

OBITUARY NOTICES

Lord Chalmers

The Right Honourable Baron Chalmers, of Northiam, who during the three years 1922–5 was President of the Society, expired at his residence in Oxford (14 Crick Road) on 17th November of last year. On 21st November there was a funeral service in the chapel of Oriel College, whereof he had been from 1918 an Honorary Fellow : a memorial service in Westminster Abbey, on 24th November, was attended by numerous public persons (including a representative of the Prime Minister) and old colleagues and associates and private friends. A well-informed and judicious obituary notice in *The Times* of 18th November was followed next day by a communication reviewing Lord Chalmers' Governorship of Ceylon, and on 26th November by two others describing his philanthropic work under the late Canon Barnett during a period of residence in St. Jude's, Whitechapel, and his conduct of business in the Treasury. In the *Cambridge Review*, of 2nd December, appeared a fuller memoir, specially informative in regard to the years 1924–1931, when Lord Chalmers was Master of Peterhouse.

Robert Chalmers was born in 1858 (18th August), only son of John Chalmers and his wife Julia, *née* Mackay. At an early age he was admitted, as a scholar, into the City of London School, whence after coming under the direct influence of a famous head master, Edwin Abbott, a rare stimulator of thought among pupils, he proceeded, in 1877, to Oxford as a Classical Scholar of Oriel. Having taken a First in Mods., he turned to science and was placed in the Second Class in the Biology group. After an interval of residence in Edinburgh he entered the Treasury, in 1882, as a First Division Clerk, having headed the list of successful candidates in the then recently instituted competitive examination. His remarkably successful career in the Treasury, where in 1903 he became

Assistant Under-Secretary and in 1911 Permanent Under-Secretary (and so virtual head of the Civil Service), was interrupted by four years, 1907–1911, of Chairmanship in the Board of Inland Revenue, by a period of two years, 1913–15, spent in the post of Governor of Ceylon and, in 1916, by an uncomfortable six months' experience of administration in Ireland, where he had been induced, by Mr. Asquith, to serve as Under-Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant. Having returned, in 1916, to the Treasury as Joint Permanent Under-Secretary, he was concerned in the gigantic finance of the War years. Upon his retirement in 1919 he was raised to the peerage, associating in his title the ancient Sussex town of Northiam, wherewith he had connection.

Lord Chalmers' qualities as an official, comprising certainly a great judiciousness and a settled policy in dealing with colleagues, do not greatly concern the Society, which is interested mainly in other sides of his activity. Naturally he rendered loyal service to successive ministers, of whom the most congenial was, it seems, Mr. Stanley (now Lord) Baldwin, with whom he shared a genuine taste for literature, maintained amid engrossing practical affairs. A touch of negativity in his nature, combined with deep reticence and occasional flashes of mordant wit, may have demanded circumspection on the part of mature colleagues and other Departments. But one of the above-mentioned communications to *The Times* attests the encouragement afforded to subordinates by confidence placed in them.

To Pali literature Chalmers was attracted during his early years in London by the enthusiasm of the late Professor Rhys Davids, then occupying rooms in the Temple. He became a member of the Pali Text Society, subsequently a donor both to the Society and to its projected *Pali Dictionary*. From Rhys Davids he took over the task of translating the *Jātaka* book: he joined the company of scholars formed by the late Professor E. B. Cowell, with the object of accomplishing the translation, whereof the first volume, published

in 1895 and dedicated to Rhys Davids, was Chalmers' work. The plan of the publication did not contemplate extensive commentary: Chalmers' rendering, with its attention to literary English, was appreciated by Cowell on account of its spirited vigour. From 1896 to 1902 Chalmers was engaged upon an edition, commenced by Trenckner, of the *Majjhima-Nikāya*, an extensive main text of the Pali Canon; after which he set to work upon the translation ultimately published in two volumes, issued in 1926 and 1927. Progress was retarded by the growing demands of official life; and certainly after 1911 the head of the Treasury found it impossible to spare even post-midnight hours. But his literary instincts found some satisfaction in attending occasional meetings of a few friends interested in Indian thought. During the two years passed in Ceylon the Governor delighted to make speeches to Buddhist communities in Pali: and he endowed a Singhalese publication of an important Pali commentary on the *Majjhima-Nikāya*.

With his retirement from the Civil Service Lord Chalmers entered upon a period of different activities, marked by recognitions not less distinguished, in their way, than those of his official life. Only in one of them, namely his membership (1924) of the Universities Commission under Lord Asquith and of the Committee subsequently appointed to carry out its recommendations, do we find a quasi-official character. After the death of Lord Reay in 1921 and a temporary succession of Sir Richard Temple, who was in infirm health, he accepted a nomination to the office of President of our Society, and at the Anniversary Meeting in May, 1922, was in due course elected. From the first he gave serious attention to the Society's affairs—he himself opened the Session 1922–3 with a lecture on "Some Buddhist Nuns and Others"; and it fell to him to direct the arrangements for the celebration, in July, 1923, of its centenary and to preside at the inauguration ceremony and at the banquet. The celebration was a brilliant affair, marked by the attendance of notable

foreign and other delegations presenting addresses and of many other distinguished visitors. Through Lord Chalmers' intervention the inauguration was honoured by the presence of the then Prince of Wales, one of the Society's Patrons, and of the Prime Minister, Mr. Stanley Baldwin; and a select number of visitors and of the Society's official personnel had the further honour of a private presentation to His Majesty, while one or two proceeded to Oxford for admission to Honorary Degrees. Towards the expenses of the celebration, borne in part by subscriptions from members of the Council, Lord Chalmers made a liberal contribution, supplemented later by a considerable donation to meet the unexpectedly high cost of the *Centenary Supplement*. During the period of the ceremonies he was in deep anxiety on account of Lady Chalmers, who was in a nursing home, where not long afterwards she expired. No public troubles agitated the Society during the remainder of Lord Chalmers' tenure of office: he regularly presided at the meetings of the Council and at the public lectures, and in 1924-5 he gave close attention to the business of selecting a new Assistant Secretary. In the summer of 1924 he accepted the Mastership of Peterhouse, in Cambridge, and that appointment, together with the rule concerning the tenure of the Presidency, entailed his retirement in May, 1925, on which occasion he was elected an Honorary Vice-President.

For an intimate appreciation of Lord Chalmers' seven years at Peterhouse we may refer to the above noted article in the *Cambridge Review*. His connection with the College had begun, quite characteristically, with his taking up the membership of his son, a prospective barrister, who in 1915, during the same month as his sole brother, was killed in France. A summer's residence in Cambridge during 1920 had made him personally known to the College; and his counsel in connection with matters of property and finance was expected to be, as in fact it proved to be, of great value. His headship seems to have been of a firm character. He

delighted also in the improvement of his Lodge, in the extension of the College by a new court, and in a liberal hospitality, which brought scholars and notable friends from outside: not less in acts of encouragement and generous, mostly indirect and sometimes secret, benevolence to students, who did not find him really formidable. In University affairs generally he took no active part: not infrequently he was seen at the High Tables of other Colleges. He was interested in his fellow Indianists and also anxious to encourage research, particularly in studies relating to the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia.

In 1924 he became a Trustee of the British Museum, and in 1927 he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy, which during the years 1930–31 he served also as Treasurer. For the Fifteenth International Congress of Orientalists, a record gathering which took place at Oxford in 1928, the local committee was so fortunate as to secure him as President; and before and during the Session he took up residence in Oriel College, presiding over the committee meetings and public functions; he also gave advice in the subsequent prolonged business of winding-up.

Retiring from his Mastership, under the age limit, in 1931, Lord Chalmers rusticated for a time near Melton Mowbray. In 1935 he made a second marriage and with his new wife, widow of Professor R. Latta and elder daughter of the late Sir John Biles—a lady whom he had known during thirty years—settled in Oxford. There he could meet old friends, Orientalists and others, and occasionally, as an Honorary Fellow (from 1918) of Oriel, join the company there. He had given up all Oriental reading, but took a serious interest in elections of Orientalist Fellows of the British Academy. Occasionally he attended meetings of the House of Lords or State ceremonies, such as the last Coronation.

As has been mentioned, the translation of the *Majjhima-Nikāya* was resumed, completed and published in 1926 and 1927, during the Cambridge period. To the same period

belongs Lord Chalmers' last work of scholarship, a translation of the *Sutta-Nipāta*, published in 1932 as the 37th volume of the Harvard Oriental Series. This work, which by its unliteral rendering of a canonical text evoked some protests from professional students of Buddhism, may be considered the most characteristic and felicitous of his writings. His literary propensities had been manifested in his *Jātaka* volume: in dealing with the *Majjhima-Nikāya* he had sought out good English equivalents (" almsman ", " canker ", and so forth) for technical terms of Buddhism, which students are apt, from fear of inaccuracy, to reproduce untranslated; and he had, like others, cut short those remorseless repetitions which are so burdensome to readers of Buddhist texts and often outran the patience even of the scribes. In the *Sutta-Nipāta* he was dealing with a very ancient compilation of verse, largely of ethical content and nowhere failing in human or religious interest. The texts were not composed originally for scholars or dogmatists; and in a highly skilful, terse and reliable verse rendering by a sound scholar, a very shrewd judge of human nature and a lover of good English, they may be taken to heart by serious students of literature and religion who are not specially interested in critical scholarship. The work may therefore come into a wider acceptance, and some of its verses be quoted with pleasure.

In the summer of 1938, and specially in the course of a visit to the south coast, including Northiam, Lord Chalmers, now concluding his 80th year, began to experience a weakness which indisposed him for making engagements. After returning to Oxford he became bedridden and endured discomfort which he studiously concealed, his intellect losing nothing of its keenness. His demise took place on 17th November.

As is evident from the remarkable distinction of his career, Lord Chalmers was a very able man of the world, a personality of great discretion and reserve, whose general judgments and principles, and also his estimates of individuals, required to be inferred. But he could be emphatic in his recommendation,

and solid in his support, of those who had his approval: he would never have given support where he did not find worth. The social work of his early life and his subsequent liberalities to institutions and students were associated with an essential manliness, and his great shrewdness was accompanied by modesty as well as by a strong sense of the becoming. His appreciation of culinary art, of good wine and furniture approvable in style and period, was of the order of a discreet gentlemanly accomplishment.

Among the titles of honour bestowed upon him that which he treasured highest was the G.C.B. (1916): the C.B. came in 1900 and the K.C.B. in 1908. His Honorary Degrees were the LL.D. of Glasgow (1913), the D.Lit. of Oxford (1923), the LL.D. of Cambridge (1924), and the LL.D. of St. Andrews (1930). He was also an Irish Privy Councillor (1916).

Beside his widow he has left a daughter, widow of the late Sir Malcolm Stevenson, who served under him in Ceylon and subsequently was Governor of Cyprus. Through that daughter he has grandchildren, but, in consequence of the loss of his two sons in the War he leaves no heir to his Barony. His first wife (1888-1923) was Maud Mary, daughter of the late Mr. John George Pigott.

March, 1939.

F. W. THOMAS.

The Maharaja of Baroda

Many of the Society's members will have learned with much regret of the death of the Gaekwar of Baroda, an outstanding figure in Indian public life, who for sixty-three years had ruled with vigour and imagination the destinies of the Baroda State. This Journal is not the place to review the results of his broadminded statesmanship and his solicitude for the welfare and education of his subjects; but it is with a deep sense of obligation that one desires to record how greatly he had earned the gratitude of scholars by his support of works on Indian history, ethnology, philosophy, etc.,