

Laws

OF THE

SOCIETY

FOR

LITERARY AND SCIENTIFIC

IMPROVEMENT;

ESTABLISHED

IN BIRMINGHAM,

OCTOBER THE 19th, 1819.

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BIRMINGHAM:

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PREFACE.

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*IN presenting to the Public "the Laws and regulations of the Society for Literary and Scientific improvement," its members feel it their duty briefly to state the motives which influenced them in the formation of such an establishment, and to explain their reasons for occasionally deviating in the construction of their Laws, from the systems which are generally adopted for the governance of similar bodies.*

*The experience of almost every one who has passed the time usually devoted to education, but who still feels desirous of improvement, must have convinced him of the difficulty of regularly devoting his leisure hours to the object he has in view, from the want of constantly acting motives, and the absence of regulations which can enforce the observance of stated times. However strong the resolutions he has made, and whatever may be his conviction of the necessity of adhering to them, trivial engagements which might easily be avoided, will furnish him, from time to time, with excuses to himself for his neglect of study: thus may he spend year after year, constantly wishing for improvement, but as constantly neglecting the means of it,*

and old age may come upon him, before he has accomplished the object of his desires; then will he look back with regret on the many opportunities he has lost, and acknowledge in despair, that the time is gone by.

Under these impressions, a few individuals who are desirous of extending their Literary and Scientific Knowledge, have endeavoured to establish a Society for that purpose; convinced that by so doing, they have provided most powerful motives for mental improvement.

It has been thought highly desirable, that every member of the Society should be, as nearly as possible, upon an equality, that all may feel alike interested in the success of the whole. In order to accomplish this important object, every regular auditor is expected, according to the rules of the Society, to deliver a lecture in his turn. Thus, instead of the Society being divided into two parties, one consisting of lecturers, the other of critics, every member feels himself called upon to listen to the others with candour and attention, as he is aware, that the time will come when he shall require the same consideration from them. It will be observed also, on a perusal of the Laws, that each lecture is followed by a discussion. Thus care is insured on the part of the lecturer that he shall not attempt a subject which he has not well studied; and an opportunity is given to every member to obtain an explanation of any thing advanced, which he may not have understood, or to express his opinions on the questions that may arise,

and by these means, correct or confirm his own ideas. But the principal advantage of a discussion is, that it calls forth the individual exertion of every member, by inviting each to take a part in the general instruction, and thus affording constant inducements to private reading and study.

In a town so populous as Birmingham, and which for superiority in art is dependent on the discoveries of science, it cannot be doubted, that many individuals may be found, who are desirous of intellectual advancement. For such persons "the Society for Literary and Scientific improvement" was established; and they are respectfully and earnestly invited to lend their assistance towards the promotion of its objects. The Society cannot promise that they shall meet with any considerable talent or learning among its members; but in mixing with their equals, with young men of similar tastes and similar pursuits, they may hope to find in a generous emulation most powerful motives for application and perseverance.

The details of management of a Society like this, may, on a superficial view, appear of little importance; those, however, who have had opportunities of closer examination, will, it is presumed, agree with the members of this Institution, in considering an attention to such particulars as necessary, not only to the well being, but to the permanent existence of an association, for whatever purpose it may be formed.

*With views like these, the Society for Literary and Scientific Improvement have been anxious to establish a mode of electing the Committee, that should secure (as nearly as possible) an accurate representation of the whole body: not only because it appeared reasonable that the members would feel interested in the welfare of the Institution, in proportion as the arrangements and regulations met their own views and wishes, but because experience proves that, owing to imperfect methods of choosing those who are to direct the affairs of a Society, the whole sway sometimes gets into the hands of a small party; and is exercised, perhaps unconsciously, in a way that renders many persons indifferent, and alienates others, until all becomes listlessness, decay, and dissolution.*

*Men of worth and talent, of every denomination in religion and politics, will be welcome members of the Society; and to prevent any unpleasant collision of opinions, it has been thought advisable to exclude altogether the discussion of subjects which have reference to peculiarities in religious belief, or to the political speculations of the day: the important questions which respect the wealth of nations, however, as they have no connexion with passing politics, are considered as among the proper objects for the Society's attention.*

*Such gentlemen as may feel desirous of improving their minds by engaging in establishments of a nature similar to this, but who, on account of their residing at a distance from any large town, have not hitherto*

*had the opportunity, will, it is hoped, be induced by the regulations respecting corresponding members, to join the Society; and they may depend upon meeting with every attention, whenever the Committee shall be favoured with their communications.*

L A W S .

I. THE members of this Society shall assemble weekly, and at each meeting a lecture shall be delivered, followed by a discussion.

II. These meetings shall be holden every Friday evening—the chair to be taken at eight o'clock.

III. A quorum shall consist of at least one fourth of the members.

IV. The expences of the society shall be defrayed by a quarterly subscription of five shillings from each member, to be paid in advance, on the first night of meeting in every quarter.

V. Each member shall in his turn officiate as chairman at one of the society's meetings, and shall be considered as president of the society from the close of the last meeting.

VI. Each member will be expected to lecture in the order of the list of subscribers, the president for the night being, to be the lecturer for the following night, and to give notice of the subject he has chosen before he leaves the chair; if he does not give this notice he shall be fined five shillings, but shall not be considered as lecturer for the ensuing evening: the duty of providing business for that evening shall then devolve upon the society. Should a member fail to lecture, after having given the regular notice of his subject, he shall forfeit seven shillings, but shall not be subject to the law respecting the attendance of the lecturer.

VII. No person shall be required either to fill the office of president, or to deliver a lecture, until he shall have been a member of the society three months.

VIII. At the close of the lecture, the president shall have the privilege of addressing the meeting first; he shall then call upon each member present for his sentiments on the subject before the society, in the order of the list, beginning with the person whose name stands next to his own. No member, however, will be required to speak if it be disagreeable to him.

IX. In order to avoid as much as possible whatever may tend to disturb the harmony of the society, no subject shall be introduced which refers either to party politics, or to religious opinions.

X. At the first meeting in April, and also in October, a Committee shall be elected, which shall consist of at least one fifth of the members of the society. The mode of election shall be as follows. A ticket shall be delivered to each member present, with his own name at the head of it, immediately under which he shall write the name of the member whom he may wish to represent him in the Committee. The votes thus given shall be delivered to the president, who, after having assorted them, shall report to the meeting the number of votes given for each nominee. Every one who has five votes shall be declared a member of the committee; if there are more than five votes given to any one person, the surplus votes, (to be selected by lot) shall be returned to the electors whose names they bear, for the purpose of their making other nominations, and this process shall be repeated till no surplus votes remain, when all the inefficient votes shall be returned to the respective electors, and the same routine shall be gone through a second time, and also a third time if necessary; when if a number is elected, equal in all to one half of the number of which the committee should consist, they shall be a committee; and if at the close of the meeting the number is not filled up, by unanimous votes of five for each member of the committee, given by those persons whose votes were returned to them at the end of the third election, then this committee shall have the power, and shall be required, to choose persons to fill up their number; and the constituents of each member so elected shall,

if necessary, be determined by lot. The president, secretary, and treasurer, all for the time being, shall be members of the committee, ex-officio, whether elected or not. In the intervals between the general elections, it shall be competent to any four members of the society, by a joint nomination, in a book to be opened for the purpose, to appoint a representative in the ensuing committee; such appointment being made shall not be withdrawn, nor shall the appointers give any vote in the choice of a committee-man, as such, until after the next election. A register shall be kept by the secretary of the constituents of every member of the committee; and the constituents of any member, except those appointed by the committee, (upon whose dismissal that body may exercise a negative,) shall have the power of withdrawing their representative by a vote of their majority, of which vote notice in writing shall be given, (subscribed by the persons composing such majority) both to the member so dismissed and to the chairman of the committee; and in the case of a vacancy occasioned by a dismissal as above, or by any other cause, the constituents of the member whose place becomes vacant, may elect another in his stead by a unanimous vote, but not otherwise; if such election be not made within a fortnight after the vacancy has occurred, the appointment shall devolve upon the committee.

XI. The committee shall be required, within a

week after their election, to fill up their number, and to appoint a chairman, secretary, and treasurer.

XII. The government of the society shall be vested in the committee for the time being, excepting that they shall have no controul over the laws relating to election; none of their resolutions, however, shall be carried into effect, until they shall have been notified to the society at one of its general meetings.

XIII. The proceedings of the committee shall be reported at each general meeting of the society.

XIV. The secretary and treasurer shall be allowed the privilege of appointing persons to officiate for them in their absence.

XV. The secretary, (or in case of his absence the last chairman then present) shall call over the list of members at 8 o'clock, and again at 10 o'clock; any person not answering to his name, shall incur a fine of six-pence at each call of the list; excepting the under-mentioned officers of the society, whose fines shall be as follows. At the first call of the list, the president, if absent, shall be fined one shilling, the secretary one shilling, and the lecturer one shilling. At 9 o'clock, the lecturer, if absent, shall forfeit one shilling. At the second call of the list, the president, if absent, shall be fined one shilling, the

secretary one shilling, and the lecturer one shilling. If the treasurer be absent on any of the quarterly nights of meeting, he shall be fined two shillings at the first call of the list, and one at the second.

XVI. The forfeits shall be registered by the secretary at the time they are incurred, and shall be collected by the treasurer at the first meeting in each quarter.

XVII. Any person desirous of becoming a member of this society shall, in the first instance, be proposed to the committee, whose duty it shall be to report to the general body their opinion as to his eligibility; the society shall then determine the question of his admission by ballot.

XVIII. Persons desirous of becoming members of the society, but who are prevented by their avocations from punctually attending its meetings, may be admitted as honorary members. They shall have no controul over the proceedings of the society, and shall pay an annual subscription of thirty shillings in advance, but shall not be subject to the fines for non-attendance, except on the nights of their being president or lecturer.

XIX. Persons residing at a distance from Birmingham, may be admitted as corresponding members upon their engaging occasionally to favour the society with communications on literary or scientific subjects;

when convenient to them, they shall have the privilege of attending the society's meetings; and should it at any time be their wish to lecture, the committee shall, on application, make the necessary arrangements. Corresponding members shall pay an annual subscription of ten shillings in advance, but shall not be subject to any of the society's laws which do not expressly refer to them.

XX. Strangers may be admitted to the meetings of this society, with the consent of the lecturer for the night being. Should any member introduce a stranger, without such consent, he shall forfeit five shillings.

XXI. Any person wishing to leave the society shall send a written resignation, addressed to the secretary, giving at least a fortnight's notice of his intention; until the expiration of which time, he shall be considered amenable to the Society's laws.

XXII. An annual general meeting of the society shall be holden on the first Friday in October in each year, on which occasion the committee shall present a report of the society's transactions during the preceding year.

*THOMAS CLARK, JUN.*

SECRETARY.

Great Charles Street, February 21st. 1820.