



Photograph by Ramsey & Muspratt, 1941

NORMAN HEPBURN BAYNES

NORMAN HEPBURN BAYNES

1877-1961

NORMAN HEPBURN BAYNES was born on 29 May 1877, the elder child and only son of Alfred Henry Baynes and Emma Katherine Bigwood. His grandfather, Joseph Baynes (1795-1875), had been for more than forty years the Baptist minister in Wellington, Somerset. His father held distinguished office for thirty years as General Secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society and his mother was herself the daughter of a Baptist minister and took an active interest in the affairs of this Society. His only sister, Amy Katherine, was married to a life-long friend, Kenneth Jay Spalding. His home was first in London and then in Eastbourne. When his father retired in 1906 the family moved to Northwood; and after his father's death in 1914 Baynes continued to make his home there with his mother until she died in 1935. Finally he settled in London in the familiar '4B', as his house in Abercorn Place was known to his friends.

Baynes was brought up in a close-knit and devoted family circle. From an early age a strong sense of Christian purpose and of public duty was instilled in him. At the same time he lived a sheltered life in the ordered security of a well-to-do Victorian family. Among his papers some of the products of his happy childhood have survived—magazines and stories which he wrote and illustrated, competitions and quizzes organized for the household, carefully copied out in his clear handwriting under his chosen pseudonym of Donald Camerons. He never knew poverty or the struggle to acquire knowledge in an uncongenial environment, though in later life his acute sensitivity and his powerful imagination allowed him to enter fully into the problems of those who had experienced such hardships. Baynes went to Eastbourne College and all his life he retained a strong interest in his school. He was a serious-minded, studious boy, with no great love of organized games, and in conversation later in life he gave the impression that the really formative influence on his early life was not his school but his family circle. One of the great events in his boyhood was the annual family holiday and several of his diaries on this topic have survived. They give careful factual accounts with

the somewhat stilted comments of a self-conscious boy of sixteen or seventeen. Later they cover family visits abroad to Germany, or travel with his father to Istanbul, or his own longer stay in Tübingen, where as a young man he gained an excellent knowledge of the German language and insight into the German character.

In 1896 he went to New College, Oxford, where he took a First Class in Honour Moderations and a Second Class in Literae Humaniores. Surviving correspondence shows that his contemporaries failed to understand why he did not get a First in Schools, but he later freely admitted that he was no philosopher. His gifts as an historian were soon shown by his success in winning the Marquess of Lothian's Prize (1901) and the Arnold Essay Prize (1903). The subjects of these essays, the Emperor Heraclius, and the military reforms of Diocletian and Constantine, pointed the way to his future work, and the diaries of this period also hinted at his growing interest in East Rome.

When he went down Baynes took as his profession the bar, studying in the Chambers of R. J. Parker, afterwards Baron Parker of Waddington, a Lord of Appeal, and until 1916 he was for some time a tutor under the Law Society. During the First World War he worked on intelligence matters in Watergate House and it was at this time also that his long connexion with University College, London, really began. In his characteristic farewell oration given on 13 March 1942 to University College (then evacuated to Bangor) Baynes tells how three times in his life he made decisions which he never regretted. As a young man at least two careers other than that which he finally chose were open to him, careers in which he would certainly have won distinction. These were politics and the bar. He was asked by a Liberal Party whip to stand for a seat in the London area but he refused. Then, during the First World War, as he said, 'I determined to abandon the teaching and the practice of the law and to devote myself to the teaching of history'. And this 'teaching of history' was from deliberate choice to be in London, for Baynes's third momentous decision was after the First World War when he refused the invitation of his own college to go back to Oxford. He sometimes spoke of this, and however strong his allegiance to Oxford he always stressed with pride that he was essentially a cockney and belonged to a cockney university. Some of Baynes's friends would maintain that quite another career was open to him and that

he could have made a name as a comedian on the music halls. There was, however, nothing in Baynes's upbringing to give him a lead in this direction, though he himself related how one of his aunts once proclaimed loudly at a meal in public, 'Norman, you ought to have been a clown.' But improvised entertainments in his family circle, or his well-known performances in aid of charity at informal college functions, or his comic turns for soldiers in hospital, bore witness to his marked gifts as a humorist.

The records of University College show that he was appointed Assistant in the Department of History in 1913. He gave his first lecture on Ancient History to the Evening School on 8 October 1913. In 1919 he became Reader in the History of the Roman Empire in the University of London and in 1931 a Chair of Byzantine History was created for him which he held until he retired in 1942. He took an active part in the life of University College. In 1919 he was appointed a member of its Professorial Board; from 1926 to 1928 he was Dean of the Faculty of Arts, and in 1936 he was elected a Fellow. Perhaps he would have said that the connexion with University College which he valued most was his work for the Evening School of History. He was associated with this non-graduate diploma school from 1919 to 1933, and when Professor A. F. Pollard retired in 1927 he held the directorship until he resigned this in 1933. In 1937 Baynes was 60 and expressed his desire to resign his chair and devote himself wholly to Byzantine History, hoping that his links with the college might be maintained by an honorary lectureship in this subject. The college replied by relieving him of all duties in relation to the teaching of Ancient History and reappointing him Honorary Professor of Byzantine History and Institutions. The question of emolument did not enter into the matter from Baynes's point of view. In 1942 Baynes retired and was given by the university the title of Emeritus Professor. His friends marked the occasion by presenting him with an *Address*, together with a bibliography of his writings, privately printed at the University Press in Oxford.

The last years of Baynes's academic career fell during the Second World War. He was never a really detached scholar and the ties of academic work were more than outweighed by what he regarded as public duty and by his strong sense of fellowship. It was imperative for him to give some kind of direct service to the community during any period of great struggle, to be working side by side with his colleagues, contributing

as far as might be to the conduct of the war. When he delivered the Romanes Lecture in Oxford on 2 June 1942 on Intellectual Liberty and Totalitarian Claims—said by those who heard it to have been a brilliant caricature of Hitler's oratory—he proclaimed at the outset that in such circumstances it was for him 'impossible to be adequately academic'. So during the years 1939–45 Baynes turned his back on Byzantine History. He migrated to Oxford to work in the Foreign Research and Press Service, afterwards the Research Department of the Foreign Office. Here he gave his services in the field of modern German history, drawing to the full on his training as an historian. He did indeed achieve a remarkable mastery over a wide range of modern German affairs, historical, administrative, and political. The piles of surviving notes among his papers and the two weighty volumes of Hitler's pre-war speeches translated into English and annotated with a wealth of learned detail¹ witness to the concentrated intensity of his activity during these years.

After the war he returned to Byzantium. He was at first much absorbed in editing a long-delayed collection of essays by various scholars, planned in the twenties and after innumerable obstacles published at last in 1948.² And then he was engaged with Elizabeth Dawes in a translation of the contemporary biographies of St. Daniel the Stylite, St. Theodore of Sykeon, and St. John the Almsgiver, which appeared as *Three Byzantine Saints* (1948). But after this his fire seemed to have spent itself, perhaps a foreshadowing of the mortal illness which was soon to attack him.

In 1947 Baynes had had his seventieth birthday. Volume xxxvii of the *Journal of Roman Studies* was dedicated to him on the occasion. This gave him great pleasure and he replied individually and characteristically to each contributor. He was an indefatigable correspondent and had a strong sense of dialectic. The essays offered him in the *J.R.S.* concluded with a letter from his friend Hugh Last, who wrote that one thing at least he wished to do:

That is to say my 'thank you'. It is well over a quarter of a century ago that our friendship started that evening when we met here as

¹ *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler August 1922–August 1939: an English translation of Representative Passages arranged under Subjects*, 2 vols., O.U.P. (issued under the auspices of the Royal Institute for International Affairs), 1942.

² *Byzantium: an Introduction to East Roman Civilisation*, ed. N. H. Baynes and H. St. L. B. Moss, Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1948.

guests of Stuart Jones. Since then our correspondence has been such that a fortnight's break seems a long interruption; and often there have been 'fusilades'. To me, as to very many others whose work lies in one of the various fields of which you are master, your letters have been one of the most wholly satisfactory features of life. For them thus far, and for the help you give so freely to every scholar, young or old, who asks, I want to put my gratitude on record—which now hereby I do.

Baynes's last years were overshadowed by illness. Pneumonia in 1953, a broken thigh in 1954, and other troubles, culminated in a long period of complete helplessness, and he died on 12 February 1961. It thus proved impossible for him to realize his plans for work on a social history of East Rome, impossible to undertake the editorship of a new volume on Byzantium in the *Cambridge Medieval History*. But as long as he was able he continued to show a keen interest in the activities of his wide circle of friends and to advise on every kind of problem. For Baynes had a genius for friendship. It was immaterial whether it was a research student asking for guidance in writing a thesis, or a fellow scholar tracking down a manuscript, or a member of his evening classes with some family problem. Baynes brought to bear on every situation the same insight and integrity and single-minded desire to help, and, it should be added, a robust sense of humour which often saved a strained or awkward situation. It was this which endeared him to generations of students and friends in every walk of life. His charity was unbounded and in great humility his services were offered to all. When an offprint or a book arrived from him one knew the full meaning of the words he so often wrote on the front page—'In friendship'.

Although Baynes taught Ancient History, his interests became increasingly focused on the early Byzantine period, though he rarely, if ever, encouraged anyone to take the decision to work in this field. He belonged to the school which considered that a student should find his own subject of research and take full responsibility for the choice. For him a supervisor with a card index of thesis subjects was anathema; nor did he believe in seminars for research students. But his supervisions were unforgettable. The raw young researcher was treated with exactly the same respect which he accorded to the proved and mature scholar and in a series of discussions the principles of exact scholarship and of elegant presentation would be indelibly instilled, though not all could live up to the standard set. For Baynes it was impossible to pursue scholarship without constant

human contacts, whether by formal instruction or by informal discussion. His gift for establishing fruitful human relationships showed itself in the foundation of at least two associations—the Ancient History Circle and the Nearer East Group. The Ancient History Circle stemmed from his work with the Evening School of History at University College and it still exists. When Baynes could no longer come in person, it reported faithfully to him on its activities. A long-standing member of this circle writes: 'Inspired by him the meetings became eagerly anticipated engagements. We enjoyed lectures, discussions, social evenings and weekend walks. As a lecturer he was superb, but he excelled equally as an actor, as when we read Aristophanes' *Frogs* and his inimitable performance of the frogs brought down the house. That evening was long remembered.' The Nearer East group was more strongly academic in character and consisted of scholars in Baynes's own and kindred fields. Its membership was exclusively male. Those privileged to join have memories of dinners and weekends when views were exchanged and contested in the genial atmosphere which Baynes's own generosity of spirit never failed to create.

In a more formal capacity he served on many boards and committees, particularly in the University of London. He gave unsparingly of his time not only at University College but on the Board of Studies in History. He was an active member of the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies and served as president. He warmly supported the Historical Association and contributed to its series of historical and bibliographical pamphlets (one of which, *The Political Ideas of St. Augustine*, became a best seller).

His early work on Constantine and Heraclius pointed the way to his consuming interest in later Roman and early medieval times. But he remained throughout essentially a classical scholar who had strayed into a medieval world which he only understood in part. His knowledge of classical antiquity and his passionate interest in Christianity made it particularly appropriate that he should have concentrated on the early Byzantine period. Here in the world of Constantine or Theodosius or Heraclius, in an atmosphere rooted in the Greek tradition, living as it were in a Roman administrative framework, and transformed by the Christian belief, he was at home. And yet as the Middle Ages progressed away from its Graeco-Roman past he felt less at ease and it was characteristic that he ended his brilliant short survey in *The Byzantine Empire* (1926) with

the Fourth Crusade in 1204. Even so the weight of the book is on the early period. And it was the same with his more detailed studies.

Baynes is best known among scholars for his work on the fourth to the seventh centuries A.D. He contributed chapters on the successors of Justinian and on Heraclius to the *Cambridge Medieval History*, i and ii (1911 and 1913). He was one of the editors of the *Cambridge Ancient History*, xii (1939). In this he contributed a chapter on Constantine the Great, who had been the subject of his Raleigh Lecture (1929). The problem of Constantine's conversion and the nature of the Roman imperial tradition continued to occupy him throughout his life. He wrote with vigour and conviction on the integrity of Constantine's religious position and, as always with Baynes, his conclusions were based on a rigorous examination of all available evidence. His views on Constantine have not commanded universal acceptance, nor has his contention that the *Historia Augusta* was written during the reign of Julian and in his interest. But Baynes was prepared to stand his ground, as he showed in his rejoinder on the *Historia Augusta* in the *Classical Quarterly* (1928), though this is more emphatic in tone than his milder comments twenty-two years later in his review of E. Hohl's *Maximini Duo Juli Capitolini* (*Classical Review*, lxiv, 1950).

Most of Baynes's work on the late classical and early Byzantine field took the form of articles or bibliographical notes. Though some of his conclusions have been challenged they have inevitably stimulated and compelled reconsideration of many problems. Much of his unspectacular and detailed work still stands; for instance his early article on the Restoration of the Cross at Jerusalem (*English Historical Review*, 1912) is drawn on by A. Pertusi in his edition of George of Pisidia (1961). An enormous amount of energy went into editorial and bibliographical work and into reviews. Tea chests filled with papers and correspondence show how much he put into his share of the editorship of the *Cambridge Ancient History* or of *Byzantium*. From 1924 until 1940 he was British contributor to the bibliographical notes of the *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*. Baynes had a passion for bibliography, and this became a feature of his articles and reviews, whether designed for a popular or a learned audience. On the whole he wrote little, not because he ever feared criticism but partly because of his careful, even fastidious, approach to scholarship, and partly also because he always gave priority to personal claims on his time and energy.

As a reviewer he set himself the task of complete mastery of the subject before he wrote. He thought himself slowly and carefully into his topic and in the end could always put his finger on any weakness in a book. But his reviews, though often acutely critical, were invariably courteous and constructive, and often made a real contribution to the subject. Some of them were subsequently reprinted in his *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (1955).

Baynes's own views on the function of the historian may be deduced from his critical appraisal of the work of J. B. Bury. His Memoir of Bury (published in 1929 under the modest title of *A Bibliography of the Works of J. B. Bury*) reveals his admiration for the scholar whom he first met in Cambridge in 1903. To the end of his life Baynes retained a warm appreciation of Bury's work in the early Byzantine and other fields. But he was convinced that an historian must be able to stand back and view his problem 'with eyes adjusted to a changed perspective'. This was precisely what Bury found difficult, perhaps because, as Baynes perceived, in his historical work 'there was war between the analysis of the critic and the vision of the creative artist'. Baynes, on the other hand, was never afraid to combine critical and exact scholarship with imaginative reconstruction. Bury had certainly prepared the way for a truer understanding of East Rome (long neglected in the British Isles). But it was Baynes, his follower and successor, who was able to bring to life the civilization of Byzantium for an immeasurably wider audience than that commanded by Bury.

Baynes had a magnificent voice and a great sense of oratory and some of his most characteristic and distinguished performances were contributions, often *ex tempore*, made at meetings or congresses. His proposal in a London café on 14 March 1914 that an Ancient History Circle be formed is still remembered. His formal and informal contributions to the Byzantine Congresses at Belgrade (1927) and Sofia (1934) are still recounted both by scholars and by members of the family circles in the Balkans where he was a welcome and an honoured guest, and indeed has become almost a legendary figure.

His contribution to scholarship was recognized by many honours at home and abroad. He was always insistent that scholarship knew no distinctions of creed or nationality and it gave him special pleasure to be linked with the learned Academies of Bavaria or Belgium or Serbia. But to those who knew him best it would seem that his contribution is something more

intangible and perhaps more valuable than works of scholarship. It is rather his constant emphasis on the compelling obligation to declare the need for, and the exercise of, independent judgement. This was his contribution to the shaping of the tradition which he entrusted to future generations in his farewell oration to the students of University College. The words applied to Alfred Henry Baynes are equally true of his son—he remains ‘an irresistible challenge and an abiding inspiration’.¹

J. M. HUSSEY

[I should like to express my warm thanks to many of N. H. B.’s friends and particularly to Professor H. Hale Bellot and Professor R. A. Humphreys.]

¹ B. R. Wheeler, *Alfred Henry Baynes, J.P.* (London, n.d.).