

FOURTH
ANNUAL REPORT

2

OF THE

COUNCIL

OF THE

NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY,

FOR 1830-31.

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REPORT.

THE Members of the Council of the Natural History Society beg leave to submit to their fellow Members a brief report of the condition of the Society, and the proceedings which have characterised the past year. This Institution has now reached its fourth anniversary, and appears therefore to have surmounted those difficulties that have stifled the attempts of former associations. The Council is of opinion that this result is owing in a great degree to the measure so judiciously adopted at the outset, of forming a Museum and Library. The extent to which these have arrived, (considering the small period elapsed since they were commenced,) is considerable, and they form a bond by which the Members are held together, and without which probably much of the interest now excited by the view of the collections, (a property in which belongs to each individual Member,) would be destroyed. But even when the zeal of some shall have cooled, it is not to be doubted that the very circumstance of the value of the collections will be a stimulus to many others, by whose exertions any want of will on the part of original Members will be made up.

The Society has laboured under a considerable disadvantage during the last year, in being compelled to remain in a room, by no means fitted for the purpose of a Museum, and in consequence,

there have been no means of keeping up that due regularity, arrangement and attention, which are necessary ingredients in conducting such an institution. The Cabinet must have suffered in the eyes of visitors, because from the impossibility of avoiding the crowding together of a great number of objects, and the consequent difficulty of any thing like a classification, unfavourable impressions might have been taken up regarding the care and attention bestowed upon the Society's duties. The Council is happy to be able to express its hope that this objection will not in future exist, it having, with the Society's approbation, procured much more extensive rooms, and in a more eligible situation. The house, rented by the Society from the Medical Faculty of M'Gill College, will be amply sufficient to contain, and display to advantage, the large collection belonging to the Society, but the repairs and fitting up, preliminary to the change of situation, will not be completed before the anniversary meeting. The task, therefore, of superintending the arrangements rendered necessary by this change will fall to the part of the Council, to be elected for the ensuing year; though the principal labour will devolve upon the Committees which have been specially deputed to arrange certain departments, it being included in their duties, that they should superintend the removal and arrangement of the articles specially intrusted to them.

The Council would be desirous of following the mode adopted in former Reports, that of stating specifically the increase in each department of the Cabinet, but the reasons already alluded to will, it hopes, prove a sufficient apology for omitting an enumeration which would be of little utility, in consequence of the new arrangements of the objects, and the rejections that must necessarily arise of many of those now contained in the catalogues.

To have enumerated them would have also entailed much unnecessary labour, since, in anticipation of the alterations that are now about to be made, the entry of the names and descriptions of the objects added has been omitted, as not being likely to be of any permanent use, and they have been only reserved in safe keeping till the new arrangement should be completed. To follow the example, then, of former reports, would require a labour unattended with any beneficial result, and would indeed be anticipating that to which special Committees have been appointed. The Council, however, cannot refrain from stating that large additions have been made to the Society's collections. Of these, the most important is unquestionably the handsome and extensive collection of minerals, which the liberality of the Legislature enabled the Society to purchase. The specimens of this collection are of a superior description, the size being that adapted to collections of public bodies, and the extent and variety such as will leave little to be desired for any purpose of general utility, or for the facility of study, or for the purpose of illustrating a course of lectures. Besides the valuable collection acquired by purchase, a considerable number of specimens has been received as donations, and of these many will form an acceptable addition even to the enlarged Cabinet. The Society cannot too often or too openly express its gratitude to those generous lovers of science, who have put themselves to the trouble and expense of collecting objects of art or of natural history, with the view of presenting them as donations to the Society; and not less is due to several individuals, unconnected with this city, who have, notwithstanding, from an earnest wish to assist the cause of science, made donations of value. The Council believes that it will not be supposed to go beyond the wishes of the Society, when, in its name, it tenders its grateful thanks to

the many individuals that have, during the closing year, added to its possessions, donations of various kinds. It trusts that the benefit, which it fondly hopes the Society will be the means of conferring upon the community, will secure a continuance of this most decided proof of the good will of the public, and of their satisfaction in the general management of the affairs of the Institution. Although it is impossible to notice all those who have presented donations of value, the Council begs leave to mention the names of T. A. Begly, Esquire, of this city, and J. J. Langdon, Esquire, of Burlington, as donors of large and valuable series of minerals; and of N. Gould, Esquire, of London, who has several times transmitted objects of curiosity and of utility. It has also pleasure in stating, that during the last summer a donation of minerals, from a sister Society, has been received. The Belfast Natural History Society, small in its outset, like the Institution of which the Council forms a part, has been raised into distinction by the persevering and zealous exertions of a few private individuals. Societies with a kindred object, situated in distant regions of the globe, can be mutually beneficial, and the Council of this Society has not failed to reciprocate the donation received from its Irish contemporary; and it is to be hoped that a connection so auspiciously begun will not be suffered to die away. Captain Bayfield, R. N. by a donation of geological specimens from the lower parts of the St. Lawrence, and William Sheppard, Esquire, of Woodfield, by a donation of dried plants from the environs of Quebec, have conferred obligations on the Society which it is bound to acknowledge. Among the donors of objects of art or curiosity, the Council thinks itself justified in mentioning the name of Captain Stoddard, of the ship *Thames*, of London, who has, on several occasions, made handsome presents to the Society.

The Council is not without hope that the example of Captain Stoddard will be imitated by many of the masters who frequent this port. Few persons have more frequent opportunities of procuring, at little expense, objects of value and interest; and were the masters of vessels to take up the habit of collecting, a large amount might be quickly amassed. We have examples, in several ports of the United States and elsewhere, of the great utility of interesting in the favour of public museums, the valuable class of mariners. Could this be effected here, the Society would find itself a gainer to a great degree, and the Council hopes that the merchants connected with these gentlemen, (particularly those who are concerned in the West India trade, a country so fertile in all the objects of natural history,) will not be unwilling to recommend to those under their influence, the objects to which allusion has been made. The Council begs leave to trespass a little longer on the patience of the Society in recording the names of E. S. Glen, Esquire, who at much trouble to himself transmitted a number of objects of curiosity connected with the customs of the inhabitants of South America, and of Mr. William Walker, merchant, of Quebec, who was at the pains of transporting from Surinam to Liverpool and from that port to this country, a large case of insects. The Council will only refer to one other donor, a lady, Miss L. D. Dix, of Boston, whose unexpected and liberal donation has been received with a pleasure much beyond the value of the objects themselves, although they were highly useful and interesting.

The Library not requiring any preparation in entering its additions, the Council will mention precisely its increase. The number of volumes mentioned in the Report of the Council for 1829-30, was 365; there have been added by purchase 27 volumes, and by donation 11, forming

a total of 403 volumes now possessed by the Society.

Passing from the state of the collections, the Council proceeds to notice the number of Members in connection with the Society. There have been elected during the year, seven Ordinary Members, and eight Corresponding—no Honorary Member has been chosen. The number of Members last year who, as resident, were subject to pay a yearly subscription, was 96 ; those at the present date amount to 90.

The Council has much satisfaction in stating the increase both in the number and merit of the Essays offered in competition for its medals. The Committees to which they were referred have in their reports stated the grounds for withholding or adjudging the different prizes, and although it would appear that the majority of the Essays was not of a kind to meet the wishes of the Society, yet the fact that there were several of considerable merit, affords an index of the utility which this mode of exciting emulation may be productive of. The Council has to regret, that the competition for the medal offered for the best Essay read during the year, at any of the monthly meetings, should have called forth so little exertion on the part of the Members, as well as of others, but it is to be hoped that should the Society judge expedient to continue a similar offer hereafter, that the competition may be such as will require the talents of judges to decide.

Among the proceedings of the year, the Council cannot omit the mention of the course of Lectures on Geology, given last fall by Mr. John Finch, which, from having been numerous attended and from the mode of delivery, must have been useful in turning the minds of the auditors to that interesting branch of science. The Council was induced to procure the services of that gentleman, from

feeling a strong desire to insure the occasional delivery of Lectures on the different branches of science in this city, and from being deeply impressed with the idea of the benefits that might result from them, especially as through them particularly, the younger portion of the community may be expected to devote more time and attention to these just objects of attention, than has hitherto been customary.

The Council will conclude its report by a notice of the financial condition of the Society. By the Report of the Finance Committee, it appears that a very considerable outlay has been made during the last year, amounting to the large sum of £442 5s. 11d. The principal part of this expense arose from the purchase of the cabinet of minerals, and of apparatus and books, and from the purchase and preparation of quadrupeds, birds, and other animals. A large expense is necessarily incurred in the cases, which are indispensable for the preservation and display of these last named objects, so that the expense of the case sometimes equals or exceeds that of the contents themselves. This is unavoidable, as otherwise, from ravages of insects and the changes produced by exposure, they would become entirely useless. The Council is happy to find from the accompanying Report of the Committee, that notwithstanding the large sum expended, a balance of £121 7s. 4½d. still remains in the Treasurer's hands, a considerable part of which is, however, already appropriated.

Finally, it is here necessary to notice the mark of protection, which for the third time has been shewn to this Society by the Legislature of the Province, in voting an aid for the present year of £50 to assist in procuring a suitable building for its reception, and which has not been included in the Treasurer's account. This liberality calls for and the Council has no doubt will receive the warmest re-

turn of thanks from every one connected with the Society, and from the strong desire shown by the Legislature to increase the means of Education, and to foster all attempts towards facilitating the acquirement of knowledge in the superior branches of science, the Society, it is to be expected, will not fail to be still further favoured, provided, of which the Council has no doubt, a judicious application be made of the funds put into its hands, and that the primary objects of the Society, viz. the advancement of the study of Natural History chiefly, but of Science and Literature in general, be kept steadily in view, and that they produce the zeal and ardour which alone can bring about the advancement of the Society, and the benefits it was expected to create.

All which is submitted.

By order of the Council,

A. F. HOLMES, M. D.

Chairman.

May 16, 1831.