

McCook (H. C.)

ADDRESS DELIVERED ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF THE
NEW LECTURE HALL OF THE ACADEMY OF NATURAL
SCIENCES OF PHILADELPHIA,

FEBRUARY 22, 1892.

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REV. HENRY C. McCOOK, D. D.

Vice-President



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Fellow Academicians and Fellow Citizens:—It has fallen to my lot, in the unavoidable absence of the President, to give some official recognition to the opening of this Lecture Hall. It is not intended here to dedicate it to its special purpose, but rather to stir up our hearts and dedicate ourselves to the high service of which it is the outer symbol. The fathers and founders of this Academy declared it to be a part of their purpose to make known the wise works of the Creator. This Hall is sacred to that design. Science has not only eyes but a voice; its mission is not only to collect and classify, but to forth-tell. It has been in the past, and will continue to be, "Vox clamantis in deserto,"—"the voice of one crying in the wilderness;" and as such, (I say it reverently), it also may and should "prepare the way of the Lord." If the revelation of the Word has its prophets and expounders; if historians interpret the divine administration of affairs; surely those who have knowledge of that revelation which is in creation should be no less eager to interpret to their fellow beings the truths which have come to them. This Lecture Hall is the sanctuary in which this interpretation shall be voiced to the thought of the people. That it may serve this noble end and afford a pleasant and convenient meeting house in which to promulgate the truths of science, is the sincere desire of those who now place it at the disposal of the public.

This building marks the culmination of a new life and policy which a few years ago was adopted by the Academy's administration. A Committee on Instruction had long existed, but it was an empty name—"vox et praetera nihil."



At last the time came when the committee expressed a living purpose. Professorships had been provided for in our constitution, but they were only high sounding titles. There were no men to occupy them. It was resolved first of all that the professorships should be filled, and that next, work should be given the professors to do. Many thought the plans of the committee extravagant and impracticable. It seems strange now and here to recall the opposition, and the arguments of the opposition, so confidently arrayed against the plans for instruction. Only a few years ago a few enthusiastic young professors were placed in the van of the new endeavor. Among them were the late H. Carvill Lewis, whose untimely death so many friends lamented; Prof. Benjamin Sharp, and Prof. Angelo Heilprin, to whom as much as to any others the success of the new departure is due. Professor Brinton came in at a later date, and Prof. J. Gibbons Hunt, the Nestor of the faculty, contributed something by his admirable popular lectures before the section of Biology and Microscopy.

Large things were laid out, as is abundantly attested by the curriculum which was published and printed for the use of scholars and professors. From the beginning the new departure was a substantial success. There were no great crowds, but those who came (and there was a goodly number) were earnest, and received what they came for. No distinctions were made because of sex or color or previous condition; men and women alike were welcome, and from all colleges and institutions of whatever school or shade of thought. Thus the Academy fulfilled its catholic and cosmopolitan office, and proved a rallying point for all those who wished to know something more of the secrets of Nature.

We are living to-day in the midst of a wonderful movement known as University Extension. It is new so far as Philadelphia is concerned; and yet, long before it had presented itself in its present form to the public thought, our Academy of Natural Sciences had adopted substantially the

same method of work, and had been patiently and successfully carrying it out to the edification of great numbers. No one made much fuss about it; it was done with quiet dignity, as befitting a venerable institution of learning and science; but none the less it was done,—done and is doing, even while men around were shrugging their shoulders, and talking about the “slowness” of the Academy! We do not recall this either to glorify or justify ourselves, but simply to state the facts which find to-night their culmination in this beautiful and convenient Hall, which is now opened for the accommodation of classes and courses of lectures that have become a part of our Academy’s life and methods.

But we may not dismiss the theme without reminding you that this is only the vestibule of an unfinished temple of science which is yet to be reared, and whose foundation walls are laid in the spacious lot beyond us. For the first time since the Academy has been organized it has received aid from the Commonwealth. Heretofore, every dollar has been given by its members, or by munificent and intelligent friends. Well might the State contribute to widen the usefulness of an institution which has done so much for its material advancement, and has reflected such credit upon American learning. We gratefully thank the powers that be! But much remains to be done. The citizens of Philadelphia should hasten to complete the Museum building of which this Hall forms a part. Philadelphia men of science have long been in the van of American naturalists. They have carried the good name of this community into circles of learning throughout the entire world, and have won a proud place amongst those whose opinion is most desirable. Had the men and women who now hold the noble succession of the past,—these experienced workers, and these bright young spirits full of enthusiasm for science,—the means at their command, which are lavishly laid down for others, they would repay you a thousand fold, citizens of this goodly town, both in substantial increment of material wealth

and the fame they would add to your name. We think, too often, with pride of what other cities and countries have done, and forget what we ourselves are doing, and the possibilities that lie within these plants that our own hands have made and nourished. We have the material around which to gather one of the noblest museums, not only in the New World, but among civilized men. Complete our building: give us money to richly endow the Museum, set these eager hands and minds, with all this machinery, to their best work, and in twenty-five years or less, there will be no institution to which you may point with such proud satisfaction as this Academy of Natural Sciences.

What a noble monument it would be were some one to contribute the price of this Hall, forty or fifty thousand dollars, and thereby secure his name or the name of some dear friend that he would fain memorialize, to a building which shall live throughout coming generations! How better far than any monument reared in Laurel Hill or Woodlands would such a memorial as this become. This Hall has not yet been named, I believe. Here is a most inviting opportunity for a philanthropic citizen. I make no doubt, moreover, that sections and alcoves of the Museum building might thus be named and set apart as memorials of helpful contributors. Why should we not gratify such an honorable ambition to associate our names, or the names of beloved friends, with institutions such as this? But if any man prefer the nameless glory of the Good Samaritan, then for him there is a wide open field; and to him also the bidding comes to help in this grand enterprise, whose vestibule to-night is thrown wide open to the inquiring world, and set apart for ever to the high service of scientific investigation and instruction.