PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

By J. W. MACKAIL

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THE British Academy has now been in existence for thirty years. By successive elections, including those made to-day, the original number of 49 Fellows has now increased to 140; and I am the ninth occupant of the Presidential chair. It may be an occasion for taking a rapid if necessarily superficial survey of the objects for which it was founded, of the main lines on which its activities have been directed, and of the extent to which it has fulfilled, varied, or enlarged, the scope of the work to which it originally addressed itself: and also for adding a word with regard to some matters in which special effort is now called for, and to responsibilities carrying with them need for increased motive force.

These thirty years have seen the disappearance of the old world and the emergence, amid much confusion, of a new age and it might almost be said of a new civilization. It has been the task of this as of other Academies, in an epoch of wide transformation of values, to preserve and to replenish the lamp of learning, to guard the tradition of culture, and to sustain the ideal of a commonwealth of studies peopled by a race of scholars with perpetual succession.

Generatio praeterit et generatio advenit, terra autem in aeternum stat: one generation passeth away and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth for ever. Each year we have to deplore the loss of some of our number, and to welcome the accession of others. Of the original members as named in the Charter of Incorporation only four now survive: five others, elected in the first year of the Academy's functioning, may be added as to all intents and purposes original members also. One of these last is Sir Frederic Kenyon, to whom the Academy and its Council, not to speak of the President for the time being, have reason for much gratitude,

realizing as we do that continuity of management in its affairs, and wise guidance in their conduct, have been secured by his consent to discharge the complex and responsible duties of secretary.

On the day before our last Annual General Meeting died Emeritus-Professor Baldwin Brown, only for eight years a Fellow of the Academy, but for more than fifty years Professor of Fine Art in my own University of Edinburgh. During the past year we have lost Viscount Dillon, one of the original Fellows; the veteran scholar and explorer over an immensely wide range of humane letters, George Saintsbury; the Dean of Wells, who had been a valued member of our body from the first year of its existence; Professor J. G. Robertson, the foremost representative of German studies in this country; and most recently of all, the President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, a man greatly loved by all his friends, whose death at the age of 63 is a grave and in some ways an irreparable loss to the study of the scholarship of the Renaissance and the large humanism with which it was associated.

In this year also Professor Sayce's long life came to an end. As one of the early pioneers in a then unexplored region which is now giving up many of its secrets, his services to Egyptology and Assyriology earned the recognition given him by election as an Honorary Fellow.

Of these I need not say more here, their obituary notices having been placed in able and sympathetic hands. That of the seven names I have mentioned all but two were over seventy, and three were approaching their 90th year, is not a little remarkable. I turn now to my main subject.

In his Presidential Address at the first Annual General Meeting, just thirty years ago, Lord Reay observed that our own country—England, he inadvertently called it—was the last of the European nations to give embodiment to the formal recognition of history, philosophy, philology, and kindred studies, as objects of scientific pursuit. These three branches of study were named in our Charter as those

for the promotion of which the Academy was constituted. But in another clause of the Charter, its objects were more closely defined as 'the moral and political sciences, including history, philosophy, law, politics and economics, archaeology and philology'. The original organization of the Academy was in four sections: (1) History and Archaeology, (2) Philology in its various departments, (3) Philosophy, (4) Jurisprudence and Economics. This quadripartition was found by experience to be inadequate; the present division into nine sections, now for a good many years in operation, has proved more satisfactory, though some minor modifications in it have been suggested and are now being considered. With such modifications as may approve themselves, it has this incidental advantage, that it enables the apportionment given to the various branches of study or research with which the Academy is concerned to be kept clearly in view. Where a number of candidates have been nominated whose qualifications as regards eminence in their own province of learning are undoubted, but can hardly be equated one against another in the larger view of humane studies as a complex but organic whole, some regard has to be paid to the proportionate strength of the various sections as well as to the sufficiency in qualification of those proposed for election. At present the number of Fellows in a section varies from thirty-six to eight. The former number is that of the section which includes the immense field of medieval and modern history, archaeology, and art: the latter, that of the more definitely restricted or self-contained field of jurisprudence. It will of course be borne in mind that a Fellow may be, and frequently is, a member of two or even of three sections.

But the position as well as the function of the Academy is becoming more generally recognized. An agreeable instance of this recognition occurred two months ago. At the Annual General Meeting of the Athenaeum Club, an amendment of the rules was proposed and unanimously accepted, under which the President of the British Academy

for the time being becomes an ex-officio member of the committee, on the same footing as that already held by the Presidents of the Royal Society and the Royal Academy. This, if a small thing in itself, is nevertheless welcome as a sign of the growing sense of the solidarity of learning and of culture.

The name of the British Academy does not of course carry in itself any indication of its scope. No more does the name of the Royal Society; but there the continuous tradition of 250 years makes any further title superfluous. Nor is the Royal Academy of Arts, though a century younger, spoken or thought of in popular usage otherwise than simply as The Royal Academy. In time the title of the British Academy will no doubt likewise carry its own meaning. But the appellation of an Academy of Humane Learning, given incidentally to it by early Presidents in their addresses of 1910 and 1912, is certainly for the present more generally intelligible.

These considerations lead up to, or point towards, a still further possibility. In the more restricted field of classical studies, the vision (or if one prefers to call it so, the imagination) has long hovered in the air of a Classical Institute in which the various bodies concerned with different provinces of Greek and Roman studies—the Classical Association, the Hellenic Society, the Roman Society, and perhaps others—should be, not indeed merged, but affiliated and brought into full contact. The ideal of a Commonwealth of Studies has a larger scope. At some future period, not I suppose in this generation or the next, may we not look forward to some analogous recognition of the unity of knowledge and the interconnexion of the whole intellectual and creative effort of mankind? That unity might be symbolized, and to some degree even substantiated, by the incorporation of the physical and moral sciences, of arts and letters, in an Institute of the British Empire.

Some confusion still exists in the public mind (if there be a public mind) about the province and function of the

Academy; and even about its place of habitation, which I was assured not long ago by a very intelligent lady, was in the Burlington Arcade. One mistake which is still widely current, is that the British Academy is, like the Académie Française, a Society of Men of Letters; I have heard surprise expressed, as no doubt many others of us have, that Mr. X. the poet, or Mr. Y. the novelist, or Mr. Z. the dramatist is not a member of our body. The Academy does not officially recognize the practice, but only the scientific and scholarly study, of the Fine Arts, including the art of literature. It is not an Academy of Art or of Letters, but an Academy of Learning. But it is not inconsistent with this that the scope of its province should be interpreted in a liberal spirit. It should be fully recognized that as art is based on intelligence, so scholarship culminates in creation. A note of warning was given in that first Presidential address to which I have already referred, against the Academy 'closing its doors to those who touch exact and technical knowledge with the graces of style and culture': and the warning has not been neglected. Artists and men of letters have not infrequently lectured here on Foundations administered by the Academy. The annual Hertz lectures on Master Minds and Aspects of Art already enlarge the scope of our activities towards humanism in its widest sense, and emphasize the solidarity of culture. Special stress was laid on this point more than twenty years ago in a Presidential Address given by S. H. Butcher, who urged the creation of Honorary Fellowships for this express purpose. Our elder sister the Royal Academy of Arts has from the first given recognition to the principle involved by including as members of its body, though they are not Academicians or Associates, a Professor of Ancient History and a Professor of Ancient Literature. The present holders of these dignified sinecures, lineal successors of Gibbon and Grote, of Johnson and Macaulay, are both Fellows of this Academy. It may perhaps be worth considering whether some corresponding recognition might not be given by us to eminent

representatives of the arts among which is included the art of letters. Like the occasional Gold Medals—three so far—given by the Academy for outstanding merit and exceptionally great services to the studies and the ideals for which the Academy stands, these would of course be rare, in Shakespeare's phrase,

> Since seldom coming, in the long year set,
> Like stones of worth they thinly placed are,
> Or captain jewels in the carcanet.

Early in the history of the Academy, stress was repeatedly laid on the importance of its becoming an intellectual centre and meeting-place for groups of scholars and researchers, and even of isolated workers. Since it has had a habitation of its own, this ideal is more possible to realize. The facilities now given to the Bibliographical Society to hold its meetings and deposit its archives here are one instance of this practical collaboration; others may follow. And within the Academy itself it is to be wished that more personal intercourse and more associated work could be carried on. Consisting as we do of scholars widely dispersed and very fully occupied, meetings, either of the whole Academy or of one or another section, are not easy to arrange. Even at the Annual General Meeting there is not, and cannot be, anything like a full attendance of the Fellows. The sections have only one stated meeting every year, and that is largely occupied by the business of considering and recommending the election of new Fellows. I would suggest for consideration that meetings of sections might be more frequent, and that fuller opportunity might thus be given for interchange of views, for discussion of work, and for strengthening the sense of intellectual comradeship. Such meetings, and particularly if they included an informal dinner like that which has for the last two years wound up the day on which the sections all meet, would be welcomed by many of our body, and I should think appreciated by all. The suggestion made in a Presidential Address twenty-five years ago that meetings of the full Academy

might occasionally be held at Oxford or Cambridge, in which foreign scholars might be invited to take part, is one which presents difficulties, but should not be allowed to drop wholly out of sight.

In spite of all drawbacks and difficulties, among which lack of means is not the least, the work already accomplished by the Academy is large and solid, and a legitimate source of satisfaction as well as a motive for continual and increased effort.

The Clarendon Press Catalogue of the publications of the Academy is a long, almost a formidable array. For the greater part it consists of pamphlets, in which the disparity in numbers between lectures and supplementary or communicated papers is noticeable. But it also includes a good many substantial volumes. The greater part of our capital consists of gifts or bequests from generous private benefactors for specific objects, for the most part the provision of lectures and prizes. I should hesitate to adopt unreservedly the phrase used by Sir Frederic Kenyon when he was President, that lectures are 'a method of barbarism'. They have their value, not only in exciting outside interest, but in forcing their authors to give shape to the results of their studies. They may give concentrated form and added stimulating power to learning which might otherwise be diluted and merged in laborious compilations, even if it did not, as often is the case, disappear with a scholar's own life. They also enable us to invite students, men of letters, artists and professional men, who do not belong to our body, to bring contributions into the common stock. The twenty-four volumes of Schweich Lectures on Biblical Archaeology already published constitute a very substantial embodiment of research, and it may be noted that they make a wide appeal, for some have gone into a second or third impression, and others are out of print. The three lectureships on the Hertz Foundation have certainly produced in some cases published work of permanent value.

To the medals and prizes given for eminent services to

scholarship no drawback attaches: as with the works of literature 'crowned' by the Académie Française, recognition of merit in its own sphere is a proper function of any Academy.

But it is in promotion, assistance, and consolidation of research, and in enabling its results to be collected, revised, and permanently recorded, that our main work lies, whether independently or internationally. In the former field, steady progress continues to be made. The Annual Report in your hands gives a list of the enterprises being carried on with our active encouragement and material support. Specially to be noted for their importance and magnitude are, in research and compilation, the Records of Social and Economic History in England and Wales, the Dictionary of Medieval Latin, the Glossaria Latina, the hitherto unprinted works of Roger Bacon; and in material exploration, the excavation and collection of relics of the past throughout the Near East, particularly in Palestine and Egypt. The foundation of the School of Oriental Studies, and of the British School at Jerusalem, was largely due to the initiative exertions and influence of the British Academy; as also was the inception, and the gratifying progress made in it, of the vast Encyclopaedia of Islam.

Parallel in importance among the functions of the Academy is the constant task of promoting the federation and intercommunication of the learned beyond the boundaries of country and language. The immediate occasion of the foundation of the Academy was the fact that when the International Association of Academies (now represented by the Union Académique Internationale) came into being, no Academy or organization existed in Great Britain to occupy the portion of the whole field of learning over which the activities of the Royal Society did not extend. The British Academy has from its inception been a constituent of the Union and taken an active share in its meetings. The recent change in its constitution by which annual meetings

of the Union are no longer confined to one European capital may be expected to increase its international effectiveness. So too, the Academy is represented on the British National Committee of the International Council of Intellectual Co-operation, at the meetings of the International Congress of Orientalists, and of the International Historical Conference. It is becoming recognized as the adviser of the Imperial Government on matters which are connected with its studies, and gradually securing a position as the official representative of learning in the state. That position is in fact recognized not only by the quarters which H.M. Government have given, but continuously and emphatically by a Treasury grant. The grant may no doubt be called a token payment. Its inadequacy is in no quarter contested. It does not compare favourably with the State Subsidies given to similar bodies in other countries suffering like our own from severe financial stringency. Its reduction under the national policy of retrenchment is a national misfortune; and there seems but little prospect of its reinstatement at the original figure, still less of its increase.

A few figures may impress, more vividly than mere generalizations can do, the urgent need of increased funds to enable the Academy to fulfil, if not its ideals, at least the most important claims pressed upon it and recognized as deserving. The Treasury subvention of £1,800 a year is spent entirely on the grants which are catalogued in the Annual Report which is now in your hands. Many other applications have had to be refused from mere lack of means; and the grants made are often less in amount than we could wish them to be. Our invested capital, apart from funds under special trusts, and therefore not capable of being diverted to other purposes, is only between £4,000 and £5,000. No substantial economy can be made on the cost of administration and maintenance, which is in round figures £800 a year. Our printers' bill is not covered by receipts from sale of our publications, though these reduce the deficit to about £100 annually.

For anything like adequate power of giving material, as well as moral support to scholarly research and record of its results, we must look, it may be hoped not in vain, to continuance of that private generosity to which we have been in the past so largely indebted.

Exploration and discovery, subsidizing of costly enterprises, encyclopaedic work in European and Oriental studies, in investigation of the life and thought and work of mankind throughout the ages, have whole provinces which still remain almost untouched. The work is endless; its value, and in many cases its urgency, is great. The wide fields of research are white to the harvest; their reaping brooks no avoidable delay.

Time forbids me to trespass on your patience longer. One word only I have to add, on a matter which is at present of very special importance. The danger which now menaces learning is not, as it may have seemed to be a generation ago, internecine conflict between the scientists and the humanists, which has now ceased to exist; it is, in both spheres, now recognized as not conflicting but complementary, the danger of a relapse into barbarism. In the inaugural Presidential Address of thirty years ago there is a sentence which now bears an even deeper meaning than it had then, and may seem almost of a prophetic nature. The Academy, it was then said, could not render a greater service to the cause of humanity than by supporting with its best strength all efforts to check the growth of any peril menacing the free development of the human intellect. That is a text on which comment would be superfluous; on its repetition and re-affirmation I will end.