

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS.

Delivered at the ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, March 30th, 1933.

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The Present Position and the Future of the Chemical Society.

It is almost a truism that the present rapidly changing conditions of our economic and industrial systems must have a profound influence on the policy of the Society, which is concerned with the advancement of chemical knowledge on which national progress and well-being are so largely dependent; and Fellows of the Society must naturally be keenly interested to know what steps are being taken to meet these changing conditions. Scientific societies in general and the Chemical Society in particular must be ready to modify their policy in accordance with the times, otherwise they will have to be succeeded by others established to meet the new situation. Whatever the future may bring forth, there will always be the necessity for a Society which has for its objects those for which our Society was founded ninety-two years ago.

As regards the present position of the Society, the first thing that may be commented upon is the membership. The unusually heavy list of resignations of Fellows and of those removed for non-payment of subscriptions is a striking feature of the present report of Council. Actually, considering the present economic situation, we have reason to be surprised that the losses to the Society and the consequent diminution of income are not heavier than they are. Some of the resignations have been withheld for more than a year in the hope that they could be avoided and these have increased the number actually recorded in 1932. Not a few have withdrawn their resignations, in many cases out of loyalty to the Society in these difficult times. A year ago, our esteemed Treasurer was faced with a very difficult financial situation and this he has tackled in a manner which has earned our admiration and gratitude. He then outlined his programme, which was to balance the budget for 1932 by effecting suitable economies, by striving to obtain "back" subscriptions, and by securing increased and new donations from outside sources. In this he has amply succeeded; and to meet the work of the Society for 1933 with a small but definite balance in hand is a wonderful achievement at the present time. The financial affairs of the Society could not have been administered more efficiently and more sympathetically and they could not be in better hands.

There is little need to emphasise the fact that the work of the Society in pursuing the objects for which it was founded has continued and actually increased during the past two years. The quality and number of original investigations, the results of which have been published in the Journal, are both of the high standard which is associated with the established reputation of the Journal of the Chemical Society. The work of the Bureau of British Chemical Abstracts has increased in a manner corresponding with the ever increasing amount of original investigation by chemists generally.

Bearing in mind the very difficult conditions with which the Society has had to contend, we have every reason not to be dissatisfied with its work for Chemistry during 1932. Although the statistics of membership give cause for anxiety, it is gratifying to be able to report important progress designed to extend the scope of the Society's activities and to ensure for it a greater measure of support by the chemists of the country. In January of last year the Council appointed a Reorganisation Committee to enquire into the general policy and the administrative system of the Society and to make recommendations accordingly. The work of this Committee, of which many of the decisions have been adopted by the Council, has in effect been an attempt to discover what changes are desirable to adapt the policy of the Society to present-day conditions. In some cases the decisions have necessitated changes in the Bye-Laws, and these have been approved by an Extraordinary General Meeting. A summary of the accepted proposals appears in the Report of the Council, and therefore I shall not refer to more than one or two of the more important.

In the first place the Council have taken a step to encourage the influx of young chemists by reducing, by one half, the annual subscription of Fellows under 25 years of age who are prepared to receive only such of the Society's publications as the Council may determine. It has also been agreed that at the ordinary scientific meetings the custom of reading highly specialised papers shall be further restricted, and that a larger number of meetings shall be devoted to organised discussions and summaries of recent work. The latter innovation has evidently appealed to the Fellows, for the four interesting discussions which have been held during the present session have attracted gratifying attendances. Moreover, in order to make the ordinary scientific meetings more attractive, the Secretaries have been empowered to select papers to be read, and to arrange, if possible, for contributors to their discussion : in addition it is hoped that senior authors of a series of papers which have appeared in the *Journal* will publish at suitable intervals a résumé of their work. Furthermore, in consideration of the fact that the Chemical Society represents the whole country and not merely London and its vicinity, it has been agreed that a due proportion of the endowed and special lectures shall be given outside of London, and that meetings of the Society, devoted to lectures or discussions of a general character and not to the reading of specialised papers, shall be held in other centres. In accordance with this resolution the Liversidge Lecture was given in Birmingham, and the Ostwald Memorial Lecture in Liverpool during the present session, and arrangements have been made for several extra meetings in other cities. It is, of course, intended that meetings of the Chemical Society outside of London will be co-ordinated with the meetings of other chemical organisations in the districts concerned, and also that at these meetings all interested will be welcome.

Following on a suggestion which I put forward in my address last year, local representatives of the Society have been appointed in a number of districts throughout the country, whose functions will be to keep in touch with Fellows resident in their respective districts, to act as recruiting officers, to arrange for special lectures or discussions in collaboration with the local secretaries of other chemical organisations, and generally to promote the interests of the Society. It is proposed that a meeting of these ambassadors of the Council shall be held annually in London, in order to afford an opportunity for the exchange of views and for the formulation of proposals to be submitted to the Council. I hope that the promotion of social intercourse among the Fellows, for instance by the arrangement of an informal dinner on the occasion of a special lecture or discussion, will not be forgotten. In order to remove apprehensions which seem to exist in this connection, I wish to make it clear that the Council has not contemplated the establishment of local sections of the Society. Numerous local sections of the Institute, of the Society of Chemical Industry, and of other Societies are already in existence in a number of cities, and in my opinion it would be a mistake to add to the number. It is gratifying to know that the Treasurer proposes to set aside a sum sufficient to meet the railway fares of local representatives who attend their annual meeting, and I wish that the charter and the financial position permitted the grant of the same assistance to country members of Council or Committees, who under present conditions, in addition to their sacrifice of time, have to pay for the privilege of serving the Society.

In recent years the work which has to be undertaken by the Honorary Secretaries has increased so largely as to make excessive calls upon their time, and in order to relieve them of part of their burden it has been decided that the number of these officers shall be three instead of two.

The *Journal* has been issued in a new format which I believe will be approved by most of the Fellows. Apart from the advantages which will arise from the use of a larger page, it is probable that the production of the *Journal* in this form will be less expensive than it has been in the past. I trust that the combined effort of the Chemical Society and the Faraday Society to produce a joint publication, which is destined to be the representative *Journal* of British Physical Chemistry, will be brought to a successful issue, and that the new journal will appear next year.

In order to induce a larger number of Fellows to take an active interest in the affairs

of the Society it appears to me that a change in the method of election, and perhaps in the constitution, of the Council would be of advantage. There are at present eighteen ordinary members of Council, of whom nine are town members, *i.e.*, Fellows resident within a radius of fifty miles from Charing Cross, and nine country members, *i.e.*, Fellows resident beyond that radius. These members are elected by the general body of Fellows, but in actual fact only a small fraction of that body appear to take any interest in the election. Assuming that the present constitution of the Council remains unaltered, I suggest, as a first step, that the country should be divided into ten electoral districts, *viz.* (1) the London area as defined above, and (2) nine other districts beyond the London area and so far as practicable approximately equal with respect to the number of Fellows resident in each. The Fellows resident in the London area would elect the town members, and one country member for each of the other nine districts would be elected by the Fellows resident in that district. The Council would not be entitled to nominate, or endorse the nomination, of any candidate for election as an ordinary member, but would have the power to elect members either to fill extraordinary vacancies or in the event of any district failing to make an election. Nominations and elections would be carried out as at present, but by Fellows resident in each of the districts and not by the general body. The term of office of ordinary members would be three years, and retiring members would not be eligible for re-election until after the lapse of one year. The present method of election of Officers and Vice-Presidents would remain unchanged. It would be necessary to prepare lists of the Fellows resident in each electoral district to serve as voters' rolls, which, bound together and provided with an alphabetical index of names, would take the place of the present list. Such a method of election would ensure direct representation of each district on the Council, and also frequent changes in its personnel—a most desirable aim. Moreover, it would, I think, go far to remove the dissatisfaction with the existing method which to my knowledge is felt by many country Fellows.

Since the beginning of this century, and particularly during the last twenty years, the chemical profession has experienced a very considerable increase in members and a more wide-spread demand for its services to the community. New conditions have created new wants, and if the Chemical Society is to retain and increase its appeal to chemists I feel that it must adopt new methods with respect to administration, to representation of Fellows on the Council, to the production and distribution of its publications, and to its association with other chemical organisations. Steps in that direction have already been taken, but much more remains to be done. It is evident from articles and letters which have appeared in the chemical press during the past year that the project of union or federation of at least all the principal organisations concerned with chemistry is making an appeal to an increasing number of members of the profession. The facts which compel attention to this matter are well summarised in the following excerpt from an article which appeared in *Nature* on Sept. 24th, 1932 :—

“ We come, therefore, to the following conclusions : First, that the present financial circumstances of the chemical societies of Great Britain demand either curtailment of services to chemists of all descriptions, or some countervailing form of retrenchment. Second, that the reduction in administrative expenses which in the course of time would follow unification or some form of very close association would assist in removing these financial difficulties, and would at the same time promote solidarity and efficiency. Third, that a substantial experiment in joint publication has proved successful over a considerable period. Fourth, that the cost of, and responsibility for, certain essential activities ought to be shared more widely. Taken together, they present an almost unanswerable case for amalgamation or federation, although of course they do not indicate exactly how it is to be achieved.”

It was my intention to discuss this problem in the course of this address, but in view of the intimation that the Federal Council for Chemistry has appointed a committee consisting of gentlemen well acquainted with our chemical societies, under the chairmanship of Sir William Pope, to frame a scheme for, among other objects, economising upon administrative expenditure, increasing the number of subscribing members, and securing substan-

tial financial assistance from chemical industry, I feel myself debarred from making any statement which might be considered embarrassing while we await with interest the result of this committee's labours. Nevertheless I venture to express some opinions which I have formed with respect to certain aspects of the problem which must be faced.

The principal duty laid upon the Chemical Society is, first, to publish the results of original investigations communicated to the Society, of which the scientific value has been approved by the Publication Committee, and secondly to prepare and publish abstracts of current researches which appear in the chemical journals of other nations. Any enforced diminution of this activity would be too deplorable for words, and yet must follow unless the Society can find new sources of income or new methods of retrenchment. So long as the Society remains, as now, an independent organisation I cannot see how a larger income is to be obtained, and as you are aware, every method of reducing expenditure which can be adopted under existing conditions has been closely investigated. The same statement applies generally to the Society of Chemical Industry, the Biochemical Society, the Faraday Society, and other societies more directly interested in various branches of applied chemistry which publish journals or abstracts or both. Consequently one is forced to the conclusion that some form of federation of these societies is not only desirable, but sooner or later inevitable. Moreover in my opinion such a federation would be incomplete and lacking in influence unless the professional organisations were also included as members. In that case it should not be impossible to devise a scheme for an annual subscription, or scale of subscriptions, which would entitle the subscriber to membership of one or both of the professional bodies and at the same time of one or more of the publishing societies. The scale naturally could also be made dependent upon the number of different publications, *e.g.*, the Journal of the Chemical Society, Chemistry and Industry, the Abstracts A and B, etc., desired by each subscriber. An essential feature of the scheme would be that the administrative work of all the members of the federation should be concentrated under one head in one office, for, as Professor Morgan has pointed out clearly, if the burden of administration expenses can be lightened by pooling of resources there will be more money available for publication and less money demanded from individual chemists in the form of subscriptions. A General Council, composed of the officers of the constituent organisations and of representatives of chemical industry, would be established to deal with the business of the federation.

The kind of federation which I envisage would not, to any material extent, involve the loss of their individuality on the part of the members, for each has its special sphere of activity on behalf of the subject as a whole and of the profession generally. On the contrary, my feeling is that each member should, so far as possible, retain a large measure of autonomy and continue to carry on its work in its own way, of course with the limitations which might arise from centralised administration and also with the expectation that still closer co-operation with respect to the publications of the different members might be attained. In some such way as this we could establish a great chemical organisation with a number of sections devoted to professional affairs, pure chemistry, and all or most of the branches of applied chemistry, including metallurgy, each with a considerable measure of independence but linked together through the General Chemical Council.

Whatever may be the nature of any scheme of union or federation propounded, in my judgment the final decision must rest with the members of the organisations concerned. I think that the Council of any society would be exceeding its powers if it took action in this matter without being assured of the support of at least a large majority of its members. It savours of platitude to say that it is incumbent upon the Officers and Members of Council of any Society to endeavour to promote its welfare by all the means in their power; indeed most if not all of them would feel that they had betrayed the trust reposed in them by the members if they agreed to any scheme which would lead to a material reduction of the sphere of its activities or if its rights and privileges.

I am confident that if chemists of all kinds got together in some such way as I have indicated the effect would be altogether beneficial to the profession. I believe that a movement towards federation would, if generally supported, be welcomed by the chemical

industry of the country and that their sympathy might find expression in that financial support which we cannot expect, and indeed do not deserve, to receive unless we set our house in order. The next two years must see great changes in the organisation of Chemical Societies in this country and we of the Chemical Society must be prepared to give sympathetic consideration to the scheme put forward by the Federal Council, which I hope and believe will lead to the formation of a great federation. When that goal is reached, we may feel confident that our work for the benefit of chemists, and hence of the community, will increase and that our profession will at last take its rightful place as one of the leading professions.