

OBITUARY NOTICE

JACOB SAMUEL SPEYER

By the death of Dr. J. S. Speyer, which occurred very suddenly in the morning of November 1, Sanskrit philology has sustained a loss which will be widely felt.

Jacob Samuel Speyer was born at Amsterdam on December 20, 1849. There he first attended the Gymnasium, and in 1865, at the age of not yet 16, he joined the Municipal College known as the "Athenæum Illustre", which since then has developed into the University of Amsterdam. After studying classics at Amsterdam for three years, he continued his studies at the University of Leyden, where Dr. Hendrik Kern then occupied the newly founded chair for Sanskrit. It was Kern, the great master of languages, who thenceforth became his chief guide. On December 21, 1872, at the age of 23, Speyer took his degree as Doctor of Philosophy on a thesis entitled *De ceremonia apud Indos quæ vocatur jātakarma*.

In November, 1873, the young doctor was called to teach Latin at the Gymnasium of Amsterdam, and from October 15, 1879 (i.e. from the date of its foundation), he became, in addition, attached to the Municipal University in that town as a Reader (Lector) of Sanskrit. In May, 1888, his Readership had been converted into an extraordinary Professorship for Sanskrit and Comparative Philology, when on December 19 of the same year he was appointed Professor of Sanskrit and Latin at the University of Groningen. He joined his new post on March 23 of the year following. After having lectured at Groningen for a period of fourteen years, Speyer was called to succeed his master, Dr. Kern, who, having reached the

age-limit of 70 fixed by the law, had to resign his Professorship of Sanskrit in the University of Leyden. Kern, the first and foremost Sanskritist of Holland, could not have found one worthier to succeed him than Speyer, on whom he ever looked as his principal pupil. During ten years Speyer taught at Leyden. He did not, like his master, live to reach the age of 70 and enjoy a well-earned rest. At the age of nearly 64 he died, only a few months after he had taken a prominent part in the celebration of Kern's 80th anniversary. The master has survived his favourite pupil.

Speyer's career as a teacher of Sanskrit at three out of the four universities of Holland extends over a period of thirty-four years. Those who have followed his lectures are unanimous as to the excellence of his teaching. They praise his clearness, his devotion, his never-failing patience. The number of his pupils who have taken their degree in Sanskrit is necessarily small, but includes some very prominent among the younger generation of Dutch scholars, like Dr. J. Huizinga, now Professor of History at Groningen, and Dr. B. Faddegon, Reader of Sanskrit at Amsterdam. The former, when speaking at his master's funeral on behalf of his fellow-pupils, declared that Speyer in no manner could better illustrate the ideal relationship between *guru* and *śishya* than through his own example.

It is, however, not Speyer's work as a teacher which will in the first place interest readers of this Journal, but his work as a writer. For through the latter his labours have borne fruit far beyond the somewhat narrow limits of his fatherland. That this has become possible is mainly due to the circumstance that Speyer wisely chose to write some of his leading contributions to Sanskrit scholarship in some language—English or German—more easily accessible to foreign colleagues than his native tongue.

In a time when the course of Sanskrit studies usually compels workers to restrict themselves to one particular parcel of that ever-widening field, one must be struck in the first place by the very vast range of Speyer's studies, which almost recalls the pioneer days of Von Schlegel and Wilson. Speyer combined in a remarkable degree the thorough and minute knowledge of the grammarian with the æsthetic taste of the *homme de lettres*. Indeed, he considered that without the former the right appreciation of literary beauties was an impossibility. His principal work in the department of grammar was his "Vedische und Sanskrit Syntax", which appeared in Bühler's *Grundriss der Indo-arischen Philologie*.

Speyer proved a true pupil of Kern's in that he paid special attention to the sacred lore of Indian Buddhism. After Kern had published his excellent edition of 'Āryasūra's *Jātakamālā*, the famous Sanskrit collection of Buddhist birth-stories, it was Speyer who, through his English translation, rendered that remarkable work available to non-Sanskritists. It appeared as the first volume of Max Müller's "Sacred Books of the Buddhists". Another important work of Speyer's in this department of Indian studies is his edition of the *Avadānaśataka*.

Closely related to the branch of Buddhist lore represented by the above-named two works are the big collections of fables and fairy tales, which are usually reckoned to belong to Brahmanical literature. To these Speyer devoted an exhaustive investigation, which, under the title *Studies about the Kathāsaritsāgara*, appeared in the Monographs of the Royal Academy of Sciences at Amsterdam (vol. viii, No. 5, 1908). On very sound grounds the author arrived at the conclusion that the *Bṛhatkathā*, the old Paiśāci work now lost, on which the later collections are based, was in existence about A.D. 600 and that the date of its composition cannot be far removed from that limit.

In this connexion Speyer discussed also the date of another important production of Sanskrit literature, the historical play *Mudrārākṣasa*, by Viśākhadatta. The best authorities had assigned this drama to the eighth or ninth century. According to Speyer's opinion it "is by four or five centuries older and must rank with the *Mrcchakaṭikā* as the two most ancient plays of the Hindu theatre come to us". The author further conjectured that Viśākhadatta had taken the victory of Candragupta Maurya over the "barbarians" as the subject of his play in order to glorify a similar exploit by his royal patron, one of the two Candraguptas of the Gupta dynasty. This assumption is in full agreement with the prominence of art, both literary and plastic, during the period of the great Gupta emperors.

The drama was another branch of Sanskrit (and Prākṛit) literature which had great attractions for Speyer. It is significant that two of his pupils took their doctor's degree on a thesis the subject of which was taken from the ancient Hindu drama. Particularly Dr. Huizinga's "dissertation" on the *Vidūṣaka*, the clown of the ancient Indian stage, is a work which does great credit, not only to its author, but also to the master under whose guidance it was composed.

Professor Speyer contributed a considerable number of papers (mostly in Dutch) to the Royal Academy of Amsterdam, of which he was a member since April, 1889. Some of his earlier papers deal with subjects borrowed from the Latin language, literature, and mythology. Among his Indian articles I mention his "Kritische Nachlese zu Aṣvaghosha's *Buddhacarita*" (Proceedings, ser. III, vol. xi, No. 3, 1895) and his "Notes on the text of Saundarananda, the poem of Aṣvaghosha, edited by Professor Haraprasād" (Proceedings, ser. IV, vol. vi, No. 2).

In the Journal of the German Oriental Society also Speyer published several of his papers on questions of

Sanskrit grammar and various other subjects. His last contribution to the *Zeitschrift* is entitled "Ein alt-javanischer mahāyānistischer Katechismus" (Bd. lxxvii, 1913). In this connexion I mention also a paper (in Dutch) on a Buddhist inscription from Java (Proceedings Royal Academy of Amsterdam, ser. IV, vol. vi, No. 2, 1904). The two last-mentioned papers show that the antiquities of Java also had been drawn within the compass of Speyer's studies. Though not exactly an archæologist himself, he fully appreciated the value of antiquarian research, and in his official capacity did much to promote this line of investigation in Dutch India. Dr. N. J. Krom, the present Director of Archæology in Java, was one of his pupils.

Professor Speyer was not one of those savants who jealously guard their learning within the inner circle of the initiated. He believed in popularizing his science, and many articles on Indian and allied subjects from his pen appeared in Dutch magazines intended for the educated public at large. There was, moreover, a special reason which induced Speyer to place his great learning at the disposal of his country and to act as a guide in a field of research so far removed, one would think, from modern life and its interests. It was the "theosophical" movement which of a sudden had given prominence to Indian philosophy and religion among the cultured in Holland as well as in other Western countries. Eastern mysticism couched in learned Sanskrit terms proved attractive to many minds whom dogmatic Christianity could no longer satisfy. The new religion inaugurated by Madame Blavatsky which pretended to provide the initiated with the quintessence of all the great world religions combined, but in reality reproduced certain Indian ideas adapted to Western use, was bound to be repulsive to one familiar with the ancient culture of India and well aware of its failings. The rapid growth of the

Theosophical Society was well calculated to rouse alarm in a man of such sound judgment and vast knowledge as Speyer, who as the official representative of Sanskrit learning at the chief University of Holland considered it his duty to raise a warning voice against the uncritical and wholesale surrender to Indian ideas, promulgated in a garbled shape by Western theosophists. This self-imposed task, both distasteful and thankless, he discharged in a series of lectures, which subsequently appeared in a volume entitled *De Indische theosophie en hare biteekenis voor ons* (Leiden, 1910). In it the author discussed at considerable length the various theosophical systems of India, and in his concluding chapter he reviewed the various forms in which they had made their appearance in the West. It is questionable whether Speyer's book will convert many Neo-Buddhists and theosophists. There are always certain minds to whom wisdom alleged to be derived in a mysterious manner from invisible Tibetan *mahātmas* will be more attractive than the knowledge gathered through lifelong study in the common way from the books. At any rate, Speyer has placed his knowledge at the disposal of the seekers after truth, and hereby he has undoubtedly done a good work.

To those who wished to be guided Speyer was an excellent guide. For not only his extensive learning, but also his common sense, his clear view, his precision, and above all his great kindness and moderation, made him a master not only to be revered but also to be loved.

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