

## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

By LORD ROBBINS

12 *July* 1967

**M**Y address last year, which was lengthy, was devoted to the inauguration of the Thank-Offering to Britain lectures by a disquisition on Academic Freedom. My address this year, which will once more conform to the tradition of brevity, will be devoted to more mundane matters. With this year's expenditure we reach the end of the triennial plan on which our recent grants have been based; and this autumn we shall be approaching the Government to request renewal and extension of our grant. It therefore seems to me an appropriate moment for a general survey of what we do and how we finance it. This is the last year in which I shall have the honour of addressing you from this chair and I should like to leave with you and my successor a clear view of our resources and our needs. I have also the suspicion that the officials and members of Parliament to whom our Accounts and Report are circulated might find it easier to conceive our functions and their value if they were presented in a somewhat less formal manner.

I turn first to our activities and our expenditure.

In this connexion I begin with our rôle as the distributor of public money to learned Schools and Institutes abroad. In an earlier address I have dwelt upon the importance of the work of these bodies as representatives in the areas in which they work of the best traditions of British humanistic culture. The average British visitor to the cities where they are situated is apt, I suspect, to take their existence for granted, as if they were some natural phenomenon. But although their origins are various and their governing bodies are independent entities, the public money they receive is all channelled through the Academy. This enables the Treasury to receive co-ordinated advice regarding the needs of the different institutions and the Academy, through the grants and its representation on the governing bodies, to maintain common standards. As you will see from the Accounts, in the last financial year we distributed £128,000 in

this manner, including £10,000 for the Council for British Archaeology which comes under the same general heading.

I come now to research. As you know, the Academy is now the chosen instrument of the Government for the subsidization of research in all humanistic studies save economics and sociology. We also dispose of smaller funds derived from permanent endowments for this purpose; and from time to time we succeed in obtaining special grants for special purposes from the great foundations. The expenditure under this head falls into three categories: grants to individuals, grants to groups, and expenditure on research directly initiated and supervised by the Academy. I think it may legitimately be claimed that the Academy is uniquely qualified to perform this function. Our twelve Sections are composed of the leading authorities in this country in their respective fields. We have thus twelve permanent committees to whom individual or collective applications can be referred for scrutiny and appraisal, and, where initiative is required, as it is with the projects for which we are directly responsible, we have the nuclei at least of appropriate supervisory bodies. It is difficult to think of other arrangements by which the expenditure of public money for this kind of activity could be as efficiently safeguarded and I am sure that a glance at the list of the projects subsidized will convince any well-informed person of the value of the research thus maintained. Last year our expenditure on research of all kinds amounted to £52,965.\*

The next category of expenditure is lectures. These are probably our best known activity. The receipt of endowments for special annual or biennial lectureships has been a happy experience of the Academy since its inauguration; and the lectures which these have made possible have an outstanding reputation in the world of scholarship. A list of the lectures given on the various foundations enumerated in the Report since their institution would include many of the most outstanding contributions of the present century in the various fields covered. Our expenditure on lectures, excluding administration and publication, in the last financial year was £700.

I must now mention publications. Our activities under this

\* This includes £3,000 for the Thank-Offering to Britain Research Fellowship, actually not awarded until 1967-68.

heading fall into several distinct divisions. First there should be noted assistance to learned journals. We made grants to no less than 28 of these last year: and it is no exaggeration to say that with the rising costs of printing recently, without this help a good many of these would have had either to cease publication or curtail their issues. If there were no such institution as the Academy, it is difficult to believe that such support would have been easily forthcoming. Then comes assistance to the publication of the results of individual or collective research, which are often of a nature not likely to receive support from commercial publishers. Lastly there is the publication of the annual Proceedings of the Academy which comprise chiefly the lectures given on the various foundations and obituaries of deceased members. It is perhaps worth observing that, taken cumulatively, these obituaries constitute one of the most valuable sources for the history of humanistic scholarship in this country during the years since the foundation of the Academy. On all these forms of publication last year we spent £19,894.

Finally come the expenses of administration and representation. As will be seen from the historical note inside the cover of the Report, the Academy owes its origin to the recognition at the end of the last century of the need for organized representation at international conferences and special public occasions of humanistic studies in this country; and the selection and sending of delegates to such assemblies is still one of our important tasks. Last year the Academy was represented at five conferences, and in some years the number is appreciably higher. But beyond this and far transcending it in importance is the common representation to the Central Government and other public bodies of the disciplines covered by our charter. If you think of the needs of different forms of research, of the publication problems of the learned journals and the equipment and standards of staffing of our learned institutions abroad, it is clear that satisfactory representation *vis-à-vis* both the Government and the general public can only be achieved by an institution like ours. But all this and the administration of our other activities involves expenditure—expenditure on salaries, accommodation, travel, and general expenses. Last year the cost of the central administration, maintenance, and travelling amounted to £17,832.

In sum the various activities I have described: the support of institutions abroad, the financing of research, lectures, publications and representation and administration involved an expenditure of £219,391.

To meet this expenditure we had current receipts amounting to £217,432, the remainder being chiefly met by a carry forward of £1,795 from the preceding year.

Not all this money came from the Government. The Government grant for the year was £196,000. The remainder, £21,432, consisted of the interest on investments of various special Funds (£10,626) and a residue consisting of subscriptions (£1,634), sales of publications and special donations for special purposes, etc. (£9,172). Thus, although the fact that we are the distributing agent for the grants to institutions abroad and for general research means that the element of public subvention looms large in the total of our receipts, there is a substantial residue which in one way or another derives from private benefactions. Indeed, for the greater part of its existence, the Academy was almost wholly dependent on the income from funds which had been collected for special lectures or special activities in the field; and even the activities now financed by public money have usually come into existence as a result of private initiative. General research, for instance, was for years financed by grants from the great academic foundations.

You will see from the Balance Sheet that our investments on 31 March 1967 had a market value of £175,118.

The position which I have just outlined, although, as I shall argue shortly, by no means adequate to future needs, is in sharp contrast to the position in 1949 when the present Secretary assumed office. Expenditure that year was £6,623 and the income £6,805, which consisted of a grant of £2,500 from the Treasury, the rest being made up of the income from various special Funds and members' subscriptions. The change since that time is of course magnified by the deplorable fall in the purchasing power of money. But when that is taken into account, there still remains a most conspicuous increase in the volume and range of our functions due to the initiative of my predecessors during those years and, above all, to the indefatigable labours of our distinguished Secretary, whose elevation to the Companionship of Honour in the new year is a just recognition of his outstanding

services and contributions to scholarship over a long and vigorous career.

The greater part of this increase is due to the assumption by the Academy of the distributive and supervisory functions in regard to institutions abroad and research at home to which I have already drawn attention. Pre-existing institutions abroad have been developed or revived during this period and two new ones, the British Institute of History and Archaeology at Nairobi and the British Institute of Persian Studies in Tehran, have been established as a direct result of initiative on behalf of the Academy. In recent years as a result of the Bowra Report on research, financed with funds from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Government grant for research has risen to its present level of £50,000.

It would be a mistake, however, to imagine that the whole of our expansion has been financed from Government sources. During the same period, six new Lectureships have been established:

- The Albert Reckitt Archaeological Lecture
- The Chatterton Lecture on an English Poet
- The Dawes Hicks Lecture on Philosophy
- The Maccabaeian Lecture in Jurisprudence
- The Sarah Tryphena Phillips Lecture in American Literature and History
- The Thank-Offering to Britain Fund Lecture in 'Human Studies'.

Furthermore, new research funds have been established:

- The Stein-Arnold Fund (annual income about £700)
- The Albert Reckitt Archaeological Fund (annual income about £3,000)
- The Thank-Offering to Britain Fund (income £4,373 in 1966-7 and will rise eventually to over £5,000).

Moreover extensive grants have been received by the Academy from Foundations for periods of years and for projects which have included the financing of studentships at British Schools abroad, of central learned periodicals, and of the publication of early English church music. Foundations which have notably contributed under these heads are the Nuffield Foundation, the Pilgrim Trust, the Gulbenkian Foundation, and All Souls College. (These are in addition to the considerable grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to which I have already referred.)

In other words, while the Academy has been able to build up its funds and functions during the period from Government sources, it has whenever possible made collateral use of non-Government benefaction. Needless to say, this has been of immense value in itself. It is perhaps also worth noting that more than once it has helped us in getting funds, or increased funds, from Government.

Thus it cannot be said that we have not made satisfactory progress. But equally no one who is acquainted with present needs and present possibilities can say that the present position is adequate for the future. I have said already that our current arrangements with the Department of Education and Science come to an end with this financial year and that this autumn we shall have to engage in new negotiations. I should like therefore to conclude this survey by indicating in a broad way the increased needs to which we shall have to draw attention. I shall not give exact figures—at this stage that would be inadvisable. I divide my indications under three headings: institutions abroad, research (including publication), and central administration.

To begin with institutions abroad. There are two needs to underline in this connexion: first to catch up and keep pace with local inflations which, in the recent past have made grave inroads on the power to purchase of the grant available; secondly to provide salaries for the staffs concerned more in line with the rates prevailing in academic institutions at home. As I explained in an earlier address, in the past the staffing of these institutes had depended heavily on the enthusiasm of scholars with private means who were prepared to do the work involved for a comparative pittance. But these days are passing. In the future if we wish to maintain standards in fields where, quite apart from its intrinsic desirability, our national prestige depends upon such maintenance, we must bring it about that a scholar who elects to work abroad in a British Institute need not feel that he is subjecting himself and his family to worse conditions than those he would enjoy if he had stayed at home in a university department. I should hope too that more generally the funds available to such institutions for work in the field would come to compare less unfavourably with those available to similar institutes maintained by other leading powers.

Then as regards research. I would not wish to appear to be

ungrateful for what has been done already or to underestimate the splendid stimulus which it has afforded to all branches of learning within our purview. But there can be no doubt that we could do with a great deal more. With the £42,500 which is what we have available out of the general research grant when an appropriate amount has been deducted for periodicals and administration, we have to reject or to limit in scope a large number of worthwhile applications; and I have no doubt that as the availability of this fund becomes more widely known, this area of rejection will continue to widen. But apart from this we are faced with an increasing need for money to finance researches directly initiated and supervised by our own Sections. This is a branch of our activities which we wish very much to develop: and since it involves ambitious undertakings of a collective nature such as the *Early History of Agriculture*, the *Dictionary of British Medieval Latin* and the preparation and publication of the *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, it necessarily requires finance on an increasingly extensive scale. I believe that in a few years we could usefully spend four times the existing research grant and I am quite sure that at once we could dispose without any lowering of standards of at least twice its present magnitude.

Finally I come to an area where the increase needed is not so great as in the fields I have already mentioned, but where the urgency of the need is even greater, the secretariat. Hitherto the leadership of the secretariat has been furnished on what can only be described as a nearly honorary basis. This is a matter which has been a private concern to your Treasurer and President for years but hitherto, owing to a certain inherently intractable factor in the situation, without any solution. It is clear, however, that it is a state of affairs which cannot continue indefinitely; and if at any time we were obliged to make a new appointment, nothing less than the emoluments and allowances of a senior chair would attract the right kind of talent. It is clear too that with the increasing volume of office work arising from the increased scale of our activities certain small extensions of our establishment will be necessary. As I have said already, the extra finance involved under this heading is small. But if the progress that has already been achieved is to be sustained, let alone continued, it is fundamentally necessary that it should be forthcoming.

I have dwelt at some length on the needs of expansion. But although to meet them would involve a considerable percentage increase in our grant, the sums involved are negligible in relation to Government expenditure in general, or expenditure on other forms of research in particular. Last government year, the expenditure of the Science Research Council was £26,151,000. The Social Science Research Council disposed of £250,000 for research projects. In comparison with these figures a doubling of our present grant would be almost within the *minimum sensibile*. But it would make all the difference to our scholarly representation abroad and to our capacity to foster humanistic research at home.

But do we want this? By 'we' in this context I mean the people of this country. I do not know. In the past there can be no doubt that public expenditure on art and learning has been starved. It is difficult to believe that the history of any great nation has ever exhibited a greater indifference to matters of this sort than that which prevailed in this country in the first forty years of this century when there was no public support for the theatre or music, when the purchase grant of the National Gallery was £7,500 a year and the allowance of the British Academy a pittance of £2,500 or less. In recent years, however, there has been considerable improvement. The State has awakened to its necessary functions in this respect. We have a national theatre and a national opera house. The grants to museums and galleries have been greatly increased. And, as I have shown, the Academy itself has enjoyed a notable improvement. The question now is, will this process continue? Is the Government prepared to afford the small extra outlays which will consolidate the progress already achieved and enable still further progress? We have the traditions and talent available which, with adequate support, can maintain and advance conspicuous contributions to the humanistic culture that is so essential to the equilibrium of the world if spiritual health is to persist. In an age in which, as a friendly American critic has put it, we have lost an Empire and have not yet found a new rôle, this is surely not an undesirable objective. It is certainly one which is well within our financial capacity.