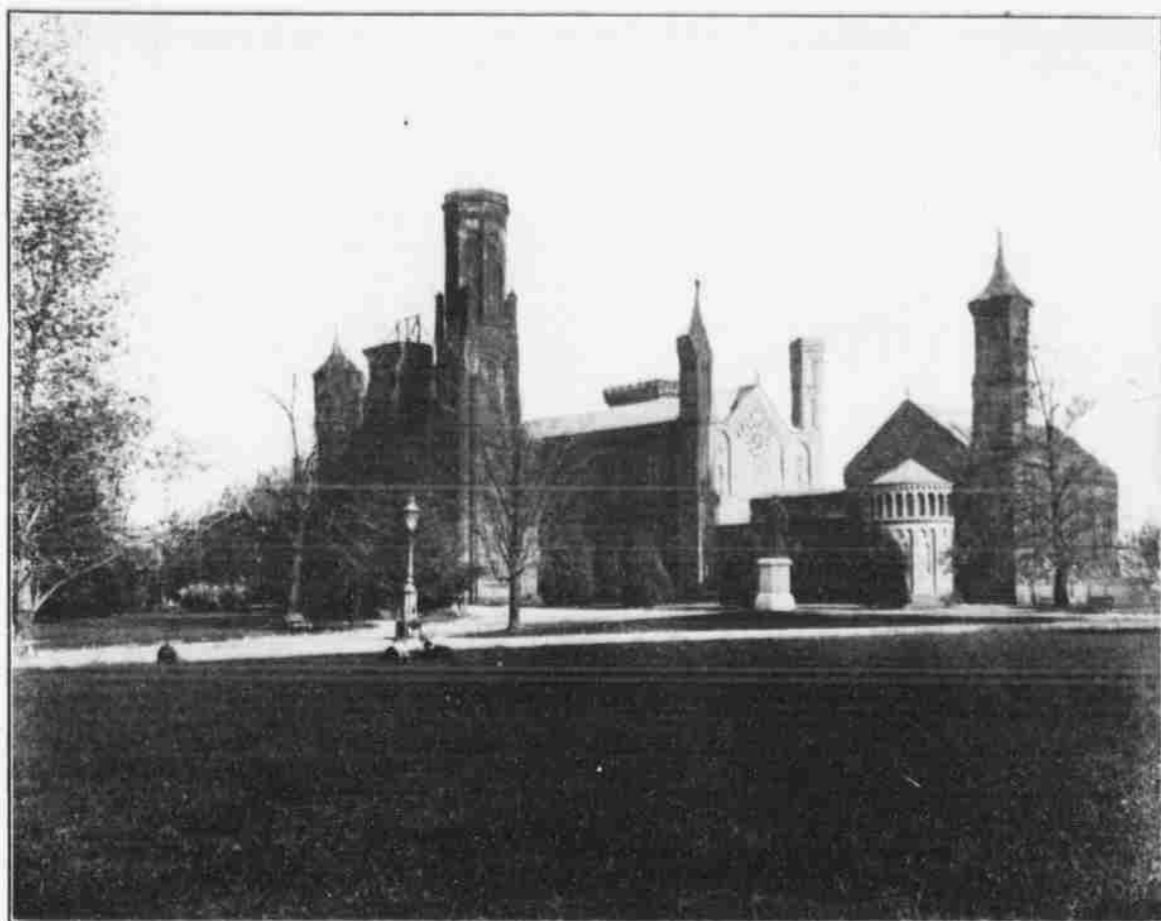


Smithsonian Institution and National Museum



THE SMITHSONIAN BUILDING AT WASHINGTON.



NORTH HALL IN THE NATIONAL MUSEUM.



JAMES SMITHSON, ENGLISH FOUNDER OF AMERICA'S CHIEF SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTION.

WASHINGTON, Nov. 25.—(Special Correspondence of The Bee.)—Perhaps the most universally interesting "free book" ever published, containing over 800 pages and nearly 200 illustrations, has just been issued by the national government for general distribution to the American people through their congressmen. "The People's Own Book," indeed, would be a truer title than the one it bears—"Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution"—but although the name is not exactly eloquent with promise, yet the same volume in the hands of a corps of energetic book agents would probably find its way into the libraries of a goodly proportion of American homes.

The new report—always an event in Washington scientific circles—marks the beginning of a new century for the Smithsonian Institution and is the latest and most comprehensive expression of its twofold purpose of increasing learning and diffusing knowledge among men. The first purpose applies to readers already interested in technically scientific matters; the second is distinctly popular, appealing directly to the far larger class whose interest is general rather than technical. Science in these days is a large field, and aside from the reports of the various great departments that have grown up under the protection of the Smithsonian, the volume is practically a library of modern progress during the last year, ranging from popular magazine articles on automobiles and automobile racing, the aerial experiments of Santos-Dumont, or the epoch-making discovery of wireless telegraphy, to expert analysis of such technical subjects as recent investigations into gravitation or the discussion of bodies smaller than atoms.

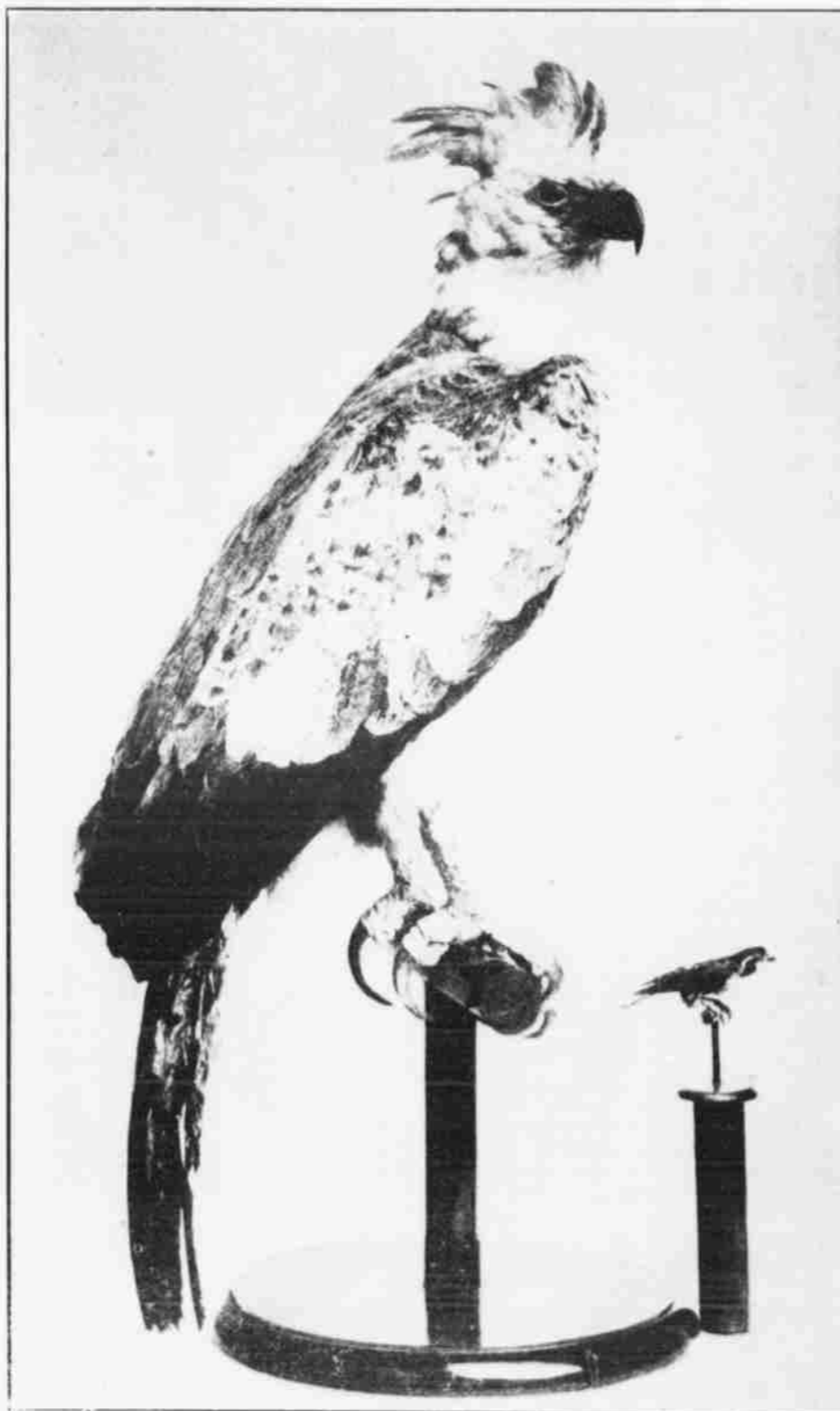
But what is the Smithsonian? The name is familiar enough, but—perhaps for that very reason—the meaning and purposes of an institution established by the United States government and therefore one in which every citizen has, or ought to have, a personal interest, are rather hazy in the minds of a good many among its millions of proprietors. And this despite the fact that it has made Washington the center of a scientific correspondence that covers the whole civilized world, and that the National Museum at Washington, supported by the government but managed by the Smithsonian, is yearly visited by over 250,000 sightseers.

In 1829, James Smithson, an Englishman, died in Genoa, leaving his entire estate to the United States of America, "to found at Washington, under the name of the Smithsonian Institute, an establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowl-

edge among men." This fortune amounted to between \$500,000 and \$750,000, a large sum in the period before the war, but the trust was accepted by congress only after an intermittent ten years' debate of the question: Should or should not the United States government accept the unprecedented position of a guardian to a ward? Fortunately the answer was affirmative, and an act of congress created an "establishment" consisting of high government officers to administer the Smithsonian fund for the benefit of science the world over. The possible activities of the institution are therefore limitless. Its board of "regents," as they are called, form perhaps the best connecting link in the world between capital seeking a wise avenue of benevolence and science handicapped by lack of money to carry on its thousand and one special investigations. Even where the institution cannot directly oversee scientific expenditure, its authoritative position is in itself a guaranty of wise suggestions and advice, whether to the donor or to the scientist himself. "The relations of the general government to the Smithsonian," to quote apropos of this point, from its latest volume, "are most extraordinary, one may even say unique, since the United States solemnly bound itself to the administration of a trust. Probably never before has any ward found so powerful a guardian." The "trust" is obviously of a different kind from others with which the American public is more familiar.

First of all, therefore, the Smithsonian exists to increase learning and diffuse knowledge. One of these two abstract propositions has taken concrete form in financial assistance to scientific investigators. The second has been attained by a general diffusion of scientific literature, both technical and popular, on so stupendous a scale that, were the packing boxes used in sending "exchanges" of publications—its own and those of other scientific organizations—from the United States to foreign countries during a single year piled up one on top of another, they would make a column that would now tower five times as high as the Washington monument.

But the Smithsonian has naturally become associated with other work of a more strictly national character, provided by national appropriations and entrusted by the government to its ward as the body best situated to carry it to a successful conclu-



LARGEST AND SMALLEST BIRDS OF PREY—THE HARPY EAGLE AND A TINY HAWK COMPARED FOR THE CHILDREN.

sion. In this way it has become identified with the important task of studying the aborigines of our own continent, through the Bureau of Ethnology, and with the management of the great astrophysical observatory, the National Museum and the National Zoological garden at Washington.

Reports are not ordinarily very exciting reading, yet it is hardly necessary to say that all these interests brought together in a single volume make an exceptional publication—the more so at a period when scientific progress, taking such practical form as improved means of transportation, lighting and communication, is a matter to appeal to the curiosity of everybody. For that matter the Smithsonian report is really only about one-sixth "report;" the remaining five-sixths are a general appendix of miscellaneous papers, the authors of which include such men as Marconi, Fournier, the famous French automobilist; Rear Admiral Melville of the United States navy; Albert Bigelow Paine and Sir William J. Herschel. Altogether this appendix con-

tains some fifty articles, many of them from popular as well as scientific magazines and periodicals, nearly all profusely illustrated with pictures, ranging from a comparison of the largest and smallest eggs to the final scene in a great French automobile race. The average reader has seen "profusely illustrated" volumes in which the illustrations consisted of a frontispiece and a decorated capital, but in this case the expression embraces no less than 179 illustrations, some of them beautiful examples of the modern art of color printing. Knowledge, that is to say, is taken in its broadest sense, and modern intelligence, as represented by the ordinarily well informed individual, is credited with an interest sufficiently diversified to include not only the latest development of the submarine boat, but also the peoples that once inhabited our continent, the possible improvement of the human race under existing conditions, the result of a century's study of meteorites or an essay on the importance of the sea in the life of nations. One of the more popular articles, for example, is a study of the National zoo by Ernest Thompson Seton, which is reprinted from a leading magazine, accompanied by all the original illustrations from the brush and pencil of this famous portrayer of animals.

Here one may read about the newest discoveries in astronomy; the explorations of the atmosphere by means of kites, one of the most interesting recent scientific experiments; the latest investigations into the X-ray; wireless telegraphy; transatlantic telephoning; the invention of the telephonograph, an application of the telephone that is already delivering the daily news to the numerous subscribers in some European cities; color photography; the history and mechanics of motion pictures; American "emigrant" diamonds—diamonds found where the mineralogist wouldn't expect them, that is, forest destruction and irrigation; the traps used by the American Indian; fire-walking in Tahiti; the dinosaurs, or "terrible lizards," once native to this continent; or the latest adventures of the submarine boat. In a word, the whole world is drawn upon for material that shall interest and instruct.

One of the most delightful articles in the volume is about the "Children's Room," where Dr. S. P. Langley, the secretary and executive of the Smithsonian, has devoted a part of the space at his command to the sole pleasure of the small fry who



SAMUEL PIERPONT LANGLEY, SECRETARY SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.

are still a long way from the ballot box. Here the institution, forgetting for a moment the serious business of corresponding with learned societies in Europe, Asia, and Africa, to say nothing of the other continents, sets itself to the task of amusing and interesting the very youngest minds in the A B C's of science. "The cases are arranged," says the author, Dr. Albert Bigelow Paine, in an account that originally appeared in *St. Nicholas*, but now adapted, with exquisitely colored pictures, to the uses of the Smithsonian report—just "as a child would wish them, and he will begin, perhaps, with those on the left as he enters—the cases of the birds. At the first of these he will linger. Within are the 'Largest and smallest birds of prey.' He will look at the great condor of the Andes, and the bald eagle, and then at the tiny sparrow hawk; and he will wonder why these are so big and that so little, and if the bald eagle could whip the condor in a fair fight. He thinks it likely, because the condor has blunt claws—so blunt, the card says, that he cannot carry off the big animals he sometimes kills. The condor is bigger than the bald eagle, but he is not so good looking, and the child does not like him. He likes much better the largest owl, the great eagle owl, who lives in the vast, trackless woods of northern Europe and Asia—a monarch of the far, dim stillness; and if the child is little, she adores the smallest of his race, the tiny elf owl, who might well be a real sprite to dart from the leafy, dewy tangle of evening.

"The small observer passes on. 'Some Curious Birds' come next, and he must see them, even if he has to come back to the bald eagle and the condor, and the different-sized owls, by and by. He wonders and laughs, too, at the curious birds. Truly they are a funny lot. Some of them have fans that fold. Others have veils, aprons, crowns, lappets, armor, and what not? The toucan has such an absurd big bill. The black skimmer's flat bill is set the wrong way. A queer paradise bird has one tail where it should be, besides two very long tails that are half saw and half feather, and that start from behind his ears. Then there is a row of little bat-parrakeets that sleep with their heads hanging down. The child wonders why the blood doesn't run to their heads, and how the umbrella bird can see through the thick tangle of his head covering. Almost all the curious birds have funny attachments, something they don't seem to need—all except the poor apteryx from Australia, who has much less than he should have, because he is left over from some

(Continued on Seventh Page.)