

1878

FIRST

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

Natural History Society

OF

MONTREAL,

DELIVERED BY THE LATE COMMITTEE OF

MANAGEMENT,

AND READ AT THE MEETING OF THE SOCIETY

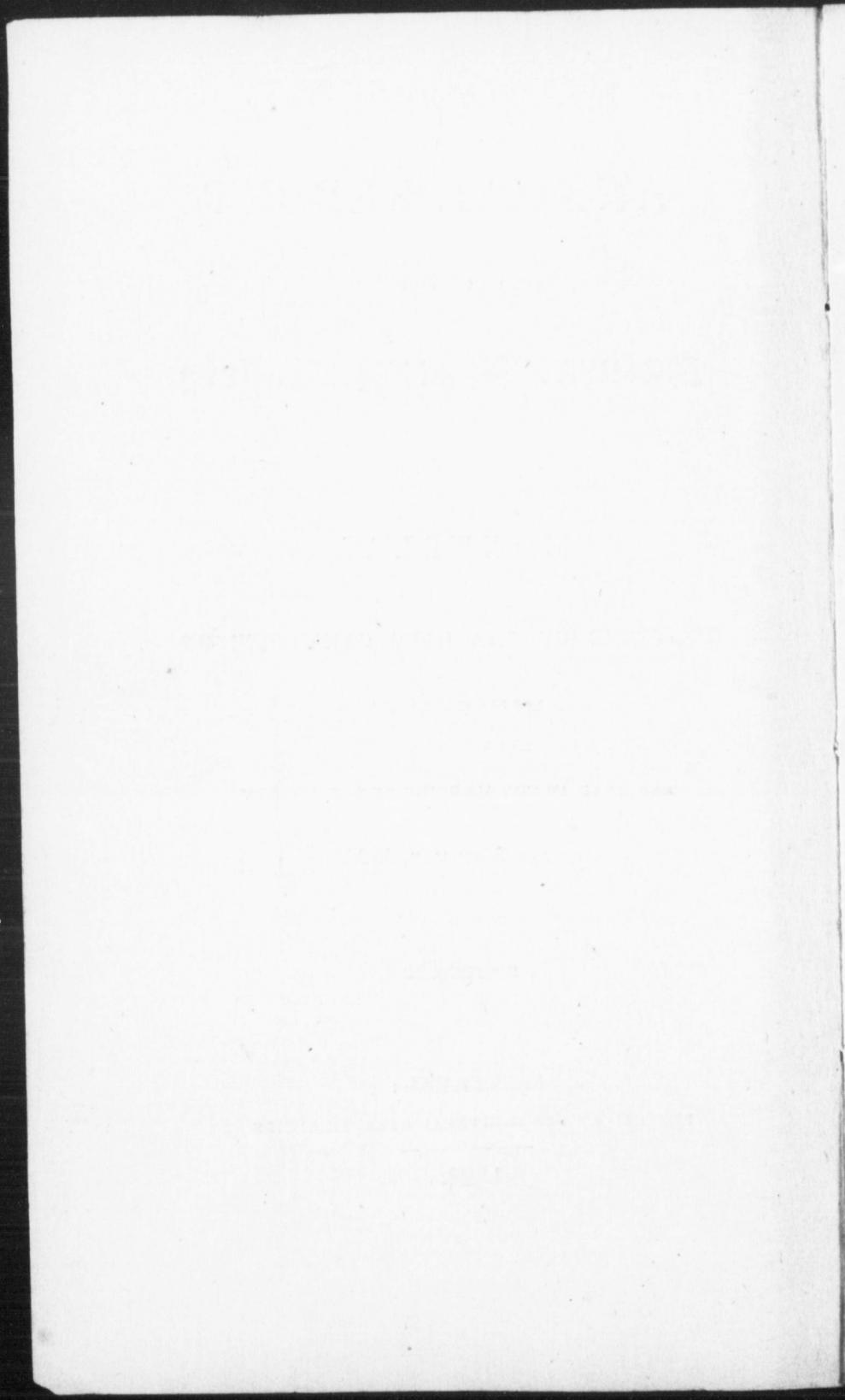
OF THE 26TH MAY, 1828.

MONTREAL:

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1828.

Major August-Lalor



REPORT.



The termination of the first year of the existence of the NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY makes it imperative on the Committee to whom was entrusted the guardianship of its interests to render an account of its proceedings. In making this report, they do but follow a rule established in many other Societies of a similar nature. In these Societies it is customary at the close of every year to draw up a report of the progress made and of their future prospects, and at the same time to point out the means to ensure their advancement or to resist their retrogression. Following this judicious custom, it is thought proper to commence what may hereafter become a regular practice, viz. the presentation of Annual Reports, and by casting a glance on the proceedings of the last year, to recall to the recollection of the Members, the progress of the Society.

It is now only 12 months since a few gentlemen, casually met together, proposed the establishment of this Society. They were not unaware of the difficulties they would have to encounter. In all communities, the persons who devote themselves to scientific pursuits are few. Few of the ordinary avocations of life require a general scientific knowledge and altho' some professions necessarily exact a greater acquaintance with science and nature than others, still such knowledge is commonly looked upon only as a necessary precursor to more solid advantages, and its possessors are seldom led to extend it. In communities such as this where wealth is comparatively little, where no opulent endowments take off the necessity of attention to securing a livelihood, and where in consequence the attention is directed into channels, very different from those of scientific research, not many could be expected to join in assisting the Society by their personal exertions, however pleased they might be to see it arise. Anticipating, therefore, but a small list of members, and aware also that at different times, associations had been formed for literary purposes, which had gradually been dissolved, the founders of the Society saw the necessity of a bond of union

independent of the personal characters of the first members,—a visible sign of the existence and utility of the Institution and around which, the members might at all times rally. With a view, then, to afford this bond,—to prevent the tendency to dissolution, the proposers of the NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY resolved to found a Museum, an Institution which experience has proved to have great power in calling the attention to scientific pursuits, and the want of which was forcibly felt by several members, who looked back upon the causes which in their younger days retarded their own improvement. But the mere collection of the productions of nature would leave the design of the Society imperfect without the possession of books, that treat of such objects. They are mutually dependent on each other—One without the other leaves the work half-done, but both connected give the greatest facilities for instruction which can be afforded. In addition therefore to the possession of a Museum, it was one of the first objects of the Society to secure a library of books on Science in general. On these principles, and with these views, the NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY was established and we may now turn to the development of the plan and the progress we have made.

We cannot without feelings of pride contrast the appearance which this room presents within the lapse of a year. At the commencement of the Society, the expectations of the members were by no means sanguine. They hoped that by affording a focus, they might, in the course of years, have formed a collection of some value and they were content to think they might slowly advance. Commencing with no extravagant ideas, but acting with zeal and unanimity, their success exceeded all expectation. No one in May 1827 could have anticipated the state of the Society in the present month. His Excellency the Governor in Chief consented to become its Patron, and shewed by a munificent donation his wish for its success. New members were admitted at every meeting by which the funds of the Society were increased. The Society enrolled on its list many of the most scientific men of the neighbouring States and of Britain, and from many of them has received assurances of support. Correspondence was commenced with all willing to assist in the undertaking. Donations have crowded upon the Society, and the flourishing state of the funds has allowed the purchase and preparation of numerous specimens, and their being arranged in a proper manner. Among the donations the Committee cannot omit to mention that the collection originally formed by S. SEWELL Esquire, and deposited in the charge of the MONTREAL LIBRARY was by the liberality of that gentleman, and with the consent of the Directors of the Library, transferred in full right to the Society, by which donation possession was obtained of a large number of specimens of every kind.

The Committee will now proceed to detail more particularly the state of the Society, premising, that at its commencement,

they had literally nothing. The detail will divide itself into two heads: the state of the Museum and that of the Library, to which a third may be added, containing what cannot be classed under either of these.

The Museum contains four divisions: of Zoology, Botany, Mineralogy and of Miscellanies, the latter including all objects of curiosity, or of art, which do not fall under one or other of the preceding classes:

In the first department, that of Zoology, the acquisitions made have been numerous and important. They are classed thus:—

Quadrupeds—specimens,.....	20
Birds, do... ..	220
Fishes—most of them preserved } ..	40
in spirits—specimens, } ..	
Shells—species,.....	144
Insects—dried and in spirits,.....	172
Corals and Corallines,.....	11

Of these the quadrupeds and birds are the most striking from their number, and the beautiful manner in which they have been prepared. The Society has engaged a regular artist in this department, who is in constant employment. The insects and shells are also objects pleasing from their beauty and variety, and although the specimens preserved in spirits are less striking in appearance, they are not less valuable, and the object of the Society is not so much to gratify the eye, as to afford solid instruction to the mind.

In the second department, that of Botany, the collection is as yet small, consisting of Plants collected in the vicinity of Montreal and Quebec, and of a few from the British isles. The Society anticipates considerable additions in this department.

The number of indigenous specimens is	121
The number of European do.	321

Total 442

As plants when preserved occupy a very small space, they of course appear to little advantage in a Museum, and they cannot be exhibited at all times from their liability to be injured. They are however a valuable part of a collection, and deserve every attention.

In the third department, the Museum has made very rapid progress. From the imperfect state in which it must still be, notwithstanding the number of the specimens, and from the constant donations which are received, the arrangement of this division has not yet been attempted. The specimens have only been placed generally under three heads.—Simple Minerals, Geological specimens, and Organic remains. In the catalogue of Minerals, including these three subdivisions, the number amounts to 685. These are principally Canadian, but many are from the United States, and a few from Europe. The

Society believes, that, it is in this department, it will receive the most frequent donations; promises, indeed, have been made by several gentlemen, correspondents of the Society, who from their residence and other facilities have much in their power. Another obvious cause for anticipated greater increase in this department, is that Minerals require no other trouble but that of collection, are easily transported without risk of injury,—advantages enjoyed by no other objects of Natural History.

In the Fourth department, a great number of objects has been collected which would not be easy correctly to specify, or enumerate. Among them are various Indian curiosities, such as dresses, weapons, instruments, &c., also articles of dress from various countries—articles of interest, from their antiquity, or from their associations with great men, or great events—and finally *lusus naturæ*. In this department, the present confined state of the room will not allow of any other arrangement, but that of convenience, and consequently, though numerous, these objects do not appear to advantage. The total number of articles in this department amount to 40.

The Committee proceeds next to detail the state of the Library. It is a standing rule of the Society to allow no books to be purchased, but those treating of some subject, connected with science, or the arts.—They do not, however, exclude from their Library, works on general literature, provided they are offered as donations. The number of volumes which the Library contains must of course be small. There have been obtained by purchase 23 volumes, and by donation 49, making in all 72 volumes. The Society is in daily expectation of receiving by arrivals from Europe, a further addition of the most necessary works on the different departments of science.

The Committee has now to notice those other matters which concern the interests of the Society, and which have not hitherto been touched upon. The number of ordinary members who contribute to the funds amount to 90, and 18 Honorary, and 32 corresponding members, grace the Society's list. Among them are many of the most eminent men in Britain and the United States. With a view to secure the assistance of persons resident in the interior, a Committee was appointed, to which was transferred all the duties connected with the Indian countries. From this Committee, the Society will receive a report. Feeling the necessity of order and regularity in the conduct of the Society, a Committee was early appointed to revise the regulations then in force, and to frame a code for the government of the members. This duty has been performed in a proper manner, and the Society now enjoys the result of their labours in the printed laws in the hands of their members. With a view also, to bind closer the ties of fellowship, it was thought right to procure an engraved Diploma, by possessing which the Members would feel more strongly engaged in promo-

ting the general interest. This project, delayed by unexpected circumstances, the Committee is in hopes will soon be accomplished.

In conclusion the Committee of Management has now completed the term for which it was elected, and the Society, under the new laws, will hereafter be governed by a Council. The Committee has only further to express its earnest hope, that successive years may bring a harvest as abundant as that gathered under its auspices, and that the usefulness of the Society may become fully appreciated. As the object of the founders was to foster a general spirit of scientific and literary research, they did not make their Society an exclusive one. It was their intention to admit, whenever circumstances should call for it, an extension of the plan, and to join the more ostensible object with other departments of Science and of Art, and with literature in general.

All which is respectfully submitted

A. F. HOLMES, M. D.
CHAIRMAN, C. M.

May 26th, 1828.