

IV.—OBITUARY NOTICES OF DECEASED MEMBERS.

1.—PROFESSOR GEORGE STEPHENS, of Copenhagen, LL.D.; F.S.A.,
etc., Honorary Member.

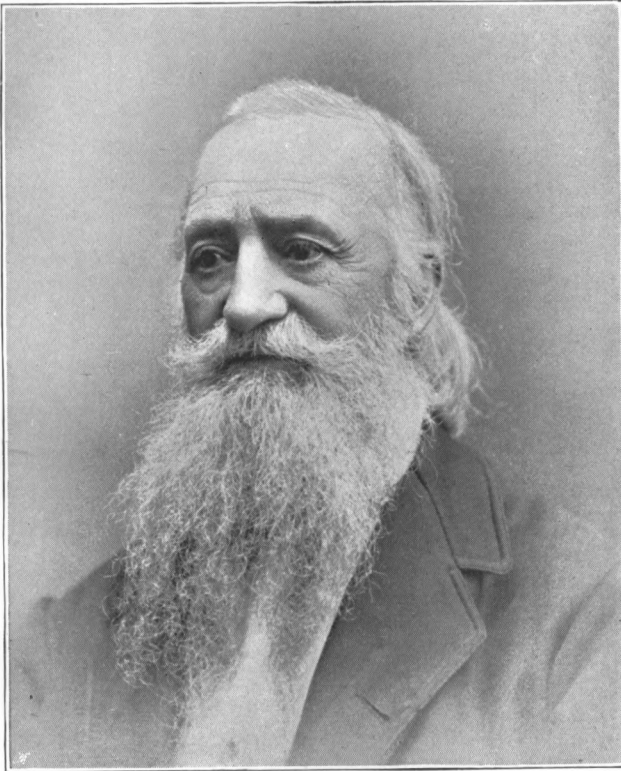
By THOMAS HODGKIN, D.C.L., F.S.A., etc., Secretary.

[Read on the 30th October, 1895.]

WITH deep regret we have to record the death of professor George Stephens of Copenhagen, the patriarch of Scandinavian archaeology and an honorary member of our Society.

Professor Stephens was one of the rather small class of Englishmen who have settled and found a home neither under the Union Jack nor the Stars and Stripes. The son of a Wesleyan minister (the rev. John Stephens of Ongar, Essex), George Stephens was born at Liverpool in 1813. His academic education was received at University college, London, of which he must have been one of the earliest students. His strong philological bias caused him, while still a young man, to undertake extensive journeys in order to study the local dialects of Great Britain and Scandinavia. Shortly after his marriage (to Miss Maria Bennett), which took place in 1834, he settled in Stockholm, where it is believed he adopted the profession of a teacher. In 1851, however, he removed to Copenhagen, having received the appointment of professor of English Language and Literature in the university of that city, which he held till 1894.

The life-labour of professor Stephens was the study of old Runes. While strictly contending for the specially Sandinavian (or to use his own phrase Scando-Anglian) character of this interesting script, he heartily accepted the rev. Isaac Taylor's brilliant suggestion that it was originally derived from the Greek colonies of Thrace and the Euxine, being carried by Gothic tribes along the valleys of the Dnieper and the Vistula; and so reaching the Scandinavian lands, all which probably occurred six or seven centuries before Christ. But he strenuously combated the theory of 'so-called German Runes,' and in his bitter attacks on the German 'annexers,' who wished to wrest the Runic alphabet from his beloved Scandinavians, may be heard some echoes



*Your friend & servant,
George Stephens.*



of the war of 1864, which resulted in the dismemberment of Denmark by the overwhelming might of Germany. He seems to have been all his life a keen politician, and in his published pamphlets there are to be found some pretty sharp attacks on European or English statesmen who had roused his anger.

One of the points for which professor Stephens strenuously contended was that the 15th letter in the Runic alphabet Ψ , which undoubtedly had in the later Scandinavian inscriptions the power of M, was originally and for many centuries equivalent to A. Here also Isaac Taylor agrees with Stephens in the main, at least he says that, 'though originally descended from a guttural, it cannot be doubted that in some inscriptions it has the power of a vowel' (*Greek and Goths*, 84-5). The fourth Rune F , to which most preceding scholars had assigned the value of A, must, according to Stephens, be read (in the earlier inscriptions) as Æ . Here, also, he is in general agreement with Taylor, who derives this Rune-letter from the Greek Epsilon.

Another of Stephens's main points was 'that the whole modern doctrine of one uniform classical, more or less Icelandic, language all over the immense north, from Finland and Halogoland to the Eider and the Thames, in the first thousand years after Christ, is an impossible absurdity,' that Icelandic, as we now know it, is a peculiarly developed and artificial dialect, and that 'in one word, to translate the oldest Runic inscriptions written in their local floating dialects from 200 to 700 or 800 A.D., into a modern uniformised "Icelandic" of the 13th or 14th century, is as reasonable as it would be to read Latin monuments from the times of the Kings and the Republic, as if they answered to the classical dialect of Florentine Dante.' Evidently this question of the language with which the Runes are to be read is one of primary importance to the decipherer of Runic inscriptions.

Though perhaps sometimes hasty in forming his own conclusion, Stephens saw clearly the dangers of premature and precipitate criticism. As he himself says at the end of one of his 'forewords': 'The present rage for infallibly fixing everything all at once is highly to be deprecated. Future finds and the progress of Runic studies will doubtless modify some things here given. We shall know more a hundred years hence than we do now.'

An amusing instance of the errors into which over-speed in coming to a conclusion might betray the critic was furnished by Stephens himself in his interpretation of the famous Brough inscription. In his handbook, published in 1884, he attempted to read this inscription as Runic, commemorating a certain 'Ingalang in Buckenhome.' He made, it must be confessed, very poor sense out of it, and in June of the same year professor Sayce published a letter in the *Academy* showing quite clearly that the characters were Greek, and by his labours and those of other scholars five very tolerable Greek hexameters recording the death or disappearance of a young lad named Hermes have been recovered out of the chaos of the supposed Runic epigraph. Perhaps no one was more amused at this involuntary mystification than Stephens himself. He frankly acknowledged his error, 'for which,' he said good humouredly, 'I ought to be beaten.' It must be stated, however, that the Greek professor at the University of Copenhagen declared repeatedly that the inscription was not Greek.

Professor Stephens published a great number of pamphlets, archaeological, literary, even political, both in Danish and English, but his *magnum opus* was his book in three folio volumes, *The Old Northern Runic Monuments of Scandinavia and England now first collected and deciphered* (Copenhagen, 1860-1884). A fourth volume of this work will be published posthumously about the close of the year, and will complete the catalogue of hitherto discovered Runic inscriptions. He also published, in 1884, a handsome quarto volume containing the more important inscriptions. This he called a *Handbook to the Old Northern Runic Monuments of Scandinavia and England*. We are informed that he was engaged in the last years of his life on the dialects of the north of England. The members of the Newcastle Society of Antiquaries have especial reasons for hoping that the result of these labours may not be lost to the world.

In this notice of his literary labours it is impossible to avoid some allusion to the peculiar language in which he wrote. He had all professor Freeman's horror of using a Latin or Greek word if a word of Teutonic or, better still, of Scandinavian origin could be found to serve the purpose. Thus a photograph is with him always a 'light-bild,' an antiquary is an 'old-lorist,' parchment is 'skin-book,' and so

on. His spelling also is sometimes phonographic. A few sentences from the preface to his handbook will give a good idea of the general effect which is thus produced.

‘Foreword.

I have often been askt to publish in a cheap and handy shape the rune-laves in my great folio volumes which many cannot well buy or have time to read. And this I have long wisht to do: but I waited for more finds and a better knowledge of this hard science. The day has now come when I can lay this HANDBOOK before all lovers of our Northern mother-tung. Sametimely with my *third folio tome*, which holds more than 70 new pieces bearing Old-Northern staves. (The whole tale of these O.N. rune-laves is now about 250, of which nearly 1-third is from ENGLAND ALONE, Scandinavia’s oldest colony.) This additional gathering and the onflow of Runic studies have, of course, thrown fresh light on the monuments already known.’

The venerable professor celebrated his *diamond* wedding on the 16th of January, 1894. Our member, Mr. J. Crawford Hodgson, called upon him in Copenhagen on the 6th of August, 1895; he was then very ill, but his British pluck kept him in his library at work a few hours each day until the 7th, when his work ended. He conversed with Mr. Hodgson freely on subjects of archaeological interest, and presented him with copies of his published pamphlets. On the morning of the 9th he passed peacefully away, full of years and honour. He was a lion-like man, an ardent and truth-seeking scholar, one whom England may well be proud of having lent for sixty years to her Scandinavian sisters.

2.—WILLIAM WOODMAN, one of the Vice Presidents.

By J. CRAWFORD HODGSON.

[Read on the 30th October, 1895.]

He who learns from the old, to what is he like?

‘To one who eats ripe grapes and drinks old wine.’

—*The Ethics of the Fathers.*

ABOUT the middle of the seventeenth century, Heron’s Close, in the chapelry of Hebburn, was purchased by Thomas Woodman a Hexham yeoman, and thenceforth became the seat and home of the