

THURSDAY, MARCH 12, 1874

THE LINNEAN SOCIETY

ON Thursday last the Fellows of the Linnean Society met together in a general meeting, which had been specially convened to consider the disputes which have almost paralysed its work for the past two months. One painful episode which arose out of these disputes has already been alluded to in these columns. This alone gave importance to matters which otherwise it would have been difficult to discuss with patience. But so serious a crisis as the resignation of a president so distinguished as Mr. Bentham brought together a larger meeting of the Fellows than had probably ever assembled together before in the history of the Society, and produced the very decided feeling that at least the prospect of a settlement must be reached before the meeting dispersed.

The result was, on the whole, a satisfactory one. After a debate which lasted for about two hours, and in which a considerable number of Fellows took part, a motion proposed by Major-General Strachey was finally carried with only three dissentients, to the effect that the Council possessed the confidence of the Fellows, and that the question of the disputed bye-laws should be referred to some authoritative legal adjudicator, whose decision should be regarded as final.

Those who have had no opportunity of taking any part in the proceedings will naturally wonder what can have been the nature of the portentous questions which have so violently disturbed so grave and staid a body as the Linnean Society. So far as we can arrive at a clear comprehension of the facts, they may be stated as follows:—

At the commencement of the present year the charter and bye-laws were out of print, and the Council having determined to reprint them, before doing so made and submitted to the Fellows a number of amendments in them which appeared to be advisable. It is necessary to explain that, by the constitution of the Society the Council alone has the power to legislate, and the general body of Fellows is only able to reject or ratify what the Council has done. At the meeting on January 15, when the amendments in due course came before the Fellows, the President was requested to put them to the vote *seriatim*, and not *en masse*. This was *primâ facie* a reasonable request, and might, perhaps, have been acceded to without any great inconvenience. The President, however, ruled against it, and his ruling may be defended on two grounds. In the first place the custom of the Society on other occasions appears to have been in accordance with it, and as a general principle it seems obvious that it would be inconvenient for the Fellows to modify in detail a scheme which the Council had presented to them as a whole. In the second place, although the charter is a most difficult instrument for a layman to interpret, it is held by those who ought to be able to construe it, to require that the Council's propositions should be accepted or rejected in their entirety and without modification. The amendments were accordingly put to the meeting *en masse*, and were carried by the necessary majority of two-thirds. The minority

declared themselves much aggrieved by the course that had been taken. It is not easy, however, to appreciate their objection; for it is clear that to put all the amendments *en masse* cannot facilitate their acceptance, but that, on the contrary, it brings to bear collectively upon the whole scheme all the objections which might be raised separately to different parts of it.

At the meeting in which the amendments were carried, only one of them was actually objected to. The effect of this amendment was to enable the Council to pay a Fellow to assist in editing the publications. The sum proposed was not large, and it seems very desirable that the work should be paid for, and not voluntary. It is quite obvious that in the former case the secretaries would have no scruple in criticising, if necessary, what was done, which might easily seem an ungracious proceeding in the case of unpaid labour.

Subsequently, however, to the meeting, the minority discovered that another amendment, removing the appointment of the Librarian from the general suffrages of the Fellows to the Council, was repugnant to the provisions of the charter. A competent legal authority has declared that this is not the case; nevertheless, certain of the Fellows hold a contrary opinion, and regard the change as a derogation from their privileges.

We have already referred to what took place on February 5. Mr. Carruthers, who took the lead in the opposition, proposed to discuss the legality of the amendments, and attempted to raise this question upon the confirmation of the minutes of the meeting at which they had been carried. He and his supporters being in a majority in a very thinly-attended meeting refused to acquiesce in the ruling of the President against the regularity of this proceeding; the meeting broke up in confusion, and Mr. Bentham resigned the chair which he has occupied so long to the great advantage of the Society. The difficulties of the Society began like a slight and neglected illness which terminates fatally: before the general body of Fellows had time to even realise the nature of the dispute it had culminated in an event which it will never be possible to look back upon except with the strongest regret. It was, however, a matter for satisfaction that the Fellows assembled last Thursday were anxious to efface this from Mr. Bentham's recollection; and Mr. Carruthers, whose action was the immediate cause which led to the President's resignation, spoke with befitting dignity of the regard he felt for Mr. Bentham's services to the Society and to Science generally, and of his own extreme regret that the course he had considered himself compelled to take had led to such an untoward result.

As to the points apparently in dispute it is difficult to estimate seriously the position of the dissentients from the Council's action. It is objected that the person employed as sub-editor ought not to be a Fellow, or ought on accepting the position *ipso facto* to cease to be one. But where, it may be asked, can the Society expect to find, except in its own ranks, anyone competent for the work? and why should there be any more scruple about employing a Fellow for such a purpose than there is in employing Fellows as printers and engravers?

As to the election of a Librarian, what arrangement could be more objectionable than for the Society at large to elect to an office of this kind? How could testimonials

be properly weighed by the members generally, or the fitness of candidates in any way tested? And when it is argued that the clerk and housekeeper, as well as the Librarian, ought to be appointed by the Society also, and not by the Council, the acme of absurdity in the matter seems to have been reached.

It is quite evident, from what has been said, that the less a learned Society indulges in legislation the better. What must be called the "opposition" were anxious, at the meeting on Thursday last, for a further revision of the whole laws of the Society; fortunately, however, the common sense of the Fellows was against them. Sir John Lubbock pointed out, at the conclusion of the debate, that none of the speakers had made out even a *prima facie* case for further change. It may be hoped, therefore, that when the technical question of the legality of the amendments has been disposed of, the Society will enjoy undisturbed peace and quietness.

One practical suggestion seems to educe itself from what has been said. The only way to settle matters of dispute of this kind is to have an authoritative arbitrator. If we ever get a minister to take charge of our scientific institutions, a legal assessor might be conveniently attached to his staff to act in lieu of a Visitor to the learned Societies which now possess a quasi-official status from being housed at the public expense. If the points which the dissentients raised in the present case could have been authoritatively and impartially settled off-hand, there would have been no need for an important scientific Society to have wasted a considerable portion of its session over matters in themselves of the slenderest possible consequence, and absolutely without importance in a scientific sense.

THE MOON

The Moon Considered as a Planet, a World, and a Satellite. By James Nasmyth, C.E., and James Carpenter, F.R.A.S. With 24 illustrative plates of lunar objects, phenomena, and scenery, and numerous woodcuts. (London: Murray, 1874.)

THE illustrations to this book are so admirable, so far beyond those one generally gets of any celestial phenomenon, that one is tempted to refer to them first of all. No more truthful or striking representations of natural objects than those here presented have ever been laid before his readers by any student of Science; and I may add that, rarely if ever, have equal pains been taken to insure such truthfulness. Mr. Nasmyth, not content with the drawings he has been accumulating for many years, has first translated them into *models*, which, when placed with a strong light shining obliquely upon them, should reproduce the ever-changing lunar effects of light and shadow. Having obtained models which bore this test, he has photographed them with the light falling, now on one side, and now on the other, to represent the sunrise and sunset appearances on our satellite, as observed in the telescope. The result is perfect; far more perfect than any enlargement of photographs could possibly have been, because, by every such enlargement, a softness is brought about, whereas, the more powerful the telescope employed and the more perfect the atmospheric conditions, the more does the

unevenness and sharpness of every lunar detail come out.

But, though I have given the first place to a general reference to the illustrations, I by no means intend thereby to imply that the text is of secondary importance. In fact, the more carefully the text is read, the more obvious does it become that Mr. Nasmyth has used his drawings as a means to an end, and that he and Mr. Carpenter between them have produced a work which is not only a very beautiful and a very readable one, but one of some importance. From this point of view it is to be regretted that the book had not been published a month or two later, as then the authors might further have illustrated their subject by a reference to Mr. Mallet's most important paper on volcanic energy, which has just appeared in the "Philosophical Transactions"—a paper which supports the authors' views in many important particulars, and though it clashes with others, if we are not mistaken, a discussion of the question from the two points of view presented will ultimately enable us to carry our conclusions further than they have gone hitherto.

Again, it is not a little curious that another communication presented to the Royal Society not long ago, and

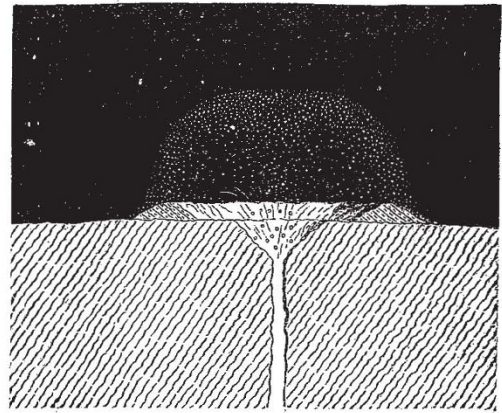


FIG. 1.—First stage of a lunar Volcano

not yet published in this country, may also throw new light upon one at least of the interesting points presented to the student of lunar physics. I refer to the working hypothesis on which I have attempted to explain the absence of metalloids from the sun's reversing layer in its bearing upon the moon's atmosphere.

Before, however, more detailed reference to these points, it is as well to state briefly, for those less conversant with lunar matters, the principal points in which Selenology differs from Geology, or rather the principal effects which have been produced on the moon in past time which differ from the effects which have been produced on our planet in past time.

First among these is undoubtedly the evidence of volcanic action on a scale far surpassing anything that we have an idea of here. Witness craters 74 miles in diameter, and if the walled plains are accepted as craters, then diameters of craters reaching 300 miles, the volcanic energy not being scattered here and there, but making up the entire surface over large areas.