

OBITUARY NOTICES

Albert von Le Coq

1860–1930

It was a melancholy coincidence which registered almost simultaneously the deaths of two of our most eminent honorary members, Albert von le Coq and F. W. K. Müller, the latter dying on 18th April, and the former on 21st April of this year. The labours of these two men had been in the same field of research during a period of thirty years, and it was nothing less than a blessed dispensation of Providence which brought them together for so long under the roof of the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin.

With the death of A. von Le Coq has died out the last branch of an old Berlin-Huguenot family. He received his early education at the *Französisches Gymnasium*. His father had been one of the first German merchants in China (Canton), and his son's youthful mind was always filled with dreams of the China he longed to see ; and it was no doubt in the hope that he would be sent there that he willingly obeyed his father's wishes, and entered the firm. And thus he lost 21 years of his life in a profession which in no way responded to his personal inclinations. For one year in London and six years in the United States he represented his father's firm, occupying, however, his leisure hours with the study of medicine. This he did because the father of his future wife had said he would never give his daughter to an unlearned man ; and it was to their utmost astonishment that his parents and his fiancée suddenly received a cablegram from New York announcing that he had taken his Doctorate in Medicine. He then came back to Germany and married. Twelve years passed ere his wife succeeded in persuading him—in his fortieth year—to become a “student”, and he never repented having taken that resolution.

He did not wish to make money, being happy in his small circumstances : nor did he wish to be in any position where he could not be wholly his own master. This was not to

be realized. Grünwedel and F. W. K. Müller soon discovered that there was something quite unusual in this man, who worked silently as a volunteer in the Museum, and as a student in the Oriental Seminar. Nobody knew anything about him, not even that he had been a merchant and that he was married.

Grünwedel one day introduced this little elderly student to the Director of the Royal Armoury, saying: "I present to you the only man in Berlin who can arrange for you the beautiful collection of Oriental costumes made by the Prince Friedrich Carl of Prussia." Von Le Coq gasped in astonishment: but took on the task, working only by night, and the labels in the Royal Armoury in his beautiful handwriting can still be seen to-day.

In 1901 he took part, as a volunteer, in the expedition to Zenjirli, as a result of which he wrote two volumes of "Kurdische Texte", which were printed (at his own expense) in the State Press on hand-made paper. It was this work which afterwards brought him the title of Dr.Phil. from the University of Kiel, to his greatest astonishment, and made the way free for him to "any appointment in the Prussian State". In March, 1914, when he returned for the last time from Turkestan, he became Director of the Asiatic Department. Without passing any examination, without even matriculating, without going to the University—though he had been for a short time in the Oriental Seminar—he reached the highest post possible for him in Prussia.

He hated being a bread winner, and resented the loss of time over routine and red tape which his position in the Museum imposed on him. But here, in the Museum, that strange community of work gradually developed which led to such amazingly fruitful results; and here the plans were laid for the four Prussian Turfan expeditions—inspired by the wonderful finds made in the deserts of Turkestan by Sven Hedin and Sir Aurel Stein. Von Le Coq took part in the last three of these expeditions, and was himself the leader of the second and fourth. He was really the life and soul of all four. He seemed to come unscathed out of the third expedi-

tion, in spite of the most strenuous journeys and the terrible conditions under which the excavations were carried out. He set out on the fourth expedition at the age of fifty-three, a hale and healthy man—and returned from it bent and aged in body but unbroken in spirit. Then came the war, and in 1917 his only child was killed on French soil. In spite of impaired health, the privations caused by the war, and this culminating blow from Fate, he pursued unceasingly and undeterred the goal he had set before him of arranging his wonderful finds in a setting worthy of their historical importance and their artistic value, with what fine results all the world may now see. Nor was this labour of love confined to the piecing together of the frescoes, sorting and arranging in historical order the specimens of plastic art: for he had a long uphill struggle to wage with the authorities, who were slow to give him the financial support necessary for the achievement of his ideal scheme. Such was his enthusiasm for the great new field of research which had been opened out by his discoveries, that he found time also to make himself an authority on the old Turkish languages, and contributed much to the elucidation of the Uighur texts which he had brought to Berlin, apart from the many handsome volumes he published with reproductions of the frescoes and statues. His main thesis was always the Hellenistic influence apparent in the arts of Middle and Eastern Asia. Fortunate were all of us who had the privilege of being taken over the ground floor of the Museum für Völkerkunde by von Le Coq himself. With that ever merry twinkle in his eye he would explain with a hundred passing quips the wonders of this newly unburied civilization. Truly in this Museum Albert von Le Coq has his worthy monument by which his name will always be held in memory. As a friend von Le Coq was without rival; even in the last year before his death he was always ready to come and crack a joke over a glass of beer, and no better company could be desired than his. As a correspondent he was of an age that is almost past, and he always delighted in telling his friends of the latest theories that had been propounded in the Museum. I remember on one

occasion receiving in Calcutta a post-card from him bearing only the words "Wir haben die Indo-Scythen!" What lay behind those words all the learned world knows to-day. With Albert von Le Coq such a light was extinguished as is rarely lit in the world.

E. DENISON ROSS.

F. W. K. Müller

1863-1930

Few readers of *The Times* or even of the German newspapers will have guessed what the death of F. W. K. Müller will mean to Science. Müller's greatness was only equalled by his modesty. He did not belong to those Orientalists whose name is world-wide. He seldom made a public appearance, either in lectures or in writing. In books of reference we shall find only that he was Director of the Berlin Museum for Ethnology, and a member of the Prussian Academy of Sciences; and yet, in historical researches connected with the Far East and Central Asia, he had no rival.

Like von Le Coq, he was a pupil of the *Französisches Gymnasium*. In 1883 he entered the University of Berlin and studied Theology and Orientalia. His Doctorate thesis dealt with the Chronology of the Syrian Simeon Sanqlawaya. On his appointment to the newly-founded Museum für Völkerkunde (1887), he at once turned to good account his combined knowledge of Languages and Religions, and was able to put into practice his principle that linguistic knowledge should go hand in hand with cultural training (*keine Sprachkenntnis ohne Sachkenntnis, keine Sachkenntnis ohne Sprachkenntnis*). In 1901 he was sent by the Prussian Ministry of Culture on a mission to China, Japan, and Korea, in order to collect objects for this Museum. His linguistic equipment covered an astonishingly wide range—Semitic, Indo-Germanian, Chinese, Japanese, Turkish, and Malay—but it was Chinese and Japanese which in later times engrossed his main attention: and his profound knowledge of the Chinese