PLATE 2

SIR GEORGE F. HILL

GEORGE FRANCIS HILL

1867–1948

GEORGE FRANCIS HILL was little of stature: his head large and well proportioned with a remarkable forehead, a favourite subject for the medallists and draughtsmen among his friends; his hands and feet particularly small; dark hair and eyes and olive skin, coming perhaps from a Portuguese ancestor; a gentle voice and charming smile. He had been an ailing child and all his life he suffered from a weak back, which came in the end to show a slight curvature.

He was born in India on 22 December 1867, the son of the Rev. Samuel John and Leonora Josephine Hill, 'a birthday present to my father' as he puts it in some scattered autobiographical notes put together in 1946 in his still firm and beautiful hand. He was the youngest of five children, four of them boys; and his father, a missionary of the London Missionary Society, was stationed at Berhampore, Bengal. Samuel Hill was a man of high integrity and strict principle: so strict that when circumstances compelled his wife to leave India for good and to settle in England, he felt that his place was still at Berhampore. For they had come to believe that English children should not grow up in India nor yet be entirely cut off from both parents, and had decided that the mother should take her youngest child, then four years old, back to England and there make a home for the family.

> It was a heavy choice [to quote the notes again] and they took it. My father could not bring himself to leave his work; and my mother, devoted as she was to him, parted from him to take care of her children in England. Always there was the hope of his coming home, but they were never to see each other again. His devotion to his task, more as a teacher than as a converter to Christianity (I think his actual converts could have been counted on the fingers of his hand) was exemplary; to many 'Rishi' Hill was something of a saint and weeping crowds followed him to the grave.

The inheritance on the mother's side was in some ways more remarkable. Leonora Josephine, born Müller, came of European stock permanently rooted in India, as was sometimes the way at the beginning of the last century. Her grandfather, according to family tradition, was a Danish optical instrument-maker with an established position at Copenhagen where he did much work for court circles. On the threshold of middle

life he suddenly threw up a successful business to go to sea, and, after an adventurous period passed on the Coromandel Coast, not always, maybe, within the law, he married an heiress from Goa and settled there for the rest of his life. It is not perhaps over fanciful to trace the mingled strains of this diverse inheritance, physical as well as mental, showing through in the younger generation: on the one side a deep conscientiousness and integrity, manifested now especially in the intellectual sphere; on the other a bent to science and mathematics joined to the precision of the skilled craftsman. All four boys, but particularly Micaiah the eldest and George the youngest, attained distinction in the worlds of science or learning. Micaiah, a notable mathematician, Professor at University College, London, and a Fellow of the Royal Society, 'would have won', as his brother notes, 'a great name in mathematics, but being the most conscientious of men, devoted himself to University and College affairs in such a degree as to leave himself little time or energy for research'. The same gifts of order and precision were leading qualities in the subject of this memoir; and, though his adventures were rather of the mind, there was still lurking, a little unexpectedly, something of the spirit which drove his ancestor from Copenhagen to Coromandel, to turn him more and more from classical antiquity to Italy and the Renaissance in middle life, and to land him in old age on the coasts of Cyprus: in little things too, to take one instance, to urge him at the age of sixty to his first riding lesson.

On her arrival in England his mother first settled at Blackheath. Life was bare, not to say austere. George, like his brothers before him, was sent to the School for the Sons of Missionaries, later Eltham College. It was a failure. The boy learnt nothing and was miserable. It was not till he had passed on to University College School, where he met the stimulus of intelligent teaching, that the clouds began to lift. It is interesting that in his school days he showed a distinct leaning towards natural science which crystallized into a lifelong interest in geology. This tendency was something of a disappointment to the Headmaster, H. W. Eve, who confided to Micaiah, now a Professor at the College, 'your little brother will never be good for anything'.

From the School he passed in due course to University College with an Andrews scholarship ('the competition must have been poor for I remember in the Latin Unseen when it said "dux paludamentum scissit" I translated "the general cut

across the marsh''!'). Other entrants of his year were Gregory Foster and Frank Heath, both to be close friends, and Mary Paul to whom he soon became informally engaged and whom he married ten years later. Here the Professors with whom he came most in contact were Alfred Goodwin, Alfred Church, and Henry Morley. Of the two last he was more than critical and in this connexion he has recorded a characteristic anecdote:

> Church, the well-known translator of Tacitus, was quite past work. He used actually to go to sleep in class while we were construing. So disgusted were we with his neglect of his duties that we (and I fear I was the ringleader) got up a petition to the authorities asking that something should be done. I can still see the grubby piece of paper which we presented. I was sent for by the Secretary and had my knuckles rapped; but Church resigned next year.

For Goodwin, however, he had the greatest respect and admiration, and his teaching was a prime factor in the boy's development. It was Goodwin who first opened his eyes through the Elgin marbles to the beauties of Greek sculpture, and Goodwin who arranged for him to break off his course at University College and go up to Oxford. After attempts on Brasenose and Balliol he obtained an exhibition at Merton College; and, with some assistance from his eldest brother, for money was still a difficulty, he went into residence in 1888.

It was now that he began to show his true quality. His first class in Honour Moderations was won in 1889 (apparently for the first time) after two terms, instead of the customary five; the same class in Greats, two years and a term later. Hill's undergraduate interests seem to have leant as much toward philosophy as to history; and we even find him, immediately after Schools, lecturing for his college on Aristotle. Very soon, however, he was working at archaeology again under Professor Percy Gardner, to whom he had been given an introduction, no doubt by Goodwin, when he went up; and under the same auspices he took his first steps in numismatics. When early in 1893 a hoped-for fellowship had passed him by and a vacancy occurred at the British Museum in the Department of Coins and Medals, on Gardner's advice he stood for the post. He was not only successful but incidentally made a lifelong friend of one of the unsuccessful candidates, now Sir Charles Peers.

Hill took up his appointment in April 1893, and in 1897 he at length obtained the consent of Mary Paul's parents to their marriage. His wife, who was some years the elder, while sharing in some degree her husband's interests (she translated

a work of T. Reinach on Jewish coins to which he contributed an introduction), occupied herself mainly with the organization of social work. She was the first Secretary of the Poor Law Examinations Board and long connected with the Charity Organization Society. They had no children, and she devoted herself to him. Her death in 1924 left him to great loneliness in which his friends at first found it difficult to help him till the society of his brother's children came to fill the gap.

The outline of Hill's subsequent career can be briefly given. In 1912 he became Keeper of the Department of Coins and Medals. Through the First World War he kept the Medal Room going practically single-handed, towards the end of it supervising the removal of the collection of over 500 cabinets (packed with his own careful hands) to the safety of the Post Office Tube. In 1931 he succeeded Sir Frederic Kenyon in the Directorship of the Museum, receiving a K.C.B. in 1933. He was the first archaeologist to hold the position, which had always hitherto been filled by a librarian, but extensive knowledge of the literary departments saved him from shifting the balance too sharply to the other side. He had always considered that a great Museum should take care to secure the big things and the small ones would take care of themselves. In accordance with this policy two outstanding events of his Directorship were the acquisition of the *Codex Sinaiticus* (a great anxiety), to further which a national campaign was organized; and, jointly with the Victoria and Albert Museum, of the extensive and magnificent Eumorfopoulos Collection of Oriental antiquities. A serious problem inherited from his predecessor was the proper handling of the generous donation by Sir Joseph (later Lord) Duveen of a building to house the Elgin marbles. Hill soon realized that the views of the donor and his architect by no means coincided with those of himself and his colleagues; and it was with difficulty that the original design was abandoned for one in which the marbles and not the architecture of the building were to be the main object of attention. The affair was still unfinished when he retired and it was left to Sir John Forsdyke to round off a satisfactory compromise. Minor but revealing acts of his office were the attempts to beautify the façade of the Museum with a row of almond trees flowering in season along the breadth of the forecourt, and with bay trees in tubs between the columns. The first he had conceived long ago as a young Assistant, and it is sad that unsuitable soil and the stress of war brought both of them to nothing. A permanent addition to the amenities of

the Museum, however, was the opening of the Colonnade to the public, with the provision of seats and permission to smoke outside the building. His retirement took place in 1936. His friends had noticed a slight flagging in his energies. He was tired and glad to be out of harness. He retired; to become in his seventies the author of a monumental history of Cyprus from the earliest times down to the present day, in four closely written volumes, the last of which was found in manuscript, practically ready, after his death in 1948, and will appear shortly.

In view of these so varied interests (he records that there was no department of the Museum, the Egyptian and the Oriental Printed Books only excepted, in which he had not done some sort of research), it is a little difficult to remember that he was first of all a numismatist and that his official life was mainly spent among Greek coins. He had entered the Medal Room at a fortunate hour for ancient numismatics. Barclay Head, after Eckhel the second founder of the science, had just succeeded to the Keepership. His compendious but encyclopaedic *Historia Numorum*, the Bible of Greek numismatics as it has been called, had appeared in 1887 and was bringing home to scholars the multifarious contribution that the study of coins could make to ancient history, art, and religion. The Medal Room was acquiring an international reputation as a centre of research—so much that Willamowitz was soon to speak of numismatics as 'the English science'—and its members were in the closest touch with their leading continental colleagues: men like Imhoof Blumer, J. P. Six, and Ernest Babelon. True that the foundation of the Roman catalogue, later to become so important, was already being laid by H. A. Grueber, while a distinguished Sanskrit scholar, E. J. Rapson, a close friend of Hill's, presided over the Oriental section. The fact remained that little more than routine work was done otherwise than among Greek coins, the resources of the Department being concentrated on the pioneer series of Greek Catalogues, inaugurated in 1873 by R. Stuart Poole (whose retirement had produced the vacancy that Hill came to fill), and continued with the help of Head and Warwick Wroth. Hill was at once put to reinforce these two at the same task. Volume on volume had been appearing with commendable rapidity, and the Catalogue was now travelling round the shores of Asia Minor. Hill's first assignment was the difficult one of Lycia (published in 1897). From this land of half-hellenized barbarians, speaking an unknown tongue, his

official work took him ever farther towards the borders of the civilized world, through Cyprus (a lasting interest), Cilicia, Phoenicia, and Palestine to Arabia and the Persian gulf; finally by a sudden somersault to the extreme West and Spain: the Spanish catalogue was cut short by his promotion to the Directorship. All the time he was improving the form of these publications by increasing the number of coins reproduced and the amount of illustrative material from other collections, but especially by elaborating the introductions, so that in the end each one became in effect a monograph on its subject. It was work that offered special scope for that combination of meticulous accuracy with breadth of view which was particularly his own. Yet it was surely with some regret that he found his work thus bearing him away from the centre of things, in which six books, the formidable *parerga* of the thirteen years, 1897 to 1909, stand to show his remarkable grasp and range.[1]

He did not actually visit Greece until 1928, when he went in company with his friends the Ashmoles, and the comment in his notes is revealing:

> It was a very fortunate dispensation which introduced me to Italy before Greece, and enabled me to place the latter in its true perspective, and to realise its immense intellectual superiority in all fields of culture. The emotional effect of the Acropolis of Athens was such as might have been made by some work of art in which the highest powers of mathematics and poetry had somehow combined to produce one incomparable masterpiece.

Meanwhile this preoccupation with the periphery of ancient culture perhaps fanned his rising enthusiasm for the history and art of Medieval and Renaissance Italy. The earliest impulse in this direction had come in the course of departmental routine work; but ample opportunities for such studies were soon to be provided by regular visits to his parents-in-law (one a good Dante scholar) who spent much time in Italy and eventually settled in Rome. His friendship with the brothers Max and Maurice Rosenheim, two notable collectors, was also a powerful stimulus; and he used to tell of regular Saturday lunches at the Café Royal with them and other friends like Colonel Croft Lyons, where the latest treasures were passed round and dis-

[1] *Sources for Greek History between the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars* (1897), *Handbook of Greek and Roman Coins* (1899), *Manual of Greek Historical Inscriptions* (1901, with E. L. Hicks), *Coins of Ancient Sicily* (1903), *Historical Greek Coins* and *Historical Roman Coins* (1906 and 1909). For the next three years he was also revising Head's *Historia Numorum* for a second edition.

cussed. The first step was a brief article on Italian medals for *Knowledge* in 1896. Soon a series of scholarly notes began to appear in various journals, after 1904 principally in the *Burlington Magazine*. His work on medals included a volume on Italian Medals of the Renaissance, the outcome of the Rhind Lectures which he delivered in Edinburgh in 1915; and culminated in the *Corpus of Italian Medals before Benevenuto Cellini*, two noble volumes published in folio by the Trustees of the British Museum in 1930. Through the medals, and particularly those of Pisanello, he came to the study and appreciation of drawings;[1] for the proper understanding of this great medallist required a study of his work as painter and draughtsman. It was thus that the idea came to him of a Society for the publication of Old Master drawings, and his enthusiasm was largely responsible for the launching of the Vasari Society in 1905. His monograph on Pisanello appeared in 1905,[2] and a volume of drawings in 1929.

Another field into which these studies lured him was that of Italian heraldry, iconography, and kindred subjects. He collected coats of arms, badges, and mottoes with passionate enthusiasm and took great pleasure in the careful coloured drawings which he made of them. These collections, which are of great value for the subject, are now deposited in the British Museum, the heraldic in the Department of Manuscripts (with a duplicate set in the Warburg Institute), the iconographic in the Print Room. Besides his scholarship Hill had a strongly practical side. There can be hardly a journal nearly touching his interests, the *Numismatic Chronicle*, for example, *Hellenic Journal*, or *Burlington Magazine*, of which he was not at some time an editor. In the administration of Treasure Trove, on which subject he wrote the standard work, he planned, and finally brought about, a remarkable change in favour of the finder, which should go far to prevent the concealment and clandestine disposal of finds. As Secretary of the Archaeological Joint Committee from its inception in 1920 he had been concerned with the drafting of an Antiquities Law for Iraq and for Palestine. In 1934 he was commissioned to report on the Cyprus

[1] I am indebted to my colleague Mr. A. E. Popham for kindly giving me a note on this subject.

[2] This was reprinted in 1912, with a new title-page and date but otherwise unaltered. In the meantime much new material had come to light. It should be put on record that the reprint took place without any reference to the author, who bitterly resented the slur cast on his scholarship by its apparent omissions.

Museum and the administration of the island's Antiquities Law. He travelled there with Sir Charles Peers and other friends and his recommendations resulted in a new Law and a greatly improved organization. He devoted much time and thought to fostering the modern medal, and served for long on the Mint Advisory Committee. He was also closely involved in the practical details of the production of the commemorative plaque given to the next of kin of all those who fell in the First World War. Besides all this, various bodies, learned and otherwise, claimed his help on their councils, from the Society of Antiquaries to the Anti-Noise League (now, alas, defunct) which he had helped to promote.

It was a life of tireless activity, its output doubled by system and order; in which patient attention to detail never hindered him from seeing the wood however many the trees. The same qualities were carried over into trivial day-to-day affairs. Who else would have recorded year after year, in a special book, as they came in, the amounts of even the smallest dividends received, before and after tax? To travel with him, especially abroad, was a restful experience. Routes were planned in closest detail and the times of trains carefully noted with alternatives in case of emergency. There was of course another side to this, and he remarked one day a little ruefully that for him the idea of foreign travel had a cathartic tendency; 'I have only to take the Continental Bradshaw in hand . . .'.

His nature was unusually sensitive, deeply moved by beauty whether in poetry, music, or the visual arts; and of very human sympathies. I remember a performance of *Macbeth* at which he showed signs of distress in the fourth act and I thought he must be ill. 'I'm sorry,' he said, 'Macduff and his pretty ones—it *always* makes me cry.' Children he loved, the more for having none of his own. He was always at ease with them and they with him. Under the date 1910 in his bibliography there appears, sandwiched between *Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Phoenicia* and *Notes on the Mediaeval Medals of Constantine*, the entry *The Truth about old King Cole, and other very Natural Histories*. His kindness to the young, too, was unfailing and he would take endless pains to help in the early stage of their studies. He had been among the first to realize the quality of such artists as Skeaping and Barbara Hepworth; and the small but choice collection which he formed in later years contained particularly fine examples of the drawings of the one and of the other's sculpture. It was a great grief when he felt compelled by the difficulty

of life after the war to leave his house in Sussex Place, where his friends will remember the music parties and the quiet evenings overlooking Regent's Park, and to disperse the greater part of his library and collections.

His humour, mixed now and again with an astringent dash of malice, was characteristic. One instance must suffice. He told with quiet enjoyment of an incident at the Garden Party following the Encaenia at which his University had conferred on him an honorary degree. Among other distinguished guests were André Maurois and a politician, of whom his opinion was not high. The latter, deceived perhaps by Hill's slightly foreign appearance, came up to him and addressed him in French with a florid compliment on his literary work. Hill replied in character, and a long and stilted conversation ensued in the same language till he turned to other friends and dismissed his admirer who withdrew with a slightly puzzled air. The picture would not be complete without a reference to a strain of deep pessimism which appeared now and again in his outlook. A sheet of his notes written in 1947 was to the Sophoclean text μὴ φῦναι τὸν ἅπαντα νικᾶ λόγον; and he could even add 'I have had nothing to record in the way of intellectual or spiritual growth. I am unable to narrate, as many seem able to do, how even during my school days I was grappling with major philosophical or religious problems. I suppose I did discuss such matters with my friends; but, if so, I have, perhaps fortunately, forgotten what I, and they, said.' This is the other side of his emotional sensibility. He must have been very vulnerable as a boy, and it was a bleak wind that blew through the intellectual circles of his youth.

He was among the most modest of men, unwilling to trust his judgement in anything that he did not know to the bottom, and diffident. Even in 1946 he could write in a moment of despondency:

> I realise my work has never been quite in the first class . . . my Greek and Latin have become terribly rusty. . . . Instead of sticking to Homer, Aeschylus or Vergil, I have spent my time verifying references in Strabo, Suidas or Pliny and the Historia Augusta. More and more the knowledge which I have acquired has become of the card-index type. I have learnt not to know things, but to know where to refer to about them. I hope, nevertheless, that my mind is not like a sort of fly-paper to which the facts stick and promptly die.

It was not, and his work remains to refute the depreciatory estimate. The learned world everywhere combined to honour

his eightieth birthday: through the Hellenic Society by a volume dedicated to him, through the Royal Numismatic Society by the publication of a complete Bibliography, which brings home, as nothing else can, his varied interests and his prodigious output.

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