

But it is hardly the duty of the historian of thought to record that which belongs more to the impediments of mental progress than to its promotion, were it not that in and through these peculiar circumstances the genius of the nation has developed its main features, its strong character. These are manifest as much in the department of science as they are in general literature and in the institutions of practical life. British science through all the centuries, since the time of Roger Bacon, and in spite of the efforts of his illustrious namesake, has

23.  
Character-  
istics of  
English  
thought.

the welfare of the poor. William Wilberforce was one of the original promoters; Thomas Bernard, the founder of many other charitable institutions, one of its most active members. To a committee of this Society Count Rumford submitted, in 1799, his proposals for forming the Royal Institution, and it was accordingly founded in February of that year on private subscriptions of fifty guineas each. It was described as a "public Institution for diffusing the knowledge and facilitating the general introduction of useful mechanical inventions and improvements, and for teaching by courses of philosophical lectures and experiments the application of science to the common purposes of life." In the course of a very few years the original character of the Institution entirely changed, the aim of influencing directly the condition of the poor was lost sight of, and little remained besides the result of "bringing science into some degree of fashion" and "affording a new employment and amusement to the higher classes of life." The interest of the Institution for the history of thought is the fact that in its laboratory Davy and Faraday

conducted their researches, and that they, as well as Young, Coleridge, and Sydney Smith, there delivered their lectures. And the history of the Royal Institution is also typical of the history of other establishments for higher culture in this country: it has been in its main features repeated on a larger or smaller scale in many provincial societies, and notably in the colleges of Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, Newcastle, Leeds, Bristol, Nottingham, &c. Started by persons with large but nevertheless insufficient means, or by subscriptions and endowments of moderate extent, obliged to gain popularity and fashionable support in order to meet their growing expenses, these institutions have depended mostly on individual energy for their first successes, and have all had to pass through periods of great difficulty, till in course of years they have acquired a special character of usefulness and defined their peculiar sphere of action. The absence of a definite programme and a great waste of energy and funds over special departures are not uncommon features of these developments.