

# Preface

There are few people of education who have not a pretty accurate idea of what is meant by the terms astro-  
nomy, ~~astronomy~~ or chemistry; but there are not many among  
us who have a satisfactory idea of the term Natural History.  
If when puzzled they recur to the meaning of words, they  
learn that Natural History is a treasure of the mind kept  
by memory; whereas most people conceive it to be merely  
a knowledge of those criteria by which we are enabled to  
distinguish <sup>at first sight,</sup> one natural body from another; and therefore  
instead of an history is ~~only~~ <sup>frequently</sup> a mere description of a fixed  
and permanent substance: and if they consult those splend-  
-ed & costly books, in which the graphic art almost equals  
nature, they still wonder why those pictures are called his-  
-tories, since they do not express those alterations & suc-  
-cessive changes, which the earth, & all that it produces  
undergoes; and which alone would entitle them to the  
name of histories. In recurring again to books, they find  
that histories are either civil, or natural; that civil his-  
-tory records the works & acts of men; and they thence infer  
that Natural history records the works & acts of nature; but  
that which is ordinarily understood by the term Natural  
History leaves the acts of nature out of the question; & cir-  
-cumscribes the knowledge to the sight alone. The en-  
-quirer is still at a loss what ideas to annex to the term  
Nature. When he is told that <sup>by</sup> the word Nature, we mean  
the

the energy of God, seen in the various productions that replenish & adorn the world, he is silenced, but not satisfied.

In the course of the last year, when the Lectures on Natural History, as well as the Medical Lectures, which were heretofore given at this University, were all transferred to Boston, Natural History became a subject of general conversation among characters of the first rank, & of both sexes. The general expression of those who attended the lectures was sufficient to excite a suspicion in the author, that the public had but inadequate ideas of that science which is denominated Natural history; seeing that men of the first rate talents & education had no fixed & determinate ideas on the subject. To be able to pronounce, at first sight, the name of each mineral; to distinguish one genus of plants from another; and to discriminate stuffed animals in a museum, were enough to entitle a man to be considered well informed in Natural history; when, at the same time, he perhaps knew nothing of the anatomy of a seed, & of its gradual developement into a perfect plant & flower, producing again a seed, or epitome of its parent, capable of generating its kind forever. Nature coeval with matter never ceases her operations; but then she occupies whole ages in some of her works, while man remains too short a time on earth to observe, & to record them. Every thing that he sees has been more than once handled by nature. This globe has been penetrated by fire, & covered and acted upon by water; & great changes have been the result. Thus,

in

P a new paragraph

Curtis defines Botany to be that science which teaches to determine one plant from another.

Thus, in small things, a piece of wood has <sup>ing</sup> been changed by fire into charcoal, and passes from thence through various changes of refinement & excellency, till at length, it becomes a concrete of elementary fire & light, in the form & qualities of a diamond. He who traces and records these things is indeed a Natural Historian: so is he, who knowing the anatomy of an egg, is able to trace its evolutions into a perfect animal, and thence through all its successive stages to its acme, or ~~full~~ <sup>and so, in like manner of vegetable from a seed.</sup> perfection; & <sup>every</sup>

Is there not then a distinction, in the nature of things, between a mere describer of what Addison calls "the shell of the world," and "the world of life"? There appears to be as much difference between the nomenclator of a museum of natural bodies and a Natural historian, that is an historiographer of the economy of nature, as there is between the mere anatomist, or dissector of the human body, and its physiologist.

Passing from Natural history in general to one of its branches, may we not ask if the like confined notion of Botany does not prevail? To know the name of a plant, & to be able to ascertain its place in the Linnean system is, in the opinion of many, to be a botanist; although such a one may be entirely unacquainted with its anatomy, or organical structure, and ignorant of its peculiar, or medicinal qualities; as well as of the nature of its food, & the means of its nourishment; yet these are the things which principally govern its nature.

It is of importance that one universal language be adopted ~~by~~ <sup>by</sup> botanists; but it is wrong to

(not italicized)

make it the primary object. Agreeably <sup>to</sup> this ~~for~~  
- ~~going~~ doctrine is the sentiment of the famous Boissieu,  
who, in his "Letters on the Elements of Botany" says "I  
have always thought it possible to be a very great  
~~botanist without knowing so much as one plant~~  
"by name"

The author has been desirous of giving the young  
gentlemen in this University a more enlarged view of  
Natural history in general, & of Botany in particular than  
what has been commonly taken of them. Whether the  
Botanist has contributed to enlarge the sphere of their  
vision is not for him to determine. He by no means  
considers himself a master in the science. Physic is  
his profession; and Natural history his amusement. During  
a residence of several years in the family of the celebrated  
D<sup>r</sup> Fothergill in London, he acquired <sup>there</sup> a taste for the  
works of Nature; and has endeavoured to follow the  
advice of his venerable kinsman, ~~which was~~, "never  
to suffer Natural history to supersede Medicine; but  
to regard it only as an agreeable adjunct to the  
healing art"