PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

By J. H. CLAPHAM

12 July 1944

LET me first welcome the twelve new Fellows whom the Council has recommended to you and whom you have just elected. Following up a little statistical hobby, I note that their average age is 53·6. This is a shade higher than last year, when the figure was 53·1; but since the current figure is 'spoiled', mainly by the election of two old friends of my own, I will not press a statistician's point. And as the average during the four years during which I have been your President is below the age at which I was myself elected, I find the situation, in its bearing on the Academy's vitality, encouraging.

I also note, with the very greatest satisfaction, that the solitary woman Fellow whom we lost more than a year ago has been replaced through the energy of Section X: the History of Local Government, Fabian Socialism, and the Communism of Soviet Russia, in a woman Fellow's care, are succeeded by the Archaeology of Zimbabwe, the Fayum, and Hadhramaut. I am in hopes that before long this newly-elected Fellow may find a woman colleague.

When the Report in your hands was drafted we had lost by death in the year seven Fellows and one retired Fellow. To this list must be added the deaths within the last few days of Lord Atkin, and of James Tait, retired Fellow, that fine medieval scholar and local historian. I was in correspondence with him recently and am glad to report that in his last year there was no trace of decline in natural powers, in scholarly precision, in kindliness, or in humour. Of our other dead, with a single exception, I will not speak. To my loss, the majority of them were known to me only by repute; and those whom I did know were, to my loss again, valued acquaintance rather than friends. I leave the record of their memory to men who knew them and their work well: these are already chosen and, no doubt, busy. When the printers will find leisure to put the results into your hands we cannot say.

The exception of whom I spoke is Sir Aurel Stein. Whether he was the most learned among those who have left us, I do not know. In any case, to attempt such comparisons is not profitable. But to the world, and possibly to ourselves, he was the

most distinguished, and to me the most enviable; for, of all scholars, the wanderer, the discoverer, is in my thinking the noblest. Stein has two other claims on our respect: he was an embodiment of international learning, of the type for whom the learned quest comes first and the nations only second; and the Academy is his debtor, his residuary legatee. In time one hopes that the Stein–Arnold Fund will help, in spite of quarrels and jealousies among the nations, to uncover something of the buried history of Bactria.

There is a personal acknowledgement that should be made. I have served here now for four years. War-time difficulties decided the Council to break with its usual practice of a four-year tenure for Presidents and leave me in the Chair for another year. I appreciate the honour, though I am distressed at its occasion. But it gives me the chance, now I am glad to think a good one, of presiding once in a July of peace.

For the campaigns have moved more steadily from without towards the place where Satan's seat is than I had ever dared to hope. The only reverse movement in the year—I will not call it a campaign—has been that which made me wonder whether the Secretary might not feel it his duty to cancel this meeting. In Europe there has been less general destruction to date than I, for one, had feared. The Greek temples of Sicily, with Monreale and Cefalu, are safe. Monte Cassino is a blasted eminence and the towns of the Alban hills are wrecked. But a superbly handled campaign has saved nearly everything in Rome, including—it is said—treasures from Monte Cassino housed in Sant Angelo. About Vesuvius, Act of God has in places done as much damage as the acts of men. From farther north, there is some sad, though as yet uncertain, news; but I believe that Aquila has not suffered. Perugia, Assisi, and Siena certainly have not. There has been talk of Florence as an open town, talk which may be verified, or not, before this address is delivered. We learn that the French were careful not to train a gun on Siena, care which, with their own towns in mind, we can well understand. It was their good fortune that, owing to the excellent speed of General Alexander's armies, this restraint was—from the military point of view—justifiable.

And now Normandy, with Chartres and how much else behind! We have heard to-day that the Conqueror's abbeys still stand at Caen—one, the report says, intact, the other only slightly damaged. Sympathetic soldiers were horrified to learn in advance how full Normandy is of ancient beautiful things. They

are not taught about that in the staff colleges. They have been provided with lists. Their speed saved Bayeux; but there are ugly accounts, unconfirmed as yet in detail, of the effect of what is called I believe blanket-bombing on other Norman cathedral towns. The Air Vice-Marshal, who is credited with the invention of that form of attack, had an historian's training and understands our anxieties; but he must be left sole judge of military needs. So must the general in command there. We can only hope that those needs will not call for the bombing of the Norman site from which he takes his name. It has already been his duty to have many Norman châteaux razed, with what good reason is shown by the heavy casualties among German generals who used them as head-quarters. The enemy has not told us where those generals met their death; but often we can confidently guess.

As the end of the war comes within range I have found myself brooding over a subject which lies within the legitimate scope of the President of an Academy—German learning, its present and its future. In the summer of 1938 I met in a Swiss hotel a great scholar, born a German subject but now one of us. He spoke to me of the German achievement with encyclopaedias—of Pauly–Wissowa and the to me more familiar *Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaften.* 'I know', he said in effect, 'that this is not the highest sort of scholar's work; but it is essential. The English have relied on Germans to do it. They seem to think that the work will be resumed within a few years. But German learning is ruined not for a few years but for thirty. Cannot the English do something to fill the gap?'

And that was before war; before we—as it is said—had blotted out the publishing quarter of Leipzig.

I hope he took too gloomy a view. But when I read in a once reputable legal publication lying upon our table here the grovelling and academically blasphemous sentence 'what the Leader wills, that is the law of Germany', I realized how thoroughly one branch of German learning had rotted; just as when, in the spring of 1938, I saw painted across locomotives' boilers in Hamburg, on some Nazi festival day, the words—'What has the Leader done for you? What will you do for the Leader?'—words that recalled the methods of a crude religious revivalism—I realized how the German masses were being hypnotized, and how long it might take to lift them from a degrading Leader-worship. Perhaps a Leader's lost war may do it sooner and better than many years.

Those who have access to the German war-time book-lists tell me that until recently a remarkable amount of serious and learned publication had continued; perhaps it continues still, in spite of the bombing of Leipzig. There may be left impartial scholars enough to shorten those thirty years—men who have not been called to bow in the house of Rimmon, or have bowed only with that mental reservation which we connect with the place. But often, when I talk with one or other of ourselves, hope sinks: Anthropology and Archaeology, he may say—ruined by racial nonsense and deliberate distortion; Economics—decadent long since: the men whom we have quoted these twenty years were sometimes Austrians, never Reichsdeutscher; History—technical competence survives: there are great names from the older generation, of men pensioned off and silenced, exiled or dying; but who can learn to write honest history in the Third Reich? So the list might be run through.

One need not endorse all such gloomy responses. But many of us must had noticed a growing provincialism in the German learned outlook long before 1933. Poverty and inability to buy books since 1918 may have accounted for it in part. There were curious gaps in some German bibliographies, or unexpected notes of *war mir nicht zugänglich*. And this strengthened that old arrogant German habit, known to us all, of assuming that only German theories need be discussed. Not many years ago a scholar in my field proved elaborately that a certain German theory, by no means new, was invalid. No one here had ever supposed it valid, for it did not cover our English facts—or some others. We were not interested in his proof.

I have touched on German historiography, however, not to rail at it, but to illustrate from a particular book that, hard as it may have been to learn how to write honest history in the Third Reich, it was still possible to write and publish it, if you had already learnt—an encouraging fact. Between 1929 and 1937 appeared the first four volumes of Franz Schnabel's *German History in the Nineteenth Century*, the only large-scale history of modern Germany since Treitschke. What has happened to the author after 1937 I do not know. He had not got beyond 1848, and his fifth volume was probably due not before 1940. I expect he has fallen silent; for his book bore no trace of the dominant superstitions either of Treitschke or of the Third Reich. He lacks also, one must allow, Treitschke's constructive power and the vivid German that made one relish Treitschke at his prejudiced worst.

Schnabel's book has the old German encyclopaedic touch. It is a history of the German spirit, very broadly conceived, of all the forces making in Germany—and everywhere else—for the secularization and mechanization of life; and of the opposing forces which in Germany were not victorious. Yet it is not pessimistic. There are no laments over 1914–18, no hysterical crying over an *Untergang des Abendlandes*. The fourth, the largest, volume, that of 1937, is all about religion, especially about movements within the Catholic Church of which most of us in England are rather ignorant. Among Protestants, Schnabel's sympathies seem to lie with the south German orthodox pietists: the nearest approach to harshness is in his picture of a certain overrated north German popular preacher, Schleiermacher. He is himself a south German, a Catholic or of Catholic stock. To his historian's credit it is not easy to say which.

I first read him because I was told that his economic section was good. The mechanization of life, he naturally holds, must be studied in its relation to technology. I found that a man who could touch, in interesting fashion, on the restoration of Catholic Church music and the Basel Mission of southern Protestants had also composed by far the best account of how the economic transformation of Germany began that I had ever read.

On matters of general political interest, he writes that in Prussia 'the state did not make the army, but the army made the state'; he shows no sympathy with what he calls 'historical annexationism'; he allows with no trace of bitterness that the Revolution and good Napoleonic administration made Alsatians feel French; and throughout he is perfectly fair to England. Not quite perfectly informed about her, however. Perhaps he too could not get at all the books. He thinks that Canning was a Lord and that the Duke's Waterloo army was of veterans. But he also says, in so many words, that the Duke was 'the greatest of all defensive generals'. One cannot ask for more, from German or Frenchman or Russian. An historian's Waterloo is always a test question. Schnabel passes. He is not uncritical and he is perfectly just.

I trust that he is still alive. He is a German whom I would gladly meet. It is my hope, as I end this excursus and this address, that there may exist and survive men enough like him to make possible both such meetings and a revival of honest German scholarship.