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The Foundation of the Society of Authors and its Cultural Significance

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The Society of Authors was founded in 1884 by Walter Besant to protect the rights and furthering the interests of authors. With the support of most of the prominent writers of the day, Besant made the Society grow greatly and rapidly until it was recognized as the leading professional organization for authors. It could be said that the foundation was one of the social reactions to the gradual change of the publishing industry in which literature was being highly commercialized at the end of the nineteenth century. This paper is an attempt to trace how the Society as a representative of authors, was concerned about the commercialization of literature and what the activity of the Society was aimed at through some publications of the Society.

The Author, the Society's journal which was founded in 1890 as its official organ, is the most useful source to see the development of the Society at that time. It became an influential forum for discussions of what the profession of literature might be in the new circumstances. Throughout the journal, we can find Besant's principles to manage the Society's activity that helps young possible writers to understand what it is to be a novelist. While the Society claimed to defend writers' commercial rights, we should not ignore the aspect that the Society was also concerned about the aesthetic value of literary works, as Besant's lecture *The Art of Fiction* indicates, and conducted a vigorous campaign to redefine the profession of authorship.