



KARL LEYSER

*Deborah Elliott*

## Karl Joseph Leyser 1920–1992

KARL JOSEPH LEYSER was born in Düsseldorf on 24 October 1920. His father was a manufacturer of belts and braces, inheriting a family business, while his mother, a young woman of stunning beauty whose maiden name was Hayum, came from a Cologne family which owned a factory producing gloves and stockings. After the terrible German inflation of the 1920s, the Leysers settled down in a roomy, old-fashioned house in one of the quieter parts of Düsseldorf. They were Jewish, and when the Nazi regime came, every obstacle was placed in the way of Otto Leyser. Scrupulously careful as he was to obey the new regulations governing his exports to Holland and Belgium where his markets mainly lay, he none the less fell victim to an employee's denunciation and had to escape to Holland with his wife, Emmy, in 1937. It was in this year that Karl and his sister came to England, since the continuance of their education would have been virtually impossible in Düsseldorf. Indeed, the family was declared stateless by a decree of 1937 and its property in Germany was sequestered. Between 1937 and 1939 Karl's father built up a new factory in Holland, and his parents lived in a small house at Edam. But ruin once again followed the German occupation of Holland, and the couple lived in hiding and in the gravest danger for the last two-and-a-half years of the war. Two weeks after the German surrender in 1945, a certain Lieutenant (later Captain) Charles Lyser of the Black Watch (one assumes that the newspapers which reported this dropped the *e* on account of anti-German feeling at the time) drove his jeep into Edam, and had the joy of finding his parents

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once again. He had been standing in the main square of Edam, wondering what to do and where to go, when a man who recognised his likeness to his parents approached him. 'My father', he said to the journalists, 'is 67 years of age, and my mother is more than 50. Now they are safely housed in their own home. The quisling who occupied it is in jail.' For a third time his father began to build up his business, but the toll of the war on his health had been too great, and a few months later he succumbed to an attack of angina and died. His mother settled in England in 1950, having been helped financially by her son from the time he became a Fellow of Magdalen, and she lived to be high in her nineties.

Karl's education in 1937 continued at St Paul's School, to which he was channelled by voluntary agencies for refugees, with various of his father's relatives, not least among them the distinguished medieval historian Wilhelm Levison, helping with the fees. There survives a charming Christmas letter of 1946 from Levison to Karl, beginning 'Lieber Karl—denn so sage ich, wie in alten Zeiten, auch zu dem Captain' ('Dear Karl—for so I address you as formerly, albeit now Captain':—an allusion to Karl's rank in the Army). There is a story that because Karl would have exceeded the then quota of non-Anglicans at St Paul's, he was at first smuggled by the charismatic Philip Whitting into his history class. In any event, Whitting was an inspiration from the start. Karl would later say that the most lasting and exhilarating trait of Whitting's teaching for himself was his use of incident, an anecdote or a saying, to illuminate 'as if by a flash' a whole historical landscape. He taught with verve and, 'each essay was an event; he went through them with the writers individually, taking if anything more pains than would College tutors'. The galaxy of open awards won by Pauline historians, Karl's own among them, told their own tale. 'But more important because more lasting', Karl added, 'was the exhilaration, the shared enjoyment of the work which sweetened and tempered its competitiveness'. None the less, like all clever boys, Karl was interested in his marks. They had just had a history essay returned to them, he wrote to his mother on 4 March 1938, and his was by far the best.

Philip Whitting, in his turn, was very impressed by Karl from the start. His report for the autumn term of 1937 refers to his deep thought about, and (for his age) great knowledge of history, his excellent preparation and his exceptional general knowledge. His knowledge was commented on by other reports that term. It is important, for the method of using a single event or anecdote to illuminate a whole historical landscape, a method which Karl would use to fine effect in

his lecturing and writing, only works if one knows enough to find an apposite instance in one's repertoire. His tutor, A. N. G. Richards, wrote, 'he has clearly been well taught in the past and, for his age, can draw on a surprisingly wide range of illustration and example from history and literature'. He added that his chief temptation was discursiveness and indulgence in abstractions not based on any reality, but that he was rapidly introducing order and precision into his work, which now began to show the virtues and not the vices of a philosophical mind. Another of his teachers wrote, 'he must learn something of Gallic concision of style and purge himself of Teutonic turgidity and the habit of using long windy phrases where one or two short words will do'. This, however, showed less discernment as a criticism. What Karl achieved was not to change the quintessential Leyser into a Gallican scholastic (thank goodness!), but to bring clarity and control to his long rolling sentences which became such wonderful vehicles of Leyserian expression.

In the evenings Karl was sitting at home in Rugby Mansions (London W14) writing to his mother (in German of course), more than bearing out what these reports said. 'Goethe will do me good here', says one letter, 'for if one seeks a kind of delight and recreation after all the dry work, nothing is better than such a book for the spirit to turn to'. A month later (February 1938) he is alone listening to music while he writes. He likes Beethoven's Seventh Symphony best. 'I have no better friend when alone than such music, and more and more my knowledge of such works is broadening'. No apology is needed to expatiate on Karl's boyhood and youth, if one wishes to say something meaningful about his historical scholarship, for to an unusual degree in our time, his own personality and human experience were invested in his study of history. His school reports at this time indicate how fast his English was improving, and in later life he would come to think of himself as British even to the point of resentment at being taken for a foreigner. In his St Paul's days, however, he was willing to poke fun at the English with the best of the foreigners, showing early his gift for irony. 'Spring approaches', he writes in March 1938, 'and even the stiff English are becoming excited, and a sort of high spirits forces itself on one's attention'. Again, a week or so later 'the weather is already wonderfully fine and the sun continues to shine daily. The oldest Londoners do not know what is wrong and how it comes about'. Then, with a reference to his sporting activities, and also with just a hint of homesickness, he adds that if the St Paul's boys row under the

bridges, the people stand and stare down, 'just as I used often to do if I went across the Rhine bridge'.

Over the Christmas holiday of 1937–8 Karl stayed with the Lloyds at Great Dixter in Sussex, the first of many stays, and became very friendly with the youngest son of the family, Christopher Lloyd, who would later become famous as a garden writer. It was Karl's earliest experience of English upper class life. The Lloyds took boys from refugee organisations for holidays, but Karl was the one who most became a part of the family. 'The days pass quickly', he wrote to his mother, 'with reading, various nice games, conversation, music, and miles-long walks' (*meilenweiten Spaziergängen*). He went with Mrs Lloyd and Christopher to London to see *The School for Scandal*, 'a comedy full of biting attacks on the loving concern of eighteenth-century widows and maidens to ruin the character and reputation of their fellow creatures'. He would be truly sorry, he continued, to leave a house so full of history from every period. After Karl's death, Christopher Lloyd wrote of their respect and affection for each other as teenagers, and of how he and his sister used to tease Karl, who took it all good-humouredly to the point of guying himself. 'As an urban man' (and for all his later contacts with the British and Irish upper classes this represents an important perception), 'he pretended to no communion with the country. When a friend asked him if he could identify a common daisy, he said he supposed it was a sort of cow flower. And when he had been for a walk by himself while staying here (in Great Dixter), he described some sheep he met as letting out an ironical shout'.

In 1939 he entered Magdalen College, Oxford, as a demy (or scholar), but after a year in residence and a brief spell of internment he joined the Army. From the war years we have a correspondence between Karl and Bruce McFarlane, the celebrated history tutor of Magdalen, remarkable alike for its volume, intensity, and high level of thought and feeling. It begins when the news of Karl's internment as an enemy alien reached McFarlane in July 1940. The idea of the nineteen-year-old Karl amongst so many elderly and distinguished-looking Germans may be one to savour now, but at the time internment came as a blow, and when it would end could not be predicted. His letter to McFarlane has real pathos: 'I ardently hope that one day I may again take my place among the students of Magdalen College. Will I be able to resume gown and all when the time comes?' And then, about the academics in the internment camp, 'we are sincerely attached to this country and all hope to be its citizens in a not too remote future'.

McFarlane's response was immediate and his letter of 11 July 1940 deserves to be quoted at length:

Your letter with its sad but not unexpected news, arrived only this morning. I have seen Histed and I will pick out some books for him to send you this afternoon. I don't know that I shall choose well, so please write and give me a list of what you would most like and I will arrange for them to be sent to you. Also please let me know if there is anything else that you would like sent or done for you. You don't smoke, perhaps fortunately, but I should like to send you fruit or chocolate if I knew that you would care for it. I know that you are reluctant to make what you may think is a nuisance of yourself, but I hope that you will make every use of me possible, relying on my friendship *absolutely*. I want you to feel no doubt at all that you have in me someone who will stand by you and care for your welfare as a parent or a brother would. I hope that you will never forget that. And never forget to let me know what you want so that I may do my best to do it.

This imaginative and unstinting kindness which persisted throughout the war and thereafter was surely the bedrock of McFarlane's subsequent influence, and of their friendship. The same could be said for many of McFarlane's other pupils. Karl summed it up in a brilliant phrase when, less than a year before his own death, he spoke at a dinner to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of McFarlane's death, and referred to McFarlane's friendship and concern and how they were a function of his 'resourceful shyness'. 'He was the past master of friendship', Karl concluded, 'and that has brought us together to-night.'

In his memoir of McFarlane (1976) Karl wrote of McFarlane's correspondence with his pupils and friends as a war service:

He corresponded with them, writing hundreds of letters and so kept open their lines of communication with interests and aspirations then in abeyance. Parcels of books were dispatched to various theatres of war and home stations and the arrival of his letters was something to be looked forward to in Nissen huts, slit trenches, and gun-pits. He wrote with enjoyment and ease about people, his reading, his work, music, and the wartime College. He did not just want to entertain but to share.

The kindness and friendship of McFarlane's letters, however, imposed pressures on Karl. He is found frequently apologising for his own letters, highly wrought as they were. 'Yes, my letters were flat, and reading stopped early at OCTU'; 'how pleasant your musings as against mine'; or 'this is a skittish letter without the usual ponderous approach to writing'. McFarlane's letters imposed a strain of elevated response, and some of the gloom or anger at his situations which Karl's replies from time to time show may have been partly occasioned by the effort

to whack up a degree of 'sensitivity'. Having been posted to the middle of nowhere in Midlothian (while still in the Pioneers before he joined the Black Watch), and having in a letter of March 1941 exercised his gift for characterisation which would constantly reappear in his historical writing by describing his new sergeant-major as 'a mountain of debauch, shaky on his legs which cannot carry such a hulk', he ends pathetically, 'Bruce, don't get angry and impatient with me, I am having bad luck again'. Moreover it was well to beware before making an apparently light request to McFarlane for a favour. Even Karl may have been surprised when in reply to his asking for suggested reading on the social and economic history of the Industrial Revolution in August 1945, McFarlane sent a seven-page handwritten bibliography of seventy-five items, all arranged in alphabetical order, followed by a surely superfluous protestation that he could not 'possibly' spend a whole morning in Bodley finding out the publishers. Quite often, on the other hand, the emotional initiative shifted to Karl in these letters, for McFarlane himself was not without his neurotic anxieties and self-doubt. In a letter probably of 1943 to 1944, Karl wrote warning McFarlane against his going into war work, saying emphatically that it would be catastrophic. Then, apropos of some paper of which McFarlane doubted that Sir Maurice Powicke, at that time Regius Professor in Oxford, would approve, he added with the warm-heartedness that his family and friends constantly experienced, 'Do you really think I would 'deny thee' even unconsciously if Powicke disapproved of your paper? You sound harassed, intimidated and distraught with sorrows.' From such letters as this, he could easily pass to teasing his formidable correspondent with impunity. 'I see you lying in your green deckchair on the lawn, being nice to Juan [a cat], but sphinxish to all and sundry else'. Again, not so teasingly, but with a *franchise* gained over the years of correspondence, he wrote on 30 June 1944 about one of McFarlane's sudden illnesses, 'is it accident or does it link up with your ever mysterious personality?'

Karl transferred from the Pioneer Corps to the Black Watch at Perth in 1943, and was commissioned in that regiment in June 1944, thereafter seeing active service with the 7th Battalion in North West Europe, where he remained until the end of October 1945. He was mentioned in despatches and became a captain, continuing in the Territorial Army until 1963 where he rose to the rank of major. It was a source of great pride to him for the rest of his life that he had been an officer of the Black Watch and had fought for his country (he became a naturalised

British citizen in 1946) during the war. He threw himself into it. Once selected as officer material he had first to 'gain experience with British personnel'. 'I wish my new companions would spit less and wash more regularly', he wrote to McFarlane in June 1943. But from this opening there followed a letter both sympathetic and observant. 'The insolence of bosses in civil life, the ruthlessness of N.C.O.s in the army have not given them a sense of unbearable rankling. They do not even form a class or a community, but have remained sensitively individualists.' He goes on to describe how a scraggy-looking man came up to him, pressing pencil and paper into his hands. 'I wrote a letter for him. It goes without saying that only a very personal and important business could have called for a letter at all. How upset he was being helpless and thus forced to let a stranger peer into his affairs.' He had perceptive remarks to make also of his fellow officers-to-be. One, for instance, seemed worried about sex, 'at least so one might guess from the embarrassingly foolish jokes he made from time to time amidst the sound obscenities of normal people'. Once commissioned he wrote about his colonel, of whom he approved, 'I hope, though I cannot be sure, to win his good opinion. It matters a great deal. I have no social fluency to settle down here; only the strictest courtesy, good behaviour and the required degree of efficiency can be my aims.' On the seventh page of his letter he excused himself for writing so briefly! 'In the dead of night I'll have to turn out the guard. In the morning again there is a reveillé to attend to, breakfasts to inspect etc.' On active service in the war Karl liberated the village on the borders of Germany and Holland where lived the eight-year-old Arnold Angenendt, who would become a distinguished German medievalist. The two men only came to realise this fact late in Karl's life; it was a source of pride to both liberator and liberated.

All this is not irrelevant to the fact that when Karl's work on the Ottonian period began to gather momentum in the 1960s, his first two publications were two fundamental articles on the military build-up of the Saxon rulers. In the first, on the Battle of the Lechfeld (955), he showed how once the new-style heavily armed Saxon knights mounted on powerful war-horses could corner the Hungarians on their fast but light horses, they could deny the latter the advantages of their speed and crush them. The Battle of the Lechfeld was the decisive defeat of these dangerous external enemies, and was of vital importance in establishing the rule of Otto I over his kingdom. In the second article, on Henry I and the foundations of the Saxon Empire, he broadened the basis of



demonstration to show how this military build-up had been achieved by training, fortifications and exploitation of resources. His war experience was not of course directly brought to bear in this work; only in his later writings did he actually cite his experience of combat, and then for comparatively incidental purposes like the observed effect of drunkenness in reducing fighting skills. But it helped to shape his historical interest. I once heard the philosopher, Anthony Flew, say that war experience had obviously imparted to the teaching of some Oxford dons immediately after it, not in particulars but in a general way, a noticeable grip and direction. So it was with Karl in these writings, and in two much later articles on Early Medieval and crusading warfare.

In his correspondence with McFarlane, Karl gave as good value as he got, in his descriptions of events and people in his life, in comments on the books he had read, and particularly in his accounts of theatre visits. One of these, Richard III at Hamburg in early July 1945, is so brilliant and characteristic that it deserves to be quoted at length:

Laurence Olivier made a bland and convincing villain; that is to say, he succeeded in convincing the hearer and spectator of the necessity of his actions. Richard was obsessed with a hatred of all his associates because he appeared even to himself as an outcast and a monster . . . The scenes at the court of the dying King Edward were superb; the vicious enmities and bitter rooted venom of the family factions banished any feeling of sentimentality or pity for Richard's victims . . . Olivier may have run amok with one or two scenes, but then some of it seems almost impossible to act . . . Ralph Richardson made the best of Richmond—he has only one impressive line, 'the bloody dog is dead.' His personal combat with Richard was exciting. One did not know the issue, so hard did they hack at one another. Even there Olivier shone; for he died like the beast Richard was, kicking and slashing until the last flicker of life had left him. I was much impressed also in that scene where the younger of the two princes insults his uncle for his hunched back. Emilyn Williams and Donald Wolfitt both pulled a terrible aside grimace and the assembled entourage raised their hands in virtuous horror. Here, there was a sudden complete silence, startling and awful, just for a moment, before conventional courtesies and glossings over and the sinister acceptance of the insult follow.

McFarlane, whose praise was rarely hyperbolic, replied, 'I haven't seen Olivier's Richard III. You make it sound interesting . . . You ought I think to be a dramatic critic if you tire of history'. Karl never tired of history, but he poured quite a lot of his dramatic genius into his historical writing. 'The vicious enmities and bitter rooted venom' of the Ottonian family factions are dramatised with a will in *Rule and Conflict*. The insult of Ekkehard of Meissen barging uninvited into a

dinner of Otto III's sisters Adelheid, abbess of Quedlingburg, and Sophia, soon to be abbess of Gandersheim, and helping himself to the food, is described with all the zest and horror of the above letter. And the suspicion and fear in which Henry I of England lived (whom C. Warren Hollister depicted as adept in the cultivation of *amicitia*), and the horrendous last journey of his body from Normandy to Reading Abbey, would make an apt commentary on 'the dog is dead'.

Karl, who returned to Magdalen at the beginning of 1946, was one of a remarkable trio of Magdalen medievalists who all got Firsts in 1947. The other two were Roger Highfield and Eric Stone. He then began to research on the political and financial background to the Good Parliament of 1376. This was the scheme outlined by McFarlane in a letter of January 1948 to J. G. (later Sir Goronwy) Edwards, where he called Karl the best pupil that he had ever had. Historian of Germany as Karl became, he never talked down the strong element of English history existing in the Oxford syllabus during the whole of his career; in 1962 he was a signatory to a fly-sheet circulated in the History Faculty which deprecated a proposal to reduce the amount of English history. So why did he shift his main interest to German history? This shift had already occurred by 1950 when he wrote to say that if appointed to a University Lectureship (he had been elected a Tutorial Fellow of Magdalen College in 1948), he would continue to lecture on the Salian and Hohenstaufen periods of German History. The Ottonians do not yet get a look in. He expressed the hope that he would research Anglo-Imperial relations in the Norman period; a fine article appeared on that subject, his first major publication, exactly ten years later. He also suggested that the career of the Empress Mathilda before 1126 would be a fruitful subject of investigation; he published an even better article on that subject, with a most moving intuition of the life and personality of Mathilda, forty-one years later. The slow pace of Karl's publications until his last years is often commented upon, but the truly remarkable feature of his record is how much of it represented the realisation of very long-term aims.

He himself gave a disarmingly simple answer to our question in a speech of 1984, the year he became Chichele Professor of Medieval History:

Let no one think [he said,] that some inner drive, some deep-seated prompting, led me all along to the medieval Empire in the early and high Middle Ages. Not at all! The period I read for in Schools was late medieval European, beginning with the Council of Konstanz [*sic*, on paper and

perhaps significantly so]. Nor was there a road to Damascus, a sudden revelation that here—e.g. in tenth-century Saxony—lay my goal. No. I was simply told [by McFarlane]: ‘do that’ because no one else in Oxford looked after it in a much read period of General History in the syllabus, 919–1273. ‘You’ve got German. You can read the stuff.’

The truth would appear to be more complex than this rhetorically effective reconstruction allows. While Karl undoubtedly stressed his Britishness and was angered by those who insisted on treating him as a foreigner, asking what more they wanted than that he had fought for his country in the war, he never allowed his German identity to be submerged. He was a superb English stylist who knew to a nicety how to achieve the desired and often highly dramatic effect in his writing; yet this writing is studded with germanisms, not least in the word order, in the Germanically placed ‘evens’ and ‘alreadys’, or in such an opening of a sentence as, ‘Thirteen years old was also Hathui’ . . . . It happened similarly in his speech, to the point of being catching. A colleague on the History Faculty Board told me how tickled he had been to hear Karl once say that the medievalists needed more *Spielraum*. The reason for it was that Karl, like so many German Jews, could never deny his German culture. Besides he was far too shrewd an historian to overlook the advantage that the entrée to two cultures gave him. McFarlane had already prevented this German identity from going under, and that in a most significant way, before he ‘told’ Karl to study German history. The reader will have noticed that in the Press reports of the discovery of his parents in 1945 not only was Karl’s surname spelt Lyser to make it look less German, but his forename was also given in the English form of Charles, and so he signed his letters to McFarlane at the same period. Dropped into a letter of McFarlane dated 27 May 1945, however, is the single sentence paragraph, ‘Do you want me to call you Charles?’ And on 10 June 1945 he began his letter ‘Dear Karl, I can’t call you anything else; Karl is a better name than Charles, I think. Do you mind?’ That must surely be the main reason why Karl never became Charles, though he perhaps tipped the balance slightly back again when his eldest child, Conrad, was called Charles Conrad Leyser. I remember Karl taking part in a historical ‘Brains Trust’ at the Merton 1066 Society in the autumn of 1957 when I was a graduate. Someone raised the question whether A. J. P. Taylor had been right to argue that there was a constantly recurring demonic trait in German history. Karl repudiated such nonsense with passion.

During the 1950s Karl established a reputation as one of the most

exciting tutors in Oxford. We shall return to his teaching. I was never tutored by him, but none the less had a glimpse of what he was like in that role through being vivaed by him in the finals of 1957—on Rousseau! It was an unforgettable experience, both on account of his stimulating intellectual insight and of his immaculate courtesy. He also cut a dash as Dean (the disciplinary authority), within Magdalen at this time. Many undergraduates long remembered their interviews with him, interviews which often passed far beyond the misdemeanours which had occasioned them. One man, of whom there had been something about the light bulbs in the cloisters and a golf-club, asked by the Dean what he was reading and replying French and Russian, was told that he was studying one language which every educated person ought to know in any case, and one which no educated person needed to know. Another, who had sought to set his misdeeds in the philosophical context of the general weakness of the human condition, was told, ‘the trouble with you, Hodgson, is not determinism but too much free will’.

This was not a good decade, however, for the advance of his scholarship. Part of the reason for that was undoubtedly that his teaching was based on very extensive reading, and not just in medieval history. Part of the reason was perhaps that he became something of a socialite. Reading through his correspondence with his upper class friends, some of them his former pupils, one notices phrases like, ‘it was a nice treat; they were excellent grouse’; or in a letter from a lady friend beginning, ‘Darling Karl’, ‘I had one week among the Scottish nobility which I loathed’; or from a male friend, ‘I must come to Oxford for a Bullingdon dance or some such, next term: if you hear of it in good time and go yourself, can you let me know’. Affairs of the heart were also involved in all this, as is shown by the pathetic words, ‘letters over which I spent hours and sometimes days failed to please you . . .’ (Karl often laboured long over preliminary drafts of his never brief letters). Moreover, his highly effective method of being Dean required the maximum input of socialising and emotional energy. An undergraduate of the time described his method as ‘going to everybody’s party and staying the longest’. He added in a vignette worth quoting, ‘if you waited to hear the end of his tortuous sentences he had wonderfully perceptive things to say about life (especially life under the Ottonian emperors)’. One letter of the 1950s sent to Karl by Richard Lumley, now Earl of Scarborough, who described himself to Henrietta after Karl’s death as ‘one of his idlest and most undistinguished pupils’, is also

worth quoting for its charm and contemporary flavour. 'The terrible news has just been broken to me that I attacked you in a low and base manner at Folly Bridge. I am sorry. This is the fourth letter of apology I have had to write as a result of that night. Please send me all doctors' and tailors' bills.' McFarlane warned Karl about the direction his life was taking although he was far from suggesting that marriage would be the remedy. Once again, his own influence had itself not been absent. 'Dear Karl', went one of his letters during the war, 'I do so want to see you expand into an aristocrat'. In the 1950s his vision was being realised with a vengeance.

Although the decade issued in very few publications, however, it was in one respect (among others) of vital importance to his later scholarship. That scholarship was concentrated, albeit by no means exclusively, on the early medieval German aristocracy. His participation in British (and Irish) aristocratic life may not have had any specific lessons in it which he could apply to the Ottonian aristocracy, but it surely gave him (an urban Jew himself) that abiding sense of how aristocracies worked not so much on formal rules as through social nuances, reputation, symbols, gestures, and unspoken assumptions or understandings, a sense which would become a vital part of his intuitive approach to Ottonian society. One of the unfulfilled schemes of his later life was to write an article about aristocracy based on Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. I could never discover, however, that it would propound any theory, *spekulativer Mensch* as he was, rather than that it would describe the opera's many social nuances. His favourite piece in it was *O Statua Gentilissima*, in which Leporello, the valet, invites the stone statue of the Commendatore to dinner, but places the responsibility for the outrageous invitation squarely on the shoulders of Don Giovanni. *Il padron mio badate ben, non io*, he was fond of repeating.

The 1960s were altogether another matter from the 1950s. By 1960 Karl looked like a fine and influential tutor indeed, but one who would settle down to write the occasional statutory article in the *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, be a good college man, and enjoy the absorbing company of an ever-widening circle of friends. By 1970 he was recognised as one of the leading scholars in the world on the Ottonian Empire. True he had only as yet published three major articles on the subject, but they were all of the highest originality and importance. Moreover, much of the intense work which he did in the 1960s only fed through into print during the 1980s or even the early 1990s, as he himself later said. It is hard to resist the evidence for saying that this

sea change was brought about by his marriage in 1962. In the autumn of 1960, when he had already begun to lecture on the Ottonians, Beryl Smalley of St Hilda's College urged one of her college pupils to attend his lectures. She found not only that they made sense as none of the books on the subject did, but also that they shed floods of light, and were gripping to listen to. Her name was Henrietta Bateman. Like her parents before her, Henrietta was highly educated, having been at Victoria College, Belfast, then a girls' school of good academic reputation, and at Cheltenham Ladies College. She could not draw Karl into an aristocratic social circle or even much of a family circle at all, for she had been orphaned at the age of eight. Nor had she much money; her education had been paid on a grandparental trust. She removed him, therefore, far from the anxieties which beset him whilst he tried to keep up with the fast-living sets, and she gave him security, as well as a family home which he had not known since the age of sixteen (and he was now forty-one). Among his aristocratic friends, however much one side of him gladly played up the image of the distinguished foreigner, the other side longed to be taken as one of themselves; but there are signs that they would persist in thinking of him as a foreigner; and small wonder when one considers his short stature, his dark and swarthy good looks, the naturally oily texture of his hair, and the strong German accent which remained amalgamated with the cultured army officer's diction. With Henrietta, lively and intelligent, possessed of an element of 'outsiderhood', Roman Catholic by conversion, and with socialist leanings, the troublesome issues of his class, his blood, and his Britishness or Germanness, at once fell flat on their face. Not least of all, to use Karl's phrase, she was a serious historical scholar herself, whose B.Litt. thesis on medieval hermits, produced in the days when the B.Litt. was still a reputable graduate degree, would have walked into a doctorate today. Karl once said to the present writer that he owed everything to Henrietta. This saying covered no doubt far more than can be known to anyone outside his family, but in so far as it pertained to his professional life, it did not mean that Henrietta had ever urged him to get on with his research or write the great book. It meant that she had released him to be a scholar, in fact to be himself.

Of the three major articles published by Karl on the Ottonians in the 1960s (there was also one on the polemics of the papal, or Gregorian, revolution) the first two have already been discussed. The third, on the early medieval German aristocracy, published in December 1968, was if anything the most important. It gave a wholly new face to the subject;

nobody had ever written about it like this before. Suddenly the bonds of constitutionalism and over-rigid anthropological modelling were broken and the reader found himself in the midst of a description of a social dynamic, which, despite its intricate detail, meant something in human terms, and not only to English scholars and students but also to the Germans. Its immediate acclaim was all the more remarkable as it is not easy to express its argument. Its nature is that of a cluster of cohering perceptions; its effect is polyphonic rather than monodic. Its theme is the disjunction between consciousness and being, between self-awareness, wishful thinking, idealisation, day-dreaming (to use words taken from the article itself) on the one hand, and harsh reality on the other, particularly the shifts and fragmentations of fortunes which destroyed the equilibrium of aristocratic kindreds. Highly effective use is made of the epic *Ruodlieb* to reconstruct the thought world of the aristocracy, an echo of the school reports which referred to his aptly applied knowledge of literature in writing about history. What Karl tried to do here can perhaps best be described in words he would later apply to McFarlane's Ford Lectures of 1953 on the late medieval English nobility. Having sung the praises of McFarlane's history for 'its deep sense of humanity, sometimes melancholy, often wry and sardonic, but always intuitive', he came to his 'fine sense of social nuances, the characterization of behaviour patterns, and the identification of attitudes and types without which the history of an aristocracy cannot be written'. The very success of the article with so many readers may actually have been due in part to the fact that its profound perceptions were not strait-jacketed into too precise a form of argumentation.

A decade later in 1979, this work on the aristocracy came to fruition in a book which is an undoubted masterpiece, *Rule and Conflict in an Early Medieval Society: Ottonian Saxony*, a study of the relations of the Ottonian rulers with their aristocracy. Written with density of ideas and factual detail, and in highly dramatic language, it was described by Patrick Wormald, reviewing it in the *English Historical Review*, as 'quite simply, the most original, penetrating and challenging study of this theme to appear in any language during recent times', and he added that the publisher (Arnold) was to be thanked and congratulated 'for winning the long race to get this author into print on such a scale'. The whole book read with total originality even to a considerable degree as from his earlier article. At first sight it looks like three discrete extended essays, entitled 'Otto I and his Saxon Enemies', 'The Women of the Saxon Aristocracy', and 'Sacral Kingship'. Amidst the richness of the

first essay one can detect three major arguments. First, it was impossible for the Ottonians to follow the Carolingians in exercising a shared kingship, so that every one of the brothers could receive somewhere to be king of, because of the strength and deep roots of the families such as the Liutpoldings of Bavaria who held the duchies. Hence the Saxon ruling dynasty, the Liudolfings, became divided and feud-ridden as they struggled for the one kingship, even to the point of cousinly strife from reign to reign in succession disputes. Secondly, lesser men (but still aristocrats) needed to fuel conflicts within the ruling dynasty in order to channel their own grievances, and by taking sides, to establish in rebellion an alternative ruler in the one agreed kingship. Grievances arose through *co-hereditas*, by which kinsmen (and women) had a right to share in inheritances, which were partible, in quite unspecified proportions, leading to disappointed expectations and in-fighting between and within large groups of kindred. The king could never be seen to stand above such feuds, partly because as the only possible judge he was bound to add to the numbers of the disappointed, and partly because he was involved as a party himself by reason of the fact that so many of them involved his own kinsmen. Third (Karl himself would deeply disapprove of this sort of schematisation), many of the disappointed expectations which led other Saxons to side with royal rebels had to do with the distribution of the new frontier commands in the East, rich in Slav tributes. All this was written with the sharpest of eyes for resentments, possible only to someone who understood to a nicety how aristocracies worked in general, let alone this particular aristocracy, and who had no small sensitivity to the danger of losing face himself.

It follows from the fact that women were regarded as co-heirs in partible inheritances, that the Saxon women of the second essay are integral to the unified theme of the book, and that this essay is not only loosely connected to the first, as some have said. There are two extra ingredients here, which added to the seethings of Saxon men. First was the much greater life expectancy of women, if they once surmounted the period of child-bearing, in a warrior society, for they thereby became the residual legatees of much property at the expense of other relatives. Nuns, who were not excluded from their shares by reason of their religious life, did not even (in the normal way) have the health risks of child-bearing. Second was the fact that so much of the accumulated wealth of Saxon nunneries passed into the hands of kings or, by his arrangement, into the protection and ultimately the *proprietas* of



bishops, and hence was siphoned off from the families to which it belonged, never to be a part of their inheritance pool again.

In the article of 1968 on the German aristocracy there was scarcely a word about sacral kingship, the subject of the majestic third essay of *Rule and Conflict*. That is the element which had come flooding in to Karl's treatment of king–noble relations by 1979. How is this connected to the first parts of the book? Only loosely as some have supposed? The answer is not at first sight entirely clear. Karl was a German romantic. If he was a Mozart in the felicity of his phrases, he was a Brahms in his structures. If Brahms kept to sonata form, he did not, as Mozart did, make it crystal clear at every point whereabouts in the structure he was, so that there can often be an abundance of rolling music before he even reaches the first subject. Several of Karl's articles are like this, and so is *Rule and Conflict*. In another way he was like Caspar David Friedrich. Many of Friedrich's landscapes were intended to make the viewer shiver, and it is always less likely that they would be represented under a clear sky than amid mists and storm clouds. Not for Karl, therefore, the neon-lighting of his purposes. In fact I can find only one sentence in *Rule and Conflict* which specifically addresses the issue of how the three essays are related. It is the first sentence of the preface, and it reads, 'The three studies presented here have a common theme'. Nevertheless, Karl would always have been perfectly happy to write articles, if they suited his purpose, rather than a book. The second sentence of the preface reads, 'They grew out of another book on the Saxon nobility as a ruling class which is not far from completion.' But although a long string of wonderful articles came out between 1979 and 1992, virtually nothing of this book was found after his death. Therefore we cannot possibly imagine that sacral kingship forms the third part of *Rule and Conflict* merely to fill out a book, or other than because he saw it as integral to the work as a whole. He had a purpose. What was it?

Karl thought that German scholars had treated sacrality too much as 'an inert body of ideas', whereas it needed to be seen as 'a diversified, growing, and changing phenomenon'. This had come out already in his review of Schramm's *Kaiser, Könige and Päpste*, published in 1975. His question was rather how sacrality acted in society, what were its functions, a question 'more often evaded than asked'. In apposition to his first question he put a second. 'What impression did the exalted and quasi-numinous image of the king make on those whose conduct it was meant to govern or at least to influence?' This question he had already raised at the International Historical Congress of 1965 in Vienna,

fourteen years earlier, in a breath-taking intervention, where, rendered into two pages of print, many of the issues later considered in *Rule and Conflict* were dramatically and sharply outlined. His answer in 1965 was unequivocal. 'If the cult of sacred kingship created a distance between king and nobles', he said, 'it was a distance not of awe but of alienation'. Although in 1979 there is still much stress on how sacral kingship could never be a magic wand with which to bypass the murky world of conflict, his answer was not now so unequivocal. He no longer saw sacrality only as a source of alienation. He cited, for instance, the effect of six-year-old Otto III taking the field against the Liutizi Slavs in 986, partly to make the serving of the Polish Duke Miesko with the Saxon host possible. Indeed there would still now be mileage in considering the function of sacrality not with regard to the Saxons but to the emerging leaders of the Slav world.

One of the vital contributions made by Karl to the study of sacral kingship in *Rule and Conflict*, rather similar to that made by Janet Nelson in the case of the Carolingians, was to show that sacrality was nothing like the mere act of anointing from which all subsequent magic followed. It was a long and slow build-up of royal hagiography, acquiring relics, crown-wearings at great assemblies, and processions. In a brilliant passage on Henry II's sacrality he represents it as one long procession of solemn entries into cities, crown-wearings, and presidings at church dedications. During the 1970s two very important works of German scholarship impressed themselves on Karl's mind in this connection. One was Carl Richard Brühl's two volume work on the royal itinerary and the other was Josef Fleckenstein's book on the Ottonian chapel. It must be remembered that the Ottonians had no capital where major political events occurred and where a bureaucracy could be located. They travelled, and this not only for economic reasons, but because they could only rule by coming face to face with their subjects. Their rule was patrimonial, not bureaucratic. Their chapel travelled with them, with its chaplains, men often of high birth, intelligence, and religious devotion, who would walk into bishoprics, and with its sacred treasures, relics and books. All this Karl explained in his article on Ottonian Government, published in 1981, which could itself easily have made a fourth and integral part of *Rule and Conflict*. I once heard Karl say, in a paper to an undergraduate society in Oxford the text of which could nowhere be discovered after his death, that if one had the itinerary, the chapel, and the crown-wearings, one had the three main elements of Ottonian rule. Thus, in Karl's conception, the build-up of

sacrality was inseparable from the itinerary, and the itinerary meant the face to face politics which was *the* mode of relationship between king and nobles.

There is another important advance on his Vienna intervention of 1965 in *Rule and Conflict*. In 1965 he made a point which would be repeated in 1979. 'How deeply the cult of kingship impressed the lay nobility is difficult to ascertain because its effect, like any negative effect, cannot be measured. How many rebellions did not happen because the *Vicarius Christi* was sacrosanct and unassailable is a question we cannot answer.' But by 1979 he had had an inspiration with regard to this point which it seems had not been vouchsafed to him so early as 1965. It was that even if sacral kingship could not prevent rebellions by reason of any awe it inspired, it could none the less make it easier for a failed rebel to submit without too much loss of face because he was submitting to a sacral person. In other words sacrality had a function of saving face among the nobility. He names some who 'lost less face' by giving themselves up as repentant sinners 'to God and the king' from whom they had strayed. 'Sacred kingship could not prevent risings but it could help to restore a measure of harmony afterwards and make reconciliation, even on very unfavourable terms, easier for the losers. Conversely it enabled an enraged king not to lose face in turn when he failed to or did not want to exact the full revenge which harsh custom, his own threats and reputation for terror demanded.' 'Loss of face' is a phrase which occurs several times in *Rule and Conflict*; it would remain with Karl as a significant motif in his later writings.

The insights gained by Karl from papers of two anthropologists, E. E. Evans-Pritchard and Max Gluckmann, which he used sparingly but with devastating relevance, were yet another reason for him to integrate his treatment of sacral kingship with that of relations between king and aristocracy. On the one hand it could not remove the reality of conflict and might even exacerbate the king's involvement in it. On the other hand, to quote Evans-Pritchard on the divine kingship of the Nilotic Shilluk, 'kingship actually embodied the contradiction between dogma and social facts'. The divine ruler, for this was a sacral kingship, while rebelled against when calamities struck or because of deep seated regional particularisms, stood for what unity could be achieved. Max Gluckmann, also writing of sacral kingships in Africa, perceived that what unified the people of structurally disunified kingdoms was the struggle for the agreed kingship. By analogy, and by a paradox, in

Ottonian society which had to be studied through the polarities of rule and conflict, sacral kingship, in one sense so at odds with the facts of conflict and the king's involvement in it, in another sense could be seen to have a function in favour of the ruler as the principle of unity.

What Karl did not argue, or argue directly, was that the religious ideas inherent in sacral kingship, and in the rich art and ceremonial which sprang from it, had in themselves a force to shape mundane reality. And in this he was surely wise, for the religious content of sacrality is here assumed while its sociological application is what is under discussion. However, the conclusion should not be drawn, as it sometimes is, that Karl was not interested in the history of religion. It was not in the forefront of his interests, but one can exaggerate his lack of interest in it. Both before and after *Rule and Conflict* his sense of the suffusion of the medieval social fabric with religion frequently comes to the surface. In writing on Byzantine-Western relations in the tenth century (1973) he had not overlooked the feature in Otto III's rule whereby according to Byzantine tradition highly placed laymen and even emperors had monks and ascetics as their spiritual counsellors and friends. Then in another article on the Hand of St James (1975) he had recognised that both Henry II of England and Frederick Barbarossa early in their reigns and vulnerable, hard-headed men as they were, attached vital importance to hanging on to or securing such a relic, and Karl dilated at length on the splendid marquee that Henry II had given Barbarossa in order to avoid handing over the relic. Prestige, of course; but as the article implicitly recognised, how could one derive prestige from relics which were not the object of religious devotion more widely? In the second of two highly original articles on Liudprand of Cremona (1985) he studied Liudprand's theology head-on in order to pose the question how it related to his historical writing. In connection with his masterly discussion of St Hugh of Lincoln, and the functions of a Holy Man in Angevin politics, delivered as a lecture in 1986, in a series of lectures to commemorate Hugh's becoming bishop of Lincoln in 1186 (published in 1987), one should bear in mind that he could assume the religious achievement which lay behind those functions, because this was brilliantly described by Henrietta Leyser earlier in the same series and volume. She and Karl had come into the series very much as a team.

We are fortunate to have *Rule and Conflict* at all. In 1977 Karl had a serious car accident from the after-effects of which he nearly died. It was this which, when he recovered, impelled him to work on the book,

as he told many people, myself included, while he was writing it. Today, for purposes of Research Assessment Exercises it would be regarded as a starred piece of 'research'. But it does not really read like this. There is no suggestion of card indexes, labours of research assistants, or methodical accumulation of information about kins in his prosopography. Rather it reads like the spontaneous outpouring from a vast reservoir of knowledge by a scholar, who though doubtless checking his references, had a fabulously retentive memory. He may have had his method, and he was rigorous in his *Quellenkritik* and his use of sources only for purposes they would allow, but he never flaunted methodology. He knew the Ottonian aristocratic family connections inside out, but like Mozart's counterpoint in his mature works, his prosopography was allusive rather than formal. If his memoir of McFarlane may be taken as one of the best indicators of how he viewed his own work as an historian, he was inclined almost to scoff at McFarlane's accumulation of family histories, reconstruction of careers, and establishment of genealogies, in his work on the English aristocracy. 'McFarlane', he wrote, 'enjoyed this kind of drudgery to an almost dangerous degree.' His great admiration was reserved for McFarlane's 'intuitive' qualities. The peroration of Karl's own inaugural lecture as Chichele Professor was a plea for intuition, according to 'an Oxford tradition'. The tradition, of Wallace-Hadrill, Southern, and Powicke, was 'the intuitive practice of allowing imagination and literary sensibilities to open up direct lines of communication between the historian and his subjects, not least of all his medieval forbears'. Nowhere in *Rule and Conflict* does one see this 'intuitive practice' to more poignant effect than in the handling of charters, a kind of source which one might think the least susceptible to it, for instance where he writes to the demographic theme of male and female life expectancies. 'A mother took over the inheritance of the dying childless son', he says, 'with more right than his brother . . .' 'The widow Aeddila, who in 960 transferred four *curtes* to Otto I for the endowment of Hilwartshausen, had received them from the *hereditates* of her dying sons.'

The publication of *Rule and Conflict* opened the floodgates to a wonderful series of articles in the last thirteen years of Karl's life. Some have already been discussed or mentioned. Of the others I would single out five, although this is invidious since all are brilliant, and it is to some extent misguided since they form a corpus of work on the themes of self-awareness in historical writing, aristocratic dynamics, and (now coming more into the frame) state formation. Two of these five articles

have the considerable achievement of working the West Frankish kingdom into the Ottonian picture, not by the conventional method of selection from the 'political narrative', but by profound prosopographical study. In particular, 'The Ottonians and Wessex', which first appeared in German in the prestigious Münster organ, *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* (1983), showed how Otto I's marriage to Edith of Wessex was part of a network of relationships which bound the various dynasties of East and West Francia together with that of Athelstan of Wessex, Edith's brother. This paper ends with a highly relevant vignette on pepper supplies in the Ottonian Empire. The paper on 'Ritual, Ceremony and Gesture: Ottonian Germany', takes us back to, and carries us forward from, that of 1968 on the German aristocracy. It is a vivid reconstruction of the symbolic language of aristocratic culture; it is in some measure, apropos of aristocratic mentality, the tenth-century counterpart to the role that the eleventh-century *Ruodlieb* plays in his earlier article. It also makes a point anticipated by Beryl Smalley in her *Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* that tenth-century culture and expression was less based on writing than that of the Carolingians had been, and more on ritual. 'Frederick Barbarossa and the Hohenstaufen Polity' (1988) broke new ground in demonstrating how Barbarossa had built up, often by purchase with ready cash, dynastic Hohenstaufen lands as a fundamental resource of his rule. The supreme paper, however, of Karl's post-*Rule and Conflict* period must surely be his Raleigh Lecture of 1983, published in late 1984, 'The Crisis of Medieval Germany'. The crisis was that of the Saxon revolts of the 1070s against Henry IV, coincidental (but as he shows no more than coincidental) with the outbreak of the Investiture Contest; the latter was another crisis in itself, fired by 'the volcanic and brooding spirit of Gregory VII and the brazen heedlessness and yet also unquenchable sense of his own regality that dwelt in Henry IV'. Karl showed that the Saxon kings might grant to their nobles lands *in proprietatem* as well as making grants *in hereditatem*. The former in theory did not necessarily merge with the noble's *hereditas* but might remain part of the king's. These were what the south-western Salian successors to the Saxon kings made a concerted effort to recover, and with them the formerly rich resources of Saxon rule. No wonder that in Karl's presentation Henry III was such a hated figure to the Saxons, whereas in Tellenbach's view of things he had been a saintly exemplar of the imperial system. Karl pin-pointed here a radical shift in the Salian mode of rule from the Ottonian, a significant change of ideas. In his own words:

The Salians were not the Ottonians' sole heirs and it was *jure regni* that they had come by the lion's share of the Ottonian inheritance. What had been relationships of gift and mutual obligation between the Liudolfings and their Saxon followers became attributes of kingship as such, impersonal and enforceable rules, menacing staging-posts almost on the way to statehood or at least institutionalized and legally concrete dealings as against the face-to-face arrangements between princely givers and their military *comitatus*. The Saxon nobles could not fathom this development and it goes far to explain their deep-seated and lasting estrangement.

In April 1984 Karl became Chichele Professor of Medieval History. He had already been spoken of as one of the leading candidates for this chair in 1970 when Geoffrey Barraclough was surprisingly elected, to be succeeded in 1974 by Michael Wallace-Hadrill. Karl was thus Sir Richard Southern's successor at two removes. This worthy crowning of his career meant much to him, even though he would find that an Oxford professorship brought him more administrative work and less respect from within the university than he had anticipated. As he wittily said at his retirement dinner in 1988, referring to his thirty-six years as a college tutor at Magdalen and his last four as professor, 'I served thirty-six years before the mast, only to find in the last four that there was no quarterdeck.' But the Chichele Professor is first and foremost, by his scholarship, a flag-bearer of the medieval historians in the Oxford History Faculty, to the university as a whole and to the outside world. In this respect Karl did a first-rate job. He lectured and was present at high-powered conferences all over the world. Having been elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1983, he became a Corresponding Member of the Directorate of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* in Munich, a Council Member of the Max-Planck Institute in Göttingen, a Corresponding Fellow of the Medieval Academy of America, and Distinguished Visiting Professor in Medieval Studies at Berkeley, California. I myself met him in Cornmarket Street around Christmas-time in 1983, on the very afternoon that he had heard of his election. He was not obviously walking to anywhere; indeed he was obviously not walking on Cornmarket Street but on air. He said to me—and it is one of the most engaging things that I have ever heard—'I'm it'. Lest anyone think that he would not otherwise have stopped in the street, I must add that one of the aspects of his hugely kind and generous personality was that he was one of the kindest and most generous stoppers-in-the-street (or elsewhere) for a chat that I have ever known, even when he was heavily laden with shopping. For his inaugural

lecture, Karl took the title, *The Ascent of Latin Europe*, a luminous study of 'new forms of self-awareness' made through the chroniclers Adhémar of Chabannes, Rodulf Glaber, and Thietmar of Merseburg. Thietmar, the dramatic and masterful Saxon bishop historian of the early eleventh century, was a writer with whom Karl always felt a peculiar affinity. Indeed he and Widukind of Corvey probably had much to do with drawing Karl's interest towards the Ottonians. Now, in the lecture, an ironic smile played over his face and he drew himself up to his full five foot six as he said, 'The Ottonians liked good-looking bishops in the secular church—men of stature, literally, who stood out over the shoulders of the crowd as rulers should. Thietmar was small,' and so on. Was he not guying himself again? Karl continued, 'He had, however, an indefatigable memory, and an irresistible urge to record and write about himself, his kin, his contemporaries and the Ottonian *Reich* at large.' After the lecture he threw an enormous party in All Souls College, reminiscent of the feast given by Thietmar's family when he became a canon of Magdeburg.

For most of Karl's working life he was a college tutor at Magdalen, and evidently an inspired one. This is rather surprising at first sight, since his principal method of teaching was not one generally recommended by educationalists, namely the monologue. There were four main reasons why it worked. First, the monologues themselves were frequently inspired; secondly, they emanated from a person of great charisma; thirdly, he often referred appositely to points made by his pupils in their essays, showing that his talk was about them as well as about his own preoccupations; and fourthly, behind these tutorials lay his transparent personal kindness and concern towards his pupils. He would go to the ends of the earth to help an undergraduate or research student in trouble. One former pupil has asserted that Karl was the kindest man he ever knew. It is certain that many undergraduates did not know in the tutorials what Karl was talking about and had insufficient knowledge to get their bearings. But one does not need to understand a monologue to be inspired by it. A certain flavour of his tutorials may be had from two reminiscences of pupils. One is that of Sir Michael Wheeler-Booth, now Clerk of the Parliaments:

To me he remains always as he was in a tutorial about Frederick Barbarossa, in which as was his wont he began to quote from chronicles in Latin—which I forget [it was Rahewin]—with a concluding passage beginning *talis vir*. He read it with his eyes gleaming and throwing himself into it with intense excitement as the achievements of the warrior emperor were described. After



the quotation there was a silence, and I said, 'Karl, I think you really are imagining yourself as Frederick Barbarossa'. He looked at me sharply and said something to the effect, 'perhaps I did, just a bit.'

The other reminiscence is from Tim Berner, now a successful solicitor in the City. In a private communication dated 24 December 1993, having said that Karl's method was to allow the pupil into the historical world he inhabited by showing him the particular parts that he happened to be exploring at the time, he continues:

A precious memory (whether it is entirely accurate I cannot be sure) of how close he was getting to the world he described with such subtlety was an absorbing speculation towards the end of a tutorial, during which we lost all sense of time and place, about whether Henry IV, in flight in the Harz Mountains, had stumbled into Rudolf of Swabia (and his retinue) who realized of a sudden that he was looking on the face of the king and that rebellion might not be such a good idea after all.

The memory here is not quite accurate in that it was not Rudolf but the Saxon rebel Otto of Norheim who was in question. The whole matter forms a paragraph in *Rule and Conflict* where Karl describes the special gaze and glowing eyes of kings as an aspect of their sacrality. But the psychology of the memory is right, and, moreover, one sees from this how the magic spark, flashing to light in his tutorials, later illuminated whole landscapes in his published writings.

Karl's two very last pupils were undergraduates of my own college who went on a reading party to Penzance with Henrietta and himself in March 1992, only a month before his stroke. One of them wrote to Henrietta after his death, in a letter where Karl's kindness and teaching method are both highlighted:

I must admit that at first the prospect of spending a week with such a renowned historian was somewhat daunting, but with the first pub lunch of the week this was soon dispelled, and the sessions with Karl will always remain in my memory . . . (especially) his wonderful blend of acute insight and anecdotal illustrations.

These two St Peter's undergraduates knew, after Karl's death, that they were the two luckiest people walking around Oxford.

Karl was deeply happy in his family life. Henrietta was the keel of this happiness, but Einhard would have commented, as he did of an even more famous Karl, on his great love for his children. He told me how proud he had been of the piece written by Conrad for transfer to D.Phil. status as an Oxford graduate student. Conrad is the only one who has followed him as a medieval historian, but at one time or

another I heard him speak with great feeling and perceptiveness about the individual and very varied intellectual and social (and human) gifts of each of Ottoline, Crispin and Matilda as well. He was fond of saying in his later years, ‘standing room only for the professor in his own house’. There was an irony in this, considering reports one heard that when he was comfortably sitting, one or other of his children would make sure that the TV was on the required channel, or whatever. In truth his saying was a proud boast about how the remarkable qualities of his wife and children made themselves felt to him.

After five weeks of lying in a coma following his stroke, Karl died on 27 May 1992. His funeral was an occasion of great sadness, sadness for his loss, and sadness because, having suffered no diminution of intellectual alertness and power before he was struck down, he therefore still had great scholarly achievements in him; but it was also an occasion of truly joyous celebration for a great and lovable man. Henrietta invited anyone to speak who wished. Sir Richard Southern rose, and with his fine bearing and euphonious voice said that Karl was one of the greatest historians of the century because of his covering and illuminating vast tracts of historical territory that had previously been unknown. He did not say that Karl was one of the greatest British historians or one of the greatest historians of Germany. There was no such qualification. He was simply one of the greatest.

He lies now in Islip churchyard. Beyond his grave one looks out towards miles of peaceful, rolling English countryside. On his gravestone are inscribed his name and dates in plain, elegant capitals, and at its foot the words *talīs vir* (such a man!).

HENRY MAYR-HARTING

*Fellow of the Academy*

*Note:* All letters cited, except that from Mr Tim Berner to myself, come from the Karl Leyser archive, as do most of the citations from the texts of speeches, fly-sheets etc. I am very grateful to Henrietta Leyser for allowing me to use it and for much help generally. I am also indebted for advice to James Campbell and Gerald Harriss, and for permission to cite them by name as writers of letters to Tim Berner; Christopher Lloyd; Richard Lumley, Earl of Scarbrough; and Sir Michael Wheeler-Booth.

The following comprise Karl’s publications (other than reviews): *Rule and Conflict in an Early Medieval Society: Ottonian Saxony* (Arnold, London, 1979); *Medieval Germany and Its Neighbours, 900–1250* (Hambleton Press, London,

1982); *Communications and Power in Medieval Europe*, 2 vols, *I The Carolingian and Ottonian Centuries*, *II The Gregorian Revolution and Beyond*, ed. Timothy Reuter (Hambledon Press, London, 1994), the latter with an admirable paper on 'Karl Leyser the Historian', pp. ix–xvi, by the editor. The last three volumes named above are all collections of articles. Also, 'Kenneth Bruce McFarlane, 1903–1966', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 62 (1976), 485–506; and intervention on the ruling classes, *xiii Congrès International des Sciences Historiques 1965*, V *Actes*, ed. H.L. Mikoletzky (Vienna, 1965), pp. 165–6. Karl's reviews, many of them important, are listed in the bibliography to his Festschrift, *Warriors and Churchmen in the High Middle Ages: Essays presented to Karl Leyser*, ed. Timothy Reuter (Hambledon Press, London, 1992), which also contains a perceptive essay by Gerald Harriss on 'Karl Leyser as a Teacher'. Highly illuminating reviews should be noted, of *Rule and Conflict* by Patrick Wormald, *English Historical Review*, 96 (1981), 595–601, and of *Communications and Power* (2 vols.) by James Campbell, in *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, 17, no. 3 (1995), 41–8.