From W. H. Dobson, Esq. A History and Description of the ancient houses in the
market-place of Preston, with notices of their successive owners to the present
time. Extracted from the Preston Chronicle, pamph. 12mo., 1855, two copies.
From Thomas Sansom, Esq. "The Events," a Liverpool newspaper, price 4d.
No. 1, May 19th, 1855.
From James Boardman, Esq., the author. History and Description of the Barberini
or Portland Vase, with illustrations, pamph. 8vo. 1855.
From D. Buxton, Esq., editor. Flowers Freshly Gathered, a selection of original
Poetry, 12mo., 1853.
From R. A. Macfie, Esq. A Letter to the Evangelical Alliance on Brother-Love,
1847 ; Short Practical Hints on the means of inducing, combining, and directing
Missionary Efforts, respectfully inscribed to the Presbyterian Church in
England, 1842.
From W. Beau, Esq., Liverpool, Francis Brent, Esq., Folkstone, and Thomas
Sansom, Esq., F.L.S., Liverpool. Several Parcels of Plants for the formation
of a Herbarium.

Mr. Macfie exhibited an ancient MS copy of the Scriptures, with ornamented capitals,
&c. It is supposed to belong to the 14th century.

Mr. Sansom exhibited a photograph of a monumental inscription. It was one
sixteenth of a square inch in area, and contained nineteen lines, the whole of which
could be easily read by the microscope. Each letter was the one thousandth part of an
inch in height. It was prepared by Mr. B. Dancer, of Manchester, and could be read
with a comparatively low power.

Mr. Thomas Gray exhibited several copper coins, apparently inserted in stone. They
were taken from the oyster-beds of Kent, where they had been obviously deposited by
shipwreck. Several of them were East India coins, and on one the date 1803 was visible.

Mr. Fisher again exhibited the contents of a large Herbarium, as illustrative of his
paper.

The Chairman drew attention to a passage in one of Heylin's Works, from which it
appeared that the Cathedrals of England are of two classes, thirteen being of the old or
secular foundation, and the remainder having been founded by Henry VIII., principally
on the dissolution of the monasteries.

The following Papers were then read:—

Remarks upon the Flora of Liverpool, by H. S. Fisher; On the Illumination of the
Diatomaceae when viewed under the Microscope, by Thomas Sansom, A.L.S., F.B.S.E.,
&c.; and the Concluding Address, by Dr. Hume, Hon. Sec.

At the close of the business of another Session, to which every friend of the Society
looked forward with much interest, the Council have requested me to lay before the
Members some considerations of a general kind, such as our present position seems to
require. I have at once accepted the responsibility of doing so:—believing that we
have always a tendency to lose sight of general principles in the details of papers on
specific subjects; and also that it is a mark of wisdom to notice favourable facts, for the
purpose of exciting a frequent imitation of them, and unfavourable facts,—whether of
action or omission,—to secure their avoidance in future.

Our present position is somewhat peculiar. We have been for seven years before the
public, and numerous gratifying testimonies have been borne to the zeal and success of
our labours. We have also, since the date of the Society's inauguration, had proofs of
local interest which have steadily increased:—each list of members has been larger than
the preceding one, and we have no reason whatever to suppose that the standing number
has yet been reached. It is only during the session which is now closing, however, that
the principal members of the Society have been able to satisfy themselves respecting the
general arrangement of the business, or to occupy the whole, or indeed any large portion
of the ground which they had originally marked out. The past session, therefore, as I
may now almost venture to call it, has afforded a more correct representation of the
Society's character than any previous one; the degree of success which has attended it is
a better measure of our actual capability; and the volume which is now in preparation will exhibit our whole design and general objects, more truly than any which the members or the public have yet had an opportunity of seeing.

On comparing the first printed List of the Society with the present one, two facts arrest the attention at the same time—the number of valuable members which the Society has lost, and the still greater number which it has gained. In the removal of the former, Death has gathered in a large harvest, some of the most valued of our original members being gentlemen full of years, whose names had been familiar to the public, and held in high esteem. Others have been separated from us by those accidents which are inseparable from a great commercial community, so that we find those whose names are in our first list, in almost every part of the world, including the remotest colonial possessions of the United Kingdom. It thus happens, that, at the close of seven years, exactly one-third of the enlarged Society consists of original members; and that two-thirds who have joined them, inspired with the same sentiments and giving earnest more or less of future promise, have in some degree “entered into the labours” of their predecessors. In noticing our present position, therefore, it is absolutely necessary to allude to first principles, and thus to glance slightly at the past. It may also be well to direct our attention, by anticipation to the future.

The great general object which the founders of the Society had in view, may be expressed in a variety of ways. It was to collect and classify material objects, and to procure information respecting persons, places, and things—all of which should be illustrative of the two Counties of Lancashire and Cheshire. The publication of results followed as a matter of course; for without this, members who were widely scattered could not be instructed; and others who were ready to assist would be without examples for guidance. It was hoped that the volumes of the Society would in time be a valuable storehouse of materials, for the future historian of the counties, or of any portion of them; and that his task would merely be that of moulding the metal, which we had collected in the ore and prepared for use.

It is evident, however, that though the geographical “extension” of the Society was not great, the intellectual “comprehension” exhibited great variety. Whatever subjects it was proper for a local historian to treat of, it was proper for us to investigate; including such subjects as local meteorology and topography, antiquities, statistics, the biography of distinguished individuals, abstract science and its practical applications, the results of observation and experiment, the nature of the people and their characteristics, natural or acquired.* In the first paper that ever was read to the Society, the following passage occurs:

“Our basis of operations is anything but narrow, for it embraces every subject of historic interest in a given locality. We are circumscribed only in area, and that partly from choice and partly from necessity; but it is difficult to conceive of a Society more comprehensive in its general principles and its details. It is not, for example, a mere Documentary Society, nor is it Archaeological alone, nor Genealogical, nor Topographical. It is not confined to any branch of Natural History, nor to the whole subject; it is not a mere depository of Folk-lore, or a recorder of facts respecting Battles, Churches and Ships. With every one of these subjects, and with every other, it claims a connexion; in so far, and only so far as they tend to illustrate the two counties of which this town is in some respects the natural centre.”

During the first three years of the Society’s operations, it was sufficiently clear, that there were both materials in abundance, and earnest willing labourers. Of the eleven subjects which are enumerated in the original prospectus, almost every one had met with some elucidation, while the greater number might be said to indicate whole classes of papers. Even of the more detailed subjects, enumerated in an early and special publication of the Society, a very large number had met with attention—but this seemed to be rather the result of

* The proposer of the first resolution at the meeting at which the Society was founded, expressed himself thus:—“I can fancy that some will at first believe our objects to be too varied; that they will see little harmony or congruity between natural history and architecture, traditions and parliamentary papers, ancient pedigrees and modern manufactures. Let it be borne in mind, however, that all these come within the field of inquiry of the historian; for this is the reason why we cannot omit a single item of our programme.”
accident than design. The Society had not yet taken any pains to classify its subjects or to give to each a special evening—and thus there was a danger that some subjects would receive undue attention at the expense of others. Indeed, this fact actually occurred. Four years ago, the following language was used in the Concluding Address:

"It has been assumed not only by strangers but by some of ourselves, that our inquiries are exclusively of an archaeological or antiquarian character; and some gentlemen who would gladly have sought a connexion with us, have kept aloof, from the supposed narrowness of our basis. Now it is important to correct an impression so erroneous. We embrace every subject in which the historian is supposed to take an interest,—in short, every local subject which is worthy of a permanent record."

It is only necessary to say that this error has since been remedied. The systematising of the inquiries of the Society, which took place last autumn, brings before us in order each of our great subjects; and there is no reason that any department or branch of these should suffer systematic neglect. The extension of the Society too, enables us to read and discuss papers, occasionally, of an abstract character, or which are in no respect related to the soil of our two counties. The importance of this last arrangement will be evident, when I state that some of the most valuable papers which have come before the Society this session, respecting inventions, manufactures, and philosophical observations in Lancashire and Cheshire, would actually have been inadmissible under our old laws, except by an alteration of title which would have made the whole appear ridiculous.

The Session which is just closing has presented a degree of uniform success far exceeding the most sanguine expectations of the warmest friends of the Society. It has also solved several difficulties and given a practical reply to many doubts and objections.

One of the first was, that the meetings would be too numerous, and that it would not be possible to obtain a supply of valuable matter for them all. The answer is, that we have had more than sufficient for twenty-one meetings; for, after reading twenty-one formal papers and fourteen contributions of a less formal character, we have been under the necessity of postponing about fifteen papers, some of which were ready and in hand, while others were only in preparation.

Another objection was, that the arrangements are too artificial, and that it is impossible for the members to cultivate Literature, Science, and Archaeology, in exactly an equal degree. It should be borne in mind, however, that each of these terms is relative and expansive, but not of absolute limitation; so that what some call Science others call Literature, e.g. philology, statistics, topography, and ethnology. Our laws also provide for the equalisation of the supply in special cases, but nothing of the kind has been necessary, as papers on all the three subjects have been read during the miscellaneous Meetings.

It was also objected that the members would not attend meetings so frequently held, and that the attendance would be occasionally very limited. This prediction has certainly not been verified, for during no former Session were the meetings so well attended, nor did they excite so lively an interest. For this, various reasons may be assigned, e.g., that the place of meeting is more central, the members are greatly increased in number, and the evenings of meeting are so distinct, and so well known, that arrangements can easily be made for attending them.

It is important to state, at the same time, that the papers have not deteriorated in character; on the contrary, several gentlemen of acknowledged eminence in their several departments, have given us aid of great value. Indeed a practical difficulty is to know how we can do justice to all the authors of papers without making our volume larger than prudence warrants. In another department, which does not so readily arrest the attention, the Society has made some progress. Every meeting has brought some addition to the Library, and occasionally to the Museum. On one or two occasions these have been very large; and even on this last evening of the Session, donations have been laid upon our table, more valuable in quantity, variety, and intrinsic worth, than some of our local societies are accustomed to receive in the course of the whole year. One donation, of great value, consists of parcels of plants for the formation of a herbarium, from Mr. Brent of Folkestone, and Messrs. Bean and Sansom of this town. Mr. Sansom has also kindly undertaken to mount them, and to have them ready for reference by the commencement of next Session.
The future progress of the Society may be anticipated from a consideration of the difficulties already overcome, and from the arrangements which have been entered upon for permanent guidance. One of the most important of them is a provision made in the laws for placing an Annual Volume of Proceedings and Papers in the hands of every member. Of course it will vary, from time to time, in magnitude and interest, but it will be a regular register of our labours, and will keep in useful exercise the knowledge and interest of the members and other friends. Several societies, which in past years seemed not to feel the value of regular publication, have at length entered upon it, and one has just brought up an arrear of eighteen years in its first publication, while another devotes two volumes to twenty-one years.

It may naturally be supposed that a society, which has its centre at one great town of a district will illustrate that immediate neighbourhood with great or even unnecessary minuteness; while many other points of equal importance will, from the absence of investigators, be comparatively unnoticed. Perhaps it is impossible to avoid this difficulty altogether; but in our case it exists only in a small degree. We have members in almost every part of the two counties, and writers of papers even where we have not members; and even those who are resident in or near Liverpool refer their local information and associations to points considerably remote. At present about three-fifths of the members reside within seven miles of the Town Hall; yet, during this seventh session, half the papers have been contributed by persons non-resident; and of the remainder, some have no reference to Liverpool or its immediate neighbourhood.

It is hoped that this will be the case in a still more marked degree, when Mr. Danson's paper and the General Statement which accompanies it have received a wide distribution. It exhibits, in detail, numerous subjects, in connection with which many gentlemen may be able to assist us, and no doubt a large number will generously and kindly render their aid, in a cause of public usefulness, but of no individual benefit. In treating of places of limited extent, or of places which do not afford much matter, some of those papers may be exhaustive in their character, but in general they will be valuable, not merely for their positive information, but from being suggestive to the readers of them.

It should not be supposed, however, that all the papers will be printed as a matter of course. In former years this has nearly been the case, from the excellence of the matter and from the quantity supplied; but in future years the matter may vary widely in quality, while it will undoubtedly be abundant in quantity. The members will therefore expect the Council to exercise a wise discretion.

It is possible, too, to improve the character of our meetings. The objects which are exhibited, from time to time, should always be of interest; for it is obviously trifling with the time of a Learned Society to occupy its members and visitors with the examination of things which are neither rare, nor curious, nor illustrative. In strict order, a notice should be sent to the Curator, of objects to be brought before the meeting; there would then be some guarantee that they were thoroughly deserving of attention. In the matter of miscellaneous communications, also, I may remark, that they might be more frequent and more varied than they have hitherto been. It is a mistake to suppose that papers should necessarily be of any fixed length, they should merely express, fully and explicitly, what the writer has to say. They will, therefore, be very varied in magnitude, and those which are shortest or longest may, in certain cases, be those of most interest.

The conclusion of a session of so much interest is not without a feeling of melancholy, in which I am sure many of the members will participate. It is, at the same time, a relief to those who have occupied positions of prominence; nor will their labours cease with the termination of the meetings. Less than three months will probably suffice to place in the hands of the members another volume; and the recess on which we are all entering will afford new opportunities of prosecuting valuable researches, or of arranging accumulated materials. Let us part in the hope of meeting in October next, not merely to sustain, but to extend the character and usefulness which have thus far crowned our labours.