

AUSTIN ROBINSON

Also by Sir Alec Cairncross

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YEARS OF RECOVERY

Austin Robinson

The Life of an Economic Adviser

Alec Cairncross



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Publishers' Note

Sadly Sir Austin Robinson did not live to see the publication of this book. He died on 1 June 1993, at the age of 95, after the proofs had been passed for press.

Preface

Sir Austin Robinson has had a unique career, beginning in the nineteenth century and stretching out towards the twenty-first. His long life includes a spell as a seaplane pilot in the First World War when seaplanes were barely ten years old; tutoring a maharajah for two years in India; travelling for 12,000 miles through Africa in 1932; taking part in the various revolutions in economic thought in Cambridge in the 1930s; playing a leading part on the economic side of the war effort from 1939 to 1945; and exercising a major influence after the war in nearly every major association of economists in this country.

I started to write his life with all this in mind but also from a sense of personal obligation. It was he who brought about what proved to be the most important event in my professional career at the end of 1939. He rang me up when I was just about to go to the Scottish Home Department in Edinburgh to organise information-gathering on the state of public morale by pub-crawl, and suggested, out of the blue, that I should join him and John Jewkes in the War Cabinet Offices as some kind of economic adviser. This brought me in at the birth of what, a year later, became the Economic Section of the War Cabinet Offices and was transferred in 1953 to the Treasury as the chief source of economic advice to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Then at the end of the war I took over from Austin in Berlin as head of the Economic Advisory Panel, acting for the Treasury in the quadripartite negotiations on the future level of industry in Germany. On my return to London in the spring of 1946 I was asked once again to follow him, this time as Economic Adviser to the Board of Trade.

When I came to prepare a draft of the memoir, I found that much more detail survived to enliven the narrative, both in letters from India and Africa and in wartime papers, than I could have guessed. Added to that, Austin has been indefatigable in amplifying my draft with his own memories, written in his usual elegant style. I must have had at least a letter a week from him, sometimes even two a day, many of them filling several pages and all containing material that I could build into the text like a bird's nest. Although I take full

responsibility for the manuscript, a high proportion of it is written in Austin's own words or condenses information he has supplied.

Among those to whom I am indebted for information in preparing this memoir are Joyce Baird, Ezra Bennathan, Henry Phelps Brown, Tam Dalyell, Charles Feinstein, Geoffrey Harcourt, Barbara Jeffrey, David Layton, Robin Matthews, James Meade, Margaret Robinson, Aubrey Silberston, Hans Singer and John Toye. I am indebted to Cambridge University Press for permission to reprint in Chapter 1 an extract from *Eminent Economists: Their Life Philosophies*. I should like also to thank Mrs Anne Robinson for once more reducing my scribbles to order and legibility.

ALEC CAIRNCROSS