S. H. BUTCHER

By LORD REAY

(FIRST PRESIDENT OF THE ACADEMY)

At a Meeting of the Fellows on January 18, 1911

We meet to-day under the shadow of the great loss we have sustained. Our late President ever since its creation took the deepest interest in the fortunes of our Academy. A scholar of the highest distinction, his study of the humanities lent him a charm which was purely humane, and endeared him to all who came in contact with him.

'In his own life and work he illustrates his conception of *humanitas* as the refining influence of Literature and Art . . .': these words applied by your first President to the late Sir Richard Jebb he now recalls on the passing away of one who was universally accepted as an ideal representative of English humanism in the noblest and fullest sense of the word.

A Fellow of the Academy from the very beginning, Mr. Butcher had the right view of the Academy's purposes, functions, possibilities, and all that pertained to its dignity. As President, he did much during the all too short period of his tenure of office to advance that corporate organization of Learning in all its branches for which the Academy was founded. His interests were manifold; within and without the Academy many looked on him as the very embodiment of what may be styled 'the tradition of English Classical Scholarship'. With him accuracy, minute learning, patient investigation, the search for truth, went in happiest conjunction with grace of style —the quest for beauty.

A masterly address on 'Tennyson' delivered in October 1909, when he entered on the Presidentship, attracted much attention as a kind of object-lesson in the art of criticism; it illustrated the main topic of his Presidential Address, the relation of the Academy to English Literature.

In June last he took as his theme the relation of the Academy to Science, in the ordinary acceptation of the word. 'All the Sciences, and indeed all the Arts on the historical side,' he maintained, 'have points of contact with the British Academy, and here is a promising field for opening up relations with other corporate bodies at home as well as for international co-operation.'

He strongly advocated the claims of the Academy, and endeavoured in many ways, known only to a very few of those concerned, to help forward its interest: he clearly voiced the conviction that the denial of State support to organize Learning outside the sphere of the physical Sciences tends to lower the intellectual dignity of Great Britain in international relations.

His was a just pride in the office to which his Fellow members of the Academy had appointed him; they chose him in the hope that for some years to come he would guide its course. All too soon he has joined the noble group whose loss the Academy has deep cause to deplore—Acton, Sidgwick, Jebb, Lecky, Leslie Stephen, Caird, Monro, Maitland—to name a few only of those who first manned the vessel. In June last for the first time we reached our maximum limit of 100; before the year closed our ranks have become depleted —Furnivall, Peile, Mayor, one after the other, passed from us, all of them linked to the Academy by many ties; each went to his rest after the fullness of life's harvest, though each could ill be spared. Our President at a comparatively young age, when so much vigorous activity seemed to be in store for him, was struck down as it were in the very midst of life. He has left behind him a noble record, and for us there is some comfort at least in the knowledge that we had chosen him as our Chief. The death of Jebb comes to our mind in this time of our grievous loss, for many regarded Butcher as heir to Jebb in the domain of learning and ideals.

He had a single-minded and simple nature, and the *simplex sigillum veri* was fully applicable to him. There was a higher influence which made itself felt. He was a devout Christian. His strength of character, of convictions, was derived from his faith in principles which are immutable. He advocated a cause strenuously, but he never roused any animosity. He never made use of invective, and his style was always persuasive. He felt deeply, and his transparent sincerity raised the tone of any controversy in which he was engaged. His knowledge of the University systems of England, Scotland, and Ireland was unrivalled, and the Universities owe him a debt of lasting gratitude for his life-long endeavour to improve their condition and to widen their sphere of usefulness. In a speech

delivered at the Mansion House on June 30, 1909, he gave this admirable definition of a liberal education :—

'What do we mean by a liberal education? The phrase was invented by the Greeks, and the Greek idea is still the true idea of it. It is the idea of an education that is worthy of a freeman, and a fit preparation for the calling of a citizen ; one that is in some senses disinterested, that is to say, that it is not directed to immediate gain, or to mere material ends. A liberal education does indeed fit a man for the practical requirements of afterlife, but any technical skill that is produced is merely a by-product of the process, and not the direct end. The direct end is to call out the free activities, both of mind and of body, and to produce capable citizens. And let me say with all emphasis that there is a deep and ineffaceable distinction between education and apprenticeship, between the training of a faculty and the preparation for a trade, between the discipline of the will and the sharpening of the wits.'

His gifts were so varied that he was pre-eminently fit to be the President of a British Academy and to discharge the responsible duties of the office. We were all looking forward with the utmost confidence to his guidance. His life was devoted to the highest interests of the United Kingdom. He leaves us an example of patriotism and conscientious adaptation of high ideals in many fields of civic activity.

His memory is that of a unique personality. In my Address, to which I have already alluded, I mentioned that Jebb once instanced in illustration of the deepening influences of Scholarship on life, the famous story of how the dying English statesman quoted Sarpedon's words to Glaucus to one who, seeing his condition, wished to defer the task of the day, repeating the last word of the line again and again: '*ἴομεν*' *let us go forward.* Such a message comes to us again from our departed friend—'*ἴομεν*' *let us go forward.*

S. H. BUTCHER

1850–1910

At the close of the year 1910 the society of British learning and letters lost a unique figure, one of the most beneficent and attractive men by whom in recent times it has been adorned. Henry Butcher, late President of the British Academy, had a character and position to which no sufficient justice can be done in the common forms of an obituary record. His peculiar distinction lay not so much in achievements literary or political, as in his personality, a singularly harmonious union of qualities, moral, intellectual, and even physical, by which his mere presence and existence became a charm, an encouragement, and an example.

The ordinary proofs of distinction he possessed, indeed, in ample measure. Among a mass of important functions, which he was discharging at the end of his career, it is sufficient to mention, in addition to his place in the British Academy, that he was Member of Parliament for the University of Cambridge, and a Trustee of the British Museum. His published works, though not voluminous, include one at least—an exposition of Aristotle's *Poetics*—which has been stamped with every kind of approval, and is a permanent addition to the classical library. His public services to the higher education, especially in connexion with the reform of the Scottish Universities and the recent creation of a new University in Ireland, are great and notorious.

But these things were not the whole of his performance, nor the most important part. They would not in themselves account for what was most remarkable in the public impression produced by the news of his death. Many proofs might be cited that this event was felt as a personal loss by people whose interest in academic affairs was slight, and their concern with philosophy little or nothing, by some whose acquaintance with Butcher himself was limited to an occasional or single sight and hearing upon a platform. However slight the acquaintance, there would remain a remembrance of it, and the desire for more. He seemed to be the very type of cultivated humanity, an assurance of its reality and value.

It has been remarked, by foreign critics of this country, that in the English use of the words *scholar* and *scholarship* there is something which could hardly be represented in other languages. The terms convey, perhaps, a less definite mental attribution (and certainly a stronger suggestion of character) than belongs to any like term elsewhere. And it seems to be true that, however we may come short of realizing the conception in our prevalent type, we have retained, with some firmness, the notion at least, the idea, derived from Graeco-Roman culture, of the *ingenuas didicisse fideliter artes*; we believe at least that the 'scholar' should be more humane than others, more quick in appreciative interest, more facile of intercourse, gentler, more social, better, in short, as a man. To such a demand, at all events, it was that Henry Butcher responded, as fully, perhaps, as the conditions of humanity allow, and certainly to a degree seldom seen.

His figure was graceful, his face was noble and impressive without any touch of severity. Still more remarkable were his voice and speech. Here indeed, if in any particular trait, might perhaps have been placed, by a close observer, the essence and differential mark of his manner. His command of the English language, for every practical purpose, might be recommended as a model of perfection, correct, simple, flexible, subtle where subtlety was in place, and all without the least suspicion of constraint or unnatural effort. In conversation he was ready to take his theme from his company. His own mind by preference ran upon subjects of some gravity, especially social and political topics; but he was ready (if the expression is not too blunt) for every one; and of engrossing the conversation, or any like offence, he was incapable. Formal jest he affected little, and epigram hardly at all; but whatever the theme, there went with his eagerness a certain playfulness and enjoyment, the fruit and evidence of his pleasure in human fellowship. He talked well, but not too well, never as if for effect. And his wide experience of men made him rich in humorous and original illustration.

His whole career, his time and labour given without stint to the improvement and diffusion of culture, are the best proof that he really had the generous sentiments and the high public spirit, of which such manners should be the sign. But no one who saw and heard him could have suspected otherwise. His sincerity was visible, and it was plain that what he acted was his character; and if, as doubtless is the truth, character, feeling, principle, are themselves more important than the translation of them into manners, it is also true that the great social virtues would be commoner than they are, if the habit of so translating them, and the self-culture necessary for the formation

of such a habit, could be communicated to the average man in a measure at all approaching what was natural to Butcher. And meanwhile the best pleasures of life would be indefinitely enhanced. To the achievement of these ends he was a living incentive, and his memory should be an incentive still.

His career had few episodes and a consistent unity. In his family, as in his temper, there was a blend of English and Irish; but by both parents, Samuel Butcher and Mary Leahy, he was an Irishman. Samuel Henry, their eldest son, was born on April 26, 1850, at Dublin, his father (afterwards Bishop of Meath) being then Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Trinity College. He was educated chiefly in England, at Marlborough from 1864, and at Trinity College, Cambridge, from 1869 to 1873, in which year he was Senior Classic. In 1874 he was elected a Fellow of his College, and there he resided and taught until the vacation of his fellowship by marriage (to Rose Chenevix Trench, daughter of the Archbishop of Dublin) in 1876. Dr. Bradley, his head master at Marlborough, was now Master of University College, Oxford, and procured his appointment to a tutorial fellowship there. At Oxford, as one of the staff of University College, Butcher lived, and worked with great success, from 1876 to 1882, when he obtained the important post of Greek Professor in the University of Edinburgh. This he held for twenty-one years, residing chiefly, of course, at Edinburgh, but often at a house which he possessed near Killarney. In 1902 his wife died, and in the following year he resigned his professorship and removed to London. By this time he had achieved a very great reputation, not only in the ordinary professional work of a writer and teacher, but also in all kinds of social and public business connected with the higher education.

In particular he had taken a leading part, not only in the government of the University of Edinburgh, but also, as a Commissioner and otherwise, in the reform of the Scottish Universities under the Act of 1889, as he afterwards did in the foundation of the new University of Ireland. He had also gained an immense acquaintance and personal touch with things, classes, and men concerned, directly or indirectly, in our academic system or systems. The circumstances of his life had given him in Ireland, England, and Scotland a singular combination of opportunities for observation. His ceaseless industry and keen interest in all connexions of men—he was, for one thing, an untiring correspondent—enabled him to use these opportunities to the utmost. And his fascinating personality—to which at every point it is essential to recur—the genuine pleasure which he took and gave in all human intercourse, from the slightest to the deepest,

inspired with life what, in other management, might have been a mere web of knowledge. His advice, help, and judgement were more and more sought, by men and corporations, in matters academical, and during the last twenty years of his life few or none had more weight in this department than he.

Resident in London from 1903, and nominally without occupation, he had soon as much work, or more, than ever, in connexion with such enterprises as the Hellenic Society, the Classical Association, and others too numerous to mention. To the Classical Association, originated by others, he gave invaluable assistance, and was a mainspring of its development and success.

Of the British Academy he was an original member, and in 1909 was chosen President. He delivered presidential addresses in 1909—when his principal topic was the anniversary of the death of Tennyson—and in 1910, upon the general scope and purpose of the Academy itself. The latter, in particular, though both are interesting, may be noticed as a specimen of his range and judgement. As a chairman for purposes of business he was admirably qualified by courtesy, dexterity, and patience almost in excess; and for purposes of state or ceremony it would be hard to conceive his superior.

Though he described himself, in addressing the Academy as President, as 'not an international person', he did, in fact, receive many proofs of admiration from abroad, and, in particular, an honorary degree from the University of Harvard, where in 1904 he delivered the course of lectures afterwards published.

But the most practically important accession to his influence and labours was his election in 1906, upon the death of Sir R. C. Jebb, as Member of Parliament for the University of Cambridge. With his views and feelings, it was a matter of course that he should be deeply interested in politics, especially in a time when at so many points education has been the subject of political action and debate; and his patriotism demanded that he should put his convictions in practice. At Edinburgh, in Ireland, and elsewhere, he had always been active in public affairs. Many causes combined to make him a Conservative, not least, perhaps, his profound and even painful interest in the preservation of that traditional culture, to which he himself was so deeply indebted. To consider him as a politician hardly belongs to this place. He made his mark in the House of Commons, and commanded both confidence and respect. For the representation of a University his fitness may fairly be described as ideal.

His strenuous life had not apparently impaired his strength, and his age still left a prospect of many years' activity, when in October,

1910, after a vacation which had not been restorative, he suddenly collapsed. The stroke was not immediately fatal; but he made no substantial recovery, and died, in London, on December 29, 1910.

Of his literary legacy, his published work, the most permanent part, as it will probably prove, is the treatise above mentioned, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*; and of this, for that reason, nothing need here be said. His prose translation of the *Odyssey*, in collaboration with Mr. Andrew Lang, also needs no commendation to sustain its popularity. But it may be worth while to direct attention to the great interest, from the present point of view and perhaps also for historical purposes, of the essays collected under the title *Some Aspects of the Greek Genius*, and of the *Harvard Lectures*. Nowhere will be found a more just appreciation of those qualities—freshness, flexibility, spontaneity—which belong to the Greek language and literature almost alone among instruments of education; nowhere a more sympathetic reading of the Hellenic lessons—the harmonious cultivation of all the individual powers, and the direction of those powers towards a more humane life and a closer intercourse of thought. That grave and strenuous Hellenism, wholly without affectation, which entered for so large a part into the religion of the last century, is perhaps nowhere better represented. As personal relics of the author, these books surpass the more elaborate treatise; they afford glimpses, all too few and imperfect, of the mixed humour and gravity, the delicate adjustment of language, which were so remarkable in his speeches and conversation. For specimens may be recommended two essays in the earlier volume (*Some Aspects, &c.*), *The Written and the Spoken Word*, and *The Melancholy of the Greeks*. Both exhibit essential elements in Butcher's mind; the second, in particular, contains some criticism not the less fine because quite unpretentious.

The text of Demosthenes in the Oxford Series remains unfinished and will be completed by another hand. What is done represents, of course, a vast amount of invisible labour. With this, a small book, a brief history and account of *Demosthenes*, published in 1881, is almost all that perpetuates an exceedingly rare intelligence of the Greek orators. But, since the author's time was filled with work that could not be spared, there is nothing to regret but that his life could not be spent twice.

Though Butcher's professional studies, after the days of pupilage, were turned—and this by no accident—almost entirely to Greek, it should not be forgotten that he was an exquisite Latinist, writing the language, both prose and verse, with a wonderful union of correctness to standard with the flavour of individual distinction. If any literature,

composed in a language not rooted in living speech, can be itself a thing of life and a new creation, this praise may be given to Butcher's poetry in Latin hexameters. The appreciation of such art has diminished, and is perhaps not likely to increase. Nevertheless, there are those ~~who~~ find pleasure in it; and if there remain any materials for a volume or volumes of Butcher's speeches, essays, or other matter, the collection should certainly preserve all that can be found of his very beautiful verses.

Addressing the Academy as President, and half humorously depreciating his claims to such a position, he described himself as so far from possessing many languages that he could with difficulty make himself intelligible in one. To those who knew his readiness of delivery in formal speaking, his unique and graceful facility in conversation, and the rapid production of his lucid and agreeable letters, such a criticism might seem to have no possible application. Yet Butcher was the last man to adopt a commonplace of apology, or any commonplace form, merely as a convention and without meaning. And, upon a moment's reflection, no one familiar with his thinking will miss the real significance of his remark. In nothing was he a more faithful disciple of the Greeks than in his distrust of the linguistic medium, on account of its tendency to stiffen and lose life, and in his ever-present sense of the difficulty, or rather impossibility, of making language, even spoken and respoken, contain, and conform to, the elusory mobility of living thought. In his essay on *The Written and the Spoken Word* the attentive reader will find much suggested beyond what is actually said. Moreover, in the view of Butcher, this stiffening habit of language, exhibited in English certainly not less than to the average degree, would seem to involve dangers other and more grave than those of art. Speech is, after all, the chief medium of human society. But how easily it may become a barrier between minds instead of a connexion—here is a matter of which we are not likely to think too much.

Between this way of regarding language, and the extending circles of social effort in which Butcher's life was passed, there was, as between all parts of his harmonious thought and work, a real and instinctive continuity. In holding that he drew mainly upon Hellenic example and suggestion, he himself certainly did not err; and to keep those sources open was for him a prime duty of patriotism. Not in this, however, nor in anything, had he the rigidity of a fanatic. He took part, repeatedly and eagerly, in educational movements which tended to relax the pressure of the 'classical' type. But undoubtedly he watched such movements, especially in the older academic foundations,

with jealousy, and held, without qualification, that for the loss of Hellenism, were it lost, hardly anything, not anything, could pay. Whether he drew the line exactly at the right place, each will judge, and the future will show better than can be seen now. But assuredly it would be well for the country and the world, if from any education, Hellenic or non-Hellenic, might spring commonly, or more often, such intellectual and moral fruits as were seen in Henry Butcher. They will not come too often, and it is well to have seen them once.

A. W. VERRALL.