

## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

By SIR H. I. BELL

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THE year which concludes with this meeting has been an eventful one in our history. In my last Presidential Address I referred to various schemes which were under consideration for extending the activities of the Academy and increasing its efficiency as the central representative of humanistic studies in Great Britain. Among others I mentioned the formation of an Advisory Committee to assist the Council by preparing for its consideration such business as requires freer and more detailed discussion than is possible in the larger body, with its often very full Agenda. This Committee, which has met several times, has already proved its usefulness. Its first task was to prepare a memorial to the Treasury, setting forth our difficulties and making various proposals for the future. The memorial was submitted last autumn, and following on it a small delegation was received by officials of the Treasury. Our representations were accorded a very sympathetic hearing, and the discussion which followed was certainly fruitful. One of our suggestions concerned the subventions made annually by the Treasury to various archaeological schools and societies. Hitherto, though the applications of these had for the most part been sent through the Academy, the payments had been made direct to the bodies concerned. Moreover, by an anomaly which seems to have been accidental in origin, one or two had been throughout in immediate contact with the Treasury, and had never submitted their applications to us. Our suggestion that this was not a satisfactory arrangement, and that it would be better for the Academy to act in the fullest measure as a clearing house for all such business, examining the applications, submitting them to the Treasury, and receiving for distribution the sums voted, was approved and indeed welcomed, subject only to the proviso that the bodies concerned should agree to the suggested change. All of them, on being approached, gave their consent; and the position will henceforth be that the Academy bears the responsibility for considering and, if approved, commending to the Treasury all requests for subventions of this kind, and of receiving the grants in a lump sum, for distribution in accordance with the requirements of the applicants. In fact, the British

Academy will now occupy with regard to the societies for humanistic research the position already accorded to the Royal Society in science.

It is understandable that one or two of the bodies concerned should have expressed misgivings about the new arrangement, but I do not think I am being rashly optimistic when I say that there is really no need whatsoever to fear that their needs will receive less sympathetic treatment from the Academy than when they dealt with the Treasury directly. The requests presented last winter, several of them for larger grants necessitated by increased expenses and the reduced value of sterling, were granted in every case except one, where an additional sum asked for was somewhat scaled down for special and understandable reasons. Our own application for an increase in our inadequate grant was favourably received, and though, owing to the circumstances of the time, we did not obtain quite all that we asked for, our grant has been raised to £5,000, double the previous amount. Moreover, it has been agreed that a portion of this sum may be used for the expenses of administration, a very welcome concession in view of the general rise in costs. It has thus become possible to arrange a long-due increase in the salary of our Assistant Secretary; and I should like to take this opportunity of expressing the gratitude we feel to Miss Pearson for many years of able and devoted service. We are further enabled to make the engagement of Miss Myers as her assistant a permanent one. With a clerical staff of this calibre we can face without misgiving the increased work which the recent developments will involve.

Even with the new grant the need is still felt to conserve our resources, and the Council has been considering possible economies. To this end it has been decided that the volumes of *Proceedings* issued to Fellows shall in future be bound in cloth, not in half morocco, a change which will mean a substantial reduction in cost. Furthermore, obituaries, which have hitherto been issued separately from time to time, will not henceforward be issued in anticipation of the appropriate volume of the *Proceedings*; but to meet the demand for separate copies an adequate supply of off-prints will in each case be printed, twenty-five of which will go to the author and twenty-five to relatives. Some additional saving will be effected by abandoning the practice of re-paginating papers reprinted from the *Proceedings*; and since it is anticipated that the arrears in the issue of these volumes will soon be overtaken, the constituent papers will not in future be issued separately, in advance of the volume to

which they belong, though provision will be made for author's off-prints and for separate sales.

The new arrangement with the Treasury means that the Academy will now be handling considerably larger sums than in the past and will be confronted with tasks which call for expert knowledge, particularly in the field of archaeology and, in view of the important functions performed in this respect by the British School at Rome in particular, in art also. Plans are being made to secure that this knowledge is fully available. Our responsibilities in the sphere of archaeology have recently been increased in two other directions. The first instalment of the Stein-Arnold bequest was received in the year 1948-9, and a committee was then set up to administer this fund, which will be used for purposes of archaeological exploration in Asia. To this Foundation has been added the Reckitt Archaeological Trust, which is being transferred to the Academy's administration, and another committee has been appointed to deal with it. The annual income from this source is substantial, and there is also an accumulated capital sum. The wide terms of the trust leave us considerable discretion in the disposal of the funds available.

These two benefactions, combined with the new arrangement for the schools and societies assisted by the Treasury, greatly increase the Academy's responsibilities and add to its standing in the field of British archaeology. Experience will show whether our existing machinery is adequate or whether new arrangements ought to be made if we are satisfactorily to perform our functions in this sphere.

I referred last year to the fact that we shall soon be celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Academy's foundation. This will occur next year, thus synchronizing with the Festival of Britain. The best method of marking so important an occasion will have to be considered by the Council. Meanwhile I am happy to announce that an invitation sent to the Union Académique Internationale to hold its annual meeting next year in London has been accepted; and the opportunities offered by this event for celebrating our Jubilee are already occupying the attention of the Advisory Committee.

The schemes for enlarging our publishing activities by including in our *Proceedings* or issuing as separate volumes a larger number of articles and treatises other than lectures, and not necessarily by our own Fellows, have borne fruit, and I venture to think that the reproaches levelled by some critics at the Academy on this score will soon lose what relevance they had. I



may refer in particular to Mr. Edgar Lobel's recent edition of a papyrus from Oxyrhynchus containing a fragment of a Greek historical drama, an event of outstanding importance for classical studies, and to a valuable article on Magna Carta by Mr. A. J. Collins which the Academy is proposing to publish. Other notable publications are also in preparation.

I began my Address last year by referring to the retirement from the Secretaryship of Sir Frederic Kenyon and to the hope that we should soon have an opportunity to express in some concrete way our gratitude for his services. It was decided that our tribute should take the form of a portrait. The commission for this was entrusted to Mr. Augustus John, to whom we are much indebted for accepting it and for the pains taken by him to attain a satisfactory result. The admirable pencil portrait which he has produced was presented to Sir Frederic at a luncheon held on the occasion of the Sections Meeting, which was attended by some sixty Fellows. It has been decided to hang it in the principal Lecture Room, on the walls of which it can now be seen. As a further mark of the esteem which we all feel for our late Secretary, and in recognition of the many years of ungrudging and able service devoted by him to the Academy as Fellow, President, Treasurer, and Secretary, the Council proposed, and you have just voted, his election as an Honorary Fellow. I cannot let this occasion pass without a reference to his recent serious illness. I am glad to say that he seems to be making a satisfactory recovery, and I wish him a complete return to normal health and strength. He has found it necessary to resign the Hon. Treasurership and his share in the Secretaryship, but it is typical of his devotion to our interests that he at once agreed when asked to undertake the task of writing the history of the Academy; and it is satisfactory to know that he has made good progress with this.

Dr. Wheeler has thrown himself into the duties of the Secretaryship with the energy and capacity which all who knew him had expected. In pursuance of a previous undertaking to the Government of Pakistan he found it necessary to go out to that country for three and a half months at the beginning of the present year, and Sir Alfred Clapham put us greatly in his debt by undertaking the Secretaryship during his absence.

During the past year five Fellows have died. To Professor S. A. Cook we owe a bequest of £500, the income from which will be available for general purposes. A Fellow of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, he was a learned Semitic scholar, who

had done both editorial and original work of high quality. He was a joint editor of the *Cambridge Ancient History* and had been on the editorial staff of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, besides editing for thirty years the Palestine Exploration Fund's journal. This activity did not prevent a prolific output of original and constructive work. At once daring and judicious, open to new ideas but never losing his basic convictions, he combined a personal religious faith with the critical judgement of the true scholar.

The same may be said of Canon Knox, whose acquaintance, like that of Professor Cook, I made during the First World War, when we were all three serving in that outgrowth of the War Office known indifferently as Watergate House or M.I. 7 D. A member of a brilliant and distinguished family, he shared the lively wit and the alert intelligence shown in various spheres by his brothers. His volume of Schweich Lectures, *Some Hellenistic Elements in Primitive Christianity*, will be in the possession of many of you.

The death of Professor Battiscombe Gunn is a severe blow to Egyptological studies in this country. Egyptologists are never at any time more than a small group, and Gunn belonged to the yet smaller group of Egyptologists who have a marked capacity for minute philological study. It is indeed in the linguistic rather than the archaeological sphere—though in the latter also he was fully qualified—that he will be specially missed. His published output was comparatively small, for he belonged to that class of meticulously accurate scholars, jealously alive to even the smallest minutiae of scholarship, who find it hard to bring any task to a conclusion. But the work he did publish was in consequence of the highest quality; and he rendered great service to the Egypt Exploration Society by acting for several years as editor of the *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, a task to which he devoted the same conscientious and self-sacrificing labour as to his own undertakings.

Mr. T. W. Allen was a Greek scholar whose name will always be associated with Homeric studies, both as an editor of the text and for his contributions to the elucidation of Homeric problems, as in his work, *The Homeric Catalogue of Ships*. He was honourably distinguished among classical scholars by the attention he paid to Greek palaeography, a subject vital as the necessary foundation of any fruitful textual criticism, but far too little studied in Great Britain.

With Professor Basil Williams, unlike the others I have

mentioned, I had no personal acquaintance, and his work lay outside the spheres which have chiefly occupied my attention. He was an outstanding historian, who made important contributions to historical biography, but his life had by no means been spent in the seclusion of the study. He served in the South African War, twice stood (unsuccessfully) as a Liberal candidate for Parliament, and taught in various universities. His most generally acclaimed work was, I believe, his life of Chatham.

I have now to give a hearty welcome to the newly elected Fellows, eight in number, of whom two are assigned to Section II, one to Section IV, one to Section VI, one to Section VII, one to Section IX, and two to Section X.

With this meeting ends my term of office as President, and I should like in conclusion to thank you for the honour done me in my election and successive re-elections, and to wish my successor a happy and prosperous tenure of the office. Sir David Ross, in one of his Presidential Addresses, referred to the Presidency as 'an honour which I esteem the greatest that has ever been bestowed on me or is ever likely to be bestowed'. With how much more justice might I say the same! Indeed, I must confess that my first reaction to the news that I had been nominated was a mixture of incredulity and dismay; and I can only hope that I have not too conspicuously failed to justify the confidence reposed in me. It is true that, as Sir David Ross remarked in the Address from which I have quoted, the duties of the President are not onerous; but the position is certainly a responsible one, and never more so than at the present time. The British Academy is, and the recent enlargement of its functions makes it still more, the central representative and defender of humanistic studies in this country. The things for which it stands, disinterested scholarship, intellectual integrity, and the maintenance of the whole tradition of humane learning built up through centuries of Western civilization, are today in greater peril than they have been for a long time. This is not just the old family quarrel between scientific studies and the 'humanities'. Both alike are threatened by movements which seek to subject science and scholarship, literature and art and music, yes, truth itself and the free activities of the human mind, to the exigencies of some political ideology. Nor is the peril confined to political parties or to Eastern Europe; it is inherent in the whole mental atmosphere of an age which demands quick results and tends to rate utility and practical efficiency above the unfettered exercise of the intellectual and aesthetic faculties; which indeed regards



that as at best a harmless adornment of life, at worst a culpable escapism. Moreover, a perverted interpretation of the democratic ideal too often attempts to measure intellectual and aesthetic values by the standards of the average man. I am not ashamed to avow myself a convinced believer in democracy; but democracy, rightly understood, does not exclude excellence, and to attain excellence in any branch of human activity is given to no more than a minority of men. At such a time it is the duty and the privilege of a body like the Academy to defend and proclaim, undeterred by popular pressure, the integrity of scholarship, the independence of the human spirit, and the maintenance of the highest attainable standards. That is the ideal I have tried to keep before me during my term of office, and I do not doubt that my successor, whose reputation stands too high to need any words of commendation from me, will be no less jealous to maintain it.