

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

BY SIR H. I. BELL

13 *July* 1949

THE session of which this is the final meeting has witnessed a change to which I must refer at the beginning of my Address. Sir Frederic Kenyon, who since 1930 has served the Academy with such whole-hearted devotion as Secretary, has asked to be relieved of his duties and has resigned his post. His official connexion with the Academy will not, indeed, cease altogether, since he is, for the present at least, to make his long experience available to his successor by assisting him in the routine duties of the Secretaryship, and he will continue to be Honorary Treasurer; but this seems to be the occasion for expressing our sense of the services he has rendered. To commend him would, I feel, be an impertinence in me, who owe so much to him, both here and in what I may, in parliamentary phrase, refer to as 'another place'; but this at least I must say, that he brought to the post he is now vacating those qualities of ripe scholarship, balanced judgement, administrative capacity, and wide acquaintance with men and affairs which made his Directorship so memorable in the annals of the British Museum. We shall before long, I hope, have the opportunity for a more public and more adequate manifestation of our gratitude; for the present these few words must suffice. We wish him all happiness in his retirement, and rejoice that we shall still have the benefit of his wise counsel. I am glad to announce that he has consented to write a short history of the British Academy, a task for which his long experience, as Fellow, President, Secretary, and Treasurer, gives him unique qualifications.

The new Secretary, Dr. Mortimer Wheeler, comes to us with a high reputation alike as scholar and as administrator. His past experience is precisely of the kind likely to fit him in peculiar measure for his functions, and we can expect much from his energy and initiative. I should like, in my own name and in that of the Academy as a whole, to give him a hearty welcome to his new post, and to wish him an agreeable and successful tenure of it.

An administrative change usually suggests and gives opportunity for a general stocktaking, and your Council and Officers have been considering whether any improvements in our

organization are needful and possible. I have previously referred to unfavourable criticisms passed upon the Academy, both within and without our Fellowship, and have suggested that some of them were, if not misplaced, at least exaggerated, and that, so far as they have substance, the faults complained of are in large part due to the inadequacy of our financial resources; but when all reserves have been made it must be conceded that the complaints have not been uttered without reason. The Academy is not fulfilling as fully as it should the functions which it exists to perform, and it does not enjoy that reputation or that place in the national life which such a body might rightly claim. That this state of things should, if possible, be remedied is particularly desirable at the present time, when science and economics are claiming, as against the humanities, an ever larger place in education and public esteem. Far be it from me to say a word against the natural sciences, to which we owe so much, and without which the complicated structure of modern civilization would have little chance of survival; but I may surely say without impropriety that science and economics are not in themselves an adequate foundation for a rich and vital civilization. Science deals with the phenomenal world, economics with the material bases and structure of society; but the human spirit cannot be fed merely on a knowledge of phenomena and of economic factors. It is from the things of the spirit that the spirit draws its true sustenance; and it is with them that humanistic studies are concerned, it is primarily these studies which the Academy exists to represent. The speculations of the philosopher and the theologian, the record of human achievement and human failure and the efforts of mankind to construct a satisfactory frame-work for society which are the concern of the historian and the social scientist, the revelation of a loftier beauty and a deeper meaning in the universe and human life which we owe to great literature, to music, and the visual arts—it is these things alone which can give to even the most materially splendid civilization an abiding value and significance. The Academy is a body of scholars, not of writers or creative artists as such; but it is, or ought to be, the national centre and focus for humanistic studies. Its function is to vindicate their importance in the eyes of the nation, to defend and preserve the humanist tradition, and to uphold the highest attainable standard of disinterested scholarship. It is a lofty aim, but no lower one will justify our existence, and if we fail in our duty humanistic studies are likely to suffer proportionately.

It must in fairness be said that neither the Academy as a body nor its individual members and officers have been forgetful of their responsibilities. Our connexions with similar bodies in other countries and with international organizations, like the Union Académique Internationale and the new International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies, of which your President is a Vice-President, are close and increasing.

I have said that our shortcomings may be attributed in large measure to financial reasons. The effects of these are various. Our premises are inconvenient and quite unworthy of such an institution. We need a larger clerical staff. The sum available for publications is inadequate, especially now that printing costs have increased so greatly. We have no library, nor even accommodation for such books as are from time to time presented to us. We have no room in which Fellows can conveniently meet for social intercourse, though the promotion of mutual acquaintance among scholars and of discussions on matters of common interest is surely among the functions of an Academy. We have no facilities for entertaining foreign visitors. Even our lecture room is very far from ideal, as all will agree who have ever lectured there or tried to keep awake during somebody else's lecture. With a necessarily part-time Secretary and one Assistant Secretary we lack the staff required if we are to make the contribution which might be expected of us to certain big undertakings of national or international scholarship. There are several such to which the Academy, if it had the necessary staff, might appropriately render valuable service by acting as the centre for the British share in the work. Lastly, an enlargement of our *Proceedings* by the inclusion of more articles other than annual lectures is both desirable and possible, and we are actually undertaking the publication of an extra volume, the edition of Cotton MS. Julius E. i; but alike for the *Proceedings* and for special publications financial considerations impose a strict limit. It is this necessity to curtail our activities which gives force to the objections brought by some Fellows against obituary memoirs. For my own part, I should be very sorry indeed to see these abandoned. Quite apart from the fact that they are a laudable act of piety towards the memory of deceased Fellows, they have a real value. No doubt they vary greatly in merit, but the best of them are valuable contributions to biography, or important assessments of a scholar's achievement in speculation or scholarship. The argument that they are unnecessary because the subjects will find a place in the *Dictionary of National Biography*

has little weight, since considerations of space make it quite impossible in that series to treat a man's life and work with the intimacy and fullness of detail seen in many of our memoirs. Nevertheless, it is true that obituary notices should be only a minor feature of an Academy's publications, and if our *Proceedings* have to be limited to their present size it can reasonably be argued that the memoirs occupy a disproportionate amount of space. And if our publishing activity be compared with that of many foreign Academies it must be conceded that we make but a poor showing.

It is, then, urgently necessary to augment our resources. How is this to be done? To increase the subscription, or the entrance fee, or both, would bar our doors to some scholars who ought certainly to be admitted. We cannot, without lowering our standards, have recourse to the expedient, open to most learned societies, of enlarging our membership. An endowment fund, founded and maintained by gifts or bequests from private benefactors, would be most desirable, but it is not to be had for the wishing. It is to an increase in the Government grant that we must look. We shall soon be celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of our foundation. Premises and financial and secretarial resources which sufficed in the earlier years of the Academy's existence are surely not adequate to the larger responsibilities and the changed economic conditions of to-day. There is every justification for submitting to the Treasury a case for a more liberal grant. But it must be a reasoned case, avoiding alike vagueness and exaggeration, and if we are to ask for more money we must be able to point to definite projects and a programme of future activity which justify the request.

It is with these and similar considerations in mind that the Council has appointed a small Advisory Committee to review our position, and has charged it with the duty of examining the state of our finances, the funds of the endowed lectures, the grants to other learned societies, and our whole future policy, and, if this appear to be justified, of preparing a memorial for submission to the Treasury. Meantime, even without augmentation of our revenue, we have taken the bold—I hope it will not appear the rash—step of engaging a part-time assistant to Miss Pearson. To Miss Pearson's energy and capacity, which have been placed with unfailing loyalty at our service, our debt is already heavy; and if the secretarial work is to be increased, which will be necessary if we are adequately to discharge our functions, we must provide her with some assistance.

It is necessary to add that insufficiency of funds is not the sole cause of the shortcomings alleged against the Academy, and that a mere change of machinery will not be an adequate remedy. The reputation and the efficiency of this or any other Academy depend ultimately on its members, on the spirit in which they regard their obligations towards it and their readiness to serve its interests. Election to the Academy is, I venture to think, a privilege which even the most distinguished scholar can justifiably regard as such; but a privilege implies responsibilities, and though not a few of our Fellows have shown themselves fully aware of that fact, have been jealous for the honour of the Academy, and ready at all times to exert themselves on its behalf, there are others who appear to regard election as no more than a recognition of past achievement, carrying with it no duties for the future. It has been pointed out more than once that it is desirable to enlarge the scope of the *Proceedings*, and Fellows have been invited, nay, urged, to offer contributions, but very few have responded. I feel some awkwardness in speaking of this, knowing that I am myself among the offenders. I can recall but one article, apart from obituary memoirs, from my own pen, and of that I was only part author. But a consciousness of his own failures has never been held to preclude a man from perceiving the faults of others. No doubt there are extenuating circumstances. For reasons already explained articles for the *Proceedings* must be limited in both number and extent. Many Fellows are engaged in what the French happily call *œuvres de longue haleine* and have little time for other commitments, and for anything of less extent that they may write there is much demand elsewhere. Editors of learned periodicals pester them for contributions; appeals are received to support some *Festschrift* or other, an institution laudable enough in itself but to-day rather overdone. Yet it is useless to complain that the *Proceedings* lack variety and substantial importance if even the critics themselves ignore them.

There are other negligences which call for comment. The attendances at the Sections Meeting in April and at the Annual General Meeting in July, though both occur during university vacations, are often very poor. It is quite common for a fairly large Section to be represented by only two or three members, not unknown for the Chairman to be the sole member present. Here again excuses may be made. Many Fellows live at a distance from London, some have reached an age when they find it advisable to avoid much travelling, and a busy university

teacher may feel that he has earned a holiday when term is over. But too many Fellows do not even record a postal vote or respond to appeals for the suggestion of possible candidates. A praiseworthy reluctance to express an opinion on some scholar whose work is quite unknown to them may be a sufficient explanation in many cases; but when all allowances have been made I venture to think that there is a degree of indifference to responsibilities which gives cause for regret, and I would appeal to all Fellows for a more lively interest in our work. The Advisory Committee has already recommended that papers by Fellows or non-Fellows should from time to time be read to the Academy, apart from the endowed lectures. I hope that this suggestion will be acted upon. The Academy will be what we choose to make it, and an individual responsibility lies upon each one of us.

I come now to the themes which have most often formed the starting-point of a Presidential Address. First, I must welcome the ten newly elected Fellows, who are distributed over eight of our Sections.

During the past year six Fellows have died, and Professor de Zulueta has resigned. There have been several such resignations of Fellows who, having reached a certain age, have felt it proper to make room for younger men. It is a laudable impulse, but I hope the precedent will not become a settled practice. We do not readily say farewell to a colleague who has deservedly won his place among us, and there seems to me no reason, despite what I have said, why a man should feel bound to retire because he can no longer take an active part in our proceedings.

Two days ago I received from Paris news of the death of Pierre Jouguet, one of our Corresponding Fellows, whose friendship I had enjoyed for forty years. A native of southern France, he was a true *méridional* in the geniality, kindness, and sunny warmth of his temperament. To these qualities he added the modesty, the critical caution, and the humanism of the true scholar, and the courtesy and fine feeling of a gentleman. Since the early years of the century he had been the leader of papyrological studies in France, as a Professor first at Lille and later at the Sorbonne. At the former university he organized a group of enthusiastic young papyrologists, among them the much-loved Jean Lesquier, whose early death was so heavy a loss to scholarship, and he was largely instrumental in producing the edition of the Lille papyri. In 1911 he published his *Papyrus de Théadelphie*; and his *Vie municipale dans l'Égypte romaine*, which

appeared the same year, has ever since been an indispensable book of reference to every papyrologist. It was followed later by his *L'Impérialisme macédonien et l'hellénisation de l'Orient*, contributed to the series 'L'évolution de l'humanité'. After becoming Director of the Institut français at Cairo he had little leisure for anything but administrative work, but he continued to take a directing part in various scholarly and archaeological undertakings, and to contribute to periodicals articles and reviews of invariable distinction. A man of international sympathies, he was also a patriotic Frenchman. On the fall of France in 1940 he at once rallied to the side of General de Gaulle, and was the Chairman of the Free French Committee at Cairo. He will be mourned by all who had the privilege of his acquaintance, and the sixth International Congress of Papyrologists, which is to meet at Paris in August, and over which he was to have presided, will be a sadly truncated festival without him.

Sir George Hill, whose friendship, first as a colleague and later as Director of the British Museum, I was proud to enjoy, died last October. He had a range of knowledge and a variety of interests which recall the more spacious days of a vanished generation. Classic and medievalist, historian, numismatist, and a discriminating connoisseur of music and the visual arts, he had enriched with his learning, taste, and critical judgement many different fields of scholarship, and tasted life in many aspects. He was a man of great kindness, though he could be sharp in his judgements, and his friends will cherish his memory with affection.

Two months before him had died another Fellow of high distinction, A. F. Pollard, whose work, alike as an historian whose researches have left a permanent mark on historical scholarship and as an inspirer of others, will not soon be forgotten. It is gratifying to know that his creation, the Institute of Historical Research, has won an assured place in the world of international scholarship, and has become a centre and a meeting point for historians not only from the British Isles but from many foreign countries.

Three days before the last Annual General Meeting died Campbell Dodgson, an unsurpassed authority on wood-cuttings and engravings, particularly those of the German school, a discriminating collector, and for twenty years Keeper of the Department of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum. He was, both during his life-time and by his will, a generous benefactor of the great institution which he had served so loyally.

Professor Souter, for twenty-six years Regius Professor of Humanity at Aberdeen, who died last January, was a learned Latinist, doing specially valuable work in the sphere of Latin lexicography; but he devoted himself with particular enthusiasm to the textual study of the New Testament, and he had, indeed, been Professor of New Testament Greek and Exegesis at Mansfield College from 1903 to 1911. His critical edition of the Greek New Testament has won an assured place in the libraries of scholars and students. He was a man of a genial and kindly personality, for whom pupils and friends alike felt a warm and affectionate regard.

In J. L. Hammond we have lost a distinguished historian, whose studies of social and economic conditions may without exaggeration be said to mark an epoch in our understanding of the Industrial Revolution and its consequences. In most of these studies he had his wife as collaborator, and it was a striking, perhaps a unique, recognition of their partnership when the University of Oxford in 1933 conferred upon them simultaneously the honorary degree of D.Litt. Hammond's activities had by no means been confined to industrial history or even to historical studies in general. His work on *Gladstone and the Irish Nation* enjoys a high reputation, and he had long experience alike of journalism (he was for some years editor of *The Speaker*) and of administration in the Civil Service.

The death of J. D. Denniston is a serious loss to the Academy and the learned world, for he was a scholar of a type becoming rarer in a society increasingly given to activities and methods which yield quick results. Though he was, I believe (I had not the privilege of a personal acquaintance), a man of wide culture, passionately fond of music, and endowed with imagination and taste, he devoted himself for years to the task of studying the often baffling behaviour of the Greek particles. His bulky work on this somewhat intimidating theme has been generally acclaimed as a monument of erudition and critical scholarship. Let no one suppose that it was an undertaking unworthy of his attainments. Scholarship, however attractively its results may be presented, must rest ultimately on a basis of laborious research into often small minutiae. Without that basis the whole fabric will be shaky. Unless we satisfactorily 'settle *Hoti's* business' our apprehension of the texts we read will be proportionately the more precarious and our scholarship will tend to be bogus. There is an old feud, by no means confined to classical studies, between the 'pure' scholar, absorbed in the meticulous

investigation of small details and resolute not to overlook any piece of relevant evidence, and the scholar who, with a broader view and a more agile pen, but making use, if he is wise, of the other's researches, can attractively present the results of scholarship to a wider public than the small circle of experts. The first is apt to accuse the second of being a superficial smatterer intent on popularity, the second to regard the first as a desiccated pedant pursuing a barren and unrewarding erudition. There is sometimes an element of truth in both views—few men combine in equal measure the capacity for meticulous research and for broad generalization—but often there is in either judgement more prejudice than justice. Neither type of scholar can be spared. Without the concentrated labours of the one the edifice of scholarship will be insecure; without the other it will tend to become a sterile specialization, divorced from the life of mankind. Our Academy exists primarily to foster and defend the ideal of exact and disinterested learning; but it would be a disaster if we forgot that scholarship, like other disinterested activities of men, should be an enrichment of human experience, and that it is our function to preserve the connexion between letters and life. It may, I think, fairly be claimed that British scholars in general have known how to be scholarly without ceasing to be human.