

is better established, its influence upon the human frame cannot be determined. The grand total of deaths from all causes under consideration during the six years was 143,249, and the average population 867,313. The corrected population for each year is employed as the standard of reference for each year's mortality. The inquiry is led into the influence of weather upon mortality from individual diseases, and the several classes of disease, as well as into the mortality from all causes. A detailed account of the inferences deduced by these investigations would involve the reproduction of a series of tables and diagrams for which the Society's Proceedings are not available, and all of which will be found in the extended paper.

## 2. History of Popular Literature, and its Influence on Society. By Wm. Chambers, Esq., of Glenormiston.

Having introduced the subject, Mr Chambers referred to the earliest examples of popular literature in the reign of Elizabeth; they were embellished with wood engravings, believed to be executed in Germany. Such was the origin of those very curious tracts known as "chap books," now very rare, and much prized by bibliographic amateurs. The subjects of these books resembled the Folk-Lore of the Germans, and were the embodiment of the superstitions, fancies, and traditions of a much earlier period; the least exceptionable being the ballads of a heroic and tender kind. Next was traced the rise of newspapers, and the importance they began to assume in the reign of Queen Anne, a period also signalled by the popular writings of Steele, Addison, and Defoe. The imposition of the stamp-duty in 1712 checked this sudden rise of popular literature; and various circumstances postponed its reappearance until the reigns of George IV. and William IV., by which time great advances had been made in education and in a general taste for literature,—the writings of Cowper, Burns, Campbell, Wordsworth, Scott, Byron, and others, along with the influence of certain reviews and magazines, having latterly given much impetus to thought. Mr Chambers then spoke of the origin of Chambers' Journal in February 1832, the Penny Magazine in the subsequent March, and other cheap prints, devoted in an especial manner to popularise

literature. Finally, he drew attention to the abolition of fiscal duties on the products of the press,—the prodigious copiousness of cheap popular sheets, cheap newspapers included,—and the capacity of modern machinery, moved by steam-power, for their rapid production. On investigation, he found that only a small proportion of the whole was of an immoral, or otherwise objectionable kind; much of the writing in this popular department of literature being by authors of repute, to whom large sums were paid for their services. He estimated that there were not fewer than three hundred millions of newspapers now circulated per annum in the United Kingdom; while the quantity of cheap literary sheets issued per annum amounted to 144,000,000. He concluded by referring to the highly improved tone in all departments of the press, not the least of the beneficial effects of modern popular literature being the extinction of what was worthless and pernicious. On concluding his paper, Mr Chambers laid on the table a quantity of copies privately printed for distribution among the members present.

The following note from Principal Sir David Brewster was read by Professor Tait:—

“ I send you, for the Royal Society, six of my best specimens of Decomposed Glass. In presenting them, perhaps you might mention the disappearance of all colour, by introducing a drop of water, and the passage of a prismatic line over each film, owing to the water entering more quickly between some of the elementary films than between others. These may be found by using a balsam that will quickly indurate.”

The following announcements were made from the Chair:—

1. The Council have awarded the Neill Prize for the Triennial period 1859–62 to Robert Kaye Greville, LL.D., for his contributions to Scottish Natural History, more especially in the department of Cryptogamic Botany, including his recent papers on Diatomaceæ.

2. The Council have resolved that a *Conversazione* shall take place in the Society's room, on Wednesday, 25th February, at 8 P.M.

The following Gentlemen were elected Fellows of the Society:—

JOHN YOUNG, M.D., Assistant Geologist, Geological Survey  
of Great Britain.

DAVID PAGE, Esq., F.G.S.

The following Donations to the Library were announced:—

Essays from the “Quarterly Review.” By James Hannay, Esq.,  
F.R.S.E., Author of “Satire and Satirists,” &c. 8vo.—*From  
the Author.*

Sitzungsberichte der königl. bayer. Akademie der Wissenschaften  
zu München. 1862. I. Heft 4, und II. Heft 1. 8vo.—*From  
the Academy.*

Bulletin de la Société Impériale des Naturalistes de Moscou. Année  
1861. Nos. I., II., III., et IV. 8vo.—*From the Society.*

The Journal of the Royal Dublin Society, Nos. 26, 27, 28. 8vo.—  
*From the Society.*

Historical Sketch of Popular Literature, and its Influence on So-  
ciety. By Wm. Chambers, Esq. of Glenormiston.—*From the  
Author.*

*Monday, 16th February 1863.*

DR CHRISTISON, Vice-President, in the Chair.

The following Communications were read:—

1. Sketch of the Recent Progress of Sanskrit Literature.  
By John Muir, D.C.L., LL.D. (This Paper was given at  
the request of the Council.)

After giving a sketch of the first beginnings of these studies in India, and their further prosecution in Europe, the author adverted to the relations of Sanskrit with the Greek, Latin, and Teutonic languages, and showed how this affinity established the common origin of the nations by which these languages have been spoken. He then proceeded to give an account of Indian literature, commencing with the hymns and other constituent parts of the Vedas, and then proceeding to the principal systems of Indian philosophy,