

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

BY PROFESSOR OWEN CHADWICK

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I THANK Sir Kenneth Dover, whose service as President happened during a period of unparalleled difficulty for the Academy and whose good humour and patience and care over detail were of high importance to our welfare.

In a time of retrenchment in government expenditure on universities our members have been much concerned that good shall not disappear with bad. To interfere in the private arrangements of universities is impossible for the Academy even if it disposed of all the information; but during the year we have taken an interest in the preservation of certain of the smaller subjects at risk, like the History of Science, and fostered a Conference of Iranian Studies at a time when political conditions made difficult or impossible the usual modes of studying Persian. The Academy has been concerned in two other difficult areas, the preservation of historical monuments, and the accessibility of public records. We can very seldom interfere directly, but at least we are a voice to which authority is willing to listen even if it then says it has no money to do what we should like. Care is necessary. For a corporate body as for an individual, to talk too much is not to be heard.

At the annual meeting of the Academy in 1981 you passed a resolution that we should discuss with the Council of the Royal Society the possibility of 'a joint meeting to examine the questions raised by nuclear weapons in all their aspects—scientific, ethical, legal, technical'. In obedience to this resolution your officers held a discussion with the officers of the Royal Society, when it was agreed to await the publication of the British Association's earlier discussion on the same range of topics, to ask for a bibliography of what was already written, and to see whether the Reith Lectures by Professor L. Martin had something to contribute. The discussion at the meeting of the British Association held at York in September 1981 has now been published, edited by C. F. Barnaby and G. P. Thomas, as *The Nuclear Arms Race—Control or Catastrophe?* (Frances Pinter, 1982). The British Medical Association is conducting a study of the medical effects of nuclear

weapons, led by a working party under the chairmanship of Sir John Stallworthy; and we understand that they hope to publish their report early in 1983 with an interim report in July 1982. The Academy has received a number of other resolutions on this subject, some of which are wholly serious in their scientific or ethical standpoint, and some of which are mere propaganda against democratic regimes.

What is clear from all this is as follows. The matter is of deep interest both to the scientific communities of the world and to everyone who thinks seriously about ethics. The most fruitful line is the urgent encouragement of schemes of arms limitation, and the addition of further scientific knowledge now being sought may lend force to such encouragement. Neither your officers nor the officers of the Royal Society believe that at this moment any useful purpose would be served by such a symposium as is described in the resolution, at least until the effects of the parallel British Association symposium, which of course included an ethical dimension as well as a scientific, have been considered more fully. But we are keeping in close touch with the Royal Society, and will not lose sight of the concern which the Academy has shown.

During the year the Academy was paid the compliment of being asked whether it could take large new responsibility. We have become by historical development a research council for the humanities; and the Department of Education and Science enquired whether we would consent to extend that function by administering postgraduate studentships in the humanities. Lord Rothschild, in his enquiry into the Social Science Research Council, then consulted us; and others suggested that if Government decided to dismantle the Social Science Research Council, the Academy might take over such of its functions as were appropriate.

Doubtless the views of the Fellowship on these matters were and are various. What is clear is that either extension of our responsibilities would need a reconstruction of the way in which we work and are funded; and your Council as a whole has been keenly conscious of the need for caution if the essential purposes of the Academy, as we know them now, are to be maintained and extended in the way which has hitherto been found fruitful. Lord Rothschild has recommended the maintenance of the Social Science Research Council; and because Government has yet to comment upon the report, it would be premature at this moment to speculate on what might happen to our work in those areas in certain circumstances which are still hypothetical. The administration

of postgraduate awards in the humanities is still under discussion. If it should prove in the event that in public duty we ought to play a larger part there than hitherto, it will be absolutely essential that heavy new burdens do not fall upon our officers and staff. And we place high value on our constitutional independence as a learned society, responsible to our Fellows.

In the coming year we move house. In 1965 the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works offered us the ground floor of this side of Burlington House. We replied that we could not do without the first floor, or at least part of it. Meanwhile, other learned societies were ardent for the same space, and some tough fighting ensued. By December 1965 we accepted the premises which we now occupy, glad to have that much, but very sorry that Government was not bolder on our behalf, aware that the rooms were already too small for our administrative staff, and that as our responsibilities grew we must grow out of them. So the Government left us with a splendid façade, a magnificent address, and unworthy accommodation, especially for our secretariat; and as the work of the Academy has extended, and we have therefore taken more far-flung responsibilities, we have grown out of the space which we were given, as we predicted at the time.

The President of 1971–2 said that the premises were already inadequate, and had no doubt that within a few years they would become ‘intolerably congested’. ‘The truth is’ he said, ‘that the work is rapidly outgrowing our staff and their premises’.

A year later he repeated the warning. ‘I said last year that our staff needs a new structure and more room. This year I will modify that judgement only by saying that we need much more room.’

Sir Isaiah Berlin went to visit the Bavarian Academy at Munich and found that its corridors alone comfortably exceed the space allotted to the British Academy.

The quest therefore continued for new premises which would enable our work to be better founded.

The error of judgement, as we are bound to think it, on the part of Government in 1965 could not be reversed and therefore no expansion within Burlington House was possible, however obviously suitable that might seem to a national institution like ourselves.

Since the mid 1970s we have looked into several possible sites. Finally the Crown Estate made us an offer of premises in Cornwall Terrace facing Regent’s Park. In 1979–80, as members will know, the Academy committed itself to move thither. The Crown Estate has constructed for us a new lecture theatre. There was much to do

to make the premises habitable. The walls were covered in scarlet graffiti from Italian squatters presumed to have links with the Red Brigades, and the entire interior needed gutting and reconstructing. That work is almost finished. It is a walk of two minutes from Baker Street Station and therefore accessible, and nearby is a big car park. The Secretary and his Staff will move thither just before Christmas and Sections will meet there for the first time in January 1983. Our lectures for the autumn of 1982 will continue to be held in this room. By this move into more satisfactory premises nothing is taken away from our existing resources. We have a lease for sixty years from the Crown Estate and our grant will take the rent into account. Whether we can stay there for sixty years is another question. The place is a considerable improvement and adequate for our present needs. But it is not more than adequate; and if we were to undertake large new tasks during the next years it might again become a matter for consideration how the staff is to be housed. Many will regret leaving Burlington House. Those regrets will not be shared by those who know how our work is done.

Our President Sir Kenneth Wheare said in 1970 that Afghanistan 'is a key country in the study of Eastern antiquities and cultures. It is the meeting-ground in antiquity of the civilizations of Greece, China, India, and Persia. In most respects its magnificent archaeological riches are virtually unexplored.' Sir Max Mallowan helped to create our Institute in Kabul, which came to fruition during 1971-2.

In April 1976 the Society for Afghan Studies appointed R. H. Pinder-Wilson as third Director.

Between 1974 and 1979, by agreement with the Afghan government, the British Institute carried out excavations at Old Kandahar, the site of a Hellenistic and Kushan city.

The political troubles in Afghanistan produced questions about the work of the Institute similar to those which happened a little earlier in Tehran. The Director chose to stay and for a time received a measure of encouragement from the authorities. But he was arrested this spring, weeks passed without his being brought to trial, hard words were said by propagandists on Afghan television, and the course of events gave us every ground for acute anxiety on his behalf. Apart from everything else he was due to retire in May and his health is delicate. You may rest assured that in consultation with the Foreign Office and the Afghan Society everything possible was done and is being done. This is one of the places where the international relations of the Academy and of its

individual members have been of the first importance. French and Italian scholars concerned with Afghan studies have done all that is in their power, more even than we could have expected. We also approached the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

You will have read in the newspapers yesterday morning about the latest developments. We have heard with incredulity some of the detailed charges which have been lodged, and we have every confidence in his integrity. We can only imagine the pressures brought upon him in the three months during which he has had virtually no communication with the outside world. Some of the allegations which appear to have been made against him seem to be based on a misunderstanding of actions undertaken with the full knowledge and approval of the Afghan authorities. He is now said to have been tried, and in open trial. We have no knowledge of the trial. British representatives in Kabul did not know of the trial beforehand and had no access. What is said to have been an open trial was no open trial. I will not say more at present for reasons you will understand. In the meantime any work aided by us in Afghanistan must be placed in suspense.¹

Members will know of the Readership Scheme. This provides a period of research for established scholars. It has the incidental effect, which is of the first importance in the present situation of universities when they can hardly appoint young men, of opening three-year posts to young scholars while the Reader is seconded. We have received expressions of gratitude from universities. There are five Readers at present, three more to be appointed. That makes the selection hard, for the posts attract a host of excellent people who would be helped. We are sorry not to be able to appoint more. We have decided to change the composition of the selecting committee each year in order that different interests may be represented. We cannot expect that we shall have got all the arrangements perfect at the first effort, and are committed to a review during the course of the coming winter.

The response shows that the scheme was badly needed. Various criticisms have been made of its detailed working, but I have met no dissent from the proposition that as a whole it is valuable. The forthcoming review, we hope, will be available to Sections for consideration at the January meeting in 1983.

In the course of the year Section XII has been divided into two Sections: XII for Social Studies and XV for Political Studies. This proposal and its implementation led to a discussion on the

¹ Mr Pinder-Wilson was released on 14 July and was able to return to this country.

sectional structure of the Academy. This structure is historic and serves us well in getting expert advice on research projects, elections to Fellowships, publications, and all the Academy's other business. It has two problems: the first is that of communication between the Sections and the centre, and the second is inherent in the development of knowledge and academic interests, where a historic Section fails fully to represent borderland between itself and another Section. One axiom is self-evident: the more Sections the more cumbersome, and the greater the need for administrative staff. Another axiom is self-evident: it is ridiculous to create two Sections out of one when all the members of the old single Section are going to be members of both the new Sections. Nevertheless we have in large majority been persuaded that the new division is right in relation to what has been happening in the Social Sciences and in the study of Politics. We propose to engage further in the discussion of the sectional structure in the course of the next few months.

Already in 1972 the then President was very gloomy about the prospects of publishing learned works, especially by young scholars. Now the crisis which he foresaw has come upon us, not only for young scholars. The humanities owe a debt to certain publishers, especially but not exclusively publishers associated with universities, who have borne risks bigger than they would have liked, to continue to promote learning though it is unremunerative. The Academy has given grants for the research which prepares the book, and engages in its own major publishing projects which themselves need a critical eye in the present economic climate. In addition, thanks largely to kind benefactors, we are able from our own resources to run a scheme for subsidizing scholarly monographs. Under this scheme there is a bias towards scholars seeking to publish a first book. This problem of publishing the results of learned research becomes an ever larger part of the Academy's cares.

The work of the Academy rests upon its staff, the Secretary, the Deputy Secretary, and their helpers. At a time of increasing activity, and with a coming move, we owe them much.