

Mechanics, physics, chemistry, physiology itself, have found at once a *point d'appui* and a bond of connection. And this powerful flight of ideas has been sustained by the progress of the methods, I should say by the more careful exactness of observations, the perfect delicacy of experiments, the more rigorous severity of deductions. These are the springs of this movement which hurry along the sciences, and of which we are the astonished and moved witnesses. It is to propagate it broadcast over our country that we hold, each year, this parliament, to which are invited all who take part or are interested in the war against the unknown. Science is indeed a war against the unknown; for, if in literature it is enough to give expression, and in art a body, to conceptions or beauties deposited either in the human mind or in nature, it is not so in science, where truth is deeply hidder. She must be conquered, she must be stolen, like the Promethean fire.

It is of some of these conquests that I wish to speak to-day, full of doubt and apprehension in presence of so great a task. To respond to the demands of his position and to follow noble examples, your president ought, at the beginning of this session and of the ceremonies which inaugurate our young association, to trace the progress accomplished in the sciences, mark by a few bold lines the various routes over which it has recently run, and the culminating points which it has attained. I shrink from such a programme: if it does not exceed the powers of some of my colleagues, and doubtless of some among you, it greatly surpasses mine. Less justified and less daring than was Condorcet at the end of last century, I only perceive the outlines and some bright patches of the sketch which he attempted to draw; and to see it accomplished, I shall call to my assistance those who will follow me in the honourable and perilous post I now occupy.

I shall confine myself, then, gentlemen, to speaking to you of what I know, or of what I think I know, by directing your attention to the science to which I have devoted my life.

Chemistry has not merely grown, it has been regenerated since Lavoisier. You know the work of that immortal master. His labours in connection with combustion gave to our science an immovable basis by fixing at once the notion of simple bodies and the essential character of chemical combinations. In these latter we find in weight all that is ponderable in their elements. These, in uniting to form compound bodies, do not lose any of their proper substance; they lose only an imponderable thing,