

Milford, Sir Humphrey Sumner (1877–1952), publisher, was born at East Knoyle, Wiltshire, on 8 February 1877, the youngest of the ten children of the rector, Canon Robert Newman Milford (*b. c.1829*), and his wife, Emily Sarah Frances, daughter of [Charles Richard Sumner](#), bishop of Winchester. He was a scholar of Winchester College and of New College, Oxford, taking firsts in classical moderations and *literae humaniores*; his tennis-playing skills matched his academic abilities. In 1900 he became assistant to Charles Cannan, secretary to the delegates of the Oxford University Press. Cannan transferred him to the London office in Paternoster Row in 1906. Succeeding Henry Frowde as manager of the London business and publisher to the University of Oxford in 1913, Milford held the post until his retirement in 1945. He was president of the Publishers' Association from 1919 to 1921, and supervised the office's move to Amen House in Warwick Square in 1924. Four years later, Oxford made him an honorary DLitt on the completion of the first edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. His knighthood followed in 1936. Milford married twice. His first wife, whom he married on 24 April 1902, was Marion Louisa, daughter of Horace Smith, a Metropolitan Police magistrate. She died in 1940, and on 5 February 1947 Milford married Rose Caroline (*b. 1890/91*), the widow of Sir Arnold Wilson and daughter of Charles Hensley Henson, stockbroker. The first marriage produced a daughter and two sons, the composer Robin Humphrey Milford (1903–1959) and [David Sumner Milford](#), seven times British amateur rackets champion. Having lived latterly at the White House, Drayton St Leonard, Oxfordshire, Milford died in the Acland Nursing Home, Oxford, on 6 September 1952.

The scale of Oxford University Press activities increased dramatically during Milford's tenure. When Cannan appointed him, the press was a relatively specialized concern which depended on sales of academic works, bibles, and prayer books. By the time Milford retired, he had helped to transform this business into a leading publishing house with a vast list of works aimed at scholar and general reader alike: Oxford's first *General Catalogue* (1916) ran to 576 pages. It was also a global organization. Milford encouraged his editor E. C. Parnwell to travel through Africa and the Far East in 1928, investigating avenues for educational publishing in those areas. From this came Oxford's overseas education department, E. S. Hornby's seminal Oxford *Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, and the press's wide-ranging involvement in English language teaching around the world.

Cannan had seen great possibilities if the London office began publishing on its own account. Milford became his lieutenant in this scheme, and the two maintained a close, even hermetic, friendship among their associates until Cannan died in 1919.

Soon Milford's name became a familiar mark on Oxford books, distinguishing London volumes from the Clarendon Press imprint that appeared on works which the delegates supervised at Oxford. Milford's brand of mild despotism drew other Oxford men to his staff, including Charles Williams and Gerard Hopkins, nephew of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Milford was quick to make other contacts. His London neighbours included Ernest Hodder Williams, and Milford soon entered into an agreement with Hodder and Stoughton to publish children's literature. Among other works, this produced the successful books written by Herbert Ely and Charles L'Estrange under the pen-name Herbert Strang. The joint venture also led to a new list of medical works from Oxford, with the delegate Sir William Osler as its advisory editor. Milford's first publication in this series for practitioners was Osler's seven-volume *System of Medicine* in 1907.

Milford continued the press's expansion after Cannan's death. In 1923 his great interest in music and hymnbooks encouraged the formation of the press's music department under Hubert Foss. Despite this, literature remained Milford's first love. An insatiable reader of detective stories, he edited *The Oxford Book of English Verse of the Romantic Period* (1928), and produced scholarly volumes of Cowper, Leigh Hunt, and Browning. The latter became one of the most cited authors in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (1941), a volume which was Milford's idea, and which was produced entirely at Amen House.

Milford favoured both literary resurrections and discoveries. Oxford University Press purchased the World's Classics list from Grant Richards in 1906, and Milford used this as the foundation for a hugely popular series that reflected his own catholic tastes. The World's Classics introduced Tolstoy to English readers, and also acquainted them with novels by Constance Holme. Milford insisted that several of Anthony Trollope's works be reissued as well, and the World's Classics played a large part in restoring the novelist's reputation.

Milford was equally astute with new titles. In 1918 he published *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, a volume undervalued until its second edition in 1930. He also 'discovered' Flora Thompson, author of *Lark Rise to Candleford*. It says much for the breadth of Milford's mentality that his colleagues could never decide whether this, or Toynbee's *A Study of History*, was the most important book he had published.

Milford worked a six-day week and proved tenacious in defending his business. He steered the press through the depression of the 1930s while resisting calls for its

rationalization. In addition, when it was offered the *Dictionary of National Biography* in 1917, Milford was eager to accept it. Cannan resisted. It seemed too costly. Others shared his opinion: the dictionary appeared a white elephant. Milford replied: 'Very likely; but that is the sort of animal that ought to be in our stable' (Sutcliffe, 186). The phrase was characteristic of the man—polished and literary, but brooking no disagreement.

Martin Maw

Sources

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Likenesses

photograph, c.1913, repro. in Sutcliffe, *Oxford University Press*, facing p. 245 · painting, [priv. coll.](#) · photographs, Oxford University Press, London

Wealth at death

£12,197 os. 2d.: probate, 8 Dec 1952, *CGPLA Eng. & Wales*

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