PROFESSOR E. O. JAMES
1888-1972

Edwin Oliver James, doyen of British scholars in the field of the history of religions, died in hospital on 6 July 1972 after a motor car accident at the age of 84 years. Educated at University College School he started his academic career as a chemist, but quite soon turned to anthropology, which he read at Exeter College, Oxford, under the late R. R. Marett; and later he researched for his Ph.D. degree at University College, London, under the late Sir W. Flinders Petrie. About this time he was also associated with Elliott Smith and W. J. Perry, whose controversial pan-Egyptian diffusionism he was never entirely happy with and of which Petrie strongly disapproved. James rarely adopted a doctrinaire position, but was content to present different scholars' theories and suggest a mid-way assessment.

Always a devout and faithful Churchman of the older Anglo-Catholic school, he was ordained to the priesthood by the Bishop of Ripon in 1912, and served in a number of English parishes as far afield as Yorkshire, the East End of London and the Thames Valley for over twenty years. During this period he began his voluminous output of publications with his *Primitive Ritual and Belief* (1917); and he undertook part-time teaching of anthropology, notably at Cambridge from 1928 to 1933. His long association with the Folk Lore Society, of which he became president, goes back to this time.

In 1933 he was appointed the first professor of the history and philosophy of religion in the University of Leeds, and also became a well-known visiting lecturer in other universities. His lectures at the University College of North Wales and elsewhere formed the basis of a useful textbook, *Comparative Religion: An Introductory and Historical Survey* (1938). Earlier he had collaborated with S. H. Hooke in the much discussed myth and ritual theory of the religions of the ancient Near East, a subject to which he returned in his *Christian Myth and Ritual* (1934) and *Myth and Ritual in the Ancient Near East* (1958).
After ten years at Leeds he moved to a chair at London, and was elected a fellow of King's College. On his retirement in 1955 he went to live permanently at Oxford, and from 1960 was chaplain of All Souls College. His writings had earned him a doctorate of letters at Oxford, and in 1939 he was made a doctor of divinity *honoris causa* by the University of St Andrews.

Even a list of his publications would occupy several pages. Many are textbooks or conflations of other scholars' works. Perhaps his most original earlier work was his *Origins of Sacrifice* (1934). *The Social Function of Religion* (1940) also appeared subsequently in a French edition. *The Concept of Deity* (1950) embodies his Wilde lectures at Oxford, and is his main excursion into the philosophy of religion. Among his books which have appeared in the major European languages are *The Nature and Function of Priesthood* (1940), *Prehistoric Religion* (1957), *The Cult of the Mother Goddess* (1959), and *The Ancient Gods* (1960). He was a familiar figure in the Bodleian Library at Oxford; and he continued to produce books and articles until a short time before his death.

His membership and active support of learned societies, as well as his annual archaeological expeditions to prehistoric sites on the continent of Europe, brought him into contact with scholars of many countries. He attended most of the History of Religions Congresses of the past few decades; and I had the privilege of collaborating with him in 1954 in founding the British section of the International Association for the History of Religions, the promotion of which had been warmly urged on us both by the late Professor R. Pettazzoni of Rome. James was held in such affection and esteem that the late Professor S. G. F. Brandon and others presented him with a Fest-schrift, *The Saviour God*, to commemorate his seventy-fifth birthday. That volume contains a full bibliography of his writings up to 1963.

His friends and colleagues in many countries are glad to have known this gentle, kindly scholar. He was an exacting teacher and examiner; but his hidden warmth and quiet sense of humour are well exemplified by the story of the humane way in which he dealt with an attractive but not very bright girl student, whose examination papers her own tutor thought must fail her. He referred the case to E. O. James, the external examiner that year, who, having read the scripts and interviewed her, said in his slow, reflective fashion after