

HISTORY OF PARLIAMENT.

SUMMARY OF SCHEME.

The idea is to provide a record of past Parliaments in Great Britain and Ireland which shall give the names and lives of those who formed Parliament. The working and Acts of each Parliament will be summarised, so that public opinion in each age may be understood, and so that the influence of individual and party on the institution can be seen. And the lists will contain all those who sat in either House with the offices they held. But the main object is to have the identity of the Members determined so that they can be classified as to age, experience of Parliament and office, interest, family connections and party. By this means the action and reaction of governed on governors, of executive on democracy, can be traced from age to age. No historian has dealt or can deal with the composition of Parliament, or of any single Parliament in the present state of our knowledge; and the knowledge of each Parliament reveals human society at that date.

The object of the work is historical, sociological, political, even genealogical, but mainly to examine and explain the development of those democratic institutions which must remain our chief contribution to liberal ideas and human progress.

To carry out such a work is beyond the powers of any one historian, beyond the means of any one publisher. Each historian must deal with his own period, and the co-operation of learned endowments in both Great Britain, the Dominions and America must be obtained, in default of Government aid, to finance and supervise the work. It is hoped that H.M. Government will see to printing, publication and issue, once the material is compiled and edited. It is hoped that the Dominions and America will take on responsibility for certain periods.

It is proposed to break up the history into seventeen periods and to include parallel studies of Scottish and Irish Parliaments before the Union, and to close the work at the end of the Great War. These periods are roughly as follows: 1240-1326, 1327-1360, 1361-1399, 1399-1437, 1439-1504, 1510-1558, 1559-1601, 1603-1639, 1640-1660, 1661-1686, 1688-1714, 1714-1760, 1761-1802, 1802-1831, 1832-1864, 1865-1892, 1892-1918.

While the general lines of what each historian is to record will be indicated, each will be allowed latitude, within generous limits of space, to take his own line in his commentaries and in such expansions and excursions as Appendices permit.

At least two volumes will be required for each period. The first will contain the general commentary on and summary of the period. This will be followed by a list of each Parliament in turn, prefaced by the commentary on and summary of that Parliament, and by a statement of its methods and operations. The second volume, providing in fact the raw material for the first, will contain biographical notes on all the members of that period. The lists themselves will give, beside the name, some slight indication of office, interest, party or identity as well as the usual stars or asterisks to distinguish old from new members. By-elections will follow the general election list, and will be arranged in Chronological order. Polls and contests will be shown probably in footnotes to the Lists.

In each period special attention will be paid to the nature, distribution and growth of constituencies, and the varying methods of election, payment and control—to the relations between elected and electors as well as the relations between elected and the Crown or Executive. The sequence, consequence and precedence of the King's Ministers and their use of an influence in either House will also obtain special attention, as well as the actual working of the parliamentary machine. But the historian of each period will know well what ever-changing feature will call for especial attention in a work which breaks ground so new that only general principles can be laid down.