SIR WILLIAM RIDGEWAY

1853–1926

WILLIAM RIDGEWAY was born on August 6, 1853, the son of the Rev. J. H. Ridgeway, of Ballydermot, King's County, who was descended from one of James I's Ulster settlers. He belonged, therefore, to "the Pale", and he believed, no doubt truly, that he "had not a drop of Gaelic blood in his veins". Nevertheless, from his earliest years he was surrounded by those who had plenty; and it is quite certain that his personality and outlook on life were largely affected by them, more largely, perhaps, than by any other single influence. Loyal as he always was, in some ways ideally loyal, to the finest traditions of Cambridge, he had through all and beneath all the warm blood and warm heart of the true Irishman.

From Portarlington School he went to Trinity College, Dublin, where he won all the chief Classical prizes, including Sanskrit in his course, and graduated as Senior Moderator both in Classics and in Modern Literature. Then he entered Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, and after being placed seventh Classic in the old undivided Tripos of 1880 he was elected a Fellow of the College, and devoted much of his time for the next few years to taking private pupils—an experience which greatly developed his instinctive understanding of young men and his sense of the mutual helpfulness of teaching and research.

A vacancy occurred in the Classical staff of the College in 1881, and to this Ridgeway naturally aspired, but he was not chosen. Caius was then setting the fashion, in principle of course a wise one, which the *Granta*, a little later on, noted as characteristic of the College: "Fellows imported and exported at the shortest notice"; and the late Professor J. S. Reid, then a young Fellow of Christ's, with a great reputation as a master of Ciceronian prose, was the first to benefit by the innovation. The merits of the appointment were obvious; but in passing over Ridgeway the authorities of the College lost a Classical teacher with a rare power of inspiring his pupils. Ridgeway's own disappointment was severe, especially as he had boldly married, without waiting for a permanent appointment; nor can there be any doubt that the partisan feeling which was then engendered did something to delay the proper recognition of his own original research in Cambridge. Probably the same cause contributed later to a prolonged delay in the publication of his epoch-making article

on "The Authors of the Mycenaean Culture" in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, a mistake of judgement on the part of the then editors of that journal which was sternly censured in a general meeting of the Hellenic Society by Sir Richard Jebb, and which led to their resignation.

Meanwhile, Ridgeway had been appointed in 1883 to the Chair of Greek in University College, Cork, a post which left him free to spend five months of every year in Cambridge, in the little, old-world farmhouse with a big garden which later on became his permanent home; and the important discoveries which he was making on many sides of Classical study went on without ceasing. They included a series of essays on the historical interpretation of Aristotle, among which was the germ of all his studies on Greek drama; an explanation of the size of the Homeric horse which was too small to be ridden, though it could draw a 'chariot'; and the origin of the mathematical element in the teaching of Pythagoras, whom Ridgeway showed to have studied the prismatic qualities of precious stones. He was one of the first, if not the first, of English scholars to recognise the importance of the new scientific school of comparative philology in Germany, for in 1881 he correctly applied Brugmann's great discovery of the sonant nasals to explain certain Ionic and Attic terminations (*-αται* and *-ατο* in the 3rd plur.) before this had been done even by Brugmann himself. This was in marked contrast with the attitude prevailing at Cambridge where, as late as 1890, the official teaching was still hostile to the scientific methods of the "new school" now universally accepted. But the help of the Cambridge Philological Society more than counterbalanced, for him as for many other young scholars, the frown of his official seniors; and to the cordial encouragement of Dr. Henry Jackson in particular he was deeply indebted; of this he was always conscious even after years of acute controversy. In 1894 or 1895, before the struggle about women's degrees had begun to darken counsel, that distinguished scholar and teacher said to me once with deliberate earnestness, "Ridgeway is always right. He gets to the bottom of things. Of whom else can you say that?" And the result of his fearless inquiry was a great emancipation for Classical study, which in the 'seventies and 'eighties, especially in England, was oppressed by an unintelligent orthodoxy drawn from the teaching of a few eminent Germans like Mommsen, Schliemann, and K. O. Mueller, whom it was the fashion to regard as infallible. Ridgeway's discoveries were fiercely resisted at the time—for they put a crowd of text-books out of date; but they passed quickly into the stream of current knowledge.

The turning-point of his career was his appointment to the Disney

Chair of Archaeology in Cambridge in 1892, largely the result of the publication of his first substantial book, *The Origin of Metallic Currency and Weight Standards*, earlier in the year. His College gladly re-elected him to a Fellowship; and, though the Disney Chair was then but poorly endowed, he decided to relinquish the Chair of Greek at Cork, in which he had rendered more than one vital service to Irish education. His appointment a few years later to the newly founded Brereton Readership in Classics finally established his position in Cambridge.

The University was then passing through a period of great dissensions, and Ridgeway's affection for the Anglican Church in Ireland and this country, and for the traditions of Cambridge scholarship, more and more permeated his enthusiasm for academic reform. The bitter struggle about women's degrees in the 'nineties permanently attached him to the Conservative side of University politics, separating him from some of his oldest friends. On voting days it was easy to distinguish the care-worn and excited faces of resident voters from the cheerful aspect of the non-residents who had come up in response to entreaties from their friends. On one of the last of these occasions Ridgeway was conspicuous all day long, warning, pleading, chaffing, entreating all his acquaintances, and even laying a weighty hand on strangers, to secure their vote against any change. The remark of the head-porter of one of the colleges, a jovial ex-boatswain from the Navy, pictured the stress of local feeling: "It 's a thousand pities this was ever raised, Sir. Why, I see every day men who used to go arm-in-arm down this street cross over the road rather than meet." Probably few lost more and felt their loss more keenly in this severing of friendships than the foremost combatant. In the controversy on compulsory Greek he was again one of the leaders of the then victorious party. "All first-class fighting men", he used to say of his own forebears, in the thunderous but indescribably humorous ejaculative murmur in which he always spoke, and their descendant did them no discredit in the fightings of his own time. Yet, when the war had "changed all that", he was clear-sighted enough to discourage further resistance to the removal of compulsory Greek, grieved as he was.

Ridgeway's first book, *The Origin of Metallic Currency and Weight Standards* (1892), destroyed the theories of the purely religious origin of coin-types which held the field at the time, and threw a flood of light on the early life and commerce of the Mediterranean lands. Thus the tunny-fish on the coins of Cyzicus, the silphium on those of Cyrene, or the ox on the early issues of Athens were not

objects of some (unknown) worship, but good sound tokens of local commerce, the ox indeed being far more than local and appearing equally at Rome as the basal value of all *pecunia*, and itself (not the Etruscan and elusive *iugerum*) providing the modulus of the Servian timocracy; where the qualification of the first Class was really the possession of 100 head of cattle, not "10,000" coins of the *as*-type. Mommsen's hopeless endeavour to translate the money value into land was thus replaced by a clear and simple explanation. By his proof that the ox was a widespread standard of value, Ridgeway explained for the first time the proverb put by Aeschylus into the mouth of the Watchman at the outset of the *Agamemnon*, "a great ox has trodden on my tongue", i. e. "I am well paid to keep silence". This was typical of the literary interest with which his antiquarian research always went hand in hand.

In his *Early Age of Greece* (1901) he enforced and enlarged the fundamental distinction, which he had pointed out in his famous paper already mentioned, between the authors of the Mycenaean Culture with their bare shins, bronze weapons, figure-of-eight shields, and southern ways of life, on the one hand, and, on the other, the warrior immigrants with their iron greaves, round shields, and long iron swords, and their fibulae of the Early Iron Age in central Europe, bringing with them the sterner morals of the North, the Achaeans of Homer. This great study was never completed; for only some 200 pages of the second volume were in type at his death, and the first has no index, an omission which he himself often regretted. Indeed, there is no doubt that the additional labour needed for the making of an index would have been more than repaid by enabling him to remedy some superficial inconsistencies, and to review some of the topics from other standpoints. The chapter or chapters which were to deal with Greek Religion in the light of his encyclopaedic knowledge are still an urgent need. Of course in the true sense the work of a discoverer is always incomplete; nevertheless, it is this book which marks Ridgeway's greatest contribution to history. Its main doctrine everywhere secured almost immediate acceptance, even in the minds of many scholars who attacked it violently, and often most unjustly, on this and that detail. The controversy thus created undoubtedly served to make clearer the precise limits of the new doctrine, especially in his crushing rejoinder to an attack in the *Classical Review*; though the bitterness of the controversy was a misfortune. But the truth of his lifelong contention that Indo-European languages were spoken in the Mediterranean area before the coming of the Iron-Age men from

the North has been triumphantly vindicated by the recent linguistic discoveries in the "Hittite" region, and is now universally accepted. 'He never forgot that he came of a conquering race, and his vision of this coloured all his life and all his work. He was "of the Pale"; and as he scanned history he saw everywhere invader and invaded—Norman and Sicilian, Sabine and Ligurian, Achaean and Pelasgian. To him the conviction of separable Northern and Southern strains in the Greek race was almost a psychological necessity, for there was much in classical Greece that repelled him, and he was implacable against "the old Southern vices". But though in the last resort he never relaxed his ethical code, his interest and sympathy, always alert and vivid as a child's, extended to every age and every race of mankind, as well as to birds, beasts, plants, and stones. His amazing memory was stored with a world of knowledge, drawn no less from men than from books, that few can ever have rivalled.'

In strict logic he was weak, especially from his way of using all kinds of evidence, strong and weak alike, in support of a theory of whose truth he was convinced; nor did he always give enough consideration to the difficulties. 'But in his great constructive books this weakness hardly seemed to matter. His mind's eye surveyed so vast a range of facts that he saw in a flash the great lines of their connexion, and his lively knowledge of human nature kept him always within the limits of reasonableness and good sense. In literature and art a superficial critic might have said that he admired only the obvious, and in a sense this would have been true. He did not love the bizarre or the exotic, and some delicate beauty escaped his mind and eye. But his enjoyment of masterpieces was suffused with a burning glow of enthusiasm. Njal in his blazing house, Hector before the walls of Troy, Heracles standing amazed in the forests of the North—he saw these great things with an intensity of appreciation that many subtler critics might have envied. Nor was it only poetry, art, or history that stirred him to eloquence. In a lecture on ancient gems, for instance, he would suddenly break into a paean on the extraordinary beauty of jewels: how they alone catch and preserve unchangeably and for ever a loveliness that in all else is brief and evanescent, the glow of sunsets and the brilliance of flowers; and his words had a rough splendour that stamped them imperishably on his listeners' minds. As a teacher of small classes he was, indeed, unrivalled. He did not like formal lecturing, and in a big room those unfamiliar with his voice found him difficult to follow; but round a table, with half a dozen archaeological students, he was incomparable. His vivid imagination, his width of view, his unbroken

contact with reality kept the class spellbound, as gems, coins, axe-heads, totem-spoons tumbled on to the table from his inexhaustible pockets. He must always have had sensitive fingers, and as his sight failed he depended more and more upon touch. And he knew at once, more by instinct, perhaps, than by sight, from the way in which new pupils handled the stuff which he passed round the table, whether or no they had the makings of real archaeologists.'

'In judging men and women the qualities which he cared for were courage, strength, independence, and sense; for the cowardly, the vacillating, the imitative, and the silly he had a deep contempt, though he could use them; but he had nothing but admiration and sympathy for honest work, however modest and unassuming. He liked opposition. He was dissatisfied with his Caius portrait because it lacked animation, and he knew the reason. The painter had all the right views: he wished the man had been "a damned radical". In scholarship and science, except when controversy had inflamed him, his instinct for the men that really mattered was unfailing, and his appreciation infinitely generous, however little their aims or methods might resemble his own.'

In *The Origin and Influence of the Thoroughbred Horse* (1907) he showed the secret of the development of the horse from its small Homeric ancestor—namely, the admixture of zebraic blood by the horse-breeding Greeks of North Africa and their successors, from the days of Pindar's patrons to the Mahometan conquests. Ridgeway's research had reached its conclusion almost simultaneously with, and independently of, that of two eminent zoologists, each of whom had approached the problem along different lines, Professor James Cossar Ewart of Edinburgh, the discoverer of *Equus Caballus Celticus*, and Professor H. F. Osborn, a leading authority on the fossil-horses of America. Their results in these different fields were such as to harmonise with, and be completed by, Ridgeway's historical study. The book has been acclaimed by the highest authorities as the most important addition to evolutionary research since the death of Darwin himself.

In the same year his British Academy paper "Who were the Romans?" revived and established by fresh evidence Schwegler's theory of the racial distinction between the Sabine or Patrician element in Rome, on the one hand, and the earlier Latian or Plebeian stratum on the other. Much confirmatory evidence from the linguistic side has since[1] been put forward.

[1] Especially in the *Cambridge Ancient History* (1926), vol. iv, c. xiii ('The Etruscan Age in Italy').

Not less important than any part of his work was *The Origin of Greek Tragedy* (1910). Tragedy, as Ridgeway conclusively showed, arose from the celebration of the prowess of local heroes at their tombs, the representations being later on swept into the service of Dionysus and so combined with the Satyric plays. This explained at once the prevailing sombre hue of the Tragedies we possess; if they are not actually centred in the death of the hero (as in the *Ajax* of Sophocles) or at his tomb (as in the *Choephoroe* of Aeschylus) or in honours to be paid to his memory (as in the *Hippolytos* of Euripides) they contain ghosts, or ceremonies of expiation (for homicide), or deliverance by the power of some Sanctuary-tomb, or long recitals of the story of some hero's death. It is, in fact, difficult to point to any Greek tragedy which is not somehow concerned either with the death of some conspicuous person, or with the establishment of a posthumous cult. All those to whom it is a matter of concern that the great writers of antiquity be not represented as continually running into nonsense, nor defended by incredible though highly respectable glosses, but understood as honestly dealing with the human life they knew, will always think of Ridgeway as a great interpreter, a keen-sighted historian of the spirit of man.

In *Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races* (given in lectures 1913, published 1915) Ridgeway confirmed his theory and pulverized his critics, including the bearers of some illustrious names, by a comprehensive induction drawn from examples ranging round the world from China to Bolivia and Japan, from Australia and Central Africa to the Alaskan Eskimos. His more accurate and penetrating study turned the weapons of the comparative method against the school of "Solar Myths, Tree spirits, and Totems" which regarded that method as its peculiar property. But as a picture of its author, one sentence from the preface (August 6, 1915) is worth more to us now than even the brilliant demonstrations which the book itself contains.

"Although the work . . . was already in type at the outbreak of the War, I must crave the reader's indulgence, if he shall find in it an inordinate number of defects, since in the months that have elapsed no man save one devoid of all love of country and utterly insensate could have concentrated his attention on questions which can only be regarded as mere trivialities in presence of the stern and sad realities that confront us day by day."

This book was destined to be his last large work, though it by no means included the last of his discoveries. It is dedicated by what

to smaller men might have seemed, in the storm of the war, an untimely impulse, but one which to him was then more than ever natural, *Luciae uxori carissimae.*

Of his more recent work, on Cuchullain, on the (Danish) "Origin of the Scots", of his last public lecture on "The Origin of Ballads" (in the praise of real popular heroes), delivered at Manchester in March 1926 and not yet published, it is perhaps too soon to write. But to many of his Classical friends his study of the *Rhesus,* a powerful presentation of the case for its being an authentic work of Euripides, composed in Macedonia, seems well worthy to stand beside his other inquiries, however much it may invite criticism in detail. To the last his enthusiasm for the great ends of Classical study remained unabated, and none of the honours that fell to him gave him more delight than to be chosen President of the Classical Association for 1914.

In later years Ridgeway was a frequent and valued correspondent of *The Times*, in letters remarkable both for their range of subject and the vigour of their style. Indeed, that trenchant but genial criticism with which Ridgeway commended his discoveries, and ridiculed his opponents, made him a speaker in great request at learned gatherings, especially those which had a popular side. At the British Association meetings, in particular, he was an attractive figure, with his tall, gaunt frame, the pronounced stoop of huge shoulders, the hawk-like glance and the pathetically slow and uncertain gait, due to a nearness of sight which in changing lights amounted almost to blindness, his deep voice, his fund of Irish humour, and his eloquence in an irresistible brogue, leaping in quick gusts, like a falcon hugging at the chain till it broke.

'At the very end of his life he could talk of his student days at Dublin with a fun and a vividness that brought the whole scene before his listeners' eyes. One could see him as "a young fellow from the King's County or otherwise" dancing on a forbidden table and flinging a fat freshman on to a protesting Professor; dragging a stupid young policeman into Trinity, and terrifying him with the threat of the dissecting-table; or laughing afterwards at the police sergeant's bitter lamentations that they had ever let their victim out alive: "I'll never speak to you again, Mr. Ridgeway: I was just saying to Mr. Murphy, 'Glory be to God, we shall never see that damned fool again!'" In Ireland he had seen broken heads, and worse, and there was perhaps a touch of ruthlessness about these reminiscences.'

Besides his Presidency of the Classical Association, he was at

various times President of the Royal Anthropological Institute, and of the Cambridge Philological, Antiquarian, Classical, and Anthropological Societies; Gifford lecturer at Aberdeen, Stokes lecturer on Irish Archaeology, a Fellow of the British Academy, an Honorary member of the Anthropological Societies of Paris and Brussels, and the recipient of honorary degrees from Dublin, Manchester, and Aberdeen. He was knighted in 1919.

No picture of Ridgeway's life could be complete which did not indicate, however faintly, the extraordinary stimulus which he exerted upon all who came into contact with him; and his untiring interest in the research and the future prospects of younger men, of whom a multitude, like the present writer, owe him lifelong gratitude for his influence on their work. From about 1882 onwards his home at Fen Ditton was the constant resort of scholars engaged in many kinds of research, not merely in every branch of Classical or antiquarian learning, but in Mediaeval History, Old Irish, Biology, Church History, Indian Sculpture, English race-horses, and even Mathematics. They might be found on any Sunday afternoon in summer seeking Ridgeway's counsel, often waiting an hour or more for their chance of a chat with him in the pleasant garden where his wife and daughter loved to welcome his guests, who strolled up and down between the clumps of violets and double daffodils, or the roses and hollyhocks, or marvelled at the deep colours of the single dahlias with which Lady Ridgeway's parterre was glorious every autumn. To all his visitors he gave the same unselfish and penetrating attention; and no one ever went away without having gained some new point of view or finding some new avenue in which to look for evidence. And his intercourse with scholars and students was only a part of his cordial acquaintance with all sorts and conditions of men, College porters, boatmen, labourers, farmers, cabmen, jockeys and trainers, missionaries, colonial governors, country clergy, brewers, bishops, soldiers, editors, painters, and politicians.

The establishment of the powerful and fruitful Cambridge School of Anthropology, with considerable endowments and with correspondents and inquirers all over the world, is a permanent monument to one side of Ridgeway's influence. His later years were gladdened by the recognition which the importance of his work had everywhere obtained. This was notably marked on his 60th birthday, which was celebrated by a dinner in Caius, attended by a hundred scholars and men of science from nearly every university in the United Kingdom, and followed by a volume of "Essays and Studies" published in his honour, in which some forty different authors,

including many of high distinction, wrote on subjects ranging from Homer and Plato to kite-fishing in the Straits.

The last months of his life were darkened by the tragically sudden death of his wife, his companion almost since his boyhood. Sister of another gifted Irishman of the Pale, Sir Arthur W. Samuels, late Solicitor-General for Ireland, she shared her husband's ideals and was hardly less interested in his work than he was himself. No happier marriage could well have been, for her strong and genial common sense often served to guide and always to comfort the moods in which his genius would seem wayward even to his dearest friends. In all his endeavours she gave unfailing help, especially after his increasing myopia made difficult even the simplest duties. To those who saw him a month later, it was clear that his own health and strength were stricken, in some mysterious way; though it was even more clear that he was facing the future with heroic courage. His own death came suddenly, not quite three months after hers; and in spite of their grief his friends could not but feel that for him it was a merciful release, both from physical weakness and from the deepest sorrow of his life.

No written words can represent to strangers what his loss means to those who knew him—a great adversary—a great friend—a great heart. His pre-eminence in his own generation will be most readily admitted precisely by those who are most conscious of what learning owes to many of his contemporaries, D. B. Monro, Warde Fowler, H. A. J. Munro, A. W. Verrall, Henry Jackson. But whatever may be the judgement of posterity upon others, it will assuredly rank Ridgeway with Darwin and Mommsen as a great master and maker of knowledge.

R. S. CONWAY.

This memoir is based, by the kind permission of the editors of the *Caian*, upon a brief biography written by me at their request for that periodical. I have also to thank my friend Mr. D. S. Robertson, of Trinity College, Cambridge, for allowing me to quote one or two passages from the memorial notice which he contributed to the *Cambridge Review*. They reflect Professor Ridgeway's activities as a teacher and colleague more closely than can the recollections of one who, though always learning from him in the unbroken intercourse of forty years, was never a member of his classes. The quotations have been marked by single inverted commas. I am grateful also to another friend of Professor Ridgeway's and my own, Mr. Ernest Harrison, Registrary of the University of Cambridge, who has helped me by his encouragement and wise counsel.

MANCHESTER,
OCTOBER 1927.

R. S. C.