

OBITUARY NOTICE

DR. JAMES BURGESS, C.I.E., LL.D., ETC.

THE death of Dr. James Burgess, on October 3rd, at 22 Seton Place, Edinburgh, where he had lived for many years, deprives the Royal Asiatic Society of one of its oldest and most distinguished members. His labours in the field of Indian antiquities and history, prolonged as they were for more than half a century, can never be forgotten, for he was in large measure the founder and father of modern Indian archæological science; while his monumental volumes will always remain standard works of reference.

James Burgess was born in 1832 at Kirkmahoe, Dumfriesshire, and was educated at Dumfries, Glasgow, and Edinburgh. He went to India in 1856, engaged for educational work at Calcutta, and was transferred to Bombay in 1861. Fascinated by the antiquarian treasures in the neighbourhood of Bombay, he began those historical and architectural studies which were destined in after life to bear such great fruit. In 1866 he became a member of the Royal Asiatic Society. In 1869 he published his first book, *The Temples of Satruñjaya*. In 1871 appeared his *Rock-cut Temples of Elephanta*. In 1868 he was appointed Secretary to the Bombay Geographical Society, and in 1872 he founded the well-known scientific journal, *The Indian Antiquary*, which he edited and published for thirteen years, transferring it then to Mr. Fleet and Sir Richard Temple. In 1873 he was appointed by the Government of Bombay to be head of the Archæological Survey of Western India. The news of this appointment was received with much gratification in scientific circles in Europe; for it was felt that historical and archæological

research had not been sufficiently encouraged up to that time by the authorities. Too much had been left to private hands, and though General Cunningham had been entrusted ten years previously with the duty of surveying the monuments of Northern India, no such concession had been made to the requirements of the West and South. Great things were expected of Burgess, and the world was not disappointed. He set to work with characteristic energy and on a well-considered system. In 1874 appeared a handsome volume, the *Report on the Antiquities of the Belgaum and Kalādgi Districts*, the issue of which made it abundantly clear that the Government had found the right man for the work in hand. This was followed by a second volume on *Kāthiāwād and Kachh* (1876), and this by another (1878) on *The Antiquities of the Bidar and Aurangabad Districts*. In 1883 his work on *The Buddhist Caves and their Inscriptions* was published, and shortly afterwards another on *The Cave-Temples of Elurā and other Brahmanical and Jaina Caves in Western India*. In 1887 yet another on *The Buddhist Stupas of Amarāvati and Jaggayyapēta*. These formed a series, in royal quarto, brought out in the highest style, printed on excellent paper, handsomely bound, richly illustrated, filled with information historical, antiquarian, and architectural, and constituting an important collection of authoritative works of reference.

Meanwhile, in 1881, Burgess had been appointed head of the Archæological Survey of Southern India. The last of the volumes mentioned above dealt with the great Buddhist remains on the Krishna River in the Madras Presidency, and two other publications of his dealt with South Indian antiquities, namely, *Notes on the Amarāvati Stupa* (1882) and *Tamil and Sanskrit Inscriptions* (1886), these being respectively vols. iii and iv of the Archæological Survey of South India. In 1880 he had published, jointly with the late James Fergusson, *The*

Cave-Temples of India, a most valuable and important work.

In 1886 Dr. Burgess was promoted to the post of Director-General of the Archæological Surveys of India, and took up his residence in Calcutta, supervising therefrom the work of research over the whole country. Here he planned one of the great works of his life, namely, the systematic and scholarly publication, with facsimiles, transliterations, and translations, of the ancient records on stone and copper-plate known to exist in great numbers all over India, but more especially in the south. The *Epigraphia Indica* took the place of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* projected ten years previously by General Cunningham, and supported by Mr. Fleet, whose treatment of the Gupta inscriptions was published as vol. iii of the series, the first volume being the *Inscriptions of Aśoka* by General Cunningham himself. Vol. ii, intended to contain the Indo-Scythian inscriptions, was entrusted to other hands and has never been issued. Burgess believed that it would be unwise to attempt to carry the series farther on Cunningham's plan, which was to collect, as far as possible, for appearance in one or more volumes, all the known inscriptions of a particular kingdom or dynasty or period. To attempt this, he wrote, "would necessitate infinite delays," and the result would still be imperfect. It seemed better to publish the records in order as received by the editor from the scholars employed in their examination, trusting to the index of each volume to facilitate reference. This plan has been carried out, and to-day there can hardly be anyone living who doubts its wisdom.

Sanctioned in 1888 the first volume of the *Epigraphia Indica*, containing articles and translations by Bühler, Kielhorn, Eggeling, Hultzsch, Fleet, and Jacobi, only made its appearance, owing to unavoidable delays caused by difficulties in the press, in 1892. The second volume was

published in 1894 equally under his editorship. (He had retired from the Government service in 1889.) The series has continued regularly to the present day, the fourteenth volume being now in hand; and it is safe to say that in addition to being of such immense use to scholars at home, no Government publication has had a greater or more far-reaching effect on the minds of the people of India themselves. These Indian historical records, as Burgess wrote in the preface to vol. i, "more so than those of any other country, are the real archives of the annals of its ancient history, the contemporaneous witnesses of the events and of the men whose deeds they hand down . . . They supply important [he might have said 'invaluable'] data bearing on the chronology, geography, religious systems, affiliations of families and dynasties, taxes, land-tenures, magistrates, customs, manners, organization of societies, languages, and systems of writings of ancient times. Hence the great need for collecting and publishing them, with the best translations and comments that modern scholarship can supply." His high hopes were justified. The *Epigraphia Indica* has thrown a flood of light on the buried history of the country, history which, practically unknown before, can now be mapped out almost as clearly as that of any of the nations of Europe; and it must have been a source of constant gratification to him in his declining years to find that the best brains in India have since been applying themselves to the study of the past of their country, and are now, particularly in Southern India, steadily collecting historical information from those infallible sources, the contemporaneous statements of their own ancestors. Other Governments, too, have observed the importance of the work, and we now have a parallel series of epigraphical publications in Burma, Ceylon, Mysore, and Travancore, doubtless to be followed by others in the principal native States.

It may perhaps be more appropriately said of James Burgess than of many others to whom the old epitaph has been applied—"Si monumentum quæris circumspice."

That he was a man of very exceptional powers of mind, by no means confined to one groove, may be gathered from the fact that, having devoted considerable time to the study of abstruse mathematical subjects, he was awarded, nine years after his retirement from Government service in India, the Keith Medal of the Royal Society of Edinburgh for a paper "On the Error-function Definite Integral".

Dr. Burgess in his last years suffered much from ill-health and heart-weakness, but in spite of this he was always ready to give his assistance to those working in the field of archæology. No one ever wrote to him for information, even up to the last few weeks of his life, without receiving such cordial and willing help as he could give for the solution of difficulties. Regarding his deep religious convictions and the quiet happiness of his home life it is not for me to attempt to draw aside a sacred veil.

As to his honours, he was a Companion of the Order of the Indian Empire (1885); Honorary LL.D. of Edinburgh University (1881); Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh; Hon. A.R.I.B.A.; Hon. Member of the Imperial Russian Archæological Society, the American Oriental Society, and the Royal Philosophical Society of Glasgow; Hon. Associate of the Finno-Ugrian Society; Hon. Correspondent of the Berlin Society of Anthropology and of the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences; and sometime Fellow of the University of Bombay. He was also a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, and a member of the Société Asiatique, Paris.

R. SEWELL.