

Sir Roderick Murchison looked forward with interest to the occasion which has called us together to-day. Only a few weeks ago I talked with him regarding it, and his eye brightened as I told him of the subject on which I proposed to speak to you. I had hoped that he would have lived to see this day, and to hear at least of the beginning of the work which he has inaugurated for us in this University; but this was not to be. He has been taken from us ripe in years, in work, and in honours, and he leaves us the example of his unwearied industry, his admirable powers of observation, and his rare goodness of heart.

In the course of study now before us, we are to be engaged in examining together the structure and history of the earth. We shall trace the working of the various natural agents which are now carrying on geological change, and by which the past changes of the globe may be explained. In so doing we shall be brought continually face to face with the history of life as recorded in the rocks—for it is by that history mainly that the sequences of geological time can be established. We shall thus have to trespass a little on what is the proper domain of the Professors of Botany and of Natural History. But you will find that no hard line can be drawn between the sciences. Each must needs overlap upon the other; and indeed it is in this mutual interlacing that one great element of the strength and interest of science lies. From Professors Balfour and Wyville Thomson you will learn the structure of the fossils with which we shall have to deal as our geological alphabet, and their relation to living plants and animals. By Professor Crum Brown you are taught the full meaning and application of the chemical laws under which the minerals and rocks, which we in this class must study, have been formed, and of the processes concerned