

Georgius Forster

**LIMITES HISTORIAE NATURALIS
ORATIO QUA LECTIONES SUAS IN ACADEMIA
VILNENSI AUSPICATUS EST¹**

<https://doi.10.37240/FiN.2024.12.1.2>

ABSTRACT²

The author presents his panoramic (and comprehensive) vision of natural history, including—in addition to botany, zoology and mineralogy—also issues in the field of sciences that only later emerged and became independent, such as general biology, geology and paleontology. He refers to his own experiences gained during numerous journeys, including the longest, three-year trip around the world³ (which resulted in, among others, the description of 75 new genera and 265 species of tropical flora). The philosophical foundation of his narrative is an original concept of nature (inorganic and organic) perceived in a holistic and evolutionary way.

Keywords: (materialistic) philosophy of nature of the 18th century, the idea of pre-biological and biological evolution.

If I were to make a somewhat more deliberate judgment about the just desires of a worthy man, I must declare, in accordance with the general opinion, that this position, bestowed on me by the highest benevolence of the eminent administrators of the affairs of public enlightenment, it is at the same time the most worthy goal of my desires and very precious honor. For since to the peace and happiness of the soul we cannot no other way, neither safer nor more pleasant, than that which opens the service for the entire human race, therefore it should be recognized that no doubt a great and enviable fate was won by the one who was given it he will be most joyful to realize that he will be able to teach the principles of the most useful of sciences, and that by this opportunity he will be of good service to his fellow

¹ In English: *The Limits of Natural History*: The speech with which Georg Forster solemnly began his lectures at the Vilnius Academy on February 2, 1785. The original title is: *Limites historiae naturalis. Oratio qua lectiones suas in Academia Vilnensi auspicatus est Georgius Forster die 2. Febr. MDCCLXXXV*.

² The text of the speech was first published in the fourth volume of collected works, edited by the author's daughter, in Leipzig in 1843 by the Brockhaus publishing house. The abstract comes from the translator.

³ G. Forster, *A Voyage toward the South Pole and Round the World in HMS "Resolution" Com-manded by Captain Cook, during the Years 1772–1775*, London 1777.

citizens. It must also not be forgotten that this awareness of a high and joyful mission increases even more if it is increased by additional and favorable circumstances. Because when I consider mine person, then among the most just reasons for my satisfaction, who could omit the fact that by an exceptionally fortunate fate after twenty years, after traversing vast spaces around the world, and having made other journeys as well, it is given to me again to see his homeland, in order to become a priest of this venerable a vocation to which I had wanted to devote myself completely from an early age.

There are many, many, of a similar kind of seduction, but with striving to summarize, I must omit the others, and turn my eyes to that liveliest source of my joy, viz. this excellent and well-matched team of yours gathered here today. For though men of profound knowledge are accustomed to gain fame by their above-average, by a diligent effort of the mind, it is exceedingly so what is important to them is who is the judge to whom they are above they all owe such a reward for their merit. Because just you surpass the most eminent, both in birth, dignities, rank and nobility, and especially in wisdom and magnanimity, no one will deny that the recognition contained in your resolution should be valued above other distinctions, and the happiest is anyone who will be able to win your favor, and both for the honor received, and for the great value of your judgment.

These words, however, faithfully reflect what I should today think, but not quite what I really feel. For even after careful consideration of the whole matter, I could, without any hesitation, feel complete satisfaction, one thing I lack: that happy recklessness of anticipating what, I believe, should be achieved only long-term effort and persistent diligence. Therefore, I am not little afraid that, although in those matters which I have dealt with hitherto, I may have had some happy achievements, which won me your favour, support, listeners, and your kindness, it is working right now to my detriment, for behold, you expect that he whom you know that in the farthest countries of the world he zealously cultivated natural history, he will turn out to be a golden-tongued praiser of this field of science in front of the great your panel of judges. And how foreign it is to my disposition, about this both my mode of life, more seasoned for research, testify clearly and observation than to eloquence, as well as the calm moderation that always I used it in my work. So if the muse refused me the ability to use round phrases, therefore I beg you earnestly, excellent listeners, lest ye be sparing of understanding attention to this simple and unsophisticated talk. Because if I get it thanks to you kindness that you will graciously accept my humble and empty words oratory, perhaps in the course of listening, the mere preoccupation with nature, how appropriate to noble minds and how related, will attract you with its charm and will bring you so much pleasure that you will hardly notice the poverty of my speech. Therefore, not wanting to be accused of boring you and occupying your time in vain with useless praises of the most dear science to me, I must finally proceed to define the limits of natural history.

Well, nature has shaped us so by the will of the Supreme Being that neither we could not know anything about ourselves or obtain information about any object, as long as the various properties of things, having struck into the sense organs, they will not cause any movement in them, and until after when it reaches the seat of the soul, no new transformations will arise there, capable of producing the image called the idea of that thing which moves first implemented. From here we follow in the footsteps of sensory experience, that one and surest guide and trusting in his help we gather all our possessions for a happy life. Besides, I believe that this is the origin of all existing sciences and arts that namely people, influenced by the needs of life, have explored more and more attentively to the riches of nature, and by trials they have bent them to their own use, and this use of them, especially in the face of an inexhaustible multitude of perceived things, became a price for them and an appropriate an orderliness leading to the mind's grasp of an immeasurable resource all knowledge. Thus, when the primitive peoples had already renounced the wild life of the forest, and, at the instigation of wiser people, already gentle and tame, began to use some laws, at first there was hardly any difference in duties, so that those who were to become leaders of the state were torn from the plough. Since from the ancestors apart from the method of obtaining food from the meat of wild animals, only very few observations were still taken over, it is a meagre stock of all kind of ideas, accumulated step by step, as experience grew, fit in the mind of even one man, who often, in the exercise of kingship, at the same time dabbled in the art of medicine, watched over the worship of the gods, reckoned time according to the course of the stars, cultivated the land and raised cattle, built a house for himself by his own industry, prepared clothing and equipment, and devoted the rest of his time to his first attempts at fine arts, poetry and music. Because the law of gradual development of the whole human race, from primordial savagery to decent and gentle manners, is very similar to the course of the periods of human life; and it is not without reason that the beginnings of social life, due to the poverty of experience, are compared to the incompetence of childhood.

And from the time when people got used to handing down in writing to posterity his observations or thoughts, the number of messages of various kinds began to increase. Thus, almost forty centuries that have passed since of the invention of writings, amassed by numerous and momentous observations and discovering such enormous resources in the whole of science; at the same time, the bond binding the whole of science has become so loosened that what was once the knowledge of one man, with time dispersed into many voluminous parts. Boundaries have been drawn to these particular parts, and here are the scientists who, in this one field of their choosing, are stuck completely ignoring all others.

As a result, in our time the powers of the mind are developing splendidly, are stimulated very strongly, and rise to great heights, but at the same time, the transparent simplicity of sciences and their sister connection have

been almost completely neglected. You would say that knowledge, after dismembering her body, gave up her more beautiful soul, although there is still so much vitality left in these severed limbs that new freaks are born from them. It is a common thing today among learned men to devote themselves to a piece of knowledge cut off from the whole, and to dismiss with haughty contempt the rest of its components, which from the first moment they do not bestow even with a glance. But it is precisely this excessive attention to particular parts of knowledge that has done the worst for the development of a science untainted by errors and therefore useful. Because if talented minds should be eager to learn new things, and at the same time true and useful things, and to announce them to everyone for the general benefit, if it is right to prevent from the gates of the temple reckless views and old errors, sanctified by their antiquity alone, and instead throw wide open the doors of experience and eyewitness truth, which is the duty of philosophers, if at last to all the wise and most devoted to mankind should, above all, be at heart that not only through recommendations, but also by the irresistible power of example to show unanimously that the end of all knowledge is the prosperity of a permanently happy life, that is—by the immortal gods!—what can happen more contrary to human happiness, and better suited to the overthrow of the whole edifice of science than this discord and envy between the various parts of knowledge? May Elicius Jupiter taught us with what song we can appease these quarrels! And I am deeply convinced that every branch of science will be sterile as long as it remains alone; and only then will they bring forth a rich harvest, when in mutual embraces they exchange kisses and bind each other as if in a marriage bond.

Even the knowledge of nature was divided into the most fragmented parts. Because it's hard to believe, and it may seem to posterity quite ridiculous, that the observation and ordering of natural phenomena, from which, as from beyond the tiltyard ranks, the progress of all knowledge once proceeded, from a few for decades, nowhere have they found their own chair. For the different parts of this knowledge lay hidden, overwhelmed by the splendid apparatus of the other parts. After all, where should we start, according to the nature of things, a general outline of the most extensive kingdom of nature, speaking on the relationship of the earth to the other spheres, of the basic geography and the geography of minerals? This question has been brushed aside by physicists, raised only in passing and in just a few words. A similar fate befell the chapters of the more special natural history. Mineralogy was absorbed by chemistry. Botany, which had just taken the form of a science, fell under the power of physicians. Finally, zoology, the usefulness of which is clear as day because of man's kinship with the rest of the animals, has not yet managed to find a suitable place for itself. And now, illustrious listeners, we hand over to you to cherish a new, or rather, barely torn from Libitina and rebuilt knowledge, whose foundations, polished with the correct method, have been established in recent times.

Natural history is the enumeration and description of all things which exist independently, and which are perceived by the senses, either unarmed or with the help of tools. From this definition we can best understand that this science can indeed be regarded as the unshakable foundation upon which the whole body of knowledge rests. For since the human mind and reason originate from ideas-concepts received through the sense organs, no impartial man can escape the notice of how much we care to transmit to memory the true and faithful images of objects, which can only be obtained from the observation of nature. So we finally find that bond—desired by the gods—covering all parts of knowledge. We find this spring gushing from a rich vein, where men of all kinds of sciences converge, whose objects come to light from the bosom of nature, in order to draw from this source material suitable for them—whether they enjoy watching bright suns moving through the sky, or prefer to study the smallest particles of bodies that escape the focus of senses, whether they admire the simplest order that governs everything and its practical application in mechanics, or whether they wish to reduce human views, the most diverse customs and ways of life, and everything that human thought has brought into its own life, useful or harmful, to the same most sacred laws of nature and, in accordance with its pattern, tend, as it were, to safeguard the health of the spirit and the body at the same time.

Already from what I have said, it appears that our science is clearly divided into two main parts, the first leading to the attainment of knowledge of things, the second aiming at utility. In that part that gives knowledge, it is necessary to discuss the conduct of observation first. Now, in the field of observing nature, we have a threefold problem. The first concerns what the observer should be like, the second the tools with which he should equip himself who focuses his attention on observing things in nature, the third has to do with the method of ordering the observations. It is very favorable if the observer combines the fullness of bodily strength with the advantages of a healthy spirit. For since man is chiefly characterized by the search for truth, so he who by observation of nature aims at extracting the truth, should have a strong and particularly persistent mind, and at the same time all senses well sharpened. And here the first thing to consider is the body. For since we can learn something about the characteristics of things outside of us only through our sense organs, care must be taken that what we taken with their help, as it descends to the abode of the soul, did not suffer in the course of this transference any distortion or damage, which should be attributed to some damaged condition of the organs, diseased or in any sense abnormal. For it is obvious that imperfect images of things and departing from the truth could arise from this. Moreover, it is a fact that the observer cannot do his work at fixed times of the day or in one place alone (this is shown by the variety of things spread far and wide in the world and their changeability), so the strength would leave the body, beset by too much effort, the indefatigable work, vigils, travels, bad weather, noxious vapors, animal bites, plant poisons, and countless other discomforts, if by its own

and innate power it could not endure all kinds of mortifications. And further: to this endurance of the body, although it is of the greatest importance here, let us also add physical fitness, because in the collection and study of things found in nature, skilled hands and well-trained eyes are needed.

As for the virtues of the spirit, the need for them is twofold: one has to do with the mind, the other with the innate sense of right and good. For on the spiritual health of the observer depends a lot in striving to know the truth. Therefore, this principle must be observed above all in the teachings and opinions of science, lest in favor of a conjecture accepted or recklessly borrowed, the true character of things should not be changed, and falsehood should not be substituted for the truth. On the same principle, all omens, common superstitions, deliberately made-up information about things—should arouse such strong indignation in the observer that he would pursue it all fiercely and in this way help in driving away from the Country of vagabonds, jugglers, soothsayers and all other impudent rogues who deceive, harass and exploit the common people with their lies. For the mind, in which an insatiable love of truth burns, when it learns something new, hastens to announce it around for the benefit of all, and considers silence, with only one's own gain in mind, a betrayal.

Among the virtues of the mind that are required of the observer, the most important are: acuteness of understanding—on it the method of research is based, very clear judgment needed to recognize the riches of multi-form nature, ingenuity and skill in devising experiments, and great care and vigilance in carrying them out, a wealth of memory capable of retaining various features and names of things—finally unyielding persistence in observing and inquisitiveness. Armed with these aids, the diligent observer should take as a rule: to follow the guidance of nature and experience, not to place too much faith in the authority of others, not to be overly enthusiastic about anything, but to look at everything with the equanimity of mind that befits a sage. And all that we have hitherto recommended should be considered the more important and worthy of mentioning, the clearer it is and it is more evident that in the natural sciences there is no eminent scholar who does not also excel as an observer.

We come to the second point concerning tools, the first of which are instruments of the following six varieties: mathematical, by which bodies are measured; mechanical, adapted to movement rules; optical, which serve the eyesight; anatomical, which separates its parts from the body; chemical, suitable for the separation of body elements; and finally the physical ones, prepared for the study of the properties of the elements. And since those who devote themselves to the study of nature are often unable to go beyond the borders of their native country, and the judgment of the connection between various forms of things and the usefulness of them can only be reached after seeing them in the whole ensemble, we need other instruments as well, which can supplement the knowledge of things coming from abroad. Thus, museums are built, filled with dead animals and various fossil

specimens; in botanic gardens plants from foreign countries are grown, either in the open air or in greenhouses; finally, the things that cannot be brought before the eyes, as well as the constantly disseminated new discoveries, are obtained from books by the exchange of scientific reports.

It remains for me, in the third place, to discuss the method to be used in assessing the phenomena of nature. So I must repeat, for the second time, that all things appear to us either by a stimulus which automatically affects all or at least some of our senses, or by the changes which one thing produces in another thing. For that which has not entered the senses and has no connection with the senses has no place in natural history. But since many things are constantly changing by the eternal movement of nature, when one is destroyed, another develops, some grow by joining together, others, previously completely apart, come into direct relationships, still others, conversely, they lose their connection with each other, though originally they were intimately connected with each other—therefore the knowledge of every thing turns out to be insufficient if constant observation has not revealed the history of its transformations, that is, its biography. Every knowledge of a thing in nature, therefore, is twofold: the first gives a description of a body, the second establishes the relations which exist between it and other bodies, or its natural history in the true sense. In the preparation of descriptions, it is especially desirable that the characteristics by which objects existing in nature differ from one another should be denoted by fixed and well-defined words, and further that different species should receive appropriate names. For the knowledge of a thing consists in a true image—a faithful conception of the object, composed of its proper characteristics, which distinguishes the like from the dissimilar. And in order to be able to communicate this knowledge to others, it is necessary to give each of them its own name—as if the signs of concepts; for, according to the opinion of the immortal Linnaeus, if the names are lost, the knowledge of objects will also be lost.

On the other hand, in the practice of natural history, we must take into account the whole universe, with the unbroken chain of causes and effects and the real relationship between large and small objects. Quite often it is also necessary to take into account even what related sciences about the nature of bodies and the relationships between them have revealed on the basis of experiments and treatments carried out with them, so that this precisely defined knowledge, which we derive from the shape and structure of things, by reaching deeper to their particular properties, symptoms, secrets, characteristics, powers and usefulness, to exhaust all points and to use their applications for the needs of life and for the enjoyment of life.

However, in view of the amazing variety of things that exist, where shall we begin and what end shall we place in our investigation? Because among these such vast treasures of nature that we see, filled with an almost infinite series of various types of bodies, which consist of luminous clusters of celestial bodies scattered over immeasurable spaces, countless and varied in size and number of combinations of inorganic matter and the resulting forms of

minerals, myriads of plants and animals, variety of shapes, organs, limbs, elements, forces, drugs; who dares to enter these labyrinths, so to speak, without Ariadne's thread? For human memory cannot comprehend all these things and each one separately, unless it is aided by an order which, with Linnaeus, I would like to call the soul of science, by which different groups of objects are put together according to their affinity, or by distinction according to some predetermined properties—classes, orders, genera and species - so that, like an army arrayed in camp formation, they can easily be surveyed at first sight. But this method—which the observer of nature has worked out with great skill and painstaking effort, from the observation of particular cases to general propositions—we invert in the course of teaching to make the work of the pupils more easy, and so we begin with the highest and most general divisions, which, as less many are easily grasped by thought, and we slowly descend to the minutest details. Proceeding along this path, we will not only happily find our way through all the intricate paths of nature, but also we will finally introduce into the apparent confusion of things some natural order, established by the creator of the world himself, where everything is in a uniform whole and overlaps each other.

There would be much more to say, excellent listeners, about the method of research, but this should find a more appropriate place in discussing particular fields of natural history. Nor do I think that I would be doing the right thing now by trying to convince you with unnecessary arguments about the need for order, a thing so obvious and completely clear. I therefore come to the most important question, which concerns another part of our science. Namely, it seems to me that many people many people have following question on their lips: What are such extensive methods used for? What is the limit and measure of this nomenclature, where every smallest body in nature is marked separately? Since the number of those things in nature which are useful to people is limited, is it permissible to burden the memory of pupils with a variety of other useless things, and is it right for naturalists to spend their whole lives studying them? Wouldn't it be wiser to be content with knowing only useful things?

Do these demands seem to you, splendid listeners, just and consistent with the pursuit of truth? So, if the gods will, all our newly born science in Lithuania is to perish! It is true that I, looking at your so numerous assembly, have no reason to fear the annihilation of natural history. On the contrary, I know perfectly well that you share my belief in the existence of a quality of mind from which none is more human or so different from those of others living beings, like this innate longing for the truth. Therefore - and I will speak here according to the greatest of philosophers—it seems to me that a great goal, a peak, is reached by a man who is superior to other people just in what people are superior to animals. And how much the study of the whole of nature is helpful in this pursuit of the truth lies beyond all doubt, as it follows from the previous arguments. For if we were to accept the condemnation of curiosity, then we would immediately have to return to the

wildness of forest existence, to live like animals and to care only about getting food and drink.

But when it is a feature of the common and almost animal dispositions that utility put above nobility and disregard everything from which they do not see the possibility of extracting benefits and fruits for themselves, on the other hand, in thoroughly educated people who value dignity above all else and care for the common good of people and its enrichment, often it happens that they deviate in the other direction, and, taking too proud of man's advantage, rave about how the whole world with its infinite variety of things was created for him. And no argument can break this pride as effectively as a deep-reaching study of nature. Of course, we can agree that man ranks first among the living beings fed by mother earth, nevertheless, since we know from natural research that he is subject to the same laws of nature as all other animals, and that countless kinds of beings across the land and seas are still unknown to him, that many animals still freely roam vast lands and are not yet subject to the power of man—then indeed, he who disregards all this and convinces himself that nature, which for so many thousands of years still shimmers with novelty of shapes, exists only for him, he resembles a mentally ill person. And if, on the basis of the principle of necessary destinies, someone should fable that the fact that man is necessary for the harmony of the world should be taken as proof that he is the purpose of creation, I will gladly agree that man is necessary for the perfection of the universe, but, I will add, on the same principle that it is undeniable that flies, fleas, and the smallest creatures, such as infusoria, are not born by chance, but exist by natural necessity, related to other things by constant laws; therefore it cannot be denied that nothing in nature is superfluous. But if I wanted to conclude from this that the world is made for fleas, could you listeners refrain from laughing? What then, when we raise our face to the sky and begin to admire countless suns separated by a vast space, balanced in weight, many of which do not can be seen with the naked eye, and many others because of it of the immensity of distance has hitherto been hidden from our sight? Can it then be said that all of them were created for the purpose of enriching the world of man's imagination? Presumably to finally, after so many centuries, Can it then be said that all of them were created for the purpose of enriching the world of man's imagination? Presumably to finally, after so many centuries, accidentally flash something at us through someone else's telescope? And if, by Hercules, it should happen that one of these outermost stars, competing in size with our sun, perished with its retinue of planets in hitherto impenetrable abysses of space, before being discovered by man with instruments, would we notice that this diminishing of light made our nights darker? Indeed, to keep within the reach of our sun: this seventh planet, unknown two years ago, is it not a serious warning for us, which teaches us about our smallness?

If, then, it is evidence of a particularly conceited mind claim to everything in the name of man's dominion, and to look with contempt at anything

that does not serve direct advantage, then what shall we decide on the usefulness of natural research, now, when we have come to a crossroads? In my opinion, this question will be settled very easily, provided that we remember more diligently the scope of our own possibilities, and look at how far human affairs have been carried so far by them. For what I have said before, that peoples who had come out of childhood ignorance, absorbed only slowly the latest acquisitions of knowledge about things, and that many phenomena unknown to ages before them were only known in our century, that this slow process of maturation, which nature, faithful to her own laws, established in all areas of her dominion, repeated also in the development of the virtues of the human mind and bringing them to the highest level of perfection. These facts, in my opinion, indicate the existence of order of a much more serious scope than that which it would merely aim at human benefit, but also proves, by a very clear example, the wisdom and goodness of the creator, above all, that he has hardly set limits to our mind. Thanks to this, our mind, until the latest times, enjoys the innumerable multitude and variety of things, and in their study—as it is mobile and cannot stand idleness—it exercises its forces and brings to light the truth locked inside the treasury of nature. Therefore, the same infinite power that pushes people eternally keep track of their relation to all things, contributes very greatly to the enrichment of happiness in life, and fills the soul with the highest delight, by the continual increase of the study of new subjects.

But based on the most reliable observations, it is known that the human race is constantly increasing in number. Therefore, in order to satisfy the needs of all, we must always invent for us in the kingdom of nature new means of subsistence, we must learn how to appease hunger and thirst, and use against diseases unknown to our ancestors, medicines never heard of before; use the riches of nature in a thousand ways to increase comfort and culture in the way of life; following the example of nature, to combine in the products of crafts the usefulness with the charm of form, and to awaken in the souls of all men some subtle sense of beauty and harmony, which soothes manners and separates them from wildness, so that they may enjoy and constantly enjoy this consistency and grace, which are contained in shapes, colors, tones, melodies, movements, and finally words.

And since we make use of this lively mobility of our senses to awaken and calm the deeper emotions of the mind, we continue to study the laws and their relations hidden in nature, thanks to which things that are apparently opposite in their essence are nevertheless associated with each other and are firmly rooted in a closely related system, we come across that very natural principle of right and good, essential to a happy life, which will explain to us all the better what is our duty, the more carefully we consider the whole chaos of phenomena and the connection of small things with great things. Nor will we dwell in our considerations on what concerns the improvement of societies, but, turning our attention to the whole universe, we come to the final limit of our inquiries, and we admire with rapture the di-

vine thought, by whose command all things exist. For who, to end with the words of Cicero, is so irrational that either, looking at the heavens, he does not feel the existence of God, and thinks that it is by chance that what happens under the influence of such a powerful thought that no one can trace the order of things by any art, nor the necessity of their existence—or since he understood that God exists, he does not understand, however, that it was at his beck and call that such a great power was born, grew and lasts forever. Let what has just been said suffice to praise the magnanimity and benevolence of the mightiest rulers of Europe, who have sent indefatigable explorers of nature to the remotest islands and oceans to collect all kinds of natural treasures, to write them down and bring them back with them; our contemporaries benefit in part from them, and for posterity they will survive in an enriched proportion. With similar indeed, and perhaps with even greater homage, the services to natural sciences made by our most merciful King Stanisław August should be raised, as it was thanks to his happy support in our homeland that the chairs of this science were finally dedicated. The most generous king, by this kindness, assured in advance not only the transfer to his nation of the numerous benefits that come from the knowledge of nature, but also the organization of research on its native specimens, which hitherto lay fallow, disregarded and useless. Since this is the case, I offer my most fervent prayers for the wholeness and prosperity of natural history in our academies, and I have a duty beyond which you have no greater. I turn, namely, to You, most eminent Prince, most reverend Bishop of Vilnius, in whom we honor with all the depths of our hearts the chancellor of our university and his leading protector, with a soul full of devotion. I implore and beg you to favor and surround with grace—natural history, which on the basis of your decision, was organized in this school by an excellent college of ministers of public enlightenment, who revere in you their chairmen, caring so much for the good of the homeland. For it is well known to all how much love you had for all the sciences, how much a human protector you have always been for scholars, most eminent Prince, and what a valiant guarantor of them, with what generosity you took the liberal arts under your protection, so much so that even in your palace they feel at home. Let the science of nature, which is the youngest between them in this region, barely taken out of its cradle, but nourished by Your grace, cherish hope and that unwavering trust that is a feature of childhood, that it too, like other branches, by your care will be raised to the heights. So let this Your favourite, supported by the help of such a powerful defender, given to benevolence of the rulers of public enlightenment and—I dare say—our most generous King, so that if she is to live, grow, bloom and bear fruit in her new room, may she receive expensive and fastidiously selected but indispensable equipment of a botanical garden and natural history museum, full of various specimens of nature—let me, I repeat, join the choir of muses in Vilnius, and crown their leader, with due homage, in joyful rapture and singing in full voice, in the presence of grateful posterity, with a sweet flower gathered from the maternal bosom of nature.

And when the soul is inflamed by the thought of the prince's favors to our university and melts with admiration for him, it cannot at the same time refrain from well-deserved praise for the enormous effort devoted to the education of our youth, which brings great pride to the most distinguished academic senate. And most of all to you, most worthy and admirable man, Magnificence Rector of this university, whom I highly respect as a friend of mine at the Royal Academy of Sciences in London, because your merits towards all skills, and especially towards the most brilliant of them, astronomy, are generally known and famous throughout the world, you, the second father and builder of our academy, all present at this splendid assembly, in whose hearts a deep awareness of your outstanding merits has taken root, students, scholars, guardians of our university, ask me to mention here respectfully and truthfully. For even if I omit the fact that you have not spared your health, laboring over the development of the most difficult science, and that by indomitable perseverance and constant vigilance you have gathered treasures of observations never before known to the general body of scientists, everyone has something on their lips that requires an equal, and perhaps even more fervent praise that thanks to your dedication to the affairs of the Country, your tireless work and your wisdom and moderation, we can see our university intact, safe, reborn and equipped with new scientific tools. And that is why I cordially congratulate the entire homeland on such a man famous for his learning, nobility, reason and greatness of spirit, who is also the bravest advocate of disseminating knowledge that serves the benefit, and on the local academic youth, and finally I congratulate myself on a just, honorable and very human guide. Equally fervently, and with equal respect, I beg you, Magnificence Rector, and you, most worthy colleagues from the academic senate, since you have accepted me into your group with your grace, to support me with your advice in the extent to which our fields of science are linked by the bonds of brotherhood, to help me in my plans and, to continue the friendship that I, thirsty for your kindness, had already experienced. You have taken in a colleague who, trusting in your help, does not doubt about the successful outcome of his duties, and desiring to prove himself worthy of your recognition, he vows to you that in the teachings in the teachings presented during the lectures he will most conscientiously and steadfastly remain faithful to the love of nature and truth. I finished.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR — Jerzy (Georg) Forster (1754–1794). Born in Mokry Dwór in northern Poland, near Gdańsk, died in Paris. Naturalist. Philosopher. Writer. Translator. Traveler. Freemason. Rosicrucian. Revolutionary. (Proto)communist. Author of works on botany, zoology, mineralogy, geography, chemistry, physics, ethnography, race theory, colonial issues, aesthetics, history of art, and literary studies. Member of the academies of sciences in Naples, Madrid and Berlin—as well as the Royal Society of London. Professor at the universities of Kassel and Vilnius. (More about Forster—see Introductory Essay).