SOCIETIES, associations voluntarily formed by a num­ber of individuals for promoting knowledge, industry, or virtue. They may therefore be divided into three classes ; societies for promoting science and literature, societies for encouraging and promoting arts and manufactures, and so­cieties for diffusing religion and morality and relieving dis­tress. These, however, are so numerous and fluctuating, that it would be difficult to offer any thing like an accurate account of them. The reader is referred for information on the subject to the articles, London Dublin, Edinburgh, and the other towns and countries where these institutions have been established. We shall only notice the Royal So­cieties of London and Edinburgh.

The Royal Society of London is an academy or body of persons of eminent learning, instituted by Charles II., for the promoting of all the different branches of physical know­ledge. The origin of this society is traced by Dr. Sprat, its earliest historian, no farther back than to “ some space after the end of the civil wars” in the seventeenth century. The scene of the first meetings of the learned men who laid the foundation of it, is by him fixed in the university of Oxford, at the lodgings of Dr. Wilkins, warden of Wadham College. But Dr. Birch, on the authority of Dr. Wallis, one of its ear­liest and most considerable members, assigns it an earlier origin. According to him, certain worthy persons, residing in London about the year 1645, being “ inquisitive into na­tural and the new and experimental philosophy, agreed to meet weekly on a certain day, to discourse upon such sub­jects, and were known by the title of *The Invisible* or *Phi­losophical college”* In the years 1648 and 1649, the com­pany who formed these meetings was divided, part retiring to Oxford and part remaining in London ; but they conti­nued the same pursuits as when united, corresponding with each other, and giving a mutual account of their respective discoveries. About the year 1659 the greater part of the Oxford society returned to London, and again uniting with their fellow-labourers, met once, if not twice a-week at Gresham College, during term-time, till they were scattered by the public distractions of that year, and the place of their meeting made quarters for soldiers. On the restora­tion in 1660 their meetings were revived, and attended by a greater concourse of men eminent for their rank and learn­ing. They were at last taken notice of by the king, who having himself a considerable taste for physical science, was pleased to grant them an ample charter, dated the 15th of July 1662, and afterwards a second dated 15th April 1663, by which they were erected into a corporation, consisting of a president, council, and fellows, for promoting natural knowledge ; and to give their investigations, against which strange prejudices were entertained, every possible support, he sometimes honoured their meetings with his presence.

Their manner of electing fellows is by balloting. Their council consists of twenty-one, including the president, vice-president, treasurer, and two secretaries, eleven of which are continued for the next year, and ten more added to them ; all being chosen on St. Andrew’s day.

The services which this illustrious society has rendered to the public are very great. They have improved naval, civil, and military architecture ; advanced the security and perfection of navigation ; improved agriculture ; and put not only this kingdom, but also Ireland, the plantations, &c, upon planting. They have registered experiments, histories, relations, observations, &c., and reduced them into one com­mon stock ; and have, from time to time, published those which they reckoned most useful, under the title of *Philo­sophical Transactions,* &c. They have a library adapted to their institution ; towards which Mr. Henry Howard, after­wards duke of Norfolk, contributed the Norfolcian library, and which has been vastly increased by a continual scries of benefactions.

The Royal Society of Edinburgh was incorporated by

royal charter on the 29th of March 1783, and has for its object the cultivation of every branch of science, erudition, and taste. Its rise and progress towards its present state was as follows. In the year 1718 a literary society was es­tablished in Edinburgh by the learned Ruddiman and others, which in 1731 was succeeded by a society instituted for the improvement of medical knowledge. In the year 1739 the celebrated Maclaurin conceived the idea of enlarging the plan of this society, by extending it to subjects of philosophy and literature. The institution was accordingly new-mo­delled by a printed set of laws and regulations, the number of members was increased, and they were distinguished from that time by the title of *The Society for Improving Arts and Sciences,* or more generally by the title of *The Philosophical Society of Edinburgh.* Its meetings, how­ever, were soon interrupted by the disorders of the country during the rebellion in 1745 ; and they were not renewed till the year 1752. Soon after this period the first volume of the Transactions of the Philosophical Society of Edin­burgh was published, under the title of *Essays and Obser­vations, Physical and Literary,* and was followed by other volumes of acknowledged merit. About the end of the year 1782, in a meeting of the professors of the university of Edinburgh, many of whom were likewise members of the Philosophical Society, and warmly attached to its interests, a scheme was proposed by the late Dr. Robertson, principal of the university, for the establishment of a new society on a more extended plan, and after the model of some of the foreign academies. It appeared an expedient measure to solicit the royal patronage to an institution of this nature, which promised to be of national importance, and to request an establishment by charter from the crown. The plan was approved and adopted ; and the Philosophical Society, join­ing its influence as a body in seconding the application from the university, his majesty, as we have already observed, was graciously pleased to incorporate The Royal Society of Edinburgh by charter.

Members are elected by ballot. The general business of the society is managed by a president, two vice-presidents, with a council of twelve, a general secretary, and a trea­surer. These officers are chosen by ballot annually on the last Monday of November. All public deeds, whether of a civil or of a literary nature, are transacted by this board, and proceed in the name of the president or vice-president.

As it was thought that the members would have a greater inducement to punctual attendance on the meetings of the society, if they had some general intimation of the nature of the subjects which were to be considered, and made the to­pics of conversation, it was therefore resolved to divide the society into two classes, which should meet and deliberate separately. One of these classes is denominated the *Phy­sical class,* and has for its department the sciences of ma­thematics, natural philosophy, chemistry, medicine, natural history, and whatever relates to the improvement of arts and manufactures. The other is denominated the *Literary class,* and has for its department literature, philology, his­tory, antiquities, and speculative philosophy. There are many valuable papers in the volumes that have been pub­lished of the *Transactions* of this society.

*Society Isles,* a cluster of isles, so named by Captain Cook in 1769. They are situated between the latitudes of 16. 10. and 16.55. south, and between the longitudes of 150. 57. and 152. west. See Polynesia.

SOCINIANS, in church history, a sect of Christian he­retics, so called from their founder Faustus Socinus. They maintain, “ that Jesus Christ was a mere man, who had no existence before he was conceived by the Virgin Mary ; that the Holy Ghost is no distinct person, but that the Fa­ther is truly and properly God. They own, that the name of God is given in the Holy Scriptures to Jesus Christ ; but contend, that it is onlv a deputed title, which however in-