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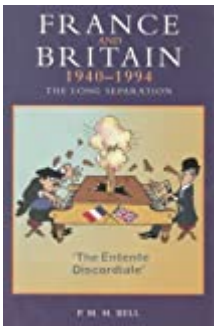

P. M. H. Bell. *France and Britain, 1940-1994 : The Long Separation.* London and New York: Longman, 1997. viii + 320 pp. $44.80 (textbook), ISBN 978-0-582-28920-8; $89.33 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-582-28921-5.

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Those who are interested in Anglo-French relations–or Franco-British relations as P.M.H. Bell correctly prefers to call them (p. viii)–probably already know his *France and Britain, 1900-1940 : Entente and Estrangement.*[1] For those who do not, it is perhaps fitting to quote the concluding sentences of that earlier book: "In June 1940 those British Francophiles whose affection ran true and deep retained their admiration, but it had become a matter of faith, relying on the evidence of things not seen. French faith in Britain was for the most part numbed, though it still lived in a few and was shortly to revive in many. For the most part, and for a time, the two countries turned in upon themselves, seeking salvation in completely different ways. They had gone from*entente*to a profound estrangement. It remained to be seen how permanent that estrangement would prove to be" (p. 254).

These reflections indeed provide him with the central theme in the introduction to *France and Britain, 1940-1994: The Long Separation*, "The story thus begins with the impact of the Second World War, whose effects had still to work themselves out even half a century later" (p. 1). From then on, the discussion follows the chronology of events, with a segmentation which reflects the 'highlights' of Franco-British relations since 1940: the War (1945-1945), the Reconstruction period (1945-1950), the Schuman Plan years (1950-1955), the Suez crisis (1956), the British applications for membership of the EEC (1957-1974), the clashes inside the European institutions (1975-1994)–some of these topics being covered by several chapters. The only chapter which somehow escapes this historical logic is chapter 13 : "Views Across the Channel, c.1970-1990," as it undertakes to describe the image of Britain in France and vice-versa–the least successful part of the book. The discussion ends on "Some Snapshots by Way of a Conclusion" (pp. 289-97), followed by a very copious "Bibliographical Essay" (pp. 298-309) which usefully complements the Essay included in the previous book. Taken together, these two essays provide the interested newcomer with a comprehensive annotated reading-list on Franco-British relations in the twentieth century which will be found extremely convenient, with numerous recent French books not often mentioned in other publications.

The War is covered in three chapters, which reflect three now classic themes, starting with "The Parting of the Ways, 1940". The lasting symbol of this 'parting of the ways' in 1940 is the destruction of the French Fleet at Oran (*Mers-el-Kebir* for the French) by the British on July 3rd–a festering sore in the post-war Franco-British Entente which Bell illustrates with the anecdote of a British naval officer astonished to be challenged on this by one

of his French partners during the Suez operation in 1956 (p. 19). This French refusal to forget Mers-el-Kebir has its parallel in an 'incident' treated with humour in Bell's earlier book: "Fashoda was long remembered in France as an example of British brutality and injustice. De Gaulle referred to it near the beginning of his memoirs of the Second World War. During that war, over forty years after the event, the British War Cabinet's Minister-Resident in the Middle East, Richard Casey, remarked despairingly that the French General Catroux was talking to him about Fashoda, about which he had never heard" (*France and Britain, 1900-1940 : Entente and Estrangement*, p. 3). It is also worth noting that the two recent (1990) books on the Oran affair, which Bell mentions in his notes, are French ones: this constant interest in France and lack of interest in Britain, like the fact that until recently all French schoolchildren were taught about Fashoda in their history lessons, is in itself a useful indication of the complicated conscious and subconscious relations between the two countries. Curiously, Bell does not mention Churchill's 'split personality' on this 'Greek tragedy,' as he calls it in his memoirs, for instance when he takes an analogy derived from French history to justify his decision, "I thought of Danton in 1973: 'The coalesced Kings threaten us, and we hurl at their feet as a gage of battle the head of a King' ".[2]

De Gaulle seemed to suffer equally from a 'split personality' on the subject, since, as a patriotic supporter of the French navy he deplored the pitiful fate of some of its best men and vessels, but as a realistic strategist he could only approve of Britain's move[3] and curiously again, Bell does not mention this second aspect of de Gaulle's position after Oran. This is true though the speech he gives to the BBC of 8 July 1940–reproduced in full in his war memoirs–makes it clear that he accepts Churchill's reasons, a fact that Bell obviously knows very well.[4]

Now, during the debates held at a recent international conference " '1898 And All That' : Anglo-French Relations since Fashoda,"[5] the point was made that no-one can begin to understand Franco-British attitudes in the twentieth century if one major outsider, Germany, is omitted from the equation. In July 1940, de Gaulle's approval of Churchill's decision to sink the French fleet at Oran, reluctant though it was, can only be explained in the light of the 'worse evil' of the permanent German threat of seizure (contrary to the British Government, de Gaulle of course refused to believe that French officers would ever infringe their code of honour). Again, one is surprised that Bell, whose older publications evidently show he is fully aware of this third factor in the equation,[6] does not try to integrate it in his reasoning. De Gaulle himself would have added a fourth parameter: the so-called 'special relationship' (and for him, it was not 'so-called'–he was convinced of its existence and strength as a one-way, subservient relationship in which Churchill invariably espoused Roosevelt's cause). If we then add Vichy, as Bell correctly does in his Chapter Two, "A Complicated War: (i) Britain, Vichy and de Gaulle, 1940-1942," we can indeed agree that it was a 'complicated war' for Franco-British relations. It is arguable, as Bell himself suggests, that the complexities did not disappear with the approach of victory and the return of peace.

In his next chapter, "A Complicated War: (ii) Britain and de Gaulle, 1943-1944," Bell has the ultimate answer to the French Anglophobes who only see Churchill as 'Roosevelt's poodle,' "Churchill was to secure for France a zone of occupation in Germany and a permanent seat on the Security Council of the United Nations. Without Churchill's advocacy, France would never have been granted these great assets in the post-war world" (p. 59). The irony, of course, is that these 'great assets' were to make French relations with Britain even more 'complicated' on many occasions. One such occasion was the creation of the Anglo-American 'Bizonia' in Germany in 1946. As Bell explains, the French, who "still could not follow the Americans and British in a policy of reconstructing Germany," kept aloof (p. 77). And one more irony is that the rapprochement between West Germany and France a few years later was to catch the British wrong-footed: their 'policy of reconstructing Germany' had been all too successful, so successful, in fact, that the French, on the excellent English principle that 'if you can't beat them, join them', effected an about-turn in their attitude to German recovery which eventually led to the creation of the 'Common Market', as it was then called–a development officially supported by the 'Anglo-Saxons,' as de Gaulle liked to call the British and Americans when they acted in concert, but viewed with the greatest suspicion from the start, as Bell very convincingly explains in his chapter on "Separation: Schuman Plan and After, 1950-1955."

The number of books on the genesis of the European Union is of course extremely impressive,[7] but what makes Bell's specificity in the treatment of the subject is his 'two-sided' approach: every major French move towards increased cooperation with Germany is commented on with reference to Britain's suspicious reactions and to French suspicions of the motives behind these British reactions, which made France all the more

eager to 'push' partnership with Germany, and Britain to retard the process–a self-feeding mechanism of estrangement, in fact. Bell's conclusion is that the winner in this absurd escalation was evidently France (p. 121), and that the Entente, after the ambiguous celebrations of its fiftieth anniversary (especially in the British press, in 1954) was only rescued by the Suez crisis. Yet it was to be only a Pyrrhic victory for the Entente in the old style, as Bell explains by citing the despatches of the British Ambassador in Paris in January 1957. The French had found a new scapegoat, which was good news, "For the failure of the operation, they tended to blame the Americans (rather than the British)" (p. 152), but, the Ambassador, Gladwyn Jebb (Lord Gladwyn), later reflected in his memoirs, " 'From now on it must be obvious that the French would turn more and more towards the Western Germans. The days of the Entente based on British leadership were over' " (p. 155)–which was the bad news.

This reflection by the British Ambassador is doubly interesting, as 1) it confirms constant earlier French suspicions that for British Diplomacy, 'some were more equal than others' in the Anglo-French 'equal' partnership, and 2) because it throws light on the post-Suez, post-Treaty of Rome foundations on the Entente. Bell magnificently explains how Eden and his Cabinet discussed "surrealist" possibilities of France joining the British Commonwealth in October 1956 after the French Prime Minister, Guy Mollet, had revived the ill-fated idea of Franco-British union. As he concludes, this "now almost defies belief; but it is a salutary reminder of the assumptions of the time" (p. 158). Now, who among the younger generations remembers the Treaty of Dunkirk (4 March 1947), "the only formal treaty of alliance between France and Britain in the twentieth century ... an anti-German alliance" (p. 80), "valid for 50 years" (p. 296)? Bell, writing before 4 March 1997, was full of expectation, "The occasion will surely provoke some reflection on the state of Franco-British relations" (p. 296). But the present reviewer can tell him that to the best of his knowledge, no such reflection was seen in France–if there was, it must have been restricted to confidential circles. Why so? The answer is in the title of his Chapter Eight, "A New France Confronts an Uncertain Britain, 1957-1960," whose period of reference could easily be extended to 1997. "Self-confidence" (p. 178) was now on the wrong side of the Channel –and so was "self-doubt" (p. 183). As Bell puts it, "Confronted by the EEC, the British were left floundering and uncertain. Much the same was true of their relations with the new France of General de Gaulle. The image of the old France was too strongly established to be easily changed" (p. 170).

The chapter on "The General Says No, 1961-1963" illustrates the reversal of positions in Franco-British relations, "For the first time in the twentieth century, at any rate in peacetime, the success or failure of a vital British policy was to be decided by France" (p. 180), with an entertaining discussion of Macmillan's disastrous scheming, "If Britain could manage to join the EEC, Macmillan persuaded himself that she would somehow be able to lead it as a means of extending British influence in the world–not *instead* of the Commonwealth and the special relationship with the United States, but in addition to them" (p. 182). An equally entertaining sub-chapter on "Macmillan and de Gaulle" (pp. 189-97), very clearly explains why this could only be a dialogue of the deaf. And of course when "The General" finally says 'No' (pp. 197-203), Bell does not fail to quote Nora Beloff's celebrated remark, " 'How could we have presented him with such an exposed posterior'¿' (p. 201). Bell then concludes his discussion of what is now generally called 'Britain's first application for membership of the Common Market' with a remark which goes a long way towards explaining future difficulties, "Yet, as the indignation subsided, there were signs that the British were relieved rather than dismayed by the substance of de Gaulle's action, whatever they thought of his manner" (p. 201). The task was of course resumed by Harold Wilson, with the same Gaullian obstruction. The circumstances were equally inauspicious. Bell reminds us that "The new Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, was uncertain about European policy" and that "He had no liking for travel on the continent, and always took his holidays in the Scilly Isles.[8] He genuinely liked meat and two veg. and HP sauce" (p. 207). This implicit Little England parochialism is of course in contrast to the frequent contacts with Continental–mostly French, in fact–culture and gastronomy of his more flamboyant predecessors, like Churchill, Eden and Macmillan, and invited the accusation that he was not a 'good European'. Rejection was announced by General de Gaulle in due course–just over a week after the humiliating devaluation of sterling, in November 1967.[9]

In the wake of the Soames Affair (February 1969), for which Bell gives a balanced description of the two points of view, "Relations between French and British governments were in a grievous state" (p. 217). They were rescued by the arrival of Pompidou (June 1969) and Heath (June 1970), but only "for a short period" (p. 218). Chapter Eleven, "Britain Joins the Club - With Second Thoughts, 1969-1975," gives a good idea of the hag-

gling that took place during the new negotiations for EEC membership–haggling between Britain and France, mostly. This enables Bell to write that "Britain's position within the EEC was seen very largely in terms of Franco-British relations" (p. 223). And we are back to the three-cornered relationship with Germany, since Bell explains that Pompidou's conciliatory attitude was "largely in order to counterbalance the growing influence of West Germany" (p. 218). But the British had more low-key preoccupations: In 1974, Callaghan, then Foreign Secretary, said over the terms of membership, " 'The touchstone was what would please the British housewife' " (p. 236). The French, who has 'European' ambitions, could not be satisfied with such pusillanimous preoccupations, we are given to understand, and Bell has a sub-chapter on the revival of "The Franco-German Axis" followed by another one on "France and Britain: An Incompatible Couple?" (pp. 243-47). P.M.H. Bell of course reminds us of the personal empathy between Giscard and Schmidt, followed by the Mitterand-Kohl duet. This contrasted with the contempt which Giscard felt towards Callaghan, who reminded him of "a politician of the Fourth Republic" (p. 245), and the notorious discord between M. Thatcher and Giscard, and to a more ambiguous extent, Mitterand. Then, in matters of personal relations, there was also the 'fourth partner' in the background, and Bell aptly reminds us of the Transatlantic love-affair between 'Maggie and Ronnie,' while "The genial, apparently simple-minded former film actor, with his homespun talk and his habit of making a political point by means of an anecdote, and the subtle, cultivated Renaissance prince found it hard to meet on common ground" (p. 252).

During the 1980s, with the British Prime Minister looking across the Atlantic and the French President looking across the Rhine, cross-Channel relations were at a low ebb. During the 1989 celebrations of the French Revolution, M. Thatcher's tactless suggestion that the British had had their 'democratic' Revolution exactly a century before (a fracas which, again, one is surprised not to find in the book) did nothing to improve the situation. The chapter "Unhappy Partners, 1975-1990" is therefore founded on the central idea that France and Britain's dual memberships in the EEC created new causes for friction. The book ends in 1994 apparently because that year saw the opening of the Channel Tunnel and the ceremonies of the fiftieth anniversary of the Normandy landings–both of which are adequately treated. But the years 1990-1994 do not seem to have benefited from the same depth of treatment as the years 1940-1990. Poor John Major is only mentioned for his rejection of Dehaene as President of the European Commission (p. 280), and the vehement Conservative Eurosceptics and their constant denigration of anything French (or German) do not receive the attention which they undoubtedly deserve in any discussion of the period 1990-1994. Indeed, one is puzzled not to find in the book at least a footnote referring to Nicholas Ridley's offensive "poodle" declarations of July 1990, which arguably were a contributory factor to M. Thatcher's downfall a few months later.[10]

But, as I suggested at the beginning, my principal reservations over Bell's approach have to do with his Chapter Thirteen, "Views Across the Channel, c.1970-1990." His analysis of the books and declarations from intellectuals and journalists on both sides of the Channel is extremely superficial. I would suggest that "the immense success of Peter Mayle's books, *A Year in Provence* and *Toujours Provence*" is not, as P.M.H. Bell indicates, "a sign of the interest that already existed" (p. 269). The books simply reinforce a hackneyed, spurious, patronising view of French rural life encouraged by the specialised estate agents; moreover this type of book is read only by the upper- and middle-classes–the working-classes go to the 'Costas'[11] anyway. How representative are Francophiles like John Ardagh[12] or Theodore Zeldin?[13] And Anglophile academics like Bedarida?[14] Why was Zeldin so popular when he appeared on the French vogue literary television programme 'Apostrophes'?: Because he told his French middlebrow audience what it wanted to hear. Why was the Editor of *The Sun* never invited? Because, as the French graphically say, when you are invited you are not expected to 'spit in the soup.' Zeldin formulated benign, harmless criticism–as a French unsophisticated reader or viewer, you do not expect an Englishman to approve 100 percent of anything French, you would feel short-changed! My point here is that all these 'dual perspectives' are extremely conventional and never reflect true popular feelings. For that, you have to go to the 'gutter' press. Why does Bell never mention it, let alone quote it? If you are a British political leader who depends on the popular vote for survival, what sort of Franco-British relations can you establish when a newspaper with an "Audited sale of 3,979,330"[15] writes in banner headlines, "Up Yours Delors", with the title "At midday tomorrow *Sun* readers are urged to tell the French fool where to stuff his ECU?"[16] No doubt, equivalents could be found in French publications–simply my professional duties do not require that I should read them, and anyway conversations with some of the less enlightened French people always reveal a horrifying degree of ignorance of the realities of Britain and the British.[17]

This seems to me to be the central problem in Franco-British–or for that matter in any country-to-country–relations: how to eliminate or at least reduce prejudice and fear. Obviously, the highly educated and intellectually sophisticated authors whom Bell quotes give 'measured' criticism–but they are one per cent of the population in each country. The great difficulty is ascertaining the real state of 'popular opinion', and this Bell does not even try to do.[18]

I would therefore say that the factual content of the book–most of it, in fact–is extremely useful. As a chronological account of Franco-British relations since 1940, as a record of the declarations of the main political leaders and diplomats, at the time or in their memoirs, it is invaluable. P.M.H. Bell's narrative very clearly indicates how and why the various statesmen and decision-makers shaped this evolution in the way they did according to the available evidence and possible conjectures. But the continued estrangement of the 'popular classes', which shows no sign of abating in spite of all the Shuttles[19] and twinned towns[20] receives scant treatment–in spite of the fact that it *must* influence decision-making in high places in our democratic countries. Trevelyan famously defined Social History as "the history of a people with the politics left out."[21] You cannot write a satisfactory history of Franco-British relations with only the politics left in. Readers of this review might be tempted by the challenge.

Notes

[1]. London and New York : Longman, 1996.

[2]. Churchill, Winston. *Their Finest Hour.* New York : Houghton Mifflin, 1949, p.232.

[3]. De Gaulle, Charles. *L'Appel, 1940-1942.* Paris : Plon, 1954, p.78, p.276.

[4]. See his latest article on de Gaulle : Bell, P.M.H. "L'opinion publique en Grande-Bretagne et le general de Gaulle, 1940-1944". *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 190 (juin 1998) : 79-101.

[5].Held at the University of Bordeaux, France, 6-7 November 1998. The Proceedings will be shortly published. Interested readers should contact Dr Philippe Chassaigne, History Department, Universite Michel de Montaigne (Bordeaux 3), 33405 Talence Cedex, France

[6]. See for instance : Bell, P.M.H. *A Certain Eventuality : Britain and the Fall of France.* Farnborough : Saxon House, 1974.

[7]. A good recent starting point for the newcomer would be Stirk, Peter. *A History of European Integration.*London : Cassell, 1997.

[8]. A small group of islands off Cornwall.

[9]. In his memoirs, Wilson argues that the Continentals were not innocent in the Devaluation Crisis : "What forced us off parity was, basically, the economic consequences of the Middle East crisis, and in particular the closure of the Suez canal ; the proximate causes were the dock strikes in London and Liverpool, and, following their ending, financial manoeuvring within the Six". (Wilson, Harold. *The Labour Government, 1964-1970 : A Personal Record.*London : Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971 (Penguin, 1974, p.559).

[10]. Interestingly, Ridley does not reproduce the offending words ("German racket in Europe…French…poodles of the Germans") in the passage of his memoirs which deals with the affair (Ridley, Nicholas. *"My Style of Government" : The Thatcher Years.*London : Hutchinson, 1991 (Fontana, 1992, p.224). Sir Geoffrey Howe was incensed by these anti-European attacks and resigned in November, which greatly weakened M.Thatcher's position in the party.

[11]. The colloquial name given to the downmarket Spanish resorts ("Costa Brava" ,"Costa del Sol", etc) on British travel agents' brochures -favourites among the British lower classes for their cheap "sea, sex and sun" image.

[12]. A former *Times*correspondent in Paris, who wrote *The New France* in 1970. The blurb on the Penguin edition is enough to show his 'elitist' tastes : "His special interests include the cinema and gastronomy, and he is devoted to almost every aspect of French life". An updated version appeared in 1987, with the title*France Today.*

[13]. His *France, 1848-1945* (2 volumes. Oxford : University Press, 1973-1977) was immensely successful in French translation, with the more 'titillating' title*Histoire des passions francaises* (5 volumes. Paris : Le Seuil, 1980-1981).

[14]. Bell quotes from his*La societe anglaise du milieu du XIXe siecle a nos jours* (Second Edition : Paris, Le Seuil, 1990).

[15]. *The Sun* November 1, 1990, masthead.

[16]. Ibid., p.1. Upmarket newspapers in the Rupert Murdoch stable do not of course use the same language,

but the Paris correspondent of *The Sunday Times*, devotes her weekly column to systematic denigration of what she sees in France, with a constant schadenfreude tonality.

[17]. From *Les Carnets du Major Thompson*by Pierre Daninos (1953) to *Messieurs les Anglais*by the journalist Rene Dabernat (1976) and the various 'coffee-table books' written in the 1990s by former French Television correspondent in London Bernard Rapp, there has always been a thriving trade in French middlebrow books founded on the perpetuation of the 'brolly and bowler-hat' image of the British.

[18]. To be fair to Bell, he does give a comprehensive table of opinion polls, 1974-1986, the question asked in each country being : "In a general way, do you think that (for your country) the fact of forming part of the European Community (Common Market) is a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad?" (p.235). But the latest figures are now over ten years old, and the question does not specifically bear on Franco-British relations.

[19]. The name given to the special trains which take cars and lorries through the Channel Tunnel. British lorry drivers immediately complained of the 'fancy cuisine' served on the Heavy Goods Vehicle Shuttles : they much preferred the stodgy food served in their special 'transport cafes' on the old car-ferries.

[20]. Many French towns are on the waiting-list : far fewer British towns are interested in these 'twinning' arrangements. Again, Bell does not mention these 'cultural' differences : as individuals, the British educated classes like to travel to France, but they are not interested if the 'exchange' is on an institutional basis. The reverse is largely true for the petty bourgeois French, who hesitate to 'go it alone' in Britain, and are reassured by 'twinning' arrangements and suchlike. (Statistically, of course : one always finds exceptions.)

[21]. Trevelyan, G.M.*English Social History.* London : Longmans, 1944, p.vii.

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