

THE AMERICAN COUNCIL OF LEARNED SOCIETIES

REPORT TO THE AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY
BY ITS DELEGATE

October 21, 1925

THE American Council of Learned Societies was organized in 1920 and incorporated under the laws of the District of Columbia in 1924. It is a federation of the twelve most representative learned societies of the United States, devoted to the humanistic and social sciences and occupies a place in its field somewhat similar to that held by the National Research Council in the field of the exact and natural sciences.

The societies which comprise the Council are, in the first place, the three which most nearly resemble academies in their organization, membership, and activities. These are the American Philosophical Society of Philadelphia, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences of Boston, and the American Antiquarian Society. The other nine societies are of the associational type: the Philosophical Association, the Oriental Society, the Philological and Modern Language Associations, the Archaeological Institute, the Historical, Economic, and Political Science Associations, and the Sociological Society.

Each society is represented in the Council by two delegates who serve terms of four years each, and contributes to the support of the Council at the rate of five cents per member, with a minimum assessment of \$25.00 for societies which have less than 500 members. As the aggregate membership of the constituent societies is about 15,000 the annual income from dues is approximately \$800.00. In addition to this slender resource the Council has been able to secure important gifts or subventions, which now—including those promised as well as those which have been turned over to the Council—aggregate nearly \$545,000.00. These subventions are, however, for specific purposes and only a very small part of them is available

for the necessary general expenses of the Council, which is actively seeking a permanent endowment.

The Council is the American member of the International Union of Academies, organized in 1919, to which the humanistic academies of seventeen countries at present belong. The headquarters of the Union are in Brussels. It holds an annual meeting in May, to which the member countries send two delegates each. Its support is derived from the annual dues of 2,000 Belgian francs paid by each member country and from gifts. The American Council has been able to make several such gifts, amounting in all to about 20,000 francs.

The work of the Council of Learned Societies falls into two categories—international undertakings carried on in co-operation with the learned bodies of other countries under the auspices of the International Union of Academies, and domestic activities for the advancement of humanistic learning in America and for the promotion of the interests of the constituent societies.

In the category of international undertakings are the Corpus of Ancient Vases and the dictionaries of Medieval Latin. The American contribution to the Corpus of Vases consists thus far of a fascicle devoted to the collections of Mr. Albert Gallatin and the late Mr. Joseph C. Hoppin, prepared and published at the expense of the collectors themselves. It is hoped that further fascicles may be prepared which shall be devoted to the important collections of the leading American museums. The contribution to the general dictionary of Medieval Latin is the work done under the direction of Professor Charles H. Beeson, of the University of Chicago, on selected printed medieval texts, while of more restricted scope is the work of a committee under Professor James F. Willard, of the University of Colorado, in co-operation with a British committee, on a dictionary of late medieval British Latin.

The Council has proposed to the International Union that there be made a survey of the current bibliography of the humanistic and social sciences, as a first step towards improving and completing the record of contemporary scholarship. It is probable that the proposal will be adopted by the Union at its next meeting.

In the category of domestic undertakings there is a considerable activity to the credit of the Council.

In order to promote closer relations between the constituent societies and to discover means of further advancing their interests as corporate bodies, a conference of their secretaries is held annually. At this conference problems of membership, finance, publications, meetings, and general welfare are discussed, and each society is thus enabled to take advantage of the experience of the other societies. The conference, still in its beginnings, promises to be of great practical value to the constituent societies.

The Council is just completing a comprehensive historical survey of the learned societies of the United States, which will bring together a body of information never before assembled, respecting their government, membership, finances, meetings, publications, and scientific activities in general. The survey will make a substantial volume which will be published this winter.

Another survey, which will be undertaken during the coming year, and which, like the survey of learned societies, is financed by the Carnegie Corporation, will cover the entire field of research in the humanistic and social sciences in America. This second survey will attempt to show what research is being carried on in the various subdivisions of the general field, whether by individual scholars or by institutes or bureaus of research, what resources are available for its support and encouragement, and what means exist for the publication of its results.

Other enterprises of the Council must be briefly mentioned. Under its auspices American scholars interested in medieval studies have organized a general committee, and are about to commence the publication of a *Journal of Medieval Studies*. For three years they have put out an annual bulletin on the progress of medieval studies in the United States.

A catalogue of manuscripts of foreign origin which are to be found in American libraries and collections is to be undertaken by a committee of the Council, thus providing a much needed guide to a vast and exceedingly important, but almost unknown body of material.

Another committee of the Council has been created to deal with the problem of assuring a better distinction abroad of American humanistic periodicals and other publications. The committee has already printed a descriptive list of American Journals devoted to the Humanistic and Social Sciences, which is being distributed to foreign and American libraries.

For the encouragement of research by mature scholars—not candidates for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy—the Council has received from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial a subvention of \$5000.00 a year for three years, which will be utilized in small grants of from \$50.00 to \$300.00, assigned to scholars who are engaged in definite projects of constructive research and who are in need of such aid for specific purposes—travel, copies, statistical compilations, assistance, etc.

The undertaking which is doubtless of most interest to the American Antiquarian Society, is the Dictionary of American Biography. This enterprise was proposed to the Council in 1921 by one of the delegates of this Society, Professor Frederick J. Turner. Another member of this Society, Dr. J. Franklin Jameson, was chairman of the committee which was charged with studying the proposal and with finding the means necessary for its execution, and he is now chairman of the permanent Committee on Management which has the general direction of the enterprise. It was not easy to find the means for the undertaking but after persistent search and many disappointments a benefactor was found. Mr. Adolph S. Ochs, in the name of the New York Times generously and in public-spirited fashion offered to provide the working capital of \$500,000.00 which it was estimated would be required. A general editor has been secured, Professor Allen Johnson of Yale University, whose broad interests, comprehensive knowledge, and success as editor of the *Chronicles of American History* assure the successful conduct of the enterprise and the high standard of the completed work.

The Dictionary will be published in twenty volumes, the first of which will appear in three years, to be followed by the others at regular intervals at the rate of three a year. It is estimated that the work will comprise about 20,000 biographies. Living subjects will not be included but supple-

mental volumes will be issued after the completion of the principal series.

In literary form and method the Dictionary will resemble the English National Dictionary of Biography but the basis of selection will naturally be more inclusive. It is expected that the Dictionary will make important contributions to all aspects of American history, economic, industrial, agricultural, social, intellectual, religious, political, etc. Without doubt the collections of this Society will furnish a vast amount of valuable material, not available elsewhere, which will be much utilized by the contributors to the Dictionary, and thus the American Antiquarian Society through its members and through its library, will have a most important part in the enterprise.

Respectfully submitted,

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to the American Council of Learned Societies.*

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