

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

By J. W. MACKAIL

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THE arrangements for to-day's proceedings allow of only a brief address; but in a review of the Academy's record during the last twelve months there are not many matters of salient importance to chronicle. Its work has continued on well established lines; its influence is maintained by no spectacular achievements, but by the steady pursuit of the objects which it promotes or encourages. I have to thank my colleagues for the honour they have done me by inviting me to continue for a fourth and final year in the position of President, and to acknowledge with gratitude all that the Council and the Secretary have done to make the duties or responsibilities of this office both easy and pleasant.

Five of our Ordinary Fellows have been removed by death during the year. All of these were scholars of high distinction in their several fields: all had reached the traditional term of normal human life. Professor Francis Burkitt, who had for thirty years been Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, was one of the most eminent of the theologians and Orientalists who have one after another succeeded to the tradition and authority of that chair. His knowledge of liturgical forms and usages, of early and medieval monasticism, and of the whole history of the Christian Church from Apostolic times, extended the scope and widened the outlook of his special researches in Syriac and Old Latin. Fishing, gardening, and music were recreations which he keenly enjoyed; and his hospitality won him not only the friendship but the affection of his contemporaries and his pupils alike. *Lucerna ardens et lucens* would be a fitting epitaph for him.

Professor A. C. Pearson, best known by his admirable work on the Greek Tragedians, established his reputation

in the front ranks of classical scholars nearly twenty years ago by his great edition of the Fragments of Sophocles; a recognition confirmed by his appointment, a few years later, to the Regius Professorship of Greek at Cambridge as successor to Henry Jackson. In textual scholarship he was unsurpassed. Concurrently with his classical studies he had for many years been occupied in business. Under the double strain his health gave way, and he was finally obliged to resign his chair and live thenceforth as an invalid.

The sphere of studies occupied by Professor A. Pearce Higgins, as Deputy-professor and then Professor of International Law at Cambridge, is one which does not ask or receive wide popular recognition. But his eminence in that field made him a valuable adviser to H.M. Government during the war on problems of Prize Law and kindred subjects, and was recognized by his election, a few years later, to the Presidency of the Institut de Droit International.

Henry Julian White had for many years, while Professor of New Testament Exegesis at King's College, London, and since 1920 as Dean of Christ Church, devoted his main energies and his fine and accurate scholarship to the Oxford Vulgate New Testament. In the laborious task of editorship he had been adopted as his coadjutor by John Wordsworth, Bishop of Salisbury (himself one of the early Fellows of the Academy), and after Wordsworth's death in 1911 became sole editor. He was the foremost living authority on Old Latin Biblical Texts.

Very recently the death at a great age of Lord Fitzmaurice removed from our members a statesman and writer in whom the scholarly tradition of his family was fully sustained, and whose biographies of Petty, Shelburne, and Granville showed him as a trained historian and a master of research. His election to the Academy in 1914 was the recognition, even then belated, of an eminence which had been established for more than thirty years. He was not quite, but very nearly, the oldest of our Fellows.

Among the deceased foreign scholars who had been elected Corresponding Fellows of our society, one name is conspicuous, that of Oliver Wendell Holmes, scholar, soldier, and jurist, a Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States for thirty years, and the distinguished son and namesake of a distinguished father whose name was equally known on both sides of the Atlantic. Their joint lives cover the period of four generations from the collapse of Jefferson's disastrous Presidency to the present day.

I would here add the name of another scholar not of our number. John U. Powell, Fellow of St. John's and University Lecturer in Greek and Latin Literature at Oxford, had been nominated and was warmly supported for election to the Academy this year, on the ground of his work on the disinterred papyrus fragments deciphered and edited by him in the *Collectanea Alexandrina*. He died only a few days before his nomination would have come before the Council.

With the elections just made the full number of 150 to which the Academy is limited by its statutes has been reached. Henceforth, unless steps be taken for revision of our constitution, fresh admissions to Ordinary Fellowship will be limited to the number of vacancies occurring through death or resignation. The suggestions tentatively made by me a year ago as to possible action have been under consideration by the Council. The problems involved are intricate, and any hasty conclusion is doubtless to be deprecated. The Council determined to take no action for the present as regards either increase or variation of our membership. The question will probably from time to time be reconsidered in the light of further experience; but it seems unlikely that until, say, two years hence, any proposals will be formulated by Council and submitted for decision to a General Meeting of the Academy.

A full account of the activities of the Academy during the year 1934-5 is given in the Annual Report which is now in your hands. I may note, however, as of special interest, the publication of another volume, the ninth, of the *Social*



and Economic Records, of further portions of the Coptic Dictionary and the hitherto unpublished works of Roger Bacon; and the substantial progress made with the *Dictionary of Mediaeval Latin* and the *Concordance of Moslem Tradition*. Only subsidies from the Academy have rendered the effective progress of all these enterprises possible. The restoration of the full Treasury grant has enabled the Academy to increase, to a small extent, the number or amount of its subsidies. I feel, however, bound to repeat that the grant of £2,000 is admittedly quite inadequate, and compares unfavourably with the aid given by the Governments of other nations towards the promotion of research in the vast and still largely unexplored field of humanistic studies. It will be noted that in the province of material as distinct from what may be called literary research, the British School of Archaeology at Jerusalem is, since the completion of the valuable excavations at Samaria, the only body whose work in exploration and excavation receives financial aid from us. Our contribution to the British School of Archaeology in 'Iraq is on a different footing. The aid as well as the sympathy of the Academy is greatly to be desired for continuance and extension of the work in discovery, decipherment, and treatment of the buried records of the life, habits, and institutions of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt. In this work the labours of Grenfell and Hunt, our deceased colleagues, will always take a leading place, and constitute a special claim on the Academy, of which they were distinguished members, for the furthering of its continuance so far as means permit.

When we pass to matters of wider national or international interest, two events of the year are conspicuous: the gracious reply of H.M. the King to the Jubilee Address presented to him two months ago, in which His Majesty was pleased to assure the Academy of his lively interest in their activities; and the important step taken towards the restoration of a European Commonwealth of Learning by the long-deferred and welcome admission of the Academies

of Germany and Austria to membership of the Union Académique Internationale.

Representatives have been nominated by the Academy during the year to the British Committee of International Historical Congresses, to the Joint Committee for Archaeological Research, to the British School of Archaeology in 'Iraq, and to the Royal Institute of International Affairs; also to the governing bodies of the London Society and of the British School at Rome.

This is not an Academy of Letters. But the preservation of a standard of language, whether spoken or written, is one not perhaps of the tasks, but certainly of the duties and the interests of scholarship. We were fully justified in sending a congratulatory address to the Académie Française on the occasion of its tercentenary last month, and in being represented at the ceremonies which then took place. At home, the Council recently complied with a request from the British Broadcasting Corporation to nominate a representative on its Advisory Committee on spoken English, and so help towards keeping some dignity and beauty in an historic language, as regards the use of which, even by what are called the educated classes, the lamentation of twenty-one centuries ago (then as now at the end of a long, desperate, and destructive war) may often be repeated, that 'they have forgotten to speak in Latin at Rome'.

The list of lectures delivered during the past twelve months on the various foundations of the Academy (or in two cases still to be delivered, one to-day, the other, from unavoidable postponement, next week) is in the report before you. It shows the wide range over which we are enabled to enlist the services of scholars and experts from outside as well as from within our own body, and frequently from other countries.

Here I may be allowed to make particular mention of the series of lectures given in December last by Professor Ernst Herzfeld on the archaeological history of Iran. They must have opened up to many among the audience little short

of a new world, one which has other besides archaeological interest. The Persian civilization, the history of which in its many phases is as old as that of Rome and concurrent with that of Europe, has been unduly neglected except among Oriental experts. In letters, in science, in architecture, in religion, in painting and sculpture, in design and decoration, the accomplishment and vital force of Iran are only now beginning to receive adequate recognition; they were brought into view first by the exhibition of Persian Art at the Royal Academy in 1931, and more recently by the celebration in London of the millenary of Firdausi. Archaeological exploration in independent countries of the East is not a pursuit which is within the scope of a British Academy; but the exploration of the political, social, and intellectual records of Iranian civilization deserves, as it would repay, all the support it is in our power to give.

A provisional list of lectures for the coming year has already been in substance arranged; it is hoped to include in it a special lecture on Horace, the Latin author who beyond all others has been denizenized and, so to say, adopted into the fabric of our national consciousness, on the occasion of the two-thousandth anniversary of his birth.

The work done by the Academy, however far it may have fallen short of fulfilling its ideals, has been large both in amount and in importance. In the immensity of the untouched or unexplored fields before us, we must not forget or slight the actual ground won. The full catalogue of the Academy's publications, just issued by the Oxford University Press, gives a record which we may regard with pleasure and even with some amount of pride. Yet the preservation and enhancement of our activity to its full measure is a matter which must never be outside our minds. The feeling that the Academy should be and might be 'more youthful and energetic', is one which cannot be ignored or denied consideration. In this connexion I venture to make a suggestion which has been favourably regarded by several colleagues with whom I have discussed it. The ten sections

have meetings of their own only once a year, and their members are consequently more or less out of touch with one another unless they meet in other capacities. That each section should meet not once but twice a year, in autumn as well as in spring, would enable them to act more corporately, to realize their functions more fully, and in particular to discuss with wider and more considered regard the particular fields in which their membership needs strengthening and the claims which one or another scholar most prominently has for admission to membership, not merely as a recognition of his own distinction, but in the general interest of the Section and of the Academy as a whole. It might also impress on some of the Fellows who are more remote from any central meetings a fuller sense of the fact that membership of the Academy has its duties as well as its privileges. If such meetings were preceded or followed by a dinner, it would be consonant with tradition and promote friendly interchange of views.

In the few minutes left at my disposal, may I be allowed to repeat and reinforce some considerations which must always be, as indeed they have been, prominent in all our efforts and activities.

The products of the Academy as an organized body, and of its members individually or conjointly, are all, in their different ways and from their different angles and lines of approach, means towards an end. That end may be concisely stated as including two interlinked motives: to maintain a standard of learning, and to preserve the continuity of civilization. It is by the first of these that the second may be most directly and most effectively attained. The present age has been recently summarized, by one of our own number, as an age of the breaking of traditions. It is perhaps not so fully realized that the breaking, or rather, one might say, the dissolving, of traditions was the work of a century now over: during which, and specially in its later years, the impact of new forces, the invention of new machinery, the immense increase of knowledge as well as

material wealth, and the intoxication of progress led up, or shall we rather say led down, to intellectual anarchy. The compass was demagnetized; the needle spun about recklessly and aimlessly. Then came the cataclysm of the War. Since then, the collapse of civilization, buried among the ruins of the vast structure it had erected, has become a phrase of usage, a commonplace of journalism; and what men go on saying or hearing, they end in believing. Such a collapse, the submergence of the ground so laboriously won, is regarded by some, the actual inheritors, little as they think it, of Victorianism, with exultation; by others with dismay; by us, it is to be hoped, with equanimity.

Our path lies straight forward. The recovery of equilibrium, so ardently desired in many quarters, so needlessly despaired of in some, is in fact on its way. If we fail to realize that it will, like its predecessors, be not a static but an organic and continuously shifting equilibrium, we shall miss the lesson both of science and history. The old belief in automatic progress is discredited; it did not stand the test of experience. The new disbelief in any progress at all has already spent its force. It has been remarked that the four writers of the greatest popular influence over the generation which is now passing away were all critical, analytic, and destructive. Two of the four are still alive, but they have ceased to exercise magic over the new generation. For they could destroy but could not create.

Our task, as an Academy of humane learning, is not to destroy nor to create, but to preserve. Our enthusiasm in it comes from our assured conviction that there is so much that is worth preserving. It is this conviction which may, and does, sustain the energy and the vitality of scholars in carrying on the collection, the classification, the analysis of innumerable documents (material as well as written) which might otherwise seem a hopeless as well as an endless employment. For all their industry and all their trained capacity cannot keep pace with the constant accumulation of material. Of a whole life's labours it may often be asked,

What is the upshot? Libraries of millions of volumes, endless encyclopaedic collections, specialization carried into apparent futility; are these what is meant by civilization?

The answer to such apprehensions is to look deeper and to exercise faith and patience. To take two significant instances from the studies with which I have most acquaintance, the result of about a century of destructive analysis has been the re-integration of Homer and the re-integration of Shakespeare. The same might, I believe, be said of the Canon of the New Testament.

'Les hommes,' said a distinguished French writer some forty years ago, 'ont je ne sais quelle peur étrange de la beauté.' And in many minds also there is, overt or lurking, a strange fear of the truth and a needless fear of the future. The escape from fear, if not the beginning, is the result of wisdom. Through the crash of demolition, through the swirling eddies of resettlement, life goes on and renews itself perpetually. Our task is to connect the continuity of learning with the continuity of life.