

**Address on the occasion of the first meeting in the new house of the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society, no. 20, Hanover Square, on Tuesday, October 22, 1889 / by Sir Edward H. Sieveking.**

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# ADDRESS

13

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

FIRST MEETING IN THE NEW HOUSE OF THE  
ROYAL MEDICAL AND CHIRURGICAL SOCIETY,  
No. 20, HANOVER SQUARE,

ON

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 22, 1889.

BY

SIR EDWARD H. SIEVEKING, M.D., LL.D., F.R.C.P.,  
PRESIDENT.



LONDON:


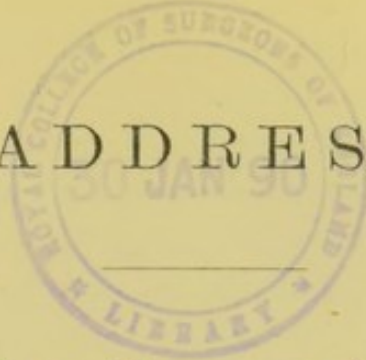
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ADDRESS.

FELLOWS OF THE ROYAL MEDICAL AND CHIRURGICAL SOCIETY !

Welcome to our New Home !

The new phase which our Society is this day entering upon, not only appears to justify, but to call for a brief consideration of the admirable work performed by our founders and predecessors, as well as of the duties which we have undertaken to medical science and to humanity. The small beginnings which ushered in the first formation of the Society have been nurtured and fostered, until greater expansion became imperative ; and we have now entered upon what, as far as we can see into the future, promises to remain the home of the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society for many future generations. The wishes which are now, thanks to the admirable management of the Building Committee and the energy of the Fellows, on the eve of fulfilment, have for some years been in the hearts and mouths of all our supporters. We have long felt cramped in our Berners Street residence, where at last, all the ingenuity that could be brought to bear, failed to make room for the work that we were called upon to do, and to house the ever-increasing library, our most precious heirloom and possession.

No history of our Society is at present available. The following notices therefore, gathered together from authentic records, may not be without interest ; and though necessarily meagre and disjointed, may prove useful to the future writer possessed of the ability and leisure to exhibit the true development of the Society, as displayed by the scientific growth that has characterised it, and by the fostering care with which it has watched over medicine and surgery.

On May 22nd, 1805, an inaugural meeting was held at

Freemasons' Tavern,<sup>1</sup> Dr. Saunders, F.R.S., F.R.C.P., in the chair, at which it was determined :

1. That a Society comprehending the several branches of the Medical Profession be established in London, for the purpose of conversation on professional subjects, for the reception of communications, and for the formation of a library.

2. That this Society be denominated the Medical and Chirurgical Society of London.

3. That its meetings be held in some central situation.

4. That its affairs be conducted by a President, four Vice-Presidents, a Treasurer, three Secretaries (one of whom shall be Foreign Secretary) and a certain number of members, who together shall constitute a Council and shall be elected annually.

5. That no gentleman shall be eligible to the office of President or Vice-President for more than two years in succession.

6. That a certain number of the Council go out annually.

7. That six guineas be the sum subscribed on admission, and that three guineas annually be subscribed for the use of the Society.

8. That after the organisation of the Society all admission into it be by ballot, and that no person be declared elected unless he have in his favour at least three fourths of the numbers voting.

These are the main points determined upon at this preliminary meeting, and their wisdom cannot be better demonstrated than by the fact that they continue to rule our conduct. Twenty-six gentlemen were at once inscribed as regular members, and Dr. Yelloly was requested to act as Secretary of the Committee nominated for the purpose of preparing a plan of further operations. This Committee consisted of eighteen of the original members.

The first meeting of the Society was held at No. 2, Verulam Buildings, Gray's Inn, in December, 1805, but

<sup>1</sup> This is still in existence in Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, though much altered. I am, however, informed by the manager that some of the old rooms belonging to the original building are in existence.

it was not till 1809 that the first volume of our 'Transactions' was published, a publication which, as we believe it to redound to the honour of the Society, we hope has been profitable as well as honorable to the ancient and respected firm of publishers,<sup>1</sup> who from the commencement have behaved to the Society with liberality.

Before going any further it may be interesting to you to know the intellectual basis upon which our Society was founded. The members of the first Council, which held the reins of office from 1805 to 1807, were all men who have contributed largely to the advancement of medical science, and no future history of our profession will be complete without an admiring record of much of the work performed by them. Many of their names are even yet household words among us. The following may be regarded as the founders as they were the first rulers of the Medical and Chirurgical Society<sup>2</sup>:—William Saunders, M.D., F.R.S., President; John Abernethy, Esq., F.R.S., Vice-President; Charles Rochemont Aikin, Esq., Secretary; William Babington, M.D., F.R.S., Vice-President; Matthew Baillie, M.D., F.R.S.; Thomas Bateman, M.D., F.R.S.; Gilbert Blaine, M.D., F.R.S.; Sir William Blizard, F.R.S., Vice-President; Astley Cooper, Esq., F.R.S., Treasurer; James Curry, M.D., F.R.S.; Sir Walter Farquhar, M.D.; John Heaviside, Esq., F.R.S.; Alexander Marcet, M.D., F.R.S., Foreign Secretary; David Pitcairn, M.D., F.R.S.; Henry Revell Reynolds, M.D., F.R.S.; H. Leigh Thomas, Esq., F.R.S.; James Wilson, Esq., F.R.S., and John Yelloly, M.D., Secretary.

The only material difference that suggests itself between this list and the lists that you are familiar with, is the elimination of the Foreign Secretary. The greater intercourse which has existed between this country and the Continent has doubtless increased the accomplishments of our more recent secretaries to such an extent

<sup>1</sup> Messrs. Longman and Co.

<sup>2</sup> The sequence of the names is that given in the first volume of the 'Transactions.'

that they have not for many years required the aid of a special official to enable them to carry on a foreign correspondence.

The first volume of the 'Transactions' appeared in 1809, and had the distinction of being reprinted for a third time in 1815. It opens with a paper by Astley Cooper on a case of Aneurism of the Carotid Artery, followed by one of Dr. Stanger on Violent and Obstinate Cough; on the Treatment of Whooping-Cough by Dr. Pearson; a paper by Dr. Bostock, of Liverpool, on the Gelatine of the Blood; one by Thompson Forster, a case of Lithotomy; and by Dr. Marcet on the Effects of Large Doses of Laudanum and their Remedies. These are dated 1806. The following belong to the years 1807 and 1808:—An Account of a Peculiar Disease of the Heart by David Dundas, Sergeant-Surgeon; a case of Exposure to the Vapour of Burning Charcoal by Dr. Babington; on Gouty Concretions by Mr. Moore; a case of Artificial Dilatation of the Female Urethra by Mr. Thomas; a case of Hydrophobia by Dr. Marcet; three cases of Sudden Death, with Post-mortem, by M. Chevalier; a case of Intussusception by Mr. Blizard, and a description of Two Muscles surrounding the Membranous portion of the Urethra by Mr. J. Wilson. This is followed by a case of Tumour of the Brain by Dr. Yelloly, and a second case of Carotid Aneurism by Astley Cooper; then we come upon a case of a Fœtus found in the Abdomen of a Boy by Geo. Will. Young; two cases of Smallpox Infection communicated to the Fœtus in Utero under Peculiar Circumstances by Dr. Jenner, and an historical account, by Dr. White, of Philip Howorth, a boy in whom signs of Puberty commenced at an Early Age, which was communicated by Dr. Yelloly, conclude this catalogue. A list of works given by Baillie, Hunter, Astley Cooper, and others, and which formed the nucleus of the magnificent library we now possess, ends this first volume of the 'Medical and Chirurgical Transactions.'

From this time forth the Society's 'Transactions' have appeared, with very few interruptions, annually up to the

present day, and have contributed in no small degree to give an excellent stamp to its fellowship and to British medicine at large. The Society steadily increased in numbers and in influence, but it was evidently cramped at first by the *res angusta domi*, for we find that in these early days the Council resolved that Mr. Nichols (Clerk) be allowed to occupy "the library when it is not otherwise wanted, and to procure a press-bedstead at the Society's expense for his accommodation, to stand in the further corner of the meeting room."

In the year 1810 No. 3, Lincoln's Inn Fields became the home of the Society, which it occupied in conjunction with the Geological Society, from whose President, on the security of three Fellows, the Medical and Chirurgical Society borrowed £200. The two societies did not separate till 1816. Nos. 30 and 57, Lincoln's Inn Fields<sup>1</sup> were temporarily our home until, in 1834, for a long series of years the property of the Society was moved to No. 53, Berners Street. The first meeting assembled in this locality on February 3rd, 1835, the last on June 11th, 1889.<sup>2</sup> Although difficulties occasionally surrounded the Society, especially in the early part of its existence, nothing appears materially to have checked its work and steady growth. For the first time, in 1812, we find the Society associating with itself Foreign Honorary Members; their names are still mentioned with veneration: Blumenbach, Cuvier, Rush (of Pennsylvania), Sömmering, Corvisart, Odier, Scarpa, and Vieussieux (of Geneva).<sup>3</sup> It may be mentioned that the year 1834, during which the removal from Lincoln's Inn was effected, and the cost of

<sup>1</sup> It appears that No. 57, Lincoln's Inn Fields was taken conjointly with the Astronomical Society from Midsummer Day, 1821, on a 7, 14, or 21 years' lease, terminable at the option of either party on giving six months' notice.

<sup>2</sup> The last meeting of Council was held at 53, Berners Street, in Mr. MacAlister's rooms on Oct. 15th, 1889.

<sup>3</sup> The first proposal paper, still in our possession, is in manuscript. It was that of Thomas Young, M.D., F.R.S., Physician to St. George's Hospital, and is signed by Alex. Marcet, Henry Halford, Robert Bree, J. Yelloly, and P. M. Roget. He was proposed Nov. 12th, 1812, and balloted for on Jan. 5th, 1813.



which was defrayed by voluntary subscriptions<sup>1</sup> of the Fellows, was marked by the absence of a volume of the 'Transactions,' owing to the confusion necessarily arising from the migration. At this time the agitation for a Royal Charter was successful, and since then we have been incorporated as the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society of London,<sup>2</sup> of which the Sovereign (in the first instance, William the Fourth) is Patron, by which name we shall "have perpetual succession and a Common Seal," with such other rights and privileges as belong to any other body, politic and corporate, in "our United Kingdom of Great Britain." It was not without a struggle that this Charter had been obtained; the Society had made great efforts during the years 1812, 1813, and 1814 to achieve this object of their ambition. In the month of February, 1812, "in consequence of the gracious reception accorded by H.R.H. the Prince Regent to an application of Sir Henry Hallford," who was at that time President of the Medical and Chirurgical Society, a petition for a Charter was sanctioned by the Society; after having been signed by Sir H. Hallford, President, Drs. Saunders and Baillie, past Presidents, by Sir Walter Farquhar, Drs. Marcet and Yelloly, and Messrs. Clive, Abernethy, and Cooper, the Trustees of the Society, it was laid before H.R.H. the Prince Regent in Council. I regret to say that the Royal College of Physicians, under the Presidency of Sir Francis Milman, objected to the grant, stating in their counter-petition that they would be materially aggrieved by the grant of a Royal Charter of Incorporation to the Medical and Chirurgical Society. The grounds upon which the College based its opposition would be unintelligible to the present generation, but as an item in the history of British medicine, I think it right to place before you some of the arguments employed on behalf of the College. It was said by its defenders that "by certain Regulations or Bye-laws of the said College,

<sup>1</sup> They amounted to £346 9s.

<sup>2</sup> This charter was granted to Dr. Elliotson, Sir Astley Cooper, Bart., and Dr. Yelloly.

any tract or treatise on medical subjects, written by any Fellow or Candidate of the said College, or by any person licensed by the said College to practise physic, may be read at certain meetings of the said College, and if approved of, in manner as by such Regulations and Bye-laws is required, will be directed to be printed at the expense of the said College ;” and again, “ that the establishment of such Society by Royal Charter will be the means of depriving the College of Physicians of such tracts upon medical subjects as shall be written by those members of the College who shall likewise be members of the Medical and Chirurgical Society.”

The Attorney-General and Solicitor-General took the part of the College of Physicians, and in spite of a long correspondence, the Privy Council agreed, at the Court at Carlton House, the 19th March, 1814, present H.R.H. the Prince Regent in Council :—“ That they do not see sufficient grounds for recommending the grant of a charter to the Medical and Chirurgical Society.”

Of this report the Prince Regent was pleased to approve, and the charter accordingly was not granted.

Let us hope that if Sir Francis Milman and his co-adjutors were alive now, they would, in the favourite language of the College in those days, repentantly join us in exclaiming, “ *O cœca mens mortalium!* ”

Our Society seems to have for some time been exercised by the desire of bestowing prizes upon distinguished Fellows ; we find references to this matter in 1822 and again in 1837, but nothing was ever done in this direction, until the foundation, by voluntary subscription, of the Marshall Hall Prize, in 1872, as a memorial to a great man ; and which has been since awarded to three distinguished workers in the same field as that in which he laboured so successfully : Drs. Hughlings Jackson, Ferrier, and Gaskell.—The whole question of prize-giving is one that may be discussed from various points of view, but if there is a difference of opinion in regard to some aspects of the question, it can scarcely be doubted that it is a high function for a society like ours to perform, to award a tangible

proof of its appreciation of good work done in the cause of science under the restrictions such as those surrounding the Marshall Hall Prize. You will remember that this is a quinquennial prize bestowed for work not necessarily done in connection with our Society. This was not the former object of the Society, for we read in the 'Transactions' of 1823 the resolution, "that the Council shall adjudge out of the funds of the Society a prize to the author of the paper that shall appear to them most deserving of that honour, amongst those that shall have been read to the Society during the session."

It is to be assumed that the Council were satisfied that they had sufficient pecuniary means at their disposal or they would not have made such a proposition. It is easily intelligible that the great variety of subjects treated by different Fellows, would render it very difficult to judge of their productions according to any common standard. Although I have no definite data to rely upon, I have little doubt that this was the rock on which the good intentions of the Council were wrecked. Whenever our Treasurers report an ample credit balance, and we are again tempted to establish prizes, let us profit by the experience of the past. There are ample methods of spending our money for the advancement of science, and so long as we appoint good working committees for the special investigation of questions bearing upon medicine and surgery we need never be at a loss as to spending our money for the promotion of the objects defined by our Charter.<sup>1</sup>

Our removal to Berners Street, and our receiving the honour of a Royal Charter of Incorporation, was marked by the termination of the first series of eighteen volumes of our 'Transactions' and by the commencement of the series which is still running on. It will be a question for your consideration whether it may not be well to mark the great event of our emigration to a new home in a similar manner as was done by our predecessors. I, for

<sup>1</sup> The Society's Charter states that "the Society was formed for the cultivation and promotion of physic and surgery, and of the branches of science connected with them."

one, see certain advantages in defining in a society like ours, the footsteps of time ; and, as far as my judgment guides me, I do not apprehend any counteracting drawbacks.

When I had the honour of serving the office of Secretary to the Society there was a prolonged agitation on the subject of establishing a fusion of the numerous societies formed for the promotion of distinct branches of the medical profession. I cannot say that I saw my way to removing the various difficulties in the way of the execution of a plan which, theoretically, promised very well. Nor do I think that the difficulties are less now or that there would be a greater prospect of success if the different societies took up the question at the present day. But it does suggest itself to me that as six societies of a scientific character and one with philanthropic purposes, all closely associated with the medical profession, will in future occupy rooms under our roof, there will be many opportunities of carrying out objects that an Academy of Medicine would have in view, but which would be perhaps even more energetically and beneficially realised by the co-operation of Societies that are now distinct in their objects, their means, and their government. There are many questions of medical science and medical government which would be more completely solved and more actively prosecuted by joint committees of the six scientific societies working with the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society than could be achieved by any one of them carrying on their labours alone.

But a few words more and I will call upon the Secretary to initiate the regular work to which our assemblies are devoted. If we are deeply indebted to our predecessors for what they have done in establishing this Society on a broad and firm basis, we must not forget the debt of gratitude we owe to those of our contemporaries who have made it possible for us to enter into possession of this palatial edifice, a home that Medical Science will claim as its own, we trust, for centuries to come, and where, "widening down from precedent to precedent," true and

beneficial knowledge may find expansive and increasing power for good through many future generations of Britons.

Some unavoidable delays have prevented the house being as far advanced towards completion as your Council had reason to expect when the contracts were first signed, but the Building Committee and your Council were equally of opinion that it would be better to assemble even in the present condition of the rooms than to seek a temporary home. It is only right to mention that the Medical Society of London through its President, Dr. Theodore Williams, who is also a distinguished Fellow of this Society, knowing of some difficulties that beset us, offered us the use of their rooms. The fraternal spirit that suggested this offer is an admirable illustration of the good feeling and harmony that pervades the republic of science.

Much, however, has been achieved in the brief space of time that has been at our disposal, and it is only right that you and future Fellows of the Society should know upon whom the chief burden and anxiety has fallen. The members of the Building Committee, to whom the Council, with your sanction, have delegated the great responsibility of carrying out this important work, are Mr. Timothy Holmes (Chairman), Dr. Cheadle, Dr. Gee, Dr. Hare, Dr. Isambard Owen, Mr. Warrington Haward, Mr. R. W. Parker, and Mr. A. Willett. Our architect is Mr. Flockhart. I am quite sure that I only echo the opinion of every Fellow of the Society if I couple with this distinguished list of names, that of a gentleman who, though not a member of the Building Committee, has from the first inception of the plan shown an amount of tact, zeal, and ability which has materially lightened the labours of the Committee and Council, I mean our Resident Librarian, Mr. MacAlister.

It now only remains for me to express a hope that I am sure you will all echo, that God may bless the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society in its new home, and prosper its work, carried on for the advancement of science and for the benefit of our countrymen and of humanity at large.