

IS THE STATE ACADEMY OF SCIENCE WORTH WHILE?

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In these days of flux and change, when everything is taking on new values, and when new calls are being made on all of us for time and energy and sacrifice, it may be well to scrutinize almost any existing institution as to its worthwhileness.

The Illinois Academy of Science had a most propitious beginning, enrolling as it did, almost every scientist of any prominence in the State, as a charter member. It seemed to give promise at the time of its birth, of becoming at once, one of the strongest organizations of its kind in the country. But of course, there was in this promise of vigor and usefulness, and in the plan of organization, as laid down in the constitution, a confident expectation that the State would soon recognize the value of the organization and give it the aid it needed to to function properly, in the service of the commonwealth. We seem to have been possessed of a perennial hope that the State would ultimately recognize our worth and bestow upon us the financial aid necessary to vitalize our organization, and to carry over to the point of effective service, the energy, and time and money that we as members could afford and were willing to put into it. While this hope which has been kept alive by a small bit of realization in the form of a small grant from the State Treasury for the biennium of 1911-12, and by repeated passage of an appropriation for us by both houses of the legislature,—while this hope has been a stimulating factor, during the eleven years of our history, doubtless some of us are beginning to feel that we can not continue to exist on hope alone.

Now, we are facing a large financial deficit, which we incurred under the delusion, that our hopes had been finally realized. While nearly every member from whom I have heard, seems determined to make what further sacrifices are necessary to raise money with which to meet our obligations and to put the organization intact once more and ready to continue its demands of the State, I have some intimation that a

good many are asking more seriously than ever before: "Is the Academy worth while?"

I for one would be frank to confess, that if the Academy is to continue indefinitely to be the poverty stricken organization that it has been in the past, it would not be worth the sacrifice and the effort that its members would have to make for it. Thru lack of funds for printing, we have not been able in the past to do in any effective manner, either of the two fundamental things which we state in our constitution to be the purposes for which we exist as an organization. Most of our publications have been little more than mere apologies for what they might have been. They have consisted too largely of abstracts and have been published in such small editions that the papers printed in them have been quite effectively buried from sight. They have been neither an effective stimulus to scientific research, nor an adequate means for the dissemination of scientific knowledge. We have had some splendid programs, but we might have had much better programs, could we have offered a more attractive medium of publication. Money for the adequate publication and distribution of our transactions is the one thing needed to transform the Academy from a weak, struggling and ineffective organization, to a vigorous and effective organization that would draw all the forces of science in the State together and multiply their power for good.

So, in my opinion, the question as to the worthwhileness of the Academy resolves itself into the question: "Is there any likelihood that we shall ultimately secure the aid from the State that is necessary to make it worth while?" I am persuaded that there is absolutely no question about this. We have probably been too patient and long-suffering in this matter. We have probably urged our cause with a modesty and a timidity that may be becoming to men of science, but which is not calculated to attain success in some other fields of activity. The State is thoroughly committed to the policy of aiding scientific and educational organizations by paying for the publication and distribution of their proceedings, and the states of the middle west are most of them, committed to the policy of supporting state academies in this way.

The High School Conference at the State University publishes its transactions and pays the expenses of most of the speakers on its program out of State funds. In the same House Bill No. 853 in which our illfated appropriation was included when it passed both houses of the legislature, were included the following allowances for somewhat similar organizations: to the Bee-Keepers' Association, \$2,000.00; to the Dairymen's Association, \$5,000.00; to the Poultry Association, \$2,000.00; to the Live-Stock Breeders' Association, \$3,000.00, and to the State Horticultural Society, \$11,000.00. It may be that we are not exactly in the same class with these organizations. It may be that the services that we could render to the State would be a little less direct, or a little farther to seek than those rendered by these other organizations, but they are surely none the less certain, and of no less magnitude. It only remains for us to convince the Authorities at Springfield that this is the case. It is my understanding, however, that Governor Lowden vetoed our item in the bill, not because he deemed our cause unworthy, but simply because it happened to fall in the class of new requests, and under the conditions of great national stress, he had determined to draw the line at that point. So, so far as the worthiness of our cause is concerned, in the judgment of the present State government, our battle has been already won. Of course, many good things must wait on the outcome of the present international crisis, and on this account we may be compelled to wait, but I can see no cause, at the present time, for ceasing to persist in our efforts to make the Academy what it should be, with firm confidence that if normal conditions do return after the war we shall succeed.

When we consider how faithful the original members of the Academy have been in clinging to the idea thru eleven years of discouragement and disappointment; when we consider how willing they have been to contribute valuable papers to our programs, only to have them tide up for two or three years, before being published, and then finally published in so small an edition as to give them no adequate currency, there seems to be no grounds whatever to doubt the abiding faith which the membership has in the value of the organization. But we are now put to a new and more severe test. We must meet this

new financial deficit. We must pay more than we bargained for. Let us hope that this is the final test before we are admitted to the promised land. It is my hope that we shall meet this test in such a convincing fashion that the very manner of our meeting it will be a large factor in making it the final one. To this end, it seems to me to be of the highest importance that every member contribute something, even if it is only a dollar. This would show a solidarity of purpose, of devotion to the cause, and of faith in the value of the organization, that would not be shown should we raise the funds needed by a few large contributions. We should show our strength, and our devotion to the cause of science also by the amount we raise. We should not stop with paying the debts already contracted. We should provide also, and speedily, the funds needed with which to publish the papers of this meeting.

The special address by Dr. Coulter, and the symposium on Science and Education, were planned specifically for the accomplishment of a definite and very much needed piece of work, and it is obvious that very little will be accomplished in the direction intended unless these addresses are given wide circulation. If, with the aid of a few large donations from wealthy men, we can raise enough money, not only to pay for the two volumes already published, but to publish the papers of the present meeting, we will have in this accomplishment itself, an unanswerable argument to the effect that we as a body stand ready to do our part of the work for the State that can be done only by such an organization of the science forces within it.

This is a day of organizations. Hardly any cause can prosper as it should, in these days, unless it is backed by an organization. I would not underestimate the value of the individual worker in science. Science itself, is the sum total of what individuals have done, and yet, it is obvious that no one has given his full measure of support to science when he has served it merely as an individual. He must join forces with others for the accomplishment of ends that cannot be accomplished by individuals, working alone. The papers and discussions of this meeting will develop the fact, I am sure, that science is not functioning in society as it should. In fact, I am sure that it will be shown that if certain present tendencies in

education are allowed to continue, science will function among the masses of people, in the future, to a less extent than at present. Now, who is to check these tendencies, if not the men and women engaged in science work? And how can we deal with such problems except thru some organization? We who, are devoting our lives to science, should know better than any other class in society, the great need of the further prosecution of scientific research, and of the wider dissemination of scientific knowledge among the people, and so because of this knowledge, we are charged with the responsibility of doing whatever lies within our power to further the interests of these things. If we do not do every thing that we can to create public support and demand for scientific research, such support is likely to be lacking. If we do not assume some guarding care over science education, it is likely to be neglected. Science, like everything else, is always in competition with other interests, and most of these competing interests are backed by active organizations. Hence, it follows that if science is to hold its place and perform its true mission in society, those who understand and appreciate it best must be organized and in a position to assert its rights and to advocate its cause at every turn, and in the most effective manner.

In conclusion, I would say, then, that this is no time for any member of the Academy to give even a single thought to withdrawing his support from the organization or to shirk his share of the responsibility in helping it out of its present difficulties. In this day of patriotic appeals, when young men on every side of us are making sacrifices which are out of all proportions to anything that most of us shall be asked to make, the present difficulties of the Academy should shrink to exceedingly small dimensions, and we should do with a generous hand, what is to my mind, plainly our patriotic duty, both to society at large, and to the State of Illinois. It would be a sad commentary on the men of science in Illinois if this Academy should be allowed to perish or even to languish in this time when it is needed as never before.