

“*His Theories I Cannot Admire*”

DURING JEFFERSON’S SECOND YEAR in Paris, his friend Francis Hopkinson wrote from Philadelphia about the remarkable case of a certain Dr. Moyses, a blind Scottish chemist and “a Philosopher by Profession.” “He arrived I believe about a Year ago at Boston and has come from thence to this City, giving public Lectures in Natural philosophy all the way. He spent the beginning of this Winter at New York, where he became very popular and a great favourite of the Ladies in particular who crowded to his Lectures, and happy was she who [could] get him to dine or drink Tea at her House. Having gone thro’ his Course there and reaped no small Honour and Profit, he is now performing with us.”

Moyses’s reception in Philadelphia was even more frenzied. “The Ladies are ready to break their Necks after him. They throng to the Hall at 5 o’Clock for places, altho’ his Lecture does not begin till 7. He has been blind from his Infancy, has made Philosophy his Study and is well acquainted with the present admitted Systems, adding sometimes Theories of his own, which he does however, with rather too much Arrogance.”<sup>1</sup>

The extent of the popular fashion for natural philosophy, which extended well into the next century, can be judged from the following poem: *An Address to the Late Dr. Moyses, by the Ladies of Edinburgh, in Consequence of a Course of Lectures Given by Him in That City, 1795*. It begins:

Dear Doctor, let it not transpire  
How much your lectures we admire;  
How at your eloquence we wonder,