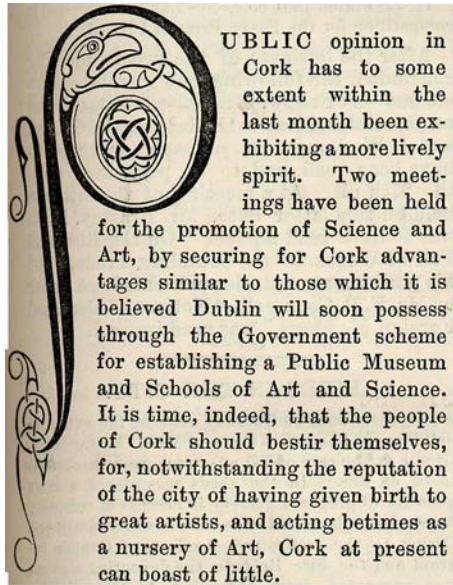


# The Irish Builder.

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*Science and Art Prospects in Cork;*



On each occasion of our visit to the southern capital during late years, though we witnessed improvements in a building and sanitary direction, we failed to observe any effort towards providing Cork with one or more of those local literary and scientific institutions which may be found in some Irish cities, and in nearly all English and Scotch towns of any importance. While in Cork, we were often pained in looking upon the dilapidated state of the building known as the Cork School of Art. Within the structure the Art School could not be more badly housed, and, without the building, the surroundings are the reverse of enticing in look, appearance, or approach. The Cork School has a collection of casts which long since would have proved valuable if utilised, but for years back they have been existing, stowed away as if they had been so much lumber.

It would scarcely be believed by strangers that at present Cork cannot boast of a single public or private museum available to the people. There are some small collections at the Cork Institution, but they are of little value; and, in the interest of literature as well as Art, there is no centre or association worthy of the name.

The wants of Cork at present are—a well provided school of Art, a public library, a museum of Science and Art, and permanent exhibitions of objects of the fine and industrial arts. How are these wants to be supplied? A portion of the Cork people think and expect that the Government will come to their aid, while others believe that the resources of the city in itself are sufficient for the purpose.

Voluntary contributions cannot be depended upon for the support of Art and scientific bodies. There must be a regular income; and, without Government help, it can only come through the striking of a rate. Several gifts of one hundred pounds or of fifties from gentlemen and merchants will, if contributed, no doubt be most useful for putting infant societies upon their feet, and giving them a start; but, if permanent or lasting work is to be achieved in Cork, it must be through the rates and with the concurrence of the ratepayers.

The President of the Queen's College, who acted as the chairman of the late meeting in Cork, said that there were two ways in which the project might be started. Alluding to their place of meeting, he said:—

"Those buildings belonged to the proprietors of the Royal Cork Institution, as a corporate body, who (his impression was) got them from the Treasury on relieving it from the ground rent. The proprietors were almost entirely gentlemen in the city, and having connection with it. Were they prepared to hand over their right to that institution—to, in fact, give all they possessed to support the new one? If that were done they would have the nucleus, round which might be gathered the subscriptions of the citizens, and the penny in the pound to be levied by the Corporation; and in that way they would have the beginning of an institution worthy of Cork. If anything was to be got from Parliament he believed it was when the people of Cork would have done that much for themselves. He was perfectly satisfied that if they went to the House of Commons tomorrow for a grant, however willing Parliament might be to help them, they would first be asked—how much have you done for yourselves? That idea was, in fact, carried very far indeed. For six or seven years he had been secretary to the Royal Irish Academy, and during that time they got upwards of £2,500 from the Treasury, exclusive of the annual grants, because they always put their hands first into their own pockets. In that way the Academy had been enabled to purchase a collection of Irish coins which belonged to this city and ought to have remained in it—Mr. Sainthill's collection; and in the same way they had got the bell shrine of St. Patrick. If the proprietors of the Royal Cork Institution were prepared to hand over their possessions to such a new body of trustees or commissioners as might be appointed, they would then have the beginning of an institution in which they might have a proper school of art, where he hoped some permanent contributions would always be exhibited, with a museum, technological and otherwise, attached, an art museum, and the nucleus of a public library. All that could be done if it were backed up by the subscriptions of the citizens and the annual rate for its maintenance. If the Corporation were prepared to build a town hall—and they had been talking of it since he was a boy—they might devote a portion of it to the purposes of a school of art and picture and statuary gallery, and, if they liked a public library. That was the second way in which the thing might be started."

It appears that there would be some difficulty in the way of handing over the Royal Cork Institute building to any new body, on account of its original constitution; and, in our opinion, it would be better to go in entirely for a new building. The Science and Art Department at South Kensington contribute a certain amount towards a building fund, if the locality interested in connection provides the remaining portion; but the maximum grant that Cork could obtain would only amount to £500. The Science and Art Department of South Kensington started on a different footing originally than what it now maintains.

Two divisions were intended—one for Science and one for Art; and aid in both cases was to be given to all the towns in the sister kingdoms. Money was first given, but after a while it was withdrawn step by step, until the present system came to be established and continued, of payment by results.

Looking on all the surroundings of the project in Cork, we are of opinion that its permanent success must depend solely upon the efforts of the people of Cork themselves. The difficulty will not be in founding a public museum and a School of Art and Science in Cork, but in supporting it, and maintaining it in vigour; and the enthusiasm of the hour must not be built upon, or taken as a criterion of the intentions of the many. No doubt, some few will continue to voluntarily subscribe towards the support of Science and Art in Cork long after the new buildings are provided; but can an amount of voluntary support be calculated upon sufficient to keep the Institution in a flourishing condition? If a penny rate could be doubled in Cork by continued voluntary subscriptions, of course there would be nothing to fear, but we have our grave doubts upon the matter. We would prefer seeing a rate struck (if Cork could bear it) sufficient at first to meet ordinary expenses in support of the new Institution. If it was found afterwards that good voluntary or other help was forthcoming, it would be far pleasanter and easier to reduce a rate than to increase it.

Some of our Cork friends have got it into their heads that the Government scheme for Art and Science purposes in Dublin is all but accomplished. This is a mistake. As we write, the scheme stands still, as far as we are aware, in the same crude state as it first appeared in Lord Sandon's letter. Even suppose the scheme, or an altered one agreeable to the wishes of our Dublin bodies interested, was being carried out, the people of Cork have ample time to consider how best they can provide their own wants. We would advise, on the part of the committee, a careful consideration of the works and the responsibilities they are placing themselves under. To be enthusiastic is one thing—to be over-sanguine is another. Nothing should be taken as granted without a strict scrutiny, and a calculation of expenses, so that a miserable collapse will be rendered impossible, or a languishing institution improbable. Apart from this, we wish the project in Cork every success, and will be only too glad to chronicle its triumph.

[Taken from *Irish Builder*, Vol. XVIII, 1876, p.85]