ADDRESS

BY

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Gentlemen of the British Association,—I esteem it the greatest honour of my life that I am called upon to assume the office of your President. In that capacity, and as representing your body, I may be allowed to advert to the gratifying reception which the British Association met with on their former visit to this region of mining and manufacturing industry, and, as a member of the community which you have again honoured with a visit, I undertake to convey to you the assurance of a renewed and hearty welcome. A quarter of a century has elapsed since the Association assembled in this town, and in no former period of equal duration has so great a progress been made in physical knowledge. In mechanical science, and especially in those branches of it which are concerned in the application of steam power to effect interchange between distant communities, the progress made since 1838 has no parallel in history. The railway system was then in its infancy, and the great problem of trans-Atlantic steam navigation had only received its complete solution in the preceding year. Since that time railways have extended to every continent, and steamships have covered the ocean. These reflections claim our attention on this occasion, because the locality in which we hold our present meeting is the birthplace of railways, and because the coal-mines of this district have contributed more largely than any others to supply the motive power by which steam communication by land and water has been established on so gigantic a scale.

The history of railways shows what grand results may have their origin in small beginnings. When coal was first conveyed in this neighbourhood from the pit to the shipping-place on the Tyne, the pack-horse, carrying a burden of 3 cwt., was the only mode of transport employed. As soon as roads suitable for wheeled carriages were formed, carts were introduced, and this first step in mechanical appliance to facilitate transport had the effect of increasing the load which the horse was enabled to convey from 3 cwt. to 17 cwt. The next improvement consisted in laying wooden bars or rails for the wheels of the carts to run upon, and this was followed by the substitution of the four-wheeled wagon for the two-wheeled cart. By this further application of mechanical principles the original horseload of 3 cwt. was augmented to 42 cwt. These were important results, and they were not obtained without the shipwreck of the fortunes of at least one adventurous man whose ideas were in advance of the times in which he lived. We read, in a record published in the year 1649, that "one Master Beaumont, a gentleman of great ingenuity and rare parts, adventured into the mines of Northumberland with his £30,000, and brought with him many rare engines not then known in that shire, and wagons with one horse to carry down coal from the pits to the river, but within a few years he consumed all his money and rode home upon his light horse." The next step in the progress of railways was the attachment of slips of iron to the wooden rails. Then came the iron tramway, consisting of cast-iron bars of an angular section : in this arrangement the upright flange of the bar acted as a guide to keep the wheel on the track. The next advance was an important one, and consisted in transferring the guiding flange from the rail to the wheel: this improvement enabled cast-iron edge rails to be used. Finally, in 1820, after the lapse of about 200 years from the first employment of wooden bars, wrought-iron rails, rolled in long lengths, and of suitable section, were made in this neighbourhood, and eventually superseded all other forms of railway. Thus, the railway system, like all large inventions, has risen to its present importance by a series of steps; and so gradual has been its progress, that Europe finds itself committed to a gauge fortuitously determined by the distance between the wheels of the carts for which wooden rails were originally laid down.

Last of all came the locomotive engine, that crowning achievement of mechanical science, which enables us to convey a load of 200 tons at a cost of fuel scarcely exceeding that of the corn and hay which the original pack-horse consumed in conveying its load of 3 cwt. an equal distance.

It was chiefly in this locality that the railway system was thus reared from earliest infancy to full maturity, and amongst the many names associated with its growth, that of George Stephenson stands preeminent.

In thus glancing at the history of railways, we may observe how promptly the inventive faculty of man supplies the device which the circumstances of the moment require. No sooner is a road formed fit for wheeled carriages to pass along, than the cart takes the place of the pack-saddle: no sooner is the wooden railway provided than the wagon is substituted for the cart: and no sooner is an iron railway formed, capable of carrying heavy loads, than the locomotive engine is found ready to commence its career. As in the vegetable kingdom fit conditions of soil and climate quickly cause the appearance of suitable plants, so in the intellectual world fitness of time and circumstance promptly calls forth appropriate devices. The seeds of invention exist, as it were, in the air, ready to germinate whenever suitable conditions arise, and no legislative interference is needed to ensure their growth in proper season.

The coal-fields of this district, so intimately connected with the railway system, both in its origin and maintenance, will doubtless receive much attention from the Association at their present meeting.

To persons who contend that all geological phenomena may be attributed to causes identical in nature and degree with those now in operation, the formation of coal must present peculiar difficulty. The rankness of vegetation which must have existed in the carboniferous era, and the uniformity of climate which appears to have prevailed almost from the Poles to the Equator, would seem to imply a higher temperature of the earth's crust, and an atmosphere more laden with humidity and carbonic acid than exist in our day. But whatever may have been the geological conditions affecting the origin of coal, we may regard the deposits of that mineral as vast magazines of power stored up at periods immeasurably distant for our use.

The principle of conservation of force and the relationship now established between heat and motion, enable us to trace back the effects which we now derive from coal to equivalent agencies exercised at the periods of its formation. The philosophical mind of George Stephenson, unaided by theoretical knowledge, rightly saw that coal was the embodiment of power originally derived from the sun. That small pencil of solar radiation which is arrested by our planet, and which constitutes less than the 2000-millionth part of the total energy sent forth from the sun, must be regarded as the power which enabled the plants of the carboniferous period to wrest the carbon they required from the oxygen with which it was combined, and eventually to deposit it as the solid material of coal. In our day, the reunion of that carbon with oxygen restores the energy expended in the former process, and thus we are enabled to utilize the power originally derived from the luminous centre of our planetary system.

But the agency of the sun in originating coal does not stop at this point. In every period of geological history the waters of the ocean have been lifted by the action of the sun and precipitated in rain upon the earth. This has given rise to all those sedimentary actions by which mineral substances have been collected at particular localities, and there deposited in a stratified form with a protecting cover to preserve them for future use. The phase of the earth's existence suitable for the extensive formation of coal appears to have passed away for ever; but the quantity of that invaluable mineral which has been stored up throughout the globe for our benefit is sufficient (if used discreetly) to serve the purposes of the human race for many thousands of years. In fact, the entire quantity of coal may be considered as practically inexhaustible. Turning, however, to our own particular country, and contemplating the rate at which we are expending those seams of coal which yield the best quality of fuel, and can be worked at the least expense, we shall find much cause for anxiety. The greatness of England much depends upon the superiority of her coal in cheapness and quality over that of other nations; but we have already drawn from our choicest mines a far larger quantity of coal than has been raised in all other parts of the world put together, and the time is not remote when we shall have to encounter the disadvantages of increased cost of working and diminished value of produce.

Estimates have been made at various periods of the time which would be required to produce complete exhaustion of all the accessible coal in the British Islands. These estimates are extremely discordant; but the discrepancies arise, not from any important disagreement as to the available quantity of coal, but from the enormous difference in the rate of consumption at the various dates when the estimates were made, and also from the different views which have been entertained as to the probable increase of consumption in future years. The quantity of coal yearly worked from British mines has been almost trebled during the last twenty years, and has probably increased tenfold since the commencement of the present century; but as this increase has taken place pending the introduction of steam navigation and railway transit, and under exceptional conditions of manufacturing development, it would be too much to assume that it will continue to advance with equal rapidity. The statistics collected by Mr. Hunt, of the Mining Record Office, show that at the end of 1861 the quantity of coal raised in the United Kingdom had reached the enormous total of 86 millions of tons, and that the average annual increase of the eight preceding years amounted to $2\frac{3}{4}$ millions of tons. Let us inquire, then, what will be the duration of our coal-fields if this more moderate rate of increase be maintained.

By combining the known thickness of the various workable seams of coal, and computing the area of the surface under which they lie, it is easy to arrive at an estimate of the total quantity comprised in our coal-bearing strata. Assuming 4000 feet as the greatest depth at which it will ever be possible to carry on mining operations, and rejecting all seams of less than 2 feet in thickness, the entire quantity of available coal existing in these Islands has been calculated to amount to about 80,000 millions of tons, which, at the present rate of consumption, would be exhausted in 930 years, but, with a continued yearly increase of $2\frac{3}{4}$ millions of tons, would only last 212 years. It is clear that long before complete exhaustion takes place, England will have ceased to be a coal-producing country on an extensive scale. Other nations, and especially the United States of America, which possess coal-fields 37 times more extensive than ours, will then be working more accessible beds at a smaller cost, and will be able to displace the English coal from every market. The question is, not how long our coal will endure before absolute exhaustion is effected, but how long will those particular coal-seams last which yield coal of a quality and at a price to enable this country to maintain her present supremacy in manufacturing industry. So far as this particular district is concerned, it is generally admitted that 200 years will be sufficient to exhaust the principal seams even at the present rate of working. If the production should continue to increase as it is now doing, the duration of those seams will not reach half that period. How the case may stand in other coal-mining districts I have not the means of ascertaining; but as the best and most accessible coal will always be worked in preference to any other, I fear the same rapid exhaustion of our most valuable seams is everywhere taking place. Were we reaping the full advantage of all the coal we burnt, no objection could be made to the largeness of the quantity, but we are using it wastefully and extravagantly in all its applications. It is probable that fully one-fourth of the entire quantity of coal raised from our mines is used in the production of heat for motive power; but, much as we are in the habit of admiring the powers of the steam-engine, our present knowledge of the mechanical energy of heat shows that we realize in that engine only a small part of the thermic effect of the fuel. That a pound of coal should, in our best engines, produce an effect equal to raising a weight of a million pounds a foot high, is a result which bears the character of the marvellous, and seems to defy all further improvement. Yet the investigations of recent years have demonstrated the fact that the mechanical energy resident in a pound of coal, and liberated by its combustion, is capable of raising to the same height 10 times that weight. But although the power of our most economical steam-engines has reached, or perhaps somewhat exceeded, the limit of a million pounds raised a foot high per lb. of coal, yet, if we take the average effect obtained from steam-engines of the various constructions now in use, we shall not be justified in assuming it at more than one-third of that amount. It follows therefore that the average quantity of coal which we expend in realizing a given effect by means of the steam-engine is about 30 times greater than would be requisite with an absolutely perfect heat-engine.

The causes which render the application of heat so uneconomic in the steam-engine have been brought to light by the discovery of the dynamical theory of heat; and it now remains for mechanicians, guided by the light they have thus received, to devise improved practical methods of converting the heat of combustion into available power.

Engines in which the motive power is excited by the communication of heat to fluids already existing in the aëriform condition, as in those of Stirling, Ericson, and Siemens, promise to afford results greatly superior to those obtained from the steam-engine. They are all based upon the principle of employing fuel to generate sensible heat, to the exclusion of latent heat, which is only another name for heat which has taken the form of unprofitable motion amongst the particles of the fluid to which it is applied. They also embrace what is called the regenerative principle—a term which has, with reason, been objected to, as implying a restoration of expended heat. The so called "regenerator" is a contrivance for arresting unutilized heat rejected by the engine, and causing it to operate in aid and consequent reduction of fuel.

It is a common observation that before coal is exhausted some other motive agent will be discovered to take its place, and electricity is generally cited as the coming power. Electricity, like heat, may be converted into motion, and both theory and practice have demonstrated that its mechanical application does not involve so much waste of power as takes place in a steam-engine; but whether we use heat or electricity as a motive power, we must equally depend upon chemical affinity as the source of supply. The act of uniting to form a chemical product liberates an energy which assumes the form of heat or electricity, from either of which states it is convertible into mechanical effect. In contemplating, therefore, the application of electricity as a motive power, we must bear in mind that we shall still require to effect chemical combinations, and in so doing to consume materials. But where are we to find materials so economical for this purpose as the coal we derive from the earth and the oxygen we obtain from the air? The latter costs absolutely nothing; and every pound of coal, which in the act of combustion enters into chemical combination, renders more than two and a half pounds of oxygen available for power. We cannot look to water as a practicable source of oxygen, for there it exists in the combined state, requiring expenditure of chemical energy for its separation from hydrogen. It is in the atmosphere alone that it can be found in that free state in which we require it, and there does not appear to me to be the remotest chance, in an economic point of view, of being able to dispense with the oxygen of the air as a source either of thermodynamic or electrodynamic effect. But to use this oxygen we must consume some oxidizable substance, and coal is the cheapest we can procure.

There is another source of motive power to which I am induced to refer, as exhibiting a further instance in which solar influence affords the means of obtaining mechanical effects from inanimate agents. I allude to the power of water descending from heights to which it has been lifted by the evaporative action of the sun. To illustrate the great advantage of collecting water for power in elevated situations I may refer to the waterworks of Greenock, where the collecting-reservoirs are situated at an elevation of 512 feet above the river Clyde. The daily yield of these reservoirs is said to be nearly 100,000 tons of water, which is derived from the rainfall on an area of 5000 acres. The power obtainable from this quantity and head of water is equal to that of a steam-engine of about 2000 horsepower, and the whole effect might be realized on the margin of the river by bringing down the water in a pipe of sufficient capacity, and causing it to act as a column on suitable machinery at the foot of the descent. But the hydraulic capabilities of the Greenock reservoirs sink into insignificance when compared with those of other localities where the naturally collected waters of large areas of surface descend from great elevations in rapid rivers or vertical falls. Alpine regions abound in falls which, with the aid of artificial works to impound the surplus water and equalize the supply, would yield thousands of horse-power; and there is at least one great river in the world which in a single plunge developes sufficient power to carry on all the manufacturing operations of mankind if concentrated in its neighbourhood. Industrial populations have scarcely yet extended to those regions which afford this profusion of motive power, but we may anticipate the time when these natural falls will be brought into useful operation. In that day the heat of the sun, by raising the water to heights from which to flow in these great rapids and cascades, will become the means of economizing the precious stores of motive power, which the solar energy differently directed has accumulated at a remote period of geological history, and which when once expended may probably never be replaced.

I have hitherto spoken of coal only as a source of mechanical power, but it is also extensively used for the kindred purpose of relaxing those cohesive forces which resist our efforts to give new forms and conditions to solid substances. In these applications, which are generally of a metallurgical nature, the same wasteful expenditure of fuel is everywhere observable. In an ordinary furnace employed to fuse or soften any solid substance, it is the excess of the heat of combustion over that of the body heated which alone is rendered available for the purpose intended. The rest of the heat, which in many instances constitutes by far the greater proportion of the whole, is allowed to escape uselessly into the chimney. The combustion also in common furnaces is so imperfect, that clouds of powdered carbon, in the form of smoke, envelope our manufacturing towns, and gases, which ought to be completely oxygenized in the fire, pass into the air with two-thirds of their heating power undeveloped.

Some remedy for this state of things, we may hope, is at hand, in the gas regenerative furnaces recently introduced by Mr. Siemens. In these furnaces the rejected heat is arrested by a so-called "regenerator," as in Stirling's air-engine, and is communicated to the new fuel before it enters the furnace. The fuel, however, is not solid coal, but gas previously evolved from coal. A stream of this gas raised to a high temperature by the rejected heat of combustion is admitted into the furnace, and there meets a stream of atmospheric air also raised to a high temperature by the same agency. In the combination which then ensues, the heat evolved by the combustion is superadded to the heat previously acquired by the gases. Thus, in addition to the advantage of economy, a greater intensity of heat is attained than by the combustion of unheated fuel. In fact, as the heat evolved in the furnace, or so much of it as is not communicated to the bodies exposed to its action, continually returns to augment the effect of the new fuel, there appears to be no limit to the temperature attainable, except the powers of resistance in the materials of which the furnace is composed.

With regard to smoke, which is at once a waste and a nuisance, having myself taken part with Dr. Richardson and Mr. Longridge in a series of experiments made in this neighbourhood in the years 1857–58 for the purpose of testing the practicability of preventing smoke in the combustion of bituminous coal in steam-engine boilers, I can state with perfect confidence that, so far as the raising of steam is concerned, the production of smoke is unnecessary and inexcusable. The experiments to which I refer proved beyond a doubt, that by an easy method of firing, combined with a due admission of air and a proper arrangement of firegrate, not involving any complexity, the emission of smoke might be perfectly avoided, and that the prevention of the smoke increased the economic value of the fuel and the evaporative power of the boiler. As a rule, there is more smoke evolved from the fires of steam-engines than from any others, and it is in these fires that it may be most easily prevented. But in the furnaces used for most manufacturing operations the prevention of smoke is much more difficult, and will probably not be effected until a radical change is made in the system of applying fuel for such operations.

Not less wasteful and extravagant is our mode of employing coal for domestic purposes. It is computed that the consumption of coal in dwelling-houses amounts in this country to a ton per head per annum of the entire population; so that upwards of twenty-nine millions of tons are annually expended in Great Britain alone for domestic use. If any one will consider that one pound of coal applied to a well-constructed steam-engine boiler evaporates 10 lbs. or one gallon of water, and if he will compare this effect with the insignificant quantity of water which can be boiled off in steam by a pound of coal consumed in an ordinary kitchen fire, he will be able to appreciate the enormous waste which takes place by the common method of burning coal for culinary purposes. The simplest arrangements to confine the heat and concentrate it upon the operation to be performed would suffice to obviate this reprehensible waste. So also in warming houses we consume in our open fires about five times as much coal as will produce the same heating effect when burnt in a close and properly constructed stove. Without sacrificing the luxury of a visible fire, it would be easy, by attending to the principles of radiation and convection, to render available the greater part of the heat which is now so improvidently discharged into the chimney. These are homely considerations—too much so, perhaps, for an assembly like this; but I trust that an abuse involving a useless expenditure exceeding in amount our income-tax, and capable of being rectified by attention to scientific principles, may not be deemed unworthy of the notice of some of those whom I have the honour of addressing.

The introduction of the Davy lamp was a great event in the history of coal-mining, not as effecting any great diminution of those disastrous accidents which still devastate every colliery district, but as a means of enabling mines to be worked which, from their greater explosive tendencies, would otherwise have been deemed inaccessible. Thus, while the Davy lamp has been of great benefit both to the public and the proprietors of coal, it has been the means of leading the miners into more perilous workings, and the frequency of accident by explosion has in consequence not been diminished to the extent which was originally expected. The Davy lamp is a beautiful application of a scientific principle to effect a practical purpose, and with fair treatment its efficiency is indisputable; but where Davy lamps are entrusted to hundreds of men, and amongst them to many careless and reckless persons, it is impossible to guard entirely against gross negligence and its disastrous consequences. In coal-mines where the most perfect system of ventilation prevails, and where proper regulations are, as far as practicable, enforced in regard to the use of Davy lamps, deplorable accidents do occasionally occur, and it is impossible at present to point out what additional precautions would secure immunity from such calamities. The only gleam of amelioration is in the fact that the loss of life in relation to the quantity of coal worked is on the decrease, from which we may infer that it is also on the decrease taken as a percentage on the number of miners employed.

The increase of the earth's temperature as we descend below the surface is a subject which has been discussed at previous Meetings of the British Association. It possesses great scientific interest as affecting the computed thickness of the crust which covers the molten mass assumed to constitute the interior portions of the earth, and it is also of great practical importance as determining the depth at which it would be possible to pursue the working of coal and other minerals. The deepest coal-mine in this district is the Monkwearmouth Colliery, which reaches a depth of 1800 feet below the surface of the ground, and nearly as much below the level of the sea. The observed temperature of the strata at this depth agrees pretty closely with what has been ascertained in other localities, and shows that the increase takes place at the rate of 1° Fahr. to about 60 feet of depth. Assuming the temperature of subterranean fusion to be 3000°, and that the increase of heat at greater depths continues uniform (which, however, is by no means certain), the thickness of the film which separates us from the fiery ocean beneath will be about thirty-four miles—a thickness which may be fairly represented by the skin of a peach taken in relation to the body of the fruit which it covers. The depth of 4000 feet, which has been assumed as the limit at which coal could be worked, would probably be attended by an increase of heat exceeding the powers of human endurance. In the Monkwearmouth colliery, which is less than half that depth, the temperature of the air in the workings is about 84° Fahr., which is considered to be nearly as high as is consistent with the great bodily exertion necessary in the operation of mining. The computations therefore of the duration of coal would probably require a considerable reduction in consequence of too great a depth being assumed as practicable.

At the last Meeting of the British Association in this town, the importance of establishing an office for mining records was brought under the notice of the Council by Mr. Sopwith, and measures were taken which resulted in the formation of the present Mining Records Office. The British Association may congratulate itself upon having thus been instrumental in establishing an office in which plans of abandoned mines are preserved for the information of those who, at a future period, may be disposed to incur the expense of bringing those mines again into operation. But more than this is required. Many of the inferior seams of coal can be worked only in conjunction with those of superior quality, and they will be entirely lost if neglected until the choicer beds be exhausted. Although coal is private property, its duration is a national question, and Government interference would be justified to enforce such modes of working as the national interests demand. But to enable Government to exercise any supervision and control, a complete mining survey of all our coal-fields should be made, and full plans, sections, and reports lodged at the Mining Records Office for the information of the legislature and of the public in general.

Before dismissing the subject of coal, it may be proper to notice the recent discovery by Berthelot of a new form of carburetted hydrogen possessing twice the illuminating power of ordinary coal-gas. Berthelot succeeded in procuring this gas by passing hydrogen between the carbon electrodes of a powerful battery. Dr. Odling has since shown that the same gas may be produced by mixing carbonic oxide with an equal volume of light carburetted hydrogen and exposing the mixture in a porcelain tube to an intense heat. Still more recently, Mr. Siemens has detected the same gas in the highly heated regenerators of his furnaces, and there is now every reason to believe that the new gas will become practically available for illuminating-purposes. Thus it is that discoveries which in the first instance interest the philosopher only almost invariably initiate a rapid series of steps leading to results of great practical importance to mankind.

In the course of the preceding observations I have had occasion to speak of the sun as the great source of motive power on our earth, and I must not omit to refer to recent discoveries connected with that most glorious body. Of all the results which science has produced within the last few years, none has been more unexpected than that by which we are enabled to test the materials of which the sun is made, and prove their identity, in part at least, with those of our planet. The spectrum experiments of Bunsen and Kirchhoff have not only shown all this, but they have also corroborated previous conjectures as to the luminous envelope of the sun. I have still to advert to Mr. Nasmyth's remarkable discovery, that the bright surface of the sun is composed of an aggregation of apparently solid forms, shaped like willow-leaves or some well-known forms of Diatomaceæ, and interlacing one another in every direction. The forms are so regular in size and shape, as to have led to a suggestion from one of our profoundest philosophers of their being organisms, possibly even partaking of the nature of life, but at all events closely connected with the heating and vivifying influences of the sun. These mysterious objects, which, since Mr. Nasmyth discovered them, have been seen by other observers as well, are computed to be each not less than 1000 miles in length and about 100 miles in breadth. The enormous chasms in the sun's photosphere, to which we apply the diminutive term "spots," exhibit the extremities of these leaf-like bodies pointing inwards, and fringing the sides of the cavern far down into the abyss. Sometimes they form a sort of rope or bridge across the chasm, and appear to adhere to one another by lateral attraction. I can imagine nothing more deserving of the scrutiny of observers than these extraordinary forms. The sympathy also which appears to exist between forces operating in the sun and magnetic forces belonging to the earth merits a continuance of that close attention which it has already received from the British Association, and of labours such as General Sabine has with so much ability and effect devoted to the elucidation of the subject. I may here notice that most remarkable phenomenon which was seen by independent observers at two different places on the 1st of September 1859. A sudden outburst of light, far exceeding the brightness of the sun's surface, was seen to take place, and sweep like a drifting cloud over a portion of the solar face. This was attended with magnetic disturbances of unusual intensity and with exhibitions of aurora of extraordinary brilliancy. The identical instant at which the effusion of light was observed was recorded by an abrupt and strongly marked deflection in the self-registering instruments at Kew. The phenomenon as seen was probably only part of what actually took place, for the magnetic storm in the midst of which it occurred commenced before and continued after the event. If conjecture be allowable in such a case, we may suppose that this remarkable event had some connexion with the means by which the sun's heat is renovated. It is a reasonable supposition that the sun was at that time in the act of receiving a more than usual accession of new energy; and the theory which assigns the maintenance of its power to cosmical matter plunging into it with that prodigious velocity which gravitation would impress upon it as it approached to actual contact with the solar orb, would afford an explanation of this sudden exhibition of intensified light in harmony with the knowledge we have now attained that arrested motion is represented by equivalent heat. Telescopic observations will probably add new facts to guide our judgment on this subject, and, taken in connexion with observations on terrestrial magnetism, may enlarge and correct our views respecting the nature of heat, light, and electricity. Much as we have yet to learn respecting these agencies, we know sufficient to infer that they cannot be transmitted from the sun to the earth except by communication from particle to particle of intervening matter. Not that I speak of particles in the sense of the atomist. Whatever our views may be of the nature of particles, we must conceive them as centres invested with surrounding forces. We have no evidence, either from our senses or otherwise, of these centres being occupied by solid cores of indivisible incompressible matter essentially distinct from force. Dr. Young has shown that even in so dense a body as water, these nuclei, if they exist at all, must be so small in relation to the intervening spaces, that a hundred men distributed at equal distances over the whole surface of England would represent their relative magnitude and distance. What then must be these relative dimensions in highly rarefied matter? But why encumber our conceptions of material forces by this unnecessary imagining of a central molecule? If we retain the forces and reject the molecule, we shall still have every property we can recognize in matter by the use of our senses or by the aid of our reason. Viewed in this light, matter is not merely a thing subject to force, but is itself composed and constituted of force.

The dynamical theory of heat is probably the most important discovery of the present century. We now know that each Fahrenheit degree of temperature in a pound of water is equivalent to a weight of 772 lbs. lifted 1 foot high, and that these amounts of heat and power are reciprocally convertible into one another. This theory of heat, with its numerical computation, is chiefly due to the labours of Mayer and Joule, though many other names, including those of Thomson and Rankine, are deservedly associated with its development. I speak of this discovery as one of the present age because it has been established in our time; but if we search back for earlier conceptions of the identity of heat and motion, we shall find (as we always do in such cases) that similar ideas have been held before, though in a clouded and undemonstrated form. In the writings of Lord Bacon we find it stated that heat is to be regarded as motion and nothing else. In dilating upon this subject, that extraordinary man shows that he had grasped the true theory of heat to the utmost extent that was compatible with the state of knowledge existing in his time. Even Aristotle seems to have entertained the idea that motion was to be considered as the foundation not only of heat, but of all manifestations of matter; and, for aught we know, still earlier thinkers may have held similar views.

The science of gunnery, to which I shall make but slight allusion on this occasion, is intimately connected with the dynamical theory of heat. When gunpowder is exploded in a cannon, the immediate effect of the affinities by which the materials of the powder are caused to enter into new combinations, is to liberate a force which first appears as heat, and then takes the form of mechanical power communicated in part to the shot and in part to the products of explosion which are also propelled from the gun. The mechanical force of the shot is reconverted into heat when the motion is arrested by striking an object, and this heat is divided between the shot and the object struck, in the proportion of the work done or damage inflicted upon each. These considerations recently led me, in conjunction with my friend Captain Noble, to determine experimentally, by the heat elicited in the shot, the loss of effect due to its crushing when fired against iron plates. Joule's law, and the known velocity of the shot, enabled us to compute the number of dynamical units of heat representing the whole mechanical power in the projectile, and by ascertaining the number of units developed in it by impact, we arrived at the power which took effect upon the shot instead of the plate. These experiments showed an enormous absorption of power to be caused by the yielding nature of the materials of which projectiles are usually formed; but further experiments are required to complete the inquiry.

Whilst speaking of the subject of gunnery, I must pay a passing tribute of praise to that beautiful instrument invented and perfected by Major Navez of the Belgian Artillery, for determining, by means of electro-magnetism, the velocity of projectiles. This instrument has been of great value in recent investigations, and there are questions affecting projectiles which we can only hope to solve by its assistance. Experiments are still required to clear up several apparently anomalous effects in gunnery, and to determine the conditions most conducive to efficiency both as regards attack and defence. It is gratifying to see our Government acting in accordance with the enlightened principles of the age by carrying on scientific experiments to arrive at knowledge, which, in the arts of war as well as in those of peace, is proverbially recognized as the true source of human power.

Professor Tyndall's recent discoveries respecting the absorption and radiation of heat by vapours and permanent gases constitute important additions to our knowledge. The extreme delicacy of his experiments and the remarkable distinctness of their results render them beautiful examples of physical research. They are of great value as affording further illustrations of the vibratory actions in matter which constitute heat; but it is in connexion with the science of meteorology that they chiefly command our attention. From these experiments we learn that the minute quantity of water suspended as invisible vapour in the atmosphere acts as a warm clothing to the earth. The efficacy of this vapour in arresting heat is, in comparison with that of air, perfectly astounding. Although the atmosphere contains on an average but one particle of aqueous vapour to 200 of air, yet that single particle absorbs 80 times as much heat as the collective 200 particles of air. Remove, says Professor Tyndall, for a single summer night, the aqueous vapour from the air which overspreads this country, and you would assuredly destroy every plant incapable of bearing extreme cold. The warmth of our fields and gardens would pour itself unrequited into space, and the sun would rise upon an island held fast in the grip of frost. Many meteorological phenomena receive a feasible explanation from these investigations, which are probably destined to throw further light upon the functions of our atmosphere.

Few sciences have more practical value than meteorology, and there are few of which we as yet know so little. Nothing would contribute more to the saving of life and property, and to augmenting the general wealth of the world, than the ability to foresee with certainty impending changes of the weather. At present our means of doing so are exceedingly imperfect, but, such as they are, they have been employed with considerable effect by Admiral FitzRoy in warning mariners of the probable approach of storms. We may hope that so good an object will be effected with more unvarying success when we attain a better knowledge of the causes by which wind and rain, heat and cold are determined. The balloon explorations conducted with so much intrepidity by Mr. Glaisher, under the auspices of the British Association, may perhaps in some degree assist in enlightening us upon these important subjects. We have learnt from Mr. Glaisher's observations that the decrease of temperature with elevation does not follow the law previously assumed of 1° in 300 feet, and that in fact it follows no definite law at all. Mr. Glaisher appears also to have ascertained the interesting fact that rain is only precipitated when cloud exists in a double layer. Raindrops, he has found, diminish in size with elevation, merging into wet mist and ultimately into dry fog. Mr. Glaisher met with snow for a mile in thickness below rain, which is at variance with our preconceived ideas. He has also rendered good service by testing the efficiency of various instruments at heights which cannot be visited without personal danger.

The facility now given to the transmission of intelligence and the interchange of thought is one of the most remarkable features of the present age. Cheap and rapid postage to all parts of the world—paper and printing reduced to the lowest possible cost—electric telegraphs between nation and nation, town and town, and now even (thanks to the beautiful inventions of Professor Wheatstone) between house and house—all contribute to aid that commerce of ideas by which wealth and knowledge are augmented. But while so much facility is given to mental communication by new measures and new inventions, the fundamental art of expressing thought by written symbols remains as imperfect now as it has been for centuries past. It seems strange that while we actually possess a system of shorthand by which words can be recorded as rapidly as they can be spoken, we should persist in writing a slow and laborious longhand. It is intelligible that grown-up persons who have acquired the present conventional art of writing should be reluctant to incur the labour of mastering a better system; but there can be no reason why the rising generation should not be instructed in a method of writing more in accordance with the activity of mind which now prevails. Even without going so far as to adopt for ordinary use a complete system of stenography, which it is not easy to acquire, we might greatly abridge the time and labour of writing by the recognition of a few simple signs to express the syllables which are of most frequent occurrence in our language. Our words are in a great measure made up of such syllables as *com, con, tion, ing, able, ain, ent, est, ance,* &c. These we are now obliged to write out over and over again, as if time and labour expended in what may be termed visual speech were of no importance. Neither has our written character the advantage of distinctness to recommend it: it is only necessary to write such a word as "minimum" or "ammunition" to become aware of the want of sufficient difference between the letters we employ. I refrain from enlarging on this subject, because I conceive that it belongs to social more than to physical science, although the boundary which separates the two is sufficiently indistinct to permit of my alluding to it in the hope of procuring for it the attention which its importance deserves.

Another subject of a social character which demands our consideration is the much-debated question of weights and measures. Whatever difference of opinion there may be as to the comparative merits of decimal and duodecimal division, there can, at all events, be none as to the importance of assimilating the systems of measurement in different countries. Science suffers by the want of uniformity, because valuable observations made in one country are in a great measure lost to another from the labour required to convert a series of quantities into new denominations. International commerce is also impeded by the same cause, which is productive of constant inconvenience and frequent mistake. It is much to be regretted that two standards of measure so nearly alike as the English yard and the French metre should not be made absolutely identical. The metric system has already been adopted by other nations besides France, and is the only one which has any chance of becoming universal. We in England, therefore, have no alternative but to conform with France, if we desire general uniformity. The change might easily be introduced in scientific literature, and in that case it would probably extend itself by degrees amongst the commercial classes without much legislative pressure. Besides the advantage which would thus be gained in regard to uniformity, I am convinced that the adoption of the decimal division of the French scale would be attended with great convenience, both in science and commerce. I can speak from personal experience of the superiority of decimal measurement in all cases where accuracy is required in mechanical construction. In the Elswick Works, as well as in some other large establishments of the same description, the inch is adopted as the unit, and all fractional parts are expressed in decimals. No difficulty has been experienced in habituating the workmen to the use of this method, and it has greatly contributed to precision of workmanship. The inch, however, is too small a unit, and it would be advantageous to substitute the metre if general concurrence could be obtained. As to our thermometric scale, it was originally founded in error; it is also most inconvenient in division, and ought at once to be abandoned in favour of the Centigrade scale. The recognition of the metric system and of the Centigrade scale by the numerous men of science composing the British Association, would be a most important step towards effecting that universal adoption of the French standards in this country which sooner or later will inevitably take place; and the Association in its collective capacity might take the lead in this good work, by excluding in future all other standards from their published proceedings.

The recent discovery of the source of the Nile by Captains Speke and Grant has solved a problem in geography which has been a subject of speculation from the earliest ages. It is an honour to England that this interesting discovery has been made by two of her sons, and the British Association, which is accustomed to value every addition to knowledge for its own sake, whether or not it be attended with any immediate utility, will at once appreciate the importance of the discovery and the courage and devotion by which it has been accomplished. The Royal Geographical Society, under the able presidency of Sir Roderick Murchison, was chiefly instrumental in procuring the organization of the expedition which has resulted in this great achievement, and the success of the Society's labours in connexion with this and other cases of African exploration shows how much good may be effected by associations for the promotion of scientific objects.

The science of organic life has of late years been making great and rapid strides, and it is gratifying to observe that researches both in zoology and botany are characterized in the present day by great accuracy and elaboration.

Investigations patiently conducted upon true inductive principles cannot fail eventually to elicit the hidden laws which govern the animated world. Neither is there any lack of bold speculation contemporaneously with this painstaking spirit of inquiry. The remarkable work of Mr. Darwin promulgating the doctrine of natural selection has produced a profound sensation. The novelty of this ingenious theory, the eminence of its author, and his masterly treatment of the subject have perhaps combined to excite more enthusiasm in its favour than is consistent with that dispassionate spirit which it is so necessary top reserve in the pursuit of truth. Mr. Darwin's views have not passed unchallenged, and the arguments both for and against have been urged with great vigour by the supporters and opponents of the theory. Where good reasons can be shown on both sides of a question, the truth is generally to be found between the two extremes. In the present instance we may without difficulty suppose it to have been part of the great scheme of creation that natural selection should be permitted to determine variations amounting even to specific differences where those differences were matters of degree; but when natural selection is adduced as a cause adequate to explain the production of a new organ not provided for in original creation, the hypothesis must appear, to common apprehensions, to be pushed beyond the limits of reasonable conjecture. The Darwinian theory, when fully enunciated, founds the pedigree of living nature upon the most elementary form of vitalized matter. One step further would carry us back, without greater violence to probability, to inorganic rudiments, and then we should be called upon to recognize in ourselves, and in the exquisite elaborations of the animal and vegetable kingdoms, the ultimate results of mere material forces left free to follow their own unguided tendencies. Surely our minds would in that case be more oppressed with a sense of the miraculous than they now are in attributing the wondrous things around us to the creative hand of a Great presiding Intelligence.

The evidences bearing upon the antiquity of man have been recently produced in a collected and most logically-treated form by Sir Charles Lyell. It seems no longer possible to doubt that the human race has existed on the earth in a barbarian state for a period far exceeding the limit of historical record; but notwithstanding this great antiquity, the proofs still remain unaltered that man is the latest as well as the noblest work of God.

I will not run the risk of wearying this assembly by extending my remarks to other branches of science. In conclusion I will express a hope that when the time again comes round to receive the British Association in this town, its members will find the interval to have been as fruitful as the corresponding period on which we now look back. The tendency of progress is to quicken progress, because every acquisition in science is so much vantage ground for fresh attainment. We may expect, therefore, to increase our speed as we struggle forward; but however high we climb in the pursuit of knowledge we shall still see heights above us, and the more we extend our view, the more conscious we shall be of the immensity which lies beyond.