

An answer to certain statements contained in Mr Neill's "Address to the members of the Wernerian Natural History Society" / by Henry H. Cheek.

Contributors

Wernerian Natural History Society.
Cheek Henry H.
Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh

Publication/Creation

[Edinburgh?] : [publisher not identified], [1830?]

Persistent URL

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/m3xzy9ja>

Provider

Royal College of Physicians Edinburgh

License and attribution

This material has been provided by This material has been provided by the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. The original may be consulted at the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. where the originals may be consulted.

This work has been identified as being free of known restrictions under copyright law, including all related and neighbouring rights and is being made available under the Creative Commons, Public Domain Mark.

You can copy, modify, distribute and perform the work, even for commercial purposes, without asking permission.



Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

AN ANSWER, &c.

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE

AN

ANSWER

TO CERTAIN STATEMENTS CONTAINED IN

MR NEILL'S "ADDRESS TO THE MEMBERS
OF THE WERNERIAN NATURAL
HISTORY SOCIETY."

BY HENRY H. CHEEK.

ADVERTISEMENT.

I have been strongly recommended, by several friends, to confine my Answer to Mr. Neill's "Address" within the smallest possible limits; but as it is not improbable that this pamphlet may be hereafter referred to, in connection with the history of the Wernerian Society, which now bids fair to become eminent amongst its fellows, I have thought it better to risk the tedium of the uninterested reader, than to pass over any facts of importance.

It may be right also to mention here, that whatever may be the opinion of the reader after the perusal of this "Answer," I do not wish to put him on his guard against receiving impressions from any thing which Mr. Neill may afterwards publish relative to the *Wernerian Natural History Society*,—a method of exciting prejudice, which that gentleman has employed against me in his "Address;" but, as I have said all that I have to say upon this subject, and as my object of exciting an investigation into the condition of the Wernerian Society is attained, I now decline any further discussion upon the matter; which, indeed, could serve no other purpose than that of widening the breach which already unhappily exists between Mr. Neill and myself.

H. H. C.

AN ANSWER, &c.

" Let me see wherein
My tongue hath wrong'd him : if it do him right,
Then he hath wrong'd himself ; if he be free,
Why then, my taxing like a wild goose flies,
Unclaim'd of any man."

As You Like It.

A PAMPHLET, bearing the title of " An Address to the Members of the Wernerian Natural History Society, by their Secretary," has recently been put in circulation by Mr. Neill, and a copy has been sent to me by that gentleman. On the perusal of its contents, I was surprized to find that, though it assumes the character of " a defence" of others, it is virtually little else than an attack upon me, and some gentlemen who are termed my " secret friends," for drawing the attention of the public to what I consider to be abuses in the Wernerian Society. Feeling considerable doubt in my own mind, as to the necessity or propriety of my answering such a paper, I have sought the advice of several individuals, in the hope that I should receive the support of their judgment against a line of action which I was very loth to pursue. In asking their opinion, I made these gentlemen fully aware of the respect and esteem I entertained for Mr. Neill in his particular vocations. I mentioned to them my regret that, in connection with the Wernerian Society, I had been forced to view him as the friendly instrument of the person whose champion he now stands forth confessed; and I assured them that, if it could possibly be avoided, I would most anxiously refrain from adding " gall to the wormwood" which, from the bitter tone of his " Address," he seemed already to have tasted. But it was argued, on the other hand, by my friends, 1st, That as the Edinburgh Journal of Natural and Geographical Science, (in which the exposure of the misdirection of the Wernerian Society was published *anonymously*,) was unable to notice the " Address," on ac-

count of its author having cast from himself the dignified bearing towards the editors of that work, which good breeding might have suggested, and singled me out for personal vituperation ; and as I had been careless of admitting to him, privately, that I was the sole author of the obnoxious article, against which his pamphlet is directed,—thereby giving him some colour for the personality of his attack,—it might probably be considered incumbent upon me to answer his accusations. And, 2dly, it was placed before me in a strong light, that from the circumstances of our relative age and status in Edinburgh,—from the long period during which Mr. Neill had been known, and from the respect which was paid to him, by scientific men,—and particularly from the *esprit de corps* which prevails amongst all old citizens, and which may be especially baneful to any one who is placed under the imputation of being a “ young stranger,”—if I did not explain and vindicate my conduct from the charges which were preferred against me by Mr. Neill, a most injurious feeling would inevitably prevail against me in Edinburgh, and might even spread its contagion amongst my personal friends.

The importance of these considerations was urgent, and compelled me to the course I have taken ; and I sincerely hope this will plead my excuse for thus obtruding myself upon the notice of those amongst whom I have reason to suppose Mr. Neill has circulated his pamphlet, in which he so lavishly, and I trust unjustly, charges me with “ malignity,” “ calumny,” “ effrontery,” and “ falsity ;” and garnishes my patronymic with such a variety of adjuncts, as the “ boasting editor,” the “ self-constituted censor of Edinburgh,” “ raw lad,” “ young stranger,”* &c. &c. In thus

* The possession of youth seems, from the repetition of the taunt, to rank amongst my heinous offences ; but I would suggest to Mr. Neill that, if a man does properly what he undertakes to do, he is not thought any worse of, for being in the vigour of his youth, by those of his seniors who have nothing to fear. And I would remark, by quoting the language of Pitt, as far as my memory serves me, that “ the atrocious crime of being a young man I shall neither attempt to palliate nor deny ; but content myself with wishing that I may be one of those whose weakness and follies may cease with their youth, and not of that number who become testy and garrulous with old age, and ignorantly bigoted in spite of experience.” And further, I am happy to have it in my power to assure Mr. Neill that I have never been reminded by any other person of my being a stranger ; and that the reception I have uniformly experienced has satisfied me that an Englishman is not considered as a stranger in Scotland.

complying with the wishes of my friends, my sole object is gently to wipe off the aspersions which have been so vindictively hurled upon me, and I trust that I shall not be infected with the revengeful spirit which I might run some hazard of catching from the perusal of the angry effusion of Mr. Neill. Indeed, from the disparity of our years, I feel a sort of pledge within myself that I shall be able to treat with a respectful consideration of pity, what I ought to view as the result of a peevish irritability; and I therefore feel naturally disposed to be lenient in the castigation I might be inclined to inflict on a younger man, or on one more able to bear it. I trust, however, that Mr. Neill will recollect the remark of Horne Tooke, that "the experience of much injustice will cause the forbearance of injury to appear like kindness," and that he will estimate my motives accordingly.

The "Address" of Mr. Neill is stated to be "a vindication of the Wernerian Society—its President—and Secretary," from charges which were made, or supposed to be made, against them, in an article contained in the 10th No. of the Journal of which I am joint-editor. Now, for the purpose of distinctly relating all the circumstances connected with that article, and the events which have risen out of it, I shall declare openly that it was entirely written by me, and that so little do I observe in it, or in my subsequent conduct, to be ashamed of, that I now stand forward to explain and defend that which I have done. I shall therefore speak as if my name were attached to the article in question, and anxiously avoid connecting the Journal with what I have further to say. As to the right by which I, as an editor of a Journal, took upon myself the office of "Censor" over the management of a public scientific society, of which I was not a member, that is a question which must be left to the determination of the public, and not of an implicated party; and perhaps will be found to depend principally upon the truth of the allegations which I have made respecting it.

That some "censor," who may be unshackled by local connections, is wanted in Edinburgh, is, I fear, sufficiently apparent; for the state of natural science, and in particular, of what is called "natural history," is truly alarming. I can declare that, during the four years of my residence in Edinburgh, I have been grieved to see the Museum of the University closed to the student who did not purchase certain nominal privileges at an exorbitant price, and, what was more disgraceful, the to-

tal uselessness of that establishment to the man of science ;*—I have felt indignant at the perusal of the syllabus of lectures which the Professor of Natural History puts into the hands of his pupils, and which is only calculated to delude ;†—and I have beheld with disgust a coterie brooding like a night-mare over the

* The readers of the Edin. Journ. of Nat. and Geog. Science, will be aware that this subject has been already pretty fully discussed ; and even now *sub judice lis est*.

† On this subject I may remark, that I am well aware of the difficulty which every lecturer or professor must experience for some time, in so arranging his course as to give a proper view of all the different subjects upon which he professes to lecture. I can understand how, for the first three or four years of his professorship, he will always find himself in arrears at the end of his appointed time ; and could excuse his repeating for such a period, in his syllabus, pledges, which, though he had hitherto found himself incapable of redeeming them, he still hoped and expected to recover in the succeeding course. But when a professor, year after year, repeats the identical promise which he has as often found it impossible to perform, and which he is bound not to make, unless he at the same time attempts by some additional effort or arrangement to accomplish it,—there appears to be ground for something more than a charge of negligence or incapacity. In such conduct there is a monopolizing spirit of exclusion which amounts to actual dishonesty ; and though it may be said that every one who pays for the ticket under these promises, has his redress if they be not fulfilled,—that proceedings would lie in a court of law, as in all cases of obtaining money under false pretences,—I view the circumstance in a very different light. So long as this syllabus is annually issued to the pupils, the impression may continue that the Professor is qualified to deliver such a course as is therein defined ; and the necessity of a division of labour will be overlooked. But to show the actual need of such a measure, I cannot do better than quote a passage from Mr. Macleay's *Horæ Entomologicæ*, the more particularly as it is expressly applied to the chair of Natural History in this University, and as it will sufficiently authorize my allusion to this matter.

After speaking of the melancholy state of zoological instruction in this country, the author continues, " It is true, that there are Professors of Natural History in three of our northern universities ; and indeed the zeal, the liberality, and justly-celebrated acquirements of one of these gentlemen are likely (!) to produce the most beneficial effects to science at large, as well as to the learned body which he adorns. But we must not conceal the fact, that a professorship of Natural History is necessarily charged with duties that give ample employment in Paris to thirteen professors with their numerous assistants. I have ventured to give this humiliating picture of the state of zoological instruction in Great Britain, because there are persons who affect surprise, that in that science which relates to the animated works of God, France should take precedence over a nation incomparably more religious."—*Macleay's Horæ Ent.* Vol. I. Pt. ii. p. 457 ; note.

Wernerian Natural History Society, till there was little remained of it but the mockery cast by its name, upon opinions which are now only to be found in the pages of the history of error.

In his "Address" Mr. Neill attempts to involve the members of the Society in support of this coterie, by pretending that I have attacked the Society, and ingeniously volunteering a defence. But I must here repeat (what I have so often elsewhere asserted) that the remarks which I have made upon the mismanagement of this Institution, could not, and did not apply to the *Society*, but to those who were its *managers*; and further, that these remarks could only become applicable to Mr. Neill, if he should appear as the champion of the managers, which I presume from his pamphlet he now does. Of the Wernerian Society I can with pleasure say, that its active members merit the esteem of all good and liberal-minded men, for the independent and public-spirited course they have recently chosen; and that whatever I have done or said respecting it, has been dictated by the best intentions for its increasing welfare and prosperity.

In an early part of his pamphlet, Mr. Neill attempts to excite a prejudice against me, by laying much stress upon my having "testified friendship" for him, and upon "the kindness" with which he has "ever treated me;" and afterwards alludes to his having given me some letters of introduction to scientific friends in London. But the friendship which I have felt and expressed for Mr. Neill, has been that which he holds in common with all honourable and upright men, whose pursuits are similar to my own. And, though I should be sorry to have the imputation of ingratitude placed upon me, I must be excused if I say that I do not remember to have received any extraordinary "kindness" from Mr. Neill, of which he would be entitled to boast; and that I am entirely ignorant of the time or manner of its exhibition. I have always had reason, in my slight connection with that gentleman, to be pleased with his amiable and communicative disposition, and have invariably left his company with a desire to return to it; but I have never visited at his house,—I have never met him in society,—I have not even spoken to him at twenty different times; and as to the letters of introduction, all that I recollect of them is, that in March last, when I was about to visit London, I mentioned to him that I should be much pleased to be made acquainted with any of his scientific friends in town, and that I should be glad to be the bearer of any parcel or let-

ters which he was desirous to send to the south; of which offer he said he would take advantage. He accordingly sent to me three sealed letters, with an intimation on the envelope which enclosed them, that he had put my name on the corner of each, so that I might make acquaintance with the parties, if inclined. But I can detect nothing very remarkable in this, independently of the mode of "introduction," which perhaps may be considered novel; and, even if I had exposed the public conduct of Mr. Neill with a view to injure him, (which I solemnly declare I never did,) I do not see that he would have any right to enter the want of gratitude for favours received, as a plea against me. It may, however, serve for a lesson to those who accept letters of introduction, without reflecting upon the advantage that may afterwards be taken of them.

The "plain, unvarnished tale" which has given so much offence, and which has been the subject of so much correspondence between Mr. Neill, myself, and others, besides giving birth to the Secretary's "Address," may be told in a very few words:—I, as editor of a scientific Journal, which I conceive has a right to interest itself in the proceedings of every public scientific society, received information, upon the accuracy of which I thought I could depend, and accordingly made use of it in an article I was then writing. It related to what took place at a public meeting of a Society, and I received it from a person who was present. I was therefore, according to all ordinary rules, entitled to say, that what I stated was "*upon evidence*;" and when that information was subsequently confirmed by the testimony of other persons, who were also present, I held myself entitled to state it "*with confidence*." But though the weight of evidence was in favour of the statement I made, it afterwards turned out to be wrong.

The whole fact, which Mr. Neill has magnified into one of such importance, was simply this:—A letter was delivered to the chairman at a public meeting of the Wernerian Society, and two names were read by him as signatures attached to it, he adding "&c." after reading these two names. Unfortunately, the persons with whom I conversed on the subject did not hear this concluding apogiatura; and if they had, I am not aware that they would have had the ingenuity to conceive the "&c." to be another expression for the name of the gentleman who read the letter. They therefore, upon the evidence of their hearing, con-

fidently asserted to me, (though the grounds of their assertion were not known to me at the time,) that no such name was appended to the document when it was read.

Subsequently to the period of this meeting, however, Mr. Neill had circulated, amongst certain members of the Wernerian Society, a printed paper which he terms "Extracts," purporting to be notes from the minute-book of the Society, relating to the history of the Library Committee, and in which he stated that the name of Mr. Arnott, who happened to be chairman at that meeting, was signed to the letter in question. This, upon the evidence I had received, I took the liberty of contradicting in the 10th No. of the Journal in which I was engaged, using such language as, I believe, would not have been uncalled for, had my information been correct. I was, perhaps, at the time the more authorized to contradict Mr. Neill's statement, that I had several assurances, to oppose the statement contained in his "Extracts;" and that, moreover, there *was* an actual mis-statement in his saying that the letter was signed by "others," and a want of candour in suppressing the name of Dr. Gillies, who was the only other subscriber, and who was entirely unconnected with the old Committee, with which, however, it was attempted to confound the present one. To show how any other person might have fallen into the same mistake, I may quote the following passage from a correction of my error, which was published in the 11th No. of the Journal.

"Moreover, we have the authority of Mr. Falconar and Dr. Gillies to state, that it was their full impression that the letter was only signed by themselves when delivered by Mr. Falconar to the chair; and that, from Mr. Arnott's name not having been read to the Society, they believed, until the time of our discovering the error, that their signatures alone were attached. Thus, it will be evident that the fact of Mr. Arnott's name being also signed, could only be known to himself, and to the secretary, in whose possession the letter was deposited. To these gentlemen, it has been said, we might have applied for information; but had there even appeared to us to be any room for doubt, Mr. Arnott was at the time absent from Scotland, and delicacy restrained us from interrogating Mr. Neill, whose connection with the circular was of rather a dubious nature. Public opinion, then, could alone be our guide; and to this we confidently trusted. We did not wantonly make an assertion which we knew to be false, but reported an opinion which was entertained by numbers of the Society, as well as several visitors who were present at the meeting."—(P. *354.)

Shortly after the 10th No. of the Journal was in the publisher's hands, but prior to the day of publication, I ascertained from

Mr. Neill (who showed me the letter of requisition,) that Mr. Arnott's name was actually appended to it, and I confess I was not a little astonished to see it. But if I was surprized to find that Mr. Arnott's name was then attached to the letter, I was still more amazed when I subsequently learnt from that gentleman that his signature had been affixed to the letter before it was presented to the chair; though, happening himself to be chairman of the meeting, he did not read his own name, but merely added "&c." after the other two signatures. However, to correct my inaccurate statement as far as lay in my power, without entirely stopping the publication, I immediately got printed and inserted on the very face of the book, a fly-slip, wherein the reader was warned against the erroneous passage; and as a portion of the London copies were already on their way, I despatched the necessary "slips" after them by the mail, with express directions that not a copy should be allowed to leave the shop without having its slip inserted. It appears, however, and Mr. Neill makes a flourish of trumpets thereupon, that Dr. Traill was able to find *one copy* without it in Liverpool.

Thus I presume I did every thing that it was possible for me to do under the circumstances. It was totally out of my power to substitute a new leaf, at that late period of the month, for the one which contained the inaccurate passage; and notwithstanding Mr. Neill's technical quibbles about the meaning of the word "cancel," I declare that I never mentioned to him my intention to suppress *the leaf*:—to neutralize the incorrect statement by a fly-slip, was all I could do, prior to the next month's publication. Mr. Neill also asserts that I "protested strenuously," in my conversation with him, that I "was not the author of the offensive passage." I know not how to reconcile this part of the "Address" with the fairness of that "spirit and integrity" which ought to have been shown even in his accusations against me. I must positively deny any such assertion. I told Mr. Neill that the statement originally rested upon the responsibility of another; but I never, in any way, attempted to lead him to believe that I was not the author of the whole of the article, or that I, as one of the editors, was not responsible for whatever had been published in the Journal in an anonymous form.

It will be seen throughout the whole of the correspondence printed in Mr. Neill's "Address," that he calls upon me incessantly to give up my informant. The notion that, as an editor, I

should be prevailed upon to divulge the names of gentlemen, who had communicated to me facts connected with the mal-administration of a public trust, was certainly unauthorized; and I cannot conceive what the gentleman, who has been so long acquainted with periodical literature, could possibly think of, when he made such an application;—(may I not be excused in retorting Mr. Neill's question, "Did he judge of me by the feelings which actuated himself!")—but his statement, that I refused both to give up the names of my friends, and to make any apology myself, is not formed upon that principle which I would have expected from Mr. Neill, who, according to my ideas of the golden rule, should not only have stated the truth, but the *whole truth*. If Mr. Neill had not used that most uncandid mode of passing over a letter, without denying that it had been received, by referring to it as "partly private," and then saying that his answer will at once explain its general contents,—I think the reader of his "Address" would have seen, that in my letter of 7th July, I attempted in respectful and conciliatory language to express my concern for the error which I had committed. But let the letter speak for itself.

"To Patrick Neill, Esq.

"DEAR SIR, "11, Gardner's Crescent, 7th July 1830.

"HAVING this morning obtained an interview with Mr. Arnott, I am now able to answer your letter, dated 30th June.

"It, however, appears to be necessary, in the first place, to remind you that there is now no public contradiction of the statement in the circular (*i. e.* "the Extracts,") respecting Mr. Arnott's name; for the error of which you complain is corrected on the very face of the Journal. And every explanation I choose to enter into, after that correction, is entirely between ourselves as individuals,* and solely prompted by my desire to preserve your friendship.

"I have already stated to you that the information upon which I acted was received from an individual who was present at the meeting alluded to, (but whose name I do not feel myself at liberty to mention,) and as that information was afterwards confirmed by some collateral circumstances which came to my

* I know not whether Mr. Neill was in fairness authorized to construe this remark into a desire that this letter should be held to be private, and on that plea to suppress it; but I can state, that I merely wished to convey the idea that any further explanation must be made "between ourselves as individuals," in contradistinction to the public and printed correction. And I think that the context (which certainly could not be gathered from Mr. Neill's answer) will convey that idea to any candid reader,—and not that I wished the *letter* which contained that explanation to be made private.

knowledge, I considered myself, at the time, entitled to say, that my assertion was made "on evidence, and with confidence." Having now, however, ascertained that the statement I made was incorrect, I am most anxious to do away with the erroneous impression it was calculated to convey, and I am ready either to cancel the offensive passage by printing a new and corrected leaf, to be inserted in the volume when completed, or to write an explanatory article in the next number of the *Journal*, according to your option. This, with what I have already done, will I trust be satisfactory to you.

"To prove to you that my remarks were never intended to be applied to *you*, I need only refer you to the observations respecting you which I made in the latter part of the article on the Wernerian Society. Indeed, the fact of my reading to you, in your own counting-room, the passage referred to, before the publication of the *Journal*, certainly did not indicate much hostility to you. And I must express my regret at having unwillingly given you the annoyance which the misapplication of my remarks, and the inaccuracy of that particular passage have occasioned.

"In conclusion, allow me to assure you that I entertain the same esteem for you I have ever felt, and that I shall always be ready to receive your hand with the same grasp of friendship to which it has been accustomed.—I am, &c.

"HENRY H. CHEEK."

I must leave it to the reader's consideration, whether, if Mr. Neill had been desirous of giving an ingenuous narrative of the facts, and of avoiding the use of any unnecessary censure, he would have suppressed this letter: the injustice of this proceeding appears to me to be so flagrant, that I cannot trust myself to make any remarks upon it. Surely, if he had any doubts as to the propriety of publishing the letter, he might have asked my permission to do so; instead of which he threatens, in his letter of the 8th July, that he will "only allude to it." In my next letter to him, dated 31st July, I took occasion to mention that there was nothing between us which I held to be private, and that he was at perfect liberty to make what use of my letters he thought proper. But on the 2d August I received the "Address," with the mutilated correspondence.

Even after I had discovered my error, until I was informed by Mr. Arnott that he had signed his name prior to the letter being delivered to him as chairman, I certainly considered, as I stated in my letter of 29th June, that though my assertion was incorrect, it was "not entirely unfounded;" but besides suppressing the above letter, which is a virtual retraction of that opinion, Mr. Neill has the unfairness to make my former statement the apology for additional abuse.

In the same page, (18,) Mr. Neill, notwithstanding his being

in possession of the above letter, states that I had never made any proper apology, even at the date of the "Address." I am compelled, then, to enter into further detail. It will be observed by those whose eyesight is good, that there is a paragraph of *non-pareil* print cramped into a note at the bottom of the 10th page of the Address; but which, nevertheless, contains an allusion to a fact of some considerable importance.

About the beginning of July I received a visit from my excellent friend Dr. Gillies, who stated that he had been conversing with Mr. Neill on the subject of our unfortunate differences, in consequence of a letter he had received from that gentleman; and that he called upon me in the capacity of the mutual friend of Mr. Neill and myself, to suggest the propriety of a reference to two gentlemen, of whatever was in dispute between us. I told Dr. Gillies that I was most anxious to do every thing in my power to appease Mr. Neill, whose feelings were evidently much irritated,—except that I did not feel myself at liberty to mention the name of the gentleman who had communicated to me the circumstances relating to Mr. Arnott's signature. I, however, immediately agreed to a reference of any further public, or private apology, which might be considered due from me to Mr. Neill; and Dr. Gillies, whose good offices in this affair, both Mr. Neill and myself must appreciate highly, was kind enough to say that he would take upon himself to make a written proposition to us both. Accordingly, in a few days, I received the following letter from Dr. Gillies :—

" *To Henry H. Cheek, Esq.*

" MY DEAR SIR,

" *Portobello, 13th July 1830.*

" I HAVE now to inform you that I have to-day written Mr. Neill in the following terms :—' Agreeably to what I stated verbally to you yesterday, and in accordance with my own desire to be instrumental in bringing about an amicable adjustment of the differences which unfortunately exist between you and Mr. Cheek,—in consequence of an article published in the 10th Number of the *Edinburgh Journal of Natural and Geographical Science*, edited by that gentleman,—I would again venture to suggest the propriety of referring all the differences existing betwixt you to the decision of a friend nominated by each of the parties, to act as arbiters, these choosing a third person to aid them in case of necessity; and that the decision of such arbiters shall be considered final and binding on both parties.

" 'At the latest communication which I have had with Mr. Cheek, I have been verbally authorized to state his readiness to accede to the above proposal, provided he is to be considered the sole author and responsible person for the article in question.

“ ‘ It, therefore, only now remains with you to determine whether your differences are to be adjusted as proposed above, or whether matters are to be allowed to take their course. And, with expectations of being favoured with an answer, I remain,’ &c.

“ On perusal of the preceding, you will perceive whether I have correctly stated the terms of your accession to the proposed arrangement, and answer me in writing accordingly. And I remain, &c.

“ JOHN GILLIES.”

My reply was as follows:—

“ To Dr. Gillies.

“ MY DEAR SIR,

“ 13th July 1830.

“ I HAVE just received your letter, proposing a reference of the difference between Mr. Neill and myself to the decision of two friends. Your praiseworthy desire to promote peace will meet with the highest estimation from all good men, and I assure you that I myself feel proud of the possession of such a friend. It will, however, be necessary for me, on giving my most cordial acquiescence to your proposal, to state what I understand to be the matter for reference.

“ I made an incorrect statement in the Journal, with respect to a paper signed by Mr. Neill; but, on discovering its inaccuracy, I immediately contradicted it. And I have since offered to Mr. Neill either to cancel the leaf which contains the statement at the end of the volume, or to write an explanatory article in the forthcoming No. Mr. Neill, in a letter dated 8th instant, has chosen the latter. “ Doubtless,” he says, “ the retractation of the calumny should be made as wide as the promulgation of it, and as obvious to the reader.” This, therefore I shall most willingly do.

“ But Mr. Neill further requires, *first*, that I shall give up to him the name of the gentleman from whom I received my information. To this I refuse to accede; for I consider myself answerable for every statement which I insert in the Journal without the author’s name affixed; though, as I mentioned to Mr. Neill, the accuracy of the particular assertion in question originally rested on the responsibility of another.

“ And, *secondly*, Mr. Neill requires an apology from myself. I may mention to you, that on making myself responsible to Mr. Neill for the mis-statement and its correction, by refusing to give up my informant’s name, I offered what I considered to be a personal apology to him,—though, by his last letter, he appears not to have understood my meaning. In a letter dated 7th inst., I wrote to him, ‘ To prove to you that my remarks were never intended to be applied to you, I need only refer you to the observations respecting you which I made in the latter part of the article on the Wernerian Society. Indeed, the fact of my reading to you in your own counting-room the passage referred to, before the publication of the Journal, certainly did not indicate much hostility to you. And I must express my regret at having unwillingly given you the annoyance which the misapplication of my remarks, and the inaccuracy of that particular passage, have occasioned.’

" But as Mr. Neill is dissatisfied with this expression of my regret, and reiterates his requisition for a further apology, I will leave it to referees to decide whether any, and what kind of further personal apology is called for from me, besides the public statement, which will be made in the *Journal*. And, 2dly, if it be thought necessary to have the nature of the public explanation also submitted to reference, the Editors of the *Journal* can have no objection thereto. If, however, the latter question is to be referred, immediate steps for the reference must be taken, or the publication of the explanation must be delayed to the 12th number of the *Journal*, as the printers are now occupied with that part of the next month's number, where it ought to be inserted.

" The above, however, I agree to do, exclusively on the understanding that all recollection and written mention of the matter shall thereafter drop, and that Mr. Neill and I shall hold ourselves thereafter on the same friendly footing as before."

(I then named my referee, in case Mr. Neill should also have agreed to Dr. Gillies' proposal; and at the same time intimated, that I considered it would be improper for any Member of the Wernerian Society to be connected with the reference on either side.)

I heard nothing further on the subject of the reference till the 21st July, when I received a communication from Dr. Gillies, from which I learnt that Mr. Neill, avoiding the usual practice in these matters, had written to him that if Mr. Arnott should hold the apology contained in my letter of 7th July as sufficient, he would state in his "Address," (which it appears he was determined to print at all hazards,) that I had made such an apology; and he further observed, in answer to Dr. Gillies' intimation,—that I objected to any member of the Wernerian Society being connected with the reference,—"I never doubted," to use Mr. Neill's own words, "that he (Mr. Arnott) would have been to Mr. Cheek the most acceptable referee I could name."*

* In a letter to me, dated 2d August, Mr. Neill even goes so far as to appoint Dr. Gillies as my referee. He says, "you are in a mistake in thinking that I did not acquiesce in the suggestion of a reference as to the 'kind of apology' which was proper, as far as I was concerned individually. I fully acquiesced in this, and at once offered to abide satisfied with any apology which Dr. Gillies, and Mr. Arnott should concur in holding as sufficient. It was impossible for me to imagine that these gentlemen would not be acceptable to you as referees; for they already knew the merits of the case, and I considered them as your friends as well as mine." If, however, Mr. Neill had taken Mr. Arnott's advice, his line of action would have been very different from that which he has pursued. In a letter to me, dated 20th July, Mr. Arnott says, "I will write to Mr. Neill to say that if any more personal apology is neces-

This peculiar mode of shuffling off a reference, without refusing it, merits remark; but it was not quite consonant with my notions of the customs of this world, and I accordingly wrote to Dr. Gillies, as follows:—

“ MY DEAR SIR,

July 22. 1830.

“ IN case I should not be able to meet with you in the morning, I write to say, that, from Mr. Neill’s answer to your proposition, it is evident that any thing but a friendly arrangement is his object. I am sorry that your good endeavours should have been so unsuccessful; but I hope you will not attribute your failure to Mr. Neill’s own feelings; for I still rely upon the belief that his unwarped judgement would have guided him better. But he ‘cannot serve both God and Mammon.’

“ I received yesterday a letter from Mr. Arnott, which I answered at great length, acquainting him with the actual state of the affair. He also is anxious to promote an *éclaircissement*. If hostility be destined to prevail, it at least is no fault of our friends. As Mr. Neill treats your proposal for reference so cavalierly, I cannot, in justice to myself and to the gentleman who so kindly undertook the duty of a referee, submit to be any longer trifled with by delay, and must accordingly intimate to my friend to-day that his services are no longer requisite.—Sincerely yours,

“ HENRY H. CHEEK.”

In the note, (p. 10,) which contains the only allusion in the “Address” to this proposed reference, Mr. Neill makes the excuse for not having acceded thereto, that he had received a letter from a member of the Wernerian Society, (Dr. Gillies,) “suggesting the propriety of referring *all differences* to the decision of a friend nominated by each party;” but that “it appeared that the member alluded to could not state in writing the particular points to be submitted.” “I expressed my perfect willingness,” Mr. Neill continues, “to submit to such arbiters the *terms* of any apology regarding myself, to be made by Mr. Cheek. But, however desirous of ‘following the things that make for peace,’ I felt that I should be compromising the dignity of the Wernerian Society and its President, had I presumed to refer to arbitration, differences which involved their character fully as much as mine.” But if Mr. Neill had been exact in his

sary, it ought to be drawn out, and indeed the whole business referred to two or more friends, which I hope may terminate the disagreeable business.” Indeed I may say of Mr. Arnott, as well as of Dr. Gillies, that he has shown himself to be a true friend to both parties, and that I place the highest value on his good intentions.

quotation from Dr. Gillies' letter, he would have found himself unable to employ this subterfuge. The words are, "all the differences existing *betwixt you*," (*i. e.* Mr. Neill and Mr. Cheek,) (*Vide the Letter*, p. 11. *supra*;) indeed, what could Mr. Neill be supposed to have to do with differences between the Wernerian Society, or its President, and Mr. Cheek?

Thus I think it is sufficiently evident, that I was both willing and anxious to make any further private apology which might be considered necessary, and that I made a fair offer to that effect. One would have thought that this might have satisfied the most fastidious mortal; but no! Mr. Neill was not to be appeased. In truth he had other objects in view. An apology from me was quite a secondary consideration. My "secret friends" and "advisers behind the curtain," were the prey he sought for; and, not content with impertinently charging Mr. Falconar and Dr. Gillies with being my informants, nor with making a most unbecoming allusion to visitors being guilty of abusing the confidence of the Society, and acting as my spies, (*Address*, p. 19,)—Mr. Neill writes in the last letter I received from him, (dated 16th Aug.) that the dispute is not between him and me, "but rather between Drs. Knox and Gillies, and the Wernerian Society." And again, "had not reports been abroad that certain *members* of the Wernerian Society had associated themselves with Mr. Cheek in the attack, I never would have circulated any Address on the subject." The letter of Dr. Knox, inserted in the Appendix, will answer for the share he had as my informant; to Dr. Gillies I have communicated this ridiculous charge, that he may vindicate himself in his own way; and I had not the pleasure of knowing Mr. Falconar at the time of the publication of my atrocious article. The imputation cast upon the visitors, (from whom Mr. Neill pretends that I insinuated my information was obtained,) is certainly most unhandsome, and moreover betrays an excessive jealousy. What could take place at a public meeting of the Society that ought not to be reported, I know not, provided it be done correctly and fairly. But the whole of my remarks amounted to this, that there were several visitors present at the meeting when the celebrated letter was read.

I thus, as I conceive, did every thing in my power to give Mr. Neill a satisfactory private apology. But this was not all. I published in the 11th No. of the Journal a correction of the erroneous

statement, and made a public apology to Mr. Neill in the following terms :—" So highly do we estimate this gentleman's public and private worth, that we do not for one moment hesitate to declare, that the remarks we made were never intended to attach to him, and that we are concerned at having occasioned him the slightest uneasiness." It appears from an envelope dated 2d August, which inclosed the copy of the " Address" sent to me, that a friend had offered to obtain for Mr. Neill a proof-sheet of this article before the time of publication, if he desired it ; but he declined it, by saying that he " could not ask any favour from Mr. Cheek." I, however, sent him a copy of the Journal containing it, on the 31st July, never dreaming but that, as he was aware that I had an explanatory article in the press, he would delay the printing of his " Address," until he knew what explanation and apology I should give. The reader may judge of my surprise, then, when, on the 2d August, I received a packet from Mr. Neill, containing his " Address," and a letter acknowledging the receipt of the 11th No. of the Journal. I was thunderstruck at Mr. Neill's precipitation ; and the more that the opening paragraph of his letter contained this statement : " Had it (the Journal) reached me even one day sooner, I could have noticed it in my Address, and might have been led to modify *one or two expressions* ; for the printed apology, as far as I am individually concerned, is certainly more satisfactory than that in your letter of 7th July." But he, who complains so loudly against me for not stopping the publication of a periodical work, to correct and reprint a leaf, did not even paste a corrigendum to his pamphlet, which was independent of time ; though he felt the justice of *privately* making the above communication to me. It is true that the " Address" was inclosed in a printed envelope, acknowledging that he was aware of my public apology prior to the circulation of the pamphlet. But did this envelope accompany all the copies ? I believe not. Indeed, I have reason to know instances, where, from its not having been sent with the " Address," the parties believed that I had made no apology, public or private, and of course formed a very injurious opinion of my conduct.

Such is " the head and front of my offending," the discussion of which occupies nearly half of Mr. Neill's pamphlet of twenty-six pages. But I trust that I have now shown that I did not knowingly make the erroneous assertion, and that, on discovering my error, I did every thing in my power to retrieve the

fault,—a fault which I hope Mr. Neill will no longer impute to “malign intention,” or to a willingness to state that which I knew to be false. I declare that, from the nature of the evidence I received, I believed, at the time, that the statement, which I contradicted, was not true, and I expressed my belief in terms which perhaps might have been warranted, had I been in the right; but the same habit of mind which may lead me into a hasty expression of my sentiments, will also, I trust, when I am in the wrong, be the first to prompt the fullest apology which a gentleman can be expected to give; and I hope my conduct on this occasion has been consonant with that character.

No one, I am sure, who knows Mr. Neill's naturally good temper, will for a moment suppose that he could be really so angry at a young man, whom, he himself says, he “had ever treated with kindness, as far as his slender opportunities of doing kindness extended,” unless there were some deeper-seated cause than this, for the unusual violence of expression which pervades his pamphlet, and for the passion by which he seems to have been agitated, throughout the whole affair. As soon as I discovered my error, I published an “*errata*,” correcting the mis-statement; but this only served to exasperate. I publicly *explained*; it would not appease him. I offered to *cancel the leaf* at the end of the volume; but it was of no avail. I made a private *apology*; he would not receive it. I agreed to *refer*; but all was in vain. My once kind friend, to whom I might with truth apply the appellation he bestows upon another, of “an amiable naturalist,” refused to listen to any thing I could say; and though he states that I “had testified friendship for him,”—that I came to him “with smiles and with professions of esteem,”—and although the very article in question bears evidence of the high opinion I entertained of him as an individual, still were my attempts to pacify him fruitless.

Besides this principal topic of Mr. Neill's pamphlet, there are several minor points in the obnoxious article on the Wernerian Society, which are made the subject of animadversion in the “Address.” These I shall now enter upon generally, and add some remarks which occur to me in connection with the subject.

I. The *occasion* and *objects* of the circulation of Mr. Neill's “Extracts,” is a matter of dispute. It had been stated in a Number of the Journal, that some “merit” was considered to be due to

the Editors who had "instigated," or, as Mr. Neill does not like the word, let us say promoted, an inquiry into the disease which afflicted the Wernerian Society, and seemed to rankle at its heart's core. Mr. Neill, however, says "there seems a wish to scatter 'firebrands and arrows'" in the Society, and declares that "the native tendency" of the article on this subject is to "instigate the Members of the Wernerian Society to discord and mutual distrust."—P. 11. But if—permit one moment's digression—if, to inquire into the state of the Society's affairs, and to correct abuses, should cause "discord" and "mutual distrust," it surely cannot be the fault of those who promote the inquiry, but shows that there is something wrong in the system; and that very proof of the system being faulty, also points out the necessity of an examination.

Mr. Neill has also given himself extraordinary trouble to disprove the "erroneous notions," which were in circulation, that the attention we had drawn to the state of the Society had any influence over the nomination of a committee of investigation; and thence sprang, as I believe, 1st, his "Extracts," upon which we animadverted in the tenth number of the Journal; and, 2dly, his "Address," with which I am now engaged. Mr. Neill repeats more than once, in the "Address," that the present investigation was "begun in 1824, and all but completed in December 1827;" and yet, in May 1830, the gentleman, who has been for twenty-three years Secretary to the Wernerian Society, declares, with tears in his eyes, that one member (of the Society) believed that no list of the books had ever been made up; another, that the books had never been delivered over to the Librarian; and he himself, with the most superior means of information, is obliged to print some "MS. extracts," to enlighten the members who were "so much in the dark." And when the paper of "Extracts" makes its appearance, what does it contain? Neither a list of the "Books," be they few or many, nor a catalogue of the "Donations," be they worthy of the name of a Museum or not; but merely a statement of the acts of the Society, showing (even if we allowed Mr. Neill's argument that the present committee is a continuation of the old one,) that the Members of the Society have been attempting for more than *five* years to obtain information respecting their property, of which they appear still to be in ignorance. But the true statement is, that an inquiry similar to the one which is now in prosecution, had been attempted in 1824,

and repeated in 1827; but had on both occasions failed: and that this year a *new committee* has been formed out of the council, composed, in part, of different individuals, and with restricted objects; for, whereas in the former struggle, the Council directed "that the state of the objects of natural history presented to the Society be inquired into, immediately after the books shall have been arranged," in the appointment of the present Committee all written mention of the collection was avoided, and when a Member rose in the Society and attempted to have it included in the duties of the Committee, the President contrived to prevent it, by one of his characteristic suggestions of the propriety of delay.

In analyzing Mr. Neill's circular of "Extracts," I came to the conclusion that it "had been put forth for the mere apparent purpose of depriving us of the credit of having occasioned the renewal of the investigation;" and this he now admits to have been one reason, though he previously attempted to escape the allowance, in conversation with me, by saying that he "*had never seen*" the Journal. We now, however, arrive at several reasons why the "Extracts" were printed. *1st*, Because, as before-mentioned, it was "believed by one Member (of the Wernerian Society) that no list of the books had ever been made up." *2d*, Because Mr. Neill heard "another assign as the reason, that the books had never been delivered over to the Librarian."—(*Address*, p. 1.) *3d*, Because, as Mr. Neill mentioned to me, "the Librarian had permitted this statement to be made, in his presence, without contradiction;" and, *4th*, Because the "young Editors" had "arrogated to themselves and their work, merit relative to the inquiry."—(Pp. 1, 2.)

If I were confident that there is no mistake in the statement, so frequently repeated in the "Address," that Mr. Neill "had never seen" the work, which contained the notice of the present state of the Wernerian Society, (*Edin. Journ. &c. No. V.*), there might be some occasion,—in spite of Mr. Neill's admission that he had read extracts from it in the Observer newspaper, or of any oral information he might have received,—for my withdrawing the opinion I have expressed, that his "Extracts" were circulated as much for the purpose of denying our agency in the promotion of the present inquiry, as with the view to mitigate the severity of the investigation by the Committee. But on this subject I have always doubted, and from the following circumstance my mind still wavers.

The reader of Mr. Neill's pamphlet will observe, that he states that, at the latter end of May last, he "*had never seen* the periodical work of Messrs. Ainsworth and Cheek"—(P. 3.)

And again, "*I had not seen* Mr. Cheek's work," (meaning, I suppose, the same Journal;) "it had scarcely ever occurred to my thoughts," P. 11. (at the time of printing the "Extracts," viz. "about the 20th May.")

And in another paragraph, he speaks of "a paper which, it seems, appeared in their 5th Number, and *which I never saw*, unless perhaps it was alluded to, and partially quoted in the Observer newspaper."—P. 15.

Any one may conceive how, when this point-blank assertion first met my eye, the mortified pride of the editor struggled with pity for a gentleman, who unites so many scientific offices in himself, when he could openly declare that he had never seen a work, which he knew to have the character of being tolerably active in giving the earliest information on the subjects with which he is connected, and which was the more likely to interest him, that it appeared in his own city. But there was something so unnatural in the idea, and so utterly inconsistent with the notion I had formed of what a man of science, and especially of what a secretary of a scientific society, ought to be, that I felt it possible that there might be some mistake in the construction which I had put upon the thrice-repeated statement, and I held myself excused in instituting some inquiries, for the purpose of elucidating so strange a declaration. I accordingly wrote to the confidential clerk of Mr. Lizars, our publisher, to know whether he could give me any information on the subject, and I received from him in reply the subjoined letter, which, though it may perhaps tend to throw some light upon the difficulty, I confess my inability to ally precisely with the above-quoted assertions.

" *To Henry H. Cheek, Esq.*

" EDINBURGH, 2d Aug. 1830.

" DEAR SIR,

" In answer to your note just received, I beg to state that I have perfect recollection of Mr. Neill calling at Mr. Lizars' shop, on the 13th February last, and remarking that he had heard there was an attack upon the Wernerian Society, in the Journal of Natural and Geographical Science, and requesting a copy of No. V. which I sold him.

" What impresses the circumstance more on my memory, is, that Mr. Neill asked it at trade price, and got it by paying 1s. 6d. instead of 2s.

" As further evidence of the transaction, a copy stands in the Cash-Book at 1s. 6d. on the day on which Mr. N. purchased the No. of the Journal.

"I have also to state, that when Mr. Neill purchased another No. of the Journal, some weeks ago, he said he had never before seen a No. of it, and I then mentioned to him my recollection of having formerly sold him one: to this remark Mr. N. made no reply.—I am, &c.

"JOHN HAMILTON."

But, however business-like and circumstantial this letter may appear, it certainly proves nothing more than that on the 13th February last, rather more than three months prior to the time at which Mr. Neill states, "*he had never seen* the periodical work of Messrs. Ainsworth and Cheek," he entered the shop of Mr. Lizars, and with open mouth, (but whether with open eyes your deponent sayeth not,) he asked for the 5th No. of this work, in which he had been informed there was a particular article, misconstrued into "an attack upon the *Wernerian Society*," and which it is easy to conceive would draw down the indignation of the worthy secretary; 2dly, that he bought it at the reduced price of eighteen-pence, perhaps because there was only one article in the number which attracted his attention; and 3dly, that he appears to have been more regular of late in paying his *devoirs* at the shop of our publisher. But, that Mr. Neill ever *saw* the work in question, prior to the end of May, the letter does not state, and no one, after the perusal of his asseverations, can for one moment suppose it; though he must have possessed a remarkable share of self-denial, not to take a sly peep at the article he sought for, when he had the naughty book in his pocket!

II. So much for the *reasons* which induced Mr. Neill to print his "Extracts." Now, as to the *nature* of the document, its *privacy*, or *publicity*; for Mr. Neill abuses me, for publishing what he calls his "*private* document." Of this I have only two things to say, 1st, That if it were a "*private*," and, consequently, an underhand trick of Mr. Neill, or his client, to lull the vigilance of the Committee, by making them believe that all was going on rightly, it was a most unworthy doing. Justly did Mr. Arnott blame Mr. Neill for "not sending a copy of it to every Member of the Society."—(*Address*, p. 20.) If that had been done, the transaction would have assumed a character of openness and fairness, whatever might have been the opinion of the accuracy of the statements. But this was not the object. The poison was only prepared for those whose activity was dangerous, and its efficacy depended on its concentration. But, 2dly, I confess that I do not even yet—after Mr. Neill's

somewhat envious elucidation, that Mr. Cheek "*himself prints* his Journal in Gardner's Crescent, and *publishes* it in the New Town," (P. 12.)—clearly see the distinction between *printing* and *publishing*, unless the word "*private*," or its synonyme, be placed on the face of the printed document. I do not mean to say that Mr. Neill's little paper was put into the hands of a bookseller, or entered at Stationers' Hall; but if the essence of publication is exemplified in the circulation, amongst a certain number of persons, of historical statements connected with the officers of a public institution, indubitably Mr. Neill's "Extracts" were published. He might as well say that his "Address" is not published: yet the nature of its circulation differs only from that of the "Extracts," in the greater number of individuals to whom it was sent. But if a man, who would "brain himself with a lady's fan," can circulate abuse on the victim of his spleen, and afterwards defend himself on the plea of not having *published* his slander, the printing-office may teem with "Addresses," where "*private*" licence can be indulged in at so cheap a rate. And further, even if Mr. Neill wished his *printed* "Extracts" to be considered "*private*," and not to be *published*, he must allow that my offence was somewhat venial, inasmuch as I labour under a considerable disadvantage with respect to him, in the discrimination of these terms, which are somewhat foreign to my profession.

III. After a careful examination of Mr. Neill's circular, I came to the conclusion, as stated in the Journal, (p. 270,) that "almost every paragraph which is not actually an extract, is either a misrepresentation, or a true representation of a censurable fact." Mr. Neill says, this remark is "sweeping and audacious," "mere vapouring and *persiflage*." Let us then "*particularize*," and "*exemplify*."

The "misrepresentations" are as follows:—

1. Mr. Neill, in his "Extracts," states that "Mr. Arnott having gone to the Continent, the Committee (for investigating into the state of the Library, in 1824) delayed to report." But I mentioned in the Journal, on the authority of Dr. Knox, a member of the Committee, that they did not delay in consequence of Mr. Arnott's absence, but, amongst other reasons, because "the Committee were not permitted to enter the room where the books were said to be kept."—(P. 271.) Mr. Neill, on the other hand, in his "Address," declares that "this allega-

tion is utterly groundless," though he admits that this room was not "at all times" accessible to the members, ("Extracts,") and that (on this account, I presume) a separate apartment is "an accommodation perhaps now indispensable."—(*Address*, p. 12.) Mr. Neill further attempts to throw the blame of the delay on the Committee, who, he says, "were rather remiss," (p. 2. ;) and he particularly points out Dr. Knox, as one who "did not appear inclined to take much trouble or concern in the matters remitted to the Committee." (P. 16.) As I had no other means of authenticating the statement which I had made, than by applying to the gentleman on whose authority it rested, and whose name was originally given in support of the remark, I have written to Dr. Knox, and he has favoured me with the reply, which is printed in the *Appendix* to this Answer, and which will be found to be corroborant, in an important degree, of several other things upon which I dilate. To this letter I refer, in support of this first charge of "misrepresentation."

2. Mr. Neill states that, during the delay of the Committee, viz. from 1824 to 1827, "such members as demanded books were furnished with them;" ("Extracts;") and again "books were, (in 1830,) as heretofore, furnished by the librarian to members requiring them."—(*Ibid.*) It was stated in the Journal, that this was a mere equivocation, because "no members required the books;" for, indeed, no one knew what books there were. I further requested that the book might be shown, in which the receipts for volumes borrowed by members from the Society, were entered; but the Secretary takes care to make no mention of this test.

3. I declared the statement respecting the signature of Mr. Arnott's name, to be a "misrepresentation." But in this I was mistaken; and had made amends for my error, before the circulation of Mr. Neill's "Address."

4. And lastly, I mentioned that the Rev. Dr. Ritchie did not move "*resolutions*," as stated in the "Extracts;" but, that the President having overruled a motion for a special Committee, Dr. Ritchie moved as "*an amendment*," "that the Council be directed to examine into the state of the Library;" which was afterwards agreed to, by the original motion being withdrawn. The "misrepresentation" here consisted in a mere lapse of form, which I mentioned rather to show the loose nature of the system, than for any other purpose. And this the Secretary admits; for

he says that though he holds "the record as accurate," from its not having been disputed when read at the succeeding meeting, the proceedings may not have been taken down with a "scrupulous adherence to form." (P. 23.)

Such are the "misrepresentations," which were charged upon the circular of "Extracts." There are only two more statements in the paper, which are not actually extracts from the minute-book ; and these two, I still believe I was justified in terming "censurable facts."

1. It is stated in the 5th paragraph of the "Extracts," that "Mr. Macgillivray had hitherto (Nov. 1828) assisted in arranging and keeping the books, *without holding any office* in the Society." On this declaration, it was remarked in the Journal, "We need say no more, in explanation of this most unwarrantable assumption, than that Mr. Macgillivray was the private secretary of Professor Jameson, the president of the Society, and that it shows plainly enough, who had the use of the books." And if Mr. Neill's statement had been exact, would this not have been "a censurable fact?" But, though I have since discovered that Mr. Macgillivray was appointed assistant librarian so far back as Dec. 1823, I have not to refer to Mr. Neill's "Extracts" for my knowledge of the fact.

2. Finally, the Journal relates the following amusing anecdote, and this completes the list of "misrepresentations" and "censurable facts:"—"The 8th and concluding paragraph (of Mr. Neill's 'Extracts,') states that 'the Council met on the 1st May,' and 'appointed a committee for the purposes mentioned in the minutes of the meeting of 24th April, viz. Professor Jameson, Mr. Falconar, Dr. Gillies, Mr. Arnott, with Mr. Wilson, librarian; *Professor Jameson, convener.*' But who had the indelicacy to name the president convener, when it was well known that against him, the inquiry was, in point of fact, directed? *He named himself, though another gentleman was proposed.*"

IV. We come now to a more interesting, because a less private and personal, portion of Mr. Neill's pamphlet, viz. the facts connected with the Library and Museum of the Wernerian Society ; and surely it must have been a severe struggle for the Secretary's contending feelings, when he had to declare *in print*, (although this be a very different thing from *publishing*,) that the "Library" of the Wernerian Society is merely the term which, "with perhaps pardonable self-complacency," they sometimes

apply to "the few books belonging to the Society;" (p. 1.) and that their "Museum" was nothing but a "ridiculous" title, "to dignify the few objects of natural history which have been presented" to them.—(P. 14.)

Mr. Neill, who does not wish "to blink any thing," adds considerably to the value of his pamphlet by putting in print, I believe for the first time, the laws relating to "donations" to the Society. "Oh! that mine adversary had written a book," saith the Prophet; and, truly, in being the unintentional cause of the publication of the Secretary's "Address," I consider that more has been done for exposing the misdirection of the Wernerian Society, than all the labours of the Journal could have otherwise effected. From Mr. Neill's "Address" it appears, that "manuscript communications, or books, presented to the Society," are, by an express law, made "*their private property*;" but that the same law contains a "stipulation" with Professor Jameson, that "all specimens of objects in natural history presented to the Society, be *deposited* in the Museum of the University; *the Members of the Society retaining the right of inspecting them at proper times.*"—(Address, p. 14.) Mr. Neill, however, apologetically states, "that Professor Jameson never *required fulfilment*" of this "stipulation," "in any case where the Society possessed the means of preserving the articles." This would certainly, in some degree, alleviate the charge, that the Society has been palpably tricked out of any right of property in the donations, which have been presented to it for the purpose of establishing a rallying point and bond of connection amongst the Members, by the formation of a private museum,—if it were clear that they have access at pleasure to the room where these donations are deposited. But I have reason to know, that if any Member of the Wernerian Society apply at the door of the University Museum, for admittance in virtue of his membership, he will be submitted to the insult of a refusal from the Professor's porter.

Indeed Mr. Neill himself admits the fact, though in more covert terms, when he states that "difficulty has doubtless occurred in regard to the fulfilment of the stipulation in the second clause of the first section,* (viz. that the Members of the Society

* The reader of the "Address," will observe that I have here taken the opportunity to make use of a corrigendum, which Mr. Neill has done me the favour to transmit to me.

retain a right of inspecting the donations to the Society at proper times,) "owing to a price having been put on admission into the Museum." But though I see clearly the difficulty of the case, the President might surely invent some ingenious method of admitting the members without a fee, from the resources of the same intellect, which has contrived to secure the enjoyment of any advantages that may arise from the first clause of the law. The fact, when reduced to the most extreme simplicity, is, that the Members of the Wernerian Society are at the same time deprived of a property in the donations which are presented to them, and of the power of inspecting them, wherever they may be deposited.

To prove, further, how "absolutely ridiculous" it is, "to dignify the few objects of natural history which have been presented" to the Society, "with the title of 'the Society's Museum,'" Mr. Neill gives a list, which, he declares, contains "all the donations which the Society ever received."—(P. 14.) viz. :—

- | | |
|--|--|
| "A collection of British Shells; from the late Captain Laskey. | } "In the Society's private possession." |
| "A collection of Insects, from Mr. Wilkins and Mr. Spence of Hull. | |
| "A collection of the <i>Filices</i> of Tristan d'Acunha, from the late Captain Carmichael. | |
| "A stuffed Ornithorynchus, from the late Dr. Wright. | |
| "The cranium of a Barbarossa,* from Dr. Wright. | |
| "Rock Specimens, illustrative of his excellent geognostical papers on different districts of Scotland, from the Rev. Dr. Mac-knight. | |

* Alas, poor Fred! (for I presume this must be thy noble skull,) little didst thou dream, during thy earthly career, that our University Museum would be thy gaudy tomb! Little didst thou think, even at the period of thy greatest debasement,—when thou wert obliged to hold the stirrup of the Pope, and lead the holy father's palfrey,—that thy head would ultimately be an item in the list of gewgaws shown to the vulgar at a price! But is this really the cranium of Frederick Barbarossa? If I recollect aright, he died in Sili-cia, from bathing, when over-heated, in that very river which, from the same cause, had so nearly proved fatal to Alexander the Great. But my researches have not led me to the discovery of the place where his bones were deposited: nor can I learn upon what authority Dr. Wright has stated this to be his skull. Indeed, I should be very much inclined to doubt its authenticity, if it had not been given *in print* by the Secretary of the Wernerian Society. I do not think that the phrenologists know any thing about it; and, in this city, I would almost take that fact as sufficient evidence against it. That it is not the skull of either of the famous corsair-brothers, I take to be beyond dispute; or it could not possibly have lain so long in secret.

"Rock Specimens, which illustrated his Notice of the Campsie Hills, from the late Colonel Imrie."

"Such," says Mr. Neill, "are the 'many donations which have been presented,' (to use Mr. Cheek's language;) and I doubt not that they will be found in the University Museum,—their proper place."—(P. 14.) What an odious service has the Secretary brought upon himself, thus to sacrifice the fair fame of the Wernerian Society on the altar of the respectability of his idol, the President! But far be it from me to interfere with his worshipping. I cannot but admire the friendly devotion. However, without using the pointed language employed in Dr. Knox's letter, on the subject of this list, (*Vide Appendix*), and without wishing to over-rate the collection of the Wernerian Society, which, like all others, must have its beginning, and which may have been unfairly retarded, I am able to add the following few donations from my own knowledge, which must, however, be very inferior to that of the Secretary of the Society:—

The cranium of a Babyroussa, from the late Dr. Wright.

A collection of Rocks of the Coal Formation of Alloa, from R. Bald, Esq.

A collection of Rocks of the Island of Papa Stour, from the Rev. Dr. Fleming.

A series of Rocks illustrating the Geognosy of Arran, from Professor Jameson.

The bones of the Orkney Animal, from Gilbert Meason, Esq. And Dr. Knox mentions in his letter—

"A specimen of a Pelican, from Mr. Neill; and

"A Fossil Seal from the marine deposit between Loch Lomond and the Clyde; donor unknown to him:" and, indeed, I should not be at all surprized, if the investigations of the Committee were to bring to light many other donations.

Of the "Library," I would merely say, that if Mr. Neill finds it "scarcely possible to withhold a smile," when it is spoken of under that designation, the members of the Society seem to have formed a very different estimate of its value; and that a great deal of unnecessary trouble must have been taken in appointing an assistant librarian in 1823, and again in 1828, to "relieve Mr. Wilson," (the librarian,) and "facilitate access to the books," (*Vide "Extracts;"*) and lastly, that the apparent importance attached to the books, in the language of the "Extracts," would impress one with a very contrary notion.

At p. 20. of the "Address," Mr. Neill says I am "pleased broadly to insinuate that the President appropriated to his own use the books belonging to the Wernerian Society;" and he attempts to ridicule the idea. But notwithstanding all that Mr. Neill has said, in praise of his "distinguished," "illustrious," and "valued" superior, I confess myself to be fully persuaded of the truth of the "contemptible and ludicrous idea," which he says was "pardonable only in some raw lad in his first session at a debating club!" And I believe that the possession of books, and the facility for gratifying the most inordinate passion for books, does not take away, but actually increases, the desire for grasping at even a few volumes more, particularly when these volumes have the charm of novelty. But I am far from asserting, that Professor Jameson does make any improper use of his opportunities, although he may do so for any thing his advocate, Mr. Neill, has said to disprove it. Mr. Neill allows, in his "Address," that the whole of the select, and I have reason to believe, valuable collection of books, belonging to the Wernerian Society, is deposited in the Professor's private room, which Mr. Neill himself declares that "no member of the Wernerian Society could ever for a moment entertain a thought of claiming."—(P. 16.) Does this not amount to conferring upon the President of the Society the exclusive privileges of the Library? Moreover, even the Librarian cannot enter the room, by right of office, to give out books, without asking the President's permission. And at the time of the original statement, he had neither a catalogue of the library, nor the keys of the book-case. In short, the library was not in his possession, nor under his control.

V. Another statement of mine which calls forth Mr. Neill's ire, is, that "it was well known that the President (of the Wernerian Society,) who is the Editor of a scientific journal, was in the constant habit of appropriating to his own use the papers which ought to have formed part of the Transactions."—(*Journal*, p. 269.) It is unfortunate for the cause which Mr. Neill espouses that he should admit his being so much connected with the President; for the circumstances of his being the "printer of Professor Jameson's Journal," and of the Society not having published Transactions for *four* years, indicate something like sinking the one for the purpose of exalting the other; and the fact that the President is in the habit of applying the papers of the Society to his own use, is admitted by Mr. Neill in express words,

"As far as my individual influence could go," he says, "I have uniformly, in voting the disposal of all papers presented to the Society,* acted on this principle, that provided a useful paper were given to the world, it signified little through what channel,—whether in a separate form,—in Society Transactions,—or in a periodical work; and it has been a uniform rule, that if an author thought that he could derive from his MSS. pecuniary advantage, no obstacle should be opposed to his doing so. That papers read before the Wernerian Society should occasionally, at the desire, or with the approbation of the author, find a place in our President's scientific Journal, was surely most natural, most proper, and most desirable."—P. 12. All that I stated was, that the papers read at the Society's meetings, made their appearance, not in the published Transactions of the Society, where they should have been, but in their "President's scientific Journal,"—and this to the manifest deterioration of the Society's fame. But I agree with Mr. Neill, that provided a useful paper be given to the world, it signifies little to science through what channel it circulates; and if it become more widely known through Professor Jameson's Journal than through the Wernerian Memoirs, the scientific world is no loser,—the author is no loser, (if, as Mr. Neill would seem to insinuate, he is paid for handing over his manuscripts from the "Memoirs" to the "Journal,")—probably the Professor is no loser,—and as for the Society, poor thing! if its President and Secretary vote away, or forestall its marketable papers, instead of protecting its interests, who is to advocate its cause?

Mr. Neill says that the "good reason" why the Society has not published Transactions for such a long period, is, "that it has incurred considerable loss by every publication." How could it be otherwise, if the best papers which are read before the Society, are sure to be found in the President's Journal? Who is to buy a work composed of the refuse papers which would not answer the purpose of the New Philosophical Journal? When, in a prospectus stitched into the No. of this periodical for July 1830, it is even stated that "in this Journal alone will be

* It must be remembered, that Law VII. Sect. 2. of the Wernerian Code, as quoted by Mr. Neill, enacts, that manuscript communications presented to the Society, do remain their private property; and yet he confesses that he has been in the habit of voting for their disposal.—*Address*, p. 14.

found the proceedings of the Wernerian Natural History Society," the nature of the method here employed assumes a palpable form; but though I do not blame the editor of the Journal for making the name of the Society a saleable article, I think the prospectus-writer would do well to look into other publications, before he makes such assertions. Finally, I need not remind Mr. Neill what he told me was expected to be done with the papers read before the Wernerian Society, when I asked him, some time ago, not without the sanction of its author, to allow me to publish a short notice, which he read at one of the meetings, on the naturalization of the *Saturnia luna* in Europe.

From the foregoing details, then, I presume I have sufficiently proved the truth of my assertion, that the Wernerian Society has been "*misdirected*;" and indeed I know not how it could possibly be otherwise, whilst the highest office in the Society,—of little worth to the Professor of Natural History, from the constancy of its possession,—and affording no source of emulation to the talented members of the Society, from being placed beyond their reach,—has been for 23 years a monopoly.

I am the more surprized that the Society should have annually kept up this exclusive system, that I am not led to understand that the Professor made any "stipulation" for the perpetual office, when the fundamental laws were framed. The Committee of investigation will, however, probably be able to throw some light upon this question, if they have the power to cause the laws to be printed for circulation amongst the members. In the interim, if I may be excused the liberty, I would suggest to the members of the Society, that the Geographical Society of London has seen the wisdom of providing such a law as the following:—

Resolved, "That the office of President be not held by the same individual for a longer period than two consecutive years, but that he be eligible for re-election after the lapse of one year." By thus preventing stagnation, corruption would be avoided. *Verbum sat!*

My task is now drawing to a close. There is but one other part of Mr. Neill's "Address" which seems to require my notice; and this speaks so touchingly and forcibly for itself, that no comment of mine can improve it.

It was very innocently asked, in the article on the Wernerian Society, whether the Council had seen it necessary "to go to

the expense, however trifling," of printing the circular of "Extracts." And here again we touched a tender chord, "which vibrates in this measure:—"

"I must be excused, Gentleman," says Mr. Neill, "for here adding, that there is something exceedingly contemptible in Mr. Cheek's thus alluding to the 'expense' of the 'circular.' Assuredly I never dreamt of charging the trifling expense of that Circular to the Society, more than of charging the greater expense now occasioned to me, in printing this Address, and sending a copy to every member of the Society. Whoever has acted as secretary to any literary society for some years, will bear me out in testifying that, let him try to be as punctual as he may, in marking down the postages, carriages of parcels, and other incidents of cash expenditure on account of his official situation, he will find himself considerably out of pocket every year. I have now been for twenty-three years Secretary to the Wernerian Society: let Mr. Cheek think of that, and he will be convinced that the expense of the 'circular' was as a drop in the bucket!"

Mr. Neill, however, begs the gentlemen not to imagine that he grudges either "the unavoidable loss of petty outlays," incident to his official situation, or his "long-continued gratuitous services." Would it not have been more delicate, then, not to have alluded to them, even "in print"?

I have throughout stated that I do not hold Mr. Neill to be responsible for what he has done; nor is he, any more than I was responsible for the error of fact which I repeated as it was told to me. But as soon as I discovered my error, I anxiously sought to retrieve it; and perhaps Mr. Neill might have found it more suitable to the occasion, if, instead of attempting to implicate the members of the Wernerian Society in the support of his fault, he had circulated an "Address," soliciting the Society's pardon for the unwarrantable assumption into which he had been betrayed, (in reliance on the *privacy* of the transaction,) of circulating a printed document, either representing truly, or misrepresenting, the affairs of the Society, without asking the permission of the Council, or even submitting to them a proof-sheet. Mr. Neill now declares that the President had authorized the document. Did I not from the beginning express my confident belief that such was the case? The proof-sheet was submitted to the President; and he returned it, (to the Secretary,) "merely marking in the envelope, that he saw no objection to the extracts." (*Address*, p. 3.) The fact is thus placed in its true light. If the

President had stated to the Secretary, (as he ought to have done,) that he considered the circulation of the "Extracts" was uncalled for and improper—would Mr. Neill have committed himself in such a measure?

I now terminate my unpleasant duty. My object is fulfilled. The Wernerian Society is in the progress of regeneration. I have done justice to my regard for Mr. Neill, by disclaiming any unfriendly feeling against him, in spite of his reckless attack upon me,—at the same time that I have shown him, where I might press upon an open sore, if I were so disposed. And I have drawn the eyes of the public upon a gentleman, who, if he had made a different use of his opportunities, might have perpetuated his fame for ages, instead of stripping himself of the honours which he has won in past days, and leaving the world in nakedness. Mr. Neill is very much mistaken in supposing that I feel "enmity," or "hostility" against the Professor of Natural History. I am only sorry that he who has hitherto done so much service to the Wernerian Society, to the University Museum, and to Mineralogy, should not now see his own interest; and I declare my sentiments plainly and openly. But I would that the respect which all men feel for his past services, were not to be supplanted by regret for the obstructions which he is now placing in the path of science in Edinburgh.

Finally, I may inform those of my friends who suppose that I have been acting in concert with other persons, during the recent exposure of the system which obtains in the Wernerian Society and the University Museum, that I am solely responsible for what I have done, having acted on the suggestion of no one; and that if there be fault found with me, I do not feel myself incapacitated for the burden, since I believe I have done, if not what was "expedient" in regard to myself, at least what was upright and just. And I may further say, that what I have done, I would, and will do again, if occasion require it, so long as my independence can maintain that spirit of disgust by which I am now led to point my finger at a sickly and overgrown monopoly.

11, Gardner's Crescent, }
September 25, 1830. }

APPENDIX.

LETTER FROM DR. KNOX TO MR. CHEEK.

MY DEAR SIR,

IN answer to your inquiry as to the particular reason why the Committee appointed by the Wernerian Society in 1824, and of which I was a member, delayed to report on the state of the library, I can only inform you that the statement which I formerly gave you on this subject, and which you have recorded in your Journal, was founded upon the following fact. The Committee having met, ascertained,—and the discovery was a novel one, I believe, to most of us,—that no one could enter the hall or room in which the Wernerian Society was permitted to meet, on any pretence whatever, without having first obtained permission in writing from Professor Jameson, the President of the Society. I repeat, and my memory is perfect on this matter, though I have no memorandum of the fact, that the exclusion of all persons from that room, was the first point distinctly made out by the Committee, and to me at least it was a perfectly novel discovery. But I am not aware that any of us ever objected to the system of exclusion, or deemed it hard that Mr. Jameson should have the right of making the sole use of his own private room ;—all that I wondered at was, that such a selection of an apartment for a public society could ever have been made. There are circumstances which impress these matters strongly on my mind, and make me feel astonished that Mr. Neill could venture to doubt that this was at least one cause of the Committee not proceeding in its labours, since the facts themselves must be so well known to him ; and I will venture to affirm it, without the least fear of contradiction, to every individual member of that Society. The circumstances to which I more particularly allude, are, that this exclusion extended to every body, including the librarian, Mr. Neill himself, and the very Principal of the University, as I was most solemnly assured, and with great earnestness, by Mr. Jameson's own confidential secretary.

It will no doubt be in your recollection, that soon after the publication of your first observations in the Edinburgh Journal of Natural and Geographical Science, which at that time I had not read, though aware of their existence, I asked you, without reflecting on the impropriety of the question, who it was that had given you the facts, whatever they might be, on which you had proceeded ? which question you very properly declined answering. It was only after Mr. Neill's "Extracts" appeared, that I stated to you, in plain language, that these extracts were full of misrepresentations and nonsense, and

were altogether unworthy of Mr. Neill, whose character for good sense, honesty, and correct feelings on every occasion, I had myself been witness to for a great number of years. In this, the only conversation, which I held with you on the subject of these "Extracts," sent under the form of a circular to me, and I believe to other members of the Society,—indeed, the only conversation which, to the best of my recollection, I have had on the subject of the Wernerian Society since the year 1825, so little part have I taken in its affairs,—I assigned to you only one cause of the delay of the Committee of the Society, which indeed I thought sufficient to satisfy any one; but since I am now forced to speak out, by the unwarrantable measures of our secretary, I may state to you other reasons why the proceedings of the Committee could not possibly go on. For, 1st, I beg of you to remark that the librarian had no access to the library,—that he possessed no catalogue of the books,—that the books were known to us not to be in the apartment where the Society met,—that we knew they were not in the hands of the members,—that no one pretended to know where they were: but every thing showed to us distinctly that we were about to come into violent collision and hostility with the president of the Society, which one and all of us declined doing.

I beg of you to observe, that Mr. Arnott did not proceed early to the Continent,—that he breakfasted with me in my house in Nicolson Square, expressly on this business, prior to his departure,—that Mr. Adie and myself were always in town, and we formed a majority of the Committee,—and that all who know us will feel, and the Transactions of the Society will show, that the charge of a dislike to labour made by Mr. Neill, particularly against me, could never have been more unhappily brought against any individual. But about that time I began to discover the prevalence of the system, with regard to the Society, which appears to have led to such important consequences; and determined thenceforward to take no active part in it otherwise than in its scientific labours. Thus I may safely say, that since 1825, being the time at which I also began to be greatly occupied with other pursuits, I have ceased to attend its meetings, not from any disinclination to labour for it, for nothing ever gave me greater pleasure; but because time for this attendance was totally wanting. But further, since that period I have not only ceased to attend its meetings, which I have always regretted my inability to do; but I have ceased altogether to interest myself in its affairs. I am wholly unacquainted with its members, and know its proceedings only by the titles of the papers noticed in the billets circulated amongst the members, so that there is not a scientific body in existence, with whose doings I have been less acquainted, within the last five years, than with those of the Wernerian Society. The sum total of what I have said, is contained in the 271st page of the 10th No. of the Edin. Journ. of Nat. and Geog. Science.

Language has been used by Mr. Neill in an "Address to the Members of the Wernerian Society," a copy of which has been sent to me, relative to the library of the Society, and to the collection of objects of natural history, which ought to have belonged to it,—language, which must give pain to every one who, with me, feels a strong attachment to that Society. How particularly unbecoming it is of a secretary to disparage and sneer at the property of a scientific body, in the alienation of which property he had so ably assisted!!

Mr. Neill speaks, in the same pamphlet, of the fundamental laws of the Society; but who has seen these laws? Have they been printed? No. Has a copy been given to each member at his entrance into the Society? Never. Are they placed in a conspicuous part of the place of meeting? No such document is to be seen. Why does it happen that the laws of that Society are not to be found, in an intelligible and printed form, on the tables of its members, like the laws of the Royal Society, the Royal Medical, Royal Physical, and all other respectable Societies in the city? I will answer this question in a few words. The founders of the Society dared not publish them! You will observe in the Address, to which I now allude, p. 13, that so early as December 1824, the circumstance of a Society of Natural History not being in possession of a Museum of objects of natural history, attracted my attention, the more particularly that I found myself excluded, with all other scientific men, from the public Museum of Natural History in this city; and on a motion made by me, the Council directed "that the state of the objects of natural history presented to the Society be inquired into, immediately after the books shall have been arranged." It was then I discovered that by a manœuvre of I know not whom, but of an extremely dishonest and reprehensible character, the Society by its original laws, which had never been promulgated to its members, was for ever prevented from acquiring any property in that department, which alone interested them, and without which they were nothing. It was then I was told that by a written law, which, however, I have never yet seen, all specimens of objects in natural history, presented to the Society, were to be *deposited* in the Museum of the University; the Members of the Society retaining the right of *INSPECTING* them *at proper times*. Who the proposer and passer of this law might be, I know not; but I will take it upon me to say, that its whole character, its style, and manner, the equivocal use of the word "*deposit*," the depriving the Society of the possession of its donations,—in short the whole proceeding, is most ungentlemanlike, and most dishonest. And who has ever seen this collection, which ought to have belonged to the Wernerian Society; but which evidently does not belong to them, in consequence of laws which it is pretended they themselves have made? Is it not considered insanity in a man in ordinary life to denude himself of his own property? And, in point of fact, is it not true that the Members of the Wernerian Society are excluded from the Museum, where the objects that have been presented to them are deposited? Mr. Neill himself admits that it is; p. 15. And what can be more equivocal than the use of such phrases as "*inspecting at proper times*?" Who is to determine the proper time? Must the scientific man, in pursuit of a little knowledge, be daily, almost hourly, obliged to write official letters to the Regius Keeper, requesting permission to examine the colouring of an insect, or the characters of a mineral? If it be desired that science should flourish in this country, it certainly should not be thus trammelled.

I cannot, for obvious reasons, put Mr. Neill right, to any great extent, regarding the number and quality of the donations, which, by the kindness of members and strangers, have been presented to the Society; but this I will say, that his own books will tell him that the statement made by him in the Address, p. 14, is not correct. Did his modesty prevent him from naming the pelican, I think, of New

Holland, which he himself presented to the Society? But I do not wish to dwell on these facts. The main point, from which the members of the Society ought never to depart for a moment, nor allow their attention to be distracted, is that if a Museum does not exist, as Mr. Neill says it does not, the cause of this deplorable, I may almost say disgraceful circumstance, is solely owing to the individual, whoever he may be, who penned and carried Law VII. of the Society's code, for this is the number which Mr. Neill gives to an enactment without a parallel, I do firmly believe, in the history of scientific societies. But that person was not Mr. Neill—I believe him to be utterly incapable of such a doing. I have known that gentleman now for many years, and have been connected with him in a variety of transactions,—some of which were not without their intricacy and perplexity,—and I have ever found him to be possessed of all the amiable and honourable qualities we could desire in a man. I repeat, then, that I acquit Mr. Neill of all blame in these transactions; but he ought not to lend himself to them. Let the framer of that law name himself, and what I have here said will be “tarts and cheesecakes” to what will follow.

Lastly, you have mentioned to me in conversation that you have received lately a foolish letter from Mr. Neill, in which my name is mixed up with that of another member of the Society, Dr. Gillies, a gentleman whom I never saw, and with whom I never communicated in any way; and something is said in that letter, as you inform me, regarding a dispute “between Dr. Gillies, myself, and the Wernerian Society,” which is just as true as to say that we are now disputing with the government of Mexico. For a long period, I repeat, I have taken no part in the transactions of the Society, having been entirely engrossed in my own affairs; and indeed never having met with any member of the Society, excepting our excellent Librarian, whom, it is true, I have frequently seen, but whose conversation was undoubtedly directed to very different matters. From the pages of your Journal, I learned, for the first time, for five years, that the affairs of the Society did not flow on smoothly; and from the “*Extracts*” and “*Address*” of Mr. Neill, I was, for the same period, first made acquainted with the private business of the Society.

If Mr. Neill had at a private meeting of the Society stated his opinions, no possible fault could have been found with him, and all these matters could have been adjusted in a very brief space, by showing him the folly of imagining that I had commenced a dispute with the Wernerian Society. But I must consider his circulating his “*Address*,” as a most unwarrantable measure. However, I do not reproach Mr. Neill: let his employer look to it.

Amongst other donations, perhaps Mr. Neill may remember the bones of a seal, taken from the marine deposit between Loch Lomond and the Clyde, presented by a gentleman whose name I forget, and which the President and his Council mistook for those of a fox. In mentioning the Council of the Society, I hope I give no offence to any one, since it really did not exist. I myself was a Member of Council for two years, during a very active period of the Society's labours; and, for that period at least, the Council was never summoned to meet—so that no blame can attach to them in this instance.

Had the object of your reports been to attack the character of the Society, I should have felt, with many others, the greatest regret; but no impartial person can read them, I think, without perceiving that an assertion of this kind is without foundation, though I frankly admit that I perused these reports hastily, and have had no opportunity of re-examining them.

In what way the Society will receive the publication of its private business by the Secretary, and of an Address said to exculpate the Society from charges, which, as far as I know, were never made against it, I cannot now conjecture; but I do not think it consistent with their honour that they should pass it over in silence.

If there be any other information which, as a Member of the Society, I can with propriety state to you on these matters, I shall be happy to furnish you with it. After what has been said and done, I do not think myself bound by any courtesy towards Mr. Jameson or Mr. Neill; but against a Society for which I have so much respect, I shall certainly not be stimulated by malicious folly to say any thing unbecoming. I am, &c.

ROBERT KNOX.

Newington, Aug. 30, 1830.

