

MEMORANDUM CONCERNING THE COLONIAL MUSEUM.

ONE of the most important duties in connection with the geological survey of a new country is the formation of a scientific Museum, the principal object of which is to facilitate the classification and comparison of the specimens collected in different localities during the progress of the survey.

By this means only is a reliable basis obtained for a general system of geological nomenclature, the value, proof, and application of which to the development of the country depends mainly upon the preservation of minutely recorded information respecting the history of individual specimens.

In this respect a scientific Museum differs from one intended only for the popular diffusion of natural science—the former being a record office from which typical or popular Museums can be supplied with accurate information instructively arranged—a method which would prevent their lapsing, as is too frequently the case, into unmeaning collections of curiosities.

This division of museums into two classes is now clearly recognized in England, and its adoption has been strongly recommended in the re-arrangement of the Natural History collections in the British Museum.

It appears to me that an arrangement of this kind with regard to Museums is particularly applicable to New Zealand, as the most favourable for the rapid development of its resources; and it is with this view that the Colonial Museum should be formed—not as a rival, but to assist the local typical Museums, the establishment of which should be encouraged in all the principal centres of population, for the purpose of giving instruction respecting the resources and natural history of the country, as well as acting as a stimulus and guide to local research in those branches of knowledge.

The chief expense of the scientific Museum arises from the nature of the staff required for the comparison, analysis and discrimination of specimens, and for publication; but as the labours of this staff will be available for the different local Museums, these latter will be spared all further superintendence beyond that of a Curator and a Committee of Management, and be maintained at a very small annual expense.

In this way each Province might have a popular Museum on any scale of expense that suited the requirements and taste of the inhabitants, and for such, the nucleus already exists in all the principal towns of the Colony; but unless the arrangements of the Colonial Museum are such as enable the scientific work of examination and comparison to be performed with facility and accuracy, the progress that will be made in acquiring knowledge of the resources of the Colony will be slow and unsatisfactory, and in the long run effected only at a great and unnecessary expense.

The Museum in its present state does not afford the required facilities, and the provision of additional accommodation is very desirable and could be effected at a small expense. A great part of the space that should be devoted to the arrangement and display of specimens is now used as a temporary office, for which it is not suited, and I need hardly point out that in order to avoid confusion and loss of time, proper office accommodation is absolutely necessary for the performance of clerical and draughtsman's work, and for the systematic preservation of records and observations.

The museum building as designed originally, consists of the present central hall, with the addition of a wing of equal extent to the hall at each end, and a two storied front that will afford all the required office accommodation.

For the present I believe it would be the most economical course for the Government, considering the real purpose of the Museum, to proceed with the erection of the offices. This would add a very considerable area to the Museum proper; and, with a few slight changes in the manner of lighting and in the interior fittings, the present hall would be sufficient for the purpose of the scientific Museum for some time to come. It would undoubtedly be more convenient if the wings were also erected, and the collections permanently arranged therein, especially as the hall would then be available as a lecture room, in connection with the survey; but this for the present is not so pressing a want.

If, however, the additional office accommodation were provided, the present staff of the Geological Survey is quite sufficient to carry on the work efficiently, and to assimilate and render available the work done in the field, at least for some time, until the collections of fossils are sufficiently copious to form a correct basis for the classification and correlation of the geology of New Zealand with that of other countries, when it will be necessary to add a Palæontologist to the present staff, in order that this most important branch of the work of the survey may receive proper attention.

In addition to the office accommodation, a most necessary and important adjunct to the Museum is a conveniently constructed and well-finished Laboratory; and I would strongly urge a small expenditure for this purpose, as the present temporary accommodation is extremely imperfect, and not at all in keeping with the importance of the questions that have frequently to be decided by the experimental operations there carried on.

The present portion of the Museum building was completed in September last, and by December the collections which had been accumulating since the month of April previous, were sufficiently arranged to admit of the Museum being opened to the public.

Since that time the collections have received large additions; and if there was sufficient accommodation, and funds for the construction of proper show cases, there is no doubt that a large and valuable collection of objects worthy of preservation would soon be formed from gifts to the Colony by private individuals.