

and holder of the Emperor of Austria's gold medal for distinction in science; in 1905 he was president of the fourth Ornithological Congress, which met in London.

In addition to being joint author of the earlier portion of the "Birds of Europe" and sole author of various bird-monographs such as those of the kingfishers and birds-of-paradise, Dr. Sharpe compiled 13 out of the 27 volumes of the invaluable British Museum "Catalogue of Birds," and was responsible for the whole of the 5 volumes of the companion work, the "Hand-list of Birds," of which the last volume was completed only a short time before his death. As regards his knowledge of the external features of birds, and his capacity for identifying species, Dr. Sharpe was, if not unrivalled, at all events unsurpassed; and his preeminence in these respects received world-wide recognition. Unfortunately, he knew little of the anatomy of birds, so that in his address on "Attempts to Classify Birds," read before the second Ornithological Congress at Budapest, in 1891, he had to depend for this portion of his subject on information borrowed from Seebohm, who had in turn been mainly dependent upon Kitchen Parker. Under Dr. Sharpe's supervision, the collection of bird-skins in the British Museum increased by leaps and bounds, and has now attained vast dimensions, while it is specially valuable on account of the number of "types" it contains.

As a relaxation from his ornithological studies, Dr. Sharpe devoted, during the later years of his life, a considerable amount of time to the natural history and antiquities of Selborne, where he owned a cottage in which he spent much of his holidays. As the result of these leisure-time studies, he brought out a beautifully illustrated edition of "White's Selborne" in two thick volumes.

THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM.

THE *Times* of December 28 includes further correspondence upon the question of the separation of the Natural History Museum from the British Museum. In the two letters subjoined, Prof. A. Sedgwick and Sir Ray Lankester reply to the letter of Sir Archibald Geikie, published in that journal on December 13, and reprinted in *NATURE* of December 16.

I much regret that it should be necessary for me to address you again on the subject of the Natural History Museum, but the publication of the correspondence between Mr. Lowther and Sir Archibald Geikie in your issue of December 13 last leaves me no alternative. The only satisfactory thing about the correspondence is the admission by Mr. Lowther that the Trustees are uneasy in their own minds as to the satisfactoriness of the present arrangements. They "are anxious to be reassured," Mr. Lowther writes, "that the management of the Natural History Museum is adequate." This is a sign of grace, if only a small one, but such as it is we are thankful to have obtained it.

Before proceeding to deal with Sir Archibald Geikie's letter, there are two small points to which I desire to call the attention of your readers. The first of these concerns the views of the Trustees as to the proper person to call in for judgment in a matter directly concerning the administration of the Museum. They call in one of their own body. This seems to me to constitute a new departure in judicial procedure. The second is the fact that the President of the Royal Society, in his capacity as Trustee, has allowed himself to be nominated public censor of those of his colleagues who in the last forty years have expressed objections to the system which is under discussion. I also desire to emphasise the following points:—

(1) In this prolonged agitation it has always been the system of administration, and not the persons administering

the system, which has been impugned. (2) The living protagonists of the agitation hold that a system of control by Trustees is the best, provided that their number is small and that the scientific element, whether professional or other, is not represented as such (see *NATURE*, April 29, 1909, p. 254).

I now proceed to the consideration of Sir Archibald's letter. It is painful to me to have to call in question the deliberate statement of a much respected friend, and one who holds the high and honoured position of President of the Royal Society. It is hard to be certain of one's motives, but I believe that my sole motive in the present case is that of the interests of science. I also wish to say that I have the same belief as to the reasons which have induced Sir A. Geikie to write his remarkable letter. The issue between us, therefore, is simply one of fact, and can only be decided by an inquiry. I had hoped, especially after Mr. Montagu's letter to you of November 19, that the Trustees might be willing to set their own house in order, and that an inquiry might be avoided. I have not always held this view, and for two years, acting in conjunction with my colleagues, I pressed for an inquiry; but I came to see that there were many difficulties in the way of an inquiry and objections to the possible legislation which might result therefrom, and that the essential points in which we deemed the museum administration defective might be remedied by the action of the Trustees themselves. I therefore welcomed the suggestion in Mr. Montagu's letter, and wrote to you to say so. But so long as Sir Archibald's statements are accepted as authoritative, and so long as the Trustees think along the lines of Mr. Lowther's letter, it is clear that reform from within is impossible, and that an inquiry by impartial outsiders is a necessity.

As Sir Archibald Geikie says that he has made a "careful investigation of the facts of the case," we may presume that all his statements, particularly those which can be tested without any inquiry, will be accurate. Let us submit his letter to that test. His first statement is that the "agitation has been carried on fitfully but persistently in the public Press for many years, and has been supported by some well-known men of science" (the italics are mine). That Sir Archibald should have made this statement shows that his investigation has been, to say the least of it, superficial. The recent (during the last half-century) history of the agitation is as follows. In the year 1866 there was a memorial to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, signed by all the most famous biologists of the time (I will enumerate them when I deal with the word *some*), stating that they were "of opinion that it is of fundamental importance to the progress of Natural Sciences in this country that the administration of the national Natural History Collections should be separated from that of the Library and Art Collections, and placed under one officer, who should be immediately responsible to one of the Queen's Ministers." In the year 1874 the Royal Commission on Scientific Instruction and the Advancement of Science, having fully considered the state of the Natural History Departments in the British Museum and taken evidence thereon from the principal scientific authorities of the country, came to the same conclusion. In 1879 the Council of the British Association for the Advancement of Science prepared a memorial to the Prime Minister pointing out that the views of scientific men on this subject, as embodied in the recommendations of the Royal Commissioners, had been entirely overlooked, and that "the question of the administration of the Natural History Collections is one of the utmost importance as regards the future progress of Natural History in this country," and urging upon the Government to take the opportunity afforded by the removal to South Kensington "of effecting the alterations in the mode of administration of the Collections recommended by the Royal Commission." Now ensued a lull in the agitation for twenty years. The cause of this lull is highly instructive, and must be mentioned here. Hitherto the head of the Natural History Collections had been entitled Superintendent, and had been subordinate to the Principal Librarian. In 1885, on the recommendation of the Principal Librarian, Sir E. Bond, the office of Superintendent was replaced by a new office, that of Director, with new duties, new responsi-

ties, and new salary. The Director was made entirely independent of the Principal Librarian, except in financial matters. Financial independence was offered him, but declined. This meant that the Trustees had accepted the recommendations of the Duke of Devonshire's Commission so far as concerned the independence of the Museum. In 1898, on Sir W. Flower's retirement, it became known that the Trustees had in contemplation the revocation of the position of comparative independence assigned in 1885 to the Director of the Natural History Museum. Accordingly, a memorial was presented to the Trustees stating that, in the opinion of the memorialists, it was "of great importance to the welfare of Natural History that the principal officer in charge of the national collections relating to the subject should not be subordinate in authority to any other officer of the Museum." This memorial was published in the *Times* on July 9, 1898, and on the following day a letter appeared from the Principal Librarian stating that the petitioners had been misinformed, and that no change in the status of the Director was in contemplation. In spite of that public statement the fears of the memorialists were realised, for either in July or August of that year the position of comparative independence assigned to the Director of the Natural History Museum in 1885 was revoked, and the new Director who was appointed shortly after found himself—quite unexpectedly in view of the letter just referred to—in a position very different from that of his predecessor. In September, 1907, a memorial praying that advantage might be taken of the approaching vacancy in the Directorship to hold an inquiry into the administration of the Museum was sent to the Prime Minister, who in July, 1908, received a deputation on the same subject. As nothing resulted from this last effort, a letter was addressed to the *Times* on April 19 of this year calling the attention of the public to the matter. So much for the suggestion that the agitation on this matter has been a Press agitation.

I must now pass to consider the suggestion contained in the words "supported by some well-known men of science." The memorial of 1866 was signed by G. Bentham, W. B. Carpenter, W. S. Dallas, Charles Darwin, F. D. Godman, Joseph Hooker, T. H. Huxley, John Kirk, Lord Lilford, A. Newton, W. K. Porter, O. Salvin, P. L. Sclater, S. J. A. Salter, H. B. Tristram, A. R. Wallace and others. The Report of the Royal Commission was signed by the Duke of Devonshire, Sir J. Lubbock, Sir J. P. Kay-Shuttleworth, Dr. Sharpey, T. H. Huxley, G. G. Stokes, Prof. Henry Smith, Mr. B. Samuelson, Sir Norman Lockyer being Secretary. The memorial of the Council of the British Association was signed by W. Spottiswoode, Douglas Galton, P. L. Sclater, on behalf of the Council. The memorial to the Trustees in 1898 was signed by Lord Kelvin, G. G. Stokes, M. Foster, A. Rücker, John Murray, Francis Galton, Henry Thompson, W. Turner, Benjamin Baker, A. R. Wallace, W. F. R. Weldon, amongst others—I have not access to a complete list. The memorial of 1907 was signed by all the Professors of Zoology in the United Kingdom except two, and was supported by all of them. The deputation to the Prime Minister of 1908 consisted of some of these Professors, supported by Mr. Francis Darwin and Dr. Marr. From these lists it is clear that, although it would not be correct to say that this long-continued agitation has received the support of all well-known men of science, yet it would have been nearer the truth if Sir Archibald Geikie had used the word *most* instead of *some* in referring to the support it has received, for the cream of certainly two, and perhaps three, generations of English men of science have taken part in the agitation. Having thus shown that Sir A. Geikie has been inaccurate, not to say loose, in two of his statements of fact, what weight can be attached to any opinion that he formulates in his letter on the subject under discussion? He says that the result of his inquiry has been to convince him "that the agitation has no substantial justification, but has arisen from misapprehension and ignorance," and he goes on to reprove those who have taken part in it in these words:—"If the actual state of the matter had been realised no agitation ought ever to have been started." This is Sir Archibald Geikie's opinion. Let us try to realise for a

moment what an extraordinary state of mind it reveals! What a contempt for his colleagues, some of them among the greatest naturalists of the world's history, not to mention great names in other branches of science, some of whom had made a special and prolonged inquiry as members of a Royal Commission specially deputed to deal with this matter, and were masters of administrative methods! His contempt for the knowledge and judgment of his most distinguished scientific contemporaries is so colossal that it almost touches the infinite. But I need not labour this point, nor need I refer to his estimate of the knowledge of those of his zoological colleagues now living, all of whom by their avocations have a special interest in the Museum.

We now come to the last and most important point of all. Sir Archibald says that "the allegation so constantly made, that the Director of the Natural History Museum is under much more than merely nominal control of the Director and Principal Librarian at Bloomsbury is without any real foundation." This, of course, is his opinion on the question which has always been at issue. We, that is my colleagues and myself, traverse it absolutely. Can it be supposed that all the distinguished men in the past whom I have mentioned, and all the biologists now living who have paid special attention to the matter, have undergone the labour and expenditure of time and money which this prolonged agitation has involved without convincing themselves of the reality of this basal element in the question? It is true they may be wrong and Sir Archibald right, but what, I ask all unprejudiced men, are the probabilities? It may be said in reply, "Yes, but what are your reasons for holding this view? You must at least state them." A most reasonable request, with which we are only too anxious to comply if the opportunity is given us. Unsupported statements are worth little, and may easily be turned into personal attacks and lead to useless and hurtful recriminations. An inquiry must be held before a proper tribunal which can receive and sift evidence on this question so important to biological science in England.

At the end of his letter Sir Archibald Geikie draws a red herring across the scent by referring to a matter which, however deeply we may feel it, we have always avoided. It is not the question at issue. That question existed long before the recent circumstances to which he refers arose, and will, unless dealt with, continue long after they are forgotten.

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December 20.

I am sure that everyone connected with natural history or with the Royal Society recognises the amiable tactfulness and discretion of our worthy President. These qualities explain the opinion which he has expressed in reply to an inquiry from the Speaker as to the government of the Natural History Museum. They do not, however, give any weight to it. The essential qualification for expressing an opinion of value on this subject is a knowledge of the facts. Of that, I am sorry to be obliged to say, Sir Archibald Geikie is entirely innocent. The Speaker says in his letter that he understands that Sir Archibald Geikie "has recently made special inquiries on this subject." Sir Archibald himself says he has "had occasion to make a careful investigation of the facts of the case."

Sir Archibald, though he has recently become a Trustee of the British Museum, has not become one of the inner circle of the standing committee. No doubt he supposes that he has acquired some knowledge of the "facts of the case." He has been permitted to see the Red Book of Regulations! But he does not duly estimate the secrecy with which the business of the Trustees is conducted by the standing committee. He knows so little of the matter that he is unaware of his own ignorance. There are only three people who really know the facts as to the proceedings of the Trustees of the British Museum in regard to the Natural History Departments during the last twelve years. The Trustees themselves, even those of the inner circle, do not understand what has been done in their name. Sir Archibald Geikie has not sought information from any one of the three persons who could (were they willing) give it. The individual who really knows every