

OBITUARY NOTICES.

SIR WILLIAM MUIR.

THE death, on the 11th July last, of Sir William Muir, at the ripe age of 86, has brought to an end a life of remarkable activity and achievement in a number of different fields of effort. Of his long and distinguished career as an administrator in India, which lasted from 1837 to 1876, this is not the place to speak: it has already been dealt with in some detail in the notice which appeared in *The Times* of July 12. On his return to England at the end of 1876 he was nominated a member of the Council of India, and held that office till 1885, when he resigned it on his appointment as Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Edinburgh. He continued to occupy the latter post till January 1903, when he retired after no less than two-thirds of a century spent in the public service.

Sir William Muir became a member of our Society in 1877. In May 1884 he was elected President, and held that office until the following year, when he was compelled to relinquish it on taking up his residence in Edinburgh. He was Vice-President in 1885-86, and again from 1894 to 1897.

As a scholar, his fame rests securely on his great work *The Life of Mahomet*, the first two volumes of which were published in 1858, and the last two in 1861. The preface is dated Agra, January 2, 1857, on the eve of the Indian Mutiny; the work had been preceded by a long preparatory study, the results of which were communicated in a series

of articles, commencing in 1845, to the *Calcutta Review*. Some of these were republished many years later in a volume entitled *The Mohammedan Controversy, and other Indian articles* (1897). In 1876 Sir William prepared, for more popular use, an abridged edition of the *Life* in one volume. This omitted the greater portion of the notes, and the introductory chapters on the pre-Islamic history of Arabia, as well as the summaries of the *sūrah*s of the *Qur'ān*, but included the whole of the *Life* proper, and the chapter on the sources of information. A revised edition, with such changes as were required by the progress of research, appeared in 1894.

Ever since its original publication Sir William Muir's *Life* has held the field as the standard presentment, in English, of the career of the Prophet of Islam. While availing himself of the labours of his predecessors, Dr. Gustav Weil, Dr. Sprenger, and M. Caussin de Perceval, the author has throughout founded his work on the original authorities, which at the time when he wrote had for the most part not yet been printed. The manuscripts which he used, and which are now deposited in the India Office Library, consisted of an abridgement of Ibn Hishām's *Sīrat ar-Rasūl*, the autograph of the compiler, dating from 707 of the Hijrah; the volume of Ṭabarī's *Annals* dealing with the whole of the Prophet's life except the last five years; and, most important of all, the portion of the *Ṭabaqāt* of Ibn Sa'd, called the Secretary of Wākīdī, giving the traditions relating to Muḥammad's career. For the Medinah period he was able to use in print Von Kremer's edition in the *Bibliotheca Indica* of the *Maghāzī* of Wākīdī. Of the *Qur'ān* and its commentaries, which must ever remain the groundwork of any theory of Muḥammad's development, Sir W. Muir had a thorough knowledge; and he had also access to the great collections of traditions made by Bukhārī and Tirmidhī. This branch of Arabic learning is perhaps that most cultivated by Indian scholars, and in his study of the *Hadīth* he had the assistance of the most erudite men to be found in the country.

The introductory chapter on the sources of the biography states, with a skill and clearness which have never been surpassed, the criteria which must be applied in utilising, for an account of the Prophet's career, the information furnished by the *Qur'ān* and the supplementary data of tradition. The author's intimate knowledge and experience of Oriental character enabled him to criticise and interpret these data with a unique authority; and the chapter will always be read with profit by those who approach the task of constructing a rational account of the origins of the Faith of Islam. Of the biography itself, among other excellences, may be mentioned the clear and vivid style, the systematic and well-arranged presentment of facts, and the sobriety of judgment in the estimate of probabilities. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that the work is marked with a polemic character which must necessarily render it in some degree antipathetic to those who profess the religion of Muḥammad. It began in a controversy between Islam and Christianity, and the echoes of that controversy make themselves heard from time to time as the narrative proceeds. Yet it can scarcely be doubted that the author always strove to be just and fair: anyone who reads the 37th chapter, dealing with the character of the Prophet, must be convinced of this; and it is sufficient evidence of his good faith and candour that, in spite of the strong position which he maintained on the side of his own creed in the standing controversy, he always retained the confidence of the Muhammadans of Upper India, and spoke to them with unquestioned authority on matters in which their religion was concerned.

After his return to Europe Muir continued to occupy himself with Islamic history, and in 1883 produced his second contribution to the subject in *The Annals of the Early Caliphate*. This work is chiefly based upon the *Kāmil* of Ibn al-Athīr, the edition of Ṭabarī which had been commenced at Leiden in 1879 not having progressed sufficiently to afford independent material. Balādhurī was also utilised, and Dr. Weil's *Geschichte der Chalifen* again afforded an

outline which was filled in by Muir from the original sources. In 1891 the book, which had dealt in detail only with the history of the first four Caliphs, was expanded in a second edition into *The Caliphate: its Rise, Decline, and Fall*, and carried down to the extinction of the Fatimides in Egypt. A third edition of the work appeared in 1898, and it has evidently been appreciated by the reading public as a vivid and masterly summary of the history of the Islamic Empire during the centuries of its greatest development. It is not, however, anything more than a summary. The facts are related as set forth by others, and the rapid course of the narrative precluded discussion of the data contained in the original authorities. Indeed, until Wellhausen's work, in his *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten*, Part vi, and *Das Arabische Reich*, appeared within the last decade, no one had applied the tests of strict criticism to the traditional material; and the picturesque romances of Saif, son of 'Umar, the Tamīmite, relating to the Early Conquests, were generally accepted as history.

In 1896 Muir gave to the world his last historical work on Islam in his *History of the Mameluke or Slave Dynasty of Egypt*. This is mainly founded on the last two volumes of Weil's *Geschichte der Chalifen*; like the *Caliphate*, it is marked by clear and picturesque arrangement of materials, and in its rapid outlines is well calculated to give an accurate idea of one of the most extraordinary experiments in government which have ever been tried in human history.

Besides these standard works, Sir W. Muir made a great number of contributions, as a champion of Christianity, to the Muhammadan controversy. Of these it is not necessary to say much. The little book on *The Coran: its Composition and Teaching, and its Testimony to the Holy Scriptures*, published by the S.P.C.K. in 1878 in its series relating to non-Christian religions, deserves mention. It was a re-arrangement and expansion of an early essay printed so far back as 1855, and re-edited in 1860. Another interesting production was his work on the *Apology of al-Kindy* (1882: 2nd edition 1887), consisting of an introductory essay, which

originally appeared in the Journal of our Society, and a summary of the *Apology*, the original Arabic text of which was printed in 1880 by the Rev. A. Tien for the Turkish Mission Aid Society.

Besides the essay on al-Kindī's *Apology*, Sir W. Muir contributed to our Journal in 1879 an interesting paper on "Ancient Arabic Poetry: its genuineness and authenticity."

In 1903 the great value, importance, and volume of the work done by Sir William Muir in furtherance of the study of Islamic history and literature were recognised by the award to him of the Society's Triennial Jubilee Gold Medal, the previous recipients of which had been the late Professor Cowell (1897) and the late Dr. E. W. West (1900). Sir William had previously received the honorary degree of D.C.L. from the University of Oxford and that of LL.D. from the Universities of Cambridge, Edinburgh, and Glasgow, while the University of Bologna had made him a Doctor of Philosophy.

C. J. LYALL.

WE regret to announce the death of two of the Honorary Members of the Society, M. Jules Oppert and the Rev. Dr. Edkins. In the January Journal a full account of their life and work will appear.

NOTE.—*The Index for 1905 will appear with the January number for 1906.*
