

1873.

NEW ZEALAND.

FIFTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE NEW ZEALAND INSTITUTE.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

FIVE years have now elapsed since the foundation of the New Zealand Institute, and this being the first occasion of a change of its official President, it affords an opportunity for a brief retrospect of the results which have been achieved through its instrumentality.

The chief object of the Act under which the Institute was incorporated was to promote the formation of societies in different parts of the Colony for the collection and discussion of original observations concerning its natural history and resources. It was obvious that the geographical circumstances of the Colony prevented the formation of any strong central society capable of stimulating and directing such investigations by frequent meetings of its members, as in other colonies that possess a chief centre of population, in which all social institutions become naturally concentrated. The constitution of the New Zealand Institute furnishes, therefore, a means of combining the efforts of Provincial societies, at the same time relieving them of the great expense which they would have to incur in publishing their Transactions in an independent form. Experience elsewhere has shown that, in new countries especially, the funds of such societies are inadequate for the proper production of their Transactions, from the fact that the number of their members is few and the field for original observation is large, so that in a few years such societies are liable to decay, after accumulating much material that would be, if published, of great assistance in advancing our knowledge of the country.

Each scientific society in New Zealand that becomes affiliated to the Institute receives a share of an annual parliamentary grant, in proportion to the amount of work which is performed by its members, and the result is the production of a volume of Transactions and Proceedings that carries more authority, and does more credit to the Colony, than could be derived from the publication of a number of detached pamphlets.

The form of constitution thus indicated has already evoked favourable expressions of opinion in some of the leading scientific journals of the old country, and it has even been seriously proposed that a similar institution should be established for consolidating the work of the different scientific societies scattered throughout Great Britain.

Although there is still much room for improvement, a comparison of the five volumes which have now been issued shows that there is an increasing interest manifested in scientific pursuits, which must be attributed in a great measure to the influence which has been exerted by the publications of the Institute. Not only has the standard of the communications made to the societies greatly improved, but the demand which is everywhere expressed for elementary instruction in science evinces a desire on the part of the public to obtain as a branch of education the qualifications necessary for the comprehension and utilization of scientific literature which is so characteristic a feature of the present age.

During the last five years, 445 communications have been read before the different societies incorporated with the Institute, and of these 286 have been printed at length in the Transactions. With few exceptions, all these papers relate directly to the Colony, and place on record matters of fact and observations that otherwise would probably not have been published for many years to come. They comprise in round numbers about 120 papers on miscellaneous subjects, chiefly relating to ethnological considerations of the aboriginal race or connected with the industrial resources of the Colony, 120 on Zoological subjects, 70 on Botanical, 53 on Chemistry and Metallurgy, and 60 on subjects relating to Geology and Physical Geography.

The information contained in these volumes is widely diffused beyond the limits of the Colony, the chief libraries in all parts of the world being supplied with copies.

The number of members of the Institute has now increased from 256 to 563, the following being the numbers enrolled in the different incorporated Societies:—

Auckland Institute	...	...	...	...	...	174
Wellington Philosophical Society	...	...	...	...	...	135
Otago Institute	...	...	...	...	...	113
Philosophical Institute of Canterbury	...	...	...	...	...	77
Nelson Association	...	...	...	...	...	64

During the past year four meetings of the Board of Governors have been held for the transaction of business, on 19th September and 13th November, 1872, and 21st February and 29th July, 1873.