

OBITUARY NOTICES

SIR ROBERT KENNAWAY DOUGLAS

FOLLOWING close upon the deaths of Sir Raymond West and Mr. Thomas Henry Thornton, C.S.I., the Royal Asiatic Society has to mourn the loss of another of its Vice-Presidents in Sir Robert Douglas, who died at Acton Turville, Chippenham, on May 20, 1913. He joined the Society in 1874, and had therefore a longer connexion with it than any surviving member of the Council.

Robert Kennaway Douglas was born at Larkbeare House, Tallaton, on August 23, 1838. He was the fourth son of the Rev. Philip W. Douglas, who was appointed to the Chapel of Ease at Escot, near Ottery St. Mary, Devon, by the late Sir John Kennaway, Bart., and his grandfather was Dr. Philip Douglas, Master of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. Douglas was delicate in his childhood, and spent the first few years of his life at Larkbeare, receiving the rudiments of his education, in company with his three brothers and the present Sir John Kennaway, from a tutor who lived in the village. When he was 10 his father moved to Bath, and Douglas was sent, first to a school in Park Street, and afterwards to Blandford Grammar School. At the age of 17 he went with an elder brother to New Zealand, where he proposed to devote himself to sheep-farming, but after two years spent in the Middle Island he returned to England and matriculated at King's College, London, where he studied Chinese under the late Dr. Sumner. At the age of 20 he passed first of the candidates for the Chinese Consular Service, went out to China in 1858, and was appointed on June 7 of that year student interpreter in the Superintendentcy of Trade at Hong-Kong. China was then

waging a rather desultory war with England and France, the city of Canton having been captured by the Allied Forces in December, 1857, when it was placed under a native governor with European assessors. It soon became necessary to read the mandarins of the capital also a lesson, and the Chinese forts at the mouth of the Peiho were taken by a combined French and English force only the month before Douglas' appointment. In July of the same year the Treaty of Tientsin, providing among other things for the payment of an indemnity for the loss sustained by British subjects at Canton and for the expenses of the expedition, was signed by Lord Elgin; and Douglas was removed to Canton on August 2, 1859, and attached to the Allied Commissioners who had administered the city since its capture. Here he spent the greater part of his stay in China, and it was here that he acquired the greater part of his knowledge of the Chinese life and language. In March, 1861, he was transferred to Peking, where Sir Frederick Bruce was Minister and Envoy Extraordinary, and in August of the same year was appointed third assistant in the Consular Service and attached as interpreter to the staff of General, afterwards Sir Charles, Staveley until the withdrawal of our troops in 1862. The same period saw the first attempt to deal seriously with the Taiping rebellion, which was finally suppressed by Gordon in July, 1864. In June, 1862, Douglas was first assistant in the Consulate at Tientsin, and was acting Vice-Consul at Taku in October of the same year. Here he remained until 1864, when he returned home on leave, arriving in London on July 9.

Douglas had now spent six years in China, and had been the witness of the many stirring scenes attending the renewal of hostilities, including the second capture of the Taku forts in 1860, the defeat of the Chinese army at Palikao, and the loot of the Summer Palace at Peking.

But he had no particular liking for a life of adventure, and had always been a bookish boy, preferring during his childhood to spend his time in reading or in the solitary sport of fishing rather than in games with his contemporaries. Moreover, the climate of China had affected his health, and he began to look about him for some sedentary occupation which would keep him in England. His colloquial knowledge of Chinese here stood him in good stead, and, helped doubtless by the influence of his lifelong friend Sir John Kennaway, he was appointed Assistant of the First Class "for the Chinese Language" in the British Museum on February 23, 1865. His chief, Sir Frederick Bruce, had previously (on January 19) recommended him for appointment as Interpreter at Tientsin, and the appointment seems to have been actually made, Douglas receiving pay up to April. He did not, however, return to China to take it up, and resigned from the Consular Service on April 12, 1865. Sir Frederick Bruce had in the meantime retired from the post of British Minister at Peking, where he was succeeded by Sir Rutherford Alcock.

At the British Museum Douglas found a niche which he occupied for more than forty years. The study of the Chinese language and literature was till then almost entirely confined to missionaries, and the Chinese books and MSS. in the Museum were scattered through the King's and Grenville Libraries without any attempt at order or arrangement. Douglas, who had married the year after his appointment Rachel, daughter of Kirkby Fenton of Caldecote Hall, Warwickshire, at once set himself to work to arrange the existing collection and to make additions to it, for which the knowledge of native dealers which he had acquired during his life in China gave him special facilities. He further found a field for his energies in the printing of the Accessions to the General Catalogue, for which he made himself

responsible. In 1880 he was made Assistant Keeper of Printed Books and MSS., and was put in charge of the collection of Maps, then raised to a sub-department. In 1873 he was appointed Professor of Chinese at King's College, London, of which he had been an *alumnus*, and he was elected Fellow in 1875. He took part in the foundation and organization of the First International Congress of Orientalists held in Paris in September, 1873, at which he acted as delegate of the English Government, presided over one of the sittings, and obtained from the Congress the appointment of a committee for the publication in popular form of the earliest native histories of China. He also was Secretary to the Second International Congress of Orientalists held in London, and in that capacity edited its Transactions, and to the Chinese Section of the Ninth Congress, also held in London in 1892.

In 1875 Douglas published his first book on *The Language and Literature of China* and in 1877 a translation of the Chinese life of Jenghiz Khan, and in this last-named year his Catalogue of Chinese Books in the British Museum was printed and published by the Trustees. His other principal works are *Confucianism and Taoism*, 1877; *China*, 1882; a *Manual of Chinese Grammar*, 1889; *Chinese Stories*, 1893; *Society in China*, 1894; *The Life of Li Hung-Chang*, 1895; *China* (in the Story of the Nations Series), 1899; and *Europe and the Far East* (in the Cambridge Historical Series), 1904; while in lighter vein he wrote the *Whirligig of Time—a Political Satire* in 1885. His labours at the British Museum were rewarded with the appointment of Keeper to the newly-formed Department of Oriental Printed Books and MSS., in March, 1892, a position which he held until his retirement in 1907. He was also made one of the Governors of Dulwich College, was knighted in 1903, and elected a member of the

Athenæum Club under Rule 3 in the same year. His health had been failing for some time before his retirement; and in 1907 he gave up his house at Dulwich, where he had lived during the greater part of his service at the Museum, and returned to the West of England. Not finding accommodation to his mind at his birthplace or Ottery St. Mary, he finally settled at Acton Turville, where he remained until his death, having been a confirmed invalid during the last two years of his life. He left behind him Lady Douglas, whom he married, as has been said, in 1866, and six sons and two daughters.

The interest which Douglas always took in the welfare of this Society will be remembered by most of its members. He became a member of the Council in 1895, and one of the Society's Trustees in 1904. The following year he was elected Vice-President, and in 1911, on his retiring from the Council, he was, as a special mark of esteem, made Honorary Vice-President, in which office he continued until his death.

As a pioneer in Chinese studies, Douglas, perhaps, troubled himself little about philological questions. Yet he was well skilled in colloquial Chinese, and the three years he spent in Canton gave him a mastery over the Southern dialects not always possessed by those who learn spoken Chinese in Peking. As a popularizer of things Chinese he was excellent, and, as he had a clear and easy literary style, a letter from him in the *Times* came to be looked for directly any Chinese question came to the front.

In private life one of the most charming of men, Douglas knew how to make his will felt, and was, perhaps, at his best as an administrator. He had also a genius for friendship; and although at the time of his death he had outlived many of the friends he had made early in his career, he continued almost up to the last to make new ones. The circle of those who deplore his loss is unusually wide.

F. LEGGE.