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978-0-521-08396-6 - The German Historians and England: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Views

Charles E. McClelland

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THE GERMAN HISTORIANS
AND ENGLAND

A STUDY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY
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University of Pennsylvania



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To the memory of Hajo Holborn

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The history of ideas is now established as a legitimate approach to the past. Unlike other daughters of Clio, however, it has often had to struggle to assert its personality, techniques, and virtues. Political history, for example, does not have to be defended against charges of being airy, speculative, or irrelevant. The history of ideas has to answer accusations that it veers between hagiography (of those who established commonly accepted views of man and the universe) and the recounting of errors (which had best be forgotten). The methods of the history of ideas are less fixed than those of economic or social history. Yet despite all its weaknesses, it lives on.

The explanation for its vitality lies partly in a heightened curiosity about ideas which have been called into question. A general European *crise de conscience* since the late nineteenth century forced the careful examination of received ideas and their creators. It would be hard to find a land where this crisis was more keenly felt than Germany itself. The subsequent transfer of deep concern with the history of ideas to American soil, often by exiles from regimes which attempted to stamp out ideas, has nurtured the discipline.

Anyone who knew the late Hajo Holborn will know what I mean by saying this book would have been impossible without him. His wisdom, insight, and encouragement constantly sustained my labors, just as his humor, courage, and commitment to high intellectual values presented his students and friends with an unforgettable example for their lives. He upheld the standard of the history of ideas erected in Germany by his teacher, Friedrich Meinecke.

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Even the best advice, whether stylistic or substantive, cannot eliminate all errors; for these I alone take responsibility.

CHARLES MCCLELLAND

Philadelphia, March 1971