

GRAYA

A Magazine for Members of Gray's Inn

No. VII.—MICHAELMAS TERM, 1930

THE EDITOR'S NOTES.

DEATH OF LORD BIRKENHEAD.

The death of Lord Birkenhead has overshadowed all other recent happenings in the life of Gray's Inn. His marvellous career, and his unsurpassed services to the Society, had endeared him to every one of us who shared with him the privilege of membership of Gray's Inn. His name and the records of his triumphs in so many departments of life had travelled widely. The personality of few Englishmen was better known than his, not only throughout the Kingdom and Empire, but all over the world. For many years, no function at Gray's Inn was complete without his presence, and no Bencher in this or any other time had been more closely identified with every activity of the Society. As I passed through our chapel, where he lay in impressive and simple state, I harboured the thought, in common I am sure with other members—Shall we ever see his like again?

FINE TRIBUTE BY THE TREASURER.

The eloquent tribute which Lord Greenwood, the Treasurer of Gray's Inn, pays to the memory of his late friend and colleague on other pages in this magazine, will be read with satisfaction and gratitude by all who peruse this number of "Graya." Lord Greenwood not only gives full and intimate expression to his own views and estimate of Lord Birkenhead, but he has placed upon permanent record here the sentiments of the whole Bench of our Society, as well as of each individual member, at home and abroad. As the Treasurer remarks, we revere the memory of the great Bencher mainly because of his abiding affection for Gray's Inn. His conception of service to the Society was a whole-hearted devotion to its interests. I once

heard him say in Hall that he would gladly do anything in his power for Gray's Inn, and any member of it. These were no idle words, for he gave effective demonstration of their truth on countless occasions.

A CALL TO SERVICE.

Even when the demands of public life were most insistent upon his time and attention, Lord Birkenhead never failed to make personal response to any claim from Gray's Inn. Twice in 1928 he was present at the Moots in Hall, entering with obvious enjoyment into the arguments with the students and young barristers appearing there, and on one occasion he delivered a separate judgment. He came to the last Debating Society dinner, and spoke with Lord Carson and Lord Atkin in reply to one of the toasts. Three years ago, when the Gray's Inn Masonic Lodge was formed, he was one of the founders and remained to the end a member of the Lodge. When the starting of this magazine was in contemplation, he manifested great interest in the project, and contributed an article on the "Local Bar" to the second number. He never tired of urging the younger members of the Society to engage in service to the Inn. Little more than a year ago, when speaking in Hall, he said "We have done our best in our day and generation to maintain and to sustain the greatness of this House. The task must pass from our hands to yours. See that you sustain it with as much fidelity and affection as we have done."

FASHIONING HIS OWN DESTINY.

In the accounts of Lord Birkenhead's life and work which have appeared in the newspapers, there has been little reference to his early struggles, when, deprived through the death of his father of parental help and guidance, he struck out, without money or that influence which many young men can command, to fashion his own destiny. He was the architect and builder of his own career. He made his way to Oxford by winning an open classical scholarship at Wadham College, at the age of eighteen, before he left the High School at Birkenhead, in

1890. Without that scholarship he could not have gone to the University. From that time onwards he worked hard and played hard, and very soon began to make a name for himself. For a number of years "Smith of Wadham" was perhaps the best known man at Oxford. His academic career was one of continuous success. In 1892 he obtained a first class in Mods. Then he read law and took a first class in the final honour school of Jurisprudence, as well as winning the Vinerian Scholarship, the coveted goal of an Oxford law student's ambition.

PRESIDENT OF THE UNION.

From 1897 to 1900, "F.E.", as he had then become familiarly known, was engaged in lecturing and examining in law and modern history, having become Fellow and lecturer of Merton College. During this period he was keeping Terms at Gray's Inn, and in 1899 he was Called to the Bar in our Hall. He was a distinguished scholar, but it was his speeches in the Union, of which he was President in 1893, which brought him fame and popularity which no academical attainments could have secured him. His wonderful gift of oratory, trained and developed by the debates in the Union, gave his name prominence outside the University. A London newspaper at that time, commenting on a speech made by him when President of the Union remarked "The rest are good speakers; Mr. F. E. Smith is an orator."

EARLY EFFORTS IN ORATORY.

Lord Birkenhead has himself described his first efforts in oratory. "My first attempts at public speaking" he wrote twenty years ago, "were made at my college debating society. Such debates, however, were not to be taken too seriously. At the Union it was a very different state of affairs. There, on a big night, one had to face an extremely critical and earnest audience of some five or six hundred men, and woe betide the speaker who blundered or mumbled. The House of Commons is said to be a severe audience, and undoubtedly this is true, but, in my opinion, the Commons are not nearly so merciless to an indifferent or tiresome orator as an undergraduate audience."

STEP BY STEP TO THE WOOLSACK.

It was with this exceptional equipment of acquired knowledge and trained speaking ability, that Lord Birkenhead left Oxford and began to practise at the Bar, settling down to work as a local practitioner in Liverpool. His first brief was a defence to an ordinary County Court summons, but he soon escaped from the rough and tumble of the minor courts. Within five years he had become the busiest junior on the Northern Circuit. In 1908, eight and a half years from Call, he took Silk, and was in the same year elected a Bencher of Gray's Inn. Thereafter the career of Lord Birkenhead is known to all. Rapidly and surely he climbed step by step, till he took his seat on the Woolsack as Lord Chancellor of England. His long and successful journey through life was a triumph of courage and industry, and, as Lord Greenwood remarks, his career should prove an irresistible incentive to accomplishment to every student in the Kingdom.