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"Gilbert Murray OM, 1866-1957" by Duncan Wilson

Jeffrey P. von Arx S.J.

Fairfield University, president@fairfield.edu

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Duncan Wilson. *Gilbert Murray OM, 1866–1957*. New York: The Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press. 1987. Pp. xii, 474. \$54.00.

Gilbert Murray died in 1957 at the age of ninety-one, and there are people in Britain of no very great age who can recall hearing the regular broadcasts he made for the BBC on a variety of topics until almost his last year. In addition, Murray remained active until well into his eighties in a number of public causes, principally in the interest of international peace, collective security, the United Nations, and international cooperation among scholars. Murray is probably still best remembered for his translations of the plays of the classical Greek dramatists, which, while seldom performed today, introduced a generation of listeners and a mass audience to Aeschylus, Aristophanes, and Euripides in frequent broadcasts in the forties and fifties.

In an earlier phase of his career, while professor of Greek at Glasgow and later at Oxford, Murray contributed to the emergence of contemporary classical scholarship through his critical editions of the plays of Euripides (1901, 1904, 1909), and in works such as *The Rise of the Greek Epic* (1907), *Four Stages of Greek Religion* (1912), and *Euripides and his Age* (1913). Although these latter clearly reflected, and helped to popularize, a more comparative and anthropological approach to Homeric literature, Greek religion, and Greek tragedy, the tendency of Murray's argument about the nature of Hellenism and its contribution to western culture was in clear contrast to the conclusions of his friend and sometimes collaborator, Jane Ellen Harrison, the chief representative of the anthropological turn in classical studies at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Harrison, strongly influenced by the late nineteenth-century biblical critic William Robertson Smith, as well as by the founder of anthropology, James Frazer, emphasized the social role of religion, the sources of pre-Homeric Greek religion in primitive and irrational fear, and the chthonic character of ancient Greek ritual and worship. Far from deprecating the irrational and primitive character of Greek religion, Harrison saw it as a more authentic reflection of the human spirit, and regretted the later domestication and rationalization of religious instinct in the anthropomorphic figures of the Olympic pantheon. For Murray, on the other hand, the development of Greek religion according to the needs of the emerging *polis* into the more serene and rational religion of the classical period, was "the victory of human intelligence, reason and gentleness against what seems at first the overwhelming power of Passion and unguided strength" (p. 159).

Murray's adoption of the sociological perspective of the new classical scholarship at the same time that he substituted for its naturalistic conclusions about religion his own brand of Victorian progressivism can stand as a metaphor for what is most problematic in his life. As an extremely bright and precocious young man (he was elected professor of Greek at Glasgow at the age of twenty-three), Murray acquired in his first twenty years most of the convictions that stayed with him throughout the rest of his very long life. But even for the mid-1880s, these convictions were somewhat old-fashioned, consisting of commitment to Mill's philosophy, Comte's religion (in its critical if not in its positive phase), and Radical politics as exemplified by one of its last surviving representatives, John Morley. The encounter between these convictions and the new circumstances of life in the first half of the twentieth century is the chief interest of Wilson's biography, although one must often read between the lines to grasp it. That encounter is

of interest not just for its significance in Murray's life, wherein the courage of conviction and selfless service of ideals alternate with blocked understanding and frustrated ability. The encounter is of greater interest because Murray represents, in his own person, the dialectic of change between the Victorian age and our own.

In addition to what Frank Turner in his *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* has called the ironic character of Murray's intellectual life, which combined conflicting enthusiasms for modernism and Hellenism, anthropology and moralism, this dialectic can also be seen at work in the evolution of the political agenda of an 1880s Victorian Radical under the pressure of events in the twentieth century. Murray's response to developments in international affairs from the Boer War to the Suez Crisis, in domestic policy from the Radical Budget of 1909 to the implementation of the welfare state, in imperial relations from the Home Rule Bill of 1886 to the liberation movements of the 1940s and 1950s is an answer to the question of how a typical Victorian would have reacted to us and our doings in the first half of this century. Wilson, a former British diplomat, is particularly helpful in illustrating the origins of Murray's support for the League of Nations, the United Nations, and collective security in convictions about foreign affairs that took their inspiration from William Ewart Gladstone.

Georgetown University

JEFFREY VON ARX, S.J.

E. P. Hennock. *British Social Reform and German Precedents. The Case of Social Insurance 1880-1914*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1987. Pp. vi, 243. \$49.95.

There is a tendency among historians who want to prove something to mix up coincidence with causality. Thus a patriotic Chinese scholar might point out that his country declared war upon Germany in 1917 and, sure enough, the Germans surrendered the next year. E. P. Hennock has written an earnest, heavily researched, book on the German precedents for British social reform in the years before the first World War, but he has, in this reviewer's opinion, fallen into precisely this trap.

To be sure this is no crime. There were certainly admirers of the German welfare system in Great Britain: Sir John Gorst comes to mind; his influential book *The Children of the Nation* published in 1906 is an encomium of German arrangements for the care of children. Lloyd George, as is recounted in detail in this study, did go to Germany in August of 1908 and came back full of well publicized praise for all German social security programs including some, unemployment insurance, that they did not possess. William Beveridge praised them as well.

The problem with Professor Hennock's study is not that he points to Germany as Britain's model in reform, but that he rigorously excludes all other influence, most important domestic politics, and hints at a conspiracy of silence to deny Germany the credit due her. After 1907, he says, when a few "well-informed" people came to recognize that Germany had something to offer it amounted to a "remarkable volte-face . . . so remarkable in fact that the politicians felt the need to disguise it as much as possible" (p. 2; see also p. 131-32). One cannot be sure to which politicians this refers, the text provides no identification, but the quotation provides the theme of the book: the suppressed truth at last revealed.