

TRANSACTIONS
OF THE
Literary and Historical Society,
OF QUEBEC.

SESSION OF 1865-6.

PAPER I.—OPENING ADDRESS.

BY REV. JAMES DOUGLAS VICE-PRESIDENT.

(Read before the Society, 15th November, 1865.)

The untoward event, which imposes upon me, the youngest of the Vice-Presidents elected at the beginning of the year, the necessity of addressing you at the opening of another Session, has suggested a subject.

Heretofore with the departure of the Government our Society has declined. Its return has revived it. But the animation which it more than once thus temporarily inspired was not vigorous enough to maintain much activity for any length of time after its removal. Must it be so again? Or have we not within ourselves strength enough to stand, yes, and walk, without the assistance of so unreliable a prop. If, under our present organization and mode of procedure we have not, can any change be made which would ensure so indispensable a result? To assist us in our answers I shall trace the history of the Society from its first establishment, and thereby show you what has been tried, and with what success.

The origin of our Society was explained last year by one of the original members, the Hon. W. Sheppard, in an

address at a conversazione of the Natural History Society of Montreal. "Strange to say", he remarks, "its formation was brought about indirectly by a political movement in this wise: It is no doubt known to many of you that the late John Neilson was the owner of the *Quebec Gazette*, established in 1764. In virtue of an Act of Parliament, it possessed the privilege of publishing all official documents as they occurred. Neilson was a great politician, and was opposed to Lord Dalhousie in some points of government. This opposition Lord Dalhousie could not tolerate, and he came to the determination of establishing a paper which he could control, calling it the *Quebec Gazette, By Authority*; and he caused Dr. Fisher, co-editor of the *New-York Albion*, to come to take charge of it. Dr. Fisher had been a member of the Literary and Historical Society of New-York. He persuaded Lord Dalhousie to get up a Society with similar title and object in Quebec. This was done; Chief Justice Sewell (a slight error, as we shall see hereafter) became the first President, and Mr. Green the Secretary. The Society was in the first instance composed of high officials and courtiers, and the fee was fixed at a high rate, for some end which can only be guessed at". For the reasons Mr. Sheppard stated the *Gazette* is silent as to the young association; but the *Mercury* even then commenced to yield it that firm support from which it has never wavered. Though Dr. Fisher may have given a name and form to the Society, the idea seems to have originated with Lord Dalhousie himself; for as A. Stuart, Esq., the president for 1838, states in his obituary notice of the noble founder: "The establishment of a Literary Society in Lower Canada appears to have occupied his thoughts from his first arrival. His impression probably was, that the time was now come when such an attempt could be made with some prospect of success, and that the Lower Province, the oldest of the Colonies, was the place where it ought naturally to originate. Accordingly, in the course of the year 1823, he called together, at the castle of St. Louis, a number of persons favourable to his design, and in a short address explained to them his views.

After apologizing for taking the lead in the absence of any other likely to do it, he stated that the advantages of such an institution were indispensable,—that, independently of other subjects of research open to all, the early history of Canada, and the language and customs of the *aborigines*, offered an immediate and prominent ground of enquiry, and concluded by offering for himself an ardent zeal and most anxious desire to promote the success of the Society by every means in his power.

“The first meeting of the Society was held on the 6th of January 1824, when an election of officers took place, and his lordship was nominated patron”.

The meeting to organize and accept the laws and bye-laws was held in the Castle of St. Louis, on Monday, the 16th of March, 1824. The Society then received the name it has ever since borne; and a constitution, not essentially different to that now in force, was adopted. There were fewer officers, however, and much higher fees. By law No. VI. it was enacted that “members of the Society, resident in the Province, shall pay, on admission the sum of five pounds, and the annual subscription shall be three pounds, payable during their residence in the Province”. Accompanying the report of the meeting, is an address to the public, detailing the objects which the promoters of the Society had in view, viz.:—“To discover and rescue from the unsparing hand of time the records which yet remain of the earliest history of Canada”; and, as secondary in importance to that, “to promote every means of discovering, collecting, and procuring whatever information may throw light on the natural and early civil and literary history of the *British Provinces of North America*”.

The officers elected for the year 1824 were:—

FOUNDER AND PATRON.—*His Excellency the Right Honble. George, Earl of Dalhousie.*

PRESIDENT.—*His Excellency the Hon. Sir Francis E. Burton.*

VICE-PRESIDENT.—*The Hon. Chief Justice Valliers de St. Real, Esq.*

RECORDING SECRETARY.—*William Green, Esq.*

TREASURER AND CORRESPONDING SECRETARY.—*John Charlton Fisher, Esq., LL.D.*

“ At this meeting Lord Dalhousie fully redeemed the pledge held out in his opening address, by granting annually out of his own resources the sum of £100, during the period of his stay in the Province. By means of this munificent grant the Society was enabled to enter upon the collection of a museum and apparatus, with a rapidity which would otherwise have been impossible, with its scanty resources and the paucity of its members at that period”.—*Council Report of 1824.*

Thus did the Society alienate its first funds from the avowed object of its pursuits, Canadian history and antiquities.

Lord and Lady Dalhousie continued to take a lively interest in the welfare of the Society. Her Ladyship presented to the museum a collection of Canadian plants; and on their departure, his Excellency addressed an autograph letter to the President. This letter came into the possession of our late Council Secretary, who presented it to the Society before his removal to Ottawa. It is as follows:—

“ Castle of St. Louis, 3rd Sept., 1828.

“ Mr. President,—

“ Deeply sensible of the many favours and distinguished honors which the Literary and Historical Society has conferred upon me. I cannot take my leave of it without expressing the pride and gratitude which the recollection of them will constantly nourish in my mind, and which will ever lead me to take the warmest interest in the advancement and prosperity of the Institution.

Upon the hour of my departure, I feel one act of duty still incumbent on me, and which is important to the great object of all our wishes; it is an act that would be felt painful to myself, were it not leading to the welfare of the Society, and, therefore, only am I gratified in the performance of it.

“ In resigning my station here as his Majesty's representative in this country, I must also resign the distinguished title of ‘Patron of this Society’. The presence of the patron at the table is too important to be dispensed with, and I therefore return into your hands an honour which I have ever highly appreciated, and shall never cease to appreciate as I ought.

“ I have the honor, Sir, to be

“ Your much obliged and faithful humble servant,

“ DALHOUSIE.

‘ To the President of the Literary and Historical Society,
“ Quebec ”.

He was not the last governor that bore the name of patron, and really performed some of a patron's duties. Sir James Kemp, his immediate successor, identified himself with the Society as intimately as its founder had done. Lord Gosford's name and annual subscription appear at the head of the list of ordinary members, and Lord Durham inaugurated his connection with the Society by the donation of the splendid collection of the Greek and Latin classics, a few volumes of which have escaped amidst the vicissitudes to which the library has been exposed, and, by presenting the Society with a number of valuable manuscripts, copied at his own expense in France. Some of these were printed in the volume of Historical Memoirs published by the Society in 1840.

The exclusive character of the Society, and the high annual subscription, invited opposition. A new Society was started, under the presidency of Colonel Joseph Bouchette, with somewhat the same aim as the Literary and Historical. It was named "The Society for encouraging the Arts and Sciences in Canada". Of course it was discountenanced by Lord Dalhousie, but nevertheless prospered, and could soon boast of a longer list of members than its more favoured opponent. There can never, however, have been any hostility between the competing associations, as the most active members in the one were leading members in the other. But one difference is very observable between them. This Society of Arts and Sciences obtained the support of as many French as English. After the amalgamation, however, the French seemed soon to withdraw, and the united Society has never enrolled many of them on its list. This amalgamation was brought about through the intervention of Sir James Kemp, in 1829.

The joint Societies retained the name of the elder branch, and continued in the pursuit of the same object they had both heretofore followed. For in the first volume of our transaction, published in 1829, out of 17 papers, but three are on historical subjects, two only of which bear upon American topics, and that despite the repeated

determination that the Society should really sustain its character as a depository and disseminator of historical tradition.

A special grant of £250 was in that year made by the Legislature. It was principally laid out on philosophical and chemical apparatus, allowed in a report of a few years later to have been of little or no service, as the Society never had a laboratory or theatre suitable for experimental illustrations and lectures, even if members had been found desirous of so using them. The appointment of curator of apparatus, now so complete a sinecure, was then a responsible office.

In 1831 our present charter was granted to the Society; it issued a second volume of transactions as bulky as the first, and bade fair to enjoy increasing prosperity. It was composed of the most influential men of the city, many of whom, besides lending their name and contributing their subscription, really assisted in its work. In 1836 the report of Council gave the following:—

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| Honorary in Europe and America. | 61 |
| Corresponding. | 96 |
| Ordinary and Associate. | 154 |
| Actual residing members supporting Society | 127 |

It was the only period in the history of the Society when it could be said that “any considerable accession was not to be expected, as it already embraced a large proportion of the resident inhabitants, who from their tastes and pursuits might be induced to give it their support”

The 3rd volume of Transactions, containing 38 papers, appeared in 1837.

In 1838 was published the 1st volume of Historical Memoirs. It was followed in 1840 by another collection of documents, obtained from the archives and public offices of France by Lord Durham and the Revd. M. J. Holmes, of the Quebec Seminary; and in 1843, by a republication of some old and inaccessible narratives of early North American discovery.

But the political troubles which convulsed the Province during the latter part of the decennial period from 1830-40, diverted the public mind from any quieter pursuits than politics. This told upon the Society, not so much in diminishing the number of members as in what is even more injurious, diverting their attention and lessening their interest in its special objects. Then, in 1839, arose the lament which we are echoing to-day, the removal of the civil government with its many efficient members. The hold which the Society had on the public mind before the Rebellion it appears never to have recovered: for though it now occupied spacious rooms, in the old Parliament Buildings; had a mineralogical cabinet of over 1300 specimens; and the care of the extensive collection of stuffed animals, made by M. Chasseur, and owned by the Province; and a well selected library of a thousand volumes, the annual reports complain of a "falling off in the attendance at meetings", and that "few original papers were read before it in the ordinary course", Rep. for 1840; or that "the funds are in a very low state", Rep. for 1841. This condition of things was still further aggravated by the establishment of the Quebec Library, and the Quebec Library Association, which evidently offered greater attractions than the old Society, and won away its members from their adherence. To so low an ebb did affairs at last sink, that subscriptions were received in 1850 from only 14 members, and more than once only two papers are reported as read during the session.

In 1852, the return of the government was hailed as a relief in so desperate a condition of affairs; and certainly it did somewhat fill up the list of members. But its coming was not unattended with drawbacks; for parliamentary requirements compelled that the space allotted to the Society should be restricted. So cases were pulled down and cut to pieces and re-erected, only again to be pulled down and huddled together in greater confusion than before. Sorrowful are the complaints of the Council, and indignant its appeal for compensation. But compensation

never came. A general conflagration however did come to solve that question, and give rise to several others. The Parliament Buildings were burnt down in 1854, and the Society went in search of lodgings. They found some rooms over Henderson's grocery store, in St. Louis street, and thither they removed what of their property remained. But the fire, and the accession to their numbers from among the government officials, and a grant of £250 to make up for losses sustained, revived it: for the meetings began again to be attended, the full complement of papers was read, and in 1855 there was published Vol. IV. of the Transactions, which had been so long in press that two of the members, who contributed papers to it, had died ere it appeared.

Then the government again left, and the Society, in consequence, again languished. Yet it succeeded in paying rent for its miserable accommodation, and even moved into somewhat better lodgings in St. John street. There, in the course of time, the government once more found it.

All those who had previously belonged to the Society again joined, and to their number was added our present President, to whom certainly, more than to any dozen members, is due the praise and honour of raising the Society to the comfortable position it now occupies. But this result even his energy and tact would hardly have brought about, had it not been for another fire, which, this time, as you all remember, left us only 700 sodden and coverless books, out of the fine library of 4,000 volumes, which had been amassed up to the year 1862. The few moth-eaten, unearthly-looking creatures which had been saved from the museum in the first fire, we were spared the trouble of burning; and after the fire we sold all that remained of our apparatus for old brass. The fire had the good effect, however, of awakening our fellow townsmen to a recollection of our existence, and created such sympathy in our favour that an increase of members rapidly followed. Besides which, an arrangement was made with Morrin College, whereby we have come to occupy more becoming quarters than the Society has enjoyed

since she was so unceremoniously turned out of her fine apartments in the old Parliament Buildings, and shoved into a corner.

Since 1862 we have had not only a full roll, but we have done our due share of work. Under Mr. Faribault's editorship there have been published a pamphlet, appended to the transactions of 1862, entitled "Documents sur Jacques Cartier" and a "Mémoire du Sieur Ramesay;" and to the Transactions have been added 24 papers. A classified catalogue of the library was also issued in 1862.

And now we have arrived again at one of the crises in our history, when we are called upon to rely on our own resources. Is the result to be what it heretofore has been, or is it not?

It is certainly disheartening, this review of the past and its failure: for there were always some members whose whole hearts were in the work, and who spared themselves no troubles in furthering its cause. At first there were such men as Capt. Bayfield, Lieut. Baddeley, Chief Justice Sewell, and Mr. Stuart; and afterwards there were those who had served the Society in its brighter days, and who lived or remained in town to support it in its days of adversity. Take, for instance, the late Dr. Wilkie. In 1844, when the attendance at the meetings was by no means encouraging, of seven papers read no less than four were by him. And he was not alone in his attachment to the once prosperous undertaking. There were the late Arch. Campbell, Esq., who never forsook it, and whose name stood in the Treasurer's books from the time they were first opened till the year of his death; and that single-hearted man, Robert Symes, and the Messrs. Cary, father and son, and Judge Black, who, though he never took part in the proceedings, never withdrew his name from the list; and our old friend M. Faribault, and a Capt. McDougall, who not merely worked hard in the Society's interests, but gave it his extensive collection of charts and atlases and nautical works.

And there were many experiments tried to encourage

literature and keep the Society in working order. For instance: prizes were for many years offered for the best essays in any branch of science, literature and art, in prose or poetry, as well as for the best historical and landscape painting, or piece of sculpture. But so very few competitors were found, that when the plan had been tried once and again, it was finally abandoned as a hopeless failure after 1852—the last occasion on which the Society's silver medal was offered for competition. Public lectures also were delivered under the auspices of the Society, but with no better result. So many attempts ending unsuccessfully, one is almost driven to admit that it is a hopeless endeavour, that of keeping the Society in a healthy, vigorous, working condition; and that its prosperity must oscillate with extraneous influences, till at last some time or other there shall be such a run of baneful circumstances against it, that it must succumb, as so many others have done before it. But it would be ignominious to yield to such an issue without a struggle; and if that struggle is to be made with any good prospect of success, we should begin it before the flush of good fortune subsides, and a fresh decline sets in.

One notable circumstance has struck me in looking over our old reports: that so few young men have taken an interest in the Society. Unfortunately this is an evil that can hardly be wholly remedied, yet, as one of our objects is to diffuse a taste for higher pursuits than too generally occupy the leisure of our young men, and offer food for its gratification, we should bear in mind, in the disposal of our funds, that we have to work upon those who are disinclined to literary occupation, and must, therefore, be tempted by the amenities of literature. That can be done without filling our shelves with novels. And measures might be taken for carrying out the plan contemplated last year, of admitting, at a reduced rate of subscription, and with only limited privileges, the large and useful class of our young men, to whom the payment of the full fee might be so burdensome as to exclude them.

A subject upon which no single report is silent is the Legislative grant. Except on two occasions, and that for special purposes, the grants from 1831 to 1860 never exceeded £50 per annum, and in 1835 and 1836 failed altogether. In 1860, on the return of government, it was raised to \$1,000, at which it stood the year following, and has been subsequently reduced to \$700 per annum. It would be unreasonable to suppose it will continue to stand at that high figure, and therefore we should count upon its reduction. But might not our funds be recruited from some other source? I find as much as £17 have been raised per annum by the sale of our Transactions, when I presume they were not distributed gratuitously to our members. Now this gratuitous distribution necessitates the publication of a larger number than would otherwise be required, and serves very little purpose; for those who are interested in their contents would not complain at paying a trifle for the yearly number, and those who are not, throw the book into the waste paper basket, and it goes the way of all such reading matter. The subject is worthy of being again re-opened, and with it other questions respecting our Transactions. However little they may be esteemed and read among ourselves, they occupy a place in foreign libraries, side by side with the proceedings of more illustrious societies, and therefore give us a status which is of no little importance to us. I should, therefore, be sorry to see their publication discontinued. But they might still be issued, though at a less cost, and in a manner calculated to keep our doings more prominently before the public than they are. I refer to their publication in some one of the local newspapers, previous to their being embodied in a volume, not, however, in the skeleton form in which they appeared in the Canadian Journal in 1854. The subject is now under consideration by the Council. In like manner we might continue the publication of interesting manuscripts, which in fact has been done this past year by our Librarian, at a much lower cost than the work could otherwise have been accomplished. And this brings me to another remark, which has been often made

(and I think with justice), but cannot be too often repeated that the Society does not adhere closely enough to its avowed object, the gathering and publishing of historical and archaeological matter, illustrative of the aborigines of this country, and of its earliest European settlements. Every year the Indian tribes are perceptibly fading away before the influence of European civilization, either dying out under its uncongenial system, or losing their identity in the unequal amalgamation. In the recollection of even the younger among us, much of the natural character of the aborigines in our neighbourhood has been lost. Such a gathering as welcomed Lord Durham at the Castle of St. Louis could not be collected now. Their costume will soon be doubtful, and their manners and customs extinct, while many an interesting point, which could still be decided, will be left without the possibility of solution. Then again with regard to our local history: one of the most interesting sources of information in writing it would be the *Quebec Gazette*, whose establishment dates back beyond a century. But of this important work only one complete copy exists, and that in the possession of a private family, where it is doubly exposed to destruction by fire or other accidents. Under these circumstances, would it not be wise to avail ourselves of this and such other advantages as are still within our reach; and would not doing so give a zest to our proceeding, and enlist in our interest many who are now very lukewarm? I mean that it would be well if some of our members who are in earnest would pursue their studies in that line, and employ their leisure in what would not only be found absorbingly interesting by themselves, but would be of permanent benefit to history.

But what is of hardly less importance is the possession of suitable and permanent accommodation for our Library and Musuem. Much of the Society's funds has been wasted in transporting its cumbrous effects from one place to another, and making the necessary alterations in its furniture, which every fresh remove entailed. Feeling this,

the Society has twice endeavoured to remove this obstacle to its progress. In 1844 there were overtures made to the other literary Societies then in existence, with a view to a general union of their property, and a fusion of their respective laws and bye-laws into one code. It was thought if this could be effected, their combined resources would suffice to erect a building devoted to their exclusive use. As might have been foreseen, the scheme came to naught. Ten years later (after the fire at the Parliament Building), a fresh attempt was made. The attempt and its failure are thus referred to in the Council Report of that year: "It may be mentioned that the Society has long been anxious to secure a building for its own use, where its museum and library might be deposited in safety, and in such a way as to be available, as heretofore, to the public generally, and in which we may be able to eventually establish an Astronomical and Meteorological Observatory, in connection with and under the auspices of the Society.

"In order to carry out these objects, the Council applied to the Head of the Government for a grant of a portion of the Ordnance property, on the north side of the government gardens in this city, sufficiently large for such a building as they thought necessary. We regret to say that this application, although favourably received by the Head of the Government here, has been refused by the Ordnance Department at home; the reason assigned being that the ground may be required for military purposes, in the event of the head-quarters of the military government in the Province being transported to this city.

"It is much to be regretted, for many reasons, that the prospect of being possessed of a building is not likely soon to be realized; yet we hope that our successors in office will not be discouraged by the failure of our efforts in that respect, but that they will endeavour to devise some expedient for securing for the Society a local habitation, in the enjoyment of which they cannot be disturbed".

The injunction laid upon us is worthy of our attention.

If it is true that a more advantageous arrangement than that with Morrin College could not well be made; but how long our connection may last is extremely doubtful; and whenever it does terminate we should be prepared with some feasible scheme for the erection of a building of our own. Perhaps it might be worth while renewing the application to the Imperial Government. Could we obtain a site on easy terms, I apprehend there would be no serious difficulty in raising the means for the erection of so humble a building as would answer our requirements. The Provincial Government would probably contribute something, and the balance, I am sure, would be subscribed by ourselves, with some aid from our friends. The project should be kept constantly in view; for its consummation would tend more than any thing else towards giving stability to the Society.

It remains now with ourselves to interrupt the invariable sequence of events which has heretofore followed the removal of the seat of government from our midst. We have still, after omitting the names of members whom we have thereby lost, over 100 on our roll, and we have good promise of their activity in the number of papers already promised for the coming winter; but still it will be only by redoubled energy on the part of all that we shall be able to retain the prosperity we have enjoyed the last three years.