

B. P. GRENFELL

1869-1926

SCHOLARSHIP at large and in particular the all-too-slender band of British papyrologists suffered a conspicuous loss on May 18, 1926, through the death of Dr. B. P. Grenfell at the early age of fifty-six. Ill health had kept him from Oxford and from his work for several years, but had not recently given ground for special anxiety. A sudden heart attack, however, supervened, and the end came swiftly.

Bernard Pyne Grenfell was born on December 16, 1869, at Birmingham, where his father, John Granville Grenfell, a member of the junior branch of the Cornish and Bucks family, had lately become a master at King Edward's School, having formerly been an assistant at the British Museum. His mother, Mrs. Alice Grenfell, was also a person of vigorous intellect and no small originality, who in later life, following the lead of her son, developed an interest in Egyptology, especially in amuletic scarabs, a subject on which she published a number of articles—more distinguished perhaps for ingenuity than depth of knowledge—in learned periodicals, British and foreign. In the year following the birth of their eldest son (a second died in infancy) Mr. Grenfell was offered by the late Dr. Percival a house-mastership at Clifton College, and the family accordingly migrated to Clifton, where they lived till 1889 and Bernard received his early education. As a boy he was far from robust. A former school-fellow,¹ who knew him well, writes: 'At school he had been so delicate that he was excused parts of the ordinary work and could take little share in the games, only playing fives and latterly a little cricket; indeed, it was feared that he could not live to grow up.' At Oxford, however, whither he went in 1888 as a scholar of Queen's College, his health rapidly improved, and when I first met him a year later his physique was not noticeably poor. He continued to play fives, and showed considerable skill at lawn-tennis. He was also a strong walker, and we scaled some Tyrolese peaks together in the long vacation of 1889.

A First Class in Classical Moderations was followed in due course by a First in *Literae Humaniores* (1892). Grenfell would no doubt

¹ Dr. P. S. Allen, in the *Oxford Magazine*, 1926, p. 531.

have distinguished himself wherever his lot had been cast, but at Queen's he encountered an admirable trio of teachers in T. H. Grose, E. M. Walker, and A. C. Clark, and ran no risks. There now arose the question of a career. He decided to stay for a fifth year at Oxford and began an intensive study of economics, but presently determined to offer himself as a candidate for the Craven travelling Fellowship, with a subject most felicitously suggested by Professor Clark, that of Greek Papyri, the possibilities of which had recently been proclaimed anew by the publication of the *'Αθηναίων Πολιτεία*. Election to the Fellowship assured a period of two years' research, and Grenfell went to Egypt in the winter of 1893-4, joining Professor Flinders Petrie at Guft (Coptos) in order to acquire an insight into methods of excavation and a knowledge of colloquial Arabic. By a fortunate coincidence a large Greek roll of the Ptolemaic period came just then by purchase into Petrie's hands, and Grenfell was presently invited to undertake its publication. He was thus enabled, after devoting some weeks at Vienna to the study of the Rainer collection of papyri and the improvement of his German, to reappear at Oxford armed with a document of cardinal importance for the economic history of the period. Two or three late contracts of sale from Apollonopolis were published¹ as a 'preliminary canter', and in June, fortified by the assistance of Professor Mahaffy, then the chief British authority on early Ptolemaic texts, he settled down to the decipherment and interpretation of what has come to be known as the Revenue Papyrus. Additional portions of this were acquired by Grenfell himself on his return to Egypt the following winter, when he again joined Sir Flinders Petrie and also ventured on a little digging on his own account at Gurob, where he succeeded in finding a small quantity of papyrus cartonnage.² Meanwhile the Governing Body of Queen's College, recognizing that the young scholar had really found his vocation and that both he and his subject were deserving of encouragement, had elected him to the Research Fellowship which he held continuously for the next thirty years.

The edition of the Revenue Papyrus³ made its appearance in 1896 and was at once recognized as a brilliant performance. It owed much, naturally, not only to the co-operation of Mahaffy, who wrote the lengthy introduction, but also to the assistance of two other eminent authorities, Professor G. Lumbroso, who was visited in Rome, and

¹ *Journal of Philology*, xxii, 268 sqq.

² Subsequently presented to Prof. J. G. Smyly, and published by him in *Cunningham Memoirs*, xii, 1921.

³ *Revenue Laws of Ptolemy Philadelphus*, with atlas of facsimiles.

Professor Wilcken, who came to Oxford; but there was ample evidence in Grenfell's commentary of his grasp of the subject and independence of judgement, and the elaborate appendix on the coinage was essentially his own work. The only mark of immaturity was the somewhat truculent tone adopted towards the well-known Demotic scholar E. Revillout, whose theory of the relative values of Ptolemaic silver and copper Grenfell here sought to demolish. A thin and rather too hastily produced volume of miscellaneous texts which he had picked up from dealers during the two previous winters was published almost simultaneously¹ and helped to establish his reputation as an editor of Greek papyri. These two were the only books for which he assumed the sole responsibility. In the meantime there was formed at his suggestion the literary partnership with the present writer, of which the firstfruits were a further series of texts acquired by purchase,² and a final aftermath has yet to come.

During the course of 1895 a project was shaped which was destined to have a far-reaching effect on the development of papyrology. The flow of papyri from various districts to the antiquity-dealers was obviously proceeding. Might it not be more satisfactory, perhaps in the long run more economical, to go to the source and to dig them up for oneself instead of buying them at second or third hand and thereby encouraging an illicit traffic? The Committee of the Egypt Exploration Fund (now Society) agreed to finance an experiment for the purpose of answering this question. A concession was obtained in the north-east of the Fayûm, a region known to have been productive, and in the following winter Dr. Hogarth and Grenfell proceeded thither to conduct the first excavations expressly undertaken by qualified European explorers for the discovery of Greek papyri. I joined them in January. The results, which were presently incorporated in *Fayûm Towns and their Papyri*,³ though not brilliant, were encouraging enough to justify a second attempt, and in the following season the important site of Behnesa, the ancient Oxyrhynchus, was attacked by Grenfell and myself. Here success was immediate and spectacular. The first mound tried produced a leaf containing the so-called *Logia*⁴ and a fragment inscribed with the

¹ *An Alexandrian Erotic Fragment and other Greek Papyri*, 1896.

² *New Classical Fragments and other Papyri*, by B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt, 1897.

³ By B. P. Grenfell, A. S. H., and D. G. Hogarth, 1900.

⁴ *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, i. 1; published also as a separate pamphlet, *Λόγια Ἰησοῦ, Sayings of Our Lord*, by B. P. Grenfell and A. S. H., 1897, and reprinted in *New Sayings of Jesus*, by B. P. G. and A. S. H., 1904.

Nereid ode of Sappho,¹ and after fourteen weeks we were able to dispatch to Oxford an enormous collection of papyri, which, though the seventeenth volume has now been reached, are very far from being exhausted.

These striking discoveries led to the establishment of a Graeco-Roman branch of the Egypt Exploration Society, designed on the one hand to provide for the systematic publication of what had already been secured, on the other for further excavations. Delay with the latter was undesirable not only on account of the activity of native plunderers but because foreign explorers were not slow to follow our lead, and the more attractive concessions would soon be taken up. During 1898-1902 we continued the search in the Fayûm, testing the more promising sites on the edge of the desert, with varying fortune. Of the results of those years a considerable part has been published in *Fayûm Towns* (1900) and in two bulky instalments of *Tebtunis Papyri* (1902 and 1907). Grenfell had recently embarked on a third *Tebtunis* volume when he was overtaken by his last illness; and a good deal remains untouched. In 1902 we migrated to the Nile valley, working first at El Hibeh, where a quantity of early papyrus cartonnage was found,² and subsequently during five successive seasons at Oxyrhynchus, which again produced a rich harvest, including—to name but a few outstanding items—extensive fragments of Pindar's *Paeans*,³ of the *Ichneutae* of Sophocles,⁴ of the *Hypsipyle* of Euripides,⁵ and the so-called *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*,⁶ to be attributed perhaps to Ephorus. Meanwhile, other sources of supply were not neglected. Though the dealers had in large degree been superseded they were not to be ignored, and during this period considerable collections of papyri were formed on behalf of the late Lord Amherst of Hackney,⁷ the late Lord Crawford, and the Rylands Library.

It was during the final winter at Oxyrhynchus that Grenfell's first nervous breakdown happened. He was obviously overwrought before leaving England, but it was hoped that release from books and change of scene would have a beneficial effect. This hope was not fulfilled, and he went rapidly from bad to worse, so that after some ten days in

¹ *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, i. 7.

² Partly published in *Hibeh Papyri*, i, 1905.

³ *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, v. 841.

⁴ *Ibid.*, ix. 1174; reprinted in *Fragmenta Tragica Papyracea*, 1912.

⁵ *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, vi. 852; reprinted *ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, v. 842; reprinted in *Hellen. Oxyrh.* (Oxford Classical Texts), 1909.

⁷ Published in *Amherst Papyri*, by B. P. Grenfell and A. S. H., Part I, 1900, Part II, 1901.

camp it became clear that medical care was essential. He was removed to Cairo, where he made a surprisingly rapid recovery, and he was able to resume superintendence of the excavations before the season closed and to go back as usual to Oxford, where few were aware of what had taken place. But he was never quite the same man again. He had become subject to recurrent fits of depression, which necessitated more than one visit of recuperation to Switzerland. Editorial work was, however, continued without serious interruption till the autumn of 1908,¹ when another collapse occurred, only a few weeks after his appointment as Professor of Papyrology, a post which had been created expressly for him. This second attack was far more severe than the first, and it may be doubted if he would have recovered from it but for his mother's unsparing attention. He was incapacitated for four years, and a resumption of work only became possible in the spring of 1913. This protracted inaction was followed by a corresponding period of normality, and the ease and rapidity with which the broken threads were picked up were extraordinary. No loss of power was discernible so far. During the war he was busy with Parts xii-xiv of the *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, besides making some progress, as already mentioned, with *Tebtunis* iii. He also began collecting materials for a treatise on the geography of Egypt, and compiled a classification of published non-literary papyri. The *Tebtunis* volume will appear in due course, and it may be possible eventually to proceed with the classified lists of texts; but the *Geography* is a mere embryo.

In the winter of 1919-20 Grenfell was once more in Egypt after an interval of twelve years. His mother, with whom, being himself unmarried, he had resided at Oxford ever since his father's death in 1897, had died two years before, so that there was no longer that tie, and, though he needed a rest, his health had for some time been satisfactory. At Cairo he copied or revised certain texts which were to be included in *Oxyrhynchus* xvi, then in course of preparation,² and he also went about visiting the dealers in antiquities, from whom a number of purchases were made.³ He returned in the spring in good spirits and apparently having benefited from the change. But ere long the old symptoms recurred, and work had to be again abandoned. During a temporary improvement he was advised in the late summer of 1920 to go to a sanatorium at St. Andrews, and from there he presently proceeded to an establishment near Perth, where

¹ *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, v-vi belong to this period.

² Published 1924.

³ Some were included in *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, xv, 1922.

he remained till his death. He was buried in Holywell cemetery, Oxford, with his mother, to whose devoted care he owed so much. His tombstone bears this inscription: 'Many were his friends. Scholars of all time and place will remember his work.' What scholar would desire a more honourable epitaph?

The view seems to be prevalent that Grenfell ruined his health by over-application. It is, I believe, mistaken. His weakness was in fact hereditary, and Mrs. Grenfell had been known to say that she had been constantly on the watch for the appearance of its symptoms in her son. At most he may have accelerated the disaster by his mode of life. He cared little for outdoor pursuits, and eschewed other hobbies. But though the work both at home and in Egypt was exacting, and he never spared himself, the complete change from the one to the other was of itself a relaxation, not to mention the enforced leisure of the voyage to and fro, and of the few days' halt, each way, at Cairo. Moreover, time was found on several occasions for a small interlude either at the beginning or end of the excavating season—for a fortnight's stay in Rome, for a visit to Geneva, where the text of a newly found fragment of Menander was revised,¹ for a journey up the Nile as far as the second cataract, or for a short tour in the district of Nîmes and Arles. There appears to be no real ground for the assumption that Grenfell taxed his strength too severely or succumbed to protracted overstrain, though no doubt his appearance and demeanour might at times give that impression. But the feverish mental activity which now and then characterized him, and was the usual precursor of a collapse, was a symptom, not the cause, of the malady.

To estimate the value of his contribution to learning or to assign him a place in the history of scholarship is not an easy nor indeed a becoming task for a collaborator whose archaeological and literary activities were so closely bound up with his own. A scientific partnership more intimate and harmonious than was ours during the years 1896-1908 has perhaps not often been formed. In the winter at our Egyptian camp we seldom saw another European; in the summer months our editorial work was mostly done in the same room. Problems which arose in the field, difficulties of decipherment and interpretation, were ventilated and discussed. Copies of papyri were exchanged for the purpose of collation, and whatever one wrote was revised by the other. Wilken's phrase² 'Eine schöpferische Einheit' is thus hardly an overstatement. In the elucidation of difficult texts

¹ *Menander's Γεωργός*: a revised text, by B. P. Grenfell and A. S. H., 1898.

² *Gnomon*, 1926, p. 559.

a consortium of this kind is especially valuable; and certain differences of taste and temperament tended to produce a happy combination. Grenfell's superabundant energy was infectious. He possessed an unusual power of concentration and sustained effort. A retentive memory for details, coupled with a quick perception of essential facts, enabled him to master an unfamiliar subject with great rapidity. His bent was historical rather than literary; the more intricate the problem of chronology or numismatics the greater the zest with which it was faced. Though, of course, an expert decipherer, especially of Ptolemaic scripts, he is hardly to be accounted a great palaeographer; in manuscripts as such he took no particular interest, and a certain impetuosity was here a doubtful asset. In an excavator, too, that quality has its disadvantages, though it makes for rapid results—and in the early years, at any rate, results were essential.

Grenfell's abilities and industry quickly gained recognition in various academic distinctions both at home and abroad. Trinity College, Dublin, led the way with an Honorary Doctorate in 1900, and in the same year he proceeded at Oxford to the newly established degree of D.Litt., which he was the first member of his University to take. Similar honours presently came from the Universities of Königsberg and Graz, and the Drexel medal for archaeology from the University of Pennsylvania. An Honorary Doctorate at St. Andrews was also offered, but for reasons of health was never actually taken. At the time of his election as a Fellow of the British Academy in 1905 he was, I believe, its youngest member. He became also a corresponding member of the Royal Bavarian Academy and of the R. Accademia dei Lincei. When owing to continued absence his Professorship at Oxford necessarily lapsed, the title of Honorary Professor was conferred on him by the University. Many privately received tributes to his memory testify to the esteem in which he was held by foreign scholars: 'Un maître dont les beaux livres m'ont tant appris.' 'Il a fondé . . . une œuvre imposante, impérissable.' His death was 'Ein unersetzlicher Verlust für die Wissenschaft'. 'Sein Andenken bleibt unauslösllich.' These are a few samples of the phraseology to which his colleagues have been moved. And let it not be forgotten in the tale of his great achievement that no less than ten of the best working years of his short life were wrecked by failure of health.

Warm-hearted, generous, and genial, he made friends wherever he went. Men more immediately perhaps than women were attracted by him. Not that he was at all averse to the society of ladies; on the contrary, he was a regular and congenial visitor at many houses

in North Oxford. He was 'given to hospitality', and made a point of trying by that means to get to know his younger contemporaries. For visitors from abroad welcome and entertainment were always ready. In matters scientific he was no less open-handed, and was ungrudging of time or labour spent in assisting others. His second breakdown was probably hastened by work gratuitously and quite unnecessarily undertaken in connexion with the Congress of Religions at Oxford. He even used to find a request to deliver a lecture difficult to resist. When in normal health he was full of good spirits which made him an admirable travelling companion. Camp life in quest of papyri is a pretty severe test of amiability, and to one at least of the pair the long *tête-à-tête* in the desert continued to be a pleasant change after the modified *tête-à-tête* at home. With the native workmen Grenfell was on the best of terms, and was probably regarded with as much affection as the Fellah is capable of feeling towards his European employer. But he was respected as well as liked, and kept excellent order. Some of these men accompanied us year after year, no matter to what distance from their homes. 'Many were his friends': and these unlettered rustics, too, must be counted among them. It is not for his intellectual gifts and attainments alone that Grenfell's friends will cherish his memory.

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