

## Sir Maurice Byers CBE QC

### *Bar Association Annual Report 1982*

On the occasion of his receiving the accolade of Knighthood, the Bar dined one of its greatest and best loved sons. Maurice Byers became President of the Bar on the appointment of the late Mr Justice Holmes to the Court of Appeal in the latter part of 1965, and he held the appointment through 1966 and 1967. He was appointed Solicitor-General for Australia in December 1973. With his permission, parts of his 'address in reply' are included here:

#### **On Presidents:**

Recently I opened what I suppose may be described as a weekly newspaper and was confronted by the scornful visage of our immediate past President. His generously proportioned frame must have loomed threateningly over the photographer for, to be candid, even his photographic image terrified me.

Meagher has long been what the media call a 'colourful figure'. At times he resembles a regency buck who has mislaid his valet: at others a fin de siècle and heterosexual Oscar Wilde who has just swallowed a bonne bouche of a bon mot.

For his entertainment he has mastered the pithy expression to credulous journalists of opinions well to the right of those which ensured in the 1790s the decapitation of the less adaptable members of the Ancien Regime.

The article which accompanied Meagher's photograph concluded ominously what the Bar Association's response to the Law Reform Commission's suggestion of lay participation upon the Council could easily be judged. It lay in Meagher's comment that 5 per cent of the population were convicted criminals, 5 per cent drug addicts and a surprisingly low 30 per cent, cretins.

Now the point of this, somewhat unfairly to the present incumbent I thought, was that the Association was composed mainly of those who had barely crawled into the age of representative, let alone responsible, government. While this may be an arguable view, I hesitate to think it has been conclusively established.

Now the President is also a 'colourful figure' in newspaper terms. His photograph is frequently in the press. He appears at the committal stages only

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