

Newton

At the opening session of the Assemblée Générale of AICA at Wadham College, Oxford, at 6 p.m. on Sunday, 3rd July, 1955, Mr Eric Newton, President of the British Section of AICA, spoke as follows:

Monsieur le Président Paul Pierens, Vice-Chancellor, fellow members of AICA,

This afternoon I have two pleasant duties to perform.

The first is to welcome you, on behalf of the British Section, to England: the second, to introduce to you the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford who has done us the honour to be present at the opening of our Assemblée Générale, and to ask him to welcome us all to the University of Oxford which, by his permission, is to be our home for the first three days of this week.

Since, during the course of our discussions during the coming week, we shall have every opportunity of becoming tired of the sound of each others' voices, I will be as brief as possible.

It is now nearly two years since we proposed, at the Dublin Congress, that the Assemblée of 1955 should be held in England, and nearly a year since you accepted, at Istanbul, our formal invitation to meet this year in Oxford and London, The 3rd of July, a date once so distant in our imaginations, has now arrived and it is my pleasant duty to offer to you all a very warm welcome on behalf of the British Section, to our country. During the past twelve months we have been planning a programme which we hope you will find entertaining and which will underline whatever, in these islands, is both artistically interesting and typically British.

Throughout the year of our preparations we have been constantly encouraged and advised by Madame Gilk-Delafon who, as we all know, combines the charm and persuasiveness of a woman with the energy and the ruthless determination of a man.

On your programmes, you will discover the detail of each day's discussions, entertainments and expeditions. I need add nothing to what you will read there. I can only hope that you will find the coming week both useful and enjoyable. I need hardly assure you of the anxiety of the British Section to serve you, our guests, to the best of our abilities. I can only add the hope that that unpredictable and capricious creature, the British climate will help rather than hinder our efforts.

Before I ask the Vice-Chancellor to address you, may I make one or two observations to him in explanation of this Assemblée.

The famous University of Oxford, during the many centuries of its history, has welcomed, entertained, educated and sent out again into the world, many thousands of distinguished men. But it is possible that it has never before sheltered a confraternity of art critics. And it may well be that from this Assemblée, both we, the art critics, and you, Sir, who represent one of the most famous Universities in the world, may benefit from contact with each other.

Most of our guests will have noticed that the English language has a strange genius for coining what are known as "nouns of assembly". Thus, we speak of a flock of birds, a shoal of fishes, a herd of cattle, a pride of lions. But to the best of my knowledge, no noun of assembly exists for a body of art critics.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, in thanking you for honouring us with your presence among us this afternoon, I invite you to address a jargon of art critics. I assure you that we are all deeply conscious of the honour of being the guests of the University over which you preside.

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The Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University, Br W.H.Smith, Warden of New College, welcomed the President, M. Paul Pierens and the members of AICA present at the Assemblée Generale. He said that the University of Oxford was, by a long tradition, in the habit of providing a temporary home and a refuge from the distractions of civilization to all kinds of specialist bodies. At that very moment a conference of Musicologists was being held in Oxford and only a few days ago he had addressed a Congress of Low Temperature Physicists.

He thought Mr Newton had been less than polite in describing the Assembly as a jargon of art critics and he suggested that a more flattering noun of assembly would be a catalogue of critics.

He hoped that the members of AICA would have a successful and a profitable Assemblée and that while they were in Oxford they would benefit from the semi-monastic life of an Oxford College and from the architectural beauties of the University/itself.