

ried me further, almost against my will, than I had at first intended. I thank you for the kind patience with which you have heard what I had to say, and I hope that this meeting will prove a good augury of the session which the Society has now commenced.

II.—*Report of the Council at the Opening of the Twentieth Session.*

[Read Tuesday, 27th November, 1866]

At the commencement of this, the Twentieth Session of our Society, we feel much pleasure in congratulating you on its continued progress, and the success which has attended its efforts in promoting the great social and scientific ends contemplated by its founders. The number of members and the amount of our finances are each year steadily increasing.

During the recent session several valuable papers were read, some of them devoted to a consideration of subjects of present interest—all of them dealing with questions of vast social importance. Early in the session, Dr. Mapother read a paper on the important subject of Sanitary Reform, in which he called attention to the unhealthiness of Irish towns, and the evils arising from the want of sanitary legislation, and the defective and insufficient powers of the local authorities. Since then this subject has received the attention of the Legislature, and, by the Sanitary-Act of 1866, the central and local authorities in this country have been invested with all the same powers and authorities as are now possessed by similar bodies in the sister kingdom, and are enabled to take effective measures towards remedying that unhealthy condition which Dr. Mapother, in his valuable paper, has shown to distinguish so many of our towns.

The period having arrived when the Government, by the Act of 1844, would be enabled to treat for the purchase of railways, and a Royal Commission, before which several of our members have been examined, being engaged for some time in investigating the matter, the subject of Railway Reform and Management has become one of the great questions of the day. On this subject three papers were read, which led to very interesting discussions. One was on "The Relation of the State to Railways," by Mr. Joseph J. Murphy; another by Dr. Hancock, on "The Financial Position of Irish Railways"; and the third, on "The French System of Railways," by Mr. Alexander McDonnell.

Upon the question of affording government security to the savings of the poor by life insurance and annuities, Mr. Michael J. O'Shaughnessy contributed a paper, in which he called attention to the Government Assurance and Annuity Acts of 1853 and 1864 (16 and 17 Vict. cap. 45; 27 and 28 Vict. cap. 43), and the great advantage of having their provisions brought into operation in Ireland, and we have much pleasure in being able to state that

since the reading of this paper those statutes have been brought into operation in this country, and we are confident they will prove of much benefit to the humbler classes of our people.

The recent commercial crisis and the sanction given by Government to the suspension of the Bank Charter Act for the third time since its enactment in 1844, gave rise to a consideration of our banking system with reference to a limited issue of Government Paper Money; Mr. Ross read a paper on this important subject. The Extension of the Field for the Employment of Women was discussed by Professor Houston in an interesting paper, in which he directed attention to the excellent manner in which the Queen's Institute was managed, and the amount of good it had already done. Papers on the Irish Bankrupt Code with suggestions for its Amendment by Mr. Charles Meldon, and Observations on the Record of Titles' Act by Mr. Fallon were brought before the Society during the year. Most of these papers have been already published in the Journal of the Society.

From the experience of the past few sessions the Council have come to the conclusion that it would prove advantageous to make such arrangements for the subjects to be considered at the different meetings of the Society, that papers on cognate subjects should be grouped for discussion on the same evening.

At the time when the Social Inquiry Society was incorporated with this Society, a provision was made for the preparation of Reports from time to time under the direction of the Council on important social questions, and in consequence of an application from Jonathan Pim, Esq., M P., Vice-President, the Council selected Mr. Randal McDonnell to prepare a report on the Impediments to Express Contracts as to the occupation of land in Ireland. Mr. McDonnell's Report has been communicated to the members by being inserted in the Journal and it forms a valuable addition to the series of reports and papers on the land question which occupied so much of the attention of the Society in former years.

The Council regret to have to announce the retirement of your late Secretaries, Mark S. O'Shaughnessy, Esq. and Edward Gibson, Esq. These gentlemen have rendered very efficient service to the Society. Mr. O'Shaughnessy took an active part in recasting the laws and arrangements of the Society, consequent on the changes introduced after the Dublin meeting of the Social Science Congress in 1861. He gave special attention to the editing of the Journal and the financial arrangements of the Society, and contributed some valuable papers during the six years of his Secretaryship. To Mr. Gibson the acknowledgements of the Society are due for the promptitude with which, on several occasions, at the request of the Council, he undertook to examine and elucidate the bearings of questions of immediate interest, and the ability with which he executed the task.

During the year, courses of lectures were delivered by the Barrington lecturer, Mr. Monroe, in Lurgan and Cork on the subject of Co-operation, its rise and progress—Post-office savings banks, Friendly Societies, Government Annuities, and Free Trade; and it appears from

the Report of Mr. Monroe that these courses have been very successful, in Cork especially, where the arrangements were conducted by a committee, consisting of the foremen of the principal shipbuilding and mercantile establishments in that city, and the audiences were never less than one thousand, and on one occasion exceeded twelve hundred, and were composed principally of large numbers of intelligent artisans. In Lurgan, also, the lectures were attended by large and attentive audiences, who manifested their interest in the subjects discussed by asking a variety of questions at the close of the course.

In conclusion, we notice with satisfaction that the National Association for the promotion of Social Science have acceded to the invitation of the Town Council of Belfast to hold their next congress in Belfast. The meeting has been fixed to take place in September,* 1867, and we feel confident that the members of this Society will avail themselves of the opportunity to again manifest their interest in the Association for the promotion of Social Science, which they evinced in so marked a manner on the occasion of the Association's former visit to Dublin in 1861.

III.—*The Condition of our Railways considered with reference to their Purchase by the State.* By Joseph T. Pim, Esq.

[Read, Tuesday, 18th of December, 1866.]

THE condition of the Railways of Great Britain and Ireland has for the past few years increasingly occupied public attention. It has caused much dissatisfaction both to the public and to the shareholders—to the public because railways have failed to afford them the accommodation they desire; and to the shareholders because railways have failed to return them the profits they had expected.

People have begun to doubt the soundness of the foundation on which our railway system is based, to lose faith in the universality of the superiority of private enterprise over that of the State, and to think that our system does not compare favourably with those of continental countries. In short, the conviction is rapidly forcing itself on the public mind that private enterprise, practically uncontrolled and undirected by the State, has failed, as regards our railways, in giving to the nation a commensurate return for its outlay; and that the time has come for us to retrace our steps in railway legislation. The opinion is rapidly growing that the State should resume the power it has conferred on the many trading corporations by which our railways have been constructed and managed, that it should purchase their entire property, and that we should start afresh on a sounder principle of management; whether directly by the State, as in Belgium; or indirectly through companies of lessees

* The meeting is announced to commence on the 11th of September.