

OBITUARY NOTICE

HENDRIK KERN

[The following appreciation of Kern's character and work, kindly furnished by Professor Vogel, comes with the authority of a fellow-countryman, an ex-pupil, a sharer in the experience of an Indian career, and a successor in the chair of Sanskrit at Leiden. In the pages of this Journal, however, we may be permitted to record the observation that the regard for the master's achievements as a philologist, an exponent of the science of language, and a linguist, as well as for his personal qualities, was felt no less deeply among English-speaking Orientalists than in his own country and in the world at large. His election as an Honorary Member of the Royal Asiatic Society was an early testimony thereto. Mr. Blagden has been so good as to append a statement concerning Kern's achievements in the field of Malayo-Polynesian studies. His work in the special Indian sphere is of that ripe character which is a guarantee of permanency and which rewards each fresh perusal; and this is true, not only of his editions and translations of texts and of his masterly *History of Buddhism in India* and his *Manual of Buddhism*, but also of his investigations in constantly progressive studies, such as the interpretation of the inscriptions of Asoka, where even now we may turn to him for suggestion or confirmation. Kern's personal friendship was treasured by not a few English scholars of more than one generation, including also the undersigned, in whose case it dates from the Congress of Orientalists at Rome in the year 1899.

We may call attention to the Obituary Notice by our Honorary Member Professor C. Snouck Hurgronje

published in the *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indie*, vol. lxxiii, pt. ii, 1917.

F. W. THOMAS.]

THE death of Professor Johann Kaspar Hendrik Kern, which occurred at Utrecht on July 4, 1917, deprives the world of one of its greatest Orientalists and the Royal Asiatic Society of the oldest of its Honorary Members.

If we should call Kern one of the world's foremost Sanskritists, this title, however exalted, would imply but a very partial recognition of his marvellous scholarly attainments. Familiarity with every branch of the ancient literature of India, founded on a complete mastery of Vedic, Sanskrit, and Pali alike, is in itself in these days of specialization a rare and enviable accomplishment. But, although Kern was in the first place a linguist, a master of languages, he penetrated through the words into their deepest sense, and through the form into the profoundest thoughts to which they gave expression. It was the history of Indian religions—more particularly Buddhism—to which his principal works were devoted. Next the study of Indian astronomy is to be specially mentioned. Whilst, on the one hand, he extended his linguistic researches over almost every branch of the Indo-Germanic languages (not to mention the many tongues belonging to totally different groups with which he was more or less acquainted), he followed; on the other hand, the Indo-Aryan civilization across the Eastern Ocean to the shores of Further India and to the Islands of the Archipelago. In the field of the Malayo-Polynesian languages, as well as in the epigraphy of Java and Cambodia, his leadership was acknowledged as generally as among Sanskritists.

Hendrik Kern was born at Poerworedjo in the Isle of Java on April 6, 1833, his father being an officer in the Netherlands-India Army. In his 7th year his

parents left the East and took him to Holland, where he received his education. In the year 1850 he commenced his university studies at Utrecht, to continue them in the following year at Leiden. Here he had the advantage of finding an instructor in the as yet little trodden field of Sanskrit study, towards which he found himself mightily drawn. In those days Sanskrit did not yet belong to the officially recognized subjects taught at the Leiden University; but the Hebrew professor Rutgers, who had taken it up of his own accord, lectured on it and became Kern's *guru*. Kern, moreover, devoted his energies to ancient Germanic and in a lesser measure to Slavonic languages.

The subject, however, on which Kern took his doctor's degree on October 12, 1855, belonged to the domain of Iranian studies. The title of his thesis was: *Specimen historicum exhibens scriptores græcos de rebus persicis Achæmenidarum monumentis collatos*. It will be remembered that the estampages of the great rock inscription of Bisutūn (Behistun) prepared by Sir Henry Rawlinson had been edited a few years previously (1847 and 1851) in the pages of this Journal.

Only a fortnight after his promotion the young doctor betook himself to Berlin, in order to continue his Sanskrit studies under the guidance of Albrecht Weber. It was at the latter's suggestion that he undertook an edition of Varāhamihira's *Brhatsaṃhitā*, a task requiring both an intimate knowledge of the Sanskrit language and a familiarity with astronomy. It was not until 1865 that Kern's edition of that remarkable astrological work appeared in the *Bibliotheca Indica*, to be followed by an English translation, published in the Royal Asiatic Society's Journal for the year 1870. At Weber's request Kern became also a contributor to the great St. Petersburg dictionary.

On New Year's Day, 1857, Kern returned to Holland;

but in his own country he did not at once find that official and practical recognition which his extraordinary scholarly talents called for. It is true that in the summer of the following year he was appointed professor of Greek at the Royal Athenæum of Maastricht; but this position left him but scanty scope for his favourite studies. In those days he composed a Dutch translation of Kālidāsa's famous play *Śakuntalā*, and this version contributed in no small degree to the establishment of that great and well-merited reputation which Kern has ever since enjoyed among his countrymen. The more serious task of editing and interpreting Varāhamihira had to be accomplished abroad. In connexion with this work Kern went to spend the summer vacation of 1861 in London; and in the following year he resigned his educational appointment at Maastricht, in order to be able to devote himself entirely to his great task of collating the manuscripts of Varāhamihira and the commentary by Bhaṭṭotpala in the Library of the India Office. Here he made the acquaintance of Goldstücker, Max Müller, and Bühler.

It appears from Kern's private letters that in the course of his stay at London he conceived a great admiration for the British character and for British institutions.¹ It is also evident from his letters that, when he went over to England, it was in the secret hope that a stay in that country might become a stepping-stone to acquiring a position in the land of his dreams and of his favourite studies. This hope was fulfilled in the spring of 1863 by the offer of a post of Anglo-Sanskrit professor at Queen's College, Benares. With

¹ This admiration, indeed, was severely shaken by the events in South Africa of 1899 and following years, as was only natural in a man who combined a generous sense of cosmopolitanism with a strong patriotic feeling, extending also to the scions of the Dutch race in other parts of the world.

his characteristic energy he immediately made ready for his voyage, reaching Benares by the end of June.

Any one who has lived in Hindustan knows that the end of June, when the heat of summer is fiercest, rendering life almost unbearable, is not the moment aptest to impart a favourable impression of India and Indian life. The circumstance of this untimely date of Kern's arrival may have been a factor in creating that feeling of disappointment to which he gave vent in his home letters written from Benares. Anglo-Indian Society, moreover, and its amusements had but slight attractions for one so wholly absorbed in scientific research. But the chief source of his disappointment apparently was his failing to find in the Indians of to-day that lofty character which the highly idealized picture of the ancient literature had led him to expect. This, however, did not affect that warm sympathy for the indigenous population of India which ever characterized him.

There is ample proof, too, that Bhaṭṭa-Karṇa, as they used to call him, enjoyed the affectionate esteem of his Brahman students. One of them gave expression to his feelings of admiration in the following lines of high-flown Sanskrit poetry :—

*jayati jagati Karṇaḥ kaumudīsubhravarṇaḥ |
khalabhujagasuparṇaḥ sāstradattaikakarṇaḥ ||
jagadakhilasavidyāsindhunaukarṇadhāraḥ |
kṛtanijagunaṣaṃkhyākarnākīrttiprahāraḥ ||
samājñākūpāre plavanakṛtalīpsāḥ kavigiro
nimajjanti kṣipraṃ tava karuṇayā paśyasi yadā |
nimagno 'raṃ pāraṃ vrajati vicikitsārṇavajalād
ataḥ sevyo 'si tvam kavibhir athavā saṃśayagataih ||*

When the Government at The Hague had at last decided to create a professorship for Sanskrit at the Leiden University and Kern had been elected as the only man to occupy the newly founded chair, he did not

hesitate to accept a post which promised to give him full scope for the display of his extraordinary talents.

On October 18, 1865, Kern assumed his professorship, which he retained until the year 1903, when he had reached the age limit of 70 years fixed by the law. During the thirty-eight years of his teaching activity he formed a numerous school, consisting, on the one hand, of Sanskritists like Speyer, Caland, Uhlenbeck, and Warren, and, on the other hand, of scholars like Brandes, Adriani, Hazeu, Jonker, Juynboll, and Van Ronkel, who chose the study of Old-Javanese and of the Malayo-Polynesian languages.

The books and articles which he produced within the period of sixty-two years intervening between his promotion in 1855 and his death in 1917 are so numerous, and belong to so different fields of research, that in the present notice I must restrict myself to mentioning only the most important; and in doing so I choose preferably from amongst those publications which pertain to the field of Indian and Indonesian studies.

In the first place I mention his standard work *Geschiedenis van het Buddhisme in Indië* (1882-4), which was translated into French and German. It was followed by his *Manual of Indian Buddhism* (1896), of which lately a Japanese version has appeared. Kern gave an English translation of the *Saddharmapundarika* in vol. xxi of the *Sacred Books of the East* (1884) and a new edition of the same work in coöperation with the Japanese scholar Bunyiu Nanjio (*Bibl. Buddh.*, x, 1912). Another important Sanskrit work pertaining to the Buddhist religion which was edited by Kern is the *Jātakamālā* (Harvard Oriental Series, i, 1890), of which Speyer gave subsequently an English translation (1895).

One of the last works contributed by Kern to our knowledge of Indian Buddhism is his *Toevoegselen op 't Woordenboek van Childers*, which appeared in the year

1916 in the Transactions of the Royal Academy of Sciences at Amsterdam. To many scholars abroad it will be a matter of regret that this supplement to Childers' well-known Pali-English Dictionary (London, 1875) is in Dutch.

It is a remarkable fact that Kern's principal works in the domain of Indian studies deal with the history and literature of the Buddhists, whereas it is evident that the Brahmanical ideals of social and religious life were much more sympathetic to him than the monastic ideals of Buddhism.

How great are Kern's merits in regard to the study of the archæology, history, and languages of the Archipelago has been well expressed by Professor Snouck Hurgronje, who wrote shortly after his death: "Kern would rank among Holland's greatest scholars, even if we possessed nothing from his hand but his researches in the field of Indonesian studies."

It was in 1868, at the suggestion of Dr. Van der Tuuk, that Kern commenced studying the Kawi or Old-Javanese language; and two years later he published his first article relating to this little-explored field of research. Of special importance are his studies relating to the Old-Javanese adaptations of the two great epics of India, the stories of which have retained immense popularity among the Javanese down to the present day owing to their being enacted in the shadow-show or *wayang*.

Among Kern's publications in this department of studies we may mention first of all his edition of the Old-Javanese *Rāmāyaṇa* in 1900, followed by a Dutch translation of the same work, which has as yet only partly appeared in the *Bijdragen* of the Royal Institute of Netherlands-India. Another work of great importance, completed in 1914, was Kern's version of the *Nāgarakṛtāgama*, a Javanese chronicle of the fourteenth century, which had been discovered and edited by Dr. Brandes, one of the master's most gifted pupils.

Of special importance was his epoch-making study *De Fidji taal vergeleken met hare verwanten in Indonesië en Polynesië* (1889), by which Kern became the founder of a new department of research, that of the comparative philology of Indonesian languages.

That the Indian religions introduced into the Archipelago attracted Kern's special attention is evident from his interesting article *Over de vermenging van Çivaïsme en Buddhisme op Java, naar aanleiding van het Oud-Javaansch gedicht Sutasoma*.

The record of his wonderful activity as an Indonesian scholar would be incomplete without mentioning how much the archæology and epigraphy of the Archipelago owes to Kern. A considerable number of inscriptions, both in Sanskrit and Old-Javanese, have been edited by him in various Dutch periodicals.

In the interpretation of the Sanskrit inscriptions of Further India (Campā and Kambodia in particular) Kern has taken a leading part, as is generously acknowledged by the French scholars who have distinguished themselves in this domain. Let me only quote the eloquent words of M. Louis Finot, the distinguished head of the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient*.

"En mai et juin, 1879," that scholar wrote, "les *Annales de l'Extrême-Orient* publiaient un récit de la belle exploration du Dr. Harmand au Cambodge, avec des planches reproduisant quelques fragments d'inscriptions estampées par le voyageur. 'Pourra-t-on jamais déchiffrer ces inscriptions?' demandait M. Harmand. L'année ne s'était pas écoulée que les *Bijdragen* de l'Institut royal de La Haye donnaient à cette question une victorieuse réponse: M. Kern avait lu les inscriptions, l'épigraphie cambodgienne et avec elle l'histoire documentaire des Etats hindous de la péninsule était du coup fondée; l'attention du monde savant était attirée sur ces témoins authentiques du passé; le sceau du livre mystérieux

était brisé, et Bergaigne, Barth, Aymonier allaient bientôt en déchiffrer les pages.”

It only remains to register the outstanding events in the concluding portion of the master's life. In the year 1903 Kern was to reach the age of 70 years, fixed by the law in vogue in the Netherlands as the age limit for University professors. This rule, however excellent in its main principles, has the disadvantage of sometimes withdrawing persons fully able in body and mind from their teaching activity. Such was the case with Kern. In a letter written in the beginning of October of the previous year he expressed himself in the following typical manner: “Ik ben nu mijn laatsten cursus ingegaan, ben dien begonnen met meer leerlingen dan gewoonlijk en wil dien vooral niet minder ijverig voortzetten dan vroeger; tot nog toe ben ik, God zij dank, nog niet versleten.” [“I have now entered upon my last course; I have begun with more pupils than usual, and shall certainly carry it on not less zealously than formerly; up to now, I am, thank God, not yet worn out.”]

On the occasion of Kern's 70th birthday his friends and pupils honoured him with a commemorative album, containing contributions covering the many departments of research in which they acknowledged him as their leader. In this imposing volume of more than 400 pages, comprising scientific papers by eighty-six scholars of different nationality, the universal veneration and homage of the learned world took, as it were, visible shape.

The bibliography of Kern's writings from 1855 to 1903, which is found at the end of this album—the titles covering twelve folio pages each of two columns—is well calculated to impart a vivid impression of the master's power of production.

This production by no means ceased with Kern's resignation as a University professor. It is true that a few months afterwards, when he had left Leiden for

Utrecht—the place where he had commenced his academic studies in 1850—he met with an accident which, though not very serious in itself, owing to his advanced age made him an invalid for the rest of his life. However awkward this must have been to a man of his active habits, it by no means affected his mental powers.

Kern's 80th birthday on April 6, 1913, became again the occasion of a cordial celebration, in which Professor Speyer, who had succeeded him at Leiden and on whom he looked as his most distinguished pupil, took the leading part. This time the homage of his admirers assumed a twofold form: a marble bust of the revered master by the sculptor Charles van Wijk (it is now placed in the rooms of the Royal Institute at The Hague), and a complete edition of Kern's minor writings (*Verspreide Geschriften*), divided into fifteen sections in accordance with the various fields of research to which they refer. Of this work six volumes so far have appeared.

The concluding years of his life were devoted to his favourite studies, of which the fruits continued to appear in learned journals. He remained in the full possession of his intellectual capacities until November, 1916, when death deprived him of his wife, with whom he had been united for more than fifty years. This loss brought about a sudden break-down both in body and in mind. On July 4 he followed her into the grave.

Of the manifold honours which were heaped upon Kern by governments and scientific bodies in the course of his scholarly career, and which he himself accepted with great modesty, it will be unnecessary to give a detailed enumeration. But we do not wish to conclude this account of his life and work without referring to his great simplicity of mind and kindness of heart, which won him the affection of all who knew him, whatever their nationality might be, nor without mentioning his ever ready willingness to assist and advise, to which his

pupils and friends will bear a unanimous and grateful testimony.

J. PH. VOGEL.

By way of supplement to what has been said above I venture to add a few words from the point of view of a student of Indonesian linguistics. In that field Kern was a pioneer; in fact, he was, together with H. N. van der Tuuk, the founder of it. Shortly after the latter had established (in his *Outlines of a Grammar of the Malagasy Language*: JRAS., n.s., vol. i, pp. 419-46, 1865), as against Crawford, that the Indonesian languages constituted a real family and were not a mere congeries of separate and independent tongues held together only by the slender thread of a number of common loan-words, Kern proceeded to fortify that position and set it on a firmer and broader basis. This he did by the careful study of their comparative grammar, with the help of the evidence of the Old Javanese texts, seconded by a very wide and accurate acquaintance with many of the other languages of the family. In certain cases, where there had been some doubt as to the true affiliation of a language (e.g. the dialects of the Philippine Negritos and the Mafoor language near New Guinea), he definitely proved their relationship, though a similar attempt to include the dialects of Northern Halmahera has not met with the same general acceptance. Passing beyond the boundaries of the Indonesian division, he showed by the evidence of Fijian, Samoan, Maori, and the languages of Eromanga and Aneityum, that Melanesia and Polynesia could not be severed from their genealogical relationship with Indonesia. From linguistic data derived from these different divisions of the great Malayo-Polynesian (or Austronesian) family, he drew the inference that the homeland of its original mother tongue must have been situated somewhere in the western portion of

its geographical area, and probably on the east coast of Indo-China, where relics and traces of Indonesian languages are to be found to this day.

These are only a few outstanding points in Kern's Indonesian studies; but they are conclusions of fundamental importance, and the subsequent researches of other scholars have only served to confirm them. In all his work, and particularly in this department of it, bristling with details as it does, Kern displayed a complete mastery over his materials, combined with an encyclopædic grasp of them. His work was not that of a mere collector and tabulator of facts: he illuminated them by the light of his original mentality and sound judgment; and hence it is that nearly all his conclusions have stood the test of further inquiry. Considering that his work extended over half a century and that so large a proportion of it was the work of a pioneer in a new field, the achievement is remarkable.

Of Kern's character much might be said, particularly of his kindness to other scholars and his unflinching readiness to help them in their work. His juniors who attempted to follow after him in any of the various fields of research in which he excelled can testify to his generous and stimulating willingness to aid them in their studies. That was one of his leading characteristics, the outcome of a broad mind and a noble heart, two possessions that are more to be esteemed than even the highest purely intellectual faculties.

C. O. BLAGDEN.