities of the pastoral life. As an original scholar, who was acquainted with the Aristotelian logic, as he was with the

main principles of law and medicine, he became curious about the physical universe as a reflection of Divine goodness. He was a cosmographer, interested in the stars and the wonder of light and sound. He knew all about the *computus* or science of astronomical measurement and reckoning in space and time. He was acquainted with Arabian arithmetic and science. As a countryman of lively mind he was observant of the natural world. In this age of intelligent wonder and receptiveness, some scholars became encyclopaedists and compiled more or less orderly accounts of everything they could know, just as builders used their experience to devise structures which depended upon new forces of balance and stress, and artists in stone and glass decorated them with sculpture and windows which imply a learned guidance. Grosseteste's powerful and orderly mind preferred to meditate about the explanation of things. He sought the principles of order at work in them. As he taught and wrote about the inductive method of inquiry into known facts, explained by Aristotle in his *Posterior Analytics*, he felt compelled to go further and to understand, what apparently none of the Greeks had been able to establish, how to discriminate between possible theories suggested by the investigation. The story of the tortuous development of theories about physical reality, the nature of substance, species and motion, and the essential function of tests by observation and experiment, begins in the later twelfth century in logical refinements upon Aristotle's argument and continues in the Middle Ages through speculations at Oxford and Paris and in the Italian schools. The importance of Grosseteste lies in his understanding of the procedure of verification and falsification on which modern experimental science is based, and in his influence upon the Oxford school, and especially upon Roger Bacon. In a short paper on the notion of species in medieval philosophy and science Dr. Crombie has described Grosseteste's contribution as follows :¹

The criterion of truth was whether a hypothesis "saved the appearances". However, since the same effect might follow from more than one cause, and since it was never possible to know all the possible causes of a given effect, it was never possible to reach absolutely certain knowledge of the cause of that

¹ *Archives internationales d'histoire des sciences* (1951), pp. 365-73.

effect. All that could be done was to eliminate false causes by experiment or observation, and to go on using the ones that had not yet been eliminated. Among these, the simplest was likely to be nearest the truth about Nature.

Thus Grosseteste held that the unaided human mind by itself could gain only probable knowledge of reality, though he thought that God might illuminate the mind with absolute and certain knowledge. His theory of science was a method of getting as close to the truth about Nature as was humanly possible. Moreover, like a good Platonist, he held that that truth would show that the physical world was in some sense "really mathematical". In fact, he believed that the fundamental physical substance was light, and that the nature of light could be understood only by means of geometry, through geometrical optics.

The self-discipline acquired by Grosseteste in the scientific environment of the study of the arts in the Oxford schools helped to form his theological teaching and the studies which he pursued during his brief but important period of office as the first *lector* of the Franciscans at Oxford and after his elevation to the episcopate in 1235. Father Callus, whose opinion carries great weight, has suggested that he planned to write a comprehensive *summa* of theology, on the lines of that composed by William of Auxerre. Enough survives of his numerous writings and enough is known of his projected works to justify this suggestion. The plan would appeal to his orderly mind. As his theological *questiones* show,¹ the *summa* would have been a conservative work, based upon Peter the Lombard's *Sentences* (the official handbook of theology) and the *Summa* of William of Auxerre, and inspired by the tradition of St. Augustine, the *De Sacramentis* of Hugh of St. Victor and the Greek Fathers available to him. He came to maturity too early to expatiate on the "new" Aristotle, the *De Anima* and the *Metaphysics*, or to incline his mind to the more specialized discussions in philosophy and theology which prepared the way for the comprehensive system of St. Thomas.

His interest lay in the great texts and led to his translations from the Greek. Miss Beryl Smalley has pointed out² that his commentaries on the *Hexameron* and on the Psalter "show a deliberate cult of the Greek Fathers". He was one of the

¹ Extracts from these have been edited by Father Callus in the paper in which he has elaborated his suggestion: *Studies in medieval history presented to F. M. Powicke* (1948), pp. 180-208.

² *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (2nd edn., 1952), pp. 336-7.

first to resume the study of St. Basil's *Hexameron* in the Latin translation familiar to Bede five centuries before and is known to have borrowed a copy of this book from his friends at Bury St. Edmunds. His *Hexameron* indeed was probably the link between his last days at Oxford and the translations of the *De fide Orthodoxa* of St. John Damascene previously known through a twelfth century translation, and of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus and his commentaries upon it, later followed by the translation of Aristotle's *Ethics*, to which I have already referred. His theological teaching had directed his mind to big questions in Christian cosmography and ecclesiastical policy. At Paris, for example, he had got to know the famous commentator on the Pseudo-Dionysius, Thomas of Vercelli, and the friendship would have helped to give a theological direction to his cosmological interests. In the *Hexameron*, which, Father Callus tells us, indicates his technique in the manipulation of his sources, his relish for cosmological topics leads him to discuss that theological *crux*, the eternity of the world, and to inveigh against the "moderns" who would turn the heretic Aristotle into a catholic, in their desire to maintain his heretical views on this subject, and deny the truths of creation. During fifteen busy years the aged scholar used his scanty leisure as bishop to work with his clerks and translators. His country manors where he stayed, Stow by Lincoln, Buckden on the London road, Fingest in its lovely hollow in the Chilterns, and many other places were the scenes of this congenial relief from the business and troubles of the episcopal day.

Grosseteste's public life as Bishop of Lincoln was informed by two experiences, one his outlook on the universe as a scholar, the other the realization of his duties as a prelate, an experience which, though of slow and steady growth, was doubtless given a more urgent and personal edge by his friendship with the friars at Oxford.

His curiosity about natural things, his scientific accuracy, and his consciousness of a wider world, embracing the celestial hierarchy, directed by an omnipresent God, and sanctioned by an over-ruling natural law revealed in the Scriptures and claiming the allegiance of the informed will—all this and much more

was fostered and defined by his experience as a scholar and a friend of scholars. That no responsible teacher should say anything unless he was sure of it and had studied its ground and implications, was a truth to which he often recurred. In one of his earlier books, the *De cessatione legalium*, he applies it to the allegorical interpretation of Scripture, in which all truth is contained.¹ The *De cessatione* attracted attention in the seventeenth century; some of it was printed, with an appreciation of its author, in London in 1658; its subject, the relations between the Old and the New Law, as revealed by the Scriptures and interpreted by the wisest doctors, was felt to be of topical interest. A new sign, says Grosseteste, does not necessarily "evacuate" an old sign. The observance of the Sabbath, for example, is so generally (*communiter*) useful and necessary that it proclaims itself to have been ordained by God, not as temporary but as permanent in the order of the universe. Reason cannot make the supreme reason better. The significance of the observance in the new order, he points out later, requires the most careful regard to the literal texts in the search for their allegorical meaning. "A good teacher does not inform the mind of his disciple by means of the abbreviated word but of the full word, and every scholar of a master or an art knows how to distinguish between the two and finds the master's intention fully and clearly in his perfected and rounded (*integrus*) utterances. So the elucidation of Scripture must be based upon the text as a whole, the naked word, not on truncated and casual words." This instruction is clearly in the Augustinian tradition. St. Augustine tried "to steer a middle course between literal and allegorical expositions". Earnest meditation on the text is needed if the interpretation "which tends to establish the reign of charity" is to be found.² Grosseteste explained this tradition in the light of the new scholastic method. He was on the way to the canons of interpretation laid down by St. Thomas;³ but his

¹ For this work and the MSS. see S. H. Thomson, *op. cit.* pp. 121-2. The book has never been fully and well edited. The argument and contents of the part printed in 1658 do not confirm Thomson's view that the work was a deliberate contribution to a current anti-Jewish movement.

² Smalley, *op. cit.* pp. 23-4.

³ *Ibid.* p. 300.

point of view is best approached by way of Roger Bacon, who stood nearer to him and gave high praise to his expositions of Scripture.

Bacon firmly believed that all wisdom is contained in the Bible, and that the Bible should be *the* text of theological study in the schools, just as great and authoritative texts were the objects of study in other faculties. The Bible should not be neglected, as he thought it too often was, and displaced by a textbook, the *Sentences* of Peter the Lombard. And, as all knowledge is contained in the Bible, though not fully expressed, the theologian must know all things ; every new truth can both be found there and must be used to elucidate its teaching. Hence it is essential to have an accurate text, a new edition of the Vulgate, newly based on the Hebrew and Greek originals and on the best manuscripts of the Latin version. Then the theologian as scientist and moralist can safely come to grips with it. Dr. A. G. Little quotes Bacon's observations on a passage in *Ecclesiasticus* : " A man blowing a furnace is in works of heat ; but the sun three times more, burning up the mountains." Bacon interpreted the Latin, *tripliciter*, not as " three times more " but as " in a threefold manner ". His scientific interest in optics insisted that an optical interpretation was required, and he added " an elaborate disquisition on the incidence of the sun's rays and the laws of reflection and refraction ".¹ Grosseteste, in spite of his high regard for the science of optics, could not have been carried away so far ; but he would certainly have agreed with Bacon's views about the place of the Bible in theological teaching. He [himself expressed his views about this very clearly and precisely in a well-known letter (no. 123) to the Oxford regents in theology. As we have seen, he also believed in the need for a knowledge of Hebrew and Greek.

Probably the quickest way to realize how Grosseteste as a Christian scholar applied his mind to the world about him as part of an ordered universe under divine direction would be the study of his *Dicta*, one of the most popular of his works ; for this miscellaneous collection of 147 passages, mainly taken from his sermons and lectures, including the whole of some of the

¹ *Proceedings of the British Academy*, xiv (1928), 288.

sermons delivered to the clergy or people while he was a teacher in the schools, was obviously intended as a work of edification. Unhappily, only twenty-one of the *Dicta* have been published. These were printed by Edward Brown in his valuable *Fasciculus Rerum Expetendarum* in 1690. Professor Harrison Thomson, in his book on the writings of Grosseteste, has given a full list with brief indications of their contents (pp. 216-32). A more satisfactory guide to Grosseteste's mind would be editions of his commentaries, especially his *moralia* on the Gospels and his work on the Psalter. Thomson has listed ninety-two sermons which he regards as certainly Grosseteste's and seventy-five more, mainly from an early Durham manuscript, which he feels safe in attributing to him; but only one or two have been published. Gascoigne in the fifteenth century was emphatic that Grosseteste commented on all the Epistles of St. Paul, but only one, on the Epistle to the Galatians, has survived, though another, on the Romans, may also be his. None of them has been printed. Hence we have to rely upon the Letters, and fortunately these are full and comprehensive, and can be supplemented by the numerous letters written to the bishop by his disciple and friend, the Franciscan Adam Marsh.

One of the sermons from which extracts have appeared in print¹ was preached by Grosseteste to the Franciscans in chapter. Its theme is the ladder of poverty. The preacher characteristically urges his hearers to avoid the pride latent in humility and always to remember the end or purpose of their way of life. This Aristotelean emphasis on the intention of things and the subordination of every grade in the ordered scale of being to its superior grade is as fundamental to an understanding of Grosseteste's life as a bishop and his outlook on practical issues as it is in the development of philosophical thought in the thirteenth century. The conception, however, implies a scale of values, and, in this case, of theological and cosmological values, which must guide the religious life, whether contemplative or ecclesiastical or parochial, and in particular illuminate the cure of souls. Theology, so he said in one of

¹ In A. G. Little's edition of Thomas of Eccleston's *De adventu fratrum minorum in Angliam* (Paris, 1909), pp. 178-87.

his *Dicta* (no. 118), turns the syllogism to spiritual uses and catches in its net spiritual fish who are readily caught. Here we come to the influences which clarified the mind and strengthened the will of the elderly scholar in the years which preceded his episcopate.

What made him consent to change his life at Oxford for the duties of a diocesan? And what made him, in contrast to that other great scholar, St. Edmund of Abingdon, who in these same years became Archbishop of Canterbury and found that he could not tolerate the burden, so resolute and forthright a prelate? I do not know, but I suspect that his friendship with and admiration for the new mendicant orders had something to do with his decision and his pertinacity. The arrival of the orders in 1221 and 1224 and their immediate establishment in Oxford had aroused much excitement. Their sense of purpose and their modes of life had created a deep impression. About the time when Grosseteste agreed to supervise Franciscan studies in the humble Greyfriars, Jordan of Saxony, St. Dominic's successor as Master General of the Dominicans, came on a visit to England. He preached on St. Martin's day (11 Nov. 1229) in Oxford and issued a "challenge to the prelates assembled there to save the souls of the people throughout England". Grosseteste, who, in a letter (no. 40) written to the Master General some years later, recalls the intimate and friendly conversations which he had had with him in Oxford, must have heard this sermon. Its text survives in the Durham manuscript which contains the material for Grosseteste's work on the Psalms and many of his own sermons.¹ Brother Jordan, speaking from the texts Judith viii. 21: "You are priests in the people of God, from you hangs their soul" and Isa. xxii. 23, 24, on the nail fastened in a sure place, from which all kinds of vessels hung, exclaimed, "Oh, my God, where shall be found a cord so long that the people of all the parishes of England may hang on it? Will it come from their prelates residing in Oxford? God knows, I know not. But we do know that if the column falls or the nail gives way, all the vessels which

¹ A. G. Little, in *Eng. Hist. Rev.* liv (1939), 1-19, has edited Jordan's sermon and two others preached by him in England.

hang on it will fall and be broken." And then, turning to the masters in the schools, he warned them against pride and cupidity and the desire for worldly promotion. "We read in Matthew how the devil lifted the Lord to the pinnacle of the Temple, which signifies the status of the *magisterium*. The devil has placed many there, all, that is to say, who are so eager to be made or called masters that they may be honoured and advanced in temporal things. There is nothing wrong in being called master; it is the height of pride to *wish* to be called master."

About this time Grosseteste became the first lecturer to the Franciscans. Brother Thomas of Eccleston, who wrote the story of the arrival of the friars minor in England, put on record their debt to their teacher. "Under him within a short time," he says, "they made incalculable progress both in scholastic discussion, and the subtle moralities suitable for preaching". In 1232 he decided to resign his prebends, including the arch-deaconry of Leicester. He retained only his prebend in the cathedral church of Lincoln. In a letter (no. 8) to his sister Juetta, who was a nun, telling her of his decision, he says: "You, who wear the habit and have bought the vow of the religious life, must not be at all disturbed or sorry. If I am poorer by my own choice, I am made richer in virtues. If I am more despicable in the eyes of the world, I am more acceptable to the citizens of heaven. If I have given up temporal things for the sake of obedience, only by obedience can I merit heavenly things. You should love more in me the good which you love in yourself, the more closely we are bound together by ties of the flesh." He seems to have felt some doubt whether Juetta would receive his news with the sisterly and sympathetic understanding that he had the right to expect from a cloistered nun.

Hitherto I have tried to tell you what sort of man it was who was appointed to a big bishopric at an advanced age. Now, in the brief time that remains, let us see how Grosseteste applied his principles as he faced his task during the next eighteen years.

His most troublesome problem in England was his relations with the dean and chapter of Lincoln. His right of episcopal

visitation was challenged. The long and dramatic controversy which ensued had finally to be settled in his favour by the Pope. Early in the dispute (c. 1239) he prepared for the dean and chapter a long essay about the relations which should exist between a bishop and his cathedral chapter (Epistle 127). This illustrates perfectly his conception of the Church as an organism. It is based upon arguments made clear by examples—examples taken from the Old Testament, examples drawn from daily life, examples suggested by his almost passionate interest in the nature of light. Moses, as the meaning of his name suggests, is the type of a Christian prelate. When he gave duties to his helpers he did not surrender power but reserved his own rights ; just as the sun is no less the source of light when its rays are reflected by a mirror and throw light in places not directly exposed to them. Moses and his helpers correspond to the Pope and the bishops ; each bishop in his own diocese is what the Pope is in the whole Church and controls his assistants in the same way, and the dean and chapter have their helpers, and so down to the lowest. A bishop's powers may be limited ; for example, he cannot visit Cistercian abbeys as each abbot can visit the houses affiliated to his own mother abbey ; but every case of this kind depends upon a privilege granted by the Pope. A dean cannot visit his own chapter, for he resides in the cathedral with it, and even if he could, he could not exclude the bishop. The Pope is like the sun, giving light to moon and stars. He imparts power to bishops who impart power to others. Just as the Pope cannot diminish his plentitude of power unless a mandate from Christ approves his action, because of its advantage (*utilitatis*), so no bishop can give away any of his authority. Moreover no civil law or custom can stand in his way, for custom is a positive, not a negative thing, and cannot overrule the exercise of the good. Underlying all this formal argument about structure is the conception of the happiness and freedom which cordial co-operation in the salvation of souls can and should bring to all. All are watchmen, trusting in the watchfulness of their subordinates. All are shepherds anxious for the safety of the sheep. In another memorandum, written eleven years later for the guidance of Archbishop Boniface

of Canterbury, Grosseteste likens the hierarchy to the subdivision of an immense flock, 10,000 sheep divided into thousands, thousands into hundreds, hundreds into tens, each group or multiple of groups under its shepherd, feeding and watching the sheep¹. To revert to the pamphlet for the dean and chapter, Grosseteste argued that here was true liberty, for as Philo-Judaeus wrote: "The slave is everyone who sins; the freeman is everyone who labours for the good." And so, throughout this long argument the bishop turns from one aspect of the theme to another, with inexhaustible fertility in Scriptural analogy. It appears to have made very little impression upon the canons.¹ They lived decently and contentedly in an English world of rights, customs, precedents, social distinctions, secular and ecclesiastical. They resented this instruction from a low-born prelate, who brought newfangled mendicant friars into his household to help him to get on with his diocesan job.

Everything that Grosseteste did and said as bishop can be brought within the implications of this document. Neither his view of the universe nor its expression in the details of a reformed ecclesiasticism was new. Some of it was very old, much had been defined in 1215 at the Fourth Lateran Council and again by Stephen Langton at a provincial council at Oxford in 1222, and yet again in episcopal constitutions. The qualities which made Grosseteste so formidable and brought him to the front were the range of his incisive mind, his tireless energy and the grandeur of his character.

He was a leader from the first years of his episcopate, a propelling force which might be deplored but could not be disregarded. In letters to Archbishop Edmund and the justice William Raleigh he gave the clearest and most orderly statement yet made of the grievances of the clergy and the subordination

¹ Dr. R. W. Hunt has recently discovered the reply of the Chancellor of Lincoln in Bodl. MS. 760, ff. 176^v-178^v. It rebuts the views that the bishop has authority, except to instruct and teach, over the members of chapter and their vicars and peculiars, and that correction of the dean lies with the bishop: 'ex consuetudine cathedralium Anglie capitulum totum ita ut sumatur capitulum collective et formaliter corrigat decanum'. I owe the summary in this note to Miss Dorothy Williamson of the Lincoln Diocesan Record Office.

of the common law to the law of the Church. His constitutions or directions to his clergy were, in Professor Cheney's opinion, more widely adopted than any others were in later episcopal constitutions. His lists of *gravamina* initiated a movement which found periodic expression during the next hundred years. His pertinacity in inquiries into the conduct and character of the laity in his widespread diocese, a form of interference with the king's subjects for which at least twice he was called to account by the royal authority, set an example which could not be disregarded in giving this episcopal duty such effectiveness as it ever had in English medieval life. His insistence that prelates and clergy should not accept secular office found little response, but must, I think, have done much, at a critical time, to set the tradition of clerical independence later expressed in a separate convocation of the clergy, distinct from parliament.

He knew everybody and feared nobody. At King Henry's request he instructed him on the nature of an anointed king, and in so doing courteously reminded him of his responsibility for the maintenace of his subjects in peace and justice and of his duty to abstain from any interference with the cure of souls. He would allow no compromise on matters of principle. The common law of the Church should be applied in the light of equity, the dictate of conscience, and the teaching of natural law, as revealed in the Scriptures, implicit in the working of a Divine Providence, and conformable to the teaching and guidance of Christ in the Church militant on earth. Hence came his fierce attacks upon legal pedantry and venality in the ecclesiastical courts, notably the court of Canterbury, and upon Archbishop Boniface's exaction of procurations on an early visitation which, so the bishops insisted, had a financial rather than a spiritual objective, his hatred of the indiscriminate provision to benefices by the papal court and the exploitation of parishes by monastic houses, his minute scrutiny of presentations to benefices and dignities, his urgent expostulations in his letters of counsel to all kinds of persons in positions of civil or ecclesiastical authority, and the influence which he could exercise over men like Earl Simon de Montfort. His memory was venerated by like-minded men, and was invoked in times of

revolt by many who can have had no clear idea of the cause for which he stood, the art of arts, the salvation of souls.

In no matter was Grosseteste more true to himself than in his relations with the papacy. He was a thorough-going papalist. The Vicar of Christ was the lynch pin upon which the whole fabric of the Church depended ; but he was the Vicar of Christ, and woe betide if he fell short of his awful responsibilities. Orthodox minds were more outspoken than they were in post-Tridentian days in their criticism of papal behaviour. The rapid development of the ecclesiastical system under the impulse of the papal plenitude of power was itself a justification of their concern during the century and a half which separate St. Bernard's paternal warnings to his friend Pope Eugenius III from the unseemly relations between Pope Boniface VIII and his cardinals. Some distinguished canonists found a solution in the conception of the Church as a whole, and the college of cardinals in particular, as corporations. Thus Hostiensis worked out the implications of the current view that the cardinals are part of the Pope's body. "Not the Pope alone but the cardinals also are comprehended in the expression of the *plenitudo potestatis*", which remains with the cardinals during a vacancy in the Holy See. The Pope could certainly act on his own initiative, he was not compelled to adopt the advice of the cardinals, but his decision must not "tend to subvert the well-being of the Universal Church". But what if it does? Here Hostiensis went farther than the other leading canonists. He maintained that in matters of faith the ultimate authority is a general council.¹ Grosseteste followed a personal course when he was confronted by the problem of papal error. He was a theologian, not a professional canonist. In practice, and probably in principle, he was not affected by the legal theory of corporation. He trusted rather to the mystical union of the church whose authoritative expression on earth was the Vicar of Christ. As an English bishop he did not regard himself, as Hostiensis seems to have regarded all bishops, as bound to consult his chapter, as the Pope consulted his cardinals. In his dealings with the

¹ See Brian Tierney, "A conciliar theory of the thirteenth century", in *The Catholic Historical Review*, xxxvi (Jan. 1951), 415-40.

papal Curia he kept in touch with friendly cardinals, as all important litigants liked to do, and he was very conscious of the value to be attached to the influence of the Sacred College ;¹ but as a thorough-going papalist he could and would appeal to an erring Pope alone as man to man.

He was prepared, indeed, to support his English episcopal colleagues in deploring the extent of papal exactions and, needless to say, in appealing for papal support against all kinds of secular interference in the ecclesiastical system, but he was mainly concerned to emphasize the responsibility of the Curia for the danger to the pastoral care of a narrow and pedantic insistence on the common law in church and state, the demoralizing effect of papal provisions and Archbishop Boniface's perversion of his right to visit his province, so different from his own conception of an episcopal visitation. In 1250, when he was at least eighty years of age, he went to the Papal Court to make his protest. He stood up alone, attended by nobody but his official, Robert Marsh, who wrote a description of the scene with a text of the memoranda presented by the bishop and of the speeches which he made. Pope Innocent IV sat there with his cardinals and members of his household to hear the most thorough and vehement attack that any great Pope can ever have had to hear at the height of his power.² Three years later, in the year of his death, Grosseteste, in a letter of protest addressed to a papal agent and notary against a papal provision of the Pope's nephew to a benefice, took the extreme step. He refused, in the name of papal power, to obey the papal mandate. Some scholars, confining their attention to the letter alone, have rejected it as a forgery, though it is one of the best authenticated of Grosseteste's works ; but in fact it accords with all his moral and cosmological convictions. Pope Innocent had presented his nephew, explicitly setting aside any obstacles or episcopal privileges of any kind, as a naked act of papal authority. Grosseteste, old, tired and angry, but in full control of his mental faculties, denounced the papal mandate as an act of sin

¹ Cf. *Epistolae*, no. 36 for Grosseteste's high view of the Pope *with his cardinals* as giving light and beauty to the universe.

² S. H. Thomson, *op. cit.* pp. 141-7.

impossible to the Apostolic See. He went on, "No faithful subject in pure and full obedience to the Holy See, who is not schismatically cut off from the body of Christ and the same See, can be in accord with this or any other mandate of its kind, even though it came from the highest order of Angels. Wherefore, reverend Sir, out of the obedience and fealty by which I am bound, as a child to his parents, to the most Holy Apostolic See and the love I bear to its union with the Body of Christ, filially and obediently I do not obey, I reject, I rebel against the contents of this letter."¹

That this outburst came from the depth of his being and expressed his inmost conviction is shown very clearly if we place it beside the following passage in the memorandum presented three years earlier to Pope Innocent and the cardinals :²

This most holy see is the throne of God and like to the sun of the world in His sight. Whence, just as there exists causally in the sun the whole illumination of this world, its vegetation, nutrition of sensible life, augmentation, consummation, conservation, beauty and grace ; and just as the sun is always causing all these things to flow [*influere*] into this sensible world, and so makes and keeps the world sensible and perfect ; so this most holy see ought to have all these things, spiritually understood, within itself causally, and ought to cause all these things to flow unceasingly upon that whole spiritual world of which it is the spiritual sun, and so save that spiritual world. Otherwise, just as, if the causal reasons [*rationes causales*] in the visible sun and the influences from it upon the world should fail, straightway this whole sensible world would perish ; even so, if the spiritual causal reasons, which correspond to those of the sun, and the corresponding influences upon the spiritual world, should fail in this spiritual sun, this world, of which it is the sun, must needs perish, and it must be the cause and be guilty of this perdition, especially since these causal reasons and the influences therefrom are in its free power. But God forbid, God forbid that this sun, entirely shining in intelligence and always straight in its justice, should at any time be turned into darkness and turn black like a piece of sackcloth or turn backwards.

This passage anticipates in some measure the argument in the *Monarchia* where Dante maintains the function and necessity of universal Empire as the ultimate end for the universal civil order of mankind, on the ground that "the work proper to the human race, taken as a whole, is to keep the whole capacity of the potential intellect constantly actualised". Grosseteste expressed himself in terms natural to a student of natural

¹ *Epistolae*, no. 128 ; cf. Thomson, pp. 212-13.

² Edward Brown, *Fasciculus*, ii. 254 ; the translation is by Mr. W. A. Pantin.

science and the pseudo-Dionysius, Dante as a reader of Aristotle's *Politics* influenced by Averroistic thought ;¹ but the impression conveyed by both is of a great organism working at full strength. The difference between them is this : Grosseteste was afflicted by the incredible fear that the papacy, at the height of its power, might falter in its function as the source of vivifying light ; whereas Dante, in a mood of temporary exaltation, saw in the restoration and enlargement of an empire which had ceased to function the only way to unite mankind on earth. Grosseteste was shocked by the possible perversity of a great power whose operations were affecting every Christian soul, Dante, as he came to feel, was (to use a fine phrase of Professor d'Entreves) confusing the mission of a man with that of the Divine Saviour.

Each of these great men expected the impossible from the human nature which each, in his own way, desired to save from disorder and corruption. Grosseteste, in his urgency and strong faith in the existing ecclesiastical system, underrated the virile forces at work in the world about him, and the opportunities open to the good no less than to the bad. He may, for all we know, have been a different man in his personal relationships with his flock, but I fear that he was too old, too certain of himself, too tidy-minded, to keep in touch with the souls which he longed to save. I can see few traces of the grace of compassion in his revealing letters.² Adam Marsh himself thought sometimes that he was too hard. He and Simon de Montfort had this fault in common. In one of his last letters to his archdeacons (c. 1250-1), a letter which he ordered them to have read throughout his diocese, he writes despairingly about the state of his spiritual subjects. He had even, he says,

¹ Cf. A. P. d'Entreves, *Dante as a Political Thinker* (1952), pp. 47-51.

² At least one sermon, and a very popular sermon, strikes a gentler note. The bishop advises any parish priest who knew no Latin to persuade a better-informed neighbour to go through the text of the Gospel for the following Sunday with him, so that he can teach it to his flock. The passage was translated in a Lollard tract, which was published at Marlborough in 1530, and copied by John Foxe into his *Actes and Monuments* in 1563. See Curt F. Bühler, 'A Lollard Tract : on translating the Bible into English', in *Medium Aevum*, vii (1938), 167-83, at pp. 175 (translation), 182 (Grosseteste's text).

decided to resign, but had been prevented by higher authority. In fact he seems to have relied too much upon the efficacy of injunctions and exhortations and his disciplinary powers. He had not really got to know his sheep as a good shepherd should ; not, for example, as one of his successors, Oliver Sutton, Bishop of Lincoln from 1280 to 1299, was to get to know them.¹ Yet, when all is said, he was one of those rare men whose minds and spirits move easily in the universe of things and in practical life do not fear to face the consequences. This year his church at Lincoln will venerate him as the greatest of her bishops ; and, in my view, the University of Oxford would not be far wrong if she were to honour him as the greatest of her sons.

¹ See Rosalind Hill, *Oliver Sutton* (Lincoln Minster Pamphlets, no. 4, 1950), and her paper on "Public Penance : some problems of a thirteenth century bishop", in *History*, for October 1951 (N.S. xxxvi, pp. 213-26).