

# The Canadian Journal.

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## Meeting of the British Association at Glasgow.

### THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

Gentlemen of the British Association,—I know, that the duty of presiding over this Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, has been assigned to me mainly in consequence of my local connexion with the district and city in which we are now assembled. It cannot therefore be departing from the special duty of that position if I address you in the first place as one of those who are receiving the honour of your visit. I am sure I cannot express in terms too warm the feelings of this great community. It would be strange, indeed, if Glasgow did not hold out to you a cordial reception. Here, if anywhere, we have reason to honour Science, and to welcome the men whose lives are devoted to its pursuit. The West of Scotland has itself contributed not a few illustrious names to the number of those who have enlarged the boundaries of knowledge, or have given fruitful application to principles already known. I need not dwell on the fact that it was in this valley of the Clyde that the patient genius of Watt perfected the mechanism which first gave complete control over the powers of steam; and that it was on these waters too that those powers were first applied in a manner which has given new wings to commerce, and is now affecting not less decisively the terrible operations of war. These are but single examples, more striking and palpable than others of the dependence of the Arts upon the advance of Science. This, however, is a dependence which I am sure the citizens of Glasgow would be the first to acknowledge, and which no doubt, with them as with all men, must be an important element in the value which they set upon physical research. But I am sure I should deeply wrong the intelligence of the people of Glasgow, if I were to represent them as measuring the value of science by no other standard than its immediate applicability to commercial purposes. They seek to honour science for its own sake, and to encourage the desire of knowledge as in itself one of the noblest instincts of our nature.

It is my duty also, Gentlemen, to speak on behalf of a special body—one of which Glasgow has so much reason to be proud—I mean its ancient and venerable University. If the mechanical arts owe to this district of Scotland, the greatest impulse they have ever yet received, it is not less true that our knowledge of the laws which regulate the pursuits of industry, and determine the distribution of the “wealth of nations,” has been almost founded on the researches of one whose name is indissolubly associated with this seat of learning. Here again we have an illustrious example of the mutual relations between science and politics in its best and highest definition. But, indeed, our convictions are independent of such examples. It is impossible to appreciate too highly the influence which science is evidently destined to have on the prospects of education; and we look for the time when its methods, as well as its results, will form the subject of teaching, not only as partially it has long done in our colleges, but also in the humblest of our schools. I feel it to be no small privilege arising out of the academical office which this year I have the honour of

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holding, to be able to assure you, on behalf of the University of Glasgow, of the deep interest with which we regard your visit, and of our high appreciation of the ends which it is your object to promote.

It is now fifteen years since the last Meeting of the British Association here. There are probably few, even annual, meetings of any considerable body of men, which are not marked by some melancholy recollections. Still more must this be the case after the lapse of so long an interval,—one which measures, as is usually reckoned, full half a generation in the life of man. Among the many vacancies in your ranks which that period has occasioned there are some which, from local association or from other causes, are naturally impressed more deeply on the mind than others. I am sure that one venerable name will rise to the memory of all who took any interest in the proceedings of 1840;—of one whose early tastes for natural science had only yielded before his devotion to a yet higher service; but whose powerful mind still sought to found all his efforts in the cause of religion and humanity on obedience to the eternal laws, which are as sure and steady in their operation over the minds of men, and over the progress of society, as are other laws over the subjects of material change. Who can forget the zeal and more than youthful eagerness with which Dr. Chalmers entered into the discussions of the Statistical Section; and how he saw in those discussions the means of spreading the knowledge of principles which are of vital interest to the welfare of the State!

But that name, though the lapse of years has not carried it beyond the region of regret, is one with which we have at least become familiar as belonging to the number of the departed great. Such is not the case with other vacancies, and especially with one which is still affecting us with almost bewildered sorrow, and an abiding sense of irreparable loss. Who shall take up the torch which has fallen from the hand of Edward Forbes? Who shall hold it as he held it to those dark places in the history of life which science is striving, perhaps in vain, to penetrate, but which seemed already opening their treasures to his fine and advancing genius?

But whilst sad recollections are thus forced upon us as regards the life of individual men, we have every reason to be satisfied with the inheritance they have left. Many labourers are gone, but the cause in which they laboured has been steadily gaining ground. Long as fifteen years may be as a period in human life, it is generally but a fraction in the history of mental progress. Yet since the last Meeting of the British Association here, I am greatly mistaken if we cannot mark great strides in the advance of science. I wish, Gentlemen, you had a President more competent than I am to chronicle that advance, and direct the retrospect to a practical and useful end. There are, however, some features so remarkable that I cannot omit referring to them, as well calculated to raise our hopes and stimulate our exertions. In that science which is the oldest and most venerable of all, I mean Astronomy, if there had been nothing else to mark the progress of discovery, the construction and application of Lord Rosse's Great Reflector would have been enough to constitute an important epoch. Its systematic operations may be said to be still only in the first stages of their progress; yet already how often do we see reference had to the mysterious revelations it has made in discussions on the principles of that science, and in not a few of the speculations to which they are giving birth! My distinguished friend Sir D. Brewster, in his recent Life of Newton, has designated that telescope as “one of the most wonderful combinations of art and science which the world has yet seen.”