THE AFRICAN ASSOCIATION OF 1788.

IN reading an account of the newly-formed African Society, I was reminded of its prototype 111 years ago. The coincidence is another instance of the way in which history repeats itself. My grandfather, Sir John Sinclair, was an extremely active and busy pioneer of every kind of progress and reform in the days of George III. His principal achievement was perhaps the Statistical Account of Scotland, an analytical account of every parish in that country, now of really high value. He wished to do the same for England, but was prevented by Archbishop Moore, who thought the project might have a beneficial influence on Tithes. Towards the close of the eighteenth century he persuaded Mr. Pitt to establish a Board of Agriculture, which on a small income disseminated information, brought forward Sir Humphry Davy, Macadam, Arthur Young, and others, and, had it continued, would have placed British Agriculture in a very different position from that which it occupies. The old Board was like the African Association an anticipation of an important movement a century later. Amongst many other really lasting services to the country, Sir John founded the British Wool Society for the improvement of sheep, introduced the Cheviot breed into Scotland, which is now found in every county, and founded the Scottish herring fisheries, which spread from his own county, Caithness, to other parts of the coasts of Scotland. His bust is the representation of Agriculture on the Foreign Office.

In 1788 he took a leading part in forming an association to promote discoveries in Africa. At that date the map of Africa, beyond the coast-line and Egypt, was almost a blank. Hitherto Europeans had visited that continent to plunder, oppress, and enslave: the share of this country in the slave-trade is the most

astounding and disgraceful chapter in its history. The object of this society was "to promote the cause of science and humanity, to explore the mysterious geography, to ascertain the resources, and to improve the condition of that ill-fated continent." In furtherance of their designs they employed able and experienced travellers to penetrate as far as they could into the interior, and collect information on all subjects interesting to the philosopher or the philanthropist. Towards the expenses of these missions each member paid an annual subscription. The management of the funds, the choice of agents, and the business of correspondence were intrusted to a Committee, consisting of the following persons: Lord Rawdon, Bishop Watson, Sir Joseph Banks, Mr. Beaufoy and Mr. Stewart. About Sir Joseph Banks it is unnecessary to say anything. Lord Rawdon was afterwards second Earl of Moira and first Marquess of Hastings. Besides being K.G. and G.C.B., he was F.R.S., F.S.A., and M.R.I.A. He was the grandson of the well-known Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, the friend of Wesley and Whitefield; and was esteemed in his day as a gallant soldier, an eloquent speaker, and popular statesman, Governor-General of India, Commander-in-Chief of Malta, Governor of the Tower, etc. Dr. Watson was a scientific professor at Cambridge, and Bishop of Llandaff; an able and distinguished man, who occupied a large place in the intellectual society of those days, but who never visited his diocese. "The result of their labours," wrote Murray, the author of *African Discoveries*, vol. i. p. 5, "has thrown new lustre on the British name, and widely extended the boundaries of human knowledge. They have caused a solid and permanent glory, and have acquired higher claims to the admiration of mankind than many of those whose achievements fill the first place in the page of history. "Their list of missionaries contains names immortal in the annals of human intrepidity those of Ledyard, Lucas, Houghton, Horneman and Mungo Park. When Ledyard was asked by Sir Joseph Banks, "How soon will you be ready to set out?" his answer was, "To-morrow morning."

The story of this Association is now too far back for any minute details. But the biographer of Sir John Sinclair adds the following illustration of its work. "Among other papers I find

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the following familiar reference [to a meeting of this Society. 'On Saturday the African Club dined at the St. Alban's Tavern. There were a number of articles produced from the interior parts of Africa, which may turn out very important in a commercial view; as gums, pepper, &c. We have heard of a city where Major Houghton, our geographical missionary, is going, called *Tombuctoo*; gold is so plentiful as to adorn even the slaves; amber is there the most valuable article. If we could get our manufacture into that country, we should soon have gold enough.'"

Many years afterwards Sir John became a member of another philanthropic society, which had Africa for the scene of its operations. A letter from Sir Sidney Smith, dated Paris, 6th January, 1817, thanks him for his subscription, and states the objects of the institution to be immediately the deliverance of European captives in Barbary, and ultimately the civilization and settlement of that savage country. "Such an opening," he says, "for the idle and the turbulent, especially in France, would insure the tranquillity of Europe."

Amongst the questions agitated in the last decade of the 18th century, both in and out of Parliament, was the abolition of the African Slave Trade. Sir John had been intimate with William Wilberforce for many years, and while agreeing with him in his general principles, he differed from him as to their application. He regarded the plan of the Abolitionists as sweeping and precipitate; and thought that where the interests were so complicated, caution was peculiarly necessary. On the 26th March, 1791, after the subject had been repeatedly debated in Parliament, Sir John wrote a letter to Mr. Wilberforce, containing a distinct statement of his views. As moral principle was here in question, he attached comparatively no importance to the inevitable losses which the shipping interest would sustain by the annihilation of a lucrative trade; nor even to the fact that the cultivation of the West India islands must remain stationary, or might even retrograde, if no fresh importation of slaves from Africa were permitted. He pointed out however, what seems not to have occurred at that time to the Abolitionists, that the emancipation of the slave population in the colonies must follow the

abolition of the slave-trade, and warned them against the consequences of sudden measures. He also foresaw, that if other nations did not concur with Great Britain, the trade would be transferred rather than abolished, and perhaps transferred to parties who would carry it on with greater vigour than ourselves. He therefore proposed that other Christian Powers should be solicited to combine with us in this great philanthropic work; and that a loss, which humanity ought not to regret, should be shared alike by all. "The abolition must be universal, otherwise it will be inoperative. It will be a sacrifice injurious to ourselves, and useless to those whom it was meant to benefit."

The *Encyclopædia Britannica* thus summarises the work of the African Association (x. 188): "Before the death of Bruce an African Association was formed in 1788 for collecting information respecting the interior of that continent with Major Rennell and Sir Joseph Banks as leading members, and Bryan Edwards as secretary. The Association first employed a Mr. Ledyard to cross Africa from east to west on the parallel of the Niger, and Mr. Lucas to cross the Sahara to Fezzan. Ledyard, who had previously made a most extraordinary journey into Siberia, died at Cairo in 1788. Lucas went from Tripoli to Mesurata, obtained some information respecting Fezzan, and returned in 1789. One of the chief problems the Association wished to solve, was that of the existence and course of the River Niger, which Maxwell believed to be identical with the Congo. Mungo Park, then an Assistant-Surgeon of an East Indiaman, volunteered his services, which were accepted by the Association, and in 1795 he arrived at the English factory of Pisania, 200 miles up the Gambia. Leaving this station in December, he reached Ludamar, where a Moorish chief imprisoned him until the following July. He then crossed a mountainous tract to a Mandingo town called Kamalia. Quite destitute, and suffering from fever, he remained there for several months, but finally found his way back to Pisania, and returned to England. The interesting narrative of his adventures, with a geographical memoir by Rennell, was published in 1799. Five years afterwards he accepted an offer from the Government to command an expedition into the interior of Africa, the plan

being to cross from the Gambia to the Niger, and descend the latter river to the sea. Park left the factory of Pisanía on the Gambia on the 4th May, 1805, accompanied by Lieutenant Martyn and 35 soldiers, besides guides. All died but four, during the rainy season, and the rest, including Mungo Park, perished in a rapid on the Niger, having been attacked from the shore by order of a chief who thought he had not received suitable presents. Park was only 35 at the time of his death. The details respecting the fate of the ill-fated explorer and his party were obtained from the guide."

The following account is also given by the *Encyclopædia* (xvii. 498, African Association) of Mungo Park's first view of the Niger: "He saw the river near Sego 'glittering in the morning sun, as broad as the Thames at Westminster, and flowing slowly to the eastward.' In this first expedition he went down the river as far as Sella, and up as far as Bammako; in his second, he sailed down to Bussa, where he was drowned. Park adopted the opinion that the Niger and the Congo were one. Major Peddie's expedition to the Niger, and Tuckey's expedition to the Congo, threw no light on the relation of the rivers (1802)."

These details of an enlightened society of a hundred years ago are highly interesting at the present time. Had the Association continued its existence, it might have done much for the peaceful solution of many African problems, and for the general improvement of commerce and knowledge.

WILLIAM SINCLAIR,
Archdeacon of London.

Members and others are invited to contribute papers on the following subjects:—

NATIVE LAWS AND CUSTOMS.

NATIVE SYSTEMS OF GOVERNMENT.

NATIVE FORMS OF RELIGION.

POLYGAMY. Its connection with the social life of the Natives.

NATIVE WANTS AND ASPIRATIONS. Where possible the Society would be glad if Native gentlemen would write most fully on these subjects.

TECHNICAL INSTRUCTION AND EDUCATION GENERALLY.

NATIVE TRADE SOCIETIES. SECRET SOCIETIES. Contributors on these subjects are asked not to treat them in a general way but to take one Society and where possible carefully describe all its forms and practices, its use or abuse by the Natives.

IDOLS. Many kinds are found all over Africa. Papers on these should be accompanied with photographs of the full face, the profile and the back. The attributes of the Fetish should also be carefully explained.

NATIVE HERBS AND THEIR MEDICINAL PROPERTIES.

THE MYTHOLOGY OF THE YORUBAS. This is said to be very elaborate and a full account of it would be most interesting.

TRADE ROUTES.

NEW OPENINGS FOR TRADE. Information and description of various parts of Africa where there might be openings for trade.

ROUGH SURVEYS OF DISTRICTS where light railways might be inexpensively laid, with full information as to the possibilities of such railways being remunerative.

All communications should be addressed to THE SECRETARY, The African Society, 22 Albemarle Street, London, W.