

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

By SIR JOHN CLAPHAM

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TWELVE months ago, when the Academy extended my tenure of this Chair for a further year, I welcomed the chance of presiding once in a year of peace. We are now in what we might call a state of three-quarters peace; and as you have just honoured me with a second extension I may yet live to address you in a state of such total peace as six or more years of war may render possible. In any case, it is time to look forward, whereas until 1944 one's vision was limited to the circumstance of war; and even in 1944 any attempted distant vision seemed presumptuous.

But first some words on the events of the year. We have lost seven Ordinary Fellows and two retired Fellows; and, as the Report tells you, notices of the deaths of six Corresponding Fellows that have occurred since 1940 have been sent to us. Those whom we have lost from our inner circle, including the two retired Fellows, had an average life—I hope the Academy will still pardon my taste for simple arithmetic—of over 80 years. My old friend Professor Bastable, the Dublin economist, was 90. It is evident that scholarship is a healthy life and that we scholars are durable. The newly elected are not so young as they have recently been; here I omit the arithmetic. Yet I cannot help noting that, of the nine who have left us, I knew only two personally, besides Bastable that exact and eminent historian James Tait, of whose work you will find a preliminary account in the contribution of the Place-Name Society to the Annual Report. These two were workers in my own fields, whom of course I knew. My ignorance of the other seven shows that, owing to election late in life, our widely scattered homes, the scholar's love of his study, and latterly the difficulties of travel, we are not quite so much of a *societas*, not so much of a fraternity, as I could wish. It will be for future Councils and Presidents to revive our modest social gatherings and do whatever else they may think proper to bind us together, not forgetting that the third of one of the oldest surviving sets of rules for a fraternity or guild—it is from St. Omer—begins with the words *adveniente tempore potacionis*.

On one event of the year I ought to make a formal independent report. At the end of April, with the organizing and financial support of the British Council, three of us—the Warden of Wadham, Professor Galbraith, and I—spent a week in Paris renewing, or establishing, contact with men at the Sorbonne, the Archives, the *École des Chartes*, and the *Collège de France*. We learnt who had gone and how learning had been kept alive—surprisingly well I may note—and how nobly the student body had stood by the country. We heard a very little about collaboration, about those of whom one does not speak. While we were in Paris the Director of the *Bibliothèque Nationale* returned, not well but happily convalescent, from a concentration camp. But my greatest friend among the professors at the Sorbonne, Marc Bloch, could not return. He had been foully murdered—the old term is in his case strictly correct—by Germans; for he had gone underground at 57, had worked under a series of assumed names, and was caught.

One French scholar whom I asked for back news from the newspapers said he could not give it—he had not read a paper since June 1940: he did not mind reading a German paper, but he would not read a German paper written in French. ‘I have lived on that’, he said, jerking his hand over his shoulder towards a big radio set. Our much-criticized British Broadcasting Corporation has to meet only a single criticism in France—it began to talk of invasion a little too soon, and raised hopes that had to be deferred.

May I quote, at the risk of appearing unscholarly sentimental, an inscription in a book which came to me the day after its author, an old friend, had learnt that I was in Paris: ‘Ce livre vous attend depuis avril, 1941, dans la confiance jamais ébranlée depuis juin, 1940, d’une famille qui a prié chaque jour pour l’Angleterre.’

As a result of our visit, counter-visits are now being organized. French scholars are due at Classical gatherings in August: and in September the British Committee of the International Historical Congress, which the Academy supports, hopes to welcome in London twelve French historians headed by our Corresponding Fellow, the veteran Charles Petit-Dutaillis, whose name carries the minds even of undergraduates back to that of Stubbs. There are also plans for bringing over Dutch, Belgian, and perhaps Scandinavian scholars, for which we can draw upon the generous gift from the Halley Stewart Trust mentioned in the Annual Report.

Looking forward, I am disposed to touch on what is no doubt a controversial matter—the size of the Academy. As a general proposition I find it hard to believe that there are from three to four times as many persons distinguished in the natural and mathematical sciences as in all other branches of learning from Archaeology to Economics. Yet that is about the ratio between the Academy and the Royal Society. An increase of numbers would mean a change in our Bye-laws, but that could be arranged if we wished it. At present I incline to think that we do not. Certainly a few colleagues whom I have consulted do not. Some argue that increase would lower the standard of entry. It might; but I do not myself think that an increase from 150 to say 200 need do this. We all know scholars fit for admission who are kept out by the reluctance of Sections to press claims on a limited list of vacancies. I have a friend—one of ourselves—who argues that the satisfaction of those elected to the Academy is outweighed by the disappointment of those who might be, but are not. I have not heard this said of the Royal Society, and am inclined to think that both creative genius and solid achievement normally gain admission there. If an increase in our numbers did lead to some slight lowering of standards, it might also lead to greater activity in a society of lower average age, if with a faintly lower average of distinction.

Another point: more than once recently it has been suggested to me that the Academy might initiate, or participate in, such and such an activity, national or international. I have felt bound to say that our Secretary-Treasurer and his single Assistant are incomparable, but that I cannot ask them to undertake tasks involving heavy additional administrative work. A larger society, with a larger income, might carry a larger staff. The difficulty could of course be met by an increased government grant, for which a strong case can, I think, be made out; but with a larger society that might not be needed.

Some Fellows with whom I have discussed this question of numbers have argued warmly that the present is not the moment for action; and perhaps they are right. Sharing my interest in the election of relatively young Fellows, they point out that in general it is the younger men who have sacrificed most completely long years, in which they might have been establishing their claims on us, to the service of the State. And, they add, we must never elect without achievement. An admirable maxim; but there are degrees of achievement, and I am not yet convinced that the argument is decisive. I *am* convinced that if younger

men who have sacrificed six years to the State have then to reach the full standard of achievement to which we have been accustomed the average age of election will certainly not fall. Sometimes, in reckless and indiscreet imagination, I tell myself that groups might be found within the Royal Society not superior in intellectual quality or in achievement to groups outside the Academy. That imagining sounds impertinent. Yet it only suggests what I have already suggested once, that there may not be in the country from three to four times so many distinguished Naturalists as distinguished Humanists.

Were we a large society, and most certainly if we carried a larger staff, the question of accommodation would arise. But, with all our gratitude to those who originally made these quarters habitable for us, I think that this ought to arise in any event before many years are over. I should suspect that the Academy of Peru—if Peru has an Academy—is more sumptuously housed; and I sometimes wonder whether a health inspector might not condemn the working conditions of our Assistant Secretary. But if this, as those friends of mine who may be right have maintained, is not the moment for an increase of numbers, it is hardly the moment to clamour for housing space. I leave these disputable matters for your consideration; and I sit down with a thanksgiving for having been honoured and spared to preside over the Academy at a time of three-quarters peace.