



The Rothenstein Mural



I

The Mural is the work of Sir William Rothenstein (1872-1945), the well-known painter and Principal of the Royal College of Art. It was presented to the University by his son, Sir John Rothenstein, in 1959.

II

In his book **Men and Memories** (1) the artist tells how the idea for the Mural came to him; he calls it "The New Chivalry":

"The New Chivalry"

I happened to be at Oxford where I witnessed the conferring of degrees ... The sight of a number of youths, booted and spurred, with their gowns over their khaki, kneeling before the Chancellor to receive their degrees, put me in mind of the age of chivalry, so touching and beautiful were these young figures; and I thought what a fine subject for a memorial painting this would make. When Henry Wilson was planning an exhibition at Burlington House to illustrate future memorials of the war, he asked me to paint a large decoration, and I bethought me of what I had seen at Oxford. I therefore painted a group of representative figures, Vice-Chancellors, scholars and men of science surrounding a Chancellor conferring a degree upon a young soldier, with a group of undergraduates, Rupert Brooke, Julian Grenfell, Raymond Asquith, John Manners and others, walking up, hand in hand, to receive symbolically what could never now be given them." (2)

A few pages later, he refers to the Mural again and to the help he received from his fellow-artist, Eric Kennington, in assembling it for exhibition:

"... he (Kennington) stayed with us at Oakridge, where I was busy on the large decoration for Henry Wilson of which I spoke before. Kennington helped me to square out and transfer my drawings on to the canvas, and he painted in the architectural details of the background, and the ornaments on the robe which the Chancellor wears in the painting. I was glad of his help; for there were sixty feet of canvas to be covered with life-size figures. These were representative university types, whom I drew at Oxford and Cambridge, or else when they came to stay at Oakridge. Among these last were William Bateson, Michael Sadler, A.E. Housman, Henry Hadow, Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir Isambard Owen, Sir Alfred Dale and Sir Henry Miers; while Rupert Brooke and other heroic young men who had lost their lives in the war, I painted from photographs with which Eddie Marsh, ever helpful, had provided me." (3)

In the 1st Edition of **Men and Memories** (1931) there is a drawing by Rothenstein showing the Mural being assembled.

(1) Rothenstein, William: *Men and Memories: London (New Edition) 1934*

(2) *Ibid.* vol. ii., 298-299

(3) *Ibid.* vol. ii., 309. Eddie Marsh was Edward (later Sir) Howard Marsh (1872-1953); he was at the time Assistant Private Secretary to the Prime Minister (H.H. Asquith); he later became well-known as a scholar and a patron of the arts. He was literary executive of Rupert Brooke, the soldier-poet.

III

The Mural, or as Rothenstein called it, the Decoration, was shown at the 11th Exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society at the Royal Academy in the Autumn of 1916. The catalogue has this entry:

"South Side and part of East and West Ends

542 W Rothenstein

Three Panels for a decoration. Designed as a Memorial for Members of the English Universities who have served in the War.

On either side of the central panel are portrait figures representing some few of those graduates and undergraduates who have given their lives for their country. The young men are shown wearing their academic dress over their uniforms and advancing to receive the honours that would have been theirs.

The figures represented in the central panel are: Lord Rayleigh conferring a degree on an undergraduate; the Master of Trinity College, Cambridge; the Dean of Christ Church (Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University); the Duke of Devonshire, K.G. (Chancellor of Leeds University); Lord Bryce, O.M.; Dr Sadler (Vice-Chancellor of Leeds University); Prof. Gilbert Murray; Robert Bridges; Dr L P Jacks; Prof. A E Housman; Sir James Fraser; Dr H A L Fisher (Vice-Chancellor of Sheffield University); Prof. Poulton; Sir Francis Darwin; Sir Oliver Lodge (Vice-Chancellor of Birmingham University); Prof. E G Browne; Prof. H H Turner; Dr W H Hadow (Vice-Chancellor of the University of Newcastle); Lord Haldane, O.M. (Chancellor of Bristol University); Sir Isambard Owen (Vice-Chancellor of Bristol University); Sir J J Thomson, O.M.; Sir Walter Raleigh; Dr A C Benson; Dr McTaggart; Sir Henry Miers (Vice-Chancellor of Manchester University); Dr W Bateson; Dr M R James; Sir Alfred Dale (Vice-Chancellor of Liverpool University)."

The compiler of the entry can be forgiven the mis-spellings of Frazer, Hadow, and Isambard, and for anticipating the creation of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne by some 47 years! Hadow was at the time Principal of Armstrong College, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and taking his turn as Vice-Chancellor of Durham University.

The Exhibition does not seem to have been as successful as its organisers would have wished; Rothenstein makes this comment:

"Unfortunately this exhibition was premature. When the time came for the planning and executing of war memorials, the projects shown at Burlington House were forgotten." (4)

He was, however, heartened by a letter he received from his friend Edward Marsh (*see Note 3 on page 1*)

(4) *Ibid.* vol. ii., 299

"5, Raymond Buildings.

Oct. 16.16.

My dear Rothenstein,

I went to the Academy on Saturday, and was deeply moved by the Group. I think it very beautiful. You have given a lovely vision of Billy Grenfell, and in essence it's very like what he was when I first knew him - about the time the photograph you had must have been taken - Julian is like too, but more superficially - the photograph gave no clue to his strength or his depth. I hear Lady Manners is delighted with the portrait of John, I expect she's written you about it. I think you've given a very beautiful version of Rupert. Will you forgive me if I express a feeling which I know always annoys the artist intensely, but which the beholder of a sketch can hardly help feeling - the fear that to go on with it will spoil it? In this case there's a practical reason for saying it - because I want you to leave this particular version as it is. The white is such a great beauty, it gives the spiritual look that the thing has now, and I think much will be lost when the gowns are what a herald would call 'proper' - (also the white goes so beautifully with the pale green of the background). I suppose it wouldn't be possible to treat the gowns, even in a final version, as a kind of surplices, and have them white for good? It would be such a fine 'romantic' contrast with the blacks and reds of the dons' gowns.

Yrs ever,

E Marsh

There was no final version. After the Exhibition my 60 feet of canvas were rolled up and forgotten."
(5)

IV

The academic company in the central panel is of such interest that the following notes on each of its members are worth putting on record.

1. John William Strutt, 3rd Baron Rayleigh O.M. 1842-1919

Mathematician and physicist.

Cavendish Professor of Experimental Physics, Cambridge, 1879-1884

Professor of Natural Philosophy, Royal Institution, 1887-1905

Chancellor of Cambridge University, 1908-1919

FRS 1873 and President, Royal Society, 1905-1908

Nobel Prize for Physics, 1904

Lord-Lieutenant of Essex, 1892-1901

O.M. 1902; Privy Councillor, 1905

He wears the robes of the Chancellor of Cambridge.

(5) *Ibid.* vol. ii., 309-310

2. An Unknown Service-Man Graduate

He wears the robes of a Cambridge B.A.

3. Henry Montagu Butler 1833-1918

Educationist and churchman.

Headmaster of Harrow School, 1859-1885

Dean of Gloucester, 1885-1886

Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, 1886-1918

Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University, 1889-1890

He wears the robes of a Cambridge D.D.

4. Thomas Banks Strong G.B.E. 1861-1944

Theologian and churchman.

Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, 1901-1920

Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University, 1913-1917

Bishop of Ripon, 1920-1925

Bishop of Oxford, 1925- 1937

G.B.E. 1918

He wears the robes of an Oxford D.D.

5. Victor Christian William Cavendish, 9th Duke of Devonshire 1868-1938

K.G., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O.

Landowner and pro-consul.

Succeeded to Dukedom, 1908

Chancellor of Leeds University, 1909-1938

High Steward of Cambridge University, 1923-1938

Member of Parliament for Derbyshire West, 1891-1908

Lord Lieutenant of Derbyshire, 1908-1938

Governor-General of Canada, 1914-1921

Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1922-1925

Privy Councillor, 1905; G.C.V.O. 1912; K.G. and G.C.M.G. 1916

He wears the robes of the Chancellor of Leeds.

6. James Bryce, 1st Viscount Bryce O.M., G.C.V.O. 1838-1922

Jurist, historian and politician.

Regius Professor of Civil Law, Oxford, 1870-1893

Professor of Jurisprudence, Owens College, Manchester, 1870-1875

F.R.S. 1893; F.B.A. 1902 and President, British Academy, 1913-1917

Member of Parliament for Tower Hamlets, 1880-1885 and for Aberdeen, 1885-1907

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, 1892-1894; President of the Board of Trade,

1894-1895; Chief Secretary for Ireland, 1905-1907

Ambassador to the United States of America, 1907-1913

Privy Councillor, 1895; O.M. 1907; created Viscount, 1914; G.C.V.O. 1917

He wears the robes of an Oxford D.Litt.

7. Sir Michael Ernest Sadler, K.C.S.I., C.B. 1861-1943

Educational pioneer and art patron.

Professor of History and Administration of Education, Manchester, 1903-1911

Vice-Chancellor of Leeds University, 1911-1923

Master, University College, Oxford, 1923-1934

C.B. 1911; K.C.S.I. 1919

He wears the robes then worn by the Vice-Chancellor of Leeds.

8. Gilbert George Aime Murray, O.M. 1866-1957

Classical scholar and internationalist.

Professor of Greek, Glasgow, 1889-1899

Regius Professor of Greek, Oxford, 1908-1936

F.B.A. 1910

Chairman of Executive Council, League of Nations Union, 1923-1938

President, United Nations Association, 1945-1957

O.M. 1941.

He wears the Convocation habit of an Oxford D.Litt.

9. Robert Seymour Bridges, O.M. 1844-1930

Poet.

Assistant Physician, Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street, London, 1878-1882

Poet Laureate, 1913-1930

O.M. 1929

He wears the robes of an Oxford D.Litt.

10. Lawrence Pearsall Jacks 1860-1955

Unitarian divine.

Principal of Manchester College, Oxford, 1915-1931

Editor of **The Hibbert Journal**, 1902-1947

He wears the robes of a Glasgow LL.D.

11. Albert Edward Housman 1859-1936

Poet and classical scholar.

Professor of Latin, University College, London, 1892-1911

Professor of Latin, Cambridge, 1911-1936

He wears the robes of a Cambridge M.A.

12. Sir James George Frazer, O.M. 1854-1941

Social anthropologist.

Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, 1879-1941

Professor of Social Anthropology, Liverpool, 1907-1922

F.B.A. 1902; F.R.S. 1920

Knight 1914; O.M. 1925

He wears the robes of a Cambridge M.A.

13. Herbert Albert Laurens Fisher, O.M. 1865-1940

Historian and statesman.

Vice-Chancellor of Sheffield University, 1912-1916

Warden, New College, Oxford 1925-1940

F.B.A. 1907 and President, British Academy, 1928-1932; F.R.S. 1920

Member of Parliament for Hallam (Sheffield), 1916-1918 and for the English Universities, 1918-1926.

President of the Board of Education, 1916-1922

Privy Councillor, 1916; O.M. 1937

He wears the robes of the Vice-Chancellor of Sheffield.

14. Sir Edward Bagnall Poulton 1856-1943

Zoologist.

Hope Professor of Zoology, Oxford, 1893-1933

F.R.S. 1889

Knight 1935

He wears the Convocation habit of an Oxford D.Sc.

15. Sir Francis Darwin 1848-1925

Botanist.

Reader in Botany, Cambridge, 1888-1904

F.R.S. 1882

Knight 1913

He wears the robes of a Cambridge Sc.D.

16. Sir Oliver Joseph Lodge 1851-1940

Scientist.

Professor of Physics, University College, Liverpool, 1881-1900

Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Birmingham University, 1900-1919

F.R.S. 1887

Knight 1902

He wears the robes of the Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Birmingham

17. Edward Granville Browne 1862-1926

Persian scholar and Orientalist.

Sir Thomas Adams Professor of Arabic, Cambridge, 1902-1926

F.B.A. 1903; F.R.C.P. 1911.

He wears the robes of a Cambridge M.A.

18. Herbert Hall Turner 1861-1930

Astronomer.

Savilian Professor of Astronomy, Oxford, 1893-1930

F.R.S. 1896

He wears the robes of an Oxford D.Sc.

19. Sir William Henry Hadow, C.B.E. 1859-1937

Scholar, educationist, and critic and historian of music.

Dean, Worcester College, Oxford, 1889-1909

Principal, Armstrong College, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1909-1919

Vice-Chancellor of Durham University, 1916-1919

Vice-Chancellor of Sheffield University, 1919-1930

Knight 1918; C.B.E. 1920

He wears the robes of the Vice-Chancellor of Durham.

20. Richard Burdon Haldane, 1st Viscount Haldane of Cloan, K.T., O.M. 1856-1928

Statesman, lawyer, and philosopher.

Rector of Edinburgh University, 1905-1908

Chancellor of Bristol University, 1911-1928

Chancellor of St Andrews University, 1928

F.R.S. 1906; F.B.A. 1914

Secretary of State for War, 1905-1912; Lord Chancellor, 1912-1915 and 1924

Privy Councillor, 1902; created Viscount 1911; K.T. 1913; O.M. 1915.

He wears the robes of the Chancellor of Bristol.

21. Sir Isambard Owen 1850-1927

Physician and educationist.

Vice-Dean, Faculty of Medicine, London, 1901-1904

Senior Deputy Chancellor of the University of Wales, 1895-1910

Principal, Armstrong College, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1904-1909

Vice-Chancellor of Bristol University, 1909-1921

Knight 1902

He wears the robes then worn by the Vice-Chancellor of Bristol.

22. Sir Joseph John Thomson, O.M. 1856-1940

Physicist.

Cavendish Professor of Experimental Physics, Cambridge, 1894-1919

Professor of Natural Philosophy, Royal Institution, 1905-1920

Master, Trinity College, Cambridge, 1918-1940

F.R.S. 1884 and President, Royal Society, 1915-1920; Nobel Prize in Physics, 1906

Knight 1908; O.M. 1912

He wears the robes of a Cambridge Sc.D.

23. Sir Walter Alexander Raleigh 1861-1922

Critic and essayist.

Professor of Modern Literature, University College, Liverpool, 1889-1900

Regius Professor of English Language and Literature, Glasgow, 1900-1904

Professor of English Literature, Oxford, 1904-1914

Merton Professor of English Literature, Oxford, 1914-1922,

Knight 1911

He wears the robes of an Oxford M.A.

24. Arthur Christopher Benson, C.V.O. 1862-1925

Man of letters.

Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, 1915-1925

C.V.O. 1907

He wears the robes of a Cambridge LL.D.

25. John McTaggart Ellis McTaggart 1866-1925

Philosopher.

Fellow and College Lecturer in the Moral Sciences, Trinity College, Cambridge, 1897-1923

F.B.A. 1906.

He wears the robes of a Cambridge Litt.D.

26. Sir Henry Alexander Miers 1858-1942

Mineralogist, administrator and scholar.

Waynflete Professor of Mineralogy, Oxford, 1895-1908

Principal, London University, 1908-1915

Vice-Chancellor and Professor of Crystallography, Manchester University, 1915-1926

F.R.S. 1896

Knight 1912

He wears the robes then worn by the Manchester Vice-Chancellor.

27. William Bateson 1861-1926

Biologist.

Professor of Biology, Cambridge, 1908-1909

Director, John Innes Horticultural Institute, Merton, Surrey, 1910-1926

F.R.S. 1894

He wears the robes of a Cambridge M.A.

28. Montague Rhodes James, O.M. 1862-1936

Biblical scholar, antiquary and palaeographer.

Provost, King's College, Cambridge, 1905-1918

Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University, 1913-1915

Provost of Eton College, 1918-1936

F.B.A. 1903; O.M. 1930

He wears the robes of a Cambridge D.D.

29. Sir Alfred William Winterslow Dale 1855-1921

Historian and educationist.

Principal, University College, Liverpool, 1899-1903

Vice-Chancellor of Liverpool University, 1903-1919

Knight 1911

He wears the robes of the Vice-Chancellor of Liverpool.

Most of the information I have given has been found in the Dictionary of National Biography, in which all the above (except 2, 21 and 29) appear. I have checked all the degrees mentioned with the **Oxford and Cambridge Historical Registers** and in the case of L.P. Jacks (No. 10) with Glasgow University. This has disclosed that M.R. James (No. 28) took his Cambridge Litt.D. in 1895, but did not become a Cambridge D.D. until 1934 when he received that degree **honoris causa**. Then Sir J.J. Thomson (No. 22) did not possess a Cambridge Sc.D. until 1920 when he received that degree **honoris causa**. It is of interest to mention that Lord Rayleigh (No. 1.) and Sir Francis Darwin (No. 15) also received their Cambridge Sc.D.s **honoris causa**.

V.

The identification of the young men in the other two panels would be a difficult matter, even assuming that they were all drawn from real persons. No names are given in the Exhibition Catalogue mentioned above but we do know from **Men and Memories** (6) that they include:

Raymond Asquith (1878-1916), barrister and eldest son of Herbert Henry Asquith (1858-1928) who was the Prime Minister in October 1916. Raymond Asquith was killed in action in September 1916; (7)

Rupert Brooke (1887-1915), soldier-poet and Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, who died on active service in April 1915;

The Honourable **Gerald William Grenfell (1890-1915)**, 2nd son of 1st Baron Desborough (1855-1945) killed in action in July 1915;

The Honourable **Julian Henry Francis Grenfell (1888-1915)**, soldier-poet, eldest son of 1st Baron Desborough, died from wounds received in action in May 1915;

The Honourable **John Neville Manners (1892-1914)**, elder son of 3rd Baron Manners (1852-1927), who was killed in action in September 1914.

VI

The Mural or Decoration was obviously offered as a very sincere tribute to those who had given their lives in the Great War. Perchance the artist had these lines from Julian Grenfell's **Into Battle** in his mind as he worked on his sixty feet of canvas:

"And life is colour and warmth and light,
And a striving evermore for these;
And he is dead who will not fight;
And who dies fighting has increase."

(6) *Ibid.* vol. ii., 299, 309-310

(7) *There is a fine appreciation of Raymond Asquith in Memory Hold-the-Door by John Buchan.*

William Rothenstein (1872-1945)

William Rothenstein was born at Bradford and was trained at the Slade School in London under Alphonse Legros and at the Academie Julian in Paris. While in Paris he got to know Lautrec, Degas, Forain, Puvis, Verlaine and English visitors such as Roger Fry, Henry James and Logan Pearsall-Smith. His first exhibition held in 1891 received favourable mention from Degas and Whistler. In 1893 he went to Oxford to make pencil portraits of leading figures there: this was the start of that long sequence of pencil portraits which are his chief monument.

He showed portraits, landscapes and genre at the New English Art Club in the late nineties, and his interiors aroused a contemporary vogue. He became interested in the revival of wall painting in the early years of this century, and painted a big panel in St. Stephens Hall, Westminster.

During the First War, Rothenstein was Official Artist with the British and Canadian armies. He was Professor of Civic Art at Sheffield University, 1917-26 and was Principal of the Royal College of Art, 1920-35. He served as War Artist for two years during the Second War with the R.A.F. He received a Knighthood in 1931, and an Honorary D.Litt. from Oxford University in 1934.

Rothenstein occupies a conspicuous place in the line of draughtsmen who issued from the Slade School in the period before 1900. Portraiture and draughtsmanship, the two mainstays of English art, are brilliantly brought together in his work. His portraits have opposite qualities to those of his contemporary, Augustus John: his line is soft and reflective where John's is incisive and dashing. As is usual with born draughtsmen, his painting was often in a high key, where line would tell - as it does in this painting, done in 1916. The figures are conceived in the spirit of a Renaissance frieze, simple, linear and with direct brilliant colour.

The painting is the central panel of a larger mural which was shown at the 11th Exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, held at the Royal Academy in the Autumn of 1916. In the catalogue it is described as:-

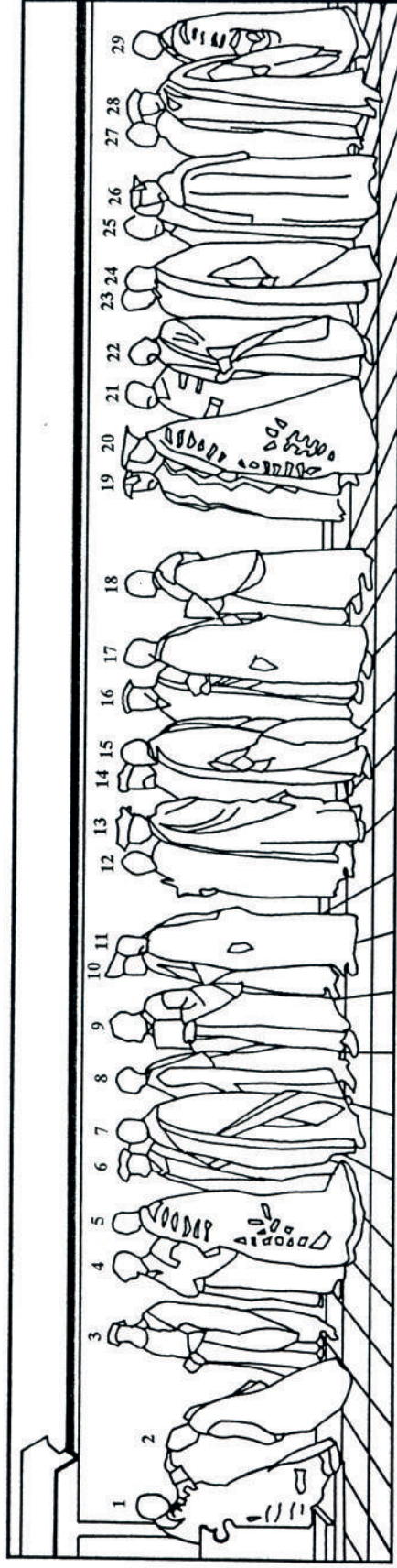
"W Rothenstein. Three Panels for a decoration. Designed as a Memorial for Members of the English Universities who have served in the War."

The names of the distinguished men represented on the central panel are given overleaf.

The other two panels (not on display) contain portrait figures "representing a few of those graduates and undergraduates who gave their lives for their country. The young men are shown wearing their academic dress over their uniforms and advancing to receive the honours that would have been theirs."

The Mural was presented to the University in 1959, by the artist's son, Sir John Rothenstein.

William Rothenstein Mural



1. **John, 3rd Baron Rayleigh**
Chancellor, Cambridge University
2. **An unknown service-man graduand**
3. **Henry Montagu Butler**
Master of Trinity College, Cambridge
4. **Thomas Banks Strong**
Dean of Christ Church and Vice-Chancellor, Oxford University
5. **Victor, 9th Duke of Devonshire**
Chancellor, Leeds University
6. **James, 1st Viscount Bryce**
President, British Academy
7. **Michael Ernest Sadler**
Vice-Chancellor, Leeds University
8. **Gilbert George Aime Murray**
Regius Professor of Greek, Oxford
9. **Robert Seymour Bridges**
Poet Laureate
10. **Lawrence Pearsall Jacks**
Principal, Manchester College, Oxford

11. **Albert Edward Housman**
Professor of Latin, Cambridge
12. **Sir James George Frazer**
Professor of Social Anthropology, Liverpool
13. **Herbert Albert Laurens Fisher**
Vice-Chancellor, Sheffield University
14. **Edward Bagnall Poulton**
Hope Professor of Zoology, Oxford
15. **Sir Francis Darwin**
Botanist
16. **Sir Oliver Joseph Lodge**
Vice-Chancellor, Birmingham University
17. **Edward Granville Browne**
Sir Thomas Hope Professor of Arabic, Cambridge
18. **Herbert Hall Turner**
Savilian Professor of Astronomy, Oxford
19. **William Henry Hadow**
Principal, Armstrong College, Newcastle, & Vice-Chancellor of Durham University
20. **Richard, 1st Viscount Haldane of Cloan**
Chancellor, Bristol University

21. **Sir Isambard Owen**
Vice-Chancellor, Bristol University
22. **Sir Joseph John Thomson**
Cavendish Professor of Experimental Physics, Cambridge & President, Royal Society
23. **Sir Walter Alexander Raleigh**
Merton Professor of English Literature, Oxford
24. **Arthur Christopher Benson**
Master, Magdalene College, Cambridge
25. **John McTaggart Ellis McTaggart**
Fellow & College Lecturer in Moral Sciences, Trinity College, Cambridge
26. **Sir Henry Alexander Miers**
Vice-Chancellor, Manchester University
27. **William Bateson**
Director, John Innes Horticultural Institute, Merton Park, Surrey
28. **Montague Rhodes James**
Provost, King's College, Cambridge
29. **Sir Alfred William Winterslow Dale**
Vice-Chancellor, Liverpool University