

Professor Basil Hall Chamberlain

It is with deep regret that we have to record the death at Geneva on the 15th of February of Professor Basil Hall Chamberlain.

A son of the late Vice-Admiral William Chamberlain and a grandson of Captain Basil Hall, the navigator, after whom he was named, he was born at Southsea on the 18th October, 1850. From childhood he was delicate, with a weak constitution, and it was perhaps for this reason that his earlier education in England was left in the hands of private tutors. At a later age he was sent abroad to the Continent to learn French and German, and when, after some years spent in French lycées, he returned to England with his education finally completed he was given a post in the house of Barings. But work on an office stool proved quickly unsuitable and, his health breaking down, he left home on a prolonged voyage. It was in the course of this that, after various wanderings, he eventually, in 1873, reached the shores of Japan, a country which was henceforth to be his real home for nearly forty years.

At the moment of his arrival enthusiasm for the learning and the things of the West was intense and general; and young Chamberlain, already an accomplished classical scholar and possessed of an exceptionally intimate knowledge of French and German, had no difficulty in obtaining an appointment as teacher of English in the newly founded Imperial Naval Academy. A linguist by predestination, he at once set himself to the study of Japanese; and, mastering its initial difficulties with exceptional ease, he quickly passed from the stage of student to that of scholar and authority. In 1880 the first fruits of his industry appeared in the shape of a volume on the *Classical Poetry of Japan*. This was followed in 1886 by a *Romanized Japanese Reader* and a *Simplified Grammar of the Japanese Language*, modern written style; then came in quick succession a *Translation of the Kojiki, with Commentary*, and his *Handbook of Colloquial Japanese*. The last and Aston's slimmer and more concise work on the same subject were for years the standard textbooks for English students of the language. In the meanwhile, he was also a constant contributor of learned papers to the *Journals of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, an association founded in 1872 under foreign auspices for purposes of research. In 1890 he published *Things Japanese*, a vademecum of miscellaneous information which enjoyed a wide popularity and proved invaluable to serious student and casual globe-trotter alike. Next he brought out, in collaboration with the late Mr. W. B.

Mason, a revised and up-to-date edition of *Murrays' Guide Book to Japan*, based on the singularly comprehensive and learned work, compiled originally by Satow and Hawes. Long before this he had severed his connection with the Naval Academy; but in recognition of his services in the field of linguistic knowledge he had been subsequently appointed Professor of Philology in the Imperial University of Tokyo. In 1895 he published a Grammar of the Luchuan Language; in 1902 he wrote for the Asiatic Society of Japan a paper on "Bashō, and the Japanese Epigram"; and in 1905 appeared his *Moji no Shirube—a Practical Introduction to the Study of Japanese Writing*, a sumptuous and beautifully printed work destined to lighten the labours of generations of unfortunate students. His paper on "Bashō and the Japanese Epigram", in the opinion of some the most brilliant and perfect piece of work that ever came from his pen, was subsequently published in book form in combination with his earlier volume on Japanese poetry. His last contribution in the field of Japanese knowledge was a small pamphlet entitled *The Invention of a New Religion*, an arresting essay but unpalatable to many Japanese.

Long before this, however, ill-health and poor eyesight, the latter doubtless aggravated by the strain of reading the Chinese ideograph, had made him a semi-invalid; and, never a frequenter of the fashionable world in Tokyo, he now lived in practical retirement, accessible only to his more intimate friends. Finally, in 1911, he decided to leave the country and returned to Europe, settling ultimately at Geneva. There, having laid aside for good the work which had occupied him for so many years, he turned to the study of French literature later embodying the results of his labours in a work entitled *Eight Centuries of French Poetry*. His last book appeared as late as 1933 and is called *Encore est vive la Souris*, a title taken from a poem of Charles of Orléans in which the latter protested against rumours that he was dead, Chamberlain having seen himself similarly referred to.

He was a great scholar and a great linguist in the true sense of the term, a trained philologist, with a profound knowledge of the languages of the Far East and of the West alike, gifted with amazing powers of intellectual application, and a master of style, whether the medium of expression was French or English, gentle and retiring in manner and address, but accessible always to the humble student in search of advice or assistance.

Thus has left the stage one of the greatest authorities on Japan and the Japanese language that this country has produced.

HAROLD PARLETT.