

"Now, Doctors Hingston and McCallum must allow me to speak to them freely, and you, gentlemen, allow me to detach myself for the moment from my venerable brothers, so that I may speak to them as though I were one of you. I also wish to express to them my esteem and sympathy. Besides, if I accepted your invitation it was with this object in view: I did not wish to share with these gentlemen, in silence, the praises which they deserve for so many reasons; for their labours, their science, their so varied and numerous successes, as well as for their venerable age. I feel that I am too young to be placed on an equal footing with them.

"In saying this I am only proclaiming a truth which is evident to the eyes of all—you have only to glance even discreetly at us three to see that the hair of my friends is as white as snow and that there is very little of that. Compare those two with the third! It is all very well for Sir William to say that he is the youngest and that he can prove it by his certificate of baptism; but he will not tell you that he was three years old when he was baptised.

"Since I have suppressed my speeches I will replace them by an enigma like in the time of Esop, with this difference, however, that Esop, in making his enigma, had an object in view which I have not—he wished for fame and glory. His great reputation, as you know, is due to the fact that no one could explain his enigmas, which proved that he was more clever than any of his contemporaries. Unfortunately I am not in the presence of his contemporaries, otherwise I might have attempted his experience, but I have to address my own and this makes me more circumspect. This is my enigma: What is at once the most beautiful and the most rare thing on the earth? You see this enigma is very easy. If you cannot solve it at a single glance let me come to your aid; don't let your imagination run wild; you need not even go outside of this room; be satisfied to run your eyes around this table and you will soon discover that of all the things that you have ever seen worthy of your admiration there is nothing more beautiful or at the same time more rare than old age.