

SCIENCE

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ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE¹

It is now eighty years since this association first met at York, under the presidency of Earl Fitzwilliam. The object of the association was then explicitly stated: "To give a stronger impulse and a more systematic direction to scientific inquiry, to promote the intercourse of those who cultivate science in different parts of the British Empire with one another and with foreign philosophers, to obtain a more general attention to the objects of science and a removal of any disadvantages of a public kind which impede its progress."

In 1831 the workers in the domain of science were relatively few. The Royal Society, which was founded by Dr. Willis, Dr. Wilkins, and others, under the name of the "Invisible, or Philosophical College," about the year 1645, and which was incorporated in December, 1660, with the approval of King Charles II., was almost the only meeting-place for those interested in the progress of science; and its *Philosophical Transactions*, begun in March, 1664-5, almost the only medium of publication. Its character was described in the following words of a contemporary poem:

"This noble learned Corporation
Not for themselves are thus combined
To prove all things by demonstration
But for the public good of the nation
And general benefit of mankind."

The first to hive off from the Royal Society was the Linnean Society for the promotion of botanical studies, founded in 1788 by Sir James Edward Smith, Sir

¹ Portsmouth, 1911.

Joseph Banks, and other Fellows of the Royal Society; in 1807 it was followed by the Geological Society; at a later date the Society of Antiquaries, the Chemical, the Zoological, the Physical, the Mathematical, and many other societies were founded. And it was felt by those capable of forming a judgment that, as well expressed by Lord Playfair at Aberdeen in 1885, "Human progress is so identified with scientific thought, both in its conception and realization, that it seems as if they were alternative terms in the history of civilization." This is only an echo through the ages of an utterance of the great Englishman, Roger Bacon, who wrote in 1250 A.D.: "Experimental science has three great prerogatives over all other sciences: it verifies conclusions by direct experiment; it discovers truths which they could never reach; and it investigates the secrets of Nature, and opens to us a knowledge of the past and of the future."

The world has greatly changed since 1831; the spread of railways and the equipment of numerous lines of steamships have contributed to the peopling of countries at that time practically uninhabited. Moreover, not merely has travelling been made almost infinitely easier, but communication by post has been enormously expedited and cheapened; and the telegraph, the telephone, and wireless telegraphy have simplified as well as complicated human existence. Furthermore, the art of engineering has made such strides that the question "Can it be done?" hardly arises, but rather "Will it pay to do it?" In a word, the human race has been familiarized with the applications of science; and men are ready to believe almost anything, if brought forward in its name.

Education, too, in the rudiments of science has been introduced into almost all schools; young children are taught the

elements of physics and chemistry. The institution of a Section for Education in our Association (L) has had for its object the organizing of such instruction, and much useful advice has been proffered. The problem is, indeed, largely an educational one; it is being solved abroad in various ways—in Germany and in most European states by elaborate governmental schemes dealing with elementary and advanced instruction, literary, scientific, and technical; and in the United States and in Canada by the far-sightedness of the people: both employers and employees recognize the value of training and of originality, and on both sides sacrifices are made to ensure efficiency.

In England we have made technical education a local, not an imperial question; instead of half a dozen first-rate institutions of university rank, we have a hundred, in which the institutions are necessarily understaffed, in which the staffs are mostly overworked and underpaid; and the training given is that not for captains of industry, but for workmen and foremen. "Efficient captains cannot be replaced by a large number of fairly good corporals." Moreover, to induce scholars to enter these institutions, they are bribed by scholarships, a form of pauperization practically unknown in every country but our own; and to crown the edifice, we test results by examinations of a kind not adapted to gauge originality and character (if, indeed, these can ever be tested by examination), instead of, as on the Continent and in America, trusting the teachers to form an honest estimate of the capacity and ability of each student, and awarding honors accordingly.

The remedy lies in our own hands. Let me suggest that we exact from all gainers of university scholarships an undertaking that, if and when circumstances permit,

they will repay the sum which they have received as a scholarship, bursary, or fellowship. It would then be possible for an insurance company to advance a sum representing the capital value, *viz.*, 7,464,931*l.*, of the scholarships, reserving, say, twenty per cent. for non-payment, the result of mishap or death. In this way a sum of over six million pounds, of which the interest is now expended on scholarships, would be available for university purposes. This is about one-fourth of the sum of twenty-four millions stated by Sir Norman Lockyer at the Southport meeting as necessary to place our university education on a satisfactory basis. A large part of the income of this sum should be spent in increasing the emoluments of the chairs; for, unless the income of a professor is made in some degree commensurate with the earnings of a professional man who has succeeded in his profession, it is idle to suppose that the best brains will be attracted to the teaching profession. And it follows that unless the teachers occupy the first rank, the pupils will not be stimulated as they ought to be.

Again, having made the profession of a teacher so lucrative as to tempt the best intellects in the country to enter it, it is clear that such men are alone capable of testing their pupils. The modern system of "external examinations," known only in this country, and answerable for much of its lethargy, would disappear; schools of thought would arise in all subjects, and the intellectual as well as the industrial prosperity of our nation would be assured. As things are, can we wonder that as a nation we are not scientific? Let me recommend those of my hearers who are interested in the matter to read a recent report on Technical Education by the Science Guild.

I venture to think that, in spite of the

remarkable progress of science and of its applications, there never was a time when missionary effort was more needed. Although most people have some knowledge of the results of scientific inquiry, few, very few, have entered into its spirit. We all live in hope that the world will grow better as the years roll on. Are we taking steps to secure the improvement of the race? I plead for recognition of the fact that progress in science does not only consist in accumulating information which may be put to practical use, but in developing a spirit of prevision, in taking thought for the morrow; in attempting to forecast the future, not by vague surmise, but by orderly marshalling of facts, and by deducing from them their logical outcome; and chiefly in endeavoring to control conditions which may be utilized for the lasting good of our people. We must cultivate a belief in the "application of trained intelligence to all forms of national activity."

The council of the association has had under consideration the formation of a section of agriculture. For some years this important branch of applied science, borrowing as it does from botany, from physics, from chemistry, and from economics, has in turn enjoyed the hospitality of each of these sections, itself having been made a subsection of one of these more definite sciences. It is proposed this year to form an agricultural section. Here, there is need of missionary effort; for our visits to our colonies have convinced many of us that much more is being done for the farmer in the newer parts of the British Empire than at home. Agriculture is, indeed, applied botany, chemistry, entomology, and economics; and has as much right to independent treatment as has engineering, which may be strictly regarded as applied physics.

The question has often been debated whether the present method of conducting

our proceedings is the one best adapted to gain our ends. We exist professedly "to give a stronger impulse and a more systematic direction to scientific inquiry." The council has had under consideration various plans framed with the object of facilitating our work, and the result of its deliberations will be brought under your attention at a later date. To my mind, the greatest benefit bestowed on science by our meetings is the opportunity which they offer for friendly and unrestrained intercourse, not merely between those following different branches of science, but also with persons who, though not following science professionally, are interested in its problems. Our meetings also afford an opportunity for younger men to make the acquaintance of older men. I am afraid that we who are no longer in the spring of our lifetime, perhaps from modesty, perhaps through carelessness, often do not sufficiently realize how stimulating to a young worker a little sympathy can be; a few words of encouragement go a long way. I have in my mind words which encouraged me as a young man, words spoken by the leaders of associations now long past—by Playfair, by Williamson, by Frankland, by Kelvin, by Stokes, by Francis Galton, by Fitzgerald and many others. Let me suggest to my older scientific colleagues that they should not let such pleasant opportunities slip.

Since our last meeting the Association has to mourn the loss by death of many distinguished members. Among these are:

Dr. John Beddoe, who served on the council from 1870 to 1875, has recently died at a ripe old age, after having achieved a world-wide reputation by his magnificent work in the domain of anthropology.

Sir Rubert Boyce, called away at a comparatively early age in the middle of his work, was for long a colleague of mine at

University College, and was one of the staff of the Royal Commission on Sewage Disposal. The service he rendered science in combating tropical diseases is well known.

Sir Francis Galton died at the beginning of the year, at the advanced age of 89. His influence on science has been characterized by Professor Karl Pearson in his having maintained the idea that exact quantitative methods could—nay, must—be applied to many branches of science which had been held to be beyond the field of either mathematical or physical treatment. Sir Francis was general secretary of this association from 1863 to 1868; he was president of Section E in 1862, and again in 1872; he was president of Section H in 1885; but, although often asked to accept the office of president of the association, his consent could never be obtained. Galton's name will always be associated with that of his friend and relative, Charles Darwin, as one of the most eminent and influential of English men of science.

Professor Thomas Rupert Jones, also, like Galton, a member of this association since 1860, and in 1891 president of the Geological Section, died in April last at the advanced age of 91. Like Dr. Beddoe, he was a medical man with wide scientific interests. He became a distinguished geologist, and for many years edited the *Quarterly Journal* of the Geological Society.

Professor Story Maskelyne, at one time a diligent frequenter of our meetings, and a member of the council from 1874 to 1880, was a celebrated mineralogist and crystallographer. He died at the age of 88. The work which he did in the University of Oxford and at the British Museum is well known. In his later life he entered Parliament.

Dr. Johnstone Stoney, president of Section A in 1897, died on July 1, in his 86th year. He was one of the originators of the modern view of the nature of electricity,

having given the name "electron" to its unit as far back as 1874. His investigations dealt with spectroscopy and allied subjects, and his philosophic mind led him to publish a scheme of ontology which, I venture to think, must be acknowledged to be the most important work which has ever been done on that difficult subject.

Among our corresponding members we have lost Professor Bohr, of Copenhagen; Professor Brühl, of Heidelberg; Hofrat Dr. Caro, of Berlin; Professor Fittig, of Strassburg; and Professor Van't Hoff, of Berlin. I can not omit to mention that veteran of science, Professor Cannizzaro, of Rome, whose work in the middle of last century placed chemical science on the firm basis which it now occupies.

I knew all these men, some of them intimately; and, if I have not ventured on remarks as to their personal qualities, it is because it may be said of all of them that they fought a good fight and maintained the faith that only by patient and unceasing scientific work is human progress to be hoped for.

It has been the usual custom of my predecessors in office either to give a summary of the progress of science within the past year or to attempt to present in intelligible language some aspect of the science in which they have themselves been engaged. I possess no qualifications for the former course, and I therefore ask you to bear with me while I devote some minutes to the consideration of ancient and modern views regarding the chemical elements. To many in my audience part of my story will prove an oft-told tale; but I must ask those to excuse me, in order that it may be in some wise complete.

In the days of the early Greeks the word "element" was applied rather to denote a property of matter than one of its constituents. Thus, when a substance was said

to contain fire, air, water, and earth (of which terms a childish game doubtless once played by all of us is a relic), it probably meant that they partook of the nature of the so-called elements. Inflammability showed the presence of concealed fire; the escape of "airs" when some substances are heated or when vegetable or animal matter is distilled no doubt led to the idea that these airs were imprisoned in the matters from which they escaped; hardness and permanence were ascribed to the presence of earth, while liquidity and fusibility were properties conveyed by the presence of concealed water. At a later date the "Spagyrics" added three "hypostatical principles" to the quadrilateral; these were "salt," "sulphur," and "mercury." The first conveyed solubility, and fixedness in fire; the second, inflammability; and the third, the power which some substances manifest of producing a liquid, generally termed "phlegm," on application of heat, or of themselves being converted into the liquid state by fusion.

It was Robert Boyle, in his "Skeptical Chymist," who first controverted these ancient and medieval notions, and who gave to the word "element" the meaning that it now possesses—the constituent of a compound. But in the middle of the seventeenth century chemistry had not advanced far enough to make his definition useful; for he was unable to suggest any particular substance as elementary. And, indeed, the main tenet of the doctrine of "phlogiston," promulgated by Stahl in the eighteenth century, and widely accepted, was that all bodies capable of burning or of being converted into a "calx," or earthy powder, did so in virtue of the escape of a subtle fluid from their pores; this fluid could be restored to the "calces" by heating them with other substances rich in phlogiston, such as charcoal, oil, flour and

the like. Stahl, however false his theory, had at least the merit of having constructed a reversible chemical equation: Metal — phlogiston = calx; calx + phlogiston = metal.

It is difficult to say when the first element was known to be an element. After Lavoisier's overthrow of the phlogistic hypothesis, the part played by oxygen, then recently discovered by Priestley and Scheele, came prominently forward. Loss of phlogiston was identified with oxidation; gain of phlogiston, with loss of oxygen. The scheme of nomenclature ("Méthode de Nomenclature chimique"), published by Lavoisier in conjunction with Guyton de Morveau, Berthollet and Fourcroy, created a system of chemistry out of a wilderness of isolated facts and descriptions. Shortly after, in 1789, Lavoisier published his "Traité de Chimie," and in the preface the words occur: "If we mean by 'elements' the simple and indivisible molecules of which bodies consist, it is probable that we do not know them; if, on the other hand, we mean the last term in analysis, then every substance which we have not been able to decompose is for us an element; not that we can be certain that bodies which we regard as simple are not themselves composed of two or even a larger number of elements, but because these elements can never be separated, or rather, because we have no means of separating them, they act, so far as we can judge, as elements; and we can not call them 'simple' until experiment and observation shall have furnished a proof that they are so."

The close connection between "crocus of Mars" and metallic iron, the former named by Lavoisier "oxyde de fer," and similar relations between metals and their oxides, made it likely that bodies which reacted as oxides in dissolving in acids and form-

ing salts must also possess a metallic substratum. In October, 1807, Sir Humphry Davy proved the correctness of this view for soda and potash by his famous experiment of splitting these bodies by a powerful electric current into oxygen and hydrogen on the one hand, and the metals sodium and potassium on the other. Calcium, barium, strontium and magnesium were added to the list as constituents of the oxides, lime, barytes, strontia, and magnesia. Some years later Scheele's "dephlogisticated marine acid," obtained by heating pyrolusite with "spirit of salt," was identified by Davy as in all likelihood elementary. His words are: "All the conclusions which I have ventured to make respecting the undecomposed nature of oxymuriatic gas are, I conceive, entirely confirmed by these new facts." "It has been judged most proper to suggest a name founded upon one of its obvious and characteristic properties, its color, and to call it chlorine." The subsequent discovery of iodine by Courtois in 1812, and of bromine by Balard in 1826, led to the inevitable conclusion that fluorine, if isolated, should resemble the other halogens in properties, and much later, in the able hands of Moissan, this was shown to be true.

The modern conception of the elements was much strengthened by Dalton's revival of the Greek hypothesis of the atomic constitution of matter, and the assigning to each atom a definite weight. This momentous step for the progress of chemistry was taken in 1803; the first account of the theory was given to the public with Dalton's consent in the third edition of Thomas Thomson's "System of Chemistry" in 1807; it was subsequently elaborated in the first volume of Dalton's own "System of Chemical Philosophy," published in 1808. The notion that compounds consisted of aggregations of atoms of elements, united

in definite or multiple proportions, familiarized the world with the conception of elements as the bricks of which the universe is built. Yet the more daring spirits of that day were not without hope that the elements themselves might prove decomposable. Davy, indeed, went so far as to write in 1811: "It is the duty of the chemist to be bold in pursuit; he must recollect how contrary knowledge is to what appears to be experience. . . . To enquire whether the elements be capable of being composed and decomposed is a grand object of true philosophy." And Faraday, his great pupil and successor, at a later date, 1815, was not behind Davy in his aspirations, when he wrote: "To decompose the metals, to re-form them, and to realize the once absurd notion of transformation—these are the problems now given to the chemist for solution."

Indeed, the ancient idea of the unitary nature of matter was in those days held to be highly probable. For attempts were soon made to demonstrate that the atomic weights were themselves multiples of that of one of the elements. At first the suggestion was that oxygen was the common basis; and later, when this supposition turned out to be untenable, the claims of hydrogen were brought forward by Prout. The hypothesis was revived in 1842 when Liebig and Redtenbacher, and subsequently Dumas, carried out a revision of the atomic weights of some of the commoner elements, and showed that Berzelius was in error in attributing to carbon the atomic weight 12.25, instead of 12.00. Of recent years a great advance in the accuracy of the determinations of atomic weights has been made, chiefly owing to the work of Richards and his pupils, of Gray, and of Guye and his collaborators, and every year an international committee publishes a table in which the most probable numbers are given

on the basis of the atomic weight of oxygen being taken as sixteen. In the table for 1911, of eighty-one elements no fewer than forty-three have recorded atomic weights within one-tenth of a unit above or below an integral number. My mathematical colleague, Karl Pearson, assures me that the probability against such a condition being fortuitous is 20,000 millions to one.

The relation between the elements has, however, been approached from another point of view. After preliminary suggestions by Döbereiner, Dumas and others, John Newlands in 1862 and the following years arranged the elements in the numerical order of their atomic weights, and published in the *Chemical News* of 1863 what he termed his law of octaves—that every eighth element, like the octave of a musical note, is in some measure a repetition of its forerunner. Thus, just as C on the third space is the octave of C below the line, so potassium, in 1863 the eighth known element numerically above sodium, repeats the characters of sodium, not only in its physical properties—color, softness, ductility, malleability, etc.—but also in the properties of its compounds, which, indeed, resemble each other very closely. The same fundamental notion was reproduced at a later date and independently by Lothar Meyer and Dmitri Mendeléeff; and to accentuate the recurrence of such similar elements in *periods*, the expression "the periodic system of arranging the elements" was applied to Newlands's arrangement in octaves. As everyone knows, by help of this arrangement Mendeléeff predicted the existence of then unknown elements, under the names of *eka-boron*, *eka-aluminium* and *eka-silicon*, since named *scandium*, *gallium* and *germanium*, by their discoverers, Cleve, Lecoq de Boisbaudran, and Winckler.

It might have been supposed that our knowledge of the elements was practically

complete; that perhaps a few more might be discovered to fill the outstanding gaps in the periodic table. True, a puzzle existed and still exists in the classification of the "rare earths," oxides of metals occurring in certain minerals; these metals have atomic weights between 139 and 180, and their properties preclude their arrangement in the columns of the periodic table. Besides these, the discovery of the inert gases of the atmosphere, of the existence of which Johnstone Stoney's spiral curve, published in 1888, pointed a forecast, joined the elements like sodium and potassium, strongly electro-negative, to those like fluorine and chlorine, highly electro-positive, by a series of bodies electrically as well as chemically inert, and neon, argon, krypton, and xenon formed links between fluorine and sodium, chlorine and potassium, bromine and rubidium, and iodine and caesium.

Including the inactive gases, and adding the more recently discovered elements of the rare earths, and radium, of which I shall have more to say presently, there are eighty-four definite elements, all of which find places in the periodic table, if merely numerical values be considered. Between lanthanum, with atomic weight 139, and tantalum, 181, there are in the periodic table seventeen spaces; and although it is impossible to admit, on account of their properties, that the elements of the rare earths can be distributed in successive columns (for they all resemble lanthanum in properties), yet there are now fourteen such elements; and it is not improbable that other three will be separated from the complex mixture of their oxides by further work. Assuming that the metals of the rare earths fill these seventeen spaces, how many still remain to be filled? We will take for granted that the atomic weight of uranium, 238.5, which is the

highest known, forms an upper limit not likely to be surpassed. It is easy to count the gaps; there are eleven.

But we are confronted by an *embarras de richesse*. The discovery of radioactivity by Henri Becquerel, of radium by the Curies, and the theory of the disintegration of the radioactive elements, which we owe to Rutherford and Soddy, have indicated the existence of no fewer than twenty-six elements hitherto unknown. To what places in the periodic table can they be assigned?

But what proof have we that these substances are elementary? Let us take them in order.

Beginning with radium, its salts were first studied by Madame Curie; they closely resemble those of barium—sulphate, carbonate, and chromate insoluble; chloride and bromide similar in crystalline form to chloride and bromide of barium; metal, recently prepared by Madame Curie, white, attacked by water, and evidently of the type of barium. The atomic weight, too, falls into its place; as determined by Madame Curie and by Thorpe, it is 89.5 units higher than that of barium; in short, there can be no doubt that radium fits the periodic table, with an atomic weight of about 226.5. It is an undoubted element.

But it is a very curious one. For it is *unstable*. Now, stability was believed to be the essential characteristic of an element. Radium, however, disintegrates—that is, changes into other bodies, and at a constant rate. If 1 gram of radium is kept for 1,760 years, only half a gram will be left at the end of that time; half of it will have given other products. What are they? We can answer that question. Rutherford and Soddy found that it gives a condensable gas, which they named "radium-emanation"; and Soddy and I, in 1903, discovered that, in addition, it evolves helium,

one of the inactive series of gases, like argon. Helium is an undoubted element, with a well-defined spectrum; it belongs to a well-defined series. And radium-emanation, which was shown by Rutherford and Soddy to be incapable of chemical union, has been liquefied and solidified in the laboratory of University College, London, its spectrum has been measured and its density determined. From the density the atomic weight can be calculated, and it corresponds with that of a congener of argon, the whole series being: helium, 4; neon, 20; argon, 40; krypton, 83; xenon, 130; unknown, about 178; and niton (the name proposed for the emanation to recall its connection with its congeners, and its phosphorescent properties), about 222.4. The formation of niton from radium would therefore be represented by the equation: radium (226.4) = helium (4) + niton (222.4).

Niton, in its turn, disintegrates, or decomposes, and at a rate much more rapid than the rate of radium; half of it has changed in about four days. Its investigation, therefore, had to be carried out very rapidly, in order that its decomposition might not be appreciable while its properties were being determined. Its product of change was named by Rutherford "radium A," and it is undoubtedly deposited from niton as a metal, with simultaneous evolution of helium; the equation would therefore be: niton (222.4) = helium (4) + radium A (218.4). But it is impossible to investigate radium A chemically, for in three minutes it has half changed into another solid substance, radium B, again giving off helium. This change would be represented by the equation: radium A (218.4) = helium (4) + radium B (214.4). Radium B, again, can hardly be examined chemically, for in twenty-seven minutes it has half changed into radium C¹. In this

case, however, no helium is evolved; only atoms of negative electricity, to which the name "electrons" has been given by Dr. Stoney, and these have minute weight which, although approximately ascertainable, at present has defied direct measurement. Radium C¹ has a half-life of 19.5 minutes; too short, again, for chemical investigation; but it changes into radium C², and in doing so, each atom parts with a helium atom; hence the equation: —radium C¹ (214.4) = helium (4) + radium C² (210.4). In 2.5 minutes, radium C² is half gone, parting with electrons, forming radium D. Radium D gives the chemist a chance, for its half-life is no less than sixteen and a half years. Without parting with anything detectable, radium D passes into radium E, of which the half-life period is five days; and lastly radium E changes spontaneously into radium F, the substance to which Madame Curie gave the name "polonium" in allusion to her native country, Poland. Polonium, in its turn, is half changed in 140 days with loss of an atom of helium into an unknown metal, supposed to be possibly lead. If that be the case, the equation would run: polonium (210.4) = helium (4) + lead (206.4). But the atomic weight of lead is 207.1, and not 206.4; however, it is possible that the atomic weight of radium is 227.1, and not 226.4.

We have another method of approaching the same subject. It is practically certain that the progenitor of radium is uranium; and that the transformation of uranium into radium involves the loss of three alpha particles; that is, of three atoms of helium. The atomic weight of helium may be taken as one of the most certain; it is 3.994, as determined by Mr. Watson, in my laboratories. Three atoms would therefore weigh 11.98, practically 12. There is, however, still some uncertainty in the atomic weight of uranium; Richards and Merigold make

it 239.4; but the general mean, calculated by Clarke, is 239.0. Subtracting 12 from these numbers, we have the values 227.0, and 227.4 for the atomic weight of radium. It is as yet impossible to draw any certain conclusion.

The importance of the work which will enable a definite and sure conclusion to be drawn is this: For the first time, we have accurate knowledge as to the descent of some of the elements. Supposing the atomic weight of uranium to be certainly 239, it may be taken as proved that in losing three atoms of helium, radium is produced, and, if the change consists solely in the loss of the three atoms of helium, the atomic weight of radium must necessarily be 227. But it is known that β -rays, or electrons, are also parted with during this change; and electrons have weight. How many electrons are lost is unknown; therefore, although the weight of an electron is approximately known, it is impossible to say how much to allow for in estimating the atomic weight of radium. But it is possible to solve this question indirectly, by determining exactly the atomic weights of radium and of uranium; the difference between the atomic weight of radium *plus* 12, *i. e.*, plus the weight of three atoms of helium, and that of uranium, will give the weight of the number of electrons which escape. Taking the most probable numbers available, *viz.*, 239.4 for uranium and 226.8 for radium, and adding 12 to the latter, the weight of the escaping electrons would be 0.6.

The correct solution of this problem would in great measure clear up the mystery of the irregularities in the periodic table, and would account for the deviations from Prout's law, that the atomic weights are multiples of some common factor or factors. I also venture to suggest that it would throw light on allotropy,

which in some cases at least may very well be due to the loss or gain of electrons, accompanied by a positive or negative heat-change. Incidentally, this suggestion would afford places in the periodic table for the somewhat overwhelming number of pseudo-elements the existence of which is made practically certain by the disintegration hypothesis. Of the twenty-six elements derived from uranium, thorium, and actinium, ten, which are formed by the emission of electrons alone, may be regarded as allotropes or pseudo-elements; this leaves sixteen, for which sixteen or seventeen gaps would appear to be available in the periodic table, provided the reasonable supposition be made that a second change in the length of the periods has taken place. It is above all things certain that it would be a fatal mistake to regard the existence of such elements as irreconcilable with the periodic arrangement, which has rendered to systematic chemistry such signal service in the past.

Attention has repeatedly been drawn to the enormous quantity of energy stored up in radium and its descendants. That in its emanation niton is such that if what it parts with as heat during its disintegration were available, it would be equal to three and a half million times the energy available by the explosion of an equal volume of detonating gas—a mixture of one volume of oxygen with two volumes of hydrogen. The major part of this energy comes, apparently, from the expulsion of particles (that is, of atoms of helium) with enormous velocity. It is easy to convey an idea of this magnitude in a form more realizable, by giving it a somewhat mechanical turn. Suppose that the energy in a ton of radium could be utilized in thirty years, instead of being evolved at its invariable slow rate of 1,760 years for half-disintegration, it would suffice to propel a ship

of 15,000 tons, with engines of 15,000 horsepower, at the rate of 15 knots an hour, for 30 years—practically the lifetime of the ship. To do this actually requires a million and a half tons of coal.

It is easily seen that the virtue of the energy of the radium consists in the small weight in which it is contained; in other words, the radium-energy is in an enormously concentrated form. I have attempted to apply the energy contained in niton to various purposes; it decomposes water, ammonia, hydrogen chloride and carbon dioxide, each into its constituents; further experiments on its action on salts of copper appeared to show that the metal copper was converted partially into lithium, a metal of the sodium column; and similar experiments, of which there is not time to speak, indicate that thorium, zirconium, titanium and silicon are degraded into carbon; for solutions of compounds of these, mixed with niton, invariably generated carbon dioxide; while cerium, silver, mercury and some other metals gave none. One can imagine the very atoms themselves, exposed to bombardment by enormously quickly moving helium atoms failing to withstand the impacts. Indeed, the argument *a priori* is a strong one; if we know for certain that radium and its descendants decompose spontaneously, evolving energy, why should not other more stable elements decompose when subjected to enormous strains?

This leads to the speculation whether, if elements are capable of disintegration, the world may not have at its disposal a hitherto unsuspected source of energy. If radium were to evolve its stored-up energy at the same rate that gun-cotton does, we should have an undreamt-of explosive; could we control the rate we should have a useful and potent source of energy, provided always that a sufficient supply of

radium were forthcoming. But the supply is certainly a very limited one; and it can be safely affirmed that the production will never surpass half an ounce a year. If, however, the elements which we have been used to consider as permanent are capable of changing with evolution of energy; if some form of catalyzer could be discovered which would usefully increase their almost inconceivably slow rate of change, then it is not too much to say that the whole future of our race would be altered.

The whole progress of the human race has indeed been due to individual members discovering means of concentrating energy, and of transforming one form into another. The carnivorous animals strike with their paws and crush with their teeth; the first man who aided his arm with a stick in striking a blow discovered how to concentrate his small supply of kinetic energy; the first man who used a spear found that its sharp point in motion represented a still more concentrated form; the arrow was a further advance, for the spear was then propelled by mechanical means; the bolt of the crossbow, the bullet shot forth by compressed hot gas, first derived from black powder, later, from high explosives; all these represent progress. To take another sequence: the preparation of oxygen by Priestley applied energy to oxide of mercury in the form of heat; Davy improved on this when he concentrated electrical energy into the tip of a thin wire by aid of a powerful battery, and isolated potassium and sodium.

Great progress has been made during the past century in effecting the conversion of one form of energy into others, with as little useless expenditure as possible. Let me illustrate by examples: A good steam engine converts about one eighth of the potential energy of the fuel into useful work; seven eighths are lost as unused heat

and useless friction. A good gas-engine utilizes more than one third of the total energy in the gaseous fuel; two thirds are uneconomically expended. This is a universal proposition; in order to effect the conversion from one form of energy into another, some energy must be expended uneconomically. If A is the total energy which it is required to convert; if B is the energy into which it is desired to convert A ; then a certain amount of energy, C , must be expended to effect the conversion. In short, $A = B + C$. It is eminently desirable to keep C , the useless expenditure, as small as possible; it can never equal zero, but it can be made small. The ratio of C to B (the economic coefficient) should therefore be as large as is attainable.

The middle of the nineteenth century will always be noted as the beginning of the golden age of science; the epoch when great generalizations were made, of the highest importance on all sides, philosophical, economic and scientific. Carnot, Clausius, Helmholtz, Julius Robert Mayer abroad, and the Thomsons, Lord Kelvin and his brother James, Rankine, Tait, Joule, Clerk Maxwell and many others at home, laid the foundations on which the splendid structure has been erected. That the latent energy of fuel can be converted into energy of motion by means of the steam engine is what we owe to Newcomen and Watt; that the kinetic energy of the fly-wheel can be transformed into electrical energy was due to Faraday, and to him, too, we are indebted for the reconversion of electrical energy into mechanical work; and it is this power of work which gives us leisure, and which enables a small country like ours to support the population which inhabits it.

I suppose that it will be generally granted that the commonwealth of Athens attained a high-water mark in literature

and thought, which has never yet been surpassed. The reason is not difficult to find; a large proportion of its people had ample leisure, due to ample means; they had time to think and time to discuss what they thought. How was this achieved? The answer is simple: each Greek freeman had on an average at least five helots who did his bidding, who worked his mines, looked after his farm, and, in short, saved him from manual labor. Now, we in Britain are much better off; the population of the British Isles is in round numbers 45 millions; there are consumed in our factories at least 50 million tons of coal annually, and "it is generally agreed that the consumption of coal per indicated horsepower per hour is on an average about 5 lb." (Royal Commission on Coal Supplies, Part I.) This gives seven million horse-power per year. How many man-power are equal to a horse-power? I have arrived at an estimate thus: A Bhutanese can carry 230 lb. *plus* his own weight, in all 400 lb., up a hill 4,000 feet high in eight hours; this is equivalent to about one twenty-fifth of a horse-power; seven million horse-power are therefore about 175 million man-power. Taking a family as consisting on the average of five persons, our 45 millions would represent nine million families; and dividing the total man-power by the number of families, we must conclude that each British family has, on the average, nearly twenty "helots" doing his bidding, instead of the five of the Athenian family. We do not appear, however, to have gained more leisure thereby, but it is this that makes it possible for the British Isles to support the population which it does.

We have in this world of ours only a limited supply of stored-up energy; in the British Isles a very limited one—namely, our coalfields. The rate at which this sup-

ply is being exhausted has been increasing very steadily for the last forty years, as any one can prove by mapping the data given on page 27, table D, of the General Report of the Royal Commission on Coal Supplies (1906). In 1870 110 million tons were mined in Great Britain, and ever since the amount has increased by three and a third million tons a year. The available quantity of coal in the proved coalfields is very nearly 100,000 million tons; it is easy to calculate that if the rate of working increases as it is doing our coal will be completely exhausted in 175 years. But, it will be replied, the rate of increase will slow down. Why? It has shown no sign whatever of slackening during the last forty years. Later, of course, it must slow down, when coal grows dearer owing to approaching exhaustion. It may also be said that 175 years is a long time; why, I myself have seen a man whose father fought in the '45 on the Pretender's side, nearly 170 years ago! In the life of a nation 175 years is a span.

This consumption is still proceeding at an accelerated rate. Between 1905 and 1907 the amount of coal raised in the United Kingdom increased from 236 to 268 million tons, equal to six tons per head of the population, against three and a half tons in Belgium, two and a half tons in Germany and one ton in France. Our commercial supremacy and our power of competing with other European nations are obviously governed, so far as we can see, by the relative price of coal; and when our prices rise, owing to the approaching exhaustion of our supplies, we may look forward to the near approach of famine and misery.

Having been struck some years ago with the optimism of my non-scientific friends as regards our future, I suggested that a committee of the British Science Guild

should be formed to investigate our available sources of energy. This guild is an organization, founded by Sir Norman Lockyer, after his tenure of the presidency of this association, for the purpose of endeavoring to impress on our people and their government the necessity of viewing problems affecting the race and the state from the standpoint of science; and the definition of science in this, as in other connections, is simply the acquisition of knowledge, and orderly reasoning on experience already gained and on experiments capable of being carried out, so as to forecast and control the course of events; and, if possible, to apply this knowledge to the benefit of the human race.

The Science Guild has enlisted the services of a number of men, each eminent in his own department, and each has now reported on the particular source of energy of which he has special knowledge.

Besides considering the uses of coal and its products, and how they may be more economically employed, in which branches the Hon. Sir Charles Parsons, Mr. Dugald Clerk, Sir Boverton Redwood, Dr. Beilby, Dr. Hele-Shaw, Professor Vivian Lewes and others have furnished reports, the following sources of energy have been brought under review: The possibility of utilizing the tides; the internal heat of the earth; the winds; solar heat; water-power; the extension of forests, and the use of wood and peat as fuels; and lastly, the possibility of controlling the undoubted but almost infinitely slow disintegration of the elements, with the view of utilizing their stored-up energy.

However interesting a detailed discussion of these possible sources of energy might be, time prevents my dwelling on them. Suffice it to say that the Hon. R. J. Strutt has shown that in this country at least it would be impracticable to attempt

to utilize terrestrial heat from boreholes; others have deduced that from the tides, the winds and water-power small supplies of energy are no doubt obtainable, but that, in comparison with that derived from the combustion of coal, they are negligible; nothing is to be hoped for from the direct utilization of solar heat in this temperate and uncertain climate; and it would be folly to consider seriously a possible supply of energy in a conceivable acceleration of the liberation of energy by atomic change. It looks utterly improbable, too, that we shall ever be able to utilize the energy due to the revolution of the earth on her axis, or to her proper motion round the sun.

Attention should undoubtedly be paid to forestry, and to the utilization of our stores of peat. On the continent, the forests are largely the property of the state; it is unreasonable, especially in these latter days of uncertain tenure of property, to expect any private owner of land to invest money in schemes which would at best only benefit his descendants, but which, under our present trend of legislation, do not promise even that remote return. Our neighbors and rivals, Germany and France, spend annually 2,200,000*l.* on the conservation and utilization of their forests; the net return is 6,000,000*l.* There is no doubt that we could imitate them with advantage. Moreover, an increase in our forests would bring with it an increase in our water-power; for without forest land rain rapidly reaches the sea, instead of distributing itself, so as to keep the supply of water regular, and so more easily utilized.

Various schemes have been proposed for utilizing our deposits of peat: I believe that in Germany the peat industry is moderately profitable; but our humid climate does not lend itself to natural evaporation of most of the large amount of water contained in peat, without which processes of distillation prove barely remunerative.

We must therefore rely chiefly on our coal reserve for our supply of energy, and for the means of supporting our population; and it is to the more economical use of coal that we must look, in order that our life as a nation may be prolonged. We can economize in many ways: By the substitution of turbine engines for reciprocating engines, thereby reducing the coal required per horse-power from 4 to 5 lb. to $1\frac{1}{2}$ or 2 lb.; by the further replacement of turbines by gas engines, raising the economy to 30 per cent. of the total energy available in the coal, that is, lowering the coal consumption per horse-power to 1 or $1\frac{1}{4}$ lb.; by creating the power at the pit-mouth, and distributing it electrically, as is already done in the Tyne district. Economy can also be effected in replacing "bee-hive" coke ovens by recovery ovens; this is rapidly being done; and Dr. Beilby calculates that in 1909 nearly six million tons of coal, out of a total of sixteen to eighteen millions, were coked in recovery ovens, thus effecting a saving of two to three million tons of fuel annually. Progress is also being made in substituting gas for coal or coke in metallurgical, chemical and other works. But it must be remembered that for economic use, gaseous fuel must not be charged with the heavy costs of piping and distribution.

The domestic fire problem is also one which claims our instant attention. It is best grappled with from the point of view of smoke. Although the actual loss of thermal energy in the form of smoke is small—at most less than a half per cent. of the fuel consumed—still the presence of smoke is a sign of waste of fuel and careless stoking. In works, mechanical stokers which ensure regularity of firing and complete combustion of fuel are more and more widely replacing hand-firing. But we are still utterly wasteful in our consumption of fuel in domestic fires. There is prob-

ably no single remedy applicable; but the introduction of central heating, of gas fires and of grates which permit of better utilization of fuel will all play a part in economizing our coal. It is open to argument whether it might not be wise to hasten the time when smoke is no more by imposing a sixpenny fine for each offence; an instantaneous photograph could easily prove the offense to have been committed; and the imposition of the fine might be delayed until three warnings had been given by the police.

Now I think that what I wish to convey will be best expressed by an allegory. A man of mature years who has surmounted the troubles of childhood and adolescence without much disturbance to his physical and mental state, gradually becomes aware that he is suffering from loss of blood; his system is being drained of this essential to life and strength. What does he do? If he is sensible, he calls in a doctor, or perhaps several, in consultation; they ascertain the seat of the disease, and diagnose the cause. They point out that while consumption of blood is necessary for healthy life, it will lead to a premature end if the constantly increasing drain is not stopped. They suggest certain precautionary measures; and if he adopts them, he has a good chance of living at least as long as his contemporaries; if he neglects them, his days are numbered.

That is our condition as a nation. We have had our consultation in 1903; the doctors were the members of the Coal Commission. They showed the gravity of our case, but we have turned a deaf ear.

It is true that the self-interest of coal consumers is slowly leading them to adopt more economical means of turning coal into energy. But I have noticed and frequently publicly announced a fact which cannot but strike even the most unobservant. It is this: When trade is good, as it appears to

be at present, manufacturers are making money; they are overwhelmed with orders, and have no inclination to adopt economies which do not appear to them to be essential, and the introduction of which would take thought and time, and which would withdraw the attention of their employees from the chief object of the business—how to make the most of the present opportunities. Hence improvements are postponed. When bad times come, then there is no money to spend on improvements; they are again postponed until better times arrive.

What can be done?

I would answer: Do as other nations have done and are doing; take stock annually. The Americans have a permanent commission initiated by Mr. Roosevelt, consisting of three representatives from each state, the sole object of which is to keep abreast with the diminution of the stores of natural energy, and to take steps to lessen its rate. This is a non-political undertaking, and one worthy of being initiated by the ruler of a great country. If the example is followed here the question will become a national one.

Two courses are open to us; first, the *laissez-faire* plan of leaving to self-interested competition the combating of waste; or second, initiating legislation which, in the interest of the whole nation, will endeavor to lessen the squandering of our national resources. This legislation may be of two kinds: penal, that is, imposing a penalty on wasteful expenditure of energy-supplies; and helpful, that is, imparting information as to what can be done, advancing loans at an easy rate of interest to enable reforms to be carried out, and insisting on the greater prosperity which would result from the use of more efficient appliances.

This is not the place, nor is there the time, to enter into detail; the subject is a

complicated one, and it will demand the combined efforts of experts and legislators for a generation; but if it be not considered with the definite intention of immediate action, we shall be held up to the deserved execration of our not very remote descendants.

The two great principles which I have alluded to in an earlier part of this address must not, however, be lost sight of; they should guide all our efforts to use energy economically. Concentration of energy in the form of electric current at high potential makes it possible to convey it for long distances through thin and therefore comparatively inexpensive wires; and the economic coefficient of the conversion of mechanical into electrical, and of electrical into mechanical energy is a high one; the useless expenditure does not much exceed one twentieth part of the energy which can be utilized. These considerations would point to the conversion at the pit-mouth of the energy of the fuel into electrical energy, using as an intermediary, turbines, or preferably gas engines; and distributing the electrical energy to where it is wanted. The use of gas engines may, if desired, be accompanied by the production of half-distilled coal, a fuel which burns nearly without smoke, and one which is suitable for domestic fires, if it is found too difficult to displace them and to induce our population to adopt the more efficient and economical systems of domestic heating which are used in America and on the continent. The increasing use of gas for factory, metallurgical and chemical purposes points to the gradual concentration of works near the coal mines, in order that the laying-down of expensive piping may be avoided.

An invention which would enable us to convert the energy of coal directly into electrical energy would revolutionize our ideas and methods, yet it is not unthinkable. The nearest practical approach to

this is the Mond gas-battery, which, however, has not succeeded, owing to the imperfection of the machine.

In conclusion, I would put in a plea for the study of pure science, without regard to its applications. The discovery of radium and similar radioactive substances has widened the bounds of thought. While themselves, in all probability, incapable of industrial application, save in the domain of medicine, their study has shown us to what enormous advances in the concentration of energy it is permissible to look forward, with the hope of applying the knowledge thereby gained to the betterment of the whole human race. As charity begins at home, however, and as I am speaking to the *British Association for the Advancement of Science*, I would urge that our first duty is to strive for all which makes for the permanence of the British commonwealth, and which will enable us to transmit to our posterity a heritage not unworthy to be added to that which we have received from those who have gone before.

WILLIAM RAMSAY

THE FIRST UNIVERSAL RACES CONGRESS

THANKS to the indefatigable energy and enthusiasm of Mr. Gustav Spiller, who was ably assisted by Mrs. Spiller and supported by a large and representative committee, a new departure in the history of the world has been made by bringing together representatives of many classes of varied peoples to confer on the problems connected with the contact of races and peoples. During the week of the congress there could be seen in the halls of the University of London men and women of all shades of color and of different religions in friendly converse or planning schemes for breaking down racial and other prejudice, as well as for the betterment of mankind. For the majority it was a very serious occasion, as it is evident that they would not have come from such great distances at considerable expense and trouble if they had not thought it