

An address delivered at a public meeting of the subscribers to the Vincent Testimonial : held at Saint Bartholomew's Hospital, on Saturday, April 3rd, 1847 / by Anthony Colling Brownless.

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AN ADDRESS

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DELIVERED AT

A PUBLIC MEETING OF THE SUBSCRIBERS

TO THE

Vincent Testimonial,

HELD AT

SAINT BARTHOLOMEW'S HOSPITAL,

ON

SATURDAY, APRIL 3RD, 1847,

DR. ROUPELL IN THE CHAIR,

BY

ANTHONY COLLING BROWNLESS, M.D.

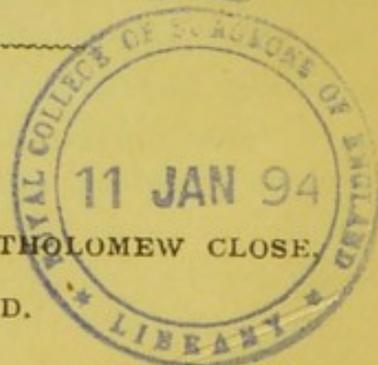
Physician to the Metropolitan Dispensary.

LONDON:

G. J. GALABIN, PRINTER, 91, BARTHOLOMEW CLOSE.

WEST SMITHFIELD.

1847.



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AN ADDRESS,

DELIVERED AT A PUBLIC MEETING OF THE SUBSCRIBERS TO
THE VINCENT TESTIMONIAL,

Held at ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S HOSPITAL, SATURDAY, APRIL 3RD, 1847,

In Support of the following

AMENDMENT TO THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE,

“ That this Meeting consider a PORTRAIT and ENGRAVING,
“ with a Copy of the latter for each Subscriber, the best mode
“ of perpetuating the Memory of MR. VINCENT.”

BY

ANTHONY COLLING BROWNLESS, M.D.

Physician to the Metropolitan Dispensary.

MR. CHAIRMAN AND GENTLEMEN,

I CANNOT rise to support this Amendment without feeling very considerable embarrassment; for, embarrassed as I should naturally be at all times in speaking before any large number of individuals, I feel myself more so on the present occasion, when I am addressing many Gentlemen so much superior to myself in ability and eloquence, so distinguished as learned Members of our Profession. I feel myself more and more embarrassed, when I consider that I am opposed to many of those Gentlemen upon the question before us, and when I know that I have arrayed against me, not only their great power of argument, but the influence, which their high station and the just estimation in which they are held in this School, will likewise give them over the minds of their hearers. I am oppressed, too, by the responsibility which has been placed upon me, and by the fear that some other Gentleman holding the same opinion on this question, might have been found more ably to have discharged the task which has devolved upon myself.

As I may be considered by some as advocating an opinion on the present question which, at first sight, may appear opposed

to the interests of this Hospital, permit me to say, that I can yield to no one in feelings of attachment to this Venerable Institution and excellent School; nor can I yield to any in feelings of the deepest respect and gratitude to those distinguished Professors, for whose kind and most able instruction we must ever feel greatly indebted; or can I remember the privileges we have enjoyed, in being able to pursue the study of our profession in the Wards of this Great Hospital, without standing first and foremost in grateful acknowledgment of the kindness and liberality of the Treasurer and Governors, in permitting us to make use of the great advantages which this extensive field of disease presents to the inquiring mind.

But whilst I do this with the greatest sincerity, and anxious as I feel, and ever shall feel, for the prosperity of this my *Alma Mater*, I, at the same time, claim for myself and for every one here present, the privilege of giving an independent vote on the present occasion; the right and privilege of speaking and acting now, and on all occasions, (with the greatest respect to the constituted authorities,) but, at the same time, strictly as our sense of duty may lead us, *uninfluenced by excited hope or servile fear*. And I have too much confidence in the liberal sentiments of the Medical Officers, the Treasurer, and Governors of this Hospital, to suppose for one moment that they would wish to use any other influence than that of legitimate argument.

And now let us consider the arguments for and against each of the two modes proposed for perpetuating the memory of MR. VINCENT.

Much importance has been attached to the opinion of MR. VINCENT, as stated in the report of the deputation, viz. that although he had no feeling for any particular form of Testimonial, yet, when he considered that the proposition of the committee, the Scholarship, was most calculated to benefit the school, he readily acquiesced in their suggestion. Now, besides knowing from the deputation that MR. VINCENT (when the Picture was first mentioned to him by them) gave evident signs not only of approval of that form of Testimonial, but even of much delight and pleasure, we may very fairly argue that he supposed that the majority of the committee represented the feeling of the majority of the subscribers, (which was not the fact,) and that will readily explain why, in the latter part of the interview, he expressed himself favorably towards the foundation of a Scholarship.

Every one who has had the pleasure of MR. VINCENT'S

friendship, must know full well that he would never knowingly express a wish opposed to the majority of those gentlemen who have endeavoured to honor him as far as their means would permit; and, therefore, it seems to me to be much more to the point to find out MR. VINCENT'S real private feeling on this matter; and, by information obtained from MR. VINCENT, through one of his most intimate friends, I am able to state to you that his private wish is for the Picture; the evidence on this point is said to be conflicting, but the greatest weight is justly due to this testimony, as it comes from one who MR. VINCENT knew to be in no way connected with the presentation of the Testimonial.

It appears to me that the undeniable fact of the majority of the Subscribers being for a Portrait and Engraving ought to have very considerable weight in our decision; especially as a most inconvenient time has been fixed upon for this meeting, a time when those usually in London have left for the Easter recess, and a time most inconvenient for those in the country to leave home; the circumstance, too, of no proxy being allowed any gentleman, however great may be the distance of his residence from the metropolis, ought I think to have some influence in our decision. And here I cannot help for a moment remarking how singularly impressed the majority of the committee appear to have been with the latter half of the old adage, "The fewer the better cheer;" fortunately, however, some of us were equally impressed with the truth of the first part of the same adage, and I trust we shall show to day that "The more" are "the merrier," even though with "the fewer" there may be for some "the better cheer."

The advocates of a Scholarship wish to impress us with the idea that that form of Testimonial will be much more lasting than the Picture and Engraving, and I am willing to admit that, looking simply at the ravages of time on matter, their assertion may be true; but when I look back at the history of the past, and see the changes which have taken place in the very oldest and noblest Foundations; when I see not only the names of the Founders erased from the title page of the Foundations, but the moneys appropriated to other and perhaps far different objects to those intended by the original Founders; when I contemplate the changes which have taken place in the civil institutions of most countries during the chances of war and the excited time of civil strife; I cannot regard a Scholarship as a form of memorial having, in the lottery of time, any greater chance of preserva-

tion than the Picture and Engravings, nay it is a well known fact that conquerors whilst they have overturned foundations and appropriated the funds to their own use have generally preserved works of art. Look at the last continental war; see how Napoleon, changing as he did the ancient foundations of the countries which he conquered, carefully preserved works of art, especially paintings, which have since been restored to their rightful owners. If it be said these were all valuable from their historical character; I can answer no, and will name as an example Paul Potter's celebrated picture of the "Young Bull," which was carried from the Hague by Napoleon, and, after being carefully preserved in the Louvre at Paris, was, at the general peace, restored to the Hague; and I would ask is not our revered friend, the late distinguished Surgeon of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, more valuable than a Young Bull?

And whilst considering the comparative chances of preservation, what numbers of valuable pictures and other works of art do we find on the Continent, which have been concealed during the time of war and revolution by the care of individuals, who are seldom wanting to preserve memorials of this kind.

I may be told that I am fighting with imaginary enemies, and that all trust we may be long blessed with peace at home and abroad; I may be told that staid, worthy, and wealthy trustees will be appointed, and that, under ordinary chances, the name and intention of the foundation will remain the same for ages. Gentlemen, do you know that men as a body, will do things which each would be heartily ashamed to be guilty of individually? At the little town in which I spent many of my younger days, there was an endowed grammar school, a very old foundation, where many had received an excellent classical, mathematical, and general education, from which men had gone forth and distinguished themselves at the Universities and elsewhere. And at which one of the most rising young Physicians now in this metropolis received his education. By the original foundation, the head master was to be at least a graduate of some distinguished University, and the trustees were men of property and respectability. You will, perhaps, hardly believe me, when I tell you that, about ten years since, the original intention of the founders of this excellent institution was entirely frustrated by the Trustees (with the consent and advice of the two clergymen of the place, both educated and most worthy men,) electing to the office of head master the son of the parish clerk, who was

junior teacher in the parish school, thus depriving the inhabitants of the blessing of an almost free and liberal education, and substituting the same character of teaching as could be had at the national school. Out of several most respectable trustees, my father was the only one who raised his voice and handed in his protest against this shameful breach of trust. So much for the durability of foundations!!

But let us suppose the scholarship secure amidst the chances of war, the changes of revolution, the policy of statesmen, and the faithlessness of trustees; let us imagine the original intention of the founders carried out, and the name of our revered friend for ages connected with the foundation, still the knowledge of the person would be forgotten; take for example the Jacksonian Prize, although the name and prize are constantly before the public, no one thinks of ascertaining who Mr. Jackson was; whilst on the other hand every one who sees a picture or beautiful engraving, is first attracted by the work of art, and then is generally anxious to know the history of the person who has been thus honored.

Again, the Scholarship will form at best but one memorial, whilst not only will the Picture perpetuate the memory of MR. VINCENT at the scene of his labours, but the copies of the Engraving, distributed in all parts of the world, will form some hundreds of memorials, each the means of spreading his reputation whilst living, and of perpetuating his memory from generation to generation; and already have I heard that his fame is in this way to be wafted along by the soft breezes of the Mediterranean and carried over the foaming billows of the rude Atlantic.

I believe the Governors of this Hospital are about to raise a memorial to the honor of our respected and excellent Treasurer; and no one can be more pleased to hear this than myself, for he has been a most noble benefactor to this Institution; but of course, as the interests of the rising generation are to be cared for when funds raised by others are concerned, of course, I say, the subscriptions of the Governors will, in the case of Mr. Bentley, be applied to the foundation of a Scholarship? Oh, no! A Portrait is to be painted, the Governors are desirous to contemplate the lineaments of their friend; they wish to hand down his likeness, as a stimulus to succeeding generations to imitate his munificent conduct, and they suppose I presume, that a Picture will be a lasting memorial of his worth, or they would

not choose that mode of showing him their esteem. And have we, I will ask, no similar sentiments in regard to MR. VINCENT? Can we be accused of having no other feeling than that of selfishness in wishing to obtain his Picture as a Public Memorial here, and to possess Engravings for ourselves at home, thus still farther extending his fame and stimulating thereby our children to emulate his great and good example? Certainly that which is considered the best means of perpetuating the memory of Mr. Bentley, cannot be a *very* bad one of handing down to future generations the merits and reputation of MR. VINCENT.

One gentleman tells me, that although he will revere the memory of MR. VINCENT, and will preserve his lineaments with care, yet his children will no sooner have placed their father in the silent tomb, than they will immediately proceed to consign the Portrait of his venerated friend to the flames. Although the world is bad enough, I believe this picture of ingratitude and want of filial affection is far too highly drawn to have any weight; and I trust there are few amongst us who will have the curse of such children as these, and many who will be blessed with offspring whose affectionate hearts will, after the death of their parents, long thrill with grateful remembrance of all that was once dear to them.

As to the argument which has been advanced in favor of a Scholarship, on the ground that the Portrait would soon be placed in a cellar, I will only answer it by saying, that I believe the Governors of this hospital never could permit, much less be the perpetrators of such a scandalous enormity.

And now I come to the consideration of what those opposed to the Picture may think their highest grounds for supporting the Scholarship; viz. The prosperity of the school; the advancement of science; and the interests of the rising generation. All truly, most laudable, most noble objects.

But let us be just before we are generous; and permit me to ask you, were these, or any of these, the objects, for the carrying out of which the public meeting was held in this room on the 1st of February last? Were these the objects which the subscribers to the VINCENT TESTIMONIAL had in view, and for which (I will even take the liberty of saying so much—for poverty is no crime) for which, I say, not a few of those subscribers have sacrificed, small perhaps, but yet customary comfort? No, gentlemen; it was to honor MR. VINCENT that meeting was held; It was to raise a tribute of respect to a venerated

master that subscriptions so freely flowed into the coffers of the fund; it was to procure the *laurel wreath* to deck the brow of the VICTORIOUS VETERAN, not the prize money for the *young recruit*, that each vied with each in zealous ardour.

If both objects could have been obtained; if a Scholarship, worthy of the man and of this great Hospital, could have been founded; and if MR. VINCENT could have reaped the fullest honor from such foundation, I, for one, would certainly not have opposed the adoption of that form of memorial. But the time has long since passed when it could have been adopted, either with regard to the honor of MR. VINCENT or the credit of this school; It was at the *commencement only* of the subscription, that a Scholarship could, with justice either to the school or to MR. VINCENT, have been decided on; and then, if the majority had been for its adoption, UNLIMITED SUBSCRIPTIONS should have been allowed, a very large sum of money would, without doubt, have been collected, and a noble memorial to the worth of our revered friend would have been the result. How differently stands the matter now!! The present amount of subscriptions is certainly most gratifying and very large, considering it has been raised by such small individual contributions; it is sufficiently large, also, to purchase a very handsome memorial in the form of a Painting and Engraving, each by eminent artists; but a Scholarship, founded with the same sum, or with one of even double the amount, would be paltry and contemptible in the extreme; rather suited to the *dignity* of some petty country school than to the honor and dignity of the Great Hospital of St. Bartholomew. But let us suppose for a moment that the amount would be doubled, if a Scholarship should be determined on, would that redound to the honour of MR. VINCENT? Certainly not; but would rather cause a feeling to go abroad, that gentlemen did not subscribe out of respect to MR. VINCENT, but only came forward when something was proposed for the aggrandizement of an institution in which they felt a *personal interest*. And too truly might it then be said of those Governors, who will not now subscribe except a Scholarship be decided upon, "That whilst they could with eagerness rush forward in support of a scheme calculated to render their institution more attractive; they felt no anxiety, no desire to reward the faithful, zealous, and most able services of him, who had, for so long a period, been one of the noblest and strongest pillars of the edifice, and whose

memory will remain for ages, one of its most venerable and chaste, but not less costly adornments."

I have now faithfully, although, I fear, very imperfectly, performed my task; and have redeemed the pledge which I gave to a very large number of gentlemen who made me the medium through which they paid their subscriptions, the pledge to support the Picture and Engraving as the best means of perpetuating the memory of MR. VINCENT. I could yet bring forward numerous and perhaps equally powerful arguments in support of the Picture, and against the foundation of a Scholarship; I shall not, however, enter upon them, as I know it is the intention of other gentlemen to mention them, and I do not wish uselessly to occupy your valuable time; I feel myself delicately placed, too, in entering upon matters, in considering which it might be necessary to canvass somewhat searchingly the proceedings of a body of which I am myself a member.

I trust that if, during the heat of argument, I have spoken too freely, those gentlemen, who are opposed to me in opinion on this question, will allow the impetuosity of my nature to plead the forgiveness of my crime. And now, Gentlemen, in conclusion, I entreat you to decide on this question solely with regard to the honor of MR. VINCENT; to vote this day strictly as your generous feelings of affection to your venerated master may guide you; and if you do so, already I see his beautiful Portrait adorning the walls of this noble institution, the rich Engraving in the hands of you and your children, and a lasting tribute of respect raised to the memory of our revered friend, A MEMORIAL, EQUALLY HONORABLE TO HIM AND TO YOURSELVES.

The Amendment was carried by a very large majority.

...will remain for ever, one of the most valuable and
...but not less costly ornaments.
I have now faithfully, although I feel, very imperfectly,
performed my task; and have returned the pledge which I gave
to a very large number of gentlemen who made me the medium
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the picture, and against the imputation of a scholastic; I shall
not, however, enter upon them, as I know it is the intention of
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with regard to the honor of Mr. Vincent; to vote this day
solely as your generous feelings of affection to your country
may guide you; and if you do so, already I see his
dearest picture adorning the walls of the noble institution,
the rich picture in the hands of you and your children, and
a lasting tribute of respect raised to the memory of our country
and a MEMORIAL, EQUALLY HONORABLE TO HIS AND TO
YOUR COUNTRY.

The Librarian was carried by a very large majority.

