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Shakespearean Club

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# ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

## SHAKSPEARE

## CLUB,

FOR THE YEAR 1845.

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MONTREAL:

PRINTED BY STARKE AND CO.

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## REPORT.

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MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN,—

The recurrence of the season at which we have once more arrived, the death-bed of the *old* year and the cradle of the *new*—even without the requirement of a law to that effect, would naturally lead your Secretary to refer to the notes of his “Minute Book” to ascertain the progress which had been made by the Society, since he last had the honour of addressing you, upon a similar subject, a twelve month since. Constrained, however, by a regulation most wisely framed, I cheerfully address myself to the task of chronicling the events of the departing year, confident that the retrospect will not prove dispiriting—but rather fraught with hope and encouragement for the future. There is something peculiarly interesting in thus looking back upon our past career—in recurring to the many pleasant hours which we have spent in each other’s company, in observing whether those hours were passed profitably to ourselves and to the Society; whether the Bond of Literary Union has been strengthened at our frequent meetings, and the stability of the Association placed beyond a doubt; and whether we have in aught failed in our duty to the Club, by omissions which might have the effect of retarding its advancement. These are the peculiar uses of an “Annual Report,” and this season “which *in-urns* the parting year, as the Church *commences* hers with gladness;” is by all societies devoted to such retrospections, as naturally as even the least thoughtful of our race cast their eyes into their own bosoms, and survey the path they have individually trodden since the New Year opened.

In the earnest hope that the few remarks which I have thrown together may not prove unprofitable, and impressed with the belief that the detail of facts contained in this address will possess an interest for

all who have the welfare of our Society really at heart, I submit to the Association most respectfully (yet diffidently) the Annual Report for the year 1845.

The General Election of the Officers of the Society took place in conformity with the Laws, on the second Monday in January, and resulted in the selection of the following gentlemen to fill the various situations :—

As President—MR. ANDREW ROBERTSON.

As Vice President—MR. FLEET.

As Secretary—MR. LEE.

As Treasurer—MR. LAVICOUNT.

The President, gentlemen, as you are aware, has declined re-election, thus throwing upon us the difficult task of finding a successor who shall combine the many distinguished qualifications which he has displayed for the office he relinquishes. But I doubt not but that in so large a Society as this has now become, an individual will be found who will feel a pride in maintaining the reputation of the Club and of its first Officer, as satisfactorily as the present incumbent ; at least I hope so. I may be pardoned for suggesting to the Society, since we have seen that both of the gentlemen who have filled the Chair since the birth of the Association, have declined re-election after their first term of office has expired, whether it would not be well to have a tacit understanding in the Club, that the same Member shall not be elected to the Presidency for two successive years. It appears to be extremely probable that amongst those who really do feel an interest in our success, and may be fairly supposed to be emulous of enjoying the distinctions which it is in our power to bestow, an extended term of office in the person of one individual might possibly have the effect of damping their energies by presenting a lengthened obstruction to their legitimate aspirations after the honors of the Society. It should be our constant endeavour to make those distinctions most difficult of attainment, and most valuable *when* attained ; and I believe that I am not far wrong when I surmise that this idea having been carried out to its fullest extent, is one of the grand secrets of the success of certain bodies of great respectability and influence which have lately taken permanent root in the City of Montreal.

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Would that I could improve upon the remarks which I felt it my duty to make in my last "Report" upon the efficiency of our "Committees," but I regret to say that the same causes of complaint have existed up to the present hour, as hampered the proceedings of the Society during the year 1844. Again suffer me to impress upon the Association the extreme necessity for exercising its votes most cautiously for Committeemen to serve during the next twelve months; useless, without a vigorous executive, must ever be the exertions of the Officers, and vain the hopes of future influence in which we all indulge.

Since the commencement of the year our Chamber has been enriched with a portrait of the distinguished nobleman, who, whilst resident in Canada vouchsafed to us his countenance and protection, the revered Lord Metcalfe, the late Governor-General of these Colonies. Discarding all allusions to the many causes for respect and veneration so universally cherished for that honoured individual, need I carry back the recollection of the "Shakspeare Club" farther than the 18th day of last September, when at our Festival Commemoration we were assured by a Reverend Gentleman, then seated at our Table, that our Patron had that day expressed to him the sentiment that "*he only wished that some one would suggest to him how best he could benefit the Shakspeare Club.*" Here was legitimate cause for pride and exultation, and the knowledge that we had gained the approval, thus flatteringly implied, of a Nobleman whose praise "*is praise indeed,*" I doubt not caused many like myself to vow internally, that henceforth all labour for the advancement of the Club—should be considered *pastime*, and self-denial as a welcome test by which to determine our sincerity in the good cause of Literature and Refinement. Our intercourse with our Patron during the past year has presented amidst some things that were pleasurable much that has been painful. In the former category we may place the interview which was had on the 19th March, by a deputation from the Society, for the purpose of presenting a congratulatory address upon his elevation to the Peerage, and in the latter the mournful duty which we were called upon to perform in tendering our respectful sympathy for the distressing circumstances under which His Lordship was constrained to relinquish the Government of Canada. Who can forget the morning which beheld

the departure of the Governor General from our City, as stalwart in spirit, but broken by disease, he looked his last upon this scene of his latest triumphs and the people he had loved so well. That moment levelled all distinctions.

“One touch of Nature makes the whole world kin.”

—discord and rancour fled before his steps, pity for his afflictions, and veneration for his person, alone pervaded that vast assemblage, and every man “went heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother.”

And he, the cause of all this heartfelt woe, whose beneficence (like that beautiful elm which overshadows and adorns the road which led to his hospitable mansion, embraced and protected *all* who fainted on the “highway of the world,”) he who was “great of heart” as generous of soul, succumbing to the weakness of the moment, wept in unison with those that followed him.

It was a painful hour, and the memory of it too melancholy to be referred to without a sigh for the excelling goodness which has departed from our shores for ever.

Suffice it, that the sentiment of this Society was embodied in an Address which followed him to Boston, and in it we requested that although absent from the country he would still permit his “*honoured name*” to be announced as *Patron* of the Society, as though we had declared that whilst he lived no other name could fitly be displayed in the most elevated position in which it was in our humble power to place it.

The progress of the Society, with reference to its increase of Members, has been most satisfactory. It has during the year added to its number in the ratio of *one-third* to the whole. Nor has this increase in *quantity* been deficient in *quality*, since our enrolments have in many instances been amongst the most valuable of our acquisitions. At the same time it must be admitted, that a few names have crept into the list which, judging from the Treasurer’s Report, it would have been well had never appeared there, since this Club would have been spared much pain and mortification in giving effect to the laws against defaulters. I must confess I feel no sympathy for those who may be so dealt with; I rather sympathise with a Society which is wantonly *forced* to exercise such unpleasant means of protection and defence. The new Law prescribing

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that every Candidate for admission shall apply *by letter* to the Society, appears to have been successful, as far as it has gone, having rendered it impossible for a Member to repudiate his nomination; a proceeding not without an instance.

The revision of the Laws previous to a second edition being published on the first of May last, deserves a passing notice. The change consisted in the partial alteration of the name of the Society—the words “Dramatic and Literary” being expunged—the first term it was supposed militating against the prejudices of a large number of the members, and misleading the public as to our real objects;—in doing away with all fines, and thus placing every grade of members of the Society on an equal footing: the increase of the Entrance Fee and the Yearly Subscription, and lastly, within the last few days, an important addition has been made to the officers of the Club, in the person of a second Vice-President.

We can scarcely as yet decide whether the removal of fines for the non production of an Essay or taking part in a Debate, in turn, has been a successful alteration of the Laws. I am almost inclined to fear that the experiment has scarcely been a fortunate one. One thing is certain, that whilst the “Fines” existed the usual exercises of the Club *never* failed; members were always ready, either personally or by proxy, to supply their just quantum of instruction and amusement to the common stock, but latterly, I regret to say, (and I entirely attribute it to the removal of “fines,”) the whole burthen of the Society has been borne by a few willing hearts, whilst in some instances either the Essay or Debate have not been forthcoming. At the same time, it must be admitted, that the various subjects discussed in this room have not been much deficient in number or in interest, as will appear from the hereto appended Report.

The President Mr. Robertson, commenced the year by furnishing “an inaugural address” on assuming the chair, and the following is a list of the various Essays delivered from that period to the present, with the names of the authors :—

On Macbeth—by Mr. Lee.

On the Life and Character of Thomas A’Becket (2 papers)—by Mr. Kingsford.

- On the Character of Marcus Brutus (3 papers),—by Mr. Ibbotson.  
 On the Clowns of Shakspeare—by Mr. Fleet.  
 On the Genius and Writings of Burns—by Mr. Elder.  
 On the Character of Jaques—by Mr. Kingsford.  
 On the Genius and Writings of Shakspeare—by Dr. Barber.  
 On Jaques in “As You Like It”—by Mr. Lee.  
 On Falstaff ————— by Mr. Dunkin.  
 On Milton’s Paradise Lost—by Dr. Barber.  
 On the Drawer, Francis in “Henry IV”—by Mr. Turner.  
 On Viola in Twelfth Light—by Mr. Kingsford.  
 A Memoir on the Defences of the Island and City of Montreal—by Mr. Turner.

- On the Life of Lord Bacon—by Mr. Cornwallis Monk.  
 On the Grave Diggers in Hamlet—by Mr. Fleet.  
 On some important corrections in the Philosophy of Mind, connected with the Physiology of the Brain—by Dr. Barber. And,  
 On Æschylus’ Drama of Prometheus—by Mr. Fletcher.

The subjects of the different Debates have been as follows:—

- Does the poetry of Johnson entitle him to a first rank amongst the British Poets?  
 Was General Monk’s conduct at the Restoration commendable?  
 Whether the Law of Primogeniture or an equal division of Property amongst the children is best calculated to advance the interests of a country?  
 Was Napoleon justified in putting to death the Duc D’Enghien?  
 Would the proposed annexation of Texas by the United States be justifiable?  
 Was the conduct of Queen Elizabeth towards the Earl of Essex justifiable?  
 Was the Madness of Hamlet feigned or real?  
 Was Sir Harry Vane’s execution just?  
 Is it advantageous to England that the principle of protection in the Corn Laws should be adhered to?  
 Were the Crusades on the whole beneficial to European civilization?  
 Would the occurrence of a war between the United States and Mexico consequent on the pending annexation of Texas, be likely to forward the interests of Great Britain or the reverse?

a Statue of Oliver Cromwell entitled to a place in the Series of Statues of British Sovereigns in the New Houses of Parliament? Was the Execution of Lord William Russell, in the reign of Charles II., justifiable?

Is the English mode of civilization more favourable to the development of the human power than the French?

Should Macbeth be regarded as needing the urgent promptings of his wife to induce him to his criminal enterprises? (Two Debates.)

Can the Execution of Sir Walter Raleigh be justified?

And are the writings in "Punch" calculated so to disturb the popular reverence for existing institutions as to exert a prejudicial influence on the public mind?

Amongst those who have signally aided the Society in the production of the above List of Essays, one name cannot have failed to have afforded you most pleasurable recollections. It is that of an Honorary Member whom we have been so happy as to acquire during the year in company with—

The Honble. Chief Justice ROBINSON.

B. H. SMART, Esq., the famous Elocutionist.

The Honble. PETER M'GILL.

The Honble. GEORGE MOFFATT.

The Rev. W. A. ADAMSON, and

J. H. HAGARTY, Esq., of Toronto.

I of course allude to Dr. BARBER, and it is to that gentleman that I now particularly refer, for the gratification of incorporating in my "Annual Report" the mention of the vote of thanks conveyed to him by the President on a late occasion, for the obliging manner in which he had responded to the wishes of the Society, by furnishing a most attractive paper. Would that our other Honorary Members would do us similar good service—I believe, however, that from one of the gentlemen whose names are above recited, we may look ere long for a Literary contribution, upon a subject of exceeding interest.

It would be ungrateful not to mention upon this occasion the presents which have been made to the Society during the year, consisting of a very splendid Shakspeare, by Mr. Hugh Taylor.

A copy of "Ireland's Forgeries," by Mr. Buchanan, Q. C.

A copy of Smart's Shakspearean Readings, by the Author.

A magnificent copy of "Boydell's Illustrations," by several Members whose names are inscribed therein.

Lucien Bonaparte's "Charlemagne," by Mr. Driscoll, Q. C., and two valuable prints, by Messrs. Walker and Lavicount.

The mention of the above Donations of Books, (in two instances by gentlemen not members of the Club) leads me to refer to the state of our Library, the acquisition of which should naturally be one of the first objects of a Society claiming to be exclusively "Literary." And I grieve to say that, but little progress has been made in this department since the last report. It is difficult to account for the supineness which appears to pervade our members on this subject—but I cannot help thinking that far greater results might have been attained, had the Library Committee bestirred itself to secure from each individual, as he joined our ranks, a donation of Books, (however small), then might we in a short period possess enough to justify us in saying that the "Shakspeare Club" had commenced the *first* testimonial in the Province to the virtues of its Patron, the late Governor General, in the shape of a collection of books which ere many years have passed it would not sound ridiculous to designate as the "*Metcalfe Library*." To this object, I for one, shall dedicate myself, and I venture to prognosticate that there are hundreds of individuals in the Province who will think it a privilege to aid us in our endeavours to establish an institution, which will redound to the credit of the Colony and of every one who shall participate in erecting so classical a memorial to the honor of the illustrious individual whose name I respectfully suggest that it should bear.

I have pointed out one or two circumstances which in my humble opinion have slightly retarded the advance of the Club—but the greatest is behind. The principal difficulty against which we had to contend has been the want of punctual attendance of the members.

Who, I may ask, will take the trouble to write an elaborate Essay when he is not certain of hearers? or who has not proved the deadening effect upon a public speaker of a half empty room? It is scarcely possible for a gentleman to conceive a greater social slight, than is offered to him

after toiling for a week to provide for the amusement and instruction of his associated literary brethren, than is displayed by the contemptuous absence of those who should have listened to his Essay, and in many instances of those who had previously engaged to assist him in Debate.

The subject is disagreeable, but I have thought it right to advert to it, knowing as I do, that I am only putting into words the feeling entertained by the working members of the Society. A more cheerful prospect is however opening upon us; the meetings are improving, and we are now enrolling a class of gentlemen who there is every reason to suppose will warmly co-operate with the elder brethren, in displaying the Society in all its vigour, and developing its perfect usefulness. In the words of the Reverend President\* of an Institution in Toronto which I am led to believe owes something of its rise to the "*disjecta Membra*" of a Society with which I had an intimate connection:—

“Let us, therefore, persevere, meet we with every so many impediments and coldnesses. Let us but exist, and husband well our life, and we shall grow with the growth of the fair city that surrounds us, and share yet, not unworthily, in its history. We are, it is true, in the embryo state; but let us believe ourselves an embryo of all hopeful things—the acorn from which the oak may grow. Let us go on steadily, without eye fixed simply on the improvement of ourselves, and the facilitating the study of Literature, and we shall speedily find our Society to be a centre of influence, not only having weight with the community around us, but connecting us and it by the strong sympathy of common pursuits, with some of the most useful and most respected bodies of men in the parent country.”

Believe me, Gentlemen, that OURS also is a future of all hopeful things—“the stream of time which is continually washing the dissoluble fabric of other Poets passes without injury *the adamant of SHAKSPEARE.*” In that mighty name we are destined to conquer, and to erect an Institution in this improving City, which shall in time embrace beneath its shadow all who by character, standing, and intelligence, can give stability to a Society formed solely for the advancement of Literature, and calculated

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\* Rev. Henry Scadding.

(as an unfailing consequence) to wean its members from frivolity and vice to the calmer walks of contemplation and improvement.

As no other opportunity may be afforded me, I have again, Gentlemen, in the language of the festive Season which approaches, unfeignedly to wish you a merry Christmas, and a happy New Year, when it comes.

JOSEPH S. LEE,  
Secretary Shakspeare Club.

MONTREAL, December 23rd, 1845.