

Address delivered on laying the corner stone of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, May 25, 1839 / by Walter R. Johnson ; published by order of the Academy.

Contributors

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DELIVERED ON
LAYING THE CORNER STONE
OF THE
ACADEMY OF NATURAL SCIENCES
OF
PHILADELPHIA:

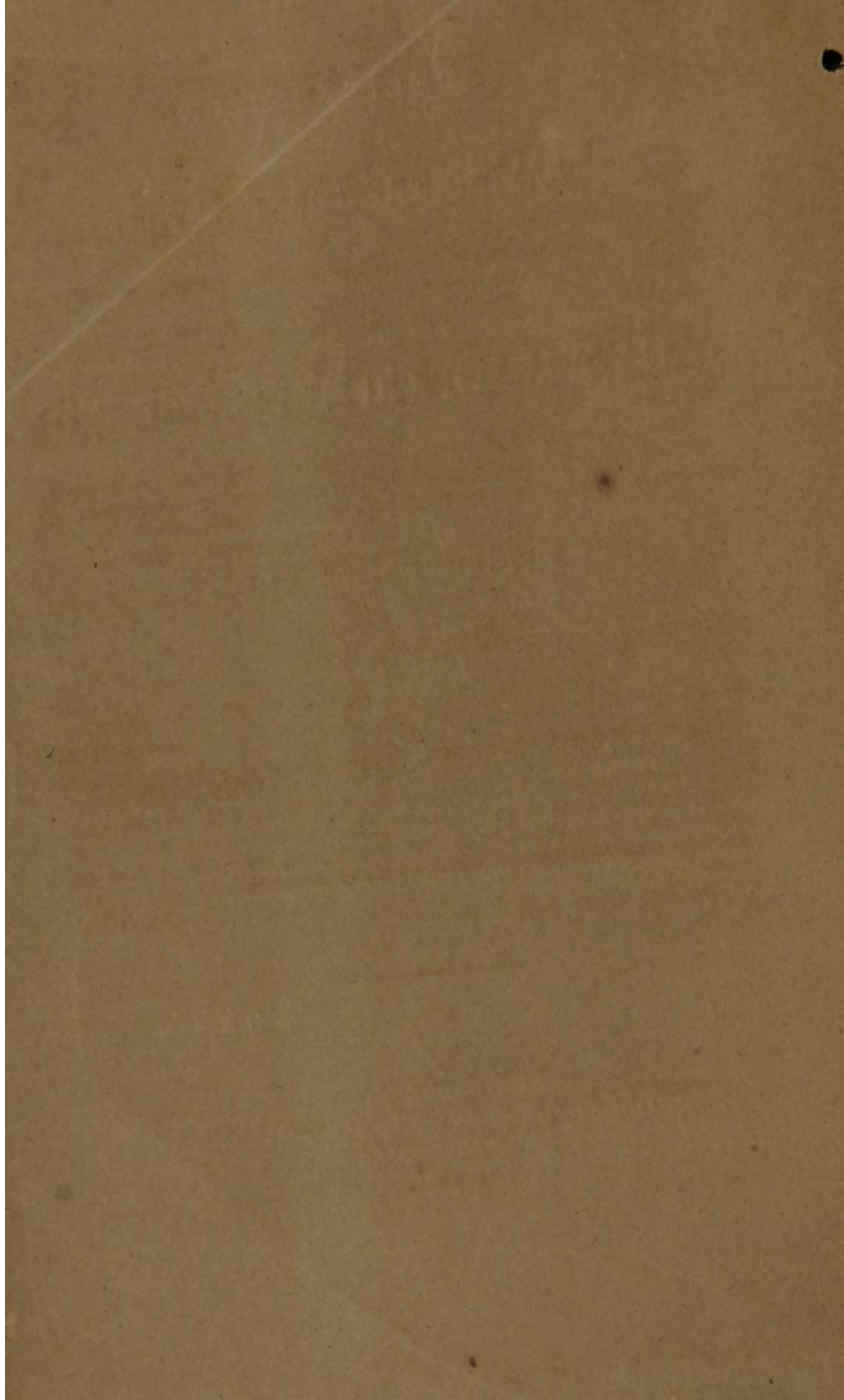
May 25th, 1839.

✓
By WALTER R. JOHNSON, A. M., M. A. N. S., &c. &c.

PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF THE ACADEMY.

————— 24822
PHILADELPHIA:
PRINTED BY T. K. & P. G. COLLINS,
NO. 1 LODGE ALLEY.

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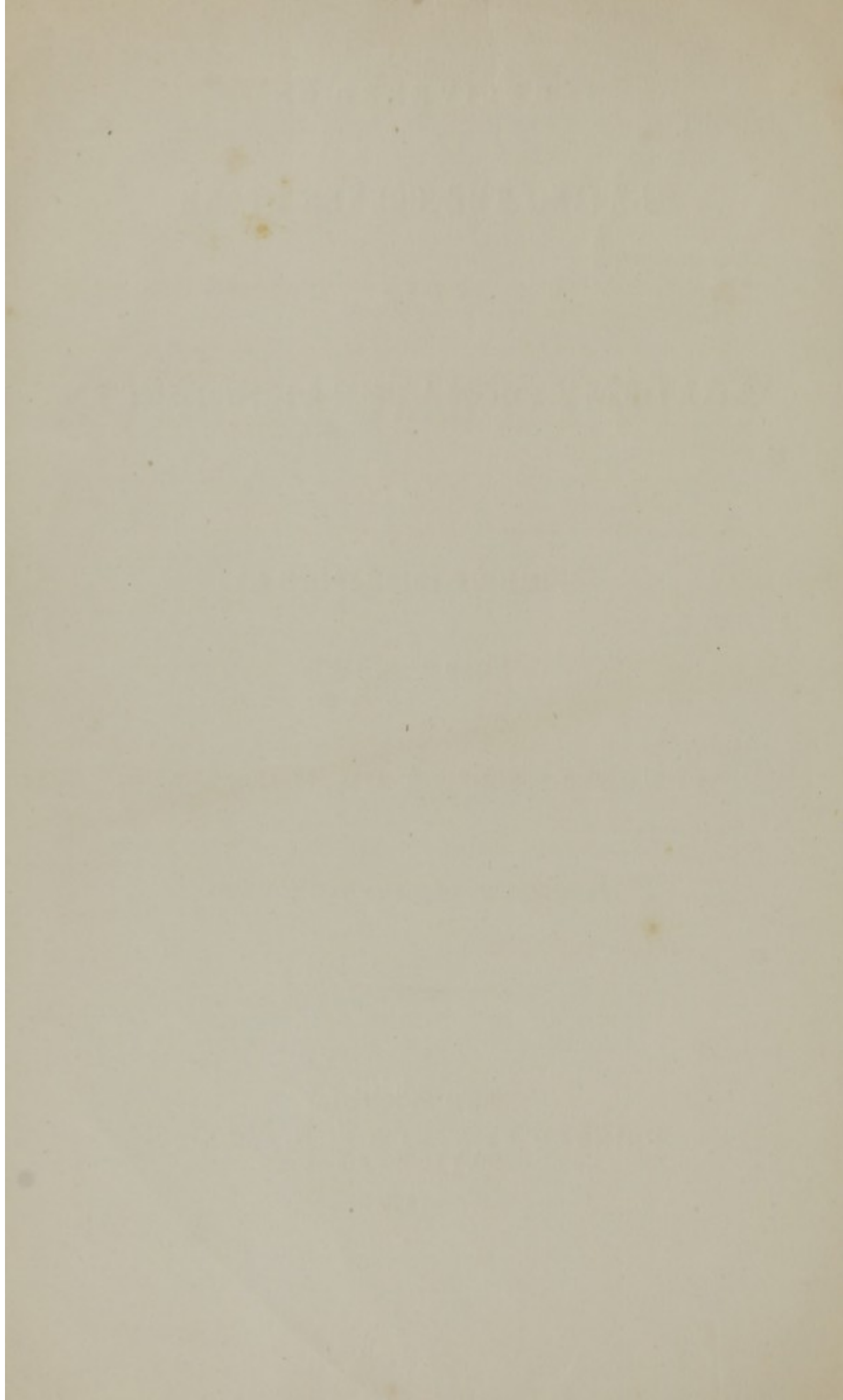
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1839.



Philadelphia, May 27th, 1839.

WALTER R. JOHNSON:

Dear Sir—At a meeting of the Academy of Natural Sciences, held May 25, 1839, the following Resolutions were passed:

Resolved, That the thanks of this society be presented to Walter R. Johnson, Esq., for the very eloquent, appropriate and well timed address this day delivered.

Resolved, That a copy be requested for publication.

Resolved, That a committee of three be appointed to carry the above resolution into effect.

Whereupon Messrs. Goddard, Vaux and Pearsall were appointed the committee.

In pursuance of the object for which we were appointed we enclose the preceding Resolutions, trusting that you will accede to the request contained in them.

PAUL B. GODDARD, M. D.,
WM. S. VAUX,
ROBERT PEARSALL.

Messrs. PAUL B. GODDARD, M. D., WM. S. VAUX and ROBERT PEARSALL, Esqs.

Gentlemen—In compliance with the wishes of the Academy of Natural Sciences as conveyed in your note of this date, a copy of the address delivered at the laying of the corner stone of the new hall of the society is herewith placed in your hands, with which I beg you to accept for yourselves, and convey to those whom you represent, the assurances of the high consideration with which I subscribe myself your obedient servant,

WALTER R. JOHNSON.

Philadelphia, May 27, 1839.

Pursuant to public notice, the members of the Academy of Natural Sciences met at their hall, corner of Twelfth and George streets, at half past four o'clock on Saturday, the 25th of May, 1839, and proceeded thence to the site of the new hall, at the corner of Broad and George streets, where the corner stone was laid with the usual ceremonies.

The new building will be completely fire-proof, forty-five feet front on Broad street, by eighty-five feet deep on George street: it will present a single saloon with two ranges of galleries, beneath which, in the basement, will be a lecture room capable of accommodating five hundred persons.

The means for accomplishing this desirable object have been chiefly derived from the splendid liberality of the President of the Academy, WILLIAM MACLURE, Esq., whose pecuniary donations to the society during the past two years amount to *Twenty Thousand Dollars*. Seventeen thousand dollars of this sum are reserved for the erection of the new hall; and this fund has been largely augmented by the liberal subscriptions of members, and others interested in the cause of science.

ADDRESS.

*Messrs. Vice Presidents, Officers and Members of the
Academy of Natural Sciences.*

GENTLEMEN:—You are assembled to perform a duty at once interesting and honorable.

Having, through the early periods of our institution, borne the arduous labors incident to its organisation; having cheerfully submitted to the necessary inconveniences, which a want of more extended accommodations has for several years occasioned; having, by your united and persevering efforts, in the wide range of the physical sciences, accumulated extensive treasures from every kingdom of nature—having, through your own exertions, and particularly through the liberality of a munificent benefactor, become possessed of a store of the recorded wisdom of past ages, too valuable to be longer subjected to the chances of the elements; and having, through the same munificence, been enabled to undertake the erection of an edifice more secure from casualties, and more conformable to the present condition and prospects of the Academy, than the premises hitherto occupied, you are now convened to signalise the commencement of this auspicious work, by laying the corner stone of the future hall of your deliberations.

In performing this grateful duty, you indicate not merely the fact that our society has, by years of diligent labor, become capable of extending the sphere of its usefulness, and that the public spirit of the friends of the institution has kept pace with the advances of science, and with the demands for increased facilities in its cultivation and diffusion—but by the plan of operations here intended to be carried into effect, you give an earnest that the truth of nature, and the love of all which is great and beautiful, curious and useful, in the scene of things around you, has taken deep hold of your affections; that the intellectual character of our city—our state—our whole country, has had a place in your regards, and has claimed a distinct and respectful consideration in the plan of your present undertaking.

By extending to the public not only, as heretofore, the benefits of free admission to your collections, but also to the invaluable treasures of the MACLUREAN LIBRARY, and offering easy access to courses of

public instruction, in various branches of useful knowledge, in a commodious hall for scientific lectures, you testify to all the lovers of truth, that you regard science as something more than a trivial and idle pursuit; and hold your collections and libraries as something better than treasures to be hoarded, talents to be buried in oblivion;—that you feel the practical benefits of knowledge to be interwoven with the daily business of human life; and that you believe the cause of human liberty, morality, civilisation and happiness, to be dependent on the extension of intelligence, the extirpation of error, the advancement of the arts, the diffusion of demonstrable truth.

Standing among the earliest of those institutions in our country which have been founded for the exclusive cultivation of the Natural Sciences—including under this comprehensive denomination, researches in every department of physical truth, you have happily avoided those discussions, which have in former ages confused the learned, and distracted the philosophic mind.

Founding on the immovable basis of observation and experiment, the superstructure of inductive science, you have left to those who shun a contact with the world, and a participation in its interests, the indulgence of imagination and the construction of ingenious intellectual theories. Admitting that many things in the works of nature have never been rightly studied, and therefore not understood, you still discover in the history of physical science, abundant grounds of diffidence in asserting that what you do not comprehend, will, therefore, never become intelligible to others. In this, you find one stimulant to the persevering diligence of philosophy. Another is, that you now find arrayed against you, none of those engines of ignorance and presumption, once so potent in compelling astronomers, philosophers, geologists and physiologists, to conceal or renounce the eternal laws of nature which they had the glory to discover; many of those laws having, since the martyrdom of their investigators, become part of the world's unquestioned knowledge, and being now confidently cited in *proof* of the doctrines and opinions against which they were then declared to militate.

A farther incitement to your continued and increased exertions, is found in the fact that, during the period of twenty-seven years since the foundation of this Academy, important and most favorable changes have taken place, as well in the physical sciences themselves, as in the condition of our country in regard to the disposition and means for their cultivation.

To say nothing of the vast strides of mechanical and chemical philosophy, with their innumerable applications to the useful arts, it is only necessary to refer to some of the more immediate objects of the naturalist, to convince ourselves how widely the boundaries of knowledge have been extended within the limits of the present century.

Of the more than 60,000 species of plants now known to botanists,

scarcely one half, it is believed, had been discovered, or at least *described*, at the commencement of this brief period.

Of the quadrupeds, birds, reptiles, fishes and other animals which make up the present sum of our knowledge of zoology, a nearly similar assertion may be made.

Of mineral forms and composition, the progress of investigation has kept pace with the wonderful advances in *chemistry*, and the latter science is known to have received nearly all its exactness since the beginning of the nineteenth century.

What, at that epoch, was *geology*, but a mass of crude, contradictory operations? What, especially, was American geology, until grappled, comprehended, irradiated by the vigorous, searching mind of our own Maclure? * And what was the amount of information comprised in the previously existing accounts of organic animal and vegetable remains, now the *index of geology*, which nature had stereotyped at so many periods, in so many successive editions of her works, as the lithographed illustrations of her incontrovertible, unfalsifiable history?

In regard to the condition of our country for the prosecution of science, it need not be demonstrated how widely extended is the spirit of inquiry, or how numerous are the institutions devoted to pursuits in common with ourselves, and founded since the period which saw the establishment of this Academy. It is not, perhaps, assuming too much to assert, that to the early friends, benefactors, and especially to the active scientific members, of this institution, is the country at large, and the cause of American science, in particular, indebted, not only for the labors they performed, and the discoveries which they made, but for the encouraging example which they set to kindred institutions throughout the land. To the labors of a Maclure, a Say, a Wilson, a Godman, a Conrad, a Collins, a Waterhouse, a Schweinitz, and many others, whose names adorn the early rolls of this Academy, along with those of numerous other members and correspondents whom it might be invidious now to distinguish, and whose co-operation it is fervently hoped we may long enjoy, has the cause of science been indebted for highly valuable additions to the pre-existing stock of knowledge, and our collections for numerous treasures which cannot be duly appreciated until displayed in the capacious hall here destined to receive them.

[*The Vice Presidents Wm. Hembel and John P. Wetherill, Esqs., here deposited in the foundation stone, the box containing various records and memorials of the institution, and of the event now to be commemorated. The master builder, under the direction of the architect, placed the cover over the cavity containing the box, cemented and secured it in its place: and when the work had been examined and approved by the building committee, the speaker proceeded as follows:*]

GENTLEMEN OF THE BUILDING COMMITTEE:—In selecting this

* See Maclure's *Geology of the United States*, accompanied with a map, Philadelphia, 1817.

central and commanding position for the new site of the Academy, you obey the dictates of a sound discretion, and respond to the wishes of an intelligent community, whose favor and liberality towards institutions for advancing and diffusing useful knowledge, when conducted with becoming spirit, has been so unequivocally manifested.

May the edifice which you have now founded, advance with speed and safety to its completion. May its durability equal that of the great abiding interests which it is intended to subserve—and long may it stand to bear witness to the liberality of our revered President and benefactor.

May its chaste *exterior* be worthy of the architectural taste, and its well stored, well ordered *interior*—of the intellectual and moral character of our city.

May the inquiring minds of our citizens here find ample gratification for their love of nature. May our hours of relaxation be here at all times devoted to an innocent, a praiseworthy, an ennobling enjoyment; and may our social intercourse continue to be marked with every courtesy and kindness.

May our simple and equitable system of laws ever be consistent with the liberal institutions of the age and country in which we live.

May active and vigorous minds here form and execute manly purposes.

May all subtle and unworthy combinations continue to be strangers within our walls, and all subjects of acrimonious tendency be, as heretofore, sedulously excluded from our deliberations.

May our honors, at home, still rest on the most deserving;—and may we still deserve to be honored abroad, by the continued co-operation of those in every clime, whom Science shall at all times be proud to call her own.

May the voice of true learning here expound the laws which govern our wide universe, and may the progress of American science be on this spot rendered illustrious by the harmony, the zeal, the consistency, the wisdom, the untiring perseverance, and the fearless fidelity to nature, of those who should have devoted their energies to the discovery and illustration of TRUTH.



