

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

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SINCE this is the first time that I have had the privilege of addressing you as President, I should like to thank you for the great honour which you have done me by electing me and to express my sincere ambition to do all that I can to help the Academy in its expanding interests and enterprises. I am fortunate in more than one respect. My immediate predecessors have laboured so loyally and so successfully in the Academy's cause that they have left it with a greatly enhanced reputation and an ever-increasing influence. In the happy assurance that I can rely on their experience and their counsel I hope to continue their policy of making the Academy an active, central power for Humanistic studies in this country and of strengthening its relations with learned bodies abroad in all matters of common concern. I am fortunate also in having the unfailing assistance of our gifted and indefatigable secretary, who has in the last year, among his many other achievements, substantially improved our financial position by agreeing with the Treasury to have our grant calculated on a triennial instead of on an annual basis, with the result that we can now plan ahead with some reasonable measure of confidence that we shall be able to carry out our projects and our promises. In such circumstances and with such assistance I feel that our prospects may be described as encouraging and that, though our responsibilities are growing rapidly and call for imaginative attention, we should be able to meet them.

Learned academies have many duties, but the fundamental duty which governs all others is to encourage and sustain the pursuit of knowledge. In this country the British Academy is far from being alone in assuming such a task even in the Humanities. There is almost no branch of serious intellectual inquiry which lacks a society to bring together those who pursue it and to enable them to share their labours and researches and discoveries. Nearly all these societies have the advantage that the members of each are all concerned with more or less the same matters and work within a single, definite and recognizable field. The British Academy differs from them

in that it attempts to cover all knowledge which lies outside the scope of natural science. Its task is to look after not a group of specialists engaged on a more or less common enterprise but the whole world of scholars in all the variety and difference of their interests. It aims to do for the Humanities what the Royal Society does for natural science—to bring together under its protection a generous range of intellectual pursuits and to do all that it can to help them. At times it may act as no more than an agency or a clearing-house, but it must certainly be very much more than these, and its ideal and essential task is to act as a centre which provides help and encouragement wherever it can and does not shrink from initiating new projects if it is convinced that they are needed.

In the past year this central function has been exemplified in more than one way. Let me first take a simple, practical issue. The Inland Revenue raised the point that learned societies were not entitled to the benefits of income-tax refund on subscriptions enjoyed by charitable bodies. This did not in fact affect the Academy very seriously, but it did affect some other learned societies, whose resources would have suffered gravely if they were deprived of the advantages of reclaimed tax. The Academy, in association with the Society of Antiquaries, acted for them, took up a test case, and won it, with the result that many learned societies will, we hope, now be allowed to enjoy the benefit of this relief. In this we were greatly helped by the generosity and skill of Lord Nathan, who took every step to see that our case was properly presented to the Special Commissioners of Income Tax, and by the unflagging efforts of our assistant secretary, Miss D. Pearson, who mastered the intricacies of the relevant law and provided the necessary information with an impeccable care. The preparation of such a case in an office so restricted in staff and space as our own called for much expenditure of time and energy, and we are indeed grateful to those who did the hard work and helped so materially to so satisfactory a result. This is perhaps a small matter in the vast scene of human learning, but it deserves attention as an example of what practical services a central body like the Academy can render to other learned societies, which, just because their pursuits are more specialized, are not able to act as a unifying and representative body in the world of scholarship.

This central position imposes special responsibilities on us, and it is of these that I wish to speak today. First, there is the part which we play in the conduct of the various British Schools

of Art and Archaeology abroad. Such schools exist at Rome, Athens, Jerusalem, Ankara, and Baghdad, and it has been agreed in principle that another will soon be started for East Africa. The benefits which these schools bring to knowledge is incalculable. They enable a civilization to be studied in its own home, with all the advantages that this gives to a proper understanding of it. The scholar can examine actual sites instead of drawings of them, and objects in their right surroundings instead of in photographs. Excavation not only provides the mature scholar with a fascinating and satisfying task but trains young men and women in the latest methods of digging and of classifying and recording results. No year passes without the British Schools making some substantial addition to knowledge, and for this reason alone they justify their existence and are an indispensable instrument for learning. This is familiar to you all, and there is no need for me to dwell on it, but I would like to stress some other, less commonly recognized advantages which these schools offer and to argue that they are hardly less valuable and worthy of pursuit.

First, the scholar who works in Italy or Greece or Turkey or Jordan or Iraq cannot fail to gain a first-hand knowledge of the physical nature of the country, and this is of fundamental relevance to almost every branch of history. Let me take the example of Greece. In the nineteenth century very few classical scholars visited Greece or thought that it had anything to teach them. They wrote about its wars without having seen its battlefields, of its drama without having seen its theatres, of its political history without knowing the configuration of its landscape, of its language without knowing its living descendant. The result was not so much that they made mistakes, though indeed they did, as that they presented the whole achievement of the Greeks in a vacuum, which might indeed have a place in some idealized picture of a largely imaginary past but hardly in time or on the map. The change came from archaeology, which slowly persuaded reluctant scholars that they could not understand Greece without knowing its physical reality, and to this the whole study of the Greeks owes a complete transformation. Through knowing how they lived from day to day, in what conditions and in what a climate, we are enabled to understand far better the economic, social, political, and artistic aspects of their achievement. What is true of Greece is equally true of other countries. What began in a simple desire to discover works of art hidden underground has transformed

historical study and given to it a far firmer grasp of the way in which things really happen.

Secondly, it is impossible to live and work in a foreign country without learning much more than a single, specialized subject. The existence of our schools of archaeology has furthered to a remarkable degree not only their main purposes but others of which their founders may not have been conscious. The inescapable need to speak the living tongue, often in remote districts, promotes new enterprises in linguistic study; an intimate acquaintance with country life inspires new inquiries into sociology and folk-lore; village festivals throw light on the origins of drama, the composition and performance of epic song, the peculiarities of indigenous music. Tales told in the market-place may be older than Herodotus, and in certain localities words survive with all their pristine significance when they have perished for centuries elsewhere. The world of men, like that of birds and beasts and fishes, has its living fossils, and these can be discovered only by those who know a country fully from the inside and apply to it their scholarly curiosity and trained observation.

Thirdly, the presence of such schools has a political side. They are not and were never meant to be institutions for advertising British goods, however distinguished, abroad, and if they were to attempt this, they would lose their influence and their usefulness. Just because they are dedicated to the study of foreign civilizations, they force us to look at other countries with fresh eyes and to try to understand them as they understand themselves. An interest of this kind can only breed good relations, and even when these are countered by hostile relations at a high, political level, they still do nothing but good, and in the ordinary whirligig of international affairs they mean that a large fund of good will is created between peoples who might otherwise know almost nothing of each other.

You may perhaps ask what these considerations have to do with the British Academy, whose main obligation towards schools of archaeology is to act as agent in getting their grants from the Treasury. Yet I venture to suggest that for more than one reason they are relevant to our tasks. It is not enough to act simply as a channel for money. It is important that schools should get sufficient money to pursue their duties fully and competently, and it is inevitable that they should develop new projects whose cost has to be explained and justified. Here the Academy has an important function, since it is well qualified

through the wide range of its activities and experience to examine new developments and assess their worth and give advice upon them. I would not for one moment claim that the Academy has magical powers to extort money from the Treasury, but it can present the case for it with knowledge and authority, and this is what it tries to do. More than this, the existing schools of archaeology cover only small areas of the discoverable world. These areas are indeed of first importance, but there are others hardly less important which cry out for a like attention. I have already said that a school will soon be started in Africa, and at this pre-natal stage of its career the Academy can give valuable help. It can explore the possibilities of work to be done, of the right locations for the central buildings and outlying branches, of obtaining local interest and support. It can help in choosing experienced men to start a new venture and in discussing the right methods of appointing staff and scholars. Just as the Academy is taking an active part in starting an African school, so I hope that before long it may be able to pay a like attention to another part of the world where such a school is greatly needed. Asia calls for our scholars, and just as parts of the Near and Middle East are well looked after at Ankara and Baghdad, so something ought to be done for the Far East, where not only are new discoveries being made on an enthralling scale, but what is already known to exist awaits the full application of modern methods and improved techniques. Such a school would bring untold advantages to Oriental scholarship and would incidentally do much to restore relations between this country and others too long divided from us by the mischances of politics.

If the support of schools of art and archaeology is in the best sense a national activity, the Academy has also international activities which are no less important. Though the individual scholar must always rely on his own exertions to discover what work is being done elsewhere in his own field, and though nobody is likely to invent a fool-proof system by which all movements in any branch of study can be made known to all who may be interested in them, the Union Académique Internationale does a great deal to guide common ventures and to encourage the learned academies of different nations to cooperate in them. Its special concern is with large projects which can be conducted by individual nations in accordance with general principles established by common agreement. The Union is now a richly representative body, and it is comforting to see that the Iron Curtain has been lifted at least enough to

allow members from Czechoslovakia, Rumania, and Poland to attend it, and that it has extended its membership to Japan. Our own Academy has for the last three years provided it with a President in our foreign secretary, Professor R. A. B. Mynors, and his skilful and lively conduct of its affairs has furthered established projects and started new ones. You will find an account of its various enterprises in our Annual Report, and I will not bother you with them now, but I should like to say a few words about the kind of thing which we ought to do.

An obvious advantage of such international projects is that they almost compel individual countries to turn their attention to branches of study which they have hitherto neglected or thought relatively unimportant. A new project may well raise awkward problems. Not every country is equally well provided with scholars of the same quality and quantity in every field, and to train and equip experts calls for time and money. For instance, the Union is much interested in forming a corpus of medieval painted glass, and the production of such a corpus will be quite invaluable to more than one kind of historian and indeed to anyone who is interested in the surviving monuments of the past. Until quite recently the subject has too often been a monopoly of gifted amateurs, who have done heroic pioneering work but have, just because they are amateurs, not always attained the highest standard of precision in their presentation of results. The material is anyhow not easy to control, since stained glass is liable to suffer even more than pictures from repairs and restoration, and so long as it looks reasonably convincing, nobody is very much worried. But a scientific knowledge of it demands that all such repairs should be marked and noted, and without exact examination of every piece trustworthy results are unattainable. This country has excellent experts on stained glass, but they are few in number and are hampered by having other work to do. They give their spare time to making careful studies of it, but they cannot be expected to produce extensive results until they have more trained assistants to help them. The study is still in its infancy, and we may be confident that in time more experts will appear. In the meanwhile the Union Académique is doing a valuable task by encouraging us to follow the example of such countries as France in studying these important monuments, and in time its efforts will be rewarded.

Some of these international projects call for financial resources beyond the command of the British or indeed any other

academy. This is specially relevant to the project for a Medieval Latin Dictionary sponsored by the Union. Of the urgent need for it nobody who has ever grappled with medieval Latin will have a moment's doubt. It is needed equally by historians and by linguists and is fundamental to the study not only of medieval documents but of any western language. It has wisely been decided that the work should be done by countries, not merely for reasons of convenience, though these are obvious enough, but because medieval Latin in its close relation to current vernaculars differs greatly from country to country. This country has been asked to be responsible for the volumes which deal with England and Ireland, and this is a matter where the Academy has a duty which it cannot shirk. In some ways the prospects are good. A great deal of work has already been done; experts have given abundant help and are ready to give more; we have a number of trained lexicographers who know the special technique of compiling dictionaries; our highly skilled university presses are more than able to deal with problems of printing and production. All is set for a good start and not too distant a finish, but the problem of financing the venture remains. The Academy cannot possibly pay for such a project from its own limited resources, and must therefore make every endeavour to get help from outside. That it will do so eventually I do not doubt, but in the meantime this important work is hampered and delayed, and we are not yet in a position to tell our continental colleagues, who have themselves made notable progress in their own work, that all is well. There are times when I wish that there existed in this country some central fund for the humanities such as exists for the natural sciences, and that we could appeal to it for support in projects which are plainly important for a whole wide range of learning. In the meanwhile we must do what we can, and in our efforts to promote this cause we can at least feel some comfort in the thought that we have the whole world of learning behind us.

I have dwelt today upon these two main aspects of our activities because they illustrate the importance of the Academy as a centre for the encouragement and furthering of learned work. These are of course only two activities among many, and you must forgive me for confining myself to them. Of others I am well aware and shall keep my eyes open to them. To a learned body like the Academy every year brings new problems and new challenges, and we shall do our best to answer them. We have of course our handicaps. Our premises are not so

spacious as they ought to be, and we have very few amenities. On the other hand we have a most able and devoted staff, who spare no effort to make our machinery work smoothly and effectively, and we have much good will in the world of learning and the lovers of learning. With these assets I hope that we shall be able not only to continue to do well what we do already but to increase the scope of our activities and to play an even more vigorous part on both the national and the international scene.