

I.

ADDRESS

*Delivered by the President, the REV. JOSEPH CROMPTON, to the
Members of the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society,
at their First Meeting, on April 27th, 1869.*

THE PRESIDENT said it becomes my duty to open the proceedings of the Society with a few words. In doing so I hope to throw out some thoughts that may indicate what seems to me to be the scope of our Society, and to give some hints also in regard to our actual work and proceedings during this year. I am of course flattered by being appointed your first president, but I feel that if I am ever to be president of such a Society as this, it must be now, for it is easier to rock the cradle than to drill an adult, and I consider myself as rocking the cradle of this Society. There was a time when I thought I did know something about Natural History. In those days when one was a student under Lindley and others, one did think that one was in the way of getting a little knowledge, but like the lady in one of Goethe's works, who knew enough to listen with intelligence when wise men spoke, I can just do that, for all things in science are going on so fast, that a man occupied in other professions and other work requiring time and attention, cannot keep up with it. The worst that can be said of your Society is, that you have a parson at the head of it. A great German writer said that all members of the clerical profession should strive to get some department of God's works outside their regular routine and professional duties, and by studying it, widen their minds and keep their hearts open. That has been my feeling all through life. Although I was led in early life to take an interest in various departments of knowledge, I know that of many of my cloth it may be said that we are "Jacks of all trades.

and masters of none," but still I believe that it is better to have a smattering of a good many things, than total ignorance of all.

During nearly thirty years that I have lived in Norwich, it has been satisfactory to see that there is a decided step being made in the love of all departments of knowledge and science. I can remember when there were one or two little clubs just dying out—little private societies, at which papers were read, and which did a deal of good. I remember myself being a member of such a society. It had three members when I joined it, and we soon finished with being a nice little gossiping club. Mr. Fitch was one of the members, and at his house the last meeting was held. Some of us tried to stir up the Norwich people, and one after another of these societies arose and died away, each rotting and adding something to the soil. It may be the fate of this society to die also, and if so, we shall leave a nice little *debris* for other people's benefit afterwards. Here we are, then, trying to form what seems to be a wider and larger, and, I fancy, more promising society than any that has arisen in Norwich. Let us look at the scope of this society, and what it is to do if it comes to maturity, and does its work in life. You have first to take a wide sweep over all nature's works, except the field of geology. We have a society of geologists, and let us leave them to their special department, only we ought to work in alliance and in union with them, for all parts of knowledge, all parts of nature, are allied to each other. There is no such thing as a scientific man worthy of the name who confines his attention to one subject, however important, without looking at the relation which science shows it has to the things around it. I remember a severe lesson being given to some of the scientific men of the last generation. At the Bristol meeting of the British Association, Mr. Cross, of Taunton, brought forth his extraordinary experiments in electricity, and next day Professor Sedgwick, Buckland, and one or two more were not to be found. Enquiry was made, and it was found they were in bed; they had been so excited the previous day that they could not get up—they were scientifically intoxicated, and had to sleep it off next morning. The chemists came to their rescue, and said they ought to have known better, they ought to have known that certain French chemists had anticipated Mr. Cross in some points; and the consequence was that the geologists had to eat humble pie

next day, and confess their ignorance of chemistry. They had studied their own particular topic, but had not studied its relation to chemistry. I hope we have all got beyond that, and although we do not touch geological points particularly, still geology will be of assistance to us, and we to it. Our variety of pursuits will be our bond of union; we have no narrowness, no separation in this room. Some of us may know a great deal upon one topic, some nothing, and some a little; and we shall want patience and perseverance—patience to learn to understand how our friends' favourite topics bear upon our own special pursuits. As to that particular sin which still exists among scientific men as elsewhere—jealousy between one branch and another, we must consider that banished and never to enter here.

As your president, there is one particular danger that I must warn you against, namely the tendency to indifference. Conchologists may not care to consider other branches, and entomologists or microscopists may not care much for alliance with their neighbours, whose special pursuit is conchology or ornithology. One may be very learned in one branch, and show indifference towards the branches in which his neighbours are interested, but it is our duty to get rid of all that, and to find that our several topics have connection one with the other. I hope to see Mr. Gunn here as head of the Geological Society, and that we shall have assistance from the geologists, for just as physical geography is only a phase of geology presenting the superficies and geological aspect of the earth, so there is no department of science which has not a relation to others as geology has to nearly all. I do not think our botanists will go far without claiming assistance from geologists to explain the existence and decay of plants that flourished in the past. So in regard to the other branches of our society. We shall start from our own district, as the geologists have done, and we shall have to ask, and I hope we shall get, papers and discussions on the botany of our district; and we must make a register of the plants growing in this district, their localities, and their conditions. I cannot conceive how you can have a proper understanding of the flora of this district without knowing something of the soil, and there we shall have to ask for the assistance of the geologists. At our very starting we ought to have it impressed upon all our members that we are not to be destructive in our hunting. We ought

to have an understanding that we are to be scientific, but not destructive. For if the society is to go in a body to hunt for rare plants, existing only in special localities, and each one claim to take a specimen, it will become a pest to all true lovers of science, and a dread to all sensible occupiers of land.

There is another thing strikes me, from the experience I have had of other Societies, namely, that we should assert the rights of the poor, and our own rights therewith, in keeping open footpaths. I have seen a great tendency to make bridle-paths into footpaths, and footpaths into no paths at all.

No one likes to go to battle with the authorities and the powers that be, but a Society can send a lawyer's letter, and I know of a Society which was the means of keeping open many footpaths, and was of great public service in this way. We ought to take care that we do not let public rights be trespassed upon, and our walks shut up from us by the selfishness of the powers that may happen for the time being to be owners of the land.

I remember, in the first volume of John Stuart Mill's book on political economy, that cold, logical book, the necessity of commons and waste places is insisted upon. One would have thought this would have been one of the last things to be found in such a book, but it so happens that John Mill is a botanist, and, therefore, you can comprehend why he wishes to keep the commons and waste places intact. He finds a reason for it in political economy, but I suspect the botany was father to the wish. He loves his political economy, but he loves his botany quite as much.

Every region has peculiarities in its flora, which, I suspect, might teach us something of the ancient geology and geography of the country; and although we cannot, like the Rugby, Dudley, and Shrewsbury Societies, go to the top of the Wrekin to see the plants there which seem to be looking wistfully to their relatives far away on the hills of Wales, or the more distant Scotch hills, yet there may be mosses and plants about our marshes and ditches which might teach us something of the history of far-gone-by times, and lead us to distant countries as well as distant ages. Then our conchologists have to work out their vein of investigation, and in holiday times, could we not get into connection with the dredgers on our shores, or even establish a little dredging ourselves? Many an important topic, both of marine botany and marine

conchology, might thus be investigated, and we might occasionally dredge up some old bone or tooth that even Mr. Gunn would not despise. I merely suggest these things as objects we might have in view. Our northern seas have not yet been properly dredged and it strikes me, there is much yet lying in them for us, if by any contrivance we could get them dredged.

We are likely to have one or two more entomologists, and we have the late Mr. Brightwell's collection open to us: and, perhaps, some of our friends may be able to get tropical insects or descriptions of them for us. Our Society may not only be interesting but useful, if we bring entomological knowledge to bear on agriculture, as botany has been brought to bear on it. There are many insects that are nuisances to the farmers, and, perhaps, we might be able to do something that might be practically useful. We shall also have one or two ornithologists; and we ought to know a great deal more minutely about the migration of birds. Mr. Stevenson has done a great deal, but we shall want it broken down into small bits for us to digest at our leisure. There again our conservative principle must come in, and we must set our faces against the perpetual gunning and destruction of birds throughout the land. It is possible that we may have to bring some facts and some papers upon the subject of excessive preservation of game and its results—of course, only as naturalists—and upon the diseases thereby produced, and even its effects on the farming interest. If we have a member or two who are large land-owners and game preservers, I shall be happy to help them in getting up a discussion, not upon the holy crocodile or ibis of Egypt, but upon the holy pheasant and sacred partridge of present times.

In all these ways there seems to be plenty of work laid out for us. There is a great interest rising up in all departments of natural history, and all departments of science.

In regard to the question of origin of species, upon which Mr. Wallace has given us certain information, there is the light thrown upon it by fancy domesticated animals. We have the canary, pigeons, sheep, and cattle, and it strikes me we might get papers and even facts that might be of great interest; and I don't see why we should not take our share in the great battle of species. We might get some honourable wounds, or might come out with honourable spurs, but that battle is going on and must be fought out; and

therefore, if we can have some discussion on the subject our Society will be all the more animated, and possibly we might add a little to the progress of science in this particular.

Then as to fish, we have a capital river, besides the broads, and I do not know any spot in the country, till you go to the lakes, where ichthyology could be better studied.

Then as to expeditions, we propose next month to go over to see the Scoulton gulls; or to Horstead, either with or without our geological friends. Those expeditions, I hope, will present great variety of interest. We have one feature which does not occur, I believe, amongst the geologists—we have admitted the ladies amongst us, not out of compliment or flattery, nor yet upon the principle of Miss Lydia Becker, but I do hope they will attend, and that we will get information and co-operation from them, and that we shall have them accompanying us on our expeditions.

I have laid before you what seems to me a rough sketch of the various lines in which our Society may direct its efforts. Professor Huxley told us the other day that all naturalists are, by character and by nature, huntsmen. I believe Huxley is right. All naturalists and lovers of nature are in some degree inspired with a love of hunting. It is a glorious excitement and a glorious pursuit, only let us remember that we are students, and that it takes many facts to make a truth—many facts must be gathered together into your crucible, and the fire of patient investigation applied to them, before you get the little shining globule of truth.

We shall require the assistance of the members of all parts of our Society; we shall require careful, patient help, and hard work, which is the work most healthy, most exciting, and most uniting. The work done by our fathers and predecessors will be useful to us, but we shall have to verify it and take nothing upon trust, and we must also try to get some new facts for ourselves. The works we study are the works of Him to whom nothing is small and nothing too large—nothing so great but that it is made up of what is small, minute, and infinitesimal.