

ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
SHAKSPEARE CLUB
FOR THE YEAR
1844

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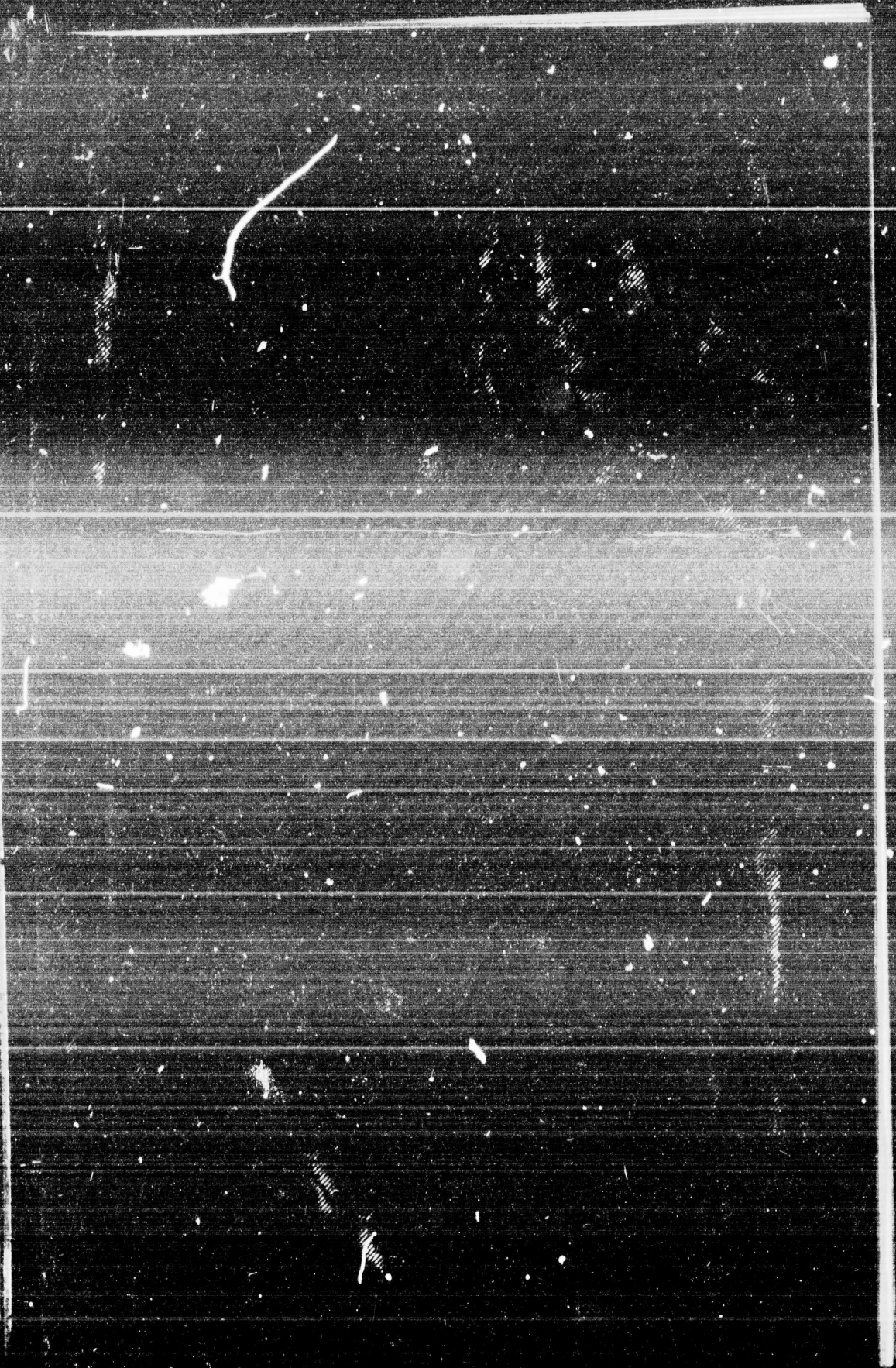


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ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

SHAKSPEARE

DRAMATIC AND LITERARY
CLUB,

FOR THE YEAR 1844.

MONTREAL :

PRINTED BY JAMES STARKE & CO.

1845.

MR. VICE-PRESIDENT

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REPORT.

MR. VICE-PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN,—

There are certain seasons, such as the departure of the old and the commencement of the New Year; birth days, anniversaries of memorable events, those "milestones" in the road of human life, when men are more immediately led to review the past. In our social relations we reflect on the strange vicissitudes whether good or evil that have befallen us, whether death has left a vacant place round the family fireside, or whether our family circle has been enlarged. The politician compares the present state of affairs with the past, the merchant balances his books, the wise and good man examines himself and casts a retrospective gaze into his own bosom, charitable and other societies send forth their annual reports, and every one in his private and public vocation seems anxious to wind up the departing year before entering upon that which is at hand. In compliance with so laudable and universal a custom, and also in accordance with the Fourth Regulation of this Society, I have now the honor to lay before it a detailed account of its proceedings during the past year. And in so doing, it is gratifying in the highest degree to be enabled to address the Club, in a strain of congratulation, the Minute Book chronicling no deeds save those of active exertion and success. At the close of the preceding year, (the first of our existence), on a similar occasion to the present, much

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was suggested for the consideration and approval of the Society; those suggestions have been carried out, and the consequence has been that we now find ourselves ranking in no secondary degree with the other Literary Associations of the Metropolis,—equalling them in the accommodation which we are enabled to afford to our members, and graced with the sanction of the name of the Representative of our Sovereign. Under any circumstances this last would be a proud reflection, but when we consider the character of the noble individual who has vouchsafed us his countenance and protection, when we reflect on that wisdom, that gentleness of heart, and liberality of disposition, which render all imitation vain and hopeless, it is difficult to overestimate the advantage and consideration which accrues to us from being allowed to place the name of His Excellency Sir Charles Metcalfe in the van of our undertaking—our Patron, Friend, and Example.

The objects which we proposed to ourselves at the beginning of the year, in addition to the procuring the Patronage of the Governor General, were briefly these: the acquisition of a Hall and Furniture of our own, and the collection of a Library. In one of these objects we have wholly succeeded, in the other two but partially. We certainly *have* furniture, which, through the liberality of the Members, is not unworthy of being placed in a more ambitious chamber than that in which we now assemble, which latter, although not “our own,” may in one sense be said to be so, inasmuch as it is wholly devoted to the use of the Society. But still we must not lose sight of the consummation at which we have ever aimed, the erection of a Chamber which shall be emphatically “our own,” a credit to the Society and an ornament to Montreal. At the risk of being branded as a visionary, I confidently predict that few “Sessions” of this Association will elapse, ere the “Shakspeare Club House” will have arisen, a building chaste in its design, convenient in its arrangement, and elegant (but inexpensive) in its ornaments and details. I steadfastly believe, that, with the constant acquisition of Members, which we have a right to expect,—with a prudent man-

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agement of our funds,—and with common energy and spirit, on the part of the “ Council” of the Society,—my prophecy will be fulfilled to the very letter. Our Library has not increased commensurately with the other branches of the Club, although it can boast of a few volumes possessing a certain value. The tardiness in increase of our collection of books, I fear must be attributed to the supineness of the Committee specially appointed to supervise this portion of our design. It is well known that a donation of books (however small) was expected of each Member, and also that but few of these donations have been made. A little energy on the part of the Library Committee, I apprehend, would have collected, catalogued, and classed these books.

Amongst the pleasurable recollections of the past year, must be prominently placed the visit of Mr. Macready to Montreal, his acceptance of an Honorary Membership in the Society, and also his affording us an opportunity of possessing ourselves of his portrait. By a Society professing the objects of the “ Shakespeare Club,” Mr. Macready’s name should be held in peculiar veneration on every ground, both Literary and Dramatic, for whilst at the present day, as an actor, he has no equal, as a scholar, he has few superiors. In what his claims upon society consist, as an accomplished gentleman, some of us have had the happiness of judging, and there can be but one opinion that Mr. Macready’s name confers particular dignity and consideration upon our Honorary Members’ List, however previously enriched with names of high repute.

The election of Officers of the Society, took place on the 8th January last, being the second Monday in the new year, as prescribed by the Laws.

The gentlemen elected to fill the various offices were :—

Mr. HARTLEY, as President,
 Mr. G. ROBERTSON, Vice-President,
 Mr. LEE, as Secretary, and
 Mr. FENWICK, as Treasurer.

With the exception of Mr. George Robertson, (who left the City in April last, and was succeeded in his office by his brother,) the same gentlemen have continued in their respective situations during the year, and it will be for you to evince by your votes in a few days, whether they have merited and secured your confidence. The President, however, you are aware, by his resignation at the last meeting, has declined re-election, but by your unanimous vote of thanks for his valuable services, the question of approval was determined, as far as he was concerned. At the same time with the officers were elected the three Committees necessary for carrying out the objects of the Society, viz. : The Council or Executive Committee, the "Questions" and the "Library" Committees. I trust that I shall not be overstepping my duty, when I express an opinion generally entertained in the Society, that these Committees have all lacked the essentials to their usefulness, viz., both industry and perseverance. The good that has been achieved, certainly cannot be traced to them, and experience has shown us the absolute necessity at the ensuing Election, of exercising our votes most cautiously for Committee-men for the next twelve months.

Very early in the year, the measure of printing a large number of copies of our Laws was adopted, and an immediate accession of Members was the result, a result which was still further contributed to by the opening of the new Club Room, on the 20th of May, since which period we have gone on increasing, and I now find, on reference to the Minute Book, that the Society possesses, three times the number of Members which it did at the beginning of the year. I fear however that the Treasurer will inform us that all the names are not "good" names, in other words, that after voluntarily entering our ranks, partaking of our exercises, and allowing us to incur liabilities in perfect faith in their integrity, some few are to be found, the credit side of whose accounts present but a barren aspect, and one which it is to be feared is little likely to improve. This evening will decide their fate—and the Roll will be purged of such

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Members of the Society, their names according to a Law passed on the 17th June, being to be prominently displayed as Defaulters upon the walls of the Club Room. Another Regulation which passed the Society on the same date, making the proposer of a Candidate liable for the Entrance Fee of the person admitted after default of one month, I apprehend will obviate such unpleasant proceedings for the future.

It was on the 3rd of July that the Officers, of the Society had an interview with His Excellency the Governor General, for the purpose of presenting an Address soliciting his countenance and patronage, they were received in the most kind and condescending manner, and the prayer of the address was acceded to. In a few days we may hope to see a Portrait of our worthy Patron, now executing by Mr. Bradish, adorning the walls of our Club Room.

The next most important event to the Society was the Anniversary Dinner upon the 18th September, of which I doubt not we all possess a pleasant recollection. Its success could not have been surpassed. May we often again meet an equally, intellectual, respectable, and happy assemblage around our board, and as we grow grey and sink in years, may the remembrance of our *jovial* no less than our *Literary* re-unions in the Shakespeare Club, restore our failing spirits and rejuvenate our hearts.

When time that steals our years away,

Shall steal our pleasures too,

The memory of the past shall stay,

And half our joys renew.

The following is a list of the Lectures which have been delivered during the past year, with the names of the authors:—

On Modern Novels—by Mr. Austin.

On Goldsmith's Deserted Village—by Mr. Kingsford.

On the Objects of our Club—by Mr. Robertson.

On the Antiquities of Athens—by Mr. Kingsford.

On Hamlet—by Mr. Lee.

- On Literary Quackery—by Mr. Kingsford.
 On the Cultivation of the Moral and Intellectual Faculties—by Mr. A. Robertson.
 Sketch of the History of the British Constitution—by Mr. M'Iver.
 On the Character of Othello—by Mr. Lee.
 On the Character of Falstaff—by Mr. Fleet.
 On Classical Learning—by Mr. A. Robertson.
 On Boldness—by Mr. Hughes.
 On the Character of Shylock—by Mr. Lee.
 On the Tragedy of Henry the Eighth—by Mr. Fleet.
 On Angelo, in Measure for Measure—by Mr. Kingsford.
 On Sympathy—by Mr. Burroughs.
 On Happiness—by Mr. Kingsford.
 On Mesmerism—by Mr. Constable.
 On the State of the Drama—by Mr. Evans.
 On the Two Grand Epochs in the Art of War—by Mr. Turner.
 On the Protector Cromwell—by Mr. A. Robertson,
 On Clever Young Gentlemen—by Mr. Fleet.
 A Defence of Samuel Johnson—by Mr. Kingsford.
 And on the Supernatural Beings of Shakspeare—by Mr. Lee.

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

- Was the Treatment of Mary, Queen of Scots, by Elizabeth, justifiable?
 Does the Pulpit afford a finer field for Eloquence than the Bar?
 Is Duelling ever Justifiable?
 Were the English justified in appropriating the Lands of the Indians in the manner in which they did, in North America?
 Was Brutus justified in killing Cæsar?
 Is a Republic better fitted for the developement of Talent than a Monarchy?
 Ought the Impeachment of Warren Hastings to have been sustained?
 Were the Allies justified in Banishing Napoleon Bonaparte?

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Is Impressment of Seamen in time of War, in England, necessary and justifiable?

Does Phrenology deserve to be reckoned amongst the Sciences?

Are the Pleasures of Hope greater than those of Memory?

Is the Genius of Shakspeare evinced more in his Tragedies than in his Comedies?

Is Gaming more dangerous and pernicious than Drunkenness?

Ought Punishment by Death to be abolished?

Was Mary, Queen of Scots, cognizant of the death of her husband, and guilty of the other crimes with which she is charged?

Was the English Parliament justifiable in taking Arms against Charles the First?

Has the World been a gainer by the successes of those usually denominated Heroes?

Is the poetry of Byron superior to that of Moore?

Was Cromwell a friend to the Liberties of England?

That these Debates have added greatly to our information who can doubt? Subjects of the most interesting nature which involved many passages of Ancient and Modern History, which raised discussion on points of casuistry, international Law, and the Literary character, cannot have been agitated without producing much benefit both to the speakers and auditors. That these Debates, besides their accustoming us to public business have exercised a beneficial influence on our conduct, must be equally admitted. Many of us walk in different paths of life, many of us are running a race of rivalry; and in a city like Montreal, where we are all known, either personally or by repute one to the other prejudices frequently will spring up, *kind* friends may represent us unfavourably, and unpleasant feelings arise between two persons merely because they are unacquainted with each other. In our intercourse here we rub off these narrow little prejudices, we judge for ourselves, and kindly sentiments supplant ungenerous suspicions. Union by degrees grows up amongst us; and though I do not wish to introduce politics into the peaceful recesses of Literature, or to make any manifestation of party

spirit, I cannot refrain from remarking, that in case of any civil commotion, the feeling which has sprung up amongst us at these Literary Meetings will nerve us in the defence of our dearest rights, and cement us into a phalanx, firm as that Roman Band, which threatened the life of the Etruscan King Porsena.

I have nothing to report as to the Dramatic proceedings of the past year, a remark which I trust not to have to repeat in my next "Report."

Suffer me in conclusion to cast a look towards the future. And there, as from an eminence, I behold a prospect rich in beauty and promise. I see our little grain of mustard seed, spreading into a good and widely extending tree. Our books increase, their quality and quantity at last entitle them to be called a Library. A Club House is built, and we, the original Members, recall with gratulation and complacency the time when we thought that Forty Members constituted a numerous society. Our feelings on such an occasion will be similar to those which an old settler in Montreal *now* experiences, when contrasting its splendid quays, its numerous public buildings and general advancement in civilization, with the comparative rudeness and simplicity of his younger days. To show that these expectations are not problematic or my views over-coloured by too sanguine a temperament, I need only allude to the infancy of similar Institutions in the old world. The Society for the encouragement of Arts, consisted at its commencement of only 12 Members, illustrious neither for their birth nor influence. The Royal Society was similarly weak in its early days, and owes its origin to a Club that met in Dr. Wilkins's Rooms at Wadham College. I cite these instances that Members may not ridicule the idea of this Club ever rising into a leading Literary Institution.

In my last report I indulged in a strain of thankfulness that since the formation of the Club, we had not lost a single Member by the hand of death. May we be enabled to assert the same fact (which by the goodness of Providence we are still allowed to repeat) at the return of *this* Anniversary, and not only so, but to say, that this So-

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ciety has advanced us in the path of virtue, weaned us from sensual and degrading pleasures, diffused benevolence and kindly feeling, and rendered us fitter to enter into that indissoluble *Society* above, in which, (unlike this) there is neither controversy nor division.

Gentlemen, in the language of the Festive Season which approaches, I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year when it comes.

JOSEPH S. LEE,

Secretary *Shakspeare Club*.

MONTREAL, December 23rd, 1844.