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THE BOOK OF NATURE.*

BY PRESIDENT SIR DANIEL WILSON.

"All research into the Book of Nature has not discovered an erratum."

IN the part which you have assigned to me in this centennial commemoration, I find myself called upon to deal with a subject, the compass of which is wholly beyond my powers, as it is all too ample for the limited time available. In the eloquent address in which you, Mr. President, retraced the history of this, the oldest among the scientific societies of America, you found an hour too brief for a review of the events of the century which to-day completes its cycle; and now I find myself called upon, in the briefer limits at my disposal, to verify the entire Book of Nature, and demonstrate the faultless perfection of the record. Looking back over the immeasurable ages of the past, and turning to the equally incomprehensible vastness of the visible universe, hours, instead of minutes, would fail in the most superficial effort at such a review.

Amid the brightness of this festive commemoration the temptation is rather to leave the past unheeded and

to take the wings of fancy—or, better still, the intuitions of science—and anticipate the marvels of the coming time; those fairy tales of science that surpass all the wonders of romance. But your behest must be obeyed; and it will, perhaps, most aptly meet present requirements, if I select from the manifold phases which challenge our consideration two suggestive aspects of the comprehensive subject, which in some sense may serve to epitomise the past and the present for such a brief review.

When the fiat went forth, formulated in words that might fitly constitute the motto of this the oldest among the philosophic fellowships of the New World: "Let there be light!" the abyss flashed into cosmic brightness and beauty; and the illimitable depths of space, illumined with the splendour that enkindled suns and awoke the myriad worlds to life, traced for us the first page in the Book of Nature. Your theme invites our attention to it under the apt metaphor of a book; no chance medley of the materialist or mere evolution of time

* An Address delivered at Philadelphia at the Centenary Celebration of the oldest Scientific Society in the New World.