

jurisdiction, owing to the delay now of some years duration of extending to Ireland the English and Scotch law, of having bankruptcy jurisdiction conferred on every county court judge.

Dr. Hancock read a paper "On the Report of the Irish Lunacy Commissioners, and the policy of extending the English Law for the Protection of Neglected Lunatics to Ireland." The feature of the paper was the avoidance of immediate expense of new buildings, by recommending the extension to Ireland of the Belgian, Scotch, and English system of boarding-out harmless lunatics, so as to give immediate protection to the 6,000 lunatics officially reported to be in a neglected state.

II.—*Obituary Notice of the late Alexander Thom, Esq. J.P., Queen's Printer in Ireland, a Vice-President of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland.* Prepared by request of the Council. By W. Neilson Hancock, LL.D.

[Read, 27th January, 1880.]

SINCE the last meeting of this Society, we have lost one of its original members, Mr. Alexander Thom, who did more to popularize statistics in Ireland and place before the world the real condition of the country than any other member. The Council have requested me to bring under your notice a brief sketch of his life, with special reference to the services he has rendered to Ireland in the matter of statistics.

Mr. Thom was born in Scotland of a good Scotch family, and was educated at the High School of Edinburgh. His maternal grandfather was an estated gentleman, Mr. John Turner, of Turner Hall, in Aberdeenshire; his paternal grandfather was a linen manufacturer, and the first to introduce into Scotland a machine for spinning linen yarn. His father, Mr. Walter Thom, was a statistical writer of considerable repute, as appears from the notice of him in *Cates' Dictionary of General Biography*. He wrote an account of his native parish of Bervie, in Aberdeenshire, for Sir John Sinclair's *Statistical Survey of Scotland*; he contributed several articles to Brewster's *Encyclopædia*, and published in 1811 a *History of Aberdeen*, in which he describes himself as author of *Sketches in Political Economy*.

When the great Sir Robert Peel came over to Ireland as Chief-Secretary, he selected Mr. Walter Thom as editor of the *Dublin Journal*, which after the fashion of that day he retained to defend his policy. On Sir Robert Peel retiring from the Chief-Secretaryship in 1817, he handed over the *Dublin Journal** to Mr. Walter Thom, and he appears as proprietor from thenceforward. The prospects of the paper were seriously affected by the changes of imperial

* For earlier history of *Dublin Journal* see Gilbert's *History of Dublin*, vol. ii. p. 54.

policy towards Ireland, introduced by the Marquis of Wellesley when he came over as Lord Lieutenant, in December, 1821. The change was marked by the appointment of Mr., afterwards Lord Plunket, the Protestant champion of Roman Catholic Emancipation, as Attorney-General, in place of Mr. Saurin, who held opposite views.

The *Evening Mail* was started by the Irish opponents of Emancipation, to resist Lord Wellesley's policy, and its extreme views being then more acceptable to Irish Protestants, the *Dublin Journal* consequently became an unsuccessful speculation.

To help his father in this crisis, Mr. Alexander Thom, a young man of twenty, gave up his own prospects in life and devoted his whole energy to keep the paper going as long as his father lived. In the discharge of this filial duty he thoroughly learned the business of printing, and the more important moral lesson of how to struggle against difficulties. His father died in June, 1824, and is buried in St. Luke's church, where there is a monument to his memory. On his death the *Dublin Journal* ceased to exist, and Mr. Alexander Thom sought from Sir Robert Peel some recognition of his father's and his own services. These were rewarded by a contract for printing for the Post Office, and Mr. Thom found a partner to supply the requisite capital to enable him to take advantage of his contract.

The next great step in Mr. Thom's career was his energy in executing the printing for the Irish Railway Commission of 1838, presided over by the celebrated Thomas Drummond, the distinguished Scotchman, who was Under-Secretary for Ireland during the early years of Lord Melbourne's government. Up to that time the printing for Royal Commissions in Ireland had all been executed in London, but Mr. Drummond was anxious to avoid the delay of that mode of proceeding, and Mr. Thom offered for and obtained the contract, and secured the printing of future Royal Commissions for Dublin.

The great achievement of Mr. Thom's life was his starting, in 1844, his *Irish Almanac and Official Directory*, containing the novel feature of statistics of Ireland.

Whilst he had owed his first start in life to the patronage of Sir Robert Peel, having now arrived at the prime of life, forty-two years of age, he seeks the support of the public on higher and safer ground, indicated in the preface of his first volume, compiled in 1843, for the year 1844, which commences in these terms:—

“In offering a New Almanac and Directory to the notice of the public, the publisher is fully sensible that its title to the patronage he hopes for must rest wholly on its intrinsic merits.”

He was spared to the ripe age of seventy-eight to carry out this sound principle of seeking public patronage, and it was only within three months of his death that he transferred his successful printing business to his son-in-law, Mr. Pilkington, to whom he had two years previously transferred his *Almanac*.

As we have seen him prosperous and successful in business, and

commanding respect for his intelligence and ability, it is well to bear in mind as some guide for younger men commencing their career, the manly and honest principle he here laid down and ever followed, of endeavouring to deserve public approval by the intrinsic merit of his work.

That first preface of his contains a singular commentary on Irish affairs; it was written in the closing months of 1843, just when the Clontarf meeting had been proclaimed, and informations had been filed against O'Connell, Sir John Gray, and others. While statesmen and public writers at a distance thought Ireland so difficult to govern, this naturalised Scotchman, addressing himself with earnestness and intelligence to supply a want in Irish affairs, and to diffuse true and accurate information, found everyone, irrespective of creed or party, ready to assist.

"To those persons to whom the publisher is indebted for aiding in this revision, he feels that his most grateful thanks are due, as well for the cordial alacrity with which they have responded to his applications, and the opinions expressed by them of the manner in which the portions submitted to their inspection have been executed, has been to him a gratifying testimony of the utility of the undertaking."

The early and cordial appreciation which Mr. Thom received helped him in his work, for he adds :—

"Thus encouraged by the favourable opinions of those highly qualified to appreciate the merits of the work, the publisher looks forward to its annual continuance, not merely in its present form, but with such additions and improvements as will render every successive year's publication more worthy of general patronage."

If the compilation which Mr. Thom then commenced, and annually improved for so many years, is creditable to him, the thorough appreciation of it which encouraged him and enabled him to continue it so long, and leave it an institution in the country, is creditable to the Irish public.

The modest term of publisher which Mr. Thom adopted in his prefaces, concealed for many years from all but his intimate friends, the fact that he was author of the compilation himself, and that the whole conception, plan, and continuous improvements were his. This, fortunately, became known in time for this Society to acknowledge his services, by making him first a Vice-President and afterwards offering to him the Presidency of the Society. Though from the pressure of his engagements he dreaded the preparation of an address, and declined the honour, he cordially appreciated the recognition of his work, and he presented the Society with £100, which was employed in procuring a valuable series of reports on Irish affairs by Mr. William Graham Brooke, Mr. Mulholland, Mr. Molloy, and Professor Donnell.

When the Peel scholarships in the Queen's Colleges were founded by the present Sir Robert Peel, during his Chief-Secretaryship, in remembrance of the patronage of his father already referred to, Mr. Thom was one of the earliest and most substantial contributors to the fund.

The breadth of view Mr. Thom had of Irish affairs was probably

best indicated by his valuable contribution towards the materials of Irish history, in the republication, entirely for gratuitous distribution, of a collection in two volumes, entitled: *Tracts and Treatises Illustrative of the Natural History, Antiquities, and Political and Social State of Ireland at various periods prior to the Present Century.* In these volumes he brought out the works of Boate, Ware, Spenser, and Sir John Davis; also those of Sir William Petty, Bishop Berkeley, Price, and Dobbs. This work of his is so appreciated, that when the volumes he presented turn up at sales of private libraries, they bring two guineas.

We are thus indebted to the munificence of an individual for what in other countries is the work of great societies or of the state. As he has thus preserved the memory of those Irish statisticians and public writers of past centuries, historians in future years, when treating of Irish affairs in the present century, will add the name of Alexander Thom to the honoured list of trustworthy and able writers on Irish affairs.

THE PRESIDENT (John K. Ingram, LL.D.), said—This is not an occasion on which it would be proper to take any formal vote of the Society. But the cordial acclamations with which you have received Dr. Hancock's paper sufficiently show that you agree with the Council in thinking that some such tribute was due to the memory of our late distinguished fellow-member; and also show that you are of opinion that Dr. Hancock has discharged in an appropriate and graceful manner the task entrusted to him by the Council, and has well expressed the sentiments we must all feel in contemplating so useful and honourable a career as Mr. Thom's.

III.—*On the Report of the Select Committee appointed "To enquire and report whether any and what steps ought to be taken to simplify the Title to Land, and to facilitate the Transfer thereof, and to prevent Frauds on Purchasers and Mortgagees of Land," and on the First Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners appointed "To enquire into the Law relating to the Registration of Deeds and Assurances in Ireland."* By James McDonnell, Esq.

[Read, 18th November, 1879.]

To simplify the title to land and facilitate the transfer thereof must always be a subject of much interest in this country, where so large a proportion of the wealth of the inhabitants consists of land. I will therefore offer no apology for bringing under the notice of the Society this evening the Report (dated 24th June, 1879) of the Select Committee appointed to enquire and report whether any and what steps ought to be taken to simplify the title to land, and to facilitate the transfer thereof, and to prevent frauds on purchasers and mortgagees