

SCIENCE:

A WEEKLY NEWSPAPER OF ALL THE ARTS AND SCIENCES

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Attention is called to the "Wants" column. All are invited to use it in soliciting information or seeking new positions. The name and address of applicants should be given in full, so that answers will go direct to them. The "Exchange" column is likewise open.

SCIENCE IN NEW ZEALAND.¹

WHEN I rashly replied in the affirmative to the cablegram which I received from our secretary in Melbourne, asking me to undertake the honorable and responsible duties which I have to commence this evening, I fear I did not fully realize the difficulties of the position; but since then the sense of my unfitness for the task has become very oppressive. To address an assembly of this kind on general science must involve unusual difficulties, owing to the audience being largely composed of those who, only taking a casual interest in scientific discussions, look chiefly to the results; while, at the same time, there are present professional specialists in almost every branch of knowledge. I feel that on this occasion I must be ruled by the interest of the majority, and claim the forbearance of my fellow-workers in science if I have to refer in a sketchy way to subjects in which they are deeply interested, and far more learned than I profess to be.

Seeing that I am addressing a Christchurch audience, I hope I may be permitted, in the first place, to say a word concerning one whose scientific services should, without doubt, have obtained for him the position of first president in New Zealand of the Australasian Association. We naturally recall the name of Sir Julius von Haast on this occasion, and mourn for the loss the colony has sustained of one who for thirty years occupied a most prominent position. His early researches in the North Island, in company with Von Hochstetter, were followed by the exploration of the remote districts on the west coast of Nelson, after which Canterbury secured his distinguished services, and enabled him to leave that monument of his varied scientific knowledge, shrewd capacity, and indefatigable industry, which is to be found in the Canterbury Museum.

There are others of our fellow-colonists whose wide range of experience would have peculiarly fitted them to act as your president; and I am able to say, that, had our veteran colonist and explorer Sir George Grey felt more assured in health and strength, it would have been your pleasure this evening to listen to a flood of eloquence on all scientific topics that relate to the future development of Australasia. There is another name I feel must be mentioned as one who should have been in this position had his health permitted. I refer to the Rev. William Colenso, who is not only the greatest authority on the folk-lore of the Maoris, on whom he was among the first to confer a printed literature in their own language, but whose long-continued work as a field naturalist, and especially as a botanist, is exceedingly interesting,

seeing that it forms a connecting link that has continued the early spirit of natural-history research in New Zealand, that commenced with Banks and Solander, and was continued by Menzies, Lesson, the two Cunninghams, and Sir Joseph Hooker, prior to the arrival of colonists. Thus we still have in my esteemed friend, Mr. Colenso, an active veteran naturalist of what we may call the old school of explorers.

It is wonderful to reflect that little more than fifty years ago this European colony was represented by a few fishing hamlets on the seaboard of a country occupied by a considerable native population. To the early explorers, and even down to a much later date, the obstacles that beset their path were very different from those of the present time,—often obstructive natives, no roads, no steamers, no railways. Had an association then existed, and desired to promote science by giving our visitors an opportunity of visiting the remote parts of the islands, the same excursions which have on this occasion been planned to occupy a few days, would have occupied as many months, and then be accomplished only with great hardship and difficulty. I must ask the young and rising generation of colonial naturalists to bear this in mind when they have to criticise and add to the work of their predecessors. Such names of early colonists as Bidwill, Sinclair, Monro, Mantell, Travers, and many others, should ever be held in esteem as those who, amidst all the arduous trials of early colonization, never lost sight of their duty towards the advancement of science in New Zealand. I will not attempt to particularize other names from among our existing, and, though small in number, very active, corps of scientific workers. They are here, or should be, to speak for themselves in the sectional work; and I have no doubt some of those who did me the great honor of placing me in my present position are secretly congratulating themselves that they have secured for themselves the position of free lances on this occasion.

This is now the third annual gathering of this association, and New Zealand should feel honored that it has at so early a date in the association's history been selected to the turn in rotation as the place of meeting among so many divisions of the great colony of Australasia. The two volumes of the "Transactions" of the association, already in the hands of members, are quite sufficient to prove that the hopes of its founders—or, rather, I may almost say, the founder, Professor Liversidge of Sydney—have been amply fulfilled.

The papers read before the different sections, and the addresses delivered, have, in my opinion, to a most remarkable extent embodied information and discussions which were not likely to have been produced as the result of any of our local scientific organizations. The authors seemed to have felt it incumbent on them to place their subjects in the environment of Australasia, and not in relation to the colony they happened to represent. This, I take it, is the first truly effective step towards federation which has yet been achieved, and I trust that all our members will continue to be imbued with this spirit. Politicians should take this well to heart. Let them continue to aid all efforts that will tend to bring scientific accumulations in these colonies into a common store; so that each may discover for what purpose it has been best adapted by nature, and, by paying proper political respect in fiscal policy to one another, each may prosper to the full extent of its natural advantages. But it is not alone in the value of the papers communicated the association contributes to advance true civilization in the colonies. The face-to-face conference, the personal contact of the active workers in different lines of scientific work, must greatly facilitate the more thorough understanding of the work which has been done, and which is still undone. A vague idea, simmering in the brain of one scientist, who thinks light of it because it has no special application in his particular environment, may, by personal converse, flash into important results in the mind of another who has had the difficulties facing him, but without the happy thought occurring. It would be rather interesting for some one with leisure to endeavor to recount how many great discoveries have eventuated in this manner.

In casting my thoughts for a particular subject on which to address the association, I felt perplexed. Presidents of similar associations in the Old World, who are in constant contact with the actual

¹ Address of the president of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science, Christchurch, Jan. 16, 1891.