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E. M. W. TILLYARD, O.B.E.

EUSTACE
MANDEVILLE WETENHALL TILLYARD

1889-1962

EUSTACE MANDEVILLE WETENHALL TILLYARD was, in the fullest sense, a Cambridge man. Born in Cambridge on 19 May 1889, the son of a former Mayor of the Borough (as it then was), and educated at St. Faith's, in Switzerland (for a year), at the Perse School, and at Jesus College, he lived in Cambridge all his life, apart from his period of service in the First World War and his many academic tours in later years. And to Cambridge—the town itself and the surrounding countryside—his college, the university, and above all the English School, his heart was fully dedicated.

Tillyard came of a cultured family where religion and a strong social conscience were the dominant influences. His parents were Presbyterians, and his father found time, amongst the preoccupations of journalism, law-coaching, and local government, to write several books on religious topics. Eustace displayed, in maturity, some of the well-known characteristics of the 'escaped Puritan': a liberal-agnostic outlook and a passion for liberty coupled with a certain apostolic ardour, an instinctive urge to be a labourer in the vineyard 'as ever in his great Taskmaster's eye', and a deep unconscious attachment to the ancestral moral standards. If he had been sent to a Public School of the usual kind he might well have become more rebellious or more conventional. But instead he was sent to the Perse, a day-school which, under the enlightened rule of W. H. D. Rouse, was justly reputed 'progressive' in the best sense. In those days the Perse, like most schools, had no 'English' master, but Rouse was a Classic so unusual that he actually treated the Classics as literature, and linked them with later literatures (for example, by juxtaposing Theocritus with *Lycidas*), giving sixth-form talks on literary criticism, and setting the boys to read Sidney's *Apologia* and Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. Thus deep are the taproots from which spring, and flourish to this day, those hardy perennials of the English Tripos.

In 1908 Tillyard came up to Jesus College to read Classics, and here he received the first of the jolts which deflected him

into his destined path. He found Classics, Part I, a bore; there was no glimmer of literary criticism in it; textual scholarship held undivided sway, and he was merely repeating the work done at school without the inspiration. Part II, in which he took the archaeological section, was a very different affair; here he had the stimulus of two remarkable men, William Ridgeway and A. B. Cook, whose originality, vigour, and brilliance first suggested to him that a university career might be worth following. He gained Firsts in both parts of the Classical Tripos and won the Craven Scholarship; he then went off to the British School of Archaeology at Athens. His studies in classical archaeology, for which he had been awarded a research fellowship at Jesus, bore fruit after the war in his first book, *The Hope Vases* (1923), a solid and remarkable work of scholarship. They also led to a knowledge of modern Greek which caused him, after seeing active service as an infantry officer with the B.E.F. in France (1915-16), to be seconded to the Salonica Force (1916) and later chosen to act as Liaison Officer with the Greek G.H.Q. (1918-19). His distinguished work in this field was recognized by an O.B.E., a Greek M.C., and three mentions in dispatches.

When after the war he returned to a research fellowship at Jesus, it might have seemed that a brilliant career in Classics or Classical Archaeology lay ahead. But, as he himself says, 'in and behind the trenches in Flanders I found that the only reading that satisfied me was of English poetry, and that there and not in Greek vases my true aesthetic interests lay'. And that was not all. During the year 1917, in wartime Cambridge, where the few remaining dons were quizzed incredulously by the military hosts in possession, talks were going on in a quiet backwater—Chadwick's garden in Gresham Road—which were big with promise for the future. H. M. Chadwick, who had succeeded Skeat as Professor of Anglo-Saxon in 1912, Quiller-Couch who had succeeded Verrall the same year as King Edward VII Professor of English Literature, and H. F. Stewart of the Special Board for Medieval and Modern Languages, were hammering out a scheme for an English Tripos independent of the Modern Languages Tripos, of which English had hitherto been a minor constituent. Chadwick, to whose statesmanship and determination the English Tripos largely owes its origin, had as a junior colleague at Clare Mansfield ('Manny') Forbes, whose feeble eyesight had kept him from the war. Forbes's eager and imaginative nature was fired with the new idea, and he had already

agreed to Chadwick's request that he should leave History for English. Tillyard had made Forbes's acquaintance through their common interest in archaeology, and in the summer of 1917, when home on leave from Salonica, he heard Manny holding forth with infectious enthusiasm on the exciting prospects. Would 'Tilly' lecture for the proposed paper on literary criticism? If so, he must see Chadwick: Chadwick, not Q? Yes! in such matters 'it was Chadwick alone who counted'. He went, and at the end of a splendid talk on Balkan politics Chadwick suddenly put to him the same question. 'I, hypnotised by Chadwick's quiet but compelling importunity, replied as suddenly that I should be delighted.'

When the war was at last over, Tillyard found himself caught up immediately in a breathless race to improvise lectures and supervisions, and to help in recruiting teachers for the newborn Tripos which was to hold its first examination in 1919. With what resourcefulness and success Tillyard faced this challenge I can testify, for I was one of his first pupils (1920-1). Having taken my war-degree in History Part II (1920), I determined to follow my bent and read for the new 'Section A' English. My college, like most of the colleges in those days, looked upon this idea with scant favour, but sent me for advice to A. J. Wyatt who had hitherto supervised in English for almost the whole university. Wyatt was an exact scholar of the old philological school; he had helped William Morris with the Kelmscott translation of *Beowulf*, and he was bitterly opposed to the new literary and critical approach. Accordingly, at the interview, he prophesied disaster for the new Tripos, and unemployment for me or anyone who should be deluded enough to take it. I came away deeply dejected, and what put it into my head to go and see Chadwick I cannot remember. But go I did, and Chadwick, in his asthmatic whisper and Yorkshire intonation, and with much blinking of the eyelids, uttered the memorable words: 'You ought to go to Tillyard!' From that moment I never looked back. Tillyard accepted me (as he was accepting innumerable others from all colleges at that time), and quickly inspired me with his own confidence and zeal. Those supervisions of his, for two or three of us at a time, held in his little back room at no. 31 New Square, are unforgettable. We felt ourselves to be a happy band of pioneers, united by a common faith, despised perhaps by the older academics, but sure of triumph in a glorious future. This was the spirit that prevailed throughout the English School in those early years, when it

was flooded with returning soldiers, many of them nearly as old as their supervisors, and most of them quick to distinguish the genuine from the counterfeit, fruitful study from sterile pedantry. We felt that we were in at the start of an important new movement in university history, and nobody radiated this inspiring feeling more abundantly than Tillyard. From the outset his method was to direct our attention to particular texts and passages, to make us taste their diverse qualities, comparing and distinguishing; and, in our essays, to make us avoid mere reportage, metaphorical vapourings and woolly mysticism. He seemed to us immensely wise and well read; I can see now, of course, that he must have been hard put to it to keep up with the supervisions. Life was not easy for him in those years; he was without a fellowship till 1933.

From that time, and onwards through the later twenties, Tillyard was working indefatigably to build up and consolidate both his own scholarship and the whole fabric of the School. The story of his career thus has two main interlocked themes: the development of his own powers in a series of books showing a steady increase of weight and scope; and the development of Cambridge English under his guidance. I say 'under his guidance' advisedly, for it was he who, during its formative years, did most of the essential thinking and planning. There were others who brought to the work high and rare gifts; there was Forbes with his creative imagination and sureness of taste; I. A. Richards, the real founder of modern criticism, whose wonderful genius seemed to unite the best of Bentham and of Coleridge; there was the immensely learned medievalist, Coulton; the scholarly, lovable, yet unproductive Attwater; F. L. Lucas, ever-coruscating and omniscient; and, for a time most glamorous of all, the legendary Q himself, who with his prestige as a novelist, his grand and yet sparkling manner, his courtesy and wit, and his immense gusto for life and literature, held undisputed sway over many academic generations. Yet all of these, for one reason or another, lacked something which Tillyard could supply: Forbes was hopeless on committees, Richards was Olympian and elusive; Coulton, Lucas, and in a sense Attwater, though widely different in their interests, were alike in not being initiators of policy; and Q, perhaps by a sound instinct, kept himself as aloof as he could from the contagion of the world's slow stain: he just could not endure the drudgery of boards and committees. The result of all this was that Tillyard, with his Puritan conscience and sense of vocation, together

with, perhaps, a natural bent for politics and a certain love of power, soon found himself the 'political factotum' of the School. The others, especially Richards, Forbes, and Q, could not be bothered with the routine of academic business; they kept 'outside the alliances which have to be created if things are to get done on board or committee'. 'I can remember', says Tillyard in *The Muse Unchained* (to which I am indebted for some of this early history), 'a great deal of work over framing, scrapping, and revising proposals and much lobbying with constant journeys on my bicycle to this or that person concerned.' And for a long time, especially while the Tripos regulations were being revised and a second literary part being shaped, it was Tillyard who bore the main brunt of this work. He was the one who *minded* most, and who was prepared to take the trouble. Those were the days—fabulous-seeming to later generations who have grown up amidst the rigid officialdom of modern Cambridge—when one or two men who really minded could actually get things done overnight. For example, English, before there was a Faculty Board at all, was represented on the Special Board for Medieval and Modern Languages by Chadwick and Q, Coulton, and Tillyard. Tillyard, Forbes, and Richards acted behind the scenes as one man, and Tillyard spoke for all three. Q, having been patiently briefed by Tillyard, could be counted upon to support his line; Chadwick trusted Forbes and Tillyard entirely, and could also be counted upon; finally, Coulton (at that time) trusted Chadwick. The rest of the board, being modern linguists, cared for none of these things; or, if they did, they could be swayed by H. F. Stewart, the one among them who was interested in English. Thus Tillyard, in his unobtrusive way, really held the strings of power in his hands; he it was who took the pains to think out, and finally to decide, what the Tripos regulations should be, who should lecture and who should examine. It was thus that he acquired the reputation, in some quarters, of being a subtle politician and schemer. This was largely unfair, for the true 'schemer' is usually out for his own ends, whereas Tillyard was quite selfless. It is true that he enjoyed the exercise of power and the manipulation of pieces on the chess-board, but he was ever actuated by a single-minded devotion to the cause of English. To the best interests of English, as he understood them, he was prepared to sacrifice everything.

It was not to be expected that he would be in a position to publish much during that first post-war decade when, in the

scanty leisure left over from all these efforts, he was hard at work building up his own repertoire of scholarship. Yet his first two productions (apart from the aforementioned *Hope Vases*, which belonged to the past) appeared in that decade: *Lamb's Criticism* (1923) and *The Poetry of Sir Thomas Wyatt* (1929). The first was the outcome of his early interest in the history of literary criticism, an interest which (as I have said) flowed directly from Rouse's teaching at the Perse, and which furnished the subject of his first lectures. It was a happy thought to collect in one slim volume all the best of Charles Lamb's critical writings; it had not been done before. Lamb was in those early days still an author whom one could praise without losing caste. However, it was a slender performance, and probably few today are aware that it existed. The *Wyatt* was a more substantial piece of work, though this too was a book of selections with introduction and notes. The introduction, however, showed both scholarship and literary perception. No one could mistake the genuineness of his feeling for Wyatt's lyric quality, the sureness with which he discriminated between the best and the less good in this poet's work, and the soundness of his judgement in placing Wyatt above Surrey.

These were but trial trips round the aerodrome; his next effort, *Milton* (1930), was a major flight, and it brought him immediate recognition (and the Cambridge Litt.D). Only those who knew him best could have believed him capable of work on such a scale, or could have discerned, behind and beneath the mask of the busy politician and committee-man, the intellect and courage of a first-class scholar-critic. Succeeding years were to show him following, with a consistency and singleness of purpose truly Miltonic, the compulsion of a 'vast idea'—the idea of *The Epic*, and working this out with encyclopaedic thoroughness. The *Milton* was the overture to his life's work, and it remained, in the opinion of many, his best single book. During the years of gestation which preceded it, Tillyard's mind was being continually enriched by wide and purposeful reading, by his teaching, and by the stimulus of other minds, notably that of I. A. Richards. Richards, in his lectures and the books which embodied them—*Principles of Literary Criticism* and *Practical Criticism*—had added a new dimension to literary criticism, revealing possibilities of a deeper understanding of poetry, a closer approach to its ways of communicating meaning, than had been dreamed of in older criticism. Under Richards's influence Tillyard, who had already

been basing his own teaching on the close reading of texts rather than upon gossip about books and authors, was encouraged to look below the surface for the total meanings of imaginative literature, to supplement surface meanings by attention to all that is further conveyed by rhythm, imagery, and construction, and by penetrating to the unconscious assumptions of a writer and of his age. It was not only through public channels that Richards's seminal influence reached him; there were also the sessions of a poetry-reading group, meeting informally in each other's rooms from time to time, of which Richards—when he happened to be in Cambridge—was the guiding spirit. Here we would read and discuss not only the more complex productions of the past, but whatever was most challenging in contemporary literature: *The Waste Land*, the later poems of Yeats, the earlier work of Auden, and so forth. It was at these meetings that Richards, ever in advance of us all, would announce his latest discoveries; here he taught us to value G. M. Hopkins (hitherto almost unknown), and here he would point to such-and-such a new writer as worth watching.

Milton was the ideal subject for Tillyard at this, the culminating-point of his first phase of maturity. As a classic and a humanist, and as a liberal Protestant, he had a natural affinity with the Miltonic spirit. There was in Tillyard, along with many endearing qualities, a certain Puritan restraint and austerity, which everybody could recognize in his personality and his way of life, and which led him to admire in literature all that was noble and spare and greatly planned. And in this book on Milton he was able to draw upon all his best resources in a great interpretative effort: upon his instinctive sympathy with his subject, his classical scholarship, and his newly gained poetical insights. He thus achieved several 'things unattempted yet' in Milton criticism. To begin with, his familiarity with Latin enabled him to treat Milton's Latin poetry and prose on exactly the same level as his English work, and to use the former in a new and illuminating way in tracing Milton's development. Similarly he integrated all Milton's prose, carefully studied in chronological order, with his poetic output, instead of treating it in the traditional manner as a sideline. Finally, he used the new techniques of poetic analysis to answer certain profound questions, hardly posed by previous critics, about the ultimate meaning of Milton's poetry. What, for example, was *Paradise Lost* really about? What was the true state of Milton's mind when he wrote it? His conscious meaning and intention are,

admittedly, stated in the opening lines, but what of the deeper, unconscious meanings? 'The meaning of a poem', Tillyard wrote, 'is not the story told, the statements made, the philosophy stated, but the state of mind, valuable or otherwise, revealed by the sum of all the elements of the poem. . . .' His interpretation of *Lycidas* is a typical example of his use of this principle. Most previous interpretations, he urged, were off the mark because they failed 'to distinguish between the nominal and the real subject'. Legouis, indeed, had pointed in the right direction when he said that Milton himself, and not Edward King, was the real subject of the poem. From this point of view the passages on Fame and the corruption of the clergy are not digressions, however fine, but the core of the poem. Nor is the old charge of 'insincerity' relevant. Milton was not deeply distressed by the death of King, whom he scarcely knew; but he was profoundly disturbed at the thought, suggested by King's death at sea, of his own possible death *en route* for Italy, and the consequent waste of all his efforts to qualify himself for his life's work; and he was deeply moved at the state of the Church, which threatened all his hopes for the triumph of the saints in England. In *Lycidas* Milton faces these fears, overcomes them, and achieves at the end a 'balanced' and 'valuable' state of mind. In interpreting *Paradise Lost* Tillyard is careful to bring together all the known biographical facts, and all the evidence contained in such hitherto less regarded works as *Ad Patrem*, *Epitaphium Damonis*, *Reason of Church Government*, and the other anti-episcopal pamphlets, and all the evidence we possess about Milton's moral and religious beliefs, and to apply all this (and more) to the elucidation of Milton's mind when he was writing it. He shows the stages by which Milton was forced to abandon, first his projected Arthuriad, and later any subject for heroic song based on the victory of the good old cause. Though Tillyard rejects the heresies of Blake and Shelley—that Milton was of the Devil's party without knowing it, or that Satan is the 'real' hero of *Paradise Lost*—he sees how much of Milton's proud, heroic energy gets expressed through Satan, as well as through the surge and pomp of the Miltonic verse. He shows how the construction of the poem makes the whole scheme converge upon Man, and how the disappointment of Milton's earthly hopes is felt in the pessimism of the final books, written after the Restoration. The ultimate 'meaning' of the epic, as Tillyard sees it, is this pessimism about frail and fallible mankind, tempered by an undamaged faith in the sovereignty of God,

the authority of Reason and Conscience, and the possibility, for each individual, of regeneration and the 'paradise with thee, happier far'. Throughout this book the sense of discovery, of being first in the field, imparts to the tone a 'happy valiancy' which Tillyard never wholly recaptured in his later writings.

Milton placed Tillyard at once in the front rank of 'Miltonists', and, recognizing what was now expected of him on both sides of the Atlantic, he followed up his success with a series of supplementary books on Milton: *Milton's Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises* in which an English translation (by Mrs. Tillyard) of the *Prolusiones Academicæ* was given for the first time, with Introduction and notes by Tillyard himself; *The Miltonic Setting* (1938); *Studies in Milton* (1951); and *The Metaphysicals and Milton* (1956). From the many topics discussed in these books I will pick out one or two for brief mention. First, there was one of the happiest of his *trouvailles*, the derivation of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* from the *First Prolusion*, an Academic Exercise (not later than 1628) on the topic 'Whether Day or Night is the more Excellent'. He was led to this discovery partly by his work on the *Prolusions*, but still more by his literary perceptiveness, which told him that there was something unaccountable about these poems, and something very queer indeed about the bombastic opening lines of *L'Allegro*. His demonstration, which was quite convincing, confirmed Hanford's conjecture that the poems were written before the Horton period, probably during the summer vacation of 1631. Secondly, it must be remembered that when Tillyard's *Milton* came out, Milton had already come under fire from Mr. Eliot, and that during the thirties the attack on his reputation was stepped up by Dr. Leavis and others in *Scrutiny*. Tillyard, as one who had invested heavily in Milton, felt bound to speak out for the defence. And so, in *The Miltonic Setting*, he argues that Milton must not be judged by the standards applicable to Donne and Shakespeare; that the heightened style of *Paradise Lost* was the style demanded of him as an epic poet, and was supremely well fitted for epic purposes; that there was in Milton an Elizabethan abundance and richness which, though it appears openly from time to time (as in *Comus*, and the epic similes), is normally controlled by Milton's powerful will; and that in consequence of this tension of opposites Milton, poised between the Elizabethan and Augustan ages, combines the best of both.

Although Tillyard thus continued to write about Milton for more than a quarter of a century after his first book, he had long

ago turned to fresh woods and pastures new. In *Poetry Direct and Oblique* (1934) he tried to develop, by applying it to a wide variety of examples, the method he had already used for *Lycidas* and *Paradise Lost*. The central idea is that in poetry more is often meant than is actually said, and Tillyard's aim is 'to lay down and illustrate a scale ranging from the greatest possible directness to the greatest possible obliquity in poetry'. Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* is mainly 'statement'; whereas Blake's *Echoing Green* is 'obliquity', since Blake is here affirming, through rhythm and implication, one of the 'great commonplaces', viz. 'that there is a virtue in desire satisfied'. This book had a mixed reception; it was felt by some that Tillyard had for once let his sanguine temper run him into mistaking a useful tool of analysis for a fundamental distinction. What was to be the criterion of 'obliquity'? how far was one right to look for it? how could one be sure that one had found it, or that what one had found was really there at all? Nevertheless, as revealing a sensitive and practised reader in the act of recording his impressions of many different kinds of poetry, the book could not fail to be interesting and instructive. And at least Tillyard showed his accustomed sanity in not insisting on his own particular 'obliquities', and still more in not surrendering, as he might so easily have done, to the allurements of the Freudian and Jungian methods of interpretation. The farthest he ever went in that direction was to use one of the 'archetypal patterns' of the erudite Miss Maud Bodkin in trying to account for Shakespeare's last plays.

This search for the oblique meanings of poetry, its ambiguities, undertones and overtones, was of course no private concern of Tillyard's; it was in very widespread vogue in the thirties, whether with the sociological or the psychological types of critics, or with those more purely literary who were busy trying to arrive at meaning through Imagery or Multiple Senses. It was the same impulse which first led Tillyard, undaunted as ever, to venture into the densely populated field of Shakespeare criticism. In *Shakespeare's Last Plays* (1938) he adds one more explanation, to the many already extant, of the peculiarities of *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*. As usual, his strong point is that he has studied the plays with deep attention and full responsiveness, and received from them an impression which is not accounted for by any of the standard explanations—e.g. that Shakespeare was 'on the heights' or in a 'sunset glow'; that he was bored; that he was emulating

Beaumont and Fletcher with an eye to the Box Office; that he was experimenting in a new style, &c. No; Shakespeare had long been engaged on Tragedy; and Tragedy, properly understood, needs to be completed by introducing the theme of rebirth and regeneration following upon destruction. The tragic kind of death is a death into life. And so Shakespeare, in turning finally to the themes of healing and reconciliation, and the creation of worlds where suffering is distanced and unearthly music is heard, was simply following—without knowing it—the Archetypal Tragic Pattern. He was under the compulsion, as Tillyard puts it, 'to develop the final phase of the tragic pattern, to add, as it were, his *Eumenides* to the already completed *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroe*'.

Tillyard's continuing preoccupation with Shakespeare showed itself in two ensuing books, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (1944) and *Shakespeare's Problem Plays* (1950). Of these the former remains, I think, easily the best of his Shakespeare books, and one of the three or four best of all his works. Here he returned to firmer ground, and to the path which led to the central *massif* of his life's interests, the Epic Idea. It had struck him that Shakespeare's History Plays constituted, together with Sidney's *Arcadia* and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, the nearest approach to the epic which the Elizabethan age produced. To demonstrate this he had to find a definition of 'Epic' wider than the currently accepted one; it had to include 'speaking for one's own age', 'voicing the unconscious metaphysic of the times'. Tillyard set himself with characteristic intrepidity to the task of discovering and summarizing what that unconscious metaphysic, of which Shakespeare's history plays were the expression, really was. As a result of this investigation he found himself compelled to write another, an introductory, book first; this was *The Elizabethan World Picture* (1943), which has proved his most popular and widely read book. Shakespeare's history plays depict political disorder judged and condemned by certain concepts of true order. What were these? Tillyard found that it was impossible to separate Elizabethan ideas of political order from their ideas of cosmic order; their 'world-picture' was an interlocked system which could not be understood piecemeal. So, in *The Elizabethan World Picture* he explained, with great learning and ample illustration, and at the same time in a highly readable style, the intricacies of the Chain of Being, the relationships and correspondences between the various planes of existence: Angelic, Celestial, Elemental, Political, Human,

Animal, Vegetable, and Mineral; and showed how fully these notions of order and degree, inherited without a break (as yet) from the Middle Ages, permeated all the educated minds, and hence all the literature, of the time. He always disclaimed any notion of being a 'History of Ideas' expert; nevertheless this little book proved beyond question his skill in sketching the intellectual background of a period just so far as this was relevant to the proper understanding of its literature.

After this he could begin his *Shakespeare's History Plays* with no more than a brief résumé of the Elizabethan notions of world-order. His first aim is to explain and illustrate the philosophy of history which was accepted in Shakespeare's time, and then to demonstrate from the plays themselves that Shakespeare, whatever particular author he had or had not read, was steeped in the prevailing historical notions. He rightly proceeds on the assumption that the myth of the 'unlettered' Shakespeare has been exploded, and that by his demonstrable awareness of the principles of degree and of the accepted pattern and moral of English history from Richard II to Henry VII, he was at one with the more thoughtful writers of his day. The early chapters give the best account I have seen of the evolution of ideas about history from Lydgate to the age of Elizabeth. The burden of it all, running through writers like Polydore Vergil, Hall, Holinshed, the *Mirror for Magistrates*, and the rest, is that history teaches by example; that it incites to great deeds by preserving the memory of past heroism; that it gives power to foresee and control the future; and, most important of all, that it shows God's justice punishing sin and crime and exacting retribution and expiation. This pattern was discerned by all these writers in the history of the English kings Richard II, the three Henries, Edward IV, Richard III, and Henry VII. Crime, that is violence done to the order of things, led to chaos and civil war; repentance (as by Henry IV and Henry V) could arrest, but not prevent, the working out of inevitable nemesis. And so England had to endure the misery of the Wars of the Roses. But all this was seen as leading up to the glorious advent of the House of Tudor, which by the marriage of Henry VII with Elizabeth of York not only united the warring factions, but restored to the English throne the ancient line of Cadwallader, and further back still, of Arthur himself. The Tudors were careful to foster what Tillyard calls the Tudor Myth, which by incorporating the age-old superstition of *Arthurus redivivus* and attaching it to themselves, greatly enhanced the prestige of

their rule. Such was the set of assumptions with which Shakespeare grew up, and Tillyard shows that the history plays are dominated and shaped by them.

It had always been a principle of Cambridge English to see a poem not merely *in vacuo*, as something to be evaluated on its own merits (though this was a very important *part* of what had to be done), but also in the context of its intellectual and historical background. Tillyard, with his interest in the epic as the voice of an age, and in the 'great commonplaces' or unexamined assumptions which often find 'oblique' utterance in poetry, was naturally inclined to the study of 'climates of opinion'. Having tested his powers in *The Elizabethan World Picture*, and found them fully equal to this sort of task, he next wrote the book called *Five Poems* (1948), which was reissued in 1955 under the more descriptive title of *Poetry and its Background, Illustrated by Five Poems, 1470-1870*. The plan was to turn the spotlight upon five historical 'moments' or epochs, and show how the *ethos* of each one was manifested in the work of a representative poet. He chose, for the fifteenth century Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*; for the Elizabethan age Sir John Davies's *Orchestra*; for the Restoration Dryden's *Ode on Anne Killigrew*; for the Romantics Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, and for the Victorians Swinburne's *Hertha*. 'To my mind', he wrote, 'the alien, non-literary matters that mix most readily with literature are the prevalent ideas, the current commonplaces, the notions least paraded and most taken for granted, in a word the mythology, of a given epoch.' Thus, for example, in this book he sees behind *Orchestra* the whole Elizabethan world-order again, with Copernicus tacked on in sublime unawareness of his destructive potentialities; behind Dryden's *Ode* Restoration decorum and culture, God and man at a new, safe distance from each other, the status of the poet and poetry still high in spite of the Royal Society; behind *Hertha*, the nineteenth-century creed of Progress and Liberty, though in Swinburne's version it is Liberty without Discipline; man is left without the control of religion or any sense of responsibility. Tillyard's special merit, in this and other books, is his power of combining a direct critical responsiveness to the poem on the page with a proper curiosity about its historical setting. Others could do the practical criticism with greater intensity, or go more deeply into the background; not many could keep the balance as Tillyard did. For him, the Poem was the Thing; ideas did not interest him for their own sake, but only in so far as they spoke obliquely or directly through the poem.

If *The Elizabethan World Picture* was a by-product of *Shakespeare's History Plays*, the latter was itself an offshoot of Tillyard's *magnum opus*, *The English Epic and its Background* (1954). 'I was bred a Classic', as he says in the preface to that book, 'and in my early years Homer, Virgil, and Milton were my favourite poets. And I have long been, and still am, drawn to those writers who have dared to risk everything on one great work.' There is indeed an epic quality about Tillyard's own steady ascent to his summit of achievement; aiming at the heights he surmounts one foot-hill after another, all of them connected with the central ridge, and on reaching the top he surveys the panorama and sees it as a vast unity. The enterprise took him nearly twenty years in all, during which he never left the main track for long. Most of his apparent deviations were really, as I have suggested, stages in the climb, to be undertaken because of the way in which, on all such expeditions, 'Alps on Alps arise'.

The English Epic is a work of massive proportions, representing a very remarkable amount of reading and scholarship. It ranges from Homer to Gibbon, taking in on its way all the manifestations of the epic spirit in every century and in most of the literatures of Western Europe. On account of its size and exhaustiveness it cannot rank among his more readable works; yet it is wonderful how nimbly, and with what a springy gait, he pushes forward on the interminable march, never showing fatigue, always alert, always excited by each new object he meets. He explains at the outset that he is giving to the word 'epic' a definition wider than is usual, so that it may include not merely 'heroic poetry', or narrative poetry with a 'heroic' subject (whether of 'Heroic Ages' or not), but all embodiments of the epic spirit wherever they appear, whether in verse or prose or in whatever literary 'kind'. His search for a more inclusive definition of 'epic' led him, after years of reflection, to the conclusion that, to qualify as 'epic', a work must show wide inclusiveness and variety, ranging from vivid observation to a sense of the numinous; it must proceed on a predetermined plan, maintained and carried through by a continuous effort of conscious will; it must be highly serious in tone and style (which does not mean continuously 'solemn'); it must include a tragic sense of life, without necessarily excluding elements of comedy; it must give us a feeling of what it was like to be alive at the time of the story; it must speak for a large group or community of people and express 'the accepted unconscious metaphysic of the time' (this is its 'choric' function); and it must show faith

in the system of beliefs or way of life with which it deals. Armed with these criteria he sets off on his progress through the centuries, testing each writer, and every work which may have epic pretensions. Space forbids any full account of his findings; it must suffice to say that he has something, and always something good, to say about Homer, Herodotus, Virgil, Lucan, Statius, the Greek Romances, *Beowulf*, the Norse sagas, and the *Chanson de Roland*. Coming to the Middle Ages, and applying the principle that 'we must seek the epic in those concerns that an age takes most seriously and in the literary forms that embody those concerns', he finds the first in the idea of the soul's pilgrimage, and the second in Allegory—Allegory, which arises from a recognition of different planes of reality and of the correspondences between them. Dante is the true medieval epic poet of Europe; and *Piers Plowman* is 'the undoubted, if imperfect, English epic of the Middle Ages'. And so he proceeds, neglecting nothing important, through Italy from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century; the poets and critics of the Renaissance in Italy, France, Portugal, and England; the rise of history as an epic form; and arrives, in due course, at Elizabethan England. He has already dealt with one of the chief manifestations of this period (he calls the age an 'epic area'), namely Shakespeare's history plays, so he spends himself here on the other two works which, taken together with the history plays, make up a composite 'epic' of the age: *Arcadia* and *The Faerie Queene*. In the seventeenth century, having already dealt with Milton, he points to 'the Puritan Myth' as full of epic possibility, and to Bunyan as the writer who, in *The Holy War*, came nearest to realizing the idea of 'England's Puritan epic'. Next, he takes a deep breath and plunges into the world of Neo-Classicism; here he finds Pope's *Homer* to be, not merely a 'translation', but an original work in which the material is assimilated closely enough with the Age of Queen Anne to give the poem a 'choric' quality, in Tillyard's sense. And lastly there is Gibbon, whose *Decline and Fall* is 'the one English work that expresses the temper of 18th century Britain in the age of Hume in something of an epic manner'.

A bald summary such as the foregoing can give no idea of the wealth of learning, and the variety and freshness of the critical *aperçus*, with which the book abounds. But that was not all; Tillyard had not yet delivered his heart of the whole burden, and he followed up *The English Epic* with *The Epic Strain in the English Novel* (1958). Here, applying the same tests

as before, he finds that, of the novels that approach the required standards, *Robinson Crusoe* is an epic having some of the limitations of the middle-class *ethos* of which it was the 'choric' expression; that *Tom Jones* lacks epic intensity; that Scott's novels as a whole are an 'epic area' (Scott has amplitude and choric quality, but is defective in organization and exercise of will); that *Vanity Fair* is a 'superlative picaresque romance', not an epic; that *Nostramo*, with its 'geographical intensity', its construction, its political wisdom, and its sense of 'life being lived all at once by a great number of very different people', is a truly epic novel; that *Middlemarch* is really about individuals, and not a group as such; that *The Old Wives' Tale* is 'choric' about provincial puritanism, and is an authentic epic; and lastly, that *Ulysses* fails to qualify.

Tillyard's scholarly work never made him aloof from university and college affairs. He remained the central figure and the leading statesman of the English Faculty until he reached the retiring age (in 1954: he and H. S. Bennett reached the age of 65 just before the age-limit was raised to 67). Meanwhile he had attained another summit: the mastership of his college, which he held from 1945 till his retirement in 1959. Although there was in his make-up a certain diffidence, a lack of complete self-assurance, he undoubtedly enjoyed academic affairs and was good at them. Much of his restless activity, both in affairs and in scholarship, may be traceable to a deep-seated craving for reassurance; he needed to prove to himself, and to the world, and to his great taskmaster, that he really was one of the elect, and not an unprofitable servant. He certainly proved it to the world, for in all public relationships—as Master of Jesus, as Secretary or Chairman or member of the Faculty Board of English, and as Chairman of the Fitzwilliam Museum Syndicate—he commanded respect by his dignity and sanity combined with an unassuming and ingratiating manner, and by the weight and thoughtfulness of his judgements. His central position in the world of English studies was acknowledged in many ways: by his election to a fellowship of the British Academy (1952), by his presidency of the International Association of University Professors of English (1953–6: a beautiful proof of his prestige, for he was not a 'professor', yet nobody minded!), by his presidency of the English Association (1957–8), and by the many invitations he received (and often accepted) to lecture in the United States, Canada, Germany, Scandinavia, Switzerland, and elsewhere.

In all his writing and teaching Tillyard preserved his integrity and independence, he never joined any coterie, never adopted any extreme or sectarian position, nor turned aside for very long into the tempting but dangerous fields of psychology, sociology, or the 'history of ideas'. He kept to the central formula, the straight and narrow way, of 'English' as he had understood it from the start: practical criticism stabilized by a proper knowledge of the historical backgrounds.

The year before he retired from the mastership he published *The Muse Unchained* (1958), described in its sub-title as 'An Intimate Account of the Revolution in English Studies at Cambridge'. I need not say much more about this, because I have already drawn upon it in my own account of Tillyard's early years. This little book, enthralling to those of us who had lived through the period described and who knew the *dramatis personae*, was misunderstood by some of the younger generation who imagined (as many still do, and will doubtless continue to do) that 'Cambridge English' began some time in the nineteen-thirties. Finding that this was precisely where Tillyard's account stopped, they criticized him for leaving out what was to them the interesting part. I think (and indeed I warned him beforehand) that the sub-title he chose was ill advised; it was bound to create the wrong sort of expectations. But the book admirably fulfilled its avowed intention, which was to describe the emergence of English from the chrysalis stage of subservience to other languages and to philology, its growth towards independence and freedom after 1919, and its palmy days up to about 1930. To him and to the rest of the generation who had worked for this victory and enjoyed its fruits, no later developments could possibly rival it in importance. They could only seem, at best, continuations, and perhaps intensifications, of what was there from the beginning; or, at worst, signs of incipient decay. In what Tillyard called 'the tricky business of blending fact with gossip and personalities', he was notably successful, and the book will be relished if only for its graphic portraits of the 'Patriarchs' (Furnivall, Skeat, Verrall, &c.), and above all of the 'Founders', H. M. Chadwick, Mansfield Forbes, Aubrey Attwater, Ivor Richards, H. F. Stewart, Q, and their allies and successors. Tillyard, like other liberals of his age and generation, had to live on into an epoch which was growing more and more distasteful to him, and to adjust himself to it as best he might. He once wrote (in *Shakespeare's Last Plays*), 'the man is most alive who is readiest to forgo the lazy

comforts of his own habitual ways of thinking and, when confronted with a new situation, to recast the contents of his own mind'. He might have been thinking of himself when he wrote that, for this is exactly what he had done, and done over again, in the course of his life. But even liberals as gallant and sanguine as he could hardly live through the anti-liberal blizzards of the 30's and 40's without suffering and heartache. *The Muse Unchained* was the testament of his early liberal faith and hope, and it is plain that he felt the best days had long been over.

After his retirement, and not long before his death, he was appointed by Trinity College to give the Clark Lectures (1959-60). His topic was *Some Mythical Elements in English Literature* (published 1961) and the lectures dealt, in the urbane and allusive style proper to the occasion, with some of the great commonplaces or images which had dominated men's minds from century to century: The Harrowing of Hell, the Tudor Myths, Aggression, Retirement, Liberty. His last publication, *Essays Literary and Educational*, appeared posthumously; he had been able to finish the proof-reading for it during his last illness. Eustace came of a long-lived stock, and he had always been lean and vigorous. We confidently expected for him a long and fruitful autumn of life in the charming house he and Phyllis had built for their retirement in Millington Road. But just before Christmas 1961, he fell from his bicycle and broke a thigh. This set going a succession of ills, under which he gradually sank, always brave and always expecting to recover, till his death on 24 May 1962.

Not only in Cambridge, but far beyond it, Eustace Tillyard is mourned by his many friends and admirers, many of them his former pupils. As a man he was at once frank and reserved, simple and subtle. He had an extraordinary gift for not saying what was in his mind, even while appearing most communicative; and of personal or family small-talk he was habitually very sparing. For example, I now know that he had a lifelong interest in cricket, but he never once referred to the subject throughout our forty years' friendship (doubtless realizing that it would be wasted on me). He was himself a good batsman in his youth; and one of the proudest moments of his life was when, as Master of Jesus, he made the highest score in a match between the fellows and the college servants, although he had not held a bat for thirty years. Tillyard was more many-sided than most people guessed: for instance, he was an accomplished linguist, speaking French and German and modern Greek fluently,

Italian only a little less well, and Turkish a little less still. He read Greek and Latin with a scholar's ease and familiarity. A good many people knew of his discriminating taste in painting and architecture; not so many knew of his musicianship. He played the flute with more than average competence, as I discovered when I accompanied him on the piano in some of Handel's flute sonatas. He had a passion for natural beauty, especially for mountains and for wild flowers, which strengthened with the years; and he lent all the aid he could to the preservation of the Cambridge countryside. He loved open-air exercise, especially walking, and if he ever gave himself freely and spontaneously it was on those walks. Only those who shared his walks with him, round the Cambridge footpaths, in Italy, Greece, or the Alps, discovered to the full his capacity for good companionship and true friendship, his sanguine temper, his flow of rich talk and his occasional flights of drollery, and knew that they all arose from the essential goodness and innocence of his heart.

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