PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

By SIR DAVID ROSS

10 July 1940

WE have to lament this year the loss of no less than ten of our Fellows, and of these I take leave to say a few words. In Dr. A. E. Brooke and Dr. C. M. Creed we have lost two successive Ely Professors of Divinity at Cambridge. Dr. Brooke was a master of exact scholarship, which he displayed most fully in the great edition of the Septuagint in which he had as his partner our other Fellow, Dr. Norman Maclean; in addition he was a man of wise judgement, in whom his colleagues showed their confidence by electing him to the Provostship of King's College. Dr. Creed had only been elected to our Fellowship last year. His comparatively early death ended a career of much distinction in the field of theology. In addition to writing some important books, he rendered great services to learning by his joint editorship of the *Journal of Theological Studies*. I should like to add a word of appreciation of the great help he rendered to the University Presses of Oxford and Cambridge in connexion with a project for a new translation of the Bible, a project in which he was keenly interested.

H. A. L. Fisher, a man whose distinction of face and bearing were the fit expression of a rare distinction of mind, combined great services to the State, to the University of Sheffield, and to his beloved college with contributions to history notable both for accuracy of research and for breadth of view. As President of the Board of Education he introduced reforms remarkable for vigour and enlightenment; as a member of the Government he shared the responsibilities and endurances of the War of 1914–18. As an historian, he made himself in early life our greatest authority on the Napoleonic period, and near the end of his life he

painted on a larger canvas and wrote a study of European history distinguished alike by the width of knowledge and by the incisiveness of judgement it displayed. As President of the Academy from 1928 to 1932 he showed himself a worthy successor to Lord Balfour and set an example very difficult for any of his successors to live up to.

Sir Thomas Heath, like his friend Lord Chalmers, in the scanty leisure enjoyed by a Civil Servant in high place, made notable contributions to learning; Lord Chalmers was the more eminent as an administrator, Sir Thomas Heath as a scholar. He rose in the Civil Service to be, with Chalmers as his colleague, Joint Permanent Secretary to the Treasury; but he will be longest remembered for his work in the study of Greek mathematics, in which he was *facile princeps* in this country and had no superior anywhere. His edition of Euclid in English, a classic (as Professor Whitehead said of it) from the day it was published, and his *History of Greek Mathematics*, were only two of his many contributions to the subject. At his death he was engaged in a study of Greek mathematics as it appears in Aristotle; in all such matters I found him the surest of guides and the kindest of friends.

Edward Jenks was the author of many legal works and won an international reputation by the *Digest of English Civil Law* which he edited. He reformed the educational system of the Law Society and did much to build up the school of law in the University of London. I remember with gratitude the lectures in which, forty years ago at Oxford, he instructed non-legal students in the elements of politics.

R. B. McKerrow, during the busy life of a publisher, made himself one of our leading authorities on matters of bibliography, especially in connexion with Shakespeare and his age. The Clarendon Press counted itself happy in finding in him the ideal editor for the critical edition of Shakespeare which it has in contemplation. Even those who like myself are not experts in these matters could not fail to be impressed by the admirable method and the

convincing logic of his *Introduction to Bibliography for Literary Students*.

D. S. Margoliouth, after an undergraduate career of dazzling success as a classical scholar, turned to Oriental studies, and was appointed at the age of thirty to the Chair of Arabic at Oxford, which he held for forty-eight years. He was perhaps the greatest Arabic scholar of his time—great in his knowledge not only of the niceties of the language but of the history of the Islamic peoples and of their religion and theology. Nor did he entirely desert classical studies; his edition of Aristotle's *Poetics*, paradoxical in some respects, can by no means be ignored by those who hold to more traditional interpretations. He was perhaps the most omnivorous reader of his generation, and to all his reading he brought a caustic and independent mind which made his comments full of interest to all who listened to them.

J. H. Muirhead was at the time of his death the doyen of British philosophers. A devoted pupil of Edward Caird at Glasgow and of T. H. Green at Oxford, he remained the most authoritative exponent of their idealistic creed, untouched by the Italian influences under which some British idealists of a later generation came. And, more perhaps than any other of Green's pupils, he, like Green, combined philosophical idealism with a practical idealism which expressed itself in a deep interest in social reform and in the spread of education. When last year I found in America a student who wished to study the influence of the school of Green on social reform, it was inevitable that I should direct him to Muirhead as the true fount of information. He retained his freshness of mind to the end of his long life, and in a book written very near the end of his life discussed with lively interest and great understanding the most recent developments of ethical theory.

R. L. Poole held a peculiar place in the regard of medieval historians as a pioneer in the application of the most exact scholarship to the study of the mind of the Middle Ages, whether as expressed in institutions or as

expressed in literature. He was associated with the *English Historical Review* from its foundation in 1885 to 1920, first as assistant editor, then as joint editor, and for nineteen years as sole editor; and to his wise selection and judicious editing of articles many historians have paid tribute. A great scholar himself, he was also a great begetter of scholarship in others.

W. R. Scott, most kindly of men, was also one of the most learned of our historians of economic practice and theory. His first books were studies of the philosophy of Cudworth and of Hutcheson, but he soon transferred his interest to the economics of the same period, and became the leading authority on Adam Smith. He held the Chair of Political Economy at Glasgow for a quarter of a century, and during that time not only built up a fine school of economics but did public service on innumerable commissions and committees. He was a member of the Council of the Academy for twenty-one years, and for the last nine years managed our finances most prudently. Those of us who sat on the Council of the Academy with him are very grateful for the wise judgement which he brought to bear on many a difficult question.

The number of Fellows, which had been reduced by death and retirements to 133, has now by the election of new Fellows been raised to 142. The number of Corresponding Fellows is now 53.

Council had intended to propose the election of a Fellow in accordance with the modification of Bye-law 6 (*b*) passed last year, which enables Council to recommend for election persons whose qualifications do not sufficiently come within the purview of any particular section. I greatly regret that ill health has prevented Sir Donald Tovey from accepting nomination now.[1] It is not intended that this power should be used anything but sparingly; so used, it should gradually add to the strength of our body.

[1] He died on the day on which these words were spoken.

In 1934, commenting on the ages at which Fellows had recently been elected, the President said: '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.' For purposes of comparison it may be useful for me to put it on record that of the thirty-two Fellows elected in the last four years, nine were under fifty, ten between fifty and sixty, three between sixty and seventy, and ten between seventy and eighty. There has been little change in the average age, which is now just under sixty; but it is satisfactory to note that a much larger number have been elected while still in their forties.

The flood of war, which had for years threatened the freedom of Europe and the moral standards created by centuries of Christianity and civilization, has at last burst upon us. When the very survival of civilization is at stake, our quiet intellectual pursuits have necessarily been rudely interrupted, and many of us must have felt that to pursue them was like fiddling while Rome was burning. Many of our number have willingly left their favourite fields of study and given their services as linguists or historians or economists to the immediate needs of the country; all success to them in their valuable work! Our intercourse with colleagues on the Continent has been brought to an end; in the very week in which the Union Académique was to have met at its accustomed home in Brussels, that city was given over to a brutal invader. At home we have had, in the interests of national economy, to bow to a serious crippling of our financial resources. Yet, as our Annual Report shows, much good work has gone on and is still going on.

Ten years ago no one, except by a mere guess, could have predicted the intellectual night which would within that time descend upon the greater part of western Europe, as one country after another came under despotic rule. Twice before has such an intellectual night descended upon

Europe; once when the barbarians conquered Rome and Justinian closed the schools of Athens, and once again when Constantinople fell to the Turks. But Greek philosophy, banned in Greece, lived on in eastern lands and ultimately returned to Europe with Averroes and the Schoolmen; and Greek learning, banished from the east, sought refuge in the west and gave the impulse to the Renaissance of learning. Similarly our country has profited by the dispersion of scholars from Nazi- and Fascist-ridden lands. Scholars have learned to look on this country as the last great home of learning and of intellectual freedom left in Europe; and the eminence in learning which Germany enjoyed in the nineteenth century has passed to Great Britain and to America. Intellectual freedom and integrity may be suppressed in one place or in another, but they have never been suppressed everywhere; nor will they now. When the anxieties and sufferings of the present time have passed, we may hope for a day in which our Academy and our Universities will apply themselves as zealously as ever to the pursuit of learning, enriched by the contact of our native culture with the learning of the refugee scholars to whom we have been glad to offer a home. If we survive the present storm, if our beloved country once more saves herself by her exertions, and Europe by her example, we have every chance of becoming the focal point from which intellectual as well as political freedom will radiate to other lands.

I must not conclude without thanking you once more for electing me for four years to the most honourable office which I now demit, nor without expressing the gratitude I feel to our Secretary, to our late Treasurer, and to the members of Council for their unfailing courtesy and co-operation. To my successor I wish a term of office which will finish in circumstances much happier than those in which it begins.