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THE PLACE OF STATE ACADEMIES OF SCIENCE AMONG SCIENTIFIC ORGANIZATIONS¹

DURING the early part and the middle of the last century, when the means of transportation were less abundant than at present, when science was not so highly differentiated and scientific men were not so thoroughly organized, the state academies were at the apex of their influence. Those citizens in the most populous centers of the more progressive states that were interested in science banded together to talk about the new books that were being published abroad, to share with each other their various discoveries, to lend each other specimens, to show each other their collections and to discuss in general the scientific news brought to their attention by travellers. They were—most of them—amateurs whose vocations were along business lines and whose pastime was science. The telescope and the microscope were their instruments of pleasure rather than golf sticks, and the objects of their interest were the minute or the distant, rather than their scores. Scientific knowledge was by them regarded as cultural—to be acquired deliberately and to be dispensed with dignity. They were the chosen among the intellectuals. They were possessors of information that was unattainable to the common herd and he who reached the heights of publication became the elect of the elect. New theories were scanned with awesome wonder and new terms were caressed by the tongue as delightful morsels and the more complex they were the more appetizing they became. Discussions of new views were carried on with warmth and sometimes with heat. Often open meetings were held, when the members explained the mysteries of science to the uninitiated in the subject and incidentally acquired fame. As

¹ Abstract of address delivered before the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters and the Wisconsin Archeological Society, at Beloit, Wisconsin, April 6, 1923.

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