

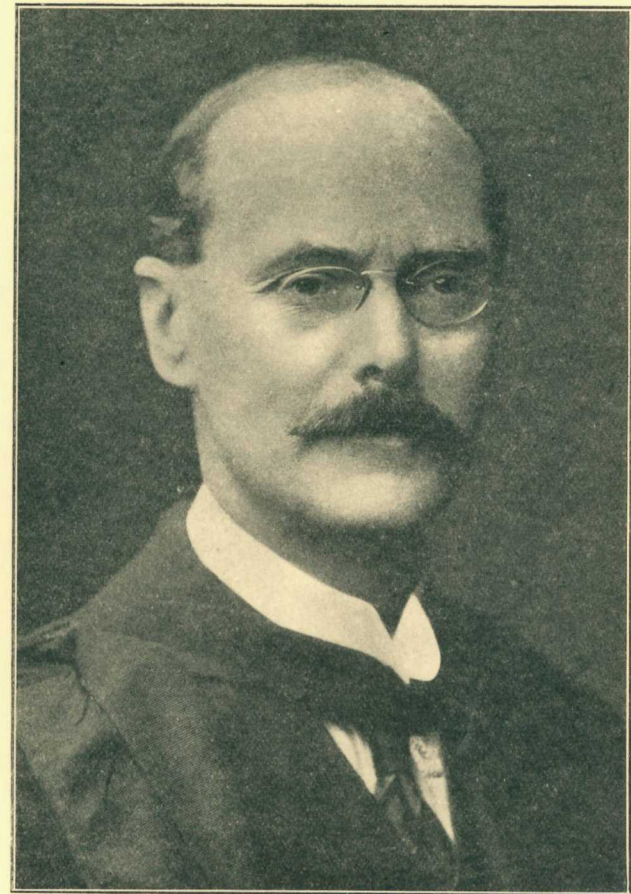
ARCHIVE S COLLECTION 1938 ?
FILE 36

CITY OF LEEDS
TRAINING COLLEGE

JOHN R. AIREY

PRINCIPAL, 1919-1933

LEEDS POLYTECHNIC - BECKETT PARK LIBRARY



Dr. John R. Airey died at Newtown, Montgomeryshire, on the 16th September, 1937, in his seventieth year. The Governors, Staff and Old Students of the College were represented at the funeral at Newtown on the 19th September. A Memorial Service, conducted by the Rev. Canon C. C. Marshall was held in the College on the 25th September, on which occasion an Address was given by the Rev. W. L. Schroeder, the lessons being read by Walter Parsons Esq., first Principal of the College, and Dr. R. W. Rich, the present Principal.

This booklet is intended as a tribute of affectionate remembrance to one who presided over the College for nearly fifteen years.

DR. JOHN R. AIREY

DR. AIREY came of a Wensleydale family which settled in Leeds in the middle of the nineteenth century. He was born on the 25th April, 1868 and after attending the Carlton Hill Board School became a pupil teacher. On completing his apprenticeship he went to the Borough Road Training College. Here in the years 1888 and 1889 he received his training as a teacher, and in later life he never ceased to think of Borough Road College with tenderness and affection. Leaving the college he became an elementary school teacher in Leeds, but very soon was transferred to the new Central Higher Grade School (as it was then called) to be assistant master in the Organised Science Department. He remained here from 1890 to 1896 at the same time attending evening classes at the Yorkshire College (now the Leeds University) with a view to taking his B.Sc. degree London, which he gained in 1894. There will be many men who recall Dr. Airey as he then was. The term 'firm disciplinarian' had a special meaning with him. He could be severe, he stood no nonsense, but he was familiar and genial with his boys, and many delightful stories are told of his whimsical humour. In 1896 he became Second Master at the Rhondda Intermediate School, Porth, where he remained until 1903. Letters sent to the local newspapers thirty-four years later emphasize the deep impression he made as a teacher, and the warm feelings of affection he inspired among his scholars.

In 1903 at the age of thirty-five he went to St. John's College, Cambridge as a student. It is not easy to leave a position of responsibility and security to begin student life again, but everyone who knew Dr. Airey will agree that he found no difficulty in adapting himself to new conditions. He enjoyed every phase of his life at St. John's, and completed his course there by taking a double first in the Natural Science Tripos.

Although tempted to stay at Cambridge and continue as a research student he decided to re-enter the teaching profession and in 1906 became the first headmaster of the Morley Secondary School and Technical School. During the next six years he impressed himself so firmly in the traditions of Morley that his name and work are still vividly remembered. He became a part of the life of Morley,

Two

his school the centre of learning and opportunity. In 1912 he became the Principal of the West Ham Technical Institute, London, remaining there until 1919. During these years he did much mathematical research for the Government and in addition gained the D.Sc. degree of London University. In January, 1919 he came to Leeds as Principal of the City of Leeds Training College. While engaged in developing the College and carrying out the varied duties of a Principal he found time to present work to the University of Cambridge which gained him the Sc.D. degree. In 1933 he retired to Newtown, Montgomery.

In the scientific world he was known as a calculator of mathematical tables. These were made chiefly under the auspices of a research committee of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, and constitute a monument of patient and accurate work extending over many years. Such tables made possible the rapid and accurate calculations which are necessary in many problems of engineering design, particularly in relation to the danger of collapse, through vibration, of aeroplanes, bridges and running machinery.

Such is the record of Dr. Airey's achievements, a record of cool decisions and brilliant academic success. And yet it fails to give a true indication of what made him great. These things won the admiration and respect of those who knew him. We were proud of him because he could walk easily in a world of speculation with which we were unfamiliar, we were proud of him because he brought distinction to the College, but our regard was built rather on his deep sympathy, his tenderness and generosity to those less intellectually stalwart, his humility, his delightful sense of fun. He found no difficulty in entering into the life of those around him, he enjoyed attending the gatherings of the old students, he liked being one of them. He never stooped to win a temporary popularity. It was this unconscious tribute to their good sense which won from the old students that love and loyalty which, in ways they could not know, strengthened and illuminated his life. He loved learning; he hated the parade of learning, taking as many precautions to hide his achievements as some people do to reveal them. He liked to feel that he was the friend of those he governed, and it is as a friend we shall always remember him.

Three

ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE MEMORIAL
SERVICE 25TH SEPTEMBER, 1937, BY THE
REV. W. L. SCHROEDER.

It will be admitted that by the death of John Robinson Airey the world of scientific learning is distinctly poorer. In various parts of the Kingdom—Porth, Morley, London, he did extraordinary work as an educationist. Everywhere he was recognised as a man of real power, which manifested itself not on the 'showy' levels of activity, but in his intimate relations as an administrator, a teacher, and a scholar. In realms where but few move with authority he moved with the ease of a man who had mastered his subject and feared neither the rebuke of the learned nor the criticism of the ignorant. His papers on the higher mathematics and physics commanded the praise and admiration of all qualified to hold an opinion. It was not that he strove for the high place as such, but because he found a real delight in marshalling figures and symbols, eliciting in his own apprehension of the universe a rational order which meant for him a measure of peace. He was the type of the pure scholar.

But it is not as the man of learning that we think more especially of him at this time, though learning placed him in a position of authority. It is as teacher and friend we commemorate John Airey to-day.

When I try to understand the profound regard in which I held him, I find it was conditioned by certain simple qualities of personality. He was an exceedingly modest man, quiet in his demeanour, unobtrusive among his fellows. He never boasted of his achievements, though he was proud—and rightly so—that he held doctorates of two Universities by right and not by grace. He was ever ready to acknowledge the ability of others—a true sign of modesty—and to award the due meed of praise.

He was a duteous soul. When as Principal of the Leeds Training College he felt it right that he should take certain religious subjects, he set himself to the study of the Bible and acquainted himself with the leading authorities in criticism. It was the fulfilment of the instinct to be in command of any subject he handled. I remember a lecture he gave to members of a society, with which we both were

connected, on Sumerian symbols and the tracing of their relationship with Biblical lore.

I think of Chaucer's "Poure Persoun of a Toun"—

"But Cristes loore and his Apostles twelve
He taughte, but first he folwed it hymselfe."

John Airey knew that teaching without knowledge was not only dangerous but dishonest. His sense of duty laid upon him obligations which a less duteous mind most comfortably could have evaded.

He was an essentially loyal man. The way of a College Principal is not easy. Points of view vary, yet the activities which issue therefrom must harmonize: clashes, which from time to time arise, creating uncomfortable discords, must be resolved: energies must be rationalized to effective ends: an atmosphere must be generated wherein teachers and students can work freely and happily: and at all times the end must be kept in view—the production of men and women with the knowledge and power to elicit from their pupils the best of which they are capable. It would be too much to say that Dr. Airey was invariably successful in the realisation of his task—human failings will emerge even in the best of Training Colleges and natural depravity will find expression in defiance of the over-ruling mind—but this we can say that Dr. Airey was intensely loyal to the highest interests of the City, of the College as such and its individual members specifically, and of the larger community of which his students were to become a part. There were times when the internal problems of the College bore hardly upon him, and he was momentarily bewildered: but loyalty to his own high ideals of service brought him safely through.

He was such a kindly soul, generous in his appreciation of the work of his colleagues, sympathetic with them in their various difficulties, tenderly considerate where they might fail. There was nothing harsh in his nature: his gentleness was sometimes mistaken for weakness; but when the occasion called he was firm and definite in his judgment.

There was a curious childlike playfulness that sometimes bubbled forth,—when he told the tale that raised the chastened smile or evoked the rippling laughter, when he talked sheer nonsense with an innocent air or 'pulled one's leg' with the gravity of a judge.

Among kindred souls he was delightful company : he never obtruded his scholarship and the idea of a stance on dignity would never occur to him. He was a good sportsman, as anyone who met him in the occasional games he played could testify, and he was a comfortable companion in the innocent frivolities of a festive occasion.

A marked characteristic was his friendliness—never effusive, but sound and sweet. The casual acquaintance might have thought him reserved, but to those in closer relationship he was a delightfully helpful counsellor and friend. Many of those over whom he exercised a wise discipline have abundant reason to be grateful that they were brought into contact with a Head whose personality was so fine and whose essential nature was so generous. For Dr. Airey, despite an appearance that suggested a vision rapt from the affairs of a work-a-day world, had a penetrative perceptive power that served an understanding exercised sympathetically in the interests of those for whom he felt responsible.

Of the profounder elements of his nature I speak with reserve. Only those nearest to him have the right so to speak. But I remember when on one occasion I had the privilege of speaking at the religious Service which was so fine a feature of the Old Students' Reunion, and we met to arrange beforehand the order of the Service, being struck by his preference for certain prayers. For a moment it seemed as if the depths had been revealed—of a soul sensitive to spiritual influences, humble in the presence of the Eternal, deeply desirous of the knowledge that means life.

Into the nearer Presence of the Creative Power whose laws he strove so faithfully to understand, John Robinson Airey has passed. We remember him here with gratitude and tender appreciation, not only as a great yet humble scholar, but as a wise teacher, a careful administrator, and a man whose friendship was a joy and an inspiration.

In God's loving care we leave him.

