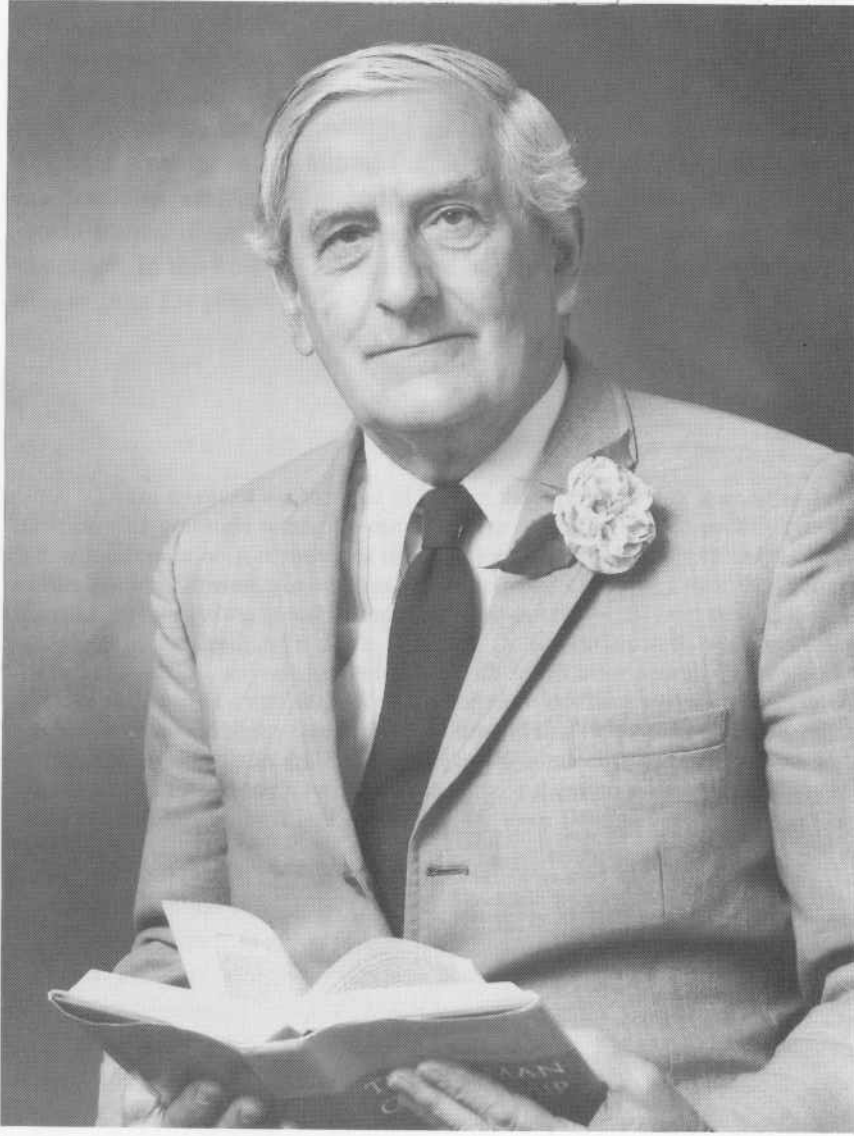


brought into existence in 1981. It is in pursuit of these matches that the British Academy, through its Committee of the Year's Prizes,



A. N. SHERWIN-WHITE

Quoted from the biographical notes of the Year's Prizes.

Adrian Nicholas Sherwin-White 1911–1993

ADRIAN NICHOLAS SHERWIN-WHITE (Nicholas within the family, but Sherwin to all but a few intimates), was born in 1911, the son of a member of the legal department of the London County Council. He entered Merchant Taylors' School in 1923. Despite a period of ill health, which forced him to postpone for a year taking his School Certificate, and in which he learned to teach himself at home, he played a willing part in school sports, just as at college he would row for the second boat, as well as in literary activities; he was celebrated for the skill of his compositions in Latin and Greek verse and prose. From the school he won a Scholarship at St John's College, Oxford, a sister foundation; he matriculated there in 1930, one of four who became Fellows of the Academy. After obtaining first classes in Honour Moderations in Greek and Latin languages and literature and in Greats (1934), he was elected to the Derby Scholarship and to a College Senior Scholarship. His tutor in ancient history had been H. M. Last, who was now to supervise his research. Before its completion he was elected in 1936 to the tutorial Fellowship at St John's vacated by Last's translation to the Camden Chair of Ancient history. There were strong and senior competitors, notably A. H. M. Jones, and it must have been chiefly on Last's recommendation that he was chosen.

The teaching duties that he then assumed did not retard production of his doctoral thesis. Quite the contrary; it was submitted after only three years in 1937, and acclaimed by the examiners, M. Cary and R. Syme. Sherwin disdained to take the degree but converted the thesis

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into his book, *The Roman Citizenship*, which appeared late in 1939 and presumably went to the press in 1938. This was astonishingly rapid progress, all the more when we consider the range of the work, and the maturity of judgement on which the examiners had remarked. It became a classic of modern historical writing on Rome, and was to be notably enlarged, but not altered in its main conclusions, in a second edition (1973). It must have been the principal basis of his election as Fellow of the Academy as early as 1956; the articles published in the interim could have done no more than confirm his scholarly reputation. Indeed it remains the most memorable of all his publications, and I shall have more to say of it in due course.

In the same year as his Fellowship election Sherwin married a contemporary, who had also read Greats at St Hugh's, Marie Downes. They were to have two children. The son, David, would become a script writer for films, and Sherwin took pride in his work on the celebrated film, *If*, and could easily be diverted in tutorials to talk of it. His daughter, Susan, distinguished herself in the study of Hellenistic history, before she abandoned it for social work. Both remembered him as a superb story teller in their childhood; his appearance at the bedside made childhood illnesses almost desirable. Happiness in the family was the background to his on the whole uneventful life as scholar and teacher, occupations in which he was thoroughly content; he used often to say 'how lucky we are to be *paid* for doing what we *like*'.

Even the war affected Sherwin's mode of life less than that of most of his contemporaries. He joined the navy, but a defect of sight barred him from active service. He was employed by the Admiralty in the production of one of the excellent handbooks on foreign lands designed for the guidance of officers who might be concerned in their liberation, occupation or other dealings with them. This was scholarly activity that fitted one of Sherwin's prior interests. Before the war he had travelled extensively in north Africa, and the knowledge thereby acquired bore fruit in his first article (1944) for the *Journal of Roman Studies*, on the historical geography of Algeria, a necessary background for the understanding of the Roman problems in the conquest and administration of that region. It was, however, Anatolia which he was required to study by the Admiralty, and the knowledge he amassed is reflected in his article (*JRS* 1976) on 'Rome, Pamphylia and Cilicia', and in his last book, *Roman Foreign Policy in the East* (London, 1984).

Sherwin had not had to leave Oxford, since it was there that the

handbooks were produced. His life was continuously bound up with his college, of which he remained a Fellow till retirement, actually occupying the same room for forty years. Until 1963 he lived in a closely adjacent house, thereafter 'on the edge of Fyfield, in the heart of St John's rural territory', where he could indulge 'his love of the country, his part in the church, his horses and his racing'. Before the war sailing had been his recreation, and he then had his own yacht, but, later, equestrian sports became a passion; in a talk on the wireless he marvellously communicated his enthusiasm for the sheer beauty of the spectacles. He was also devoted to gardening; while still resident in the town, he had devoted much time to raising fruit, vegetables and flowers in his own garden and allotment. Alpine plants were his speciality, and he was placed by the College in charge of its famous rockery. From 1970 he took over supervision of the whole garden, the finest in Oxford. 'At coffee time most mornings, he would meet the Head Gardener to discuss what was to be done. In the proper season, the trug which he regularly carried would be full of Alpines chosen from a leading grower at Stow-on-the-Wold, whom he often visited.'

Professor Donald Russell, from whose memoir I have quoted, has also written of the vivid and pleasant memories he left with colleagues, of whom some were life-long friends. 'He was never a silent or inaudible companion, and the ebullient zest and occasional mischievousness, which he brought to every activity has always been both endearing and disarming.' All who knew him will recall his forthright utterances, and the crescendo of excitement that his vocal chords could produce. I do not gather that he took a leading part in the administration of the college, any more than he did in the affairs of the Faculty or of the University at large. His chief contribution to the college was therefore that of a tutor. Throughout his time the load of teaching duties usually left no leisure for systematic research or extensive writing except in vacations: he enjoyed only three Sabbatical terms between 1945 and his retirement. It was not till 1966 that on his appointment as a Reader in Roman administrative history, on the basis of personal distinction, his hours of College teaching were restricted. Many no doubt thought that this honour would herald his election as Camden Professor in succession to Sir Ronald Syme in 1970; however, the choice was to fall on me. Sherwin congratulated me with generous warmth: he acknowledged that he was disappointed, but added that he was consoled by not being obliged to migrate from St John's to Brasenose College, to which the chair is attached.

Sherwin once observed to me, justly in my opinion, that the aim and effect of the Oxford course in ancient history was not to turn out historians, but to train pupils in the evaluation of evidence. He approved of this more whole-heartedly than I did, probably having it in mind that very few undergraduates would or should choose a scholarly career, but that in every occupation they would be obliged to make practical decisions on the basis of evidence, often as defective as that on which our reconstructions of events and conditions in the classical world depend. Although his own writings were all concerned with the history of Rome, he prided himself on his skill in teaching Greek history though only of the period down to 403 BC; his pupils were not allowed to opt for study of the fourth century. Now it is precisely of this period that the evidence is so meagre that undergraduates with the limited time at their disposal can try to master it for themselves and reach their own independent judgements. (In my own experience this study was the best training even for scholarly research that I ever received.) It does not surprise me that Professor Stephen Mitchell found him at the time he was being taught 'more illuminating on Greek than Roman history'; he suspects that this was 'determined by the subject matter and the nature of the sources'. 'In his heyday as a tutor,' Professor Russell wrote, he 'shouted, stimulated, prodded, encouraged, and shocked, squeezing every drop out of the primary sources, never afraid to push a heterodox idea, and always willing to consider one. As you crossed the Front Quad, you could hear it going on, and at quite a high pitch.' But he would also impart information: Mitchell could take 'a couple of pages of very detailed and precise notes each session', which proved to be 'useful, when I turned them up many years afterwards'. The tutorials were 'extremely professional', and marked by some 'distance and formality': by this time Sherwin was of another generation from his pupils. Mitchell has the impression that his focus was very much on undergraduate teaching, and that he was tolerant rather than encouraging of research projects. Very probably he thought that the prospects of an academic career were such that the young scholar should not embark on it except from an inner urge and determination.

We may now turn to Sherwin's writing, and first to *The Roman Citizenship*. As Sherwin himself recorded, the subject of his doctoral research was proposed to him by Last, to whose supervision he also acknowledged a great debt on 'points of detail and doctrine'. The theme of the book had indeed been outlined by Last in *The Cambridge Ancient*

History XI (1936), where he maintained that from the earliest times Rome had overcome successive enemies through superiority in manpower, partly by incorporating neighbouring Italian communities in her own citizen body, partly by other arrangements which subordinated them to her control over their foreign relations; but by leaving them local self-government, secured their loyal support. This process eventually led in the Republic to the incorporation of all the Italian peoples at their own demand, or at least with their consent. In the Principate it was extended to the provinces, until it was formally consummated in AD 212 by the grant of the Roman citizenship to virtually all the free inhabitants of the empire, and induced the growth of the sentiment that Rome was the 'common fatherland' of all (pp. 435–8). Sherwin's achievement was to elaborate this theme, in all its ramifications, from the sixth or fifth century BC to the fourth century AD.

The title of the book does not clearly reveal its scope. It was not primarily a study of the Roman conception of citizenship *per se*, and of the obligations, rights and advantages that pertained to Roman citizens, though these had to be discussed. In the first edition he entirely ignored the remarkable practice whereby the Romans from the earliest times admitted to the citizenship individual slaves whom their Roman owners manumitted by due process of law, but in following my suggestion (as he says) of introducing this topic into the second edition, he was perhaps being led away from his original purpose of working out Last's theme. His concern had rather been the process by which Rome so organised *communities* subject to her power as ultimately to win their allegiance. Enfranchisement was only one of the devices used. Another, which was also part of his subject, was the conferment of Latin status. The bonds which in the early Republic had linked Rome with other Latin cities secured many of the rights of Roman citizens to Latins; in its final form Latin status, artificially extended to numerous provincial communities, meant that the local ruling class automatically obtained the Roman citizenship. Other Italian peoples, again, were bound to Rome by treaties which subordinated their foreign relations to Roman control but left them free to manage their domestic affairs. Nor was this local autonomy denied to those communities which had been incorporated or given Latin status. Their citizens could combine traditional loyalty to their own fatherlands with a sense of allegiance to Rome as the 'common fatherland'. This was equally true of provincial peoples, whether or not they were subjects or had treaties with Rome. The growing practice of enfranchising individual members of the local

ruling class (which also gave them access to high positions in the Roman state) also served to bind to Rome the communities they ruled. In these ways Rome first united Italy, and then the empire. The Roman citizenship, when ultimately extended to virtually all the free inhabitants of the empire, had ceased to carry with it the legal privileges that had once set citizens above other subjects, but it was a symbol of this unity.

In the very last sentence of the book Sherwin describes his effort to build up 'in historical sequence, from the earliest days of the Republic, the order of events or impulses by which the Orbis not only became but was recognised to be the Urbs'. It must be confessed that in the long and often controversial discussions of legal institutions, in which the exposition, though never unclear, often lacks the ease and perspicuity displayed by Sherwin whenever he was not immersed in technicalities, and requires the closest attention, the reader may lose sight of the underlying theme; it comes out most plainly in his account of developments in the Principate, and especially in his analysis of the laudations on Rome's imperial achievements composed by provincial writers, some of them witnesses of the disintegration of Roman power. These he adduced as proof that a true imperial patriotism had eventually emerged, without fully confronting the questions of how far they spoke for the masses and not merely the élites, or how far this patriotism was evinced in deeds as well as in words. He was not of course under the illusion that this was explicable merely by the institutional developments he examined; he briefly adverted to many other factors, political, economic and cultural: but he would probably have said that the institutions themselves reflected the aims of the government and furnished the necessary framework in which gratitude for the extension of peace and prosperity, for relatively good government after Augustus, the 'tradition of restrained exploitation that led through to the relatively enlightened provincial administration of the Principate' (*Greece and Rome* 1957, 45), the spread of civilisation in the west, and the supposed readiness in the east to revere a divine monarch, could all take effect.

The second edition of Sherwin's work (1975) reprinted with only minor amendments what he had written over thirty years earlier; he had not changed his views on any matter of great substance, though he had carefully examined the subsequent discussions of scholars and all the new evidence that was relevant. This appeared in substantial addenda of two kinds. In the first (pp. 134–49, 190–220) he reviewed and rebutted theories advanced since 1939 which ran counter to his own reconstruc-

tion of developments in the Republic, in the second (pp. 291–396) he surveyed ‘technical problems’ of Roman and Latin status in the Principate, which he had overlooked earlier and which had indeed come into greater prominence as a result of subsequent research. He was unable to take account of a tardily published inscription, the *Tabula Banasitana*, of great importance to this theme, but when at last it became accessible, he at once republished it with a far superior commentary (*JRS* 1976).

He explained in his preface to the second edition that he had decided not to ‘spoil the relative directness of the original version, in which discussion of the evidence generally predominates over scholarly controversy (apart from the excessive refutation of the unfortunate Dr Rudolph), if I incorporated extensive criticism of modern theories into the script’. The allusion to Rudolph merits comment. His book, *Stadt and Staat im römischen Italien* (1935), bid fair to be received as the standard treatment of the relationship between Rome and the Italian communities which on reception of the Roman citizenship were reduced to municipal status. Rudolph denied that before legislation he imputed to Caesar they retained any large measure of local self-government. This needed rebutting if the view was to be sustained, that Rome was able to win the hearts of her subjects, in this case of the Italian peoples, by enabling them to combine continued pride in their own communities with loyalty to ‘the common fatherland’. But Sherwin did not take this doctrinal ground of disagreement: instead, he showed conclusively that Rudolph’s thesis was incompatible with the documentary evidence.

He was always averse to superimposing general theories on the evidence. It would have suited his own conception of the unifying tendency of Roman policy to assume that all the Italians who revolted in 90 BC, when their demand for the Roman citizenship was refused, sincerely desired incorporation in the Roman state, but he rejected this view, supposing (in my judgement wrongly) that there is reliable testimony that some at least really aimed at resuming full independence. In an article on the political violence common in the last century of the Republic (*JRS* 1956), he insisted that each phase in that revolutionary period must be interpreted in its own context from the actual evidence about men’s conduct at the time, and not by any preconceptions about the character of the power struggle throughout the whole period. Again in his long review (*JRS* 1980) of the important book by W. V. Harris, *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome*, he conceded that Harris had established the pervasiveness among all Romans of

militaristic sentiments, and had subverted the orthodox notion that the Republican government seldom sought imperial expansion; still he thought Harris's thesis that Rome was consistently aggressive too rigid; the causes of each individual war and the nature of each subsequent settlement must be examined without prepossessions, and it would then be found that Rome precipitated some preventive wars in 'a neurosis of fear', but also that annexations were sometimes eschewed, not from any reluctance to extend the empire, but because geographical factors or the insufficiency of manpower made them seem inexpedient at the time. All this was more thoroughly worked out in his last book (*below*).

Unfortunately there are all too many parts of Greek and Roman history for which the evidence, or what passes as evidence, is too meagre, conflicting or dubiously authentic to warrant virtually certain conclusions, and it is not fair to the student if the extent of scholarly controversy is concealed. The addenda in the second edition of *The Roman Citizenship* freely indulge in such controversy; in particular a wrong-headed theory about provincial *municipia* is refuted as thoroughly as Rudolph's thesis. The reader now discovers that much of what Sherwin had written about the early Republic was highly disputable, and in reality covertly polemical. It would have been clearer if alternative reconstructions had been presented, if only to be rebutted. Sherwin had indeed little to say about the reliability of the so-called evidence, much of which may be sheer fiction. Subsequently he would offer some brief observations on the difficulties that arise when we can draw only on late and sometimes conflicting accounts, themselves dependent on sources whose credibility it is hard to assess, for events that occurred perhaps generations or centuries before they were composed, and he would allude to the critical methods designed for ascertaining the truth (*Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* 186 ff., *Roman Foreign Policy in the East* 4 ff.); the 'tradition' on early Roman history is an acute example of these difficulties. But his remarks do not convince me that he had deeply considered this whole matter. We ancient historians are too reluctant to confess that the truth may elude our perspicacity, and Sherwin was no exception. Naturally he was most successful in establishing what is attested by documents, juristic writings and well-informed contemporary witnesses. Such evidence is often available on the institutions of the late Republic and Principate, and it was in his accounts of these both in *The Roman Citizenship* and in other works that Sherwin excelled. In

any case, the great and enduring value of his first book consists above all in the integration of the detailed discussions in the wide and perceptive synthesis of the institutional devices by which Rome unified her dominions.

After the war Sherwin began to prepare a commentary on Pliny's letters, a project again suggested by Last. It appeared in 1966, after sixteen years of work, presumably between 1947 and 1963, when according to the preface it was virtually complete. He says there that he originally intended to deal only with the political letters, and that his commentary remained broadly historical, social and economic; no doubt it was this aspect of the correspondence, especially the letters that Pliny as governor of Bithynia exchanged with Trajan, which constitute our most copious source of information on provincial government in the Principate, that first made the project congenial to him. But, as he says, the private letters 'cover almost every aspect of Roman life except warfare', and he found it 'unsatisfactory' to limit the scope of his work as he had intended; hence, for instance, he would also concern himself with 'the literary and semi-scientific interests that occupied Pliny's leisure hours', not to speak of the descriptions of his villas. In fact he deals as diligently with such subjects as with those in which he had long been an expert. He only 'excluded philological questions of grammar, syntax and vocabulary, except where the elucidation of the context requires it'; yet even such matters often come under his scrutiny, where he thought that his close familiarity with Pliny's style enabled him to contribute, and Sir Roger Mynors acknowledged a special debt to his aid in preparing the new Oxford redaction of the text, which appeared in 1963.

Some of Sherwin's publications in these sixteen years were related, at least indirectly, to the commentary, but not all. They included one of his rare excursions into the study of Roman politics, the article on violence already mentioned. Here he took occasion to acknowledge that 'the Münzer school', of which Syme was now the leading representative, had 'contributed much to the explanation of Roman history by their analysis of factions connected by ties of blood and marriage and capable of mobilizing vast *clientelae*', but he would not admit that this fashionable explanation was the sole key to understanding. I doubt if he really thought such factions of great importance in the Republic: he would later praise A. W. Lintott's *Violence in Republican Rome* for 'the great merit of illuminating Roman politics by considering the ideas of the contestants rather than their matrimonial bulletins' (*JRS* 1969,

287). So too he did not think that decisions in foreign policy could always be explained by 'the pressures of those coteries and factions dear to the Roman historians of today' (*JRS* 1980). He believed in 'the underlying legality of the Roman outlook. A genius for civil law, for civil administration, for municipal government, for compromise in the handling of provincial subjects, all these qualities fit very oddly with an unabashed preference for power politics'; as a true disciple of Last, he regretted the 'sad divorce between the study of Roman politics and of Roman law' (*JRS* 1955, 9). Again, in his important review of Syme's 'tremendous' book on Tacitus, Sherwin found that he 'is frequently speculative and is dominated by ideas of power politics in the Principate that are his own speciality', by the theory that 'the recruitment of the oligarchy is the essence of the political history of the empire, and proceeded by faction and intrigue', a theory Syme supported 'with a wealth of prosopographical detail'. Sherwin conceded that his 'detailed exegesis of family history is a notable addition to knowledge', but it is clear that he thought that many of Syme's prosopographical findings were 'speculative', and more important, that Syme gave far too little attention (and less than Tacitus) to 'the use of power when it had been gained', to the 'most vital part' of the work of emperors, 'to which they devoted most of their working hours': Syme 'underestimates the role of Rome in the control of imperial administration' (*JRS* 1959, 140 ff.). By contrast, Sherwin avowed himself to be 'a Roman public law and administration man', and from *The Roman Citizenship* onwards most, though not all, of his writings fit this description.

In 1962 he was invited to give the Gray lectures at Cambridge. His subject is given in the title of the little book in which they were published in 1966, *Racial Prejudice in Imperial Rome*. At the outset he remarked that 'it is commonplace to assert that the ancient world knew nothing of colour bar and racial prejudice' and that Greeks and Romans were ready to assimilate foreigners and barbarians who acquired their culture'. Rightly, he did not dissent. In 'probing' the question, which he did not hope to exhaust in three lectures, he gave *aperçus* of the views that some Greek and Roman authors took of Iberian, Celtic and German barbarians, and showed that they manifest dislike and contempt for their undeveloped cultures unmixed with fear, since they were confident of their own superiority in power. By contrast the criticisms that some Greeks and Romans made of each other at times betray jealousy and rivalry, and Greek (but not Roman) hostility to the Jews is often bitter, evoked by the Jews' rejection of Hellenic

culture and by the privileges in Greek cities which Rome guaranteed. The work is unpretentious, and original only in detailed insights into the opinions of certain Greek and Roman writers, whom Sherwin had read with a fresh mind. It was indeed intended to appeal to undergraduates. Not surprisingly the lectures commanded 'an agreeably large audience'; the presentation is full of zest, and the style often racy.

Pliny's letters furnish important accounts of trials of former governors for extortion in which Pliny appeared as an advocate. The process had originated, and to some extent remained, one in which the victims were enabled to seek recovery of the losses they had sustained from illegal exactions by officials. It had a long history which Sherwin explored from its beginnings in the second century BC to the time of the great jurists over three centuries later. His first article on this theme in *Proceedings of the British School at Rome* 1949, which he defended against criticisms in *JRS* 1952, is of fundamental importance. He assumed with most scholars that a Republican law on the subject, preserved though incompletely in a bronze inscription, the *Tabula Bembina*, was the work of Gaius Gracchus. Later, he would defend this orthodox dating when it had been challenged afresh (*JRS* 1970). He proved it to be correct, in his own cautious formulation, 'so far as anything is finally proved in ancient history'. Gracchus' creation of a new court to try what Sherwin called 'recovery' cases has generally been seen as primarily a device in his effort to limit the authority of the senate and enhance his own. But by a close analysis of the statute Sherwin showed, in perhaps the most original of all his contributions to the study of Roman public law, that it is carefully framed to maximise the chances that justice would be done; he then proceeded from this analysis and other reliable evidence to reconstruct the political ideas of 'that intelligent and liberal statesman'. This article (*JRS* 1982) illustrated his conviction that ideas mattered in Roman Republican politics, and that the actions of Roman statesmen are not to be explained invariably by greed or ambition: they might be seeking to find solutions in the public interest, as they saw it, for problems of law and administration.

It was, no doubt, the famous exchange of letters between Pliny and Trajan concerning the Christians that led Sherwin to examine the legal basis on which they were persecuted by Rome in and long after Pliny's time; his article in the *Journal of Theological Studies* 1962 was to be reprinted and supplemented in the *Commentary*, where, with his desire to leave nothing untouched on which the letters bear, he inserts an

excursus on the contribution they make to our knowledge of the early Christian liturgy. Christians were punished if they disobeyed official commands to worship the pagan gods or the emperor, which their own faith forbade. Sherwin refuted theories that this could be legally explained by a ban on Christianity or by the fact that the Church was an illegal association or by the belief that Christians were guilty of atrocious crimes; they were condemned simply for refusal to comply with legitimate orders given in virtue of the discretionary prerogative vested in holders of *imperium*. The thesis was not new, but Sherwin placed its truth beyond rational doubt. But more important questions remained: why did governors ever issue commands which they knew Christians would disobey, and why were the persecutions sporadic, intermittent and probably rare except in the 250s and the first decade of the fourth century? To these his answers were manifestly unsatisfying.

In his Sarum lectures at Oxford for 1960–1, Sherwin had already gone back to the earliest phase of contacts between the Roman government and the Christians; they were published in 1963 as *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*. Strangely enough, few modern historians of the Roman Empire had recognised the New Testament as itself an important source for conditions in one part of it, and indeed for the life and thought world of rather humble people, of which other literary and epigraphic texts have little to tell. Indeed they often gave little attention even to Josephus' narratives (Even Rostovtzeff almost neglected Judaea in his *Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*.) Sherwin's book was thus a revelation to many students of Rome. But his primary purpose was to correct errors on Roman matters received in standard works on the New Testament and to show that the settings of the Biblical narratives betoken contemporary familiarity with what we know from our other sources of the administration, judicial proceedings and municipal life in Roman provinces of the first century AD (or of Galilee within the tetrarchy of Herod Antipas).

This encouraged him to argue that as much faith could be given to their accounts of events; it did not occur to him that even novels may accurately reflect contemporary conditions. Admitting that the narratives are sometimes in conflict, he urged that this is true also of many of the accounts of Greek and Roman history (which are often far removed from the events they purport to record), and yet (he contended) modern scholars are rightly confident that critical methods permit them to discern the truth. Sherwin summarily dismissed the objection that the

purpose of the New Testament stories was 'didactic' and not historical, and rejects the 'extreme' kinds of form-criticism which make 'the historical Christ' unknowable; he did not recall the partially similar difficulty in determining the teaching of the historic Socrates from our didactic and contradictory sources. He was himself a practising Churchman, and this may explain his unconvincing adventure into apologetics. However, this epilogue hardly reduces the great value of his stimulating and erudite contribution to New Testament studies.

At last the Commentary appeared, compressed into some 800 pages only by strict economy in style and the resolution not to diverge too far into full discussions of every general issue on which Pliny's correspondence impinges but to concentrate on the full elucidation of what Pliny wrote. Three quarters of the text thus consist in comments on particular passages; on each point Sherwin brings together everything in the letters themselves that bears on it, and his deep and comprehensive knowledge of their contents gives the work its chief value; he then cites many comparable texts from other authors or from inscriptions, and where he thought it necessary, modern writings in which further and better particulars could be found or in which controversies were debated. It was his avowed intention to refer only to 'the most illuminating modern discussions' and to omit 'sound but repetitive stuff', so as 'to make the work manageable'; by implication he would also omit what he thought unsound, though he may mention opinions for the purpose of contesting them. He would later observe with justice that 'total bibliographies in the modern fashion . . . exaggerate the erudition of the author, and add to the expense rather than the profit of the reader' (*Roman Citizenship*, 2nd edn., p. vi). Thus the bibliographical material is highly selective. Of course not every one shared his judgement of what is sound. He also missed or forgot some works that would have saved him from errors, but his critics also taxed him with culpable failure to cite others of value, of which *he* might have said that they were not sufficiently relevant for the elucidation of Pliny, given that the commentary was to be kept within 'manageable' proportions. The introductory matter was chiefly confined to the chronology of the letters, of which he gave a much improved account, to their character (how far are these literary compositions like real letters?), and the like; here too, as in the appendices, he concentrates material that might otherwise have been scattered at many different points.

The reception of the book was disappointing. Some reviews were enthusiastic, others distressing to the author. One ground of complaint

was precisely the limitation of its scope. Thus, it was held, he had missed the opportunity of using the correspondence with Trajan to explore more generally the relationships between emperors and highly placed senators and the extent of the emperor's active supervision of provincial government. There was a valuable study of Pliny's career, but not of his property-holding, and no attempt to delineate his personality, or the society in which he moved, still less to differentiate it from the milieu of other second century writers. All this was to ask for a different kind of book. No doubt it is a matter of regret that Sherwin did not draw on his immense knowledge of the Letters to treat these themes fully elsewhere. In fact he did sketch his impressions of Pliny, and still more of his literary style, in an article in *Greece and Rome* 1969, which reads like an accompaniment to his useful edition for schools of *Fifty Letters of Pliny* (1967), and he gave what an audience found an extremely interesting lecture on society in Pliny's time, which was not published.

Naturally he treated many controversial questions, usually setting out the evidence and arguments for his own conclusions, but not invariably answering objections, or indicating where rival views were best expounded. Reviewers challenged some of his conclusions, or even assumptions from which he proceeded; it is enough to say here that in the cases they noted, and in others where dissent was possible, the final judgement, if it can ever be made, will not necessarily go against Sherwin, and that in general the student of such matters will see from the Commentary itself that he has to make up his own mind. If even the most judicious of the reviewers¹ ended by saying that 'the wise man' would peruse it 'with a proper blend of caution and respect', he was probably not thinking so much of Sherwin's treatment of such questions as of other more avoidable flaws, of which reviewers gave numerous specimens. It is evident that writing at intervals over many years Sherwin sometimes changed his mind on details and that imperfect revision failed to remove all inconsistencies. There were also regrettable omissions and incorrect statements of undoubted facts, some due to bad proof-reading, but others to carelessness, e.g. in giving the titles of modern works, and inexact drafting; thus there is a 'howler' in his summary of the rewards of discharged veterans, which he himself had correctly reported in *The Roman Citizenship*; this and some similar

¹ F. A. Lepper, *Gnomon* 1970, 560–72; he also reviews the criticisms of the previous reviewers.

mistakes were obliterated in later reprints. The fiercest of his reviewers seems to have enjoyed listing mistakes of detail, not always distinguishing from them points on which he differed from Sherwin in judgement. They were most common on prosopographical matters, to which Sherwin never attached so much importance as Syme and his disciples, and in which the reviewer was expert (though not himself inerrant). Apart from various other faults in this field Sherwin had given incorrect or incomplete accounts of sixty persons mentioned by Pliny; Syme (more courteously) later supplemented the list. (Neither distinguished clearly what is known from what is surmised.) How much did this matter? It might be said that ignorance of items of information concerning a number of mostly unimportant individuals would not mislead the student on any significant aspect of Roman government and society in Pliny's time, not even about the character of the upper class milieu to which they belonged. Add up all Sherwin's sheer mistakes of every kind, and they will still constitute a tiny proportion of the information supplied over a vast range of subjects. As another severe critic acknowledged, the Commentary is 'the starting point for all future work on Pliny, and one of the essential tools of study of the Roman empire'.

Some expressed the hope of a revised second edition, but Sherwin met the continuing demand for the book only by issuing reprints with minor corrections. His interest shifted to the subject of his *Roman Foreign Policy in the East 168 BC–AD 1* (1984), for which there were several *Vorarbeiten*. He tells the story of the ever more complete incorporation of the Hellenistic kingdoms and cities of the Near East in the Roman empire. His daughter, to whose assistance he acknowledges a profound debt, had stimulated his interest in the Hellenistic world, and the book often looks at the course of events from the standpoint of these states, and not merely from the Roman side. Since policy was sometimes decided by the course of campaigns, the story takes in warfare as well as diplomacy. Sherwin has much to say on geographical factors, but did not equip the book with maps adequate for the readers' needs. When the wars ended with annexations, he provided excellent accounts of the provincial organisation set up. Interspersed in the narrative there are controversial discussions of problems, especially of chronology. Hardly a word is wasted; lucidity is never sacrificed, but it is hard reading. No subject is treated for the first time, but everywhere there can be found novel suggestions reflecting the author's acumen. Not least notable is the argument that Augustus eschewed expansion in the

east, but only there, because he was conscious of the dangers of attempting conquests from Parthia. Sherwin had come a long way from the conceptions dominant in his youth that the policy both of the senate and of Augustus was essentially defensive.

The book was his last substantial work, except that he derived from it an excellent chapter in the new *Cambridge Ancient History* on Rome and the east during the years 84–56 BC. In 1974–7 he was President of the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies. In 1978 he retired from his Oxford Readership. Deafness now cut him off from social contacts; mercifully he could still hear his wife. His last years were thus spent quietly in the country, still cultivating his garden. His 1992 Christmas card said, ‘We remain in strength’. Donald Russell (his colleague for thirty years) wrote that ‘a modest content, grounded in his faith, his scholarship, his family, his love of God’s world of plants and horses, fields and seas and skies, and his devotion to Church and College, carried him through some discouragement and disappointment to a happiness the memory of which will surely remain with Marie and Susan and David, as with all of us, as a comfort and pleasure’.

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Note. For assistance I have to thank Professor Stephen Mitchell, Mr N. Purcell, Dr Susan Sherwin-White, and Professor Donald Russell, from whose obituary note in *St John’s College Notes* 1993, I have been permitted to quote. I have also drawn on the recollections of Mr A. J. C. Saunders, printed in *The Merchant Taylors’ Society News Sheet* 1993/4.