

OBITUARY NOTICE

James Drummond Anderson

WITHIN the last few months this Society has lost some of its most valued members. In our July number we mourned the loss of our Honorary Treasurer, Mr. Kennedy ; in the October number that of one of our Vice-Presidents, Sir Charles Lyall ; and now, again, it has to record the death, on the 24th November, 1920, less than a fortnight after the completion of his 68th year, of one of the members of its Council, Dr. Anderson.

The son of a doctor in the service of the East India Company, he was born in Calcutta, and was sent home, later than is now usual, at the age of 7. As was natural, he could at that time speak Bengali fluently, and that was, no doubt, the main reason for the intimate knowledge of that language possessed by him in later years. He was educated at Cheltenham and Rugby, and passed the Indian Civil Service examination in 1873, obtaining the highest marks among all the candidates for his English essay—a foretoken of the limpid English style of which in later years he was a master. His early service was spent in Bengal, but in 1880 he was transferred to Assam, where he passed through the various grades of District work, and also acted as Inspector-General of Police and, for a year, as an Assistant Secretary to the Chief Commissioner. In 1894 he returned to Bengal and served first as Collector and then as Commissioner of Chittagong, whence he returned to England for good in 1898, retiring in 1900. He was appointed teacher of Bengali at Cambridge in 1907, in which post he continued till his death, being given the honorary degree of M.A. in 1909, and later proceeding to the higher degree of Litt.D.

Besides being a master of more than one Oriental language, he was an excellent French scholar, had studied at the Paris University, and had even lectured in French at the Institute. His learning and charm of manner in no small way helped to strengthen that Entente between English and French Orientalists which has been lately so happily cemented by the joint meetings of the two Asiatic Societies in London and Paris.

We have seen that nearly the whole of his Indian official career was devoted to the work of a District Officer, a position which of all others gives the fullest opportunities for learning to understand and appreciate the people amid whom a man's lot may be cast. In Anderson's case this resulted in a series of works of great value on the customs and languages of the Tibeto-Burman inhabitants of Assam. In 1885 there appeared what he modestly called *A Short List of Words of the Hill Tippera Language*, which was really an excellent comparative vocabulary of that form of speech and of Lushei and Bodo. This was followed, ten years later, by his best-known work, a delightful *Collection of Kachārī Folktales and Rhymes* (1895), and, in the following year, by his Vocabulary of the almost unknown Aka language.

But his greatest affection was for the tongue he had learned in his childhood. After his return from Assam to Bengal he brought out, in 1897, an admirable collection of proverbs and sayings in the Chittagong dialect of Bengali,¹ and all his subsequent writings on Oriental forms of speech were devoted to that language.

He became a member of this Society in the same year that he went to Cambridge, and since then the pages of our Journal have been enriched by many contributions on difficult points of Bengali grammar, idiom, and prosody. He kept up a frequent correspondence with the literary circle in Bengal,

¹ *Some Chittagong Proverbs*, compiled as an example of the dialect of the Chittagong District (Calcutta, 1897).

of which Sir Rabindranath Tagore is an illustrious member, and took an active part in revealing to English readers of the *Times*, the *Spectator*, and other newspapers of this country the merits, and in justly criticizing the defects, of modern Bengali writings. Conversely, by his contributions to the *Englishman*, the *Pioneer*, the *Civil and Military Gazette*, and other Anglo-India periodicals, he helped to keep India in touch with the English and French points of view in regard to Indian subjects.

In 1913 he wrote for the Cambridge Press a short work on Indian ethnology, entitled *The People of India*, and a few months before his death he inaugurated the Cambridge Guides to modern languages with his *Manual of the Bengali Language*.¹ No work illustrates his mastery of this difficult form of speech more than the latter. Previous writers had founded their accounts on the works of their predecessors, each adding his own additions and corrections. But Anderson broke entirely new ground. He took the language as he found it in modern literature, and, without regard to theories of what Bengali ought to be, he described it as it is, with most illuminating results.

His home in Cambridge was a social centre where Indians and Europeans met on common ground and learned much from each other. Of many of the former he gained the warmest and truest affection. As one of them wrote to me on hearing of the news of his death, "his gentleness, sympathy, and kindness I shall never forget, and I do not know how to express my feelings of respect and gratitude for him."

The pages of a learned journal are hardly the place for an estimate of Anderson's personal character. But one who had the privilege of his friendship for many years may be allowed to remind its readers of qualities familiar to fellow-members of Council—of his charming, unselfish character, and of familiarity with his subjects, combined with a modesty too

¹ Reviewed on pp. 615 ff. of the *JRAS.* for October, 1920.

great to allow it to be appreciated by those who were less intimate. In a letter to the *Spectator*¹ his old comrade Mr. Ritchie wrote: "At heart he was the most humorous, the most right-thinking, the most affectionate nature conceivable"; and to these words all who knew him will give the heartiest assent.

G. A. GRIERSON.

The Society has just lost one of its oldest members in the death of Dr. Codrington, Hon. Vice-President. An obituary notice will appear in the April Journal.

¹ December 4, 1920.
