PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

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I HAVE first of all to convey my gratitude to you for conferring on me for the third time the great honour of electing me President of the Academy. It has come at the beginning of a new reign and the Council has already expressed to our young and gracious Sovereign our determination to fulfil the duties of our Royal Charter given to us fifty years ago. We have just elected to Honorary Fellowship that great man of letters Mr. Winston Churchill, who throughout all that period has played so great a part in our national life. My responsibility is all the greater as it has fallen to my lot to preside on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of our Charter. You will know how deeply I must feel my own inadequacy to carry out such duties, and how much I must rely on the great traditions that I inherit from my predecessors and the ready and efficient help of my colleagues in the Council, my brother officers, and their capable assistants.

You will no doubt expect me to offer in this address some reflections on those fifty years and I will try to make some general observations in the detached and objective manner of an historian, for which I have prepared myself by some researches in our *Proceedings* and rather tenuous records. Eulogy and congratulation may be left to our more festive reunion this evening, when you will also be provided with Sir Frederic Kenyon's admirable History of the Academy, in which much precious information is given in the concise style of which he has always been a master. No such survey was made at our twenty-fifth celebration, when our President was Lord Balfour. But in 1932 Dr. J. W. Mackail gave a sober and discriminating account of what had been accomplished which some of us here will remember.

It is important, in the first place, in any estimate we make of these fifty years to remind ourselves that ten of them have been passed in fighting two world wars. The Academy came into existence primarily as a body to co-operate with scholars in other countries. It was impossible to carry out such a task in war-time, and all subsequent relations were affected by the aftermath and the memories of the war years. We can, however,

be proud to recall that the activities of the Academy, though naturally somewhat diminished, were maintained without interruption throughout the two world wars. The lectures were punctually delivered in the second one, more than once under the threat of bombardment, and damage was in fact done to our rooms, in which our devoted Assistant Secretary worked throughout the whole of these war years after all the other inhabitants of the building had been evacuated.

In my last Address I considered our relations with the Government and the happy position to which they had attained, a position which I am glad to say has been fully maintained during the last year. I do not wish, therefore, today to dwell unduly on the attitude of the State in the past towards the Academy whose creation it had encouraged, which it frequently used for its own purposes, and to which for so long it refused to give any adequate assistance. But in any survey of the activities of the Academy this circumstance cannot be ignored, since it determined the whole course of its work. 'We are predominantly a materially minded people', said Sir Frederic himself, in his Presidential Address thirty years ago, 'Consequently literature, art, knowledge, wherever they have not an obvious material value, have to fight everywhere for recognition.'[1] He pointed out in his Address in 1918 that the *Institut de France* with its five Academies received a State grant of about £28,000, of which £20,000 was paid in salaries of the members and secretaries; the Berlin Academy received over £16,000, of which about £10,000 was paid in salaries. All that the British Government had given the British Academy for its own purposes was £400 a year towards its Social and Economic series, and this grant was suspended in the First World War and never renewed.[2] Not until 1924, after the first Labour Government came into office, was a general grant given to the Academy. Nor was any habitation provided for it by the Government until half the course of the fifty years was over. The solution finally adopted had been put forward by Lord Bryce as early as 1914. 'Whenever', he said, 'the question of providing better accommodation for the Civil Service Examinations and other kinds of work connected with the education or research in which the State is interested, comes to be settled, the Academy ought to urge its claim to have some meeting-place assigned to it in the buildings to be erected for any such purposes.'[3] When it is remembered

[1] *Proceedings of the British Academy*, x. 8. [2] *Proceedings*, 1917–18, 42–43.
[3] *Proceedings*, 1913–14, 17.

that this suggestion came from one who had been a Minister of the Crown, Ambassador to the United States, and was then President of the Academy, its modesty is surely remarkable. It was, however, thirteen years before Lord Balfour could announce in a note to 'my dear Arthur' from the Honorary Fellow whom we have elected today, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, that our present quarters had been assigned to us 'in recognition of the position of the British Academy and its services to the nation'. It was a private benefactor, Sir Charles Wakefield, who enabled the building to be reconstructed and our Council Room decorated in a manner worthy of its purpose, and presented the admirable portrait by Sir William Orpen in which Lord Balfour continues to survey our activities with an expression of philosophic doubt. The limitations of our premises are well known to you, but I have sometimes thought that, if the whole building were allotted to us, so that we might become the hosts of those scholarly societies who are now in such anxiety as to their future accommodation, we might contrive to make of it, physically as well as spiritually, a real centre of learning.

But bricks and mortar, even if faced with stone, and financial aid, however generous, do not make an Academy. That ours has not only survived, but grown into the full stature of today, is due mainly to a comparatively small number of individuals who have given it devoted service. And of these the two to whom we owe most gratitude are the two Secretaries, who between them cover nearly all of the fifty years of its life. Their diverse gifts fitted well into the pattern of the Academy's development. If Sir Israel Gollancz had not been the first holder of his office he would probably not have been included in the first list of Fellows. But he performed his difficult task better than a more mature scholar could have done. He brought to it a fertile imagination and an enthusiasm which no difficulty could daunt. His only office for twenty-five years a post-box in Burlington House, he was unsparing in his efforts to bring the new Academy to life. We owe to him the foundation of the lectures which form the greater part of our *Proceedings*, and to which a large number of the most notable scholars of the last fifty years have contributed. They are, of course, unequal in merit, but in nearly all cases they have been worthy examples of that desire of a scholar to stretch himself to the utmost before a competent and critical audience. We have recently established a new one in Archaeology from the income of the Albert Reckitt Trust to commemorate a name to which we owe much, but there are other subjects

which still lack a benefactor. Since several of the lectures have now become biennial there is ample room, indeed a growing need, for more lectures and I hope means may be found to add to their number. Few more useful methods exist of perpetuating a name at comparatively small cost, while at the same time encouraging scholars, young and old, to give in attractive form contributions to learning that might in many cases otherwise never see the light.

Sir Israel also did much to give the Academy a purpose and a status in the world of learning. He organized, for example, the International Congress of History in 1913, a notable success, for a far greater number attended it and a much greater number of papers were read than ever before. It was undertaken under great difficulties. There was no one centre available and little money to hire the necessary labour. The meetings were scattered all over London, as I know full well, for I was the Assistant Secretary of the Modern History section. But it was for all a great privilege to meet the notable array of scholars that came to London from all Europe and the North American continent.

The services of Sir Frederic Kenyon are well known to you, but we cannot too often record our gratitude for all that we owe to his austere scholarship and inflexible sense of duty. His work for the Academy began of course at its origin and he had been President when Sir Israel Gollancz was Secretary. His Presidential Addresses show that he had a somewhat different conception of the Academy from that of Sir Israel, no doubt in part due to his environment. He was not enamoured of lectures, and repeated in one of his Addresses, with relish, if not approval, the opinion of a 'statesman once eminent' that 'lectures are a method of barbarism'. 'The true functions of an Academy, to my mind,' he said, 'are two in number: to advance learning by a wise use of funds committed to its charge, and to be the official representative of learning in the State.'[1] He even suggested, at a time when a future President of the Academy was President of the Board of Education, that the Academy might be used as the machinery through which the funds of the State were transmitted to the Universities, then a rather bold and radical view. He played a notable part in remaking the union of Academies which the war had disrupted and like his predecessor, Bryce, refused to carry into the world of scholarship the passions roused by the war.

The Presidents of the Academy have naturally not played so

[1] *Proceedings*, 1917–18, 42.

important a part in its development as its Secretaries. Four of the first eight had held high administrative posts. The first President, Lord Reay, was a man of ability interested in learning, and the fact that he was also President of the Royal Asiatic Society has had, perhaps, a permanent influence on the direction of our activities. He was a zealous champion of the new body of which in its early days there was much ill-informed criticism. In reply to a noted scientist who had insisted that the State should only spend money on practical research and that '"the study of ancient eloquence and historic wisdom" should become a luxury', he replied, in the vocabulary of the time, that the study of 'the relation of man to Nature does not render superfluous an examination of the relation of man to his Creator, to his neighbours, and to spiritual influences'.[1]

Lord Balfour was President for seven years. He was more responsible than any other man for securing the annual grant from the State. But he was then an old man and it must always be a matter of regret to us that he gave no Presidential address throughout his period of office. In 1925 he delivered the Philosophical Lecture in the Hertz Foundation, but the only other record of him that we possess is a speech on the occasion of the dinner which celebrated our twenty-fifth anniversary, and that, obviously unprepared, is only notable for certain characteristic comments on the proposer of the toast, the Earl of Birkenhead. Lord Bryce, on the other hand, gave by far the longest Addresses in the records of the Academy and, if the last was delivered as printed, its length must have taxed the patience of his listeners. He had recently travelled extensively and literally surveyed the world from China to Peru. He was especially interested in the impact of Western learning on Japan. 'Would it', he asked, 'give birth to great humanitarian works, a topic fit to be discussed by our successors in the Academy fifty years hence?'[2]

H. A. L. Fisher was both statesman and scholar but when he became President his statesman's days were over. He gave only one Presidential Address at the end of his four years, an Olympian survey of the Academy's activities which ends with the pregnant suggestion that 'the measure of our future achievements will bear some direct relation to the largeness and generosity of our designs'.[3] Instead of his first Presidential Address he gave his well-remembered Raleigh Lecture on the Whig Historians, the only time a President has delivered it during the tenure of his

[1] *Proceedings*, 1905–6, 3. [2] *Proceedings*, 1913–14, 19.
[3] *Proceedings*, xviii. 21.

office. Some celebrated sentences reveal that he had, as several of our early Presidents, a certain distrust of University scholarship: 'The Histories of Macaulay and his nephew', he said, 'could not have been produced from university chairs. There is something unacademic in their impetuous flood of entertaining detail. We miss the deadly relevance and cold impartiality of the seminar.'[1] The other three Presidents of this first period were three notable scholars of whom S. H. Butcher did not live to address the Academy. Sir Adolphus Ward revealed his wide and massive learning, while Sir E. Maunde Thompson began that association with the British Museum which Sir Frederic continued. Of their successors during the last twenty years it would not become me to speak, except to say that they have maintained in all respects the tradition of their office. Two of them happily are with us in our celebration today.

The work of the Academy under these able and devoted men can be divided into two parts, international and national. I put international first because it was to take part in such work that the Academy was founded. Foreign scholars were amazed that no body existed in this country to do for the humanities what the Royal Society had done so admirably for science. Many of their Academies contained both disciplines combined in varying degrees of association. Some of these Academies had been brought into being by the exercise of the power of monarchs or princes, who endowed them and gave them honours which shed lustre on the donor himself. In some cases great statesmen had moved the State to action. The foundation of the Vienna Academy, for example, which possesses one of the most charming habitations in Europe, was almost entirely due to Metternich's interest in scholarship and science.

The instincts and habits of this country made any such course impossible. But it can be said, I think, that the Academy, represented for a long period in the international field by Sir Frederic Kenyon as President or Secretary, has played no unworthy part in the difficult task of forming in a union of Academies a centre of co-operation amongst scholars. There was always of course and still is a political aspect to such co-operation. The prestige and the public relations of States towards one another can be affected. This was one of the reasons why the Union Académique Internationale changed its statutes so that meetings could, if necessary, be held elsewhere than in Brussels. After the First World War it was ten years before the German and Austrian Academies

[1] *Proceedings*, xiv. 339.

could be readmitted, and by that time their scholars were no longer free to express themselves. The meeting in London in 1939 was used by the Italians and Germans as a means of propaganda. One of the latter, a scholar whom I had known for twenty years, was a member of Hitler's Reichstag and his language was such that I found it necessary to tell him that war between our two countries was in my opinion practically inevitable. Nevertheless throughout most of the period the Union has functioned with much success and it has an impressive record of co-operative enterprises, most of which would not have been attempted if it had not existed. It is heartening to be able to report that on this side of the iron curtain, at least, the last war, despite its greater range and scope, has had far less effect on the magnanimity of scholars and that there is a more co-operative spirit amongst learned societies than ever before.

In this post-war age even the assembling of scholars together cannot be accomplished without the assistance of the State, and the funds of the Academies are inadequate for the continuation of their work. In these circumstances new machinery has been set up to advise the new inter-governmental body known as UNESCO as to the assistance to be given to scholarship. The scientists have long had such machinery which has enabled their international communications to continue uninterruptedly and made possible some of their long-term projects. The new Council of Philosophy and Humanistic Studies has already a budget of considerable dimensions. It brings of course dangers with it which will need much skill and thought to surmount. We owe much to its first Secretary-General, a member of the *Institut*, and we can be glad that its new Secretary-General is a member of our own body whom we can trust to maintain the high standards set by Sir Frederic Kenyon.

In our work in this country we have for the most part been content to exercise an indirect influence. But the fertilizing stream of our funds, if small in volume, has been directed into many different channels, with, I think, much practical wisdom. It has facilitated the publication of much scholarly work produced by the voluntary labours of numbers of individuals. Almost all our members could testify to benefits received by some society or project in which he takes an interest. It is my earnest hope that that assistance can be increased and broadened in the years to come, while at the same time ensuring that independence to scholars which we value more than any financial aid. Now that we administer the Albert Reckitt as well as the

Stein–Arnold Trust we have a solid capital backing to enable us to continue the support that we have always given to archaeological research, now more urgently needed than ever before, at a time when so many writers are engaged in summing up and passing judgement on civilizations still imperfectly known.

Many Fellows have regretted that we did not continue the series of Social and Economic Records which Vinogradoff induced the Academy to produce, and I am glad that we have begun again to plan more contributions under our own name. But I think that most will agree that we should use the bulk of our funds to stimulate and encourage the work of other more specialist societies, always ensuring that standards are maintained and that the results are commensurate with the assistance given. We must not forget, however, in this connexion the volumes of the Schweich Lectures, a series that contains much learning that would not otherwise have been given to the world in so convenient a form, and whose sales show how much it meets a deeply felt need.

In the field of what I may term academic statesmanship, the Academy has played a smaller role than might have been expected. It has tended, no doubt wisely, to leave the initiative to other older bodies where, however, its members have often had a commanding influence. There are none the less a number of instances where it has played an important part in fostering instruments of scholarly co-operation or defending the interests of pure learning. I will give only one example. 'A paper read before the Academy', claimed Bryce in 1914, 'marked the beginning of a movement which has now culminated in the foundation in London of a School of Oriental Studies.'[1]

We are now in a stronger position to exert our influence than ever before. Not only have we more money to spend, though, it is true, in a depreciated sterling, but we have been fully recognized as the channel to which learned societies in the humanities and social sciences should apply if they desire to be helped by State funds. This responsibility includes that spent abroad by such institutions as the British Schools at Rome, Athens, and elsewhere, whose budgets are now incorporated in our grant. We have, therefore, the duty of taking the initiative if such work demands expansion or if new bodies are urgently needed. In the last two years we have made two attempts to obtain substantial Treasury grants for such purposes, which I regret to say have been unsuccessful. But the reason given for the refusal was the

[1] *Proceedings*, 1913–14, 16.

present national emergency and we do not intend to let the matter rest there. I may add that though we based our claims on those of pure scholarship there were in both cases advantages accruing to the State which could not be obtained by any other means. Non-governmental bodies can sometimes do work useful for the State which would be suspect if it were performed by the State itself. Large funds are now devoted in various ways to the dissemination of British culture in other countries, and we can fairly claim that its highest scholarship can take part in this ambassadorial work with every prospect of producing results equal or superior to much that is attempted by other means. But our position must always rest in the scholarly nature of the work to be done and the impossibility of doing it in any other way, and not on the indirect results that it may produce. Still I believe that we can establish a fruitful partnership with the State that will redound to the advantage of both.

Finally I would suggest, after reading through these records, that in the necessary process of safeguarding the claims of scholarship we have, perhaps, been too austere and limited in our attitude. In his second Presidential Address Lord Reay gave it as his opinion that the Academy 'must not expose itself to the taunt of running in too narrow a groove, and of closing its doors to those who touch exact and technical knowledge with the graces of style and culture'.[1] This sentence was recommended to the attention of the Academy by Dr. Mackail twenty years ago.[2] In its early days the Academy was the centre of several celebrations of great masters of literature. It organized that of the tricentenary of Milton's birth and its *Proceedings* contain an ode by George Meredith on the subject, one of the last poems he ever composed.[3] Had it not been for the First World War the Academy would have devoted much time and energy to the celebration of the Shakespeare tricentenary in 1916. It gradually abandoned these admirable activities, and I think that we might, perhaps, do well to resume them. I note also that Harley Granville-Barker gave one of the Shakespeare Lectures, and I think we might well broaden the character of our lectures in some of the fields which they cover. We have also to extend our activities in the Social Sciences and bring them to a level with those in other fields.

It was for reasons such as these, as well as for others which I need not now repeat, that I suggested, as more than one of my

[1] *Proceedings*, 1907–8, 4.
[2] *Proceedings*, xix. 23.
[3] *Proceedings*, 1907–8, 354.

predecessors had done, the creation of a category of Senior Fellows. The response has shown that, as on previous occasions, the Academy is not yet willing to follow this course. The fact that under our new bye-laws we can extend our membership to two hundred makes the problem less urgent. We have, indeed, in our fiftieth year been able to elect a larger number of Fellows than on any occasion since the Academy was first establishing itself, and we are glad to welcome so many able scholars to our ranks and hope to see many of them at our celebration this evening.

But the problem is bound to recur. For we must remember that the number of vacancies was larger because of the exceptionally large number of deaths amongst our members, some at a comparatively early age. If I do not attempt to express at greater length the deep sense of loss that we all feel and to bring to your notice the merits and achievements of those who have left us, it is because such tributes will be paid, with more intimate knowledge and on a broader canvas than is possible today, in future volumes of our *Proceedings*, for us and future generations to have as a memorial. And all have left behind enduring memorials in their contributions to learning. It is to foster and protect the production of such work by all the means in its power that the Academy exists. If the technical developments and social changes of our time make it possible for many to become scholars who in the past would have been denied the opportunity, they also bring to scholars new difficulties, new problems—and new temptations. In a world in flux the Academy can find in the first fifty years of its history much to fortify and encourage it in the tásks which lie before it.