

OBITUARY NOTICES

ROBERT NEEDHAM CUST, LL.D.

DEATH has been busy of late among the past members of our Council. Within the past year Mr. E. L. Brandreth and Major-General Sir F. Goldsmid have passed away, and their deaths have now been followed by the decease, on October 28, of Robert Needham Cust, LL.D., Honorary Vice-President, for seven-and-twenty years our Honorary Secretary, a frequent contributor to our Journal, and deserving the special thanks of Orientalists as the originator and promoter of the great Survey, now in progress, of all the languages of India.

After a most useful and distinguished career in India, as Political Officer, Administrator, Judge, Legislator, and frequent writer on subjects of the day, for well-nigh a quarter of a century, he was constrained by domestic affliction to give up his high position and prospects a few months before he had earned his full retiring pension.

Having means of his own, he declined to accept further service under Government, but devoted the remaining years of his long life to independent research, study, travels, active work as Magistrate and on the Committees of a multitude of Societies for literary, scientific, religious, and charitable objects; and to giving others the benefit of his labours by a continuous stream of published writings, some ephemeral, some permanent in character—his motto being: “*Scire tuum nihil est nisi te scire hoc sciat alter*”; and all this he did, not for gain or self-advancement, but as a duty owed to his Creator for the health and strength and opportunities vouchsafed to him.

As to the incidents and work of his singularly busy life there is, fortunately, no lack of information, for, with characteristic forethought and thoroughness, he has left behind him a *Life Memoir* of 313 closely printed pages of extremely interesting matter, with elaborate appendices; and a *Brief Autobiography*, of thirty-two pages, for those not desirous of details.

From these sources I propose to give a short account of our friend's career—dealing more particularly with the work he did for this Society—and conclude with a few personal reminiscences.

Dr. Cust was born at Cockayne Hatley (his father's place in Bedfordshire) in 1821. He was the son of the Hon. and Rev. Henry Cockayne Cust, brother of the Earl Brownlow, and of Lady Anna Maria Needham, sister of the Earl of Kilmorey. He was educated at Eton and intended for the Bar, but ultimately accepted a nomination for the Indian Civil Service. At Haileybury College he greatly distinguished himself, and acquired a knowledge of Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, and Hindūstāni. He arrived in Calcutta in 1843, and completed his studies in the College of Fort William, receiving Medals and a Degree of Honour and acquiring a knowledge of the Bengālī language.

His first appointment in the public service was that of Assistant to the Magistrate of Ambāla (then headquarters of the Political Administration of Northern India); here he learned the ordinary duties of a young civilian. He was then selected for the post of Personal Assistant to a distinguished Political Officer, Major George Broadfoot, newly appointed Agent to the Governor-General for the then North-Western Frontier.

In this capacity he was marching through the domains of the Cis-Satlej Protected Chiefs when news arrived of the Sikh invasion of our territory; he and his chief at once proceeded to the front and took part in the great battles on the Satlej in 1845—at Mūdki, Ferozshahr, and

Sobrão (of which he has left a graphic account in his *Linguistic and Oriental Essays*), and his services were mentioned in the Governor-General's dispatch.

At Ferozshahr his superior officer, Major Broadfoot ("the foremost man in India"¹), was unfortunately killed in action, and Cust, albeit a very junior officer, carried on for a time the duties of Governor-General's Agent. Then, in acknowledgment of his services, he was appointed by Lord Hardinge to the charge of a district in the newly formed province of the Punjab, the district of Hoshiārpur. Here, after some years of incessant labour, with little experience to guide him, but under the inspiration of his new chief, the great John Lawrence, he organized the district in a "masterly fashion" on a "non-regulation system"—a system of firmness and kindness, "the iron hand and the velvet glove," no red tape, no technical formalities, no lawyers; rough and ready justice, and words of sympathy and good-fellowship; living alone amongst the people—without soldiers or policemen—the Court held under the green mango-trees in the presence of hundreds. "The experience of half a century," he remarks, "has given the stamp of approval to our strong but benevolent, rigorous but sympathetic, system." It was here that he developed that intense love for India and its people, and profound acquaintance with their customs and feelings, which formed a marked feature of his character.

At length, to his sorrow, he was moved from Hoshiārpur to his old district of Ambāla, and took its administration vigorously in hand.

Then came the second Sikh war, which ended in the decisive victory of Gujrāt and the annexation of the Punjab; and Cust thought the time a good one for paying a brief visit to his father (now advanced in years) in England, but, before starting, he was required

¹ So styled in the inscription on his tomb in the Cemetery of Ferozpor.

by the Chief Commissioner, Sir John Lawrence, to visit all the districts of the new territory and report on their condition and requirements—an important and most laborious task.

On its completion in 1851 he proceeded to England on a brief furlough. Returning to India he was appointed Joint Magistrate of Benāres, and afterwards to the important charge of Magistrate and Collector of Banda in Bundelkund, and in three years put the district, which was in a most unsatisfactory condition, into perfect order. In recognition of his service he was offered the more important post of Magistrate and Collector of Dehli, but, fortunately for himself, declined it and proceeded to England on furlough in 1855. I say “fortunately for himself”, for the officer who accepted the post which he declined was among the victims of the Dehli massacre.

In England Cust was married to his first wife—daughter of the Hon. and Very Rev. Henry Lewis Hobart, Dean of Windsor, brother of the Earl of Buckinghamshire—and was called to the English Bar.

He was in England at the outbreak of the Mutiny of 1857, but, returning to India in February, 1858, was immediately appointed at the special request of Sir John Lawrence, then Chief Commissioner, to be Commissioner of the Lahore Division of the Punjab, and when that Division, found to be too large for the effective supervision of one man, was subdivided into two he chose the moiety forming the new division of Amritsar. For a time he held office as Financial Commissioner of the province, and made his mark as a reorganizer; then (in 1861) became Judicial Commissioner, but early in 1864, while busily engaged in overhauling the Department of Justice, he had the misfortune to lose his wife. He at once proceeded to England with his children, but returned to India in October to take up the office of Member of the Legislative Council, and to act temporarily as Home Secretary to the

Supreme Government. Returning to England at the end of the legislative session, he was again sent for to fill the important post of Member of the Board of Revenue in the North-West Provinces. Meanwhile he married his second wife, daughter of the Rev. E. Carlyon, a lady of considerable literary attainments, and with her proceeded to India. Her death at Allahabad after childbirth, in August, 1867, was a severe blow and determined Cust to retire from India for ever—just nine months before completing his service for full pension.

For a year after his retirement in 1867 he felt, he says, "like a man who had been crushed," but at length roused himself, distracted his thoughts by the study of Hebrew and completing the draft of a Code of Revenue Law for Northern India¹; was united in marriage to Elizabeth, daughter of E. Mathews, Esq. (his devoted companion to the end), and by 1869 found himself restored to his old energy and powers; and from that time he found in England, as we have seen, a new career of usefulness.

He aided for a time in the preparation of Murray's great Dictionary of the English Language, and between 1870 and 1909 published more than fifty volumes. The list includes a clear and accurate account of the Religion and Languages of India, a scholarly description of the Modern Languages of Africa (described by a French savant as "un livre du premier ordre"), the Modern Languages of Oceania, of the Caucasian group of the Turki branch of the Ural-Altai family, seven volumes of Linguistic and Oriental Essays, besides a multitude of smaller works, translations into French, Italian, and Greek, and two volumes of poetry; while, by his annual visits to foreign cities, he drew to himself correspondents

¹ The draft was finished, and printed by the Government in 1870 and circulated; but, like Sir J. Stephen's draft Penal Code for England, was not destined to become law: it remains a monument of the drafter's skill and profound knowledge of his subject.

in all the great languages of Europe, and had a friend in every centre of intellectual movement in Europe or North America. He served on the Council or Committee of some thirty Societies or Boards—including the Royal Asiatic Society, the Royal Geographical Society, the Philological Society, the S.P.G., the S.P.C.K., the C.M.S., the Charity Organization Society; was a J.P. for Middlesex and Surrey, a Visiting Justice for Wormwood Scrubs Prison, a member of the Chelsea Board of Guardians, etc. He was a good publicist, lecturer, and platform speaker; and, without being a profound scholar, he had, he tells us, knowledge for practical purposes for reading, speaking, and writing, of *sixteen languages*—

European : Greek, Latin, English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese.

Asiatic : Hebrew, Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Hindi, Ūrdū or Hindūstāni, Panjābi, Bengāli.

His religious feelings were profound, but without a trace of bigotry. Religion and missionary enterprise form the subject of several of his published volumes.

As for Dr. Cust's relations with the Royal Asiatic Society, he originally joined it in 1851, withdrew for a time on his return to India, but, on his final retirement, rejoined it; in 1872 was appointed Member of Council and Honorary Librarian, and in 1878 Honorary Secretary, a post he filled admirably for many years, being an excellent man of business, possessing, as we have seen, an extensive knowledge of languages and a wide acquaintance with foreign scholars. Besides his ordinary work as Honorary Secretary he contributed to the Journal a large number of well-written Obituary Notices, Reviews of Books, and other articles. He attended and ably represented the Society at the Oriental Congresses of London, St. Petersburg, Florence, Berlin, Leyden, Vienna, Stockholm, and, without attending, contributed papers to those of

Geneva, Paris, and Rome. He frequently took the chair at meetings of the Society in the absence of the President and Director; and, when present, took an effective part in discussions following the reading of papers.

In 1904 a cataract appeared in each eye and he began to lose his sight—a terrible deprivation, which the sufferer bore with the greatest patience, and with the help of a reader and amanuensis he continued to take a keen interest in affairs generally, and especially in his old subjects, and so late as February, 1909, he issued a pamphlet containing selections from his writings and dedicated to his children. But the failure of his strength, which commenced in 1905, steadily increased, until on October 28 he passed peacefully away.

Yes, he has passed away, full of years and the happiness resulting from a *mens conscia recti*; undecorated indeed—for the degree of LL.D. granted him late in life by the University of Edinburgh is the only title he received—but none the less honoured. He will be remembered by multitudes of friends in England, in India, in France, in Germany, in America; and his presence will be missed at the gatherings of the many Committees in which he took an active interest. Meanwhile he remains—and will long remain—an example to us all of a strenuous life well spent: a life in which he faithfully carried out, so far as he was able, the old Latin distribution of the hours of the day (which he often quoted)—

“Seven to the world; to prayer and slumber Seven;
Ten hours to work bestow, and all for Heaven.”

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With regard to personal reminiscences the writer was Dr. Cust's subordinate and fellow-worker in India for several years, and enjoyed his friendship to the last.

In India his abilities and power of work were most remarkable. Some thought him too severely logical for

ordinary mortals, and somewhat of a social recluse; but he loved India, and to all his friends, whether Indian or English, was most kind and sympathetic.

He was of a highly-strung nervous temperament, and possibly unfitted for periods of stress, and he had not the magnetic power of Lawrence or Nicholson or Edwardes; but as an organizer, investigator, and administrator dealing with complicated issues he was masterly. He was an indefatigable worker and writer, with a style particularly clear; a vigorous disputant, but always kept his temper; was intensely methodical and abhorred waste of time, but kept impatience well under control. Though he rowed in the "ten-oar" at Eton, in after-life he cared neither for games nor sport, but was fond of travel for an object, and in society was full of geniality and humour. Let me add that he was no time-server or party-man, but thought out questions for himself: "nullius addictus," as he often used to say, "jurare in verba magistri." At the same time he was always ready to listen carefully to argument.

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He leaves a widow and four children, one son and two daughters by his first wife and one daughter by his last wife. All his children have shown literary power.

T. H. THORNTON.