SIR A. C. LYALL

By LORD REAY

ACTING PRESIDENT

At a Meeting of the Fellows, May 31, 1911

We meet again under the shadow of a great loss. As man of letters Sir Alfred Lyall held an eminent place in our ranks; but his services to his country were many-sided. I would recall but a few facts of his record as a great Anglo-Indian official. He saw the Indian Mutiny through, and with Sir George Campbell rode in to the relief of Delhi. He was regarded as a good soldier.

As Agent to the Governor-General in Rajputana among the ancient Rajput States, in this romantic and poetical part of India, he was very much in his element and he was much liked by the Rajputs.

As Foreign Office secretary through the Afghan war time he rendered eminent services to Lord Lytton, to whom he was invaluable. Being very tender hearted and sensitive he was deeply impressed by the massacre of Cavagnari and the Cabul Mission.

As Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Provinces he gave them a Legislative Council and a University anxious to keep the Province self-centred.

His great desire was to see India contented, and to avoid taxation. He wished to uphold the dignity and the sense of responsibility of ruling chiefs, and to conciliate the nobles of India and the fighting classes.

He was not in favour of the forward policy. He did not resist reform, because he had a clear conception of the mainspring of British power. As he stated in his *Life of Warren Hastings*, 'the standards of English proof ought always to be the measure of Englishmen who represent their country abroad.'

In his *Asiatic Studies* Lyall was the interpreter of the East to the West. He revealed the various aspects of Oriental life because he understood them. Being free from prejudices Lyall dealt with facts, viewing them in relation to their aggregate significance.

As a historian he brought his knowledge of European history, especially of the eighteenth century, to bear on the history of India. His *British Dominion in India* is by far the most suggestive history of India. He wrote an excellent *Gazetteer of the Central Provinces.*

He took a deep interest in the fortunes of our Academy. He believed in its future. He associated himself with all movements which brought us into friendly relations with continental scholars, who had a great regard for him. French Orientalists looked up to him and appreciated his finesse and critical faculty. Lyall, on the other hand, took the greatest delight in any masterpiece which appeared abroad. He followed closely international relations.

He was an excellent chief. As a friend nothing could exceed his kindness and loyalty. He would stand up for a man in difficulties —unasked—in a way very few men would.

He had genius which is rare, and a peculiar social charm. The future historian of the Administration of India will assign to Lyall a very exceptional and superior position. We cannot be sufficiently grateful that his talents were consecrated to the strengthening of British rule, and that he has left us an example of high-minded patriotism and of devotion to duty which represents the best side of the English character.

As poet, historian, and critic Sir Alfred Lyall held a position of no small distinction among his contemporaries. The very spirit of India, its introspection and haunting melancholy, seems to inspire many of his *Verses written in India*, and the tenderness of his being finds expression in many of his lines. Taken all together these verses are the poetical counterpart of his life—that of a man of action and of affairs—and are the best commentaries we possess on his views and aspirations, as set forth in his *Asiatic Studies*, and his valuable survey of *British Dominion in India.* In all his literary work we feel we are face to face with a mind eminently philosophical, reminding one constantly of his kinship with the great Indian writers whose spirit he so well interpreted. But he brought to bear upon the problems he treated the more orderly method of the well-trained western intellect. This is strikingly the case in his attempt to deal with the problem of *British Dominion in India*, as evidenced in some of the chapters of that remarkable work.

He was not only a poet, but a critic of poetry, and his luminous book on Tennyson, more especially the chapters dealing with the philosophy of the poet, takes rank among the best of its kind.

Among the noble band of Anglo-Indians he will long be

conspicuous as one who had imbibed the *spirit*, the *genius loci*, one in whom there was inbred much that was almost elemental in the mind and soul of ancient India:

> Fanciful shapes of a plastic earth,
> These are the visions that weary the eye;
> These I may 'scape by a luckier birth,
> Musing, and fasting, and hoping to die.
> When shall these phantoms flicker away?
> Like the stroke of the guns on the wind-swept hill,
> Like the sounds and colours of yesterday:
> And the soul have rest, and the air be still.[1]

[1] *Studies at Delhi* (1876), 'The Hindu Ascetic.

SIR ALFRED LYALL

1835–1911

Alfred Comyn Lyall was born on January 4, 1835. His grandfather, John Lyall, came of a Berwickshire family, but migrated to London and became a prosperous shipowner and merchant. Three of John's sons attained to such distinction as earns a place in the *Dictionary of National Biography*: George, the eldest, who was in his time member for the city of London, chairman of the East India Company, and a great authority on mercantile matters; William Rowe, who was well known as a writer on historical and theological subjects, and died as Dean of Canterbury; and Alfred, the youngest, who edited the *Annual Register*, took holy orders, and wrote narratives of his travels and philosophical treatises. It was this Alfred that was the father of two of the most eminent Indian civilians of our day, Sir Alfred Lyall and Sir James Broadwood Lyall, formerly Lieutenant-governor of the Punjab.

Lyall went to Eton, as a colleger, at the age of ten. Had he stayed longer at the school, he might have carried a Newcastle scholarship to Cambridge. But he went instead to Haileybury in 1853, and arrived in India on the 1st of January, 1856, as a member of the last generation of Haileyburians who were then being supersededby the 'competition wallah'. He was posted to Bulandshahr, in the region known as the Doab, between the two great rivers Ganges and Jumna. The outbreak of the mutiny and the fall of Delhi in the following year plunged the Bulandshahr district into anarchy. The town was pillaged, the English bungalows were burnt, and the young assistant magistrate had to ride off with some half-dozen comrades to Meerut. Here he joined the Meerut cavalry, took part in their skirmishes, shared Sir George Campbell's tent, and in the month of September, 1857, rode with him into Delhi immediately after the end of the siege. But before the month was over he was riding out again with Greathed's column, to which he was attached as a volunteer, and which was charged with the duty of clearing the road to Agra. Lord Roberts, then a young lieutenant of artillery, has described how he and Sir Henry Norman and Lyall, riding together, fought their way into Bulandshahr. In the following year he was riding and fighting again,

as a volunteer, with the troops in Rohilkhand and on the borders of Oudh. He was mentioned in Lord Canning's minute of July 1859 among the officers to whose excellent services Her Majesty's notice was invited, and he received the Mutiny medal.

Of his experiences during this time of tragedies and horrors Lyall was always reluctant to write or speak. Here and there the veil is lifted by verses which are familiar to many, verses such as 'Theology in extremis' and 'Retrospection'. But as a rule his pen was stayed and his lips were sealed. Before he had been three years in India, Lyall was marked out for early and rapid promotion, and his official career is that of service in a succession of responsible posts, with short intervals of rest in England. In 1867 he was made Commissioner of West Berar, part of the 'assigned districts' of Hyderabad, which, though not, technically, part of British India, are under British administration, and his period of service there was fruitful of much in future years. Under his supervision was brought out the *Gazetteer of Berar* which became the model of those storehouses of information, the provincial gazetteers, whose contents are now summarized in the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*. And it was his experiences and meditations in Berar that laid the foundations of his *Asiatic Studies*.

In 1873 Lyall was called up to the important post of Secretary to the Government of India in the Home department, and in 1874 he went, as Governor-General's agent, to Rajputana, spending there four years which have left deep traces in his published essays.

More eventful were the next four years of Lyall's life. In 1878 he became Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, and held that post during the whole of the Afghan war under the vice-royalties of Lord Lytton and Lord Ripon. He went twice on diplomatic missions to Afghanistan, and, before resigning his office in 1881, he wrote an important minute laying down the principles on which the settlement of the North-West frontier of India was eventually based.

In 1881 Lyall became Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Provinces and Chief Commissioner of Oudh, and for six years he ruled wisely and peacefully the provinces in which he had once fought as a volunteer. He applied to them Lord Ripon's principles of local government, reformed their land laws, and obtained for them a legislature and a university of their own.

In December 1887 he retired from the Indian Civil Service, and, in January 1888, immediately after his return to England, he was appointed a member of the Council of India. He remained a member of that Council for fifteen years, having, at the expiration of his normal term of ten years, been reappointed for a further term, and he did not

finally retire from the Council until January 1903. Had he so chosen he might have undertaken more arduous and responsible work, for he was offered the Governorship of the Cape. But his health was not strong, by more than thirty years' service in India he had earned rest, and he wisely declined to break social ties and sacrifice literary interests by returning to exile. For, when he returned to England at the age of fifty-two, he leapt at once into a position in the English literary and social worlds such as had never been occupied by any Indian civilian.

His mere external appearance, the whitened hair, the musing grey eyes, lit from time to time by gleams of humour, the clearly chiselled features, made him a noticeable figure in any company. And his literary fame, his intellectual distinction, his social and conversational charm, the romantic part which he had played in some of the most stirring episodes of Indian history, the influential part which he had played in others, opened to him the doors of English society and procured him admission into the most exclusive and esoteric clubs. Nor was he less fascinating under more solitary conditions. The present writer will never forget the midnight hours that sped swiftly as he listened under Indian canvas to the outpourings of Lyall's thoughts, soliloquies rather than talk.

In February 1872 there appeared in John Morley's *Fortnightly Review* the first of the remarkable series of articles which were afterwards collected as *Asiatic Studies*. The first volume of these was published in 1882, a second volume, including the Rede Lecture of 1891, was added in 1899. Long before Lyall left India his poems were well known, and were on the lips and in the memories of a wide circle of friends and admirers. But it was not until 1889 that they were published in the modest little volume entitled *Verses written in India*. After he left India his pen was rarely idle. He contributed a life of Warren Hastings to the series of *English Men of Action*, a biography of Tennyson to *English Men of Letters*. His *Rise and Expansion of British Dominion in India* first appeared as a University extension manual in 1891, but was much enlarged in subsequent editions. He wrote a *Life of Lord Dufferin* in 1905. He contributed an article on Indian Native States to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and a chapter on the Moghul Empire to the *Cambridge Modern History*, and in many other ways, not always acknowledged, he helped to advance the knowledge of subjects of which he was a master. For instance, he presided over the International Congress for the History of Religion held at Oxford in 1908.

What were Lyall's chief and most enduring contributions to thought

and knowledge? More than any man of his time he did two things. He revealed and interpreted to the West the mind and soul of India. He brought the development of Indian history into living relation with the development of European history.

Lyall took up and carried on Maine's work of showing how Indian and European thought, habits, and institutions throw light upon each other. But whilst Maine worked chiefly in the field of law, Lyall worked chiefly in the field of religion. And the knowledge of Indian life and thought which Lyall brought to bear upon his work was more intimate and profound than had been attainable by Maine. His knowledge was derived, not from books, nor from the reports of travellers or missionaries, but from personal observation, stimulated by sympathy, illuminated by wide culture, and controlled by a critical habit of mind.

For the comparative student of religions the interest of India lies in its having preserved against the attacks of later creeds one of the old-world creedless religions, still operating as a living and moving force, not only among barbarous or semi-barbarous races, but in classes which have reached a high mental level. A stroke of good fortune gave a man who was at once a scholar, a philosopher, and a poet, an official position in a field exceptionally favourable for observing and studying the phenomena characteristic of Hinduism as a religion. In Berar Lyall lived in a world where miracles are normal, because physical laws are unknown. He could study religious symbolism in its crudest and in its most sublimated forms. He was acquainted with a Hindu officer 'of great shrewdness and very fair education, who devoted several hours daily to the elaborate worship of five round pebbles, which he had appointed to be his symbol of Omnipotence'. He could see gods in the making, and watch the incipient god in his progress up the Jacob's ladder, much shorter in India than in Europe, which leads from earth to heaven. He could tell one of 'a native official, well known in the Bombay Presidency, in whom the signs of divinity had been detected' and who 'was so harassed by an incessant following of devout folk that he became unable to do his business'. It is realistic touches such as these that give life and colour to his studies of Indian religion. And it is the first-hand knowledge which they imply that gives weight and force to his criticisms of the 'solar myth' theories once popularized by Max Müller and of the brilliant generalizations with which Mr. J. G. Frazer fascinates his readers.

If the comparative study of religions came first among Lyall's intellectual interests, the study of history came next. He always dis-

claimed being an expert in any branch of history, but in some of its branches, especially in European history of the eighteenth century, he was exceptionally well read. The thesis which he maintained in his treatise on the *Rise and Expansion of British Dominion in India* was that this dominion does not, as has often been asserted, owe its origin and extension to a series of happy accidents, but has been the necessary and inevitable result of causes and converging influences which the historian can explore and verify. In support of this thesis he traces, in a series of broad, vigorous sketches, the political and economic changes and the geographical discoveries which deflected the course of trade routes to the East, and the European events which brought about the rise and fall of Portugal, Holland, and France as predominating influences in India. And he shows how British dominion in India was founded and still rests on her command of the sea, and how, unlike previous conquerors of India, England advanced to the conquest of the great peninsula, not through the traditional passes across the mountain ranges of its North-west frontier, but by an attack on its 'soft side' from a naval base. An adequate history of British India still remains to be written, but Lyall's essay is the most luminous and suggestive introduction to that history which has yet been produced.

The *Verses written in India* were given with some reluctance to the world, for their author was too fine an artist to be satisfied with their form. But they are the natural and spontaneous expression of experiences, remembrances, moods, questionings for which prose was not a suitable vehicle; they are instinct with genuine poetical feeling; and they contain lines and stanzas which have long haunted many memories, and which will not easily be forgotten.

Lyall was one of the earliest members of the British Academy, and of its Council. His public services and literary work obtained, in due measure, official recognition. He was made a K.C.B. in 1881, a G.C.I.E. in 1896, and a Privy Councillor in 1902. Honorary degrees were conferred on him by the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and he was a trustee of the British Museum.

Death came to him, with a swift and gentle shaft, on the 10th of April, 1911, when he was on a visit to Lord Tennyson at Farringford in the Isle of Wight.

C. P. ILBERT.