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SIR CHARLES K. WEBSTER, K.C.M.G.

## CHARLES KINGSLEY WEBSTER

1886-1961

THE life of Charles Kingsley Webster is the record of one man's achievement. In each of his callings, as scholar, teacher, servant of the State, and champion of high causes, Webster did notable things, and in doing them fulfilled himself to an enviable degree. Almost alone among tasks which he essayed but did not discharge was that of setting down his own memories of it all: of a projected autobiography he left only the table of contents and one unfinished chapter. Since the range and interest of his career, and the abundance of the materials, alike argue strongly for its being recounted on appropriate scale, what has been attempted here is no more than the outline of a life and a sketch for a portrait.

Webster began with few advantages beyond his own gifts. Sixth of the seven children of a Liverpool forwarding agent with a passion for golf, the boy owed his baptismal names, we may be sure, to the fame of *Westward Ho!* and *The Water Babies*, not to their author's undistinguished tenure of a Regius Chair of History. Neither the father's means, nor his interest, would have stretched to keeping a son at school beyond his early teens, and from that point Charles had to provide for his own education. The permanent weakening of his eyesight caused by clandestine, candle-lit reading after an attack of measles—perhaps of those school-stories to which he was devoted—was not an unqualified misfortune: it was to deny him the combatant service which he would have chosen in 1914, and if it stalked him, especially in later life, with the dread of blindness, his eyes did in fact serve him until the end.

His first benefactor was the school at which he spent the nine years from 1895 to 1904, and of which he was to remain a loyal and generous Old Boy for nearly sixty. Of respectable antiquity, Merchant Taylors' School, Crosby, owes its latter-day excellence to a great headmaster, Canon Armour, who in the forty years from 1863 quadrupled its numbers and made its intellectual reputation. The last decade of Armour's headship was deservedly a vintage period. Between 1902 and 1909 the school sent forth, besides Webster, three future professors and a reader in L. W. Grensted, N. B. Jopson, Eric Peet, and C. R. Fay; a head of the Liverpool School of Architecture in Lionel

Budden; a M.O.H. for London in Allan Daley; and a headmaster of Rydal in A. J. Costain. To the stimulus of such company no one of Webster's stamp could have failed to respond, and from 1900 he was a regular prize-winner. By 1903, when he won the Great Crosby Scholarship for the best scholar going to Oxford or Cambridge, his future was half assured, and in the following year he made certain of it by gaining an Open Scholarship at King's College, Cambridge—being the third Crosbeian to do so in four years—and a scholarship from the Lancashire County Council.

In other ways, too, the boy was already showing himself the father to the man. In a school with a strong debating tradition Webster excelled at this art. Although in a debate of 1902 he supported C. R. Fay in opposing a protectionist motion, 'with every burning word he spoke full of rage and full of grief', he was usually to be found on the conservative side; but with history at stake, as it was in a debate of 1903 on Napoleon, he revealed not only knowledge but an admiration of the emperor which he was never to forswear. Webster's other great delight was in ball-games. Of this side of the school's life Fay, himself an outstanding player, was later to write that 'at least one-third of our time and two-thirds of our thought were given to games. . . . I am told today that the scholars and the athletes are not normally the same group: in our day they had to be. . . .' Webster was one of the scholar-players. At cricket and tennis he was handicapped by his poor sight, but his size and energy made him a formidable member of the Rugby scrum. To the chapter of autobiography which he left at his death there was found appended a copy, in his hand, of the scorecard of the Test Match at Old Trafford in July 1902 which the Australians won by three runs, with some notes on the highlights of that epic contest.

The educative processes which Webster's school had so effectively begun his college and university were well fitted to continue. He entered King's at a time when what it had to offer was both admirable in itself and salutary to one of his temperament and upbringing; while the university boasted outstanding scholarship in his own and neighbouring fields. Maitland and Acton, to his deep regret, he just missed, but he heard Bury, Marshall, and Westlake; and although he deplored their remoteness from the few undergraduates who followed their lectures, not to mention the many who did not, he knew that he had been in the presence of greatness. With the lecturers who were drawn from his own college, Reddaway, Lowes Dickinson, Pigou, and

Temperley, he naturally felt a closer bond. But it was through the intimacy of the tutorial, the society meeting, and the reading-party that the Fellows best served their charges, and Kingsmen of Webster's generation were fortunate in the number of bachelor Fellows who were prepared to foster what one of that generation has called 'intellectual homosexuality'. For those who, like Webster, came to the college from modest homes and little-known schools the encouragement was not only intellectual: to Oscar Browning, in particular, he was to owe much more than guidance about history.

In this milieu Webster developed naturally along lines already indicated at school. He worked hard at his own subject, and although, partly because of one of those acute digestive upsets which afflicted him at times of stress, he missed a First in Part I, he secured one in Part II. In his second year he had won the Members' Prize for English Essay. He had revelled in debate and discussion, both in and out of society meetings, and he had played uninhibited football for the XV and proved a powerful no. 5 in the second boat. Not least, he had confirmed the habit, which was to become lifelong, of making friends. Closest of these were his fellows of Staircase D, and among them pre-eminently Stuart Brown, afterwards a pillar of the India Office. Other intimates were Noel Compton-Burnett and Harold Fry (both killed in the First World War), William Haslam, Shane Leslie, and Gerard Young. Later, when Webster became a Fellow, F. E. Adcock, A. D. Knox, Frank Birch, and Philip Baker were to join the company. One of the bonds which linked this group of young men was, as Webster himself said, 'a sense of social duty higher than that of any of its predecessors and a greater belief that remedies could be found for the evils of the time'. A by-product of this belief was the holiday boat at Rye where Kingsmen entertained working-class lads, an enterprise in which Webster took an enthusiastic part.

Both Webster's decision to pursue the study of history, and his choice of subject, owed something to this sense of social obligation. As he told the hearers of his Ford Lectures in 1948, the topic he chose sprang from his brush with the European Alliance for the Tripos.

I was much puzzled by it; and in fact did very badly in it in my examination papers which were corrected by a don who not long afterwards became a Colonial Bishop. But I got immensely interested in it; and determined to find out the contribution towards it of my own country which seemed to me to need some explanation. When I had

finished that task, say in a year or two, I thought I would go on to the period of the thirties and begin an examination of the Concert of Europe which succeeded the Alliance. Thus in a few years I might be able to write a book which would assist men of action to construct the new international institutions which I thought I saw growing up under my eyes and so make a small contribution to preserve the world's peace. Unfortunately there were two mistakes in this calculation. I underrated both the pace at which history would be made and the pace at which history could be written.

The two-and-a-half years from October 1907 to March 1910 Webster devoted to his dissertation. He supported himself from scholarships, by deputizing for J. R. Tanner on 'Modern Constitutional Documents' and by tutoring at Trinity. Much of the work had to be done at the Record Office, and while doing it Webster lived very frugally in lodgings in Southwark, at the same time paying a copyist considerably more than he allowed himself to live on. But the effort was not in vain, for in March 1910 he was given a Fellowship at King's, and with it a research scholarship of £100 from an anonymous donor. Thus recognized and encouraged Webster began a fresh spell of work which was to last until 1914. A further year (1911) spent among the Foreign Office papers (and an appearance before the Royal Commission to give evidence about them) was followed by a series of sustained attacks upon the archives of foreign courts. The early months of 1912 were spent at Vienna, with a return by way of Paris, and the autumn of 1913 saw Berlin, Hanover, Warsaw, Cracow, and St. Petersburg brought under contribution. Here were laid the foundations both of the study of Castlereagh and of Webster's fame as the foremost English scholar in the field. He grasped the opportunity of meeting the continental masters, Schieman, Fournier, Pribram, and Weil, as well as of rising men such as Handelsmann of Warsaw, with whom he forged a friendship ended only by the Polish historian's death in the Second World War. The two papers of 1912-13 to the Royal Historical Society, of which Webster had become a Fellow in 1910, and the first article in the Review alike attracted attention, and his role at the International Historical Congress in London in April 1913 foreshadowed the prominence he was later to attain at these gatherings.

A growing reputation was not matched by a rising income or settled prospects. Webster lived from hand to mouth, on research grants and the meagre rewards of casual teaching such as the Extension Class which he took at Portsmouth in 1912-13.

It was during this lean period that he tried for a Research Scholarship at the London School of Economics to study the Conference System of 1815–22. Nearly forty years later, from the eminence of the Stevenson Chair, he recalled how Mrs. Webb had declared, ‘with a rising inflection in her voice, “Why! this is pure political history!”’, a remark which, he thought, ‘betrayed an imperfect analysis of all the relevant facts’. Rebuffed by London, in the autumn of 1913 Webster went back into residence at King’s, where he was soon afterwards made Steward. The appointment was a victory for J. M. Keynes in his campaign to improve the administration of the college finances, for Webster was one of the ‘young Turks’ who supported this Keynesian revolution. He also took a hand in the establishment of the Junior Historians, a pressure-group of young teachers which, after half a century, still marches in the van of progress.

In March 1914 Webster received an offer of the Chair of Modern History at Liverpool. To achieve at twenty-eight, and with no book yet written, the succession to Ramsay Muir, material security, and (with any luck) matrimony—this was a chance not to be missed, and Webster bade farewell to the college and university which had reared but could not retain him. By the time he took up his new post, however, the country was at war, and within six months he was translated to another sphere. Yet during this brief first tenure he did two notable things. His Inaugural Lecture, delivered in December, on ‘The Study of Nineteenth Century Diplomacy’, sounded a challenge which not even the thunder of war could wholly drown; and his foundation of the Canning Club, for ‘the discussion of subjects connected with Politics and Modern History’, was to give students of history at Liverpool the benefits which their new professor had derived from the Political Society of King’s. Named after the street in which Webster was living, and where its meetings were held, the club met under Webster’s presidency until March 1915 and was kept alive in his absence by Dr. George Veitch. Its early minute books have recently come to light.

In the chapter of autobiography Webster reveals that ‘from the outset of the war [I was] resolved, if I survived, to get to the Congress which would inevitably conclude it’. In the spring of 1915 he took a commission in the Army Service Corps, with the intention of having himself posted to the Balkans, a theatre where he hoped to gain the experience which would qualify him to assist in the Settlement. After serving for a year at Newcastle, and earning a recommendation on grounds of ‘marked ability’,

he applied for posting overseas, preferably in the Balkans, but found himself instead put in charge of the Detail Issue Store at Étaples. There he spent nine unhappy months. During the severe winter of 1916 he contracted a painful and persistent skin disease. Then, following criticism of the arrangements at the depot, his relations with his C.O. became strained, and he twice applied for transfer to a Divisional Train. Transferred he was, but not in that direction. In the autumn of 1917 he was brought back to the War Office as a member of the Military Intelligence Division. This feat of wizardry was performed by his friend and former teacher Harold Temperley, the head of the section concerned. It was the turning-point in Webster's career.

He had already taken, in April 1915, a step of equal importance in his private life. This was his marriage to Nora Harvey. His bride, who had been brought up in Italy, where her grandfather had held an appointment at the Court of Parma, was beautiful, charming, and accomplished, and these gifts, with others of a more practical kind, she was to devote without stint to her husband's happiness and welfare. She was to accompany him on nearly all his travels, relieve him of an infinity of cares, and help to gain and keep for him a multitude of friends. In his scholarly life she was content to play a humble part, and her name is to be found in prefaces, not on title-pages. But for a host of people 'Charles' was to appear, as indeed he was to become, inseparable from 'Nora'. To his students, above all, she came as a revelation of what a professor's wife might be, and there is none of them who does not carry affectionate memories of her.

It was from the War Office that Webster was seconded, in the summer of 1918, to place his knowledge of an earlier settlement at the disposal of the peacemakers. Thus there came to be written, in eleven weeks, his first book, *The Congress of Vienna*. Spurned at Paris, above all by President Wilson, to whom what he mis-called the Holy Alliance was anathema, this work, which was quickly published, has for forty years remained unchallenged as a minor masterpiece. But for its author at the time it was primarily a means to an end, and to attain that end, a place at the Peace Conference, called for diplomacy as well as scholarship. Both proved equal to the test, and in December 1918 Webster went over as Secretary to the Military Section of the British Delegation, a post which, as he has written, 'I invented for myself'.

Webster's activities during the seven months he spent at Paris are to be glimpsed in the *History of the Peace Conference*.

They are related more fully and frankly in the chapter of autobiography which will one day be made public. The Military Section played a bigger part than its name implies, or than, perhaps, in a more orderly arrangement it should have done; but this gave its able and devoted staff opportunities to exert influence, and that influence was generally a good one. In one episode, the release of food to a starving Germany, their intervention was decisive. They also procured a number of changes in the terms of the Settlement, and when, in after years, Webster began a lecture with the words 'I wish to discuss a clause which I put into the Treaty of Versailles' the effect was obtained without distortion of the truth.

Webster's sojourn in Paris, besides enabling him to study at close range the making, and the makers, of history, gave him unlimited opportunity to satisfy his gregarious instincts. He enormously broadened his acquaintanceship and made many new friends. His own chief, Sir Henry Wilson, teased him with the nickname 'Junker' for being more military than the soldiers, and thought all the better of him for having 'a peach of a wife'. Among his colleagues two of the regular officers, Cornwall and Kisch, and one of the temporary sort, Humphrey Sumner, were to become lifelong friends. Then there were the Americans, notably Haskins and Shotwell, who would form the nucleus of an ever-widening acquaintanceship in the New World. But of all the men whom he met at this time none was to make so deep an impression on him as Chaim Weizmann. Webster himself recalled, nearly forty years later, the circumstances of their association in his eloquent lecture 'The Founder of the National Home'. Weizmann inspired in him an enduring interest in Jewry and Palestine, and one of the last projects with which he concerned himself was a history of anti-Semitism and persecution.

Webster was demobilized on 26 July 1919. Instead of the holiday which he needed, and had earned, he plunged at once into the preparations for his return to academic life. He was back at Liverpool at the opening of the session, to face the problems of an influx of students and a remodelled B.A. course. On top of this he was heavily involved in the *History of the Peace Conference* which Harold Temperley was editing for the Institute of International Affairs, a body which Webster had helped to found at Paris, as well as in the Liverpool Branch of the League of Nations Union. It is a tribute to Webster's toughness and resilience that when the influenza caught him in November he



showed such powers of resistance; but he was really ill, and was forced to take one of his rare periods of convalescence.

Webster spent three more years at Liverpool, and the warmth of the tributes which his departure was to evoke show how greatly he was valued there. As a teacher he attained an excellence which would mature with the years: both in and out of the lecture room his learning, enthusiasm, and vitality carried all before them. As a policy-maker he was always to the fore in schemes for enlarging the university's range and resources: thus he campaigned for a School of Administration designed to train Englishmen going abroad, especially to the new Mandates. He laboured to promote postgraduate study, and the number of M.A. students grew steadily. It was to facilitate work in his own field that he sought, without success, to have some of the Foreign Office records transferred to Liverpool, an arrangement similar to that which obtained at Cambridge. But his greatest service to the university was his cultivation of its links with the city, a task for which the local boy who had made good was peculiarly fitted. It was as a vehicle for this, as well as for spreading its own message, that he helped to fashion the local branch of the League of Nations Union. The public lectures which he organized, many by leading figures—Kingsmen prominent among them—whom he coaxed north; the open-air rallies under the banner which his wife made and embroidered; the stream of articles and letters to the press—these testified not only to his burning zeal for the League but also to his conviction that those few who had gained the *entrée* to the worlds of scholarship and affairs had a prime duty to diffuse their insights as widely as possible.

In the midst of all this his own work advanced to fruition. In 1921 there appeared the source-book, *British Diplomacy 1813-1815*, on which generations of students would be reared, and in the following year the magisterial chapter in the first volume of the 'Cambridge Foreign Policy'. But the *magnum opus* hung fire, and the urge to finish it was one of the reasons for Webster's growing restiveness and desire for a change of post. Another was his yearning for facilities to study the international scene, and to shape opinion on it, beyond those available to the head of a large history department. In the course of 1922 an exciting opportunity presented itself. The Wilson Chair of International Politics at Aberystwyth had fallen vacant on the resignation of Alfred Zimmern. Its co-founder with his sisters, David Davies, was a Kingsman, and Webster was invited to discuss its future. The up-shot was a revised Trust Deed which established a chair

unique in this country. It was offered to Webster and accepted; and he entered upon its duties on 1 January 1923.

Webster intended to head the next chapter of his autobiography 'The Peripatetic Professor'; and mobility was indeed to be the keynote of these years. The terms of the Wilson Chair required him to spend one-third of each year at the college, one-third in study abroad, and one-third at any university in the world which desired his services. It was this tripartite obligation which set the pattern of his life between the ages of thirty-six and forty-five. The summer and autumn were usually passed in Wales, the long vacation at Morben Issa, the farm overlooking the Dovey estuary where Webster both wrote and relaxed, the autumn term in residence at the college. From 1927 an appointment for the second semester at Harvard fulfilled the foreign teaching requirement, but it was earlier discharged by a succession of engagements in Europe and America. In 1925, after attending the American Historical Association's Convention (which included the Second Anglo-American Conference) at Richmond, Virginia, Webster spent eight months in America: he taught at Minnesota and California, gave many public addresses, and visited thirty States. In the summer of 1926 he made an extended tour of south-east Europe. In 1927 his first semester at Harvard was followed, between July and December, by attendance at the Second Pacific Relations Conference at Honolulu and tours of Japan, Korea, China, and India. 'I feel', Webster wrote on his return, 'that I have obtained at least a bird's-eye view of Far Eastern problems.' Two years later he was again studying them, at closer—indeed for a time at uncomfortably close—range. In September 1929 he travelled, with his wife and Eileen Power, by way of Moscow and the Trans-Siberian Railway to Vladivostock, and thence, after a second tour of China, to Kyoto for another Pacific Relations Conference. He then crossed to America, carried out a coast-to-coast lecture tour for the Foreign Policy Association, and wound up with his semester's teaching at Harvard and a conference on international relations at Yale.

Each of these journeys was a marathon of academic lectures, public engagements, interviews, and discussions; but Webster's stamina proved equal to their incessant demands and continuous strain. (Only his digestion succumbed from time to time to the combination of stress and exotic foods.) Wherever he went he sought out the wielders of power and framers of policy. On his first American trip he talked with President Coolidge and

Secretaries Borah and Herbert Hoover; the first visit to China brought a meeting with Chang Tso Lin and the second one with Chiang Kai Shek; while his gallery of European notabilities included Litvinov, Pilsudski, and Queen Marie of Roumania. He was avid of sightseeing and experience: the tour of India had to include the passage of the Khyber Pass, a visit to the Grand Canyon would have been incomplete without its (for him terrifying) descent by mule. But such diversions were the reward of great labours, and in every exchange, large or small, Webster more than paid his way.

The global achievements of the Wilson Professor brought lustre to his department and college, and during part of every year Aberystwyth was the livelier for his presence. He had inaugurated himself with great éclat, and his public lectures quickly achieved the status of 'occasions' which few would willingly have missed. But in Wales no more than elsewhere was the humdrum neglected for the spectacular. The department was fostered and a line of able students nurtured in its discipline; while, as at Liverpool, the League of Nations, and its implications for teaching, monopolized extra-mural activity. In a kind of microcosm of his world-travels Webster traversed the Principality addressing its teachers—to the number of four or five thousand in all—on World Citizenship; and to him is to be ascribed in no small measure that international-mindedness which prevails among the Welsh people of our own day.

Most of Webster's writing during these years was concerned, as befitted his office, with the contemporary scene and was designed to inform and mould both British and foreign opinion. It, too, was centred on the League. His regular attendance at Assembly Meetings, and his friendship with so many of those who mattered there, helped to make him an outstanding commentator, and the articles which he contributed to the *Nation and Athenæum* in 1923-5 were journalism at its enlightened best. Later, he was to garner his knowledge in the volume called *The League of Nations in Theory and Practice* which he brought out with his colleague Sydney Herbert in 1933. Of the other 'occasional' writings the most notable was the address 'What the World Owes to President Wilson' which Webster delivered at Washington in December 1929 and which was printed in the *Congressional Record*; and the most immediately effective the article in the *Nation* of June 1924 in which he advocated both the throwing open of the Foreign Office records to the year 1878 and the publication of the British documents on the origin of the war.

Yet time and energy had to be, and were, found to bring to completion the study of *Castlereagh*. The first volume, covering the years 1815–22, had been begun in the summer of 1922 but was interrupted by illness and not finished until July 1924; this last delay taxed Webster's patience to the limit, and the child so long in gestation had a difficult delivery. Its companion, the volume on 1812–15, was deferred until after the travels; it was written in 1930, and appeared in 1931. The '*Castlereagh*' stands—alongside Temperley's '*Canning*', which by agreement followed its first volume by a few months—so securely among those works which, to adopt Sir Lewis Namier's test of greatness, make it impossible ever to go back upon their treatment of the subject, that its appraisal here would be all but superfluous. One thing is abundantly clear: it is how much the work had gained from all that had befallen its author between its beginning and its ending. If it remained, as it had begun, a study in the relations between governments, and above all between the men who personified those governments, this theme would be presented with an insight and understanding to which the young man who had essayed it a dozen years before could not have attained. The peacemakers of Paris, who had themselves set so little store by history, were not to be without service to the historian of their precursors.

Within a year of the appearance of the second *Castlereagh* Webster was appointed Professor of International History at the London School of Economics. One of two chairs—the other being the Research Professorship at Chatham House—newly founded by the gift of Sir Daniel Stevenson, the post involved some teaching of a specialist nature but was calculated to afford its holder ample time and facilities for his own work; and its chief attraction to Webster was as a base for his next '*œuvre de longue haleine*', a study of Palmerston's foreign policy. But besides translating him to London, where he had always hoped to spend a part of his career, the new chair admitted him to the brilliant and congenial society of Houghton Street. A college which would hear, within a single session, the inaugural lectures of Eileen Power and R. H. Tawney, as well as Webster's own, was an institution not to be outmatched in intellectual distinction or progressive zeal. Webster was to remain at the School until his retirement from teaching, and it came to rank second only to King's in his affections.

The School gave him a platform—and huge and enthusiastic audiences—for lectures of unequalled power; a Special Subject

class in which smaller groups were introduced to documentary study; and the postgraduate seminar which was to become the training-ground for a generation of workers in the field. Held at his home, first in Brunswick and Mecklenburgh Square and, after the war, at Swiss Cottage, and preceded by tea dispensed by Nora, this weekly meeting approached as near to the ideal seminar laid up in a celestial university as its participants could imagine. They themselves were drawn to it from near and far, for they were the harvest of the journeyings of the years gone by; and it was not unknown for the proceedings to be conducted in the language of a continental member. The seminar was a 'cell' of that world-wide fellowship of international historians which Webster was to do more than any other Englishman of his time to foster and sustain.

In Webster's own tale of scholarship this was pre-eminently the 'age of Palmerston'. Thirty years and more had passed since he had pillaged the archives for the 'Castlereagh,' but he attacked the new and yet more formidable mass of material with infectious *élan*. The vacations were passed either at Broadlands, where alone some 20,000 letters were gone through and a copyist employed continuously for two years, or in one of the capitals—Vienna again taking pride of place—whose archives had again to be laboriously searched; while the Record Office could be visited almost every day during term. The well-tried scheme of note-taking was again brought into play, as were, by a characteristic piece of economy, the original set of boxes which, emptied of Castlereagh, were now appropriated to his successor. As the work advanced its harbingers began to appear, the Raleigh Lecture and an article in 1934, the paper at the Zurich Congress in 1938, and, after the war, the Ford Lectures. By contrast, the other notable publication of these years harked back to the days of yore: it was the splendid collection of documents on British recognition of Latin-American Independence produced for the Ibero-American Institute in 1938.

Bounteous in these satisfactions, the thirties would have been a high summer for Webster but for the ominousness of the wider scene. The triumph of lawlessness, and the martyrdom of the League, were for him a personal no less than a public tragedy. He gave generously, if with dwindling conviction, of his time and thought to the problems of disarmament and security: in particular, the Chatham House study of *Sanctions* (1935) bears the imprint of his urgent study of this all-too-topical subject. He could not fail to contrast the shifts and evasions of British

policy with the skill and resolution which, as his current studies revealed, had suffused it a century earlier; and in one spasm of disgust he was heard to exclaim: 'What this country wants is not a Castlereagh, nor yet a Canning, but a Palmerston to tell Hitler just what he thinks of him!' As things went from bad to worse, his spirits sank and his patience, never one of his more lavish endowments, gave out. Of the meaning of Munich he was never in doubt: and when, twenty years after, he made it the subject of his last important lecture, he found no reason to modify his earlier condemnation.

When war came Webster was released from his duties at the School of Economics and went to Oxford as head of the American Section of the Foreign Research and Press Service. For him the next two years must have had something of the quality of Newcastle and Étapes, and he was soon fretting for something more creative and dynamic than the observers' post at Balliol. The summer of 1940 was to add to this frustration his grief at the death of Eileen Power, of whom he wrote a moving memoir for the *Economic Journal*. The following winter found him busy with a project for the public discussion of war aims and reconstruction, and these efforts led to the visit which he paid, in May and June 1941, to the United States, where he toured universities and other centres of informed opinion to sound American thinking on these issues. Here he seemed to have found a suitable and congenial role, and shortly after his return and report he was sent back as Director of the British Library of Information at New York. This appointment, which was to prove the least successful of Webster's undertakings, lasted until the summer of 1942, when he returned to England, to find almost at once the opportunity which he had been seeking.

In September 1942 Mr. H. M. G. Jebb, now Lord Gladwyn, brought Webster (who twenty years before had been one of his examiners at Oxford) into the newly formed Economic and Reconstruction Department of the Foreign Office. It was a mutually beneficial appointment; for if the department gained much from Webster's expertise, he could himself feel that this was being put to good account. He had a large share in the production of the five Memoranda on post-war security which, after submission to the Dominion Prime Ministers in May 1943, became the British proposals at the Dumbarton Oaks Conference. Of the negotiations at that conference, and afterwards at San Francisco, Webster has given his own account in his Creighton Lecture of 1946 on the making of the United Nations Charter. He was to be heavily involved at both, especially with the intractable

problem of the 'Great Power veto' demanded by the Soviet Government. The role of Great Powers in a collective system was a subject after his own heart. It continued to engage him, with such equally familiar ones as the treatment of the enemy and the reorganization of Europe, throughout the winter of 1944-5; and although some progress seemed to have been made at Yalta towards a compromise about voting on the Security Council, the difficulty was to recur in acute form at San Francisco. It was there, as a member of the Political Committee, that Webster had to defend the Great Power thesis, including the so-called 'hidden veto', against the smaller powers, among them Australia, with whose leading delegate, Dr. Evatt, he had a notable duel. But here, as at Dumbarton Oaks, 'the Prof.' made a reputation for integrity, resilience, and goodwill which bore him over all difficulties to the end.

Peace and the Charter were not to mean Webster's release from public cares; on the contrary, their coincidence with a Labour Government was to bring fresh obligations and opportunities. Although he had never been an active party man—he was, indeed, a 'floating voter' of the best type—most of Webster's political friends were in the Labour camp. During the winter of 1945-6 he was Special Adviser to his old comrade, Philip Noel-Baker, Minister of State, and as such an Alternate Delegate to the Preparatory Commission of the United Nations. One of the results of his attendance at Church House was the cementing of his friendship with Mr. Adlai Stevenson, and it was pleasing that the two men should receive honorary degrees at Oxford together a few years later. For Webster the New Year's Honours List of 1946 brought the signal honour of K.C.M.G. Hardly less pleasing than the award itself was the spate of congratulation which poured in from all over the world. Webster's last official activity for the United Nations was his membership of the First General Assembly; after that he confined his services to UNESCO, for which he worked hard from the outset and which was to take him to Florence in 1950 and Montevideo in 1954 for its General Conference. Behind the scenes, however, there was activity in plenty, not least in the form of briefs for ministerial statements on foreign affairs: often called for at desperately short notice, these vicarious manifestoes cost much effort but yielded keen, if necessarily private, pleasure. And on top of these continuing demands were piled those which measured his prominence in the public eye. Platform, press, and microphone competed for his favour, and each met with generous, if discriminating, response.

It was amidst all these distractions, and the demands of teaching in an overcrowded college and university, that Webster took up again his study of Palmerston. His library and papers had survived—at one point thanks to a timely removal—the hazards of war, but there was fresh material to be incorporated and, with the abandonment of a projected volume of letters, the book had to be recast. To write it Webster retreated every long vacation to the peace of Morben Issa, an operation calling for logistics of a high order. He planned to finish in three years, but needed five: the book was completed in the spring of 1951 and was published, as *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston, 1830–1841*, in the following autumn. It evoked high praise at home, but scored its real triumph abroad, especially in countries like Belgium and Portugal where ‘Milord Palmerston’ is still a name to conjure with. Yet it has made less stir than ‘Castlereagh’, and this, in some judgements, not unfairly since it is thought to yield to the earlier work in grasp, tautness, and vigour. Such appraisal is inclined to miss the point that the first ten years of Palmerston posed an altogether more formidable problem than the ten of Castlereagh, and that what appears the greater achievement may prove to have been the smaller. It must also be remembered that by 1950 the vogue of ‘pure’ diplomatic history was passing, that the focus was shifting from the chancelleries themselves to the social structures, economic systems, and ideologies of which they were but an imperfect expression, and that the Rankeian ideal of ‘scientific’, documented history was being challenged by the new subjectivism. It was perhaps rather in what he had not set out to do than in what he had done that Webster was felt by some to have fallen short: for what he minded he had indeed compassed.

Webster had always intended to round off ‘Palmerston’ by a study of the third foreign secretaryship; and with this in view he was to keep his lien on the Broadlands Papers to within a year or two of his death. But even he was daunted by the prospect of embarking, at sixty-five and with failing sight, upon that enterprise, and when a different one presented itself he greeted it with enthusiasm. In 1951 he accepted an invitation to write the official history of the bombing of Germany during the Second World War. For the historian of diplomacy and peacemaking to turn to the study of war in one of its most gruesome forms was a striking, and to some of his friends a questionable change of *métier*. To Webster himself it was at once a duty, a challenge, and an opportunity. ‘I was convinced’, he wrote to G. M. Trevelyan, ‘it was



my duty to attempt it, and . . . I hope to do some justice to a body of men who were among the bravest of the last war.' To the intellectual challenge of mastering a new and complex subject would be added those which were inherent in the writing of 'official history'. But it was the intrinsic interest of the work which above all engaged Webster's imagination. Always fascinated by men of action, he was to find in the bombing offensive a case-study of the relationship between action and ideas, and between the men who personified them.

In another way, too, the project was to be a new experience for him. Webster had always chosen to work single-handed, with no more than copying and clerical assistance to spare him drudgery; it was a pattern of work which suited his personality, and the occasional exception tended to endorse its wisdom. Yet no one was more insistent than he that other, and especially younger, men should receive the same credit for their work as he claimed for his; and it was this innate sense of fair play which was to turn the *History of the Bomber Offensive* into a joint enterprise. At his first meeting with Noble Frankland, who had already made some study of the subject, Webster brushed aside the notion that they should co-operate except on a footing of equality. They were to do so for nearly ten years, achieving a relationship which was a tribute to both and which made possible the production of a remarkable book. They supplemented the archival work with many interviews. Frankland had served with distinction in Bomber Command; Webster dented his own inexperience by taking part in practice sorties. The American side of the story was explored in the course of separate visits in 1952-3. Finally, what they wrote—running to 1,100 printed pages—was refined in the furnace of criticism until each was content to stand by every word of it.

The book was finished in the summer of 1960, and Webster bore his share of seeing it through the press. But his death two months before it was published was to deny him the double enjoyment of its appearance and of its controversial reception. Into that controversy it would be otiose to enter; but a word may be said of some qualities in the book which make it a worthy successor to 'Castlereagh' and 'Palmerston'. Foremost among them is its honesty, evident alike in its determination to get at the truth and in the refusal to portray that truth, once apprehended, as less complex or elusive than it was found to be. Next comes the architecture of the book, with its satisfying reconciliation of the demands of chronology with those of

analysis and the firm relationship of the parts to the whole. And, finally, the style and tone answer both to the intricacy of the matter and to the tragic immensity of the theme.

Although Webster did not readily abandon the hope of finishing 'Palmerston', his retirement from the Stevenson Chair in 1953 made it less, not more, likely that he would do so. He then felt both the need for remunerative pursuits and the urge to use his experience and prestige in promoting the commonwealth or scholarship. Of his varied efforts in this sphere, those which fostered the internationalizing of historical study were the most zealous and rewarding. Webster had attended every Historical Congress since 1913 and was a mainstay of the British National Committee from its beginning. From 1945 he never missed a meeting of the bureau and assemblée, and at the Congresses in Paris (1950) and Rome (1955) he was a towering figure. His apogee came at Stockholm in 1960, where he discharged the presidency which had fallen to him by the death of his friend Chabod with a mixture of forcefulness and *bonhomie* which was altogether Palmerstonian.

One of Webster's most cherished aims was the breaching of the Iron Curtain. As early as 1945 he and Humphrey Sumner had arranged an Anglo-Russian Historical Conference, which, however, came to nothing. But Soviet historians were in force at the Rome Congress, and the contacts then made led to the conferences held in London in 1958 and at Moscow two years later. What diplomacy, in all its forms, could do to smooth these approaches Webster lavished upon them: but of appeasement through sacrifice of principle there could, for him, be no question. At the closing session of the Moscow Conference—his last appearance at such a forum—he stirred the audience to its depths by his forthright criticism of a Russian paper on the origins of the Second World War. Soviet historians, he declared, would have to do better than this if they were to gain the respect of their Western colleagues; they must be prepared to expose the past misdeeds of their government as British, French, and American historians were doing all the time of theirs. It was magnificently done, and Webster could have left his hearers no finer memory of himself than in this witness to the sanctity of truth and to the freedom of its service.

After Stockholm and Moscow Webster at last set about reducing his commitments and shortening his range. The best of his lectures and essays on international topics he collected in *The Art and Practice of Diplomacy*, a volume which he did not live

to see but which has won him many new admirers. (A companion to it, in the form of a set of essays in his honour by a group of past students, was also in preparation, but was abandoned on his death.) His seventy-fifth birthday, in April, found him settling down to the autobiography which he had long wished, and been urged, to write: he started with the Paris Conference, and gathered on his desk his own files and his well-thumbed set of Temperley. But as spring passed into summer he began to feel, and look, tired. In July he was complaining of a sore throat, and towards the end of the month he entered University College Hospital. Although this was initially for observation he sensed the truth, and among the letters he then wrote was one to his college which was unmistakably a farewell. Once in hospital he was found to have a malignant growth: it was inoperable and it overcame his resistance with merciful speed. He died on 21 August, and his body was cremated at a private funeral.

Of Webster it may be truly said that the career was the man: and this in both senses of the epigram. For if his whole life was an act of dedication, the ends he strove after were of his own choosing, they remained constant in the midst of change, and he came nearer than most men to achieving them. It was thus no paradox that, for a man who travelled so far in life, Webster underwent remarkably little change in himself. His undimmed youthfulness and inveterate optimism were infectious and endearing, particularly to those of an age to prize them: for him it was always bliss to be alive, since to be alive was also to be young. No *laudator temporis acti*, he never tired of telling schoolchildren how enviable they were to be growing up in an age of such promise. He hailed the extension of those educational opportunities which in his day had been denied to all but the few, and which that few had been so hard put to it to obtain. On Webster himself that early struggle had left marks which he was also to carry to the end. Towards the Establishment he displayed an ambivalence in which his democratic principles warred with his instinct to take his place among the rulers; and he sometimes fell prey to the fear of reaping less than his meed of recognition and prestige. He was apt to be proprietary about his researches, sensitive about his authority, and put out when crossed. Such traits gave him a reputation for 'difficulty' which was not without its bearing on his career. Yet the public image and the private reality were, as so often, much too far removed from each other. Behind the intimidating big-wig stood the man of humble mind, warm heart, and rich humanity; behind the hard

bargainer and stickler over pence the benefactor to whose stealthy generosity many owed much; behind the sharp-tongued critic the single-minded searcher after truth.

A professed unbeliever, Webster was imbued with Christian ethics and observed, in his life as in his studies, a strict moral code. His attitude towards work was Victorian, and he regulated his life with frugal meticulousness. In his eyes unpunctuality and procrastination were among the gravest of failings. It was his custom to carry two watches which, having compared them to his satisfaction, he would abide by against all discrepant evidence; and the latecomer at table, lecture, or meeting risked homily or reproof. He answered letters, and delivered copy, with unflinching promptitude. No such punctiliousness, however, at least on his own part, was reflected in his appearance: his disdain for clothes was ducal, and in the decrepitude of his black hats he had no rival but Tawney.

Webster was not much given to general reading, partly because of the need to spare his eyes, but also because his literary taste did not mature: it was the books of his youth which remained his trustiest companions. More rewarding to him was music, both in its 'pure' form and as an ingredient of opera and ballet, of which his experience went back to Imperial Vienna and St. Petersburg. In later life he would often spend the hour after supper, stretched out on a sofa in the dark, listening to a broadcast concert, before settling to the night's work. Out of doors he had two addictions. The first of them, walking, had been formed at Lakeland reading-parties as an undergraduate, was nourished by Welsh excursions in the middle years, and survived in a Sunday morning 'constitutional' between Swiss Cottage and the Zoo. But his absorbing passion was watching cricket; and it may be doubted whether he ever knew keener delight than when settled, with a boon companion, on the free seats at Lord's.

The last words shall be Webster's own. Spoken shortly before his death, and with difficulty, to one of his oldest friends, they were: 'I haven't done so badly.'

S. T. BINDOFF

*The persons who have helped in the preparation of this memoir are not less gratefully thanked because, by reason of their number, they are unnamed.*

SIR CHARLES WEBSTER AND THE BRITISH  
ACADEMY

WHEN he became President of the Academy in 1950 Sir Charles Webster had been a Fellow for twenty years. For more than half the period he had been one of the most active of the Fellows. His research in foreign archives, his association with the International Historical Congress in 1913, and his experience of international political negotiations in Paris and in America all contributed to make him an unquestioning believer in the value of associations of scholars, especially those of them which were international. He regarded them not merely as machinery for carrying out specific purposes but as expressions of an activity which was valuable in itself. In 1939 he became chairman of Section II, and in the same year he was busy with the entertaining of the Bureau of the Union Académique Internationale when it met in England. It was not until he went to America on the first of his war-time visits that he ceased to act as chairman of his section, and, though he had served for three years, he was re-appointed in 1947 to serve for another three. He served on the Council for three periods before becoming President. These were not all full periods of three years, since they were adjusted to his own movements and to other needs of the Council: the upshot was that except for the first three years of peace he served from 1939. From 1948 he served continuously for eleven years as one of our delegates to the Union Académique Internationale. His work there was thus essentially personal and was not undertaken *ex officio*, though his notable influence with the Union also owed something to his being our President during four of these years.

As President of the Academy he made it one of his aims to take the body of the Fellows as far as possible into his confidence and that of the Council. He was entirely without the inclinations which sometimes endue the councils of learned bodies with an oligarchical temper, and his four presidential addresses give a full and frank account of the main problems of the Academy as he saw them. They show the stages by which he guided it in the directions which seemed to him most important, the strengthening of its links with the Treasury and with international organizations, the refreshing of its membership by the election of younger men. There was, however, one piece of business which was necessarily done behind closed doors. Sir Frederic Kenyon's long and immensely valuable service as Secretary ended

about the time when Sir Charles was elected President. A successor had to be found; the terms of his appointment had to be settled, and there had to be adjustments in the Academy's way of doing its business. As we all know these matters were all dealt with most successfully. Sir Frederic Kenyon gave very generous assistance throughout and continued to act as Honorary Treasurer until he was elected an Honorary Fellow in 1950; but Sir Charles Webster was the driving force. His cheerful energy, his considerateness and his single-minded attention to the interests of the Academy earned their reward.

It would have been appropriate if the celebration of the Academy's jubilee in 1952 could have given a shining demonstration of everything that it stood and stands for. The occasion, over which Sir Charles presided, was indeed splendid; but the arrangements had to be made in the opening months of a new reign, so that it was less completely representative in character than would otherwise have been possible. Within the Academy his own special position was recognized when the office of Foreign Secretary was created in 1955, and his devotion to it was finally expressed by his testamentary benefaction.

G. N. CLARK