

THE LIMERICK PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

NOTES CONTRIBUTED BY J. G. BARRY, M.R.S.A.I., IN REPLY TO A
QUERY IN THE LAST JOURNAL.

At a public meeting held in this city on the 9th April, 1840, it was resolved to form a society, to be called "The Limerick Philosophical and Literary Society," for the cultivation of the arts and sciences by courses of lectures in Natural Philosophy, Mechanics, Agricultural Chemistry, Botany, etc., and the establishment of a Public Library and Museum. This Society started well, and eminent men were employed to lecture on the above subjects. The nucleus of a library and museum was formed, but it was found that the utility of the Society was greatly circumscribed by the want of a suitable building. Consequently, at a meeting of the Society held on the 17th May, 1842, it was resolved that funds should be raised by the issue of £5 debentures for building purposes. The sum of £1,600 was immediately subscribed, and a plot of ground at the top of Glentworth Street was taken on a long lease from the Earl of Limerick, at a ground rent of £35 a year. Mr. W. Owens, C.E., was employed to make the necessary plans, and Mr. Duggan was employed as contractor to carry out the works for a sum of £2,000. The new building was to be vested in the following gentlemen as Trustees for the Society:—Messrs. Francis Spaight, Michael Furnell, James Seymour, James Harvey, and George Westropp. At this time Sir Aubrey de Vere, Baronet, was President of the Society, and the following were the Vice-Presidents:—Sir Lucius O'Brien, Bart., Sir R. Franklin, Messrs. William Monsell, Vere de Vere, William S. O'Brien, M.P., and Dr. Wilkinson. Mr. Thomas Fitt and Dr. Gore were Secretaries.

The Corporation, on being approached, made an annual grant of £120. The new buildings (now Havergal Hall) were sufficiently advanced in 1843 for occupation by the Society. A Public Library and Museum were at once opened. Several interesting re-unions took place during this year and the following, including bazaars, concerts, and public

entertainments. Eminent men lectured, and classes were formed ; but, unfortunately, the Society got into financial difficulties, as the cost of the buildings far exceeded the estimates, and proceedings were instituted by the contractor. The building had to be mortgaged, and in 1845 the Society collapsed. Most of the books and the contents of the Museum were transferred to the Limerick Institution and to Barrington's Hospital.

In 1847 a new Literary Society was started under the title of "The Limerick Society for the promotion of Literary, Scientific, and Industrial Education." At a meeting of this Society held on the 28th July, 1847, Robert O'Brien, Esq., in the chair, the following resolution was adopted :—"That it is highly desirable that the house occupied by the late Philosophical Society should be permanently secured for the purposes of this Society, containing as it does a large lecture room, laboratory, magnificent rooms for a museum and a library, and being in every way adapted for the purposes proposed ; that the following gentlemen be Trustees for taking over an assignment of the lease :— Robert O'Brien, Martin Honan, Pierce Shannon, William J. Geary, M.D., and William Griffin, M.D. ; that William Monsell, Esq., M.P., be President, and Viscount Adare and William Smith O'Brien, Esq., M.P., be Vice-Presidents, and Thomas Kane, Esq., M.D., Hon. Secretary ; and that a Council of fifteen be elected annually by ballot."

In February and March, 1848, Professor Davy gave a course of lectures on Experimental Chemistry, which were followed during the Spring by other lectures on scientific subjects. During the Summer the Library and Museum were opened to the public. The Council offered a silver medal and a purse of £5 for the best course of lectures during the next Winter. The following circular was published and sent to the leading residents in the city and adjoining counties :—

SIR,

I am directed by the General Committee of the "Limerick Society," whose Rooms are now open, to inform you that the transfer of the Buildings in Glentworth-street, called the "Philosophical Rooms," has been duly effected and possession given to their Trustees. The Council have only awaited this essential arrangement, and the Grant from the Corporation, to claim the support of their fellow Citizens, and of the Nobility and Gentry in the adjoining counties, for an Institution which they confidently hope will prove advantageous to every class in the Community ; by developing the intellectual capabilities and industrial resources of the Country, as well as by the promotion of the higher branches of Scientific Education.

It is intended, by the Society, to establish a Museum. For this purpose a very valuable collection has been handed over to them. The services of Lecturers will be secured, on Natural Philosophy, Mechanics, Agricultural Chemistry, &c.; and also of Lecturers from the Dublin Society, each Winter Session, on some useful and interesting Branch of Science. It will, also, be an object with the Limerick Society to afford opportunities to as many of their Fellow Citizens as may be able or willing to give Lectures on subjects with which they may be most familiar, and in every possible way to create a taste for Science, Literature, and Arts, and to promote the Manufactures and the Trade of Limerick.

The Society are not without hope, too, that they may be enabled to have an Annual Exhibition of Articles of Irish Manufacture, and of Paintings, which latter, we have reason to believe, the surrounding Gentry will encourage by loans of Pictures for such occasions. Finally, it may be mentioned that there is the strongest reason to assume that an Agricultural Society for this district will be established in connection with the Limerick Society.

The Committee, believing the objects of the Society may be best attained through the following means, have appointed Sub-Committees for each of the following purposes.

- 1.—The formation of a Public Library, specially including Books on Ireland, Books of general reference, Periodicals, containing new discoveries in Science, Mechanics, Agriculture, &c.
- 2.—The formation of a Museum, containing specimens in Natural History, Irish Antiquities, &c., Models of Machinery, and Mechanics.
- 3.—The delivery of Lectures at stated periods, the reading of Essays, and discussions of a literary character.
- 4.—The exhibition of Pictures and other Works of Art, and the collection of Casts from the Antique.
- 5.—The exhibition of Manufactures, with a view of encouraging those that exist and the planting of new ones.
- 6.—The exhibition of Agricultural and Floricultural Produce, in connection with such Societies.

Donations of Books, Specimens, Models, or other objects of scientific interest, are earnestly requested; all of which shall be deemed the Donor's property; to secure which the Donor's name *shall, in every instance*, be attached to the Gift.

Persons wishing to join the Society are requested to give their name and subscription to Dr. Kane, Treasurer, or the Secretaries, Dr. D. Griffin or Dr. Kidd.

President:—WILLIAM MONSELL, Esq., M.P.

Treasurer:—THOMAS KANE, M.D.

Honorary Secretaries:—DANIEL GRIFFIN, M.D., CHARLES KIDD, M.D.

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In the month of October an interesting course of lectures on Botany was given by Dr. Harvey. Unfortunately, before the end of the year the Society had to cope with financial troubles, as it was ascertained that the transfer of the building and its contents to the new Trustees transferred also the liabilities of the old Society. Proceedings were taken for arrears of rent and debts incurred by the Philosophical Society. In the year 1849 the end came. The Corporation withdrew the annual grant of £120, and Mr. Spaight, the mortgagee, demanded possession of the building. An effort was made to form a junction with the body known as the "Limerick Institution," but this did not succeed, and at a special meeting of the Council a Committee was formed with power to negotiate with Mr. Spaight, and on his paying their liabilities, amounting to £125, to hand him over possession of the building. The Society came to an end on Mr. Spaight getting up the premises, then and for many years after known as the "Philosophical Buildings." The Library, I believe, was transferred to the "Limerick Institution," and the contents of the Museum to Barrington's Hospital.
