GEORGE LEE HASKINS

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I am first aware of having met George Lee Haskins in 1974, but long before that he and his family were close friends of mine. When I was a teenager the first book of historical scholarship to bedazzle me was The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century¹ by his father, Charles Homer Haskins. I was enthralled by, and envied, the depth, breadth, and accuracy of his scholarship. Rather later, rummaging through the stacks of the Glasgow University Library I came across George's own Law and Authority in Early Massachusetts.² Again, I was dazzled, again by the scholarship. This book, too, opened up new vistas for me. It was the first time I had read a law book that set law in its political, religious, economic, and historical context. It was, in fact, the first book of its kind in America and, I believe, in the world. I still think it the most perceptive and informative book on any aspect of American legal history. I learnt a great deal from it and it formed the basis of a chapter of my book Legal Transplants³ which George claims is my best work. On that one point alone, I often wonder about his objectivity. What cannot be stressed too much, though, is that, recognized by all or not, it was that book that set the fashion for all subsequent American legal history.

A bonus is that the book is a pleasure to read. George is a stylist; beautifully constructed sentences carry one along almost at a military march pace, hiding the depth of the learning and the complexity of the thought in the clarity of expression.

Law and Authority is by no means George’s only book. His latest is the masterly Foundations of Power: John Marshall, 1801-15.⁴ Praised as it has been, it will in time, I firmly believe, be regarded more highly yet. The same is true of his numerous learned papers.

I revere George as a scholar and teacher, but, as others will testify, he is much more than that: soldier, lawyer, businessman, and administrator. Above all I love him as a friend. He is an individualist, very well aware of what he wants out of life and eager to achieve it. Some

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² G. HASKINS, LAW AND AUTHORITY IN EARLY MASSACHUSETTS (1960).
might see in that an element of selfishness, but that would be to mis-
take George’s nature. The secret of George and his eagerness for what
he wants is that he sees friends as extensions of himself and is avid
after their happiness. What he wants is worthy of desire and he counts
a multitude as his friends.

When he leaves us I will sorely miss him dropping into my office.
In consolation I can look forward to reading more of his writings. I was
with him when a jejune professor observed to him that some people
never learn that one book in a lifetime is enough. Happily, that is one
lesson George has never been able to learn.