

OBITUARY

SIR CHARLES LYALL, K.C.S.I.

THE School of Oriental Studies has lost a valued friend in Sir Charles James Lyall, K.C.S.I., whose death occurred on 1st September, 1920, at the age of 76. Born in 1845, he entered the Bengal Civil Service at the age of 22, and rose to some of the highest offices under the Indian Government, ending with that of Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces—a position equivalent to that of a governor of a province—which he filled from 1895 to 1898. When he left India he became secretary of the Judicial and Public Department, India Office, and continued to hold this post until his retirement from the public service in 1910. He took an active interest in the work of the Royal Asiatic Society and in the Oriental studies carried on in the University of London, and was for many years chairman of the Board of Studies in Oriental Languages and Literatures. He regularly attended such meetings of the International Congress of Orientalists as were held after 1898, and on such occasions generally represented either the Government of India or the Secretary of State for India.

In the intervals of his official duties he found time for the study of Arabic, and he took the opportunity of being on leave in Europe to become a pupil of Professor Nöldeke in the University of Strassburg; to this distinguished Orientalist he dedicated his edition of two Arabic *Dīwāns*, with the words “Dedicated to our master Theodor Nöldeke in gratitude and affection”, adding in his Preface, “Whatever merit the edition may possess is due to this most valuable co-operation of the acknowledged master of all European scholars in this field of study,” and he used to show with pride a letter in which Professor Nöldeke averred that Lyall had succeeded in carrying through an undertaking which he himself would not have ventured to attempt.

His first published work was a series of translations that appeared at intervals in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, in the years 1877, 1878, and 1881, and were afterwards published in collected form in a book entitled *Translations of Ancient Arabian Poetry, chiefly pre-Islamic* (London, 1885). His first edition of an Arabic text was *A Commentary on ten ancient Arabic poems, namely, the seven Mu'allakāt, and poems by al-A'sha, an-Nābighah, and 'Abd ibn al-Abras, by the Khaṭīb Abū Zakarīyā Yahyā at-Tibrīzī* (Calcutta, 1894). This was followed later by *The Dīwāns of 'Abd ibn al-Abras of Asad, and 'Amir ibn at-Tufail, of 'Amir ibn Sa'sa'ah, edited for the first time*

and supplied with a translation and notes (London, 1913), and by *The Poems of 'Amr son of Qamī'ah*, edited and translated (Cambridge, 1919). What will be the greatest monument of his erudition, he unhappily did not live to complete—an edition of the *Mufaddaliyāt*—though he succeeded in seeing the greater part of it through the press, in spite of the difficulties that arose during the war, including the loss of a batch of proofs in a vessel that was torpedoed, and the destruction of the press at Beyrout in which the text was being printed. European scholars had hitherto shrunk from the difficult task of editing this collection of early Arabic poetry (with the exception of about a third of the poems, published by Thorbecke in 1885), and Sir Charles Lyall himself did not approach it until after decades of training and preparation; but when once he commenced the work he brought to it a vast store of knowledge of Arabic lexicography and textual criticism, and his edition (which has been completed by Professor Bevan) will take rank with Freytag's edition of the *Ḥamāsa*.

In another department of Oriental studies—Hindustani—though his literary output was much more restricted, yet all he wrote was marked with the same careful and accurate scholarship. In his *Sketch of the Hindustani Language* (Edinburgh, 1880) he established the important fact that this language instead of being an artificial hybrid as had hitherto been supposed, was really a development of the dialect spoken in the district of Meerut. He later contributed the article on Hindustani to successive editions of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

Sir Charles Lyall took a great interest in the foundation of the School of Oriental Studies. He was a member of the Committee appointed in 1905 by the Senate of the University of London to consider the re-organization of Oriental studies in the University and to suggest a scheme therefor, and he accompanied the deputation that approached the First Lord of the Treasury in 1906 with the request that he would appoint a Departmental Committee to inquire into the subject. The Committee was appointed in 1907, and in the following year submitted a report which met with the approval of the Government, and Sir Charles Lyall became a member of the Committee appointed in 1910 for carrying out the proposed scheme of a School of Oriental Studies. Since the opening of the School in February, 1917, up to the time of his last illness, Sir Charles Lyall continued to take an active interest in the institution to the establishment of which he had devoted so much time and thought.