ON BEING SANSKRITIC

A Plea for Civilized Study and the Study of Civilization

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ON BEING SANSKRITIC: A PLEA FOR CIVILIZED STUDY AND THE STUDY OF CIVILIZATION

ON WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 22 1830, The Times carried among its small ads on p. 3 the following notice:

PROFESSORSHIP OF SANSKRIT IN THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD.
The late Joseph Boden Esq., Colonel in the Honourable the East India Company's Service, bequeathed the whole of his property to the University of Oxford, for the establishment of a Professorship and Scholarship in Sanscrit Literature, "being of opinion that a more general and critical knowledge of that language will be a means of enabling my Countrymen to proceed in the Conversion of the Natives of India to the Christian Religion, by disseminating a knowledge of the Sacred Scriptures amongst them more effectually than all other means whatsoever." The ELECTION to the BODEN PROFESSORSHIP is fixed for Thursday, the 15th day of March, 1832; the right of election being vested in the Chancellor, Masters and Scholars of the University of Oxford, in convocation assembled.

After giving more details regarding the scholarship, the advertisement ended by inviting those 'desirous of obtaining further information relative to the Boden Professorship' to apply to the Registrar. Readers not so desirous no doubt turned rapidly to the next item, which advertised a concert by the GRAND RUSSIAN HORN BAND, who had 'had the honour of performing before His Majesty, and a large assemblage of the Nobility, with rapturous applause'.

The Boden Professorship is the oldest chair of Sanskrit in Britain. When it was founded, Oxford had about twenty-five professorships; there were chairs in Hebrew and Greek, and two in Arabic—but none yet in Latin. In the middle
1760s Warren Hastings had had printed *A Proposal for establishing a Professorship of the Persian Language in the University of Oxford.* He was urging Persian as a means to study India. He wrote:

It is not unreasonable to suppose that the powers of the mind are distributed in equal perfection to the whole race of mankind, however differently cultivated and variously applied: and even from that difference in their improvements and from that variety in their pursuits, powerful argument may be drawn of the advantages which might be derived to every branch of knowledge, from an acquaintance with the manners, customs, and practice of the most remote nations. . . . The speculative mind may find something even in their morality which may afford it entertainment, nor wholly without instruction. The natural partiality which we feel for our own customs is apt to inspire us with very narrow, and generally very contemptuous notions of those of other countries. There is perhaps no country in the world possessed of fewer national vices, with a larger proportion of national virtues, than our own; yet surely it will be the highest presumption to suppose that every opinion which has obtained the common assent of the narrow sphere in which we move, is necessarily founded on truth, or that every little duty which fashion has imposed is the standard of propriety. If in any such points we find men differ from ourselves (men who are affected with the same passions, susceptible of the same infirmities, and bound by the same social ties, by which nature has connected us); it will naturally lead us to suspend our opinions till we have fixed them on certain principles and truth will never suffer by such a suspension.

But Hastings's proposal sank without a trace—indeed, the University still has no chair in Persian—and the spirit which informed it was soon submerged in the turbid tide of evangelism. When in 1882 Max Müller, who never became Boden Professor, published a book called *India: What Can It Teach Us?*, the title was not merely arresting: it was polemical. The Boden Professor of that day, Mr. Monier Williams, had entitled his inaugural lecture *The Study of Sanskrit in Relation to Missionary Work in India.* It is the only inaugural lecture which I can find to have been delivered by any of my seven predecessors; certainly it is the only one to have been published. Whether this silence arises from an embarrassment concerning the founder's wishes, or from a despair of communicating to a general educated audience any account or defense of Sanskrit studies, I cannot tell. But thus it falls to me, a fool prepared to rush in, to say something of the early history of this chair before I try to explain and justify my title and my subject.

The Boden Professorship was founded when the British study of Sanskrit was a generation old. The early landmarks were all set up under the aegis of the East India Company in Calcutta. Warren Hastings 3 patronized Charles Wilkins, who in 1785 published an English translation of the *Bhagavad Gītā,* the first substantial translation of Sanskrit into any European language. In 1786, Sir William Jones declared 4 that Sanskrit, Latin, and Greek were so alike that they must 'have sprung from some common source which, perhaps, no longer exists'. In 1789 Jones published his translation of Kalidāsa's classic drama, the *Sākuntalā,* which Goethe so admired 5 that he modelled on its prologue the prologue to his *Faust.* But Jones died in Calcutta in 1794, aged only forty-seven. Though he was educated here at University

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1. Hastings's name does not appear on the pamphlet, but his authorship is certain (see *English Historical Review* xliv, 1929, p. 640). I owe my knowledge of the pamphlet to a lecture by Dr. Peter Marshall which is published as 'Warren Hastings as Scholar and Patron', pp. 242-62 in *Statesmen, Scholars and Merchants: Essays in Eighteenth-Century History* presented to Dame Lucy Sutherland, ed. Anne Whiteman et al., Oxford, 1973.


3. In 1784 Hastings wrote in a letter that the Hindu scriptures would 'survive when the British dominion in India shall have long ceased to exist, and when the sources which it once yielded of wealth and power are lost to remembrance' (P. J. Marshall (ed.), *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge, 1970, pp. 44 and p. 189). Contrast this with the arrogance of the nineteenth-century missionaries, exemplified later in this lecture. The missionary attitude is beautifully illustrated for Ceylon by Khali Mahaloda in *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750-1900* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1976), chapter vi, 'Buddhism versus Christianity'; see especially the quotation on p. 231, where a famous missionary predicts that the Buddha will go the way of 'the old idols of Europe, Jupiter and Mars, Woden and Thor'.


5. He addressed to the play a stanza which I translate:

Do you wish for the blossoms of spring, the fruits of the autumn,
Do you wish for what charms and delights, do you wish for what satisfies and nourishes,

Do you wish to grasp heaven and earth with a single name?
I name you, Śakuntalā, and so all is said.
College, where he has a monument by Flaxman, Sanskrit at Oxford can claim no direct link with Jones, of whom the Dictionary of National Biography records that 'he felt none of the contempt which his English contemporaries showed to the natives of India'. As we pass into the nineteenth century, we leave an interest in what we might learn from Indians for a determination to teach them.

The earliest fact known about Joseph Boden is that he entered the Bombay native infantry in 1781. He spent just over twenty-five years in that part of India, and retired in 1807 with the rank of lieutenant-colonel. Apparently he never married. In his will, which he wrote three months before his death in November 1811, he left various bequests to friends and relatives (in this the advertisement which I read out to you was inaccurate), and then left the residue of his considerable estate to 'a certain female child said to be begotten by me on and born of the body of Jane Ingram at Bath . . . about three years ago which child is I believe as yet unchristened'. He asked that she be christened Elizabeth and assume the surname Boden. In the event of her dying in her minority, he bequeathed the money to Oxford University for 'the erection and endowment of a Professorship in the Shanskreet language', in the opinion which you have already heard. Poor Elizabeth died in 1827, aged nineteen, and after some legal delays £26,190 12s. 7d. passed to the University. I find it melancholy to reflect that we owe Sanskrit at Oxford to her death.

Boden Professors, as you have heard, were originally elected by all the M.A.s of the University. In his recent biography of Max Müller, Mr. Nirad Chaudhuri has devoted several pages to the second election, that of 1860, in which Monier Williams defeated Max Müller by 833 to 610. Chaudhuri has quoted a part of Williams's address to the electors:

Had I found plain instructions that the electors of the University were to search throughout Europe for the man most likely to secure a world-wide reputation for the Sanskrit Chair, I confess that I should have hesitated to prosecute my design. But Colonel Boden thought more of aiding, by means of Sanskrit, the diffusion of Christianity in India . . . The establishment of a school of European comparative philology and Indian history, mythology, and philosophy, would doubtless be attractive; but such a departure from the one object of the Founder and strict province of the Professorship would not, in my opinion, be justifiable.

This neatly states what was also the main issue in the first election. The Williams-Müller struggle was long and nasty; but the first campaign was longer and nastier. At one point there were eight candidates, but in the end six withdrew to leave the arena clear for the two protagonists. Horace Hayman Wilson and the Revd. W. H. Mill were both contending from Calcutta, where Mill was the Principal of the Bishop's College. Mill's claim to be a Sanskritist rested on his part in the authorship of the Christa-Sangita, or the Sacred History of Our Lord Jesus Christ in Sanskrit Verse. Mill's preface tells us that the poem was begun, on his own initiative, by 'an unconverted Gentile Pandit, Râmachandra Vidyabhushana of Burdwan'. After the first canto, Mill 'took the direction of the work, not only in the selection and the supply of the materials, but in their Sanskrit rendering also'. He had received help also from his future rival, Wilson. Mill wrote: 'Many Brahmins have expressed a strong desire to read this work: and one heathen Pandit now teaches it to his heathen pupils . . . The most melancholy trait in the account of this work [is] the readiness with which these devotees of superstition can assume the ideas and expressions
of a faith most opposed to it." He concludes by hoping to
displace, even for a few, 'by a pure and holy substitute, the
monstrous and demoralizing legends of pagan worship', but
admits that even his co-author persists in preferring the
\textit{Bhagavad Gita}.

No one disputed that when it came to knowledge of
Sanskrit, Wilson had no rival. He was a remarkable man.
Born in 1786, he studied medicine at St. Thomas's Hospital,
and in 1808 was nominated surgeon on the Bengal establi-
sment of the East India Company. On the passage out, which
took six months, he taught himself Hindustani. Arriving in
Calcutta, he was appointed assistant at the Mint, and became
assay-master there in 1816. He must have begun the study of
Sanskrit almost as soon as he got to India. 'Excited' (in his
own words) 'by the example and biography of Sir William
Jones', he began publication in 1813, with a text and transla-
tion of \textit{Kalidasa}'s poem \textit{The Cloud Messenger}. In 1811 he
had already been appointed secretary to the Asiatick Society
of Bengal, founded by Jones, and he held that office till he
left Bengal in 1832.

In 1819 Wilson published the first Sanskrit-English
dictionary—the first dictionary, in fact, from Sanskrit into
another language. A second, enlarged edition appeared in
1832. In the preface to their monumental Sanskrit-German
dictionary, of which the first volume appeared in 1855 and
which is only now being superseded, Bohtlingk and Roth
wrote: 'we admire the extraordinary familiarity of the Nestor
of Indianists' with the so-called classical language and
literature, but regret that he has preferred in his dictionary
as well as his grammar to abide by the position of Indian
pundits instead of treading the path offered by European
learning.' In pitting European—and especially Continental—
philology against Indian traditional learning, they were but
picking up the gauntlet Wilson had thrown down twenty-five
years earlier. When he first became a candidate for the Boden
chair, Wilson forwarded via the Bishop of Calcutta to the
Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford a \textit{Memorandum
respecting Sanskrit Literature in England}. This document,
which was subsequently printed and circulated in the election
campaign, makes entertaining reading, being for the most
part still apposite today, and I regret that time does not allow
me to regale you with the whole of it. Adverting to the great
German philologists Bopp and Schlegel, Wilson wrote:

\begin{quote}
I should think it an indispensable requisite in the first Professor of the
Sanskrit language, that he had acquired his knowledge in India. It is
true that considerable proficiency has been attained by some learned men
on the continent, but it is evident from their publications, that their reading
has been very limited. . . . Their knowledge is in fact of the most
elementary kind, and is restricted to the Grammar of the language.
\end{quote}

Wilson had proved his own facility by editing and translating
numerous Sanskrit works; and in his \textit{Memorandum} he gives
very proper weight to the need for books, and proposes to
establish a printing press at the University, not least so that
some students of Sanskrit might find employment as
compositors and correctors.

The campaign against Wilson was, however, not fought on
academic grounds. At first his opponents alleged irreligion.
In a letter to Mr. Macbride, Principal of Magdalen Hall,
who played an important part in the campaign, the Bishop of
Calcutta supported both Mill and Wilson, but wrote of
Wilson:

\begin{quote}
It must be stated that he has uniformly supported the views of that class
of natives who made the exclusion of Christian instruction an indispensable
condition before they would give their aid to the [Hindu] College. The
Bible was not to be introduced to the Class Rooms; but it was placed in the
Library, to which all the Students have free access . . . . This may appear
strangely inconsistent, but it serves to mark very exactly the view
entertained by Mr. Wilson and those who think with him; they urge, that
in the actual circumstances of the College, considering what the moral and
intellectual state of the great majority of the Students really is, the solemn
truths of the Bible cannot with propriety be made the subject of direct

\footnote{The author's autograph, dated 17th Sept. 1830, is in the Bodleian, MS. Clar. Press c.23.}
in the school-room, but every effort may and should be made that they may be learned in the closet.

However, when Graves Haughton, a respectable Sanskritist who was a rival candidate, testified that Wilson was devout, Mill's supporters shifted to another line of attack. Three days before the election, an ex-Professor of the Bishop's College wrote a letter averring that in 1821 Wilson had been living in a state of concubinage, and that Mr. Wilson was the chief ornament and supporter of the Cakutta theatre, another circumstance conveying but a melancholy notion of his moral character . . . ' His friends had to admit that some years before his marriage Wilson had indeed lived with an Englishwoman and had two children by her—not seven or eight, as was alleged. No one mentioned the similarity to Colonel Boden's own circumstance; but I suppose they did not know of it. That Wilson's wedded wife was a granddaughter of the actress Mrs. Siddons was not adduced as further evidence against him.

On 15 March 1832 Wilson beat Mill by 207 votes to 200. Wilson's victory was owed to Haughton, who a few days earlier had withdrawn in his favour. The day after the election, Principal Macbride wrote to Haughton of 'publications of a very exaggerated kind of [Wilson's] early conduct which placed his well-wishers in the painful dilemma, a peculiarly embarrassing one in an University, of overlooking preeminent literary fitness or seeming to sacrifice to it the far higher interests of morality'. What might have been the fate of Sanskrit studies in this country had four votes gone the other way! A few days earlier, the Earl of Munster had written to Haughton: 'The House has been full of Clergymen and all loud in Mill's praise . . . One said before me, we want a universal scholar with Sanskrit knowledge . . . when we get him to Oxford, to prove that Sanskrit is from the Greeks! I should not be surprised if they attempted this . . . .' Of course, this was just loose talk; but the choice between the man who read and published Sanskrit texts and the man who only wrote the language, and that with but one purpose, was a stark one. Those interested in India for its own sake may be said to have lost the second round, when Monier Williams beat Max Müller, but by then Wilson had implanted a tradition of scholarship—indeed, Williams was a pupil of his—which could not quite be uprooted.

Wilson's only genuflection towards the purpose of the founder was made at the end of his Memorandum: 'As long as the study of Sanskrit is not obligatory upon any individual, as long as it is a mere matter of enlightened curiosity, as long as it holds out no prospect of emolument or distinction, it is not probable that it will be extensively prosecuted.' So, to give it 'some advantage more substantial than literary information', he suggested that knowledge of Sanskrit be made 'a condition of an Indian Chaplaincy'. Contrasting the chaplains with the 'degraded' character of the missionaries, he concluded: 'Did the regular Clergy add to their personal respectability a reputation for scholarship in Indian Literature, and particularly in that Literature which the Hindus themselves consider as classical and sacred, consequences of the most important and beneficial nature might be confidently predicted.' Whether it is the Hindus or the clergy who would benefit is pleasingly ambiguous.

Wilson lived only three years in Oxford; then, in 1836, he succeeded Sir Charles Wilkins as Librarian of the East India Company and moved to London. Next year he also became Director of the Royal Asiatic Society. He visited Oxford for a part of each term. As the terms of his employment dictated that he give at least forty-two lectures annually in term time and be fined £10 for each one omitted, he must have taught regularly; but in those days of course Sanskrit did not form part of any Honour School. It was probably studied only by those intending a career in India. Wilson did see to the establishment of a devanāgarī press at the Clarendon Press,
and during the latter part of his tenure it began to print Max Müller's famous edition of the Rg Veda with Śāyana's commentary. Wilson also laid the foundation of Oxford's fine collection of Sanskrit manuscripts: in 1842 he sold the University his collection of 616 MSS. for £500, and more were purchased from his estate in 1865. But it was above all by his own publications that Wilson established the reputation of the Boden Professorship.

Monier Williams was born in India, but he left it as a child and did not revisit it till he was in his mid-fifties. (Curiously enough, exactly the same is true of his successor, Macdonell.) Williams (he only assumed the surname Monier-Williams in 1887 when he was knighted) began to study Sanskrit at Oxford under Wilson when he was planning to make his life in India as a writer in the East India Company civil service; but a family tragedy changed his plans and he went to teach at Haileybury instead. Williams was a Balliol man, and perhaps established a claim on the college's affections by rowing in the College Eight in 1839, when they were head of the river. When in 1881 all professorships were for the first time anchored in specific colleges the Boden was assigned to Balliol. Colonel Boden had stipulated that the professorship be 'at or in any or either of the Colleges', and Wilson had been given an M.A. from Exeter, but he never held a college fellowship. The 1881 statutes for Balliol laid down that the Boden Professor was to be an ex officio fellow of the college, and gave Balliol a hand in future elections. In 1882 Williams duly became a fellow. [Not only does it give me great pleasure to be a Fellow of Balliol College; my pleasure has derived an additional spice from the discovery that the Boden has of all chairs much the longest association with the college—for it was the only chair attached to it before the twentieth century.] Balliol under Jowett gave further hospitality to Sanskrit when in 1884 it admitted Indian Civil Service probationers, and appointed Macdonell as Lecturer in Sanskrit to teach them. Indeed, Jowett had a lifelong interest in everything connected with India; and it was during his Vice-Chancellorship and with his help that the Indian Institute was founded in 1883 and the Honour School of Oriental Studies started in 1886.

Monier Williams was born in 1819, and was Boden Professor from 1860 to 1899, a record which is unlikely to be beaten in an era of compulsory retirement. But the length of his tenure is misleading: he retired from active duty at the end of 1887, when he was sixty-eight, and had Macdonell appointed as his deputy, carrying out all his duties on one-third of his salary—the money was deducted from his own. The tone of Williams's professorship was, I surmise, set by the opening words of his inaugural lecture:

India is of all the possessions of Great Britain the most interesting, and presents the most inviting prospect to the missionary. He has there no common country or people to deal with; no ordinary religion. He is not there brought into contact with savage tribes who melt away before the superior force and intelligence of Europeans. He is placed in the midst of a great and ancient people, who, many of them tracing back their origin to the same stock as ourselves, attained a high degree of civilisation when our forefathers were barbarians, and had a polished language and literature when English was unknown.

It is only fair to recall that though history has made us find the confusion of linguistic with racial affinity distasteful, it was at that period commonplace and was already present in the mind of Sir William Jones. Williams discourses on the diversity of the 'great Hindū race' in caste and religion. Caste he ascribes to 'a general conspiracy on the part of the Brahmans to monopolise temporal and spiritual power without personal risk or labour'—a fine example of what Sir Karl Popper has termed a 'conspiracy theory of society'.[14] He then proceeds 'to shew that the vagueness and uncertainty of Hindū religious belief is another source of disunion'. This brings him to his climax: why study Sanskrit? It is

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the one bond of sympathy, which, like an electric chain, connects Hindus of opposite characters in every district of India. There can be little doubt that a more correct knowledge of the religious opinions and practices of the Sanskrit Hindus, or as we may call them the Hindus proper, is essential to extensive progress in our Indian missions. This knowledge is best gained at first hand from Sanskrit books. The Christian missionary who attempts to hold discussions with educated natives without an acquaintance with the Sanskrit language may be strong in intellect and faith, but resembles a man shed in iron walking on ice. He has no certain standing-ground, and must either slip altogether or advance with timid hesitating steps. Not that the Hindus with whom he converses are likely to be Sanskrit scholars. Real Pandits are, after all, rarely to be found in India, except in the neighbourhood of the great seats of learning, and the ignorance of the mass of the population is notorious. But what we assert is, that the national character is cast in a Sanskrit mould, and that the Sanskrit language and literature is not only the key to a vast and apparently confused and unmeaning religious system, but is also the one medium of approach to the hearts of the Hindus, however unlearned, or however disinclined by the various circumstances of country, caste, and creed. 15

With the substance of the last sentence, though not its intention, I shall later show that I entirely agree.

Monier-Williams was by no means an inactive professor, but his main activity lay in fund-raising and empire-building. He helped to start the Honour School of Oriental Studies in 1886, though the Indian side of it has never quite attained the form he intended. In an address entitled 'How can the University of Oxford best fulfil its duty towards India?' he argued that 'we are bound to establish an Honour School of Oriental Literae Humaniores, including Modern Indian Languages'. For the modern Indian languages I am afraid we are still waiting, and now that so much Indological scholarship is being published in those languages I think the argument for them is even stronger than it was in the nineteenth century. Fund-raising is not my chosen métier; but I hope that some benefactor, whether public or private, will provide us with funds to pay for regular tuition in at least one modern Indian language so that we can put it on the syllabus before Monier-Williams's proposal is a century old.

Monier-Williams's greatest achievement was the founding of the Indian Institute, most of the funds for which he raised in India, and to which he donated his collection of about three thousand books and manuscripts. We nowadays think of the Indian Institute as a library which has been under Bodleian administration since 1927. Originally it was of course in the first instance a building (which still stands, though now used for other purposes). The building housed a library, a museum, and lecture rooms. But in Williams's conception it was far more. In the record which he published of its founding—a document of breath-taking sanctimony—we may read his original proposal, that above and beyond the normal purposes one might expect library and lecture-rooms to serve, the Institute should effect 'three other special objects':

1. To act as an attractive meeting-place for students of all countries who may be engaged in Indian or Oriental research, and to encourage personal intercourse, and promote interchange of ideas among them. It will therefore invite distinguished Indian administrators, able Indologists and Orientalists of all nationalities, and eminent natives of India who may visit this country, to meet and deliver addresses in its Lecture-rooms or Library. There also conversaziones and social gatherings will occasionally be held with a view to more sympathetic action in arousing an interest in Indian subjects and in making England and India better acquainted with each other.

2. To draw together and assist the selected candidates for the Civil Service of India, who are now required to reside at a University.

3. To befriend and aid all native students from India who may matriculate or reside at Oxford, whether holders of Government Scholarships, or members of any College, or who may not belong to the University but simply have lodgings in the city. Books and other appliances would be set apart in the Building for their special use, and the Boden Professor of Sanskrit would undertake to watch over their interests and help them with advice. 16

The kind of advice which would have awaited them we may judge from the following passage:

The Indian Institute will become a place for the interchange of qualities as well as knowledge. It will be a place for forming the character as well as informing the mind. Young Indians will there, I trust, derive from their contact with young Englishmen a little of that bone and fibre which constitutes strength of character. At any rate, they will see in many an Oxford youth such qualities as courage, determination, tenacity of purpose, soundness of judgement, accuracy, punctuality, powers of observation, and that manly self-respect which lies at the root of both personal and political morality. And young Englishmen, on the other hand, will see in young Indians many qualities worthy of their imitation—such as patience, courtesy of manner, temperance, obedience to authority, and toleration...

But other advantages will flow to young Indians from contact with young English men. Here in India [Williams is speaking in Calcutta] it is difficult for a young student imbued with Indian philosophical thought, to get rid of the belief that life is an illusion and a dream, and action a mistake and a blunder, as leading to future births and repeated existences. At Oxford, on the other hand, he will learn that life is a solemn reality and that work is a part of religion. At Oxford, too, he will see many highly educated women co-operating with their husbands in good works, and thus gain a higher estimate of family life.17

Macdonell wrote of him in the D.N.B.: ‘Monier-Williams’s activity as a scholar was directed mainly towards the practical side of Sanskrit studies... This interest led him to devote much of his time to writing books meant to diffuse a knowledge of Indian religions in England.’ Those books have not lasted well. On the other hand, we still use every day the Sanskrit—English dictionary of which he finished correcting the proofs a few days before his death. But we can deduce from its preface that little of the dictionary is Williams’s own work; moreover, it is little more than a translated abridgement of the great dictionary of Böhltingk and Roth. Each of the first three Boden Professors published a Sanskrit grammar and a Sanskrit—English dictionary; but while the grammars at least may be said to represent some progress in presentation, the dictionaries are progressively of lesser account: Wilson’s was the pioneering work, but Monier-Williams’s was a précis and Macdonell’s Sanskrit—English Dictionary for Students was a précis of a précis.

Arthur Antony Macdonell carried out the duties of the Boden Professorship from 1888, and held the title from 1899 till his retirement in 1926. As I wish to leave time to say something on my own account, I leave the facts of his life to be gleaned from the notice in the D.N.B. or his obituary for the British Academy,19 both written by his successor, F. W. Thomas. He visited India in 1907-8 and was justly proud of having on this visit secured for Oxford a collection of over six thousand Sanskrit manuscripts, a library which was on sale in Benares. He got Lord Curzon to persuade the Prime Minister of Nepal, Maharaja Chandra Shum Shere Jung, to buy them for the University. That is how it came about that Oxford possesses (by a small margin over the India Office) the largest collection of Sanskrit manuscripts outside India. Unfortunately the Chandra Shum Shere collection still awaits a cataloguer; in the seventy years since acquisition little more has been achieved than a card catalogue listing titles and authors, and not very accurately at that. For such cataloguing responsibility must ultimately lie with Sanskritists. I regard it as one of the major duties of my incumbency to remedy the deficiency—not that I would be capable of doing so by my own efforts. I am most grateful to my friend Professor David Pingree of Brown University for providing, on his own initiative and at his own expense, what he modestly calls a ‘handlist’ of the many astronomical and astrological manuscripts. If visiting and local scholars follow his example and share out the work by subject we may jointly finish the task. I look forward to fruitful co-operation with my new colleagues in the Bodleian, Mr. Roberts and Mr. Katz, in this endeavour. The list of titles already allows the manuscripts for teaching; and we have even had undergraduates editing unpublished texts in our collection.

Macdonell worked mainly in Vedic studies. Though Thomas says that his personality was engaging, his published work does not reveal his character. It is careful, clear and dry, and his two major editions of Vedic texts are unlikely

17. Ibid., pp. 28-9.
to be superseded. But Thomas noted that he was 'no
theorist, nor specialist in Avestan or Iranian or Indo-
European philology'. The Boden Professors have, until
modern times, failed to bring to fruition the seed laid by
Sir William Jones: comparative philology we seem to have
left to the Germans. With Wilson this was a matter of
principle; with Monier Williams lack of competence or
interest or both. The case of Macdonell is curious, in that he
studied in Germany, and indeed began his Sanskrit along
with comparative philology under Theodor Benfey in
Göttingen. F. W. Thomas, Boden Professor 1927-37, was
somewhat interested in comparative philology, and published
a few articles on it when he was young; but by the time he
succeeded to the chair (on his retirement at the age of sixty
from the Librarianship of the India Office) his publications
reflect a complete preoccupation with central Asia.
E. H. Johnston (Boden Professor 1937-42), who took up
serious work on Sanskrit on his retirement from the Indian
Civil Service, was interested only in the Chair's central area
of concern, classical Indology. Philology has come into its
own only with Professor Burrow, whose active occupancy of
the Chair for thirty-two years is a more real achievement than
Monier-Williams's longer titular occupancy. Professor
Burrow has made great contributions to many areas of
philology: to Indo-European, to both Old and Middle Indo-
Aryan, and above all, to Dravidian. The Comparative
Dravidian Etymological Dictionary which he compiled with Professor Emeneau is his magnum opus, and it is a source of deep satisfaction that in his retirement he should be preparing a second edition. Those acquainted with Professor Burrow only superficially may be surprised to learn that that dictionary is very far from being based on library materials alone; Professor Burrow has collected in the field, on journeys to remote parts of India, material both for the dictionary and for three monographs on hitherto barely

known Dravidian languages. All the monographs are
published jointly with the late Dr. Sudhibhushan Bhattacharya
of the Indian Anthropological Survey, a kindly scholar who
gave me my first lessons in Pali.

The reforms embodied in the statutes of 1881 did away
with the public election of the Boden Professor, and trans-
ferred the powers of Convocation to a small committee of
electors. That no system is fool-proof is axiomatic, and if
corroboration were needed, I stand here as ocular proof. But
the removal of the election from the public arena did mean,
in this case, that candidates no longer had to vie with each
other in claiming to be best attuned to the founder's
intention. Indeed, the 1881 statute for the Boden Chair
makes no mention of the founder's purposes, and merely says
that the professor 'shall deliver lectures and give instruction
on the Sanskrit Language and Literature'. This invites me to
say something of how I conceive that task.

I must begin by explaining how I view the relationship of
Sanskrit as a field of study to comparative Indo-European
philology. I do not wish to be polemical, and I need to be
brief. But I cannot see that either our history—the founder's
will, the statutes, the practice of my predecessors—or the
demands of Sanskrit studies themselves give Indo-European
an important place in our curriculum. My colleagues and I
shall of course do our utmost to meet the requests of
colleagues and students in other faculties—anthropology,
philosophy and theology I hope among them—for teaching
and co-operation at every level. Indo-European philology is a
field with a most distinguished history; but its claims to
serious academic consideration are so indisputable that
stridency cannot enhance them. No one expects the resources
and energies of a department of Greek or French to be largely
devoted to languages other than Greek or French, or to
subjects unconnected with Greece or France. Why then
should Sanskrit and India be differently treated?
The reason why this question has to be asked at all is that in many universities, for historical reasons, it is only in connection with Indo-European philology that Sanskrit is taught. Since, then, 'the Grammar of the language', as Wilson put it, is studied by many Indo-Europeans, how can I say that Indo-European has no intimate connection with Sanskrit studies themselves?

Well, what exactly is Sanskrit? And, for that matter, what on earth is being Sanskritic? It is true, of course, that Sanskrit is the name of a language; but the word has a more general meaning. It means 'elaborated', 'refined', 'cultured', 'civilized'; it can be used to describe anything which is adorned or otherwise prepared for some purpose. It is the contrary of Prakrit, 'natural', and it is never pejorative. The Sanskrit language is the language of educated men, and Sanskrit is the vehicle of civilization.

Sanskrit or Sanskritic study, then, is civilized study, is the study of civilization, and of course the study of Indian civilization in particular. How does this relate to philology? Sanskrit has its own tradition of linguistics, the glories of which need no advertisement. In about the fourth century B.C., Pāṇini gave his incredibly brilliant, subtle, comprehensive, and concise description of Sanskrit morphology and morpho-phonemics. The influence of this intellectual feat was such that grammar became the paradigm subject in India, much as Plato advocated that geometry should in Greece: all subjects tried to model their procedures on those of the grammarians. One might even argue that the more closely subjects were linked with grammar in their intellectual origins—I am thinking especially of aesthetics and logic—the more they achieved. Of the grammar itself modern western linguists and philosophers are beginning to discover the fascination. I shall only mention the two greatest grammarians after Pāṇini: Patañjali, who pointed out in the second century B.C. that the demand that one should define one's terms leads to an infinite regress; and Bhartrhari, who argued in about the fifth century A.D. that meaning lies in sentences, and that their dissection is from this point of view as artificial as the dissection of individual words. Intellectual historians will also be interested in Pāṇini's predecessor Yāska, whose Vedic exegesis I think supplied Max Müller with the theory that myth is an allegory of nature, the gods and heroes personifications of natural phenomena.

Yāska brings us back to Indo-European philology. Certainly that subject can elucidate the meanings of Vedic words. But how exigous a part the meaning of the Veda has played in Indian civilization! The Veda was of course the repository of all wisdom; acceptance of this tenet is a defining criterion of Hindu orthodoxy. But it existed to be venerated, not to be understood. Perhaps its very unintelligibility helped to preserve its prestige and authority. Yāska, who can hardly be later than the fifth century B.C., was already at sea with it, and forced it into the strait-jacket of his nature myth interpretation. Sāyana's famous commentary on the Veda, which Max Müller had printed, post-dates Yāska by nearly two thousand years, but in essence follows his interpretation. In those two thousand years there was no intellectually productive tradition of Vedic exegesis. On the contrary; in traditional India there have always been two kinds of schools, the Vedic and the sāstrik, i.e. that for the study of recognized subjects. All that went on in the Vedic schools was rote learning; they were attended by brahmins who were to become priests and had to learn the liturgies—but without any regard for their meaning whatsoever. In the sāstrik tradition memory has also played a part, but it is to this day an intellectual tradition of reasoning and argument.

Even Pāṇini's grammar is a completely secular work. It has often been said that the Indian concern with grammar arose from the need to preserve the Vedas perfectly, for ritual purposes, and there is some truth in this; but in Pāṇini the
connection is already remote. His aim is to describe the daily speech of educated men, and he embraces such contingencies as sarcastic abuse and shouting from a distance. He often mentions Vedic Sanskrit, but only where it exemplifies a restriction or extension of a rule already given for the language he is describing. Wherever Vedic Sanskrit would require the formulation of a completely new rule, he ignores it. Vedic Sanskrit is only a marginal concern of the Indian grammatical tradition.

I am not maintaining that from Śaṅkara to Śāntana and beyond no one had any understanding of the Veda; let alone that the Veda is not an important document for Indian social, religious, intellectual and linguistic history. Either proposition would be absurd. But I wish to redress the balance; for so far as the Veda directly influenced later developments, it did so as the Indians understood it, not as we may now better understand it with the help of comparative philology.

Surviving Sanskrit literature is many times as large as Latin and Greek literature together. There may be as many as two million manuscripts extant, though they are perishing fast. (For comparison, there are perhaps about thirty thousand Greek codices.) A very high percentage of Sanskrit works have not even been published, while the number of those to have been critically edited is minuscule. A massive rescue operation is required. Of course, a great deal of what lies buried is commentarial literature and other products of medieval scholasticism; but discoveries of important classical works still occur whenever anyone goes digging. As against this, nearly the whole of Vedic literature, which forms but a small fraction of Sanskrit literature as a whole, has been carefully edited. Naturally, much remains to be done; but the attention given to the Vedas in Europe is out of all proportion.

Indo-European philology is not alone responsible for this anti-medieval bias. Theological fundamentalism is also implicated. Historians of oriental religions have long had a tendency to try to establish the original meaning which the religious teacher intended, rather than to examine what his followers have understood him to mean. I can see that, just as the original meaning of words is important for comparative philology, the original purport of words which may be divinely inspired is crucial for theology; but is either important for history? No one familiar with the study of Buddhism in modern times will accuse me of exaggeration. Scholars have endlessly lucubrated, and are still lucubrating, over what the Buddha meant by his no-soul doctrine; but in so far as they assume his meaning to be something other than what Buddhists have taken him to mean, I consider that they are wasting their time. Similarly, study of the most famous of all Indian texts, the Bhagavad Gītā, has been almost entirely on this theological level, the desperate a priori assumption that the text has a single coherent message leading to attempts to explain away the difficulties for the interpretation selected. This style of modern exegesis merely replicates the efforts of traditional commentators—except that it usually does the job less well. But surely our aim should be to examine the many different interpretations which can be put on the text by emphasizing some passages at the expense of others, and seeing the historical relationships between them. In other words, as historians let us assume that a religious text is a human product, and examine it like any other cultural phenomenon. It has been widely observed that things tend to survive successfully if they answer many disparate purposes. The Veda could remain authoritative because it was so obscure (and in fact so limited in scope) that any doctrine could at least be said to be compatible with it. The Gītā is supremely famous, I think, because though its sentences are intelligible it contains so many different doctrines, many of them mutually inconsistent, that the most diverse religious teachers have been able to find in it justification for their own teachings.

Let no one mistake me: I am not hostile to philology. On the
contrary, there are areas of it which I particularly wish to foster: the historical and comparative study of Indian languages, both ancient and modern, for which we shall draw inspiration from the work of Professor Burrow, and in which I myself delight to be guided by my teacher, Mr. Roy Norman; and the study of the Indian grammarians, to which I shall allot a fundamental part in the undergraduate syllabus, as Wilson recommended in 1830. But by and large I consider the relations of Sanskrit with non-Indic philology, as with theology, to be complementary. With anthropology too I envisage a fruitful complementarity. In a remarkable inaugural lecture delivered in this very room last term, Professor Rodney Needham argued that the proper sphere of anthropology is the study of the structure of the human mind, the discovery and explication of universal categories of human thought and experience. Anthropologists, then, will study Man; we Sanskritists shall study people. They will seek for unity; we shall explore diversity. Professor Needham will trek back up the mountain of Kedang while we get lost in the by-ways of the Indian jungle. Professor Needham spoke of 'cultural translation', only to reject it as his primary aim; we shall be very glad to try our hand at it. We shall try to translate into English—for how else can we be intelligible?—but in such a way as to multiply our categories, to elaborate our concepts, to enlarge, by refining it, our area of experience. We shall try to be Sanskritic.

But can we do it? I am worried by the low standards in our field. I speak from personal experience—of myself. I have an old friend who says that he is a good psycho-analyst because he has had every neurosis himself. I have the same insights into the deficiencies of British Sanskrit. For me could have been composed the Sanskrit proverb that putting on the sacred thread does not make a brahmin. I am painfully aware that assumption of the duties and privileges of this Chair confers neither knowledge nor wisdom. My Chair is in a glasshouse, and I am throwing no stones. We have three problems: we are not very good at English; we are not very good at Sanskrit; and we are not very good at anything else. Let me take the three in order.

First English. Whatever may be the failings of the humanities in Britain, sloppiness of expression has been one of the rarest. Education in the classics used to inculcate a sense of style. Though most Indologists have classical backgrounds, our translations frequently have neither elegance nor clarity. The so-called 'literal translation'—an intellectual fallacy and an aesthetic monstrosity—is still widespread; and in our examining we demand good style in Sanskrit prose but rarely in English. Yet in translation there is no clear dividing line between form and content. If our published translations from Sanskrit literature are little read, that may be because few of them deserve to be. Accuracy is a sine qua non; but so is taste.

Elsewhere, on the other hand, our teaching is still too much influenced by classics. In the western classical tradition the canon of excellence was long ago established, so that the study of 'set books' is appropriate. The Indian educational tradition, after beginning with grammar, is to specialize in one or two fields; and even within literature the canon is not clear-cut. There is no one ideal way to get a bird's eye view of ancient India in a three year course. That might not matter if our methods gave students the ability to read Sanskrit with any fluency, so that they could explore further alone; but I fear we still fall short of that. Classical Sanskrit texts have in India always been presented to the student with commentaries, whether oral or written. To bring our students to something approaching the ease with which a B.A. in classics reads Latin or Greek, or an Indian graduate reads Sanskrit, we must concentrate entirely on reading as widely as possible, and always with Sanskrit commentaries.

If sheer lack of fluency in Sanskrit is our most basic
insufficiency, other skills are in even shorter supply. Epigraphy, palaeography, and numismatics are essential for Indian history; but they are so little taught in Britain, and arrangements between universities are so inflexible, that we shall find it hard to provide any instruction in them at Oxford. Expertise in most of the more technical subjects—classical Indian astronomy, mathematics, medicine and music are obvious examples—is even harder to come by. If we are to raise our standards, we shall have to exploit the services of visiting lecturers and examiners from the Continent. But above all I think we must turn to India. I am appalled to find that no Indian has ever been employed in a permanent capacity to teach Sanskrit at a British university. I know that jobs are few, and one must allow some prospects to local talent. But if several western countries are now far ahead of us in Indology, I attribute this in part to their employing Indians to teach it. Though his official duties are confined to Indian religion and ethics, I am indeed happy that Oxford can now call on the services of a good Sanskritist such as my recently arrived colleague, Professor Matilal. For several years we have been admitting as graduate students in Indology students who have done well in some quite different field and wish to apply their training to Indian materials. We can do this because of a book which sets new standards in Sanskrit pedagogy. The late Michael Coulson's *Teach Yourself Sanskrit* makes the language and literature available even to the many who cannot hope to attend a university, and is equally suitable for class instruction. The saddest blow I have ever suffered has been Coulson's early and self-inflicted death; it would be a better world if he could, as I had long hoped, be standing here in my stead.

In conclusion, a few more words about civilization. An unfashionable word—maybe the thing itself is obsolescent. Civilization is more specific than 'culture' in the anthropologist's sense, more global than the 'high culture' sneered at by trendy educationists. A civilization is large-scale, uniting local 'cultures' (in the anthropological sense) in allegiance to the values embodied in a 'high culture'. A civilization is self-confident—though not necessarily arrogant like Monier-Williams. A civilized society, sharing certain moral and aesthetic values, prizes education as transmitting those values. We, I think, have lost this view. Certainly the government has: it has no confidence that our universities or our libraries might confer, either at home or abroad, any benefits that transcend quantification in cash; it will not even leave the Bible in the closet. And if education is indeed no more than the assimilation of facts, it is hard to argue. In this world of ethical relativism, in which we no longer have any sure criterion by which to decide what our children should be
taught—and I am myself not exempt from this incertitude—it is of the greatest importance to explain what the other world, the shared world, was like. Only thus can we see our own world in its proper perspective, and criticize with understanding our loss of nerve.

One of my predecessors, F. W. Thomas, began his first book, *The History and Prospects of British Education in India*, with these words: 'Education is no exotic in India. There is no country where the love of learning had so early an origin or has exercised so lasting and powerful an influence.' That is what I mean by being Sanskritic. Sanskrit, as Monier-Williams rightly explained, is the very heart of Indian civilization. Nor is it just a matter of learning and intellect. In a civilization, I think, there tends to be a coincidence of values: beauty is truth, truth beauty. To give an example: the view that technique and artistry cannot be at odds may help to explain why the Indians have no taste for the primitive, and have not even gone so far as to attribute aesthetic value to simplicity; in Sanskrit poetry complexity cannot *per se* be a defect. We may not agree with that view, but we can surely learn from it.

Our civilization descended from Greece and Rome, and I am not arguing that India has a prior claim on our attention, though I think it has a very strong one. I can do no better than to quote, not Max Muller's hyperbolic praises, but Warren Hastings again:

> By familiarizing ourselves to a general inspection of the manners of the various inhabitants of the earth; by a frequent observation of the effects which climate, habit, superstition, and other adventitious causes are capable of producing on the minds and hearts of men; we shall accustom ourselves not only to revere their virtues, but even to view their errors with indulgence; and such an employment cannot fail to open our minds, and to inspire us with that benevolence which our religion inculcates, for the whole race of mankind.

The Buddha, who never over-simplified, did not claim that all values coincide. His aim was to give practical advice. One should not speak, he said, unless one can say what is both beneficial and true. That advice I shall try to follow.