

## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

BY SIR KENNETH DOVER

28 June 1979

SINCE we last met we have lost two Past Presidents—Sir George Clark, who was elected to a Fellowship before any of us, and Sir Denys Page—together with fifteen other Ordinary Fellows: Professor Robert Auty, Dr G. H. S. Bushnell, Professor G. C. Cheshire, Professor Ralph Davis, Mr V. R. d'A. Desborough, Professor E. R. Dodds, Dr A. B. Emden, Professor D. V. Glass, Dr A. L. Goodhart, Dame Kathleen Kenyon, Sir Max Mallowan, Professor T. B. Mitford, Professor R. Pfeiffer, Dr S. Smith, and Professor B. Willey; and six Corresponding Fellows: Professor Étienne Gilson, Dr J. M. De Navarro, Professor B. Karlgren, Mlle Claire Préaux, Professor Dr W. C. van Unnik, and Professor Paul Wittek.

Many aspects of the Academy's work and fortunes during the past year will be described to you by the Secretary, the Treasurer, and the Foreign Secretary. It is my business to speak about some major questions of policy and a few matters of my own choosing. In this second category I put first praise of two people who are precluded by modesty and convention alike from praising themselves. Professor Beasley and Professor Dickens intimated last year their wish to be relieved of the duties of Treasurer and Foreign Secretary respectively. You will be invited to elect their successors later this afternoon, and I cannot let the occasion pass without expressing my gratitude, which I am sure you too feel, for the services they have rendered to the Academy. If either of them is at all addicted to worry, he conceals it marvellously; and that is a great help to everyone. The good sense of Professor Beasley has watched over our finances since 1975, a period in which our budget has grown formidably. Professor Dickens has been Foreign Secretary for ten years; and the nexus of exchange agreements from which our academic life greatly benefits is essentially the product of his own patience, goodwill, and foresight.

Our estimates for the new triennium ask for an annual grant of some two million pounds. Half this sum is earmarked for the Schools and Institutes Abroad (to which we must add some Academy-sponsored Societies); a portion of the remainder is

earmarked for the Small Grants Fund, and a small percentage—admirably small, I would say—is required for administrative costs. In preparation of the estimates, allowance has been made for the imputed rent of new premises, but I am sorry to say that a prospect of premises which appeared bright a month or two ago has now faded, through no fault of ours.

Having been required by the officers of the Exchequer and Audit Department to adjust our grant in respect of a very substantial interest-earning surplus, Council is naturally concerned to avoid a repetition of this trauma. The causes of the accumulation were complex. They included underspending of the Small Grants Fund—which, for all our efforts to ensure that its existence should be widely known to university teachers, was not widely known—and the extreme variability of publication costs from year to year. The Department has now agreed to a more flexible system, in which £100,000 of the returned surplus will constitute a Publication Reserve Fund, held by the Paymaster General and drawn upon as required, while a large part of the funds available for our Research Grants will in future be similarly held by the Paymaster General and drawn upon as allocations are made by the Research Fund Committee.

Half our grant, as I said, goes to Schools and Institutes. In terms of the academic work which they achieve and assist, they are a very economical investment by any standards. I would like to emphasize—because it is so often taken for granted—the degree of mutual trust and respect which exists between the staff of the Schools and the academic and administrative authorities of the countries in which they work. This generalization is not invalidated by the fact that exceptional developments in Iran dictated as a matter of prudence a temporary return to this country of the staff of the Institute in Tehran—sadly, just at a time which saw the culmination of many years' work in Dr Stronach's volume on Pasargadae. Good relations with the countries in which Schools and Institutes are situated are the achievement of the people on the spot. The Academy does not lay down policies, and the Schools are plainly seen not to be manifestations of British political or economic interests. The business of the Academy, as the channel through which the Schools are financed, is to help them to effect the purposes for which they exist. To this end the Standing Committee on Schools and Institutes Abroad is now organizing a programme of visitations; the Secretary and I have been to Athens, the Secretary to Nairobi, and Sir Toby Weaver and Professor

Boardman to Rome. We hope that these visits were helpful to the Schools concerned; they were certainly reassuring and encouraging to us. Dr Milton Osborne, after five years in charge of the Institute in Singapore, has taken up an academic appointment in Australia; the committee appointed to choose his successor had difficulty in discriminating between excellent candidates, but decided in favour of Dr J. F. H. Villiers. I am glad to report that the Institute in Amman is now established; it has been welcomed by the Jordanian government, and His Royal Highness the Crown Prince of Jordan has graciously indicated his willingness to accept an invitation to be its Patron. Dame Kathleen Kenyon, who worked so hard for the creation of the Institute, lived to preside over the first meeting of its planning committee, and thanks to the generosity of her heir, Mr Jeremy Ritchie, the Institute will be enriched by a valuable portion of her own library. The maintenance of adequate libraries in Schools and Institutes is a constant problem, as an ever-growing proportion of books is marketed at prices which the individual research student cannot pay, and the Standing Committee decided this summer to make a supplementary distribution of £50,000 specifically for library purposes.

Of the research funds which do not go to Schools and Institutes, approximately half are devoted to what have generally been called 'Major Projects'. This aspect of our activity was reviewed by a committee under the chairmanship of Sir John Pope-Hennessy in 1975, and in the course of this last year it has been reviewed again by a committee chaired by Sir Alfred Ayer, to whom we are indebted for a number of far-reaching recommendations both on the principles which we should observe in organizing our projects as a whole and on the application of those principles to existing projects. The great majority of these recommendations have been accepted by Council. One, of fundamental importance, is the reclassification of projects into four categories according to the extent of financial commitment and commitment to publication; the term 'major project' will be dropped. The process of review has, in my opinion, illustrated a strength and a weakness of our own organization. I would regard as a weakness the readiness with which some Fellows believed that the committee's report was for all practical purposes a decree requiring only formal, even perfunctory, approval by Council. Our strength lies in the fact that what actually happened was the opposite. The criticisms made by Project Committees themselves and by Sections were

taken very seriously by Council, which added some criticisms of its own. For example, a recommendation that in selecting new projects 'somewhat greater weight' should be given to 'more recent periods of history' and to a range of disciplines 'not strongly represented in our present programme' attracted some adverse comment, and Council has explicitly declined to discriminate between periods or disciplines by setting more exacting criteria of acceptance for some than for others. The point which was in the Committee's mind was one to which the concluding section of my Address may have some relevance.

I turn now to Small Grants and Research Grants. Details of successful applications are listed in the Annual Report. Not all applications are successful. When the total applied for exceeds the money available—as may well happen in the case of certain other categories, such as the Wolfson Fellowships or the Thank-Offering to Britain Fellowships—an unsuccessful applicant has the consolation of recognizing that however high his reputation, interesting his project, and well-presented his case, this may have been true of everyone else, and a gallon cannot be dispensed from a pint-pot. But when applicants confident of their own qualification and of the value of their projects know that some money which could have been given has not been given, they are aggrieved. Discontent communicates itself more promptly than contentment, as any newspaper reader may observe. The disbursement of half a million pounds is apt to make less impact than what are believed to be some wayward or casual decisions. It is indeed possible that some amplification, in our published announcements, of the principles we follow in making grants might be helpful, and I know that both the Research Fund Committee and the Overseas Policy Committee are alert to any squeaks in the machinery by which assessments are collected and considered. In the last resort, no grant-awarding body can function unless it has the same right as a football referee or the editor of a journal to take a decision and preserve a mulish silence when reproached for it.

In our submission for the triennium there is one entirely new element, the funding of senior research posts in emulation of Royal Society Professorships, which enable distinguished scientists to devote their whole time, normally in units of five years at a time, to research.

I cannot leave the subject of grants without acknowledging our repeated debt to the Wolfson Trust for its funding of a special category of Fellowships, and to the Leverhulme Trust,

whose manifold benefactions to science and learning included this year a grant to the British School at Jerusalem of £30,000 for the publication of Dame Kathleen Kenyon's work on Jericho.

The Foreign Secretary will be reporting on the progress of our relations with foreign academies, but I should like to mention two matters which concern the Far East. In January I had the honour of representing this country, in company with the President of the Royal Society and the General Secretary of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, at the centenary celebrations of the Japan Academy in Tokyo. In May we were expecting a delegation from the Academy of Social Sciences in China, and it was a great disappointment when the illness of their President necessitated the cancellation of the visit at short notice. We are, however, assured of a welcome in China when we send a delegation there next October, and we hope to receive a Chinese delegation in May 1980. It is unfortunately true that the number of British scholars expert in the language, history, literature, and archaeology of China is small, while the interest of Chinese academic staff coming to this country may prove to be focused especially on subjects—management, for example—untypical of our Academy's interests. Our task in creating links with China is therefore entirely different from that of the Royal Society. But let's see; nothing but good can come of the increase in opportunity for academic contacts.

Up to this point I have on the whole adhered to the traditional form of a Presidential Address, reviewing systematically the main types of the Academy's activities. I wish in conclusion to speak about two matters to which I personally attach importance.

The first concerns the obituaries which we publish in the *Proceedings*. If we have done our job in the election of Fellows, the obituaries should be a major contribution to a history of scholarship in Britain, explaining to future generations what British scholars have made the most significant advances in learning and upon what questions, posed and at least in part answered by those scholars, the advances depended. There is a hit-and-miss element in this procedure, for we can all think of 'seminal' articles written by people who have not been elected to the Academy; none the less, the sum of the obituaries is the nearest we can get to a collection of material for a history of British scholarship. Council was therefore perturbed to learn from the Secretary last year that some thirty Fellows who

died over a period of as many years have not yet received an obituary in the *Proceedings*. I am also a little disturbed to observe how often it happens that a Fellow chosen by Council as the right person to compose the obituary of a recently deceased Fellow promptly and firmly declines. He has every justification for declining if he is already writing one such obituary and is asked to take on another; and to those who think of someone better and take up a position as first reserve every indulgence is due. But I find it hard to believe that Fellows seriously doubt their own ability to carry out the kind of historical research and evaluation required for the genre, even if they have not tried it before. If we can't do it, who can? Just as we recognize, when we are elected to the Academy, that we have a duty to take part, if asked, in its government, should we not recognize that, being ourselves part of the history of scholarship, we have a duty also to write it?

If I seem to be speaking didactically, even reprovingly, please attribute this to the spirit of the parabasis which I have imbibed from Attic Old Comedy. Of course, what I am trying to do is to pose questions which in my view deserve longer consideration than they commonly receive; and this is particularly true of my second point—essentially a question, not an assertion.

The greater part of the financial support which we give to research, whether in grants to individuals or in the funding and publication of collective projects, is a response to initiatives taken by others. I wonder at times if we are not a little too passive. It could reasonably be supposed that an Academy Section is the best qualified body in this country to decide, within a given area of study, what the most important problems in need of systematic investigation are; to arrive at some measure of agreement on priorities; to know which tasks are in fact being tackled, and where, and by whom, and with what prospects; to know who are the right individuals to tackle the remainder; to find out if they are willing to do so, and what kind of financial support they would need; and thus to spend relatively more time and effort in generating research projects from within the Academy and relatively less in waiting to see what someone else will come up with. In making this point I am influenced by recollection of the occasion, some years ago, on which the Computer Committee invited Sections to say what authors and texts were most urgently in need of concordances and word-indexes which could be produced in machine-readable form. No Section replied. Since then a great deal of

material of this kind has been produced all over the world, and I can testify that in my own subject it has enabled the scholar to answer good, old-fashioned grammatical questions in a minute fraction of the time which would have been taken in using a traditional word-index, but it would have been much better produced if we had weighed in at the start with the formulation and propagation of scholarly standards in the devising of transcriptional conventions. My plea that we should take the initiative more often may not commend itself; I have put up an Aunt Sally, and if she is shot to pieces we'll bury her. I do not for a moment feel that my suggestion is vulnerable to the criticism, from any quarter, that we are an academic 'establishment', practically all of us middle-aged or old, and that establishments are by nature unenterprising. What we publish as individuals demolishes that criticism. The notion of a shift of initiative from applicant to Academy is, however, much more vulnerable to the reproach of *dirigisme*. Which ways of organizing and supporting research will in fact bring into being the greatest amount of the best work is the point at issue, and the only point which really matters. Since the question does not seem to me to admit of a prompt and easy answer, I ask you to consider it at leisure.