

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

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I MUST begin by expressing my appreciation of the high honour which you have conferred upon me by twice electing me to the office of President of the Academy. I have also in full measure that sense of responsibility and unworthiness to which some of my predecessors have confessed. If I do not dwell upon this point now it is because it is difficult to find appropriate language for such feelings. I do not wish to express a deep emotion by a stereotype.

These feelings have been intensified by the conviction that the Academy is now beginning a period of special importance in its service to scholarship. I do not mean that it has not in the past faithfully carried out the duties laid on it by the Charter granted to it by His Majesty Edward VII on 8 August 1902, the eve of his coronation. When you read the history, soon to be published, of the fifty years of its life, one of the last benefits conferred on the Academy by Sir Frederic Kenyon, who himself played a major role in its affairs throughout the whole half-century, you will realize how many were the diverse tasks which it had to perform—and for a long time with quite inadequate resources. But the age in which we now live is very different from the Edwardian period and we have to face new problems in new ways. To the solution of these problems the Academy has, I believe, much to contribute and I look forward to the continual co-operation of its members in the work which lies before us. Much will depend on the manner in which we carry it out. Not only the future of the Academy will be affected by it but that of scholarly studies everywhere in our country.

For, as you all know, scholars, like others engaged in similar fields, will have to look more and more to the State for assistance if they are to maintain, and, as they ought, endeavour to surpass, the high standards set them by their predecessors. Music and the visual arts are now supported by the State in a manner our forefathers would have thought to be impossible. Scientists are given large sums of money to prosecute their researches—and not only those of immediate and obvious benefit to the community. The universities now depend on the State for the greater part of

their income. The studies represented in the Academy, if they are to survive in full vigour, will also have to rely on the assistance of the State to a greater degree than has previously been the case. Private contributions of scholars and the benefactions of patrons of learning fortunately still survive. The Academy has recently received two notable contributions in the Stein–Arnold and Reckitt trusts, which are at this moment enabling scholars, old and young, to take part in the exploration of ancient civilizations, a task in which our country has always played a distinguished part. We ourselves by our subscriptions to this and other bodies, by the provision of our own materials of learning, and by travel in our own country and abroad, devote no small part of our net income to the service of scholarship. But the cost of scholarly work is continually rising. That of paper and print alone now causes all scholars grave anxiety. There are other formidable difficulties of which I shall speak presently. It is not too much to say that the machinery of communication amongst scholars may be so seriously crippled by these developments that there will be a sensible diminution of such activities in this country unless something is done to help those who carry them on.

More than ever before also there is need for close co-operation of scholars in this country with those in Europe and overseas. It was indeed in order to obtain an authoritative body to take part in such work that the Academy was first founded. For fifty years it has played an important role in what is now called the Union Académique Internationale from which many valuable co-operative studies have come that could not have been produced in any other way. Only recently that body met at this Academy though it rarely leaves its permanent seat at Brussels, and we were assisted by the government and the kind offices of the Universities of London and Cambridge in giving its members an adequate if modest hospitality. But more funds are necessary than scholars can now supply from their own resources if the Academy is to take its due share of such work, to which I may add that we are in this country now committed by international treaties as well as by our own necessities and predilections.

Fortunately it is possible to say that this situation has been recognized by the State, even though the means have not yet been found to put all its goodwill into practical effect. For nearly twenty years the British Academy was denied any assistance from the Treasury. Even its influential President, Lord Balfour, begged at first in vain. For long the Academy had no

habitation and its work was carried on under the greatest difficulties by the devoted services of a small number of individuals. The endowment of its lectures which have provided a large body of scholarly work, much of it of the highest standard, and have, I know, aroused the admiration of foreign scholars, was due to private benefactions, benefactions now, of course, much reduced in value, for such funds are necessarily kept in a form specially vulnerable when inflation comes. Meanwhile, the government refused even the most modest contribution towards ends which it had fully approved and whose importance it had itself recognized.

But this position has now altered. The studies comprised in the Academy cannot, of course, be expected to have the same popular appeal as teaching, the arts, or science with its sensational discoveries and manifold applications to all the necessities of ordinary life, and democratic governments must take that fact into account. But in recent years it has begun to be recognized in Whitehall that much depends on fostering learning. It is known that unless a proper standard is maintained at the highest levels all other branches of scholarship will inevitably share in a universal decline. However inadequate may seem to us the sums set aside for the purposes in which we are interested, they have been considerably increased in recent years, and I have hopes that if, as I am confident will be the case, we show ourselves competent stewards these sums will be increased in the future to compensate to some degree at least for the increasing burden that is falling upon us. This is one reason, though there are others of equal or even greater weight, why the Academy is of the greatest importance to all the community of scholars in this country, a goodly band spread far and wide over the whole length and breadth of these islands.

Many people have been alarmed lest aid from the State should injure the freedom of the scholar to work as the spirit moves him, the only way in which the highest form of scholarship can appear. I do not need to insist before you, who are all scholars, that nothing of any great value is produced in our profession except through the patient, sustained intellectual energy of individuals trained to their task by long years of hard work. We have all of us chosen our own paths in the world of learning and we would resent, more perhaps than scholars in any other country, any interference from outside. Yet we must recognize that the work of scholars has often depended on their obtaining the funds necessary for them to complete their tasks. Before the first great

war these were supplied mainly from the ancient universities or private benefaction and were often unavailable to those who most needed help. I remember, when a young man, obtaining a sum of money desperately needed for researches in foreign archives by an overdraft granted (without security) by a kindly bank manager, but that is a resource not often available nowadays and is indeed discouraged by present Chancellors of the Exchequer. In the period between the wars we were indebted to the great American foundations for much precious aid to scholarship, and there are, of course, similar foundations in our own country. But these bodies are for the most part naturally and properly mainly interested in studies which have a more immediate effect on life and manners than the products of pure scholarship. And in any case their funds are limited and have not grown with the increasing cost of every kind of scholarly production.

Thus, though the main stream on which our work is borne will continue to be made as before by the innumerable contributions of private scholars, assisted we hope to some extent by the tributary waters of private generosity, yet if the craft is to reach journey's end there must be other means of covering the shallows to a reasonable depth—and these can only come from the State. And in order that the State may use its funds wisely it needs independent and highly qualified advice. For the natural and applied sciences, the Royal Society has long been the centre where this task has been performed, to the great satisfaction of the State, the scientific societies, and the individuals whose work has been made possible by it. The British Academy within much narrower limits has performed a similar task. This work has grown in recent years and is now beginning to assume formidable proportions. It may perhaps have surprised some members to realize that the Academy is now responsible to the Treasury for funds amounting to some £40,000 a year. Much the greater part of this sum is, of course, that expended on the British Schools abroad at Rome, Athens, Ankara, and elsewhere, which have their own councils of scholars, who bring much experience and devotion to the task of administration. But the Academy is responsible for the final submission to the Treasury and it has the power to distribute the funds available according to the tasks to be accomplished and the results that have been obtained.

It is on the Academy also that the responsibility lies for bringing to the attention of the State new fields where such funds can

be expended with advantage through similar institutions, and we are very much aware of the great importance of this duty. A distinguished American inquirer into our system of university education said to me recently in a tone of disparagement, 'When something new is needed, it is the State which decides whether it will be done'. Within our competence it is for us to see that in such problems the State decides wisely. It is the function of a voluntary society like our own to seek to extend and improve the means by which British scholars obtain training abroad and produce work of the highest value for the understanding of our civilization. We have, for example, recently spent much time and thought in urging new developments in this field in the proper quarters, and, but for the new emergency in national finances we would, I think, have succeeded in our purpose, which has, I trust, been only temporarily postponed.

We are also now receiving from many quarters appeals for assistance in scholarly work hard hit by the changes in our economy produced by war and inflation. One great problem is, as I have already hinted, that of the housing of the learned societies, several of whom are now threatened with the loss of their headquarters through the staggering rise of rents and services. Though we have made such representations as have been possible for us, we have as yet been able to do nothing to solve this problem. It is probable that a solution can be found only with the goodwill of the State, and the Academy is ready to co-operate with all concerned to obtain one. The State has already decided to give great assistance to the scientific societies for this purpose when resources become available. It is not too much to ask that the long-established societies of humane learning should also be given help to overcome the formidable difficulties which confront them in this respect.

I must point out also the wide range of activities covered by the Academy. For not only the humanities but the social sciences are amongst the disciplines which form our body. These latter have, of course, many resources placed at their disposal and are developing at a rapid rate in the universities. But they also have their institutions and societies outside the universities with a special role to fulfil. It is clear that these studies are drawing into their fields a greater number of scholars and must play a much greater part in our body than they do today. In my personal view it is to the advantage of both the humanities and the social sciences to be as closely associated together as is possible. Their disciplines have much to gain by such a process.

One of the greatest dangers of the modern world is lest scholarship should be too much split up into watertight compartments. In this problem also I hope that the Academy may prove of help to all scholars who realize their interdependence and common ends in the pursuit of learning.

I will not say that we are as yet properly prepared and organized to deal with all these important problems. But the development begun under my predecessor has been continued apace by the Council during the last year. Our machinery and finance, if not streamlined, has been overhauled and adapted to its new duties. For this improvement we owe a great deal to our Secretary and Treasurer. The alterations which we have suggested in our by-laws, and which you have just approved, are meant to draw into this work a greater number of our members. For if it is to be properly performed we shall need the assistance of all members of the Academy who are aware of their place in the community of scholars. Some there are no doubt, and must ever be, so absorbed in their particular interests that they can give no time to these wider problems. But I think that we are all becoming increasingly aware that in this age of specialization and administration, we can find in the Academy an outlook and a means of action such as cannot be obtained in any other body.

I will therefore not hesitate to say that my own personal opinion is that we have yet much to do before we can feel that we have fully prepared ourselves for the work that awaits us, of which I have today been able to give only the briefest outline. And to one problem, often referred to by my predecessors, I will in all humility venture to suggest a solution. We all rejoice, I think, that men, including scholars, live longer than they used to do and not only longer but more vigorously in their old age. Some of our most active scholars have long passed three score years and ten. But this has meant that in a limited society, such as ours, members are often not elected until an age when other responsibilities make it difficult for them to co-operate to the full in the activities of the Academy. My own view, formed after much reflection, and after discussing the question with members of European academies, is that the time has come to make a category of senior members who, while retaining all their rights and privileges, will not be expected to take the same part in our administrative activities. They should also, in my opinion, no longer have to pay any subscription. If this course be adopted we will be able to elect a larger number of members at a younger age without injury to the standards of our scholarship or the

finances of the Academy. I intend in the coming year to lay this proposal before the Council and, if they adopt it, to bring it before you at our next Annual General Meeting. I state this intention now so that it may receive your earnest consideration and that you may, if you wish to do so, either in meetings of the Sections or as individuals, make your views known to the Council before they themselves take a decision upon it.

If many of our members live active lives to an advanced age, there are others whom we lose prematurely and this last year the Academy has suffered heavily. Two of those who have departed from us were members of the Council and had given devoted service to it. We shall mourn them all not only as scholars and friends but as men who had done much to enable others to follow the same profession in which they themselves had attained such high distinction. The lives of all of them will be recorded in our *Proceedings* by colleagues who have known them well and understood their achievements, and I will not now attempt a personal appraisal of their careers. They will be long remembered by us.

To some of these death came so soon because of their efforts for their country in two world wars. We are constantly reminded that we have to pursue our labours in a world where new responsibilities are continually being placed on those who believe that we have not only our own safety to defend but all the liberties with which we as an Academy of learning are concerned. We ourselves enjoy that freedom of thought and expression which, as Tacitus wrote, is an infrequent phenomenon in history. 'Rara temporum felicitate ubi sentire quae velis et quae sentias dicere licet.' It is our duty as members of the Academy to safeguard this precious heritage. We must endeavour to make it in all respects a fit instrument for its high purposes.