[page 7]

**SESQUICENTENARY OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY**

Remarks by Ambassador Pierre Landy at the meeting of the Korea Branch, 14 March 1973

Nearly three years ago, in the early autumn of 1970, the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society celebrated the 70th anniversary of its founding. Those of you who were in Seoul at the time will recall, I am sure, the special program which the RAS conducted in the grounds of the Toksu Palace to commemorate that historic occasion.

Tonight we mark another important milestone in the Society’s long history. Tomorrow, 15 March, is the 150th anniversary of the first RAS meeting in London in 1823. We cannot let the date pass unnoticed.

The Royal Asiatic Society was founded by Henry Thomas Colebrooke, the eminent Sanskrit scholar. He, Sir George Thomas Staunton, Sir J. Malcolm, Sir A. Johnston, and others interested in Oriental matters met in January 1823 to draw up proposals for the establishment of such a society. Their prospectus, dated 16 January 1823, pointed out that an association of intelligent persons might encourage research, extend intercourse between Europe and Asia, and lead to results reciprocally beneficial. They proposed, therefore, ‘to found a Society that may embrace the views and be adapted to the pursuits of all persons whom it may be desirable to associate, whether their tastes should lead them into historical and antiquarian research or in other directions.’

The inaugural meeting took place on 15 March 1823 at the Thatched House in St James’s Street, London, with Mr Colebrooke presiding. He explained that the scope of the new society ‘would embrace both ancient and modern times, and include history, civil polity, institutions, manners, customs, languages, literature, and science; in short, the progress of knowledge in Asia and the means of its extension. It would not be confined to the geographical limits of Asia, but would include the connections [page 8] of Western Asia with foreign countries, as in the spread of Mohammedanism; and nothing which had engaged the thoughts of men would be foreign to the Society’s inquiry within those limits. Mr Colebrooke’s remarks were approved and published.

The Society was formally constituted as The Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, with a Council of twenty-five members, including a president, director, four vice-presidents, secretary, and treasurer. Membership in the first year of existence included nearly every Oriental scholar of note then resident in England, and numbered over 300.

King George IV consented to be the new Society’s patron and granted it the title of ‘Royal’. Accordingly, at a meeting on 7 June 1823, the name was changed officially to ‘Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland’.

It is the anniversary of the first meeting on 15 March 1823 that we commemorate tonight. In January we wrote the Society in London, felicitating them on this happy occasion. Here is their president’s reply:

*Dear M. Landy,*

*I take great pleasure in writing on behalf of this Society to offer our warm thanks and appreciation to the Officers, Council and Members of the Korea Branch for their felicitations expressed in your letter of January 25tth on the occasion of our sesquicentenary.*

*A varied programme of events has been arranged in celebration of this occasion, and it was launched yesterday by a reception attended by Her Majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness Prince Philip.*

*I hope it is not necessary for me to say that any member of the Korea Branch who finds himself in London will be most welcome at any time if he will make himself known to our secretary.*

*With kind regards and renewed thanks,*

*yours sincerely,*

*B. W. Robinson*

*President*

[page 9]

As a small memento of the occasion, we have prepared for distribution gratis to our membership a picture of Seoul taken just before the turn of the 20th century, inasmuch as our Korea Branch dates its own existence from 1900. Please be sure to claim your copy after tonight’s program.