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Abstract

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In 1835 the Chair of Surgery in the University of Edinburgh became vacant, and Bell was offered the post. The position was certainly inviting, for Edinburgh was pre-eminent among the medical schools of Europe, and Bell would have a chance to see his family again, and as he remarked "London is a place to live in, not to die in." So, at the age of sixty-two, he returned north to his birthplace. But he was by now in the autumn of his existence and in the year of 1842 Bell died.

* * *

In the death of Charles Bell, the world lost not only a master anatomist and surgeon, but also one whose skill as a painter was quite superb. Together with his talented brush was coupled an eloquence of expression which added so much to his more philosophical works. Perhaps indeed his pursuits were too numerous to enable him to complete his "New Idea" of the nervous system, the great ambition of his life. Yet, without Bell's work, for how much longer would the nervous system have remained in such obscurity? Even if Charles Bell were denied his crowning glory, it was certainly he who shone the light of understanding on the hitherto inextricable confusion of the nervous system and pointed a path to the further elucidation of its hidden mysteries.

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