

## OBITUARY.

DR. POTTS.

By the death of Dr. Potts on the 15th of November last, Fettes College has lost something more than its first Headmaster. The man who successfully undertakes the supreme care of any new school will always have some of the honour which belongs to a founder; and Dr. Potts had the distinction of being entrusted with the working out of what was, in Scotland, a novel and, at first, a not very popular idea.

Dr. Potts was born in 1834 and was educated at Shrewsbury under Dr. Kennedy and at St. John's College, Cambridge. In 1858 he graduated a senior optime and second classic, winning also the junior Chancellor's medal and becoming a Fellow of St. John's. After taking his degree he became a master first at Charterhouse and then at Rugby. From Rugby he came in 1870 to Fettes College.

Although the school was the first Public School of the English type in Scotland, it can hardly be said that there was any active demand for it. True it was that many Scotch parents desired an English Public School education for their sons. But this desire was in most cases coupled with a certain dread of provincialism which led them still to prefer a southern school, especially as to ordinary boys Fettes College offered no advantages in the way of economy. It was Dr. Potts' principal task to win for the new school a position distinct from that of an English Public School inconveniently situated. He wished to acclimatize it as a Scotch institution to flourish side by side with the native public schools. In the most jealous community to be found in the British Isles this was an object which could not be realized at once, and Dr. Potts never claimed to have thoroughly realized it. But he made great and striking progress towards that end, and had the satisfaction long before his death of witnessing the University successes of many Scotch pupils who, had it not been for Fettes College, would probably have followed other paths.

Dr. Potts is perhaps best known to the world as author of *Hints towards Latin Prose Composition*, a book which was the first to place the results attained by German erudition in this field of research, by Nägelsbach and others, within the reach of English students; and these results it presented in a fresh and incisive form, re-casting them in the mould which the fine literary instinct of English

scholarship can alone supply. Other books on Latin prose style have since appeared, each with merits of its own; but the *Hints* may claim to have marked an epoch in the teaching of Latin Prose such as no other book has made. To those who had been reared on the old 'Latin Arnold' it came as a revelation. No one can read it without gaining a clearer insight into Roman character and its reflection in the language of Rome.

In his own Sixth Form teaching, however, Dr. Potts paid more attention to the cultivation of Latin and Greek verse; with what success the achievements in this line of his old pupils at Cambridge will have shown. In this no doubt he was true to Shrewsbury traditions. But besides that, the natural bent of his mind led him to set more store by that literary sympathy with classical feeling and that versatility of expression which verse-composition especially brings into play, than by flawless and terse diction. As an educator he was brilliant rather than methodical; he taught as he talked; there was an exuberant flow of fancy, wit, and anecdote; his mind was of that order which is more quick to note resemblances than differences; he had a poet's imagination and an artist's eye for beauty. Those who heard him in school translate and almost declaim his Demosthenes, translate and almost act his Plautus and Aristophanes, could not fail to catch some of his enthusiasm.

He was essentially conservative in his methods and ideal of education. He taught the classics as literature — always with a view to knowledge of men and life. Not that he ever condoned inaccuracy or was satisfied with the 'general sense' in translation; but he never forgot that a poem or speech is a work of art which must be appreciated as a whole, and not merely considered in its details. Etymology was interesting to him in so far as it illustrated the meaning and history of a word, but he took no real interest in the shifting phases of the science of Comparative Philology, and refused to treat the classical languages as a herbarium in which dried specimens are kept in cases and labelled for comparison with Erse or Old Zend. Even in matters of grammar and syntax he trusted more to his own fine instinct for style than to methodical research and tabulation of instances. Nor did he pay, at any time of his life, any special attention to the study of textual criticism. Some of

this may possibly be explained by want of leisure. Fine scholar as he was, he was a schoolmaster before everything else: he threw himself heart and soul into the life of the school, and this, as he conceived and made it, was many-sided enough to engross his energies.

He did not read a large number of books with his Sixth Form, but what he did, he read with minute care. He never ceased to insist upon the necessity of private reading, and frequently quoted in that behalf the precepts and example of his own Headmaster. The Sixth Form of Dr. Kennedy at Shrewsbury was his ideal of what, for scholarly feeling, a Sixth Form should be. He never wearied of impressing upon his own pupils the industry which had been required of himself while a Sixth Form boy. For this purpose he would recall, often with a very happy representation of his voice and manner, how after finishing a book of Thucydides Dr. Kennedy would quietly say, 'You can read the other seven books in your studies.'

Apart from his power of teaching Dr. Potts had great gifts as a Headmaster. He was a man whose commendation could not but be prized, and whose censure no one could affect to receive without concern. No man knew better than he what to pass over and what to notice. Always open and trustful, he was, even when finding fault, courteous, considerate and moderate. Hence his great and lasting power. There was no reaction from his influence. His pupils

never outgrew his teaching. And he commanded respect by showing it.

No account of Dr. Potts, however brief, would be complete without some reference to his character as a preacher. The religious situation of Fettes College rendered the superintendence of the chapel service a matter of the greatest delicacy. It was a lay service designed to disarm the jealousy of rival denominations. Nothing could have been happier than the way in which the exigences of the case were met both in the pulpit and in the reading-desk. Dr. Potts was a preacher of great power and occasionally of true eloquence, and a reader of more than usual dignity and impressiveness. The chapel at Fettes College became popular with parents, and it is perhaps not too much to say that it was there that much of the prejudice which the school had to fight against was removed.

To conclude this notice of a really gifted teacher it only remains to say that his interests and sympathies were universal. As he was broad and general in his teaching, so he was widely appreciative of merit. He took pride in the success of his pupils in whatever career it was attained. Good work was to him good work on whatever expended. He would mention the name of a pupil who in a house of business had gained the confidence and esteem of his employers as proudly as that of a University prizeman. And he was held in honour as much by the one character as by the other.

#### BROWNING AS A CLASSICAL SCHOLAR.

No great poet has ever made himself interesting to so many kinds of students, on their purely technical and professional ground, as Mr. Browning. Philosophers, painters, musicians, Italian historians, German historians, ecclesiastical historians, Hebraists, all have a large part in him, and certainly not the smallest share in the inheritance belongs to the student of Greek (scarcely perhaps of Latin) antiquity. In general, it may be observed, as an interesting comment on the supposed 'decline of Greek,' that the half-dozen great indisputable poets of our time, all till yesterday writing together, have been passionate Hellenists, and not least popular when they were most Hellenic. In this respect, if in no other, Mr. Browning stood in a line with the authors of *Tithonus* and *Jason*, *Atalanta in Calydon* and the *Strayed Reveller*.

In his writings there are two separate strata of classical learning, sharply separated from each other—the original store of memories that he retained from his early reading, and the special studies of the period that began with *Balaustion's Adventure* (1871) and ended with the translation of the *Agamemnon* (1877); but the after-effects of this second period re-appeared at intervals for the rest of his life. In both these strata antiquity is treated in a way peculiar to Mr. Browning. No great poet ever absorbed so much with so little effect on himself. His classical learning, whether of his youth or of his declining manhood, had no more power than the Italian learning of his prime or the Rabbinical learning of his old age to make the least change in the ideals of his imagination or in his way of looking at life, nay, not even in his literary form, whether of