

## 2. WIENER ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR DIE KUNDE DES MORGENLANDES.

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## III. OBITUARY NOTICE.

*Dr. William Wright*, Sir T. Adams's Professor of Arabic at Cambridge, whose death on the 22nd of May last is the heaviest blow which Oriental studies have sustained since the decease of the veteran Fleischer, was born in India in 1830. His father was a Scottish officer in the East India Company's service, and his mother, whose maiden name was Overbeck, was the daughter of the last Dutch governor of Chinsurah. From her Wright seems to have inherited some of his linguistic talents, for she was no mean proficient in Persian, and watched with loving interest the development of scholarly tastes in her son. Captain Wright, having returned to Scotland, settled at St. Andrews; his son received his education there, first at the Madras College, and then at the ancient University, for which he retained to the

last a warm love. He distinguished himself in classics, and after taking his degree at the early age which was then common in the Scottish Universities, proceeded to Germany to continue his philological studies at the University of Halle. Here the influence of the famous Orientalist Rödiger, in whose house he was received as an inmate, soon led him to turn from classical to Oriental letters, into the study of which he threw himself with great ardour. His chief love was for the Semitic languages, and especially for Arabic, but he also attained no mean proficiency in Sanskrit, Persian, Turkish, and other Eastern tongues. In later years, when he felt that life was short, and began to doubt whether he could finish all the tasks he had prescribed for himself in his favourite branch, Wright resolutely turned aside from these secondary pursuits, and few, even of his friends, had opportunity to know how wide and solid were his attainments beyond the limits of Semitic speech. But to the last he followed with interest other men's work in every field of Oriental research, and it is mainly to his initiative and advice that Cambridge owes its magnificent collection of Buddhist-Sanskrit MSS., of which a great part were brought from Nepal by his brother Dr. D. Wright.

Rödiger was always wont to speak of Wright as his best scholar, and certainly the rapidity with which the young Scotsman conquered the difficulties of a whole series of languages was marvellous. From Halle he passed on to Leyden, then as now one of the most famous seats of Arabic learning, and here at the age of twenty-two he brought out his first work, an edition of the travels of Ibn Jubair. Already he showed the judgment which habitually guided him in the choice of work, the courage which never failed him in the face of difficulties, the fulness of resource, and solid precision in execution, which characterize all his editions. To edit a difficult text from a single MS. is a formidable undertaking even for an experienced scholar, but this *Erstlingsarbeit* shows no sign of immaturity, and few lines in it would call for correction at the present day. As an editor Wright was cautious and conservative; he was

always slow to introduce conjectures, while his unfailing eye and hand rendered it almost impossible for him to err in transcribing the MS. before him: the best scholars of the continent have confessed that there was no appeal from Wright's transcripts to the original. Like all men who have the inborn gift that makes a palæographer, he took pleasure in the work of transcription, and would copy off pages of dim and puzzling Arabic in the clear hand which he had formed on one of the finest old Codices of the Warnerianum, as fast as a clerk would transcribe an ordinary letter. Wright's caution in the matter of textual emendation was characteristic of the solid habit of mind which never allowed him to mistake a conjecture for a fact; he spared no pains to bring together all that could throw light on the facts, but he was willing to leave the inferences to others. Perhaps, indeed, he carried this habit to excess; for those who knew him well were aware that he had excellent and original ideas on many vexed subjects of Eastern lore which he never cared to publish, because they could not be established by strict proof.

A great part of his life-work was given to the editing of texts, mainly Syriac and Arabic; and of this labour he was never weary. They were always important texts, put forth with the most perfect diplomatic accuracy, and with full command of all needful helps and side lights. But the texts he published himself give but an imperfect view of his services in bringing to light the buried stores of Oriental literature. His wide knowledge of MSS., exact verbal scholarship, and expert pen, were at the service of every scholar, and there are few editors of Arabic and Syriac works in the last thirty years who have not had to acknowledge his aid either in supplying transcripts and collations, or in reading and correcting proof-sheets. In this connection special mention should be made of his prolonged and arduous labours on the *Thesaurus Syriacus* of the Dean of Canterbury.

A second kind of work in which Wright was a past master was the palæographical description and cataloguing of MSS.

From 1861 to 1870 he was employed in the Oriental Branch of the MS. Department of the British Museum, first as an assistant and then as assistant keeper. His catalogues of the Syriac and Æthiopic MSS.—both models of what a catalogue should be—are permanent memorials of his labours in this department; and to these will soon be added the work of his last months, the Catalogue of the “additional” Syriac MSS. at Cambridge, including the fine collection brought from Mesopotamia by Dr. Badger. On all questions of Syriac and Arabic palæography, Wright’s judgment, matured as it was by constant familiarity with MSS., was probably worth more than that of any other scholar in Europe. In this connection should be named also the Oriental Series of the publications of the Palæographical Society, which was directed and edited by him. It may be interesting to mention that when the Shapira fragments were brought to London, Wright was in Scotland; but without further aid than the first imperfect notices that appeared in print, he told the writer of these lines that he had no doubt that they were forgeries written on scraps of leather cut from the margins of Yemenite MSS., as was afterwards proved to be the case. In epigraphy, as well as in palæography, Wright took a great interest, and many communications on this subject were read by him before the Society of Biblical Archaeology.

His work as a teacher has still to be spoken of. From 1855 to 1861 he was Professor of Arabic, first in University College, London, and then at Dublin, and from 1870 till his death he was the head of the Semitic school at Cambridge, which owes him a great debt of gratitude, not only for his admirable and stimulating teaching in Arabic and Syriac, but perhaps most of all for the improvement in Hebrew study which has followed, indirectly, from the introduction, through his example and influence, of the comparative method. His lectures on the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages were a new thing in England; probably, indeed, nothing so complete and systematic has yet been attempted in any European University. These lectures have been left in such a form that they can be printed, and their

publication has been undertaken by the Syndics of the University Press.

Of the books which Prof. Wright published to help learners in Arabic, the Reading Book, 1870, remains unfortunately incomplete, the glossary which he projected and in great part prepared having never found a publisher. This is the more to be regretted, because he designed it on such a scale as would have made it a substantial contribution to a scientific Arabic Lexicon. As it is, his lexicographical collections remain unpublished, with the exception of the notes he contributed to Dozy's *Supplement aux dictionnaire arabes*. His Arabic Grammar had a better fate, having passed through two editions, and been generally accepted on the Continent as well as in England as the best manual of this difficult language. With characteristic modesty, the author left the words "from the German of Caspari" on the title, even of the second edition (1874), though the book is substantially an independent work.

No notice of Prof. Wright would be complete without reference to his great influence over his pupils, and the strong feelings of personal attachment with which he inspired them. Indeed, his considerate kindness, his constant helpfulness, his placid enthusiasm for learning, and the strong *esprit de corps* which made him instinctively treat every student of Eastern languages as a comrade, gained for him the hearts of younger Orientalists, whether they were his pupils or not. In his later years he had an almost cosmopolitan position, as the man whom all Eastern scholars knew and loved, to whom every one turned for help and advice, and who was never found wanting. His long struggle with fatal disease was watched with sympathetic interest in every seat of learning, and his death was mourned as a personal loss in every University of Europe. The value which was attached to his work, and the esteem in which his character was held wherever Eastern studies are appreciated, were marked by a long series of distinctions conferred on him by foreign Universities and Academies. Of these perhaps the Honorary Doctorship of Leyden and the Prussian Order *pour le mérite*,

were those which he most prized, coming as they did from the countries in which his first years of Oriental study were spent, and where his first personal relations with foreign scholars were formed.

It ought to be mentioned in conclusion that Dr. Wright was an active member of the Old Testament Revision Company, and did much good service in their important work.

#### IV. NOTES AND NEWS.

*The Professorship of Arabic at Cambridge*, vacant by the lamented death of Professor Wright, has been filled up, in accordance with general expectation, by the appointment of Professor Robertson Smith. It is understood that a separate readership in Syriac will be created.

*Professor Windisch*, of Leipzig, who has been seriously ill, is now convalescent. His edition of the *Iti-vuttaka*, for the Pali Text Society, is now all in type.

*The first volume of the Dīgha Nikāya*, being edited by Professors Rhys Davids and Estlin Carpenter, for the Pali Text Society, is now all printed, except the indices, and will form part of the issue to the subscribers for this year.

*Father Guesdon*, of Kamboja, has prepared and will shortly publish a dictionary of the Khmer language.

*Professor Lefmann*, of Heidelberg, has been staying for a short time in London. His edition of the *Lalita Vistara*, on which he has been working for many years, is now all in print; but the various readings and indices have still to be completed. Prof. Lefmann is engaged also on a biography of Franz Bopp.

*Professor Bühler* has published at Vienna (Tempsky) a monograph, 'Ueber das leben des Jaina münches Hemachandra,' which goes carefully through all the authorities, and sets forth all that is known about this distinguished scholar and religious leader, the most important personage in Gujarāt in the twelfth century of our era. We hope in a future issue to give a complete account of the conclusions at which Professor Bühler arrives.