

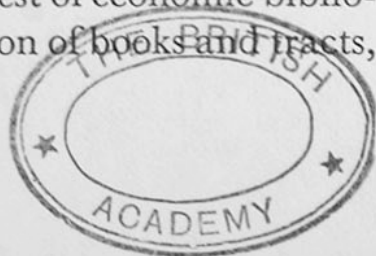
PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

By W. D. ROSS

14 July 1937

THIS is the first opportunity I have had of thanking the Fellows of the British Academy for the high honour they did me a year ago by electing me their President. It gives me peculiar pleasure to succeed in that office one with whom I share two *Almae Matres*, the University of Edinburgh and Balliol College, and, *longum post intervallum* in more senses than one, a distinguished member of my own college, Lord Bryce. When I think of the eminent men who have held the office before me, I cannot but regard myself as a very unworthy successor. But at least I yield to none of those who have gone before me in my pride in the Academy and my zeal for its worthy discharge of its duties.

We are now within a month of the thirty-fifth anniversary of our foundation; for our charter is dated the 8th of August 1902. Of the forty-nine original Fellows, five were still alive a year ago, and of these four are still among us—Sir Arthur Evans, Sir James Frazer, and Sir Henry Maxwell-Lyte as Fellows, and Sir William Ramsay as a Retired Fellow. One has passed away—full of years and honour—Sir Frederick Pollock, eminent alike as a lawyer, a student of philosophy, and a man of letters, and retaining to the end of his long life the liveliest interest in the work of the Academy. Five others of our Fellows have died within the last twelve months. Dr. Fotheringham, starting as a classical scholar, had in later life so mastered the relevant branches of astronomy that he won a unique position for himself as an authority on ancient chronology; he was one of the very few of our number who might with equal propriety have been a Fellow of the Royal Society. Professor Foxwell was not only an eminent economist, but also the greatest of economic bibliographers, and his magnificent collection of books and tracts,



and his notes upon them, form the best part of the material for one of our own undertakings, our Economic Bibliography. In Professor Clark and Professor Lindsay we have lost two of the greatest of modern Latinists. Professor Clark was the foremost of English students of Cicero and of Latin prose-rhythm, and in later years had broken new ground by studies in the text of the New Testament which challenged views that had long been accepted by scholars. Professor Lindsay had an international fame as a student of Plautus and of Latin palaeography and textual criticism, and as a pioneer in many little-trodden regions of Latin studies. Alone, so far as I know, among our Fellows, he wrote his own memoir, and those of you who have read his lively and objective account of himself, full of details which a biographer would have found it difficult to collect, will perhaps be stimulated to follow his example. Professor Langdon was equally a pioneer in Assyriology, and his death adds to the very serious losses which the study of the ancient history of the Near East has suffered in recent years.

After our valediction to the members who have gone from us should come our welcome to those who have joined our number. I give this welcome with special pleasure because a larger number of them than usual are personal friends of my own. I am sure that our body is strengthened by their accession; I hope that they will enjoy our fellowship and will not find us too dryasdust.

A year ago the number of our Fellows stood at 143; six Fellows have since died and one, Dr. Schiller, has retired; seven have been elected to-day. Our number therefore again stands at 143. We are within seven of the maximum number authorized by our charter. The question has more than once been discussed, whether we should not increase our number, either by getting the maximum raised beyond 150, or by following the example of the Royal Academy in having a class of Senior Fellows *extra numerum*. But at present it looks as if the toll taken by death of what by its nature tends to be rather an aged company is likely to yield in most

years a sufficient number of vacant places. There are many scholars outside our number who are worthy of inclusion in it; but in conversation with a good many Fellows I have heard the opinion expressed that the difficulty of selection would become greater rather than less if there were more places to be filled.

Recent Presidents have referred to a growing recognition, in other quarters, of the part played by the Academy and of the objects to which it devotes itself. There is perhaps still room for advance in this respect. Sitting beside an eminent member of the Royal Academy at the Academy banquet, I was asked the question 'Where is *your* gallery?' I had to explain to him that we are not rivals of the Royal Academy in its own distinguished sphere. That the pursuit of humane learning does not go without public recognition, however, is shown by the fact that no fewer than six of our number are members of the Order of Merit; and it is with singular pleasure that I hail the latest addition to that number in our former President, Mr. Fisher, whose services to the study of history as well as to national education had richly deserved the honour.

At a time when national defence makes so irresistible a claim on our public finances, it is too much to hope that our grant from the Treasury should be increased; but I may be allowed to say what other Presidents have said before me, that £2,000 a year, grateful though we are for it, compares unfavourably with grants made by other countries less rich than ours to their national Academies. In times less disturbed by wars and rumours of wars, we shall undoubtedly be justified in asking for more. It is possible that my words may reach the ears or eyes of some rich man or woman who wishes to endow some branch of humane learning. To any such I would say that the Academy would be a natural body to be entrusted with the administration of such a gift or bequest. There are few branches of humane studies in which we have not among our Fellows some expert qualified to advise upon the persons, books, or undertakings to be endowed.

Even as things are, we take no unworthy part in the activities of the International Academic Union. Our financial contribution to its work compares favourably with that of other countries, nor is our contribution behindhand in respect of work done. At the meetings of the Union, our Secretary takes a natural lead as a born organizer of learning. I take special pride in the fact that the first text of the great *Corpus Aristotelicum* to appear will be the work of a British scholar, Mr. W. L. Lorimer of St. Andrews; and I venture to think that his edition of the Latin translation of the *De Caelo* will be a model for future contributors to the *Corpus*.

The *Corpus Aristotelicum* was originally put forward as the first instalment of a much larger undertaking, a *Corpus Philosophorum Medii Aevi*. The larger undertaking was never officially adopted by the Union, and is indeed one which would probably be crippled by its own size and weight. But a natural and indeed necessary counterpart to the *Corpus Aristotelicum* is a *Corpus Platonicum*; for the influence of Platonism, while not so all-pervasive through the Middle Ages as that of Aristotelianism, while 'less apparent in the official teaching of schools and faculties, than in the esoteric doctrine of small circles and single outstanding thinkers' (I quote from a paper on the proposed Platonic *Corpus* by its future editor), was in the long run hardly less important. Our Academy has adopted the undertaking of a *Corpus Platonicum* comprising medieval Latin and Arabic translations of and commentaries on Plato, and has in Dr. Raymond Klibansky, of Heidelberg and Oxford, the originator of the project, an able and enterprising editor.

Another new undertaking which the Academy has resolved to support is an edition of the political writings of William of Ockham, by Mr. J. G. Sikes, of Cambridge. Ockham deprecated the multiplication of entities beyond necessity, but he did not practise parsimony as a writer, and the edition will, it is estimated, run to eight volumes and 4,000 pages. I understand that his political writings

were particularly influential, and that a good text of them is very much needed.

The Annual Report presents you with details about the progress of the other works which we carry on either independently or as members of the International Academic Union. There is one of the latter about which it seems to me advisable to say a word, viz. the Medieval Latin Dictionary. At the meeting of the Committee of the Union concerned with this work, those who are engaged in it seemed to me to wake up to the fact that, while they had done or supervised a great deal of work throughout the year, they were not very clear as to what their purpose really was, and in particular whether it was the production of a single dictionary of medieval Latin, or of a number of separate national dictionaries. The clearest principle that was laid down at the meeting was that there should be a single dictionary of the language down to the year 1000, and separate dictionaries for the later period. This may need modification in detail, but seems in principle a reasonable mark to aim at; and it is to be hoped that the question may soon be settled in this or some similar way.

One of the most remarkable features of this year's meeting of the International Academic Union was that from Spain, racked as it is by the united horrors of civil war and foreign interference, there came, to preside with equanimity over our gathering, a scholar who is at the same time Governor of the Bank of Spain. In Spain, if anywhere, we might have expected the interests of learning to be completely submerged by military, political, and economic concerns. May I take his presence as a token of the fact that learning and an interest in learning cannot be suppressed even by the most untoward circumstances? We may be sure that, even in countries where nationalism and racialism, Communism and Fascism, have reached their most excessive forms, much good work is being done by quiet scholars. 'Such an one', says Plato, 'may be compared to a man who has fallen among wild beasts—he will not join in the wickedness of

his fellows, but neither is he able singly to resist all their fierce natures, and therefore seeing that he would be of no use to the State or to his friends, and reflecting that he would have to throw away his life without doing any good either to himself or to others, he holds his peace, and goes his own way. He is like one who in the storm of dust and sleet which the driving wind hurries along, retires under the shelter of a wall; and seeing the rest of mankind full of wickedness, he is content, if only he can live his own life and be pure from evil or unrighteousness, and depart in peace and good-will, with bright hopes.' Such a man, he adds, will have done a great work, but not the greatest. And *we* may add that he will have done a greater work if he brings those qualities of clear and impartial thinking which have served him well in the pursuit of scientific truth, to bear upon the questions of the day, and uses them to oppose the half-baked 'isms' which everywhere are running riot. Peace and prosperity can be won for Europe only if higher standards of moral, political, and economic thinking prevail than those which are most popular at the moment; and this is one of the objects to which an Academy, in common with the universities and with all other learned institutions, may well devote itself. Our task is easier in this country than in some others; for our academic freedom is not threatened. All the more does it become us to maintain its importance, and to hold out a helping hand to those who suffer from its loss elsewhere.

In the field of research there are large regions which we have scarcely begun to study intensively. In particular, I would refer to one region for which we seem to have a special responsibility. The British Empire includes vast tracts of Asia and of Africa; but our Oriental section is one of our smallest sections, and we have no African section. If we had the workers and the funds, there is a vast amount of work to be done in studying the languages, the monuments, the art, the history, and the sociology of these regions. As an Academy, we have made a beginning: we co-operate in the

Encyclopaedia of Islam and in the *Concordance of Musulman Tradition*, and we contribute to the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem and to the *Journal of Assyriology*. But this is a mere scratching of the surface. Here is a field in which a benefactor who should endow research on a large scale would undoubtedly sow the seed for a rich harvest of additions to human knowledge, which would make all our relations with the peoples of Asia and Africa more intelligent than they can be so long as our knowledge of their past and of their mental climate is so dim.

It is a question whether we should not, at a convenient season, come more definitely before the public with a request for funds to assist us in organizing these and other researches. An occasional public dinner, at which we should state plainly the nature of our objects, has from time to time been thought of as a means to this end; and I hope that Fellows of the Academy will consider carefully whether at a convenient season this would not be worth while. The present time, with its more pressing anxieties, would possibly not be opportune. But the evils which at present torment our continent will, if they do not meantime destroy our civilization, ultimately pass away. *Magna est veritas et praevallet*. It is the very nature of error, if it be given long enough time, to refute itself; and we may hope that within the lifetime of at least the younger of us Europe will desert its present shibboleths and return to the path of ordered progress. Then and probably not till then can we hope for a large extension of our work as an Academy of Humane Learning.

I cannot conclude without expressing my thanks to the members of the Council who have devoted so much valuable time to the concerns of the Academy, and especially to the officers, the Secretary and Assistant Secretary and the Honorary Treasurer, for their conduct of our varied business.