

DISCUSSION AND CORRESPONDENCE.

THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION AND THE
MUSEUM IDEA.

THE discussion opened by David Fairchild and continued by David D. Mottier,¹ urging the divorce of the museum idea from the Smithsonian Institution, appears to me a hopeful sign, indicating an awakening of the scientific public to the underlying deeper question: Has the Smithsonian Institution been managed in accordance with the will of Smithson or has this country proved faithless to the trust freely accepted?

For almost half a century I have taken note of the Smithsonian Institution. I knew Joseph Henry personally quite well and in many ways assisted and was helped. I know his 'History of the Beginnings of the Institution,' which is also quite well known abroad, having been republished extensively in Europe; for example, *Cosmos*, IIe Series, T. III., Paris, 1866, pp. 723-760. The 'museum idea' is fully considered therein and everything local or even national is shown to be in conflict with the intention of Smithson.

Under the successors of Joseph Henry, the institution has gradually ceased to conform to the founder's intentions. Congress has been called upon to furnish money—and our Billion Dollar Congress has responded most liberally. A national museum has been developed, a new four-million-dollar building is now going up for the same; a zoological garden and an astrophysical observatory have been established; finally, costly experiments on flying machines have been provided for by Congress, all under the management of the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, who is not an officer of the nation, but elected as executive officer of the Smithson Trust and paid exclusively from the Smithson fund.

It is not necessary to consider the qualifications of the successors to Joseph Henry. But it can not be denied that they were first of all *specialists*, the one in fishes, the other in stars. Thus they were not naturally predisposed for the broad object of the institution: the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men.

¹ SCIENCE, June 8 and July 27.

Furthermore, each of the new national institutions established requires the full time and energy of a first-class man; this is the experience of other countries, where such national scientific institutions have long preceded and much excel ours. It can, therefore, not be questioned: both parties, the nation and the Smithsonian, have lost heavily by the attempt to administrate and plan our national institutions at the cost of the Smithsonian Fund.

The costly national institutions have not given the nation such a return in results as the outlay entitles us to expect. The putting of all the work of many able men on the shoulders of the one secretary of the Smithsonian Institution has necessarily crippled the national institutions, while it has equally necessarily made it impossible for that officer to give thought or time to the foundation of Smithson from the funds of which he drew his salary and to which he, therefore, owes in duty both all his time and his entire energy. That both the Smithsonian and the national institutions have thus been crippled can not be denied; specially glaring instances have come to my personal knowledge and have been referred to in some of my publications.

In brief, the following are the main facts of the condition that actually confronts us:

1. Congress appropriates millions of dollars for certain national scientific institutions, located at Washington, but depends for their planning and administration on the time and ability of one single man who is not in any sense a national officer nor receiving salary from the national funds; this one man serves as well as one man can do the work really requiring a number of men, each one a specialist in the line represented by each one of these different national institutions.

2. Congress has accepted Smithson's trust and funds, and through a board of regents manages the institution of Smithson. This board elects a secretary as executive officer and pays him a salary out of the Smithson Fund. His work necessarily demands the full time and all the power of a most able man of the broadest possible education and the highest mental endowment; for Smithson demanded his institution to work 'for the in-

crease and diffusion of knowledge among men.'

The British government refused to accept this trust from the Englishman Smithson, deeming the condition too broad and too difficult to comply with. The Congress of the United States thereafter was made the same offer by Smithson on the same conditions and accepted this trust on these conditions from Smithson while he was alive; this trust we are in honor bound to meet in every particular, now that Smithson is dead.

Are we faithful to this trust when we pay the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution out of the Smithson Fund—and then compel him to administrate our own large national institutions and thereby force him to neglect the Smithsonian Institution proper? To what extent this has been done is likely soon to become known throughout the scientific world in connection with questions that have thus far been suppressed here at home, but will come out by the enforcement of a recent act of Congress.

It seems to me that it is not merely a question of 'divorcing the museum idea' from the Smithsonian Institution, but to put a stop to the robbing of the Smithson Fund and to the nullification of the Smithson will. We certainly should administer our own national museums, zoological gardens, astrophysical observatories and flying machines, all paid for from national funds, granted by Congress; we should select the best man for each one of these duties and pay him from our own United States funds for his work. To take the pay for this our work in any manner or form from the Smithson Fund is to rob the grave of Smithson. It is a national disgrace that should cease the instant it is realized to exist.

But we should not only cease to rob the grave of Smithson; we should also again make an effort to comply with his conditions and to realize, in his name, so far as it be possible, his ideal: to increase and diffuse knowledge among men throughout the world.

Let us at least try to do that as well and as faithfully as it was done under the adminis-

tration of the first secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, Joseph Henry.

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IS NOT THE SMITHSONIAN AN INSTITUTE OF RESEARCH?

TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: In your issues of June 8 and July 27 I note communications from David Fairchild and David M. Mottier in regard to certain changes they would like to see made in the work of the Smithsonian Institution.

I wish to take exception to one or two statements made by these gentlemen, though I entirely agree with some of their suggestions.

In the first place, both articles *imply* that the Smithsonian Institution is not now a place where important research is being done. Surely if one will but glance over the last 'Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution' and the last volume of the 'Proceedings of the National Museum,' some sixteen hundred pages altogether, he will be forced to the conclusion that research is being done at the Smithsonian Institution. Note also some of the important monographs that have appeared under the auspices of the Smithsonian, Dr. True's recent work on the whales, for example. As is pointed out by the assistant secretary, the time of the regular staff is largely taken up with administrative duties, but, in spite of this fact, a very considerable amount of research is accomplished by these men. Besides the investigations carried on by the regular staff of the institution a large amount of research is done under the auspices of the Smithsonian through grants of money, the loan of material from the museum, and in other ways.

It seems to me that the Smithsonian is already the 'Nucleus of a great national * * * institute of research.' That with sufficient funds much more might be accomplished goes without saying; certainly it would be well to have a permanent corps of investigators who should not be hampered with routine administrative duties, and also tables where college