

in England, particularly with respect to the more difficult and abstract sciences, we are much below other nations, not merely of equal rank, but below several even of inferior power."

"It is," says the Edinburgh Reviewer of 1816,<sup>1</sup> "certainly a curious problem with respect to national genius, whence it arises that the country in Europe most generally acknowledged to abound in men of strong intellect and sound judgment should for the last seventy or eighty years have been inferior to so many of its neighbours in the cultivation of that science which requires the most steady and greatest exertions of understanding, and that this relaxation should immediately follow the period when the greatest of all mathematical discoveries had been made in that same country."

It must be said that these opinions, expressed as they were by men of the highest attainments, did not remain unchallenged at home or unnoticed abroad. It will be interesting to see how they have been met. Let us first hear what Cuvier says in his *Éloge* of Sir Joseph Banks in 1821<sup>2</sup> regarding the work of the Royal Society during the period of forty-one years of his presidency: "During this period, so memorable in the history of the human mind, English philosophers have taken a part as glorious as that of any other nation in those labours of the intellect which are common to all civilised peoples: they have faced the icy regions of both poles; they have left no corner unvisited in the two oceans; they have increased tenfold the catalogue of the kingdoms of nature; the

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opinions on  
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<sup>1</sup> 'Edinburgh Review,' 1816, vol. xxvii. p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> See Cuvier, 'Éloges historiques,' vol. iii. p. 79.