

**The Hunterian oration. Pt. II. The medical societies of the last century, and their relation to John Hunter : delivered before the Hunterian Society on Feb. 13th, 1896 / by G. Newton Pitt.**

**Contributors**

Pitt, G. Newton 1853-1929.  
Royal College of Surgeons of England

**Publication/Creation**

[London] : Printed at The Lancet office, 1896.

**Persistent URL**

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/jhue4syc>

**Provider**

Royal College of Surgeons

**License and attribution**

This material has been provided by This material has been provided by The Royal College of Surgeons of England. The original may be consulted at The Royal College of Surgeons of England. where the originals may be consulted. This work has been identified as being free of known restrictions under copyright law, including all related and neighbouring rights and is being made available under the Creative Commons, Public Domain Mark.

You can copy, modify, distribute and perform the work, even for commercial purposes, without asking permission.



Wellcome Collection  
183 Euston Road  
London NW1 2BE UK  
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722  
E [library@wellcomecollection.org](mailto:library@wellcomecollection.org)  
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

*Dupl* (2)  
The Hunterian Oration.

---

PART II.

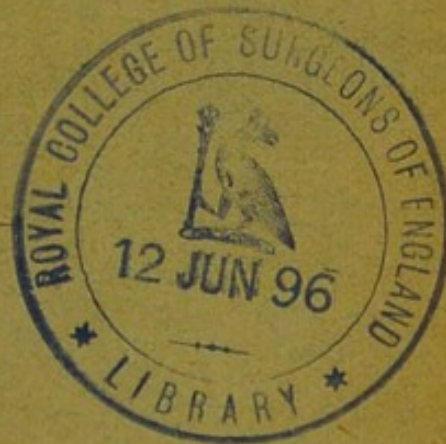
THE MEDICAL SOCIETIES OF THE  
LAST CENTURY, AND  
THEIR RELATION TO JOHN HUNTER.

*Delivered before the Hunterian Society on Feb. 13th, 1896.*

BY

G. NEWTON PITT, M.D. CANTAB., F.R.C.P. LOND.,

SENIOR ASSISTANT PHYSICIAN, LECTURER ON PATHOLOGY, AND DEMONSTRATOR  
OF MORBID ANATOMY AT GUY'S HOSPITAL, ETC.



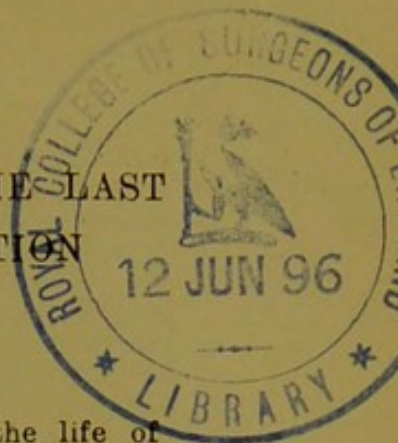
Reprinted from THE LANCET, May 9. 1896.

PRINTED AT  
THE LANCET OFFICE,  
423, STRAND W.C.



THE MEDICAL SOCIETIES OF THE LAST  
CENTURY, AND THEIR RELATION  
TO JOHN HUNTER.

---



[THE first part of the Oration dealt with the life of Hunter and his experience as a physician, which was shown to have been by no means inconsiderable. Dr. Newton Pitt then continued as follows:]

Until the latter quarter of last century, as Mr. Quain pointed out, there was no medical education in London. Surgeons and apothecaries were supposed to be able to pick up a sufficient smattering of their work by attending the hospital for a few months, and physicians were educated elsewhere. Some half-dozen each year took the degree of M.D. at the Universities of Oxford or Cambridge, and these alone could become Fellows of the College of Physicians of London, while a much greater number proceeded to medical degrees either abroad or at Edinburgh. Owing to the genius and energy of the elder Monro and others, the education at Edinburgh was far ahead of anything in London, and we naturally find that medical societies and periodicals flourished there before they became established in the south.

Before knowledge can be classified and accurate conclusions drawn, it is necessary that a large amount of material should be collected from many sources. The formation of medical societies and the publication of transactions and periodicals form a feature in the medical history of the last century, contrasting strongly with that of the seventeenth century. Previously to this the Memoirs of the Royal Academy of Sciences in Paris and the Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London were almost the only publications in which English medical cases were reported. Many English physicians had graduated at Paris, and the Philosophical Transactions contain, up to the end of the century, over 1000 medical papers. A large number of medical men have received the honour of the Fellowship of the Society, and not the least distinguished of these was John Hunter, who contributed numerous papers, for the most part dealing with questions of natural history.

*Edinburgh Medical Societies* —The School of Physics was initiated in 1720 on the lines of the University of Leyden, and in 1783 there were 400 students of medicine. The *Medical Society* was founded in 1731, the records reach back as far as 1737 and the members received a charter in 1778. This society collected and published five volumes of medical essays and observations between the years 1733 and 1744. Cullen, Hunter, Oliver Goldsmith, Fothergill and Richard and William Budd were among the members. The



Society met every Saturday evening during the winter sessions when papers were read. The publications were largely contributed by the first Monro—i.e., John—whose marvellous energy and ability contributed so essentially to the success of the school. He contributed papers on the nutrition of foetuses, on the diseases of arteries, on the lacrymal canal, on white swelling, on herniæ, on the obstruction of ureters by stones, on ulcers, on procidentia uteri, on the preparation of bodies for dissection, on the anatomy of the lower jaw and of the duodenum, on chalybeate waters, and on new instruments, a range of original work unequalled at that time in this country. *Medical and Philosophical Commentaries* by a society of physicians in Edinburgh were edited by Dr. Andrew Duncan and 20 volumes were issued between 1773 and 1799. They were continued as the *Annals of Medicine* till 1804. The publication consisted of reviews of books, original medical observations, and medical news. They form the most valuable contemporary record of medical activity of London quite as much as of Edinburgh. The *Philosophical Society* published three volumes under the title "Essays and Observations, Physical and Literary," between 1754 and 1771. The *Æsculapian Society* was instituted in 1774, and consisted of five physicians and ten surgeons, who met and supped together once a month. The *Edinburgh Harveian Society* was founded in 1752 and the *Abernethian Society* in 1785. The *Royal Physical Society of Edinburgh* was founded in 1771, incorporated in 1788, and merged with the Chirurgico-Medical Society in 1796. The *Royal Society of Edinburgh* dates from 1783; the *Hibernian Medical Society*, Edinburgh, from 1791.

The only medical society in *England* outside London was the Medical Society of Colchester, instituted in 1774.

An examination of the history of the societies which were started in London shows that each society owed its origin to the energy of one or two men, and in many instances the society faded away at their death. Until the latter part of the century there was no education for students in London beyond that given by a few private lecturers. As late even as 1783 we learn from the Medical Register that the following was the complete list of lecturers in London. Anatomy: Mr. W. Cruickshank, at the Hunterian Museum in Great Windmill-street; Dr. R. Maclaurin, at his house in Mark-lane; Mr. Blizard, at the London Hospital; Mr. John Sheldon, at his house in Great Queen-street; and Mr. Henry Cline, at St. Thomas's Hospital, who had also been appointed Professor of Anatomy to the Corporation of Surgeons in 1781. Surgery: Mr. Percival Pott, F.R.S., at St. Bartholomew's Hospital; Mr. John Hunter, F.R.S., in the Haymarket; and Mr. J. O. Justamond, F.R.S., in Macclesfield-street, Soho. Physic: Dr. Fordyce, at his house in Essex-street and at St. Thomas's Hospital; Dr. Saunders, at Guy's Hospital; and Dr. Maddocks, at the London Hospital. Most of the lectures, it will be seen, were not delivered at the hospitals, but at the lecturers' houses, where several of them had large schools; and from Mr. Rivington we learn that the school of the London Hospital first offered a complete course of educa-



tion in 1785 and commenced to give clinical lectures in 1792. From the minutes of the Corporation of Surgeons we learn that their Professor of Anatomy gave a yearly course of six lectures on the muscles and of six on the viscera, the proposal that he should also give three on the bones having been rescinded.

The following appear to be the chief of those to whom the new medical societies were due:—William and John Hunter, John Sheldon, Dr. Foart Simmons, Dr. Saunders, Dr. Fothergill, and Dr. Lettsom. The societies may be divided into two classes, those started by practitioners for the purpose of publishing cases and those started by teachers as a means of keeping in touch with students and junior practitioners and of teaching them how to report and discuss cases. In most instances the possession of a library, from which the members could borrow books, was considered a very essential and important feature. In the student societies, at any rate, the money was raised by innumerable fines rather than by fixed subscriptions.

The Fellows of the Royal College of Physicians used to meet from time to time to discuss medical questions and they issued six volumes of *Medical Transactions* between the years 1772 and 1820.

The societies associated with William Hunter were the two medical societies of 1753 and 1764. They were both small; the former consisted of physicians and the latter of licentiates. The first society published at intervals the volumes of medical observations and inquiries, and nothing more was heard of the societies after Dr. Hunter's death.

*The Medical Society (1).*—The first medical society in London was founded in 1752 by some hospital physicians who met together for their mutual improvement in the practice of their profession once a fortnight on Monday evenings at the Mitre Tavern, Fleet-street. After some time they decided to form themselves into a society for collecting and publishing "Medical Observations and Inquiries," six volumes of which were issued between the years 1757 and 1784, the first paper being dated 1753. The preface to the first volume states that "it is much to be regretted that the medical essays and observations of the Medical Society of Edinburgh have been discontinued, and that the present may be in some degree considered as a continuation of that valuable work." The chief contributors were Dr. J. Fothergill (whose museum Dr. W. Hunter bought), Dr. W. Hunter, Dr. G. Macaulay, Dr. S. Pye, Dr. C. Clephane (who died in 1762), Dr. W. Fordyce, and Dr. Gowin Knight. Dr. Hunter was the chief contributor; he was an original member and became the most influential. The society, which then consisted of seven physicians (six of whom were Fellows of the Royal Society), ceased to exist in 1784, after Hunter's death. Among the more interesting contributions I may refer to a case of Hernia of the Abdominal Viscera into the Thorax, reported by Dr. Macaulay; an excellent case of Pharyngeal Pouch, by Mr. Ludlow; a typical case of Osteo-malacia; and to papers by Dr. Fothergill on the



influenza Epidemics of 1758, 1775; on the Objections to Venesections in Apoplexy; and on the Value of Ipecacuanha in Dysentery. Fothergill also gives one of the first accounts of Sick Headache with Visual Disturbances and Fortification Figures, evidently drawn from personal experience; we know from his "Life" that he was constantly incapacitated by its attacks. Dr. Hick, in 1768, reported a case of Strangulation of Intestine under a band, about which he consulted John Hunter, who explained that it had probably arisen from adhesion of the omentum to both the mesentery and the ileum, and was able to show him two similar specimens of bands. In the same volume a case of Cæsarean section is reported, which was performed by Mr. Thompson of the London Hospital, assisted by Mr. Hunter; five years later William Cooper asked Hunter to perform the operation for him and remarks that the whole was conducted with the utmost coolness, humanity, and skill. There is no lack of evidence among contemporary records, of the high value which was set upon Hunter's practical surgical skill by practitioners. In one case he removed a tumour from the side of the neck as large as a head, and by bringing the edges of the skin together the whole nearly healed by primary union, no slight feat in those days.

Dr. Routh, in his Oration in 1859 before the London Medical Society, dealing with its history, states that there is a copy of the laws of this 1753 society in the British Museum which gives John Sheldon as the President for the years 1779 to 1782. On examination I find that this is an error, and that the laws referred to are those of the Great Queen-street Society, to which I shall allude later on. As the 1753 society consisted only of seven somewhat senior physicians it is improbable that there would be anything but the briefest manuscript note of their proceedings.

*The Medical Society (2).*—Another society of physicians with which Dr. William Hunter was connected, was instituted about 1764, and met once a fortnight on Wednesday evenings at Old Slaughter's Coffee House for the purpose of discoursing on the prevailing diseases. The members were Licentiates of the Royal College of Physicians of London. In 1783 there were twenty-three members, including Garthsore and Robert Bromfield, Hunter's colleagues at the British Lying-in Hospital, George Fordyce of St. Thomas's Hospital, and William Saunders of Guy's Hospital, after which date I have not been able to trace the society. The society was originated by Dr. Alexander Russell, formerly of Aleppo. The members also dined together once a quarter at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in the Strand. The immediate object which those who started the society had in view was to oppose the proposal that Licentiates should be admitted upon an examination in English, which, it was thought, would lower the standard.

*The Physical Society.*—This society appears to have been instituted at Guy's Hospital in 1771, according to the stamp which is impressed on the books belonging to their library, most probably by Dr. Saunders, who gave the first course



of lectures at the hospital in 1770. The book of the laws of the society is dated 1775. The early minute books of the society have for many years been lost sight of, but I have been fortunate enough to discover the volumes from 1783 to 1820, with the exception of those for the years 1786 to 1788 and 1798 to 1804. As was the case with other societies, it would appear that when they were first initiated the members met informally and did not keep minutes of their proceedings. The first existing entry is for Oct. 4th, 1783, with Mr. Cline in the chair, which is headed the first meeting of the second session; while in 1792 we find the secretary making a note that the sessions should have been counted from 1775, and in future this was done. It is probable, therefore, that the meetings became much more businesslike and formal in 1783, but had been taking place for some years. The meetings appear to have been held every Saturday evening from October to May in the theatre of Guy's Hospital, and the society consisted of ordinary, honorary, and corresponding members. The former were required to attend every evening on pain of being fined, and in turn to read a dissertation before the society. After having read two dissertations and attended regularly for two sessions they could be elected honorary members and were freed then from responsibilities. Those physicians, surgeons, and apothecaries who had already distinguished themselves were at once eligible for election as honorary members. The society possessed a library which was supported by a contribution of sixpence from each member at every meeting and of a shilling if he were absent without good excuse. The rules, it is seen, are much more stringent than those that any society enforces at the present time. In the earlier minute-books the most important contributors were Mr. Cline, Mr. Hewson, and Mr. Astley Cooper, who had all been pupils of Hunter; Dr. Babbington, Dr. Saunders, Dr. Lowder, and Dr. Skeete, who were all ultimately on the staff of Guy's Hospital; while Dr. Wells, Dr. Lister, and others of the staff of St. Thomas's Hospital also joined the society. The society also included most of the general practitioners in the neighbourhood and a few from distant parts of the country. Dr. Lettsom, who was a member, was a donor of books to the library.

It is not surprising that there should be frequent reference in the minute books to Hunter's methods of treatment and to his views on many questions, seeing that so many members had been his pupils. Thus, on December 24th, 1785, we read that Dr. Saunders reported an experiment which Mr. J. Hunter had performed for the cure of the popliteal aneurysm. "An incision was begun a little below the middle of the thigh and continued three inches downwards in the course of the artery, and four ligatures were made on the artery above its dilatation with the view to obliterate the aneurysm." This refers to Hunter's first and celebrated operation in this region. Several cases were reported during the next few years successfully treated by the method thus laid down by



Hunter. The high estimation in which Hunter was held in this society is shown by the fact that the name of no other surgeon is quoted constantly, while his opinion is several times given as authoritative.

At each meeting the medical cases of interest were first described and then a dissertation was read and discussed. In 1783 the treasurer of Guy's Hospital, Mr. Harrison, was elected a member of the society, and when he was visiting his sister Mrs. Cripps at Cirencester he made the acquaintance of Dr. Jenner, who read one of his earliest papers on Vaccination, at his invitation, before this society. I have not found the entry of this in the minute book, but those for the period 1798 to 1804 are unfortunately missing. Three prize dissertations on the subject have, however, been preserved, one by Dr. John Power of Market Bosworth in the year 1799, but neither the writer nor the date of the others can be traced, but we know that Mr. Allen, the founder of the firm of Allen and Hanburys, attended a meeting in 1802 with Mr. A. Cooper to hear such a paper. Of the numerous cases recorded in the minutes there is but little that is of interest now; on various evenings many different opinions were brought forward as to the value of styptics such as Ruspini's and agaric, and numbers of cases are reported which had been treated by digitalis and by bark, which latter was largely introduced into this country by Dr. Saunders, Dr. Relph, and Dr. Skeete, members of the society. The number of cases of hydrophobia which were brought forward is noteworthy.

The society appears to have flourished for many years, 168 ordinary members were elected in the years 1783-1785, and judging from the subscriptions collected each evening it would appear that probably the attendance was often over forty, while the amount of fines exacted at each meeting from absent members or from those who had failed in their observance of the rules frequently amounted in the latter years of the century to over £5.

The Pupils' Physical Society in the early part of the century branched off from this one and still continues to flourish; it may, therefore, claim to be a descendant of one of the oldest societies in London. The original society gradually waned as the numerous medical societies developed and finally ceased in 1852.

In 1798 a volume appeared entitled "Medical Records and Researches, Selected from the Papers of a Private Medical association." It was printed by Cox of St. Thomas-street in the Borough, and the papers were contributed or collected by Astley Cooper, William Babbington, and John Haighton, who were three out of the six presidents of the Physical Society for that year. Within the next year or so the two former were elected on the staff of Guy's Hospital, and soon became busy with practice, and no further volumes were published. It is not improbable that the Physical Society did publish some of their material, as a printing committee was elected annually, but from a passage in the life of Astley Cooper I conclude they did not publish this volume. In this Cooper published two cases of hernia of the



abdominal viscera into the thorax and some observations and experiments on the occlusion of the thoracic duct. Haighton's most important paper described some experiments which he had been induced to make owing to his opinion that the fatal results of Caesarean section might be due to the admission of air to the abdomen. He performed some laparotomies on animals with the abdomen under water, and then applied an adhesive composition to the out edges, and outside this a bandage. He obtained complete recoveries. However, not being quite satisfied, he repeated the operations in the air and obtained equally good results, thus convincing himself that the ill results ordinarily obtained were not merely due to exposure to the air.

*The Physico-Medical Society*—There is in the British Museum a copy of the laws of the Physico-Medical Society of London, established in the year 1771. We read: "In the year 1772 several medical gentlemen residing in London associated themselves for the purpose of submitting their respective opinions to the examination and correction of each other." At first the name adopted was the Philosophico-Medical Society. The volume gives the laws as revised, arranged, and amended in 1774, when this name was discarded. The council consisted of four presidents, a treasurer, two secretaries, and nine members. The society met on Monday evenings at 7 o'clock for nine months in the year; from 7 to 9 P.M. for a debate on a set subject each night, and the members dined together once a year. The annual subscription was a guinea. They possessed a library and members could borrow books. I have not been able to identify this society with any of the others, nor is it clear where they met.

*The Medical Society of London (Bolt-court).*—The Medical Society of London was instituted in 1773 and, according to the Medical Register of 1783, met every Tuesday evening at 7 o'clock at Crane-court, Fleet-street. It at first consisted of thirty physicians, thirty surgeons, and thirty apothecaries, and the meetings were held in the house of Dr. Lettsom, who was in every way a most liberal benefactor to the society, giving donations of money, books, and finally the premises in Bolt-court. He was practically the founder of the society. Dr. Fothergill was also a munificent donor of books. In 1784 the society was nearly wrecked by violent party disputes over the candidatureship of two of its members, Dr. Cooke and Dr. Whitehead, who was President at the time, for an appointment at the London Hospital. After 1784 two gold medals were awarded biennially for original essays, but judging by the meagreness of some of the successful essays there must often have been but little or no competition. In 1794 the attendance at the meetings was often very small, and sometimes only four members were present—as a result they tended to drift into gossip rather than business. The society somehow got under the thumb of Dr. James Simms, who succeeded in being re-elected President for over twenty years. They agreed to pay him and his wife an annuity of £30 a year, and in 1800 paid him £500 for a large



number of his books. The manner in which Dr. Simms managed the society gave great offence and led to the secession of a number of members, who formed the Medico-Chirurgical Society in 1806. The society in 1850 amalgamated with the Westminster Medical Society and still flourishes at Chandos-street. Six volumes of the "Memoirs of the Medical Society of London" were issued between the years 1792 and 1805. It is clear that at first Dr. Fothergill and Dr. Lettsom were the influential members.

*The Medical Society (Great Queen-street).*—This medical society was instituted at the Anatomical Theatre, Great Queen-street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, on Dec 9th, 1779. The members met every Tuesday evening at 7 o'clock from October to May. Medical news and cases were brought forward from 7 until 8 o'clock, when the dissertation for the evening was read out by the author, and afterwards by the president, paragraph by paragraph, for discussion. The president wore his hat while in the chair. Dissertations were written by each member in turn, and any member failing to write one was fined 10s. 6d. Members absent without having sent an apology were fined 2s. 6d. There are copies of the laws of this society and the list of members in the libraries of the British Museum and of the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society, dated 1783 and 1784.

This society was started by John Sheldon in connexion with his Anatomical School at Great Queen-street. Sheldon was also surgeon to the General Medical Asylum in Welbeck-street. The society possessed a library, and awarded a diploma to members who gave proof of sufficient medical ability and had written two dissertations. The greater number of the members were practitioners, only a few being students. In 1783 the society consisted of twelve foreign and seventeen honorary members, with eighty-seven ordinary members who were required to attend the society regularly. Old members kept their names on the book when they moved into the country as corresponding members. Mr. Sheldon was perpetual president, and each year from one to three other members were also elected as presidents. Sheldon and Cruikshank, I learn from Mr. D'Arcy Power, were rival teachers under Dr. William Hunter at the Great Windmill-street School; both were teaching anatomy and both were working at the lymphatic system. Owing to some difference with Hunter, Sheldon left and started an anatomical school for himself at Great Queen-street. About the time of Hunter's death Dr. Johnson wrote to Sir Joshua Reynolds in favour of Cruikshank for the post of Professor of Anatomy, which Hunter had held at the Royal Academy, but Sheldon was elected, and retained the office till his death in 1808, when he was succeeded by Anthony Carlisle. Sheldon was a great patron of aeronauts and was the first Englishman who made an experimental ascent. In 1788 he was compelled to resign his surgical appointment at Westminster owing to overwork. This medical society was evidently closely associated with his teaching and was under his control; the majority of the



members, however, were practitioners. I have not been able to trace the society later than 1784; apparently it ceased when Sheldon gave up his house, and it would appear that within a few years Wilson, who had been Cruikshank's assistant, was lecturing on surgery in Great Queen-street in probably the same house. This society was a rival and opponent of Hunter's Lyceum Medicum, with which Cruikshank was connected.

The *Society for the Improvement of Medical Knowledge* was established by Dr. Foart Simmons and others in February, 1782, for the purpose of collecting useful essays and observations for publication. Dr. Simmons had studied at Edinburgh, where such societies were flourishing. He had just been appointed physician to St. Luke's Hospital, and became the most distinguished alienist physician of his day. In 1803 he was called in to attend George III. Meetings of the society were held once a fortnight, on Tuesday evenings, at Old Slaughter's Coffee-house in St. Martin's-lane, when papers were read. There were formal meetings once a quarter, when candidates were proposed at one meeting and balloted for at the next. The society consisted of sixteen members, with a president, treasurer, two secretaries, and a committee for revising and selecting papers for publication. They published two volumes of *Medical Communications* in 1784 and 1790 respectively, containing thirty-one papers. The following are among the more interesting. A Careful Post-mortem of what is obviously a case of Cancer of the Oesophagus, by John Hunter, who looked upon the condition as one of ulcer. Nothing is more striking in reading the records of this time than the lack of system in the post-mortem examinations: one or two organs which were suspected were examined, but too often no note is made as to the condition of those which had probably been the real source of the illness. Hunter often gave full and accurate reports, but rarely examined all the organs. A most remarkable case of a sword wound of the stomach which recovered is reported by Dr. Carmichael Smyth, physician to the Middlesex Hospital. The patient was fed for weeks per rectum with from four to five pints of broth daily, which was retained. Mr. Henry Watson, senior surgeon to the Westminster Hospital proposed enterectomy for cases of hernia in which the bowel was found to be gangrenous. He showed, by a successful operation on a dog, that by making a solid cylinder of isinglass jelly, which he inserted into the two cut ends of the intestine, they could be brought together and united by a continuous suture with a Glover's needle and thread. Dr. Willan records a case of fasting which lasted for sixty days, the man only taking water and two oranges each week.

In the library of the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society there is a manuscript which belonged to Dr. Lettsom entitled "A Scheme for Instituting a Society under the title of the Society of Physicians of London, instituted for the Improvement of Medical Knowledge and also for building a New College of Physicians, 1782." It is somewhat uncer-



tain whether the date is not a recent addition in another handwriting. If this refers to the same society the manuscript, I should conclude, was written by Dr. Foart Simmons; but as the writing appears to be that of an old man, and Simmons would be about thirty, it is almost certainly quite distinct. The object for the foundation of the society was to organise the Licentiates of the College together and to raise funds to build a new College of Physicians. The Licentiates included many men of the greatest ability and with the largest practices; but unless they were graduates in medicine in the universities of Oxford or Cambridge, and had, therefore, conformed to the Test Act, they could not become Fellows. They had shortly before lost an action which they had brought against the College before the Court of King's Bench, and hence the bitter feeling which is expressed. The scheme commences by stating that every member is to subscribe £50, and those whose fortunes enable them are expected to be more liberal. Public-spirited persons, particularly dissenters of different denominations, are to be applied to for assistance; the regulations included the formation of a magnificent library, but nothing seems to have come of this great scheme.

*Society for the Improvement of Medical and Chirurgical Knowledge.*—This society issued three volumes of Transactions between 1793 and 1812. The society was founded by John Hunter and George Fordyce, senior physician to St. Thomas's Hospital, in 1783, which is the date of delivery of the first paper, but none were published till ten years later. The society originally consisted of nine members, with power to increase up to twelve, but not beyond, and only eighteen, whose names are given in the minute book, joined during the thirty years of its existence. They met once a month at Slaughter's Coffee-house, and after dinner read and discussed the papers. Members to be eligible were required to be living in the neighbourhood so as to attend regularly, and they were required to be physicians or surgeons of five years' standing, or to be on the staff of St. Bartholomew's, St. George's, Guy's, or St. Thomas's Hospitals. It is interesting to note that the first volume of Transactions was published in 1793, the year of Hunter's death, and after 1812, when the last volume was issued, the society continued merely as a club of ten, who dined together once a month. They had been, according to their last secretary (Mr. Benjamin Brodie), a very exclusive society and finally dissolved in 1818. The minute book is now in the Library of the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society. The chief contributors to the Transactions were John Hunter, Dr. John Hunter, physician to the army, Dr. G. Fordyce, Dr. Jenner (paper on the preparation of tartar emetic), Matthew Baillie, Everard Home, Anthony Carlisle, and John Clarke, most of whom it will be seen were Hunter's pupils. Dr. Wells was the most remarkable and influential man in the society after Hunter's death.

Hunter's communication on inflammation of the internal



coat of veins is one of great importance. He pointed out that it occurred wherever there was severe inflammation in the neighbourhood of large veins, whether as the result of a compound fracture, an accident, or a surgical operation, but that it may also occur after venesection, and insists upon the importance of obtaining primary union. He points out that a thick, dry compress of linen or lint is the proper dressing for venesection or for compound fractures so as to allow dry scabbing, but that if the parts are kept moist or prevented by plasters from evaporating they always suppurate and the vein is then liable to inflame, and if so it will become occluded. If the surgeon suspects suppuration to have taken place he must keep a compress on the vein higher up. Hunter also reports one of the first cases of artificial feeding (a case of melancholia) by an œsophageal tube, which was suggested to him by a tube he was using for injecting liquids into the stomachs of animals. The difficulties might have appeared to any one but Hunter insurmountable. A probang was inserted in a fresh eelskin and tied in above and below the sponge. A slit was then made in the skin just above the sponge. The probang was passed into the stomach and a wooden pipe with a bladder attached was pushed over the probang. The food and medicine were put in the bladder and squeezed down the tube. In this way the patient was fed until he recovered. We also read in Hunter's own case-book of a patient whose pulse failed suddenly when the spermatic cord was tied during the removal of the testicle for the treatment of a large hydrocele. Hunter at once injected into the stomach with a crooked tube and syringe (such as he was in the habit of using for injecting fluids into the stomachs of animals for the purposes of experiment) volatile cordials and then laid the body before the fire, but without avail.<sup>1</sup>

*Lyceum Medicum Londinense.*—This society was established under the patronage of John Hunter and Dr. George Fordyce in January, 1785. The meetings were held every Friday evening from 8.30 P.M. to 11 P.M. between October and May, in Hunter's lecture room, which was situated between Castle-street and the east side of Leicester-square. According to Chevalier, Hunter gave them the gratuitous use of his lecture room and generally displayed for their benefit the more interesting and instructive of the additions to the museum. Among the receipts of Hunter's executors, an abstract of which was published by Dr. Finlayson,<sup>2</sup> I notice a sum of twenty-four guineas was received in September, 1793, from this society, but no further payment was made within the next year or so; it is not clear, therefore, for what this was paid, possibly for carpenters' or printers' work, and not for rent. The Royal College of Surgeons of England possess a copy of the rules of the society and a list of members from the foundation to the date of publication, 1792, from which we learn the following particulars. The

<sup>1</sup> Vol. iii., p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> Brit. Med. Jour., 1890, vol. i., p. 738, and Library of the Royal College of Surgeons of England.



society consisted of honorary, corresponding, and ordinary members, the latter being divided up into three classes.

The six honorary members were the following teachers: John Hunter, lecturer on Surgery in the Haymarket; George Fordyce, lecturer on Physic at Essex-street; William Saunders, lecturer on Physic at Guy's Hospital; William Osborn and Thomas Denman, lecturers on Midwifery at Leicester-square; and William Cruikshank, lecturer on Anatomy at the Hunterian Museum, Great Windmill-street; the corresponding members (21) being teachers or members of hospital staffs in the country. The ordinary members consisted of: Class 1. Those who had taken a qualification or were in practice; of these there were 78, and among the names may be noted the following: Baillie, Home, Adair, J. Clarke, Pearson, Ford, Cleghorn, Babington, James Curry, Abernethy, Astley Cooper, and Thomas Young. Class 2, which numbered 314, consisted of those who had attended a hospital and one course of lectures on Anatomy and the practice of Physic. Class 3, numbering only 7, consisted only of those who were commencing their studies. The two former were required, in turn, to read a dissertation which, on the following Friday, was read out by the President and discussed. The first hour of each meeting was devoted to the narration of medical cases, which were entered in a book, and the more important were sent to Dr. Foart Simmons to be published in his *Medical Facts and Observations*. The society possessed a library and presented a five-guinea gold medal annually for the best dissertation on a set subject.

Such a society was a very great educational centre, as each member was required to observe and inquire for himself; fines were inflicted on a member who left a meeting without publicly standing up and asking permission; and for each time he failed to attend the meetings until he had read a dissertation, after which he attended at his convenience. No member was allowed to leave London without writing for permission. There was an entrance fee of a guinea. Jenner, we learn, attended a meeting of this society on April 22nd, 1801, when he was admitted a Fellow.<sup>3</sup> But little is now known about the society; the Index Catalogue of the Surgical General Library, U.S. Army, possesses the Laws for 1798. The society had ceased by 1805 to hold any meetings. In that year Sir C. Mansfield Clarke, Sir B. Brodie, Dr. Baillie Clarke, and a few other members of the society established the Westminster Medical Society for the purpose of promoting intercourse between students and teachers, and the members of the old society were elected honorary members. After a somewhat chequered career this society amalgamated with the Westminster Society, and later both with the Medical Society, which now flourishes.

Hunter's influence was paramount in the three following societies: (1) The Society for the Promotion of Medical and Chirurgical Knowledge, which was a small society of physicians and surgeons founded in 1783, consisting of nine or ten members, who dined together and discussed their papers,

<sup>3</sup> Life of Jenner, vol. I., p. 449.



of which they published three volumes after the death of Hunter; (2) The Lyceum Medicum Londinense, a large society which met at Hunter's Museum and numbered 350 members, including, probably, all those who attended Hunter's lectures on Surgery, Cruikshank's on Anatomy, Saunders' on Physic, and Denman's on Midwifery—i.e., probably a majority of the students in London; and (3) The Physical Society, which met at Guy's Hospital and was attended by the students of the United Hospitals—Guy's and St. Thomas's—and by the practitioners in the neighbourhood. It numbered more than 200 members. It is not possible now to determine with certainty who were the founders of the latter society, but in 1783, in the earliest remaining record, we find the most influential members were pupils or friends of Hunter, who all looked up to him as the greatest living authority on all questions. Thus at this period Hunter influenced more or less directly some 500 students and practitioners, and his museum was more especially at the service of the Lyceum; the only other society was Sheldon's, which contained, however, very few students. The Lyceum, the Physical, and Sheldon's Medical Societies were not included in the Medical Register for 1783, probably because they were not limited to practitioners and were looked upon as merely part of the educational machinery of the metropolis. It is not to be wondered at, that twenty years later, Hunter's were the views accepted by the leaders of surgery in London and that he had revolutionised the studies of surgeons; and there can be no question that the change had largely been brought about by means of these societies. When after years of isolation, the schools of London and Paris compared notes at the end of the war it was found that the English surgeons were far ahead of their *confrères*, thanks to Hunter, but that the converse was the case with regard to medicine.

*The Society of Physicians.*—Dr. S. Foart Simmons, who compiled the Medical Register of the last century, which was issued in the years 1779, 1780, and 1783, giving a list of all the medical men and of the societies of Europe, also edited the *London Medical Journal* for a society of physicians. Eleven volumes were issued between 1781 to 1790, and the publication was continued as *Medical Facts and Observations* from the year 1791 for six volumes.<sup>4</sup> The *Journal* was published monthly and consisted of reviews of all the new European medical books, of original papers and of medical news, being on the same lines as the medical and philosophical commentaries of Edinburgh, and together they give us the best epitome of the current medical opinions of the time. I have not been able to learn more about this society beyond what is stated in the first volume. It appears that the society had occasionally met together to converse on medical subjects, and at the instigation of Dr. Simmons, who undertook to act as editor, they agreed to set on foot this monthly publication.

Not much can be learnt of the Middlesex Hospital students' medical society, which dates back to 1774, but of which records have not been preserved. The students appear to have met twice a week in the physicians' room. The

<sup>4</sup> There are seven volumes in three in Guy's Hospital Library.



Abernethian Society of St. Bartholomew's Hospital commenced at the end of the century.

In bringing before you this evening these remarks about Hunter and the history of the medical societies of London, I trust we all realise how great a debt we owe to the Hunters (William and John) and to John Sheldon for instituting debating societies for the purposes of medical education. We can afford now to read with amusement a pamphlet which is entitled, "Reflexions on a Letter addressed to the Governors of St. George's Hospital by John Hunter in 1792." After abusing Hunter for his lack of education, &c., the writer says: "Your disputing societies, several varieties of lectures in a day, and a squint at an operation are the fashionable attendances of the modern student. Since the Medical Tea-sipping Society was commenced mankind has been classed to view the wonders of your museum and the world indulged with a volume of your notions at the common price. It is ridiculous to observe how this tea-kettle invitation has spread. An apothecary may now take his tea gratis and have a game of whist for only the price of the cards every evening in the week, if he keeps a regular list of the bread-and-butter manufactories."

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY.

R. Quain: Observations on Medical Education, 1865. Dr. C. H. Routh: The History of the Medical Society of London, 1859. The Medical Register, 1783. The Medical Institutions of London, Brit. Med. Jour., 1895, vols. i. and ii. Reflexions on a Letter addressed to the Governors of St. George's Hospital by John Hunter in 1792 (Guildhall Library). Minute-book of the Corporation of Surgeons (Guildhall Library). Medical Essays and Observations, being an Abridgment of the Useful Papers in the Memoirs of the Royal Academy of Sciences in Paris (4 vols.), 1699 to 1750, by T. Southwell (Royal College of Physicians of London). Medical Essays and Observations, published by a Society in Edinburgh (5 vols.), 1733 to 1742. Essays and Observations, Physical and Literary (3 vols.), 1754 to 1771. Medical and Philosophical Commentaries, by a Society of Physicians in Edinburgh, 1773 to 1779, and Medical Commentaries, 1780 to 1795 (in all 20 vols.), edited by Dr. Andrew Duncan, and continued eight years longer as Duncan's Annals of Medicine, 1796 to 1804. Index to the Anatomical, Medical, Chirurgical and Physiological Papers in the Philosophical Transactions up to 1813. Medical Essays and Observations relating to the Practice of Physic and Surgery, abridged from the Philosophical Transactions by Dr. Mihles (2 vols.), 1745. The Medical Museum, by Gentlemen of the Faculty (3 vols.), 1763-1764. Medical Transactions of the Royal College of Physicians of London (6 vols.), 1768 to 1820. Medical Observations and Inquiries by a Society of Physicians in London (6 vols.), 1757 to 1784. Minutes of the Physical Society (the early volumes are missing, but those from 1783 onwards are at Guy's Hospital, with the exception of those for the years 1786 to 1788 and 1798 to 1804). Medical Records and Researches from the Papers of a Private Medical Association, 1798. Laws of the Physico-Medical Society of London, 1774 (British Museum). Memoirs of the Medical Society of London (6 vols.), 1787 to 1805. The Minute-books from the commencement (at the Medical Society's Rooms). Laws and List of Members of the Medical Society—i.e., the Great Queen-street Society—for 1783 and 1784 (British Museum; the latter also at the Medico-Chirurgical Society). Scheme for Instituting a Society under the title of the Society of Physicians of London, instituted for the Improvement of Medical Knowledge and also for Building a new College of Physicians (MSS. in the Library of the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society). Transactions of the Society for the Improvement of Medical and Chirurgical Knowledge (3 vols.), 1793 to 1812. Minute book of the above Society (Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society). Lyceum Medicum Londinense: Rules and List of Members, 1792 (Library of the Royal College of Surgeons of England). London Medical Journal, by a Society of Physicians (11 vols.), 1781 to 1790. Medical Facts and Observations, edited by S. Foart Simmons (6 vols.), 1791.