FIFTEENTH SESSION—1861-2.


[Read Monday, 18th November, 1861.]

GENTLEMEN:

The Council of the Statistical Society feel peculiar gratification at the commencement of the present, the Fifteenth Session, in referring to the circumstances which enable them to congratulate the members upon the great advance which the study of Social Science has made in Ireland during the past year, and upon the aid which this Society, in particular, was able to give towards furthering those objects, which it had long been the means of protecting and promoting in this country.

The meeting in this city, during the month of August, of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, must be regarded as the commencement in Ireland of a period when subjects of social interest will henceforward receive greater attention than hitherto had been generally given to them.

Towards this lasting result the Council feel that the exertions of this Society have been greatly conducive. Immediately upon learning that the Association had accepted the invitation of the Royal Dublin Society, the Council took steps to make sure that subjects of peculiar interest in the social condition of this country should be brought before the Association at the meeting; and likewise put themselves into active communication with the officers of the Association, with offers of the aid which, through its influence and its exertions, this Society would be enabled to give towards the success of the meeting. It is scarcely necessary to do more than refer to the highly-distinguished success which attended the first meeting of the Association in Ireland—a success to which the Statistical Society contributed, and in which it participated. The Association readily availed itself of the co-operation of your members upon the Committees, in some cases as presidents, vice-presidents, and secretaries of departments; and the transactions of the Association owe to members of this Society more than twenty contributions upon the various subjects which form the range of the investigations of the Association.

The Conversazione which this Society gave to Lord Brougham and the other members of the Association was attended by a numerous and influential company, and served to indicate to the distinguished personages then in this city the position which this Society holds among the local learned and scientific bodies. The building in which the Conversazione was held, the Museum of Irish Industry, offered to the examination of the visitors additional objects of national and local interest; and for this feature the Society is indebted to the influence, most kindly and readily exercised, of one of your vice-presidents, Sir Robert Kane.

The expenses connected with this Conversazione, which the Council
had to meet, were paid out of the ordinary funds of the Society, without any necessity for calling upon the members for contribution.

The Council have felt strongly that the interest in investigations into subjects connected with Social Science having been thus stimulated in Ireland, this feeling ought to be availed of. By its position, this Society was enabled to draw around it the interest, but newly excited amongst the public at large, in the subjects to which this Society has been for many years devoting its attention. Keeping these circumstances in view, the Council have considered it advisable to adopt, subject to the approval of the members at large, a plan by which, under a duly-regulated supervision, topics of interest connected with each of the following departments will frequently be brought before the Society:

1. Jurisprudence, and the Amendment of the Law, including the subjects of the Punishment and Reformation of Criminals.
2. Social Economy, including the principles of Trade and Commerce, and the Educational and Industrial Progress of the Poor and Working Classes.

Considering the extent, the nature, and the value of the contributions made to the transactions of the National Association by ladies, and that, since the meeting in August, three new societies, of which ladies are members, have been formed in Dublin, it appeared to your Council that, as well to procure for your Society the aid of the valuable labours of these ladies in the cause of Social Science, as to offer to their newly-formed associations the strength and stability which connection with a well-established Society would ensure, it was advisable to open this Society to ladies as associates, the rate of subscription to whom should be reduced. The Council also propose to admit as associates persons not resident within fifteen miles of Dublin; and thus hope that the influence of the Society may be increased throughout the country generally, and its sphere of usefulness greatly extended.

The laws so revised as to admit of these and other changes being carried out will be submitted hereafter to the members at large for their consideration.

PAPERS READ DURING THE LAST SESSION.

In reviewing the business of the past session, the Council feel they have peculiar reason for congratulating the members upon the character of the papers presented for discussion.

Foremost, probably, in interest was a plan laid before the Society by one of the vice-presidents, the Hon. Judge Longfield, for enabling the owners of land to raise money on land debentures, the features of which the learned Judge developed in the provisions of a Draft Bill, which he had prepared for the purpose. This valuable paper will be placed in the Journal of the Society.

Another paper of remarkable interest was that in which Mr. Heron, Q.C., called attention to the frauds committed on public companies during the great extension of the principle of association within the last fifteen years, the learned writer suggesting as the only remedy the appointment of a public audit office, with power of inspection...
and power to publish accounts, branches of the office (which should form a department of the Board of Trade) being established in Dublin and at Edinburgh.

Amendments of our present system of Trial by Jury were suggested by Professor Houston, whose observations gave rise to an animated and interesting discussion.

On subjects of more general application were those papers by Dr. George F. Shaw on the Use and Abuse of Apprenticeship, and by Mr. F. W. Connor upon Competitive Examinations and their bearing upon the Civil Service.

Upon a matter of so great national importance as the Salmon Fisheries and Fishery Laws of Ireland the Society had the benefit of the information imparted by Alderman Joynt, in the paper which appeared immediately after in the Journal of the Society.

Of great national interest also was the paper read early in the session by one of the secretaries, Dr. Hancock, upon the Industrial School System as carried out in Aberdeen, in which the writer contended for the superiority of a plan which allowed of family influences being brought to bear upon children, over the system which prevails in this country of rearing children in workhouses. The principle of Industrial Schools under the English Act was explained in a paper by another of the secretaries, Mr. O'Shaughnessy, who took occasion, whilst bringing before the Society some aspects of the statistics of crime in Dublin, to point out the necessity, as shown by these statistics, of greatly-improved industrial education for the poor.

Upon the subject of the Relief of the Poor, a paper which had been contributed by Dr. J. Dowling was read by Mr. James Haughton, by whom some remarks upon the subject were added.

Another paper contributed by Mr. Connor, upon the Formation of a Free Library in Dublin, was of considerable local interest; as was likewise a plan presented by Mr. J. Moncrieff Wilson, for a Dublin Fire Brigade and a Fire-Escape and Salvage Corps.

The only other paper which remains to be noticed is that also contributed by Dr. Hancock, in which, after offering some considerations upon the Discoveries of Gold and Silver in the Sixteenth Century, he pointed out the effects which may be anticipated from the recent discoveries of gold, and, with a view to prevent the anticipated rise in prices, he proposed silver as a substitute for a gold standard.

The Journal of the Society has already placed nearly all these papers before the members; and the Council hope also to be enabled to provide for the full publication of such papers as were read before the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science by members of the Statistical Society.

The Society will perceive that during the session, as on former occasions, the labours of the members have, in directing public attention upon certain subjects, been leading the way to practical results. Thus, too, the Society lent its aid to the promotion of Post-office Savings' Banks, which have recently been put into operation in England, and which it will be the care of the Council to endeavour to have extended to Ireland, with arrangements suited to the wants of the country in that respect.
Suggestions for the Improvement of [April,

BARRINGTON LECTURES.

The Council continue to manage this trust in conjunction with the trustees of the fund. In accordance with the plan explained in the report at the commencement of last session, one lecturer only is now appointed, and this appointment was conferred upon Mr. Andrew M. Porter, A. B. (Queen’s University) and Barrister-at-Law; after his qualifications and those of four other candidates, as public lecturers, had been tested in a series of very valuable lectures delivered in the Lecture room of the Dublin Athenæum. Applications from nine different places, (being a far larger number than on any former occasion), were sent in this year; and the Council acceded to the applications from Newtownards, county of Down, Sligo, county of Sligo, and Tralee, county of Kerry—thus extending the benefits of the lectures to three different provinces.

The Council have only to add, that no diminution whatever has taken place in the number of members connected with the Society; to congratulate the members upon the healthy condition of the Society, and the zeal and activity displayed by the members in furthering its objects; and to express the continued obligations which the Society owes to the Royal Dublin Society for the use of a place of meeting, and the cordial manner in which that Society co-operates in the views and action of the Statistical Society.

IV.—Suggestions for the Improvement of the Laws relating to Bankrupts in Ireland.—By Alexander D. Kennedy, Esq.

[Read Monday, 18th November, 1861.]

As the business of the Court of Bankruptcy seems to be more on the increase than that of any other court in this country, and as the laws regulating that court are occupying much public attention at present, there is, I trust, no need for apology in introducing the subject to the notice of this Society. Without tracing the history of this branch of law, I may just remind you that at one time a bankrupt, whether honest or dishonest, was regarded and punished as a criminal. And under the ancient Roman law, which has been sometimes called “written reason,” the bankrupt laws were absurdly and horribly severe; for they permitted the creditors, when a bankrupt’s estate was insufficient to pay his debts, to cut up his body and divide it in proportion to the amount of their demands. This, however, being rather an unprofitable piece of butchery, the Roman legislature mitigated the law, by allowing the creditors to sell the bankrupt, and sometimes his wife and children, as slaves, and afterwards to divide the price. What a happy change the wisdom of ages has made! And while all must rejoice at the abolition of cruel and unjust laws, still, on an impartial consideration, I think all will agree in saying that the British legislature, in its abhorrence of legal cruelty, has run into the opposite extreme, and instead of tempering justice with mercy, has shown mercy at the expense of