



LIONEL CHARLES ROBBINS

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1898–1984

THE incessant traffic on the spur from the M₄ motorway to Heathrow Airport passes through fields that when Lionel Robbins was born in 1898 were being farmed by his father. In those days London stopped at Hounslow. To the west of it lay a countryside of market gardens and orchards, with waggonettes trundling along leafy lanes with their elms and cottages. Here Lionel grew up, in a farmhouse with a large garden and an orchard beyond: ‘in the springtime’, he has written, ‘when the plum trees were in blossom and the ground beneath was covered with sheets of daffodils and narcissi, the entrance seemed a gateway to paradise.’

Lionel’s father came of Cotswold stock. Himself the youngest son among the seven children of a Kensington greengrocer, he was trained as a market gardener. When he took over a farm at Sipson, he showed exceptional enterprise in the modern methods he used, and he was a model employer. As he prospered he was able to find time for the local and the county council, and the bench; he was active in the Liberal cause; and he was to serve for many years as President of the National Farmers’ Union. His wife was one of the eleven children of a provision merchant with a house in St John’s Wood. She had had a French grandmother, whose liveliness and sensitivity came down to her.

Husband and wife held in common a faith that was strangely incongruous with their warm hearts: they were Strict Baptists, members of a sect dedicated to the worship of an unrelenting Calvinist deity. ‘Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate’: an eternity of torture awaited all those, from the foundation of the world and through ages that yet might be, who were excluded from the number of the elect. Yet the inference, that in that case it didn’t matter what you did, was never taken. On the contrary, the experience of conversion, basic to evangelicals of all kinds, was sought by the Strict Baptists as an earnest of their election: conversion, and the self-control that enabled them to live a sober and godly life. Lionel as a boy sought on his knees

that assurance of escape from the wrath to come; but it was denied him, and a gulf separated him from his elders.

In other respects, they were very close to him, in the affection, encouragement, and security they afforded. Their gaunt creed did not preclude a wide range of interests and enjoyments. His father was well read in the English classics, and attained an almost professional knowledge of the law. His mother's lively mind animated her beauty; when she took him for walks, he did not notice the distance as he listened to the stories she told him. She was a lover of poetry, and wrote verse herself. Had she not died as a still young woman, her great gifts of intellect and character might have been more widely known. As it was, we have Lionel's tribute to her 'high spirits and vivacity', 'the zest and intensity which she brought to the business of living'. In his early years she was his constant companion.

He was eleven years old when she died. Her death, and that of a sister, shook the faith in an all-powerful, all-wise God that his parents had imparted. But as in the course of time he left the terrors and anguish of those early years behind, his parents' sense of duty stayed with him, and their example of hard work and unshakable uprightness. Their steady affection had given him confidence, and the warmth in which his innate gifts could gather strength. Nor was his the bookishness of the lonely child: besides the company of his mother, he had a younger sister (the future historian Caroline) at home, and his many and lively aunts and cousins in St John's Wood.

His learning had begun with a governess, of whom he remembered little. But his was a home in which an appetite for learning would have come to him by osmosis—as well as by the heredity that endowed him with intellectual power. At the age of five he became a rapid and omnivorous reader. Three years later he was sent as a weekly boarder to a preparatory school. It was a horrible place, though he was able to look back on it without horror. But when he was ten years old, and it was time for the next stage, his father would not hear of boarding: he was determined that no son of his should undergo what he himself had had to suffer in a minor 'public school'; he set Lionel to cycle daily to and from the secondary school at Southall, five miles away. The choice was fortunate for him. At Southall he found conscientious and, for the most part, effective teachers, and the company of some boys of congenial interests, who shared the excitement of their discoveries. There was one especially whose love of music and philosophy, and knowledge of them, were

outstanding. Lionel's horizons widened and his personality affirmed itself. He had been spared the aggressive philistinism of the worse kind of boarding school, and the honing down to acceptable contours of scholarship and interests imposed more subtly by the better.

But then came the war. What he would have gone on to but for that we cannot tell, so manifold were his interests and abilities. Instead, foreseeing that he would be caught up in the war when he reached military age, his father decided that he should have at least a year of university life first. So at Michaelmas 1915, when he was still some months short of 17, he entered University College London, to read History and English. Here he heard—'with acceptance', as the Baptists say—the lectures of Pollard and W. P. Ker. But the presence of a young man in the classroom—even one as young as he was—seemed anomalous; and his own mind was on the war. Despite his youth, his father obtained his entry as a cadet in the Royal Artillery.

Here he encountered the barrack-room that he had escaped in most of his schooldays. It places a premium on thick skins, and he was intensely sensitive. He was unprepared for its lewdness, or the triviality and narrowness of interest of most of his companions. They seemed 'a different race of animals'. But he held his own among them, and recognized the qualities of loyalty and courage that many of them were to show before long. Some of the instruction seemed boneheaded or pointless, but he enjoyed the riding school, and found interest in the technicalities of gunnery. The course completed, he awaited gazetting, but was denied it because he was still only 18. Instead he was posted to the depot at Woolwich. The year he spent there, passing through various courses and exercises, made him, he said 'something of a professional'. But he lacked friends; only with two ranker officers did he find company that was accessible and, in its rough and ready way, congenial. In the evenings he could escape to town, for concerts and the theatre—which had been beyond his parents' moral pale.

In the week of his nineteenth birthday, in November 1917, he was posted to France. For a gunner subaltern that was not the rendezvous with death that an infantry officer might feel it to be; but in the OP he would be exposed to an infantryman's dangers; and, much worse when it happened, counter-battery fire would come down on the gun position—suddenly the air would be filled with the rising whine of shells, and the concussion of their shattering bursts. Quiet times, however long they lasted, were

harassed by the thought that at any moment an inferno might erupt. It was an experience to which Lionel adapted himself; we do not know with how much effort, how much experience of the cold clutch of fear. But there is a supportive comradeship that springs up in the field, a will to avoid offence, find common ground, and share harmless jokes; his fellow officers were friendly, and not uncongenial. He became a companionable member of the mess, and found himself happier than at Woolwich. But being shelled, especially when on the move and in the open, is an experience that can be supported only by a totality of commitment, a refusal of recognition of all possibility of existence in peaceful worlds, that numbs the impulse of self-preservation. The more continuous and intense the engagement of all one's faculties in the present, the easier it is to carry on. Lionel has recorded that the days of open warfare, when his battery was caught up in the retreat of Gough's Army in March 1918, were 'exciting and even enjoyable'. On the third day, being sent forward to make contact with the infantry, he bumped the advancing Germans instead, and was shot in the arm. A few days later, he was back in hospital in London.

When he was demobilized, in March 1919, the obvious course for him might seem to have been to go back to University College. He had not the least intention of doing so. His months in France had crammed a long course in the university of life into one term. At the age of 20, he was in some ways old for his years. He must have seen the world around him, and his home in particular, with new eyes. The prospect of renewed dependence on his father was uncongenial. If he had had any purpose before he had been caught up in the war, it was to be a poet; but three years in other tasks, among other sorts of people, had deflected his passionate interests into other channels. The very fact of the war itself, falling like a sudden volcanic eruption on the security of his boyhood, had shaken his faith in the arrangements of society, and roused his critical interest in them. When he had looked out on the miry waste of Paschendaele he had lost all faith in the higher authority that had flung men's lives away there. The insistent problem of the day was the structure of society that let such things happen. The year after the Armistice was a time of the breaking of the nations, a time of mingled revulsion and idealism, when it seemed equally possible that hallowed structures would collapse, and that visionary hopes would be realized. His early indoctrination had implanted in him a sense of special responsibility that remained powerful. He was sure that a radical

change was near. He found the form it should take in Guild Socialism, as this was advocated at the time by G. D. H. Cole and by A. R. Orage in the *New Age*.

In the version that attracted him, the state would own the capital, but the operations would be controlled by the workers of each industry through their trade unions. He sought work accordingly in the trade union movement; applied, and was rejected, for a job as organizer of a union of waiters and chefs. But then an acquaintance, J. J. Mallon (later to be Warden of Toynbee Hall, and his brother-in-law) offered him a post as assistant to the Labour politician Arthur Greenwood as director of a campaign for the nationalization of the drink trade. Here he met many people in and around the Labour movement, and they did not impress him. The practical difficulties of administering any such enterprise as the Guild Socialists envisaged were becoming more apparent to him. His mentor A. R. Orage had himself turned away, to propound Major Douglas's social credit theory—which held that the economy suffered from an inherent tendency to return less purchasing power to the public as employees than it took from them as consumers. This turned Lionel's mind to a branch of study that he had hitherto avoided, and he began to read textbooks of economics.

In this disturbed and disheartened state of mind, he took a period of leave in Paris. Reflecting on his plans, he concluded that he had made a false start. He wanted to return to study, but could not accept renewed dependence on his father, from whom, for all their love for one another, his outspoken socialism had divided him. He must set about making enough money to gain the independence that would enable him to follow his interests. The decision was typical of him in its enterprise and confidence.

The opportunity of making money was opened by an introduction to a stockbroker, who held out the prospect of a partnership. On his way to reach agreement with him, Lionel called for a cup of coffee in a tea shop, and there whom should he come on but his father, on his way back from the offices of the Farmers' Union. Lionel was moved to tell him what he was about. His father, judging that by now Lionel would really prefer to return to university but did not want to be dependent on him, offered to meet the cost by handing over a lump sum forthwith and leaving him to use it as he chose. Lionel reckoned he would need £250 a year; his father wrote a cheque for £750. The next morning Lionel registered at the London School of Economics.

He entered it with the purpose of mastering economics as the source of understanding of the problems of the day that bore so hard on his conscience. Until the war came and brought those problems down on him, his interests had all been in the arts. When as a boy of twelve he had been reading the classical novelists, he had been put on to Ruskin. At school, under an excellent teacher of English, he had been transported by poetry—the Golden Treasury; Coleridge, Keats, and Shelley; Goethe's *Faust*. With that went music; and Schopenhauer—'perhaps the one philosopher who has written of music with a real understanding'. While at Woolwich he explored the theatre—Ibsen, Maeterlinck, and Shaw. Through his friend, the artist Clive Gardiner—the closest male friend of his lifetime—he gained 'the first thrill of discovery of the great masters'. In Paris he had read Dostoevsky, visited the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists in the Louvre, and sat 'morning after morning, gazing in rapture at Cézanne's *Vase Bleu*'. The intense interest in ideas that was fed by his wide and rapid reading was borne onwards by a strong current of emotion. This was a habit of mind to which the philosophical principles of political economy would prove more congenial than the empirical investigations and advanced techniques of an increasingly specialized profession. But there was much in the economics he found taught in the School that he absorbed with an avidity born of his sense of its relevance to the contemporary problems that concerned him so deeply. In his teachers—Hugh Dalton, Allyn Young, and above all Edwin Cannan, he found a tradition of enquiry coming down from Hume, Adam Smith, Ricardo, and John Stuart Mill, but particularly from the last two. It proceeded by the mental representation of typical economic agents, be they businessmen, landlords, taxpayers, or labourers, in what were believed to be typical if simplified situations. The following out of the consequences of the propensities with which these agents were endowed presented itself as a kind of deductive reasoning, as of theorems establishing propositions. If the reasoning was correct and the assumptions were representative of the real world, these propositions were indisputable. They could therefore provide an authoritative guide to policy. Lionel adopted this conception with all the ardour of his love of the arts and his concern for 'the condition of England question'. He made for the heights: as his special subject he chose, not a branch of economics, but the history of political thought—'because it offered more scope for the wide reading of the great international literature in which the

leading minds of the past had explored the possibilities of alternative patterns of political society'. Laski gave him a reading list of a hundred major works, and he read most of them. He worked long hours, by day in the British Museum, at night in his lodgings in Pimlico, reading with outstanding rapidity and power of retention. He was stimulated by the company of some exceptionally mature and able fellow students. At this time, too, there became manifest the tendency of his enthusiasm to magnify the attainments and heighten the characteristics of those he judged of the first class: the vivid and perceptive portraits he has left in his memoirs of some of his teachers endow them with exceptional powers, and turn even their faults into attractions. Of Cannan he was to say, in his own first published work a year or two later, that he owed to him whatever knowledge he had 'of Economic Science and its application to the complex and bewildering problems of our day'. He experienced times of depression, and difficulty—hard to believe by those who knew his later facility—in drafting. But he had great inner strength, and a core of confidence. He meant now to become an academic economist. The strides forward he made were apparent when, even before his final examination, his teachers supported his application for a Fellowship at New College, Oxford. He was short-listed, but not selected.

When, after the examination, he had pursued other unsuccessful applications, Dalton found him a post as assistant to the Director, William Beveridge, in updating his *Unemployment: a Problem of Industry* (1909). The bringing of two such powerful personalities together might have been momentous. But there was no meeting of minds: they moved in different worlds of thought. Beveridge, a Greats man but a natural scientist by bent, had drawn from T. H. Huxley the belief that social science should proceed by patient observation of the facts to the discovery of underlying regularities that might establish social laws on the same basis as natural laws. This was not Lionel's idea of method. The gathering of statistics could and should be left to 'the hewers of wood and drawers of water'. The findings of induction were in practice jejune. Theory alone provided insight, rigour, and the command of wide prospects. The post was significant to him mainly as an opportunity to read the trade cycle theorists. As the appointment approached its term, he applied for and obtained a Rockefeller Travelling Fellowship, to which he looked forward as enabling him to meet the leading American economists; but at the same time he was offered a

temporary lectureship at New College. This he preferred, as offering the better prospect of an academic permanency. So it proved: before the year was out Dalton offered him a lectureship at the School. Two years later, New College asked him to return, and elected him to a Fellowship. Two years later again, the School called him back, to succeed Cannan.

He had been happy at New College, which he looked back on as an earthly paradise. There were notable figures in the Common Room who impressed and attracted him. He had to teach long hours, but some of his pupils were able. But in Oxford at that time economics did not, to say the least, provide the stimulus and prospects that it held at the School. To be offered what was by now one of the leading Chairs in economics in the whole country was a great opportunity; to reach it at the age of 30 would be an outstanding mark of personal distinction.

After only five years of teaching he had reached a peak of his profession. In those years his future had become settled in another way. In 1924 he married Iris Gardiner, sister of Clive. She brought to him qualities of affectionate understanding and insight that were to heighten the joys and uphold him in the troubles of all his years. A son and daughter were born to them in the early years of their marriage.

Her supportive influence was never more needed than in the battle that he felt he had to fight, not long after he acceded to his Chair. There had come, out of the blue, an invitation from Keynes to join a small committee, formed at the request of the Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald, to recommend action in the face of the daily worsening state of economic affairs. The other members were economists of standing and distinction: Hubert Henderson, A. C. Pigou, Josiah Stamp. For the youngest Professor of Economics in the country, the invitation to join them was in itself an honour; it also opened the prospect of a productive collaboration. But when discussion was joined, it appeared that among the expedients that Keynes devised there were two that Lionel could not accept; and when it came to drafting, he insisted on a minority report, for all that he was in a minority of one. Keynes proposed an expansion of public expenditure, to stimulate employment. To Lionel's mind this was the opposite of what was needed. He had become a convinced adherent of the Austrian school, which found the origins of depression in a shortage of savings: what was needed for recovery was more savings, not a bigger deficit. The second sticking point concerned free trade. By general consent, sterling was over-

valued. An overt devaluation was out of the question, but Keynes proposed a covert one, by way of a revenue tariff, the proceeds of which would be used to subsidize exports; when that proved impracticable he fell back on a simple tariff, to be removed when the balance of payments had righted itself. Beyond all the fallacies of protectionism Lionel saw in tariffs all manner of political dangers, at home and abroad. Keynes was furious. Opposition was hard to take from a protégé, the more so when it dashed his hope for a unanimous report. He dismissed Lionel, it is said, as 'a suburban intellectual'. With all the darting rapier play of which he was master, he bore down on him to pierce his intellectual and moral defences. Lionel was deeply hurt, but he would not give way. The courage he needed to make his stand was very great. There was not only the difference in age, experience, and reputation between himself and those on the other side: between him and Keynes there was also the difference of social status, so much greater then than it would be now, between the Etonian and Kingsman, and the young man from a Southall secondary school and the LSE. But for Lionel their disagreement was a moral issue. It might seem that the first issue at least was only technical, a difference of economic analysis, one moreover in which Lionel himself later admitted that he had been quite mistaken. But in both of Keynes's proposals he saw expediency preferred to principle, and the superficial appeal of the easy way out overriding the unpalatable deliverances of rigorous reasoning. He had been raised in a tradition of holding fast that which is good, be it in the face of mockery and persecution. He not only stood his ground in the committee, but continued his opposition to 'the obstruction of imports' outside it.

This had been a second baptism of fire for him. It revealed the intensity of his commitment to the dictates of reason and conscience, the vigour with which he would defend them, and the courage sustained by his self-confidence. The magnanimity of his nature emerged too: he bore no grudge against Keynes, co-operated loyally with him in later years, and paid eloquent tribute to his qualities.

That struggle over, he was free to devote himself to his work as an academic economist. He saw this as the guarding of the tradition of economic theory and its application to the insistent issues of the day. It had come to provide a coherent and comprehensive solution of the problems of value and distribution. This was the achievement of those who in the last fifty years had developed and corrected the classical tradition—at home,

Jevons, Marshall, and Wicksteed; Wicksell in Sweden; Irving Fisher in America; and above all the Austrians, Wieser, Böhm-Bawerk, and latterly especially von Mises and von Hayek, both of whom exerted a strong personal influence on him. What remained was to refine the system at some still remaining points of dubiety, and extend it by introducing complicating hypotheses in successive approximations towards the real world. There was room for elaboration, but the main lines had been established once and for all. It was to the clarification or correction of detail that his own first papers in the journals were devoted.

In this conception of what was basic in economics, there was something of the quest of a religious nature for an orthodoxy. Lionel had long since escaped the particular dogma in which he had been raised, but he continued to feel the need for an ultimate certainty, for eternal verities. Sometimes he spoke of economic doctrine as 'the faith which was once delivered unto the saints', whimsically, but there was truth in the jest. This true faith was under constant attack, moreover, from the hosts of Midian, 'the ignorant and perverse' as he termed them, 'the charlatan and the quack', 'second-rate persons and the psychopathological major prophets', 'the dilettante economists of wealthy universities'. Those who were valiant for the truth must denounce error with the opprobrium attaching to heresy. Much of his exposition was to gain force from his way of contrasting the stern deliverances of theory with the easy options offered by the popularity-seekers and the glib followers of intellectual fashion. His eloquence caught the fervour of the pulpit.

There was an aesthetic element too in his approach to economics. Of Samuel Bailey he wrote: 'The most *blasé* could scarcely resist a thrill at the exquisite delicacy of his exhibition of the ambiguities of the first proposition of Ricardo's *Principles*.' 'A diagram in Barone's *Principi*, one of the most beautiful in the whole range of geometrical economics,' illustrates a theory 'with incomparable elegance'. Formal beauty joined with cogency and clarity in establishing the supremacy of theory. Sir Claus Moser has recorded how when Lionel, visiting the Hermitage, came upon a Rembrandt that he had long wanted to see, he broke into tears. To many of us that capacity to be deeply moved by the arts seems a far more splendid trait than the ability to master the principles of political economy; but he himself would not have set so much distance between them. The sensibility that drew him to formal theory also constituted a gift for it, even though he was

more attracted by the neatness of a demonstration than concerned with the validation of its premisses.

It was a feeling for form that animated his first major publication, *The Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (1932). He said that it originated in dissatisfaction with the prevailing definition of economics as the science of material welfare, but it was also written as a defence of economic theory against Beveridge's attacks on it for its unscientific procedure. This polemical purpose may account for the inadequacy of this *Essay* as an account of the work in which economists were actually engaged, and the ways in which they set about it. There are some inconsistencies and thin places in the argument. But these were the faults of the vigour with which it was driven home. Its influence has been lasting. The *Essay* has been the most widely read of all his publications: after forty years it was still in print. When he returned to the theme before the American Economic Association in 1979, he received an ovation. Like other methodological discourses, the *Essay* was more effective in what it asserted than in what it denied. It held that economics is essentially and distinctively concerned with the allocation of scarce resources as means to a variety of ends; and that 'economic science' proceeds by deduction simply from the assumption that each person acts on a scale of relative valuation. Scarcity was shown to be the essential economic problem common to many forms of activity. The task of the economist was to study 'the formal implications of the relationship between ends and the technical and social environment', but not the changing constitution of that environment itself. The chain of deduction by which the theory of value and distribution was established was made the paradigm for the explanation of chains of causality: only theory could explain the trade cycle. These contentions took a wide effect on the course of economics; in particular, they stimulated the development of the new welfare economics. The writer's sense of the importance of his message conveyed itself to the reader. The propositions were clear-cut and uncompromising: they sustained interest not least where they aroused dissent. The style was arresting. The oratorical command of language, the lucidity, the easy flow that were to mark all Lionel's writing appeared here with all their persuasive force. The ideas mounted on winged words: one thought of Rousseau.

It is remarkable how strongly the influence of Lionel's teacher Edwin Cannan comes through in his writings of the 1930s.

Cannan was outstanding in his readiness to take propositions reached by economic reasoning at a high level of abstraction and descend from the mount to apply them to the situations of daily life, in which many elements are present which the reasoning left out. This was Lionel's approach. Among these elements were the sufferings of those whom economic change impoverishes or uproots. In his Sidney Ball Lecture in 1928 Cannan had given an account of how, if the income that residents in the Isle of Wight receive from the mainland falls off, the balance of payments of the Isle would be adjusted silently and automatically, thanks to the same currency being used in both areas: very evident possibilities of the creation of a 'depressed area' are simply not considered. Lionel uses exactly the same parable, only substituting South Wales for the Isle; and he follows Cannan in quoting Hume's parable of the Heptarchy. He follows Cannan too in his belief that the most important economic principles can be conveyed in plain words—but in both writers the style was also pointed, quick-moving, and persuasive. Cannan had concluded that 'if the income from foreign investments falls off, the balance of trade will "redress" itself so far as is necessary without any of the politicians' impertinent and ignorant attempts to assist it to do so.' Lionel dismissed 'the soi-disant practical politicians who still live in cloud-cuckoo land'. It may have been from Cannan that he derived his way of commending his own views by dismissing others as contemptible.

The subject of the *Essay* was abstract, and so was the theory that attracted him; but it was his interest in contemporary problems that had drawn him into economics, and his work throughout the 1930s was animated by a concern for policy. He published four studies in what he termed Political Economy. His aim throughout was to apply the findings of economic theory to the urgent issues of the day. Those findings brought enlightenment: they showed that many ideas, widely accepted and authoritatively endorsed, were sheer fallacy. It was necessary to uphold clear thinking against confusion, and assert the necessity of surgery against the pedlars of quack remedies. The theory he brought to bear in *The Great Depression* (1934) was an analysis of the trade cycle that he had drawn from the Austrians. The boom originated in too great an extension of credit, that encouraged firms to undertake investments that were not warranted by the eventual demand for their products—hence the slump. The way out was through the liquidation of mistaken investments, the contraction of the over-expanded supply of money, and the

reduction of prices and wages from the levels they had reached in the boom. Looking back in later years, Lionel called this a bad book, because he had failed to take account of the general deflation that had followed the breaking of the boom. The scenario of inflation and overinvestment that he had taken over may well have been representative of some Central European experience in the immediate post-war years, but was far from applicable to the circumstances of the 1930s.

One basic argument runs through the other three works of that decade—*Economic Planning and International Order* (1937); the collection of papers entitled *The Economic Basis of Class Conflict* (1939); and *The Economic Causes of War* (1939). Economic theory shows that welfare will be maximized when consumers spend and save their money as they think best, and producers are led by the pursuit of profit to arrange production to meet consumers' demands. The workings of the market will bring about the optimum allocation of resources if they are unimpeded; but endeavours to impede them are rife—through monopolies and trade unions, and through tariffs, and all manner of other well-meaning or venial intervention by governments. The appeal of these arrangements to sectional self-interest or short-sighted benevolence must be dispelled by the hard clear light of economic principles. We may wish to advance supposed national interests, or protect people from upheavals; but the prosperity of the whole community depends on the making of adjustments—the workers, for instance, in industries faced with a reduction of demand must accept lower wages, or migrate to find jobs elsewhere. The aim must be a world of international liberalism, under a federal government.

After war was declared in 1939 the London School of Economics moved to Cambridge, and Lionel found it not unsatisfying to lecture through that winter to the combined audience of such London and Cambridge students as remained—until the blitzkrieg broke out in May, and then academic life seemed purposeless. The tension was relieved by a phone call from Austin Robinson, inviting him to join the Economic Secretariat of the War Cabinet as an assistant. His instant acceptance was a turning point in his life.

After a time he became Head of the Section. He showed at once a keen and tactical sense of its position. One of its tasks was to review papers on economic issues coming in to the Cabinet from the various Departments concerned. There was evidently a danger that a body of outsiders, drawn in from the academic

world, but placed in this comparatively close relation to the Cabinet, and able to comment upon, perhaps to oppose, papers drafted by the professional Civil Servants of the Departments, might be regarded with suspicion if not hostility. Under John Jewkes's leadership the Section had already shown itself concerned to remove all grounds for that, by establishing friendly and co-operative relations with the Departments. This approach Lionel maintained and developed with the diplomatic skill that now first showed itself in all the strength of his personality. Issues requiring discussion were dealt with as a common problem, in which all parties were equally concerned to find the right answer, even if it meant giving up their initial position. The Section became integrated in a well-understood system of administration of the war effort on the home front. But there were still conflicts of opinion, and positions to be upheld against opposition. Especially in debate with the Treasury and the Board of Trade Lionel's personal touch and force of character made a distinctive impact. One notable contribution of his was to secure the adoption of the German system of points rationing against what was originally the resolute opposition of the Ministry of Food.

The economists of the Section were also 'ideas merchants'. Lionel fostered ideas by continuing the weekly meetings that Jewkes had held for the presentation of discussion papers. He conducted them like seminars, in which the youngest member was free to speak, and the professor would listen. He seldom found it necessary to assert his authority, but the outcome was generally in accordance with his views. He gave the full weight of his support to proposals that came up to him from a staff whose ideas were often in spontaneous agreement with his own, and always influenced by his principles. His support and editorial flair were of critical importance in securing that proposals went forward from the Section in a form likely to attract the attention of Ministers and be adopted by them. The decisive body in all issues of economic and domestic policy was the Lord President's Committee of the Cabinet, under Sir John Anderson. It was to Sir John that Lionel reported: he won his confidence, and himself learned to admire him wholeheartedly. In these transactions Lionel's special gifts in dealing with people—his keen and often amused appreciation of their idiosyncracies, the enthusiasm with which he responded to their good qualities, and the great persuasive power of his combination of fervent language with complete sincerity—all made their mark. In his evidence to the committee that reported in 1943 on 'The Role of the Economist

in the Machinery of Government', he advised against the setting up of a general economic staff, and held that 'the initiation and framing of policy should come, at least in part, from the departments which have to carry it out'. But there would still be need for a central body that could take a synoptic view. The actual perpetuation of the Section owed much to his conduct of it. 'In very large measure', James Meade has said, 'it is to Lionel Robbins, backed by John Anderson, the Minister in charge, and Edward Bridges, the Secretary of the Cabinet, that the country owes the firm establishment of organized professional economic advice in our machinery of government.'

The Section became concerned not only with the immediate problems of the war effort, but with the prospects and principles of reconstruction. The demobilized subaltern whose mind had turned in 1919 to building a better world after the war now found himself during another war, with the bombs and rockets falling around, sleeping at night in a bunk underground, charged once again with developing the ideas on which a better world might be built. The first draft of what became the 1944 White Paper on Employment Policy was written in the Section by James Meade; the final form owed much to Lionel's pen, and its adoption by the Cabinet to his advocacy with Sir John Anderson. While the British contribution to the formation of the International Monetary Fund came from Keynes and the Treasury, the British proposals that led to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade came from the Section.

One who served for a time under Lionel in the Section has written: 'His personal confidence about the way things ought to go, his tactical vigilance (especially with regard to some of the Treasury knights) and his conviction of success ("They won't stand up to the cold steel of reason") had an extraordinary tonic effect on the Section's morale.'

Among the personal relations that were formed at this time was one that brought great joy to Lionel. In all matters of economic strategy, the Treasury at this time was led by Maynard Keynes. It was natural that the Head of the Section should deal with Keynes on many issues of policy, but not that they should find it easy to work together. There had been that painful clash in 1931, and to a recent date Lionel had made clear his sharp difference from Keynes on some matters of policy. Edward Bridges, indeed, had originally been opposed to Lionel's joining the Section, because he feared that it would impair co-operation between the Section and the Treasury. But now their former

differences were far behind them both. They found a common purpose, and discovered a mutual admiration. In some conspicuous ways they had been and were very different, but in upbringing and temperament they had much in common. James Meade who knew them both well remarked on one basic similarity between them—at heart both were do-gooders. Keynes's corrosive wit and Bloomsbury style of life were joined with an intense sense of moral obligation to make life better worth living for people everywhere and for posterity. This harmonized with all that had been bred in Lionel by his childhood. The social conscience of Nonconformity had been instilled in him by his parents' Baptist faith, in Keynes by his mother's Congregationalism. They were alike no less in the intensity of their aesthetic sensibility, and their knowledge of the arts. Each in his way wielded a powerful command of language; both excelled in exposition. Most of all, both were men of action. It was a profound satisfaction to Lionel that they joined forces.

In 1943 he was flown out to America to take part in the Hot Springs conference out of which arose the Food and Agriculture Organisation. The next year he was back to take part with Keynes in the conference at Bretton Woods that founded the International Monetary Fund and the Bank for International Reconstruction and Development. When the diary that he kept at this time is published, it will be received as a work not only of historical value but of great literary accomplishment and attraction. It shows how in these negotiations he came into his own. He discovered, and others around him observed, what he could do supremely well. His tactical sense was acute: the stages by which the British case should be put, and the timing of his own interventions, were matters of careful judgement for him. He had antennae, and empathy. He was keenly interested in the personalities with whom he had to deal, concerned to assess their temperament and abilities, and to understand their outlook and style and the constraints of their actions. What they said he interpreted in the light of his feeling for their motivation. When he argued against them, he did so in terms intelligible to them. His appreciation of the Americans gave him great powers of persuasion with them. After Bretton Woods, when another British delegation had run into acute difficulties in negotiations about oil, Beaverbrook called him back to the rescue; he came out with an agreement which, though far from satisfactory in his view, did at least avert a rupture of Anglo-American relations. The next year, once again, when this time it was Keynes himself

who had reached an impasse, Lionel was a member of the rescue party. The negotiations that ensued arrived at the Loan Agreement; but they had been protracted, and utterly exhausting.

At the end of the war Lionel's special abilities had been recognized at the highest level of administration, where responsibility for the execution of policy merges into a constructive role in devising it. As head of the Economic Section, he had won the respect of Whitehall. In visits to the United States he had shown himself a negotiator of international calibre. It seems unlikely that posts commensurate with these attainments were not offered him, in the public service, in the City. Certainly he could have put himself forward with every prospect of success. But that was not in his character. He was indifferent, even averse, to money-making, advancing a career, or moving in exalted circles. It was as a scholar that he saw himself, charged with a duty to learning and to the diffusion of sound principles in public affairs and in the classroom. His aim was to excel in writing and teaching. His loyalty to the School was intense and enduring. Where the fates seem to us now to have assigned a parting of the ways, he saw only his old path. He returned to the School, happy to take up his work as an economist where he had left it off five years before. For the ensuing thirty years he was to continue to teach at the School, the leader of its economists, the Chairman of the Graduate School committee, and a pervasive and constructive influence in all its affairs. His light but deft touch with his colleagues joined with their affection and respect for him to make his informal methods of administration effective. His strong views on what was and was not the best way to work in economics did not impair his recognition of personal merit in the variety of approaches that developed under his liberal oversight.

During those same years he was to draft a succession of lectures, papers, and books on economic policy; inflation and monetary policy; the dollar shortage and the management of the exchanges; free trade, protection, and customs unions, leading on to international relations at large. To these questions he brought the stock of ideas that he had ingested from Edwin Cannan. He wrote from a point of view that, he said, 'is not exclusively my own but springs from the great traditions of (nonparty) liberal social philosophy and political economy.' One major work, *Political Economy Past and Present* (1976) he devoted to the question, how far the principles of classical political economy were applicable to contemporary problems: the answer he found was that with few exceptions they certainly were. This assured

doctrinal basis enabled him to deal magisterially with contemporary controversy, and dispel new erroneous notions. It is typical that to refute the view of the Radcliffe Committee that the velocity of the circulation of money was capable of indefinite variation, he cited Arthur Young. His task, as he saw it, was not to launch a fresh attack on the problems of the day, or engage in factual investigations of them, but gain a hearing for the 'invincible platitudes' that so many around him—not the 'soi-disant experts' only but people whom he liked and respected—found it easier to wish away.

He was not in the counsels of government, save on two occasions; on one of them, in 1957, he was called back from a holiday in Austria to advise the Chancellor of the Exchequer on a crisis of sterling. But when in 1959 he was made a life peer, he could address himself from the cross benches to the great and growing menace of inflation. The indispensable means of checking it was control of 'the credit base', 'the supply of money', whereby alone 'national expenditure' could be effectively restrained—though fiscal measures could help. But abrupt contraction would precipitate depression: incomes policy, though clumsy and ultimately ineffective, might enable the transition to be made with less unemployment. This urgent message he repeated in speech after speech. At the same time he was concerned with the restoration of stability of the exchanges. Balance of payments problems he regarded as ultimately due to the failure of the authorities in the various centres to regulate their own currencies appropriately. But a practicable working arrangement might be found in the formation of blocs around the United States, Western Europe and Japan, with stable rates of exchange internally, and flexible rates between them.

In his academic work meanwhile he followed a line of his own. While economists around him were pushing out in various directions, devising new methods or investigating matters of fact in detail, he stood fast on the impregnable rock of classical liberalism. His learning commanded respect, his eloquence assured him of a hearing. He served as President of the Royal Economic Society. But to his fellow economists in their increasing professionalism, he appeared as an imposing figure seen through the haze of distance on some lofty eminence, his face turned towards the hinterland of learning. In this return to the classics he found his scholarly vocation. Since 1930 economics had been moving forward along lines uncongenial to his habit of mind. He was not equipped to follow the development of mathematical

economics and econometrics. He respected statistical studies when as in the works of Bowley and Stamp they reached significant conclusions, but in less masterly hands they quite failed to afford the enlightenment he found in theory. When charged with an inquiry into the future of higher education, he was to see it as essential to launch a statistical investigation. But he lacked the scientific curiosity that assembles observations, pores over them, and seeks to account for them. It is understandable, then, that he came to direct his attention increasingly to the history of economic thought. It was here that he moved with the greatest ease and keenest enjoyment, here too that he is generally held to have excelled. None of his works reveal his learning and his gifts of exposition more fully than *The Theory of Economic Policy in English Classical Political Economy* (1952), *Robert Torrens and the Evolution of Classical Economies* (1958), and his Chichele Lectures, *The Theory of Economic Development in the History of Economic Thought* (1968). The work on Torrens in particular shows with what zest he pursued this kind of study: the gathering of eighty-four of that prolific author's publications, all scattered and many of them rare, and the drafting of a full and readable abstract of each, was a singular feat of scholarship. 'It is this work', he wrote later, 'by which I would most wish to be judged as a scholar.' Here as elsewhere in these studies the lucid and pointed writing conveys to the reader the excitement of the writer: the hunt is up.

In these studies he was not concerned to set the classical economists in the circumstances of their time, and show how their thought was stimulated or directed by the problems that pressed on them; he did not place their method and principles within the perspective of a history of ideas; nor did he interpret their thought in the light of biography. Instead, he brought a close attention to bear on their texts. What interested him in these was not so much their findings on the problems of their day as their philosophic grasp of the basic issues of society, and their contribution to the formulation of the enduring principles of political economy. Like them, he himself rode straight at the basic issues of man and society. Like them, he believed that those issues could be debated and decided by argument. Their conclusions remained of present relevance. Much had been added since their day, and some errors had been corrected; but no shift of paradigm separated them from his own way of thought. By the power of their intellects and the force of their exposition, the founding fathers, from David Hume to John Stuart Mill,

compelled his respect. There were giants in the earth in those days, towering above 'the spiritual flatness of our pygmy age'. His own task was to make clear what it was they held, and defend it against the misconceptions of the uninformed and the misrepresentations of the malevolent.

There was another way in which he moved away from his course of pre-war days. The gifts of diplomacy and direction that he had brought to bear in the Economic Secretariat and even more notably in America became recognized in the world of affairs in London: people who had seen him in action were eager to secure his services for the bodies with which they were concerned. One thing, as he himself said, led to another. The chain of appointments had been begun before the war, when the University Senate nominated him to the place it had to fill on the Committee of Management of the Courtauld Institute. He had not been long there before he brought off a coup. Lord Lee of Fareham, who had intended to leave his collection of pictures to the University, had become gravely dissatisfied with the University's response, and threatened to withhold his bequest. Lionel went to see him, and told him how when his own father as President of the National Farmers' Union had had to deal with him as Minister of Agriculture he had found him always a man of his word. Lord Lee's hostility was dispelled, and Lionel came away with the bequest saved. After that it seemed natural that he should succeed to the Chair of the Courtauld Committee, an office that he continued to hold for more than thirty years. It was equally natural, when one remembers his association with Sir John Anderson during the war, that he should have been asked to join the Committee led by Sir John, now Lord Waverley, on the Export of Works of Art. His work on this Committee led in 1953 to an invitation to become a Trustee of the National Gallery. He was to serve three seven-year terms as such, and for two periods to take the Chair. He represented the National Gallery for two terms on the Board of the Tate. Meanwhile Lord Waverley invited him to join the Board of Covent Garden, on the initiative of Lord Drogheda, who had known him as a fellow director of the Economists' Bookshop. He was also to become a director of *The Economist*, and chairman of the Economist Intelligence Unit.

The year 1958 brought an invitation from his friend Lord Poole to succeed him as Chairman of the *Financial Times*, of which Lord Drogheda was Managing Director; Lionel took over the Chair after two experimental years on the Board. The next

year came his appointment to a Life Peerage, on the motion of Harold Macmillan as Prime Minister.

In 1961 he received a call from the Home Secretary, R. A. Butler, who had been known to him when the first Mrs Butler was a fellow governor of the Courtauld. Butler's purpose now was to invite him to chair a Prime Minister's Committee, that should prescribe for the whole pattern and future course of higher education. The invitation came at an inconvenient moment. Lionel had begun work on a long contemplated survey of economic theory; and he had just taken up the Chairmanship of the *Financial Times*. But the importance of the task was unmistakable. His acceptance was to open the most influential of all his activities. His name goes down to posterity as Chairman of the Robbins Committee.

The activities on which it was to report were requiring a growing public expenditure. Seven new universities had been founded since 1953. The Anderson Committee had recommended that student grants, previously provided by local authorities at their own discretion, should be made available to everyone who could gain a place. There was need to consider how these students could best be provided for—on what principles the long-term development of higher education should be based, and how it should be planned and co-ordinated. Here was an opportunity to form for higher education designs as thoroughgoing as those laid down for the schools by the Education Act of 1944.

A Committee with such terms of reference had a choice of several principles. It could have asked how far the diversion of resources into higher education must be limited by taxable capacity. It might have held that the activities that the public were paying for should be directed to forming the qualifications and pursuing the researches that would be of most benefit in the judgement, not of those who pursued them, but of the public who paid for them. But the Committee under Lionel's guidance would have none of this. The innovative and penetrating statistical inquiry carried out for the Committee by Claus Moser revealed a prospective rise in the number of applicants. To Lionel and his colleagues it seemed impossible to deny them the light of learning. It became the dominant principle of the Committee that 'all young persons qualified by ability and attainment to pursue a full-time course in higher education should have the opportunity to do so'. The cost was no bar:

taxation might have to be raised, but that was always possible if the value of education as an investment was recognized.

Two other principles governed the recommendations of the Committee concerning institutions. One was that of academic freedom and autonomy. This precluded the imposition of national priorities. Young people must be free to choose their courses; institutions must be free to offer what courses they chose, though the Report recommended some change in the proportion following different types of course, in particular a relative expansion of science and technology. The third principle also accepted the value of present practices. It held that the autonomous university was the type to which other institutions of higher education such as the technical and the teacher training colleges should be assimilated: all higher education should be covered by 'a seamless robe', and be guided by a single advisory council for all higher education and the arts. But in the matter of the curriculum the endorsement of present practice was qualified by the recommendation, to which Lionel himself attached great importance, that undergraduate courses should be broadened after the Scottish pattern, with consequent freedom for the schools to broaden their sixth-form courses too.

By no means all the recommendations made in pursuance of these principles were adopted. Of the six new universities recommended, only Stirling was launched: the others proved unnecessary, as existing universities raised their estimates of potential expansion. Nine colleges of advanced technology were given university status, but the Government decided against three of the five proposed prestigious institutions of science and technology. It also rejected the recommendation that the teacher training colleges should be linked with universities. Most drastically of all, the Minister of Education rejected the 'seamless robe', and endorsed the binary system made up of an autonomous sector containing the universities and the colleges of advanced technology, and a public sector containing the technical colleges and colleges of education.

But the main principle held good. The Committee's projection saw the number of qualified entrants—qualified without relaxation of existing standards—as being raised by 1980–1 by a factor of more than 2.5. The actual total number of university students came near this mark. An even greater increase, unforeseen by the Committee, came about in the public sector.

The Robbins Report was a document of historic significance. It did not mark a turning point, for the tide of expansion was

flowing strongly already; its proposals appeared at a time when public and Government would be receptive to them. But its first and basic principle validated existing tendencies and set the course of public policy. To the universities, whose existing structure, procedure, and autonomy it endorsed, it came as a charter, a recognition of their present achievement and a warrant for their future growth. Ten British universities conferred honorary degrees on the Chairman. He became Chancellor of the new university of Stirling. The completion of the Committee's task in two and a half years after the digestion of masses of evidence oral and written, and much travelling at home and abroad, had borne witness to the skill and vigour of his leadership. In substance and style alike, the Report bore the mark of his outlook. John Carswell has noted his outstanding confidence that he was right. 'It was a friendly, comforting confidence, and disagreement was tolerated: but made no impression. . . . He saw before him high principles and noble goals, and was liable to ignore or wave aside brutal or inconvenient realities.'¹ Questions concerning the accountability of the universities, the limits of resources for the support of them and their students, and the morale of the enlarged academic bodies, were to assert themselves later.

Amid so many other commitments—he was also a Government director on the board of British Petroleum—in 1962 Lionel assumed the Presidency of the British Academy. His tenure was to be extended for the unusual span of five years. In this as in each of the other responsibilities that he bore, he showed his gift of giving his whole attention, with all his mental energy, to the matter in hand. In the Academy he worked harmoniously with Sir Mortimer Wheeler as Secretary. Here were two distinctive characters who appreciated each other's style. Lionel 'conducted the Academy's affairs,' Sir Mortimer has recorded,² 'not merely with zest and understanding, but with an added quality which I can only attempt to describe in terms of sensibility and affection. . . . He was in touch with every relevant activity; nevertheless, at our frequent working lunches together at the Club our talk would range beyond it into all manner of problems in all manner of places. They were light-hearted affairs, those lunches. . . .'

This summary of his appointments has indicated the personal

¹ John Carswell, *Government and the Universities in Britain* (CUP, 1985).

² Sir Mortimer Wheeler, *The British Academy 1949–1966* (British Academy and OUP, 1970), p. 152.

links between them: those contacts are indeed part of the story, but they would have counted for little—indeed they would never have come about—if his abilities had not been so conspicuously well adapted to the posts he was called on to fill. Unlike some academics, he could make up his mind, and come out firmly for a particular course. This he would commend with speech at once forcible and persuasive, even though there were times when he relied overmuch on an ornate vocabulary. It was through personal contact that he preferred to work, not through memoranda at arm's length—though he could draft rapidly when the occasion required. The diplomatic gifts he had shown during the war made him especially effective in personal relations. When these were difficult, as when he first joined the Courtauld, and even more in a most painful dispute at the Tate, he was effective through his appreciation of character and his steadfast support of those who in his judgement were in the right. It was part of his strength that his judgements were emphatic. He was skilful in public relations, as in the action he took after the theft of a picture from the National Gallery, and in the controversy over the cleaning of pictures there. As a Chairman he sought to advise rather than direct: he took great pains with appointments, but once people were appointed he gave them their head. He was especially interested in young people: at the *Financial Times* he began the practice of bringing in younger members of the staff to meet the Chairman informally after Board meetings. His colleagues respected his combination of decisiveness with modesty.

These commitments did not conflict with his devotion to the School. The suggestion that they would impair the full performance of his duties there was deeply painful to him. It seemed implicit in the reaction of the University—not of the School—to his accession to the Chair of the *Financial Times*. The question arose, under existing practice, of the compatibility of this appointment with the tenure of a full-time Professorship. He was determined to continue to play his full part in the School, in lecturing, supervising graduate students, and administering his Department. He knew he could do this fairly within the terms of a half-time Professorship, and the School was well content with that. But the Senate refused: though that sort of appointment was within the Statutes, some unfortunate experience of it had prompted a resolution to allow it no more. As a principle this might well have been reasonable, however inconvenient in one's own case; but Lionel was deeply hurt by its application to him personally; he felt his good faith impugned by an implied

distrust. He resigned his Chair, and refused to accept the title of Emeritus at the hands of a University that he felt had treated him so shabbily. (Instead, it conferred on him an honorary doctorate.) Under the title of Temporary Lecturer he continued all the work he had planned at the School, to which his loyalty was unshakable.

That loyalty was signally displayed when as Chairman of the Governors he found himself confronted with the student revolts that began in 1968. That it was indeed a confrontation for him, when he could have remained at a distance, was of his own valiant choosing. He spent each day at the School, determined to give no vital ground to the insurgents, but concerned no less to understand their motivation as that might be discerned in long parleys. That attitudes should have emerged so different from any known in his own student days, and so unforeseen in his plan for increased student numbers, was painful to him, but he met the new manifestations with diplomacy as well as firmness. He played a main part in ensuring that the School came through substantially unscathed.

His devotion to the School was to be shown again not long afterwards, when in 1971 he undertook the leadership of the appeal for funds to enable the magnificent library of the School to be re-housed. The opportunity had arisen to acquire a building made suitable by its structure, capacity, and providential closeness to the School's existing quarters. £2,500,000 was needed to complete the purchase of the building and convert it. For most of five years he devoted himself unsparingly, not merely to the duties of a Chairman, but to taking the begging bowl round himself. Those were years in which the name of LSE was no talisman to loosen purse-strings: in the City it still called up the spectre of Laski; the student disorders that the School had recently experienced in common with many other colleges had attracted disproportionate publicity. These might have been years, too, of retirement, when Lionel in his seventies could well have withdrawn to write some work long meditated, long deferred. He chose instead to throw himself into an arduous campaign. Some who worked with him then have wondered if even he would have taken up the task if he had known how heavy and protracted it was to be. But his devotion to the School was unquenchable. He travelled widely, to speak at gatherings of friends of the School—in Barcelona, for example, and Madrid—and to approach individual benefactors in many countries, not least in the United States and, in an exhausting itinerary, in

Japan. He sustained the enthusiasm of the team that worked with him. By midsummer 1975 the critical issue so long in doubt was decided, and the acquisition of the building was assured; the cost of conversion was covered subsequently. The name was changed from 'the Strand' to 'the Lionel Robbins Building', so that readers who resort to that great collection might be reminded of the benefactor to whose exertions they owe its spacious setting.

The roll-call of his honours bears witness to his impact at home and abroad. Beside the ten doctorates from British universities, and six honorary fellowships, there were six honorary degrees from universities overseas. He was made a Companion of the Bath in 1946, a Life Peer in 1959, and a Companion of Honour in 1968.

One evening in July 1982, after watching with excitement the final of the men's singles at Wimbledon, he suffered a severe stroke. In the long struggle that ensued between a strong constitution and crippling disability, there were times when he was able to meet family and friends as his old and lovable self. He died on 15 May 1984.

When those of us who knew him cast our minds back to ask why in the judgement of us all he was one of the great men of his time, we find the reason in his force of character. To his colleagues he was informal, and accessible, yet unmistakably Olympian. His stature, made more noticeable by the thick but smooth hair brushed back from a strong forehead, heightened the impression made by the firm cast of expressive features. Their changes marked a quickness of response. More than most of us, he cared deeply about the issues that came up in talk; he was not disposed to let disagreement pass for the sake of affability. Those who brought their personal concerns to him realized that they had his whole attention. His friends and colleagues responded also to his sense of fun, the wit that was shown in the verses he turned about some of them, and his amused and tolerant observation of the stranger manifestations of human nature. There were exceptions to his amiability. It seemed sometimes that he saw life through a magnifying glass: people and issues loomed large in his eyes, for ill as well as good. He had a black book, and his contempt for those few whom he saw reason to put in it was scathing, though it was not stronger than his admiration for those he approved. But until his values were transgressed, his judgements were generous;

he would seek to extenuate rather than condemn. For some who met him for the first time his courtesy seemed elaborate, his speech orotund. But his authority among his colleagues rested not only on his learning and outstanding power of recall, but also on his openness, and the integrity that it made evident. His self-confidence was singularly devoid of self-seeking. It was learning and the arts, and not himself, that he was concerned to advance. Those among whom he moved in the world of affairs remarked on how unacquisitive he was.

Whatever the insights afforded by the masters of psychology and psycho-analysis, he found little that was helpful to understanding or therapy among the current practitioners: they could teach us nothing about human nature that could not be learned from Shakespeare and the Russian novelists. He himself seemed singularly free from internal conflicts. Sometimes he suffered migraine, but the sustained vigour with which he pressed on through a long working day was exceptional. It was extraordinary that when engaged all day long in the struggle with rebel students, he refreshed his spirits on his return home by beginning to write his *Autobiography*. The text shows no mark of strain, or catharsis, but bears the reader along in the full flow of his powers of perceptive delineation and pointed expression.

His distinctive impact, indeed, owed much to a style equally characteristic in speech and in writing. He was a master of rhetoric, of the power to persuade by force of eloquence. The confidence and fluency of his diction were enhanced by an expressive vocabulary: it could be grandiloquent, but he used it naturally. The positions he took up were not complicated; his propositions were expressed with corresponding clarity. He developed them with a pastoral fervour of exposition, approaching the same theme from different sides, warding off misunderstandings, and heaping opprobrium on error. His discourse was not that of a mind wrestling with a problem: rather it was his way to command the field of controversy from a vantage point of principle. His statements were the more weighty because commonly made in short sentences—qualifications followed separately; rarely did he use even a semicolon. He wrote, too, in the first person—sometimes, it must be said, in the first person pontifical. He felt no need to be concise, but would expand his themes at a largo that set listeners and readers at their ease, at the same time as it conveyed a sense of his mastery of the subject. His powers of persuasion flowed ultimately from the integrity and high emotional charge of his personality, but those qualities were

expressed through creative gifts that made him at his best a great writer and orator.

His greatest gift, manifest in many undertakings from the Economic Section and Hot Springs to Bracken House, Covent Garden, and the Robbins Committee, was for the management and direction of affairs. He was equipped with strength of purpose, powers of persuasion, and the ability to deal with all sorts of people. It is natural to conjecture what career these abilities might have afforded him in politics, if his first contacts with that way of life had not been so discouraging. Probably his intellectual interests were too strong, and his aesthetic sensibility too acute, for him ever to have submitted to a politician's apprenticeship. Certainly the judgement that he did his best work in the world of affairs would have been wholly unwelcome and unacceptable to him. It was not there that he saw his calling. In the preface to *Politics and Economics* (1961) he spoke of his devotion to 'the continued pursuit of those academic interests and activities which have been the main inspiration of my working life'. What had wounded him so deeply in the refusal of the University to continue his Chair on a part-time basis was the imputation that he might neglect the work that he considered the object of his duty and devotion above all else.

One of the great men of his time—but also, it has been well said, a great Renaissance man in his many-sidedness. He was a man of action, vigorous, fertile in initiatives, and realistic; but an idealist too, concerned with the ultimate questions of the human condition; a public servant; a dedicated scholar and teacher; learned in the visual and musical arts to which he was devoted passionately; himself a creative artist at desk and lectern.

Ultimately—a word of which he himself was fond—it was by a moral purpose that he was animated. Though he had come far from the Baptist home and chapel of his boyhood, its influence persisted, not in his expository style alone, but in a compelling sense of the importance of the basic issues of right conduct. Here was his mainspring. Those whose upbringing had been more worldly felt the evangelist in him. It was a commitment to the humanities, to all that elevated the spirit of man, in the arts, in learning, in public affairs. His liberalism expressed a loathing of all that oppressed or demeaned that spirit. He was one who 'knew what he fought for and loved what he knew': *preux chevalier*.

HENRY PHELPS BROWN

Note. A principal source for the earlier years is Lord Robbins's own *Autobiography of an Economist* (1971). The present text also owes much to the comments of a number of readers, and information supplied by them, though none of them must be identified with its contents, or thought necessarily to approve all the judgements expressed in it: Christopher Johnson and other members of Lord Robbins's family; Prof. W. J. Baumol, Dr Anne Bohm, Prof. A. J. Brown, Sir Alec Cairncross, Lord Drogheda, Miss Ambrosine Hurt, Sir Donald MacDougall, Prof. J. E. Meade, Miss N. M. Myers, Prof. Z. A. Silberston, Prof. Thomas Wilson, David Worswick. A bibliography of Lord Robbins's publications is appended to the account and appreciation of his work as an economist by D. P. O'Brien in the *Economic Journal*, xcvi, no. 389 (March 1988), 104-25.