

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

BY SIR DAVID ROSS

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I MUST begin by thanking the Fellows of the Academy for the signal honour they have done me by electing me, for a fourth and final year, as President. I shall never cease to regard the Presidency as the greatest honour that has ever fallen to my lot.

The Academy has to lament the loss, since its last annual meeting, of eight of its Fellows; and it is only fitting that at the beginning of my address I should say a few words of valediction to their memory. Lascelles Abercrombie had made his name as a poet before he made a second reputation as a professor of English Literature. It may be the case that, as has often been said, a good critic never makes a good poet; but there is no reason why a good poet should not make a good critic; and there can be no doubt that Abercrombie's appreciation of the subtler shades of the poetry of others was enriched by the fact that he was a fine and accomplished poet himself. We lament his death before his time; for he was only fifty-seven when he died. Of the others who have died, almost all had exceeded the span of seventy years, and some had far exceeded it.—Samuel Alexander was almost the senior among British philosophers, and I suppose that he would have been generally chosen as their most distinguished representative. His noble head was the clear outward sign of a noble character, which to know was to love; and his philosophical system, though perhaps it won few unqualified supporters, was certainly the boldest piece of constructive thinking that our generation in philosophy has produced, since that of Bradley. Among the most attractive features of his character was the freshness of the interest which he always maintained in the work of younger men; to them he was a very

father in Israel.—Robert Chalmers had won his highest distinction as the head of the Civil Service, in which alike his administrative ability and his pungent speech have become traditional; but he was one of that select band of civil servants who, like some who are still members of our number, have combined their official work with great devotion, and great contributions, to scholarship. Behind a rather formidable exterior he concealed a very warm heart, and a nature capable of acts of extraordinary generosity.—Of Harold Joachim I cannot speak without a keen sense of personal loss. He was our greatest Spinozistic scholar, and one of our greatest Aristotelian scholars; and in his book on the Nature of Truth and his unpublished lectures on logic he carried on and developed with distinction the idealistic philosophy which in Oxford had found earlier representatives in Green, Bradley, Bosanquet, Caird, and Wallace. He was one of the most faithful and delightful of friends, and the courage and cheerfulness with which he supported the growing affliction of blindness was an object of admiration and envy to all who knew him.—Of Dr. Oman and Professor Slater I cannot speak with much personal knowledge, but I knew enough of Dr. Oman to know that he was one of the most original and profound of our philosophical theologians, and of Professor Slater to know that he was among the most learned and scholarly of our Latinists.—Within the last fortnight we have lost in Henry Stuart Jones a marvel of wide-ranging scholarship, who would have adorned any one of four professorships at Oxford, and who at the time of his death had all but carried to completion the great task of preparing—with the help, no doubt, of many others, which he was always most generous in acknowledging—what is almost a new lexicon of Greek.—More recently still, we have suffered the loss of Harold Temperley, who combined so remarkably a life of learned and impartial research into the history of the early nineteenth century, and into the origins of the Great War, with active incursions into Balkan wars and

Balkan politics. Of these Fellows whom we have lost, Alexander, Chalmers, and Temperley had served for several years on the Council of the Academy.

We have also lost by death, at the age of eighty-seven, a retired Fellow who was one of our original Fellows, Sir W. M. Ramsay, whose researches had thrown a flood of light both on the New Testament and on the history of Asia Minor. Of our original Fellows, Sir Arthur Evans, Sir James Frazer, and Sir Henry Maxwell Lyte still remain among us.

To-day's elections bring the number of the Fellows up to 145, and that of Corresponding Fellows up to fifty. In connexion with the election of Fellows, I have been asked by Council to lay a new proposal before you. The human mind is not in fact so much sectionalized as is the constitution of the Academy. It not infrequently happens that a scholar's activities range over several of our sections, and that while his contribution to knowledge in any one section is not sufficiently great to induce that section to put him forward for election, his total contribution to knowledge is such as to make him eminently worthy to be a Fellow. Again, it may happen that there is a scholar pursuing a branch of learning not really covered by any of our sections and, owing to the scarcity of distinguished workers in it, not likely to be set up as a new section. A scholar belonging to either of these types has at present little chance of election to our body, though he may well deserve it. Council has under consideration a suggestion that in such cases it should hold itself free to propose to the Annual Meeting for election a person whose name has not been sent up by any section; the conditions for the nomination of such a person would probably be made more rigorous than those for nominees of the sections. The proposed change is strictly a matter for Council, not for the Annual Meeting, since it can be effected by the alteration of the by-laws, which it is the business of Council to make and alter. But Council is anxious to act in a democratic rather than in

a totalitarian manner; it wishes therefore to discover, before making the change, how it appeals to the Annual Meeting, and I hope any Fellow who has views on the subject will express them.

One of the main events in our year was the meeting of the Union Académique Internationale in London, in May. This was the first time the Union has met in London, and only the second time it has met elsewhere than in Brussels. There is ample evidence that the visitors enjoyed and appreciated their entertainment both in London and in Oxford; and the dinner given by the Government to the members of the Union and the Fellows of the Academy supplied the Academy with some of the publicity which many of the Fellows have for some time desired that it should have. Our sincere thanks are due to our secretary and to Miss Pearson for the admirable way in which all the arrangements were carried out. The meetings of the U.A.I. followed very much their usual course. Two of its major enterprises—the *Dictionary of Mediaeval Latin* and the *Corpus Aristotelicum*—progress with considerably less speed than might be hoped for. The establishment of a central office for the former in Paris has met with difficulties not unconnected with international jealousies. On the other hand, the British Committee for the Dictionary has taken a step in advance by coming to the conclusion that the time has arrived for starting editorial work on a Dictionary of British and Irish Latin of the pre-Conquest period. As regards the *Corpus Aristotelicum*, the greater part of the first of the two volumes of the catalogue of manuscripts is now ready for publication, and the whole volume should be published within twelve months. It is hoped that it will be followed by Mr. Lorimer's edition of the *De Mundo*, which has long been ready for publication. Our own undertaking, the *Corpus Platonicum*, has made excellent progress. The first Latin fascicle and the first Arabic fascicle are nearly complete in type and will be published shortly; and the researches of the contributors

have brought to light works hitherto unknown. The Warburg Institute has decided to establish a new periodical, *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies*, or in short *Mars*, for the publication of by-products of these researches; let us hope that its short name does not prove appropriate to the year of its establishment.

With regard to the other undertakings which we support, I may perhaps be allowed to direct your attention particularly to Sir Allen Mawer's very interesting report on the work of the English Place-Names Society. This Society has been remarkably successful in co-ordinating its work so as to give its subscribers a regular succession of new volumes full of learning and of general interest; and it may be hoped that it will acquire enough new subscribers to fill the gaps caused by death and enable it to carry on its excellent work.