

3.—*The Financial Aspect of Parliamentary Private Bill Procedure.*

BY CHARLES A. STANUELL, ESQ., M.A.

[Read Tuesday, 15th January, 1901.]

THE mode of conducting Parliamentary Inquiries into Private Bills relating to this country has been the subject of criticism for many years, and it has been brought before the public on many occasions, while it has frequently been made the subject of papers read before this Society.

This renders it unnecessary to go at any great length into an explanation of the existing system, but still I think it is well to refer briefly to the present procedure so that the subsequent criticism may be clear and definite.

Private Bill Legislation is the promotion and obtaining of Acts of Parliament for private purposes which involve the public interests. The most familiar specimen is that of the construction of a railway, an operation which involves the purchase and severance of lands, and interference with roads and streams, in fact, with other peoples' property.

The proceedings, of course, commence with the formation of a Company or Committee of persons interested in the project, who proceed to prepare the draft of a Parliamentary Bill.

The next step is the publication of the notices, with which we are all so abundantly familiar in the month of November, and the lodgment of the draft Bill in the proper office at Westminster.

In due time the Bill is read a first time, and "passes standing orders." This is an inquiry before an officer of the House to see if the plans and sections have been properly prepared and the proper notices given and advertisements published, and, if these be found to have been correctly carried out, the Bill is read a second time, and a date is generally fixed for the Committee stage of the Bill, which is an enquiry into its merits before a Committee of Members of Parliament, and at which stage the opponents of the Bill, if it be opposed, have the opportunity of bringing forward their objections.

This is the most important stage of the measure, the report and third readings are more formal.

Following the passing of a Bill by one House it is introduced into the other, and the procedure is practically identical in both, though, of course, if the second House make changes in the Bill as passed by the first, the former has to consider whether it will adopt the alterations of the latter.

It will thus be seen that all the work has to be done twice over. In practice, however, if a Bill be not opposed, the second Committee is much modified, and even as regards opposed Bills. the opposition is often confined to the first Committee, and the fight is not renewed in the second. Finally, the Committee may be a joint one of both Houses.

I have, of course, sketched the procedure very briefly, and have omitted many points, as this is only a summary.

These Parliamentary Private Bills have a very important bearing upon the progress of the country, and there is no doubt that from one cause or another the people of Ireland are by no means satisfied, with the procedure. There have been innumerable speeches, delivered and articles written in criticism and condemnation, while there have been many suggestions for improvements, and, indeed, I should never have ventured to take up a subject which had been handled so often by abler men than myself, but for the fact that comparatively few have gone into the figures connected with the expense, and this is the part I propose to chiefly consider.

To prevent misapprehension of my own opinions, I think it right to explain here that I have made inquiries among many of my friends who are particularly well qualified to give an opinion upon the subject from ample experience, and all agree, with really pleasant unanimity, that the Parliamentary Committees are excellent. My friends have no complaints to make about the Tribunal, as a Tribunal, but they all complain of the terrible expense involved in the procedure. The fault is exactly the same as it is in reference to the House of Lords as Supreme Court of Appeal. It is a splendid tribunal, but the expense of invoking its services is so enormous that I believe I am correct in saying that the average number of appeals from Ireland is about three per year. The defect was recognised many years ago in connection with legal matters, and the Court of Appeal in Ireland was strengthened so as to provide a remedy less expensive than the tribunal in London, and the same change is what is wanted in regard to Private Bills.

I fully share the opinions of my professional friends who speak so favourably of the existing tribunal; I am by no means favourable to its being swept away. There are many questions which from one cause or another should, I think, still be considered at Westminster. I will illustrate my meaning by analogy. I have the highest opinion of the way in which business is done at Quarter Sessions by the County Courts; it is cheap, speedy, accurate, and just; but I would not abolish the High Court of Justice; it is wanted for important cases, which either by their magnitude or complexity require special treatment, which they can better receive in Dublin than in the scanty time which could be given to them in the County Court, or even at Assizes.

Just as the County Court is used to relieve the High Court of small business which would not bear the expense of that tribunal, so I think the inquiries into small measures should be conducted in Ireland, leaving the matters of greater importance to be dealt with at Westminster. I have not gone into the question of how the distinction should be drawn, nor do I think it would be expedient to draw a hard and fast line. I would be disposed to leave the selection of the tribunal to the parties

concerned. The chances are that they would in most cases be able to make a satisfactory selection.

Up to the present time the necessity for dealing with the composition of the tribunal to be substituted for the existing Committees, and in particular the universal objection to accept the Privy Council as an alternative, has so encroached upon the time and space of previous writers and speakers that they have not been able to deal at any length with the figures as to the expenditure of time and money. Now that a workable scheme has been produced in the shape of the Scottish Act, discussion is hardly necessary as to the principle of the Irish measure, and as regards criticism and condemnation of the present machinery—apart from the tribunal—my predecessors have fully convinced the public of the necessity for reform. In fact, the question is in somewhat the same position as a Parliamentary measure, of which the second reading has been carried by a large majority; the principle has been admitted, and the House has to go in to a committee on the inevitable details.

Looking upon the fact as granted that the tribunal will follow the lines of the Scottish measure, and that its utility for Ireland is admitted, I think the principal matters remaining are the time taken up and the expenses incurred; and I think that the figures upon these two points will form the debating ground upon which the question will have to be fought out, and it is upon these I propose to enter. There is, however, one point I wish to merely mention now, and refer to afterwards at greater length. The Scottish Act retains the Westminster tribunal in cases in which it seems expedient that the inquiries should be held there, and provides for the creation of a panel of persons suitable for serving on local inquiries. In Ireland there may be a difficulty in the formation of this panel, and I wish to refer to this matter later on.

The official figures for 1899 are not available in a condensed form, but I believe it is generally admitted that the Parliamentary Inquiry into the proposed amalgamation of the Dublin townships with the city cost at least £25,000, and that the equally abortive Inquiry into the amalgamation of the Southern Railways cost the supporters and opponents £30,000. Both these measures were introduced for a second time last year, and all the expenses had to be incurred over again.

I have been able to obtain some very interesting and instructive figures in connection with the first of these measures, the abortive Dublin Corporation Bill.

It was at hearing before the Committee of the House of Commons for fourteen days, running from Tuesday, the 18th April, to Monday, the 15th May. You will at once observe that the actual time from start to finish was twenty-eight days, a serious matter, as I will show later on, in the calculation of the witnesses' expenses.

The Committee usually sits upon Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednes-

days, Thursdays, and Fridays, and then adjourns till Monday, but from various causes, such as illness of a member of the Committee, or to suit the convenience of the members, they may not meet on certain days, which of course extends the time during which the witnesses must remain in London.

As regards the Committee on the Corporation Bill, the first week, counting from Tuesday, the 18th April, to Friday, the 21st, they sat continuously. The following week they did not sit on Wednesday, and the following week again they did not sit on the Friday.

The succeeding week they sat on one day, Monday, May 1st, and the succeeding week again they sat on Monday, the 8th; Tuesday, the 9th; and Wednesday, May 10th, when they adjourned until Monday, May 15th, when the Committee finished the Inquiry.

At this hearing there were twenty-two witnesses examined on behalf of the Corporation, and fifty-two on behalf of the various townships.

The amounts paid to the various witnesses varied very considerably, some being paid very large amounts as experts, and others moderate fees of two or three guineas a day, and about £1 per day for expenses, with about £5 5s. for railway and travelling.

I have not got the exact particulars of the House fees, nor the amounts paid to counsel, both were heavy. I will refer to details on these subjects later on.

The Bill afterwards came before a Committee of the House of Lords, when practically the same witnesses were examined, and the inquiry lasted for fourteen working days, running from Tuesday, July 4th, to Tuesday, July 25th, both inclusive. It will be noticed that the Lords only took twenty-two days from start to finish as against the Commons twenty-eight, an important question, as I have already said in regard to the expenses.

The total costs of the Corporation were certified by the Taxing Officer at £11,883 Os. 6d., including the expenses of taxation, £132 5s.

I take the last figures from the printed Report presented to the Lord Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses of the City of Dublin on the 19th February, 1900.

This was an exceptionally heavy Bill, and the figures are large, but a single Dublin solicitor informs me that during the last ten years the amount paid by his clients in connection with the promotion of or opposition to Bills connected with Irish matters has amounted to £39,929, in round numbers £40,000, an average of £4,000 a year.

I now pass to a brief summary of the figures of the Return of Private Bill Legislation (Expenses) issued on the 22nd September last, No. 344, which I have endeavoured to utilise, but it is not so satisfactory as I would wish.

In the first place it is not complete—it only gives as regards Ireland a return of Bills printed or opposed by Urban Sanitary Authorities or bodies of Town Commissioners, the other two returns, those for Harbour, Navigation, Pier and Port Authorities, and those for Railway and other public Companies, by far the most important have not yet been issued.

In the second place the Return does not make any distinction between contested and uncontested measures, which greatly hampers any attempt to estimate the expenses. I have endeavoured, however, to construct some tables from this return on the assumption that an expense not exceeding £600 must represent an unopposed Bill, which I think I shall be able to show later on is a fair inference.

During the period between 1892 and 1898 the Urban Authorities promoted in all thirty-one Bills, and their united expenses came to £51,362 0s. 1d., being on an average £1,656 each.

Judging by my rule that a Bill of less than £600 means an uncontested measure, I found that there were twelve of these amounting to £3,059 7s. 11d., leaving nineteen apparently contested measures passed at an expense of £48,302, or £2,542 per Bill.

This gives us some information, but it does not help us with the chief difficulty, that is to say, how, when and where the expense was incurred.

I must deal with these later on, but first there are some points about the figures I have quoted, bald as they are, which demand a little attention.

The figures are large as regards the amount of money spent, but they are small as regards the work done, that is to say, the number of Bills brought in and passed. If the Bills peculiar to Dublin, Kingstown, Rathmines and Pembroke, which as a rule figure twice, *i.e.*, as promoters or opponents as the case may be, be omitted, there remain very few Bills for the rest of the country; few towns save Belfast and Waterford have more than one Bill, and the circumstances of Waterford were very exceptional, as the city has been involved in a number of Bills in connection with the Southern Railways. Mr. Arthur Samuels gave the particulars of the expenses incurred by the City and County of Waterford in recent years in a paper read before this Society on November 28th. 1899, which appears in the *Journal* for August, 1900. It is sufficient here to mention that the total was £12,398 15s. 3d.

There is therefore another aspect to these figures—they not only show a great expense to a poor country, the greater part of which is spent out of the country, but they also show very small results for this expenditure. The fact is that they so shake the nerves of the municipal and other authorities that many a really useful measure cannot be brought forward at all. I am not speaking of commercial or speculative measures, where the promoters take a big risk to make a profit, but of such

questions as water-works, drainage works, all the numerous plans for protecting the very lives of the inhabitants, which are completely blocked by the inevitable expense of the Parliamentary Inquiry. In all Ireland, how many cities, not to speak of towns, have a really good water supply? How many have even a decent system of drainage? The members of the various councils will all tell you that they are anxious to have good water and drainage, but that they cannot face the expense. The facts connected with the Kingstown Main Drainage, as shown before the Recorder of Dublin, where the committee expenses were £10,000 upon a Bill which contemplated a total expenditure of £30,000, have sunk deeply into the minds of all local authorities, and the result is that even to save the lives of their citizens, they dare not face the expense of the preliminary inquiry.

I will now deal with the figures as well as I can; but I must first mention that I have had to consider a number of statements, and so far as possible to arrange them under various heads, and calculate an average for each, a very difficult thing to do where the amounts depend upon so many contingencies.

The first point I wish to mention is that, although Ireland is by far the poorer of the British Isles, the existing procedure is, and must be, infinitely more expensive for her than for the larger island.

The reason is often given, but it is not often alluded to in detail, and I will therefore deal with it first.

The actual house fees, counsel, and Parliamentary agents are, of course, paid on the same scale for the two countries, but when we come to witnesses the Irish are in quite a different position. Say there are two Bills, one affecting Manchester, the other Cork. Manchester is four and a half hours from London; a witness can come up by an early morning train, so he need not be summoned until actually wanted, and he is only paid for his day, or perhaps two days. His expenses then are as follows:—

Two days, at £3 3s. per day	...	...	£6	6	0
Travelling, say	...	...	2	0	0
Refreshments	...	...	2	0	0
					£10 6 0

The witness from Cork must be allowed at least twenty-four hours for his journey, probably more, and he must be allowed the same for his return. Even without the contingency of his having to spend Sunday in London his account stands as follows:—

Three days, at £3 3s. per day	...	...	£9	9	0
Railway and cars, say	...	...	7	0	0
Hotel and Refreshments (3 days)	...	...	3	0	0
					19 9 0

It will be seen that the expenses of the Cork man are very nearly double those of the Manchester representative, and when these figures come to be multiplied by the number of witnesses they make a substantial difference against the country which is least able to bear it.

Now for the figures themselves. I propose to distribute them under the following heads:—

1. House Fees. That is to say the fees paid to the Tribunal and which represent the expense of the staff.
2. Counsel.
3. Parliamentary agents and solicitors.
4. Printing and shorthand writers' notes of evidence.
5. Fees and expenses of witnesses.

1. To begin with the House fees:—

These by themselves form a very considerable item, but it is difficult to frame a fair estimate, as they vary according to the amount of the capital involved, the number of days at hearing, the number of witnesses examined and documents produced.

A good idea of the amount can be formed from the fact that in the case of an unopposed Bill the fees would be about £150 for the two Houses.

As to a contested Bill, it will be necessary in order to give an estimate to *fix* some of the features of the Bill, but we will say that the capital involved is £200,000, that ten witnesses are examined, and that the case takes five days in Committee in each House. I am merely giving figures to furnish data for the fees—ten witnesses would be a very small number.

On these data the expenses in the House of Commons would, very roughly, be as follows:—

	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
Deposit of Bill	...	5	0	0		
One day passing Standing Orders		5	0	0		
Proceedings in the House	...	65	0	0		
Proceedings in Committee	...	50	0	0		
General fee in respect of documents, plans, etc.	...	20	0	0		
				145	0	0

House of Lords:—

Deposit of Bill, etc.	...	15	10	0	
First and Second Reading		113	0	0	
First day in Committee (£8)					
Four others, at £4 (£16)	...	24	0	0	
Orders for witnesses	...	10	0	0	
Report with amendments	...	4	0	0	
Third Reading, short Bill	...	10	0	0	
				176	10 0
					£321 10 0

These are really only the principal items. There are a number of small fees, which swell the amount very much by their numbers, but I do not want to overstate my case. I have only to point out that they do not include printing or the shorthand writers' notes, which come under another heading. We will, I think, be safe in naming £350 as the minimum fees for an opposed Bill.

2. My second head is the expense of counsel.

The fees paid to London counsel are very much larger than those given in this country, and quite apart from the fact that the Irish schedule of fees is only two-thirds of the English scale, there is a special reason why 'counsels' fees are higher. In former times until the opening of the High Court of Justice in the Strand, the various Courts were greatly scattered, and a barrister could not move from court to court, and, having only one to make a living from, his fees were higher than in Dublin, where he could fill up his time by passing from one court to another. I do not say they actually confined themselves to one court, but their practice is or was very much circumscribed.

This circumstance still affects the business at Westminster, which is about two miles from the Law Courts, and hence there is a special band of counsel, who are specialists, and who receive large fees as such. The smallest fee on a Committee is £15 15s. for a junior; £35 for a senior, with the usual daily refreshers.

One of my correspondents writes:—

"Fees vary from £30 to £500, with the usual adjuncts in the way of refreshers and consultations."

Another says:—

"The fees paid to counsel vary from £1,000 down to £100 for Queen's counsel. £100 is not a large fee on a Bill of any importance, and would not secure the attendance of a leader. In regard to refreshers for second and following days, £10 10s. would be an ordinary refresher for a Q.C. It might be Fifty Guineas."

It is, I believe, an admitted fact that there was a fee of £1,000 marked on at least one brief in the Railway Amalgamation Bill. There may have been more, but this I believe is exceptional in Irish cases, though I have a case of £850 paid in fees and refreshers to a single counsel in a long Committee.

I am merely giving the fees paid in respect of the hearing. There are the fees paid for drafting and settling the Bill, together with the numerous consultations to consider the course to be adopted over suggested amendments, but without committing myself to actual figures, I think I have said enough to show that the expense of counsel is heavy, and in excess of what is paid in Ireland.

I think we shall be well within the mark in placing the expense of counsel, under the same conditions as to the capital, etc., involved, the number of witnesses and the time, at £400.

3. My third heading includes Parliamentary agents and solicitors

Owing to the procedure of the Parliamentary Committees being special, a class of practitioners has arisen who are acquainted with its peculiarities, and who attend to the detail work, such as the service of notices, the payment of fees, the supervision of the printing, arranging the time and days of sitting, and the inevitable costs. It is evident that an Irish solicitor could not look after these matters himself. He would have neither the time nor the experience, and hence an agent is a necessity. Naturally the amount of the agent's remuneration varies very much. A correspondent of very great experience estimates that for a small Bill they might run as low as £200 in addition to the House fees already alluded to, but for a large Bill they would be over £2,000 or even £5,000.

Naturally, if the Committee work were done in Dublin, the agent would be dispensed with, but the saving would not be complete, as much of his work would fall on the solicitor. At the same time I think it would be greatly reduced. There is something imperial about the procedure of a great Parliamentary agent, and his expenses are in proportion. To carry out my system of giving an estimate for each heading, I will put his account at £400.

As regards solicitors they have not so much to say to the progress of the actual Bill as the agent, except appearing at the various formal steps and being responsible for the presence of the witnesses and conduct of the case.

Naturally they have to be paid for their absence from their ordinary business, say £5 5s. a day, but to my mind this hardly defrays the lawyer for the dislocation of his business, as he must attend in London, and even so the item is a heavy one. Taking the Bill of the standard I have selected, I do not think the solicitor's account would be less than £200, and it might be far more. To be within the mark we will say this sum £200, and then he and the agent will together stand for £600.

4. My fourth heading is the cost of printing and reporting.

I think the calculation of these gave me more trouble than any other branch, the accounts varied so much.

Roughly, the practice is that one of the parties arranges to take the evidence, and get it printed, and to deliver to each of the parties next morning as many printed copies as he has agreed to take, the expense being subsequently portioned out between the parties according to the number of copies taken.

The shorthand writer's pay is £2 2s. per day, with ninepence per folio of seventy-two words for the transcript of his notes,

and the printer's charge for hurried night work is naturally high, perhaps three times the ordinary. Hence I do not think £20 a day, by any means, extravagant for the account—in fact, under the mark. For a Committee of seven days this would be £140, say as a round number £100.

I must admit that this printing is done magnificently, but I also confess that I cannot see why it is done at all in small cases. Our judges, juries, counsel, and lawyers get on very well without it.

5. Witnesses.

I have left the question of witnesses to the end, because it is the most difficult to deal with, and also one of the most serious items of the expense.

All my correspondents are unanimous upon both these points, although one writes:—

“I have not found witnesses' expenses so heavy as I anticipated, as I never summon my witnesses until my case is coming on;” but he adds, “where the principal expense comes in is in obtaining scientific evidence.”

You will observe that even he admits the expense, though he depreciates its being very high, except as regards scientific witnesses.

Another of wider experience writes:—

“Taking witnesses to London increases the expense. The payment for the time of not only expert but of non-expert witnesses is a very serious item in a certain class of Bills.”

A third gives a summary of experience extending over twenty-five years:—

“Generally speaking my experience is that, excluding the hybrid committees, an average Bill will take from a week to a fortnight to get through a Commons Committee—somewhat less in the Lords. I have seldom paid an expert witness less than £100, and often double that sum; and I am aware much larger fees have been paid. Non-expert witnesses are allowed only about £2 2s. per day in the absence of special agreement.”

Another gives further information:—

“The expenses varies according to the class of witnesses. Mercantile, *i.e.*, non-professional men are allowed £2 2s. to £3 3s. a day, with a day travelling over and another going back. Professional men, by agreement, solicitors up to £10 10s a day; £5 5s. ordinarily, engineers anything that may be arranged, £5 5s. ordinarily, but it might be fifty guineas. The usual hotel pay is £1 a day, the railway fare from Dublin is £5, but £8 to £10 is taxed for travelling expenses.”

My other informants practically agree upon these points.

I have now to put these figures together and see how far the witnesses contribute to the expenses.

I have already mentioned that one of my correspondents says a week or ten days is the average time for a Committee, and I will assume there are ten witnesses. There would probably be the inevitable expert, but we will omit him and allow all the witnesses the same amount of £3 3s. per day to make up. A week in Committee, as it only sits on five days in the week, means nine days in London, with a day going and another returning, or eleven in all. The sum then works out as follows:—

10 witnesses at £3 3s. each for 11 days	... £346	10	0
10 witnesses at £1 per day "keep" for			
11 days	... 110	0	0
10 witnesses travelling at £5 each	... 50	0	0
	£506	10	0

As a rule one contest in Committee is sufficient for the promoters and opponents, but, of course, if the contest be renewed the expense, large as it is, will be nearly doubled.

I think, therefore, that I am again taking a low estimate in putting down the witnesses' expenses at £500.

I have now to total up my expenses and see what they amount to:—

House Fees on an opposed Bill	£350
Counsel	400
Solicitor and Agent	600
Printing and Shorthand Writer	100
Witnesses	500
	£1,950

As I have already said these estimates are really *minima*. In other words the minimum expenses involved in obtaining an Act of Parliament, if there be any opposition, can hardly be placed at a lower figure than £2,000, while in the case of such Bills as the Dublin Corporation or the Southern Railways Amalgamation it may exceed £25,000. I may perhaps add that since I made this estimate of £2,000 I have received the following report from one of my professional friends, a gentleman of very large experience:—

"The average opposed Bill in London I would take to be about from £1,500 to £2,000, if there are one or two experts and a half-a-dozen witnesses and the Bill is on for five or six days."

Even in the case of an unopposed Bill, the House fees come to £150, as stated under the section dealing with them, and the Parliamentary Agents to £200 also, as already mentioned. Add another £50 for the solicitor and you get £400 for the smallest Bill unopposed. If my memory be correct I once paid £325 for an unopposed Bill; the amount was certainly between £300 and £350, but it was nineteen years ago, and I have not got

the figures available, and I do not think I made any special charge for my own work.

A professional friend gives an estimate of from £400 to £600 as the result of his experience. Another says from £500 to £600, and the last adds that if some of the work were done in Dublin or Ireland it might be taken that it would cost about one-third of the amount, and in some cases about £150.

I am purposely omitting the expenses of the opposition—they are generally less—say half the amount of the promoters, but of course if, as in the Corporation Bill, many bodies are represented, their expenses may be greater than those of the promoters.

In reference to my contention that my estimates are low, it will be seen that they amount to £1,950, and I have already mentioned in the earlier part of this paper that the average expenses of contested Bills, as given by the Parliamentary Return, worked out at £2,542 per Bill. Under the circumstances I think I am justified in assuming that my estimates of the various details were fair. I may mention that they were made before I obtained the Return in question.

I desire here to acknowledge the great kindness I have received from my professional friends who have supplied me with information. They are the busiest men in my profession, with little leisure at command, and yet they found time to give me explanations and figures which must, from their nature, have required a considerable amount of time and trouble. I should like to quote *verbatim* from them, but considerations of time forbid this.

I have now gone into the figures with which I have been so courteously supplied to the best of my ability. It is a curious fact that in some instances I have been refused information, not by the solicitors, but by their clients, for the highly significant reason that they did not want anything of the kind in Ireland, as the inevitable result would be that it would cause them a great deal of trouble, as they would possibly be attacked themselves by persons desiring improvements, a process which might be troublesome and expensive for the parties in possession.

I can quite understand the reason, but as a matter of fact the very candid, perhaps unconscious, confession that those in possession did not want a swarm of wasps round them, shows exactly where the evil lies. At present the expenses are an absolute barrier except to the very longest purses. If the expenses were reduced to reasonable amounts, one of these defences of monopolists would be removed, and, therefore, they are by no means anxious for a change.

Personally I regard the objection as about the strongest argument in support of reform, and I would have enlarged upon it, but that I have been more concerned with the figures than with the arguments.

There is just one more point I wish to mention, and that is the form of the new Tribunal. In Scotland any members of either House of Parliament can act, if available, and in addition there is a panel of suitable persons, from whom in the event of necessity a selection for a committee of inquiry can be formed.

Difficulties were anticipated in Scotland on this question of the Panel, and they may perhaps be anticipated here, but having regard to the frequent expressions of opinion from men of all parties in Ireland that reform is necessary, we may hope that a panel formed on the Scottish lines will be accepted. There are excellent men of business on all sides. For instance, the Chairman of County Councils, ex-Foreman of Grand Juries, members of the Chambers of Commerce, and ex-members of Parliament. The only necessity would be that the Committee should be essentially non-political. We have a happy example in the composition of the new Agricultural Department.

I have now come to the end of my remarks. I have avoided as much as I could any strong language, and omitted controversial points. I consider that all parties honestly desire the good of Ireland, though perhaps they may differ as to their choice of means. I think also that the existing mode of conducting Private Bill Legislation, notwithstanding the excellence of the Tribunal, is prohibitive owing to the expense which accompanies it. I see every reason why men of all political parties should unite in securing the removal of this objection, and I feel convinced that if the Irish members, both Lords and Commons, will for once unite in pressing for this improvement, it will be secured, to the great advantage of the country, while the various parties having once experienced the good result of united action, may perhaps be more ready in future to act together for the welfare of the country.

4.—*The Progress of Sanitary Science in Belfast.*

BY COUNCILLOR HENRY O'NEILL, M.D., J.P., OF BELFAST.

[Read Friday, 22nd February, 1901.]

BELFAST is a city of 359,000 inhabitants, situated on the river Lagan, where that river flows into Belfast Lough. The name was originally Balfeirste, derived from Beal (a mouth), and the plural of Fearsat (a ford). It was so called from three fords which crossed the Lagan here. The earliest mention of the place is in the "Annals of the Four Masters" in the year 665 A.D. (Annals of Ulster, 667), when it appears under the simple designation of the Ford (Fearsat), and as the scene of a battle between the Ulidenns and Picts. It was