

**ON THE EXTENT AND AIMS OF A NATIONAL  
MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, THE  
SUBSTANCE OF A DISCOURSE ON THAT  
SUBJECT, DELIVERED AT THE ROYAL  
INSTITUTION OF GREAT BRITAIN, ON THE  
EVENING OF FRIDAY, APRIL 26, 1861**

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On the Extent and Aims of a National Museum of Natural History, the Substance of a Discourse on That Subject, Delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain, on the Evening of Friday, April 26, 1861 by Richard Owen

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**RICHARD OWEN**

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EXTENT AND AIMS  
OF  
A NATIONAL MUSEUM  
OF  
NATURAL HISTORY.

INCLUDING

THE SUBSTANCE OF A DISCOURSE ON THAT SUBJECT, DELIVERED  
AT THE ROYAL INSTITUTION OF GREAT BRITAIN, ON THE  
EVENING OF FRIDAY, APRIL 26, 1861.

By PROFESSOR OWEN, F.R.S.,

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AND CHARLES CROSS.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE PLATES.

### PLATE I.

PLAN of the premises surrounding the British Museum, showing the proportion of those to the west, extending from Great Russell Street, along Charlotte Street, to Bedford Square, which would be occupied by the proposed Museum of Natural History, as adapted for the present Collections.

*Fig. 1.* Plan of Ground Floor of the proposed Museum, as adapted to any part of the oblong plot of ground extending from Great Russell Street to Montague Place; and to front either west, or east as drawn in the plan. (The details of the galleries, &c., are described in the text.)

### PLATE II.

Plan of the ground to the west of the Horticultural Garden, along Prince Albert's Road, Kensington; showing the proportion which would be occupied by the proposed Museum of Natural History, as adapted for the reception of the present Collections in the British Museum.

*Fig. 1.* Plan of the Ground Floor.

*Fig. 2.* Plan of the Upper Floor.

The dotted lines show where galleries might be added, conformably with the original design, for future accessions to the Natural History. The building is adapted to any part of the oblong plot of ground extending from the Exhibition Building towards Kensington Road, and might be erected with the entrance to face the end of Gore Road.

*Fig. 3.* Plan (elevation in two sections) of the Museum, as ultimately extended along a frontage of 780 feet.

The section, along *a, a*, *fig. 2*, through the transverse galleries, shows the mode of admitting light into the ground-floor *L*, from the interspaces of the galleries; and the mode of utilizing the interspaces below the side-lights of the ground-floor by an arched roof of glass. The section through the longitudinal galleries, along *s, s*, *fig. 2*, exposes their communications with the transverse galleries and interspaces.

ON A  
NATIONAL MUSEUM  
OF  
NATURAL HISTORY.

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MANY inquiries by those interested in the intellectual progress of the country and the material helps thereto had moved me to put the facts and arguments in behoof of an adequate National Museum of Natural History in a popular and accessible form, when the Leading Journal, divining with its usual sagacity the generality of such desire after late debates, made the appeal, the response to which will be found in the following pages.

To descant on the abstract advantage of a knowledge of the works of Creation is neither requisite nor convenient to my present purpose. I may assume the general admission that collections of the several classes of such objects, duly prepared,



named, and arranged, so as to give the utmost facility for inspection and comparison, are the indispensable instruments in the acquisition and advance of that knowledge. Not but that a vital part of Natural History requires the observation of rocks and mineral beds as they naturally appear on the earth's surface, of plants as they clothe and adorn that surface, of animals as they add life and motion to sea, earth, and air. And such knowledge must be gained abroad, in the field, in that grand Natural Museum which the world becomes to the loving eyes of the geological, botanical, and zoological observer, even such as was the Paradise in which Adam, as sung by our great poet,

" Beheld each bird and beast  
Approaching two and two ; these cowering low  
With blandishment, each bird stooped on his wing.  
He named them as they passed and understood  
Their nature ; with such knowledge God endued  
His sudden apprehension."

Under other and harder conditions we strive to regain that knowledge, needing, and urgently seeking for, every collateral aid in the struggle to acquire that most precious commodity—the

truth as it is in Nature, and as manifested by the works of God.

ARISTOTLE received such aid from his great pupil ALEXANDER, in large subventions for the requisite subjects of his numerous observations on the external form and anatomy of animals, and for the employment of hunters and fishers and other observers of their living habits. He thus obtained the materials on which his strong intellect wrought in the composition of the remarkable 'History of Animals' of which we probably form but an inadequate idea from the nine books that have come down to us. Had the Greeks, indeed, possessed and practised the arts of preserving and preparing animal bodies and structures, the science of the universal teacher might have been retained, exemplified, and expanded by his pupils. But there is no record of any collection of the conservable parts of the animals having been made after the philosopher had used them for his observations and comparisons. To the absence of such museum may be attributed the singular and sudden arrest in the course of the zoological science, which had started by so rapid a growth, but which, want-

ing that condition of progress, degenerated ; so that even Bacon failed to comprehend the zoological discoveries of the Stagyrte ; and their due appreciation had to await the zootomical labours of HUNTER and CUVIER. Not until their time, and by the aid of their vast collections of animals and animal structures, could the value and importance of Aristotle's zoological and physiological writings be fully comprehended.

The Romans, during the height of their Empire, expended enormous treasures in the capture and transport to Italy of the wild beasts of their conquered provinces, but they were solely for the service of the amphitheatre. The rhinoceros, the hippopotamus, the giraffe, the crocodile, the lion, the tiger, the European bison, with many other rare animals—some of which, as the gigantic wild ox of Hyrcania, are now extinct—were brought to Rome, and there publicly exhibited. They might be seen by the philosopher, the historian, the poet, and the satirist ; but they were seen only to be baited and slaughtered in cruel games for the gratification of the depraved tastes of an enslaved and voluptuous people.