War and economic development
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Essays in memory of David Joslin

edited by

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Preface: David Joslin

David Maelgwyn Joslin was born in 1925 in Barry, a seaport in South Wales. His surname was English and his paternal forebears came originally from Somerset. But in temperament, upbringing and background he was Welsh. Both his parents were teachers and from an early age he had an ambition, common among the children of Welsh teachers, to excel in intellectual activity. He attended the local elementary school and the Barry County School and, after three years in the Royal Navy during the war in which he acquired a knowledge of Japanese, he went up to St John’s College, Cambridge, in 1946. He was placed in the First Class of Parts I and II of the Historical Tripos in 1947 and 1948, and in 1951 he was elected Fellow and Tutor in History at Pembroke College; in 1954 he was appointed University Lecturer and in 1965 he succeeded Professor Postan in the chair of Economic History. He died in 1970 as the result of a heart attack.

In Part II of the Tripos David took Professor Postan’s Special Subject on the British Economy between 1886 and 1938 and when he decided to undertake research he naturally looked to economic history. His first intention was to investigate English country banking in the eighteenth century, particularly in East Anglia, and he collected a good deal of material on this subject. But he was diverted by the great richness and fascination of the records of Child’s Bank, Hoares and Gosling’s to explore the activities of the London private bankers in the eighteenth century, and these were the subject of his first article, which was published in 1954. He continued his publications in this field with a contribution to the Festschrift for Professor T. S. Ashton, a scholar who greatly influenced David’s work on the eighteenth century and for whom David had immense admiration. The subject was full of potentialities, the sources were abundant and in due course David’s work in this field would have resulted in a major work. But in 1956 he was invited by the Board of Directors of the Bank of London and South America to write the history of the banks which had gone to the making of that institution, as a commemoration of the centenary of the oldest of them. David was well-equipped for the task, not only by his mastery of banking history but by the knowledge of Spanish he had acquired at school; and the
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invitation and the extensive tour of South America he undertook in 1957 enormously enlarged the range of his interests. The work appeared in 1963 and is a major contribution to the history of the role of the British in the economic development of Latin America, and for the rest of his life this area remained one of his main interests.

In his academic work, David liked getting a complicated subject straight and setting it in its proper proportions; he had an orderly, logical and analytical mind and was circumspect and judicious in his use of evidence. Only rarely, as for example in his portrait of Colonel John North, the nitrate king, was his passionate interest in people given rein on the printed page. But the personality which became evident in his human relations was, to an exceptional degree, exuberant, warm and spontaneous; he was fascinated by human foibles and by the tectics of human situations; and he had a keen sense of person and place, and a skill as a raconteur which would have made him a brilliant historian of politics. He liked few things better than talking with friends and for them he peopled the world with characters which, if sometimes larger than life, were always vivid and exciting. Affection for his friends was linked with another characteristic, a strong sense of loyalty to the institutions to which he belonged. This was in part the result of a desire to be in the thick of things, a delight in having his finger on the pulse; but more fundamentally it was due to a sense of obligation which arose from his religious convictions, for he had been brought up as a keen churchman. Because he was evidently a capable and sagacious administrator and an excellent committee man, the institutions to which he belonged made full use of his services. He was Senior Tutor of Pembroke; he was a member of the General Board at Cambridge; and for many years he gave devoted service to the Economic History Review as assistant editor. He was one of the moving spirits behind the South American Centre in Cambridge and was editor of the Journal of Latin American Studies and of Cambridge Latin American Studies. And he was above all, and this remained his primary obligation, a devoted and stimulating teacher and lecturer. He took endless pains with his pupils and, in the best traditions of College life, had a wide and varied circle of friends among undergraduates.

When he died he was at the height of his powers; his main historical interests were settled, his marriage had given him new strength and purpose, and a life of dedicated scholarship seemed to lie before him. This was not to be; but that his influence as a scholar, teacher and friend remains bright and vigorous the essays in this volume testify.

H. J. HABAKKUK