

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Delivered at the Annual Meeting at Wellington on 19th May, 1932.

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GENTLEMEN,—

My first duty is to refer briefly to some losses we have sustained through death during the past year.

Dr J. P. Lotsy, of Holland, is, I think, the only honorary member who has died during the year. Dr Lotsy was a world authority on hybridism. He visited New Zealand a few years ago to study his subject and confer with the Dominion's authority in his own line—Dr L. Cockayne. Though Dr Lotsy was primarily a botanist, his studies of hybridism covered a wide range, and his passing away is a heavy loss to the scientific world.

The loss of one of our foundation fellows, and a Hector Medallist, has to be recorded in the person of Mr Elsdon Best. A very full obituary notice has already been published on pp. 179-182 of vol. 62 of the *Transactions*, but we may here record our sense of the great loss sustained by New Zealand in the death of such a great contributor to our knowledge of native races in general and in particular of our own, the Maori. He is an instance of the type of man, in prominent examples of which our race has been rather rich, who, without the aid of anything in the nature of academic preparation, takes up with enthusiasm some particular study, and by reason of native ability, unstinted devotion, and often considerable self-sacrifice, becomes a great authority and makes a great contribution to human knowledge.

Another past member to whom I should refer on this occasion is the late Mr John Kenderdine, for many years, and up to the day of his death, a member of the Council of the Auckland Institute and of the Library Committee of the Auckland City Council. He was particularly interested in the early history of New Zealand, and built up a large collection of books and pamphlets. This collection includes very many pamphlets dealing with all phases of public life in the Auckland Province from early dates to the present time. The whole of his collection was presented to the Auckland Institute shortly before his death.

We have further to mourn the death of Dr H. T. Ferrar, who was on the New Zealand Geological Survey staff, and to whom the Institute is indebted for the British Association Reports from 1919 to date; and also the untimely death of Dr F. G. Maskell, B.A., M.Sc., Ph.D., who was Lecturer in Biology in Victoria University College, and who was doing research in Germany when he contracted an illness that cut short a career of great promise.

In proceeding to make some remarks on the general affairs of the Institute, I am keeping in mind that any time saved in this address can, with advantage, be added to the time available for the discussion of the important business of the meeting.

The Economic and Financial Situation.

The dominant influence during the past year has been the economic and financial situation of the country, and the Institute has been brought into direct contact with it by the reduction and withdrawal of grants by Parliament, with the resulting crippling of the work of the Institute. The New Zealand Institute was established by special Act of Parliament in 1867, and in the following year an annual grant of £500 was made to the Institute. At that time the population of New Zealand was only approaching a quarter of a million. Its total trade was less than £9,500,000. The total deposits in its Savings Banks, both post office and private, were less than £250,000, or about £1 per head of population; and in every other direction we find that every resource, or indicator of resources, was on a similar but very much smaller scale than now. Yet the infant country thought the publication of the results of the researches of its scientists, which is the essential work of the New Zealand Institute, of such importance that, out of its comparatively slender resources, it determined to devote £500 a year towards the maintenance of the society that had charge of the work. Below this figure the annual grant has never fallen, not even, be it noted, during the great and long depression of the late 'eighties and early 'nineties of the last century. On the other hand, during more recent years the increase of the work of the Institute, together with the increase in the cost of printing and other costs, led to increases in the annual grant, bringing it up to £1500, at which figure it stood two years ago. To this had been added for some years votes varying from £750 to £1250 for the purposes of research work, and this facilitated considerably the carrying out of research where expense to the investigator was necessarily involved.

My predecessor, at the last Annual Meeting, commented on the entire withdrawal of the latter vote, and the cutting down of the ordinary annual vote to one-half (£750), both of which had been effected before the last Annual Meeting. As a consequence of this loss the Standing Committee was for some time sorely tried during the past year to make ends meet and to save the *Transactions* from sinking into insignificance. The situation was eased a little, however, by one fortunate circumstance. There was a balance of £440 of the research grant remaining unexpended, and the Government was urged to allow this to be paid and used for printing expenses. This was fortunately agreed to. But in spite of this you will no doubt have noticed that the last volume of the *Transactions* contains only some 270 pages, as contrasted with the 1000 and more that used to be sometimes reached. Some papers that would otherwise be printed have to remain unprinted, and those that are printed are in some cases so reduced and condensed as possibly to materially diminish their value.

It will be readily understood then that we were amazed to find that the Economy Commission actually recommended that the grant should be further reduced to as little as £400. Protests were naturally made against this, and every member of Parliament was

circularised, but the final result was only to obtain, instead of the expected £400, a vote of £500, just equal to the vote the Institute started with nearly 70 years ago. Even this now is no longer statutory. This means a total loss in the ordinary grant of £1000 a year, which has to be made good for the most part by a saving of an equivalent amount in our ordinary expenditure, unless funds be raised in some manner which so far we have not been able to contrive. It may be noted incidentally that the item "Printing, Stationery, etc.," of the expenditure side of the Revenue Account, which two years ago stood at £1424 0s 10d, and last year at £1342 19s, amounts this year to £208 10s 7d.

The Government was criticised in the House a week or two ago for reducing the taxation of the racing clubs. This was defended by the plea that it was done to save the goose that laid the golden eggs. It may reasonably be urged that science is a goose that has been very prolific in the laying of golden eggs, and from the point of view merely of profit deserves every care and attention. It is often quoted how other countries, when they have been in positions of distress, have made sacrifices in other directions in order to improve the education and scientific equipment of their peoples. We must have every sympathy with our own Government in the position in which they have been recently placed; but at the same time we may reasonably urge that we do not consider they have shown a due sense of values in penalising so heavily the educational and research institutions of the country. In our own case we are already reduced to the rather scornful position of having to invite scientific workers, by no means an affluent section of our population, to contribute towards the publication of their results for the national benefit.

The Library.

Our privations apparently remove to a more distant future any hope of putting our Library on a proper basis. The mainstay of our Library at present are the exchanges we get in return for the distribution of our *Transactions* to the various scientific societies of the world. How wide this is is not perhaps generally known or appreciated. Sets of the *Transactions* are to be found in the chief scientific libraries of the world, the number in the several countries being as follows:—Austria 5, Belgium 5, China 2, Denmark 4, Finland 4, France 8, Germany 30, Holland 6, Hungary 3, Italy 15, Japan 4, Norway 5, Malay States 3, Russia 10, Spain 3, Sweden 10, Switzerland 4, South America 8, United States 59, and the British Empire 150.

Obviously it may be remarked incidentally this extensive distribution of our *Transactions* in its present starved condition will not be a good advertisement for New Zealand, nor will it produce in the world of science a very high opinion of New Zealand.

The Institute has never had any money with which to supplement the exchanges received for the *Transactions*, and to buy standard works of science, and has consequently had to go without

numerous important and really essential publications. Further, the binding of such publications as we have is an expensive item, and for this purpose we have been dependent on one totally inadequate grant of £250, which has been husbanded for years by confining the actual binding to only the most essential publications. Even using the cheapest binding available in New Zealand, the remainder of this fund will be almost immediately absorbed. Yet the need for binding the publications in the Library is so great that some hundreds of pounds is really required at once for this purpose alone, especially in the direction of binding in volumes publications which are issued in small parts.

Money is wanted for still another purpose. The Institute published in 1927 a Reference List of Scientific Periodicals in the libraries of New Zealand. This list shows in which libraries in New Zealand various periodicals can be found, and served to mobilise the whole of the libraries of New Zealand as one unit for the service of the scientific worker. An enlarged and up-to-date edition is now urgently required, and it is only the absence of funds that prevents the work being put in hand at once. We are hoping that our doleful account of our Library requirements, which was made a leading feature in the statement of our case in our appeal to the Carnegie Corporation of New York, will soften their hearts, but it is sad to have to seek aid abroad for what should be deemed an essential obligation by our own people.

Reform of the Institute.

Out of present necessities arose a suggestion to increase the income of the Institute by altering its constitution. I say altering rather than reforming, because the word reform has come to connote improvement, and to take for granted that a proposed change will be an improvement is to beg the question. The proposals were put before the incorporated societies, and after the opinions of these had been obtained were referred to a committee to report. This report will no doubt be presently before you. In considering it I would suggest that viewing it from the point of view of financial return does not create the best atmosphere for its consideration, and in any case there must be a certain amount of speculation about a venture of this kind. It would be safer to make a change when we are in a position to stand any loss that may be incurred, and it is proverbially dangerous to swop horses while crossing a stream. In better times the possibility of an improved constitution could be considered without our judgment being warped by financial necessity. In particular the proposal to increase the subscription rate of Fellows of the Institute, when they have no substantial privilege or advantage beyond that of ordinary members, is one that, by levying a tax for the mere use of the symbol F.N.Z.Inst., may react in ways that the Institute would not appreciate. We do not want the fellowship of the Institute to be comparable with that of vice-president of a sports club, or to have the fellowship declined by worthy scientists because of the financial obligations involved. This particu-

lar proposal may not appear in the Report of the Committee, but in whatever form the proposals come from the Committee very careful consideration should be given and hasty action avoided in a matter so fundamental as that it will deal with.

Endowment Fund.

It would be of great advantage to the Institute if we had an endowment fund adequate to support its activities without the necessity of outside grants. The Standing Committee has wisely decided on a policy which is designed to add annually to the fund, but which will take a very long time to make the fund sufficient for its purpose. Yet I hope, as a move in this direction, the action of the Standing Committee will meet with your approval. But what I most hope for is that some day some benefaction or benefactions will be received that will more speedily raise the position of the Institute to one of independence. Many of our citizens well endowed with this world's goods, who expect to leave no dependents behind them, or are able to provide amply for their dependents and still have a surplus, endow from time to time one good cause and another. I claim that the work of the New Zealand Institute is eminently deserving of consideration in this respect, and that any wealthy citizen who appreciates our work, or perhaps has reason to realise that his fortune was only made possible by the advance of science, may well deem it a specially worthy object to make secure the adequate permanent recording of the scientific advances in his own country, and to make the Library of the Institute really worthy of the place it should occupy as an aid to scientific work.