

Personal to Sir Frederic Repton

BAH/SEC/2/5

COPY.

THE BRITISH ACADEMY.

6242/03

The "British Academy" comes back to beg for a grant, suggesting that its former application was not fully considered and indeed was treated in a "flippant" manner. The Memoranda on 6242/03 shew that that application was carefully considered on its merits, and rejected because no case had been made out for allowing this coterie of literary gentlemen to become an additional burden on the taxpayer, and because such a course would have been wholly opposed to the established policy of successive Boards of Treasury.

In the present application there is nothing new to support the proposal, but there is one important argument against it. That the former refusal was wholly justified will appear from the following analysis.

First comes a history of the circumstances under which the British Academy came into being: (Sections 1, 2 and 3); this serves to shew that His Majesty's Government have done everything that could be expected (some people think a good deal more) to extend recognition to the Academy.

Section 4 contains the utterly misleading statement that the members are "elected". A body of "distinguished scholars" should not need to be reminded that the word to describe the process by which self-nominated persons take to themselves colleagues is not "election" but "cooptation": there is not an elected representative of any learned body on this "representative" Society.

Section 5 reminds their Lordships that "the

Academy has no resources except those derived from the entrance fees and subscriptions of its members": the same is true of those learned Societies (whose numbers the Academy finds "embarrassing") who for years have been doing pioneer work in the fields of study now arrogated to themselves by the Academy: but whereas these Societies have paid their own way, the Academy, (despising Societies open to all who are willing to make pecuniary sacrifices in the cause of learning) come to ask for money to enable them to perform the "exceedingly difficult and delicate task" of offering advice to those who do not invite it - including His Majesty's Government.

What then are the grounds on which this support is asked?

Sections 7
and 8.

We are told that the Academy differs from all other Societies in that it alone can -

I. Represent certain branches of learning in relation to -

(a) Foreign Countries.

(b) Public bodies and private individuals.

(c) His Majesty's Government, and

II. Promote, guide, direct and control enterprise in these branches of learning.

The answer is that on the first ground financial support is not needed; on the second it would not be justified and further that it would be highly impolitic.

REPRESENTATION IN RELATION TO FOREIGN COUNTRIES.

They have got their Charter of Incorporation and their resolution of the International Association "recognising" them as "representative". They disclaim

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the suggestion that they want funds for entertaining, so they ought to be entirely satisfied, and this function clearly needs no State support.

REPRESENTATION IN RELATION TO PUBLIC BODIES AND
PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS.

Once more this function, as such, does not cost money or need money; and it is no business of ours. They are free to represent for what they are worth - only bien entendu those who are willing to be represented by them, with those who are willing to acknowledge them as representative - important limitations which not even Their Lordships could remove.

REPRESENTATION IN RELATION TO HIS MAJESTY'S
GOVERNMENT.

Here we come to an important consideration; instead of harmless vapouring which does not concern us, we have a definite, and it is submitted, wholly inadmissible proposal.

Crudely it is this: the British Academy propose to step in between the Treasury and the two Department of Government and sundry Commissions concerned with the subjects in which they are interested, and to dictate the manner in which monies voted by Parliament for these subjects are spent.

The Academy comes to the Treasury and says: "You are not in a position to judge of the merits of enterprises in the field of learning and research; we are experts and are willing to offer you advice, and you will doubtless recognise the advantages of the offer by paying us a substantial subsidy; to shew you how valuable our guidance would be we may remark
that

that your two great educational Departments (the British Museum and the Public Record Office) are represented on our distinguished body".

Translating this proposal into the concrete, it means that the advice (e.g.) of the Director and Principal Librarian of the British Museum, as such, is useless; that the advice of the same individual as a Fellow of the British Academy is invaluable - for of course the "collective wisdom" of this heterogeneous mass of experts is on any definite question merely the individual wisdom of each expert, and their famous "co-ordination" and "collective representation" is merely a "façon de parler".

"Representation in relation to His Majesty's Government" then means that Subheads C of the Public Record Office Vote (Calendars and Historical documents) and of the British Museum Vote (Purchases and Acquisitions - Grant in Aid) is to be examined in future not by Their Lordships but by an irresponsible body of gentlemen, unused to financial control, and, to judge by the specific proposals which they put forward, inadequately informed for the self-chosen task.

III. Promotion of enterprise etc.

But not only does the Academy propose to transfer to itself the control and disposition of monies voted for the promotion of "litterae humaniores", it proposes to increase the amount of such expenditure to an extent which to judge by its programme is wildly extravagant.

The chaotic programme furnished by the Academy has been arranged and classified below: an examination of it in comparison with (a) what is being done by private enterprise and (b) what is being done by Government will shew what prospect there is of the Academy "directing money into proper channels and preventing or checking unwise expenditure", "overlapping of work and waste of energy

and money".

THE PROGRAMME.

The publication of critical editions of pieces of early Celtic literature (No.23). In what way is the Academy in a better position to promote such a work and "represent collectively" Celtic scholarship than the (1) the "Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion", which has a library and produces publications (Cymmrodor) and transactions: (2) the "Irish Texts Society" which has edited Celtic MSS in the Franciscan Monastery at Dublin, (3) the "Society for the preservation of the Irish language" or (4) the "Irish Archaeological and Celtic Society" which exists to print the historic literature of Ireland. These efforts are supplemented by the following work done by the State:-

(1) It has appointed a Commission to publish the Brehon laws, and in spite of the fact that throughout its labours (now complete) it was unable to rely on the guidance of an Academy the result has called forth a chorus of praise from all Europe.

(2) Provision is made yearly in the Estimates (Class VII, Vote 1 Temporary Commissions) Subhead A.3) for a descriptive catalogue of Welsh MSS.

(3) Among the publications of the Irish Record Office (Class II, Vote 37) are - in addition to illustrations of non-celtic Irish History (a) the Ancient Laws and Institutes of Ireland Senchus Mor. (b) the Annals of Ulster and (c) Facsimiles of National Manuscripts of Ireland while (d) the full text and translation of every document in the Irish language found among the Public Records has been printed by the Deputy Keeper (Report XXIX App).

(4) For many years past Parliament has made annually a grant £1,600 in aid of the Royal Irish Academy including £400 specifically for research into and publication of Celtic MSS. (Estimates Class IV Vote 6 - Scientific Investigation Subhead I), and latterly, suspecting that the Royal Irish Academy does not expend this sum to the best advantage Their Lordships are considering the desirability of diverting £100 of the grant towards Dr. Kuno Meyer's periodical, the organ of the new School of Celtic studies in Dublin.

19376/03.

The British Academy "would of course seek the advice and co-operation of the Royal Irish Academy in this work" - yet this is precisely the body which, in the words of the Chief Secretary for Ireland, has given "great and legitimate complaint against the manner in which they administer their grant" managed by a person who "is not a persona grata to other celtic scholars" (eadem teste) and "whose excellence as an expert" has been questioned.

Was it anxiety to "prevent overlapping and consequent waste of money and energy" which suggested the (Item No.20) Catalogue of MSS in non-public libraries - One of the objects for which the Historical MSS Commission exists? A "more rapid publication of historical material such as that brought to light by" that Commission (item 14) would be obtained by increasing the Vote for that service. Apparently the advice offered is that the provision shall be increased - and the work subjected to a dual control.

Class VII
Vote 1
Subhead A.

penitus toto
devisos orbe
Britannos

The "Publication of documents illustrating the relations of Great Britain and Europe" (sic) 1660-1837

(Item 15)

(Item 15) is not the business of the Academy but of the Master of the Rolls; the work is being done "in sections illustrating particular periods". Apparently the Academy wants to have it all done at once and by their nominees instead of the responsible officials appointed and paid for the purpose.

(Messrs. Bliss
and Twemlow)

Item 18 - "(English Records in Rome)" suggests the doubt whether the British Academy is really aware that at the expense of the State two Scholars have been at work for years at the Vatican Archives and that the results (still in progress) viz: "Calendars of entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland" and "Calendars of Petitions to the Pope" are now accessible to (and abundantly used by) historical scholars.

To subsidize the Academy for "promoting" work like this is to confess that the sums provided by us are inadequate or that our Officers are inefficient; neither conclusion can be accepted. The same remarks apply to item 28 (Year Books).

It was unfortunate that the Academy should have mentioned the model upon which the projected History of the British Empire (item 17) is to be built; the work planned by M. Lavissee is being carried out by private enterprise without State aid or guidance, and we may safely leave the bibliographies of "British" literature and history (items 19 and 22) and the other works suggested to competent individuals or societies.

It would be tedious to go through the whole programme in detail; many of the projects are of doubtful value even from the point of view of scholarship, none, it is submitted, are of a nature which it is imperative that the State should support.

Apart from the provisions made by Parliament for encouraging the branches of learning in question in the Votes for the British Museum, the Record Offices of England Scotland and Ireland, Scientific Investigations and Temporary Commissions, a vast amount of work is being done by competent scholars privately or with the financial support of particular societies in the domains of (1) History and Archaeology (2) Philology, (3) Philosophy, (4) Jurisprudence and (5) Economics. The following names of self-supporting societies are a sufficient guarantee of the strength of private enterprise. The Royal Historical, Scottish Historical, Seldon, Surtees, Navy Records, Parish Records and Historical Records, Archaeological, Societies (there is one of the 3 last named for nearly every county in England) Chetham, Wycliffe, Early English Texts, Chaucer, Harleian, Ballard, Spalding, Roxburgh, Henry Bradshaw, Society for Northern Research, Aristotelian, Royal Statistical, Pali Text, Royal Asiatic Societies etc. etc. etc. etc.

Nearly all of these societies have refrained from asking for support; when requests have been made they have invariably been refused. A grant to the British Academy would be an injustice to these pioneer workers; there is no evidence that the money would be well spent but on the contrary a strong presumption that it would not, and if more money than is given at present were available for the objects in view, the proper way to spend it would be to increase the Votes already under Treasury control.

It is submitted that the British Academy has no case; that body is unique only in its pretensions, and even this characteristic unhappily may disappear.

State

State support would invite the further creation of supplementary academies until the French Institute - the model which they have taken - were reproduced.

The case of the Royal Society is not really analogous, for the objects which science has in view are practical and, though the question of the comparative intrinsic value of scientific and literary studies of course can never be profitably discussed, practical enterprises have unquestionably a superior claim to support from national funds.

The relation between the Academy and the French Institute was discussed in my memorandum on 6242/03; I have not thought it worth while to pursue the new comparison now suggested - that with the Berlin Academy, but from the Treasury point of view there is nothing to be added to the statement of policy made in Mr. Heath's memorandum of 9th March last filed in that paper.

(Sgd.) S. Armitage-Smith

22.1.04.

Sir G. Murray.

I submit a useful memorandum on this subject by Mr. Armitage-Smith.

I do not think the Academy have touched in any way the arguments on which we refused the original application (memorandum in 6243.)

There are two important points in the present memorial -

(1) The Academy proposes to take over and be responsible for a good deal of work now done by Government Departments and by independent Societies (without being invited to do so by the Government or those Societies) - with the definite aim of compelling Government to spend more money on such work. This should of itself make us very cautious in encouraging them in any way.

(2) They studiously ignore the fact that the subjects they deal with are (unlike the Sciences which are the sphere of the Royal Society) not subjects on which people in general in this country will accept the authority of such a body. The very genius of the people of these Islands is opposed to any such idea. The parallel of Germany (where subordination to authority is as marked a characteristic as the opposite - in matters of taste and culture - is this country) is entirely inapplicable.

A more extraordinary piece of self-laudation by a serious body than the document before us would be difficult to find. They say they ought to be consulted by Government and by everybody else who wants his literary etc. work guided; they cannot it seems to me, produce any evidence that there is in fact any rush for their advice. The hope is that advice might be sought from the various experts included in the Academy in their normal and individual capacity; but I take it that no one would

apply to the Academy as such.

(Intd.) T. L. H.

23/1.

First Lord

Mr. Cavendish.
 Chancellor of Exchequer.

See within.
 (Sgd.) J.S. Sanders
 10.4.4.

The British Academy having first created itself without much support - and with a good deal of irreverent scoffing from the outside public - and having then got itself incorporated by Charter, is very sensitive about its own dignity.

It is therefore rather difficult to give a serious answer to this application without incurring the charge of "flippancy" which Lord Reay complains of in connection with the treatment of his attempt at the beginning of last year.

The primary object of the Academy was to create for international purposes, a body representing "Historical Philosophical and Philological studies" in this country. Its representative character from this point of view has been adequately recognised by the grant of a Charter, and I think it might very well be content with this ornamental if not very useful - function.

But it now desires to "promote and assist scientific enterprise" in connection with these branches of study; and it sets out a long and very miscellaneous catalogue of work for which its "initiation and co-operation is required".

A great part of the proposed field of action is already covered by existing agencies - public Departments, Learned Societies and others, and a good deal of public money, in one form or another, is being spent on it. As regards the rest, some does not seem very deserving of support (e.g. an "encyclopaedic Dictionary of Islam", a "Greek Thesaurus" or a "Corpus of Greek Medical Writers"); and in any case I think you will probably not be disposed

to spend any public money upon it.

The proper answer to the Academy is that before they can appeal to the taxpayers for grants for such purposes as these, they must "win their spurs" - prove their capacity for work of this kind, and get some general recognition from the public of the authority which they claim.

As however, they might not like this, I have thought it better to draft a very short answer on general grounds.

I had at first thought of offering them house-room or an allowance to cover rent, and I asked the Works whether they could assist in this way. I am told however, that the number of Societies applying for this accommodation is always increasing - (many of them with much better claims than the British Academy) - and that the precedent would probably get us into difficulty.

(Intd.) G.H.M.

10.2.04.

I agree. I think the First Lord ought to see the papers.

(Intd.)

11.2.4.

I entirely concur. If the First Lord is interested he should read Mr. Armitage-Smith's examination of the Academy's case.

(Intd.) A.C.

12.2.4.