

## OBITUARIES

STANLEY CASSON: 1889–1944.

(With Plate 1.)

STANLEY CASSON combined in an unusual way the qualities of a scholar and connoisseur with those of a man of action and adventure. When he came up from Merchant Taylors in 1909 as an exhibitor of Lincoln College, he came early under the influence of Farnell and Marett, and was an energetic officer of the new Anthropological Society. Already people and their works interested him more than language or literature. Yet he wrote with ease and force, and had a good ear for foreign speech: his colloquial Greek was excellent.

When he took his degree, an alternative career was open to him, but he knew what he wanted, and attained it in his own way. A Senior Scholarship at St. John's College gave him a foothold in Oxford, and a Studentship, offered by the British School at Athens, the entry into that unique company, the learned society of modern Greece. British students have too often secluded themselves in their cosy library and hostel: Casson had come to study Greek life, in all its phases and fortunes. The pre-Hellenic studies then in vogue did not specially appeal to him—he was already too true a Hellenist; but he combined with classical sculpture and architecture the rich colour and symbolism of Byzantine art—a wider avenue to the hearts of Balkan peoples—and his eye for country, and interest already in warfare, made the National Revival a congenial phase of Greek history. A century earlier, he would have been at the side of Byron and Codrington, Hastings and Richard Church. But the School had undertaken an important piece of collaborated work; a new *Catalogue* of the Acropolis Museum was to be prepared by our students and printed in Cambridge. Here was a positive and definite task. Guy Dickins of New College undertook to edit the first volume, and Casson the second.

But after two happy active years came the War, and a commission in the East Lancashire Regiment, a *macédoine* of natives, Scots, and Liverpool Irish. Casson was one of those who had looked ahead, and made O.T.C. training a reality; and he studied and handled his platoon as he had learned to treat Greek peasant-excavators. A short experience of Flanders, a disabling but not dangerous wound, a rapid convalescence, and his sound knowledge of things Greek, brought him before long to Salonica, and into the General Staff under Sir George Milne. Here adventure was linked with antiquity at every turn; Paeonia's own peonies in no-man's-land; Amphipolis and Philippi; the great Roman milestone inscribed ΚΑΙΣΑΡΙ ΓΕΡΜΑΝΙΚΩΙ which so pleased our men; the neolithic strata in the sides of the trenches; an Intelligence mess like a College Common Room, with learned colleagues, too, among the French and the Serbs. It was all in the picture that the officer detailed to escort the Bulgar flag of truce should become an Honorary Member of the Bulgarian Archaeological Institute. And then, to be one of the first Allied officers to enter Constantinople; one of the farthest on that fantastic front in Turkestan, astride a single railway track in sand-desert; to be mentioned in despatches, and receive the Greek Order of the Saviour—what better credentials for an Assistant Director of the British School—Dean, Tutor, and Librarian in one—or for a Fellow of New College with a roving commission in archaeology, coupled with light duty as a lecturer in the Department at the Ashmolean. And by a rare chance the Professor was still Percy Gardner, most philosophical of archaeologists, with whom Casson had studied already. This appointment, on terms then unfamiliar, was peculiarly welcome, for Guy Dickins had fallen in the war, leaving a grievous void, and the *Acropolis Catalogue* unfinished. Its second volume, mainly Casson's work, and already in proof, was soon published, and he could turn to his most extensive

contribution to learning, a historical geography of *Macedonia, Thrace, and Illyria*, which gained the Conington Prize in 1924 and was published in 1929. It included, with much else, the results of his own excavations on pre-Hellenic sites revealed during the war.

Though exempt from tutorial routine, Casson was not slow to build up an acquaintance among undergraduates, all the wider because his own interests and knowledge were so varied. His success as a teacher was soon recognised by a University lectureship, which was continuously renewed. His natural love for young people and for provocative discussion, moreover, were now reinforced by the hospitality of his accomplished wife, in successive homes in New College Lane. In 1928 he was an energetic and rather unconventional Proctor, his colleague from Worcester being another ex-officer. In later years he devoted much thought, tact, and patience to secure for the younger people cheap and easy access to Greek lands, under the guidance of himself and his friends. These voyages took him as far afield as Cyprus, to the antiquities of which he began to devote his attention, attracted perhaps by the technical problems of Cypriote sculpture and certainly by the chance that the Cypriote script might offer a clue to the Minoan. Always an impressive lecturer, he was at his best on an open-air site, reconstructing temple and portico and peopling them vividly with Hellenic craftsmen and votaries—or confronted with great original sculpture in the museums of Delphi and Olympia. He did not lecture much outside Oxford, but gave some pioneer courses at the University of Bristol, and held a visiting Professorship at Bowdoin College, Maine, in 1933–34 which he combined with visits to the chief American museums. Nor did he recur to field work, except to explore the Hippodrome at Constantinople in 1928–29, for the British Academy, a difficult and rather thankless enterprise.

Only when his Macedonian book was finished did he begin to publish those studies of sculpture, Hellenic and modern, by which he is perhaps best known among scholars. They cover both technical processes and canons of style, and combine observations of minute detail with vigorous criticism and exposition of principles. These books were his chief output from 1928 to 1935.

They were followed, about the time of his first Mediterranean cruises and his American visit, by more general and popular essays: a historical retrospect of the *Progress of Archaeology*, which was much needed as the study became more widespread; an even wider retrospect, *The Discovery of Man*; and an excursion into the philosophy of history, entitled *Progress and Catastrophe*; the last two written in 1937 and 1939 under a deepening apprehension of the trend of events, and the desire to do something for Progress before Catastrophe came.

He had already set down his war memories in 1935 in a brilliant and caustic narrative. In 1939 he joined the Intelligence Corps at once, and published in an Oxford series a short account of Greece which is the best thing of its kind. He was nearly captured when the Netherlands were invaded; he served in the British Mission with the Greek Army, and on the staff of the British Expeditionary Force in Greece; and he wrote what was permissible about those dark days, with all his vivid insight and enthusiasm. Then after valuable service at home, the moment seemed to be near when all his energy, knowledge, and local skill and prestige might find congenial and ample outlet. But this was not to be. On 'active service' already, he found a soldier's end. As the Greek Government's representative wrote, 'Stanley Casson will live in the hearts of all the Greeks and those who had the privilege of meeting him, as myself, will always preserve the memory of his kindness and nobility.' And in the Greek journal *Hellas* you will find his epitaph:

'The monuments he loved in peace  
He strove to shield in war,  
And gave his life for them and Greece  
Upon a distant shore.

‘ His memory will remain fragrant among all Greeks.’

A career of so many aspects and episodes, cut short in middle life—Casson was only fifty-four, and to most of us he seemed much younger—must seem in some respects incomposite; and Casson himself changed his course repeatedly, when he had satisfied his need to know, or made what he judged to be his proper contribution to knowledge. He made up his mind rapidly, and seldom changed it. One of his most characteristic writings, his introduction to *Ancient Greece*, was mature work when it appeared in 1922: when he reissued it in 1939 it was almost without alteration in the text, for (as he wrote) ‘ I doubt if I could recapture that atmosphere of peaceful reflection which was so characteristic of the first quiet post-war years ’.

There is, however, in his later writing an appeal to a wider public, on larger issues. He had been elected, for good cause, an honorary associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects, and his more than speculative interest in town-planning, in Oxford and, long before, in Salonica after the great fire, is another pointer. He had felt the need for the New Jerusalem, and he felt it in him with sword and pen to make some contribution to progress, which might mitigate if not avert catastrophe. And if his *Progress and Catastrophe* was prophecy—history warning by examples—his *Greece and Britain*, published only last year, was an essay in the continuity of history, a study of the Byzantine foundations of our Europe, and an appeal for practical Hellenism. For as he had written long before, ‘ This freshness of spirit and clearness of outlook was in the nature of the people of Ancient Greece ’, ‘ there is in all the products of Greece a literal inspiration—a breathing-in of their temporal and physical environment. . . . And they were destined for posterity.’ ‘ To call the language, art, and culture of Greece dead, is to beg the very question at issue.’ ‘ We, with our centuries of abstract religious training behind us, find it hard to see the Greek point of view. . . . First perfect yourself and your capacities, and then, when you can use them, think hard on what is behind, beneath, and above you. That, roughly, is the Greek way of being religious.’ ‘ It may be asked ’, he added, ‘ what *we* have in common with ancient Greece. It will be sufficient answer if we say that we have common ideals. The Greek strove, as we strive, to think clearly, to act justly, and to live freely. Religion then, to the ancient Greek, was largely his own affair, the choice of the individual. Today we seem to have much the same state of affairs in our own country.’

And so too in more material things: ‘ A great city cannot thrive in a wilderness, unless it conquers the wilderness; if it does not prevail, the wilderness comes once more into its own ’—and this was written some ten years before Rostovtseff’s *Social and Economic History*. ‘ Everything which concerned man was of a nature which “ admitted of being otherwise ”, as Aristotle said. It was man’s task then to control it, as far as possible, and understand it according to his standards; to form his own tests, his own theories of action, and guide his hand by methods which he had to invent, for the most part, by himself.’

Still more did this apply to the arts, and was fundamental in Casson’s own view of sculpture, ancient and modern. ‘ Sculpture in stone was an integral part of the artistic life of the people, and never a mere artistic luxury. [The sculptor] supplied needs rather than created luxuries. The ancient Greek could not imagine a statue which had not a destination. . . . [The sculptor] had a position tantamount to that of a civil servant.’ For Casson this teleological aspect was fundamental and inspiring. Sculpture, for him, was an exceptionally delicate and eloquent mode of self-expression, and an appeal to national appreciation and outlook; it must therefore be considered in its surroundings and historical setting. To appreciate sculpture, and to create sculpture, something more was needed than technique and individual insight into the significance of form. ‘ To me,’ he wrote, ‘ an intellectual interest [in a work of art] consists in those qualities in it which stimulate me to discover *how* the artist

did it, what is the underlying composition, how his effects are created, why certain arrangements of colour and form are chosen. . . . The artist alone knows what art is, and the rest of the world mostly spends its time asking him to explain', as Casson himself thought it necessary to do about the New Bodleian.

Like all his generation Casson had had his life twice broken across by war; and it is in the 'first quiet post-war years'—may we hope, 'of peaceful reflection'—that we here shall feel the loss of so stalwart an exponent of the gospel of Greece.

For behind critical smile and cynical phrase, Casson was an optimist. Capable of great happiness, and exceptionally happy in the congenial companionship of his wife and an adored and adoring daughter, 'more precious than his own life,' he set himself with his characteristic gifts and outlook, as a practical Hellenist, to preach the good tidings of true and beautiful things wherever found. Side by side with colleagues and pupils here, artists and many friends in the larger world and in the services, there will be many simple souls on Greek hillsides who treasure his sturdy presence, his bluff address, his humorous intolerance of all shams and conventions, his capacity for friendship and leadership, his tender humanity in any kind of distress. When such a man passes beyond this world, which he loved and enjoyed, let the trumpets sound for him on the other side. In the words of one who knew him best, 'We must not be sad: he was never sad'.

JOHN L. MYRES.



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