

OBITUARY NOTICE

AUGUSTE BARTH

THERE are scholars whose claim to fame rests on the size and number of their published books. There are others who gather students around and train them to be good and useful workers, stamped with the clear impress of their masters' minds. Barth cannot be classed in either of these groups. A 'professor's career which would certainly have been both brilliant and fruitful of good was closed to him by a deafness which afflicted him from early manhood; and as for his writings, if one set has finally assumed book form, or if another by its amplitude and importance is a work in itself, all first appeared in print as integrant parts of "Selections" or of Reviews. And yet few Orientalists have had so profound an influence on their own branch of learning as Barth, for many years to Indianism a spiritual director whose advice and judgment were rarely received with anything but respect and gratitude. Whence arose this authority, so influential that, from the seclusion of his study, he came to be regarded by his colleagues as their High Priest?

Let it be said at once that his influence was in no wise due to material wealth or to political position. He possessed modest but comfortable means which enabled him to live according to his tastes and to devote himself to science, to his friendships, and to those physical pastimes in which he excelled. The story of this studious and secluded life can be told in a few words.

Marie Etienne Auguste Barth was born in Strassburg on March 22, 1834, of a Catholic father and a Protestant mother. His school days and his student days were spent at the Lycée and at the Académie of his native

town. He graduated successfully as Licencié ès lettres in 1856, and in the following year was appointed teacher of logic and rhetoric at the College of Bouxviller, a little town not far from Savern. It was there he began the study of Sanskrit. In 1861 he obtained rather more than a year's leave of absence, and went to Paris to prepare there the thesis necessary for the degree of Doctorate on which his ambition was set. The following year he was elected member of the Société asiatique de Paris. Soon after his return to Alsace he published in the *Revue Germanique* his first work, a study on the Bhagavad-Gita (1864).

In the Franco-Prussian War he fulfilled his duty—aye, and more than his duty—to his country, and fought gallantly at the head of a small number of “francs-tireurs”. When the conclusion of peace brought with it the annexation to Germany of Alsace, he refused to live there longer, but, with his father and brother—his mother had died in 1869—he settled in Geneva. There he remained six years, during which he sent numerous contributions to the *Revue critique d'Histoire et de Littérature*. These articles firmly established his authoritative position, and he began to be well known in the world of scholars. But soon he felt the need of a centre which offered him a life of greater scope. And so, in 1877, he made his home in Paris, never again to leave it except for short journeys, or to spend the last months of summer at the seaside. Thus, at last, he divided his days between the capital and his favourite spot, the little Breton town of Audierne. Meanwhile the highest distinctions were conferred upon him as the reward of his constant labour. He was successively elected honorary member of the Genootschap voor Kunst- en Wetenschap of Batavia (1886); member of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres (February, 1893); honorary member of the Royal Asiatic Society (May, 1893); foreign member

of the Koninklijk Instituut voor den Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde van Nederland-Indie (1896); associated member of the Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen of Amsterdam (1896); honorary member of the American Oriental Society (1898); membre correspondant de l'Académie des Sciences de Pétrougrade (1902). On March 10, 1894, he was appointed Grand-officier de l'ordre royal du Cambodge; on December 31, 1895, Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur; soon afterwards Commandeur du Dragon d'Annam. Finally, in 1909, Louvain University granted him the title of doctor, *honoris causa*.

Unfortunately, there came, side by side with all these honours, an illness which forced Barth to restrict to a considerable degree his scientific activities, and his last years were darkened by a cruel infirmity requiring incessant care. After the year 1911 he published no further work, and on April 15, 1916, death came to free him from his long suffering. He was 82 years of age.

I think I do not exaggerate when I say that in the domain of Indology Barth had no teacher other than his own personality. Owing to his penetrating mind, his sharp sense of criticism, his deep and intuitive knowledge of history, the independent foundation of his learning brought no drawbacks, but, on the contrary, brought great advantages. His first impressions of India were derived directly from a close study of actual texts, and his views were shielded from those distortions which knowledge necessarily undergoes in a process of reflection from one mind to another.

Both the importance and the originality of the work on which Barth's reputation is founded are due to his innate vision of the subject before him. We know the sequence of events which led to his writing this work. M. Lichtenberger had asked him to write the article on India for the *Encyclopédie des Sciences religieuses*. He

agreed, and for the first time an attempt was made to trace the immense development of beliefs and rites from Vedic origins to the most recent reformatory efforts. Barth accomplished this difficult task with the skill of a master mind. His exposition was temperate, closely reasoned and lucid; it was based on profound study, and, while throughout conveying broad, general views, was rich in ideas. So that, although written for a wide public, it proved of the greatest service even to Indianists themselves. The author, then, was not satisfied to give his readers the results obtained by a succession of scholars, or by patient and detailed research. Having deeply meditated upon India, as it were from within, he had learned to understand that which can never be discovered by critical analysis, but is revealed only to sympathetic care—the very life of the subject. And this life, complex and changeable though it be, was made known by Barth. The article in the *Encyclopédie Lichtenberger*, enriched with numerous notes, soon appeared in book form (Paris, Fischbacher, 1879). It was translated into English by the Rev. J. Wood (London, Trübner, 1882), and into Russian under the supervision of Prince S. Troubetskoï (Moscow, 1896).

His critical works are even more important. Barth sent to the *Revue Critique*, to *Mélusine*, and to the *Journal des Savants* innumerable notices, many of which have the completeness and importance of original works. He excelled, indeed, in extracting the essence from new publications and showing in what respect they modified our views on Indian subjects. And often one touch of his incisive criticism was sufficient to destroy the bubble of some plausible though ill-founded theory. Even when concerned with the examination of books of small worth, his articles would teach a useful lesson on method. Yet he served the cause of Indianism more by the ten admirable Bulletins which he published between 1880

and 1902 in the *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* than by his isolated studies. In these Bulletins he traces and reviews, with an incomparable fund of information, the entire production of the science of Indology, almost from beginning to end. Texts religious and philosophic, archæology and ancient inscriptions, law and social institutions, literature and science were discussed in these Bulletins. Thus, in the same way as in his critical articles, the civilization of India was considered in all its aspects. The appearance of these pamphlets was always awaited with impatience; so well was the author's scrupulous exactness recognized, so well the soundness of his judgment understood. An eminent Orientalist wrote me only a few days ago that, whenever he was working out some problem of Sanskrit philology, he used to ask himself: "Will my opinion meet with M. Barth's approval?"

Even while engaged upon his critical studies, Barth set to work to increase the documentary resources available to Indianists. M. Aymonier had sent to France reproductions of a large number of epigraphic documents, and sometimes the documents themselves, written in the Sanskrit, Khmère, and Tchame languages, and collected in the course of his scientific missions to Indo-China. MM. Barth, Bergaigne, and Senart undertook to decipher the Sanskrit inscriptions, and to edit, translate, and annotate them. In the first distribution of the work of translating these difficult texts the most ancient fell to the lot of M. Barth. He published his own share of the work in 1885 under the title of *Inscriptions sanscrites du Cambodge* (Notices et extraits des Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale, tome xxvii, 1ère partie; un volume in -4 de 177 pages, avec un atlas de 17 planches heliogravées). When, on August 6, 1888, Bergaigne met his death in an abyss on the mountains of La Grave, that part of the work which had devolved upon him was still

unfinished. Barth completed it and supervised the publication (*Inscriptions sanscrites de Campā et du Cambodge*, un volume in -4 de 448 pages et un atlas de 28 planches). After that he edited and published other epigraphic texts from Indo-China and from India in the *Journal Asiatique*, in the *Comptes-rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, and the *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*. His wide knowledge of mathematics and astronomy was usefully employed when, in dealing with a large number of these documents, he had to calculate dates expressed only in terms of the longitudinal position of the seven planets.

Then there is one side of Barth's life which, least of all others, the writer of this notice could ever forget. The great scholar was the most attentive, the most unselfish of guides to those who followed him in the same career. To how many young people has he given words of wise counsel and encouragement! When he had pointed out to some worker the direction in which there was research to be made, he would continue to help him, sparing neither time nor effort. For example, there is Fournereau, to whom he afforded valuable help by publishing the Siamese inscriptions in the first volume of his *Siam Ancien*, and whose work he completed when a premature death caused the pen to fall from the hand of the explorer. Another example is the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, which partly owes to him its very existence. Though so far away, he took the keenest interest in its proceedings from the beginning.

Barth's character was equally noble as man and as scholar. All who met him realized the true kindness of his nature and his devotion to others. He commanded respect by the dignity of his life, by his uprightness, and by the loftiness of his sentiments. He was too high-minded to allow his personality to be overruled by fashion

or prejudice. He was truly a man of another age, with the faithfulness and charming courtesy of a knight. He remained faithful to his friends, faithful to his Alsatian homeland, faithful to the Royalist ideals traditional in his family. And the resentment he felt towards the victors of 1870 remained ever collective, never individual. Barth gave a kindly welcome to the German scholars who came to visit him at his home, or who sought the benefit of his guidance. One of his last acts as a member of the Institut was to vote against the proposal to strike off from the roll the names of some foreign scholars who were honorary members of the Academy.

The French edition of the *Religions de l'Inde* was soon out of print, and it was found difficult, too, to make use of his other writings, buried as they were in about one hundred and fifty volumes of a dozen different periodicals. Was it possible that the fruits of such important works should be lost? Barth's friends in Paris said no. In honour of the eightieth anniversary of his birthday they decided to collect together the savant's scattered writings. MM. Senart, Foucher, and Finot have given to this enterprise their devotion and their experience. They have already put two volumes into the hands of the workers, and have arranged the publication of the three others which will complete the collection. Owing to their diligent care, future generations of Orientalists will not forget the debt owed by Indianism to the good master whom we have just lost. No more worthy monument could be raised to the memory of Auguste Barth.

PAUL ULTRAMARE.