

SIR JOHN CLAPHAM, 1873–1946

IT is with great regret that we record the death on 29 March 1946 of Sir John Clapham, C.B.E., Litt.D., F.B.A., one of the principal founders of the Cambridge Historical Society and of this *Journal*, and Professor of Economic History in the University between 1928 and 1938.

Only rarely does the student of history gain an assured glimpse of 'origins', or find his chains of connexion succinctly set out for him in a single document; but in a volume of correspondence purchased by the Cambridge University Library at Sotheby's in 1914 (and relating to the early stages in the production of the *Cambridge Modern History*), there is a letter from Alfred Marshall to Lord Acton, dated 13 November 1897, which is more than mere raw material—almost a finished piece of history as it stands—and which, whether as a prophecy or as a memorial, must be eloquent to those who knew Sir John Clapham and realized the depth of his roots in the Cambridge tradition:

I feel that the absence of any tolerable account of the economic development of England during the last century and a half is a disgrace to the land, and a grievous hindrance to the right understanding of the economic problems of our time. London and Cambridge are the only places where the work is likely to be done well; but till recently the man for the work had not appeared. But now I think the man is in sight. Clapham has more analytic faculty than any thorough historian whom I have ever taught; his future work is I think still uncertain; a little force would I think turn him this way or that. If you could turn him towards XVIII and XIX century economic history economists would ever be grateful to you... If he works at anything but recent economic history he will disobey Babbage's canon that every one should do that work for which all his best faculties are wanted and no other.

Sir John Clapham never forgot that he had begun his career as a student of the French Revolution, and he seemed to renew his reading in that field (and returned to the subject more in conversation) in the closing years of his life. It was possible to detect what seemed to be the Actonian influence upon him when he discussed historical writing in general, deplored the narrowing effect that specialization might have, and showed his appreciation of the wider issues in history. The thrust which Marshall wished to see given to him in his youth must have been powerfully supplemented by his tenure of the Chair of Economics in Leeds between 1902 and 1908 and by his contact with the Yorkshire woollen industry. Since those days successive generations of undergraduates met their first experience of Cambridge history teaching in his lectures on the economic history of England, which came to stand in some

indefinable way as an 'institution', and which, according to an ancient rumour, were once pirated and circulated in print. Not until comparatively recent years did the completion of his major work put us in a position to realize fully the aptness of the words of Marshall, and to measure the weight of the prophetic message that they carried. In the meantime Cambridge had benefited in many fields from his trenchant, judicial mind, his multifarious activities, his kindness and humanity. He was the first editor of the *Cambridge Studies in Economic History*, and one of the editors of the *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*. Up to the time of his death he was one of the Syndics of the University Press. Of his devotion to this *Journal* and his assistance, particularly in the last decade, it is difficult to believe that anyone save the editor can have any idea.