

Speech: Lord Chief Justice swearing-in, Lord Chancellor speech

I have great pleasure in adding my voice to this chorus of approval. I am delighted to welcome Sir Ian as our new Lord Chief Justice, the most senior job that the judicial system of England and Wales has to offer.

I'm sure Ian won't mind my remarking that he is only the second youngest holder of this ancient title, having been pipped by a few months by Lord Parker of Waddington back in 1958. The Master of the Rolls has already sung his virtues. I fully support that endorsement and look forward to working with Sir Ian, who is clearly an outstanding judge and will be an outstanding leader into the future.

But of course in ushering in Sir Ian, we must also say goodbye to Lord Thomas who has shown such wisdom, intellect and verve as a leader and champion of judges. And I'm sure you would all wish to join me in bidding him farewell in what I consider perhaps to be the most appropriate way.

Diolch o galon i chi am eich ymroddiad i'r swydd a'ch gwaith dygn, di-flino dros y blynyddoedd. Dymunaf pob bendith i chi yn y dyfodol.

Now lest anyone mistook that for Estonian – the last language in which I attempted to pay tribute, during my Foreign Office days – or indeed happens not to be both a fluent and forgiving Welsh speaker, I hope that I said:

Thank you very much for the dedication and the hard work that you have tirelessly shown to the role over the years. I wish you all the blessings for the future.

Sir Ian will now take on the constitutional responsibilities of Lord Chief Justice. And together we will work to ensure that justice is at the centre of our society; to secure access to justice for all, whatever their means or abilities; to provide the where-with-all through which the judges can administer justice openly and swiftly without fear or favour, affection or ill-will. He takes up his role as we navigate the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union and, Sir Ian, we are grateful for the stability you will provide as we move forward. And on the issue of Brexit, it is perhaps worth revisiting the words of Lord Thomas: when he said

Brexit does not affect the quality or certainty of English law, or the standing of our courts or London's arbitration centres. They remain as before June last year...Our legal profession will continue to be expert and world-respected. Our judges will continue to be drawn from the highest ranks of that legal profession. They will continue to be renowned for their expertise, impartiality and integrity. All the key features that made London into the leading

centre for dispute resolution will continue unchanged.

And of course our courts, after all, are grounded in the Rule of Law – and our law is a breathing, living entity that throughout history has offered a measured, thoughtful and certain response to changing circumstances, and will I am sure do so countless times again. It is a system that forms laws from the lives of men and women rather than directing them to live under forms of law. In our ancient, established and unbroken democracy, the law, our law, is truly among this nation's most treasured assets.

In the words of Rudyard Kipling,

All we have of freedom, all we use or know – This our fathers
bought for us long and long ago. Ancient Right unnoticed as the
breath we draw – Leave to live by no man's leave, underneath the
Law.

Our Law does much more than establish and govern a legal system. It is at once part of the fabric of history and also the beating heart of modern society: it is synonymous with quality and incorruptibility. As impartial and fearfully independent judges, acting under the leadership of the Lord Chief Justice, it is your task to preside over this law so that, with our support, citizens, institutions, investors and businesses can have faith in the future.

Robust economies, after all, depend upon the existence of clear law to govern societies and commerce. And without you all, without that tradition and practice of judicial independence, the Rule of Law would be but an empty shell.

As the latest in a long line of holders of this august office, Sir Ian personifies what the Rule of Law stands for and the rights it enshrines. During his career, without fear or favour, he has variously stood up for the 'little man' in common-law cases, taken part in major public inquiries, has represented the government – and also acted to hold authority to account as counsel in cases of miscarriages of justice.

So he is no stranger to challenging authority – and this is just as it should be. Judges allow us to live in a society where no individual and no government is above the law. Where executive power is balanced by a strong judiciary and a scrutinising legislature. It was not always so, of course: a former Lord Chancellor, Francis Bacon, once admonished judges thus: 'Let them be lions, but yet lions under the throne; being circumspect that they do not check or oppose any points of sovereignty'.

Fully 400 years later, I will steadfastly uphold the independence of the judiciary of England and Wales in your duty to be lions. On occasion, in the coming months and years, there will doubtless be some uncomfortable discussions between the 21st century judiciary and the Executive. And that, too, is as it should be – with discord then giving way to discussion and

finally to harmony.

Sir Ian, you were once asked why you became a lawyer. 'My teachers at school noticed I could do joined-up writing and was quite argumentative. Despairing of anything else, they suggested the Bar.'

So today let us congratulate not only Sir Ian but also his teachers for talent-spotting the second youngest Lord Chief Justice in this nation's history. Congratulations – and thank you.