

**Loránd Eötvös, “President’s opening speech,” *Akadémiai Értesítő* 6 (1895): 321-325.**

*Esteemed assembly!*

[Keep in mind that gendered pronouns are an English artifact!]

On this day, which is not only a celebration for our Academy, but also its annual reporting day, we can step before our friends, our patrons, and the entire Hungarian public, before everyone who takes an interest in our activity, with the reassuring knowledge that we have fulfilled our duty this year.

But perhaps this is not enough for festive jubilation. Our friends and patrons would still like to hear just once the triumphant clarion proclaiming the glory of Hungarian science to the world, and instead we can still only let ring the more modest sounds of the morning reveille, because in this place least of all can we fall into the now commonplace mistake of self-delusion.

There is no gainsaying that our nation has not yet occupied the position in the scientific world that would correspond to its numerical proportion and political weight, one to which it is entitled among the other nations, and which, if taken seriously, it could occupy in a short period of time, given its versatile ability.

A difficult obstacle lies here in our path, a certain insularity from the world of science that we live in, and what is even more damaging than this is the flaunting of our insularity, which, especially nowadays, has become almost popular in Hungarian public opinion, due to the one-sided perception of our national tasks.

There is no nation in the world that would be more hurt by the foreigner’s slight than Hungary, there is no nation that would be more proud of its sons who brandish the national banner before the eyes of the world, whether it bore the emblems of martial glory on itself, or the emblems of science or the arts; there is no nation that wishes more keenly to rise to the first ranks than our nation, and yet the number of those these days who, although they desire triumph, reject all the tools in support of it out of antipathy toward the foreign, is not decreasing, but still increasing, and they would rather delude themselves in the blissful yet at the same time soporific belief that there is only one language in the world, only one literature, and only one culture, and it is the Hungarian, while there is only one authorized judge above the Hungarian, the Hungarian himself.

These will surely not conquer the world for us.

Someone who only ever looks at his own image in the mirror can perhaps be embellished, but he is not rendered more capable of acting.

One who prepares for battle and for triumph in battle must familiarize himself with all the weapons of his competitors and strive to occupy a secure position in the field of battle. In the world of the sciences, this battlefield is not one nation’s domain, but the common ground of all nations, on which the decisive word belongs to the one who can render it more beautiful with his creations.

Our celebration as it recurs from year to year will thus soon be truly a triumphal celebration, when the whole world will see the advancement of Hungarian science and regard it as beneficial.

We can only approach this exalted, ideal, and patriotic goal if on the one hand we learn and elaborate according to our own reasoning process everything that we may learn from other nations; while on the other hand we propagate what we have created ourselves, presented in proper form to the public, before the world's judgment.

A nation does not abase itself when it wants to learn from other nations. The proud Frenchman can point without blushing at the foreign masters [like the astronomer Cassini] he was fortunate to enlist during the founding of his academy, and the scientific laurels of the German are not marred by the fact that their roots were planted by Frenchmen [like the physicist Maupertuis] called to [the Academy of Sciences in] Berlin by Frederick the Great.

We were not so fortunate. In past centuries, the hardships of our struggles did not allow us to arrive at this end from such beginnings, and, for example, in the glorious days of King Mátyás, a Regiomontanus only ran across our scientific firmament as a falling star, without time to permanently illuminate it; and in times closer to our own, when foreigners taught in our colleges, this teaching, though it was not lost without a trace in our erudition, could however not really bring any boon, because it was not the satisfaction of the nation's own wish, but was rather the tutoring of the nation.

Today it is too late for us to turn this manner of domesticating science to our use; national sensibility has grown much larger than what would have been possible with such glorious success in the age of Richelieu and Frederick the Great; but what others do not bring to us, we can go after ourselves, the world stands open before us, and there is no portal of science that the young Hungarian would find closed when he knocks at its door, thirsting for science.

If only the desire to seek out scientific treasures abroad and enrich the science of their nation by the collections there would awaken and gain satisfaction in greater numbers, and if only those who cannot do this would learn languages and equip themselves in order to exploit the world's scientific literature for our benefit.

It is true that those who compile scholarship still do not do science of itself, and the nation that would confine itself to this compilatory work would deserve to be belittled, but only those who know the building's foundations and design will build the structure of science higher and plant their own flag on a new tier formed on their own. Those who are unable to do so will at best cobble together a mortar hovel on whose stooped straw roof the ambitious flag would be ever so grandiose, but could not be an emblem of glory, only an object of ridicule. What our nation aspires to do is build a palace rather than a hovel of science.

In addition to the domestication of foreign science, not the least important factor for the development of our own science is also still the one that I indicated earlier, i.e., getting the results of our work before the world public.

This scientific public is not only about putting the results achieved on display in a nice light, but is necessary especially for the sake of keeping alive the scientific work that leads to such results, because without this—in the absence of recognition, encouragement, and serious criticism—dejection, despondence, and indifference sap the strength in the best workers who

are devoting their full power to the advancement of science, and conversely cannot expect reward elsewhere. Without the public there is no progress in science. The know-how kept secret by some peoples in ancient times, and the scholarship enclosed in the monastery walls of the Middle Ages, give witness to the desire for conservation rather than progress.

True progress in science, as in other branches of culture, started with the discovery of the powerful tool of the public, the press. But when I talk about the press, I do not mean the press that feeds the great multitude with information, that entertains with the news, and which, giving expression to public opinion and not just forming it itself, has grown into a power that influences every phase of public life. I mean not the tabloid press, which as fast as it functions elevates or tosses into the dirt those it deems worthy of attention, but rather the machinery, albeit operating much more slowly but much more prudently and perhaps more ponderously, which prints scientific journals and books, and whose products are not snapped up by the multitude, but in all countries and all ages are taken with delight as stepping stones on the path upward by the working group studying science.

I acknowledge that the newspaper press has done and may yet do good services to science when it drives the attention of the crowd toward it and thereby gains friends and patrons to its cause, but I still have to warn every serious worker in science not to seek glory in the columns of newspapers. In that direction they will often be unfair, because their judgment is trained on the present moment, and it comes about from the viewpoint of fast-moving, momentary interest, passing over in silence everything that only the future can make interesting and valuable for the larger public.

The newspapers talk a lot about Edisons, they are used to hearing about Faradays, while the man of science pays more respect to the tree planter and keepers than the ones picking the ripe fruits.

The only authorized public seat of judgment before which the true scientist must report what he has done stands among the up-to-date series of rigorous scientific journals and other publications in which his research results have been recorded for centuries and in any case it is to the scientist's greater glory if he may write his name in them next to even one worthy work as if all the tabloids were talking about him.

But the contemporary scientist is subject to other temptations besides the enticements of tabloid glory, including popular associations, clubs organizing public lectures, exhibitions, and the congresses that recur annually in almost every major city, with the veneer of each of these kinds of scientific public luring him away with faster and easier work from the previously allotted long and laborious path leading to a Pantheon-like building.

The virtue of great learning still does not absolve anyone from his social obligations, and that is why the most learned person also acts properly and deserves gratitude when he occasionally descends from the vantage point of his science and promotes the instruction and enjoyment of the multitude with his prudent counsel or delightful lectures. Just beware of regarding recognition earned by such services as the satisfaction of scientific ambition, because surely the desire for momentary glory will easily trivialize this.

One of the tasks of academies is to select among the manifold expressions of intellectual life and to bring to the public all their creations that are truly progressive in science in terms of their lasting value, and to the extent that this public is revealed before the whole world, any

rigorously constituted national-level academy, in addition to cultivating and disseminating the sciences within its own nation, should also be the external representative of the nation's science. Our academy is not insulated from the fulfillment of this task, it does not [merely] support an enterprise whose mission is to bring the results of our scientific work before the court of foreign judgment. In science, however, triumph even today still depends on heroes, not on the multitude of armies, and we need the kind of heroes who can conquer a country for us Hungarians in the world of science.

We are preparing for our millennial celebration where we will present ourselves to the world in the splendor of our past, and I believe that compliments will not be missing, but we will not be content with these, we will not rest until the great cultural nations regard us in our daily vesture, too, as equal factors with them in the solution of the great ideal tasks of humanity.

Soon then we will truly have a triumphal celebration!

I welcome this brilliant assembly which has honored us with its presence today, and I open the session.