

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

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2 July 1981

I HAVE been given the opportunity, with leave of my College, to spend three months early next year lecturing in America, Australia, Japan, and China. A convenient opportunity to accept long-standing invitations to so many different places within the compass of a single journey may not recur, and, since it did not seem to me right that a President should be absent for so long at a time of year which is busy and important for the Academy, I decided not to seek re-election for the year 1981/2. I must confess that my conscience on this matter might have been more flexible had there been a prospect of holding the January Reception in our new premises in Cornwall Terrace; but those premises will not in fact be ready until near the end of 1982. I must also confess that my appetite for office might have been less jaded if the conflicts of last summer had not swallowed up the greater part of the Long Vacation. It is the great good fortune of the Academy that the Revd Professor Owen Chadwick has acquiesced in the desire of Council to nominate him, as a man who combines pre-eminent scholarship with vision and practical wisdom, for election to the Presidency. I am glad to say that Professor Handley and Professor Mathias are willing to continue as Foreign Secretary and Treasurer respectively. Professor Wallace-Hadrill has resigned his office as Publications Secretary, in which he has skilfully guided the greatly increased publishing activity of the Academy; the past year has seen the appearance of eleven volumes and almost a doubling of our income from sales. I am glad to report that Professor Elton is willing to take over as Publications Secretary. I must not leave the subject of changes without paying a grateful tribute to our Accounts Officer, Miss Jean Saies, who retires in December; after thirteen years in charge of our accounts, she will be very greatly missed.

Much more information about events of the year now ending will be given in the Secretary's Report, but there are two categories of event on which I wish to comment. One is our foreign relations: we have signed an exchange agreement with the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas in Spain similar

in scope to our existing agreement with the French CNRS; and after a period of coolness amounting to breakdown, our relations with the Soviet Union seem to be taking a turn for the better, this time on Soviet initiative. Secondly, the year has been marked by some acts of great generosity, for which we are deeply grateful. A covenanted donation from Dame Helen Gardner will eventually increase the resources available for subvention of publications by some £5,700. The late Miss Marguerite Gollancz gave £6,000 for support of the prize and lecture on English literature which are named after her father, our first Secretary. The Linbury Trust made the Publications Fund an interest-free loan of £20,000 towards the heavy initial expenditure required for the splendid volume on the stained glass of Canterbury. Under arrangements concluded with the Sir Ernest Cassel Educational Trust we shall in future be administering post-doctoral grants, amounting to some £3,000 a year, on behalf of the Trust. From the Senior Fellows Fund, which was established on the initiative of Professor Hayek and has attracted generous donations, a drawing of Lord Robbins was commissioned from Milein Cosman (Mrs Hans Keller); it is exhibited today in the Fellows' Room.

It was fifteen years ago, on the day of the Annual General Meeting, that Lord Robbins inaugurated the Thank-Offering to Britain series of lectures by giving a lecture on academic freedom. He was speaking at a time which witnessed a spectacular investment of our national resources in the enlargement and creation of universities, and it is not surprising that he had occasion to remind us of the old adage about the piper and the tune. Today, when universities are faced with retrenchment, I feel that my choice of topic is inexorably dictated by the situation which is being disclosed to Parliament this afternoon.

The Academy is not the spokesman of universities, and I think we have been right to decline involvement, whether as partisan or as assessor, in the evaluation of particular colleges, institutions, and departments, in London or elsewhere. None the less, our purpose is identical with part of the purpose of some part of all universities, and when they are handicapped in the realization of that purpose, consideration of alternative or supplementary means to the same end becomes our urgent business.

Summary reports published this morning indicate that measures of contraction and closure are not likely to fall as heavily on the humanities as some of us were inclined to fear. However, satisfaction that criteria of industrial and medical utility have not on this occasion been applied ruthlessly would be short-sighted.

Where capacity for research is at issue, the humanities and the sciences would be better advised to stand together—for reasons about which I will say more in a moment—than to rejoice each in the discomfiture of the other. The University Grants Committee, as our past dealings with it would have led me to expect, is very willing to hear what we have to say on this matter. I am not unduly disturbed by the fact that the Committee's consultations with the Research Councils earlier this year were not stretched so far as to include the Academy. In the context of the total national expenditure on research of all kinds, the cost of maintaining capacity for research in the humanities is small enough to be beautiful. But from year to year one can never be confident that this beauty will be seen by the eye of the official beholder.

Within the constraints of our present budget, we cannot do more for research in the humanities than we do already. Particularly in archaeology we have been faced this year with a choice: either to reduce the grants requested by undoubtedly valuable projects to a degree which may imperil their realization, or to starve research which is not archaeological. At the same time, the special funding which we have received for the establishment of British Academy Readerships has resulted in 135 applications for the first three readerships. The process of selection can hardly be completed before the end of this month, and it will be a striking illustration of an aspect of our work to which attention is seldom drawn: the time spent by the Research Fund Committee, the Overseas Policy Committee, and other committees, above all the Section Sub-Committees, on reading and assessing every year some six hundred applications for grants, quite apart from the new Readership applications. The agenda for the Research Fund Committee are not uncommonly an inch in depth, even after Section Sub-Committees have exercised their right to give an unqualified yes or no within certain categories.

Suppose, however, that we had much more money for many more grants; suppose that the work of assessment were spread more thinly over a much larger number of Fellows and supported by a proportionate increase in our administrative staff; in those circumstances it is not hard to show that if a severe reduction in secure appointments to universities were matched by an increase in temporary appointments at the bottom of the pay scale, the total capacity of our universities for research in the humanities could well be greater and cost the taxpayer less than is now the case. Under such a system anxious competitiveness among temporary lecturers and graduate students, already sharp, would

become intense, and the ground would be littered with dashed hopes. More students would be taught, for more of the time, by inexperienced lecturers and tutors. None the less, if we are committed to the furtherance of knowledge, we must try to identify the direction in which that commitment would point if it were taken by itself, unencumbered by other social and educational considerations. I hope that during the coming year Fellows will put forward many alternative ideas about the ways in which our commitment to research in the humanities can best be met.

Problems of organization are not the only problems. The university lecturer in a subject which falls under the humanities is beset by an anxiety broader and deeper than his understandable fear that he will be put out of a job. He observes that some public criticism of our universities appears to be founded on misapprehensions about the structure and working of foreign universities; and if comparisons are in order, he may not see why reference should not be made to some German universities in which departments virtually untroubled by the presence of students are none the less lavishly funded because they are active in research, rather than to Italian universities in which the majority of students who matriculate do not attend courses (indeed, if they tried to, the available lecture-rooms and laboratories would not contain them) or to French universities whose destructive convulsions in recent years were caused, more than anything, by a staff/student ratio which precluded adequate contact between staff and students. The British lecturer is also aware that public opinion, even among people who are themselves graduates of universities, is not particularly well-disposed to research in humanities. Keep your ears open in the company of those concerned with administration, law, management, or finance, and you will hear much that is disquietingly jocular, patronizing, or contemptuous—in short, from our standpoint, philistine. The lecturer's anxiety is inevitably coloured with bitterness when he reflects that reduction of the universities' share of resources is closely related to an increase in the reward of all those involved, as workers, managers, entrepreneurs, or investors, in a process on which our type of civilization appears to depend: the design, production, and marketing of senseless junk.

To this gloomy generalization there is one intermittent strand of exceptions. Although the number of art-forms consistently and universally valued in our culture is restricted—I would include among them farce and interior decorating—quite a lot of people who never study the history of literature or of art may nevertheless enjoy reading books and looking at pictures, and the humanities

profit from their association with the qualities possessed by some of the matter which, part of the time, they study. A confusion underlies this association, and precisely because it is a confusion, to some extent engendered and sustained by the idiosyncratic ways in which the application of the English words 'science', 'art', and 'arts' differs from the application of corresponding words in related languages, we should take some trouble not to exploit it.

Ever since that brisk and vehement war between the late Lord Snow and the late Professor Leavis on the subject of 'the Two Cultures' (an episode which reawakened in Lord Snow the deep suspicion that the humanities are, as I heard him put it on a comparatively informal occasion, 'an intellectual slum') the fact that there are three cultures has been consistently overlooked. The third culture embraces all those who create works of art, literature, and music—or rather, it embraces all of us to the extent to which we are artistically creative. The activity of creating something which will attract by reason of the relation between its form and its content, or by reason of its form alone, seems to me profoundly, totally different from the activity of posing and answering questions, whether in the sciences or in the humanities, about what is already there, attractive or not. A person of strong religious faith is unlikely to accept the view that his own beliefs are a 'Third Culture' phenomenon, but he can hardly deny that the majority of religious beliefs must belong there, since they are irreconcilable with his. The very essence of what is commonly called 'the artistic temperament' is an inclination to accept a view of the past or of the universe not because it can be sustained by evidence but because it evokes a welcome aesthetic or emotional response.

Dissociating the academic activity which we call 'humanities' or 'arts' from the imaginative activity which brings into being some of the subject-matter of the humanities does not in the least mean trying to disguise the humanities as science. It does mean recognizing how much the first two cultures have in common. For many reasons which are intelligible but ultimately inadequate, public opinion associates the sciences with enquiry, discovery, and communicable reasoning, the humanities with learning, the transmission of an inheritance, and intuitive, arbitrary, private judgement. I am no expert in public relations, but I have no doubt that by contrast with the sciences, the humanities have not succeeded in implanting in public opinion adequate recognition of the part which enquiry, discovery, and reasoning play in them. I recall, for example, the speck of straw on one page of the codex

Laurentianus 32.2 which, having masqueraded for centuries as an idiosyncratic punctuation-mark, on 3 June 1960, under the eyes of Professor Zuntz, came loose from the surface of the page and solved in an instant a central problem in the history of the text of Euripides. Anything affecting the history of the text of a Greek author necessarily affects our weighing of the evidence in deciding what he actually wrote in more than one passage, as well as our estimation of Byzantine scholarship; and both in turn have repercussions on our treatment of the texts of other authors. The unmasking of the speck of straw reminds us that the correct interpretation of the minutest datum may bear the same relation to a chain of statements on a historical topic as correctness or error in a single instrumental reading may bear to a chain of scientific experiments. What is more important, the movement of the speck was not an event, simultaneously lucky and embarrassing, which proved that all scholars had been wrong; it proved rather that a long-standing and growing body of scholarly opinion, founded upon convergent reasoning from several different categories of evidence, was right.

This kind of thing is very far away from the world of the creative arts. Many artists would find it repugnant; I hope that a scientist would not. The contrast between the humanities and what I have called 'the Third Culture' does not end there, for there is another, more material contrast. Many works of art at the present time change hands for prices which appear, even to people who care a great deal about art, insane. It may be, of course, that if a work of art is justly described as 'priceless', as some great works of art can be, no price is less sane than any other. But if I dare venture to expose a philistine streak in myself, I must admit to a measure of surprise at the price sometimes commanded by a specimen of a genre which is fairly well represented or by what appear to me to be trivial and ephemeral works by minor contemporary artists. When appeals are made for very large sums in order to retain a work of art in this country, I simply cannot help reflecting on what could be achieved by the contribution of money on that scale to scholarly publication, including, of course, publications in the history of art, of a kind which we as an Academy would be delighted to undertake. I do not think we should be too readily shamed into silent acquiescence in current values.