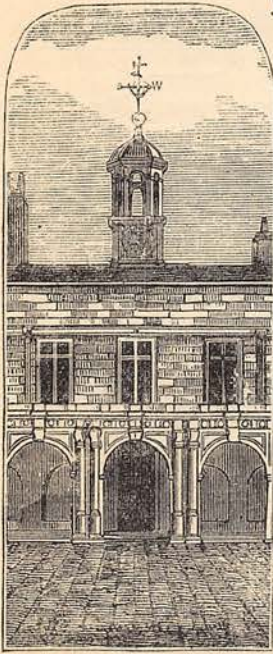


## OUR LEARNED SOCIETIES.

BY A FELLOW OF THE ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY.



COURT OF OLD SOMERSET HOUSE.

WHERE are few persons of the present day who have not some acquaintance with the so-called "Learned Societies," but comparatively few have any very definite idea as to their origin and constitution. Seldom, indeed, is a book now published to the name of the author of which on the title-page some enigmatical letters are not attached, presumably to show that he is a man of some importance in science or in literature, though as a matter of fact there is small honour attaching to membership of many of the numerous associations which have at different times been formed for the promotion of literature, science, and art. Just as the names of these societies are legion, so are their constitution and objects multifarious; but they may nevertheless be divided into two chief groups—the chartered and unchartered societies. The latter are of course far more numerous than the former; there is indeed hardly a town without its "Naturalist's Club" or "Antiquarian and Field Club," or some such association for the promotion of local inquiry, and the encouragement of learning of one kind or another. The chartered societies, on the other hand, are confined almost entirely to the Metropolitan Cities of London, Edinburgh, and Dublin, and are comparatively few in number.

Many of these societies have received most important concessions from various statesmen, who have been applied to in their behalf, and at Burlington House are gathered together the oldest and most distinguished of the societies, for whom accommodation is provided by the country, in return for the benefit conferred upon the community by the scientific labours of their Fellows. Close to the arched entrance from Piccadilly, and next door to the Post-Office, is the Linnean Society, next to which is the Royal Astronomical Society, followed by the Society of Antiquaries. Opposite to this, on the other or east side of the quadrangle, are the rooms of the Royal Society, to which those of the Geological Society are immediately adjoining, the Chemical Society closing the list, and occupying a small corner opposite the Linnean, and having its doors within the entrance

archway. Though the other societies of the metropolis are not lodged in sumptuous apartments at the expense of an appreciative country, one at least—the Zoological Society—is materially indebted to direct national support: it holds a large tract of land in the heart of London at a merely nominal rental, for the purpose of accommodating a large and scientific collection of animals, though probably few of the numerous visitors to the Zoological Gardens ever troubled themselves to think how these gardens came to occupy the position they do, or to whose enterprise and knowledge they owe their existence.

Standing first on the list of the Learned Societies of this country is the Royal Society—pre-eminent alike from its antiquity and from its standing amongst its fellow-institutions. Instituted in 1660, the Royal Society received its first charter in 1662, which was found to be in some degree defective. A second charter was obtained to remedy these defects in 1663, while a third charter was granted to it in 1669. King Charles II. appears, indeed, to have taken no little interest in the early proceedings of the society of which he was the nominal founder, and Evelyn records (21st August, 1662) that he "gave us the armes of England to be borne in a canton in our armes, and sent us a mace of silver gilt of the same fashion and bigness as those carried before his Majesty, to be borne before our President on meeting daies." In 1667 Dr. Sprat, afterwards Bishop of Rochester, published his "elegant History of the Royal Society," as it is called by Evelyn; from which it would appear that even at that early period of its existence there were objections raised amongst "outsiders" to its proceedings, which, says the learned divine, "did make it necessary for me to write of it, not altogether in the way of plain history, but sometimes of an apology." The early promoters appear, indeed, to have anticipated some such troubles as in the early part of the present century called forth Dr. Granville's "History of the Royal Society," which work, unlike Dr. Sprat's, was certainly not written even "sometimes in the way of an apology." At the time of Dr. Sprat's History, and for many years after, the society held a college and lands at Chelsea, which had been granted to them by the Crown. In 1682, however, they sold this property, and eventually removed to apartments in Crane Court, in Fleet Street, where they remained until 1782. In that year the Royal Society removed to apartments in Somerset House; thence some years later they migrated to old Burlington House, and about six years ago finally took possession of the splendid suite of apartments which they now occupy.

The Royal Society is now, perhaps, the only English society the Fellowship of which can generally be taken by itself as evidence of scientific eminence, and the letters F.R.S. after an author's name may almost always be accepted as proof of ability in some branch of science. Candidates for admission to the Royal Society must be

proposed by six Fellows, of whom three at least must certify to his fitness for the honour from their own personal knowledge. The names of all candidates proposed subsequently to the first meeting in March of the preceding year are announced by the Secretary at the first meeting of March of the current year, from a list arranged in alphabetical order.

Subsequently the Council select by ballot not more than, but practically always fifteen from the number of candidates. The names thus selected by the Council are read at the ordinary meeting in May, after which a circular letter is sent to every Fellow of

been abolished, and the subscription reduced to three guineas—a sum within the means of even the poorest of our scientific men.

As its full title implies, the Royal Society was founded for the encouragement of the scientific investigation of every branch of natural knowledge, and accordingly, in the pages of its "Philosophical Transactions" and "Proceedings," elaborate treatises may be found on almost every subject connected with natural philosophy. Physics in all its many branches, Zoology, Botany, Astronomy, Geology, Mineralogy, Chemistry, Physiology, Surgery, and Medicine, all



BURLINGTON HOUSE.

the society, naming the day and hour of the next election, and enclosing an alphabetical list of the selected candidates, leaving space for such alterations in the names as any Fellow may determine to make. The rejection, however, of any candidate selected by the Council is of the rarest occurrence, and indeed is attended with so much difficulty, and requires so much previous organisation, as to be almost impossible. The annual election of Fellows is always fixed for the first Thursday in June. Formerly the subscriptions to the Royal Society were so high that the expense stood in the way of many men of moderate means becoming Fellows, the composition-fee for life-membership having been as much as sixty guineas; but during the last few years the privilege of compounding has been withdrawn, while the entrance-fee has

find a place in these records of the labours of the English scientific world, which form a collection of the highest value.

Occupying a position and covering a field almost identical with the Royal Society of London is the Royal Society of Edinburgh, which was established under the name of the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh in 1739, and received its first charter of incorporation in 1783. In the early days of its existence this society was, like so many of the Continental societies at present, divided into two sections—the Physical and the Literary; but it was found that the literary communications were so few in number that the division was abandoned, and the society is now a purely scientific one. The Fellows are distinguished by the letters F.R.S.E. (or Ed.).

As in England and Scotland the two Royal Societies of London and Edinburgh occupy the leading place, so we find established in Dublin the Royal Irish Academy, which was instituted in 1785, and received its charter of incorporation in January of the following year. The scope of this society is wider than that of either of the societies of London or Edinburgh already referred to, and embraces "the study of Science, Polite Literature, and Antiquities," its Council of twenty-one members being equally divided into three committees, each of which has charge of one of these departments. The members use the initials M.R.I.A.

While these societies occupy themselves in the wide field of general philosophy, it was found that students of particular branches of science or art required societies to which they could communicate papers exclusively on their special subjects, and hence arose innumerable "Departmental Societies," as they have been called, each of which occupies itself solely with its own branch of research. Oldest amongst these societies is the Society of Antiquaries, the idea of which is said to have originated with Archbishop Parker, in 1572, and whose earlier meetings were held at the house of Sir Robert Cotton. This society was dissolved by King James I., who appears to have regarded its meetings as political; but, notwithstanding this dissolution, it does not appear to have become altogether extinct. From the year 1707, however, its public revival is dated, and from that to the present time its meetings have been held without interruption, the number of its members being limited in 1717 to a hundred. It was not, however, until 1751 that the society received its charter of incorporation, in which King George II. declared himself its "Founder and Patron," and gave it the name of the "Society of Antiquaries of London." In 1780 King George III. granted to the society the apartments they formerly held in Somerset House, whence they migrated to their present abode in Burlington House some six years ago. As its name implies, the objects of the society are "the study of antiquity, and the history of former times," though formerly these were limited to the elucidation of the history of Great Britain previous to the reign of King James I. Its members are known by the initials F.S.A.

Of the purely Scientific Societies the earliest was the Linnean Society, which was founded in 1788, and received its charter of incorporation in 1802. It was instituted for the "cultivation of natural history in all its branches, and more especially of the natural history of Great Britain and Ireland." It took its name from the famous Swedish naturalist, Carl von Linnæus, more generally known under the name of Linnæus, and its labours have been devoted to the study of zoology and botany, its published papers on these subjects being of the greatest value. The initials used by the Fellows are F.L.S.

Perhaps next in importance to the Linnean is the Geological Society of London, which was founded in the year 1807, and chartered in 1826. Its object is "the investigation of the mineral structure of the

earth;" but the pages of its "Transactions" and "Proceedings" and "Quarterly Journal" contain papers not only on the mineral structure of the earth, but also on the organic remains occurring in the various strata of the earth—a branch of study usually denominated paleontology, and coming as much within the domain of the zoologist and botanist as of the geologist. Its Fellows use the initials F.G.S.

The Royal Astronomical Society was founded, as is shown by its name, for "the encouragement and promotion of astronomy;" its foundation dating from the year 1820, though it did not receive its charter of incorporation until 1831. The initials of fellowship are F.R.A.S.

Another of the more important of the London societies, the Chemical Society, was founded in 1841, for the promotion of chemistry and the allied branches of science, its Fellows being known by the initials F.C.S.

The Royal Microscopical Society was instituted in 1839, for the promotion and diffusion of improvements in optical and mechanical construction; for the communication and discussion of observations and discoveries; for the exhibition of new or interesting microscopical objects and preparations: for submitting difficult and obscure microscopical phenomena to the test of various instruments; and for the establishment of a library of standard microscopical works. With such a programme there is hardly a single branch of science (unless it be astronomy) with which some of the members of the Microscopical Society are not occupied; and thus, indeed, it is with nearly all the important societies—their studies, though divided, are yet so dependent one upon another that without the means of co-operation and communication afforded by the meetings of the different societies the progress of science would be slow indeed compared with what it is at present in this country.

Another society highly important as regards its labours and scientific publications is the Zoological Society, which originated in a "Zoological Club" of the Fellows of the Linnean Society. Its Fellows use the letters F.Z.S. And perhaps on a par with the Zoological is the Royal Geographical Society, whose labours and publications are familiar to all. Its fellowship is indicated by the initials F.R.G.S.

For the "advancement of literature" the Royal Society of Literature of the United Kingdom was founded in 1823, and received its royal charter of incorporation in 1826. This society has done an immense amount of the most useful work, particularly with reference to Egyptian, Latin, and Greek literature, whilst its "Biographia Britannica Literaria" deserves special mention. Its members are known by the initials F.R.S.L., or more correctly, M.R.S.L.

The Statistical Society of London, founded in 1834, for the purpose of procuring "exact information on subjects on which only general ideas are entertained," is another highly useful society, the Fellows of which are known by the letters F.S.S.

The Royal Historical Society, too, has already done

good work in historical research, some of the papers published in its "Transactions" being of high value. After passing through a time of trouble it is now fairly established, and will probably prove itself deserving of the support it receives from the public. Its Fellows are known by the initials F.R.Hist.Soc.

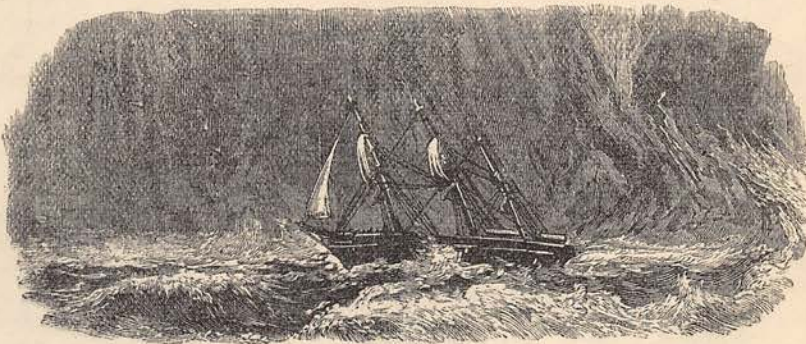
For the study of botany there are the Royal Horticultural, the Royal Botanic, and the Botanical Societies in London, as well as the Botanical Society in Edinburgh, but none of these hold so high a position as the Linnean, Geological, or others of the older scientific bodies, probably owing to the fact that they do not issue any important volumes of transactions.

While the study of insects is so universal, at least amongst the younger members of the present generation, it is curious to find but one important society devoting itself to this branch of science in London—the Entomological Society. It was founded in 1833, and has published a large number of papers on its special subject, many of them of great interest.

The mode of election of Fellows of the Royal Society has already been explained, but the election of members of the lesser societies is far from being so complicated. The candidate must be proposed and seconded by Fellows to whom he is personally known, and other Fellows support the application. He is proposed usually at one meeting, announced for

election at the next, and his name submitted for ballot at the third. The number of black balls rejecting a candidate varies considerably, but about two-thirds of those voting being in favour of election usually carry it. In the Royal Historical, and perhaps in some other societies, the election is in the hands of the Council alone, but it generally rests with the members present at general meetings.

It will be seen that every branch of science, as well as, in a lesser degree, both arts and belles-lettres, is represented in England by an association formed specially for the promotion of its study, and that thus every worker may in his own field of labour associate himself with others working in the same cause, and thus at once communicate the results of his own investigations to those most interested in them, and himself obtain the earliest intelligence of the investigations of others. And from this point of view alone should most of these societies be regarded, and not as giving a scientific status to its Fellows, though one or two, such as the "Linnean" and the "Antiquaries," are partial exceptions to this rule, while the Royal Society may fairly be regarded as the "Upper House," into which it is impossible to gain access until hard and intelligent labours in the cause of science have gained for the candidate a reputation for ability of the highest order.



## THE SAILOR BOY'S RETURN.

WHO is she with the grief-blanch'd tresses  
Wandering so oft by the murmuring sea?  
Her cheeks are pale, but her glance expresses  
A hope as constant as hope can be.  
When fiercest tempests sweep o'er the ocean,  
Wringing her hands while the breakers roar—  
In calm and storm with such fond devotion  
Watching the ship till it reach the shore.

Who is she, that no loving fingers  
Have bound her tangle of silvery hair?  
Some lonely mother, perhaps, who lingers,  
Awaiting the child of her love and care;  
For seeing white sails in the distance gleaming,  
Her white cheeks glow, and she shrieks with joy—  
"He comes! he comes! with his blue eyes beaming,  
And bright locks dancing—my darling boy!

"For very gladness the waves are leaping,  
The sun is rising to show me now  
How fair he looks with the salt breeze sweeping  
The yellow locks from his radiant brow—  
Ah, blessed sun, to these dim eyes showing  
The brightest form on that crowded deck!  
Ah, throbbing heart, that beats proudly, knowing  
Whose picture hangs round his sun-browned neck!

"How long his voyage, how lone, how dreary,  
And how my darling must yearn for rest!  
So let me haste, for my boy is weary,  
And fold him close to my longing breast—  
I shall not fear when the nights grow colder,  
Though winter tempests blow wild and bleak,  
For I shall lean on his strong young shoulder,  
And feel his breath on my faded cheek.