

OBITUARY

We regret to chronicle the death of the Rev. William Ernest Taylor—the foremost Swahili scholar in this country—which occurred, suddenly, at Bath on the 2nd October. Mr. Taylor, a graduate of Hertford College, Oxon, went to Africa in the service of the Church Missionary Society, and remained there till 1896, when failing health compelled him to leave. He afterwards worked in Egypt for two years (1898–1900) and after an interval of clerical duty in England, returned for a short time to Khartum in 1903. The rest of his life was passed at home, the last few years as Rector of Halton Holgate, in Lincolnshire. His linguistic ability was exceptional, and his ear for sounds extraordinarily delicate and sensitive. While his terminology is frequently inexact (the science of Phonetics was in its infancy when he began his studies, inspired by the work of the late Henry Sweet), his conclusions are almost invariably sound. His published work is scarcely proportionate to the extent of his knowledge: it includes translations (into the Mombasa dialect) of the Prayer Book, Gospels, and Psalms and—most important from the linguistic point of view—*African Aphorisms* (1891), *Giryama Vocabulary and Collections* (1891)—prefaced by some invaluable phonetic and grammatical notes on this interesting language, and conveying, incidentally, much important information as to beliefs and customs—*Groundwork of the Swahili Language* (1899) and the annotated edition of the *Inkishafi* poem included in the late Captain Stigand's *Dialect in Swahili*. The *Aphorisms* should never have been allowed to go out of print, both for the sake of the proverbs themselves and the notes, which besides elucidating many obscure points in Bantu grammar are full of interest from other points of view. Mr. Taylor was an enthusiast for the Mombasa dialect, which he considered the purest—at any rate, the one best adapted for the prose, as that of Lamu for poetry and that of Zanzibar for trade. (It has been, perhaps, somewhat unduly depreciated of late.) Professor Meinhof has repeatedly called attention to the value of Mr. Taylor's linguistic and more especially, phonetic work, which, he thought, was insufficiently appreciated in this country. After his retirement from work in Africa, he acted for many years as Examiner in Swahili to the War Office. I had not the honour of being personally acquainted with Mr. Taylor, but found,

in 1911–13, that he was still held in affectionate remembrance by the natives of Mombasa and other places on the Swahili Coast. Thus, Muhammad bin Ma‘alim, in relating the local tradition about the Portuguese priest, Dom Miguel of Mombasa, said : “ He was just like ‘Bwana Tela ’—everyone knew him, men, women, and children—and they all loved him.” Popular verses, still current in my time, testified to the respect which the Moslems felt for him, while repudiating his theology. For instance—

Azingazinga na chuo kwapani.
Atafuta mema, haoni ibada ya Mola :
Haiko sokoni, hatwendi, Tela, ziwani !

A. W.