

The Royal College of Physicians of London.

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THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS OF LONDON.

THE Royal College of Physicians of London is probably the most ancient medical society in Europe. It was founded in 1518, when King Henry VIII was full of his youthful zeal for learning, and has continued without any material alteration in its constitution to the present day. It was flourishing before there was a professor of medicine in either of the ancient universities of England, and its existence and policy have profoundly affected the character and status of physicians in this country.

Dr. Thomas Linacre, the physician to whom its foundation was mainly due, was a disciple of the new learning of his time, who had studied Greek under one of the last men who knew literary Greek as a living language, and had brought from Byzantium into Italy all the knowledge of the writings of ancient Greece which remained in the capital of the Eastern empire.

The College library contains a copy of the edition of Suidas, the Greek lexicographer, which Demetrius Chalcondylas, the tutor of Linacre, published at Milan in 1499. The paper on which it is printed is admirable in its colour and strength; the Greek type cast from the handwriting of the editor is of beautiful design, but whoever looks out a word in it will be struck with the advantages which the modern student has over one who, like Linacre, read Greek at the period of the Renaissance. The dictionary runs on in continuous lines, with no paragraph till at the end of one letter and beginning of another it exhibits two phrases such as "End of the alphabetical order of Sigma"; "Beginning of the alphabetical order of Tau." It must, nevertheless, have been a great help to the student of Greek in the sixteenth century, and well worth the three pieces of gold which its preface tells us was its price. The actual copy which belonged to Linacre probably perished with a large part of the library of the College in the Fire of London in 1666, but one volume, a collection of treatises on husbandry, published in 1496, which belonged to the founder, and contains his signature, is still to be seen in the library.

The original College consisted of the three physicians to the King—John Chambre, Thomas Linacre, Ferdinand De Victoria; and three other London physicians—Nicholas Halsewell, John Francis, and Robert Yaxley; and Linacre was its first President. It has continued to elect its Fellows in succession to these since 1518, and now numbers about 300 Fellows. It has, perhaps, the least

restricted constitution of any corporation or body politic in existence, for every Fellow has an equal voice in its affairs, and an equal vote in the decision of all matters that come before the College.

The President is elected in each year on the Monday after Palm Sunday, by a method closely resembling that of the College of Cardinals in the election of a Pope. The Fellows having assembled in the great library of the College and the office of President having been declared vacant, proceed to the election of any Fellow of not less than ten years' standing. No proposal is made, but each Fellow writes on a slip

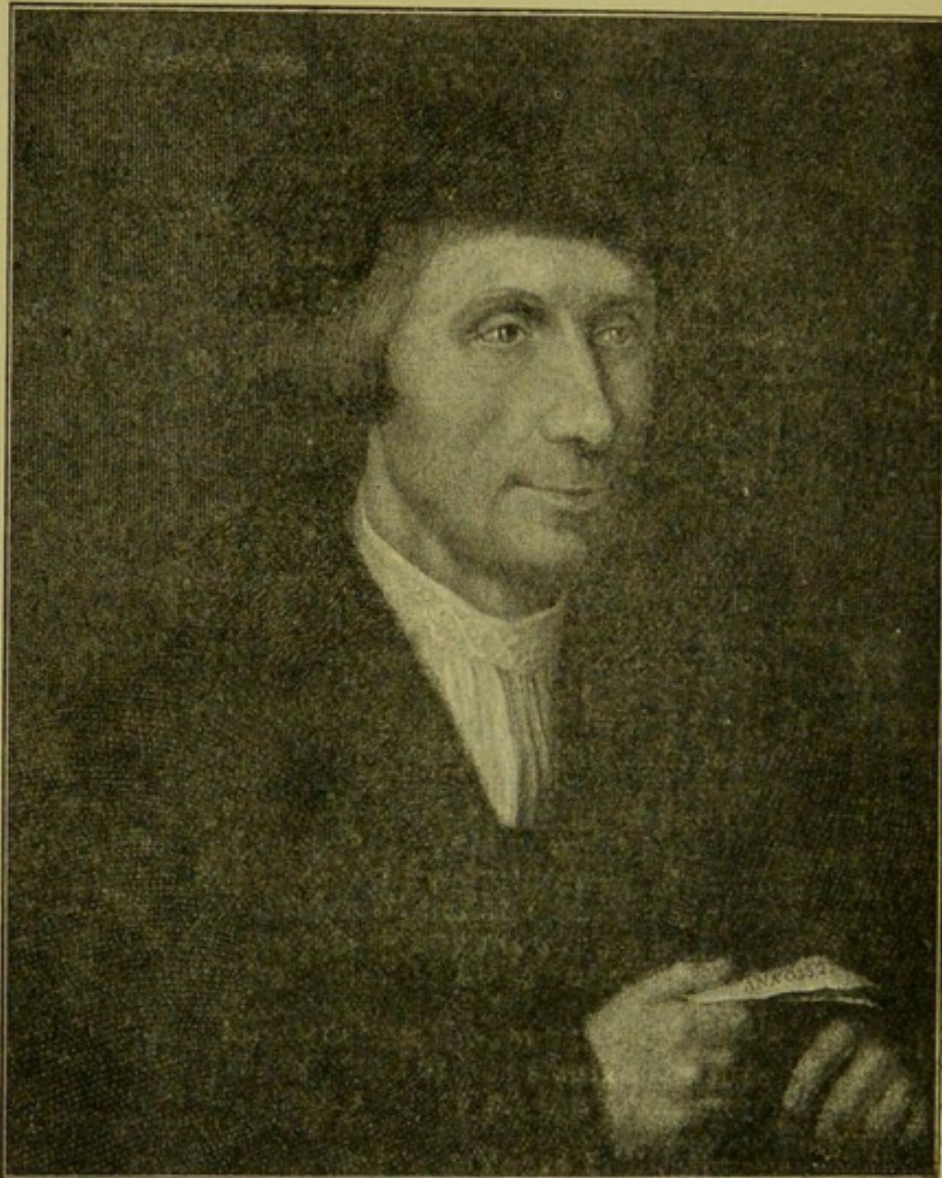


Fig. 1.—Thomas Linacre, first President of the Royal College of Physicians, died October 20th, 1524.

of paper the name which he approves; the votes thus given are collected in a silver bowl, are publicly enumerated, and the decision announced to the College by its senior Censor, the officer next to the President in dignity. A second voting on the names of the two Fellows who obtain most votes, where several are proposed, is sometimes necessary, and an absolute majority then determines the election. At the conclusion the Bedell of the College carries round a dish from which he gives each Fellow present a new half-crown piece.

The President is vested in a black damask gown embroidered with gold, and at the beginning of every meeting of the College has a mace carried before him and placed on the table, and always enters with a silver sceptre or rod of office in his hand. This sceptre, which has four small serpents at the top was made in 1556, and was first borne by Dr. Caius, then President, after whom Caius College, Cambridge, is called.

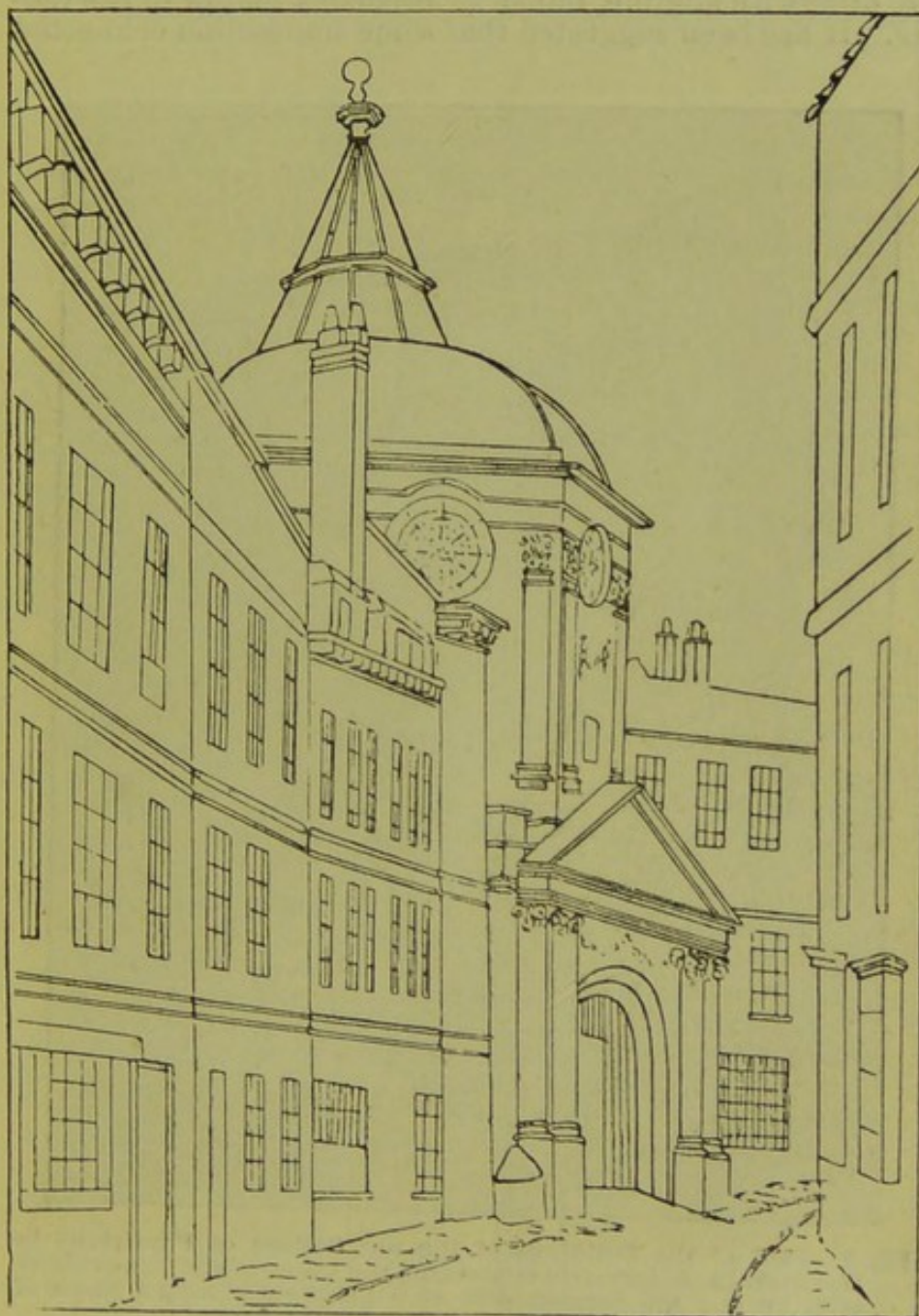


Fig. 2.—Outline drawing from an old print of the entrance to the old buildings of the Royal College of Physicians in Warwick Lane.

The College of Physicians, under its charter, has the power to grant licences to practise, and besides its numerous Licentiates, admits candidates after a higher examination to the degree of Member, a status in which after a certain number of years they are eligible, if they become distinguished in medical or in general learning, for election to the Fellowship of

the College, an election in which the College always attaches importance to character as well as to attainments.

The history of the Society, which has been set forth with exhaustive research by Dr. Munk in his "Roll of the Royal College of Physicians of London," shows that the College has had very few unworthy Fellows, and that of all the really great physicians of London during nearly four centuries, only one, otherwise eligible, failed to become a Fellow of the College. It has been suggested that some transaction connected

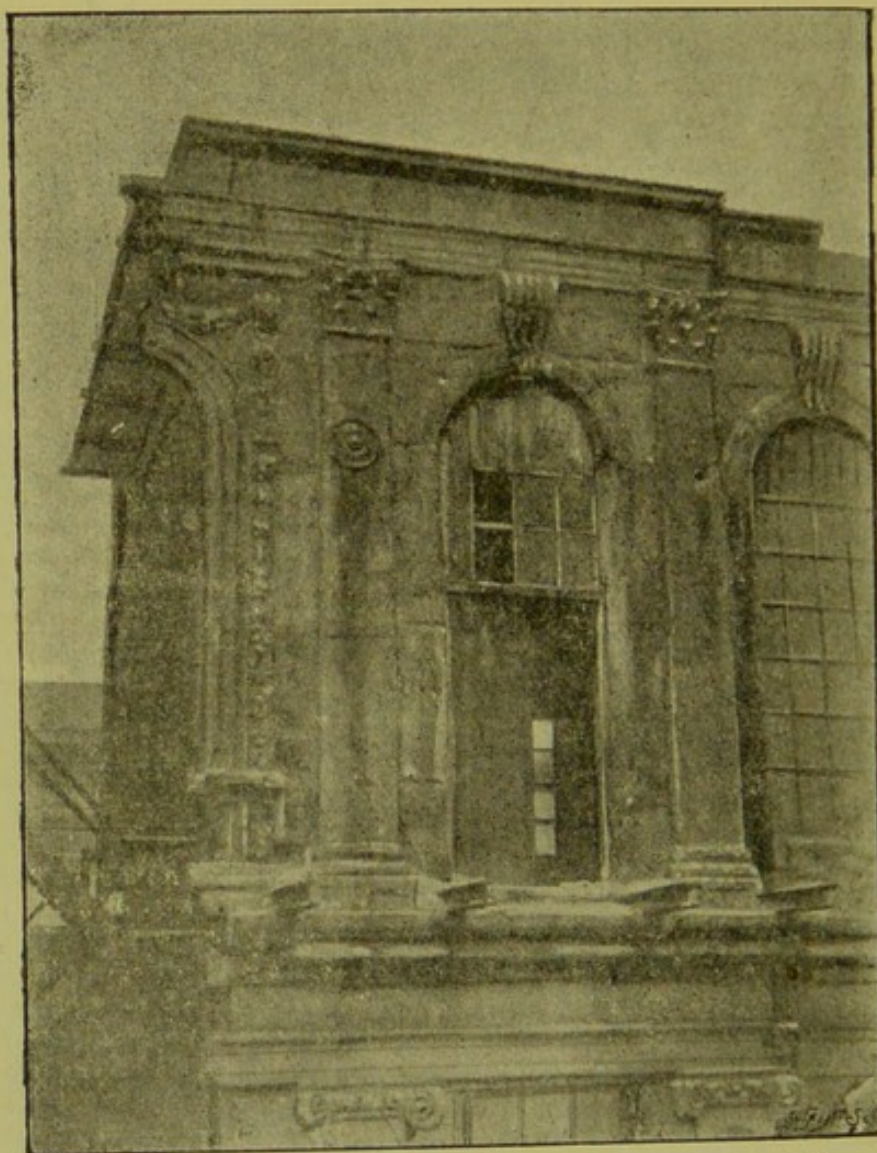


Fig. 3.—Part of the buildings of the old College of Physicians in Warwick Lane, formerly containing the Library, etc. The ruined arch on the left formed part of a niche containing a statue of Charles II. (From a photograph taken May, 1895.)

with the Great Rebellion may have stood in the way of the election of Dr. Thomas Sydenham after the restoration of the monarchy and our liberties in 1660, but the College records, which are throughout free from signs of political or theological animus, prove the contrary, and show that the College highly esteemed him, would gladly have elected him, and only did not do so because, for some fancy of his own, he did not desire to become a Fellow.

The College from 1518 till the middle of the reign of James I held its meetings in a house given to it by Linacre in Knight Rider Street, on the south side of St. Paul's Cathedral. It then moved to Amen Corner, to the north-west of the Cathedral, where are now the houses of the canons residentiary, but after the great fire, in which its buildings were destroyed, it was rebuilt at the end of Warwick Lane, an ancient street which takes its present name from the house once situate in it of the great Earl of Warwick, the kingmaker of the Wars of the Roses, but which had existed many centuries before his time under the designation of Eldenes Lane. Here the College remained till it removed to its present site in Pall Mall East. The present building was opened on June 25th, 1825. All the meetings of the College take place in this building; here the examinations for the Membership are held, and here the public lectures of the College are usually delivered.

If a lecturer desires to exhibit elaborate experiments or apparatus during his lecture he usually obtains leave to deliver it in the larger theatre of the Examination Hall on the Embankment, where the College of Physicians, in conjunction with the Royal College of Surgeons of England, holds conjoint examinations for candidates who desire to receive its licence and at the same time to be admitted Members of the Royal College of Surgeons, and where the two Colleges maintain laboratories for pathological research, open free under proper restrictions to members of the medical profession.

Numerous medical lectures are delivered during the year at the College in Pall Mall East, called, after their founders, the Lumleian, Goulstonian, Croonian, Bradshaw, and Milroy lectures, and an Oration in honour of Harvey and in praise of the benefactors of the College is delivered on St. Luke's Day. As the College income is small it seldom gives a public dinner, but the Fellows dine together at their own cost and charge four times a year, and sometimes also entertain a few guests after the Harveian Oration.

But if the aroma of rich viands, the glitter of splendid plate, and the free flow of choice wines which are associated with so many ancient and well-endowed corporations in London are not to be sought at the Royal College of Physicians, its rooms afford ample subject for that "sweet discourse, the banquet of the mind" of which Dryden speaks, a poet to whom special funeral honours were paid by the College. In the portico are the statues of Linacre as the person chiefly concerned in the original foundation; of Harvey, the greatest discoverer belonging to the College; and of Sydenham, a Licentiate of the College, the greatest expositor of the modern method of medicine—three figures which, besides commemorating these great men, typify the relations of our profession to learning in general, to the natural sciences, and to clinical observation. On the left of the hall into which the entrance leads is the College reading room, which is open to all Licentiates and Members as well as to the Fellows. On its walls are numerous portraits of Fellows famous in former times, each with the name and date.

There are also portraits of two Fellows still living—Sir William Jenner, formerly President, one of the most illustrious modern followers of the method of Sydenham, and Sir Henry Pitman, Emeritus Registrar of the College, the storehouse of

all its honourable traditions, and the highest authority on its procedure. Just inside the door are five physicians of the family of Monro who were successively Fellows of the College between 1729 and 1890. At the far end of the room is the full-length figure of Sir William Browne, President of the College in 1767, and well known by name to all Cambridge men as the founder of the medals for classical verse. The artist was Thomas Hudson, the master of Sir Joshua Reynolds.

On the wall opposite the windows are many physicians known in English history. Sir John Micklethwaite, the successor of Harvey as physician to St. Bartholomew's; Sir Edmund King, who used to do chemical experiments with King Charles II, and who bled him at the sudden onset of his last illness so as to produce a brief temporary restoration of the King's senses; Sir Hans Sloane, whose collections form the basis of the British Museum; Dr. Paris, President of the College, whose life of Sir Humphry Davy and many other books were once widely read; Dr. Richard Bright, physician to Guy's Hospital, known to all students of pathology in relation to the group of renal diseases bearing his name; Messenger Monsey, whose subsequent success as a physician was due to his attendance on the owner of one of the earliest and most famous of English racehorses, and whose talk suited the host and the company at the hilarious table of Sir Robert Walpole. Dr. Johnson spoke vehemently about his conversation, and when the Bishop of Dromore tried to diminish the force of the censure, attacked Dr. Percy and Monsey with renewed severity. However wanting in restraint Monsey's conversation may have been, it was never heard in the College, for he did not attain any higher standing than that of extra Licentiate.

On the opposite wall to Sir William Browne, besides those of Sir Andrew Clark and Sir William Jenner, there is a portrait of Dr. Francis Glisson, President in 1667, and author of the *Tractatus de Rachitide*, published in 1650, the first thorough book on a single disease by an English physician, a work admirable in its careful morbid anatomy as well as in its clinical observations. On the same wall is Dr. Walter Charleton, President in 1689, the author of several books on medicine and on metaphysics as well as on natural science, all more remarkable for ingenuity than profundity. Except by that late learned Oxonian Mr. Mark Pattison and a few among the junior Fellows of the College, who sometimes "waste time" by reading obsolete books, his volumes have probably rarely been looked into since his death in 1707, but Dryden's *Epistle to Dr. Charleton*, the finest tribute of just praise which English poetry has paid to English science, will for ever preserve him from oblivion in spite of his *Spiritus Gorgonicus*, which maintains the existence of a stone-forming spirit or essence in the human body, his dialogues between Athanasius and Lucretius in the presence of Isodicastes, his *Deliramenta Catarrhi* and the *Physiologia Epicuro-Gassendo-Charltoniana*, which maintains the interesting hypothesis that since the vast number of 295,232,799,039,604,140,847,618,609,643,520,000,000 combinations are attainable among the twenty-six letters of the alphabet, varied arrangements of numerous atoms may be the cause of the differences of appearance and structure in material substances.

On the staircase of the College there is an interesting portrait of Sir Theodore Mayerne, who was physician first to

Henry IV of France and afterwards in England to James I, Charles I, and Charles II. He was the friend of King James and of both Charles and Queen Henrietta Maria, and his extant writings show that both his character and medical skill justified their trust in him. He was fond of entomology and of chemistry, and made many experiments about pigments. He used to write out the regimen as well as the treatment of his patients, with an elaboration which extended to even more detail than the well-known minute regulations which the eager care of Sir Andrew Clark prompted him to write out for his patients. Dr. Hale, who gave a fine library to the College, and Dr. Charles Goodall, one of its historians, Registrar of the College, and a zealous defender of its rights, occupy prominent places on the staircase; and there, too, is the portrait of the delightful Arbuthnot, the friend of Swift and of Pope, with a better-balanced mind than either, whose few verses are superior to many that the poet wrote, and whose conversation was relished by one so impatient of human imperfection as the Dean of St. Patrick's. Both have commemorated him in their works, Pope in the *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, and Swift in the lines on his own death:

Poor Pope will grieve a month, and Gay
A week, and Arbuthnot a day.

At the top of the staircase is the library of the College—a spacious room lined with books, in which the comitia or general meetings of the College are held. The library may be regarded as a sort of museum, exhibiting the mental occupations and tastes of the Fellows of the College since its foundation. Here are the books which filled the minds of such learned men as Caius, Gilbert, Harvey, Mayerne, Ent, Glisson, Sir Thomas Browne, Dr. Edward Browne, Mead, Freind, Askew, Brocklesby, Heberden, Sir George Baker, and Matthew Baillie. The actual volumes whose pages they turned over are often to be found on the shelves. The library shows how strongly at all periods the College has held to the view that physicians ought not be careless of any kind of learning, and that the standing of the profession in public estimation must depend, not on royal favour and decorations, in the race for which physicians may easily be outstripped by men of an inferior kind, but on that solid learning which is so thorough in its own department that it appreciates and is properly associated with every kind of erudition.

It is this spirit and tradition in the College, which it received from Linacre at its commencement, and has maintained ever since, which has secured more respect for physicians in England during four centuries than they have received in any other European country. This tone in the highest order of medicine has from its nature and by its example tended to the steady improvement and enlightenment of the whole profession in a way which could have been accomplished by no external influence or State patronage. The library, exhibiting as it does, when looked at book by book, the reading and attainments of many past generations of Fellows of the College, shows that the general aim of the order has been to attain learning and to add to the world's stores of knowledge, and that fortune and Court favour have generally been regarded in the College as only to be deserving attention when they were the natural sequel of true professional merit and scientific depth.

In the principal place in the library is Jansen's portrait of Harvey, painted from the life, and in the gallery above it are a series of dried preparations of the vascular system prepared by the hands of the great discoverer of the circulation. Over the fireplaces, on each side of the central one, are portraits of Dr. Baldwin Hamley, a Fellow and benefactor of the College, who died in 1676; and of Dr. Radcliffe, a benefactor of the College and of his own University of Oxford, as well as of St. Bartholomew's Hospital. On one mantelpiece is a curious little figure, in painted unbaked clay, of Dr. Anthony Askew, Physician to St. Bartholomew's Hospital, a Fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, who lived till 1774 in Queen Square, Bloomsbury. The figure, which shows Askew in his scarlet gown as a Cambridge Doctor of Medicine, was made for him by a Chinaman whom he had treated. The College also possesses a fine bust by Roubiliac of Dr. Mead, presented by this learned physician and student of Aristophanes, and has also busts of Matthew Baillie, of Halford by Chantry, of Harvey by Scheemakers, and several others. One of these was lent for exhibition at the Royal Academy, and was returned with a black mark on it caused by a surreptitious attempt there to take a cast of it. The College has since declined to lend any of its works of art; nor is it necessary that they should be lent, as they are always open to the view of the learned or the curious on application.

In a case at the end of the library are preserved several valuable and curious objects—the mace of the College and the caduceus, the silver-mounted rod which Harvey used in demonstrating anatomy, the silver bowl in which votes are taken, several other pieces of plate, and the gold headed cane which was successively the property of Dr. Radcliffe, who died 1714; Dr. Mead, who died 1754; Dr. Askew, who died 1774; Dr. William Pitcairn, who died 1791; Dr. David Pitcairn, who died in 1809; and Dr. Matthew Baillie, after whose death in 1823 this interesting relic bearing arms of its several possessors was given to the College by Mrs. Baillie.

A frame at this end of the library contains an account, signed by the physicians who were present, of the translation (during the presidency of Sir William Jenner) of the remains of Harvey from the ruinous vault in which they lay wrapped in lead into a white marble sarcophagus in the Harvey chapel of the parish church of Hempstead, in Essex. The translation took place on St. Luke's Day, 1883. Many of the Fellows whose signatures attest it have since joined the majority, but the survivors will always retain a vivid recollection of that cloudy day, of the out-of-the-way village with its bull-baiting ring remaining, of the partly unroofed lonely church, of the flock of rooks flying in great circles in the air above some tall trees, cawing loudly while the leaden case was being raised from the vault outside the church, of the slow adjustment of the lid of the white marble sarcophagus within while Sir William Jenner, with the silver caduceus in his hand, resolutely stood by to the very end, of the venerable aspect of the Regius Professors of Physic from Cambridge and from Oxford, of Sir Andrew Clark with a volume of *Butler's Sermons* under his arm, and of the other Fellows, successors of those who more than two centuries before had paid the last honours to Harvey.

To the left of the record of Harvey's translation is a door leading by a very narrow staircase to the lecture theatre of

the College and to the museum. The museum is a small pathological one, and the means of the College necessarily restrict the duties of the curators to the preservation of the few but interesting specimens it contains. In it is also a wooden model of the old lecture theatre of the College, familiar to readers of English literature as the frontispiece of the early editions of Garth's poem of *The Dispensary*.

Another door leads out of the library to the Censors' room, which is panelled with oak, the gift of Dr. Baldwin Hamsey, whose arms, duly tinctured, with those of Sir George Ent, a friend of Harvey, and President of the College when Hamsey made his gift, are displayed on the cornice. The College grant of arms is over the fireplace, and on the walls are some of the choicest portraits belonging to the Society. Near the window is that of Dr. Richard Warren, Fellow in 1763, physician to King George III, by Gainsborough, one of the finest portraits of a man ever painted by that celebrated artist. Dr. William Pitcairn, President from 1775 to 1784, and Physician to St. Bartholomew's Hospital, is by Sir Joshua Reynolds, while that of his nephew, Dr. David Pitcairn, Physician to the same hospital (by Hoppner) shows a frank intelligent countenance which assures us of the genuine regret with which his early death was regarded by the physicians of his time. Vandyke's portrait of Dr. Thomas Wharton, who died in 1673, and was the first describer of the duct of the sublingual gland, hangs over one door, and near another is that of "virtuous and faithful Heberden," whose commentaries may justly be regarded as only second to the writings of Sydenham among the works of Englishmen on clinical medicine. The portrait is by Sir William Beechey, and we cannot but regret that the pencil of Reynolds had not preserved the features of a physician of such great qualities when in the full vigour of life. There is Freind, whose *History of Physic*, published in 1725, is no less admirable as a work of literature than it is accurate as a history; and Sir Samuel Garth in flowing wig by Sir Godfrey Kneller. *The Dispensary*, his amusing account of the great controversy which arose in London when, in spite of the opposition of the Apothecaries, the College of Physicians instituted the first out-patient department in London, is not often read now, but entitles him to a permanent place in English literature. He experienced in January, 1719, his own fine lines:

To die is landing on some silent shore,
Where billows never break nor tempests roar,
E'er well we feel the friendly stroke 'tis o'er.

There are fine portraits of two famous modern physicians, both Presidents of the College, both, like Garth, Cambridge men, Sir Thomas Watson and Sir George Burrows. Near Burrows is Sir George Baker, once a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, the discoverer of the true cause of the colic of Devonshire. He demonstrated that the cider of his native county, made in leaden vats, contained lead in solution, and that the colic was thus produced. He was much attacked by his countrymen, but truth of course prevailed, and that the hardy farmers of Devon can drink tankards of cider without suffering subsequent tortures and palsies is due to Baker's persevering investigations and lucid exposition of their results. His essays are the foundation of existing knowledge on lead palsy.

It would be easy to spend many days in relating the histories which a visit to the College of Physicians would recall to most readers of English medicine. Those here briefly mentioned are sufficient to show how many interesting associations are added to the practical usefulness of this ancient yet vigorous Society.

N. M.