

## WILLIAM MILLER

1864–1945<sup>1</sup>

WILLIAM MILLER was born at Wigton in Cumberland on 8 December 1864. His father, William Miller, was a local mine-owner; his mother was born Fanny Perry. He was educated at Rugby and at Hertford College, Oxford, where he obtained First-Class Honours in Mods and in Literae Humaniores. On leaving Oxford he read for the Bar, and was called to the Inner Temple in 1889. He never practised as a barrister but spent as much time as he could in travel. In 1890 he paid his first visit to the Balkan peninsula; and thenceforward he passed several months every year in revisiting the Balkans and in Italy and Greece. His wife, Ada Mary, the daughter of Col. Thomas Parker Wright, whom he married in 1895, shared his taste for travel and was with him on most of his journeys. They had no children.

His first published works were journalistic articles on his travels and on the political events in the countries that he visited, but he was also deeply and increasingly interested in their past history. In July 1896 he published his first article in the *English Historical Review*, on the history of Montenegro, a country to which no English scholar had hitherto paid any serious attention. Thenceforward scholarly articles of his appeared fairly regularly in the *English Historical Review*, the *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, *Die Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, the *Journal of the British and American Archaeological Society of Rome*, and the *Quarterly Review*. His first published book, *The Balkans*, which appeared in 1896, was a description of the actual state of the Balkan countries intended for the general reader. It was followed in 1898 by *Travel and Politics in the Near East*, which remains a very readable account of his experiences on his journeys.

In 1901 Miller published a book on *Mediaeval Rome*. It was not a work by which he later set much store. It was rather cramped and perhaps a little superficial; but it showed his

<sup>1</sup> It was recently discovered that no memoir of William Miller, who was made a Fellow in 1932 and who died in 1945, had ever appeared in the *Proceedings*. It is the aim of the Academy to publish memoirs of all deceased Fellows and in 1976 Sir Steven Runciman was asked to undertake the task. The Academy is particularly grateful to Sir Steven for providing the following record.

remarkable sympathy with the individual men and women of the past and it is still a useful introduction to the subject. During the following years he took an increasing interest in Greece, publishing in 1905 a pleasant and illuminating book on *Greek Life in Town and Country*, a lively description of Greece as it was in the days before the Balkan Wars. Since 1903 he had been living in Rome, having been appointed that year Correspondent of the *Morning Post* for Italy and the Balkans, a position which he held till 1937. It was a curious appointment; for the *Morning Post* was highly conservative in its politics, and Miller was already and increasingly known for his liberal views. Indeed, in 1923 he moved from Rome to Athens, as he disliked living in Mussolini's Italy, and in Greece he enjoyed the close friendship of Eleftherios Venizelos, whom he greatly admired. It says much both for the *Morning Post* and for Miller himself that the arrangement lasted for so long. The newspaper appreciated its correspondent far too highly ever to attempt to alter the tone of his dispatches.

It was in 1908, while he was living in Rome, that Miller published his great historical work, *The Latins in the Levant*. During the Balkan Wars his journalistic activities took up most of his time; and it was not till the eve of the First World War that he published his next important book, *The Ottoman Empire, 1801-1913*. This book did not properly live up to its name, as Miller's interest was concentrated on the Christian minorities within the Empire, and it is with them, rather than with the Turks themselves, that the book is concerned. Within those limits it is still a useful book, covering ground that is not much studied by Western scholars competently and fair-mindedly, though Miller cannot conceal his sympathy for the minorities, in particular the Serbs and the Greeks. The book was reissued in 1934 under the title of *The Ottoman Empire and its Successors, 1801-1924*, with chapters added giving the history of Greece and the Balkan states during and immediately after the First World War. In the meantime he had published in 1921 a collection of his historical articles under the title of *Essays on the Latin Orient*; and the fourth volume of the *Cambridge Medieval History* contained chapters by him on the first Bulgarian Empire, on the Balkan states in the later Middle Ages, on the Empire of Nicaea, and on the Franks and Venetians in Greece. A small book on Greece had appeared in 1918, and a *History of the Greek People, 1821-1921*, in 1922. The former work is a piece of intelligent journalism, with a shrewd and entertaining chapter called 'Who's Who in Greece'. The latter is a good general

survey of nineteenth-century Greece, though it might be criticized for a slight neglect of the religious issues of the time. Miller was not interested in ecclesiastical politics.

Miller's last published book was a short *History of the Empire of Trebizond*, which appeared in 1926. It is a useful introduction to a subject which at that time was little known, though modern research has now added greatly to our knowledge. He continued to send articles to the *Morning Post* till his retirement in 1937, and he still wrote an occasional review for various learned periodicals. His interest in history was undiminished. His flat in Athens was a centre where all the Greek savants collected and where scholars and would-be scholars were always welcome. He was very popular in Greece. Even the Royalists who resented his Venizelist sympathies respected his integrity and liked him personally. His kindness to young students was immense; and he greatly enjoyed being an honorary member of the British School at Athens. He became a Fellow of the British Academy in 1932. He had already received an honorary Doctorate from Athens University, and soon afterwards became a Corresponding Member of the Academy of Athens.

He had looked forward to a happy old age in Athens; but his hopes were ruined by the Second World War and the German invasion of Greece in 1941. He remained in Athens until orders went out that all British citizens had to leave the country. It was a great sorrow to him to have to abandon all his books and his possessions; and the anguished problem of how to dispose of a beloved cat was such that it was only with difficulty that he and Mrs. Miller were induced to take the last boat from Greece on which civilians could travel. He arrived in Cairo a sad and weary old man, and eventually settled in South Africa, at Durban. He died there on 23 October 1945, happy to know before his death that Greece was free once more.

William Miller's reputation as an important historian depends above all on his work on Frankish Greece. Till he began work on it the subject had been neglected by scholars, though early in the nineteenth century the Frenchman Buchon had collected and edited some of the relevant material, and a few decades later Karl Hopf had edited further texts and worked out genealogical trees and tables of rulers and had written on the history of various districts. In English there had been nothing apart from George Finlay's brief chapters in his history of Greece, until, the year before Miller's *Latins in the Levant* appeared, Rennell Rodd published a pleasant and careful, if not very profound, book in

two volumes on *The Princes of Achaia and the Chronicles of Morea. The Latins in the Levant* was the first full history of Frankish and Venetian rule in Greece. Miller had fully equipped himself for the task. His formidable bibliography, irritatingly compiled without giving the dates or often not even the editions of the works that he consulted, shows an amazing knowledge of the sources, including all the relevant Italian chronicles, many of them very obscure. He was helped by his wide knowledge of languages. He was further helped by his travels. As he himself claimed, with justice, in the preface to the book, he had himself visited all the chief castles and sites connected with the Frankish period, 'believing that before a writer can hope to make the Franks live on paper, he must see where they lived in the flesh'. He goes on to say of his one great predecessor: 'Enormous as is the debt which every student of mediaeval Greek history owes to the late Karl Hopf, it was here that he failed, and it was hence that his Frankish barons are labelled skeletons in a vast, cold museum, instead of human beings of like passions with ourselves.'

It is Miller's extraordinary sympathy with the characters of which he was writing and with the land in which they lived that makes *The Latins in the Levant* so enjoyable to read. It is not altogether an easy book. The reader feels that he has been to a vast reception at which he can remember only a few of the interesting persons that he has met; but all the other guests, however briefly they are seen, are treated as human beings. It is a crowded narrative. Incident follows incident at a breathless speed. Miller himself had some doubts about the arrangement of the book, whether to treat the whole subject chronologically or to treat the various areas in turn. As he said, he adopted an intermediate course, treating mainland Greece and the nearby islands as a homogeneous whole, and the islands of the Archipelago and Corfu as separate units. He omitted Crete from his survey, considering that its history could not be written until the eighty-seven volumes of the 'Duca di Candia' documents at Venice should be published.

Nowadays when historians are eager to stress the limitations of narrative history, the book can be criticized for a certain neglect of institutional and economic questions. But such questions were outside of Miller's brief, except in so far as they affected the story. His aim was to give as complete as possible an account of the events that occurred in his chosen period and of the men and women who took part in them. He believed that it

was impossible to enlarge upon institutions or social or economic conditions until the historical facts were known in their sequence. Certainly the book remains essential for anyone wishing to study any aspect of Frankish Greece; and it has not been superseded.

*The Latins in the Levant* was Miller's masterpiece. Among the essays collected in his *Essays on the Latin Orient* there are several which deal with special areas in Greece and which represent pioneer work and are still of scholarly importance, though a few, such as his essays on the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem and on Anna Comnena, are not much more than attractive pieces of historical journalism. His chapter on Frankish Greece in the 1923 edition of volume IV of the *Cambridge Medieval History* is disappointing. He was not happy at having to try to reduce the substance of his great book into one crowded chapter, and, like many contributors to that volume, he resented the editors' prohibition of footnotes giving the sources. His chapter on the First Bulgarian Empire was, he himself admitted, a little perfunctory. It was written before the publication of the works of the great Bulgarian historian, Zlatarsky, on the history of his country, and it took little account of the already available archaeological evidence. The chapters on the Balkan states in the later Middle Ages are more important and make one regret that he never carried out a project which he apparently at one time had in mind of writing a full-scale history of medieval Serbia, a country for which he always kept a deep affection.

Miller had no illusions about his more journalistic writings, which he regarded as ephemeral; but he hoped that his purely historical works would be regarded as literature as well as history. His writing was always clear, elegant, and vivid and was always permeated by his interest in humanity and in the lesser known figures of history. Characteristically he prefaced his *Essays on the Latin Orient* with a quotation from Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*: 'You imagine that the campaigners against Troy were the only heroes, while you forget the other more numerous and diviner heroes whom your country has produced.' Miller did not think that the Frankish and Greek lords and ladies and humbler folk of whom he wrote were divine. It was their humanity that attracted him. But he did not intend them to be forgotten.

This love of humanity was a reflection of his own personal character. He was possessed of great charm, combined with modesty, gentleness, and enormous kindness. Those of us who

were privileged to know him in his later years in Athens will never forget the warmth of his welcome, the interest that he took in our work, and the undemanding encouragement that he gave to us.

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