

**Address at the opening of the Medico-Chirurgical Society / by George Buchanan.**

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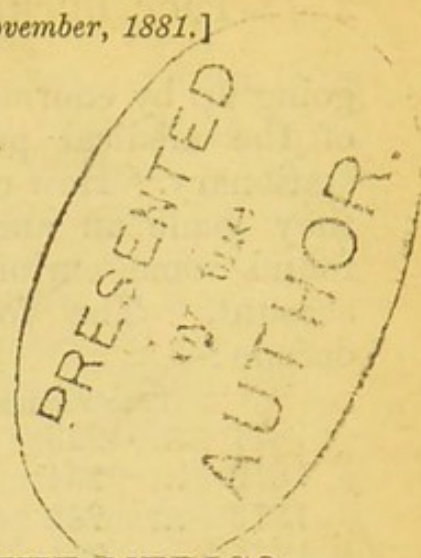
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## ADDRESS AT THE OPENING OF THE MEDICO-CHIRURGICAL SOCIETY.\*

By PROFESSOR GEORGE BUCHANAN, PRESIDENT.

PROFESSOR GEORGE BUCHANAN opened the Session with a short introductory address, having reference to the changes in the profession and medical matters generally in Glasgow within the present century, and mainly within the present generation. He said that some of these changes were of a very striking character, and some points would scarcely be credible, unless authenticated by figures.

First, *In regard to the numerical relation of the Profession to the Population of Glasgow.*—When he became a member of the Society in 1851, shortly after taking his Degree, the population of Glasgow was only about half of what it now was; but the profession was relatively much larger in numbers than at present. Here were the figures for the last 30 years.

Year.	Population (in round numbers).	Number of Medical Men.
1851, ...	... 255,000	... 231
1861, ...	... 329,000	... 226
1871, ...	... 477,000	... 231
1881, ...	... 511,000	... 294

The numbers of practitioners were those in the *Post Office Directory* for the respective years. A glance at these figures brought out some remarkable anomalies, which he would not make even an attempt to explain. For example, they found the number of medical men in Glasgow in 1871 to be numerically the same as in 1851, though the population had during these twenty years nearly doubled itself. They had brought out by these figures the curious phenomenon of a population

\* Reported for the Society by Mr. Duncan. The Report is an Abstract of the Address, which was delivered on 7th October.

going up by enormous bounds, while all the time the numbers of the medical profession in the community were nearly stationary. How could this be accounted for? Then again, if they made an analysis of the years of a single decade, they found some curious variations for which it was difficult to account. The following were the figures for the last decade :—

Practitioners.		Practitioners.	
1871	... 229	1877	... 237
1872	... 234	1878	... 228 ( <i>Minimum.</i> )
1873	... 232	1879	... 267 ( <i>Sudden rise.</i> )
1874	... 244	1880	... 274
1875	... 260 ( <i>Maximum.</i> )	1881	... 294
1876	... 241		

Second. *As to the Membership in the Society.*—The statistics of Membership of this Society, showed on the whole a steady increase, though one decade marked a diminution.

In 1851	there were	139	members.
1861	„	114	„
1871	„	211	„
1881	„	209	„

The great increment in 1871 was partly caused by the amalgamation of the Old Medical Society with the Medico-Chirurgical.

Third, *The Medical School of Glasgow.*—Other changes during these thirty years were equally significant. In 1851 there were two Medical Schools in Glasgow. To-day they had no fewer than four such institutions, three of them fully, and the fourth all but fully equipped. In 1851, there were between the two schools eighteen lecturers, giving qualifying courses. At present the number of lecturers giving curriculum courses was forty. In fact, one in every seven Medical men in Glasgow was a curriculum lecturer; and if they included those engaged in giving clinical instruction, and in non-qualifying, that is, optional courses of lectures, then one in every five was a teacher of Students.

Fourth, *Number of Medical Students.*—Another point of curious interest was the variation in the number of Glasgow students during this century. It was difficult to obtain correct information on this subject; but the Anatomy Class Rolls, to which he had access, might be taken as giving a fair criterion of attendance. It will be seen that the fluctuations were very extraordinary, and it was not difficult to get at the fact,—or one fact, which underlay them. On this point Dr.

Allen Thomson had written him in these words:—"I am sorry to say that in my experience, the numbers attending a school are much more dependent on external circumstances"—such as the prospect of a demand for Surgeons for the Army and Navy in view of a war impending or begun; or a panic in prospect of new regulations—"than anything intrinsic in a school, or than good or bad teaching." He (the President) did not go quite so far in this view; but there could be no doubt that to a considerable extent it was borne out by statistics. For example, in the four years, 1811-12-13-14, the numbers of Anatomy Students in the University alone, were respectively, 259, 280, 352, 254: while in 1815, after the Peace following the Battle of Waterloo, they went suddenly down to 166. Again, at the period of the Crimean War, in 1855, there were in the two schools of the University and the Andersonian, 310 Students of Anatomy, soon after which came the agitation which ended in the Medical Act of 1858, with the institution of a compulsory preliminary examination, and other changes equally important. This gave rise to what Dr. Thomson had called a "New Regulations Panic," culminating in what was called the year of grace, 1860-61. Well, during these years the numbers of Anatomy Students in Glasgow, from 1855 onwards, in consecutive years, were—310, 342, 381, 401, 416; while in 1861 and 1862 (the first year of the pressure of new regulations), the total numbers again fell to 284 and 287, not to mount up again till 1875, when the conjoint board agitation got warm, and there was a prospect of some organic change with increased cost of medical education and qualification. In 1875, the number was 295, and the years immediately following marked a gradual advance, 301, 313, 321, 345, and in the present year, 366. As Students of Anatomy attend that class for two out of the four Sessions, the total number of students in Glasgow at present could not be put down as less than 700.

Fifth, *Hospital Appointments*.—Professor Buchanan proceeded to advert to the improvement in the scale of medical fees, which had taken place within the present generation, as another change of some significance; and then passed on to point out the increased opportunities to the younger members of the profession, for acquiring practical experience now-a-days afforded by the public charities. In 1851, they had only one Public General Hospital, the Royal Infirmary, with some 200 beds for medical and surgical cases, and 120 for fever—to which were appointed four physicians and four surgeons;

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but only two of each class did duty at one time, in ward and clinical work. The other two of the surgeons and physicians acted in the dispensary and fever wards, and as supernumeraries. Now, in this year of 1881, there are two Public Hospitals, with about 900 beds for medical and surgical cases, employing about thirty-five paid Medical Officers, of whom no fewer than eighteen are engaged in giving clinical instruction to students. In addition to this there are many other appointments connected with special hospitals, also general and special dispensaries. Altogether, the number of medical appointments in public charities in Glasgow, could not be set down at less than 60.

These statistics might by some be considered dry and unimportant, but he trusted that others would find in them material for reflection.