

ANNUAL MEETING
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NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY OF MONTREAL.

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ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT: 56

PRINCIPAL DAWSON, LL.D., F.R.S.,

May 18, 1877.

In closing another Session of this Society, we naturally turn to the work of the past year, and in this address it is more especially our scientific labours that claim attention. What have we done in the past year for the advancement of science, and for the credit of our country as one of the civilized nations of the world? I would not underrate what we have accomplished for the popular diffusion of knowledge, by means of our museum, our excursions and our popular lectures, but the original investigations which we have given to the world constitute our best title to regard as a scientific association.

In the course of the winter nine original communications have been laid before this Society; and of these the greater number have appeared or will appear in our Journal. Of these communications two; namely, that on Inscriptions from Easter Island presented by Mr. D. Robertson, and Notes on Animals of India, did not refer to the natural history of this country. With respect to the former, however, I may say that it has a connection with America in the circumstance that so many indications point to a migration of civilized or semi-civilized men into America by way of the Pacific, and to the probability that Easter Island was one of the stations in this migration. Mr. Hyde Clarke and Dr. Wilson have both directed attention to this subject, and have shown that in languages and physical features there are links of connection between the Polynesian and the Peruvian races, and that the ruins of large stone buildings found in so many of the Polynesian Islands, as well as the arts practised in those islands, point to similar conclusions. The possession of a sort of picture writing for the keeping of family and tribal records in Easter Island, and the not very remote resemblance of this to some familiar American contrivances of the same kind, furnishes an additional link of connection. On the often disputed question of the source or sources of the aboriginal American population, it now seems to be the settled conclusion of archaeology that we have good evidence of prehistoric migrations of man into America by Behring's Straits from Northern Asia; by the Pacific Islands from Southern Asia; and by the Equatorial Atlantic, by way of the Canaries and West India Islands.