

OBITUARY NOTICES

Professor E. J. Rapson

Edward James Rapson was born at Leicester on 12th May, 1861. His father,¹ Edward Rapson, was a schoolmaster, who subsequently took Holy Orders and, after holding various curacies, was appointed Vicar of West Bradley in Somerset. In 1879 the younger Edward went from Hereford Cathedral School to St. John's College, Cambridge, as a Pensioner, becoming later successively a Sizar and a Foundation Scholar. Placed in the First Class of the Classical Tripos in 1883, he turned to Indian studies. The enthusiasm and energy of John Peile, Master of Christ's College, had created the Chair of Sanskrit. Peile's unselfish refusal to be himself a candidate for the Chair had permitted the election of that great master, Edward Cowell, to be the first Professor of Sanskrit in Cambridge. It was under him that young Rapson, to be himself the third in succession, read for the Indian Languages Tripos, gaining the Brotherton Prize for Sanskrit in 1884 and being placed in the First Class of the Tripos in 1885. In the same year he was elected to the Hutchinson Studentship, and in 1886 he won the Le Bas Prize with an essay on "The Struggle between England and France for supremacy in India". His attention was thus early drawn to that side of Indian studies with which his name will always be especially associated, History. In 1887 he became a Fellow of his College.

In the same year, after serving for a short while as Assistant Librarian to the Indian Institute at Oxford, he entered the British Museum as an Assistant in the Department of Coins.

Although he was to become a most competent scholar and teacher of Sanskrit, with an exceedingly accurate, if not very wide knowledge, of its immense literature, Rapson now found in his new work the interests that were to be predominant throughout his life. For coins, which play so great a part in

¹ Several of the details given here I owe to Dr. L. D. Barnett's fine memoir in the *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. xxiii.

recovering the ancient history of India, led him to history ; while his mastery of the Kharoṣṭhī alphabet pointed him out as the one to whom the task of editing the documents brought back by Dr. (now Sir) Aurel Stein from Chinese Turkestan in 1901 should be entrusted.

In 1906 the death of Bendall, Cowell's successor, again left the Chair of Sanskrit vacant at Cambridge, and Rapson was elected into it, and shortly afterwards once again into a Fellowship at his own College.

There followed thirty years of quiet and fruitful research and of constant and faithful teaching. Both were marked by a meticulous thoroughness and accuracy. Everything was prepared with the most exacting completeness. He was never hurried, never lost patience. He was not, I think, an inspired teacher ; but his pupils learnt the great lesson from him of accurate scholarship that never rested till every fact was verified. Though students of Sanskrit were not numerous, his work of teaching was never light, and was often onerous. At Cambridge the professor of an Oriental language has the whole teaching of his subject in his own hands, and must himself give all the instruction required by his pupil from the most elementary to the most advanced stages. At times this used to mean for Rapson eighteen or twenty hours of teaching in the week. Yet no pupil was ever put off ; and the school-boy, as the present writer was when first invited to attend the Sanskrit classes in Mortimer Road, was welcomed equally with the most advanced and promising student.

Of the works belonging to this period there came first his *Ancient India from the Earliest Times to the First Century A.D.* Then, when the *Cambridge History of India* was planned by the University Press, Rapson was the obvious editor for its first two volumes, to which Sir Richard Burn, who succeeds to his task, will refer below. The Great War, which delayed the publication of the History, found Rapson, although by now passed his eleventh lustrum, ready to take his part, and at least one of his pupils returned on leave from the

front to report to his old professor as Assistant Adjutant at the Headquarters of the 2nd Cambridgeshire Regiment.

He was, however, still able to give time to his professorial work, and in 1920 the Clarendon Press published the first volume of *Kharoṣṭhī Inscriptions discovered by Sir M. A. Stein in Chinese Turkestan*, which he had edited in collaboration with A. M. Boyer and E. Senart. The same editors produced Volume II in 1927, and Volume III followed in 1929, edited by Rapson and his pupil Professor P. Noble.

These Inscriptions or Documents (for they are mostly written on wooden tablets) are not only of the highest importance for the history of this part of Central Asia, but they present a picture of contemporary life in the third century A.D., which has scarcely any parallel in Indian documents. On the linguistic side their interest is supreme; for some of them are couched in a form of Middle Indo-Aryan brought into Central Asia probably under the Kuṣāṇa emperors. This language, strongly conservative like other dialects of the north-west of India on the phonetic side,¹ displays a far-reaching development of the final syllable and a simplification and normalization of grammatical forms, of which the more literary dialects of Prākṛit, despite their greater phonetic evolution, give us little indication. They are thus a document of the highest importance in the long history of the development of Vedic Sanskrit into the modern languages of to-day.

Although Rapson did not concern himself greatly with their linguistic implications, the careful accuracy with which he transliterated the documents, the splendid appendices of the third volume, and the complete index of words, made of this first edition a mine of accurate information and a firm foundation on which other scholars have already built and will continue to build for many years to come. It was an especial pleasure to Rapson that he saw before his death the publication

¹ For example it retained unassimilated groups of consonants such as *ṛt*, assimilated 500 years earlier even in the Shāhbāzgarhī and Mānsehrā Inscriptions of Aśoka and remaining to the present day only in one small enclave of the Hindu Kush in the Khowar of Chitral.

of a work by another pupil of his, Dr. T. Burrow, on the phonology and grammar of this language. It is a proof of the growing interest and importance of the studies based on Rapson's *editio princeps* that whereas in the *Volume of Indian Studies*, offered to him on his seventieth birthday at the School of Oriental Studies by scholars from all over the world, there was only one article devoted to the Documents, in a similar volume of the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, offered five years later to Sir George Grierson, six articles dealt with one or other aspect of the Documents.

In 1902 he had married Ellen Daisy Allen, and though within a few years of this date to the time of her death in 1921 Mrs. Rapson was an invalid constantly enduring pain and confined to the couch in their drawing-room, many generations of undergraduates remember with warm gratitude the hospitality she and her husband used to extend to them in their house in Mortimer Road.

In 1936, hoping that he would gain the leisure necessary to complete the work of editing Volume II of the *Cambridge History of India*, he resigned the Chair he had occupied for thirty years. A year later, on the 3rd of October, 1937, he died suddenly of a cerebral hæmorrhage. It was a singularly happy end. He left pupils carrying on the tradition of his own work; he saw the Chair he had occupied so long, worthily filled; he himself was engaged to the very last in work that had always held for him the most intense interest; and death, when it came, came suddenly and painlessly within the precincts of his own loved College.

R. L. TURNER.

In the field of numismatics Rapson's work is distinguished by accuracy and completeness. His first book on the subject is "Indian Coins" in Bühler's *Grundriss* (1897) which summarizes what was then known of Indian numismatics for the period before the Muslim conquest of northern India. It

is an admirable guide to the subject and is specially valuable for its bibliographical references.

In 1908, after he had left the Museum, was published his *Catalogue of the Coins of the Andhra Dynasty, the Western Satraps, the Traikūṭaka Dynasty and the "Bodhi" Dynasty*, in the British Museum. A few years earlier (*ZDMG.*, 1902, 1093) Vincent Smith had grappled with the difficult problems of the Andhra Dynasty and coinage, and in this catalogue Rapson amplified the story. Rapson himself had previously published studies of the coins of the Western Satraps, editing a paper on the subject by Bhagavanlal Indrajī in *JRAS.*, 1890, and making a further original contribution in 1899. The catalogue is an excellent piece of work which still remains the standard account of the dynasty.

His three chapters in *Cambridge History of India*, vol. i, on (xxi) Indian Native States after the period of the Maurya Dynasty, (xxii) on the successors of Alexander the Great, and (xxiii) on the Scythian and Parthian invaders, are models of the treatment of numismatic material for history where written records are scanty or fail completely.

In addition to these finished studies he published a number of interesting papers in the *Numismatic Chronicle*, in the *Journal*, and in *Corolla Numismatica*, on the Gupta coins in the Bodleian and on rare or inedited coins and seals in the British Museum and in private collections.

While editing the Cambridge History Rapson published a little book on *Ancient India* (1914) which is an excellent primer on the subject, with valuable notes on topography. His work as editor of vol. i, which appeared in 1922, is marked by all the special qualities which distinguished him. The second volume on Medieval India was planned by him and much work had been done by him on the chapters written by other contributors. His untimely death before he had completed all the chapters which he intended to write himself has caused a great loss to the work.

R. BURN.