PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

By J. W. MACKAIL

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THE twelve months which have elapsed since the last General Meeting of the Academy have not been marked by any exceptional incident in its history or any fresh development in its operations. From the Annual Report which has just been before you, you will have seen that the course of its activities has been pursued steadily, and so far as the means at its disposal have allowed, effectively. It has fully sustained the reputation, both in this country and in the international field of learning, of study and of research, which last year we were able to recognize as established by thirty years of organized effort. The reorganization in four sections of the first three sections under which the field of our work is classified met with general approval, and will, it may be hoped, be of material advantage to the working of their machinery.

We have to regret the loss by death of six of our members, whose names call for brief mention. Dr. T. Rice Holmes was widely known by his exhaustive work in the elucidation of Caesar's conquest of Gaul and invasions of Britain, and before he concentrated on that subject, had approved himself in a different province of the same immense field by his *History of the Indian Mutiny*. Professor R. S. Conway, an ardent and impetuous scholar, was for many years an unwearying supporter of humane studies in Manchester and throughout England. Both in textual criticism and in interpretation of the Latin classics, Livy and Virgil in particular, he made valuable contributions to scholarship. The work towards which, in concert with pupils or colleagues, he devoted long and minute research, in collecting, examining, and elucidating the fragmentary remains of the Italic Dialects, has been published since his death. Its publication

was only made possible by a liberal grant-in-aid from the Hertz Fund administered by the Academy. Dr. A. A. Bevan, Lord Almoner's Professor of Arabic at Cambridge since 1893, had been for the last few years a Retired Fellow; he was eminent for his vast knowledge of oriental literature, in the field of Persian as well as that of Arabic and the other Semitic languages. Dr. L. R. Farnell did much both by his writings and his influence to promote study of the art and religion of ancient Greece; his autobiography, written in his retirement and published after his death, draws a vivid picture of the vicissitudes of University studies at Oxford during the last half-century. Egyptology has sustained a grave and in some respects irreparable loss by the death of two of its most distinguished representatives, equally eminent as excavators and interpreters: Professor F. Llewellyn Griffith, the highest authority in Demotic Egyptian, on which in later years he had concentrated his study; and, very recently, Dr. A. S. Hunt, whose name, in close association with that of his colleague and joint-Professor of Papyrology at Oxford, the late B. P. Grenfell, had an unequalled European reputation. Their excavations at Oxyrhynchus and other sites in the Fayúm and the Nile Valley substantially increased the store of fragments of classical literature, and revolutionized our knowledge of the life and institutions of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt. The task of deciphering, connecting, and elucidating the immense and growing mass of this material will have to be continued by other hands, necessarily of less experience. These are the losses which the Academy has to chronicle and to regret.

The election of new Fellows which has just been made increases our number to within four of the one hundred and fifty to which no addition can be made without a special resolution of the Academy. Whether or not such action should be taken in the near future is a problem not without difficulty, and on which I think there is some divergence of opinion. Without entering now on any premature

discussion of it, I may note certain considerations which are relevant.

Vacancies may occur in our body not only from death, but from voluntary retirement. This is a course which has very seldom been taken, and which though it may not always be unjustified by circumstances, must always be accepted with regret.

Further, I may remind you that in the Royal Academy of Arts there is a class of Senior Academicians—there are twelve of them at present—who are outside of the traditional forty Academicians prescribed in the Instrument of 1768, signed with his own hand by George III, and still in force as regards its main substance. The institution of a similar class of Senior Fellows might be worth consideration in our own body.

But whether or not the limit of one hundred and fifty Ordinary Fellows be preserved, another question arises in connexion with future elections, to which I feel it my duty to call attention. It is the tendency in all Academies and Institutes—as it is perhaps in other spheres also—to become encumbered with Elder Statesmen. Such a tendency has perhaps been reinforced in our own case by the desire, natural and laudable in itself, to pay special honour or preferential regard to the claims of veteran scholars. I should like in this matter to refer to a memorandum circulated to the Academy, a good many years ago, by Sir George Prothero; and I may take this opportunity of announcing that a bequest of £500 free of duty made by Sir G. Prothero 'to be invested and employed for the promotion of historical research especially in modern times' has now taken effect by the death of Lady Prothero. In that memorandum, the plea was urged that for full efficiency the Academy should be—I quote his own words—'above all, more youthful and energetic: a student should be able to look forward to recognition while his energies are still unexhausted'.

No fixed period has been laid down by nature for the exhaustion of human energies. But it may be observed that

in the last three years the average age of the twenty-nine Fellows elected was over sixty. Only three were under fifty; nine were in their sixties, seven in their seventies. The youngest elected in these years was forty-three: I have not gone through the whole list from the foundation, but election at an age so young as this has certainly been rare. No doubt it is seldom the case that a scholar has gained an established status in the front rank of his particular studies, and confirmed it by important published work, until after he has well passed the *mezzo camin* of life. Recognition normally lags behind achievement. The wiser mind, if we are to believe Wordsworth, mourns less for what age takes away than what it leaves behind. But that age does take away something, it would be idle to deny. Experience in the sections to which I belong myself shows that where choice lies between two candidates, both of undoubted merit but widely differing in age, there is a feeling towards giving the preference to seniority as such. This is natural; and it is not unjustifiable. But it is a criterion which must be applied with much caution; nor should it be forgotten that election to the Academy is not only the conferment of an honour, but the imposition of a responsibility. Honours may be given too late: the call to more responsible duty is seldom made, can perhaps hardly be made, too early.

To meet a certain conflict of requirements, the power of the Academy to elect scholars of eminent distinction but advanced age as Honorary Fellows might perhaps be more freely exercised. There are at present none such; there have been, I think, only seven in all during the history of the Academy. For their election the special reasons varied in each particular case. It is, however, interesting to give their names: Lord Cromer, Sir Samuel Griffith, Bishop G. F. Browne, C. M. Doughty, Lord Phillimore, F. H. Bradley, A. H. Sayce. It may be noticed that two of them held the Order of Merit in addition to the five holders of the same distinction who are Ordinary Fellows. It would not, I may add, be necessarily the case that such elections

should be limited to those who had obtained their eminence in one or other of the fields with which the Academy is primarily and officially concerned.

The members of the Academy are all engaged, and most of them very fully engaged, on individual work of their own. Beyond this, there are groups collaborating in important fields of research. And the Academy in its corporate capacity not only aids both individuals and groups in these operations, but has initiated other organizations of learning both at home and in the wider international field. Prominent among these last are the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* and the *Dictionary of Mediaeval Latin*. So too the Academy may claim to be the originator, in very different fields, of the International Historical Congress, of the English Place-Name Society, and of the British School of Archaeology at Jerusalem. The list of Associations or Governing Bodies to which the Academy nominates members is too long to recite. One, however, among them is of special importance, the British National Committee of the International Committee of Intellectual Co-operation. The rather clumsy or even forbidding term of Intellectual Co-operation is an attempt to express what is the main end of this as of other Academies; the fostering, extending, and unifying of the Commonwealth of learning, throughout, and even far beyond, the sphere of academic studies.

Within that sphere, the British Academy is an important constituent member of the Union Académique Internationale. The recent decision by which the meetings of that body are no longer confined to a single European capital is a welcome step towards fuller attainment of world-wide co-operation. It has hitherto held its meetings in Brussels. It will appropriately carry thence to other centres of learning the significant motto of the Kingdom of Belgium, 'L'Union fait la force'.

In the Book of Judges, there is a passage which is relevant to the status of the British Academy and the national support which it may claim. It relates the capture by the

Chosen People of a town (I quote from the Vulgate) *cuius nomen vetus erat Cariath Sepher, id est, Civitas Literarum.* It was bestowed, together with the hand of his daughter Axa, by Caleb upon Othniel. *Fuit in eo spiritus Domini,* the chronicler briefly notes of Othniel, who is the first name in the Catalogue of the Shofetim; the land had peace under him for forty years. But the City of Letters was not self-sustaining. *Da mihi benedictionem,* pleaded Axa to her father; *terram arentem dedisti mihi; da et irriguam.* 'And Caleb', the chronicler adds, 'gave her the upper springs and the nether springs.' The Government has given our City of Learning a habitation; but it is as yet in a dry land. The trickle of State endowment to which I referred a year ago remains unreplenished; it is in fact still subject to the ten per cent. cut imposed by the programme of drastic economies which it was the first and the most imperious task of the National Government to put into practice. Its restoration to the full amount may be anticipated in the near future. But that full amount is confessedly and notoriously inadequate. The upper springs of State subvention, and the nether springs of private bequests and benefactions, *irriguum superius et inferius,* both alike crave, not, let us hope, in vain, for replenishment.

Beyond what it can accomplish from its own resources, the Academy has become a recognized channel for the extension of private generosity towards objects in which it is deeply interested. It is for instance in this way that it was enabled to undertake the conduct and financing of the excavations in the Hippodrome of Constantinople, and the preparation and issue of the facsimile of the priceless Codex Sinaiticus. Towards the purchase by the British Museum of the Codex itself, the Academy has contributed, as a gesture of goodwill and a stimulus to other bodies, the slender amount which was all that it had means to give.

I may be allowed to add a few words on the function of the Academy. Its mission is, beyond all, to maintain a standard of learning. This is a matter of very special importance at a time like the present which is being flooded

with shallow culture. If I were to suggest that there is in the sphere of knowledge something akin to the second law of thermodynamics in the physical world, that the passage from one generation of scholars to another of the great tradition which we inherit involves a silent but inevitable transformation of energy from a higher to a lower grade, ending finally in a dead stability, I should be encroaching on a province which is beyond my competence. That would be a gloomy prospect in a closed universe. But the sphere of knowledge is infinite, and in it the miracle of self-renewal is perpetually taking place. Yet the aim which some educational or social theorists appear to regard as an ideal is just this; it is the promotion or the enforcement of a dead level which, satisfied with itself, does not lift up its eyes to the hills. *Was uns alle bändigt, das Gemeine*; the famous phrase of Goethe takes in this view a new and a more sinister meaning. And these theories, educational or social, have a dangerous tendency to be translated into practice. The preservation of a standard is the task, laborious and responsible, yet surely inspiring, which is committed to us.

The word 'standard' which I have just used has two meanings. In its other sense, a standard may be flown over a prosperous city or over a beleaguered fort. The danger with which the Commonwealth of Learning is now specially menaced is as formidable as it was last year, perhaps even more so. It is no less than the establishment of a prison of the mind in countries which were once centres of humanism. As regards Germany, the recently issued Report of the Academic Assistance Council, which is doubtless in the hands of all our body, leaves little for me to say here. Of the forty-two members of that Council, I may add, twelve are Fellows of the British Academy. It was formed to assist those University teachers and investigators who, on grounds of religion, political opinion, or race, were unable to carry on their work in their own country. Many of them have sought refuge, and found not merely sympathy but aid, in this country. I may quote a few sentences from the Report.

Behind the activity of the Council lies the ambition to protect the tradition of academic freedom in which Western culture has developed, and to preserve the scholars in whom the tradition is maintained. It is convinced that the world of scholarship is a kingdom of its own, which dare not admit subjection to temporary political dictations, and that the Universities must be preserved as communities of free learning.

There is a great body of scholarship and technical experience which must be saved; it can be temporarily saved by means of maintenance grants, but that policy is only an emergency one leading to the more permanent absorption of these scholars into the world of organized culture.

The issue raised is not a Jewish one alone; many who have suffered or are threatened have no Jewish connexion. Though raised acutely in Germany, it is not confined to that country. The aims of the Council are the strengthening of constructive and positive toleration, and the preservation of learning, irrespective of nationality, race, creed, or political opinion.

More than a hundred and fifty displaced or exiled scholars from Universities or institutions of University rank in Germany have had places found for them, as a temporary measure, in the Universities and University Colleges of Great Britain. But it is not in actual relief of individuals that our main interest and duty lie. It is in the clear, emphatic, uncompromising and constant upholding of a doctrine and an ideal, the doctrine and ideal of humanism; and, so far as human weakness and inhuman dislocation allow, the translation of that doctrine into practice.

The civilization of Europe stands with its back to the wall. These words, as you will remember, are a message of encouragement, not of irresolution, still less of despair. We are members not of a League, but of a community; of a Republic one and indivisible. In the Commonwealth of Learning, to use the words of St. Paul, 'there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek', between the Aryan and the Semite, between countries and nationalities. The country of which we are citizens and to which we owe allegiance is universal. The race to which we belong is mankind.