LADY WELBY.

[Victoria Lady Welby died at Denton Manor, Lincolnshire, on March 29. Her father was the Hon. Charles Stuart-Wortley, and her mother, Lady Emmeline, a daughter of the fifth Duke of Rutland. After her father's early death, Miss Stuart-Wortley travelled with her mother in many parts of the world—including Mexico, Morocco, Russia, Turkey, Egypt, and Palestine. Lady Emmeline died in the Syrian desert, and Miss Stuart-Wortley was rescued by the British Consul at Aleppo from her perilous isolation. In 1863 she married the late Sir W. E. Welby-Gregory, whose additional name of Gregory she did not adopt. Her book of reflections on religious subjects "Links and Clues," published thirty years ago, made a powerful appeal to a large circle of readers. Two later volumes, "What is Meaning?" and "Significs and Language," and the article on Significs in the recent edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, dealt with the use of language as the coinage of thought—a subject which, as Mr. Macdonald explains in the article following, absorbed much of her attention in the latter part of her life.]

THE Hon. Victoria Lady Welby, news of whose death at the age of 75 arrives as we go to press, was not only one of the most remarkable intellectual personalities of her time, but also in some sort a founder of the Sociological Society. Regarding the great value of her help in the laborious days of its formation, only the first Honorary Secretary could speak with full knowledge; and he is now, unfortunately, beyond the seas. But having not long since heard him enlarge upon the topic, not for the first time, in most hearty terms—terms of retrospective admiration no less than of gratitude—I may be allowed to say on his behalf that nothing could have been more thorough-going or generous than Lady Welby's interest in the then tentative project, which he brought under her notice, of forming a Sociological Society of Great Britain. She worked for it, and induced others to work; and, despite her most variable health and other drawbacks, expended during many months an abundance of hospitality expressly in order to facilitate Mr. Branford's meeting, under her own auspices as hostess, a great number of distinguished or influential men likely to be interested or aiding in such a scheme. As she had a very wide acquaintance not only in the social but in the scientific and philosophical worlds, she was able to render services in this kind which hardly any one but she could have rendered, and none with such a vivacity of goodwill.

Once or twice, after the Society was triumphantly started on its career, there were hopes of an address from her on some one of the many subjects towards which her thought looked. But the same causes which continually postponed or rendered nugatory any attempt to formulate her philosophy at large, told against that also. Nevertheless she contributed to the earlier discussions several short papers through which, as through everything that she wrote, there jutted out the indications of a singularly penetrating mind and of a way of thinking that was not of the schools and still less of the colleges. It was that of what she herself would have called a Race-Mother.

This is not the place to attempt the difficult task of describing what her philosophy was, or what her way of thinking led to. One thing it may be worth while to say, however: that the word Significs, under which she finally brought it all, can only do the world a disservice if it causes people to rest in the idea that her intellectual energies were wasted in an impossible quarrel with the English language as it is and is likely to remain. Many pages of writing, and passages of conversation uncounted, might, it is true, be adduced in support of the idea. But that is because there were many distances in the field of her thought, and she was apt to meet the public on (or try to address them from) the outer or hitherward region that was nearest to them. Also it is to be added that, being typically a seer, she was liable to the fluctuations of the exceptionally gifted. She was not at all moments in full command of her own message—did not always see it clearly and see it whole, even as the poet is not always at inspiration point—and so was content to expiate upon some fringe or projection of it then in view. Hence many a quip and quibble more or less merrily meant. Hence, mainly, many a too earnest protest against particular words or phrases for which nobody is seemingly much the better or the worse. Even of these, however, it is to be said that though the currency of two or three, thirty or sixty instances of misfitting term or misdirecting connotation may be no very grievous hindrance to social or even philosophical discourse, the currency of an indefinite number of such may very reasonably become a public concern in an age of unexampled accelerations and interactions of knowledge, thought, and life. Be that as it may, however, it was with Life—Life more abundant here, Life unspeakable beyond the point where knowledge for the present ends—that Lady Welby was ultimately and always concerned, and only with Language as it was the means and attribute, the expression and the power of Life.

A biographical word or two may be indicative, if insufficient as an explanation of her mental life-course and qualities. Born of the highest rank of our oldest aristocracy titled and untitled, she early made acquaintance with the roughest hardship and the most imminent perils during an unconventional, not to say wild, round of travel made by her gifted mother through East and West about 1848–50. Returning an orphan, she spent her teens in ducal surroundings, at Belvoir, or with her godmother the Duchess of Kent, after whom she was named, and thence passed on to Court as a Maid of Honour to Queen Victoria. Then came her marriage with Sir William Welby-Gregory, a gentleman whom all tokens show to have been a paragon of just and serious manhood; the building of the beautiful manor house at Denton; and a great deal of social ministration, local and national (including the founding of the Royal School of Art Needlework), such as her position made possible and her essentially religious and sympathetic, albeit energetic and compulsive, character inclined her towards.

It sounds rather emphatically of this world, and of wealthy England. And yet through it all there had ever run, in the heart and thoughts of a child, a girl, and a young wife of renowned conversational vivacity and varied talent, an almost romantic aspiration towards, an entirely simple and wistful yearning for, the intellectual life as she conceived it to be, among the wise and the learned, the thinkers and the teachers of mankind. When in the course of her married years she began to make her way, with however little assurance, into this El Dorado of the mind—this region mild of calm and serene air—she found it, to her bewilderment, quite other than she had thought. Here was a world of confusion and outcry indeed, as though Comus and his rout held festival within the pale: in every direction antagonisms, controversies, misunderstandings, sectional interests even in science and metaphysics, and all the little ironies or vulgarities of animosity, partisanship, prejudice and stupidity, just as they exist in courts and cottages! The discovery, presently made, that the greater part of this turmoil was caused by differences about the sense of particular words first brought home to her the conception of language as conditioning and enabling all our thought, and therefore as largely constituting as well as limiting our actual being as intelligences. That conception never left her, but went with her—a warning, an encouragement and a hope—into all the worlds which thought enters and tries to make its own. There were few (with the curious exception of languages mastered in the polyglot way)

which she did not enter; but one was the exploration of her life. She had already verified (shall I say?) the sterility of philosophy—the philosophy, at least, of the systems—when she bravely set out to seek for truth, and God's sufficient answer for His universe, in Science: science, which was at that time generally regarded, by its friends and its foes alike, as the rival if not the enemy of Religion. And in Science, I think one may say, she found what she sought. Not that the "linguistic anarchy" which she discovered everywhere was absent here. In proof of the contrary she produced, in a crowded brochure or two, an alarming magazine of evidence, and could easily have centupled the citations. But here she found the open deeps of space and the secret heart of the atom teeming alike with intimations, prophecies and assurances of the best that man could dream or hope for. Here she found knowledge, as it opened more and more to men's eyes, relating itself fact by fact and science by science in one progressive denial of disorder or incompleteness, and inevitably bodying forth the vision of a Reality so beyond all imagination wonderful that it was adding no higher attribute to it to describe it as Divine. She was indifferent, indeed, whether any so described, if only they might apprehend it according to the measure of their minds and their day. To herself, the word "natural" was a sacramental word, and could get no addition from an attribution touched with particularity as even the word "divine" is, and still more the word "God"; about which indeed she always felt uncomfortable, because of all the historical horrors with which men had stained it. As a perilous modern has written of morals beyond good or evil, so hers was a religion beyond theism and atheism alike; an acceptance of the Wonder and a great expectancy; and in place of all creed a dissolving of the whole spirit before the name of Christ, which she could rarely bring herself to utter.

Writing against time, I have been carried further upon one theme than I could have wished, and cannot now restore the balance by dealing even slightly with one or two of the pleas, other than that with regard to language, which Lady Welby most eagerly maintained. This may be said as to her significance, that she is—beyond the fact of being extraordinary in the history of women—a link with three ages of English thought. Her earlier work was religious in the conventional sense, though of a rare spirituality in its kind. The challenge which it met was merely the challenge which mid-century agnostic philosophy had presented to the serious religious who were above the paltry proofs and disproofs of an earlier day and still more above the meanness of summary dispar-

agement of the views of men of acknowledged moral dignity and intellect. Her next stage, the period of her great quest, was an attempt to meet the challenge of the great disturbance of thought made by the coming of evolution and its conquests. She found her own answer; so that when the new spiritual conceptions of the universe came, or the new physiological metaphysics—let us call it for brief Bergson—it was only declaring much that she had prophesied and not a little that she had said. To know her—and she had her varying moods, as a woman, and especially one fighting up against frailties of health and much positive pain, has a right to have—but to know her was to gather a sense, which no other experience could have given, that the world was indeed spiritual and ultimately translucent. And now that her prophesying is done, one knows also that she has come to fulfilment, though not where or how.

W. MACDONALD.