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THE WESTERN ISLES THROUGH THE MISTS OF AGES¹

By Sir ALBERT SEWARD

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INTRODUCTORY

TWENTY-SEVEN years ago, when the British Association met for the second time in Dundee, Sir Edward Schäfer chose as the subject of his presidential address "The Nature, Origin and Maintenance of Life"; he discussed problems that will long continue to exercise the ingenuity and stimulate the imagination of biologists and chemists. A theme such as his is far beyond my reach. Seventy-two years ago the association met for the first time in this city. The Duke of Buccleuch occupied the presidential chair, and the opening words of his address are applicable to one who now finds himself in this privileged position; the Duke said: "No man has a title to state that he is unworthy of the post he is called on to fill, whatever may be his private feel-

ings as to his fitness for the post. To state that he is unworthy to be there placed is not only a disparagement to himself, but is no great compliment to those who thought him worthy of being so placed."

This, in my opinion, is not an occasion on which it is desirable to follow the easier course and address oneself in technical language to fellow workers in the pursuit of natural knowledge. The position which it is my great privilege to occupy affords a rare opportunity of talking to a large and, I venture to hope, a sympathetic audience, including some at least who are repelled by the jargon of specialists. My intention is to speak in ordinary language on a subject of which I know enough to realize how little that knowledge is, and briefly to describe an example of the way in which, within one small patch of an illimitable field, a student asks questions of nature and does his best to interpret the answers.

¹ Address of the president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Dundee meeting, August 30, 1939.

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