

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

BY SIR CHARLES WEBSTER

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WE have just elected and welcomed to our body fifteen scholars who are in every way fitted to be members of the Academy. They are chosen from a wide range of disciplines covering all the sections into which the Academy is divided for purposes of administration. It is the present intention of the Council to elect a number of fifteen each year, and owing to the changes which we have made in our Bye-laws we should, if we so wish, be able to continue that process for a long period. We can thus, I hope, draw into our body at an earlier age many who would have had to wait much longer before we could recognize their scholarship and invite their co-operation with us. It is, of course, most necessary to maintain in every way the standards of admission to which we have adhered throughout the life of the Academy. But I have no doubt myself that the progress of the humanities and social sciences in this country is such that we shall have no dearth of suitable candidates in subsequent years and that we shall all benefit by a greater accession of new blood than we have been able to admit in the past.

We cordially greet also the distinguished scholars whom we have elected Corresponding Fellows of the Academy. The numbers of Corresponding Fellows have in recent years remained fairly constant. We have never fixed a maximum and I think that it is hardly necessary to do so. The standard is a very high one and those who are chosen must in most cases be of a fairly advanced age. It is a matter of regret that we cannot see more of them in this country. Perhaps some day we may have the means, either from a private benefactor or from some of the many public funds concerned with the interchange of scholars, to invite each year one or two of them to visit us.

We are also most happy today to add a distinguished name to our small list of Honorary Fellows. The President of the Italian Republic has long had a great reputation as a scholar and in particular shown great interest in the progress of economic studies in this country. We shall hope that perhaps he will be able to come to Britain and that we may have the pleasure of meeting him and discussing our common interests. Another of

our Honorary Fellows, His Majesty the King of Sweden, has twice visited this country since he was elected and on each occasion he took pains to meet some of us and to inform himself of our work, especially in those spheres where he has himself made distinguished contributions to scholarship. We have much appreciated the interest which he has taken in our welfare and I hope that we shall have further opportunities of learning from his knowledge and experience. May I add that another of our Honorary Fellows, Earl Russell, has agreed to give the Master-Mind Lecture next session on John Stuart Mill, an occasion to which we shall all look forward with keen anticipation? When Sir Winston Churchill accepted an Honorary Fellowship we promised him that we would not make any demands on his time and energy so needed by the great responsibilities which fall upon him at this difficult time.

You will also have been glad to see in the report that, as I anticipated, Her Majesty's Government were not deaf to the appeal which we made for a small increase in our grant. We asked for no more than was given to us and we only decided on the amount for which we should ask after a most searching and meticulous examination of needs and possibilities. We had to take into account the requirements of our own administration as well as the wants of others, for, unless we are properly equipped to carry out our tasks, we cannot undertake the numerous and varied demands that are now coming upon us and which seem likely to increase considerably as time goes on. In order that we may make full use of the voluntary labours of members of the Academy and other scholars we must be able to provide an administrative centre of the highest efficiency. This, I think, we are in a fair way of achieving, thanks to the exceptional skill and energy of our Secretary and his staff. We congratulate Sir Mortimer Wheeler also on becoming President of the Society of Antiquaries.

One example of the kind of work that the Academy is now being called upon to perform is the formation of the new committee set up to advise the Secretary of State for the Colonies on the preservation of records and antiquities in the territories which he administers. The Council attaches the highest importance to this work, which may have far-reaching results if it is properly performed. We have been fortunate in securing the assistance of experienced and able scholars to aid us in this formidable task and we shall add to their numbers as the need and opportunity arise. The committee has already met: it has

prepared a submission on one subject to Mr. Lyttelton and set up machinery for the study of another. You will readily see how much extra work is thrown on the Secretary and his staff by such duties. Other tasks will fall on us by reason of the new funds which are coming to us of which I shall speak in a moment. And everything seems to me to point to increasing duties as time goes on. There will be a greater call for what I might term academic statesmanship than there has been in the past: I have no doubt that it will be forthcoming, but my own experience goes to show me that an expert and efficient administration is no less necessary to secure results of permanent value.

We have also this year continued to feel the impact on our finances of the delay imposed on our own publications by the war, while we have important new studies on our programme. Consequently we have had to set aside more money than usual for such purposes and have not been able to allot as much to the learned societies as we could have wished. But we have met the requests of the classical societies for help towards the publication of their journals so that these could at least maintain their present size, of whose inadequacy I spoke in my last Presidential Address. We have always had the hope of doing much more on this important question and I have now good news to announce about it. For we have received from one of the most thoughtful and imaginative of the Foundations that assist science and learning in this country, which bears the impress of its creator Lord Nuffield, an intimation of their intention to allot to the Academy during the next five years under certain conditions a substantial grant to be used for this very purpose. This action will throw on us a heavy responsibility, for we must take care that the funds are used in a manner best calculated not only to meet an immediate emergency but to lay a firmer foundation for the continuing publication of journals, texts, proceedings, annuals, and the like on which so much depends. We are concerned to ensure that such help does not merely enable a routine to be continued but that it may be so used that the societies can plan more boldly and with better heart for the future. By such means it is hoped it will be made possible for all competent scholars, young and old, to obtain the publication of their work without the delay and frustration which they now have so often to endure. It will be for the societies themselves to show that this help is being used in the spirit in which it has been proffered.

More consideration has recently been given both in the Sections and in the Council to the problem of our own publications.

In my opinion this question should not be treated as one which in any way competes with that which I have just discussed. It is rather the necessity of ascertaining how the interests of scholarly learning can best be served by a body such as ours whose members, certainly at any rate the most energetic and competent of them, are concerned with many other activities. Our publications in the past have not been planned far enough ahead and seem, when reviewed as a whole, too miscellaneous and piecemeal. This situation has largely been due to the lack of funds which prevented large-scale planning for the future. We have now in addition to the Schweich Lectures and the *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum* a new series of separate publications, not like that of the early years of the Academy devoted to one discipline, but available for any learned work of excellence which we think has a special claim to be given to the world under our auspices. There has also been a miscellaneous collection of shorter publications which have been issued from time to time to meet immediate needs, some first appearing in the *Proceedings*, others published separately for the first time.

It might be well to consider whether we should not concentrate on some large co-operative work which needs many minds and long years to complete. Such an enterprise is specially suitable for a body such as ours which has a continuous life and the possibility of calling upon the assistance of a large and varied number of experts. I do not doubt but that if we should decide to undertake such a task, for which we have special qualifications, the necessary funds will be forthcoming.

It has also been suggested that we should publish an annual series of supplemental papers of rather longer length than that of those published in the learned journals, thus producing a series of *Annals* as is done by some continental Academies. It might be that we could find ways and means to do both. It is for the Sections or Fellows to submit their views to the Council for consideration, if they have projects which they desire to accomplish. We do not wish to have publications merely for the sake of publication. The question is, as I have said, how can we best serve the interests of the whole body of scholars of which we are a part.

We have, of course, participated in several such enterprises which have been organized under the auspices of the Union Académique Internationale, particularly in classical studies. For the most part the work in this country has been done by various scholarly organizations and *ad hoc* committees of scholars, but

the Academy has been the centre through which the necessary co-operation with foreign scholars has been maintained and in some cases we have contributed considerable sums from our own funds and set up our own committees. I need not dwell on these undertakings to which your attention is constantly directed in the Annual Report. They have already produced most fruitful results. At the same time, partly because of the war, some of them have proceeded more slowly perhaps than might have been expected. They have, however, enlisted the activity of numbers of learned men in Europe and the United States and when I ventured to hint at a recent meeting of the Union Académique Internationale that they should not be considered as immortal, my words were not very well received. Indeed, we all recognize their great importance; but they should not have a monopoly of international co-operation through the Union or of the funds to which it has access. This criticism, however, only becomes valid if other alternatives are put forward. I can only say that the opportunity is there for those who wish to take advantage of it, as one of the newly elected constituent bodies of the Union was prompt to do at our recent meeting at Berne.

In this connexion we should always remember that the principal reason for setting up the British Academy was that it might take part in such work. The lack of such a body, remarked Lord Balfour in his all too brief Chapter of Biography, 'was fatal to full international co-operation in some very important branches of learning'. In more recent years there has been a great increase in international associations for specialist studies. These, however, have in the humanities for the most part confined their attention to periodical meetings of scholars and not set on foot co-operation in large-scale works. They have provided most valuable contacts and exchange of ideas and it is to be noted that since the war many have only been able to maintain themselves by means of the assistance which they have received from U.N.E.S.C.O., while others have been brought into existence by the direct action of that body. One of our own national associations in the social sciences, most urgently needed, was created as the result of action taken at the rue Kléber in Paris, where U.N.E.S.C.O. now functions in the hotel in which I once spent long months during the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, and to which I now go to attend the meetings of the International Committee for Philosophy and the Humanistic Sciences on behalf of the Union Académique Internationale.

Considerable sums of money have been obtained from

U.N.E.S.C.O. for scholarly projects in which many of us are deeply interested. If U.N.E.S.C.O. has not always acted wisely in such matters, its defects have been partly due to the fact that it has not received all the attention and assistance that it has the right to expect from mature and experienced scholars in this country and elsewhere. It is now supplied with agencies which enable it to give much valuable assistance to international co-operation in the humanities and social sciences, and in one of these the Union Académique Internationale has been given a special position. The scientific societies realized far more quickly than those connected with the humanities the opportunities thus opened to them. Some of their international associations could not have continued to function without the aid of U.N.E.S.C.O. I have myself had an opportunity to observe its beneficent activities in connexion with the International Congress of the Historical Sciences on whose Bureau I have a place. But apart from such considerations its machinery is an important link between European scholars and those in other parts of the world. The Academy should play its part in advising the Government on such matters dealt with by U.N.E.S.C.O. as come within its sphere just as the Royal Society does in scientific questions. I am glad to say that we are taking steps to enable the Academy to be more closely associated with the National Co-operating Body established for this purpose, on which some of our Fellows have already played an important role.

In this address, the last that I shall have the privilege of giving to you, I have tried to indicate the growing responsibilities of the Academy and to show that they are accompanied by great opportunities. It is a matter of congratulation to us all that the distinguished scholar whom you have just elected as President comes to his office with a specially wide and varied experience of the organization and administration of learned work. I am confident that under his guidance the responsibilities will be easily discharged and the opportunities firmly grasped. The Academy is, in comparison to most institutions of the same kind, a young society. It has still to acquire such an established position as can only be won by continuous and fruitful activity over a long period of years. Our limitations and deficiencies have often been dwelt upon by my predecessors, and I do not need to repeat today their admonitions, from which, I am sure, we have all profited. None of us can be satisfied with what we have accomplished or feel that the Academy has yet found its rightful place in the learned world.

But in laying down my office I would beg leave to express two things which I feel very deeply. The first is a strong and confident belief that the Academy has already shown its capacity to grow with the demands made upon it and that it will be able to safeguard and extend the pursuit of learning in the exciting and dangerous times in which we live. And the second is profound gratitude not only for the great honour which you have conferred on me by electing me four times as President, but also for the help which I have received from so many Fellows and the spirit of tolerance and kindness in which it has been tendered.

Adde quod ingenuas didicisse fideliter artes
Emollit mores nec sinit esse feros.

In the community of scholars both mind and heart can find solace and refreshment.