

For

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**A GREAT MUSEUM  
DIRECTOR.**

**SIR CECIL HARCOURT  
SMITH'S WORK.**

**TRIBUTE FROM FRIENDS.**

Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith, who in September last year retired, after 16 years' notable service, from the post of Director and Secretary of the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington, was entertained at dinner at Claridge's Hotel last night by a distinguished company. Lord Crawford and Balcarres presided, and the company included the French Ambassador, Lord Lascelles, and Lord Selborne.

LORD CRAWFORD, who proposed the toast of "Our Guest," said that Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith's most recent duty, extending over 15 years or more, was involved in the reorganization of the great museum with which his name would long be associated. Sir Cecil assumed responsibility for its control after he personally, while at the time head of a department of the British Museum, had investigated the necessity and the method of reducing what was a somewhat indiscriminate and chaotic collection of magnificent objects of art to a logical, consistent, and businesslike entity. That was not as simple a task as some might suppose. Not only was it necessary to lay down a large and consistent line of policy, but it very soon transpired that in order to make a museum suitable for the modern view and modern needs of a museum it was essential that far-reaching reforms should be effected, not merely in the classification of the objects themselves, but in the organization of the *personnel* and actually in the reorganization of the available accommodation.

**INTEREST OF THE CRAFTSMAN.**

"We all now know," Lord Crawford continued, "the basic principle on which Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith acted, that is, that the fundamental classification that should be adopted was classification by material. At one time I took upon myself a very different view of the attitude taken by Sir Cecil Smith, but so far as I personally am concerned, as time has gone on his decision has more and more triumphantly vindicated itself. I believe that no live and growing museum in the future can ever be organized on other lines than those that our guest laid down. He returned, in fact, to the original conception of a museum—namely that while it should do everything possible for those engaged in research, in aesthetic criticism, and so forth, the interest of the craftsman and the designer should always be given an adequate place and adequate attention. The promotion of good craftsmanship underlay Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith's reform of the museum. That is education in its best sense, especially as never for one moment throughout all these years has Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith refrained from maintaining the original ambition of his life, which he had inbred in him, the ambition of stimulating good craftsmanship and at the same time keeping interest alive in original research. (Cheers.) His achievement at the museum is the most obvious and most palpable of his successes.

"I hope, however, that it will never be forgotten that in other directions he has been doing admirable work as well. Much of it will not reach fruition in the lifetime of many of us, but the foundations are laid, and as time goes on the patience with which he has been one of the promoters of other movements will become more and more manifest. Those of us who are interested and concerned in the maintenance of our old churches scattered throughout the length and breadth of this country owe much to the initiative of Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith and those working with him. Through him a system of diocesan committees has been established all over the country, and in my opinion these, if not actually to-day, will in the near future be one of the most effective safeguards against the vandalism which is destroying our old churches by the hundred and the thousand. He has taken a very close and a very active interest in the movement to revitalize an old art in this country for which at one time we must have been famous, that is, the art of glass painting. He is closely concerned, too, with the very useful efforts being made to improve the whole standard of ordinary workaday decoration."

After a reference to the human side of Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith's character, Lord Crawford said that the colleagues of their guest at the museum had already marked their appreciation of his services by presenting him with his portrait drawn by Mr. Malcolm Osborne. The little group assembled that night offered Sir Cecil with real cordiality their tribute of affection and of respect. (Cheers.)

The FRENCH AMBASSADOR, who supported the toast, speaking in French, expressed his pleasure that in the first speech he had made since he was appointed as Ambassador he was able to congratulate an Ambassador on the work he had done to bring together the French and British nations. M. de Fleuriau referred to the services of Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith as vice-chairman of the English Committee of an exhibition of decorative art in Paris, and also spoke of his work in 1921 with respect to an exhibition of French tapestries, ecclesiastical vestments, and other objects of art, held at South Kensington. In the old days, he added, museums were little better than sepulchres. Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith had done much to make them living things, which could be visited with pleasure. (Cheers.)

**A LIVING PURPOSE.**

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ALIVING PURPOSE.

SIR CECIL HARCOURT SMITH, replying, said that, although officially retired, he was still feeling a long way from dissolution. It had always struck him as odd—he did not mean in regard to his own case, but on general principles—that they still went on rigidly applying an old-age limit for the Civil Service which must have been fixed at a time when conditions were very different. There was no doubt that our race was longer lived than it was half a century ago, and that the average man's powers remained unimpaired to a much greater age than formerly. So long as this was the case one would suppose that each additional year of experience gave an added value to a man's service, and that if he were willing to remain in office it would be in the interest of the State to keep him there. And yet we still went on the uneconomical theory that in the Civil Service a man was too old at 60. In the ordinary business walks of life, in the Church and the law, there was practically no age limit to a man's usefulness. What was the reason for this divergence of treatment?

"I have spent all my official life," he continued, "attached to the two great national museums. I was caught young, while, indeed, I was still a schoolboy at Winchester, and drawn into the British Museum by my old friend and master, Sir Charles Newton—that picturesque and imposing figure who may perhaps be regarded as the pioneer of classical archaeology in England, and to whom I owe more than I can say. I am one of those who still believe that a classical education is, taken all round, the soundest scaffolding on which to build up mental equipment; and I believe that a groundwork in Greek and Roman art is the idea starting-point from which to explore every other branch of art, if one is to retain a sane and reasonable judgment, particularly in these latter days. The real danger in such an avocation is that one is apt to let the archaeology obscure the art; in dissecting the subject, one may lose sight of its living beauty. That is the reason why I have always resented the use of the word museum as connoting a collection of dead things.

"I am afraid there is some truth in the suggestion that the very existence of a museum implies a confession of weakness. Certainly it would seem that historically, from the Museum of Alexandria downwards, such institutions have usually been founded during the decline of a nation's art, when a people needs to be artificially reminded of what was once an unconscious instinct implicit in its daily life and being. It is not that I do not feel the greatest respect for, and sympathy with, the collector; the mere joy of nosing out, running to earth, and finally capturing a valuable work of art is one of the finest field sports I know. But the side of the job that appeals to me still more is the turning it to some living purpose which may help, or uplift the drab life of to-day.

"That is part of the reason why in 1900 I consented, at Mr. Runciman's request, to uproot myself from the field of classical archaeology and adventure into the more modern life and aims of the South Kensington institution. The chief difficulty I found there was that, while it seemed to offer vistas of engaging usefulness in a thousand directions, it was under the control of a vast Department of State, with ordinances which, doubtless wise in themselves for the purpose for which they were made, were not always the best possible for the affiliated institutions. The vistas which I had seen too often proved to be a maze in which the guiding thread was made of red tape. (Laughter.) Still, when I look back on the 16 years of my administration, I see that it has been a cheerful, if not a very peaceful, time; and

(Cont.)

if the Board of Education and the higher forms of animal life at Whitehall (laughter) have not always approved of me, at least they have left me a fairly free hand, and for this relief I owe them much thanks. In my own staff I have found as loyal and helpful a body as one could wish to have.

"One naturally at such a moment is apt to recall one's unfulfilled ambitions, and among these I regret chiefly that I have failed in spite of repeated attempts to secure the detachment of the Victoria and Albert Museum from the Board of Education and the establishing of it, like the British Museum, under its own body of trustees. I am convinced that, sooner or later, this must be effected. Meanwhile, if on the other hand I have succeeded even in a small degree in forwarding the claims of British industrial art, and of the Victoria and Albert Museum as its outward and visible centre, I shall feel that my tenure of office has not been wholly in vain." (Cheers.)

Among those present were:—  
The Swedish Minister, Sir Maurice de Bunsen, the Finnish Minister, Sir George H. Murray, Mr. H. A. L. Fisher, M.P., Lord Faringdon, Lord Northbourne, Mr. Charles Trevelyan, M.P., Sir Hubert Llewellyn Smith, Sir John Burnet, A.R.A., Lord Blanesburgh, Sir T. Fermor-Hesketh, Mr. P. A. de Laszlo, Sir Charles Walston, Mr. Simon Harcourt Smith, Sir George Leveson-Gower, Sir Denison Ross, Mr. R. H. Benson, Sir William H. Clark, Sir Reginald Blomfield, R.A., Lord Ilchester, Mr. E. E. Beare, Sir Charles Allom, Baron Bruno von Schröder, Mr. V. Corry, Mr. W. Moorcroft, Sir R. Fox-Symons, Sir Frank Short, R.A., Colonel Cole, Mr. G. A. Macmillan, Sir Owen Seaman, Sir Frank Warner, Sir William Davies, Major A. A. Longden, Dr. Anning Bell, R.A., Mr. E. B. Hoare, Mr. E. A. Straus, Prebendary Gough, Mr. C. Harcourt-Smith, jun., Mr. John Watson, Mr. F. C. Richards, Mr. Louis Clarke, Mr. W. A. Forsyth, Mr. F. V. Burridge, Mr. W. Barclay Squire, Sir Henry Newbolt, Mr. D. O. Malcolm, Canon A. C. Deane, Mr. F. A. White, Mr. Alfred Powell, Mr. Noel Heaton, and Mr. G. F. Forsdike.