

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

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10 *July* 1974

IN my first Presidential Address I spoke, with a naïve blandness born of inexperience and nursed by hope, of my good fortune in inheriting a fully developed and smoothly functioning Academy, created by the initiative and industry of the past five Presidents and their distinguished Secretaries. I referred to the likelihood that I should have little more to do than observe and applaud the appearance of each new blossom in the garden which they had planted.

In principle I was right; in practice it has not been quite like that, for two reasons. First, because the blossoms have come very thick and fast, so that there is much more to know, and to note, than there was three years ago. And, secondly, because the intrinsic interest of it all develops in even the most unlikely President a lively and increasing desire to involve himself in the actual gardening. He likes, at least in broad outline, to know everything; and occasionally to cherish the illusion that he is doing something.

The truth of course is that the work of the Academy is wholly done by the Secretary and staff, by the Foreign Secretary and the Treasurer, by the Committees of the Academy; by the Chairmen of Sections and their colleagues; and by Council and its Committees. There seems little room for the President except as a transient and embarrassed phantom; and yet I wonder if I am the first to feel that, however inadequate my part in the life of the Academy during these years, the Academy has played a very large part in mine; so that I leave with regret an office entered with reluctance.

I have said that things have grown thick and fast; and it would be easy to illustrate this fact in considerable detail. I could speak of the great expansion of our international network, which now covers the whole of Europe and is spreading over other continents, mainly as a result of generous gifts from the Leverhulme Trust, the Wates Foundation, and—through the Rippon Fund—Her Majesty's Government. I could tell of the prolonged labours which have recently led to the beginnings of new Institutes in Afghanistan and South-East Asia. And of numerous other plans and performances. For the moment I

confine myself to a single aspect, and simply enumerate those Major Projects and Committees of the Academy which were not on the list two or three years ago: the Committees for Carthage, for Anglo-Palestinian Archives, for the *Corpus* of Anglo-Saxon Sculpture, for a Critical Edition of the Greek New Testament, for Episcopal *Acta*, for *Fontes Historiae Africanae*, for Illuminated Hebrew Manuscripts, for a Lexicon of Greek Personal Names, for Oriental Manuscripts, and for an Iconographical Lexicon of Classical Mythology.

These together constitute nearly one-third of the major research projects for which the Academy is wholly or in large measure responsible; and it may well be thought surprising that such studies should expand so rapidly, and on so large a scale, at the present time, a time of which the most obvious characteristics are, on the one hand, exceptionally grave economic and political perils, and, on the other, as hearty a devotion by the nation at large to the pursuit of money, material comforts, and personal pleasures as at any time in our history; a period, moreover, when only the most enviable optimist could still believe that former standards are being maintained in our schools and in our universities. It is a time in which the welfare of academic learning might easily be at risk; for that welfare depends on Government grants, and there is nowadays no lack of voices eager to explain to large and receptive audiences that there is no measurable or material interest returned on the investment of public money in the Humanities.

Fortunately there is one quarter where understanding and indeed active encouragement have never been wanting, and that is the Department of Education and Science, our paymaster. This year, at a time of exceptionally grave financial difficulty, they found it possible to increase our grant from £550,000 to £695,000. This increase, generous as it is, fell quite a long way short of what we had asked for; but in the circumstances it was obviously right to agree that certain enterprises should be postponed. Chief among these were plans for Institutes in Cairo and Amman, and—this perhaps an especially regrettable deferment—our intention to subvent, on a much larger scale than before, the publication of works of learning. I hope we shall soon be able to do something really useful in this area; but there is another aspect to the problem, and this is the more intractable. We may be able to help scholars to get their books published, but I have no idea how they are to get them sold. I gave an example last year of the kind of prohibitive

price-tag which dismisses us empty-handed from the book-seller; I add one now from the past few days. The reprint (merely reprint, without change) of a quite popular book published in 1955 at one guinea, only 180 pages, is to cost between six and seven pounds. I do not know how libraries and scholars, especially young scholars, are going to keep their heads above the rising waters.

Now, a word about our Schools and Institutes abroad. These admirable establishments absorb a very high proportion of our grant from the Department (as the Secretary has told us, about 58 per cent); and I take this opportunity of correcting a current misapprehension. I have heard it said that it is disproportionate to allocate so large a part of our resources to a single aspect of our work, the archaeological. So indeed it must appear, if there were no more to be said about it; I therefore briefly explain the true position. The Schools and Institutes are autonomous, under the management of special Committees, and the Academy acts only as agent for the distribution of their grants. Sir Mortimer Wheeler has recorded that in 1946 one School applied for its grant to the British Museum, one to the Foreign Office, three to the Academy, one to the Treasury, and one to nobody at all. This procedure was judged imperfect, and in 1950 it was decided that all should be channelled through the Academy. It means that we scrutinize their budgets, relating their requirements to what is practical within the total Government grant; we are to that extent authoritative agents, but still only agents, though of course we take great interest in the work and welfare of the Schools. The allocation to the overseas Schools and Institutes should be regarded essentially as the distribution of an ear-marked grant, delegated by the Department to the Academy.

Quite different is the nature of the Academy's control of its Research Fund. Here our powers are absolute. This year we had £137,000 to distribute, in addition to £7,700 from our Special Funds. We reserved £5,000 for the support of learned journals, and divided the remainder into equal parts, giving half to our Academy Committees and Major Projects and distributing half among 112 applicants from all over the United Kingdom in a great variety of subjects. I shall not repeat what I said last year about the value which I attach to this part of our work; this year's experience has confirmed me in my opinion, and in the hope that our Research Fund will continue to gather strength from year to year.

About our internal affairs I have two things to report. Last year I spoke of the critical inquiry into our internal structure which was then in progress, and gave notice of the procedure to be followed. This year I can announce the result. In brief, while the case for radical reorganization did not prove persuasive to the great majority of Fellows, there was widespread agreement that the problem out of which the inquiry originally arose is a real one: our sectional structure is not well adapted to the inclusion of new subjects, subjects on the borderline between Sections, and subjects on the borderline between the Academy and the Royal Society. Practical proposals were made by several Sections, and Council has in effect adopted one of these. A standing committee of Council is to be appointed in October with duties which include especially the responsibility for advising Council annually about possible candidates for election within the categories which might otherwise be overlooked. The Committee will include members of Council and some Chairmen of Sections, with power to co-opt. It will make its own studies and inquiries, working in close co-operation with Sections and welcoming the assistance and advice of individual Fellows. It will report to Council each February. A number of Sections suggested, and Council agree, that a permanent committee of this kind, with a definite duty to perform annually, and a report to make to Council, is the simplest and most probably efficient machinery for the purpose. It may be prudent to review the procedure and judge its efficacy in the light of a couple of years' experience.

Secondly, despite the action taken last year, the number of vacancies in the Fellowship next year is likely to fall below an acceptable minimum and to remain below it thereafter. Council has therefore decided to apply to the Privy Council for authority to raise the statutory limit from 300 to 350. I must particularly emphasize that Council intends this increase to cover our needs for quite a long time ahead. In considering candidates for election, academic standards will be as strictly maintained as hitherto, and it is expected that the number of elections made annually will remain as in recent years (on average, about twenty), except in so far as additions may result from recommendations of the Standing Committee to which I have referred.

In general, the year has been (as the Secretary has said) one rather of consolidation than of new enterprise. Financial pressure, not policy, was the primary cause of this; but the breathing-space was not altogether unwelcome after several

years of exceptionally rapid expansion. Not that the Secretary and his staff have noticed any breathing-space: for them, as always, the year has been hard, and would have been even without the prolonged electricity-cuts and railway-strikes of that gloomy winter. Already in those cheerless days and lamp-lit evenings, after only six months in office, our Secretary was plainly master of all aspects of our work; and he has strengthened the administration of our expanding departments with a number of new and excellent appointments. I have much cause to be grateful to him and to them. Nor shall I leave without adding a special word of the gratitude which the Academy as a whole, and its President personally, owes to Miss Myers; a President learns, directly or indirectly, more than most about the variety, the complexity, and the difficulties of her work; her services to the Academy could not easily be over-praised.

And so I take leave of you. You have today elected Sir Isaiah Berlin as President; and nothing is more certain than that the life of the Academy will be colourful, its spirits high, and its aims enlightened, under his leadership. We have known each other since undergraduate days, and I find it impossible to suppose that a retiring President ever had greater pleasure in welcoming his successor.