JOHN BURNET

1863–1928

I

JOHN BURNET was born in Edinburgh on the 9th of December, 1863, the eldest child of John Burnet and Jessie Kay. His father was a member of the Faculty of Advocates, whose eminent abilities marked him out for a promotion which his comparatively early death prevented him from attaining. His mother, a woman of independent mind and vigorous intellect, had a strong interest in the theatre at a time when that was not very common in the capital of Scotland. If in mature years Burnet himself had more legal knowledge than most scholars and had indeed not a little of the 'legal mind', and if the drama was always one of his paramount interests, that was doubtless in a measure due to the example and influence of his parents.

He was sent to school at Edinburgh's oldest educational institution, the Royal High School. Of great scholars it can commonly be recorded that they swept all before them at school in the way of prizes: Burnet was able to say, as he once did say when distributing the prizes at a school in Dundee, that he had gone through school without gaining a single one. The fact was that pressure was put on him to go prize-hunting, and characteristically he met this pressure with a resolve that he would win none. And so, during his school-days, much of the interest that would otherwise have gone to the classics was diverted to extra-scholastic studies, such as heraldry and ecclesiastical architecture. It is, however, fair to record that he always spoke with praise of the classical teaching of the High School Rector, James Donaldson, later Principal of St. Andrews University.

From the Royal High School he went for a few months to a school in Geneva, after which he matriculated at the

University of Edinburgh (Oct. 1880). Here he was fortunate in his teachers and made rapid progress with his classical studies. From Sellar he caught an interest in Greek Philosophy, and, if he learnt little from John Stuart Blackie, that was more than compensated for by the benefit and inspiration he derived in his last year from the brilliant teaching of Blackie's successor, S. H. Butcher.

At the same time he studied Sanscrit under Julius Eggeling, and that to such purpose, that Eggeling employed him as an assistant in teaching the class.

Having at an unusually early age won a Vans Dunlop Scholarship in Classics, he left Edinburgh without graduating and proceeded to Paris, where he attended the lectures of Boissier, Bréal, and others at the Sorbonne and the Collège de France. Here, too, he conceived an ardent and enduring love for France and French culture, which led him to take a prominent part some years later in the foundation of the Franco-Scottish Society.

In October 1883 he went into residence at Oxford at Balliol College, where he had shortly before won the First Open Classical Scholarship. He took First Classes in Classical Moderations and Litterae Humaniores, adding to them a Taylorian Scholarship in French and a *proxime accessit* to a native of India for the Boden Scholarship in Sanscrit. Of his tutors Lewis Nettleship had far the greatest intellectual influence upon him, but he was on more intimate personal terms with John Farmer, organist of the College, whose son-in-law he was later to become. His closest friend among his fellow-undergraduates was G. R. Benson, now Lord Charnwood, whose recently published memoir of him gives a clear picture of his life at Balliol.

On leaving Oxford Burnet went as assistant to Lewis Campbell at St. Andrews for the Session 1887–8. University lecturers and assistants were still unknown, but professors were allowed to employ private assistants for certain departments of their work, and Campbell was one of the two who could afford to do so. Burnet's position was thus

that of a private assistant in connexion with, rather than in, the University. While in general his experience of the old régime at St. Andrews was valuable to him when he returned to it, after a wholly new state of affairs had been brought into being by the Commissioners of 1889, it was perhaps his having been a private assistant that prevented him from ever grasping the full significance of the great change, gradually accomplished during his own professoriate, whereby the bulk of the teaching work in the University came to be done by University lecturers and assistants.

Greek was one of the canonical 'Seven Subjects' and as such compulsory. But as there was no Preliminary Examination, and as there were many schools where Greek was not to be had, most students began their study of Greek on entering the University. The Junior Class, as the beginners' class was called, met daily at 8 a.m. and 1 p.m., and Burnet's work consisted mainly in teaching it at the earlier of these hours. His zest for the work combined with his great capacity for simple, lucid explanation to make him a successful and acceptable instructor. The ultimate outcome of this teaching was his book, *Greek Rudiments*, published in 1897, which is typical of its author in more ways than one. There is a revolutionary freshness in the exercises, the sentences in which are drawn from the language of common life, and an equally revolutionary conservatism in the retention of the traditional order of the cases, in defiance of the insular resolutions of a nineteenth-century English Headmasters' Conference. Characteristic likewise is the confidence in human nature informing the statement in the preface that the systematic treatment of syntax has been left to the teacher because 'every teacher does best to follow his own methods'.

During his short stay of five months at St. Andrews Burnet gave some assistance to Campbell in his personal work, both on Plato and Sophocles, and as a result three convictions took shape in his mind which, rightly or wrongly, he ever after retained—first, that Campbell's determination

of the chronological order of the Platonic dialogues was correct; secondly, that Jowett and Campbell's commentary on Plato's *Republic* would have been much better, if Campbell had been less deferential to Jowett; and lastly, that Campbell's work in the interpretation of Sophocles was considerably more valuable and fruitful than is usually supposed. In general, while by no means blind to the defects of Campbell's scholarship, he held that its merits were commonly underrated. His personal relations with Campbell were of the happiest, and his loyalty to him remained unimpaired by the circumstance that Campbell gave his support to another candidate for the succession to his chair in 1892.

Burnet next held a post as an assistant master at Harrow for a short while. But he found that school teaching did not suit him, and he was glad to return to Oxford in 1889 on his election to a fellowship at Merton. At Oxford he came in touch with Bywater, and was much influenced by him. He looked forward to making Aristotle his life-study, and set to work on an annotated edition of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which, however, he did not complete till much later.

In 1890 he had his first experience of professorial duties. Sellar's death in September of that year created a vacancy in the Chair of Humanity in Edinburgh University and Burnet acted as *interim* Professor during the ensuing session.

The autumn of 1891 found him once more in St. Andrews. Campbell had obtained leave of absence for the session and Burnet was appointed to discharge the duties of the Chair. In the course of the session Campbell resigned his professorship and Burnet was chosen out of a strong field of competitors to be his successor. His life-work had now begun, and he threw himself into it with ardour. He had to face a quite new situation. On the one hand, Greek was no longer compulsory, and fears were entertained that the study of it would dwindle away. On the other, the institution of the Preliminary Examination meant that a much larger

number of students came up to the University with an elementary knowledge of the language than heretofore. Burnet was able so to use this combination of circumstances that, while the number of pass students in Greek was considerably reduced (mainly through the elimination of the sediment of incompetents and reluctants that compulsion must always produce), the number of Honours students was greatly increased. That so large a proportion of his students went on to take Honours in classics was, in the main, the direct result of his teaching. For he quickly built up for himself a reputation as a teacher which is unique in St. Andrews and has never been surpassed in Scotland. That it was deserved, that he was a supremely great teacher, is as certain as the testimony of generations of students, gifted and ungifted alike, can make it. His pupils found in him one whose firmness of touch inspired confidence; who was impressive without heaviness and suggestive without vagueness; whose union of profound knowledge with uncommon clarity of mind and lucidity of language enabled him to make the complicated simple and the chaotic orderly; who breathed life (and manifestly enjoyed the doing of it) into the dry bones of morphology, metric, and palaeography; whose dramatic perception was as keen as his linguistic sense and his philosophic understanding; who could, in a few concise phrases or sentences, light up whole tracts of Hellenic thought and feeling; above all, who continually filled them, they knew not well how, with a lively sense of the importance of all that they studied with him, and of the lasting worth of Greek literature, philosophy, and civilization. What was the secret of this? Not, certainly, any consciously acquired and applied technique of instruction. In an obituary notice of Lewis Campbell he once wrote: 'When all is said, personality tells more in teaching than the "methods" we hear so much of now.' The same may be said of himself, and if he was able to influence the minds of his students as he did, it was primarily because his teaching was not merely illumined by the light of the intellect, but

quickened by the fires of the spirit. He was not a man who wore his emotions upon his sleeve, but the ardent faith which he cherished in Hellenism glowed inevitably through his lectures, and kindled an answering flame in the souls of his hearers. He interested them in all that he said, because he was so obviously interested in it himself. There was a marvellous freshness about his teaching and that largeness of outlook, inspiring yet sane, which is peculiar to the best humanism. 'Every lecture', says one of his students, 'was an arch through which gleamed a fair and untravelled world'; or, to quote another, 'it was like a flood of golden light from a new horizon, not merely the small silver flame of specialized knowledge.' No doubt his teaching had its imperfections. The generalizations tended at times to be too sweeping, and, though details were by no means shirked, he was perhaps unduly anxious to conceal from his pupils the intricate complexity of the problems which scholarship has to deal with, and thus sometimes failed to enable them to appreciate fully the subtlety and delicacy of the methods with which it solves, or essays to solve, them. The tendency to *simplisme* which can be seen in his books naturally showed itself here, too. But these defects are insignificant when weighed against his superlative merits as a teacher.

His lectures covered a wide range of authors and subjects. Of the great authors from Homer to Theocritus the only one on whom he never lectured was Thucydides. Thucydides, indeed, he read but little, alleging, in unconscious imitation of Porson, that he found him too difficult. Not unfrequently when he had finished a course of lectures, he destroyed his MS., in order that when next he took the same book in class, he might be able to treat it with unimpaired freshness. He also lectured on periods of Greek Literature and Greek Philosophy, and on the history of the Greek Language, and during a vacancy in the Lectureship in Ancient History in 1911–12, and again after its final suspension in 1914, he gave courses on that subject.

But deep as was the influence which he exercised upon his students through the quality of his lectures, it does not suffice to explain the enthusiastic affection which he inspired in them. What won their devotion was rather the total impression of his personality upon them—his buoyant optimism, his dignity and courtesy and modesty—and, above all, his devotion, shown in deeds, not words, to them and their best interests. At all times he gave them freely of his best, whether in the way of instruction or advice. His counsel was often sought and was always found wise, helpful and sympathetic.

Throughout his professoriate, Burnet took a very prominent part in University administration. In addition to continuous participation in the business of the Senate, he served for sixteen years in all on the governing body of the University, the University Court (1897–1902, 1907–13, 1917–20, 1921–3), and was Dean of the Faculty of Arts from 1899 to 1902 and again from 1915 to 1924. For long periods this administrative work absorbed most of his energies, and though he certainly had a relish for much of it, it probably always took more out of him than anything else. His high capacity for it was recognized even by those who differed from his policies. Professor James Stuart of Cambridge, who was Rector from 1898 to 1901 and whose experience of business added to his competence as a judge, wrote in his *Reminiscences*: 'Personally I was struck with the ability of some of the members of the Court, more particularly of Professor Burnet, whose grasp of all the subjects he took up was unusually complete', and equally high legal ability was shown in Ordinance No. 4 of the University Court, the drafting of which was mainly due to him, as well as in many other ways. To those who were more interested in scholarship than in University business, his frequent absorption in administration was sometimes a matter of regret, but he himself was always firmly convinced of its paramount importance, and one would have to be as intimately acquainted with the practical problems which he coped

with as he was himself to be in a position to deny that his conviction, to which he sacrificed not a little, was well-founded. He brought to this administrative work not merely specialized capacity for university business, but the broad outlook of a cultured mind, deeply versed in the educational theory and practice of many lands and ages.

How broad-based his views on education were is evident from his *Higher Education and the War* (1917),[1] with its illuminating discussion of the difference between *Kultur* and Humanism, and its searching analysis of the German educational system. His opinions were founded primarily on his varied experience as a learner and as a teacher, reinforced as that was by careful reading. But he was also able to draw upon a considerable experience as an examiner. He kept in close touch with many schools in Scotland, visiting them from time to time to inspect their work, and he acted for many years as a Senior Examiner in the Leaving Certificate Examination. He was an examiner several times in Greats at Oxford and once in the Classical Tripos at Cambridge. After the war, he was appointed one of the members of the Prime Minister's Committee on the Teaching of the Classics, and served for a time on the Fife Education Authority, after it had been brought into existence by the Education Act of 1918. The institution of the Scottish Universities Entrance Board in 1919 was largely his work, and he was its Chairman until 1921, when, bitterly disappointed by its rejection of his policy in regard to Entrance Regulations, he resigned his position. In all these activities he was concerned with education in the narrower sense. But he was also keenly interested in the popularization of classical culture, and in furtherance of this cause he took an active part in the founding and subsequent work of the Classical Association of Scotland, serving as a member of committee in its first years

[1] It is unfortunate that this book, which was translated into Japanese, is now out of print. In spite of its title, it is far from being a mere 'war book'.

and subsequently holding in addition the offices of Vice-President (1905–15) and President (1916–23).

The termination of the war meant a great increase and complication in the work of the Deans of Faculties, more especially in their capacity of Advisers of Studies, and there is no doubt that the strain of it told severely upon Burnet's health. At first there was not much external evidence of this, but a grave illness in 1923 made an obvious and permanent change for the worse. After that time, in spite of much variation in his capacity for work, he was probably never the same man intellectually. In 1924 he accepted an invitation to give the Sather lectures in the University of California in 1926. In the autumn of 1925 he had to undergo an operation for kidney trouble, and when he sailed for America at the close of the year, many feared that the fatigue of the journey and the work in America would prove too much for him. He benefited, however, by the voyage and the climate of California, but the heat of Chicago, where he lectured during the summer, undid all the good done, and, while there, he sent in his resignation of his chair in St. Andrews. After his return in the autumn, his health continued to deteriorate; a fresh malady supervened in the autumn of 1927, and after several months of patient suffering, he died on 26 May, 1928.

He married, in 1894, Mary Farmer, daughter of John Farmer, by whom and an only daughter he is survived.

While Burnet's reputation perhaps rests and will continue to rest primarily on his work as a historian of Greek philosophy, his merits as a scholar in the narrower sense of the term are hardly less conspicuous. His critical edition of the entire works of Plato, covering about 2,700 pages, is in itself a *magnum opus*. The speed with which this edition was completed is remarkable. Setting to work in 1899 he brought out vol. i in 1900 (revised edition 1905),[1] vol. ii in 1901 (rev. ed.

[1] For the final form of the first Tetralogy in vol. i one must go to the annotated editions of the *Phaedo* (1911) and the *Euthyphro, Apology, and Crito* (1924).

1910), the *Republic* in 1902 (corrected reprint 1911), vol. iii in 1903 (corrected reprint 1909), vol. iv in 1905, vol. v in 1908 (preface dated Nov. 1906: corrected reprint 1913). Naturally he depended in a large measure on the collations of others, notably Schanz and Král. But his own collations were extensive, covering as they did B in Tetralogy i, *Politicus*, *Philebus*, Tetr. v and vi, T in the *Phaedo*, *Politicus* and *Philebus*, and A in the *Timaeus*, *Critias*, *Laws* iii–xii, *Epinomis*, *Epistles* and *Spuria*. The appearance of this edition at once antiquated its predecessors. It was based, as they were not, on a sound manuscript foundation.[1] Thus in Tetr. i–vi Hermann had held that B (Codex Bodleianus MS. E. D. Clarke 39) was the only MS. of value and the position of the Zurich editors (Baiter, Orelli and Winckelmann) was substantially the same. The result was in both cases disastrous, the text being plastered up with all sorts of worthless conjectures. Schanz had recognized that T (Venetus App. Cl. 4, Cod. 1) was of equal or nearly equal value with B. But he shut his eyes firmly to the fact that another MS., viz. W (Vindob. 54, suppl. phil. Gr. 1), is fully entitled to rank with B and T, and his edition (which was never completed) is thus inadequately grounded. From the first Burnet saw that Schanz was wrong in his estimate of W, but it was not till after his first two volumes (Tetr. i–iv) were issued that he was convinced by Král that it was hardly, if at all, inferior to BT. Of no less importance was Burnet's own discovery of the value of another MS., F (Vindob. 55, suppl. phil. Gr. 39). This MS., which extends from the *Gorgias* in Tetr. vi, to the *Minos* in Tetr. ix, had been collated by Schneider for his edition of the *Republic* (1833) and something had been known of the readings of its rela-

[1] Burnet's statement (Tom. v, Praef. ad init.) *mihi primo contigit ut totum Platonem ex optimis libris ederem*, however, goes too far, as he had either no information or very little about the readings of W in the *Cratylus*, *Politicus*, *Parmenides*, *Philebus*, *Phaedrus* and Tetral. iv. Some, too, would say that it is not only in the *Timaeus*, for which alone he used it, that Y is one of the *optimi libri*, but that is a matter on which, perhaps, the last word has not been said.

tives from an even earlier date. In spite of that and of a little subsequent work by Schanz and Fritzsche, Burnet was fully justified in speaking of this branch of the manuscripts as neglected. He showed that it represented quite a different line of tradition from that of the other MSS., as appeared not only from its very frequent agreement with the Indirect Tradition against them (a circumstance that had not escaped Schneider), but also by the fact that many of its divergences from the Direct Tradition were due to a different interpretation of uncial letters. It requires more, however, than good MSS. to make a good edition. To edit Plato well one must add to an intimate knowledge of the *sermo Platonicus* a clear philosophic understanding and a thorough acquaintance with the history of Greek thought. Never have these qualities been so happily combined in an editor of Plato as they were in Burnet. Of his competence on the philosophic side enough is said below. But he was no less fitted for his task in the other respect. As is abundantly clear from his commentaries and his *Vindiciae Platonicae*, he had a wonderfully direct and vivid sense for language, which enabled him to use grammatical formulae without being trammelled by them, and his long-continued close study of the text gave him a familiarity with Platonic idiom rivalling that of a Riddell or a Vahlen. As an editor he was conservative, adhering pretty rigidly to the Direct Tradition and only very occasionally accepting readings from the Indirect Tradition or conjectures of modern scholars. With emendations of his own he was very sparing, especially in his later editions. Emendation was, indeed, not his *forte*, and his conjectures, though nearly always sober, are rarely brilliant. His strength lay rather in interpretation and in appreciation of the variants of the MSS. The temptation here was to make too much of his own 'discovery', F, but this on the whole he successfully resisted: certain critics who thought he had been too partial to it in the *Republic* must have seen reason to modify their judgement, when its readings in the *Gorgias*, *Timaeus*, and other dialogues were

made known. In general, his critical judgement is excellent, and the great superiority of his text to that of earlier editors is beyond question. The *apparatus criticus* is rather less satisfactory than the text. That could hardly be otherwise in view of the rapidity with which the edition was produced. Later collators have, it is true, found little to correct in his own collations. But more *testimonia* should have been cited, and those that are cited are not always given with all the fullness and accuracy desirable, and the same is true of the readings of the papyri. Some of the 'literature' of the subject, too, was neglected, e.g. Král's paper on W in *Wiener Studien*, xiv (Blass's paper on the *Phaedo* papyrus, on the other hand, probably came under the rubric *leider nicht zugänglich*), and sometimes a modern conjecture that was worth mentioning has been passed over, though one can only be grateful for the suppression of 'emendations' like ἀρρά̀τως in the *Phaedo* 81 A. Lastly, the prefaces furnish inadequate information as to what the reader is, or is not, being given in the *apparatus*. But when all due deduction is made for shortcomings of this kind—and they have been considerably exaggerated by critics—Burnet's Plato remains one of the great editorial achievements of Greek scholarship in our time.

Burnet's strength in scholarship is also displayed to great advantage in his commentaries on the *Ethics* of Aristotle and on the *Phaedo*, and the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, and *Crito*. Of the last of these M. Parmentier has well said that it constitutes 'un modèle, même pour la Grande-Bretagne où les bonnes éditions des classiques grecques sont moins rares que dans nul autre pays'. In all of them mastery of the subject-matter, freshness of view, and strict relevance of comment combine with lucidity of exposition and compactness of formulation to make him a veritable prince among annotators. The intimate acquaintance with Platonic thought and diction manifested in them show how ideally fitted he was to edit a *Lexicon Platonicum*, and it may well become a matter for permanent regret that he did not bring

the project, which he had taken over from Campbell with some reluctance, to a successful issue. At various times he worked hard at it, but St. Andrews was not really a suitable place for an undertaking of the kind, and it is not certain at present how much he accomplished or how far what he has left could be utilized by a future editor.

He has been praised for his 'massive erudition' and learned he undoubtedly was. Yet erudition is hardly the characteristic quality of his scholarship. Certainly no one ever realized better the truth of the saying of Heraclitus that πολυμαθίη νόον οὐ διδάσκει, and no one ever less pursued mere learning for learning's sake, or more consistently shunned the barren lists of competitive erudition. He was the last man in the world to read a book in order to be able to say he had read it. He had an extraordinary *flair* for the essential and cardinal in an intricate mass of details. But his intellect did not rest in analysis: his was an essentially architectonic mind, which analysed only to construct. Narrow horizons could never satisfy his vision for long: he kept his eye ranging over wide territories, seeking, as it were, to make a map of them, which, while giving all important details correctly, should above all bring out clearly the general lie of the land. Self-confident and bold, he was never in the least awed by authority, however formidable in appearance, and was yet no 'rebel' or lover of paradox. No doubt, there were times when boldness overstepped the border of rashness, or when his passion for clarity betrayed him into *simplisme*. But that was the exception, and his powerful scholarship is above all notable for its uncommon union of insight, originality, and breadth with level-headedness and sanity of judgement.

The style of his books is worthy of their matter. It is marked by no 'fine writing', no sparkling phrases that appetize only to cloy. It is lucid, straightforward, unpretentious, yet has a note of real distinction which fully justified Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch in giving him a place in the *Oxford Book of English Prose*.

From what has been said above it will be seen that it would be unjust to speak of Burnet merely as a scholar and teacher. But varied as were his activities within and without the University, they were not unrelated to one another, but rather parts of one organic whole. All his life's work was in fact inspired and dominated by one master passion—a passion for the advancement of higher education. He thought long and hard and clearly on educational problems, as is plain from his book on *Higher Education and the War* and his Romanes lecture on *Ignorance* (1923). Like the Platonist he was, he believed that the primary end of higher education is to train in the best way possible one section of the community, relatively small but drawn from all classes of society, for the service of the whole, and this best way he found in a truly liberal education which should combine a study of the humanities with a study of science. Doubtless this is common ground with many teachers. But to few is it in at all the same degree as it was to Burnet a faith in the service of which to spend and be spent.

Burnet's was a strongly objective nature. Not introspective of his own intimate feelings, still less inquisitive of those of others, he made on many the impression of being more interested in causes than in personalities. Whether that was a correct impression or not, he showed a large loyalty and kindliness in his dealings with his fellows, and he was very generous in his judgements and estimates of them. In the course of his life he was involved in more than one vigorous practical controversy, but none of them left behind it any rancorous feelings in his mind. In intellectual matters he in general avoided controversy, though the last two parts of his *Vindiciae Platonicae* show that he could hit hard enough when he cared to. Patient in the endurance of physical pain, he met disappointments and adversity with a dignified fortitude and a resolute optimism. It was certainly for the best that his life was spent as a Professor of Greek, but if, as happened with one of his predecessors at St. Andrews, Sellar, circumstance had transferred him from the teaching

of Greek to the teaching of Latin, his *gravitas* and *constantia* and his feeling for law and order would have made him an admirable interpreter of the Roman spirit.

W. L. LORIMER.

II

BURNET's permanent fame will be securely based on four pillars—τετράγωνον ἄνευ ψόγου τετυγμένον—his text of Plato, his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, his work on the history of Greek philosophy and science, and his persistent effort to place the person and thought of Socrates in its true historical perspective. Of the edition of Plato—the first to put the text of the *opera omnia* on a sound critical basis—something has been said on another page; a few words may be added on the character of Burnet's work in the other three departments. The publication of *Early Greek Philosophy* in 1892 was a remarkable accomplishment for a young scholar of twenty-eight. The book is perhaps the first definite proof of the victory of a more historical understanding of the development of Greek scientific and philosophical thought over the Hegelianism which is still marked even in Zeller's treatment. Great changes for the better in the second and third editions (1908, 1920) made the volume almost into a new work, but even in its earliest form it shows the writer's characteristic combination of concreteness of vision, independence of judgement, and lucid simplicity of style. Though it had worthy precursors in the writings of Tannery and Baeumker, of whose results it was the first work in our language to take adequate account, Burnet's book was the first to describe the whole of Greek speculation down to the time of Socrates in thoroughly 'objective' fashion. The work has been continued on the Continent, notably by Th. Gomperz and Léon Robin, both of whom fully acknowledged Burnet's immense services to their common study, and the later editions have been paid the well-deserved honour of translation into both French and German as a recognized 'classic'. Certain features of its

first form (notably the account of the Parmenidean cosmology), were possibly marked by courageous independence rather than mature judgement; in the later editions these daring fancies were eliminated by the author's incessant sober self-criticism. His outstanding theses of the intimate connexion between early Greek philosophy and nascent physical science, the freedom of Greek thought in both departments from the influence of native mythology and Oriental 'wisdom', and the central significance of Eleatic Monism for the whole development, remained unchanged, and may fairly be said to have won universal acceptance from the competent. Many of us probably owe a further personal debt to the original edition of *Early Greek Philosophy* as the book which, for the first time, made the beginnings of European cosmology and biology a living subject to us, besides giving us our earliest acquaintance with the researches by which the late H. Diels established the true nature and source of the 'doxographical' tradition. The writer of these words saw nothing of Burnet from shortly before the publication of the first edition until the appearance of the second, but was in close intercourse with him from that time onwards, and is thus able to bear witness that Burnet's independence of judgement was wholly unmixed with unwillingness to consider suggestions coming from others. On the appearance of the third edition he was struck by the way in which observations, often thrown out incidentally in conversation, had been remembered and received an unexpected consideration.

The later volume on *Greek Philosophy, Thales to Plato* (1914), in its earlier chapters mainly reasserts the general results to which Burnet had been led by the time the second edition of *Early Greek Philosophy* was published, unencumbered by minute discussion of the documentary evidence on which those positions are based. Most of the volume is given to a brilliant exposition of the life and teaching of Plato, preceded by the completest and most carefully argued of Burnet's repeated attempts to vindicate the historical

accuracy of the Platonic picture of the life and doctrine of Socrates. The freshness of the views developed, the gusto with which the whole volume is written, and its fortunate freedom from unnecessary erudition make it, perhaps, the best introduction to the study of Greek philosophy as a whole in any language. In the treatment of its main hero, Plato, Burnet may fairly be said to have been a pioneer in a movement which is still gathering force. His recognition of the genuineness of the main bulk of the Platonic *Epistles* enabled him to base his whole exposition of Platonism on the sound perception that Plato was, all his life long, first and foremost, a statesman at heart, and only not a great statesman in achievement because the circumstances of his age provided no opening for the highest kind of statesmanship. This perception enabled Burnet to give, for the first time, a true explanation and estimate of Plato's often badly misunderstood intervention in Syracusan politics. Within the last few years, since the termination of the great War, this point of view has been fully appreciated in Germany, where Julius Stenzel, Paul Friedländer, and others have made valuable contributions to the right understanding of Plato's aim and purposes; it is not so clear whether it has even now made equal headway in France and Italy. What is certain is that we owe to Burnet, more than to any one else, the first indication of the true key to Plato's life and most intimate thought. It must always be matter for deep regret that the European convulsion of 1914–18 incidentally prevented the writing of a projected *Greek Philosophy, Part II*, which would have given us Burnet's considered estimate of Aristotle. It is not likely that Aristotle would have been treated, had the book been completed, with much sympathy. As was proved by the little volume *Aristotle on Education* (1903) and the commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Burnet had a thorough knowledge of Aristotle's text, and could expound Aristotle's practical philosophy with vigour and freshness, but he seemed to grow less sympathetic in his estimate of the philosopher as he grew older. He was repelled by Aristotle's

comparative aloofness from the life of affairs, always so attractive to himself, and the apparent self-contradictions of his deliverances on ultimate issues. 'I never feel', he once said to the present writer, 'that I know what Aristotle really thought about anything.' In his last years, however, he was much interested in Jaeger's important attempt to reconstruct the history of Aristotle's mental development, and there were signs that, but for the final deplorable breakdown of his health, he might have made some valuable contribution to the subject.

The Ethics of Aristotle (1900), an annotated text of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, is likely to be as indispensable, for long enough to come, to the serious student of Aristotle as Burnet's text of the *opera omnia* to the student of Plato. There was here less to be done for the text, as Burnet had the recension of Bywater before him, and, in the main, followed it, though not slavishly. But the commentary exhibits him, in many ways, at his best. The annotation is, as always with Burnet, admirably brief, but as illuminating as it is brief. The great merits of the work may be summarily indicated. Thanks to a thorough knowledge of the whole Aristotelian text, and a great familiarity with the philosopher's vocabulary, Burnet is constantly able, by apposite citation, to make Aristotle interpret himself; in particular, some of the elucidations of ethical doctrine from Aristotle's biological work (notably the excursus on the 'practical syllogism'), are models of this most valuable of methods of exposition. Burnet's mastery of the Platonic text also enabled him, by apt quotation to show, as had never been shown before, the close dependence of Aristotle's 'practical philosophy' on the great later Platonic dialogues, *Politicus*, *Philebus*, *Laws*. His use of these dialogues in the interpretation of Aristotle opened up a field of investigation which is now, after a long interval, being fruitfully worked by Jaeger and his pupils, and from which results of the first importance may be expected. Similarly, Burnet anticipated the now acknowledged results of later scholarship in his brief, but triumphant, proof

that the central books of the *N.E.* are an integral part of the πραγματεία, not, as was still widely maintained thirty years ago, an importation from the *Eudemian Ethics*. But probably his greatest service to the understanding of the *Nicomachean Ethics* was that he, before other scholars of the time, saw the supreme importance of the *Ethica Eudemia* for the interpretation, and printed the relevant parts of them under his text. At the date of publication Burnet still acquiesced in the then popular hypothesis of Spengel, according to which Eudemus was held to have made a free restatement of the substance of Aristotelian ethics in a spirit more akin to that of Plato. At the end of his life, as the present writer can state from his personal knowledge, he was convinced by Jaeger's arguments that the work is Aristotle's own first formulation of his moral doctrine, composed while he was still largely under Platonic influences. That Burnet should so emphatically have insisted on the significance of the 'Eudemian' *Ethics*, at a time when he still accepted a mistaken theory of their authorship, is a striking proof of his insight. If he showed himself unhappy anywhere in the work, it was in his attempt to interpret the confused quasi-mathematical formulae introduced by Aristotle into his account of justice. Mathematics was, in fact, a sphere in which Burnet's thought never seemed to move freely. But it must be stated that he himself, in later life, readily admitted that this part of his work was marred by grave defects.

Burnet's revindication of the historical character of Plato's representation of the philosophy of Socrates has not, as yet, won the general acceptance which the present writer believes to be its due; in particular it seems to have made comparatively little impression on scholars in France and Germany. But without venturing to prophesy the future fortunes of his thesis, one may be allowed to urge that he was fully justified in his conviction of the importance of the historical problem, and in his view of the methods by which its solution must be attempted. As he observes in the volume of Sather lectures entitled *Platonism*, posthumously

published by the University of California (1928), the *Sokratesfrage*, as the Germans call it, is only part of a wider problem. It is clear that the Periclean age, the period of the true greatness of Athens, was a time of intellectual ferment, and that out of the ferment has come what mankind has meant ever since by philosophy. But the Periclean age left no literature which has survived behind it, and we should know as good as nothing about its intellectual movements had we not the Platonic dialogues. If those dialogues are ingenious mystifications in which Socrates, Protagoras, and the other *intellectuels* of the mid-fifth century are made the mouthpieces of doctrines which only arose in the fourth century, then we do, in fact, know nothing to speak of about the mental life of Athens in the days of her greatness. Here is an adequate motive for at least giving the fullest consideration to the 'hypothesis' that Plato's philosophical dramas were meant to be, and are, substantially faithful pictures of the great time. A further motive for inquiry was Burnet's anxiety to avoid falsifying his portrait of Plato, 'the greatest man who ever lived,' by importing into it traits which have only been pronounced to belong to Plato because Plato ascribes them to his hero, Socrates. Moreover, as Burnet acutely pointed out more than once, the explanation of the unwillingness of so many scholars to accept Plato's evidence about Socrates 'at its face value' seems to be no more than a persistent after-affect of the long exploded error by which Xenophon was once supposed to be considerably Plato's senior, and therefore, presumably, a better authority for the life and doctrine of their master.

Feeling, as he did, that we have a problem of real importance, imperatively calling for solution, Burnet would rightly hear nothing of the *ignava ratio* which shirks discussion by talking of 'Socrates-Plato' as an indissoluble fictitious *dramatis persona*. The right method of treating the problem was indicated most clearly in his valuable article *Socrates*, contributed to Hastings's *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, an essay which appears to be much less generally

known than it deserves to be. We must secure a basis for our verdict on the historical worth of Plato's account of Socrates by comparing Plato's statements with any we can obtain from good sources certainly independent of him. Such sources we have in certain passages in Xenophon, certainly not due to Xenophon himself, and in notices preserved to us elsewhere, but more particularly in Aristophanes, and in the remains of the dialogues of Aeschines of Sphettus, and careful use of these sources appears to warrant certain definite conclusions. These conclusions are further supported by the evidence we possess that certain dogmas currently supposed to be 'Platonic' were actually part of the Pythagoreanism of the fifth century. This is why Burnet was convinced that the two most immediate tasks for the historian of thought in the age of Socrates are an intensive study of the fragments of Aeschines and a careful re-examination of the existing later Pythagorean literature with a view to the detection of early material incorporated in it.

Probably Burnet's thesis will need to be re-presented before it gets the full unprejudiced hearing it deserves from scholars at large. It is generally known, apparently, in the main from his *Greek Philosophy, Part One*, and from his annotated editions of the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*. But in none of these does he present the whole of the evidence for his case. Much of it has to be sought in his two articles in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* on Socrates and on Pythagoras. It is desirable that the whole case should be restated, with full documentary evidence, in a volume on Socrates written from Burnet's standpoint. If such a volume is ever forthcoming, it is the personal opinion of the present writer that the cumulative evidence will prove too strong to be resisted; be that as it may, it will at least be apparent that Burnet's so-called 'paradox' was not taken up lightly, but from mature reflection on a significant mass of evidence, and, as he said himself, as the one hypothesis by which he found himself able to 'save the appearances' of

the Platonic dialogues. They are not saved by methods which, as he said, allow every student to incorporate in his account of Socrates just as much or little of the Platonic portrait as happens to suit his personal predilections.

A few words may be added on some of Burnet's personal characteristics, as disclosed in years of frequent intercourse. So far as could be seen, he was one of those men who find their social happiness mainly within the domestic family circle. He had no tastes for sports, games, or adventures, nor, so far as one knows, for 'club-life'. As is remarked elsewhere in this sketch, he did not wear his feelings on his coat-sleeve, and he was curiously reticent about his personal convictions on the great ultimate issues of life. If he had a philosophy of these things, it was not one on which he cared to talk: like Mr. Pitt, as described by Wilberforce, he said less on such matters than most men. But there were two feelings he did not conceal: his enthusiasm for education, in the high Platonic sense, and his deep affection for the students of St. Andrews. When a Memorial Service was held, after the War, for the students of the University—many of his own most promising pupils were among them—who had given their lives for their country, it was his part to read the list of the names of the fallen. One auditor at least was deeply affected by the difficulty with which he kept his usually steady and sonorous voice from utterly failing him. If he was reserved on intimate matters, he was eminently cordial, social and 'conversable' in the common intercourse of life, and always ready to put the stores of his knowledge at the service of colleagues. An eminent French scholar wrote, on the news of his death, 'In spite of some disagreements, I had a high admiration for his penetration, his breadth of view, the range of his knowledge and his powers of exposition. I believe it was in 1920 that I had the pleasure of making his acquaintance at Paris, and was charmed by his cordiality. His death is a terrible loss to our studies.'

In conversation, as in discussion of University affairs, the preponderant impression he made on a listener, or an inter-

locutor, was that of a massive sound judgement based on an exceptionally well-organized knowledge. He could sometimes be suddenly brilliant; he always impressed by a cultivated *bon sens* and that sanity of view which an Englishman is inclined to think perhaps more characteristic of the best French or Lowland Scots mind than of the English, which is inclined to 'whimsicality'. It was part of the character that no man had a deeper respect for the value of proved practical traditions of life, private and public; no one was ever less of the *doctrinaire* or 'high-brow'. His political creed, to which he remained steadily faithful through life, was the Liberalism of men like the Earl of Oxford and Asquith, and Lord Haldane; his code for private life was that of the good family man and the good citizen all the world over. Persons who regard it as indispensable to the philosophical character to be in revolt against the Decalogue, or at least to outrage *les convenances*, would have pronounced Burnet no philosopher; his attitude to them and their theories might be summed up in the words of a character in recent fiction, 'of course, I'm moral; I'm sane'.

In Burnet the world has lost a fine scholar, Scotland a true Scot and a great educator of youth, his friends and colleagues a man most excellent in counsel—a triple loss which time will not easily make good.

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