

**PAPERS READ BEFORE THE  
MATHEMATICAL AND PHYSICAL  
SOCIETY OF TORONTO  
UNIVERSITY; DURING THE YEAR  
1890-92**

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Papers Read Before the Mathematical and Physical Society of Toronto University; During the Year 1890-92 by Various

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## PREFACE.

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Some of the papers read before the Society during the past year being deemed of sufficient excellence to warrant their publication, a committee was appointed for that purpose. That committee has now performed its duty, it hopes acceptably. Should this venture prove a success the Society may, next year, publish a periodical in which the papers as they are read will appear from time to time. This publication should receive the support of the teaching profession and graduates in Mathematics throughout the Province.

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## POETIC INTERPRETATION IN MATHEMATICS.

*Delivered by Professor Alfred Baker, M.A., before the  
Mathematical and Physical Society of the University  
of Toronto.*

GENTLEMEN,—I was somewhat at a loss to determine what title I ought to prefix to my address. My general object is to shew that our subject appeals to the imagination, to our sense of beauty, to the affections, to the emotions; and that, therefore, in some of its developments it comes within the regions haunted by the Muses. The question whether the advance of science will destroy the poetic feeling is an old one, which I think we have abundant reason to answer in the negative. As soon will it destroy the religious feeling. The effect of scientific study on the individual is various, and dependent on the strength of mind and strength of character of the individual. The study of science cannot *create* imagination where nature has not supplied it; nor, for the matter of that, can the study of general literature. The study of general literature may create a pseudo article—may breed an affectation—which, however, never deceives the discerning mind.

Science will not extinguish poetic feeling if it is cultivated in a proper soil. It may modify its character, but by extending knowledge will enlarge its domain. The emotions which a great scientific discovery awakens may be as genuinely poetic as those roused by any well-told tale of the imagination. The former usually are to be found at a greater spiritual altitude than the latter. Thoughts, to be utilized by the poet, must be easy and familiar to him. To appeal to the public, they must be easy and familiar to them. The world has not yet assimilated the scientific truth that recently has been conquered, and it is not yet material for the artist in his appeals to