

Wilson, Edward Daniel Joseph

by Bridget Hourican

Wilson, Edward Daniel Joseph (1844–1913), journalist, was born in Ballycrana, Co. Cork, eldest son of Edward Henry Wilson, Esq. He entered TCD in October 1860 but did not graduate, proceeding in 1862 to QCC, where he took the Peel prize for literature and graduated BA in 1865. He immediately departed for London and, furnished with letters of introduction to Justin McCarthy (qv), editor of the *Morning Star*, and to the editor of the *Spectator*, began contributing regular articles to both papers and also to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Contemporary Review*, the *Nineteenth Century*, and the *Quarterly Review*. He also entered the Middle Temple and was called to the bar in 1867, but never practised. In February 1870 he was appointed to the staff of *The Times* by its editor, John Thaddeus Delane (1817–79), and remained with the paper as leader writer until 1903, when he retired due to ill-health.

According to his *Times* obituary, Wilson's early views were radical, but there is little evidence of this in his writings; his 1877 article in the *Nineteenth Century*, in which he justified the British annexation of the South African Republic as necessary to preserve stability and as a consequence of the atrocities of the Boers, was typical of his imperialistic outlook. *The Times* attributed his ever more entrenched conservatism to an antagonism to home rule. The denunciation of Irish nationalism became his *leitmotif*; from the late 1870s he deplored home rule as a measure that would dismember the empire and result in the reconstitution of the imperial parliament; and he warned that it was a half-way house that could only end in total reconquest or total separation. In 1881 he defended coercion, wondering if the suspension of habeas corpus was sufficient and ridiculing those who sought to redress the causes of agrarian crimes. One of the fullest and most effective expressions of his views was in the *Times* leader of 10 April 1886 in which he called Gladstone's home rule bill a reckless adventure that would never see light; in this as in other articles he developed the argument that the Irish had never had an independent parliament and that there was no possible analogy between their situation and the Austro–Hungarian one. He also provided leader articles with their tone of moral outrage to accompany the sensational 'Parnellism and crime' articles of 1887 by J. W. Flanagan (qv) and Robert Anderson (qv). Apart from the Irish question, his other responsibility in *The Times* was foreign affairs: he condemned the Dreyfus affair as an iniquity and claimed it demonstrated the corruption of French political life and the reactionary character of the catholic church. His last significant leader was in October 1901, when he wrote that Germany could not be relied on, and that England should ally itself with Russia. On retirement he planned to write a book on Castlereagh (qv) but was prevented by ill-health. He died 28 June 1913 at home in Camberwell, London. He married (1874) Bryanna Gibson of Cork; they had two sons.

An effective, lucid journalist, Wilson had, according to his friend the writer Richard Whiting, 'a mind that could pick up a pin of an anecdote, or lift the weight of a whole thesis in politics, philosophy or history. He wrote impeccable prose at the pace of something driven by steam' (*IBL*, vii (1915), 112). However, he was somewhat eccentric: his obituary noted that his temperament was nervous and that 'his antipathy to the motor-car and telephone civilisation was almost oriental' (*Times*, 30 June 1913).

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*Times*, 10 Apr. 1886; *IBL*, i (1910), 147; v (1913), 15; vii (1915), 112–13; *Times*, 30 June 1913; James Sully, *My life and friends* (1918), 136; *Alumni Dubl.; Register of admissions to the Middle Temple* (1959), ii; Stanley Morrison, *The history of The Times* (1935–52), iii; Walter and Esther Houghton (ed.), *Wellesley's index to Victorian periodicals, 1824–1900* (1979)