



1869

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—It is my pleasing duty to bid you welcome to the Seventh Annual Conversazione of this Society—a Society which has not ceased, since its incorporation in 1832, to labour for the promotion in this city of a taste for natural science and allied subjects; and this, with marked success. In addition to its Lectures and Meetings, I may mention as a permanent monument of its utility, the issue of nine volumes of its Proceedings, containing more than 4,000 pages of matter of the highest scientific value, and of the utmost importance to the knowledge of nature as it exists in this country, and to the development of our resources. No other institution in Canada can pretend to have made any contribution to the Natural History of this continent approaching this in value and extent. I may also mention its Museum, which has within the last few years made great progress, under the care of Mr. Whiteaves, and by the patient labour of our cabinet-keeper, Mr. Hunter. When I look through this museum to-day, and observe its admirable arrangement and the great amount of scientific material of real value which it contains, I can scarcely believe that it has grown from the confused and paltry collection which was huddled together in our former rooms in Little St. James street. Nor has its growth ceased. The additions made within the last six months amount to 200 species of vertebrate animals, a large number of invertebrates, and about 200 fossils, besides many other objects. Taking together, the collections of this Society, of the Geological Survey and of the McGill University, Montreal now stands far in advance of any other city of this Dominion in its museums of Natural Science; and thus affords greater facilities than any other to the student of Canadian Natural History and Geology. This is no mean advantage, and is especially appropriate to a commercial and manufacturing metropolis; and it will be far more strongly felt when we shall have in connection with the University, or with any other agency that may be established, Schools of Science for the training of our young men in the practical application of Science to the Arts. In this respect, this Society has all along been in advance of the age; because here, as elsewhere, the accumulation of museums must always precede the establishment in any large and effectual way of the higher grade of scientific schools. A knowledge of this fact, has, I confess stimulated my own efforts in behalf of this museum and that of the university, since I hoped that here, as in the old world, the collection of objects would afford a safe basis for the erection of scientific education. There are some branches of knowledge and culture, and these very valuable in themselves and the training they afford, which require nothing but teachers and books for their successful prosecution. But training in science, to attain to any useful results, must have large preparatory appliances in collections and apparatus. This along with the apathy which naturally exists as to anything of which the public has had no previous experience, is no doubt, a cause of the lamentable fact that Canada has not yet attained to the establishment of one scientific school, while in the mother country, in the various states of the continent of Europe, and also in the United States of America, such schools largely supported and admirably appointed exist in great numbers, and are productive of immense results in the promotion of the scientific arts and manufactures. In the Christmas vacation I enjoyed the pleasure of visiting some of these institutions in the United States, in which the means of old University foundations are made available, along with modern donations and grants, for the cultivation of practical science. Such institutions are furnished with laboratories, museums, scientific libraries and apparatus; and their courses of study embrace such subjects as Mining, Metallurgy, Agriculture, Botany, Zoology, Geology, Mineralogy, Engineering, Architecture, Drawing, Military Science and Tactics, Practical Mechanics, Astronomy; all eminently practical, and arranged so as to suit the wants of young men entering on a variety of useful trades and professions. Although these institutions are numerous and largely attended, they have not yet reached the limits of the demand for their work, and large grants in their aid have recently been made by Congress, while State Legislature and the munificence of private individuals are daily adding to their number and efficiency. It should be a fact that requires but to be mentioned to excite earnest enquiry and effort, that while all the older universities in the United States have scientific schools, and while multitudes of similar schools are supported by the several States and the general government, we have in this Dominion four States, certainly equal in resources to any of those in the American Union, without one scientific school. In the mother country the subject is attracting great attention. I have just read a report presented to the House of Commons last year by a select Committee on Scientific Instruction, which, after hearing the evidence of a number of leading Professors, Teachers and Educationists, strongly recommends to Parliament to proceed at once to organize the technical education of the country, and to add to the existing means as far as possible; and further, to recognize natural science as an indispensable element in such education. This report will, no doubt, be acted on soon, probably before anything can be done in this country, and we shall have the satisfaction of being another step behind the mother country in this most important matter. It may be asked what connection has all this with this Society, and with the present occasion. One such connection is, that this Society would derive aid from every graduate of any Scientific school established here; and on the other hand, it can never attain for its collections their full utility, until there should be such schools. Another is, that while as President of this Society I have its immediate interests in view, I have also at heart the advantage of the young men growing up among us, and whom I should wish to see rising to something higher than the position of subordinates to men trained in other countries; and with this feeling, I propose, on every fitting occasion, and I regard this as one, to insist as strongly as I can on the necessity of schools of practical science to the welfare and progress of this country.



