

H. I. BELL

(1879-1967)

Papyrologists all over the world will have learnt with regret of the death in his eighty-eighth year of Sir Harold Idris Bell, Vice-President and former President of the Association Internationale de Papyrologues. He was a junior contemporary of the pioneers who created the new discipline of papyrology at the turn of the century. With his death we have not only lost one of the few remaining direct links with them, but also a scholar whose own contributions to papyrological studies were so great that he can be ranked alongside them as one of the « Grand Masters » of this branch of learning.

Soon after his appointment to the staff of the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum in 1903 he was approached by F. G. Kenyon and invited to assist in editing the Greek papyri in the Museum's possession. The story of this invitation is one which he never ceased to take pleasure in telling, nor did he ever lose the enthusiastic delight with which he then embarked on his papyrological researches. His first major contribution was his share in the editing of the third volume of the Museum's *Catalogue of Greek Papyri*, which he followed by editing on his own the fourth and fifth volumes. The first of these in particular, *The Aphrodito Papyri*, was an enormous achievement; not only were the texts extremely long, but they related to the early part of the Arab domination of Egypt and thus to what was then virtually unexplored territory. A further volume devoted to the Museum's papyri, entitled *Jews and Christians in Egypt*, perhaps shows more clearly than anywhere else his ability both as an editor of unpublished texts and as an interpreter of their content.

With his promotion to a more responsible position in the British Museum, where he was Keeper of Manuscripts from 1929 until his retirement in 1944, he found himself increasingly involved in administrative work. To these duties, with their endless round of committees, he devoted himself with his customary thoroughness and conscientiousness; yet somehow he contrived to continue pouring

out contributions to papyrological research (1). He collaborated with others many times in editing new texts, e.g. in *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri XVI and XIX*, *The Merton Papyri I and II*, and *The Abinnaeus Archive*, the last of which did not appear until he was over eighty.

Bell's services to papyrological studies did not stop with his published work. His help and counsel were readily available to all, no matter how trivial or inept the request. To the young or inexperienced scholar, struggling over his first transcripts, he never failed to be kind and encouraging, to point out error in a constructive and helpful way, and to inculcate, by example rather than precept, his own standards of scholarship. Needless to say, these were of the highest: meticulous attention to detail, scrupulous adherence to the facts, refusal to shirk any difficulty. But to those who failed to come up to these standards he always managed to offer sympathetic encouragement and to criticise without expressing or arousing rancour. He formed many friendships with papyrological scholars all over the world; especially with Victor Martin in Geneva and Wilhelm Schubart in Berlin his friendship was deep and long-lasting. He thus could well have claimed (though characteristically always refused to do so) that he played a major part in creating and fostering the *amicitia papyrologorum*.

Two publications which belong to the years after his retirement deserve to be mentioned separately, *Egypt from Alexander the Great to the Arab conquest* and *Cults and Creeds in Graeco-Roman Egypt*; one devoted to the political and administrative, and the other to the religious, history of Egypt, subjects which had remained among his very special interests since the publication of *Jews and Christians* over twenty years earlier. Each of these books resulted from a series of lectures given to an academic but non-specialist audience, and they illustrate clearly the facility with which he used the English language and the remarkable clarity he achieved. They show too the wide sweep of his knowledge and his exceptional ability for going beyond the mass of detail and picking out the broader truths lying behind it. Other reasons for his success as a scholar were his excellent memory, his sound judgment, and above all perhaps his

(1) A bibliography of Bell's papyrological work was published in *J.E.A.* XL (1954), 3-6, and a supplementary list is to appear in the forthcoming volume for 1967.

capacity for sheer hard work. It is a measure of his achievement that he used his talents to such purpose as to take his place among the foremost scholars of his generation.

The other great love of his life, inherited from his mother, was for Wales, and in particular for Welsh literature. By his translations of poetry he did much to make it known to a wider audience, and in this field too he achieved distinction as a scholar. It came as no surprise therefore that he should choose to spend his retirement far from the metropolis which had been his home for so long in the peace of rural Wales. His retirement was long and on the whole happy, though his later years were marred by the untimely death of one of his three sons, the fatal illness (mercifully brief) of his devoted wife, whose death preceded his own by a few days, and his own failing eyesight, which in the last year of his life deprived him of the joy of reading.

It was a great privilege to have known him personally. He was a genuinely humble man, who never ceased to be surprised at the honours that showered upon him over the last thirty years of his life, civil honours, culminating in a knighthood in 1946, and academic, *inter alia* he was given an honorary doctorate by the Universities of Wales, Michigan, Brussels and Liverpool. He had retained the idealism of his youth and was always ready to lend his name and services to a cause which he considered to have the good of humanity at heart. He was of simple tastes and had an enviable inner serenity. He was self-effacing, though not lacking in self-confidence, utterly without malice or cynicism, gentle, always thinking of others, never of himself. We have lost a great scholar and a good man.

J. DAVID THOMAS

Da poco è scomparso anche EVARISTO BRECCIA, illustre studioso dell'Egitto greco-romano, grande amico nostro e di *Aegyptus*, a cui Egli concesse aiuto ed assistenza fin dagli inizi, nell'ormai lontano 1920. Mentre con animo oppresso da mestizia ne diamo il triste annuncio, ci proponiamo di ricordarlo degnamente in seguito.