



SIR DENYS PAGE

*Philip Gaskell*

## DENYS LIONEL PAGE

1908-1978

DENYS LIONEL PAGE was born on 11 May 1908, the son of F. H. D. Page, a railway official, and his wife Elsie. For some time the family lived in South Wales, so that in the cricket county championship Page was a supporter of Glamorgan; but they moved to Berkshire early enough to enable him to go to Newbury Grammar School. The headmaster, the Revd W. H. Sharwood-Smith, was an admirable teacher of the classics who had been a Scholar of Jesus College, Cambridge, of which his distinguished pupil was later to be Master.

In 1926 Page won a scholarship at Christ Church, Oxford. It was a time when several gifted undergraduates were in residence there. Page's chief friends were the Hon. Quintin Hogg, now Lord Hailsham of Marylebone, and D. J. Allan, later Fellow of Balliol College and Professor of Greek at Edinburgh; but he had acquaintances also among socially minded and sporting undergraduates. An early photograph shows a studious-looking young man looking out anxiously from behind large spectacles; the worried expression recalls that which Lely captured so successfully in the great portrait of another *novus homo*, Matthew Prior, which hangs in the Combination Room of Trinity College, Cambridge. But if Page had anxieties, he quickly overcame them as he adopted the prevailing ethos of the college, and threw himself into Oxford life, working hard but always allowing himself time for relaxation. He won his place in the Christ Church cricket team as a terrifying fast bowler. Already he had very definite views about most things and about most persons; those he disapproved of 'he castigated', in the words of a contemporary, Lord Gordon-Walker, 'with a kind of mock fury, but with no real malice'. He did not change in this respect.

Page can have learned little from the Christ Church Mods tutors, S. G. Owen and J. G. Barrington-Ward, except how to write elegant Latin. He was taught ancient history by R. H. Dundas and R. P. Longden, and philosophy by M. B. Foster and Gilbert Ryle; he did well in these subjects, but from the start his main interest was in Greek literature. Gilbert Murray's lectures and classes inspired him, as they did many hearers;

he admired the unique scholarship of J. D. Beazley, who made him aware of the importance of a knowledge of Greek art and archaeology for a literary scholar; and he had the great good fortune to be sent for special coaching in Greek composition to J. D. Denniston, who was then working on his famous book *The Greek Particles*. In Denniston's hands translation into Greek was not simply a scholastic exercise, for instead of vague impressions as to whether a particular usage was right or wrong, he was able to supply precise details. Like all Denniston's friends and pupils, Page was charmed by his genial ferocity and sympathetic strictness, and there came to be a close friendship between their families.

Page obtained First Classes both in Mods and Greats, and won Craven and De Paravicini Scholarships, the Chancellor's Prize for Latin Verse, and the Gaisford Prize for Greek Verse. After taking his degree in 1930 he was elected to the Derby Scholarship, and would have liked to go to Berlin to hear Wilamowitz; but it was too late, for the great man was too old, and died in September of the following year. Instead Page spent a year in the more relaxed atmosphere of Vienna, where he attended the seminars of the cultivated and civilized Ludwig Radermacher, acquiring a command of German that was to prove useful in war as well as peace. In 1931 he was appointed a Lecturer at Christ Church, and after the probationary year that was then usual he became Student and Tutor of the House in 1932.

As Derby Scholar Page had begun his study of *Actors' Interpolations in Greek Tragedy, with Particular Reference to Euripides' Iphigenia in Aulis*, and the book appeared in 1934. New discoveries and researches had altered the situation since Wilamowitz had treated of the subject, and Page was able to make a positive contribution to the detection of interpolations and to the understanding of the process by which they came into being. Already his detailed knowledge and keen critical intelligence could be discerned, and well-qualified reviewers like Albin Lesky and Friedrich Solmsen recognized the book's high quality. Two years later he contributed a brilliant essay on the elegiac lament in Euripides' *Andromache* to *Greek Poetry and Life: Studies in Honour of Gilbert Murray*.

In 1938 Page contributed an edition of Euripides' *Medea* to the series of red-covered editions of Euripidean plays that was published by the Clarendon Press. The plan was that Gilbert Murray's Oxford text of each play should be reprinted, and

that the editor should provide simply the introduction and the commentary; but Page insisted on supplying a new text of his own editing. Text and commentary made a striking contribution to the understanding of the play, not seriously marred by youthful dogmatism. The introduction has borne the passage of time less well; its high-flown eloquence now seems as dated as the Shavian Euripides whom Page had unsuspectingly taken over from Gilbert Murray. It had not occurred to Page that he might learn something from the discussion of Euripides by E. R. Dodds, whose appointment to the Regius Chair of Greek in 1936 he had so much disapproved of that he for many years refused to speak to him.

From the beginning of his time as Tutor Page applied himself to the study of the early Greek lyric poets. New papyrus discoveries had greatly increased the number of their fragments, and by his editions of Sappho (1925) and Alcaeus (1927) Edgar Lobel had set new standards of accuracy and learning in editing them. Other texts of these writers were markedly unsatisfactory, being disfigured by rash conjectures and supplements, which often violated language, dialect, and metre. Page's first publications on Sappho and on Alcman date from this phase of his career; already the influence of Lobel on his work is easily perceptible.

Meanwhile the Loeb Classical Library invited Page to edit in a single volume all the Greek poetry on papyrus not contained in its volumes devoted to individual authors, apart from very small or unintelligible scraps; each text was to be accompanied by an introduction and a translation. Page embarked on this formidable task with his usual energy and confidence. Very often the texts were better edited or explained by him than by any previous editors; a vast amount of information was imparted; and the resulting book was not only a boon to readers, but a large contribution to knowledge. When it was published, in 1942, the entire stock was destroyed by enemy action, and it was long before it became generally available.

Page rapidly made his mark as tutor and lecturer, and proved highly congenial to his Christ Church colleagues and to most of those with whom he came in contact. As always, he had strong opinions one way or the other, and he did not see eye to eye with everybody. At first he was much stimulated and encouraged, like many others, by the friendship of Maurice Bowra, but later the two men drifted apart, perhaps because Page came to regard Bowra's scholarship as unsound. His

earliest relations with Eduard Fraenkel, who had become Corpus Professor of Latin in 1935, were friendly, and Fraenkel's assistance is acknowledged in the preface to his *Medea*; but later the two became estranged. His relations, or lack of them, with E. R. Dodds have already been mentioned. But with most of his colleagues he was on good terms, Denniston and Lobel having most influence on his work.

In 1937 he became Junior Censor of Christ Church, and was a great success in that capacity; but a year later he resigned the Censorship and applied for a year's leave in order to get married. On a Hellenic Cruise he had met Katharine Elizabeth Dohan, of Pennsylvania, whose mother, Mrs. Edith Hall Dohan, was a well-known archaeologist. In 1939 Page paid his first visit to the United States, giving the Dean West Lectures at Princeton; his marriage took place in Rome, not long before the outbreak of war in 1939. Page's married life was singularly happy, he and his wife being greatly devoted to each other; with their four beautiful daughters they made up a harmonious family.

Soon after his return to England, Page joined the department of the Foreign Office located at Bletchley Park which dealt with the branch of intelligence known as Ultra. He was assigned to the section which under the direction of Oliver Strachey dealt with the various hand ciphers used by our enemies, which came from divers sources. Page's great ability, combined with his command of German, enabled him to take an important part in this work, so much so that when Strachey retired in 1942 Page was chosen to succeed him. At the end of the war Page headed a special command mission to Lord Mountbatten's headquarters first at Kandy and later at Singapore, and did not return to Oxford until 1946.

He then resumed his teaching and research with all his usual vigour; he began to take part in University affairs by serving as Senior Proctor in 1948/9. But in 1950 the Regius Chair of Greek at Cambridge was due to be vacated by the retirement of D. S. Robertson, and though Page did not apply the electors offered him the post and he accepted. The alliance between Christ Church and Trinity College, as well as the traditional link of Trinity with the Regius Chairs, made it natural that Trinity should elect him to a Professorial Fellowship and the Page family moved from 8 St. Aldates to Strathaird, the large and comfortable house off the Madingley Road which had been the residence of J. D. Duff.

Page's early time in Oxford had been an exciting period in the history of Greek studies in that place, and of all the studies which are there classified as *Literae Humaniores*. The publication of new papyri, most of them from the Oxyrhynchus hoard, the presence of the learned refugees from Germany, the stimulus afforded by the work of Beazley, and the readiness of the younger ancient historians, impelled by Alan Blakeway, to use archaeological data to throw light on early Greek history helped to create an exhilarating atmosphere; so did the contact with a group of Roman historians which included Ronald Syme and with philosophers who were making an important contribution to their subject, most of them under the influence of J. L. Austin.

Cambridge at that time contained several classical scholars of very great distinction. But some of these were approaching retirement, and they cannot be said to have communicated with the undergraduates or with their junior colleagues as effectively as their counterparts in Oxford. The Tripos was badly in need of reform and offered a training infinitely less stimulating than *Greats* did at that time. Housman, with his exaggerated insistence that the critical appreciation of literature was an emotional matter and had nothing to do with scholarship, had done harm to Cambridge education; his opinion seemed to be confirmed by the activities of such opponents as Sir John Sheppard, Provost of King's College. The unkind remark that there was nothing in Cambridge between the high and dry of Trinity and the low and wet of King's was sadly not altogether without truth.

Page's arrival changed the atmosphere completely. Undergraduates were as fascinated as those of Oxford by his brilliant lectures, in which the necessary facts were set out with consummate learning and with crystal clarity, inferences from them deduced by cogent reasoning, and the whole performance, like that of a great advocate, rendered irresistible by the charm, liveliness, and intelligence of the performer. One might easily not notice that these qualities had seldom been applied to the literary and artistic interpretation of the subject-matter, or that one had been admiring the lecturer rather than the poetry on which he lectured, and, if one did, one had too much to be grateful for to think of complaining.

Not only undergraduates but dons, especially the younger dons, benefited enormously from Page's presence. He was, as he continued to be throughout his life, princely in the generosity

with which he sacrificed his precious time to help others in their work, and any colleague who applied to him found him both willing and able to assist him very greatly. In so large a college as Trinity it cannot be easy for a newcomer to arrive almost immediately at the centre of college life; but Page did so, and was very soon elected to the College Council.

The fruits of his prolonged and intensive study of the Greek lyric poets now began to appear in a series of important publications. In 1951 he brought out a book on Alcman's Louvre Partheneion, in 1953 an edition of Corinna, with commentary, and in 1955 his edition of the fragments of the Lesbian poets, made in collaboration with Edgar Lobel, and his book *Sappho and Alcaeus*. The Alcman book contains a text of the riddling poem, with a careful diplomatic transcription of the papyrus, a commentary and full discussion. His theory about the general meaning of the poem cannot be called fully convincing, any more than any other theory that has been put forward; but the book remains indispensable for any serious study of the work. So is the text of Corinna with its accompanying expository matter. In *Lesbiorum Poetarum Fragmenta* Page added to Lobel's earlier editions of the Lesbian poets all the new material that had accrued, making naturally full use of Lobel's publication of most of it in the Oxyrhynchus series. By a kind of coquetry not uncommon among great scholars, Lobel had chosen to present the poems in a fashion whose austerity repels some readers; and it is possible to regret that Page took over this method. But the work is done in masterly fashion, and its contribution to the establishment of the texts is very great indeed.

*Sappho and Alcaeus* contains texts of the more considerable fragments, with detailed commentaries, set in the context of a general discussion of the authors and the many problems which their poetry and lives present. The commentaries on the text are of the highest quality; but the literary questions which these authors pose are less satisfactorily dealt with. Realizing that some readers might expect a literary appreciation of the poets, Page dealt with the problem by copying out a long extract from John Addington Symonds, representative of the criticism of the nineties, but not calculated to satisfy all modern readers. Still, the two books devoted to the Lesbians are a magnificent achievement, which no living scholar could have equalled.

Two publications of the fifties that were more deeply affected

by the weakness in handling literary questions manifested by the strange decision to make extensive use of Symonds were *The Homeric Odyssey* (1955) and *History and the Homeric Iliad* (1959). Both were based on lectures given in America, the former on Flexner Lectures delivered at Bryn Mawr in 1954 and the latter on Sather Lectures delivered at Berkeley in 1958; and the need to present the material in the form of arresting lectures aimed at a transatlantic audience allowed the rhetorical element to get somewhat out of hand. Both books display their author's usual comprehensive learning, clarity of thought and presentation, and penetrating logic. But they are marred by a displeasing dogmatism; the views of other scholars are often too brusquely brushed aside; and the assumption of multiple authorship is too readily used to account for features of the poems which might well be explained by other methods. The book about the *Iliad* displays remarkable knowledge of the relevant archaeological data, of the newly deciphered Linear B tablets, and of the Oriental documents thought to have a bearing on the poem; and though arguments based on such material often lose their cogency in the light of fresh discovery and interpretation, much of this still retains its value. But in the appendix dealing with 'Multiple Authorship in the *Iliad*' some of the greatest poetry of the world is insensitively hacked about by a surgeon who hurries to operate without having paused to understand the nature of the case. This appendix, with much of the *Odyssey* book, occupies the same place in Page's work that the edition of Milton occupies in that of Bentley.

Denniston had long been working at an edition of the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, on the scale of the red-covered Oxford editions of Euripides' plays, and he had meant to revise his draft in the light of Eduard Fraenkel's great commentary. But Denniston died in 1949, a year before the publication of Fraenkel's work, and it fell to Page to prepare the manuscript for publication. The work as it appeared seems to contain a good deal more of Page than of the original Denniston. Perhaps Page was too eager to differ from Fraenkel; yet the commentary is of great value, and did good service in showing that the vastly learned editor was not immune from error. The part of the work most open to criticism was the introduction, whose rhetoric recalls that of the Homeric books, and whose patronizing assumption that problems could be bypassed by taking it for granted that the poet's religion and outlook were crude and primitive has not gone unchallenged.

During the late fifties Page's life was altered by his wife's first serious illness. For a time he coped with the management of their large house almost single-handed; and though he carried on his work with great courage, the burden of anxiety must have been a heavy tax on even his resources. His wife recovered; and in 1959 their domestic problems were alleviated by his election to be Master of Jesus College. His vast energy enabled him to discharge the duties of this office with great thoroughness, while keeping up his rapid production of scholarly work of a high order. His wife was soon able to take an active part in social life, and Page threw himself into college affairs with characteristic enthusiasm. 'He was an active and sympathetic Master', writes the author of an obituary notice in the annual report of Jesus College, 'always ready to listen to members of his College, even though some of them may not have realized that they were interrupting his work.'

After the fifties Page seldom returned to the parts of the field of Greek studies where his weaker side would have been exposed, preferring to concentrate on critical editions and commentaries. In 1962 he brought out *Poetae Melici Graeci*, a critical edition of the Greek lyric poets, other than the Lesbians. A minor edition of these poets appeared in 1968 as an Oxford Classical Text under the title of *Lyrice Graeca Selecta*, and a supplement containing new material, *Supplementum Lyricis Graecis*, followed in 1974. Page also edited large fragments of a papyrus containing an ancient work about lyric poetry, containing many quotations, which Lobel had long worked at before handing it over to him; this appeared as Part XXIX of the *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* in 1963. All these works are executed in masterly style, and the texts of the works they contain were notably improved by Page. His contribution to the editing and explanation of the texts of the Greek lyric poets would by itself suffice to make him one of the most distinguished Greek scholars of the twentieth century.

But now Page turned to the field of Hellenistic poetry, with results almost as remarkable. In 1965 his colleague at Trinity, A. S. F. Gow, followed up his great edition of Theocritus by publishing in two volumes *The Greek Anthology: Hellenistic Epigrams*, containing the text, with commentary, of those epigrams which must have formed part of the Garland of Meleager. To this work Page contributed the edition of Meleager himself; and when in 1968 the same partners brought out the two volumes of *The Greek Anthology: The Garland of*

*Philip and some Contemporary Epigrams*, Gow was responsible for Antipater of Thessalonica, but Page for all the other authors. In 1975 Page brought out a minor edition of many of the poems published in these two volumes, which appeared as an Oxford Classical Text under the title of *Epigrammata Graeca*. To the end of his life Page continued to work at the Greek epigrams; his last book, published in the year of his death, was *The Epigrams of Rufinus*, containing text and commentary. He left almost ready for publication a further volume, containing all epigrams not included in the earlier volumes down to the year AD 50, together with certain others later than that year; this is to be published shortly. Page's work on epigrams shows his usual learning and acuteness, and makes a major contribution to the understanding of Hellenistic poetry.

In 1972 Page returned to the study of Greek tragedy by satisfying the acute need for a new Oxford Classical Text of Aeschylus. He used and supplemented the important investigation of the manuscripts by Dr R. D. Dawe in a book which had begun as a thesis which he supervised; and though the text of Aeschylus abounds with problems over whose solution agreement is unlikely ever to be reached, any competent person must agree that his edition has improved on all its predecessors.

Page often visited Greece, particularly Crete, and followed with keen interest the remarkable excavations on Thera directed by his friend Spyridon Marinatos. In his pamphlet *The Santorini Volcano and the Desolation of Minoan Crete* (1969), he warmly advocated the theory that Knossos was destroyed by the eruption of the Thera volcano, one that has now lost the favour of the vulcanologists. In 1972 he gave the Jackson Lectures at Harvard, making out of them the small and attractive book *Folktales in Homer's Odyssey*, which appeared the following year.

In addition to his books, Page produced a whole series of valuable articles, notes, and reviews, most of them concerned with lyric, tragedy, or Hellenistic poetry; from the sixties on many of them appeared in the *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*. A full bibliography of his writings may be found in the volume *Dionysiaca: Nine Studies in Greek Poetry by Former Pupils, Presented to Sir Denys Page on his Seventieth Birthday* (1978).

Page's efficient conduct of business was evident in University as well as College matters, and many people believed that he would make an admirable Vice-Chancellor. But though the

turn of his College to supply a holder of the office was long overdue, the safe men who sat on University Committees, who had then embarked on the policy of appeasing revolting students that was to find its natural consequence in the riot at the Garden House Hotel, decided against this. Their progressive orthodoxy was doubtless shocked by Page's forthright expression of conservative opinions, and by the crude attempts of undergraduate journalists to construe some of his remarks as a declaration of support for the regime of Papadopoulos; they need not have worried, for Page was by no means insensitive to public opinion, and as Vice-Chancellor would certainly have given general satisfaction.

Page could have retained his Chair until 1975 and the Mastership of Jesus until 1978; but in 1973 his wife's renewed illness led him to resign both offices and retire to live quietly in Northumberland. After that time he rarely came south; but he continued to work hard, using the excellent classical library of the University of Newcastle. Early in 1978 lung cancer was diagnosed, and it was clear that he had not long to live; but he faced death with great courage and composure, and never ceased to work. Almost at the end of his life, he happened to learn from his eldest daughter that a young scholar who was her neighbour in Oxford was editing a collection of interesting inscriptions; Page asked to see the manuscript, and was able to improve it by a great many suggestions of which few living scholars would have been capable. He died on 6 July 1978, and Lady Page survived him by only a few weeks.

In the work of editing and explaining the remains of Greek poetry Page's achievement is very great; in our time only Edgar Lobel, whose aims and methods have been somewhat different, can be compared with him. Intimate acquaintance with the texts and mastery of grammar, syntax, and metre, together with all relevant knowledge of the subject-matter, was brought to bear on editorial and interpretative problems, and keen critical acumen was constantly exerted to extend the bounds of knowledge. Like all human beings he had limitations, which others may remark in the awareness that his achievement far exceeds their own. He lacked the wide general culture and refined sensibility of his predecessor, Donald Robertson; he had little interest in philosophy, religion, or the history of ideas; he did not easily appreciate qualities he did not share, and had no notion of what he might have learned from the writings of Karl Reinhardt or of E. R. Dodds. His tendency to see things

and people in strong black and white made it hard for him to do justice to the complexity of life.

But Page's charm and gaiety delighted most of those who met him, often surprising those who had known only the somewhat formidable personality revealed in what he wrote. His readiness to help pupils and colleagues was as great as his very considerable power to do so; and if his teaching had a fault it was the generous fault of finding it easier to praise or to encourage than to warn or to reprove. He rendered great services to his two Universities and his three Colleges; and his place in the history of Greek studies is assured beyond dispute.

Page was elected Fellow of the Academy in 1952, received its Kenyon Medal in 1969, and served as President from 1971 to 1974, doing it good service by his energetic conduct of its business. He was knighted in 1971; was a Doctor of Letters of Cambridge; held honorary doctorates from Oxford, Trinity College Dublin, and the Universities of Newcastle, Hull, and Bristol; and was a Corresponding Member of the Academy of Athens, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Philosophical Society, and the Greek Humanistic Society. He was an Honorary Fellow of Trinity and Jesus Colleges and an Honorary Student of Christ Church.

HUGH LLOYD-JONES