

50.
The Geological
Society.

action against the theorising methods which had come over from the Continent led to the formation of the Geological Society in the year 1807. At that time the war of the Wernerians and Huttonians, or, as they were also called, the Neptunists and Plutonists, was raging in the northern metropolis. The Geological Society of London was established with a view to "multiply and record observations, and patiently to await the result at some future period—that is, its founders resolved to apply themselves to descriptive geology, thinking the time not come for that theoretical geology which had then long fired the controversial ardour of Neptunists and Plutonists."¹ Fifty years after the formation of this society

of country life in bygone centuries. The series of letters written between the years 1765 and 1787 containing "the observations of forty years," and published, 1789, with the title 'The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne,' had the object "of laying before the public his idea of parochial history, which, he thinks, ought to consist of natural productions and occurrences as well as antiquities." To him "nature is so full that that district produces the greatest variety which is the most examined." He early insists on the necessity of monographs in natural history; suggests the usefulness of a "full history of noxious insects"; gives in a series of letters a faithful and minute description of the swallow tribe as they are found in his country; traverses the Downs of Surrey with a loving eye a hundred years before they became celebrated through the greater Darwin; makes valuable observations about "earthworms," suggesting a monograph on them; suggests, in an age which was governed by the systematising

mania, that "the botanist should study plants philosophically, should investigate the laws of vegetation, should promote their cultivation, and graft the gardener, the planter, and the husbandman on the phytologist," as "system should be subservient to, not the main object of, pursuit."

¹ "The one point the catastrophists and the uniformitarians agreed upon when this society was founded was to ignore it [*viz.*, geological speculation]. And you will find, if you look back into our records, that our revered fathers in geology plumed themselves a good deal upon the practical sense and wisdom of this proceeding. As a temporary measure I do not presume to challenge its wisdom; but in all organised bodies temporary changes are apt to produce permanent effects; and as time has slipped by, altering all the conditions which may have made such mortification of the scientific flesh desirable, I think the effect of the stream of cold water which has steadily flowed over geological specu-