

EIGHTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

June 28, 1910

ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT,
S. H. BUTCHER.

By the election of Fellows to-day we shall bring up our numbers for the first time to the prescribed limit of one hundred. As we look back over the years since 1902 the list of Fellows who have died reminds us how heavy has been our loss during this brief period. The mere enumeration of names tells its own story of varied achievements, and brings to remembrance many striking personalities and memories of friendship. These are the names:—

Dr. Edward Caird.
Professor E. B. Cowell.
Lord Davey.
Lord Goschen.
Sir R. C. Jebb.
Mr. W. E. H. Lecky.
Professor F. W. Maitland.
Mr. D. B. Monro.
Professor W. R. Morfill.
Dr. A. S. Murray.
Professor H. F. Pelham.
Rev. Provost George Salmon.
Sir Leslie Stephen.
Dr. Whitley Stokes.
Sir Spencer Walpole.

CORRESPONDING FELLOWS.

Professor de Goeje.
Professor Krumbacher.
Mr. H. C. Lea.
Professor de Martens.
M. Georges Picot.

It has occurred to me that it may not be out of place at this meeting to review our early history and to attempt to define with some

precision the chief purposes for which the British Academy exists. The idea of an Academy of Letters, such as the French Academy, is familiar to every educated person ; but an Academy which has as its object the Organization of Humane Learning is still novel to the English mind.

Previous to the granting of our Charter in 1902 there was in the United Kingdom no single body representative of those branches of learning and research which lie outside the domain of the physical and mathematical sciences. That latter field has been long and honourably occupied by the Royal Society of London. A special event forced attention to this defect. In 1899 at the instance of the Royal Society an International Association of the principal Scientific and Literary Academies of the world was formed, comprising two sections, a section of 'Natural Science' and a section of 'Literary Science', the term 'Literary' being used to denote the sciences of Language, History, Philosophy, Antiquities, and other kindred subjects, the study of which is based on scientific principles, but which are not included under the term 'Natural Science'. At the first meeting of the International Association held in Paris in 1900 Natural Science within the United Kingdom was represented by the Royal Society of London, but the section embracing the group of Historical, Philosophical, and Philological Sciences, &c., was wholly without representation so far as this country was concerned. An urgent appeal was made by the representatives present at the meeting that every effort should be employed to secure the corporate organization of these branches of study in the United Kingdom. Private conferences at which, in the first instance, the Royal Society took the leading part, were then held in London, and opinions were exchanged between members of various learned bodies. The result was the founding of our Academy, which obtained the grant of a Royal Charter in August, 1902, the eve of the Coronation of His late Majesty King Edward VII. At the second meeting of the International Association of Academies held in London in May, 1904, the United Kingdom furnished delegates both from the Royal Society and from the British Academy, and the arrangements were carried out by these two bodies acting in concert. Here let me in passing remind the Members that the next meeting of the great International Congress of the Historical Sciences, from which much is expected by the world of learning, is to be held in London in 1913. The task of organizing the Congress has been gladly undertaken by the British Academy. The last meeting held in Berlin in 1908 was carried out with unqualified success through the munificence of the German government backed by private effort

and hospitality. We hope not to fall below that high standard either as regards the quality of the papers to be contributed by our historians or the adequacy of the other preparations for the reception of our guests.

I. The origin of the Academy itself reminds us of one of the main functions of such a society—to take part in international Conferences as the official representative of the branches of learning that fall within its scope.

II. Another and primary function of an Academy such as ours is to initiate or promote large schemes of work which need organized effort and learned co-operation on the part of many persons living, it may be, in different lands. Two examples under this head may be mentioned of international enterprises which concern Great Britain as an Asiatic Power more nearly than any other country:—

(1) A critical edition of the great Indian epic, the *Mahābhārata*. The scheme was first laid before the Associated Academies at their meeting in London in 1904, and since then a Committee has been appointed from whose Report I quote the following words: ‘We are of opinion that the constitution of a critical text of the *Mahābhārata* is the most important task in the domain of Indian scholarship at the present day. This very extensive national epic has been more intimately connected with the history of Indian civilization for more than 2,000 years than any other literary work. But research can make no real progress with the material it contains till a critical edition has been produced. The work has already been apportioned among a number of most competent Sanskrit scholars, and the Associated Academies have voted a sum of £2,500 towards the cost of the edition.’ The British Academy has recently submitted to the India Office a reasoned statement setting forth the strong claims which this project has upon the consideration of our Government. I have the pleasure of being able to inform you that in the last few days I have received a reply to the effect that the Secretary of State for India, ‘recognizing the value that attaches to this important undertaking, is willing to sanction a subvention from Indian revenues amounting to £1,020, and payable in instalments of £60 on the publication of each of the seventeen volumes in which the work is to be issued.’ Though the amount of this grant falls short of our hopes, we are grateful for the official recognition and encouragement thus given to the work. One of our Fellows, Professor Macdonell, has been nominated by our Council to serve on the International Committee which is engaged on this undertaking.

(2) The second project is the Encyclopaedia of Islam. Here again

the India Office responded to the appeal of the British Academy a few years ago and made the Academy the channel of a grant of £200 a year for ten years towards the *Encyclopaedia*. This decision was reported to the third meeting of the International Association at Vienna in 1907, and a unanimous resolution was there adopted to petition the Governments of such countries as number Mahomedans among their subjects to give financial aid to the enterprise.

The lack of funds of necessity impedes the British Academy in the exercise of its functions and at every step of its progress. The departments of learning which it represents receive generous aid from the State in almost every other civilized country. Without State subsidies the labours of numerous *collaborateurs* could never have been embodied in those great collective works which stand to the credit more especially of Germany. The most notable achievements are those of the Royal Prussian Academy at Berlin. The historico-philosophical class in that Academy, whose sphere of work corresponds to that of the British Academy, has under its management a long list of works whose range and variety appear from the mention of a few of their titles:—

- The Corpus of Greek Inscriptions.
- The Corpus of Latin Inscriptions.
- The Thesaurus Linguae Latinae.
- An Index Rei Militaris of the Roman Empire.
- An Edition of the Greek Christian Fathers.
- A Lexicon of Ancient Egyptian.
- An Edition of the works of Kant.

The splendid programme, of which this is a small part, is the slow growth of years of organized learning combined with State munificence. But for the moment I would merely insist that some State aid, on however modest a scale, is essential if British learning is to take its due place in International Conferences. At each triennial meeting of the Associated Academies international projects are discussed and co-operation is invited. The Royal Society is able to contribute its share towards the scientific undertakings that come within its proper domain. Not so the British Academy. Its members can join in discussions, they can sit on committees, they may promise individual assistance in helping forward the works that are taken in hand, they are occasionally fortunate enough to be able to announce some small Government contribution to one of the schemes under consideration; but the Academy has no revenue from public funds; it cannot enter as an active partner into the enterprises of other nations; it cannot

summon to its aid by any offer of remuneration the many men in this country who are trained in habits of research, or have proved their capacity for learned and original work. The denial of State support to organized learning outside the sphere of the physical sciences tends to lower the intellectual dignity of Great Britain in international relations. Through this cold neglect the British Academy is crippled in the exercise of precisely those functions which are most distinctive of an Academy of Learning.

Other projects not of an international but of a national character also come within the scope of the British Academy. Let me give a salient instance. England possesses the most remarkable set of records of economic and social history in the world. A comparatively small portion of them has been published or even described, and there remains a vast store of similar documents which ought to be made accessible to the public. Local societies from time to time bring in welcome contributions, but these are scattered in transactions, they are difficult of access, and appear in a haphazard way without any systematic co-ordination. The Rolls Series, published out of public funds, contain the greater part of the Chronicles and Memorials for the general history of mediaeval England, but of Social and Economic History only a few samples have been given. It is this gap that the Academy proposes to fill. Out of the limited resources furnished by the subscriptions of its members the British Academy has undertaken the publication of a series of *Records of British Economic and Social History*, designed to form a sequel to the series issued under the direction of the Master of the Rolls.

The first two volumes will consist of the Cartulary of the Abbey of St. Augustine, Canterbury, the editing of this important record being entrusted to Mr. G. J. Turner, of Lincoln's Inn, under the supervision of an editorial sub-committee, of which Professor Vinogradoff is the chairman. It is hoped that the first volume—some 400 pages—may be issued in the course of the next Academic year. The survey of the possessions of the Knights Templars (1185 A.D.), now at the Record Office, will form a third volume, to be edited by the Marquis d'Alban and Mr. Salter. A field is here opened up for an undertaking of national and scientific importance, and in carrying it out students may well be stimulated by the brilliant example already set by the Selden Society and other similar Societies. If, however, the scheme is to be developed in a manner commensurate with the wealth and interest of the materials, far larger pecuniary resources will be needed than are at present at the command of the Academy.

III. A third function of an Academy such as ours is to act as an advisory body to Departments of State or local authorities on matters affecting Learning and coming within its direct cognizance. Here we have continental and even British precedent to guide us. The German Government, in considering questions as to the recognition or support which should be given to institutions or undertakings having for their object the advancement of science or learning, seeks the advice of the Berlin Academy, just as the French Government seeks the advice of the Institute, acting through its several branches. Where such questions fall within the domain of Physical Science, the British Government can refer, and does refer, to the Royal Society. There has not been up to the present time any corresponding authority for dealing with questions that fall within the scope of the British Academy.

Existing learned societies are numerous and their objects usually are highly specialized; they are not in a position to co-ordinate their claims with those of other institutions of the same class. On the best mode of applying and distributing aid to scientific work the judgment of a body which is comprehensive in its aims and representative in character ought to carry a greater weight than that of any society of more limited scope. The advice of such a body would be valuable not only to the central government but to local authorities, to public and charitable institutions having funds at their disposal, and to private individuals who wish to aid scientific work. It would direct expenditure into proper channels, and would prevent or check profusion or waste. In many cases where pecuniary aid is granted such a body could usefully act, not merely as an advising, but as a dispensing authority.

In default of adequate provision for greater enterprises out of public money the British Academy looks to private generosity for endowment for special purposes. Two such funds have already been started:—

(1) The Schweich Fund of £10,000 for the encouragement of research in the sphere of Biblical Archaeology. The first series of lectures was given in 1908 by Professor Driver on 'The results of archaeological research as bearing on the study of the Old Testament'. Last year's course was delivered by Professor R. H. Kennett on 'The composition of the Book of Isaiah in the light of Archaeology and History'. Professor George Adam Smith has been appointed lecturer for 1910.

(2) Early this year an anonymous donor, to whom the Academy would publicly tender its thanks, has promised the sum of £500 a year for at least three years as the nucleus of a fund which may hereafter be enlarged, 'to be devoted to the furtherance of research

and criticism, historical, philological, and philosophical, in the various branches of English Literature, including the investigations of problems in the history and usage of English, written and spoken, and textual and documentary work elucidating the development of English Language and Literature.' The gift is strictly on the lines of the Academy's Charter, for although Literature on its artistic or purely literary side is outside the scope of the Academy, Literature on its scientific side is as certainly within its province. The gift is intended to provide for two annual lectures. One is a Shakespeare Lecture to be delivered 'on some Shakesperean subject, philosophical, philological, or historical, or some problem in English Dramatic Literature or Histrionic Art, or some study in Literature of the age of Shakespeare', and the lecturer may be a person of any nationality.

The other lecture is to be on some historical, philological, or philosophical subject connected with English Poetry and is to be styled 'The Warton Lecture'. There is a further provision that 'a gold medal shall be specially struck, and shall be awarded on rare occasions to commemorate exceptional achievement, and pre-eminent merit in any branch of English Learning specified under the fund'.

I have indicated three functions proper to the Academy of Learning; of these three the second is perhaps the most important and distinctive, and to a great extent carries with it the others. The characteristic which more clearly than any other marks off the activities of the Academy from those of more specialized societies is the part it is adapted to take (if equipped with sufficient resources) in promoting the publication of joint works on a large scale and of enduring value, undertaken either in concert with the other Academies of the world, or with members of learned bodies in this country. The Sections of the British Academy have drawn up lists of such enterprises for which the initiative or co-operation of the Academy is required. I will enumerate a few to give concrete reality to our ideas:

A. *General.*

1. A bibliographical index of papers bearing on the work of the Academy (cf. the Catalogue of Scientific Literature of the Royal Society).

2. Co-operation in excavations in Greece, Egypt, Assyria, Asia Minor, Crete, and elsewhere, and promotion of the interests of the British Schools of Archaeology in Athens, Rome, and Egypt.

3. A new edition of Du Cange (with the co-operation of other Academies).

4. A comprehensive history of Industries and an Economic Dictionary.

B. British.

1. Publication of the collections of Greek and Roman antiquities now in private hands in this country.

2. *Corpus Inscriptionum Britannicarum*, both comprehensive and specially native (e. g. the Ogham inscriptions).

3. *Britannia Romana*. (English Records in Rome.)

4. The collection and publication by competent inquirers of records of the religions, languages, folklore, customs and traditions of the primitive races which inhabit various parts of the British Empire, some of which are fast disappearing or losing their ancient forms of speech and faith.

5. A uniform publication, on a worthy scale by modern resources, of all remains of the earlier centuries in Britain: (a) prehistoric, (b) Roman, (c) Saxon pre-Danish, (d) Danish-Saxon. The Saxon age should be first undertaken, as the material is less, and more irreplaceable in case of loss.

6. Records of English Equity.

7. Records of English Ecclesiastical Courts.

Local and Special.

1. Complete survey of the Roman wall.

2. Publication of documents illustrating the relations of Great Britain and Europe, 1660-1837. (Ample materials in Record Office. To be published in sections, illustrating particular periods and spheres of diplomatic action.)

3. The publication of critical editions of pieces of early Celtic literature, some of which are still in manuscript, while others have appeared in editions below the level of modern scholarship. (In this work the advice and co-operation of the Royal Irish Academy would, of course, be sought.)

There is one other topic on which with your permission I will touch lightly. In my Presidential Address of last October I spoke of the relation of the British Academy to Literature. I would now add a brief word on the relation of the British Academy to Science in the ordinary acceptance of that word. The history of the sciences as distinct from the work of discovery and research within the several sciences has not, I believe, hitherto been dealt with by the Royal Society, and seems to fall within the historical portion of our domain. In the second volume of our proceedings a learned paper on 'Petrus Peregrinus de Maricourt and his *Epistola de Magnete*' by Professor Silvanus Thompson, F.R.S., was a recognition of this fact. Other

and more definite reminders have reached us of the intimate relation between the studies with which we are concerned and the sciences that are outside our immediate field. We have been invited by the Berlin Academy to co-operate in the editing of the 'Corpus Medicorum Antiquorum' which, as is now resolved, will be published under the auspices of the International Association of Academies. A similar proposal has come from Vienna, offering us a place on the Committee for the publication of a 'Corpus Scriptorum de Musica'. All the sciences, and indeed all the arts on their historical side, have points of contact with the British Academy, and here is a promising field for opening up relations with other corporate bodies at home as well as for international co-operation.

But while we welcome such cosmopolitan relations with Science, we have already special ties with Science nearer home. The British Academy is not indeed the child of the Royal Society, but the Royal Society showed no small interest in our founding. When the corporate organization of Learning was under discussion in 1901, opinion was divided as to whether the new body should be created by expansion of the Royal Society from within through the addition of a new section of Historical, Philological, and Philosophical studies, or by the founding of an independent Society. The prevailing opinion was in favour of the second alternative; but the difference of view concerned only the machinery for carrying out the scheme. The Royal Society showed their sympathy from the outset, and petitioned in favour of the grant of the Charter. Though the Royal Society and the new Academy were independent bodies, the granting of a separate Charter did not, as was pointed out at the time, preclude the possibility of closer relations being established between them in the future. We still owe much to the friendly assistance of the Royal Society, to whom we are indebted this year for the use of their Rooms. The want of a domicile of our own has seriously hampered our work, and the courtesy extended to us in allowing us to hold our meetings in Burlington House is one which we deeply appreciate. Whether an Institute may some day be founded which will embrace the Royal Society, the British Academy, the Royal Academy of Arts, and other kindred bodies is perhaps a distant speculation, but the linking up of our Academy and the Royal Society as two kindred but independent bodies, would be the first and easiest step in the process. Apart from our origin and history we have many points of contact, and may I hope still be fellow-workers in elucidating some chapters in the History of the Sciences.

Co-operative enterprise in things of the mind is perhaps the most

signal achievement of our generation. Organized science on its physical side has here led the way. For the advance of Physical Science no observation is too minute, no contribution is unimportant. Modern scientific research demands a host of humble labourers in every field. The hewers of wood and drawers of water are as necessary as the men of genius; for while it is the case that nowhere does genius count for more, it is also true that nowhere does intelligent drudgery count so much. Learning, literary Learning, also seeks to be organized. The difficulties of this are greater, notably in England. The results of research outside the physical sciences do not impress the imagination by any visible conquest of nature; they do not at once compel acceptance; their value cannot be measured by equally sure tests; they have no obvious bearing on material welfare, and politicians and state departments can afford to neglect them. Fortunately, however, they possess for the workers themselves the inner secret of the success of science in other fields—the sense of progressiveness and of the discovery of truth; and the exhilarating consciousness of onward movement becomes stronger in proportion as the bonds of brotherhood in learning are drawn closer.

In my remarks to-day I have insisted chiefly on combined effort for great enterprises as the mark of an Academy of Learning. But projects of national or international significance are but the manifestation of a certain spirit that is of silent growth. The basis of union for big intellectual undertakings is generally laid in the sympathetic intercourse of small meetings—I will not say of committees, for as Newman observed, ‘living movements do not come out of committees,’ but of the meetings of friends and fellow-workers. The new idea, the particular project, may often be traced to the impulse given by some paper or discussion, or it may even originate in talk over the tea-table. I have been told by Fellows of the Royal Society that much of the Society’s vitality is due not merely to the intrinsic merit of the papers read, but to the give and take of conversation at the ordinary meetings. Strangers are freely introduced. The great men and the small, the young and the old come together. Of the papers read a large proportion are not by Fellows of the Society but by pupils or fellow-workers or by independent students. In this atmosphere of intellectual partnership there is no sense of superiority, no cold isolation. The communications made include not only such as afterwards find an important place in the published transactions; they are often more or less informal, conveyed in brief oral statement, and giving the latest results of particular investigations. The best that is being done by workers up and down the

country is here brought to a focus and to the test of friendly discussion. I have often heard of the generous and unsparing pains taken by the Fellows and some of the greatest of the Presidents of the Royal Society to direct the energies of the younger men into fruitful regions of research.

Along lines such as these the work of our Academy may well be developed and its usefulness enhanced. It is true that from the nature of the subjects discussed our proceedings do not admit of precisely the same methods as are appropriate to those sciences which report or sift the results of laboratory experiments. Our numbers, too, are much smaller than those of the Royal Society, and as a consequence our meetings are less fully attended. But the very fact of our limited membership, distributed as it is over the whole of the United Kingdom, points, in my judgement, to the need of well thought out arrangements by which we may associate with ourselves and invite to our gatherings all who have the interest of true inquirers in any of the special studies which fall within our province. Already we have made some efforts in this direction. We may perhaps proceed further and on a more definite plan, and so compensate in some degree for the drawbacks attaching to a Society with small and scattered membership. Learning, let us remember, is no longer the possession of a few, the privilege of an intellectual aristocracy. There is now nothing like a caste of learned men. Many who are unconnected with the official seats of learning contribute to the best and most highly specialized thought of our time. The British Academy should aim at becoming an intellectual centre and meeting-place not only of members of academic bodies and learned societies, but of smaller groups of students and even of isolated workers who are pursuing their own independent researches. The value also of the social side of learning must not be forgotten. It was the discovery of Greece; and the old idea, so persistent in history, is still operative and true. Even under the vastly changed intellectual conditions of the modern world the corporate organization of learning cannot dispense with the free and friendly intercourse of individuals out of which arose the earliest and most inspiring type of Academy—the philosophic schools of Hellas.