

was a passion, and whose inspiration had already appeared by the glorious creations of Titian and Raffaele, and Michael Angelo.

The earth and every common sight  
To them did seem  
Apparell'd in celestial light,  
The glory and the freshness of a dream.

These societies spread over Italy with such rapidity, that before the end of the sixteenth century there was one in almost every city of importance: nor was it long before the other countries of Europe were animated by the same spirit. In Spain, the Academy of the Wonders of Nature was founded in 1552. A similar society, with the same name, was established at Vienna in the same year. Our own Royal Society of London, the foundation of which was laid as early as 1645, dates its incorporation from 1662. Lastly, Colbert founded what is now the Institute Nationale of France in 1666. Thus, within the short space of fourteen years did these four *Musea Minerva*\* spring forth, as it were, from the head of Europe, not quite like the Goddess of Wisdom, full armed and radiant, exempt from the weakness of infancy, and the errors of youth, but possessed at least with one of her highest lessons, an humble estimation of their actual knowledge, an unquenchable desire for further light. We need scarcely remind the reader, that the Royal Society of London was the honoured instrument of giving to the world the *Principia* of Newton; that from its funds, and from the assistance of its first members, was Flamsteed enabled to commence those observations which have made Greenwich the classic ground of Astronomy: that wherever these institutions have existed, they have awakened talents which, but for them might never have been aroused; have promoted enquiries which individuals could not have conducted, and given to the world investigations and discoveries which, without their aid might never have seen the light. These truths are too familiar to be questioned, and without intending to pursue the history of learned societies, we have referred to them here to point out a legitimate deduction from them, namely, the importance of organizing an association capable of fulfilling those functions in our own community.

It can scarcely be denied that the pursuit and cultivation of the Physical Sciences has made comparatively little progress in Canada, and by no means attained the established place which might have been looked for at this stage of our history. It is true that two Societies, directed more or less to this subject, have existed in Lower Canada for more than twenty years—the Literary and Historical Society at Quebec founded in 1824, and the Natural History Society of Montreal founded in 1827, but we have the highest authority for inferring that the latter at least has not as yet realized the expectations of its zealous founders, nor can the last Report of the authorities of the former, be deemed entirely satisfactory. Neither has practically exercised any influence in Upper Canada. But a short time ago, a celebrated naturalist had occasion to compare the skeleton of a recent specimen of the *Delphinus Leucas*, or Beluga, with some remains found under equivocal geological circumstances in the State of Vermont. In vain did he enquire of every collection with which he was acquainted, in America; the unwieldy rarity he sought

was no where to be heard of. At last he remembered a museum in Copenhagen unrivalled for its riches in marine mammalians. With the cordial liberality of a brother philosopher, the distinguished naturalist who presides over that establishment, promptly met his request for a specimen, and the precious remains were shipped with much precaution, in a number of boxes and barrels, and duly waited from Denmark to Massachusetts. Then, and not until then, did M. Agassiz, the naturalist in question, become aware of the fact that the *Delphinus Leucas* under the name of the *White Whale* is one of the commonest frequenters of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and that an easy journey to the banks of our noble river, would have placed him in possession of any number of specimens his researches might have required. Need we say that such a fact speaks volumes as to the neglect among us of those pursuits by which, not only are the productions of a country laid open to the use and enjoyment of its people, but the channels of scientific information kept also replenished with that knowledge of local peculiarities which is so indispensable to the progress of science.

We have referred above to the comparative non-success of the Elder Societies in Canada not in ignorance of the ability and intelligence with which ever since their formation, one zealous President or Secretary after another, has endeavoured to animate them to successful exertion, still less to undervalue those endeavours, but to enquire in perfect respect into the cause of a circumstance so frankly and honourably admitted by both, and the probability that the Canadian Institute of Upper Canada—the Society to whose recent organization we are about to refer, will be enabled to avoid a like result. First, then, it seems probable that the great vice of Society in America, that “eternal sabbathless pursuit of a man’s fortune,” so long ago denounced; which leaves to the mind neither leisure, taste or capacity, for the cultivation on which its happiness depends, has not failed in its effect here; not in reality devoting much of our time to anything more profitable, or half so delightful as the cultivation of literary or scientific pursuits, we have nevertheless grudged it to them, and have neglected the formation of those habits with which alone they are reconcilable. Natural History and Botany have been abandoned almost entirely to the members of an arduous and ill-remunerated profession, very few of whom can command the leisure or even incur the expenses essential to their active pursuit. The unwise habit of overtasking the strength and energy of those engaged in Instruction, or filling Professorial Chairs, as if the mind can expatiate at large, while the body is bound to a tread-mill, has had something to do with it. Scientific pursuits can never make much progress while those who are professionally devoted to them, are debarred, whether by unfortunate necessity or illiberal pressure, the opportunities of self-improvement and private progress, which the ablest value the most.

It rather appears too, and we refer to this, because it is the evil which it has been principally sought to avoid, in the constitution of the Society just referred to, that the objects expressed by the titles Natural History Society, and Literary and Historical Society, are too special to be able to stand alone in this country at present. They do not include a multitude of objects in which much of the most active talent in the country is engag-

\* *Museum Minerva* was the designation of a College or Academy founded by Charles the 1st. in 1635, for the cultivation of the Physical Sciences, but which fell to the ground in the troubles of that unhappy reign.