

PLATE XXXVIII



Photograph by Rensay & Alastair, Cambridge

SIR FRANK ADCOCK, O.B.E.

FRANK EZRA ADCOCK

1886-1968

FRANK EZRA ADCOCK, born on 15 April 1886, was a Leicestershire man who pronounced his 'a's flat in the manner of that county, and his father, the headmaster of a local school at Desford, sent him to Wyggeston School, which was near his home. He had a happy and assured background of affection; he inherited a strong tradition of Methodism; and he had an excellent training in the Classics. One of five children, he was particularly close to a married sister, Mrs. A. A. Sneath, and her two sons who, like him, went to King's College, Cambridge. As an undergraduate he preached in the Cambridge Methodist circuit, and as a don he served for thirty years on the governing body of the Methodist Theological College in Cambridge, Wesley House. At Wyggeston School he was taught by M. L. Lewis, an admirer especially of Thucydides, and he recorded his impression of Lewis's influence in the magazine of the school: 'It would be impertinent to turn a light borrowed from him on his scholarship, but he taught us enough to appreciate in some degree the very great range and almost inhuman exactitude of his knowledge.' Adcock made the most of his opportunities at school and, the first of his family to aspire to a university education, he won a scholarship at King's College, Cambridge. Commencing residence in October 1905, he won the highest distinctions in the next four years: the Craven Scholarship, the Chancellor's Medal for Classics, a distinguished double First, and the Craven Studentship. He spent the next year in the Universities of Berlin and Munich, and he visited Vienna. During these years he owed much to Nathaniel Wedd and Walter Headlam in Cambridge and to Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf and Eduard Meyer in Germany, and it was predominantly the influence of the last which turned his acute and versatile mind to specialize in ancient history. In 1911 he was elected a Fellow of King's College and a Lecturer in Classics. In 1912 and 1914 he published two important articles on the sources for Solon in the *Athenaion Politeia* and Plutarch's *Life of Solon* xx-xxiv (*Klio* xii and xiii), and in 1913 he was entrusted with the task of surveying work done on Roman History for *The Year's Work in Classical Studies*. At a very young age he was an outstanding figure in the field of ancient history.

Throughout his life Adcock had extraordinary powers of memory. He remembered literally everything he had read, and he was equally at ease in quoting from the *Agamemnon* and *Right Ho, Jeeves*. Late in life he thought his mind might become overstocked and tried to be selective in what he remembered; but the old habit persisted. It was only as an octogenarian when he was recuperating in a nursing home from a severe operation that he remarked 'I've thought of a lot of quips since I've been in here: perhaps I should have written them down.' He had extraordinary quickness of mind. In discussing a historical problem many a colleague found himself lagging behind at a pedestrian pace; and in repartee many an opponent was outsmarted. On one occasion at a Faculty Board Meeting a professor criticized Adcock's argument by remarking: 'That is a sharp point.' 'Points are apt to be sharp', said Adcock, and proceeded with the argument. He had many of the qualities of mind which are needed in a barrister, and it is significant that he made a close study of the arguments in Antiphon's tetralogies and Demosthenes' private speeches. He had great tenacity in tackling any intellectual problem. He preferred to worry it out in the company of a colleague during afternoon walks, and he would not let his mind or his companion rest until he had reduced the skein of evidence to order. He liked tidy solutions even in situations which may have been untidy in historical fact. Above all he expressed himself with wit. He sought perfection in both the spoken and the written word, and he sought it on every occasion. Constant practice made him a master of the apt phrase and the telling epigram. He was by any standard a brilliant conversationalist and a brilliant writer; yet for those who were most frequently in his company the continuous scintillation tended to pall.

These qualities of mind found a new and important field of activity during the First World War when he was engaged in the Intelligence Division of the Admiralty from 1915 to 1919. His powers of memory, his precision, dexterity, speed, and tenacity, coupled with his superb knowledge of German (he translated Thucydides into German with immediate bilingual facility), enabled him to excel in deciphering the codes of the enemy as surely as he had done in matters of ancient history. Nor was this solely an intellectual exercise. It carried heavy responsibility at times: for instance on one occasion at a small hour of the night when he had to decide whether or not the Home Fleet should be alerted to put to sea. From these experiences

he gained an insight into practical affairs and appreciated the importance of prompt and efficient planning. In 1917 he was awarded the O.B.E. He had the highest regard for his naval chief, Admiral Hall, of whom a large drawing held a conspicuous place in his room. And he had ever afterwards an unrivalled skill in the solving of cross-word puzzles. Sailing down the Adriatic Sea one morning in late March he brought forth his store of Torquemada puzzles, saved up during the Lent term, in order to stave off the danger which he had anticipated of sea-sickness. Alas, he solved them all too quickly! He was an absentee at lunch.

When the Second World War was threatening Adcock recruited suitable dons for work in a branch of the Foreign Office. From 1939 to 1943 he worked at first at Bletchley and then in London, and he returned to King's when he had 'solved the initial problems', as he remarked once in conversation. His mind was as acute as ever, but in his mid-fifties he had perhaps less of the intellectual stamina which had enabled him to maintain such unremitting zest and pace in the First World War. Once again, he had contact with the problems and the policies of war and politics, and he gave his mind closely to the course of events during and after his period of service. These matters provided food for exposition and sometimes for discussion during his afternoon walks in the post-war years. But to him the events of both wars had registered rather on the intellectual than on the emotional plane. He had not himself suffered or seen suffering in others at close quarters, and his qualities of mind did not include a vivid imaginative insight into experiences outside his orbit.

Apart from the war years Adcock's life was spent in Cambridge. The first years when some part of his stipend went to the maintenance of King's Chapel were sufficiently straitened to make him appreciate the comfort and indeed the affluence of the later years as a bachelor don, and he was intensely grateful and loyal to his college and to the university. He served the former as lay Dean before and after the First War, as Treasurer of the Amalgamation Club, and as Vice-Provost in 1951-5, and he was in close touch with Kingsmen through the reading of Greek plays in his rooms on Monday evenings over some fifty years, and through the playing of tennis and golf in their company. He served the university on the General Board of the Faculties, the Council of the Senate and their committees, and his thorough mastery of the business, his grasp of practical

problems, and his clear and forceful expression made him most influential in the counsels of the university. Here too he was in touch with undergraduates as President of the University Golf Club and as a keen follower of university cricket. And with Adcock to be in touch meant friendship. He had a deep affection for a wide variety of men, both young and old; he treasured loyalty above other virtues; and he had no malice in him. If he spoke wittily of another, it was the wit of truth and not of enmity. A professor who was partnering him in a foursome missed his drive completely at the first hole. When the round was completed, Adcock remarked that after the first hole his partner's game had deteriorated.

In 1925 Adcock was elected to the Chair of Ancient History. He had served since the war as one of three editors of the *Cambridge Ancient History*, of which the first volume appeared in 1923, and after the death of J. B. Bury in 1927 he was the chief architect of the monumental work. The twelfth and last volume appeared in 1939. Within the span of Greek and Roman history Adcock's knowledge was unrivalled, and he added to this knowledge the qualities of mind and of personality which made him the ideal editor of a work of international co-operation. He planned the proportions of the whole; he chose the contributors with judgement; he kept them to their time-table, even if it involved summoning one to be his guest for a Long Vacation at King's; and he corrected and co-ordinated their contributions with consummate skill and tact. His acknowledged excellence, his unfailing courtesy, and his genuine warmth of heart put his editing beyond their criticism. When conflicting views were widely held, for example in regard to the origin of the Etruscans, he permitted both views to be represented. He did not obtrude his own judgement in those matters. Indeed he was so scrupulous towards his contributors that he abstained from publishing articles on subjects within their fields. His own writings between 1925 and 1934 were almost limited to the chapters he himself contributed to the *Cambridge Ancient History*: the Growth of the Greek City-State (iii, ch. 26), the Reform of the Athenian State (iv, ch. 2), Athens under the Tyrants (iv, ch. 3), the Breakdown of the Thirty Years Peace, 445-431 B.C. (v, ch. 7), the Archidamian War, 431-421 B.C. (v, ch. 8), the Conquest of Central Italy (vii, ch. 18), from the Conference of Luca to the Rubicon (ix, ch. 15), the Civil War (ix, ch. 16), Caesar's Dictatorship (ix, ch. 17), and the Achievement of Augustus (x, ch. 18). In addition he wrote a few articles relevant to these chapters, such

as those on the exiles of Peisistratus in *CQ* xviii and on the legal term of Caesar's governorship in Gaul in *CQ* xxvi, and he published in the *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* résumés of papers on related topics (in 1926, 1930, and 1932).

Adcock's chapters in the *Cambridge Ancient History* were the fruit of long experience in teaching and in lecturing on the central periods of Greek and Roman political and military history. He was most at home in these aspects of history and in the weighing of the evidence for these periods. His lectures were something of a *tour de force*, widely appreciated by large audiences for a variety of reasons. They excelled in wit and always in appropriate wit, often exploiting his inability to pronounce the letter 'r': 'The Senate was not a bus but a twam' and 'if the Wōmans had had bicycles, they would have worshipped a Goddess Punctuwa'. They were superbly expressed in concise, even epigrammatic form, and the narrative and the argumentation had a translucent clarity, whether he was lecturing on a general topic or a special subject. The ideas and the interpretation were stimulating and challenging. One was vastly entertained at the time, and one was made to think out one's own views afterwards. His chapters have many of the same qualities. They are in the best sense didactic, revealing at each stage the principles underlying the interpretation which is being advanced. Thus in arguing that the Greek city-state evolved from places of refuge such as are known in Scotland and Germany, he added 'and it is reasonable to suppose that like causes among peoples at a like stage of culture produced like results'. They abound in meaningful epigrams. With reference to the Greek city-state, 'the state was the possession of those who had the freedom to serve it'; 'the state was greater than its rulers'; 'the essence of the Greek state is that it is the state of a class'. They stimulate thought when the dazzling effect of their pearl-like expression has passed. 'Social exclusiveness admitted temporary exceptions.' 'Perhaps the most vivid social sense of the Greeks was religious.' 'The Greeks conceived of their gods politically.'

These examples are all taken from the first of his chapters in the *Cambridge Ancient History*. They may be said also to exemplify a weakness. Adcock grew up in an epoch of historical scholarship to which archaeological discoveries and economic or sociological theories were peripheral, and he did not interest himself in the new techniques. He was still looking backwards from the known *polis* of the fifth century B.C. into the misty past, and he had as quick an eye as any for detecting similarities.

Indeed one is reminded often of Thucydides who employed just this method in the opening chapters of his first book. Yet at the time when Adcock was writing much of the mist had been dispelled, and it was beginning to be possible to proceed not backwards from the fifth century but forwards from the archaeological evidence of the Bronze Age. This criticism of method applies with diminishing force to the later chapters. He was perhaps at his best in dealing with Cylon, Solon, and Peisistratus. Here he had already done fundamental and original work in analysing the literary sources of our knowledge, and the arguments that stemmed from that work were acute and compelling. Constitutional procedures, legal systems, and chronological problems were very much to his taste, and he had sorted them out to his satisfaction in his articles and his lectures. He was dealing too with discernible personalities, and his own knowledge of men both young and old bore fruit in the recreation of Solon and Peisistratus as living persons: the one a man whose 'ideal was fair dealing', the other 'tenacious and supple, no doubt a patient enemy and a faithful friend'.

The two chapters on the origins and the course of the Archidamian War took their colour from Adcock's own experience of similar events and his close affinity with the intellectual outlook of Thucydides. Truth here was realistic, not sentimental, and the issues of power politics were not to be blurred by the introduction of ideals or ideologies. When Athens refused to raise the embargo on Megara, Adcock used the vivid present tense. 'Behind the question of formal right or wrong stands the shadow of a military calculation.' Anyone who writes a narrative of the Archidamian War is dominated by Thucydides' account, and this domination was more acceptable to Adcock than it has been to some of his successors. It was an acceptance based upon critical and cogent reasoning as well as upon the close affinity which has been mentioned. Some of that reasoning turned upon a theory of the manner in which Thucydides composed his history, and it is a remarkable tribute to the flexibility of Adcock's mind that he had afterthoughts on this subject and expressed them in an article published in 1951 in *JHS* lxxi. So far as Greek history is concerned, ancient historians tend to be Herodoteans or Thucydideans. In the Cambridge of the 1920s and the 1930s T. R. Glover was the Herodotean and F. E. Adcock the Thucydidean. Their merits were not comparable but different. And in these two chapters on so Thucydidean a topic we see in Adcock the quintessence of the Thucydidean outlook and the

Thucydidean style. They constitute a period piece in the classical mould.

His chapters on Rome have a wider range and a more detailed character, and this was in keeping with the bigger scale of the later volumes. In writing of the conquest of central Italy he chose a period of warfare and he brought to it a knowledge of geography which he lacked in respect of Greece. Here too he grappled with the problems of source-criticism, and he considered the extent to which Roman victories 'must be suspected as fictitious, unimportant or really a defeat transmuted by the alchemy of family pride'. Livy was to him a less congenial author than Thucydides. For, although Adcock shared to some extent Livy's admiration for the early Roman Republic, he did not enter into Livy's imaginative concepts: 'ceterum et mihi vetustas res scribenti nescio quo pacto antiquus fit animus' (Livy xliii. 13). On the other hand, Julius Caesar appealed immensely to Adcock as a statesman of supreme efficiency and as a man of letters. A photograph of Caesar's bust stood on the mantelpiece of his room in King's. He admired Caesar in war as one who had entire faith in his own genius, a nimble wit, an unclouded courage, and iron patience; as one who made no single innovation in the technique of Roman soldiering but handled the traditional Roman art of war with a virtuosity and a drastic application which marked his genius (*CAH* ix. 704 f.). He admired Caesar as a statesman for similar reasons: 'The versatility of his intellect matched the steadiness of his will'; 'hardheaded as his race, practical, positive, he was no dreamer nor ideologue'; 'he was the keen edge on the old blade' (*CAH* ix. 739 f.). His admiration for Julius Caesar mirrors his standard of values to some extent. He admired efficiency, and he 'made a job' of everything which he undertook—from the organization of the *Cambridge Ancient History* down to a single round of golf which he always played to win—and win he generally did. He was not ruthless himself, but in his regard for efficiency he was prepared to tolerate ruthlessness in others; 'you cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs' was an aphorism which he often applied in lectures to political reforms. He was not primarily interested in ideas, but he appreciated the effectiveness of ideas in operation in politics and war. He might be called an applied historian, eager 'to seek the truth and expound it with lucidity and conciseness', if we understand by 'truth' the true course of what happened, τὴν ἀκριβείαν αὐτῆν τῶν πραγμάτων.

He wrote 'The Achievement of Augustus' in order to pull

together the strands of the many chapters on aspects of the Augustan Principate. It was a congenial topic, for he was fascinated by the effectiveness of what Augustus did. Others have described this period as that of the Roman Revolution. Not so Adcock; for he saw in Augustus an essential conservatism which preserved the sanctity of Roman institutions. 'To Romans faith in their past was the larger part of their faith in their future. There were to be no innovations which would shake this faith. . . . The State was no other than the Senate and People of Rome; the *princeps* was not a third estate by the side of these two.' This insistence on a nation's faith in itself was indeed topical of Germany in 1934 when this chapter was published (nor is it irrelevant to modern Britain), and he used words of pre-Augustan Rome which were to have a prophetic meaning for his own time. 'The Romans had felt the stirring of a new emotion, doubt of themselves and despair of the Republic. In such moments a people will turn with unquestioning and almost savage loyalty to a man who sets himself to exorcise these emotions.' The personality of Augustus is unusually difficult to assess. Adcock saw in him qualities which he himself admired: 'the hard-headed tenacity, the caution, the faith in the past together with the cool appreciation of the present that marked out the most solid parts of the Roman and Italian character'.

In historical insight and literary quality the chapters we have been considering rank certainly at the highest level among the contributions of the leading scholars of the world between the two wars. The *History* was, and is, an achievement without parallel in any language, and it has done more to stimulate interest in ancient history among specialists and general readers than any work of our time. It owed its existence and its finish primarily to Adcock. When the last volume was safely in the press he heaved a sigh of relief and travelled round the world. His eminence among scholars was internationally acknowledged. He gave the Martin Classical Lectures at Oberlin College, the Sather Classical Lectures at the University of California, the Jerome Lectures at the University of Michigan, and the Todd Memorial Lecture at Sydney. Many honours were conferred upon him. In 1936 he had been elected a Fellow of the Academy and in 1953 he gave the Raleigh Lecture on History. He received honorary degrees from the Universities of Durham, Dublin, Manchester, and Leicester, the last giving him particular pleasure as a Leicestershire man. In 1954 he was knighted. At that time he had retired from his Chair and was Professor

Emeritus, and he was Vice-Provost of his college. His services to classical learning lay not only in his publications, teaching, and lecturing but also in his constant work for the Classical Societies. He was President of the Roman Society 1929–31, Vice-President of the Hellenic Society, and President of the Classical Association 1947–8. He was an editor of the German periodical *Historia*, and he assisted the editorial board of the Roman Society for more than forty years. The sixty-sixth volume of *The Journal of Roman Studies* was dedicated to him. It contains a bibliography of his published writings and a tribute from Dr. A. H. McDonald.

Old age was upon him but with little diminution of his powers. In his seventieth year he published *Caesar as Man of Letters* (1956). Two short books followed: *Thucydides and his History* (1963) and *Marcus Crassus, Millionaire* (1966). Meanwhile he published a number of lectures, the most substantial being the Sather Classical Lectures on 'The Greek and Macedonian Art of War'. When he died after a very short illness at the age of eighty-one on 22 February 1968, he had been working on the manuscript of a further book on Greek and Roman Diplomacy. In these books he put into practice a piece of advice which he gave to research students: 'add to knowledge by reducing it'. For he kept refining, rethinking, repolishing, and perfecting the views which he had formed during a lifetime of thinking on these topics. They have the same finish and the same felicity of expression which marked his chapters in the *Cambridge Ancient History*. They are eminently readable, instructive, and enjoyable. But they tend to avoid controversial matters and lose the flavour of powerful or dogmatic statement. He once remarked to a colleague who showed him the manuscript of a paper on an important but controversial issue, 'I prefer not to bat on a sticky wicket'. On a wicket of his own choosing he batted with perfection until the end of a long innings.

His passing is lamented by a multitude of friends and by none more deeply than his colleagues, old and young, in ancient history. When he was writing of Augustus he said of friendships at Rome: 'only rarely, where the tastes of friends made way for each other as was true of those of Atticus and Cicero, was friendship lasting and loyal'. What was rare with Romans was general with Adcock. He delighted in the company of his friends at port, on afternoon walks, playing golf or chess, travelling and talking, and, above all, at the annual meetings of ancient historians which were sponsored by Norman Baynes, Hugh Last, and Frank Adcock, who outlived the other two. To him scholarship

was not an acrimonious but a civilized pursuit, and he showed civility always and friendship often to all scholars at these and other gatherings. If he had an inner circle of friends it was those who served under him when he was professor at Cambridge. Upon them he lavished his affection. He guided them, as he guided students, with sympathy and understanding. However busy he may have been, he always found time to read what they had written and to put at their disposal his own store of knowledge. They owe him most, and they miss him most.

N. G. L. HAMMOND