

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Copy of letter dated December 23rd, 1903

THE BRITISH ACADEMY

To the Lords Commissioners of His Majesty's Treasury

MY LORDS,

1. I have been requested by the British Academy to renew the application which was made earlier in the year for assistance from public funds.

2. The circumstances under which application was made for the grant of a charter to the Academy appear from the following paragraphs of the petition presented to the King in Council by the unincorporated Society which made the application:—

‘At a meeting of the representatives of the chief European and American Academies held at Wiesbaden, in October, 1899, a scheme was drawn up for the organization of an International Association of the principal Scientific and Literary Academies of the world.

‘The scheme provided for the division of the Association into two sections, viz. a section of “Natural Science” and a section of “Literary Science”, the term “Literary” being used to indicate the sciences of Language, History, Philosophy, and Antiquities, and other subjects the study of which is based on scientific principles, but which are not included under the term “Natural Science”.

‘While the Royal Society of London represented at the Association Your Majesty's United Kingdom

in the section of Natural Science, no existing institution was at that date deemed competent to represent Your Majesty's United Kingdom in the section dealing with Historical, Philosophical, and Philological studies.

'In consequence of this defect in existing English institutions these branches of study in Your Majesty's United Kingdom were not represented at the first meeting of the International Association of Academies held in Paris in 1900.

'It was urgently demanded by the International representatives present at the meeting of the Association that immediate efforts should be made to secure the due corporate representation of these branches of study in Your Majesty's United Kingdom.

'The direction of the International Association of Academies will, at the beginning of the year 1902, pass to Your Majesty's United Kingdom, in view of the second meeting of the Association to be held in London in the year 1904.

'The non-representation of the Historical, Philosophical, and Philological Sciences would be anomalous, and detrimental to the best interests of learning in Your Majesty's United Kingdom and Dominions beyond the Seas.

'Taking cognizance of the facts herein before stated, divers representatives of Your Majesty's learned Bodies met together at the British Museum on June 28th of the present year, when it was resolved that a Society representative of Historical, Philosophical, and Philological studies should be formed on conditions which would satisfy the requirements of the International Association of Academies.

‘In pursuance of the objects set forth above, the present Society has been formed to promote the advancement of the study of the Moral and Political Sciences, including History, Philosophy, Law, Politics and Economics, Archaeology and Philology.

‘The Society is not constituted for gain, and neither its projectors nor any of its members derive any pecuniary profit therefrom.

‘Your petitioners believe that their incorporation will tend greatly to the furtherance of the objects which the Society has in view, will exercise an influence towards maintaining a high standard of learning, and will be fruitful of national advantage by according to British students of History, Philosophy, and Philology, and kindred studies, their due representation among the Academies of the world.’

3. A Royal Charter was accordingly granted to the Academy on August 8, 1902, the eve of His Majesty's Coronation.

4. The number of the members of the Academy is limited by their by-laws to 100. The existing number is 69. Each member pays an entrance fee of ten guineas, and an annual subscription of three guineas. New members are only elected from among persons who have attained distinction in some one or more of the branches of scientific study which it is the object of the Academy to promote ; and stringent regulations have been made for securing the observance of this rule. The members of the Academy are intended to be those persons who are most actively engaged in original work in the fields of study which the Academy represent, and whose experience renders them most capable of judging the merits of work in

those fields. The Academy is divided into sectional committees, which, as at present constituted, represent respectively—

- (1) History and Archaeology.
- (2) Philology (Oriental, Biblical, Classical, Mediaeval, Modern, &c.).
- (3) Philosophy (Logic, Psychology, Ethics, Metaphysics, &c.).
- (4) Jurisprudence and Economics.

5. The Academy has no resources except those derived from the entrance fees and subscriptions of its members.

6. It has been suggested that the Academy is precluded from making the present application by some correspondence which took place between the applicants for the charter and the Treasury previously to the grant of the charter. But this suggestion is based on a misapprehension. It was clearly understood that the grant of a charter was not to be construed as a pledge of assistance from public funds. But it was equally clear that the Academy, if incorporated, was not to be precluded from making an application for such assistance, and that any such application, if made, was to be considered on its merits.

7. It has been asked in what manner the British Academy is to be differentiated from the numerous other learned societies now in existence. The answer to that question is simple. The Academy has been established for the purpose of discharging, and is prepared to discharge, with respect to the branches of scientific study which it represents, functions which

are not discharged, and which cannot be discharged, by any other organization.

8. The most important of these functions are—

- (1) The collective representation of those branches of study in international relations and proceedings.
- (2) The collective representation of those branches of study in relation to the Government, to public bodies, and to individuals.
- (3) The promotion and assistance of scientific enterprise in connexion with some one or more of those branches of study.

These are the most important of the functions now discharged by the Royal Society in relation to Physical Science, and by the Berlin Academy in relation both to Physical Science and to other branches of scientific study.

9. It was a sense of the urgent need of international co-operation in the several branches of scientific study that led to the establishment of the International Association of Academies. This Association has in the present year passed a resolution recognizing the British Academy as the representative of this country in these branches of scientific study falling beyond the scope of the Royal Society. The second meeting of representatives of the Association will take place in London in May, 1904, and both the Royal Society and the British Academy have appointed delegates to represent them at that meeting.

10. In considering questions as to the recognition or support which should be given to institutions, undertakings, or enterprises, having for their object

the advancement of science or learning, the German government seek the advice of the Berlin Academy, just as the French government seek 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. When the British government have granted direct support to enterprises of this character, as for instance, the collection, preservation, editing, publishing, or calendarizing of historical materials, the British government has usually acted through such agencies as the British Museum and the Record Office. Both these institutions are represented on the British Academy, and both of them would welcome the assistance which the Academy would afford in weighing claims for support, in determining the mode in which, and extent to which, support should be given, in selecting and helping the persons by whom scientific work is to be done. Existing learned societies are very numerous; their number is embarrassing. Many of them are practically open to any person who will pay an annual subscription, and therefore cannot speak with the same authority as a body whose membership is confined to persons who have attained acknowledged eminence. Their aims are usually special, and they are naturally inclined to magnify the importance of the objects with which they are specially identified. On the best mode of applying and distributing aid to scientific work, the opinion of a body whose aims are

comprehensive and whose members are presumably competent, impartial, and disinterested, would carry much greater weight than that of any special society. 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 money into proper channels, and would prevent or check unwise expenditure. In many cases where pecuniary aid is granted such a body could usefully act, not merely as an advising, but as a dispensing authority.

11. Perhaps the most essential function of an Academy is the initiation, promotion, or control of large pieces of scientific work, either where the work is on such a scale as to require the collaboration of many workers under some central guidance or where it is advisable that the individual worker should be controlled or assisted by some well-qualified authority. An Academy, properly endowed with funds, can either initiate schemes of work which its members, from their own experience, know to be desirable, or entertain proposals for such work from outside and support those which it considers to be deserving and in competent hands. British students, especially those engaged in the branches of Philology, History, and Archaeology, have long felt the need of such an authority. Existing learned societies (as, for instance, the Society of Antiquaries, the Royal Historical Society, the Statistical Society, the Hellenic Society, the Selden Society, and the Early English Text Society) have done and are doing much work of the highest value. These societies are largely represented

on the Academy, and there is no desire or intention on the part of that body to interfere in any manner with their independence. But their aims are too restricted, and their resources are usually too scanty, for the discharge of the functions which an Academy ought to undertake. Under the existing system there is much overlapping of work, and much consequent waste of energy and money. The function of an Academy is to direct and utilize work and to prevent waste.

12. Reference may be made by way of illustration to the work actually done by similar bodies in other countries. The nearest analogy is presented by the Royal Prussian Academy at Berlin. This body is divided into two classes—the mathematico-physical class, whose sphere of work corresponds to that of the Royal Society in England, and the historico-philosophical class, whose sphere of work corresponds to that of the British Academy. There are at present under the management of the historico-philosophical class the following works :—

- The Corpus of Greek Inscriptions.
- The Corpus of Latin Inscriptions.
- The Corpus of Etruscan Inscriptions.
- The Thesaurus Linguae Latinae.
- An edition of the works of Aristotle and of ancient commentators on them.
- A Prosopographia of the Roman Empire.
- The Corpus of Greek Coins.
- An Index Rei Militaris of the Roman Empire.
- An edition of the Codex Theodosianus.
- An edition of the Greek Christian Fathers.

A catalogue of manuscripts of Greek writers upon medicine.

A lexicon of Ancient Egyptian.

An edition of the works of Ibn Saad.

An edition of the works of Kant.

An edition of the political correspondence of Frederick the Great.

The Acta Borussica.

In addition grants are made every year in aid of the work of individual scholars. Thus, in 1902, grants varying from £20 to £175 were made to ten different scholars for travels in Asia Minor, for a map of Pergamum and its surroundings (where the German school at Athens has been working), for an edition of the works of Schleiermacher, for the publication of an Armenian work, for an ethnographical work, for a collation of manuscripts in England, for the collection of statistics bearing on moral philosophy, for an edition of the scholia on Lycophron, and for a collection of German hymns. It may be observed in this connexion that in 1902 the total income of the Prussian Academy (including both classes) was £13,047, of which £12,299 was the annual grant from the State. Out of this total, a part (apparently £2,600) was paid to the members in salaries, and about £400 on various unspecified personal expenses, but the rest was available for academical purposes.

13. It is not to be supposed that the British Academy could at once undertake so extensive a programme as that which the Prussian Academy has gradually built up. Still less is it suggested that any salary should be paid to members of the Academy

for work which they are willing to undertake gratuitously in the interest of the studies which they pursue. Even if funds were available for work so extensive as that done by the Prussian Academy, workers would in many cases have to be trained, and experience gained in the management of large combined enterprises, an experience which would be facilitated by co-operation with foreign Academies, such as the International Association is intended to promote. But it cannot be doubted that there is a great deal of work which the Academy could take in hand now or in the course of time. The sections of the Academy have drawn up lists, suggested by the special knowledge and practical experience of their members, of enterprises for which the initiation or co-operation of the Academy is required. Some of the items in these lists are specified in an appendix. The order in which these enterprises should be taken up, and the nature and amount of assistance to be given would, of course, depend on various considerations, of which the most material would be the resources at the disposal of the Academy.

14. Experience shows that where an institution is established to supply a manifest need, it is pretty sure to obtain substantial support, if it can only succeed in surmounting the initial difficulties. What is essential to the British Academy is that it should be placed in a position to make a beginning with work the need of which is generally recognized by British students. At the forthcoming meeting of the International Association of Academies, scientific undertakings considered to be of international importance will be discussed, and the representatives of

British scientific study will be asked to take part in their furtherance. The Royal Society will be able to take a due part in the furtherance of enterprises falling within the domain of Physical Science. It will not be creditable to this great country if the British representatives of other branches of scientific study and research should find themselves unable, from want of funds, to perform corresponding duties.

15. It will be understood from what has been said above that the grounds on which the present application is made are:—

- (1) That no authority now exists in the United Kingdom similar to those which exist in France, Germany, Austria, Italy, Belgium, and elsewhere, for the representation of studies outside the domain of Physical Science.
- (2) That there is need for some body capable of representing the United Kingdom with respect to those studies in international conferences and for matters of international concern.
- (3) That there is need of some body capable of giving authoritative advice to public bodies and individuals desirous of carrying out work and expending funds in these departments of study.
- (4) That there is need of some body capable of suggesting pieces of work in these departments of study, which ought to be done, and which cannot be done without co-operation and supervision, and of giving direction and assistance in the prosecution of such works.

16. It is confidently hoped that the foregoing statement substantiates the claim upon which the existence of the Academy is based, namely, that for the progress of historical, philological, and other cognate sciences there is required, no less than for the progress of Physical Science, the guidance and direction of specially competent scholars capable of advising the Government as to the steps which the Executive or the Legislative may fitly take, and the sums which may be wisely expended for the advance and utilization of knowledge. It is, therefore, submitted that in the interests of the nation as a whole, as well as in the interests of those who are occupied in promoting these branches of scientific study, the Treasury ought to recognize the British Academy as the correlative of the Royal Society, and to grant it a similar support. In this way the Government would give to England that ordered and balanced organization for the pursuit of all branches of science which is already possessed by all the leading nations of Europe.

I have the honour to be, my Lords,

Your obedient servant,

APPENDIX

*Enterprises for which the initiation or co-operation of
the British Academy is required*

1. Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Islam (in co-operation with foreign Academies, and in furtherance of the scheme approved by the International Conference of 1901).
2. Biographical Dictionary of Islam.
3. Greek Thesaurus.
4. Photographic facsimiles of important MSS.
5. A Pali Dictionary.
6. A bibliographical index of papers bearing on the work of the Academy.
7. A Corpus of Greek medical writers (in co-operation with the Berlin Academy).
8. Work on the Roman remains in Britain (excavations, explorations, and the compilation of an authoritative work).
9. Publication of the collections of Greek and Roman antiquities now in private hands in this country.
10. Excavations in Greece, Egypt, Assyria, Asia Minor, Crete and elsewhere.
11. Complete survey of the Roman wall.
12. Corpus Inscriptionum Britannicarum, both comprehensive and specially native (e. g. the Ogham inscriptions).
13. Dictionary of mediaeval Latin in use in England.
14. More rapid publication of historical material, such as that brought to light by the Historical MSS. Commission (e. g. papers relating to the Hanoverian succession).
15. 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.)

16. Completion of valuable historical works begun but suspended, e. g. Clarendon Papers, Carte Papers, &c.

17. History of the British Empire on the scale of the great French history, now being edited by M. Lavisse.

18. *Britannia Romana*. (English records in Rome.)

19. Bibliography of British Literature to the end of the sixteenth century.

20. Classified Catalogue of MSS. in non-public libraries.

21. History of British architecture.

22. Full bibliography of British history from the end of the Middle Ages.

23. The publication of critical editions of pieces of early Celtic literature, some of which are still in MS., 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.)

24. *Monumenta Biographica Imperii Britannica*. (A collection of original memoirs and other material for lives in the British dominions, with a view to a history of learning.)

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

26. Annual reviews of results obtained in the field of history and cognate science.

27. A comprehensive history of prices (supplementing and completing the work done by Thorold Rogers).

28. A complete edition of the Year Books. (A few of the Year Books have been edited as part of the Rolls Series, one of them has recently been edited by Professor Maitland for the Selden Society. A complete edition is an indispensable preliminary to the History of English Law during the period following that covered by Pollock and Maitland's History.)