THIRD ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

July 5, 1905

ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT, LORD REAY

When last year I had the pleasure of addressing you, the Academy had but recently taken its place as a constituent Academy in connexion with the important meeting in London of the International Association. The report of the Section of Letters to which I then referred has since been published, and will be found in the first volume of *The Proceedings of the Academy*, a specimen copy of which is on the table before me. I am glad to be able to report that two at least of the projects there referred to have been making progress during the past year. The Greek Thesaurus is receiving the careful attention of the International Committee. Professor Kretschmar, who holds the Chair of Comparative Philology in the University of Vienna, has been co-opted a member of the International Committee, and is prepared to draw up a Memorandum on the project of a Greek Thesaurus, and his view and that of Professor Krumbacher is that a periodical should be established for the purpose. In the absence of funds all that is possible at present is to take a preparatory survey of the subject and to consider the lines on which the undertaking might be organized; and various preliminary proposals are being considered. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* is making steady advance, and it is with special gratitude that we acknowledge the promised grant from the Government of India, through the Secretary of State, of a sum not exceeding £200 a year for ten years towards the work, under conditions which have been carefully considered by the International Committee, and accepted by them with due thanks.

As regards the internal work of the Academy, important papers have been read. Without referring to all these papers, I may perhaps be permitted to single out Sir Frederick Pollock's and Professor Campbell Fraser's papers commemorative of the centenary of John Locke, Sir Courtenay Ilbert's lucid paper on the centenary of the French Civil Code, Professor Holland's exceedingly important contribution to International Law, which is now circulating in French throughout the Continent, with special reference to international

problems. To these papers by Fellows of the Academy must be added Mr. Fitz-Maurice Kelly's scholarly address on the tercentenary of the first publication of *Don Quixote*, a paper that has received the highest commendation on the part of Spanish scholars, and has brought the Academy the most cordial thanks from leading members of the Spanish Academy. It is gratifying to know that Mr. Fitz-Maurice Kelly represented the Government of his country at the recent celebration at Madrid, and has received the medal struck to commemorate the event; he has also been nominated a Knight Commander of the Order of Alfonso XII. These, and the other papers read, represent but a small part of the activity of the Fellows of the Academy. Our best thanks are due to our energetic secretary, Professor Gollancz, for the care he has bestowed on the publication of our *Proceedings*. They will convince our sister Academies and the public that we have not been idle, and that many important subjects have been brought to our notice by experts. It must be borne in mind, however, that the Academy is still in its very early youth, and its real strength cannot be put forth until it is adequately provided with the necessary funds for carrying out its programme of work. Meanwhile, both at home and abroad, it has been striving to the best of its ability to work in the spirit of the charter under which it was incorporated. I am glad to say that on this occasion I have not to refer to any void left in our midst by death during the past twelve months. It is my most pleasant duty to recall various high distinctions conferred upon members of our body, notably Dr. James's promotion to the Provostship of King's College, Cambridge, the election of Dr. Murray as a corresponding member of the Imperial Academy of Vienna, and especially the well-merited inclusion of Sir Richard Jebb in the Order of Merit, in which he is so worthily to represent the studies fostered by this Academy. In the name of all I offer him our sincerest congratulations; may he enjoy the honour for long years to come. It can never be forgotten how great has been his service in the early days of the foundation of the British Academy, and the distinction not only adds lustre to us in our corporate capacity, but indicates that the cause of literary scholarship and culture is not yet a forlorn one in spite of ominous warnings.

One of our most eminent scientists has recently, in a powerful lecture, put forward claims which this Academy must oppose. Let me say at once that I am not going to retaliate by underrating the importance of the knowledge of Nature.

I am fully alive to the debt we owe to Nature's investigators. I wish even to point out that the author of that discourse might

have strengthened his case by alluding to the penalty paid by the great agricultural interest for the neglect of scientific research.

I willingly admit that in the administration of public affairs the teaching of science must be taken into account, and that those who enrich us with the discoveries of the forces of Nature are benefactors of mankind.

But I am not prepared to admit that we must give 'a complete supremacy to the study of Nature,' and that 'the study of ancient elegance and historic wisdom' should become a luxury.

This Academy will certainly not be prepared 'to see the classical and historical scheme of education entirely abandoned, and its place taken by a scheme of education in the knowledge of Nature.' If there were no limits to the brain-power of individuals we could enforce nature-study; but even the author of the discourse points out that there are 'limitations to the mind of man,' and that experimental psychology is only in its infancy. A proper distribution of intellectual labour is what we have to aim at.

The relation of man to Nature does not render superfluous an examination of the relation of man to his Creator, to his neighbours, and to spiritual influences. The relation of the Highland crofter to Nature is, no doubt, worth investigating, but it does not preclude the necessity of considering his relation to his Church; and no one can understand Scotland who has not followed the vicissitudes of its ecclesiastical history. A statesman who attempted to rule Scotland without such knowledge would sooner or later come to grief, and what applies to Scotland applies to other countries.

We do not claim a monopoly for Latin and Greek, but we believe that a mastery of Greek and Latin literature, and not 'a knowledge, however imperfect,' will, in and out of Parliament, improve debate and discourage rhetoric—the pitfall of statesmen.

We do not consider that our statesmen, our divines, our lawyers, our economists are wasting time if they master philosophical problems. The 'complete supremacy of the study of Nature' in our universities would be as great a calamity as the complete supremacy of any other branch of learning. I do not overlook the fact that the advocate of a 'great and leading position for the knowledge of Nature does not wish to 'remove the acquirement of the use of languages, the training in the knowledge and perception of beauty in literary art, and the feeding of the mind with the great stories of the past, from a high and necessary position in education.'

But when they are classed as 'entertainments,' whereas to us they are quite as essential as the knowledge of Nature, it is the prime duty

of such a body as ours to assert the claims of the studies we represent.

It will be an evil day for our civilization if we give encouragement to the notion that the only useful servants of the public are those who live absorbed in the study of Nature, and if public opinion comes to look upon men in other fields as merely ornamental. This Academy will certainly not need any justification for its existence if it undertakes to combat this wild theory, and to demonstrate its fallacy. It is unscientific to assess the degree of usefulness of research in various directions. Take the work of our orientalists, which meets with such scant recognition. In so far as they increase our knowledge of the East, of its literature, of its religions, they make it more possible for us to avoid mistakes in ruling the East, which are due to a very superficial understanding of the character of our fellow subjects in India. Professor Browne, who represents this Academy on the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, seems to me to be engaged in work quite as useful as the scientist in the United States whose investigations lead him to think that a meal should not be converted into a social function.

An empire like ours has need of intellectual activity in such a great variety of directions that it would be folly to differentiate.

We are told that—

> Where there is one man of first-rate intelligence employed in detecting the disease-producing parasites, their special conditions of life, and the way to bring them to an end, there should be a thousand. It should be as much the purpose of civilized governments to protect their citizens in this respect as it is to provide defence against human aggression. Yet, it is the fact that this immensely important control of a great and constant danger and injury to mankind is left to the unorganized inquiries of a few enthusiasts. So little is this matter understood or appreciated, that those who are responsible for the welfare of States, with the rarest exceptions, do not even know that such protection is possible, and others again are so far from an intelligent view as to its importance, that they actually entertain the opinion that it would be a good thing were there more disease in order to get rid of the weakly surplus population!

Leon Say foresaw this development when he once described a future cabinet as composed mainly of hygienists, hygiene having become the dominant factor in a general election.

Among 'the rarest exceptions' the Government of India should be mentioned, as it has constantly invoked the aid of bacteriologists and has treated them liberally. India will have a Central Research Institute at Kasauli under Colonel Semple, M.D., where Indian officers may study the bacteriology and parasitology of tropical diseases, and a laboratory for scientific, medical, and sanitary work is to be established or enlarged at the headquarters of each of the provinces.

Hygiene is a recognized department of Indian administration, and in India, at all events, no time is spent on the emendation of a Greek text; but I am not prepared to say that when I visit the Pasteur Institute and admire the great benefits which accrue to mankind from its investigations, it ever occurred to me that Sir Richard Jebb ought to have consecrated his talents rather to the detection of disease-producing parasites than to the emendation of a Greek text, and to the interpretation of the spirit of that glorious civilization of Greece from which we moderns have so much to learn.

But this I am willing to admit, that when distinct evidence is forthcoming of fitness for nature-study every encouragement should be given to pursue it.

I am prepared to enter upon a crusade against waste in educational effort by a careful adaptation of methods of education to the variety of capacity in students.

What is of importance to mankind is that 'emendation of a Greek text and the exact degree of turpitude of the statesmen of a bygone age,' should be determined by scholars and historians *pari passu* with the detection of disease-producing parasites by nature-searchers, and the urgency of due recognition by the State of intellectual activity in all directions will not be contested by this Academy or by the Royal Society. As long as we indulge in a barren controversy, which department of research is of more immediate usefulness to our generation, we shall not obtain from the Government the means we require in order that we, as a nation, may contribute as we ought to the increase of knowledge. Such a controversy gives to the Government a pretext for abstention. A joint effort is required in order to overcome the lethargy of Philistinism. Whether the democracy 'will demand that those who carry on public affairs shall not be persons solely acquainted with the elegant fancies and stories of past ages, but shall be trained in the acquisition of natural knowledge, and keenly active in the skilful application of nature-control to the development of the well-being of the community,' seems to me doubtful.

The great danger we have to face is that the democracy will take the view that the complex and delicate mechanism required to rule an empire like ours does not involve training of a very varied description in which 'the skilful application of nature-control,' should have due influence, as well as the application of other sciences. I certainly cannot conceive statesmanship, or even the proper exercise of the rights of a citizen, without the knowledge of history. Can it be seriously maintained that the study of such events as the downfall of the Stuarts, and of the Bourbons, and of the Commune is merely

a pleasant occupation,' because 'history does not repeat itself'? Foreign affairs can be managed without the knowledge of the laws of Nature, but not without the knowledge of history, because history does repeat itself, and explains the blunders which have been committed, and how they are to be avoided. A referendum to the leading statesmen of the present day of the proposition that 'as a matter of fact it cannot be shown that any statesman, or even the humblest politician, has ever been guided to useful action by such knowledge' would demonstrate its absolute fallacy.

I trust that means will be found for the purposes of research to establish closer relations between this Academy and cognate societies, such as the Hellenic Society, the Classical Association of England and Wales, the British Schools at Athens and Rome, the Philological Societies of Oxford, Cambridge, and London. I need not mention other societies, which in other sections might be asked to co-operate with us. The Academy is also prepared to invite those who do not belong to it to read short papers.

I think that one of the tasks we shall have to undertake is, at intervals, to focus the results of study, to give a survey of the field of classical work, marking the mutual bearings of the discoveries and researches in kindred departments.

To unify the idea of ancient learning and of the life of antiquity is becoming more and more difficult. For this work of reconstruction, the Academy has special facilities. I think the sections of history, philology, and philosophy might confer together on this subject and issue a joint report.

As universities multiply the need for concentration will be more widely felt. The Academy will afford to the representatives of our universities an opportunity of exchanging views on the direction to be given to research. The Academy is in touch with the universities, and this relation will probably grow more intimate.

I believe that for a collection of papyri the time will soon be ripe.

I am convinced that we have duties to discharge which it will take all our energy to perform adequately.

Not the least significant of the signs of the times is the fact that the address to which I have referred was delivered in the very home of culture itself, and there could be no better demonstration of the need for the vigorous maintenance of an Academy in England for the safe-guarding and promotion of humane learning; nay, I feel sure that many an ardent supporter of the physical sciences will re-echo our fervent prayer, *Floreat Academia Britannica.*