



DR. GEORGE BYRON GORDON

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IT is not an easy duty to write for the MUSEUM JOURNAL some account of DOCTOR GEORGE BYRON GORDON and of my friendship for him. He was one for whom I had an unusually deep respect and affection and I hope and believe that our friendship was enjoyed by him in equal measure.

Our intimacy began in 1911. I had resigned the Provostship of the University on the thirty-first of December, 1910, and on January 18, 1911, the University as a body gave me a dinner in the large hall of the University Gymnasium. I had at that time been a Trustee of the University since June 6, 1876, and then expected to continue to fulfil my duty as a Trustee but had not decided on any definite form of activity. I remember Doctor Gordon's foreword to his address upon the occasion of this University dinner. He was a great reader and he took as his text for this talk whose subject was the University Museum, this couplet from Alfred Austin's drama, *The Human Tragedy*,

It was as quiet as could quiet be
And all the place seemed lapped in vacancy.

In Doctor Gordon's mind the purpose of the Museum was to be nothing less than to record the history of mankind. Its collections must tell the stories of Egypt and Babylonia, of the Far and Near East, of Greece and Rome, of Mexico and Peru, of our own land and also that earlier legend handed down to us by wrought flints and ivories.

In one of Doctor Gordon's remarks he expressed the desire that if I proposed to take an interest in any one of our University departments, I might choose the Museum, whose Director he then was. His suggestion greatly attracted me and it was in response to it that I became a member of the Board of Managers of the Museum. Afterwards, upon the death of Mr. Eckley Brinton Coxe, Jr., I was

elected President of that Board, a position I still hold as I write this affectionate reference to Doctor Gordon. It is not often that so deep a personal interest is felt by the president of any university department as from the very beginning began to find its life and motive in my feelings towards Doctor Gordon. The present Provost of the University speaks of Doctor Gordon's career in the following words: "He was an explorer, anthropologist, archæologist, author, and teacher." To these words I will add—he was a loyal friend.

In such an article as this, there should be included a brief statement of the cause of his death. He had with a number of other travelers, explorers, and men interested in archæological subjects, attended a dinner given by the Wilderness Club at the Racquet Club in Philadelphia on the evening of Saturday, January 29th, and after the dinner he and others remained, listening to the account of the travels of Mr. Roosevelt's two sons, who were of the number of the guests. After this talk among men of like minds upon the purposes of the meeting, Doctor Gordon and two others went to the first floor of the Racquet Club, only to find that he had left his overcoat on the second floor. He started to walk up to this floor to recover it, but no one saw what immediately followed. Probably from a heart attack he fell backwards after beginning the ascent and struck his head upon the marble floor of the Club, severely fracturing the skull. He was taken at once to a nearby hospital unconscious; he never regained consciousness, and died in the early morning hours of Sunday, January 30th.

Doctor Gordon was born August 4, 1870, at New Perth, Prince Edward Island. He was educated at the University of South Carolina and at Harvard University and received at the latter institution the degree of Doctor of Science. In 1894, he was appointed Director of the Harvard University Expedition at Copan in Central America and continued his archæological explorations in Central America until 1900.

From the year 1903 until his death, Doctor Gordon was associated with the University of Pennsylvania and the Museum. In 1903 he was appointed Curator of the American Section of the Museum, and in the following year Lecturer on Anthropology in the University. In 1907 he was appointed Assistant Professor of Anthropology, which position he held until 1915. In 1910 he was made Director of the Museum. In 1926 the University of Pennsylvania conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Science.

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Under Doctor Gordon's direction and wise supervision, buried sites and cities in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Crete, Palestine, and North, Central, and South America, have yielded up their hidden treasures, many of which form important parts of the great collections in our Museum. To the collections obtained through excavations and explorations have been added by gift and by purchase works of art from all parts of the world. It was through Doctor Gordon's able efforts that the Museum has been brought to the high plane of perfection where it ranks among the first museums in this country and abroad. He had the gift of selecting for it only the choicest and best specimens and had also the faculty of arranging them so that they might give the fullest pleasure to visitors. I believe that it may be truly said that of the many thousands of objects there is not one which does not take high rank as being entitled to be preserved amongst the choice collections of the Museum which he had built up. The Chinese Collection best expresses his personality. He was instrumental in bringing to that Section some of the finest works of art which China has produced and it may well be said that that collection will ever stand as a fitting memorial to his taste and discrimination in assembling great art objects for the enjoyment and benefit of the people of this City.

Doctor Gordon was a wise and able administrator and every one in the service of the University Museum respected him highly. No man-of-war could have passed a closer inspection upon any day or upon any occasion with higher commendation than could the Museum under his careful supervision. He is widely known by his published writings on anthropology, archæology, and subjects of general interest. Among these may be mentioned, PREHISTORIC RUINS OF COPAN, RESEARCHES IN THE ULOA VALLEY, CAVERNS OF COPAN, THE HIEROGLYPHIC STAIRWAY AT COPAN, THE SERPENT MOTIVE IN ANCIENT ART, THE BOOK OF CHILAM BALAM OF CHUMAYEL, IN THE ALASKAN WILDERNESS, BAALBEK, THE WALLS OF CONSTANTINOPLE, and RAMBLES IN OLD LONDON.

My contact with Doctor Gordon was constant, both by his visits to my office upon a request that he come to see me and through our many talks daily over the telephone; he was always to be found at his post. In every way his work as Director of the Museum was of the highest quality. After his tragic death, it was truly said that the loss to the Museum is great but that the greatest task before us is to find anyone who can replace him. It is our hope that we shall

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find a man who will be a worthy successor to Doctor Gordon as Director of the Museum, but there is no one who can take his place in that circle of friends which he had made in the scientific and social world and in that larger group which had for him a deep affection and admiration, inspired by his writings, his lectures, and his informal talks. The latter were many, for he was constantly sought by organizations in the City to tell not only of archæology but also of those other subjects in which he was interested.

Doctor Gordon was a member of the American Philosophical Society, the Franklin Inn Club, the Lenape Club, the Rittenhouse Club, the Explorers Club of New York, the American Anthropological Society, the American Ethnological Society, the Authors Club of London, and a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society.

The funeral services were held at my own home at 1618 Locust Street and he lies interred in the beautiful and peaceful Churchyard of Old St. David's.

CHARLES C. HARRISON.

March 24, 1927.