

twentieth-century preconceptions and modifying the others. The more ambiguities and pitfalls they find in their evidence, the more gaps in their knowledge of what they thought were familiar events, the more complexities in the process of causation, the safer they are from the temptation to treat the past in Procrustean fashion. They remain objective, but experience teaches them to be cautious and tentative in their conclusions. The thundering ultimates of a Spengler or a Toynbee are not for them.

Exploring the past is a never-ending activity. The historian in each generation hunts for new evidence and reinterprets existing evidence, to provide fresh details and a fresh perspective. However stimulating the perspective may be at the moment; it will not remain indefinitely fresh; it is based on incomplete and conflicting data, and is likely to contain at most a kernel of lasting value. Few of the questions that the data raise can be settled once and for all, either because the evidence is lacking or because the questions are too large in their implications. Any segment of history, no matter how narrowly defined in time and space, is set in a context that is limitless and therefore cannot be entirely known. Although each researcher hopes to know a little more of it, to throw a little more light on the mystery of why a particular set of men acted as they did, he realizes that the mystery will remain, and that for all his efforts he will find only a partial approximation of truth.

Yet he cannot let the mystery alone, and involvement with it brings its own reward. His research may be narrow in scope, transient in value, riddled with unanswerable questions; it is still inherently exciting. It has no scale: any problem offers as sure an approach as any other to the underlying historical process, and demands the researcher's full powers of analysis and empathy. In his analytic function he is the rationalist, perhaps even the scientist. In his empathic function he is the artist, and it is research as art that redeems the drudgery of data-gathering.

This form of art is as exigent as any other. It requires its practitioner to enter into the past, to meet people who are very much alive yet different from him in ways that he can imperfectly apprehend, to view them objectively for what they were, and then to portray them in all their vitality. This is so large an assignment that his reach, he knows, will exceed his grasp; and why should it not? Just as the subject matter of research fascinates him because he will never be able to do it full justice, so does the art of research. The requirements of that art are too stringent for his comfort: they deny him the illusion that he has nothing more to learn, and keep him always reaching for what he cannot quite grasp. His own particular creativity is therefore at full stretch, and that is perhaps as near to pure joy as an academic can come.

HIBERNATION

The ears of the conies
 Are stiff with sleep
 In their hayloft
 Under the rocks;
 But time itself
 Will wake them up,
 With thunder
 At the equinox.

—ERNEST KROLL