

SENATE....No. 72.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

IN SENATE, March 10, 1863.

The Joint Special Committee to whom was referred the Order of the seventeenth of February last, directing them to consider the expediency of causing to be prepared and published, Catalogues of the Museum of Comparative Zoölogy, submit the following

R E P O R T :

The Act of April 6, 1859, to incorporate the Trustees of the Museum of Comparative Zoölogy, so intimately associates the Commonwealth with the institution, that it becomes a duty on the part of the highest public functionaries of the State to cherish its interests and advance its prosperity. The Museum having been of recent organization, has been established upon a plan including the most recent discoveries in science, and by the administrative ability of Professor Agassiz, sustained by the material aid of the friends of science in our community, it has already attained an eminent standing among those institutions which are devoted to the development of natural science. Its collections are so rich in variety and vast in number, that it is impossible to exhibit and display them within the limited accommodations of the present building. A mere announce-

ment, therefore, of its arrangement would be most welcome to all scientific men.

The Committee is assured that the Museum contains a vast amount of materials which have never before been brought to the notice of naturalists ; and that this is particularly the case with the specimens of North America. The unavoidable concealment of its treasures, caused by a lamentable want of room for their conspicuous arrangement and exhibition, may be compensated for in some measure, by the publication of carefully prepared catalogues.

Catalogues of libraries, like inventories of goods, serve as a measure of the extent, as well as of the value of that kind of property. Catalogues of objects of art and of natural specimens, to be equally valuable, must include significations of their origin, their state of preservation, and many other facts concerning them. This renders the preparation of such catalogues so difficult and laborious, that while there exist hundreds of catalogues of large libraries, there are only a few satisfactory catalogues of museums of natural history. It is a very difficult task to undertake the preparation of a systematic register of an extensive collection of specimens, and when to the nominal list of such objects, characteristic descriptions and graphic illustrations are added, the publication of such catalogues has at all times been considered as a valuable contribution to science ; so much so, that the best of these published catalogues mark the periods of real progress in every department of natural history.

The Committee are informed that the collections in the Museum have already been partially catalogued, or are in progress of being catalogued, and that for some of its most important departments, catalogues are ready for the press. A mere scientific arrangement is not all that is required for the perfection of a catalogue. When the specimens are not generally known to naturalists, (as is said to be the fact with the specimens of North America,) it would not be sufficient to give them a name only ; for without a description, and sometimes a woodcut, or a more elaborate drawing, they might not be recognized.

Professor Agassiz has already secured many such drawings from photographs recently prepared at the Museum in a style

surpassing any work of the kind done elsewhere. Their introduction into the catalogues will not now involve any additional expense, so far as preparation is concerned. It is understood that all specimens of well-known species, such as those which have been described, and have figured in the scientific reports published by authority of the several States of the Union, or in special works upon particular branches of zoölogy will only require to be registered by name, with a short reference to the works in which a full account of them may be found. That arrangement will diminish the cost of the catalogues, will avoid the doing over that which has already been done satisfactorily, and yet furnish the information that those specimens may be seen in the Museum, and that duplicates may be had in exchange for such as may not be in its collection.

As the Museum is so largely indebted to Professor Agassiz for its wonderful success, it seems but a just tribute to his great and self-sacrificing labors, and consummate skill, that he should have the opportunity of introducing and developing the plan he would have pursued by those who may succeed him in the scientific conduct of the Museum. He is now full of work, and surrounded by able assistants, all anxious to contribute gratuitously to the preparation of such catalogues as the learned conductor of the Museum contemplates.

In view of these considerations, the Committee are unanimously of opinion that provision should be made for their publication. Some of the advantages which the community would derive from such a course, the Committee will rapidly enumerate.

In the first place, it would establish the position of the Museum of Comparative Zoölogy in Cambridge among similar institutions, in a manner which could no longer be questioned.

2d. It would furnish the most satisfactory evidence that its contents have been carefully examined, identified, and labelled, and may, therefore, be confidently used for study.

3d. It would attract the attention of naturalists of all parts of the world to its riches, and induce many other institutions of the same character, or individuals engaged in similar pursuits, to enter into relations with it, and propose exchanges equally important to them and to us.

4th. It would procure the Museum similar publications from other institutions for its library.

5th. It would serve as a guide to visitors, in their examination of the specimens, as it is impossible to appoint, in so large an establishment, a sufficient number of persons competent to explain the nature of the specimens exposed to view.

6th. It would be still more useful to the special students of natural history, who pursue their labors in the Museum, and to whom such catalogues would at once serve as text-books, having special reference to the natural objects before them.

7th. It would furnish to the world the unexpected evidence that far from being behind the present state of knowledge in Europe, the Museum is exhibiting in many of its parts, a stage of progress not yet reached elsewhere.

The Committee are informed by Professor Agassiz that there are materials on hand for *several* volumes; but he is of opinion that *two* volumes would contain the most important parts of the Museum, and at all events be sufficient to establish its character as among the greatest of similar institutions in existence. The Committee have examined two parts of catalogues recently published by the British Museum; one was in quarto, on Tortoises, with elaborate illustrations; the others in duodecimo form, on Marine Polyzou, also illustrated. Professor Agassiz recommends a form between them, that of the octavo size, as less pretentious than the quarto, and more readily handled; "but," to use his own language, "I will see to it that the illustrations excel in finish all that of similar works." He proposes to select for the two first volumes such classes or families of animals as are most fully represented in the Museum, or contain the largest number of species; and thus the catalogue would assume the character of a real contribution to the progress of science.

An appropriation of ten thousand dollars would cover the expense of the publication of these two volumes, provided the utmost economy be practiced, and every advantage be taken of the facilities afforded for the execution of the work by the special abilities of the different gentlemen now connected with the Museum, who will gladly take a part in bringing out these first volumes. It is hardly necessary to state that they will not contain catalogues of *all* the collections in the Museum. It is

anticipated, however, that from the sales of the first parts enough may be realized, besides exchanges, to furnish the means for printing another volume, whose sales may defray the cost of a succeeding one; so that the planting of the first volume would have within itself, "like the immortal tree of Malabar, the means to continued self-production."

The impossibility of maintaining any extensive relations abroad during the existence of a rebellion, and enlarging the Museum by purchases, is an additional reason for wishing that the working forces of the Museum should be directed to the internal improvement of its collections, the perfecting of their arrangement, and by extending the exchanges to enlarge the collections at a comparatively small outlay.

The Committee take pleasure in adding, that besides preparing these catalogues, other scientific work of a more elaborate character, is constantly going on in the Museum, and that the means of publishing these researches in connection with the Smithsonian Institute, were secured by Professor Agassiz, who started for Washington on an official visit to the Institute, the very day the present legislature visited the Museum in Cambridge. In the language of this distinguished naturalist, (whose statements before the Committee are embraced in this Report,) "should you therefore give me the means of publishing our catalogues, I really feel that our Museum would henceforth stand on its own acquired strength."

The Committee unanimously recommend the passage of the accompanying Resolve.

FRANCIS BRINLEY.

J. H. MITCHELL.

J. HENRY GODDARD.

WM. H. WASHBURN.

A. R. LELAND.

P. FRANCIS WELLS.

HORACE UNDERWOOD.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

In the Year One Thousand Eight Hundred and Sixty-Three.

R E S O L V E

To provide for Preparing and Publishing Catalogues of the
Museum of Comparative Zoölogy.

Resolved, That there be appropriated and paid out of the treasury of the Commonwealth, to the trustees of the Museum of Comparative Zoölogy, the sum of ten thousand dollars, to be applied to the preparation and publication of catalogues of said museum, under the direction of the trustees.