

Report of the Annual Meeting

Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada

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Report of the Assembly of the International Committee of Historical Sciences

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Volume 9, numéro 1, 1930

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/300074ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/300074ar>

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Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0317-0594 (imprimé)

1712-9095 (numérique)

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Citer ce document

Trotter, R. G. (1930). Report of the Assembly of the International Committee of Historical Sciences. *Report of the Annual Meeting / Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada*, 9(1), 13–15. <https://doi.org/10.7202/300074ar>

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REPORT ON THE ASSEMBLY OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF HISTORICAL SCIENCES

BY REGINALD G. TROTTER

The Canadian Historical Association was admitted to membership in the International Committee of Historical Sciences last year, and the meeting of 1929 was described in the report of the Canadian Historical Association by Dr. Mack Eastman, who attended as Canadian representative.

This year the deliberations of the committee and of its bureau and commissions were held during the week of April 28, in Cambridge, London, and Oxford. More than seventy delegates, gathered from thirty-four countries, and from every continent, were in attendance. Favoured with almost unbroken fair weather they were enabled most comfortably to enjoy the fine and generous hospitality with which, both officially and unofficially, they were made welcome, as well as to attend to the matters of business, more serious if not more important, that were on their agenda.

The Assembly was greeted at its opening session on Tuesday, in the Examination Halls at Cambridge, with an address of welcome, in Latin, from the Vice-Chancellor of the University, Mr. A. B. Ramsay, Master of Magdalen, which he supplemented a few hours later, in English, at a luncheon in the Hall of Magdalen College. Thereafter, at a congregation in the Senate House, the honorary degree of doctor of letters was conferred with traditional pomp and circumstance upon six members of the committee: Halvdan Koht, its President and Professor of History in the University of Oslo; Raphael Altamira, Professor Emeritus in the University of Madrid and Judge of the Permanent Court of International Justice at the Hague; Karl Brandi, Professor of History in the University of Gottingen; Gustave Glotz, Professor in the Faculty of Letters of the University of Paris; Henri Pirenne, Professor of Medieval History in the University of Ghent; and Gaetano de Sanctis, Professor of History in the University of Rome. A reception tendered by the University Faculty of History in the Long Gallery of Emmanuel College ended the first day, and Cambridge official hospitality was capped on the second evening by a dinner given by the Master and Fellows of Trinity College in their Elizabethan Hall, when Professor Trevelyan's apt address to the guests was responded to by Professor Dembinski of the University of Posen, President elect of the Warsaw Congress of 1933, and when the choir of the college, after singing the lengthy Latin grace commonly used at Trinity feasts, and leading in "God Save the King," later rendered with utter delight an old English madrigal and a part song.

In London, besides functions at Crosby Hall, Westfield College, and Bedford College, held expressly for the ladies accompanying delegates, there were afternoon receptions by the Royal Institute of International Affairs and the Royal Historical Society, a dinner at University College, and a dinner tendered by the Government at the Hyde Park Hotel over which presided the Secretary for Air, Lord Thompson, whose humorous remarks about historians and politicians were matched by the reply of Dr. Koht, president of the Committee.

The last day of the week was spent at Oxford, where the degree of D. Litt. was conferred at a special convocation in the Sheldonian Theatre

upon the two vice-presidents of the committee, Professor Bronislaw Dembinski, of the University of Posen, and Professor Alfons Dopsch of the University of Vienna, as well as upon Professor Nicolae Jorga of the University of Bucharest, after which the Vice-Chancellor, the Rev. F. Homes Dudden, Master of Pembroke, was at home in the Master's Lodging, Pembroke College, and in the evening the Rhodes Trustees gave a reception at the new Rhodes House when Professor Dopsch replied to the welcoming address of the Regius Professor of Modern History. The bountiful private hospitality extended to the visitors throughout the week must remain unrecorded.

In estimating the worth of such a conference one may venture to believe that not its least value is derived from such generous and gracious hospitality as the delegates enjoyed throughout their stay, and the opportunity and stimulus which it affords for the growth of acquaintance, understanding, and good-will among the representatives of many lands and diverse traditions and points of view. Undoubtedly, in this instance, it facilitated the formal deliberations of the conference.

The committee met in full assembly on two days, the other days being occupied by meetings of the bureau and of the several commissions. At the first plenary session Professor Koht followed his presidential address by paying formal tribute to the memory of the late Professor T. F. Tout and by acknowledging Dr. Harold Temperley's dedication to the committee of a volume of *Selected Essays of J. B. Bury*.

Several applications for membership were unanimously accepted, including those from Egypt and India. The several Commissions enumerated and described by Dr. Eastman last year presented, at this session and again at the final session, reports of progress into the details of which it would be superfluous to go here, since it is proposed to publish a full formal report in the *Bulletin* of the committee. It is specially interesting to notice, however, that the work of the Commission on Bibliography has so far advanced that the first *Yearbook of Historical Bibliography* will very shortly be published. It is planned also to enlarge the scope of the *Bulletin* and seek for it a wider circulation among historians as the international journal of their profession.

A number of commissions have also been organized, some have already been at work, on subjects of such wide historical interest as the Age of Despotism, the age of Geographical Discoveries, Feudalism, the History of Science, of Modern Literature, of Historical Geography, of Historical Demography. Reports prepared by some of these are expected to become a basis for discussion at the Congress at Warsaw. The bureau received full power from the committee to proceed with arrangements for that Congress in collaboration with the Polish representatives and will also consult with the officers of the Brussels and Oslo Congresses. Much of one's hope for wide representation and substantial achievement at the Warsaw Congress arises from the interest and support of the annual committee and the continuous activity of its bureau and commissions.

The committee in itself, moreover, deserves the support of all those interested either in the cultivation of mutual understanding and good-will among peoples or in the advancement of historical scholarship. Aside from its obvious possibilities of service along bibliographical and similar lines, it is growingly able to sponsor co-operative research into those historical problems, such as the Discoveries, of which a fully satisfactory solution is unobtainable unless they are approached in collaboration by scholars having the advantages of intimate acquaintance with diverse national traditions and points of view as well as expert knowledge of their special

ranges of historical material. Increasingly, moreover, the committee's considered word will carry weight with governments, and other "breeds without the law" as the voice of the organized historical profession of the world. Already its influence is being exerted in the direction of securing more satisfactory housing and care of archives, with the increase of facilities for their use by scholars. The bureau proposes also shortly to circularise governments urging the use of durable paper and permanent ink for all records of lasting importance, a matter which demands serious attention if posterity is to possess a full picture of our generation.

In all these matters the effectiveness of the committee must depend in the long run upon the degree of support which it receives from the historians of every nation, individually and in their national organizations. The Canadian Historical Association a year ago lent its support to the extent of joining the committee. As yet there has not been very much opportunity for active Canadian co-operation in the work of the commissions. Nor, except in a few instances, is larger co-operation in this way likely to be possible in the near future, for many of the commissions are concerned with problems of a specialized sort requiring the work of specialists actively engaged in research in European history, while at present, and perhaps for some time to come, the main research interests of most Canadian historical scholars are nearer home.

In the study, however, of problems connected with the administration and use of Archives, there is no reason why Canada should not play an active and important part. The governments of many countries were officially represented on the delegations accredited to this year's meeting of the committee; indeed it is reported that the only exceptions to this practice, besides Canada, were Great Britain, the United States, and Switzerland. Canada's influence in the organization and contribution to its work would be conspicuously increased were our Government to see to it that, along with an unofficial representative, there should also be present at the committee's annual meeting a delegate of the Government from the Canadian Archives. The question seems, at any rate, worth discussing.

Such questions, however, are not the most fundamental in a consideration of the means by which the Canadian Historical Association can help this international organization. In the final issue the measure of its success must depend largely upon the breadth of intelligent support that it secures, not from a few isolated individuals, but from those generally who hold dear the cause of history. But such support largely depends upon the diffusion of adequate information, the vehicle of which is the committee's *Bulletin*. At present its circulation is limited and its cost is borne chiefly out of subventions of which the committee is for the time being the recipient. Dr. Waldo G. Leland, the treasurer, announced that the cost could not much longer be so borne; the journal must soon become self-supporting. This it can become if it receives the subscriptions of historical libraries and of those few thousand persons who are seriously interested in historical work. Only thus, moreover, will it reach those whose interest and backing are essential if the possibilities of the committee for influence and accomplishment are to be realized. If Canadians would like to see Canada take its place in this work their first step is to subscribe to the *Bulletin*, by which means they can best inform themselves and at the same time support the cause. Wider and more active participation in the program of the international organization, and weightier influence in its councils, will then follow in due time as a matter of course.

REGINALD G. TROTTER.

LONDON, May 9, 1930.