

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 30, 1873

OUR NATIONAL MUSEUMS

WE may congratulate ourselves that the Museum question is now being taken up with vigour. Not only must the Royal Commission on Science include it among their inquiries, but the Society of Arts is directing public attention to it.

This is the more opportune, as the intention of the Government to transfer to irresponsible trustees the only museums under the direction of a Minister of State has recently been declared, and needs only to be declared to be condemned on all hands.

We now let the following documents speak for themselves. Next week we shall return to the subject:—

I.

Memorial to the Right Honourable W. E. Gladstone, M.P.

"1. We, the undersigned members of the Council and Members of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce, request the attention of Her Majesty's Government to the remarkable proof of the public desire for instruction and pure enjoyment afforded by the examination of works of Art and Science, which has been shown by the opening of the Bethnal Green Museum.

"2. This Museum, established in one of the poorest and busiest districts in London, where men, women, and children are most laboriously employed, has been frequented during three months by more than 700,000 visitors,* a number which probably exceeds that of the visitors to all the other metropolitan museums and galleries during the same period.

"3. The undersigned submit that this museum could never have come into useful existence, and have been instrumental in conferring great benefits on the people, without the aid of Parliament; and they desire to press this fact upon the consideration of Her Majesty's Government, with the hope that they will submit to Parliament the policy so essentially national of voting increased means to facilitate the establishment of museums, libraries, and galleries of Science and Art in large centres of population, wherever such localities are willing to bear their share in the cost."

Appended to this are the signatures of 250 Peers, Members of Parliament, and other well-known and distinguished men.

II.

CORRESPONDENCE RELATING TO THE ABOVE MEMORIAL.

"The Secretary of the Society of Arts to the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone, M.P.

"July 3, 1873.

"SIR,—A memorial relative to the beneficial action of the Bethnal Green Museum, has been prepared by the Society of Arts for presentation to you.

"It has been signed by one hundred and fifty members of the Council and of the Society, of whom twenty-two are peers, and sixty-three are members of the House of Commons. In addition to the above, thirty-seven peers and sixty-three members of the House of Commons, not members of the Society, have expressed their concurrence in the object of the memorial.

"I am directed to request that you will have the kindness to receive a deputation to present the memorial, and to name a day for doing so, giving, if possible, at least a week's notice."

* "The numbers up to the end of September were upwards of one million and a half of people; to 31st December, 1872, only six months and a half, they amounted to 901,464, whilst the number of the general visitors to the British Museum for the whole year 1872 were only 424,068.—October 1873.

"Mr. Gurdon to the Secretary of the Society of Arts.

"July 5, 1873.

"SIR—Mr. Gladstone desires me to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 3rd inst., requesting him to receive a deputation to present the memorial from the Society of Arts, on the subject of the museum at Bethnal Green. I am directed to express Mr. Gladstone's sincere regret that the pressure of his duties, as First Lord of the Treasury, renders it absolutely necessary that he should confine his attention to those matters which fall directly within his province; and he therefore trusts that those on whose behalf you have written will kindly excuse him if he asks them to address themselves to the Privy Council Office."

"The Secretary of the Society of Arts to Mr. Gurdon.

"SIR,—I have brought before the Council your letter of the 5th July, in reply to mine of the 3rd July, asking Mr. Gladstone to receive a deputation to present a memorial from this Society on the subject of the Bethnal Green Museum. The Council observe that you express Mr. Gladstone's regret that the pressure of his duties as First Lord of the Treasury renders it absolutely necessary that he should confine his attention to those matters which fall directly under his province, and his trust that those on whose behalf the reception of a deputation was sought will kindly excuse him if he asks them to address themselves to the Privy Council Office.

I am directed, in reply, to point out that the memorial, having relation to a subject of vast importance to the education, general cultivation, and social welfare of the people, did appear to the Council to bring the subject strictly within the consideration of the Prime Minister, rather than of a department of the Government. Moreover, it did appear to the Council that the deep interest which the subject excites is manifested by the unusual character of the signatures, being those of 60 peers and 130 members of the House of Commons attached to the memorial, and justified the Council in asking for the special attention of Mr. Gladstone himself.

"Under these circumstances, the Council submit their conviction that the subject involves considerations of principle and policy worthy the attention of the Prime Minister of this country, and too wide in its political and fiscal considerations to be dealt with effectually by any single department of the Government.

"They, therefore, respectfully decline to adopt Mr. Gladstone's suggestion that they should address themselves to the Privy Council Office."

"Mr. Gurdon to the Secretary of the Society of Arts.

"SIR,—I am directed by Mr. Gladstone to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 18th inst., and to request that you will be kind enough to acquaint the Council of the Society of Arts that the intention of the reply to your communication of July 3 was to point out that, in regard to a subject of the nature of that which you brought before him (viz. the beneficial action of the Bethnal Green Museum), which falls properly within the province of a department of the State appointed to deal with it, the First Lord of the Treasury could not take the initiative out of the hands of that Department.

"This Mr. Gladstone would be doing were he to receive the proposed deputation; and he would be acting contrary to the rules of administration which are necessary for the conduct of public business.

"If, however, the Society of Arts think fit to favour him with a written communication, Mr. Gladstone will himself correspond with the proper department concerning it."

"The Secretary of the Society of Arts to the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone, M.P.

"SIR,—The Council of the Society of Arts have

directed me to reply to Mr. Gurdon's letter of July 22, in which he states that, 'if the Society of Arts think fit to place before you a written communication, you would yourself correspond with the proper department concerning it.'

"The deputation which desired to have the honour of waiting on you, and explaining in detail the objects of the memorial, would have stated that, in their view, the experiment of the Bethnal Green Museum is suggestive of the following points:—

"1. That a general popular desire exists for such museums, and that it would be good national policy for the Government to encourage the establishment of them.

"2. That like primary elementary schools, it would be impossible that such museums could, without State aid and inspection, become part of a national system, aiding technical instruction and secondary education.

"3. That this question, unfettered by any denominational difficulties, is quite ripe for solution; that the necessary expenditure for aiding museums of science and art would be advantageous from every point of view, even remunerative as respects commerce; and, further, would be auxiliary in promoting morality and social good order.

"4. That such museums are absolutely necessary to the industrial progress of the country, which is behind other countries already in the possession of them.

"5. That the time has come when it is necessary that all public museums and galleries of works of science and art receiving Parliamentary aid, should be brought under an intelligible system of administration, controlled by a responsible Minister of State, so as to render them auxiliary to the development of local museums and galleries.

"The Council submit that these are subjects not only of general policy, but involve some new principles of administration, large financial considerations, the reform of old institutions, &c., which it is the province of the general Government, and not of any single department, to deal with. The Council especially desired that the answer they might receive should come direct from yourself as Prime Minister. They could not hide from themselves the knowledge they possessed of the several departmental difficulties which attended the opening of the Bethnal Green Museum, and that they had been made cognizant, through Parliamentary returns and the revised estimates for 1871-2, of the opposition which the Treasury, as lately administered, had persistently offered to carry into effect the decisions made by Her Majesty's Government in 1866, for conducting the Bethnal Green Museum.

"The Council respectfully request you to have the kindness to bring this memorial before Her Majesty's Government. They hope it will meet with favourable consideration, and lead to decisive action; and they will feel obliged by receiving an answer upon it at as early a period as convenient."

"Mr. Gurdon to the Secretary of the Society of Arts.

"SIR—Mr. Gladstone desires me to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of October 6th, the contents of which he will not fail to make known to his colleagues."

III.

Resolutions of the Council of the Society of Arts passed at their last Meeting:—

"1. That the undermentioned persons be invited to serve on a Standing Committee for the purpose of bringing under parliamentary responsibility the National Museums and Galleries, so as to extend their benefits to Local Museums, and to make them bear on public Education. The following are the several objects in view for effecting this purpose:—

"2. All Museums and Galleries supported or subsidised by Parliament to be made conducive to the advancement

of Education and Technical Instruction to the fullest extent, and be made to extend their advantages to the promotion of original investigations and works in Science and Art.

"3. To extend the benefits of National Museums and Galleries to Local Museums of Science and Art which may desire to be in connection, and to assist them with loans of objects.

"4. To induce Parliament to grant sufficient funds to enable such objects to be systematically collected, especially in view of making such loans.

"5. For carrying out these objects most efficiently, to cause all National Museums and Galleries to be placed under the authority of a Minister of the Crown, being a member of the Cabinet, with direct responsibility to Parliament; thereby rendering unnecessary, for the purpose of executive administration, all unpaid and irresponsible trustees, except those who are trustees under bequests or deeds, who might continue to have the full powers of their trusts, but should not be charged with the expenditure of Parliamentary votes.

"6. To enter into correspondence with all existing Local Museums and the numerous Schools of Science and Art, including Music, now formed throughout the United Kingdom, and to publish suggestions for the establishment of Local Museums.

"7. Also, to cause the Public Libraries and Museums Act (18 and 19 Vic. c. lxx.) to be enlarged, in order to give local authorities increased powers of acting.

"Earl of Carnarvon.
Earl Russell.
Lord Elcho, M.P.
Lord George Hamilton, M.P.
Lord Houghton.
Lord Lyttelton.
Sir T. Acland, Bart, M.P.
Sir Antonio Brady.
Sir John Lubbock, Bart, M.P.
Right Hon. Sir Stafford Northcote, Bart., C.B., M.P.
Sir Wm. Thomson, F.R.S.
Sir S. Waterlow, Bart., Lord Mayor of London.
Sir Joseph Whitworth, Bart.
Right Hon. Sir John Pakington, Bart., M.P.
Right Hon. W. J. Henley, M.P.
Right Hon. Cowper Temple, M.P.
The Hon. Mr. Justice Grove.
Thomas Ashton, (Manchester).
E. A. Bowring, M.P.
Dr. Carpenter, F.R.S.
Henry Cole, C.B.
Montague Corry,
W. De La Rue, F.R.S.
E. B. Eastwick, M.P.
Gabriel Goldney, M.P.
Principal Greenwood (of Owens Coll., Manchester).
John Henderson, M.P.

Dr. Hooker, F.R.S.
C. Wren Hoskyns, M.P.
James Howard, M.P.
Prof. Huxley, F.R.S.
U. J. Kay-Shuttleworth, M.P.
George Melly, M.P.
S. Morley, M.P.
Dr. Mouat.
A. J. Mundella, M.P.
Prof. Roscoe, F.R.S. (of Owens College, Manchester).
Lyon Playfair, C.B., M.P.
Hodgson Pratt.
Prof. Ramsay, F.R.S.
C. Seely, jun. M.P.
Col. Strange, F.R.S.
E. Thomas, F.R.S. (Atheneum Club).
George Trevelyan, M.P.
Thomas Twining.
Prof. Tyndall, F.R.S.
G. W. Ward (Nottingham).
Prof. Williamson, F.R.S.
Also the Heads of the City Companies for the time being.
Also the Chairmen of Local Committees of Schools of Science and Art, and of Local Museums Committees.
Also the members of the Legislature who signed the Bethnal Green Memorial.

(By order) "P. LE NEVE FOSTER,
Secretary."

SPENCER'S DESCRIPTIVE SOCIOLOGY

Descriptive Sociology; or, Groups of Sociological Facts.
Classified and arranged by Herbert Spencer. No. I.
—English; compiled and abstracted by James Collier.
(London: Williams & Norgate.)

NOT long since, an announcement appeared in NATURE of Mr. Herbert Spencer's plan of publishing, not a complete and finished treatise on Socio-