

NOTES OF THE QUARTER.

(July, August, September, 1903.)

I. OBITUARY NOTICES.

Henry Cassels Kay.

BORN APRIL 21, 1827.

DIED JUNE 5, 1903.

MANY personal friends, as well as admirers of genuine scholarship, will have heard with profound regret of the unfortunate carriage accident which cost Mr. Henry Cassels Kay his life in the early summer of the present year. Few, however, even of his Kensington neighbours and acquaintances, could have realized in that calamity how distinguished an Orientalist had passed away from their midst. The patient research which had long characterized his voluntary labours in Arabic lore and literature could only be appreciated by workers in the same field; and even had such studies been of a nature to secure popular recognition, he would have been the last man to put forward his claims to distinction. But that he was eminently qualified to rank with the foremost of Arabists is a fact which may be readily demonstrated by the testimony of proficient contemporaries both at home and abroad.

Henry Cassels Kay was of Scotch descent, and was born in 1827 at Antwerp, where his father, a much respected merchant, had settled for purposes of business. His father having died at a comparatively early age, Henry, while little more than a boy, went to Egypt, where after a period

of trial and discouragement he obtained a clerkship in the house of Briggs & Co., the leading merchants of Alexandria, and speedily made his mark by dint of natural ability, diligence, and usefulness. But he was not a man to confine himself to one walk only, at a time when there was a legitimate call for the display of his talents in a wider range. For a trustworthy summary of his employment during the memorable period of the Indian Mutiny, we turn to that contained in an extract from the pages of our leading journal,¹ which supplies, as will be seen, information peculiarly its own:—

“In the year 1856 he was appointed the *Times* Correspondent in Alexandria—at that time a position of much importance, not because of Egyptian politics, but because all the *Times* news from Alexandria, China, and India was addressed to the Alexandria Correspondent, who was charged with making a summary of it, which he despatched by the fastest steamer to Constantinople, Cagliari, Malta, Trieste, or the nearest point from which it could be telegraphed to England. On the outbreak of the Indian Mutiny the position became of increased importance. Every effort was made by the *Times* to obtain information ahead of that received by the Government. Mr. Kay was authorized to engage a special engine from Cairo, to charter a steamer, and to send over a special courier. That he was in the main successful may be judged from the following extract from a letter addressed to him by Mr. Mowbray Morris:—‘Your plans for giving us the earliest intelligence brought by the last India and China mails were so good that we received the news, viâ Constantinople, on the 21st, four days in anticipation of the ordinary summary by Trieste. The Naples route also anticipated the Trieste by two days. For your activity and good judgment in this matter you deserve our thanks, and I am extremely well pleased to know that, just at the time that we require a good agent at an important point, we have had the good luck to secure one.’”

¹ The *Times*, 9th June, 1903.

In 1863—when the anxious days of the Indian Mutiny had been succeeded by a period of comparative repose, and competent officers of the Indian Government had seriously undertaken the establishment of telegraphic communication between Europe and India, irrespective of a Red Sea cable—Mr. Kay left the land of the Pharaohs and their less archaic successors, the Khedives, to become the London representative of Messrs. Briggs & Co., and subsequently returned to Egypt as a partner in the house of Tod, Rathbone, & Co. In 1875 he retired from business, and some years later, having settled in London, was appointed a director of the Bank of Egypt. He quitted one department of work, it is true, at a time of strong middle-age, but it was only to return to his own labour of love—one for which he was richly qualified by taste and inclination, and for which he had been incidentally trained by a useful, if hard experience—the study and *exploitation* of the marvellous Arabic language and literature.

In a recent number of the *Athenæum* allusion is made to Mr. Kay's contributions to the Royal Asiatic Society's Journal. Among them are noted:—"Al Kābirah and its Gates," "Inscriptions at Cairo and Burj uz Zafar," "Notes on the History of the Banu 'Oḡail," together with "Notes on Arabic Inscriptions in Egypt and at Damascus"—subjects which deeply interested him, and in the treatment of which his skill as an epigraphist found an excellent opportunity for exercise. But his chief performance, rightly styled by Mr. Lane-Poole his *magnum opus*, was 'Omārah's History of Yaman published in 1892, some ten years after he had joined the Asiatic Society, and while a member of its Council. This volume, described in detail as an early mediæval history of the country by Najm ad Din 'Omārah al Ḥakami, contains also the Abridged History of its Dynasties, by Ibn Khaldūn, and an Account of the Karmathians of Yaman, by Abu 'Abd Allah Bahā ad-Din al-Janadi, the original texts with translations and notes. If we dwell mainly on this valuable publication—here presented to the English reader in plain Anglo-Saxon with accompanying notices of 'Omārah's co-religionists and

cotemporaries—we do so because it is one which has attracted a considerable share of attention abroad and at home, and because it is the only work by which we can fairly judge of the capabilities of its interpreter. Indeed, it could hardly have been achieved at all but at a period of respite from worldly business. Mr. Kay's personal knowledge of Egypt and the Egyptians, to say nothing of the several languages current in Alexandria as well as on the shores of the Mediterranean generally, enabled him to hold converse with the more learned members of the Arab community besides the Turkish-speaking employés of the country to whom, in spite of a certain conventional education, the methods of native grammarians and lexicographers are not always intelligible. So that when appealed to as an authority in questions of native speech, he could be regarded as a reasonably safe referee. How important is the definition of local, in relation to book Arabic, must be well known to those of our civil and military officers who have taken up this subject as a serious study. Put, for instance, one who has passed his examination in Arabic at a classical Indian centre, and set him to exercise his interpretership among the wild tribes of Maskat and the Persian Gulf, and it will soon be seen how his so-called book knowledge qualifies, if it do not actually disqualify him, for the due performance of his duty.

What were the opinions of the profounder scholars on Mr. Kay's qualifications in literary Arabic may be judged by two or three extracts from letters addressed to Mrs. Kay, or her husband in his lifetime, by the bearers of well-known names at home and abroad. We have been kindly permitted to make use of them at discretion.

The eminent scholar Professor de Goeje, of Leyden University, writes that he admired in him (Kay) the true scholar who spared no pains to find the truth, and was faithful in little things as well as in important ones, knowing that small causes may have great effects. While his reading and interpretation of difficult passages were generally sound, he never hesitated to accept another version of a disputed passage when convinced that it was preferable, while if his

opinion were attacked on insufficient grounds he was well able to stand his own.

The following two extracts are from letters written by the late M. Henri Lavoix, of the Bibliothèque Nationale, and M. Sauvaire, author of the "Histoire de la Numismatique et de la Métrologie Musalmane," acknowledging receipt of the "History of Yaman," soon after publication. The first is valuable as testifying not only to Mr. Kay's ability as an Arabic scholar but also to his talent as a numismatist. He wrote:—

"Vous ne vous doutez pas, dans quelles circonstances heureuses votre livre m'est arrivé. Je viens de finir la description des monnaies Fathimites et Ayoubites du Cabinet. Les relations de l'Égypte avec le Yemen m'inquiétaient beaucoup. Vous voici avec une histoire des plus précieuses et la question est élucidée. Vous m'avez donc épargné beaucoup de recherches et vous devez voir par moi, combien votre livre est utile. Il est bien venu à bon moment."

M. Sauvaire said:—

"En revenant de voyage je trouve le superbe volume que vous avez eu la bonté de m'envoyer. Bien que je n'aie pas encore le temps de le lire, je m'empresse de vous remercier et de vous féliciter. Tout en coupant les feuilles du livre je n'ai pas résisté au désir de le parcourir, et ce que j'ai vu, m'a montré la parfaite loyauté de votre procédé scientifique, les consciencieuses recherches, les prudentes déductions, en un mot—l'amour de la vérité. Ceux qui ont le bonheur de vous connaître personnellement ne seront nullement surpris de retrouver ces qualités dans votre ouvrage. J'éprouve une grande joie de voir le résultat de votre labeur, et je pense que vous devez vous-même avoir une grande satisfaction. La droiture de votre esprit vous a fait trouver le vrai, même dans vos hypothèses, c'est ce que je conclus de quelques remarques sur Hamdan, où vous vous rencontrez avec le jugement général exprimé par Springer dans son nouveau travail dans le *Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenland Gesellschaft*."

To the above we would add the testimony of the well-known Professor of Arabic at the Dublin University, Mr. Stanley Lane-Poole:—

“Apart from his Arabic scholarship and knowledge of Arabic numismatics, Mr. Kay’s talent for Arabic epigraphy was remarkable. I should say that his chief delight was in Arabic inscriptions. I well remember, when he and I were together at Cairo in 1883, and used to wander about the streets together, it was impossible to induce him to pass a mediæval inscription until he had copied it into his note-book. It was then that he took the paper squeeze of the fine Kufic inscription over the Bāb-en-Naşr, from which the plaster cast was made which is now exhibited in the Victoria and Albert Museum at South Kensington. It was a work of great labour. Scaffoldings had to be erected, and Mr. Kay himself superintended every detail. He afterwards published the inscription in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. It was a notable service to Arabic epigraphy. I well recall our visit to the Great Pyramid in that year, in company with the Hon. George Curzon (now Lord Curzon of Kedleston) and the Malorties. Mr. Kay showed no special interest in the Pyramid, which he had doubtless often visited before, but I heard him calling to me from the King’s Chamber, ‘Do come and see this Arabic inscription.’ In my opinion he was the finest epigraphist in England, and his only rival abroad was my friend M. Max van Berchem, with whom he had a controversy on the Bāb-en-Naşr inscription.

“Mr. Kay was so modest and unassuming in matters of scholarship that one had some difficulty in realizing how thorough his work was. He always seemed to depreciate himself. Yet he was really a true scholar who worked for learning alone. His edition of ‘Omārah’s *Yaman* is proof enough. It would have been easy to make it an interesting literary narrative of an obscure chapter of history. But Mr. Kay took it from the scholar’s point of view. He cared nothing for popularity; he simply edited his texts and annotated them as far as historical research enabled

him. The result is a work which no student of Arabian history can afford to neglect. Apart from 'Omārah and his publication of Arabic inscriptions, Mr. Kay's chief contribution to Arabic historical research was his valuable essay on the 'Okaylīs, which is a standard authority. His articles on the Gates of Cairo and other archæological subjects connected with the city he loved are all of the first importance to students."

On first receipt of Mr. Kay's 'Omārah, Mr. Stanley Lane-Poole had written:—"It is a splendid piece of scholarly work in a little known branch of history. I have not only read it through, partly more than once, but already sent off a review of it; so I do not write without a fair acquaintance. . . . It will rank among the first class editions of Arabic texts in English, and you have every reason to be proud of it."

Mr. Kay formed a valuable collection of coins illustrative of the history of the Muḥammadan dynasties. He also took a deep interest in Arabic art and architecture, and though his tastes were those of the student rather than the collector of *objets d'art*, he found pleasure in fitting up a room in his house with ancient Oriental tiles, woodwork, etc., as a replica of a Cairene apartment of the old style, a work in which his friend Sir C. Purdon Clarke, of the South Kensington Museum, gave valuable assistance.

In 1859 he married Jane Anne, daughter of James Edmonstoune Aytoun, of Fife, and a cousin of Professor Aytoun; he leaves one son.

Member of the Council and serving on more than one committee of the Royal Asiatic Society, Mr. Kay was also a member of the Numismatic Society, and for some time a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. He was up to the time of his death a member of the Athenæum Club.

Acknowledgments are due to those who have kindly assisted the compiler in putting together this brief and imperfect memorial of a distinguished scholar and esteemed friend.

F. J. G.

London, 14th September, 1903.