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978-1-107-63777-1 - The Growth and Nature of Egyptology: An Inaugural Lecture
S. R. K. Glanville
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IT MAY BE ASSUMED, I suppose, that no University in this country would to-day create a new Chair which it did not consider met a need, however limited. But if I therefore take for granted your charitable welcome to a Professorship of Egyptology at Cambridge, I realize too that you may wish to know what contribution the subject can make to university education as a whole, and perhaps even what Egyptology really is. For it is true that it is possible to spend a lifetime without having meditated upon the content of that word and be none the worse for it. Not that I wish to be too modest on behalf of my subject. 'Egyptian history', wrote Wilkinson ninety years ago, 'Egyptian history and the manners of one of the most ancient nations, cannot but be interesting to every one.'

Nor, on the other hand, is it in any aggressive spirit that I call your attention to an apparent tardiness on the part of this University in giving due recognition to Egyptology. The subject has a certain claim to antiquity. London first gave it academic standing in this country with the foundation fifty-five years ago of the Edwards Professorship at University College for Flinders Petrie. Oxford followed in 1901 with a two-term Readership whose first holder, F. Ll. Griffith, brought it such distinction that he was later



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given the title of Professor and a full Chair was created for his successor. Liverpool came next with a Professorship in 1906; and from 1912–14 Manchester had a Readership, although since then the teaching of Egyptology in that University has been provided by the Professor at Liverpool. Thus, in the space of thirty years, Egyptologists were installed at four of our Universities—Universities of very different traditions. Cambridge has waited all but another quarter of a century to follow suit. The explanation of the delay is probably not merely that Cambridge had to wait for a benefactor, as London and Liverpool had to. The truth is that Egyptology is never likely to be able to claim anything but a modest place in the academic economy. But that it has its place, if only a modest place, I hope to be able to persuade you this afternoon.

Before I come to that theme, let me try and make amends for any stricture which may seem to have been implied in the statistics I have just given. Cambridge, without a school of Egyptology, has produced her great Egyptologists. Three names stand out.

The least familiar to-day, but the greatest intellect among them and the one for whom it may properly be claimed that he was a pioneer in the subject, was CHARLES WYCLIFFE GOODWIN. Born in 1817, the son of a King's Lynn solicitor, he came up to St Catharine's and graduated, in 1838, 6th Classic and senior optime in Mathematics. After three leisurely



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years, spent visiting friends, he read for the Bar at Lincoln's Inn and was called in 1843. Finding the Law uncongenial, he returned to Cambridge the following year with a Fellowship at his old College, having still in mind an earlier intention to take Holy Orders, and determined to teach. Within a year or two he resigned his Fellowship on the ground that he could no longer conscientiously accept all the doctrines of the Church, and went back to London to practise as a barrister. So he continued till 1865, when he was appointed Assistant Judge for the Supreme Court for China and Japan, married, and removed to Shanghai. There he remained (except for a single visit to England on leave) till his death in 1878, having succeeded to the Chief Judgeship two years earlier.

By the time Goodwin finally left Cambridge, he was a first-class Greek scholar, an accomplished Hebraist, and an authority on Anglo-Saxon with valuable editions of new texts to his credit. He also had a considerable knowledge of natural history, especially geology. In London, where his practice was not large, he wrote music and art criticism; was for a time editor of the *Literary Gazette*; was the only layman among the seven contributors to the much talked of *Essays and Reviews* (1860); and, because of his Greek and Hebrew scholarship, was frequently consulted by the Revisers of the New Testament. But throughout his life his main interest, begun when he



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was at school, was in the elucidation of Ancient Egyptian and Coptic texts, more especially those Egyptian texts written in the cursive script called hieratic.

In London he spent much of his time in the British Museum, copying papyri. He was in close touch with Samuel Birch, then Keeper of the Oriental Department, and was constantly exchanging information by correspondence with the other leading Egyptologists of his day. He was indeed accepted as one of their number, and his biographer[1] has remarked that when Sir Henry Layard as Parliamentary Under-Secretary to Earl Russell, then Foreign Minister, forwarded Goodwin's application for a legal appointment in the East, he made no reference to Goodwin's legal qualifications, but pressed the claim of his scholarship and especially of his study of hieratic papyri; and when, a few years later, a friend wrote to Lord Granville at the Foreign Office, suggesting that Goodwin (against the latter's own wishes) should be found a post in Egypt, Granville replied: 'His eminence as an Egyptological discoverer is well known, and I should be very glad if it were in my power to afford him an opportunity of further advancing the important science which already owes so much to his energy and critical insight.'

[1] Warren R. Dawson, on whose monograph, *Charles Wycliffe Goodwin*, 1817–1878. *A Pioneer in Egyptology*, Oxford University Press, 1934, this account is based.



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Goodwin published a very considerable number of short articles on his Egyptian studies, mostly in foreign journals, which reveal not only his intellectual power, but also the capital importance of his contribution to the development of Egyptological research in his day. But his reputation in the science would have been made by, and would stand for all time on, his essay 'Hieratic Papyri', published in 1858 in *Cambridge Essays*. In this, to quote his biographer, 'Goodwin shows himself to be at once a skilled decipherer of hieratic writing and a brilliant interpreter of it'. It was the foundation on which most subsequent translators of these documents built, and has rightly been called in our own day epoch-making.

I have spoken at some length of C. W. Goodwin, but I hope you will agree that this is a fitting place in which to pay tribute to that one of the small band of Egyptological pioneers who owed the greater part of his training for scholarship to Cambridge. I will speak more briefly of the other two to whom I have referred.

Goodwin had been indefatigable in his correspondence on Egyptian subjects with Sir Peter le Page Renouf who succeeded Birch at the British Museum in 1885. Two years earlier, E. A. WALLIS BUDGE had joined the Department as an assistant. Budge had studied cuneiform in the early days of its decipherment and was sent up to Christ's at Mr Gladstone's



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suggestion to read Oriental Languages under William Wright. His early work in the Museum was devoted to Assyrian texts, but for official reasons Birch directed him to hieroglyphic studies, which he had begun years before. On Renouf's retirement in 1892 Budge was made Acting Keeper, and Keeper in 1894. By the time he retired in 1924, he could show a list of publications, both technical and popular, unrivalled in bulk and in range of subject by those of any other Egyptologist; he had been responsible for securing large and valuable increases to the collections in his Department, notably in the field of papyri; he had produced, with the help of his staff, the most instructive set of *Guides* to be found in any Department in the Museum, and had maintained at high pressure the principle that a primary obligation of the Museum's officers was to publish the material—whether papyri, tablets, or antiquities—for which they were responsible to the public. He received a knighthood in recognition of his vigorous and single-purposed devotion to the safety of the collections under his charge during the War of 1914–18. By his popular books Budge made a small public as familiar with Egyptian writing, literature, and thought, as Sir Flinders Petrie made it familiar with Egyptian archaeology, long before the discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamen and an enlightened management of the *Illustrated London News* had made the whole of the literate population excavation-conscious.



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Popular writing on such a scale by a scholar easily invites criticism from academic colleagues; so prolific an output of learned books could only be achieved at some cost in accuracy; so single-minded a loyalty to what he conceived to be his duty to the nation, as represented by the Trustees of the Museum, inevitably brought him into conflict with individuals outside it. Probably no Egyptologist of his stature—which none could deny him—enjoyed a worse reputation among his colleagues than did Budge at the height of his power and productivity. After his retirement many old animosities were dissipated. When he died in 1934, a memorial service at St Paul's brought together most of the Egyptologists in the country, among them some of his bitterest critics. It was a tribute, grudging perhaps, to a giant. By his will he divided his estate between University College, Oxford, and his old College at Cambridge, to provide at each institution an Egyptological foundation to be named after his wife. To Christ's also he left his library.

I think it is beyond question that Wallis Budge did more than any other man to rouse in the ordinary reader of this country an interest in the language and writings of Ancient Egypt. The splendid volumes of facsimiles of papyri which he edited for the British Museum, often with transliterations and translations, together with a certain number of his own editions of texts, both Ancient Egyptian and Coptic, are



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indispensable to-day and will remain so for many years; and to Cambridge he gave her first Egyptological foundation. He, too, should be remembered gratefully and with pride on this occasion.[1]

I pass to the third name, that of SIR HERBERT THOMPSON, to whose benefaction to the University I owe it that I am speaking here now. He was born in 1859—only two years after Wallis Budge—and left Marlborough at the age of sixteen, having reached the top of the school and won a major scholarship at Trinity. After a year in Germany and some months in a London business office, he came up to Cambridge, but failed to distinguish himself in the Classical Tripos, apparently from over-study—a not common cause. At his father's wish he read for the Bar, was called, and practised for some years in the chambers of the late W. O. Danckwerts. But, though his legal experience was to be of great value to him in his Demotic work later on, practising in the Courts was entirely uncongenial. (His real interest at this time was in music and art, medieval studies, Icelandic—and always the classics.) His father agreed to his giving up the Bar on condition that he took up Biology. This new career proved abortive; too strenuous use of the microscope seriously damaged his

[1] The earliest Egyptian collections in the Fitzwilliam Museum owed much to Budge; and an *Introduction* which he planned to his *Catalogue* of the Collection grew into *The Mummy*, in its second and much enlarged edition (Cambridge University Press, 1925) still perhaps the best general handbook on Egyptology.



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sight, and for some months he was unable to use his eyes. His vision was saved, but the microscope was forbidden. The accident of proximity to Flinders Petrie led to his taking up Egyptology at University College, London, at the age of forty. F. Ll. Griffith and W. E. Crum were teaching at University College at this time and under their influence Thompson came to confine himself to Demotic and Coptic after a preliminary training in the earlier stages of the language. When he died, forty-five years later, he was the leading Demotist of his day and among the first three or four Copticists.

If you look up the entry against Henry Francis Herbert Thompson in a volume of *Who's Who* for the early 1940's, you will find it comprised in seven or eight lines. There is no reference to the remarkable musician, Kate Fanny Loder, his mother, devotion to whose memory was one of the reasons for his retirement to her native town of Bath; no mention of the six or seven major publications of texts which will perpetuate his memory. This extreme reticence and modesty were to the ordinary observer the most characteristic marks of the man; though they could not entirely conceal his extraordinary generosity from his friends. Nothing would have more distressed him than to know that an encomium on himself was to be delivered in public. I have written elsewhere more than he would have cared to read about himself. Adequately to record my own debt to him as teacher



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and friend would be quite outside the scope of this lecture. To-day I ask you to be content with this bare witness to his distinction as a scholar.

I think I have said enough to show that Cambridge had already made a worthy contribution to Egyptology before the subject had any place in the University's curriculum. It must suffice only to mention some later names: among my seniors when I first came to the subject, two archaeologists, J. E. Quibell and F. W. Green, and two Copticists, Forbes Robertson and Stephen Gaselee; among contemporaries, Sidney Smith (Budge's second successor) and I. E. S. Edwards at the British Museum, and two who died in action in the recent war, John Pendlebury on his way to becoming an archaeological colossus with one foot in Crete and the other in Egypt, and Charles Allberry who at one blow had established his reputation as a Coptic scholar in the first class. Were he alive to-day, Cambridge would have had no need to import her first Herbert Thompson Professor.

But to return to the progress and nature of Egyptology. As a scientific study Egyptology is a comparatively modern development—the latest arrival among the Humanities. This is not entirely due to lack of material to work upon, and certainly not to lack of interest. There is ample testimony in the classical writers not only to contemporary curiosity about the earlier and, as they recognized, long-lived history of the Egyptians, but also to the importance



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