A DISTINGUISHED HISTORIAN OF TRINITY COLLEGE

A Letter from Dublin.

Professor John Bagnell Bury, whose splendid edition of Gibbon has just been completed by the publication of the seventh volume, is a man of whom Dublin University is justly proud. Though still quite young—he was born in October, 1861—he has already a long record of work, the beginning of which dates from 1885, when, at the exceptionally early age of twenty-three, he obtained a Fellowship in Ancient Classics.

In Dublin University the regulations regarding fellowships differ from those in force at Oxford and Cambridge. But one is conferred annually, and the successful candidate holds his appointment for life. As he rises by successive stages until he at length attains to the dignity of a Senior Fellow, various professorships fall, in the course of time, to his lot, and the emoluments rising from these, joined to the students' fees, and to the salary attached to the fellowship itself, amount to a comfortable, and at last quite a handsome annual income. The duties are not onerous, and each man has abundant leisure to pursue his studies in his own special groove. Then, too, the Fellow becomes a member of a most exclusive, scholarly, perhaps rather narrow, but to a man of studious tastes eminently fascinating social circle; for the College Dons are a race and "set" apart in the Irish capital. All these things considered, it is not to be wondered at that the very pick of the students enter the lists, and that the Fellowship examination of Trinity College, Dublin, is universally admitted to be the "stiffest" academic test in the United Kingdom.

Even before Mr. Bury gained his Fellowship his abilities were recognised by the University authorities, and great hopes, since fully realised, were entertained as to his future career. It was expected that a scholar of such originality would select some special department of work, and this proved to be the case. Mr. Bury was not long in choosing for himself and making his own a certain field which, since Gibbon's time, has been comparatively little laboured: the history of the later Emperors of Rome and of the East. In 1889 his *History of the Later Romam Empire* appeared, and was at once recognised as a work of great ability.

The Byzantine historians are not attractive reading. The quantity of their work is immense, its literary quality as a rule poor; but they are important as recorders of facts. All honour therefore is due to the patient investigator who has waded through their thousands of dreary pages of indifferent Greek, comparing their statements and checking one by another, so as to arrive at the truth. Mr. Bury, however, has done much more than this; he has vivified the dull records, and brought the Basils and Michaels and Theodoras, the rulers and generals and court ladies of that great, corrupt, dying empire before us "in their habits as they lived."

From this work to Gibbon the transition was easy, and in 1896 Mr. Bury published through Messrs. Methuen the first two volumes of his edition of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, enriched with copious notes, in which he is often able to correct or amplify the statements of his author from contemporary sources of authority, unknown or inaccessible in the last century. Two more volumes appeared in 1897, and in 1898 yet another two. The publication of volume seven this year completes the series. The accompanying index was compiled by the Professor's wife, herself a classical scholar of some distinction.

Professor Bury by no means confines his attention to Byzantine history; his studies extend over a much wider field. He has edited the Nemean and the Isthmian Odes of Pindar, and contributed articles on various subjects connected with classical antiquity and with mediæval and modern European history to such periodicals as the *English Historical Review*, the *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, and the *Classical Review*. Neither does he disdain, at times, to deal in a lighter vein with matters more comprehensible to the unlearned in the pages of the *Fortnightly* or the *Saturday Review*.

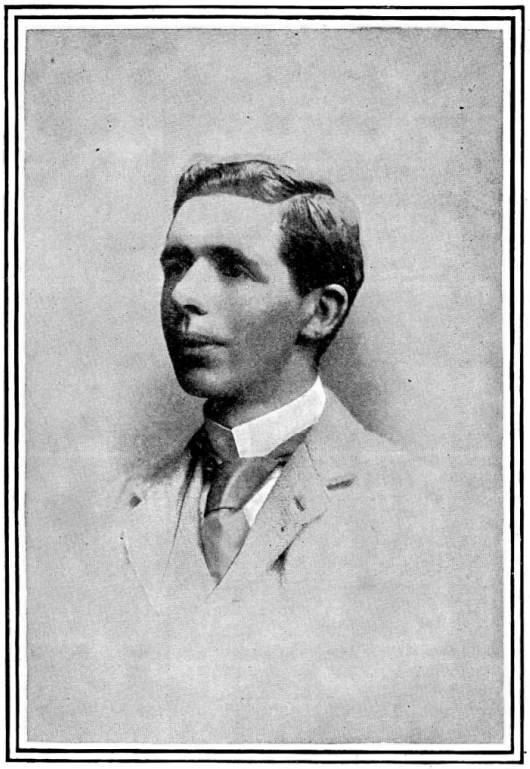
In an article contributed to the latter in June, 1896, the Professor combats the proposition that the British Empire is destined of necessity to the same dissolution and destruction as overtook that of Rome.

"The Romans of the Empire," he says, "had not the higher faculties of creation and originality. . . . From Augustus to the triumph of Christianity they invented nothing in political science, finance, warfare, mechanics, religion, literature, art. . . . Contrast this with the brain-power which has operated in England during the present century. . . . As long as there is abundance of brain-power of the best quality in a state, that state cannot, in normal circumstances, decline."

Mr. Bury, as becomes the nursling of an ancient university, is essentially an upholder of culture for its own sake. He maintains against the Utilitarians the claims of the classics of Greece and Rome to continue to be, as they have been in the past, the groundwork of a liberal education. "A university is useful because what it teaches is useless," he declares. On the other hand, he heartily detests that narrow scholarship which regards the works of the ancient poets and orators as corpses to be dissected, rather than masterpieces to be contemplated with reverent admiration. In regard to this he relates, in an article of his which appeared in the *Fortnightly Review*, the story of a man who, having visited the Giants' Causeway, returned declaring that he did not like it—"It was too d——d scientific." "In the same way," says the Professor, "I feel that classical scholarship is growing too d——d scientific. It will soon be a branch of mathematics."

When he first entered on the duties of his fellowship his appearance was so boyish that he looked several years less than even his actual age of twenty-three. It is said that on one occasion several lads were grouped round the door of the examination hall, awaiting the dreaded ordeal of the entrance examination, when they were joined by another young man, a fellow victim, as they supposed. Entering into conversation with him they began to discuss the professors before whom they were to appear, and told him amongst other things that the new man, Bury, was much to be dreaded. From this they passed to conjectures as to what lines this formidable personage was likely to follow, what passages he would set for translation, and so forth. What was their horror on discovering some time later, when they entered the examination hall, that the youth with whom they had been chatting so confidentially was no other than the learned Professor Bury himself!

MARY T. HAYDEN.



MR. JOHN BAGNELL BURY
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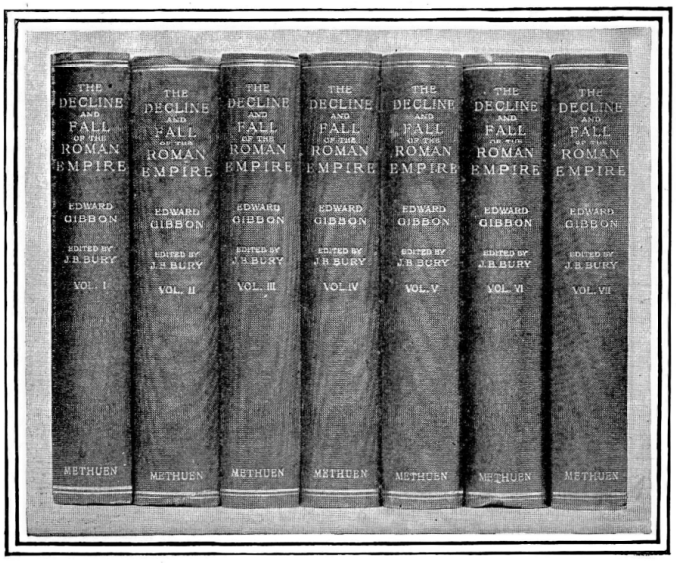
Chancellor



PROFESSOR BURY'S EDITION OF GIBBON, PUBLISHED BY METHUEN
The Large Paper Issue

PROFESSOR BURY'S "GREECE"

"Except the blind forces of nature nothing moves in this world that is not Greek in its origin." Thus, with slight note of exaggeration, wrote Sir Henry Maine, and the words convey the secret of the perennial charm of Hellenic history. Curtius, Grote, Holm, and other authorities have made that history their theme, nor will their works fail of high place. But they left room for the compendious and scholarly volume by Professor Bury that the Macmillans have just published. Lucidity of style, right sense of proportion, and accuracy of information, in which the momentous and revolutionising results of the latest researches in South-eastern Europe are embodied, are evident throughout Professor Bury's survey of Greek history, which ranges from about 3000 B.C. to the death of Alexander the Great. From the evidence of the origin of European civilisation on the Greek seaboard and among the islands of the Ægean, notably Crete, the author turns to the expansion of Greece on the Ionian and Euxine shores, and westward along the Mediterranean. Professor Bury brings into clear focus the physical and political causes and consequences of that long rivalry between the Greek states which came to a head in the Peloponnesian War, and touches with luminous comment on the foundation and fortunes of that supremacy of Athens whose zenith was in the age of Pericles. The story of the various city-states, of their internecine follies, of their invasion at home or in their colonies, now by Persia, now by Carthage, is carried to the ultimate stage when the great Macedonian and his greater son appear on the scene, till the stupendous work of Alexander, crowded into twelve years, was arrested by his early death at Babylon, 323 B.C. Professor Bury makes a slip or two, as when he speaks of the Sahara as once a sea, and quotes Herodotus as calling the Caspian Sea a gulf; but these are minor spots on the generally immaculate face of his text.

EDWARD CLODD.