

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

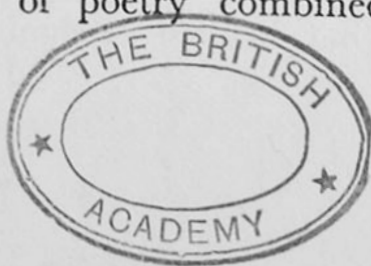
By J. W. MACKAIL

THREE years ago, in my first Presidential Address to the Academy, I made a brief survey of the objects for which it had been founded, of the main lines on which its activities had been directed, and of the extent to which it had fulfilled, varied, or necessarily fallen short of, its original scope and purpose. On these matters it would be superfluous to dwell again now. But I may, I think, unhesitatingly congratulate my colleagues, at this our thirty-fourth Annual General Meeting, on our Society being in full vigour, and year by year acquiring wider recognition and enhanced prestige.

The history of the Academy for the last twelve months has been placed before you in the Annual Report. As regards record I may therefore confine myself to mentioning some outstanding events and incidents.

Our membership remains, by the election of Fellows just made, practically the same in numbers as last year. It still retains four veteran scholars, all between eighty and ninety years of age, who were original members. It may be of some interest to note that at the beginning of this year the lists of our existing and of our deceased Fellows were exactly equal in number. But we have sustained, during the year under review, an unusually severe loss in the death of no fewer than nine of our colleagues. Of these I may be allowed, without encroaching on the substance of the fuller obituary notices which have been, or are now being, prepared and published, to say a few valedictory words going beyond a mere list of names.

Andrew Bradley, successively Professor of English Literature in the Universities of Liverpool and Glasgow and Professor of Poetry at Oxford, was a distinguished exponent of literature of singular charm and grace, both as a lecturer and as a writer. His handling of poetry combined



philosophic thought with aesthetic appreciation, and in particular, his interpretation of Shakespeare is a recognized masterpiece of constructive criticism.

Sir Charles Firth, Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford for upwards of twenty years, was not only an able historian but an accomplished man of letters. He did much to stabilize and deepen the study of history throughout Oxford, and had the further gift of lucid and attractive style. Thus, while his *Life of Cromwell* places him high in the rank of biographers, the technical study entitled *Cromwell's Army* takes in his hands the fascination of a first-rate novel. As a member of the Historical Manuscripts Commission, and as a Trustee of the National Portrait Gallery, he did high public service. He was a good fighter and a good friend.

In Edmund Gardner, the first holder of a Chair of Italian in the Universities of Manchester and London, Italian studies have lost their ablest and most learned exponent in this country; for his acquaintance with the history and the art of Italy hardly yielded in depth and width to his intimate knowledge of its poetry. His modesty and unselfishness, if they may have stood in the way of that wide recognition which his scholarship deserved, endeared him to all who had the privilege of his friendship.

Peter Giles, Master of Emmanuel since 1911, was one of a group of Aberdonians, all distinguished as scholars or philosophers, who entered Cambridge between fifty and sixty years ago. Comparative Philology, on which he specialized, may be regarded as an arid if important subject of prolonged study; but besides being a learned and accurate scholar, he was an admirable man of business, a genial host, and a charming companion.

J. S. Mackenzie, a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, and then for twenty years Professor of Philosophy at Cardiff, had for many years retired from active work. His election to the Academy only a year before his death was a somewhat belated recognition of his services to philosophic

thought and its connexion with human life. He was a contemporary of another Cambridge scholar, A. F. Shand, whose profession was that of a barrister, but whose deeper interest lay in philosophy and its application to conduct. His most important published work, *The Foundations of Character*, laid the plan of what might almost be called a new science; up to the end of his life he was expanding and revising it as it passed through edition after edition.

W. R. Sorley, Professor of Moral Philosophy at Cardiff, at Aberdeen, and then for over thirty years at Cambridge, was perhaps the last official representative in their country of the Hegelian philosophy. This was with him a reaction from the Berkeleianism into which he had been initiated under Campbell Fraser at Edinburgh, and towards which, in a modified form, he himself afterwards returned. His contributions to a perpetually contested field, specially in his *Gifford Lectures* (1914-15) and his *History of English Philosophy* (1920), are of standard quality and of high value. Even more, for a wider and unprofessional audience, is this true of his little volume of 1911, *The Moral Life*, in which the adage of La Bruyère which he took as its motto, 'les plus grandes choses n'ont besoin que d'être dites simplement', is admirably carried into practice.

Sir George Warner served for forty years in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum, as Assistant Keeper and then as Keeper. He was the founder of the New Palaeographical Society, and was Editor of the Catalogue of the Royal Manuscripts and, officially or unofficially, nearly up to the end of his long life, of numerous facsimiles of illuminated manuscripts. His authority as a palaeographic expert was unquestioned, and almost unrivalled.

Of our most recent loss, in the death just a month ago of Montague Rhodes James, no words would be an adequate expression, and many words would be superfluous. In him, immense and multifarious knowledge was combined with swift insight, tenacious memory, and unique power of

divination in all the fields over which his researches extended. Perhaps it would be a tribute even more to his liking to say that he conferred new lustre on the two Royal Foundations of which he was successively Provost for the last thirty years of his life.

Among our deceased Corresponding Fellows, some brief mention may not be inappropriate of three outstanding names: Professor H. Pirenne, the most distinguished of Belgian scholars, who was not only an historian of the first rank, but by whose initiative and tact the *Comité International des Sciences Historiques*, shattered during the war, was revived, and gradually reinstated fully as a body of representatives of all nations on terms of complete equality and comradeship: Dr. J. H. Breasted, the Egyptologist and Orientalist, Professor of Egyptology and Oriental History in the University of Chicago, where he was the organizer, the director, and it may be said the creator of the Oriental Institute: and the veteran Latin scholar, Remigio Sabbadini, to whose labours all students of Virgil are deeply indebted.

The Academy has during this year entered on the reign of a new Sovereign. Incorporated by Royal Charter granted by King Edward VII on the eve of his coronation, it has since enjoyed the favour of his successors. The Address of Condolence presented by us to His Majesty, together with our prayers for the prosperity and peace of his own reign, has received a gracious acknowledgement from His Majesty.

We have received from the Académie Française, to whom in the previous year we had sent a congratulatory address on the occasion of their tercentenary, a medal commemorating that event. The Academy has been represented at the International Congress of Numismatists, at the Anglo-American Congress of Historians, at the tercentenary of the University of Utrecht; and most recently, at the centenary celebrations of London University, when an address of congratulation was presented to the Chancellor on its great and rapidly increasing expansion, with good wishes for its future in the magnificent central quarters now rising in

Bloomsbury. We are also represented on the Departmental Committee on the Ordnance Survey which has been set up by H.M. Government.

The Annual Report now in your hands enumerates the researches or publications which are being supported by financial aid from the Academy so far as its slender funds are available. Among works published during the year towards which the Academy has made substantial contributions in its corporate capacity, as well as by the labours of individual Fellows, may be specially mentioned further volumes of the *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum*, of the hitherto unpublished writings of Roger Bacon, and of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*; also the first instalments of the *Concordance of Musulman Tradition* and of the critical edition of the Greek New Testament. Substantial progress has been made in compilation of material for the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin* in this country, as it has also been in Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, France, Holland, Hungary, Italy, Jugoslavia, Norway, and Poland. The co-operation of Austria and Germany is now anticipated, thus covering practically the whole field of Europe, while exploration of medieval texts is also proceeding in the United States.

Amid the confusion and disorganization of the world, the task of an Academy of humane learning such as ours is pursued under special difficulties, but is, just because of this, of more urgent importance. In conjunction with similar bodies in other countries, its efforts are directed to support and consolidate the intellectual and spiritual life which is the permanent force of brief lives and fleeting generations, and to sustain the ideal not only of an educated nation, but of a world-wide Commonwealth of Studies. So far, notwithstanding all difficulties, the work that this Academy has accomplished, however short it may fall of covering its immense and indeed boundless field, is a matter for congratulation as well as an incentive to sustained and increased effort.

We are at the beginning, as becomes daily more obvious,

of a new era of discovery and interpretation which is revolutionizing the whole aspect of human history. Its progress is not confined to those special fields which are a province of the Societies of Hellenic and Roman Studies, but extends over the whole width of the world. Civilizations of the past, hitherto only superficially known or fragmentarily conjectured, are yielding up more and more of their secrets. Even for our own country, the picture of the past is continually shifting its outlines. Byzantine history, art, and institutions, and the whole civilization of the East Roman Empire, have risen from comparative neglect and consequent misunderstanding into an important place in the sphere of humane studies. Research and discovery in that portion of the world which formed the Empire of Alexander are swiftly and astonishingly altering the perspective of the past. Fuller study and quickened appreciation add continually to the power of understanding India. In still more distant regions, the civilization of China and Japan are opening out their contents and revealing their significance. Central Asia, itself once if not more than once the core of an Empire even more extensive than Alexander's, is ceasing to be an unexplored and fabulous region. The perished greatnesses of Central America, from Mexico to Peru, are taking their place in the panorama of the past. Undiscovered Africa and impenetrable Arabia no longer exist. But in this prodigious expansion over time and space, while the acquisition, the tabulation, and the rendering accessible of knowledge—all of what may be called the lexicography of the humane sciences—is of high importance, what is more important still is the superstructure reared on these deep and often obscure foundations. The primary function and the highest reward of humanism is the larger, more complete, and more vital appreciation of the classics in the largest sense of that word; the classics of art, music, philosophy, history, creative invention, over the whole range of life as throughout the whole range of literature.

It cannot be too often reaffirmed that the grave duty and high privilege which rests on the Academy, and includes all its functions, is maintenance of the standard of learning and guardianship of the continuity of civilization. It is not therefore idle to repeat that the danger which menaces learning is that not of conflict of sectional interests, but of a general relapse into barbarism; it is not needless to reaffirm once more our emphatic and uncompromising support of all efforts to maintain the free development of the human intellect. During this last year, the situation has not lessened in gravity. Countries once eminent in the arts of humanism have established a prison of the mind. While as between British, German, and Italian scholars unabated friendship has been continued and mutual intercourse has been maintained, official relations with German and Italian Universities or other national institutions of learning have been unhappily strained. In Germany nearly two thousand University Professors and teachers, including names of high eminence, have been, on grounds of race or religion, dismissed from their posts, and forced into the alternative of destitution or exile. Many have sought refuge in this country. The Academic Assistance Council, which was formed more than three years ago in order to relieve the victims of this modern Inquisition, and which has had full sympathy and support from the British Academy, was meant to meet what was then thought or hoped to be a passing phase of intolerance. That hope has until now proved vain; victimization has continued and extended. The Council, which was created with the view of meeting an immediate and transitory emergency, and which secured temporary appointments for many of the refugees, is now in course of being reconstituted and placed on a permanent footing as the Academic Assistance Trust, an organized Society for the Protection of Science and Learning. The President of the British Academy will be one of the Trustees of its funds. The new Society will, it is confidently hoped, be fully launched within the next few months, and will make

its appeal for the continued and increased generosity of individuals and corporate bodies. The support given it will in particular be applied towards an object which ought to elicit wide sympathy, the creation of a Fellowship Endowment Fund from which refugees of approved distinction in science, arts, or letters may be placed in a position to carry on their work in this country, without diverting emoluments or interfering with appointments and promotions among the ranks of our own scholars.

Passing across the Alps, I think it may be desirable in this connexion to mention two institutions in Italy whose position is at present a cause of grave concern.

The British School at Rome, founded thirty-five years ago, and almost coeval, therefore, with the British Academy, had, until last year, been pursuing its varied activities steadily and with increasing success. In archaeology, history, literature, and the Fine Arts, it has been for a whole generation a training-ground for scholars and artists, and has added materially by study, research, and exploration, to knowledge and intelligent appreciation of Rome and of Italy. Before the opening of the session of 1935-6, political and economic tension between the two countries had become acute. Some fields of research were entirely closed. Other were subject to severe restrictions. In view of the very hostile attitude of the Italian Press, and the stringency of police supervision which led to several arrests, it was found desirable, and indeed inevitable, to close the School last December. The Director and Librarian were given indefinite leave of absence, which has enabled them to carry on research work in Palestine, Syria, and Cyprus. The students then in residence were sent provisionally to other centres such as Madrid and Athens. The library continues open with a skeleton staff, in charge of an Italian secretary. It still remains to be seen whether during the next few months the political horizon may have sufficiently cleared to allow of the reopening of the School, and the resumption of the activities which in the past have been of

such value to the common cause of European art, history, and letters, and more intimately, to the fostering and enlargement of mutual understanding between the two nations.

The British Institute at Florence, a younger foundation, established by His Majesty's Government in 1918 and incorporated by Royal Charter in 1923, 'for the purpose of promoting the study of English language and literature and the diffusion of British culture generally in Italy', is labouring under similar though less acute difficulties. To that Institute the British Academy has from the first contributed active sympathy, and accepted a share in the membership of its Council; a meeting organized by the Academy under Lord Balfour's Presidency was of very material help towards securing for it the endowment which stabilized its position. If this seems to have been waste effort, 'bread cast upon the waters', and if we recall the sombre words which follow, 'thou knowest not what evil shall be on the earth', it is well to remember also that 'he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap'. Meanwhile, it is legitimate to hope that the check to the activities of the Institute, if severe, may be only temporary, and that we, or our successors, may see the active resumption of its work, not only in the promotion throughout Italy of English studies, which at present have almost completely disappeared in most of the Italian universities and schools, but also in creating and extending acquaintance with, and intelligent interest in, the language, the history, the literature, and the civil institutions of Great Britain among educated Italians.

My last words from the Chair which I have been honoured to occupy and from which I now retire, must be of gratitude for the support and indulgence which have been uniformly extended to me by my colleagues on the Council, and of welcome to my successor in assuming his new honour and responsibility. To him and to the whole body over whom he will preside, in years which may put a heavy strain on the torch-bearers of humane studies, let me offer a parting

message of courage and hope: not the courage of desperation, not the hope that makes the heart sick, but unfaltering resolve, and hope which is also assurance. There may still be heard in the tempest the trumpet of prophecy: 'great voices in heaven saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.'