

II.—*Report of the Council at the opening of the Twenty-second Session.*

[Read Friday, 22nd January, 1869.]

THE Council of this Society have now, at the commencement of the twenty-second session of its existence, to offer to you some account of its proceedings during the past year. In interest they compare not unfavourably with those of previous years, and show that the members are fully alive to the importance of discussing the great social and economic questions of the day at the meetings, so that the views of each may be corrected or confirmed by others who have devoted attention to the same subject. The absolute necessity for the classification and critical examination of statistics by such a society as this, was admirably shown in the address of Mr. James W. Murland, by which last session was inaugurated. In it the various aspects of emigration and theseveral questionsrelatingto railway control and management were discussed, and the bearing of statistical information on them pointed out. The difficult problems continually arising under the artificial system of modern life are so complicated, that correct views are little likely to be attained without their full and open discussion ; and the liability they all have to be mixed up with party interests renders their calm and dispassionate consideration impossible, except in a society whose object is not to advance any particular scheme of politics, but simply to discover truth, that its members may be led by its discovery to use their influence for the correction of abuses, and may see in what way they can contribute to increase the material prosperity of the country and the well-being of its inhabitants.

During the past session no one topic engrossed attention, but in the various departments of investigation for which the Society was formed, important contributions were read.

Bearing on jurisprudence and the amendment of law, we had the following valuable papers :—

“The Cost of Recorded Charges and Transfers compared with that of Ordinary Mortgages and Conveyances,” by Mr. H. Dix Hutton ; “The Effects of the Law of Distress and of the Feudal Rule as to Improvements,” by Mr. Sproule ; “On Affidavits,” by Dr. Shaw, F.T.C.D. ; “On County Court Reform,” by Mr. Arthur Cleary ; “On Marriage Settlements, their Social and Economic Effects,” by Mr. James McDonnell ; “On British Citizenship as opposed to American Citizenship,” by Mr. Francis Nolan.

Touching public health and sanitary reform, the Society had from Dr. Mapother an important paper on “The Consolidation of Sanitary and Medico-legal Offices and Abolition of Coroner’s Courts,” the discussion of which alone occupied one evening. Other communications of varied interest were presented to the Society—one by Mr. Alfred Webb on “The Propriety of conceding the Elective Franchise to Women ;” one on “The Competitive System” by Mr. Arthur Houston ; one on “the Preservation of the Flax Plant in Ireland,” by Mr. George Orme Malley ; and one by Mr. Alfred Webb on

"The Factory Acts' Extension Act of 1867;" all these elicited considerable discussion, and are alone sufficient to prove the vitality and continued popularity of the Society.

The council sanctioned applications for Barrington Lectures in Londonderry, Newtownmavady, and Ballymena. In Dublin alone have they to regret an apparent apathy and indifference among the classes whose benefit was especially contemplated in the establishment of these lectures. No application has been made to them nor any room placed at their disposal for their delivery in this city. This is a matter of great regret to your council, for they believe that the clear and truthful exposition of the various questions arising in connection with capital and labour, and the other subjects usually discussed in these Lectures, would materially tend to the formation of more just and dispassionate views on the part of the great operative class in this metropolis.

III.—*Government Purchase of Railways in Ireland: How can it be accomplished?* By Samuel M. Greer, Esq., Barrister-at-law.

[Read Tuesday, 8th December, 1868.]

For the last four years the people of Ireland have had under their consideration the policy of having the Irish railways purchased by the government, and worked in future at the lowest possible tariff for the benefit of the public, instead of for the profit of shareholders. Public meetings have been held during that period in every part of Ireland, north and south, east and west, to promote this object. Every large city and town has declared for this policy with marvellous unanimity. Petitions have been presented to parliament praying for its adoption. Members of parliament, forgetting all party distinctions, have worked cordially together for this common purpose. The press was not slow to support the movement; and the result, for so far, is fully adequate to the unwonted moving power which all these combined forces have applied. Two successive governments, of opposite political principles, have taken up the question with prompt alacrity, and have applied the best machinery they could devise to remove the various difficulties by which the question was surrounded, and to procure such information as would enable them to deal with it effectively.

The Railway Commission of 1865, under the auspices of Mr. Gladstone, elicited a valuable body of evidence regarding the Irish railways, and the various and important social and commercial wants which these lines have hitherto *failed to supply*. But its report shocked the feelings of an expectant public throughout the whole of Ireland, by suggesting no remedy for such a glaring anomaly. The Right Hon. W. Monsell, and Sir Rowland Hill, two of the commissioners, by two masterly and well-considered reports, not only showed that the question had been fully raised before the Commission, but pointed out clearly and convincingly the advantages which could be secured to Ireland, without loss or even risk to the Imperial Ex-