

**ADDRESS TO THE  
BOSTON SOCIETY OF  
NATURAL HISTORY**

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Address to the Boston Society of Natural History by John C. Warren

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**JOHN C. WARREN**

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TO THE



BOSTON SOCIETY OF NATURAL HISTORY.

BY

JOHN C. WARREN, M.D.

PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY.

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1853.

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THIS ADDRESS was to have been delivered to the Society at its Anniversary Meeting, on the first Wednesday in May, 1853; but, owing to the indisposition of the Author, could not be pronounced, and has therefore been published for the use of the Society.

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1853

## A D D R E S S .

IN the earlier years of our Society, it was customary to have an Annual Address. This was generally employed in giving some account of its origin, and in noticing interesting occurrences in its recent history. No discourse having been delivered since June, 1850, I propose to notice the proceedings from that time; and, as some of our present members have lately united with the Society, I think it proper to call their attention to a few of the circumstances of its formation and history. Within the last six or seven years, two very interesting discourses have been delivered, one by Dr. Gould, and the other by Dr. Storer, giving an account of the formation and development of the study of Natural History in this part of the country. These valuable documents still remaining in manuscript, we may with propriety make use of the facts they record. I shall also take a view of the circumstances which

preceded the birth of our Association, and prepared the way for its growth and enlargement; closing with some remarks on the improvements the Society have it in their power to make.

Among the earliest efforts for the cultivation of Natural History in this city are found some essays in the Memoirs of the Academy of Arts and Sciences. This Association was formed in 1780, in the midst of revolution and war. Such an effort certainly does great credit to the spirit and magnanimity of our fathers, who, while their lives and property and political existence were still in a doubtful state, summoned resolution to begin the cultivation of the arts of peace and scientific improvement. The first volume of their Memoirs, published in 1785, contains a paper by Rev. Dr. Cutler on indigenous plants, and one by Professor Williams on earthquakes. In those immediately succeeding, we find an account of the interesting geological deposit at Gay Head, which, if not highly scientific, is quite amusing. The writers, Rev. Dr. Samuel West, then of Dighton, and Dr. William Baylies, of Taunton, made an excursion to Gay Head together, and were the first to describe the picturesque appearance formed by its different-colored clays, marls, &c. They were of opinion that a volcano had existed there, and even that its fires had been visible within



the memory of man. They give a traditionary account, derived from the Indian natives, of the ancient deity which presided over the Island of Martha's Vineyard, the Indian name of which is not given, and of his passage to the lower regions, on the establishment of Christianity among the natives, probably through the volcano. There is, in the same volume, an account of the discovery of very large bones near the Walkill, in the vicinity of Newburgh: these bones were evidently those of the Mastodon. They were mostly in such a decayed state as not to be susceptible of very accurate description; but there is a good account of some of the teeth, with such speculations, derived from their character, as to lead the writers to the belief that the animal to which they belonged was of a carnivorous nature, — a mistake common to them and the celebrated John Hunter.

In the third volume of the Academy's Memoirs, published in 1809, is a valuable article on the geology of the vicinity of Boston, by Monsieur Godon. The author was compelled to leave Paris by domestic trouble; and, coming to Boston with letters which proclaimed his merit as a mineralogist, he was immediately noticed, and a small class formed for a course of geological and mineralogical lectures, by which he hoped to gain the means of support. He made his

lectures practical by carrying the class to such localities as presented interesting subjects, and thus inspired a taste for the science, which many of them retained through life. After residing two or three years in the vicinity of Boston, he removed to Philadelphia, with the hope of prosecuting and enlarging his labors; but soon fell into a morbid state, which, after preying on him a long time, terminated fatally.\* The results of his labors near Boston are embodied in the paper alluded to, and will always continue a memorial of him who planted in this city the seeds of mineralogical science.

Though valuable papers were occasionally contributed to the Memoirs of the Academy, and though considerable efforts were employed to give interest to its meetings, a long time was required to bring forward a sufficient number of zealous individuals to impart activity and steadiness to its operations. Within a few years, however, the talents of its officers, and the industry of its members, have elevated it to a very high rank among similar institutions. Its volumes are rich in scientific treasures of the best kind; its library is large and valuable; its meetings frequent and attrac-

\* The death of the widow, Madame Godon, took place a few months since, after a life marked with sorrow and misfortune, but brightened in its last days by the unexpected bequest of a comfortable property. Some of his descendants reside in Philadelphia.

tive; and its efforts, in various directions, for the cultivation of science, most honorable and useful.

In 1801 a private society was formed for the study of Natural Philosophy and Natural History. The members of the original Association were Hon. John Lowell, Hon. John Davis, President J. Q. Adams, President Kirkland, President Quincy, Rev. Dr. Emerson, S. P. Gardner, Esq., Drs. James Jackson and John C. Warren. The additional members were Judge Jackson, Hon. Richard Sullivan, Hon. William Sullivan, Hon. Francis C. Gray, Joseph Tilden, Esqs., and Dr. J. C. Howard. This Society procured philosophical apparatus. It met weekly; and each member, with some exceptions, gave a lecture, usually on Natural Philosophy, sometimes on Natural History, and particularly Botany. It continued until 1807, when the members, having been called to other pursuits, determined to give their apparatus partly to the Athenæum, and partly to the Professor of Chemistry in Cambridge University, Dr. Gorham.

In 1815 the Boston Linnæan Society was formed. The principal gentlemen who moved in this Association were Hon. John Davis; Professors Jacob Bigelow, George Hayward, John Ware, and Walter Channing; Wm. S. Shaw, Hon. F. C. Gray, Nathaniel Tucker, Octavius Pickering, and B. A. Gould, Esqrs.; Dr.