THE LATE DR C. A. COOPER

AN EDITORSHIP OF THIRTY YEARS

Dr C. A. Cooper, who was for nearly thirty years editor of *The Scotsman*, died on Friday at midnight at Bournemouth in his 87th year. This event cannot be announced in these columns without deep personal feeling. Dr Cooper's death is the passing of a journalist who worked in the highest spirit of responsibility, of a political teacher who was ever true to principles honestly thought out and ably maintained, and of a publicist who served high national interests with courage and zeal. For some years before his retirement in 1905 his health was so unstable that he had to winter abroad, but devotion to the exacting duties of his position was maintained with a strenuous spirit that dominated physical infirmity. It was not till he was over seventy-five years of age that he retired. In 1901 he had the honorary degree of LL.D. conferred upon him by the University of Edinburgh in recognition, as was said by the orator of the day, "of his great work in a great sphere." While the Unionist Administration of 1886 were in power he was offered the honour of knighthood, but he declined the offer.

Dr Cooper was a born journalist. He lived and he worked during a period when the newspaper Press passed through its most remarkable developments. He helped to devise, to introduce, and to work out some of the most revolutionary changes and improvements in the methods of collecting, preparing, and distributing the news of the day. Not only did his sound and virile judgment enable him to grasp the requirements of the public and perceive the means by which they might be most promptly and fully satisfied; his exceptionally long and intimate acquaintance with all branches of newspaper work gave him a remarkable knowledge and mastery of details. He was proud of his profession and was thoroughgoing in the concern he took in everything that tended to advance and elevate it. His duties during more than half a century of service had brought him into intimate relations with a host of celebrities in journalism, in politics, and in other walks of public life. His powerful character, his strong counsel, and his genial disposition had made him many friendships of which he had reason to be proud. He had assisted, behind the scenes, in the preparation and launching of measures and events of national importance.

In 1896 he set down the recollections of more than half a century of newspaper work in a volume entitled "An Editor's Retropsect," It was drawn in part from diaries and from notes made at the time, but much more largely from the recesses of "a fairly retentive memory." Although not strictly autobiographical in form, it followed on the whole the chronological sequence of events; it was written in the crisp, direct style of which Dr Cooper was master, and contained, along with lightly but vividly drawn pictures of the figures and the scenes that impressed him in his retrospect, strokes not a few of conscious or unconscious self-portraiture. It may be taken also to contain all in his life and career concerning which he considered that the public need be taken into confidence. Born at Hull, on 16th September 1829, the son of Mr Charles Cooper, architect, he left the Grammar School "earlier than he should have left it if his father had not died;" and made his first approach towards journalism as apprentice in the business department of a newspaper office in his native town. Soon, as offering a better avenue towards the literary side of journalism, he managed to get himself transferred to the printing office, and learned how newspapers are printed. Thus he may be said to have climbed from the bottom rung to the top of a profession which he held to make more demands on the worker than almost any other calling, and wholly by his own merit and exertions. His reminiscences of general reporting went back to celebrated murder trials of the early Victorian era and to hustings and other electioneering experiences in the party contests of fifty or sixty years ago—for example, to the exciting scenes of the election of Lord Goderich (the late Marquis of Ripon) for Hull in 1852. Newspaper life, in those days of the "old wooden press," was a very different thing from what it is to-day. "The electric telegraph was not. Railways were in their infancy. Posts were slow. Weekly papers represented the great bulk of the journalism of the day." It is a changed world since then—especially in journalism; and the author of the "Retrospect" had his own part in bringing the change about.

But before this relative progress in newspapers, to which he became an active contributor, had begun to make itself prominently manifest, Dr Cooper had gone to London and made a name and place for himself in Metropolitan journalism. It was in 1861 that he left the *Hull Advertiser*, of which he was sub-editor and manager, having obtained an appointment on the Parliamentary reporting staff of the *Morning Star*. He entered on his duties at the opening of the session of that year. Many of the raciest and tenderest of his reminiscences, in his book and in conversation, were connected with his work and his colleagues on that paper. Gallery work did not detain him long—although he has recorded the opinion that as a training school for journalists it has no equal, and also that although there may be more good shorthand now, there is less good reporting. At the close of the session he was asked to do sub-editorial work for the *Star*, and early next year he became the chief, and only, sub-editor. The onerous duties of this post Dr Cooper continued for several years to discharge alone, except during a short time when he had the assistance of the late William Black. John Bright was a director and a frequent attender at the editorial symposia. Dr Cooper held—and no one was more competent to offer a judgment on the point—that the writing was as good as on any paper in the United Kingdom. Yet good writing and high aims and the fact that the office of the *Morning Star* became a chief consulting place of the managers of the Reform agitation of 1866-7, did not save it from decline and (after Mr Morley had become editor, and Dr Cooper had removed to Scotland) final absorption in the old *Daily News*. Among the public men with whom Dr Cooper was brought in personal contact at this period none impressed him more than John Bright; as an orator he placed him before Gladstone, and he held that "no statesman was ever more nearly right in all that he did and proposed."

Early in 1868, Dr Cooper came to Edinburgh to be assistant to the editor of *The Scotsman*, who was then Alexander Russel. His connection with the paper, to the service of which he devoted the remainder of his working days and the best of his thoughts and energies, did not begin at that date. Two years earlier, in February 1866, before the agreement with the Telegraph Companies for a special wire had been completed, he acted as the correspondent of this paper in sending news to Edinburgh from London. Into the work of the paper Dr Cooper threw all his heart and all his energies. His duties in this respect were by no means confined to Edinburgh. Naturally, he took a peculiar interest in the organisation of the London establishment of *The Scotsman*, which came definitely into existence on his removal to Scotland. The claims of the Provincial Press for admission into the Gallery of Parliament had the powerful support of his presence and arguments, urged upon reluctant authorities, during his interviews with whom he came to believe that the House of Commons was "the most hidebound Chinese-like institution in the world;" and it was finally efficacious, after he had engaged the interest of Mr Gladstone, and through him secured the appointment of a Select Committee of Inquiry, before whom he offered convincing evidence in support of his cause. "The London Letter," which, in the early Seventies, was a new departure in journalism, likewise received much of his thought and attention, and, like the other improvements mentioned, has passed through many developments, and received the compliment of universal imitation.

These special and general preoccupations in no wise impaired the ardour and the capacity for work which Dr Cooper manifested in acting as the helper and right hand of the Editor in upholding the reputation of *The Scotsman*. He was proud to believe that he had not lowered the ideals and traditions on which the paper had been founded and reared. Writing in 1896, he noted that during nearly

eighty years—its period of existence it had been, with two brief intervals, under the political direction of three men—Charles M'Laren, who became Editor in 1817 and retired in 1848; Alexander Russel, who joined *The Scotsman* in 1845, and soon after, as Mr M'Laren's strength declined, became actual if not nominal Editor, and who occupied the chair until his death on 18th July 1876; and finally himself. Dr Cooper's period of service was thus even longer, while his work was more varied and strenuous while it lasted than that of Russel or M'Laren. He was the model Editor for the new time and the new conditions—a time of increasing pressure, when more work had to be done and less leisure was available for doing it. Not only must things be done well; they must be done expeditiously, on the spur of the moment, if the competitor was not to fall hopelessly behind in the race for supplying the public with fresh news and ideas. Nimbleness of apprehension, readiness of resource, lucidity and facility of expression became as indispensable as intellectual force, and of much more importance than the nice turning and polishing of a phrase. He was a rapid thinker and a quick writer. He studied the art of making up his mind swiftly, and expressing it so clearly that none could misunderstand the force and meaning—the faculty of hitting the nail on the head, and hitting it hard. The strain and pressure were perhaps felt by him with exceptional severity during the period of political storm and stress in the 'Eighties—the period of the Mid-Lothian campaign, of the Home Rule crisis, of the advent and early difficulties and triumphs of the Unionist party. For Dr Cooper this parting of the ways meant pain and sacrifice—the severance of old political ties, the loss, or interruption, of some personal friendships, misrepresentation, abuse, reproach in many forms and from many quarters. But he was never in doubt as to the wisdom of the course chosen in rejecting Home Rule, and time only served to confirm and strengthen his faith in the principles that had guided the paper. Mr Gladstone—while he unflinchingly opposed and denounced his policy—Dr Cooper still considered "the greatest and first political figure of the time." Worthy of note, and honourable to both, is the record of their last conversation, on board the Tantallon Castle in June 1895, on the eve of the second great Unionist victory at the polls. They had met last ten years before, in the woods of Dalmeny, where, in the course of a long walk, they had discussed a scheme of "local-national devolution, under the direct and absolute control of Parliament," which Dr Cooper had thought out and formulated, and which, if adopted at the time, might have swamped Home Rule. Much had happened since. The next interview took place at Mr Gladstone's instance, and, speaking as one for whom political affairs had now little or no interest, he said he had been "impressed by the honesty of purpose" with which Dr Cooper had conducted his paper. "We have differed. I could not agree with you. I think you have been wrong; but I have been impressed by your straightforwardness and earnestness in enforcing your views. Perhaps if there had been as much straightforwardness in other quarters, it would have been better."

These strenuous and anxious years no doubt left their mark. But it must not be thought that for him life, at its hardest rush, was all made up of toil and worry—that he was constantly chained to the Editor's desk, or harnessed to the political car. He loved to unbend in congenial surroundings; he was familiar with a wide range of literature—a circumstance which recalls his address as president of the Scott Club. Like Alexander Russel, he was a keen angler. Much of his leisure time was given to excursions, with rod and basket, to Tweedside, to Loch Leven, or to the streams and lochs of the West Highlands. He fell into the habit of spending his holidays fishing, walking, and driving by the shores of Loch Duich or Loch Maree, in Skye or the Outer Isles, at Loch Inver, Inchnadamph, or places still more remote in the wilds of Western Ross-shire and Sutherlandshire. Although not "to the manner born," he became in many ways Scottish in tastes and feelings, and he identified himself whole-heartedly with the interests of what may be called his adopted country. Latterly, with increasing age and impaired bodily health—his mental powers never suffered obscuration—he had to go further afield in quest of sunshine and recreation: he visited Egypt, Australia, South Africa: Madeira became for some years his regular headquarters during the winter and spring; and finally he resided at Bournemouth. Dr Cooper's wife, a Hull lady, predeceased him by nearly thirty years. His son, the late Mr F. T. Cooper, K.C., died last summer. His two grandsons are serving with the forces.

The funeral will take place in Edinburgh on Wednesday, when there will be a service in St Giles' Cathedral at two o'clock.