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P.M.H. Bell. *France and Britain 1900-1940: Entente & Estrangement.* London and New York: Longman, 1996. viii + 275 pp. $31.75 (paper), ISBN 978-0-582-22953-2.

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The mounting interest of international historians in the Cold War has not come at the expense of earlier periods. Paul Schroeder's impressive volume on European politics from 1763-1848 and David Herrmann's [review by J. F. V. Keiger, H-France, February 1997] and David Stevenson's detailed studies of the land arms race before 1914 are only a few examples which suggest that work in the field remains broad in scope and time. Perhaps on a par with the Cold War has been interest in the first half of this century. Two world wars, peacemaking, successful and more often failed revolutions, technological advances, the rapid pace of social and economic change, the emergence of the United States and the Soviet Union as superpowers: these and other developments have held the interests of many scholars. Much work has been done, but, as always, there remains much to do. One notable gap in the literature is Anglo-French relations. While work on specific incidents and brief periods does exist, there have been no broad studies since the 1940s. No one is better qualified to fill this gap than Philip Bell, whose earlier book on British reactions to the fall of France in 1940, offers a model case study of relations between the two countries. Bell's latest book, *France and Britain 1900-1940*, is a welcome addition to the literature.

Much more an *essai* than a research monograph, Bell's book will be especially useful to undergraduates and non- specialists. A political narrative constitutes the bulk of the work. Aptly subtitled *Entente & Estrangement*, the study begins in the wake of the Fashoda crisis in 1898 which brought France and Britain close to war. The work then goes on to recount the making of the *entente cordiale* and its strengthening under the growing threat of Imperial Germany, the deepening of the alliance under the stress of war in 1914-18, the strains placed on it by peace-making and the demands of reconstruction during the 1920s. Finally, comes the unravelling under the challenge of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy before ending in bitter recriminations after the Third Republic's collapse in 1940.

Although this is a familiar narrative, Bell presents a succinct, thoughtful, and readable account. At times his witty prose sparkles as when he compares the British decision in 1939 to accept a continental commitment with St. Augustine's prayer for chastity: "Lord makes us strong, but not yet" (p. 222). Equally commendable is Bell's effort to incorporate revisionist scholarship, especially for the period after 1918. Following Marc Trachtenberg, Stephen Schuker, and Jacques Bariety among others, Bell produces a picture of France in the 1920s far different from the intransigent and bullying one of old. Similarly, he uses the work of Fred Kupferman, Martin Alexander, and Jean-Louis Cremieux- Brilhac to point to the complex and sometimes intractable strategic, military, political, social, and economic problems which confronted the French after 1933. Easy solutions were as scarce as heroes though there were plenty of fascist or communist villains. The vast majority of the French, it now appears, strove conscientiously to prepare their country's defences and to avoid disaster, even if they sometimes differed on the means. Much of the newer scholarship which Bell uses is on France, not on Great Britain. This represents an omission (for example, specialist studies by John Ferris, Eric Goldstein, Gaines Post, Jr. are not mentioned), but it also reflects the underdeveloped historiography on Britain in which "guilty men" and heroes continue to figure prominently.

Bell offers more than a narrative of high policy. One does not have to belong to the *annales* school to believe that approaches which focus on high policy, small groups of decision makers or individual intentions, while having much to offer, may be insufficient by themselves. Whatever the term used to describe them (background, long-term or impersonal factors) there are, in Paul Kennedy's phrase, "realities behind diplomacy". In an earlier book Bell looked at British opinion towards the Soviet Union during World War II. Similarly, he attaches to his political narrative of Anglo-French relations a study of British and French perceptions of each other, that is, of "each country's understanding of the other, and of itself in

relation to the 'other"' (p. 1). He does so by focusing on elite opinion, on those recognised experts of the "other" such as Jacques Bardoux, Andre Maurois, and Andre Siegfried in France and Edward Spiers and Denis Brogan in Britain. These commentators, he argues, generally provided a sympathetic picture of their neighbour across the Channel, thereby helping to offset the tension and rivalry created by the vicissitudes of high politics. He can thus write: "the British and French shared a sense of belonging to a common civilisation, a cultured and liberal society, believing in progress and humanity" (p. 3).

While this effort to supplement his political narrative is welcome, Bell's treatment of British and French opinion poses problems. One obvious question is how representative of wider opinion were his commentators? Generally anglophile or francophile, these men predictably concentrated on what united, not what divided the two countries. Yet Bell's account of Anglo-French relations–the road from entente to estrangement–generally undermines the assumption of an underlying Anglo-French unity. Indeed, that his commentators felt such a pressing need to propagate their view of the "other" suggests that they were not preaching to the choir. Bell himself provides ample evidence to support this suggestion. Referring to the French in the 1920s, he notes that four years of war and the massive British loss of men and expenditure of money and resources (most of it on the western front) did little to reverse the French impression of their ally as selfish and mercenary, the traditional perfidious Albion. In the end, Bell's analysis of elite opinion, which he inserts at several points in his narrative, sits uneasily with and somewhat detached from the larger story.

To be sure, integrating *les forces profondes* into a political narrative has often posed difficulties to international historians. A. J. P. Taylor, for instance, in his *Struggle for Mastery in Europe*, underlined the importance of demographic and industrial forces in his introduction, only to exclude them from his text. Unfortunately, there are no easy solutions to this methodological problem. Perhaps it might have been useful to approach British and French opinion by way of political parties. How and why, for instance, did the parties of the French Left, Centre, and Right differ in their views of relations with Britain over time? Another approach might have been to compare attitudes of key politicians, bureaucrats, and business people in both countries.

Finally, one might also question the book's underlying message. Bell is a francophile and he holds that the British and French were and are natural friends and allies. Consequently, tensions were due more to misunderstandings and misperceptions than to any fundamental incompatibility of interests. Yet over a half a century ago, Arno Wolfers, in his classic *Britain and France Between Two Wars*, insisted that geo- strategic realities had dictated rival and mutually defeating policies towards Germany. While Wolfers' analysis can no doubt be faulted for its heavy determinism, his argument that a great deal more separated than united France and Britain remains persuasive. It was only the commonly shared fear of Germany–though in the case of Nazi Germany, British government fears came late–which caused the two countries to unite. In the absence of this common threat, Bell contends that cordial relations soon gave way to tensions and divisions.

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