

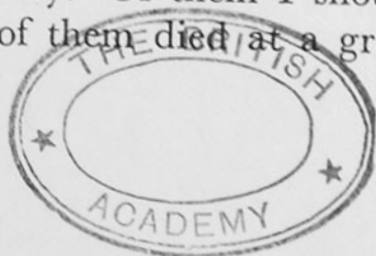
PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

By SIR DAVID ROSS

July 1938

I SHOULD like to begin by thanking the Fellows of the British Academy for doing me the honour of electing me again as their President, an honour which I esteem the greatest that has ever been bestowed on me or is likely ever to be bestowed. The duties of the President are not very arduous, and it is difficult for him to repay by service what is conferred on him in the way of honour; but the meetings of the Union Académique Internationale give him *some* opportunity of doing so. This year's meeting, which the Secretary unfortunately could not attend, and at which I represented you, with the very able assistance of Professor Baxter, gave me perhaps more opportunity than usual, and next year's meeting, which will be in London, will give still more. The meeting will be from 8 to 11 May, and it is proposed to have on 9 or 10 May a dinner at which the Fellows of the Academy will dine with the foreign delegates, and with some distinguished guests from our own country. I hope that many of you may keep those dates free, so as to be able to join in entertaining our visitors. We are all modest people, and perhaps our modesty has prevented the Academy from being as well known as it should be; it may be hoped that a public dinner may do something to attract attention, and even some of the benefactions of which we could make such good use for the furtherance of knowledge. The success of the dinner naturally depends on there being a large attendance of our own membership.

We have, I am glad to say, lost fewer Fellows by death in the last year than in most recent years. Only four Ordinary Fellows have passed away. Of them I should like to say a few words. Three of them died at a great



age. Charles Frederick D'Arcy was successively Bishop of four dioceses, and was for eighteen years Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, and in each of his successive charges showed himself a wise and able ruler; while in the leisure hours of a long life of action he made valuable contributions to theology, to ethics, and to metaphysics. Percy Gardner showed equal versatility. A profound student of Greek coinage and of Greek sculpture, he also made notable contributions to theology and to the study of the New Testament, and remained intellectually active almost to the end of his long life of ninety years. Edward James Rapson, who, like Gardner, served his apprenticeship in the Coins and Medals Department of the British Museum, rendered great services to the study of Indian numismatics, of the inscriptions of Chinese Turkestan, and of early Indian history. Bernard Hillman Streeter, alone among the four, died before his time; and he died in a manner which, while it was tragic, was not unfitting to his adventurous spirit. His work fell into two main parts. One was a restatement of Christian theology in the light of modern movements of thought; the other was a brilliant and in many respects original contribution to the solving of the Synoptic Problem. By his death, and the deaths of Archbishop D'Arcy and Percy Gardner, theological study in these islands is much the poorer.

On the other hand we have to welcome more new Fellows than has usually been the case in recent years. Having lost four Fellows by death and one (the veteran Rendel Harris) by resignation, and having to-day acquired nine by election, we now stand at the number 147, three short of our maximum. We have lost six Corresponding Fellows—of whom I would mention *honoris causa* Dr. Masaryk, the philosopher-statesman of Czechoslovakia, and Émile Legouis, eminent for his delicate and appreciative studies of English literature—and we have elected seven; and the number of our Corresponding Fellows now stands at forty-eight.

It may seem that we are getting dangerously near our maximum number of Ordinary Fellows, and that it may be necessary to move for an increase in the maximum. It must, however, be remembered that in a body whose average age is as high as ours is, a fair number of vacancies is likely to be created in each year by death; and also that, since we usually demand a considerable quantity as well as a high quality of published work of those who are to be elected, the number of those likely to qualify in one year is not very great. It is therefore possible that the present maximum may for some time yet be found sufficient.

The claims of age against youth, and those of youth against age, not infrequently come up for discussion in our choice of Fellows, and there is something to be said for each point of view, according as we regard election to the Fellowship as a recognition of services to learning already rendered or as an encouragement to further work. I cannot help thinking, however, that it is best to make election depend simply on a certain standard of achievement, irrespective of whether it has taken few or many years to bring it to pass.

It may not be out of place if I offer a few reflections on the progress of the undertakings in which we co-operate with other countries. In one of the chief of these, the Medieval Latin Dictionary, much work in the preparation of slips has been done in the past year, the most extraordinary feature being that war-ravaged Spain, with 36,000 slips, almost tops the list. But what is more important is that a definite step towards co-ordination has at last been taken, by the setting up of a Central Co-ordinating Office in Paris, under the able direction of M. Ferdinand Lot. To this office any national committee may send sets of slips with which it has finished, or duplicates of slips which it retains; and there a *Copia Verborum*, or general word-list of Latin, down to A.D. 1000 will be drawn up, and a beginning made with lexicographical articles, and with lists of technical terms. Progress in

co-ordination will certainly be slow. Varying national ideas of how things should be done will have to be reconciled, and, since international committees cannot meet at very short intervals, decisions may often have to be postponed for a year or half a year; but once the general principles have been settled, work should go forward more rapidly. Meantime, in Great Britain the material up to 1066 is complete, the preparation of articles on particular words is being begun, and work is proceeding on the later period, on which each country will work independently.

In another department good work has been done by the completion of the new edition of the pamphlet of recommendations for the editing of classical texts. Copies of these will be sent to the principal publishers of such texts, in the hope that they will bring them to the notice of editors and thus ensure greater accuracy and some approach to uniformity of method in presenting the results of editorial work.

The *Corpus Aristotelicum* is not proceeding as fast as might be desired. There have been delays, long and somewhat difficult to understand, in the publication of the catalogue of manuscripts by the Libreria dello Stato, and the labours of editors are naturally delayed by lack of knowledge of the complete results of Monsignor Lacombe's work on the manuscripts they have to study. The text of the *De Mundo*, edited by a British scholar, Mr. W. L. Lorimer, will probably be the first to appear. I think we may hope that the *Corpus Platonicum*, which is our own undertaking, will make more rapid progress; and, in fact, much progress has already been made. All the more will be made if we confine ourselves to a limited objective and resist seductive but dangerous invitations to include, at this early stage, Neoplatonic in addition to Platonic literature.

The British Academy has resolved to take part financially in one new undertaking—a Dictionary of the Terminology of Public International Law. This promises to have great practical as well as scientific importance, since it will

do something to avoid misunderstandings, due to ambiguity, in the drawing up and interpretation of treaties and other international documents. Non-technical terms (like the famous 'alsbald') will no doubt escape its attentions, but what can be done to state clearly the equivalences of technical terms in the principal European languages, such a Dictionary will attempt to do. This country is ably represented on the Committee by Sir Cecil Hurst.

In general, the temper with which the meetings of the Union Académique Internationale are conducted is excellent. With few exceptions, national *amour propre* plays a very small part; and the meetings are as a rule highly amicable. At a time at which in many regions excessive nationalism is so rife as it is at present, it is well that something should be done to give practical expression to the belief that the things of the spirit over-ride national frontiers and are a matter of common interest to all educated people. This the Union Académique does with considerable success.