

THE AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM:—
FRAGMENTS OF ITS EARLY HISTORY.

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(Plates xviii.-xx.)

I.—INCEPTION AND TITLE.

It is currently believed and officially stated that the Australian Museum was inaugurated in 1836, and under that name was consolidated by the Hon. Alexander Macleay¹, Colonial Secretary (Pl. xviii.) Certain it is, however, the Museum was a "going-concern," a small one certainly, but still in existence, some years before 1836.

With whom the idea of establishing a Museum originated it is very difficult to say, for the only person known to us by name was Mr. A. M. Baxter,² Attorney General in 1828, with an anonymous writer "U," in the "Australian Quarterly Journal of Theology, Literature and Science," in the same year.

Through the courtesy of Mr. H. Wright, Librarian, Mitchell Library, my attention was drawn to the following paragraph in the "Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser" of June 28th, 1828:—

"The Attorney-General (A. M. Baxter, Esqr.) is resolving on ways and means to start a Museum in the Colony. Nothing could be more easy, if the learned gentleman would only follow up his laudable scheme with that patriotic spirit of which we all know he is so liberally possessed. In such a quarter of the globe as ours, it is a disgrace that we have not long since had a Museum formed. We trust Mr. Baxter will not be contented, until his purpose in this, as well as in every other praiseworthy enterprise, is happily effected."

¹ Macleay, Alexander—Born 24th June, 1767, Co. Ross, Scotland. In 1795 became Chief Clerk, Prisoners-of War Office; in 1797 head of Department of Correspondence of the Transport Board, and its Secretary, 1806-18. In 1825 arrived in Australia as Colonial Secretary, and resigned office in 1836. From 1843 to 1846 was the first elected Speaker of the Legislative Council under the Constitution Act; died in Sydney, 19th July, 1848, in his 81st year—(Fletcher, Macleay Mem. Vol., 1893, p. vii.)—In all early official documents the family name is spelt M'Leay, not "Macleay" as in general use. It is so written in one of the earliest Museum publications—"Catalogue of the Specimens of Natural History, etc., in the Australian Museum," 8vo., 1837, being the first name on the list of those forming the Committee.

² Information is required regarding this gentleman.