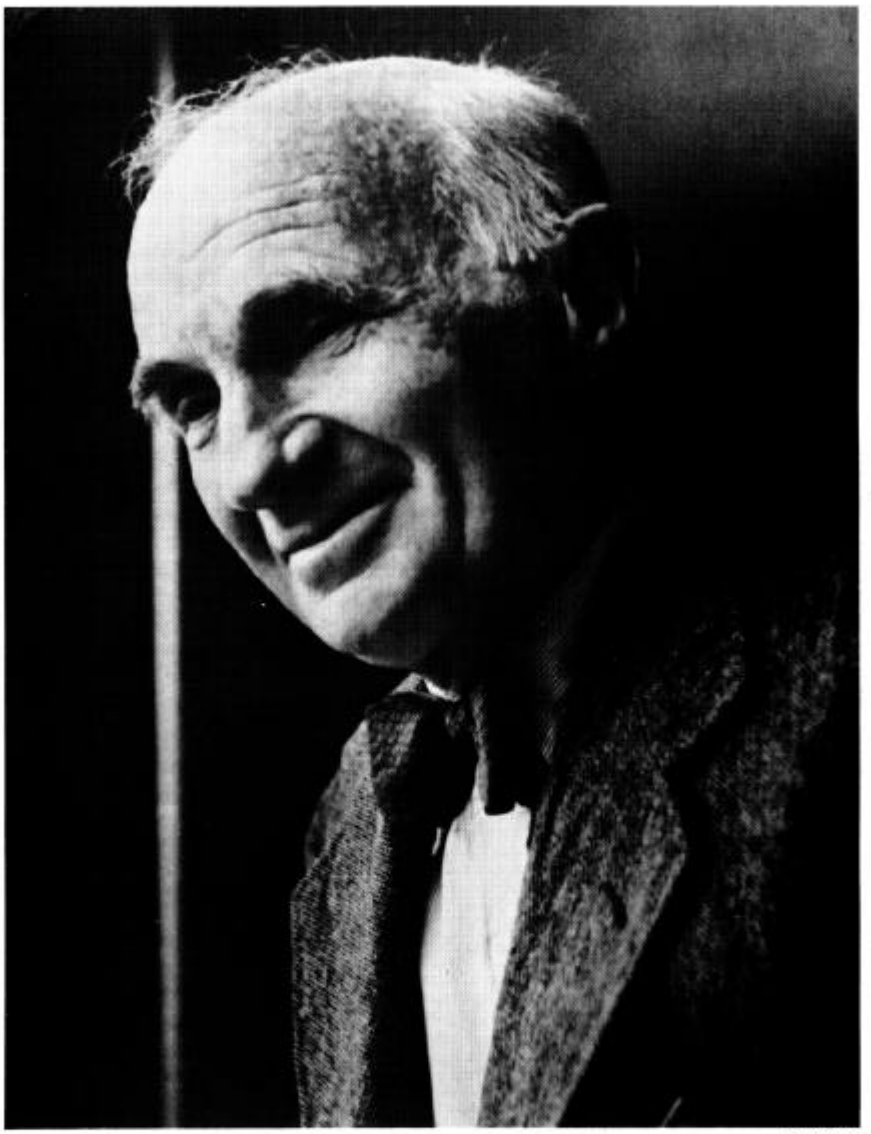
PLATE XV



Bertil Gaye

MICHAEL POSTAN

MICHAEL MOISSEY POSTAN[1]

1899–1981

SIR MICHAEL POSTAN is remembered by those who knew him for many reasons: as a fascinating companion, as a welcoming host, as a remarkable teacher, as a lover of talk, and as an internationally dominant scholar among the economic historians of his generation. He was a conspicuously many-sided man—a mountaineer, a walker, a collector of porcelain, a devotee of opera—and his vivacity, his quickness of mind, his wit and commitment in debate, his zest for life all help to explain the impact he made upon the circles in which he moved. He himself, however, would have wished his measure to be the contribution he made to economic history, a subject to which his commitment was total; and that he enhanced its prestige among the branches of historical study, increased its appeal to students, and enlarged its horizons are beyond doubt his achievements. In particular, he was one of four scholars of Russian origin (the others were Vinogradoff, Savine, and Kosminsky) who have done so much to shape current views about the early history of English rural society.

I

Postan was born, the son of Efim and Elena Postan, at Tighina in Bessarabia in 1899. His earliest education was at the local high school and in Odessa, but his attempts to go on to a university, first at St Petersburg, then at Odessa, and finally at Kiev, were interrupted by war, revolution, and his own period of military service. Where his interests lay, too, may not yet have been determined, for at St Petersburg he enrolled to study natural

[1] The author is grateful to Lady Cynthia Postan, Sir John Habakkuk, Sir Keith Hancock, Denys Hay, and Sylvia Thrupp who have supplied information. He has also drawn upon M. W. Flinn's laureation address when presenting Postan for an honorary degree at Edinburgh in 1978, upon the obituary in the *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. 35 (1982), no. 1, and most of all upon Sir John Habakkuk's address at the memorial service held in Little St Mary's church, Cambridge, on 13 February 1982. Other details have come from Sir Keith Hancock's *Country and Calling* (1954) and *Perspective in History* (1982), chapter 2, from W. N. Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade*, i (1952), and from T. C. Barker, 'The Beginnings of the Economic History Society', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. 30 (1977), 1–19.

sciences and sociology, and at Odessa economics and law. On the other hand, as Sir John Habakkuk has pointed out, 'there were many perceptions about peasant society and early industrialization which came naturally to someone educated in Russia before 1918'; it would have been difficult in those years to avoid engagement in debates about Marxism and socialism; and it was perhaps at this time that Postan first encountered some of the German and Russian controversies in history and economics which were then unfamiliar to most Englishmen. At any event he was steadily moving in the direction of the social sciences, for his *Treatise on the Political Organization of Autonomous Minorities* was published (in Russian) in 1919.

By this time, however, Postan's increasing alienation from developments since the Revolution led him to a decision to leave Russia. He did so at the end of 1919 and spent the following year in central Europe, getting what living he could as a journalist and failing to secure entry to the universities of Vienna and Cernowitz. Towards the end of 1920 he finally reached England and there, in October 1921, he enrolled for a first degree course at the London School of Economics. His undergraduate and subsequent graduate years at the LSE proved to be decisive: they confirmed his intention to become a specialist economic historian and they also established personal links which helped to shape many of his approaches to the subject he had chosen. Postan himself tells how R. H. Tawney advised him that, even though he had decided to concentrate upon the Middle Ages, he 'should engage in some modern history as well' and Tawney's influence probably reinforced in him a determination that, however indirectly, his researches would have a relevance to the problems of the contemporary world. Another vital link, of course, was that with Eileen Power. After completing his course for a master's degree in 1926 Postan became her research assistant, beginning an association which culminated in their marriage in 1937 and ended only with Eileen's untimely death in 1940. Her influence gave direction to his earliest researches and it was she who, about 1925–6, brought together a group consisting of himself and other young economic historians, the fruits of whose enquiries appeared in 1933 in *Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century*.

Postan was co-editor of this volume and he also contributed to it an essay on Anglo-Hanseatic relations which shows that most of his main traits as a scholar were already fully formed. His point of departure was a specific situation revealed by a formidable mass of primary sources. To their interpretation he brought

a cosmopolitan grasp of the secondary literature, both historical and theoretical, and also a willingness to seek out the more general tendencies at work behind the flux of specific circumstances. What those tendencies were during the later Middle Ages continued to engage his attention and in 1939 he published a 'historical revision' article on the fifteenth century, a century he had come to regard as 'an age of recession, arrested economic development and declining national income'. That view of this particular century, moreover, was not easily reconciled with the common assumption that economic history was the story of a 'continuous ascent', of unilinear progress from 'barbaric primivity' to the developed societies of modern times. Other and earlier essays—on credit and paper transactions in medieval trade and on the incompatibility of Sombart's picture of medieval 'pre-capitalism' with the results of modern research into the actualities of medieval trade—had also chipped away at received evolutionary views. A new view was put in their place: of a medieval economy which had its retreats, its setbacks, as well as its advances. This was at once an attempt to take account of all the medieval circumstances and a more credible interpretation of them in the light of twentieth-century economic experience.

In these same years Postan established himself in English academic life. He became a lecturer in history at University College London in 1927, a lecturer in economic history at the LSE in 1931, and a lecturer at Cambridge in 1935. Three years later, when he was still only thirty-nine, he was elected to succeed Sir John Clapham in the Cambridge chair of Economic History. Just before he came to Cambridge, in 1934, he had also taken over from Lipson the editorship of the *Economic History Review*. Much of the credit for keeping the *Review* alive in difficult times during the 1930s and wartime belongs to Postan, and well before the war he was making it into a journal that took a lead in new thinking as well as being deliberately international in its coverage. Most of all in these years, however, he made his mark as a teacher. Sir John Habakkuk has recalled his impact upon Cambridge undergraduates in 1935 in terms which cannot be bettered: 'the intellectual force, the ebullience, the panache, the enormous excitement he generated, which was partly a matter of personal magnetism, of accent, of distinctive appearance, partly the effect of unusual skill in exposition—the ability to build up tension—and partly the consequence of what was, to those who sat at his feet, an entirely fresh vision of economic history'. This ability to rivet undergraduate audiences was one source of Postan's

influence; another, the build up of a group of graduate students working under his direction, had not gone far in Cambridge before the war scattered it. He had, however, continued to be associated with Eileen Power's London seminar at the Institute of Historical Research, with a membership drawn from many countries. This was one of the associations helping to make his influence an international one.

One is brought back, none the less, to his vision of economic history which also crystallized during these years. Many influences shaped it, and not least a taste for speculative thought not altogether common among historians, even economic historians, in this country. Others are found in the circumstances of the time: the transformation of Postan's native Russia by men who professed to find their well-spring of ideas in Marxism and, in the West, the erosion by economic crises of an older optimism and belief in cumulative progress. The friends and colleagues in whose company he moved, especially in his London years, were also influential. They included Hugh Gaitskell, Evan Durbin, Raymond Firth, Audrey Richards, D. W. Brogan, T. H. Marshall—economists, social anthropologists, political scientists, sociologists. There are glimpses of the character of their intercommunion in the affectionate memoir of his association with Gaitskell which Postan wrote some years later. It involved intense debate conducted in dining clubs, in discussion groups, or on country walks—debate which took in 'politics, social philosophy, socialism, Russia, economics, methodology' and doubtless everything else; the object was often to establish connections between social theories and practical politics; and almost always discussion ranged back and forth across the boundaries of the disciplines into which the social sciences have been partitioned.

How Postan's mind was moving left traces in his work and writings. Occasionally he intervened in current political debates: with a characteristically detached judgement of Marx, for example, or a devastating critique of the Webbs' *Soviet Communism*, above all for their failure to recognize 'the marionette quality of public responses' in the Soviet Union. Typically, however, his historical work is even more revealing than his occasional forays into politics. Even in these years, when he was making his mark as a medievalist, he took seriously Tawney's advice to 'engage in some modern history'. At Cambridge, in addition to medieval courses, he offered others on nineteenth-century England and on the economic history of modern Europe. In 1935 he also published an article on recent trends in the accumulation of capital, which

ranged widely over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and which, too, was directly relevant to a diagnosis of seeming disorders in the contemporary economic system.

At the same time Postan was reflecting on the nature and purposes of economic history itself. His most comprehensive statement of his conclusions on that question is to be found in his Cambridge inaugural lecture delivered in February 1939, although they were all but fully worked out in a paper on 'history and the social sciences' which he read at Bedford College, London, in 1935. The essential propositions are clear and straightforward. The economic historian must 'dwell with the social sciences' and concentrate his study of the past upon those attributes of it which are relevant to the general and theoretical problems that are the concern of social scientists. The historian, however, has a distinctive function. He does not, like the economist or sociologist, seek to achieve by 'accumulated abstraction' from real situations propositions that are independent of particular circumstances. His role is to investigate 'single combinations of circumstances' which, precisely because they are not timeless abstractions, are areas of 'an interrelation so multiple as to make the work of abstraction impossible and undesirable'. The complexities which concern the historian evidently limit the precision of the result which are within his reach, but that does not mean they are without value. They are a distinctive addition to our capacity to achieve a generalized view of society and, therefore, to our powers of controlling our social environment. The economic historian's discipline was at once relevant to a consideration of the problems of the contemporary world and a necessary complement to the propositions of the economic theoretician.

II

While these ideas were being worked out Postan was also extending the scope of his medieval researches. A paper on the chronology of labour services read to the Royal Historical Society in March 1937 pushed back into the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the idea of fluctuating levels of medieval economic activity which he had discerned first in the later Middle Ages; and it was also his first major excursion into the agrarian history of medieval England. Both the idea of the ebbs and flows of economic activity during the Middle Ages and a growing concern with the agrarian aspects of the medieval scene were also evident in the revision article on the fifteenth century in 1939 and a critique in

1944 of the notion that the Middle Ages witnessed the rise of a money economy; but the book on manorial profits which Postan promised in 1937 was never written. For that the outbreak of war was immediately responsible; but over and above, by the time he was in a position to return to the problems of the medieval countryside, the ways in which he envisaged those problems and the questions he asked of his evidence were no longer the same as they had been in 1937.

In any event, Postan's medieval researches were inevitably interrupted in 1939. Use was first made of his special knowledge when he became head of the Russian section of the Ministry of Economic Warfare, and it was also proposed that, when Sir Stafford Cripps went to Moscow as ambassador in 1940, Postan should accompany him. In fact, however, when the party had got as far as Athens it was learned that the Russians had refused Postan a visa, a decision which compelled him to make the long journey back to England by the Cape. The situation was also altered when Russia was brought into the war on the allied side, but almost immediately an opportunity arose to make a very different use of Postan's abilities. Sir Keith Hancock was entrusted with the task of preparing an official civil history of the war and he has recorded his good fortune in securing Postan's collaboration in this enterprise (in the process cementing a friendship which lasted for the rest of Postan's life). What Postan did was to take responsibility for the history of war-production as a self-contained part of the larger scheme. He found himself working with helpers who must often have surprised themselves at the tasks they undertook: the Renaissance historian, Denys Hay, compiling a 'biography' of the twenty-five pounder, or Lady Cynthia Keppel (to whom Postan was married in 1944) whose work on the birth of the jet aircraft was adjudged by Sir Frank Whittle to be, not indeed quite without imperfections, but still a 'magnificent job' done by a team of engineers.

However different all this was from anything Postan had done before, it made use of some of his strengths. First, in Sir Keith Hancock's words, it exploited 'his flair for the *particular*... He built his patterns of the particular into pictures of the general.' It also exploited his gifts as a teacher (Denys Hay recalls that 'he taught me how to work at a problem and how to present the results economically') and also his capacity to carve a way through the immense bulk of wartime records to which Sir Keith Hancock points as one of the chief problems of their task. The main fruits of Postan's part in it, apart from a number of unpublished studies

which were retained by departments for official use, were the collaborative work, *The Design and Development of Weapons* (1964), which Postan edited and to which he contributed the section on aircraft, and his own volume on *British War Production* (1952). The latter provides a 'synoptic' view of the strategic and economic factors which shaped both the 'programmes' which the armed services laid down and the flow of deliveries designed to fulfil them. Quite clearly this was an undertaking of a historian who dwelt with the social sciences. This foray into official history may also have quickened Postan's interest, evident in the post-war years, in the nature of the circumstances which favoured or retarded technological progress. A lecture in 1951 explored the reasons for the backwardness of medieval science; another in 1968 sought explanations for the 'outburst of innovation' after the Second World War, a matter also treated at some length in his *Economic History of Western Europe, 1945–64*. The connection between these investigations and the biographies of guns and aircraft may be indirect, but Postan's years as 'official historian of munitions' also directed his attention to new problems that had no necessary association with war-production.

III

Work on the history of war-production lasted well into peacetime, but the war's end enabled Postan to return to Cambridge. The years that followed were very full years. There was time again for his personal interests, for breaks (often accompanied by friends) at Festiniog, and there was now a family. Of course, there were also discussions and debates, to which sometimes the savour of controversy was added. Michael Oakeshott's 'conservative anti-rationalism' provoked a response in 1948; from time to time he returned to the relationship between economic history and the neighbouring social sciences; and in 1968 he generated argument in the pages of *Encounter* by attributing some part of the blame for England's economic difficulties to the 'plague of economists' whose abstract prescriptions were too remote from actual situations in specific areas of the economy. He did not claim that historians could apply a total corrective, merely that it would be advantageous to infuse the advice that governments received from economists with 'a large dose of micro-economic understanding'. To administer that dose there was room for the historian—a natural enough conclusion of a historian with Postan's 'flair for the particular'.

However enjoyable such excursions were, on the other hand, there is no question that economic history was his absolute priority. He played a part, of course, in the affairs of his college, Peterhouse, of which he had been a fellow since his coming to Cambridge in 1935, and also in those of the History and Economics Faculties at Cambridge; but he avoided more than a necessary involvement in university politics and administration, which sometimes absorb too much of the energies of professors. This does not mean that he was niggardly of his time. In the twenty years after 1945 he offered, with an enthusiasm seemingly undimmed, an exceptionally wide range of undergraduate courses and classes; special subjects on the economy of modern Britain and on thirteenth-century English rural society, and other courses on medieval or modern English or European economic history, on the sources of medieval history, on medieval science, and on the politics and sociology of Marxism. He also directed the work of numerous research students and his regular seminar, which met in his rooms in Peterhouse and brought teachers and research students together, became a famous Cambridge institution. Its members debated amongst themselves, were sometimes brought face to face with a theoretical (or at least an applied) economist, or from time to time were enabled to meet visitors from other places. Even after many years the memory of Tawney remains, discoursing about Cranfield in his own inimitable style; and once or even twice a specially afforced session discussed the Middle Ages with E. A. Kosminsky. As a forum for the discussion of economic history Postan's seminar was a unique institution.

That it was so, reflected in no small measure his personal contribution to it. First there was the breadth of his interests, his sheer versatility: the seminar, therefore, could offer accommodation to an unusual diversity of topics. It was an antidote to any narrowness of horizons. Then there was his own engagement in every issue. At meetings of the seminar, as at conferences, Postan liked to sit close to the speaker, and as the latter's discourse proceeded his eagerness to intervene became increasingly evident. Once the paper was ended, moreover, his intervention was seldom long delayed and was likely to seize upon the crucial issue and enlarge the horizons of discussion. Inevitably there were occasions when he did not immediately convince, or convince everyone, for he was not one to show timidity in trying out an idea; but in any case his interventions were an invitation to turn an idea over and, if it was found wanting, to throw it back for further refinement. Debate, in other words, was a way of teaching and learning.

There were, of course, many other ways in which he advanced the cause of economic history. To begin with, he continued to be sole editor of the *Economic History Review* until 1950 and was then joint editor until 1960. He was a very active editor, as Sir John Habakkuk, his co-editor in the 1950s, has made clear. 'He was fertile in devising new features . . .; he commissioned reports from the frontiers of subjects; he took endless pains with young scholars who submitted manuscripts unpublishable in their existing state but with a gleam of promise in them. A lot of sparks were fanned into life by him.' Postan himself has admitted that even general articles he had commissioned were seldom published in their original form, although modestly he suggested that they had to be accommodated to the *Review*'s shortage of space. By 1956 he was able to claim for the *Review* 'a circulation larger than that of any other comparable historical journal at home or abroad' and, he might have added, an international influence shared by very few other journals in the field. Much of the credit for these achievements must be accorded to his editorial supervision. Not surprisingly, when he finally retired as editor in 1960, he was elected as vice-president of the Economic History Society, which publishes the *Review*, an office he held for the rest of his life, excepting for the years 1963–6 when he was the Society's president.

Meantime, there were many other calls upon his time. There was his other major editorship, that of the *Cambridge Economic History*, magisterial volumes designed to sum up the state of knowledge in the subject and the products of international scholarship. He was once again a characteristically active editor of three medieval and two modern volumes. He also had a substantial responsibility for securing the recognition of economic history as a social science by the SSRC, with all that this meant for the furtherance of research in the subject; he was one of the principal spokesmen for economic historians at the international historical congresses of the 1950s; and he was one of the small group which engineered the establishment of an International Economic History Association, of which he became honorary president. It was in this capacity that M. W. Flinn recalled him, at the Association's second conference at Aix-en-Provence in 1962, when 'in a crowded hall blacked out by an electricity failure, Postan, unable to see his notes, held an audience enthralled on the subject of agriculture and economic growth in India for long over the prescribed period'. In this same connection the warm hospitality dispensed by Cynthia and himself at 2 Sylvester Road, Cambridge, should also not be forgotten. One could never be sure

whom one might meet there: colleagues from this country, of course, but perhaps Walt Rostow or George Homans or Sir Keith Hancock or Carlo Cipolla or Ambrose Raftis or any of dozens of others. The extent to which Postan was an international figure was manifest even at home.

There was, too, an increasingly general recognition of his standing. He was elected to a fellowship of the British Academy in 1959; he was made an honorary fellow of the LSE in 1974; there were doctorates *honoris causa* at Birmingham, York, Edinburgh, and the Sorbonne; and finally in 1980 there was a knighthood. There was also a special appropriateness in the Economic History Society's decision, as a valedictory greeting on his retirement from the Cambridge chair in 1965, to dedicate to him an issue of the *Review* for which various of his pupils and colleagues were invited to provide contributions that would indicate 'the breadth of interests and the fertility of ideas' he had brought to economic history.

His breadth of interests, indeed, showed no signs of narrowing as the years passed. He was still actively exploring the more recent periods of economic history, in which his investigations were increasingly focused on the two problems around which his *Economic History of Europe, 1945–64* was organized: the processes of economic growth on the one hand and the changing social contexts in which those processes operated on the other. In his study of such questions his points of departure were still those appropriate to the historian—'concrete, empirical and individualized researches'; but these might pave the way, as in that dramatic lecture at Aix in 1962, for general and even practical conclusions. He began on that occasion with one of the 'questionable deductions from past experience' current in economic and sociological debate: the proposition derived from the English experience of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that economic development is synonymous with industrialization. Particular investigations of the English experience itself make that proposition questionable; and it was one which needed still further modification before it could be applied as a model of economic growth in the quite different context of, for example, contemporary India. This was a problem still concerning him in 1970, when he juxtaposed the alternative routes towards industrialization of England and the USSR and looked at the consequences of applying these models in the modern developing world. In this field at least he did feel that history had a lesson to teach: that the way to growth lay along a course which conformed to the logic of past development in the

country concerned and an avoidance of the mere reproduction of the past experience of some other, and necessarily different, society. The prescription is a very general one and leaves much room for argument about the correct medicine and its dosage: but then he had believed from the start that the historian's contribution to the science of humanity was 'small and uncertain'.

The main emphasis of Postan's work, however, continued to lie in the Middle Ages. Like others returning to academic life in 1945 he had unfinished studies to complete, including some on medieval trade. The harvest included a few short essays (one of which established the widespread use of partnership arrangements in medieval English commerce), but also two wide-ranging surveys. These were his *Cambridge Economic History* chapter on the trade of northern Europe (1952) and a chapter on economic relations in *Eastern and Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (1970). They cover much of the same ground, but the former treats trade in greater depth and the latter takes more account of the impact of the northern trade on eastern Europe, including its influence upon the changing fortunes of the eastern peasantry. In combination they offer a synoptic view of northern commerce during the Middle Ages constructed with characteristic skill.

Well before 1939, however, Postan had also begun to direct attention to the apparent fluctuations in economic activity during the Middle Ages and, in particular, to the contraction of activity in the later medieval period. He returned to this matter in 1950, in an article in the *Economic History Review* and in a report he made to the 9th International Historical Congress, which assembled evidence pointing to a long-term decline of population during the later Middle Ages and at the same time advanced arguments for tracing the beginnings of that decline back to the early decades of the fourteenth century. The timing is of basic importance, for if Postan's contention is valid the downward demographic trend cannot be attributed solely to the effects of endemic plague, which only operated from 1349 onwards. He therefore offered an alternative hypothesis: that the observable facts are compatible with 'the inherent tendencies of populations on the Malthusian level of existence' and that the men of the later Middle Ages were being punished for the over-expansion of agriculture onto marginal soils by their forefathers. When plague came in 1349 population and production were already falling and this underlying trend helps to explain why recovery from plague losses was so very slow. The population trend reflected still more basic

influences at work during the later Middle Ages as well as being a cause of some of the difficulties of the times.

His conclusions about the late Middle Ages, which were central to Postan's interpretation of the evolution of the medieval economy, naturally enough engendered a debate which has by no means ended; but they have also become a point of departure in all such discussions. They also marked a point at which his attention was increasingly concentrated upon the medieval rural scene. He was looking at that scene, too, from new angles. In 1937 his framework of reference was provided by principles drawn from classical economics; but in 1950 he wrote of the tendency among students to relate the study of the medieval economy to general problems of economic growth, while in 1962 the original title of his Aix lecture was 'agricultural problems of under-developed countries in the light of European agrarian history'. Terms of reference, in other words, were found more and more in growth economics and the economics of underdevelopment, and studies of more recent peasant societies by sociologists and anthropologists also afforded new insights into the social context of the medieval economy. At the same time, while theoretical principles drawn from other disciplines might help in formulating the questions to be asked of the medieval evidence, as always Postan's explorations were directed initially at particular and specific problems: the labour organization of manors in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (1954), mortality on the Winchester manors in the century after 1250 (1959, a joint study with J. Z. Titow), the land transactions of Peterborough villeins (1960), the holdings of livestock of thirteenth-century villagers (1962). In every sense of the phrase this series of studies was the fruit of fundamental research.

The results of these specific investigations were finally drawn together in the account of medieval English rural society in its prime which Postan wrote for the revised first volume of the *Cambridge Economic History* published in 1966. The scope of the chapter is rather wider than its rubric might imply, for it deals with the periods of 'manorial retrenchment' in the twelfth century and the later Middle Ages as well as with the age of 'buoyant demesnes' of *c.*1175–1325. It is, therefore, the most complete statement of Postan's conclusions about the rural economy and society of medieval England. The expansion and contraction of settlement, the growth and decline of population, manorial buoyancy, and retrenchment, the fluctuating fortunes of different types of landlord and of different groups amongst the peasantry—

these threads are woven together into a single tapestry with rare skill and consistency. Of course, this version of medieval English agrarian history has also become the subject of debate, but again it is the point of departure for discussion. The chapter is also an illustration of how deceptive Postan's work can be. It moves so easily across the medieval countryside that, but for the articles which preceded it, we might fail to appreciate the basic research which lay behind it. The implication is that these preliminary essays will also continue to be obligatory fare for serious students of medieval economic history.

IV

Postan retired from his Cambridge chair on 30 September 1965, and retirement perhaps called for a measure of stocktaking. In 1971–3, therefore, he published three volumes of collected papers, which are a vivid reminder of the breadth of his interests and the range of his contributions to scholarship. In 1972 he also published *The Medieval Economy and Society: an Economic History of Britain in the Middle Ages*. In some ways it disappointed, perhaps because we expected too much of it. Postan himself admitted its 'unsymmetrical' character, for while it is an excellent account for a general audience of the state of our knowledge of the medieval countryside, other areas of the economy are treated much more summarily. It was perhaps asking more than was reasonable, however, to expect the sort of reassessment in depth of these other areas which Postan, over a period of many years, had undertaken for the English rural economy of the Middle Ages.

Stocktaking, of course, was only a part of the story of his retirement. His editorial work was continued, and at his death he had almost finished work on assembling a second edition of vol. ii of the *Cambridge Economic History*. He also continued to travel and to visit friends in many countries; and from time to time he still gave undergraduate lectures and classes. He still wrote on medieval topics: on legal status and economic standing among medieval villagers for a Japanese *Festschrift* and on investment in medieval agriculture for an American periodical (1968), on trade relations between eastern and western Europe (1970), on the Polish feudal economy (1977), on population trends and class relations (with John Hatcher, 1978), and a review of the various historical models of feudalism published only after his death. There were other writings too—the broadside directed at the plague of economists and his last words on industrialization and

the processes of economic growth amongst them. Nor had his devastating sense of humour deserted him. It was in his debate with the economists that he found some of their prescriptions reminding him of 'the famous Chinese procedure for roasting pig', provoking the cautionary observation that 'there are better recipes for pork joints—less costly and more certain—than the burning down of entire homes'.

In his latter years, particularly after some help in organizing its sessions became available with the appointment of John Hatcher to a Cambridge post, his seminar again began to meet with some regularity. In addition to economic historians permanently or temporarily resident in Cambridge it also drew in former pupils from other universities: Britnell from Durham, King from Sheffield, Titow from Nottingham, among others. Postan's own contributions to its proceedings had lost little of their cogency or enthusiasm. He attended his last seminar a week before his death, a week during which there was also a visit to the opera and other social occasions at which he displayed all his customary vivacity. He died on 12 December 1981, having lived life fully to the end.

EDWARD MILLER

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