

1881

Opening Address

P. L. Hatch

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/jmas>

Recommended Citation

Hatch, P. L. (1881). Opening Address. *Journal of the Minnesota Academy of Science, Vol. 2 No.3, 37-44*. Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/jmas/vol2/iss3/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of the Minnesota Academy of Science by an authorized editor of University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well. For more information, please contact skulann@morris.umn.edu.



BULLETIN

OF THE

MINNESOTA ACADEMY

OF

NATURAL SCIENCES.

[Proceedings of the Annual Meeting, January 12th and 13th, 1881.]

VOL. II. MINNEAPOLIS, APRIL, 1881. No. 3.

OPENING ADDRESS.

BY P. L. HATCH, M. D., RETIRING PRESIDENT.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Minnesota Academy of Natural Sciences:

In obedience to the established custom of my predecessors I should have delivered an address at the annual meeting, upon retiring from the presidency. The circumstances of the occasion prevented my doing so. On last Friday or Saturday our president-elect requested me to give the opening address to-day. Nothing which I had prepared myself to say would be appropriate to the opening of this session. To refuse his request would be construed into an act of rebellion. If you challenge my discretion in attempting to obey his mandate, I can only say to you, "put yourself in my place," and find how much more courage it would have required to refuse

than to make the attempt, and this is all the apology I have.

In passing, I will avail myself of this opportunity to return my thanks for the distinguished honor of having been your chief officer during the year now past, and to Providence for having survived it. For my gratitude at being relieved of the responsibilities of office, I have no language.

To-day opens a new era in the history of the Academy. This is an occasion of unusual interest to it, to which I trust we shall always look back with pleasurable recollections. It ought to be one of interest to our busy, jostling city. This occasion affords another opportunity for our citizens to learn the purposes and workings of the Academy.

Its existence dates back about eight years to its origin, when a few earnest spirits conceived the idea and executed the plan of its organization. Its objects were then declared to be the observation and investigation of natural phenomena—to make collections of specimens illustrating the various departments of natural history in its most comprehensive sense—to name, classify and preserve the same, and to discuss all such questions as must naturally arise from within the province of its legitimate inquiries. How far it has fulfilled its mission is best known to those who have either been directly identified with its active work, or who have felt sufficient interest in the Academy to habitually attend its meetings. Such persons are aware of the creditable extent of its collections, which are to be seen upon the shelves of the museum and library, or are packed away in boxes for want of room to exhibit them. To carefully and critically review the history and work of the Academy at this time for the information of those who have had the least opportunity to learn them, would be to me a pleasing task, had it not recently been done by abler hands. I may, however, be permitted to consider some of the *obstacles* it has had to encounter in common with other similar societies, and some that have been exceptional and local.

It is a common observation that nearly all such institutions originate with individuals whose love of investigation makes them more or less oblivious to merely pecuniary matters, and ours, I will confidentially remark, was no shining exception to the rule. With a fairly good organizing membership as to numbers, there were few of them who were in circumstances to render any considerable material aid; still by their liberality all indispensable expenditures were promptly met, as they have ever continued to be, so that at the present time there are no obligations of this kind resting upon the Academy. At whatever sacrifice, this minor obstacle has thus far been surmounted.

A greater one sprung from the want of a larger number of members who were by education, habit and inclination prepared to engage in original investigations, who were willing to undertake the too often unappreciated work of laying the foundations of the scientific edifice. Some who were eminently qualified, and came to the front at first, were afterwards turned away, doubtless by causes which I shall mention further on, when referring to the reasons why the Academy has been denied the sympathy and encouragement of the community in the measure which it would be but reasonable to expect. But there have never been wanting numbers enough of such as were willing to work anywhere they were most needed, to constitute a Spartan band which no measure of discouragement could daunt. Steadily and unflinchingly have they worked onward and upward, until the heads of some of the foremost have been seen from the other side of the Atlantic.

Almost every year has added new names to the working list, and we are just now much encouraged and cheered by the acquisition of several highly qualified naturalists and scientists, some of whom are present with us to-day.

But a still more formidable obstacle to the rapid advancement of the Academy is, and has been, the indifference and

lack of sympathy manifested on the part of the community. This is thus frankly stated in no spirit of censure, or unreasonable complaint. There have been too many individual exceptions to make it a pleasant duty to refer to it in this manner; besides, causes may be pointed out which to a considerable extent will account for it.

This charge is not altogether a new one, nor is it peculiar to this city. It has been seldom that societies formed for like purposes have not felt the chilling effects of surrounding indifference, for a time at least. It takes all the solar heat of the vernal months to melt down such icebergs, and happy indeed is that society which survives its springtime. But the causes of indifference, so far as they pertain to institutions of this kind generally, are many of them quite explainable, some of which may be mentioned.

And first, it is generally true that scientifically inclined minds do not hold so strong a social influence upon the community as others (except through exceptional eminence), as their pursuits seem to isolate them in a measure from such frequent contact as to keep them closely in sympathy with it. Original investigations of the character under consideration are apt to absorb most of the time ordinarily given to society, and too often are allowed to dissipate the requisite relish for it. Thus the most genial and benevolent of scientific minds will often convey an impression of cynicism, a sort of selfish air of the cloister, that prevents them from radiating any great degree of personal influence by which to transmute indifference into sympathy. Unfortunate as this may be, it is nevertheless true. And it is undeniable that the most eminently scientific minds have not always been the most practical in their attempts to enlist sympathy and co-operation from the community. Their schemes have often proved to be inglorious failures. Hence the expectation becomes legitimate and natural that almost anything such may attempt in practical life, from building an air-ship to the founding of an

Academy of Sciences, must inevitably fail. Everybody understands that the elements of all such enterprises must be leavened by the co-operation and direction of practical and comprehensive minds if it succeeds. It is, however, a gratifying fact that while practical men are becoming more scientific, thoroughly scientific men are manifestly becoming more practical.

Another and important reason for the existence of general indifference is that however well informed most persons not engaged in scientific investigations are, they do not fully appreciate the considerations of such institutions and their collections to those who are. Museums representing in their collections all departments of natural history are utterly indispensable to such, and must be in the custody of an association of the kind to be available to all, as well as to insure their preservation. I feel assured that, aside from almost every other consideration (of which there are a great many that cannot be alluded to here), if our people could be made to fully realize this alone, they could not remain indifferent.

Having said thus much about indifference in the community as one of the most important obstacles our Academy is called upon to meet, any allusion to the want of sympathy for it would seem to be a repetition of what I have said under another term, but there is a definable distinction when the sense in which I am using it is understood. Indifference is negative and passive. It merely lets our cherished enterprise alone. It does not care. It has no ostensible obstructiveness in it. But lack of sympathy has a positive and concrete significance in its application to this Academy. Our "X. Y. Z.s" understand it, and a great many of our citizens who do not rush into print and before the ink is dry hide themselves under the trail of the insulted and blushing alphabet, understand it too. It is undeniable that from the beginning of the existence of the Academy till the present time it has been shadowed with suspicion, and covertly represented to be a

hotbed of infidelity, and the lair of all the anti-religious, anti-Bible, anti-Christ isms of the age.

If this sounds strange and incredible, it is nevertheless true, and the Academy has been compelled to carry forward its noble, exalting and beneficent work while breathing the stifling atmosphere of this pestilent misconception and misrepresentation. Witness the repeated flings, and the more recent attack through the daily papers. If this reference to these facts seems to be expressed in warm words, bear in mind the sense of injustice from which they spring. It has had to cool down many degrees before words could form. The nearer the kindred the keener the sense of the wrong. "It was not mine enemy, or I could have borne it. It was my friend." But we will let our sense of injustice be only measured by our "charity that covers a multitude of sins." The zealous friends of revelation may have had a faint shadow of excuse for their misapprehensions in the accidental coincidence of certain events to which I will refer. Previous to, and about the time it began to be known that the Academy of Natural Sciences had been organized, public attention had been arrested and startled by the announcement of some of the most radical and sweeping theories which science ever propounded. The antiquity of man and the diversities of his origin, and the evolution of species, were the three thunderbolts which broke from a clear sky. Just then a talented and ery popular apostle of these shocking and apparently Bible-annihilating doctrines of science appeared in our midst, and some faint hearts begun to fear for the Ark of the Lord, and put forth their trembling, puny hands to steady it. In their awakened zeal, they could not hear the word *science* without at once crying out, "Philistine! Philistine!!"

To make the case more complete, and fix upon the Academy which had the temerity to be born in the midst of those troublous times an unbearable responsibility, there appeared another coincidence of so circumstantial character as to pre-

clude any reasonable doubt of the status of this scientific bantling. The president, with invincible logic, made the antiquity of man the burden of an annual address; and as if this were not quite enough, he was twice re-elected! This was certainly remarkable. "What need have we of any further accusation?"

Now, without affirming that the entire membership attends one church, or all practice or employ one system of medicine, I wish to state that after being a member of the Academy seven years, during which time I have attended nearly all of its meetings, and listened to nearly all of its discussions and the reading of nearly all of the papers which have been presented, I have yet to hear the first word, syllable or letter that could offend the most sensitive Christian ears. I am certain that every other member will bear equally direct and positive testimony. From henceforth let the "X. Y. Z.s," and all the rest of mankind who have helped to foster false impressions to obstruct the fullest development of the Academy, forever keep silence, until they know whereof they affirm.

No, fellow citizens—Christian citizens, the Academy has never touched a single dogma of anybody's faith, or cast a single derogatory reflection upon the Christian's sacred record, and I am sure it has no desire to do so. A majority of its members cling as tenaciously to the old Bible and its traditions as you do, but theology is not regarded as one of the natural sciences to be arrayed within its walls for discussion, and hence every member enjoys entire immunity from apprehensions of having his religious faith assailed, be that faith whatever it may. And the members are gentlemen, who recognize the claims of ethics which are always Christian.

Now, in the name of the Academy, and in behalf of science, for the patronage of which this city ought to become as famous as it justly is for the encouragement of education, literature and art, I ask your abiding interest, sympathy and co-operation for the Academy. It is an honor to our city

now. It will be a thousand fold more so in the near future if you will give it the recognition which its aims and its possibilities demand. "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country." Its existence and work is honorably recognized in all civilized lands, as I have the means of knowing through official correspondence with several hundred similar societies, distributed through every known country.

It is the only one of its kind in active existence within the State, and the most northerly or northwesterly in the United States. Its membership extends all over the State, and while it is located here in this metropolis, its aims are to foster the scientific interests of the whole commonwealth. Will you not adopt it and send it forward with a new impulse into a broader field of activities and usefulness. Its future is in a considerable measure in your hands. Shall not Minneapolis and Minnesota have one Academy of Natural Sciences to represent it amongst the States and amongst all the nations? And shall it not be creditable to this city? Shall it be permitted to remain in any measure crippled for want of public sympathy and encouragement? I have shown that while its objects and scope of investigations are as broad as the domain of nature, it is in no way hostile or subversive to the most exalted Christianity. Had time permitted, it could have been demonstrated that it is kindred to the material interests of every honorable organization and individual within the radius of its influence. When the world is waking to the claims of scientific education and the widest investigation, and moving forward almost en masse, shall Minneapolis remain apathetic?

Shall one of the most potent instrumentalities for keeping pace with the front rank be neglected? Certainly in everything else it would be unlike her.

I believe that when our people pause from their commercial absorption long enough to consider this matter, the day of small things for the Minnesota Academy of Natural Sciences will pass away, and its sphere of usefulness will open upon the minds of all who share its ambitions, so that the realization of its possibilities will have begun.