



From a painting by Allan D. Mains.

JOHN WIGHT DUFF.

I.—JOHN WIGHT DUFF.

BY PROFESSOR W. L. RENWICK.

[Read on 25th April 1945.]

John Wight Duff (frontispiece) was born in Dundee on 4th September, 1866, and educated in the ancient Grammar School of Aberdeen, to whose fine tradition of classical teaching he paid tribute in a reminiscent lecture delivered to the Northumberland and Durham Classical Association in 1942. From the University of Aberdeen he proceeded to Pembroke College, Oxford, at each receiving the degree of Master of Arts in due course, and then to Edinburgh, to read for the Scottish Bar until Harrower of Aberdeen—an almost legendary figure in later days—recalled him to the classics. In those palmy days the Scottish university session occupied only six months of the year, and the young assistant to the professor of Greek could spend the rest of his time at Leipzig in the seminars of Ribbeck and Justus Hermann Lipsius.

Such an opportunity did not recur, for in 1893 he was appointed professor of classics and English literature in the Durham College of Science in Newcastle upon Tyne, where his time was fully occupied. It was fortunate that Duff had gone through the old Scottish mill, which, in his own words, "took one far out of classics. Philosophy helped greatly in my Oxford curriculum; Lucretius was the better for acquaintance with Natural Philosophy as was Pliny the Elder for Natural History." And he had studied English literature, "mainly on Rhetoric and Chaucer" under

Minto, with whom also he read Anglo-Saxon—a *parergon*, presumably, which became useful when the Newcastle Professor “might teach Sophocles one hour, Anglo-Saxon the next: *De Senectute* might give place to Milton.” It must have been a hard life, but Duff was not content merely to tread his round, nor was he content to see the studies he believed in so ill regarded. After five years English literature was made a separate department under C. E. Vaughan, and Duff could concentrate on his classics. Then came a wider and longer battle within the University, crowned with success when the arts degree, hitherto confined to Durham, was thrown open to the Newcastle Division. This was more than an academic struggle against clerical vested interests: it involved the whole future of Newcastle and its share in culture and scholarship, and Duff saw it.

He was a notable citizen of that little circle which became Armstrong College and, later, King’s. He saw it as an institution of university rank, and worked with persistency for its status and for its equipment with all the resources necessary to such an institution. It is proper that the portrait here reproduced should hang in the entrance of the college library, for to him, more than to any one man, that library owes its growth from the “five books on a shelf” which he found on his arrival. From 1918 until his retirement in 1933 he was elected by his colleagues, annually and unanimously, to the post of Vice-Principal; and it was no idle compliment.

Academic teaching, administration, and politics, however, did not absorb all his energy. He had the strong instinct of the man of letters. Reviewing for the Aberdeen Free Press kept his hand in, and useful selections from Dr. Johnson—a special interest to a Pembroke man—and Byron gave him practice, until the appearance in 1909 of *A Literary History of Rome*. This was—and is—greeted with respect by scholars as a solid contribution to learning, and with more than respect by such scholars as can read Latin as

literature and by such literary men as can read Latin. One tribute may suffice for many. That great war correspondent and political fighter H. W. Nevins, reviewing it in *The Nation*, wrote: "His book compels us to listen. To those who even dimly remember their Latin, there is something irresistible in his style and arrangement, in his knowledge, and the temperate freshness of his criticism. . . . The book is so filled with the interest of mortality, it is so free from pedantic trammels and second-hand judgments, that there is only one thing we regret about it. We regret only that it ends."¹ University business—Duff acted as Principal of the college in the difficult year 1918-19 before the appointment of Sir Theodore Morison—and the distractions of the war years, though they did not keep Duff from adding some Russian to his store of languages, delayed the sequel until *A Literary History of Rome in the Silver Age* appeared in 1927, less exciting in material but as full of human feeling and sound criticism as its predecessor. In the meantime he had produced *The Writers of Rome* for the Oxford Press, technically a model of compression and selection, translated some years later into Spanish.

The last years of teaching were occupied also with the preparation of *Minor Latin Poets* for the Loeb Classical Library, which gave larger scope to Duff's remarkable skill in translation and in which he had the pleasure of working in partnership with his son. Two years after his retirement he was appointed to the annual Sather classical professorship in the University of California. He had always loved travel, whether among the scenes where his Greek and Roman poetry had come to life or cycling with a friend on French roads, and the visit to California gave him immense pleasure. From that adventure came his last published work, *Roman Satire: its outlook on social life*, in 1937. Once more war interfered with his projects. The last years of his life saw him immersed in intricate negotiations, cor-

¹ *The Nation*, September 18th, 1909. Reprinted in *Visions and Memories*, p. 73.

respondence, adjustments, as one of the six editors of *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, which has still to see the light. It is a pity Duff will never see it. His unabated energy and endless care and patience earned him that much, but it was not to be, for he died, after a mercifully brief illness, on 9th December, 1944.

During his long and distinguished professional career Duff gathered many honours. He was LL.D. of Aberdeen and D.Litt. of both Oxford and Durham; Fellow of the British Academy and Honorary Fellow of Pembroke College, Oxford. He was in his turn Vice-President of the Classical Association, and when that body held its meeting in Newcastle he arranged a series of events which gave its members a bright (if misleading) notion of this city as a centre of classical culture; and though, as has been indicated, his bent was towards the literary rather than the archæological side of classical studies, he served our Society for long years as a member of committee, as a vice-president, and from 1937 to 1939 as president. Nor was his influence confined to academic and classical circles. Many societies in the neighbourhood benefited by his wide interest and goodwill. He served many years on the committee of the Literary and Philosophical Society, and was a vice-president at the time of his death.

Duff was a humanist, severe in his scholarship but never grim. He fought hard when fighting was needed, but honestly, for there was no drop of bad blood in him, and his good temper and his sense of humour (which occasionally broke out in brilliant Latin versions of limericks and nursery rhymes) kept him steady for moderation and tolerance. King's College owes much to him not only in material things and for his years of devoted teaching, but for the example he set of impartiality, judgment, and solid devotion to the needs of the college as a various but united institution. He helped to make it a happy place. In him we have all lost a wise counsellor and a steady friend, and Newcastle has lost an honourable citizen. To his wife who

helped in so many of his works, and to his son and daughter, the Society owes its sympathy, and offers it in this small record of so worthy a memory.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

BY MARJORIE DUFF.

Books.

- Johnson's Lives of Milton and Addison.* Edited by J. W. Duff. (Blackwood's English Classics.) Edinburgh and London. 1900.
- Byron—Selected poetry.* Edited by J. W. Duff. (Blackwood's English Classics.) Edinburgh and London. 1904.
- A Literary history of Rome, from the origins to the close of the Golden Age.* (Library of Literary History.) London: Fisher Unwin. 1909.
- The Writers of Rome.* (The World's Manuals Series.) Oxford University Press. 1923.
- The Writers of Greece,* by G. Norwood, and *The Writers of Rome,* by J. Wight Duff. Oxford University Press. 1925.
- Escritores de Grecia y Roma,* por Gilbert Norwood y J. Wight Duff. *Version del Inglés* por Emilio M. Martinez Amador. Barcelona: G. Gili. 1928.
- A Literary history of Rome in the Silver Age, from Tiberius to Hadrian.* (Library of Literary History.) London: Fisher Unwin. 1927.
- Minor Latin poets,* with introductions and English translations by J. Wight Duff and Arnold M. Duff. (Loeb Classical Library.) London: Wm. Heinemann. 1934.
- Roman satire: its outlook on social life.* (Sather Classical Lectures, vol. 12, 1936.) Cambridge University Press. 1937.

Pamphlets.

- A Lost palace and a lost ship.* (Crete and Cythera.) 1901.
- Byron and Aberdeen.* A plea for a memorial of the Byron House. 1902.
- The Glamour of Greece.* 1903.
- An Address on John Horsley, delivered at the unveiling of the Horsley Memorial Tablet at the Royal Grammar School, Newcastle upon Tyne. November 8th, 1932.

Latin Academic Songs.

Salve Boreale Lumen! Carmen Novocastrense. Condidit Joannes Wight Duff, musicisque modis accommodavit Carolus Sanford Terry. 1895.

Ode "*Anxia quisquis gravitate mentis.*" For male voice choir and orchestra. Poem by J. W. Duff. Music by W. G. Whittaker. [1929.]

*A Selection of articles and contributions to periodicals.**Saga Book of the Viking Club.*

Homer and Beowulf: a literary parallel. 1906.

Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics. Edited by James Hastings. Communion with Deity (Greek and Roman). Vol. 3. 1910. Education (Roman). Vol. 5. 1912.

University of Durham Philosophical Society. Proceedings.

Notes on the third International Archæological Congress, held at Rome in October, 1912. Vol. 5. Part 3. 1914.

Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne. Proceedings.

Notes on some sites of Greek civilization. 3rd ser. Vol. 7. No. 19. 1916.

Note on a Russian cross. 3rd ser. Vol. 8. No. 3. 1917.

Latin address to the Römisch-Germanische Limes Kommission on its Semi-Jubilee, with English translation. 4th ser. Vol. 3. No. 16. 1927.

Hellenic Travellers' Club. Proceedings.

The Permanent attraction of Greece. pp. 55-69. 1926.

Glances at Olympia. pp. 78-94. 1926.

Harmsworth Universal History.

The Latin language and its literature. Chap. 66. 1928.

Classical Association. Leeds and District Branch.

Martial: realism and sentiment in the epigram. 1929.

Northumberland and Durham Classical Association.

The Magic of Virgil: a presidential address. [Printed as part of the Virgil Bimillenary Celebrations, and in recognition of Dr. Duff's long services to the Association.] 1931.

The Cambridge Ancient History.

The Beginnings of Latin literature. Vol. 8. Chap. 13. 1930.
Ciceronian society. Vol. 9. Chap. 19. 1932.
Social life in Rome and Italy. Vol. 11. Chap. 19. 1936.

Encyclopaedia of Modern Knowledge. Edited by
Sir John Hammerton.

Latin's legacy to the civilized world. Part 13. 1936.

Classical Studies in honour of E. K. Rand.

Varied strains in Martial. 1938.

Also numerous reviews of classical books in *The Classical Review*,
The Journal of Roman Studies, and *The Classical Weekly*.