



*B. Gage*

W. K. C. GUTHRIE

# WILLIAM KEITH CHAMBERS GUTHRIE

1906–1981

WILLIAM KEITH CHAMBERS GUTHRIE was born in London on 1 August 1906. On both his father's and his mother's side he was of pure Scottish descent. His paternal grandfather, David Gibson Guthrie, came from Kirkcaldy, Fife, and was headmaster of Pathhead and Sinclairtown School. Keith's father, Charles Jameson Guthrie, was originally destined for the Church of Scotland ministry, but his elder brother, who had moved to London, persuaded him to do the same, to take up a career in the Westminster Bank. So Keith's father worked in London all his life: most of his interests, however, were devoted to the Presbyterian Church in Clapham where he made his home. It was a great joy to the family, though one they viewed with some apprehension, to have the Moderator of the Church of Scotland come to stay with them on visits to London. As a young man, Guthrie wrote to his mother on the first such occasion, expressing sympathy for her fears that their house would not be thought sufficiently grand for such a visit, but pointing to the paradox that, when true Christianity sets no store by worldly goods, the entertaining of a Christian should be a matter of concern on that score.

His mother was brought up in London, but her father and mother were both Scottish, her mother from a Highland family, the Mackinnons of Skye and Arran, her father, William Chambers, from Glasgow. He was an artist and engraver, and he too lived in Clapham and was an Elder of the Church there.

Keith had an elder sister, Katharine, whom he addressed as K, also a classical scholar, and father, mother, daughter, and son formed a close-knit and united family. On his expeditions to Central Anatolia after graduation Guthrie sent home a steady stream of letters of great warmth and affection to each of the members of the family, and he recorded how much he valued those he received in return. Generally somewhat reserved towards outsiders, the family drew great strength from its shared Christian values and ideals, values and ideals that provided the solid foundations of Guthrie's moral attitudes throughout his life. At Cambridge, as undergraduate and don, he appreciated College chapel and was a regular worshipper at St Columba's Church.

Guthrie was educated at Dulwich College and enjoyed his

schooldays. He was taught by Ted Hose and H. J. Dixon, later headmaster of King's School, Wimbledon, and proof of the solid grounding in the classics he received duly came with the winning of the Eric Evan Spicer scholarship to Trinity College, Cambridge. He matriculated in October 1925. That year, Pearson, the Regius Professor of Greek, was lecturing on Aristotle, *Politics* ii, Housman on Horace, *Odes* iv, Ridgeway on Greek and Roman religion and on Greek comedy, A. B. Cook—who was to be, with Cornford, one of the most important influences on the young Guthrie—on Greek sculpture and Greek vases, and A. D. Nock—another who won Guthrie's respect—on Lucan and Statius. Angus of Trinity Hall gave his usual, much appreciated, course on the History of Ancient Philosophy, and there were lectures in the Part I Schedule by W. H. S. Jones on Ancient Thought, and by J. C. Lawson on Plato, *Republic* ii–iv, and on Aristotle's *Poetics*. Cornford himself was lecturing on the Presocratics for Part II, the course which, when Guthrie came to take it, made such a deep impression upon him. With Gow and D. S. Robertson, Cornford was one of the triumvirate of Trinity lecturers in Classics responsible for Guthrie's undergraduate supervisions. By the time Guthrie took Part II Cornford was also giving a course on Socrates and Plato, Rackham was lecturing on Aristotle, and Hackforth on the set texts, Plato's *Protagoras* and *Meno*, and Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Δ.

The young Guthrie's undergraduate career was a brilliant one, marked by a succession of College and University prizes and awards. He took Part I of the Classical Tripos in one year (as Trinity scholars usually did) and got his First, and a College First Year prize to go with it. In 1926–7 he won the Browne University scholarship (being pipped for the Craven by his friend and rival, Walter Hamilton, one year his junior). He collected more College prizes in that and his third year, for Greek Prose and Latin Verse composition. In 1928 his First in Part II was a starred one, with distinction for work in ancient philosophy, and he was awarded the top Studentship, the Craven, to be followed in the next year by the highest award of all, the Chancellor's Medal for Classics, the first of two that year.

Cambridge, in those days, was already beginning to be, for some, a place of considerable political activity. But political involvement, whether on the national or the international level, was not to Guthrie's taste, and although he had political, as well as moral, ideals and convictions, the idea of trying to convert others to them was repugnant to him. Like many of his contemporaries,

though certainly to a greater degree than most, he concentrated on what he had come to Cambridge for, the studies of the University. For relaxation, he enjoyed especially the company of a small circle of mostly Trinity friends.

The award of the Craven opened up the possibilities of research and of an academic career: indeed the regulations for the studentship stipulated that the holder should spend at least six months doing research away from Cambridge. On A. B. Cook's suggestion he joined the epigraphical expedition of W. M. Calder and W. H. Buckler to Central Anatolia in the spring of 1929. The expedition that year was cut short to little more than a fortnight because of Mrs Calder's illness, but although naturally disappointed, Guthrie wrote home that he had a presentiment that he would return. Meanwhile the rest of the summer he spent visiting Greece. Though it was the first time he had seen Athens, he was much less struck by it than by Constantinople, because, as he put it, it seemed to him that he had been familiar mentally with what there was to see at Athens ever since he was twelve or thirteen years old. By contrast, to encounter the serpent column in Constantinople gave him the thrill of the unexpected. This was the column that Constantine had transported from Delphi where it had been set up, as Herodotus describes, to commemorate the battle of Plataea. What delighted him most in Greece was the sense of continuity with ancient times that the living modern Greek language gave him.

Little epigraphical work was possible that year, though there were adventures enough. Even before arriving in the Levant he describes in his letters the flight from Budapest to Vienna in a four-seater plane, travelling at all of 120 miles per hour. He reports that his deck class passage from Istanbul to Peiraeus was a great experience, and very good value—at sixteen shillings. He enjoyed, too, sleeping rough under the olives, after suppers of soup and tea. There were, however, hazards, even dangers. He contracted Malta fever, traced back by his English doctors to goat's milk he had been given by shepherds with whom he had spent the night after trekking across the mountains to Delphi. Thereafter in the following years he was careful to reassure his family in his letters about the state of his health. He remarks on how fit he feels and how healthy his appetite is, boasting on one occasion that he downed half a dozen hard-boiled eggs for lunch—twice his normal breakfast ration of three—whereas in England he found it hard to manage even one.

The serious epigraphical studies that were to be published in

*Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua* iv (in 1933) were mostly the achievement of the expeditions of 1930 and 1932. The aim was to complete a comprehensive survey of the inscriptions of a region of Turkey that stretched from Afyon Karahisar (Akroenos) to Uluborlu (Apollonia) and Dinar (Apameia) and that also included the area around ancient Eumeneia along the headwaters of the Maeander. The stones that earlier travellers had described had to be located and squeezes taken. Not only did this provide a more accurate record of inscriptions that were already known, but many new finds came to light in the areas covered: on a good day the team would do more than twenty inscriptions. To begin with, Guthrie acted as Calder's assistant: the *Monumenta* volume has a slightly faded photograph of the two of them perched one above the other at the top of a rickety ladder—improvised on the spot—as they studied an inscription on a stone built into a mosque. But he was soon taking squeezes on his own account, and being congratulated on their quality. He writes home that he considers himself to have 'no trace of the archaeological mind' but that he is much in favour of epigraphy. He responded positively to the challenges of decipherment and interpretation and was eager to put to use the new evidence thus obtained about ancient customs and beliefs. The beauty and the wildness of the places they visited, the friendliness and simplicity of the local inhabitants (Turk, Kurd, Circassian, and Yuruk alike), the exhilarations of discovery, above all the sense of contact with antiquity, all made a very deep impression on Guthrie. Not surprisingly, he often refers to his personal experiences in Asia Minor in his books on Greek religion, though he does so unobtrusively. The way in which the name Orpheus might have become attached to some object with which he originally had no connection is illustrated by the analogy of 'Plato's spring' near Selki: Plato was turned into a magician in the East and according to Arab legend it was at that spot that he stopped the Flood. Noting the commonness of mountain-top thrones dedicated to one deity or another, he records his chance discovery of one such carved in the rock in the same area.

During the 1930 expedition he received the news that he had been elected a Bye-Fellow of Peterhouse. He was still eligible that year and the next to compete for a Fellowship at Trinity but he decided to accept the Peterhouse offer. Though he may well have felt some regret at leaving his old College, his lifelong association with Peterhouse was a very happy one. When a Bye-Fellow he was also Director of Studies in Classics (B. L. Hallward was the College Lecturer), but in 1932 he was elected to a Fellowship and

joined Hallward on the College Staff: he was much more than a merely conscientious educator, taking a personal interest in the undergraduates he taught. His Fellowship became Professorial in 1952, and when he left to become Master of Downing in 1957, Peterhouse made him an Honorary Fellow, as Downing did in turn when he retired from the Mastership in 1972.

The year after his election to his Bye-Fellowship, he was invited to lecture for the Classical Tripos, offering a course on the Development of Aristotle's Thought for Part II, and on Aristotle in the next two years. In 1934 he became what was then called a Faculty, that is University, Assistant Lecturer, lecturing on Greek Religious Thought for Part I as well as on Aristotle for Part II, and in 1935 he was appointed to a full University Lectureship.

He had already been giving College supervisions in his days as a graduate student at Trinity. In 1929–30 a Newnham undergraduate, Adele Ogilvy, who came from Melbourne and who had achieved a First in Part I in the previous year, took supervisions with Keith for her Part II work in ancient philosophy—with evident success, since she emulated Keith's own performance with a starred First with distinction for work in ancient philosophy in Part II at the end of the year. Adele was then offered a teaching post at St Leonard's school at St Andrews, but her outstanding Tripos result was rewarded in 1931 by the G. C. Winter Warr Studentship. This enabled her to return to Cambridge to do research in ancient philosophy, working on Greek ideas of time under Cornford. The association with Keith was renewed and grew and in 1933 they married.

They lived at first in a part of the Cornfords' house, in Conduit Head, but then found their own place in Barrow Road, moving later to Latham Road. She and Keith were marvellously well suited to each other, sharing the same interests, beliefs, and temperament. Both cordially disliked fuss, both were, on first meeting, naturally reserved, both prized seriousness, straightforwardness, and integrity. Adele was to be a tower of strength, especially as mistress of the Lodge at Downing, and more than once Keith expressed his gratitude to her in his books for the criticism and advice she offered. In *The Greeks and their Gods* he wrote: 'The work owes more than I can well express to her classical training, her clear sense of form, and her immediately unfavourable reaction to obscurity or clumsiness of expression.' They had two very gifted children, Robin, and Anne, who both shared their parents' interest in ancient philosophy. Robin came to Cambridge and afterwards became, first, head of Cambridge

House in Camberwell, and later, Director of the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust, and Keith always took an active interest in his work. The greatest sadness of Keith's life was the sudden death of Anne who had taken a brilliant First in Greats at Oxford and been placed second in the 1957 examinations for the Administrative Civil Service. Keith was stunned, but came to believe that in ways he could not comprehend what had happened was somehow for the best—though his friends often felt that he was a man over whom the shadow of a great grief still lay.

After his contributions to the joint report of the Anatolian epigraphical expeditions, Guthrie's first book was *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, published in 1935. Here, too, A. B. Cook was the chief guide and inspiration: the book belongs to a series Cook edited. Otto Kern's *Orphicorum Fragmenta*, which appeared in 1922 and which Guthrie had read as an undergraduate, stimulated something of a boom in Orphic studies in the late twenties and the thirties, but Guthrie was well aware of the daunting nature of the task of evaluating the often confused and contradictory evidence. The enthusiasm of some writers, who detected Orphic influence in some unlikely places, eventually brought a sharp reaction, from, among others, I. M. Linforth, whose *Arts of Orpheus* (1941) concluded bluntly that there was no such thing as an Orphic religion. Nowadays most of Linforth's scepticism is widely shared, but it is important to note that Guthrie's own work appeared at the time to many of those who read it to be a model of caution. Boulanger, for instance, reviewing it in *Revue des études anciennes* in 1937, remarks on 'l'extrême prudence de Guthrie'. When the book was reprinted in a second edition in 1952 Guthrie added some notes qualifying certain of his statements, but he did not modify his essential position, remaining convinced of the existence of a body of Orphic writings in the fifth century BC and of the great influence they had, on Plato especially. The qualities that mark all his scholarly publications are already present in full measure, especially the clarity of the exposition, though one not bought at the price of any over-simplification of the issues or lack of thoroughness in the discussion. He was praised, too, by his reviewers for his detailed summaries of the evidence from sculpture and vases, many of them helpfully illustrated in the book itself.

Guthrie's next book was the Loeb edition and translation of Aristotle's *De Caelo*. As already mentioned, the very first lectures he gave at Cambridge were on the development of Aristotle's thought. Jaeger's book on that subject, which appeared in 1923,

had opened up the possibility of seeing Aristotle's work not as a static, monolithic system, but as subject to development and change—in Jaeger's view essentially a development away from the Platonism of Aristotle's early years towards the empiricism that was taken to characterize the researches undertaken in the later years of his life. Von Arnim was one of those who followed Jaeger's lead, suggesting an account of the development of Aristotle's views on the motion of the heavenly bodies that involved two major breaks, first on the introduction of the doctrine of the fifth element, aether, and then with that of the theory of the transcendent Unmoved Mover. Taking issue, with his habitual politeness, with both Jaeger and von Arnim, Guthrie analysed the evidence in two articles in the *Classical Quarterly* in 1933 and 1934 that were to become classics. When he came to edit the *De Caelo* in the Loeb series (it appeared in 1939) much of the introduction is devoted to a further careful discussion of the problem. Against Jaeger, Guthrie emphasized the beliefs that Aristotle continued to share with Plato to the end of his life, notably the doctrine of the divinity of the heavenly bodies. Against von Arnim he insisted that the view that represented the heavenly bodies as made of a fifth element that has the property of moving naturally in a circle is not incompatible with the belief that the stars are alive. Guthrie thus reconciled more of Aristotle with Plato, and more of the earlier and middle period Aristotle with the later, while he still allowed and indeed stressed that Aristotle's thought evolved. These theses too were to remain a more or less constant feature of Guthrie's interpretation of Aristotle.

A spell as University Proctor in 1936–7 confronted Guthrie with disciplinary problems, including some that reflected the political upheavals of the day. When Sir Oswald Mosley was due to hold a mass meeting in Cambridge and a left-wing counter-demonstration was planned, Guthrie and his colleagues stipulated that they were only prepared to let the meeting take place if it was held indoors. Whether this was intended or not, Mosley found this condition unacceptable and decided not to come, though he sent William Joyce instead.

When the war came, after a first year when the University continued with something like its normal programme, Guthrie was commissioned in the Intelligence Corps. After a period in London during the blitz, he was sent to St Albans (where his family was able to join him). In 1943, now a temporary major, he was posted to Istanbul, where his knowledge of Turkish and Turkey was put to use. His main duties throughout were,



however, in counter-intelligence. One of those he encountered in this period was Philby, for whom he conceived a profound dislike, though of course he was unaware what a dangerous man he was.

Back lecturing in Cambridge in 1946, Guthrie became Reader in the following year and was much involved in College, Faculty, and University affairs. He had spells on the Council of the Senate and on the Library Syndicate of which he became chairman. He was appointed Governor of Hertford School and of his old school, Dulwich. He was to be a leading mover in the setting up first of the Graduate Society and then of the University Centre. He had been elected to the post of Orator of the University as early as 1939, and he held this office for eighteen years. After the war the University kept him busy when it conferred honorary degrees (more than fifty in the three years 1946–8) on a succession of statesmen, generals, and public figures, including Churchill, Smuts, Attlee, Nehru, and Schweitzer, not to mention Eisenhower, Slim, and Montgomery. Guthrie took very great delight in every aspect of these duties including the detailed research that was sometimes involved in finding out about the work of fellow academics. He enjoyed the ceremonial and the sense of the grand occasion, as well as the opportunities that were thus presented to meet and do honour to great men and women. He enjoyed too the challenge of expressing their distinctions in elegant Latin prose, although—since it was before the time when the University began supplying the audience with the Orator's own English translation of his Latin original—some of his finer points (though not the resonance of his delivery) may well have been lost on some of the honorands as well as on some of those who gathered to honour them. Reviewing T. F. Higham's *Orationes Oxonienses Selectae* in the *Classical Review* in 1961 Guthrie remarks: 'lucernam tamen postulant (experto crede) quae lucernam minime olent.' But it took not midnight oil, but a nice touch of wit to think of introducing Bevin, for example, with the words ὦ φίλτατ' ἔρνη πατρίδος.

The immediate post-war period was also one of great scholarly productivity. Apart from the articles and reviews that appeared at regular intervals, he published two books in 1950. The first of these, the Home University Library *Greek Philosophers*, grew out of a course of lectures he gave to non-Classicists. Here stated very briefly, but also beautifully clearly, was the outline story of the development of Greek philosophical thought down to Aristotle. The book was an immediate publishing success—in this foreshadowing the later *History*.

The second, more substantial, volume, *The Greeks and their Gods*

(dedicated to A. B. Cook, as his Loeb *De Caelo* had been to Cornford), also originated in the lectures he gave on Greek religion. Guthrie focuses especially on the key issue of the relationship between men and gods: is man to live conscious of his own mortality, 'thinking mortal thoughts' and aware of the gulf between himself and the gods, or is he rather—as another tradition in Greek religion maintained—to strive as far as possible to become immortal himself? Much of the discussion is articulated round the central theme of the contrast between Olympian and Chthonian deities, but Guthrie frequently reminds his reader that this is an analytical tool, not to be taken as an absolute distinction, and the complexities of the material he is commenting on are allowed to emerge, though never to threaten the intelligibility of the argument. Where the book now rather shows its date is in the preoccupation with, as it were, the personal biographies of the gods. Guthrie already saw that it was pointless to speculate about origins where these had no bearing on historical practices and beliefs, but he still spends much time discussing the transformation that individual gods underwent. More important, they are treated rather as individuals, not, or not always, as a structured set. He cites Lévy-Bruhl, but not Dumézil, nor Gernet, who had already begun to apply a structuralist approach to problems of comparative religion.

In the same year, 1950, he edited Cornford's essays, which were published posthumously under the title *The Unwritten Philosophy*, and he introduced them with a moving memoir of Cornford himself, to whom he owed so much, not just to his teaching, but to the model he provided of how to study ancient philosophy. Many of Guthrie's descriptions of Cornford seem—at least to one who did not know Cornford—equally applicable to Guthrie himself. 'His main effort was devoted to a patient and faithful dissection of the argument, in which his historical imagination, and especially his keen awareness of the historical associations of words, took him straight to the heart of the reasoning.' 'Those of us who knew Cornford at that time can only marvel at the completeness with which all this in itself indigestible material was assimilated and transmuted, so that the reader who is presented with the finished commentary can scarcely be aware of the amount of patient labour that has gone to its composition.' 'His art has itself a Hellenic quality, which would not call for comment in one who spent most of his life in such close touch with many aspects of Greek culture, were it not in fact comparatively rare among such men.'

Two years later he was responsible for seeing Cornford's last and unfinished book, *Principium Sapientiae*, through the press. On several occasions in this period Guthrie indicates directly or indirectly how he sees the relationship between his own work and that of his seniors. His admiration for Cook and Cornford was wholehearted, though that did not prevent him from disagreeing with some of their particular opinions. Though he never knew Jane Harrison personally, he was, from time to time, critical of her enthusiasms, though, as always, those criticisms are expressed with the utmost tact. Guthrie himself was wary of the comparative method, of what he called on one occasion 'to put it a little unkindly' 'a rush of anthropology to the head' (but anthropology usually meant Frazer, not the work of men like Evans-Pritchard). But he clearly admired *Principium Sapientiae*, and believed he shared Cornford's own view in considering it far superior to the earlier *From Religion to Philosophy*. Here, in Cornford's last book, was a vindication of the idea of linking philosophy and religion and of tracing the origins of Greek rationality to ancient Near Eastern mythology.

Many of these themes recur in Guthrie's inaugural lecture. Hackforth had succeeded Cornford as Laurence Professor of Ancient Philosophy in 1939, but on his retirement in 1952 Guthrie was elected to the Chair (it was also the year he was elected a Fellow of the Academy). In *The Hub and the Spokes*, the inaugural he delivered on 10 March 1953, he is for once almost expansive, about how he sees the tradition to which he belongs, about what he calls the Cambridge ideal, about the connections between ancient philosophy and other disciplines and about his hopes for future developments. 'A good teacher', he begins, quoting Cornford, 'has no wish to impose either his personality or his opinions upon his students. He will go his own way, much concerned to put before himself a high standard of integrity, hardly aware that in doing so he is holding up an example to others.' On the subject of the relations between ancient philosophy and other disciplines (the spokes of the title, where the hub is represented by classical studies themselves) field anthropology, psychology, Hittite, all receive a mention. But the two examples he chose to develop are Arabic (which he was beginning to learn, though he was never able to develop this interest to the full) and modern science. Though Popper is taken to task for some of his views on Plato, his ideas on ancient and modern science and on their connection struck a chord with Guthrie: there was a real warmth of admiration and feeling between the two men and

they continued to correspond and exchange publications to the end of Keith's life.

In view of this expressed recognition of the possibility of an opening towards modern science, it is, at first sight, all the more surprising that Guthrie acknowledged, but accepted, a certain distance between the student of ancient philosophy and the modern philosopher. It is true that he now retracted an argument he admits to having used in the past, namely that it is a positive advantage for the student of ancient philosophy *not* to know about subsequent developments in philosophy. Yet he still differentiated himself explicitly from the historian of philosophy (that is, of later philosophy), putting it that it is principally against the background of their own contemporary historical situation that Socrates, Plato, and the rest should be viewed, and that Homer may have more to contribute to an understanding of them than Descartes or Kant.

This divorce from modern philosophy—or at least this failure to connect with it—was undoubtedly the chief limitation of the tradition to which Guthrie belonged, for here too he was following Cornford's inclinations. The separate existence of a Faculty of Moral Science at Cambridge is not in itself the explanation, for subsequent experience, and especially the example of Guthrie's successor, G. E. L. Owen, have shown how close and fruitful the relations between the two Faculties can be. Indeed the College structure of University life could have positively favoured such links. In the mid-thirties, for instance, the Fellows of Trinity included—besides Cornford—Broad, G. E. Moore, Wittgenstein, and John Wisdom, as well as the very senior Whitehead. It is true that, as Ryle pointed out, the great strength of Cambridge philosophy from the late twenties was that it had broken away from the explication of the texts of the revered ancient masters that was still the major preoccupation of the teachers of Greats at Oxford, and from the side of philosophy some emancipation from Classics was clearly beneficial. Yet on the side of the classicists to allow the distance between ancient and modern philosophy to stretch was, it now appears equally clearly, a disadvantage, whether this came about for institutional reasons or merely reflected the personalities of the individuals involved. For Guthrie in 1953 modern philosophy was still not so much a positive source of inspiration, as a negative one of possible anachronism. Nor was his attitude to fundamentally alter, even though it is certainly the case that he paid increasing attention to modern philosophical arguments as his great *History* progressed.

His inaugural was, naturally, a highly polished piece, but then all his lectures were meticulously prepared. He always wrote them out and had a text open in front of him as he spoke, though the text successfully imitates the spontaneity of the spoken word and his audience did not have the impression of being treated to a reading. Unlike some who can write but not lecture clearly, he could do both. He constantly encouraged and reassured his audience, explaining the plan of his argument, warning them where they may initially expect difficulties, where they must be patient for those difficulties to be resolved. He enjoyed the occasional literary or topical allusion or mild witticism (this was the man who, in his first book, compared Orpheus to the smile on the Cheshire cat). The audience were not expected to interrupt, but if they did they were treated with courtesy. The cut and thrust of dialectical debate was not Guthrie's style. Yet with undergraduates in the Cambridge Ancient Philosophy society—the B Club—and with his colleagues in the senior group, the so-called Beta Plus, he was ready enough to engage in informal discussion.

Five years after becoming Professor, Guthrie was elected Master of Downing in succession to Sir Lionel Whitby. Keith and Adele installed themselves in the Lodge and threw themselves into the life of their new College. Downing has no mere figurehead as Head of House. There were all the principal committees to chair. There were, too, new buildings to be planned, and the social and cultural side of the College took much time and energy. Nor was the religious side neglected: Guthrie preached occasionally in the College chapel and valued the opportunity this presented to speak on matters of faith and morality. He was always available for consultation, by senior and junior members alike, and he took an active interest in College undergraduate clubs, forming particularly close links with the Music club, and more unexpectedly with the Boat club. He much enjoyed, too, the meetings of the Literary Society. He found his senior colleagues on the whole helpful and cooperative, though some had strong personalities: he had some difficulty in restraining Leavis from interfering with the English teaching after he had retired. In the main, however, the early years at Downing were both active and happy.

The same cannot be said of the late sixties and early seventies, when undergraduate disturbances brought a set of problems that tried Keith's patience, and Adele's, to the limit. Guthrie always found it hard to understand, and so to sympathize with, those who did not accept the convention of resolving disagreement by amicable discussion. As for those who challenged the traditional

authority structures of the College and the University, he could barely conceal his aversion. Since some of his colleagues were strict disciplinarians, the situation was a potentially explosive one, and from time to time it exploded. On one notable occasion, the College had Adele to thank for averting what might have been a nasty incident. The Governing Body was to discuss the sending down of an undergraduate for abusing a Tutor, and as it was feared that the Combination Room might be bugged, it was decided to hold the meeting in the dining room at the back of the Lodge. When a group of threatening undergraduates appeared outside the bay windows of the drawing room on their way round to the dining room, it was Adele who, appearing like a *dea* if not *ex machina*, and demanding in the most haughty tones what they were about, turned them back.

Even if, in one way or another—and thanks in no small measure to Guthrie's peace-making—the crises were resolved, they had introduced a sour note. One of his acts, as Master, was to oversee the writing of new College Statutes. These stipulated that the Mastership should not be held for more than 15 years, and although they did not apply retrospectively to Guthrie, he decided nevertheless to retire a year early from the Mastership after 15 years in the Office, to spend the last year of his Professorship more quietly and to devote himself more single-mindedly to his magnum opus, the great *History of Greek Philosophy*.

This was a project proposed initially by the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, but even before he embarked on that—and throughout his Mastership at Downing—his scholarly output was, if one considers all his other commitments, quite extraordinary. The Messenger lectures he gave at Cornell on the development of early Greek world-views were published as *In the Beginning* in 1957 (he went on to be visiting Professor at Melbourne that year, and he enjoyed his other trips to the United States, to Duke in 1966, and to the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1974, and to Australia, to Sydney, Brisbane, Perth, and Adelaide, even though he always preferred lectures to the seminars he was occasionally asked to give in American universities). In this and the next few years a series of articles and reviews appeared on a wide variety of topics, notably a paper defending Aristotle's reputation as a source for the ideas of earlier Greek philosophers.

But in 1956 the Officers of the Press approached Guthrie to invite him to consider undertaking a comprehensive *History of Greek Philosophy*. The need for such a work was evident. Guthrie

himself notes in his Preface to the first volume that Gomperz's *Greek Thinkers* had been finished in 1909. Zeller's great history had come out in a revised German edition in the twenties and in an Italian version in the thirties, but these too were in many respects out of date—and apart from the *Outlines*, only parts existed in English. The proposal was that, to achieve unity of treatment, the history, which was to have included the Hellenistic philosophers but to stop short of the neo-Platonists, should be by a single author. The project was recognized to be a highly ambitious one (Guthrie writes of his temerity in taking it on) and in the event it turned out to be even more comprehensive than at first envisaged, since first the Presocratic period, and then Plato, were each found to require not just a single volume, but two. Guthrie's own statement of the qualities called for cannot be bettered: 'The difficulties are the reverse of those which beset a pioneer. Far from being a pioneer study this history deals with a subject of which almost every detail has been minutely worked over many times. What is needed . . . is a comprehensive and systematic account which will so far as possible do justice to the opposing views of reputable scholars, mediate between them, and give the most reasonable conclusions in a clear and readable form. The qualities called for are not originality and brilliance, so much as clear-headedness, sober sense, good judgement and perseverance.' Moreover 'to throw light on the Greek mind calls in addition for gifts of imagination, sympathy and insight . . .' 'Such a paragon', he proceeds, 'does not exist', and he disclaims possessing the qualifications he describes himself. Yet it may be said straight away that he came as close as any man could to that ideal.

The two volumes on the Presocratics—more than a thousand pages in all—showed what 'comprehensive' and 'systematic' meant. Every item of primary and secondary evidence had of course been sifted and most are explicitly mentioned and discussed in the text. Thus, of the 130 or so 'fragments' of Heraclitus, Guthrie has occasion to cite all but about a dozen. The coverage of the scholarly literature is even more remarkable. He recognized, to be sure, that it was impossible to be exhaustive. But it is hard indeed to point to a significant contribution to the interpretation of the Presocratics that is ignored. Again the reader does not simply have to take the author's word or judgement on other scholars' views, for these are frequently quoted and discussed at length.

The confidence all this inspired was very great. Here was a scholar of immense learning, a master of what he was about,

taking the reader through the issues one by one, and doing so in a discussion the clarity of which belied the prodigious labour that had gone into the work. Whatever was omitted, the reader could be sure was unimportant. On the score of originality too, where Guthrie had expressed himself so modestly, the very process of adjudicating scholarly controversy often led him to produce what was, in many respects, a new synthesis. Heraclitus is again a case in point. G. S. Kirk, following the views of Reinhardt, had argued that the Platonic interpretation of Heraclitus—according to which Heraclitus held the strong thesis, that physical objects are subject to constant change—is badly mistaken and misleading, and that all that should be attributed to Heraclitus himself is the much weaker view that physical objects suffer change sooner or later. Against this Guthrie's conclusion was to come down on the side of Plato and accept that the doctrine of flux was indeed a strong one. Yet with the objections of Kirk to meet, and his arguments to disagree with, even if with profound regret, the case for this interpretation had to be stated and supported all the more carefully and the interpretation itself given greater sophistication. On the Pythagoreans, too, we have not just, as always, an infinitely scrupulous evaluation of the source material, but a subtle attempt to reconcile the contrasting elements of religion and science, mysticism and mathematics.

The first two volumes, which appeared in 1962 and 1964, were immediately acclaimed. They received, with very few exceptions, not just favourable, but highly laudatory reviews from fellow scholars in England and abroad, and they and the subsequent volumes reached—to the great gratification both of Guthrie himself and of the Press—an audience that was wide not just in geographical distribution but also in the diversity of interests represented. He was and is read not just by classicists, not just by philosophers, indeed not just by academics of one kind or another. He was and is studied assiduously in Calcutta and Kyoto, as well as in California and Cardiff. The project was, in short, a brilliant publishing, as well as scholarly, success.

The same qualities of lucidity, balanced judgement, and comprehensiveness also mark the later volumes. The third was divided into two halves, one dealing with the Sophists, the other with Socrates, and in both (the former especially) Guthrie enjoys taking the reader quite far afield into aspects of Greek culture that will help to explain what is here called the fifth-century enlightenment. The interpretation of both Sophists and Socrates gains from the emphasis on their shared background. There are more



frequent references, in this section, to more modern thinkers, especially to those eighteenth-century figures who were seen as developing ideas closely analogous to those of the Sophists.

With Plato, the style of the discussion was modified somewhat. Guthrie had always been of the opinion that, as the literary master he is, Plato can and should be left to speak for himself—a view with which one could generally agree, though it might in less learned hands veer towards the naïve. Guthrie's tactic is to take the reader through each dialogue in turn, summarizing and commenting where necessary on the arguments, but less engaged in direct debate, either with Plato himself or with modern scholars, than in the earlier volumes. The Plato presented was a conservative one, not just in the sense that Guthrie saw Plato maintaining to the end of his life most of the views of his middle period—including the central ontological doctrine of the existence of transcendent, paradigmatic Forms—but also in the sense that that reading of Plato was already at the conservative end of the spectrum of English-speaking Platonic scholarship by the time these volumes appeared.

Guthrie's special forte was and had always been cosmology, the different world-views and world-systems developed and presented by different Greek philosophical and indeed religious thinkers, the sympathetic understanding of which was his particular gift. But if he was adept at the exegesis of Greek thinkers' ideas as these were expressed in, or could be inferred directly from, the ancient evidence, he was less so at exploring the philosophical potentiality of ancient positions, at engaging in imaginary dialectical debate with the ancients to see where the argument would lead, both to expose hidden weaknesses and to reveal unsuspected strengths and insights. He was, for example, more at home with Plato's *Timaeus* than with the *Parmenides* or *Sophist*, and his view that Plato's cosmological dialogue expressed many of his most important beliefs was a matter of lifelong personal conviction, not one that received from him the argumentative support that it would nowadays be thought to require.

The Aristotle that he presented in the last volume of the work published in the year he died, is also one where the emphasis is on natural philosophy, rather than on dialectic. For Guthrie science was Aristotle's passion, even ethics only engaged in out of a sense of duty. More space is devoted to psychology and even to zoology than to many of the topics dealt with in the *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, such as the philosophy of time and problems associated with infinity.

The text of this final volume was complete but for a section on politics and a brief planned discussion of the *Poetics* when Guthrie suffered a stroke in June 1980 after his return from one of his regular holidays to the Mediterranean, on this occasion to Corfu. He endured disability with great fortitude and courageously set about learning to write with his left hand—for the stroke had incapacitated his right side. But it was clear that he could not continue with work on that volume, let alone think of embarking on the projected discussion of Hellenistic philosophy. After a relapse, he died on 17 May 1981.

The curtailing of the magnum opus is an irreplaceable loss. It is true that Guthrie always had less sympathy for the Hellenistic age than for the earlier periods of Greek philosophy: his *Greek Philosophers* stopped at Aristotle from choice, with comments on the decline that sets in after him and on the contamination from non-Greek influences. It is also true that modern scholarship on the Hellenistic period is in a state of great flux, with exciting new interpretations under heated current debate. But such are lame consolations, for what we shall always lack is the continuation of the story that the sweep of Keith's unified vision would have given us.

To many who knew him just from his publications, W. K. C. Guthrie was a giant among scholars, a veritable prodigy for the range of his learning, the authority of his views, the clarity of his mind. His achievements in the exposition of ancient philosophy and religion have a nineteenth-century quality, and they brought him many honours, including the Presidency of the Classical Association and honorary degrees at Melbourne and at Sheffield. Certainly the attempt to do what he did is unlikely ever to be repeated by a single individual. To those who had the good fortune to know him personally, he was, in addition, a man possessed of a rare fineness of character. His reserve has been mentioned; but once he was confident in a relationship, it was marked on Keith's side with warmth, sympathetic concern and trust. Enthusiasm was not his style. But he was himself—to use once more an expression I have found in his often vivid personal letters—a marvellous person to share a silence with. He himself, as he said of Cornford, φίλος τ' ἦν αἰδοῖός τε.

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