

OLLSCOIL NA hÉIREANN  
THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND

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TEXT OF INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY PROFESSOR JEREMIAH J. HOGAN, M.A.,  
B.LITT. (OXON.), ON THE OCCASION OF THE CONFERRING ON JULY 20TH, 1954, OF THE DEGREE  
OF DOCTOR OF LITERATURE (*honoris causa*) UPON PROFESSOR JOHN R. R. TOLKIEN, M.A.

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JOHN RONALD TOLKIEN, born in 1892, educated at Birmingham and Oxford, served through the war of 1914 and then became Professor of English at Leeds University. In 1925, at an early age, he was appointed to the Rawlinson and Bosworth chair of Anglo-Saxon in Oxford. Having had the good fortune to hear his first lecture, I recall its freshness, informality, and vigour. Twenty years later he moved to the Merton Professorship which he now holds.

Professor Tolkien is unsurpassed in his knowledge of the English language and its literature from the beginning to the end of the medieval period. To the rare qualities of industry and acumen required to make a first-rate scholar, there is added in his case something of the still rarer touch of genius, showing itself I think in two ways—a deeper penetration of the subject, and a broader view of it. This combination of grasp and detachment has enabled him to write with a most remarkable and decisive brevity. To take one example only: in a short lecture, he changed everybody's understanding of England's oldest and one of her most famous poems. The lecture, entitled *Beowulf, the Monsters and the Critics*, proved among other things that those monsters are nearer to reality than many of the critics.

Professor Tolkien goes beyond a mere sympathetic appreciation of older English literature. The older England, with its heroism and gentleness, its humour and fantasy, seems to live in him and find a new utterance through his talent as an original author—for in this sense also he is a master of the English language. He lately wrote to *The Battle of Maldon* what is at once a commentary and a sequel. He has long been known to a select audience as something like Oxford's second Lewis Carroll—an occasional writer of works small in scale but so richly peculiar that they can hold their own among the big conventional productions of full-time authors; I refer to *The Hobbit*, and *Farmen Giles of Ham*. But at this moment he is about to break upon the world with a very large work of romantic fiction, a work in the tradition, I have been told, of Malory and Spenser; I may guess that it will not be forgetful either of *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. We congratulate him on the completion of his labour, and await the time when the "huge cloudy symbols of this high romance" shall be focused for us on the printed page.

There are many reasons why it is fitting that we should honour Professor Tolkien; I cannot touch on all of them. We value here the studies in which he excels. The Catholic University of Ireland was notable in many ways, and not least in that Old and Middle English were taught there at a very early date. The first professor, Thomas Arnold, was distinguished; at one point of his career he looked a likely candidate for the Oxford Chair to which Professor Tolkien was appointed in 1925. The great Newman himself, while he was here, guided Arnold in the pioneer task of shaping English as a university subject; I might claim that by his lectures and papers Newman functioned for the time as a professor of English. Our English School, thus derived from Oxford, has in these later days returned to the same source for new inspiration; so that three of our staff have enjoyed the kindness of Professor Tolkien and I hope profited by his learning.

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PRÆHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Præsentō vobis hunc meum filium quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur *honoris causa* ad Gradum Doctoratus in Litteris; idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo totique Academiae.