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NOTE: Sir William John Macleay (1820-1891) was a pastoralist, politician and patron of science. He was the first president of the society.

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[...] Of these the most illustrious has been Dr. Charles Darwin. Differing as many of us do from the conclusions at which he has arrived, I cannot help adding my humble tribute of admiration for his philosophical methods of inquiry in which he has set so beautiful, so illustrious an example. With such methods and in such hands the interests of truth are safe in the long run. Charles Darwin has revolutionised the science of zoology more by his ingenious and conscientious methods than by his conclusions. What the ultimate conclusions will be it would be premature to predict; but how they will be established cannot

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be a matter of doubt. As an instance of this, I may refer to the magnificent paper of the Rev. Professor Henslow, lately published in the Transactions of the Linnæan Society of London.

The learned professor has been following up Darwin's observations on the self-fertilization of plants. It will be remembered that Dr. Darwin's observations on the varieties of the common primrose led to the discovery of certain provisions to secure cross fertilization.

The facts thus revealed were so new, so startling, and at the same time so full of interest, that the field was entered upon with ardour by nearly every botanist in Europe. As a matter of course the conclusions of Dr. Darwin were pushed to the extreme. Even the most eminent naturalists were led into extravagant assertions, which, at best, were only supported by a slender array of facts, and some even roundly asserted that self-fertilization never took place. These were not men of eminence, but their opinions were eagerly seized by those whose knowledge was too slight to discriminate, and whose prejudices were too strong for caution. By no one were these excesses more deplored than Dr. Darwin, whose love of his favourite theory is great, but whose love of true science is greater. When Professor Henslow commenced his investigations he states that he adopted Dr. Darwin's views about the self-fertilization of flowers. What has induced him to abandon them is beautifully seen in the facts which a long and patient inquiry has revealed. So far as he has gone he finds self-fertilization the rule and not the exception. The whole paper is a monument to his conscientious care and industry. It is a delightful instance of the perfection of those methods of inquiry of which Dr. Darwin is the illustrious author.