

**Hunterian oration : the Hunterian oration, (February 14th, 1851,) that would have been delivered by a Member of the College of Surgeons, of London, if permission had been granted to him by the President and Council.**

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# HUNTERIAN ORATION.

by *Edwards Griffith M.D.*

*The Hunterian Oration, (February 14th, 1851,) that would have been delivered by a Member of the College of Surgeons, of London, if permission had been granted to him by the president and council. The reader must suppose, the president, council, and members are before the orator, with Lord John Russell and Sir G. Grey, as visitors.*

(From the LONDON MEDICAL EXAMINER, March, 1851.)

MR. PRESIDENT,—As the circumstances under which I appear before you are so peculiar, I must be pardoned for neglecting for a few moments the name of the great man whose industry and genius we are assembled this day to commemorate. It has been announced to the profession, through the medical journals, that Mr. R. A. Stafford was appointed to deliver the Hunterian Oration on the 14th of February, but, in a periodical that now enjoys the confidence of this council, (February 8th,) is the following announcement.—

“We regret to inform our readers that Mr. Stafford, upon whom the duty devolved this year of delivering the Hunterian Oration at the College of Surgeons, is unable to do so, as his health is greatly impaired by his constant attendance on two old and attached friends, and their death has been so severe a shock as totally to incapacitate him from the completion of an oration, which we have reason to know was thoroughly *Hunterian*; a compliment we have not been able to pay to all orations delivered in the theatre of the Royal College of Surgeons.”

I am sure, Sir, that all connected with this college will regret the severe indisposition of Mr. Stafford, at the same time some surprise must be felt by the members at large, that one of the council did not volunteer his services; but, as no such offer has been made, I willingly, at the eleventh hour, undertake the task, and, as it is the first time that a *member*, one of the *lower grade*, has been allowed such a privilege, I feel more the responsibility of my position, but I will endeavour, honestly and conscientiously, to fulfil my trust; and although some of my remarks may not be pleasing to the authorities of this, and of other corporate institutions, I have reason to believe that they will not be unacceptable to the great bulk of the profession in England. Pliny tells us that Apelles, when he had finished his paintings, placed them in some public thoroughfare that they might be seen by the common people, whose judgment he preferred before his own. Apelles heard their remarks behind a screen, and often profited by them. Would, Mr. President, that the council of this college had shewn the same amount of wisdom: the dissatisfaction and disgust at your works among those whom you are pleased to designate the lower grade, the common people, have been loud and long repeated; but you take no warning; you are deaf to the voice of complaint; the appeals of reason and of justice have had no effect upon you; and the voices of those who *once* sounded loudly for medical reform are now still, they are quieted by that upas-like poison, CORPORATE FRATERNITY. But if you disregard the appeals of your brethren, why are you deaf to the censures of the public press? I could quote, if time would admit, numerous journals which have decried your narrow, selfish, and one-sided policy. In a leading article in the Daily News, October 9th 1850, is the following remark,—



"Instead of receiving favor and protection at the hands of government, such institutions (the Colleges of Surgeons and Physicians) should for ever have been expunged from the statute book, as a disgrace alike to the profession and the nation which tolerated them."

Although, as I said before, I regret exceedingly the cause that has deprived you of the orator of your choice, I do not regret that we are not to have a "thoroughly Hunterian" lecture. The subject is threadbare; even beauty palls upon the sense; and the eloquent and soft-toned voice that repeats the same tale year after year appears inharmonious and discordant. I think I can hear the great man whose eulogy will form but a small part of this oration, exclaim, "Talk not annually of my labors, but what account can you give of your own stewardship? How have you discharged the trust you have elected yourselves to? Have you endeavoured to find out nature's secrets? Are you the working bees of the college hive? Have you not yet learned that the very basis and foundation of surgery is a knowledge of medicine, and that disease and death know no *"grades?"*

John Hunter, the great man whose merits I have heard sounded sixteen or seventeen times in this theatre, was born in Scotland, February, 1728; he was one of ten children, five of whom died young. John was born when his father had reached his seventieth year. I am sure this fact will be pleasing to some of the reverend looking gentlemen I see before me! Hunter's education, like that of Shakspeare's, had been greatly neglected; he was but imperfectly acquainted with his mother tongue; the classics were to him sealed books, and so plebeian was his taste, that he said to Sir A. Carlisle, when speaking of his friends who were desirous of sending him to Oxford, "they wanted to make an old woman of me; or that I should stuff Latin and Greek at the University; but, (added he significantly pressing his thumb nail on the table,) these schemes I cracked like so many vermin as they came before me."

Had Hunter been acquainted with modern languages, like some of those I see present, he might have quietly profited by the scientific labors and discoveries of our neighbours; but wanting these resources he was compelled to depend upon his own exertions; to draw his deductions from the work of his own hands; to think and judge for himself. As there is some obscurity about the history of the early part of the life of our immortal bard; so is that of Hunter involved in mystery. It is tolerably certain, however, that at the age of seventeen, he was apprenticed to his brother-in-law, Mr. Buchanan, of Glasgow, a carpenter and cabinet-maker. He worked at this trade for some time, and it is probable, that when his brother-in-law got into difficulties, that he superintended the business. Dr. Johnson has said, that the only high road a Scotchman knows, is the road to England. Hunter's brother William was, fortunately for him, in London, and required an assistant in his dissecting-room. John was offered the post, and came at once to the Metropolis. Mr. Lawrence in his memorable oration of 1846, told you that he rode to London on horseback, a statement I am not able to verify.

I now pause a moment for the purpose of asking, what I fear will be considered by my upper-grade auditors, some very vulgar questions.



What advantage did Hunter derive from his working in wood and iron? Did not his carving, planing, and sawing, improve his mechanical skill, so as to enable him to collect and prepare with his own hands, the contents of the museum, which has been left by the government to your keeping for the *public good*? If you wish for a memento of his fame, look at the Hunterian collection. No fulsome eulogies are needed to sound his praise. No sculptured urn, or monumental brass, should ornament his tomb. The simple name of Hunter is more touching than the poet's elegy. In the Cathedral of *Aix-la-Chapelle*, where the mortal remains of Charlemagne once reposed, are inscribed on a slab of marble the words "Carolo Magno." This inscription is more affecting than the voices of a thousand orators.

I now, Sir, come to a part of my subject that will excite both surprise and indignation in the minds of the former orators of this college who are present. These gentlemen have spoken of Hunter's doctrines as if they were immutable; and they have assumed that nearly all his deductions were correct. But, Sir, if Hunter were alive, he would be the first to reprobate these assertions—these hasty and superficial conclusions based on ignorance, indolence, and bigotry. But let us, Sir, as members of a profession who are seeking to unravel nature's mysteries—to investigate the elements of disease, and the causes of decay and death—seriously and truthfully ask ourselves whether this blind adherence to authority, this parrot-like preaching, has not been the greatest stumbling-block in our path. Original discoveries in science and art are rare: men are greatly indebted to their predecessors; they may complete the chain by joining the first-made links; but the whole is not manufactured by the same artizan. Jenner first thought of vaccination from the assertion of the dairymaid, who told him that "she had had the hives, and therefore could not have the small-pox." I am not aware that Hunter knew of the operation that Anel had practised; but Leslie, in 1774, in a case of traumatic aneurism in the lower part of the femoral artery, after securing the vessel above and below the wound (on the recurrence of hæmorrhage), says, "I now resolved to take a fresh firm spot higher up, and from the size of the aperture in the first operation, I had little more to cut. However, to make sure of it, I took up the vessel three inches at least above the former ligature. The patient recovered."

But, to use the words of Astley Cooper, "Hunter has the merit of having substituted a simple and beautiful operation for one of considerable difficulty and danger." To exemplify, however, the absurdity of hasty conclusions, and to show the progress of discovery, it is now questionable whether Hunter's operation for popliteal and brachial aneurisms is really required in one case in ten. I think an inquest should be held on all patients who die after ligature of the brachial artery for (long standing) traumatic aneurism. The present of instruments Sir B. Brodie has lately received from the Dublin College may perhaps induce our hospital surgeons to give pressure a *fair* trial. I feel, sir, that these remarks are not irrelevant to the present subject.

I proceed to the gist of the matter, as far as regards our hero; and, I ask, are his published doctrines correct? Will many of them bear the light of modern investigation? I fearlessly and unhesitatingly assert



that they will not. Is his doctrine of inflammation, that great destroyer of the human race, founded on fact? Does increased activity of vessels arise from the cause Hunter supposed? Will Hunter's account of the structure of the arteries bear the test of minute investigation? Are the correctness of his views respecting the venereal disease confirmed by modern experience? I allude to these things, Sir, and I could mention several others, not for the purpose of taking from Hunter's merits, which are beyond dispute, but to show that the fulsome laudations of previous orators have had an injurious effect upon the minds of the students of this college. Lord Bacon himself, a melancholy example of corporate and official dishonesty, says, "That which is passed and gone is irrevocable, and wise men have enough to do with things present and to come; therefore they do but trifle with themselves who labour in past matters." I presume, Sir, to recommend this sentence to the next Hunterian orator—if another should be appointed.

I have now, Sir, done with Hunter—all honor to his memory! and as I see the Prime Minister of England, and other members of the government, before me, I cannot, I think, better employ the remaining part of the time allotted to me than by placing before them the statistics of the medical profession in England; and as my knowledge is derived from the parliamentary evidence and other public documents, it is beyond dispute; and, Sir, with greatest respect, I beg the especial attention of the Right Hon. Lord John Russell to the following statements. I assume, at the onset, that it is the duty of a good government to provide proper medical attendance for the people; and that no subject can engage the attention of Parliament that is so of much *real* importance to the public welfare as that of medical reform; that medical science must be clogged and shackled whilst we have chartered monopolies, and private clubs instead of *national institutions*, and until the profession in the United Kingdom is united into three brotherhoods or faculties, and honors and rewards are open to all, there must be a great bar to scientific progress.

In the United Kingdom thirty diplomas may be obtained, all varying in price and quality; they are as follow:—*England*.—Archbishops and bishops, 1. College of Surgeons of London, 2. College of Physicians of London, 3. Apothecaries' Company, 1. University of London, 1. Oxford, 1. Cambridge, 1. *Ireland*.—College of Surgeons, 2. College of Physicians, 1. Apothecaries' Company, 1. University, 1. University of Cork, 1. Galway, 1. Belfast, 1. Queen's College, 1. *Scotland*.—Edinburgh College of Surgeons, 2. College of Physicians, 1. University, 1. Glasgow Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons, 2. University, 1. St. Andrew's University, 1. Aberdeen, 2.

It must also be remembered that, at the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, London, and Dublin, some only take the degree of M. B. The price of the parchment varies as much as the requirements to obtain it. Thus the College of Physicians of London charge £24. 18s. for the country licence (for rural knowledge) and £56. 17s. for Metropolitan parchment. The College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, assistant surgeons in the navy, £2. 11s. 6d. Fellows of the College (entry money) £250. The price of the degrees of M.D. at Cambridge varies at different Colleges: St. Peter's, £11. 7s.; Clare Hall, £13. 0s. 2d.; Pembroke, £7. 2s.; Caius £17.; Trinity Hall, £20.; Corpus Christi, £10.;



King's, £6. 4s.; Queen's, £12. 7s.; Cath. Hall, £15.; Jesus, £10. 6s. 8d.; Christ's, £8. 2s.; St. John's, £10.; Magdalen, £8. 6s.; Trinity, £14. 18s.; and Emanuel, £8. The same at Oxford; so if I were disposed, I could greatly increase the number, and in addition to the above, the University of Durham is about to confer medical diplomas. I am now, Sir, anxious to direct the attention of his Lordship to the number of diplomas sold at the London examining boards during the past year, and the money received exclusive of stamp duty. University of London, 48 admitted—cash, £305. College of Physicians, Country, 5, London, 16,—£769. 12s. Apothecaries' Company, 258,—about £199. 12s. College of Surgeons, members 371,—£7,420. Fellows 12—£126.

I, first, Mr. President, speak of the condition of this college. I might refer to a hundred blots in its history. Hunterian manuscripts—tyrannical acts—smuggled charters—back-door entrance—closure of the museum and library—sale of examinerships, but taking the advice of Bacon, which I have just quoted, I will confine myself to the present time. As the money paid for diplomas is the best test of the prosperity of an institution, I place before you the receipts and expenditure during the last sixteen years, according to your own published accounts, an inspection of which you have refused me. The receipts in these sixteen years, ending in 1849, were £234,322. 19s.; the expenditure £247,935. 9s. 9d. In 1834 the permanent income from government stock, &c. &c. was £2,034. 4s. 4d.; in 1849, £951. 3s. 3d. In 1843 the Court of Examiners received £14,093. 11s.; in 1849, only £7,508. 7s. For the four years preceding the obnoxious charter the receipts were for diplomas £54,214. 14s.; for the last four years they have been only £31,441. 8s. exclusive of £1,176. for the fellowship. Again, the library expences in 1840 were £1,945; in 1849, £422. 13s. 11d.; and during eight months, only four books, exclusive of periodicals, were purchased. Lectures, orations, Jacksonian prizes, &c. £3,320. 14s. College department, including examiners' fees, £97,336. 6s. 4d. Miscellaneous, £11,514. 1s. 8d. But the most curious item in these confused figures is £83. for the release of members—gentlemen who have paid to get absolution from surgical knowledge.

I am anxious that the members present should not suppose that by these accounts anything like a correct estimate can be formed; they only supply the large sums—not the items. But why, Mr. President, should not a *member* be allowed to see how this quarter of a million of money has been got rid of? Is this the *morality* that some of the councillors boast of? and, as I am speaking of morality, let me at once correct an important error in your communication to Sir George Grey (Aug. 20th, 1849), the statement is as follows: that “there are *some*, and the Council believe that they are not numerous,” who are merely members of the Apothecaries' Company. I find, from a careful analysis of the Medical Directory, that more than one thousand are practising with this diploma only. I have also obtained the qualifications of 10,974 practitioners of England and Wales, and including the army and navy, and those who have not returned their qualifications, the number will amount to about 14,000 or 15,000, exclusive of unqualified practitioners. Of this number I find that 1,663 members of this college are practising without any medical



diploma whatever; and yet Mr. Bransby Cooper (who I am glad to see present) has recently stated, in his introductory lecture, "That surgery is the mere mechanical part of the profession, and that ninety-nine cases out of a hundred belong to the physician." I must also allude to another incorrect statement, made by Mr. C. Hawkins (I believe unintentionally), in his Hunterian oration, 1849, he said "that 5,808 persons had been admitted to the library during the previous year;" but in this calculation, if one person entered 200 times in a year, he was reckoned as 200, and so with the reports of your hospitals and dispensaries; *the letters are renewed monthly*, and one patient is in this manner magnified to twelve. But does this kind of clap-trap, I ask, become the members of a learned profession? I have sworn, Sir, to support the dignity of this college: and I believe I cannot better fulfil my oath than by pointing out these abuses. Corporate dignity admits of various definitions; my definition would not square with that of the council of this college, and other corporate institutions. Has my friend, Mr. South, your vice-president, supported the dignity of this college by his household surgery? Does Sir B. Brodie's defence of Sir E. Home's incendiarism and literary theft add to its dignity? Does the rejection of medicine (the very basis of surgery) from your examinations dignify this corporation? Does the Swiney Cup adjudication, and do other matters I could name, add dignity to the College of Physicians?

These blots, Sir, on our medical institutions would not be allowed to disgrace a national Faculty of Medicine. Our students would not be obliged to go to Paris for anatomical knowledge, and the industrious student would meet with his reward. In Paris, at the present moment, the contest for the Chair of Clinical Surgery is going on; the names inscribed were Bouisson, Chassaignac, Desprès, Giraldès, Gosselin, Jarjavay, Maisonneuve, Marchal, Michon, Morel-Lavallée, Nélaton, Robert, Sanson, and Voillermier.

*The University of London* numbers 95 Doctors of Medicine, and 200 Bachelors of Medicine. *The London College of Physicians* (printed list, 1848) 695; of these 169 are Fellows, 256 Licentiates, and 270 country practitioners, or extra licentiates. But many of the 695 are not in practice, or they are out of England. *Apothecaries' Company*: it is difficult to ascertain the exact number of the members of this company, but, judging from the Medical Directory and other sources of information, they amount to about 5,000. From the printed lists from January 1841 to December 1850, 2864 persons have been admitted members of the Apothecaries' Company, and beginning with 1841, the following are the number of candidates admitted each year, 368, 328, 338, 313, 264, 230, 265, 246, 254, 258. It would ill become me to direct my shafts against this college only, when all our corporate institutions afford so many vulnerable points of attack. I find that during the last nine years more than £22,068. have been received by the examiners of this company, of which they refuse to give me, as a *member*, any account. In fact, as far as I can learn, the masters and wardens have the power of putting all this money into their own pockets, or of spending it about their corporate stomachs. Admitting, as I do, that this society has been of infinitely more service than any of the examining boards of this country, it has kept so close to the bad example set by its elder brethren, that the sooner it is disbanded the



better. The very name, too, is offensive, and most of the members are ashamed of it. I may here mention, that before the establishment of this society, so much opposed by this college and the College of Physicians, according to Dr. Gregory, only thirty-eight *medical* students attended the seven metropolitan Hospitals.

I must not pass over the archbishops and bishops—I believe there are now about ten *divine* doctors in England. Oxford and Cambridge, as schools of medicine, are scarcely worthy of note. Dr. Kidd in his parliamentary evidence states (4473) that from 1822 to 1834 only 15 took the degree of M.D., and 25 that of M.B., at the former university.

But what a melancholy spectacle does Ireland afford of the present state of medical government. I quote from the parliamentary evidence the numbers belonging to the three corporate bodies of Dublin. College of Surgeons, 967; College of Physicians, 117; Apothecaries' Company, 1,249; and many of these are in the army and navy, so it may be fairly inferred that Ireland does not supply more than 1,500 practitioners from her own institutions for the eight millions of her population.

In Scotland what a variety of chartered monopoly we have, and I may remark, Sir, that the arbitrary laws of the College of Physicians of this country have driven Englishmen to Scotland to obtain degrees. These institutions all play into each other's hands, first, the Doctor of Medicine, and then the Physician of what? I find in the reports of the commissioners of the universities of Scotland, that from 1776 to 1826—2792 students graduated in Edinburgh during these 50 years; I have made an analysis of the names published in the *Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal* from 1805 to 1850; the lists for the years 1846, 1848, and 1849, for some reason, being omitted. The number in these 42 years is 3,805. Of these I find, 1,058 were from England, 39 from Wales, 982 from Ireland, 1,270 from Scotland, 456 from our Colonies, including a few from other countries. The members of the College of Physicians of Edinburgh are very limited, and I am unable to obtain the list of the members of the College of Surgeons. At the University of Glasgow, from 1776 to 1830, 574 graduated in Medicine at this University.—90 of these were from England, 180 from Scotland, 135 from Ireland, 19 from the British Colonies, and 21 from foreign countries.—From 1817 to 1830, 265 took the degree of *Magister Chirurgiæ*.—10 of these were English, 104 Scotch, and 82 Irish. From 1826 to 1836, 523 graduated in medicine, and 194 took the degree of *Magister Chirurgiæ*.—72 of these were from England, 293 from Ireland, 303 from Scotland, and 21 were foreigners. At the University of St. Andrew from 1800 to 1833, 650. From 1834 to 1850 the number of graduates amounted to 563. At the University and King's College, Aberdeen, from the year 1800 to 1849, I find the number admitted is 475; only 79 of the graduates are Scotchmen. *Marischal College and University*.—From 1776 to 1830, 451 degrees in medicine were obtained.

In June 1849, I made an analysis of the London Medical Directory. The numbers for the present year would, of course, differ to a slight extent, but the labor is too great to induce me to undertake a second examination, and no important good would result from it. In London and the suburbs there were 2,567 practitioners; about 275 are practising as physicians, and probably about 90, who call themselves Pure Surgeons,



but of these the greater number prescribe in all cases. The remaining 2,262 are general practitioners; of the 2,567, 1,670 are members of the College of Surgeons of London (of these 935 are members of the Apothecaries Company, also; 536 are practising with only the College of Surgeons' diploma; the remaining 199, in addition to this diploma, have taken degrees at British and Foreign Universities) 251 are licentiates of the Apothecaries Company only; and of the remaining 281, 71 were in practice before 1815. 150 have refused to state their qualifications, and the rest, (215,) are variously qualified. 538 of the above have obtained degrees from British or Foreign Universities. Cambridge, 46; Oxford, 26; London, 63; Dublin, 18; Edinburgh, 171; St. Andrew's, 61; Glasgow, 39; Aberdeen, 22; Foreign Universities, 92.

The Provincial Directory contains the names of 8,380 practitioners, and they are thus qualified. Degrees: Lambeth 4, not including Sir C. Clarke. Oxford 14; of these 12 are M. D. and 2 M. B. Cambridge 62; 44 of these M. D., 17 M. B., and 1 L. M. London 59; of these 25 M. D., 34 M. B. Dublin 24; of these M. D. 14, M. B. 9, L. K. and Q. C. 1. Edinburgh 535; and 211 of these possess no other qualification. St. Andrew's 118; Glasgow 99; Aberdeen 64; Foreign degrees 103; London College of Surgeons and Apothecaries 3,698; College of Surgeons alone 1,127; Apothecaries' Company alone 787; London Hall, College and Edinburgh Surgeons 9; London Hall and Edinburgh Surgeons 60; London Hall and College and Glasgow Surgeons 4; London Hall and College and Dublin Hall 4; London Hall and Glasgow Surgeons 10; London and Glasgow Surgeons 3; London and Edinburgh Surgeons 17; Edinburgh Surgeons alone 113; Dublin Surgeons alone 14; Glasgow Surgeons alone 32; London College of Physicians without any other named qualification 12; in practice before 1815, or diplomas not stated, 1,408. The Irish diplomas amount to 42; the Scotch to 1,064; the Foreign to 103; and 596 are practising with Irish, Scotch, or Foreign qualifications alone.

These statements surely, Sir, are sufficient to convince the Prime Minister of England that if a Faculty of Medicine were established in England, Ireland, and Scotland, on the representative principle; election by concours, and public examinations instituted, that the benefit to medical science, and to the public at large, would be incalculable. What subject, Sir, next to religion, is so important to man, as health? And yet, so indifferent are our legislators about this matter, that when the "Medical Profession Bill," in 1841, was brought before the Commons, the House was counted out, and *only thirty-three members were present*. We have scarcely a voice in the Legislature. Our antagonistic clubs and corporations render us, as a body, powerless; but let us be united into One Faculty or Brotherhood, in which all will feel a mutual interest, and the medical profession in this country will then take the rank that its immense importance entitles it to.

Before I terminate my hour of brief authority, Mr. President, let me say that I have only alluded to the *public* acts of individuals. This is not a time to bandy fair words and fulsome compliments; the subject does not admit of it—it is too grave and important. I speak of you in your *corporate*, not in your *private* characters. The latter may be pure and spotless, and your morality may be orthodox to a fault; but I ask you, as gentlemen and as honest men, to lay aside your corporate prejudices—to take a broad and comprehensive view of this momentous subject—to recollect that as there is a beautiful harmony in the structure of all human bodies—so all who treat their diseases should possess a uniformity of qualification, an accurate knowledge both of medicine and surgery, and that the peasant should be provided with the same medical skill as the lord.

*"Pallida mors æquo pulsat pede pauperum tabernas,  
Regumque turre."*