

## OBITUARY NOTICES

---

### PROFESSOR PISCHEL

LAST Christmas brought the tidings of Richard Pischel's death in Madras. It was a sad message to many, for few scholars have been more deeply and widely admired than he. Like his friend Georg Bühler, whom he resembled in his genius and his studies, he perished by a tragic fate in the ripe maturity of his powers. As in keen and profound learning he stood with Kielhorn at the head of contemporary Sanskritists, so by his personal character he wielded an almost unequalled influence over them. A sincere and helpful friend, a scholar as fearless in asserting the cause of truth as he was vigorous and stimulating in his exposition of it, and withal a simple and modest gentleman, he has left behind him a vacant place that can never be filled and a memory that can never be effaced.

Richard Pischel was born in Breslau fifty-nine years ago. In the University of his native town he studied Sanskrit under Stenzler, a sound scholar and a man of modest and kindly character. The master and the disciple were thus united by a bond of close sympathy, and after Stenzler's death in 1887 his popular *Elementarbuch der Sanskritsprache* was carried by Pischel through three later editions. In 1870 appeared Pischel's doctoral dissertation in the University of Breslau, *De Kālidāsaē Çākuntalī Recensionibus*, a vigorous and able proof of the superior authenticity of the despised Bengali recension of the famous drama. His studies were interrupted by the French War, after which he passed some time in the libraries of England. In 1874 he "habilitated" as Docent in the University of Breslau with a dissertation *De*

*Grammaticis Prâcriticis*, a valuable preliminary study on the subject in which later he became the acknowledged *maestro di color che sanno*. In 1875 he was called to occupy the newly created Chair of Sanskrit and Comparative Philology at Kiel. In the same year appeared from his pen *Die Recensionen der Çakuntalâ*, an effective reply to the great Albrecht Weber's criticisms upon his championship of the Bengali recension, and likewise a critical edition of Kâlidâsa's *Vikramorvaśiya*, based upon Dravidian manuscripts, which formed a "Nachtrag" to the *Monatsbericht* of the Prussian Akademie der Wissenschaften for October, 1875. His mastery of the classical *belles lettres* was finally shown by his edition of the *Śākuntala* in 1877. His studies of the Prakrit dialects next bore fruit in his fine annotated edition of *Hemacandra's Grammatik der Prâkritsprachen* (2 parts, Halle, 1877–80), and in his text of the same author's *Deśinamālā*, which formed the first part of an edition of this work projected, but unhappily never completed, by him and his friend Bühler (Bombay, 1880). Together with Prakrit he worked upon Pali, and one of the first-fruits of this activity was an edition and translation of the *Assalāyana Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, likewise published in 1880, which was followed by an edition of the *Therigāthā* in the series of the Pali Text Society (1883). Meanwhile he continued to labour with unflagging energy upon the classical Sanskrit literature, and in 1886 he published annotated texts of two standard treatises upon the Hindu *Ars Poetica*, *Rudrata's Śṛṅgāra-tilaka* and *Ruyyaka's Sahṛdayalīlā*.

He was 36 years of age when he received a call to the Chair of Sanskrit at the great University of Halle. Soon after his arrival there he set himself to a task of the first magnitude, that of establishing Vedic studies upon a sound philological basis. In 1889 was issued the first volume of the now famous *Vedische Studien*, a series

of essays by Pischel and Geldner upon the interpretation of single hymns, phrases, and words of the Ṛgveda. The two friends started from a principle which in the eyes of the dominant school was a hopeless and senseless heresy. This doctrine was, in short, that the Vedas, their language, their theology, and their moral ideas, must be interpreted from later Hindu literature. "India for the Indians" was a maxim with Pischel, not because he was an uncritical admirer of things Indian, but because he and Geldner recognized that the gulf between the earliest culture of the European Aryans and that of the Vedic age was one which no amount of phonetic equations could bridge. Vedic culture, they rightly maintained, was the result of a long previous development, specifically Indian in character, and the key to the understanding of Vedic literature is to be found in the critical analysis of the post-Vedic literature which Roth and his school had contemptuously rejected from their purview. With brilliant skill and ingenuity the two friends analyzed word after word and phrase after phrase of the Ṛgveda, and showed how beneath them lay ideas which had subsequently found expression in the Brāhmaṇas, the later religious handbooks, the epics, and even the *belles lettres* of the classical period. This ruthless attack upon cherished prejudices naturally raised a storm of controversy. But now, as the dust of battle is settling down, scholars are beginning to realize the truth of the fundamental principle for which Pischel and Geldner contended, that the Veda must be interpreted in the light of Hinduism, the vast and many-sided native culture of India, of which the Veda is the earliest literary monument.

In 1900 appeared Pischel's masterwork. Almost from the beginning of his career he had given close attention to the numerous Prakrit dialects of India, and he had attained uncontested supremacy in this department. The vast materials which he had gathered through many years

of patient and exact research were now published in his *Grammatik der Prakritsprachen*, forming part viii in the first volume of the *Grundriss der Indo-arischen Philologie und Altertumskunde*. In every respect it was a work of the first order.

In Halle Pischel remained until 1902. In that year the death of Albrecht Weber made vacant the professorship in Berlin, and the Prussian Government summoned to fill his place his former opponent, the scholar who, together with erudition equal to that of Weber, possessed in a high degree the qualities that Weber had most strikingly lacked. The wisdom of this choice was proved by its results. Pischel brought, so to speak, a stream of fresh air into the close exotic atmosphere of the Sanskrit *Kollegs*, and students flocked in unexampled numbers to gather scientific inspiration from him. In addition to his professional labours in Berlin, he became one of the guiding spirits in the committee directing the explorations in Turkestan, and edited with his usual skill in the *Sitzungsberichte* of the Akademie some of the precious relics of Buddhist literature recovered by them from that region. But this by no means exhausted his interests and energies. His contributions to learned periodicals, especially to that of the Berlin Akademie, continued to be many and various. One of his hobbies was the language of the gipsies, to which he was led by his studies in the Indian Prakrits. In the *Sitzungsberichte* of the Akademie for April 30 of last year he published a brilliant essay on the idiom *Ins Gras beißen* and its analogues in Indian literature. In modern German this phrase is a synonym for death. It was Pischel's last work.

Early in 1908 the Government of India paid him a well-merited honour by inviting him to deliver a course of lectures on the Prakrits before an audience of native scholars in Calcutta. Pischel, who knew the heart of India so well, had never visited the land. He accepted

the invitation with joy, and embarked in November. Ominous symptoms of disease began to show themselves during the voyage. When he reached Ceylon he seemed to have somewhat recovered, and he began his journey northwards hopefully; but on the way the malady increased in violence, and at Christmas he died in Madras.

In Pischel the Greek ideal of the *Philologos* was perfectly realized. In his knowledge of the classical languages of India he was equalled by few, and surpassed only by Kielhorn. But he valued language only as a vehicle of thought. He conceived Hindu literature as the expression of Hindu culture, with an organic unity underlying its infinite diversity, and he loved to trace, with the precision of the biologist, the growth of its constituent ideas through their historical evolution up to their perfect expression in classical literature. His genius was synthetic; he gathered masses of facts and was led by them to unprejudiced conclusions. In his æsthetic and moral criticism he judged Hindu literature justly by its own canons, not by the possibly higher, but certainly incommensurate, standards of the West. And he was far more than an academic. By his wide interests, his genial personality, his clear grasp of his subject, and his power of luminous exposition, he was able to impress the significance of Indian studies upon wider circles than those of the University. He has gone from us, but his influence will long live: *θνήσκειν μὴ λέγε τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς.*

L. D. BARNETT.