

Oration delivered before the members of the Royal Medical Society of Edinburgh, at the celebration of their centenary, February 17, 1837 / by William B. Carpenter.

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Alfred Smith M.D.
(13.)
ORATION

DELIVERED BEFORE THE MEMBERS

OF THE

Royal Medical Society of Edinburgh,

AT THE

CELEBRATION OF THEIR CENTENARY,

FEBRUARY 17, 1837.

BY WILLIAM B. CARPENTER,

SENIOR PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY ;

MEMBER OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS, LONDON ; AND

PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL PHYSICAL SOCIETY, EDINBURGH.

WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE OTHER CENTENARY PROCEEDINGS,
AND A LIST OF THE MEMBERS PRESENT.

EDINBURGH :

PRINTED FOR THE SOCIETY,

BY BALFOUR AND JACK.

MDCCCXXXVII.

COPIES

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

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TO THE
MEMBERS
OF
THE ROYAL MEDICAL SOCIETY,
THE FOLLOWING ADDRESS,
DELIVERED AT THEIR REQUEST,
IS DEDICATED
WITH EVERY SENTIMENT
OF
RESPECT AND GRATITUDE.

*At a meeting of the ROYAL MEDICAL SOCIETY, held February 24th, 1837,
it was unanimously resolved, " That the thanks of the Society be given to Mr.
Carpenter, for his able Oration on the occasion of the Centenary Dinner, and
that he be requested to furnish his manuscript, that it may be printed at the ex-
pense of the Society, together with an account of the Centenary proceedings, and
a list of the Members present."*

CENTENARY ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN,

A hundred years have now elapsed since a few individuals studying medicine in the University of Edinburgh, then in the dawn of its subsequent lustre,—individuals at that time unknown to fame, distinguished only by their ardour in the pursuit of knowledge—associated themselves together for the purpose of mutual assistance and improvement in the cultivation of Medical Science. The association thus commenced was not suffered to decline, as too frequently happens in similar cases, when no longer animated by the presence and activity of its founders. Their spirit still remained, for their energetic zeal fell, like the mantle of the prophet, upon their successors; and a century of almost uninterrupted prosperity has raised the Medical Society of Edinburgh to a station of unequalled dignity and importance.

Numbering at its commencement but six obscure students, it now comprehends the *élite* of the medical profession in this country; and not only does it spread its ramifications into the most distant quarters of the globe, wherever British skill and talent have been called into requisition, but the greatest luminaries of our science in foreign schools

have thought it an honour to be enrolled amongst its members. Unpossessed at its origin even of “a local habitation and a name,” and deficient in the means of collecting and amassing the records of past experience, it is now incorporated by Royal authority, and master of an elegant and commodious edifice, well stored with the literary treasures of bygone ages, and the accumulating wealth of the present. Instituted for the purpose of individual improvement, it has become a mighty engine for the advancement of the science to which it is devoted ; and I assert with little fear of contradiction, that it has exercised an influence on the progress of medicine during the last century, second only to that of the Academic Institution with which it is connected, and many of whose brightest ornaments have been numbered amongst its members.

It would at any time be interesting to trace the history of an association whose career has been so remarkable—to inquire into the causes of its origin—to follow the progressive stages of its growth—to investigate the nature and extent of the influence which it has exercised on the individuals composing it, as well as on medical science in general,—and to examine what there is in its original plan, its subsequent constitution, and the circumstances in which it has been placed, which has contributed to maintain it in a degree of prosperity, and to an epoch in its existence of which no similar association can boast. But with how much more propriety may these topics engage our attention when this epoch is the special occasion of our assembling here ; when the social festival by which we are commemorating the Centenary of the Royal Medical Society of Edinburgh has called from the active duties of their profession, or from their calm and dignified retirement, so many of its old and distinguished members, to join with their younger friends in testifying the advantages which they have derived

from it, and to stimulate them to the pursuit of the same honourable and successful career; and when the beginning of a second century of its history, recalling to our minds the commencement of the first, bids us acknowledge our debt of gratitude to the founders and supporters of an institution by which we have so largely profited.

The early history of our Society is so intimately connected with that of the progress of Medical science during the same important epoch, that the relation of the one necessarily involves much detail with regard to the other; and as it is evident that the position of any branch of knowledge at a given period cannot be justly estimated unless the prominent events in its previous history are rightly understood, I shall make no apology for the introduction of a brief sketch of the more important changes in this department of philosophy previous to the commencement of the eighteenth century.

As in the infancy of society we trace the influence of personal strength and prowess in raising their possessor to the regal authority, so may we observe that intellectual superiority conferred a no less absolute domination over the minds of the ignorant and superstitious vulgar. The history of the ancient mythology records the honours of deification to have been conferred alike on the warrior and on the sage—on him who improved the arts of life, as on him who devoted himself to its prolongation. It may be surmised, that to a remnant of the same spirit, carefully fostered by the objects of its veneration, and kept up by that restriction of knowledge to a few which necessarily resulted from the want of means for its diffusion, we may attribute the blind deference to individual authority which both in religion and science retarded in so remarkable a degree the progress of mental illumination in succeeding ages. Thus it was that the taste for abstract reasoning and refined

speculation which pervaded the ancient schools, was perpetuated by the influence of Aristotle in the world of general science, and by the authority of Galen in medicine, for nearly two thousand years. The decline of the ancient schools of philosophy was succeeded by that long and dreary interval in which the world was overclouded by a dismal gloom, unbroken save by the coruscations of some brilliant intellect, which glared like a meteor through the darkness of ignorance and superstition, and then vanished without leaving a trace of its existence. During the three centuries succeeding the extinction of the Saracenic school in Spain, Medicine, which had there found a temporary refuge, fell, like every other science, into the lowest state of degradation. The metaphysics of Aristotle, adapted to the existing state of civilisation and learning, and the relations subsisting between the civil and ecclesiastical powers, gave rise to the scholastic philosophy, whose domination during the middle ages was so severe and universal. The spirit of slavish deference to authority was that which characterised the age; it paralyzed the efforts of those enlightened men who sought to free the world from this moral slavery, and entwined itself with parasitical fondness round the majestic column of revealed truth. Even in the darkest periods, however, the philosophic historian may trace the glimmering of that light which burst with full splendour upon a subsequent age.* The gradual abolition of the feudal tyranny, the downfall of the Eastern empire and the consequent revival of learning in Europe, the invention of the art of printing, which has been most justly said to "deride the havoc of time and barbarism," and the discovery of a new continent, were events of which any one would have been

* "There was always a faint twilight, like that auspicious gleam which, in a summer's night, fills up the interval between the setting and the rising sun."—*Harris's Philological Inquiries*, Part III. chap. i.

important in itself; whilst the conjoined effect of all was to produce a total revolution in the established modes of thinking, whether in religion, philosophy, or science.

One of the first effects of this revolution was to direct the attention of the learned to the original authorities on each of these subjects. Whilst Luther and his followers declared that the Scriptures are to be regarded as the sole guide to sacred truth, and separated their doctrines from the additions of a corrupted church, the students of philosophy and medicine had recourse to the genuine writings of Aristotle and Galen, which, after having been so long concealed in the libraries of Constantinople, were now most advantageously substituted for the imperfect and erroneous transcripts which had been employed in their stead. It required a further advance in the education of the age, before the simple astronomical doctrines of Pythagoras could supersede the cumbersome system which had usurped their place; and before the purer principles of Hippocrates, united to the spirit of careful observation which he so strongly inculcates, could be preferred to the more showy hypothetical structure erected by Galen and his followers.

It cannot but be esteemed as peculiarly fortunate that at this epoch, so important in the history of the human mind, the revolution in philosophy was conducted by two individuals possessed of intellects so exalted, of motives so disinterested, and of situations so favourable as those of Galileo and Bacon. These two great men arrived at the same result by different means, and thus strengthened and confirmed each other's exertions. The original and sagacious mind of Galileo led him to test the correctness of the received dogmas, by an appeal to experiment; the comprehensive learning and deep penetration of Bacon convinced him of the futility of the ancient mode of philosophising, both from the barrenness of its results, and from its inconsistency with the

structure of the human mind. Whilst Galileo has perhaps the strongest claim to be considered the father of experimental philosophy, Bacon, as Dr. Thomas Brown justly remarks, was the reformer, not of physical but of mental science.* His comprehensive genius, surveying the whole panorama of nature, seized upon the highest principles of philosophical investigation, and traced out the method to be followed in bringing them to perfection; whilst his prophetic eye, foreseeing the results which were afterwards to be attained, enabled him to delineate a system of science which had not yet begun to exist.

In tracing the history of human improvement, it is most interesting to remark the characteristics of more enlightened ages, shadowed out in the minds of men who were in advance of their time, but who were prevented by the depressing influence of the systems of error and ignorance in which it was then their lot to be placed, from rising to those exalted views which more unshackled, though perhaps not more powerful, intellects have attained. Thus in the writings of Hippocrates may be discerned a glimpse of that great and fundamental truth to which Bacon was the first to give full utterance, "that in every science, the basis of all our knowledge is the accurate observation of actual phenomena, and that the correct generalisation of these phenomena should be the sole foundation of all our reasoning."†

* "We must not forget," says this profound metaphysician, and eloquent writer, "that the temple which Bacon purified, was not the temple of external nature, but the temple of the mind; that in *its* innermost sanctuaries were all the idols which he overthrew; and that it was not till these were removed, and the intellect prepared for the presence of a nobler divinity, that Truth would deign to unveil herself to adoration;—as in the mysteries of the Eastern religions, in which the first ceremony for admission to the worship of the god, is the purification of the worshipper."—*Brown's Lectures*, vol. i. p. 28.

† Bostock's *History of Medicine*, p. ix.

The science of Medicine was not slow in experiencing the benefit of this general reformation. The authority of Galen had been gradually undermined by the palpable errors which the zealous pursuit of anatomical investigation displayed in his works; the preference given to Hippocrates gained a corresponding increase; and as a necessary consequence, the habit of correct observation was confirmed, and the value of the observations was more justly appreciated.* The splendid anatomical and physiological discoveries of Harvey and Asselli, combined with the philosophical basis given by Boyle to chemical research, to extend the boundaries of our science, and to purify it from its grosser errors. At this period of the history of medicine a remarkable analogy may again be traced with the corresponding era in the progress of general science. The age of theories was not yet past; though the abstract speculations of the ancient schools were rapidly giving way before the accumulation of opposing facts, the framing of hypotheses was found too pleasing an employment to be relinquished; and the philosophy of Descartes, and the chemical and mathematical theories of medicine, may be regarded as having alike contributed to the overthrow of the ancient systems, and retarded the progress of true science. The former was destined speedily to yield to the gigantic intellect of Newton; the latter contested their places with other theories of a similar tendency, until the Newtons of physiology and medicine appeared in the persons of Haller and Cullen. It was reserved for them to complete the triumph of the inductive philosophy, by demonstrating the practicability of its application to the sciences which were regarded as beyond its pale, and to establish, on a sure basis, the true method of advancing their progress.

You may perhaps consider, Gentlemen, that I have wan-

* Bostock's History of Medicine, p. xlvii.

dered far from my original topic in presenting you with this historical retrospect; but my object has been not so much to sketch the progress of medicine as a science, as to trace the successive changes in the mode of pursuing it, in which this Society had afterwards so important a share, and which afford us an insight into that deeply interesting branch of inquiry which I might denominate the self-education of the human race.

In the revolutions of science, as in those of religion, or of our political institutions, much is frequently due to the commanding influence of a single intellect, or perhaps more commonly to the union of a few men of congenial views, and corresponding objects. But that their labours may not be fruitless, there must have previously existed a certain preparation in the public mind, without which their exertions can be but little effectual towards their designed end.

This, it appears to me, is the explanation at once of the origin and early success of the Medical Society. The hour and the men were both come. Living at a period of remarkable mental excitement, when the splendid discoveries of the seventeenth century, and more especially the spread of the Newtonian philosophy, were giving a stimulus to the investigation of truth in every department of science, and when the medical world was the arena of fierce controversy between opposing sects, its judicious founders adopted the principles of the inductive philosophy; and determining to consider nothing as proved until submitted to the test of experience, they candidly examined the doctrines of their teachers, and formed their own opinions as to their validity.

And, Gentlemen, it is to be recollected that however evident the accordance of such a proceeding with the principles of sound philosophy, or even with the dictates of common sense, may appear to us at present, it must have been regarded at the time as a daring innovation. The period of which

we are speaking still exhibits the remains of that subservience to authority which characterised the dark ages of science. The names of Boerhaave, and Stahl, and Hoffman, were substituted by their respective followers for those of Galen and Hippocrates ; the same blind reception of their dicta, the same submissive obedience to their injunctions prevailed in the schools over which they presided, as in those of ancient Greece ; and their pupils thought themselves as much bound to maintain and propagate the opinions of their preceptors, as did those of Aristotle and Pythagoras of old. Though the objects of idolatry were changed, the temple and the worship still existed, and adoration was still paid by their blinded votaries.

I need scarcely remind you, that at the period of the formation of our Society, the Medical School of Edinburgh was rapidly advancing towards the proud eminence which it afterwards occupied. It was only about ten years previously that a regular Faculty of Medicine had been established ; and to the talents and industry of the illustrious men who were then introduced into the University, may be traced much of its subsequent renown. Its energies were cramped, however, by that spirit of system which still universally prevailed in Medical Science, and which was not long before so predominant in every school of philosophy, that Bacon lamented it as an evil inseparable from Universities. All the Professors who took an active part in the duties of instruction, had studied under the illustrious Boerhaave, whose doctrines then maintained their highest celebrity ; and in the school of Edinburgh, formed upon the model, and succeeding to the eminence of that of Leyden, his principles continued for more than forty years to hold unlimited sway. The honour of the introduction of more correct views, and the final overthrow in this country of the hypothetical systems

of former times, is due to the Medical Society, whose origin it is time that I should now detail.

The deficiency of any authentic records of its early transactions is fortunately supplied in part by the recollections of its oldest members ; and in the writings of Dr. Fothergill, we find the following elegant account of its commencement.*

“ Several students, at that time, the foremost in application and in knowledge, fired by the example of their masters, who had nothing more at heart than the improvement of those who committed themselves to their tuition, formed themselves into a Society for their mutual instruction, and advancement in their studies. Every student of a certain standing who distinguished himself by his diligence, capacity, and conduct, was initiated into this little assembly. Here the opinions of the ancients, of their contemporaries, nay, the doctrines of their masters, were freely discussed ; and two of the members were always charged with the task of providing instruction and entertainment for the next meeting of the Society. Questions, no doubt, were here disputed and decided, which long experience would have declined ; but it exercised their faculties, gave them both sides of arguments, taught them to doubt, and habituated them to observation.”

A more minute and circumstantial account, which it is not necessary here to quote, is given by Dr. Lettsom in his Memoir of Dr. Fothergill ; his information was probably derived from one of the original founders of the Society, who has recorded the names of his coadjutors.

You will naturally inquire, Gentlemen, who were the individuals whose enlightened spirit shed such lustre over the humble sphere of their exertions ; did the flame of intellectual zeal maintain a steady radiance during their subse-

* Fothergill's Works, p. 432.

quent career ; or was this a transient effort of youthful enthusiasm, whose glow was speedily extinguished by the very energy of its combustion. Of the six founders of our Society, three, at least, rose to eminence in after life. Dr. Cleghorn is honourably distinguished by his work on the diseases of Minorca (which owes its origin to the suggestion of his friend Fothergill), and subsequently to its publication he was appointed Professor of Anatomy in the University of Dublin. Of Dr. Russel, we have also a literary memorial in the Natural History of Aleppo, a work which was long regarded as a model for similar compositions. It is not a little remarkable that, at a subsequent period of his life, when engaged in practice in the English metropolis, he was mainly instrumental in the establishment of the London Medical Society.* In this undertaking he was assisted by many who remembered the benefits which they had derived from that of Edinburgh ; and the oldest institution of its kind in England may thus be considered the legitimate offspring of that whose nativity we are now commemorating. If further testimony were wanting to the merits of Dr. Russel, it is afforded by the beautiful tribute of the accomplished Fothergill. " For my own part," he says, " when I recollect what I have lost in him, the sensible, firm, and upright friend—the able, honest, and experienced physician—the pleasing, instructive companion of a social hour—expression fails me." It may be regretted that Dr. Cuming has left us no literary record of his eminence ; but it is enough to know that he not only attained great local reputation as a practitioner, but that he remained during life the beloved friend of Fothergill. Of the three remaining founders of this Society, Dr. Hamilton, Dr. James Kennedy, and Mr. Archibald Taylor, history has transmitted us no information ; it may, however, be inferred,

* Fothergill's Works, p. 437.

from an expression of Dr. Fothergill's, that they were cut off in the midst of their usefulness by premature death.—But, Gentlemen, as long as this Society shall exist, their names will not pass away unhonoured and unknown ; for of them may it be said in the language of the noblest epitaph ever written, “ *Si quæris monumentum—circumspice.*”

It was in the year 1734 that the Association was formed, which may be regarded as having originated the Medical Society ; but it was not permanently constituted until three years afterwards, at which date the list of members commences, which is the earliest of our documents still existing. In this interval, the infant Society, then struggling for existence, was strengthened by the junction of two individuals, of whom each contributed much to its subsequent eminence, and one exercised a most important influence on its destiny. I have mentioned that of the founders of this institution, three at least enjoyed through life the esteem and friendship of the illustrious Fothergill ; and it is interesting, therefore, to believe that this tie was formed by their companionship in an undertaking so important and so difficult. We cannot hesitate in the conviction, that to the “ singular combination of vigorous power of mind, and chaste integrity of manners,” which obtained for him so high a subsequent eminence, this Society is largely indebted for its early usefulness and reputation. To Dr. Fothergill and his friend Cleghorn, we probably owe its continuance, when the dispersion of the original members threatened its downfall.

To Dr. Cullen, the early obligations of the Society are probably not inferior. It appears from one of his letters which is still extant,* that he did not neglect to avail himself of the advantages which it presented even in the first year of its existence ; and though no record of its transac-

* Thomson's Life of Cullen, p. 10.

tions has come down to us, we can scarcely doubt that he there exhibited the independent and inquiring spirit, which, under the guidance of unwearied industry and insatiable desire of distinction, afterwards raised him to the loftiest eminence among the benefactors of our science. And while we believe that here the "burning and shining light" of his powerful genius unveiled its dawning lustre, and that the glow of enthusiasm which he here displayed in the pursuit of knowledge must have kindled a corresponding ardour in the breasts of his associates, are we not also justified in supposing that the mental illumination thus diffused was reflected back with augmented brilliancy upon himself, and that here his intellectual progress was cheered and supported in its advancement towards the glorious splendour of "perfect day."

I trust that I have succeeded, Gentlemen, in leading you to the view which I have myself been led to entertain, that the formation of the Medical Society of Edinburgh constitutes a most important era in the history of our science. And this I maintain, not only on account of its subsequent contributions to its advancement, but because it created a new field for the exercise of the intellect at the age of its greatest vigour and activity. The Societies which had previously been formed for the improvement of philosophy, had not so much in view the discussion of theories, as the collection of facts and the performance of experiments. These were the objects of the Lyncean Society of Florence, the earliest institution of the kind, which afterwards merged into the celebrated Academy of that city; and the Royal Society of London, framed upon the plan and carrying into effect the principles of Bacon, had similar ends in view. "For the improvement of theories," says Sir C. Wren in one of his communications to it, "we need be least solicitous; it is a work which will insensibly grow on us, if we be always

doing something in experiments. This is rather our task, and in many things we must be content to plant crabstocks for posterity to graft on."

The Medical Society of Edinburgh aspired to bolder objects. Unawed by the authority of their teachers, unfettered by the dogmatic spirit which was still too prevalent in the schools, its members dared to think for themselves; and the overthrow of the doctrines of Boerhaave, and the establishment of the more correct principles of Hoffman, first in this University, and subsequently throughout the British empire, were among the earliest effects of that freedom of thought and expression, which this Society was the first to exemplify, and which still constitutes its leading principle. Like the compass of the mariner, it opens the way to regions of unexplored magnificence; no longer restrained within the narrow and well known channel of received opinions, the inquirer after truth can now stand boldly out into the wide and trackless ocean, confident in the security of the haven which will be his resting place, and in the richness of the mine which is to reward his exertions.

The merit of Hoffman consisted not only in the important additions which he made to our knowledge of the laws of the animal economy, especially with regard to the distinct nature of the vital properties and the influence of the nervous system, but also in his having pointed out the track by the pursuit of which still further advancement might be obtained. The interesting inquiry which he originated was most successfully prosecuted by Haller and Cullen; and although greatly modified and improved by them and their followers, his doctrines may be regarded as the germ of the systems of Physiology and Pathology which are now universally received. It is well known that Dr. Cullen on his succession to a medical chair in this University, was the first who disputed the authority of Boerhaave within its precincts;

but it is recorded on the joint testimony of Dr. Gregory and Dr. Duncan,* that long before this period the fundamental doctrines of that great master had been overthrown by the members of the Medical Society, who, by the substitution of sounder principles, had created the basis on which the splendid reputation of the Edinburgh School of Medicine was subsequently raised.

I have endeavoured to trace the gradual extinction of the tendency to abstract theory and hasty generalisation which clung to Medical Science as its last stronghold until the middle of the eighteenth century. A few years later, however, witnessed its revival in the extraordinary system of Dr. Brown, whose doctrines obtained so great a temporary celebrity from the specious simplicity of their appearance, and the alleged universality of their application. It will scarcely be denied that no common ingenuity was displayed in the construction of this system, and great acuteness of reasoning employed in the support of it; but there are at present few who do not perceive its inconsistency with facts, and the discrepancy of its own components. The principles on which it is founded are altogether at variance with those of sound philosophy; for not content with a slow but steady advance in the process of induction, raised upon the groundwork of extensive and faithful observation, the creative imagination of the author called up, like the genius in the enchanted tale, that magnificent but unsubstantial fabric, which the superior power of truth was so soon to dissipate. We have still amongst our members many who can bear witness to the enthusiastic zeal with which the Brunonian controversy was carried on in the Hall of the Medical Society. Week after week, the partizans of the opposing doctrines met to continue the discussion; and talents and

* Stroud's History, p. 31.

eloquence often supplied the deficiency of truth. The royal road which this system professed to lay open to the highest principles of our science, was naturally agreeable to the ardent and ingenious as well as to the indolent, whilst the personal character of Dr. Brown was such as to render him a favourite among many of the students.* We are at no loss to account, therefore, for the support which he thus obtained on the first promulgation of his doctrines; still less can we wonder that their palpable inconsistency should subsequently induce the calmer judgment even of his partizans to modify or discard them. You are well aware that the Brunonian principles received much greater support on the continent of Europe than in this country; and that notwithstanding the enthusiasm which they excited in the schools of Germany and Italy, a few years witnessed their abandonment by those who had at first so cordially embraced them. Perhaps it would not be difficult, however, to trace in certain pathological doctrines of the modern Italian schools, some lurking remains of this once celebrated system.

It is not my intention to dwell upon the minutiae of the history of the Society, or to enumerate the distinguished individuals who have contributed to its support, since the fullest information on both these topics is within your reach. The most cursory examination of the list of its members must convince you that Britain has seen few men of high and deserved medical reputation during the last century, who have not risen from its ranks; and many of these have borne honourable testimony to the value of the advantages which they there enjoyed. It must be interesting also to reflect that in this Society have been frequently developed those talents which have subsequently acquired distinction

* This statement I have given on the authority of Dr. Stroud, (op. cit. p. 80.) who refers, I believe, principally to the convivial habits of Dr. Brown.

for their possessors in other walks of life. We can scarcely imagine a field more adapted to the display of the classical taste and elevated imagination of Akenside, or the enthusiastic simplicity which characterised the younger days of Oliver Goldsmith. In the number of those who have been honoured with the office of President, our respect and sympathy are excited by the name of the unfortunate Emmett, whose splendid talents were misguided by an erroneous judgment; whilst we give our unalloyed tribute of admiration to the memory of one whose fervid eloquence and mighty intellect so long fixed upon him the attention of his countrymen of every shade of political opinion. Need I mention Sir James Mackintosh?

There is one point of view, Gentlemen, in which some may conceive that the Medical Society has failed in rendering that service to science which its station and capacity would seem to demand from it. All attempts at the regular publication of any of the valuable essays and communications which are constantly being submitted to it, have hitherto proved unsuccessful; not so much, it may be apprehended, on account of deficiency in excellent materials, or from the want of external support, as from the constitution of the Society itself, the perpetual changes taking place in its management, and the close occupation which usually engrosses the time of its most active members. But the world has not been deprived of the benefit of these valuable contributions to medical literature. Many of them have at once been brought into notice through the medium of our periodicals; others, subsequently presented to the world in a more extended form, have contributed alike to the spread of knowledge, and to advance the reputation of their authors, as well as that of the Society from which they originated. The crude and unripened fruits of early mental vigour must be supplied with the nourishing juices of additional infor-

mation, and mellowed by the calmer judgment of riper years, before they can be acceptable to the correct and refined taste. And I do not therefore hesitate to say that the stimulus which has here been given to courses of investigation and trains of reflection, whose matured results have been ultimately laid before the scientific world, has been more beneficial than the publication of cumbrous volumes of Transactions, little read and less appreciated. The only difficulty which I have in producing illustrations confirmatory of this opinion, is the selection of examples. It is probably not generally known, that it was in the Medical Society that Dr. Crawford first promulgated his beautiful theory of animal heat, whose ingenuity none can deny, although the soundness of its premises may fairly be questioned; it has been characterised by the learned and philosophic Bostock as "one of the most interesting and beautiful specimens of the application of chemical and physical reasoning to the animal economy that had ever been presented to the world." Here, too, was commenced by the eminent author I have just quoted, that career of physiological inquiry and experimental research, by which he has earned a high and deserved reputation. The favourable reception of the dissertation read by Dr. Currie, on the effect of cold on the living animal body, must have prepared the way for those extended investigations, the publication of which ultimately led to a more correct appreciation of the therapeutic value of this agent. It was to this Society that Dr. Bateman presented his first essay in that branch of inquiry to which he afterwards so successfully devoted himself. It was here, too, that Dr. Henry exhibited his early attachment to the science of which he subsequently became so bright an ornament; and here also were commenced the beautiful researches of De la Rive on some of the nicest questions regarding Caloric and Magnetism. To the members of this Society were first communi-

cated the result of those profound investigations into the physical history of mankind, which have given an European reputation to the name of Prichard. In our hall did the sagacity of Dr. Kay demonstrate the erroneous nature of the opinions of Bichât on the subject of asphyxia, and propound a theory deduced immediately from experiment, which is now received by our ablest physiologists; and there also took its rise the series of investigations into the atmospheric changes produced by animal and vegetable respiration, which have raised the name of Ellis to a high rank among the original inquirers in this departments of science. These works, Gentlemen, are our Transactions; and what Society can boast of having more effectually contributed to the advancement of medical science? It would be easy for me to extend this catalogue by the introduction of the names and works of other authors of no less eminence; but one example more shall suffice. It cannot be regarded as a fact devoid of interest in the history of the Society, that in the dissertations of Professor Jameson are to be found the earliest display of those talents which have been so successfully devoted to the advancement of a science whose gigantic strides and comprehensive grasp are constantly opening new fields of experimental inquiry, and affording new topics for philosophic speculation.

Hitherto I have alluded only to the information with which the records of the Society have furnished me on this subject; had I the means of more extensive inquiry, I might perhaps have been able to mention other works of high and durable reputation as having taken their origin in discussions of which no other memorial remains. It is enough, however, that I can state with certainty that the lectures of Dr. Thomson on Inflammation, and the work of Dr. Wilson Philip on the Phlegmasiæ, are among the results of debates in which the principal share was taken by these two individ-

uals, whose well-earned reputation places them above any eulogy of mine. It must not be forgotten also, that the *Elementa Medicinæ* of Dr. Brown were published whilst their author occupied, for the third time, the chair of the Medical Society.

By another proceeding, not generally known, has our Society contributed largely to the advancement of medical science; and I beg to call your attention specially to this part of its comprehensive scheme, both as one which may, I conceive, be advantageously revived at the present time, and as having anticipated by nearly fifty years, the corresponding plan which forms so prominent a feature of the British Scientific Association. I refer to the appointment of annual committees for the prosecution of interesting inquiries at the common expense, which took place in the year 1784, when the rapid progress of Pneumatic Chemistry was opening the way to so many novel and important branches of investigation. In accordance with the directions given by the Society for this object, we find, as might be expected, that the subjects of respiration and animal heat were among the first on which experiments were commenced; and by these were elicited the valuable contributions of Dr. Goodwyn to this branch of physiology, which were presented to the Society in the year 1786. The splendid discoveries of Galvani and Volta, which followed at so close an interval those of Priestley, Black, Cavendish and Scheele, were not neglected by the members of our Society. Many, I have no doubt, who are now present, can bear their testimony to the enthusiasm with which they were hailed. Not content with their passive reception, the Society provided the means of confirming and extending them; and by recommending the subject to the attention of its members, gave rise to the valuable original experiments of Dr. Richard Fowler, (now of Salisbury,) in which he was assisted by Dr. Thomson. It

also attracted the notice of the scientific world, by proposing the nature of the galvanic influence as the subject of a prize-essay, the competition for which was completely unrestricted; and it is an evidence of the publicity which its proceedings had acquired, that the premium, a gold medal of the value of twenty guineas, was awarded to the elaborate dissertation of Professor Crêve of Mentz. It is not a little remarkable that on the list of the apparatus committee at this period, we find the names of Marcet, Henry, Birkbeck, and Roget among the foremost, followed by those of Bostock, Paris, Davy, and Fyfe. It can scarcely be doubted that the taste for scientific inquiry was here fostered, if not originally developed, which has led to the subsequent eminence of these distinguished men.

Of the present state of the Society, it scarcely becomes me to speak. The number of my fellow-members whom I now address is a convincing proof of its prosperity; and its continued usefulness is fully demonstrated by the rank which not a few of them hold among the aspirants after professional distinction. It may be that our discussions are not now carried on with the same enthusiasm which formerly characterised them; but let not this be imputed to any deficiency of zeal on the part of our members, since it is the necessary consequence of the improvements which have been effected in the philosophy of our science. The strict rules of inductive reasoning have taken the place of the ingenious speculations and brilliant theories of former times; and it is now perceived that the collection and comparison of facts is a more worthy exercise of philosophical skill than the conception of a magnificent but unstable hypothesis. Instead of attempting to construct a showy fabric out of the scattered ruins of some former systems, the pupils of the truly eclectic school of medicine are content to advance with less

rapid progress. Their foundation is laid on the sure basis of practical experience, and their materials are derived from every source which the pursuit of truth lays open to them ; but carefully keeping in view that every science is nothing more than an expression or arrangement of facts, they exclude every hypothesis which is not the result of induction, and each general statement which is not borne out by observation. Hence, whilst every one is enabled to take an honourable station in the republic of science, none can claim the right of universal domination. The light of true philosophy no longer emanates with dazzling brilliancy from a single luminary, but diffused over countless multitudes of reflecting objects, shines with softer though not less certain lustre on her votaries.

If any tangible proof were wanting that the commencement of our second century of existence is not a period of superannuated dotage, but of youthful vigour and activity, it is afforded by the undertaking of which the present session has witnessed the completion,—the Catalogue Raisonné of our library. To the gentlemen whose united labours have brought this enterprise to a successful conclusion, so eloquent a tribute of praise has already been paid, that any addition from me would be superfluous. I am sure that you will agree with me, however, that a more convincing evidence of the prosperity of the Society need scarcely be sought for, than the fact, that its library, amounting to more than 12,000 volumes, should be regarded as sufficiently complete to render a classified index of its contents a valuable bibliography, not merely to those who have access to it, but to the profession at large ; that amongst its members, a sufficient number could be found uniting talents of no common order, with persevering industry sufficient to execute a task of such magnitude and difficulty ; and that immediately up-

on the completion of the work, it could allot upwards of a hundred pounds to defray the expense of the publication, without the slightest inconvenience to its funds.

It may be thought that I have dwelt so long on the historical part of my subject, that I have little time to expatiate on the advantages which our Society confers upon its individual members. I shall be sorry, however, if these do not appear evident from the details into which I have already entered. If in past times an ardent thirst after knowledge, a generous emulation in its acquirement, a steadfast pursuit of truth, a clear and unprejudiced judgment, were cherished in the breasts of the illustrious men who have shared our Association, by the opportunities of mental cultivation which they there enjoyed, and of which they have shown the abundant fruits,—can we believe that these ennobling influences are no longer exerted—that from the increased fertility of the soil has resulted any diminution of its products.

Gentlemen, let the memory of the energetic spirits, who, with Promethean skill, united the scattered elements into this giant frame, and animated it with living fire, not be without its effect this day, in stimulating us to carry on their noble purposes with renewed vigour. Their period of exertion has passed, and we have entered into their labours. But though dead they yet speak to us, in the dauntless courage with which they opposed the prejudices of the times, and the unwearied energy by which they succeeded in dispelling them. They speak to us in the noble reputation they have acquired for our institution, and which we are bound by the most sacred ties to maintain. They speak to us in the ardent zeal of their pursuit of truth, which they call upon us to imitate. They speak to us in the individual celebrity which they acquired, and encourage us to similar attainments. And could their spirits be with us this day, to witness the glorious result of their exertions, they would join

with us in the earnest desire that the Society which they founded, and which now depends on us for its support, may still be the first in usefulness, as it was the earliest in formation ; that as long as Medical Science shall continue to advance, and the pains of suffering humanity be assuaged by the healing art, so long it may persevere in its brilliant course, with undiminished lustre ; and that many centenary gatherings of its members may unite, as we now do, in the fervent wish,—ESTO PERPETUA.

NOTE.—In the foregoing composition, I have freely availed myself of the materials supplied me by Dr. Stroud's History of the Medical Society, as well as by Dr. Bostock's highly philosophical History of Medicine. It may be that a few expressions derived from these sources have not been duly acknowledged in their proper place.

W. B. C.

APPENDIX.

THE year 1837 being the hundredth from the institution of the Royal Medical Society of Edinburgh, it was unanimously resolved that the event should be celebrated by a Dinner of the members. A committee having been appointed to make the preliminary arrangements, it was decided, in compliance with their recommendation, that the Dinner should take place on the 17th of February,—admission being restricted to members of the Society, with the exception of the PRINCIPAL OF THE UNIVERSITY, and the PRESIDENTS of the ROYAL COLLEGES of PHYSICIANS and SURGEONS of Edinburgh, who should be invited as visitors. DR. HOPE, from his talents and distinction, his long standing in the Society, and the warm interest he had always shewn in its welfare, was unanimously considered the most eligible person to act as Chairman ; and the wishes of the Society having been communicated to him, he readily and kindly consented to undertake that office. It was further decided that the FOUR PRESIDENTS should act as Croupiers ; and that MR. CARPENTER, the senior President, should be requested to deliver an oration immediately before the Dinner.

These preliminary arrangements having been agreed upon, and the committee requested to continue their services, they caused circulars, giving notice of the Dinner, to be sent to the members of the Society in all parts of Great Britain and Ireland.

Owing to the season of the year, and the very general prevalence of an epidemic disease, members from a distance were for the most part prevented from attending. Many, however, availed themselves of the opportunity of expressing their unabated interest in the Society, and their regret that circumstances prevented them from being present. Of this number were SIR JAMES MACGRIGOR, DR. BOSTOCK, MR. TRAVERS, DR. FENWICK of Durham, DR. STROUD, (the historian of the Society,) and DR. CONOLLY of Warwick. DR. MACDONNELL of Belfast, a very old member of the Society, who was unable to join in the celebration, communicated through DR. THOMSON his intention of placing at the disposal of the Society the sum of L.15, to be given as a prize for the best Essay on the Pulse and Respiration. Two of the honorary members residing in Edinburgh, PROFESSOR THOMSON, and DR. ABERCROMBIE, were also unavoidably absent; and the advanced life and infirm health of the venerable PRINCIPAL BAIRD, deprived the Society of the company of one who has always evinced a warm and paternal interest in its welfare, and who has almost uninterruptedly honoured with his presence the annual Dinners of the members.

Notwithstanding these unfavourable circumstances, on the appointed day one hundred and sixteen individuals assembled in the Hopetoun Rooms. The proceedings commenced with the delivery of the oration now printed, which was received with unanimous approbation. At its conclusion, PROFESSOR CHRISTISON rose and expressed on the part of the extraordinary members present the delight with which they had listened to MR. CARPENTER, and the hope that his oration would be printed at the expense of the Society, together with a list of those present on the occasion. The company then adjourned to partake of the Dinner, after which the following toasts were given:—"The King," "The Queen," "The Princess Victoria and the Royal Family," "The Army and Navy," "The Medical Society," and "The Presidents of the Society," by the Chair. Mr. Carpenter having returned thanks on the part of himself and his colleagues, proposed "The University of Edinburgh." Dr. Graham acknowledged the toast, and gave "The Extra-Collegiate Medical School," for

which Dr. Macdonald returned thanks. The subsequent toasts were, "The Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh and Dr. Alison," by Mr. Cormack; "The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh and Sir G. Ballingall," by the Chair; "The Royal Infirmary and Public Dispensaries," by Dr. Charlton, for which Dr. Alison returned thanks; "The Royal Societies of Britain, and the Royal Irish Academy," by Mr. Bennett, acknowledged by Sir C. Bell; "The memory of the Founders and distinguished Members of the Medical Society," by Professor Traill; "The Sister Universities," by Dr. Wilks, acknowledged by Rev. Mr. Coventry; "The British Association," by Dr. D. B. Reid; "The Chairman," by Mr. G. Newbigging; "The Honorary Members," by Dr. J. H. Balfour; "The English and Irish Schools of Medicine," by Dr. G. Paterson; "Foreign Medicine and Medical Schools," by Dr. Handyside; "Sir James Macgrigor," by Dr. A. D. Maclagan; "The former Presidents," by Mr. Skae; "The Treasurer," by Mr. Hopper; "The Secretary," "The City of Edinburgh," &c. &c.

These toasts were received with the greatest enthusiasm, and the meeting was characterised by the utmost harmony and good feeling. In the course of the evening, an Ode, composed for the occasion by Mr. R. M. Glover, was read amid much applause; and the musical talents of several of the members added much to the pleasure of the festivity. And when at a late hour those present found it necessary to separate, they did so not without regret at the termination of a celebration so interesting, which had hitherto been unexampled in the history of any similar Society, and the success of which had almost exceeded the anticipations of the most zealous of its promoters.

*The following is a CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF THE MEMBERS
present on this occasion :*

Date of
Election.

1786. Thomas Charles Hope, M.D. F.R.S.L. V.P.R.S.E. Professor of Chemistry in the University of Edinburgh,
CHAIRMAN.
1787. John Ramsay, M.D. *Newcastle.*
1792. William Newbigging, F.R.S.E. F.R.C.S.E.
1799. William Mackenzie, M.D. H.E.I.C.S.
1801. William Wood, F.R.S.E. F.R.C.S.E.
- Thomas Stewart Traill, M.D. F.R.S.E. Professor of
Medical Jurisprudence in the University of Edinburgh.
1802. Daniel Ellis, F.R.S.E. PRES. ANN. 1806.
1804. Richard M. Hawley, M.D. F.R.C.P.E.
1805. Robert Graham, M.D. F.R.S.E. Professor of Botany in
the University of Edinburgh.
1808. David Hay, M.D. F.R.C.S.E.
1809. Rev. George Coventry, B.D. Cantab. PRES. ANN. 1810.
1812. Andrew Fyfe, M.D. F.R.S.E. F.R.C.S.E. Lecturer on
Chemistry. PRES. ANN. 1814.
1813. James Scarth Combe, M.D. F.R.C.S.E.
- Walter Adam, M.D. F.R.C.P.E.
1814. William Beilby, M.D. F.R.C.P.E.
1815. William Brown, F.R.C.S.E.
1817. Robert Nasmyth, F.R.C.S.E.
1818. J. F. Macfarlan, Surgeon, *Treasurer.* PRES. ANN. 1822.
- David Craigie, M.D. F.R.C.P.E. Lecturer on the Practice
of Physic. PRES. ANN. 1819.
1819. James Syme, F.R.S.E. F.R.C.S.L. and E. Professor of
Clinical Surgery in the University of Edinburgh.

Date of
Election.

1819. William Thomson, M.D. F.R.C.P.E. F.R.C.S.E.
 — Robert Christison, M.D. F.R.S.E. Professor of Materia Medica in the University of Edinburgh.
1820. William Seller, M.D. F.R.C.P.E.
 — Archibald Inglis, M.D. F.R.C.S.E.
 — William Macdonald, M.D. F.R.S.E. F.R.C.P.E. Lecturer on Anatomy.
1823. David Boswell Reid, M.D. F.R.S.E. F.R.C.P.E. Lecturer on Chemistry. PRES. ANN. 1826.
1824. John Coldstream, M.D. M.W.S.
1825. P. D. Handyside, M.D. F.R.S.E. F.R.C.S.E. Lecturer on Anatomy. PRES. ANN. 1828.
 — Robert Omond, M.D. F.R.C.S.E.
 — W. A. F. Browne, Surgeon, *Montrose*.
 PRES. ANN. 1826 and 1827.
- William McGowan, M.D.
1826. Sir Charles Bell, K.H. F.R.S.L. and E. Professor of Surgery in the University of Edinburgh.
 HONORARY MEMBER.
 — John C. Home, M.D.
1827. Andrew Wood, M.D. F.R.C.S.E. PRES. ANN. 1830.
 — John G. M. Burt, Surgeon Extraordinary to the King.
 — John Hutton Balfour, M.D. F.R.S.E. F.R.C.S.E.
 PRES. ANN. 1830 and 1831.
1828. Archibald Dymock M.D.
 — Alexander Cuninghame, Esq. of Balgonie.
 — Archibald J. Wilsone, Surgeon, *Musselburgh*.
 — Alexander Jackson.
1829. Andrew Douglas Maclagan, M.D. F.R.C.S.E.
 PRES. ANN. 1832.
 — Benjamin J. Bell, F.R.C.S.E.

Date of
Election.

1829. George Paterson, M.D. PRES. ANN. 1832.
 — David Macfarlane, M.D.
1830. James Hunter, M.D.
 — James Weir, M.D.
 — Colin C. Gibson, M.D.
 — T. Augustus Ashcroft.
1831. Archibald W. Cockburn.
 — Patrick G. Kennedy.
1832. John Mure, M.D.
 — G. W. Bell, M.D.
 — Robert Spittal, M.D. F.R.C.P.E. Surgeon Extraordinary
 to the King. PRES. ANN. 1833.
 — George A. F. Wilks, M.D. *London.* PRES. ANN. 1833.
 — James Duncan, M.D. F.R.C.S.E.
 — James Cruickshank, Surgeon.
 — Edward Charlton, M.D. PRES. ANN. 1836.
 — James Cox, M.D.
 — Abram Cox, M.D.
 — John H. Pollexfen, M.D. PRES. ANN. 1835.
1833. Charles Cogswell, M.D. B.A.
 — James Y. Simpson, M.D. F.R.C.P.E. PRES. ANN. 1835.
 — H. R. Melville.
 — Rufus S. Black, M.D.
 — John Houseman.
 — Martin Barry, M.D. F.R.S.E. M.W.S. PRES. ANN. 1835.
 — John Grant, Surgeon.
 — J. H. Bennett. PRES. ANN. 1836.
 — Walter Bruce, M.D.
 — Lewis H. Thatcher.
 — Hamilton Kinglake.
 — G. P. May.

Date of
Election.

1833. Wm. Stanger, F.G.S. M.W.S.
— John G. Wood, Surgeon.
1834. A. Farquhar, M.A.
— John Reid, M.D. F.R.C.P.E. Lecturer on the Institutes
of Medicine. PRES. ANN. 1835.
— Wm. H. Madden.
— Wm. Walker.
— A. M'Laverty.
— Charles Chadwick.
— Wm. H. Carnegie.
— Archibald Douglas, Surgeon.
— Andrew J. Scott.
— Edwin Adolphus.
— William Robertson.
1835. J. H. Shirreff, M.R.C.S.L.
— A. Young.
— T. Cowan.
— John Rose Cormack. PRES. ANN. 1836.
— Wm. Hutcheson, Surgeon.
— W. Ord Mackenzie.
— Thomas Hamilton.
— George S. Newbigging, M.A.
— R. W. Shipperdson Hopper.
— William B. Carpenter, M.R.C.S.L. PRES. ANN. 1836.
— Robert Mortimer Glover.
— C. M. Durrant.
— Alexander Hunter.
1836. David Skae, F.R.C.S.E. Lecturer on Medical Jurispru-
dence.
— Wm. Knox.
— Adam Lyszczyński.

Date of
Election.

1836. G. A. Martin.
 — D. B. Ramsay.
 — Andrew Whelpdale.
 — Wm. Shand Harris.
 — R. W. Falconer.
 — Silas Palmer, M.D.
 — James Crossfield.
 — Arthur E. Turnour.
 — J. Bazett Tytler.
 1837. George J. Bell, B.A. Oxon.
 — George Atkin.
 — James Henderson Hardie.
 — Alexander Van Rensselaer.

Visitors.

Dr. W. P. Alison, President of the Royal College of Physicians,
 and Professor of the Institutes of Medicine in the University
 of Edinburgh.

Sir George Ballingall, M.D. President of the Royal College of
 Surgeons, and Professor of Military Surgery in the Uni-
 versity of Edinburgh.

(14.)

AN

ADDRESS

DELIVERED TO THE MEMBERS

OF THE

ROYAL MEDICAL SOCIETY,

DECEMBER 16TH 1836.

BY

JOHN H. BENNETT,

PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL MEDICAL AND ROYAL PHYSICAL SOCIETIES; AND
VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE ANATOMICAL AND PHYSIOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF EDINBURGH.

EDINBURGH :

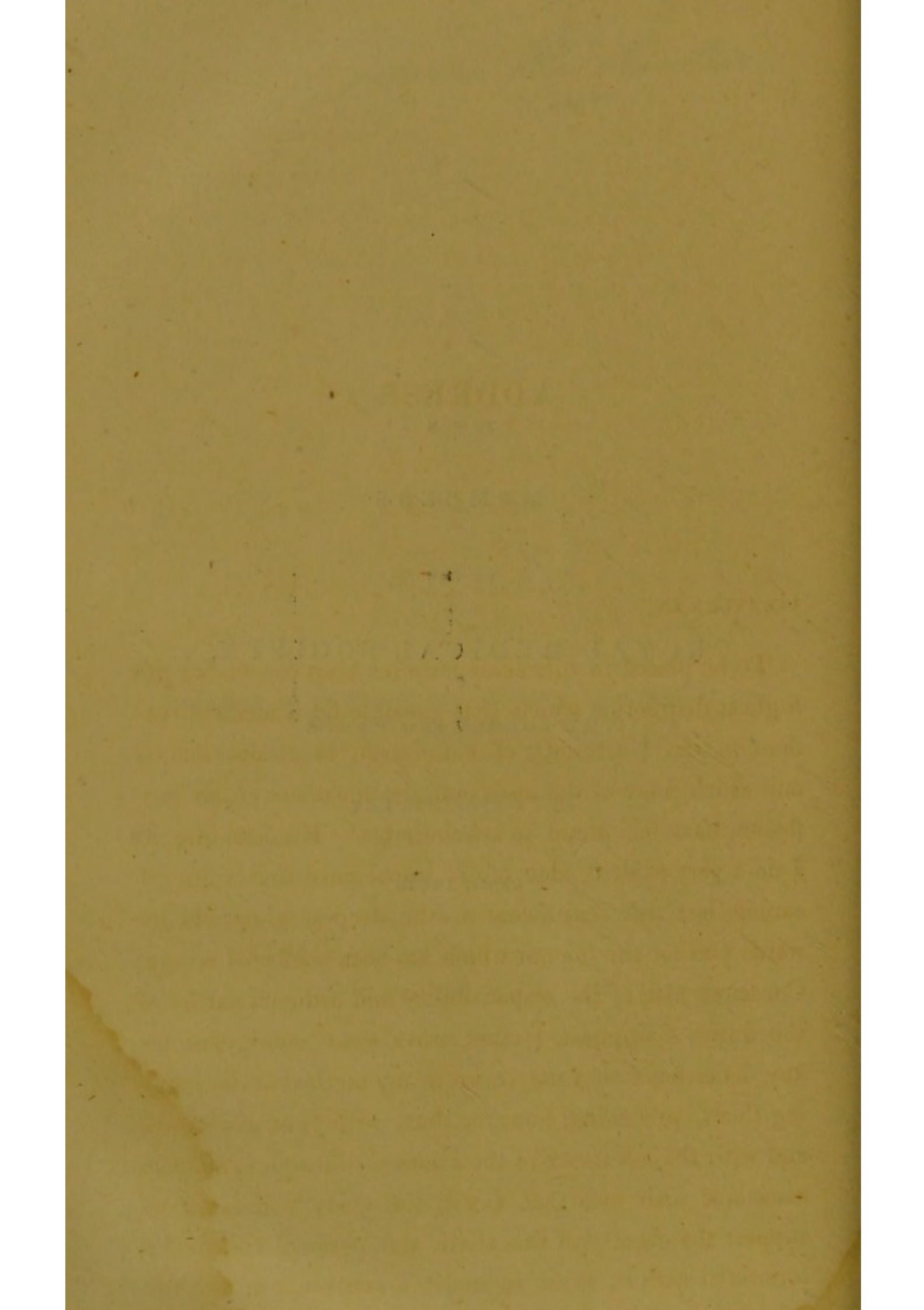
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MDCCCXXXVI.

From the Author.

PRINTED AT THE REQUEST OF MANY MEMBERS OF THE
SOCIETY.

TO THE
MEMBERS
OF THE
ROYAL MEDICAL SOCIETY,
THE FOLLOWING PAGES
ARE RESPECTFULLY
DEDICATED.



ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN,

To be placed in this chair has ever been considered the highest distinction which it is possible for a medical student in the University of Edinburgh to attain, and is one which some of the most eminent members of our profession have felt proud to acknowledge. Entertaining as I do a very exalted idea of its importance and value, I cannot but feel sentiments of the deepest gratitude towards you for the honour which has been conferred on me. Conscious also of the responsibility and arduous nature of the duties it imposes, I must crave your indulgence for any deficiencies that may arise in my method of discharging them, promising however that, with your assistance, and with the assistance of the talented colleagues you have associated with me, that I will use every endeavour to support the dignity of this chair, and perform the duties connected with it, so as to merit a continuance of your good opinion.

You may now, gentlemen, consider that I have said all that is strictly necessary ; but on an occasion like this, in a session so important to the annals of the Society, I should consider myself deficient in duty did I not allude to some of those circumstances which led to the foundation and subsequent celebrity of this institution, and point out to the large assemblage I have the honour to address, a few of the many advantages of which it can justly boast.

There was a period in the history of society when knowledge was confined to a few, and when even these amassed the fruits of science not for the purpose of ameliorating the condition of man, or of benefiting their fellow-creatures, but for the unworthy motive of establishing an influence over the multitude, and of subjecting it to the yoke of tyrannous authority. It was in those days that discussion was deemed heresy,—that the mutual interchange of thought was considered one of the greatest crimes, and the contest of abilities which the improvement of science required, led only to the infliction of inquisitorial vengeance. A time however arrived, when the energies of men increased, when the intellect was no longer to be confined, and when, aided by the press and milder forms of government, it overcame the dogmas of old, cast aside the trammels of power, and launched into the ocean of scientific discovery. It now became apparent that mental as well as physical power gained strength by association ; that the prejudices of different opinions were often corrected by their collision with each other ; that the co-operation of various minds best tended to the enunciation of truth ; and that knowledge was only to be

increased by the united efforts of understandings directed to its prosecution. Such it appears to me must have been the general views which led to the institution of Societies ; and the results which followed have more than realized the expectations of their founders. The establishment of the Royal Society of London, for instance, followed by others of a similar nature abroad, gave an impulse to science which is felt to this day, and dragged from obscurity crowds of illustrious men, to advance the knowledge of mankind, and extend the boundaries of civilization. Among other advantages, it led to the more successful cultivation of individual sciences ; and none received greater benefit from the stimulus thus given to it than that of medicine.

This important science, almost coeval with the history of mankind, has been prosecuted by the learned in all ages with the utmost diligence and enthusiasm ; and we can easily imagine how, with the first dawnings of intellect, man must have felt a natural instinct to alleviate the diseases to which he was subject, and experienced a restless curiosity to investigate into their causes. Hence we can trace in the mythological fables of the most ancient nations the existence of deities supposed to preside over health and disease, attended by priests who were the immediate agents for affording relief to suffering humanity. We can follow its progress, although enveloped in mysticism and the allegorical imagery of the Egyptians, to the time when it became mingled with the philosophy of the Greeks. We can pursue the various additions it received as a practical art from the Romans, and continue our observation of its successive improvements, until in com-

mon with the other branches of knowledge, it was overwhelmed by the inroads of barbarians, and subsequently fettered down by the bigotry and superstition of the middle ages. It was, however, the first to break through the clouds which enveloped it, and assist in dispelling the obscurity in which all the sciences were involved. It was now it received in common with these the stimulus imparted to them by learned associations; now it was that schools of instruction became established for its more zealous advancement, and that crowds of students, attracted by the beauty and utility of the study, prosecuted with an ardent enthusiasm all its various branches.

It was at this period in the history of our profession, that a few of these enthusiastic students, then humble and unknown, destined afterwards to acquire celebrity and renown, urged by their insatiable thirst after knowledge, and deeply impressed with the advantages it would afford, founded the Royal Medical Society of Edinburgh. On looking back to this event, now more than a hundred years ago, what important topics are presented to me for consideration. How interesting would it be to contrast the state of medicine as it existed then, with the position it at present occupies, or to point out the successive great improvements that have occurred within the past century, and endeavour to trace how far the production of these is connected with the existence of this Society. However conjectural it may appear, it seems more than likely, that by an idea, originating in some debate, Cullen perhaps was led to form those extensive views which caused him to revolutionize the state of medicine.

To the members of this Society probably, Black exhibited carbonic acid gas, pointed out its connexion with the animal economy, and explained his beautiful theory of latent heat. Here Beddoes, the early patron of Davy, might have been stimulated to commence his inquiries into pneumatic chemistry ; and not to single out further individual illustrations, to this Society, Fordyce, Fothergill, Blagden, Rutherford, the Monros, Duncan, Blane, Bateman, Gregory, Gordon, and a host of other illustrious men, living as well as dead, may have been indebted for that spark which kindled within them the desire of distinction, and lit the torch which guided them to renown.

To enter minutely, however, into these inquiries, would absorb too much time, and they are somewhat superseded by a topic, to us, if possible, still more interesting.

Gentlemen, it appears from authority which cannot be questioned,* that this society originated in the month of August 1734, although it was not firmly established till three years after. It was then that six students,† after spending a social evening together, determined to meet periodically, and discuss medical questions. This plan produced such beneficial effects, that the little society thus formed became extended by the admission of others, many of whom were then acquiring that knowledge which was afterwards to direct the energies of our profession, and advance the science to its present position. Favoured by

* See Life of Dr. J. Fothergill, prefixed to his works, by Lettsom, 4to, and Dr. Stroud's History of the Medical Society of Edinburgh.

† Dr. Cleghorn, Dr. Cuming, Dr. Russell, Dr. Hamilton, Mr. Archibald Taylor, and Dr. James Kennedy.

the then fluctuating state of medical opinion, and the facilities offered for free discussion, an association of young and ardent minds was admirably calculated to examine the false theories which had become consecrated by usage, and eradicate the errors that preceding ages had established. It has indeed been stated, that discussion perverts the understanding, depraves the temper, occasions personal hostility, and induces a spirit of idle wrangling; and circumstances certainly have not been wanting to give a colour to these charges. But if properly conducted, it has led, and continues to lead to far different, nay, very opposite results, while it has been the great agent by which all the dogmas that have shackled science from the days of Pythagoras to our own times have in turn been overthrown. It was by discussion that the sophists' doctrine of old was shaken to its foundation; it was by discussion that Descartes exposed the errors of the Aristotelian philosophy; it is to discussion we are indebted for the overthrow of those hypothetical and speculative doctrines promulgated by Galen, which so long delayed the advance of medicine; and it was by discussion that the members of this Society, shortly after its establishment, proved the fallacy of those principles taught by Boerhaave, introduced into this school the more enlightened views of Hoffman, and by the revolution in medical science thus brought about, first laid the foundation of that celebrity and fame which the University of Edinburgh has since maintained.

From the ranks of the Society, as it then existed, Cullen arose, who, it has been said, did for medicine

what Newton did for astronomy. His works evince the greatness of his genius ; the influence of his labours will be felt by future generations ; and his name descends to posterity, not only in connection with the University, whose celebrity he caused to be extended over the world, but as the individual who, in the year 1775, laid the foundation-stone of this building, and contributed by his advice and exertions so much to the Society's reputation. Since then the institution has continued to advance in honour and usefulness ; its property has been confirmed to it by a royal charter ; freedom of discussion has ever been maintained within its walls ; for in this very hall were fought those well known mental contests between the disciples of Brown and Cullen, the noise of which spread over Europe ; and from that time it has weekly been the arena of intellectual battles, and never wanted combatants anxious to engage in them. Our library has gradually become one of the most select and valuable now extant ; the extended education of modern times has introduced into our reading-room all the leading foreign, as well as domestic periodicals ; our laws having undergone successive alterations, to meet the changes of the times, present a code excellently adapted for conducting its affairs ; while, besides a floating capital more than sufficient to meet the annual expenditure, a sinking fund has been established which must ever guard the Society from the pecuniary distress which mutations of income are liable to occasion.

With these advantages, then, we enter upon a new century of existence. The present celebrity of the insti-

tution has been built up by the talents and labours of our predecessors ; its future honour and prosperity must come from you. Let me therefore earnestly solicit your united endeavours in transmitting its reputation unsullied to our successors. Do not say that your object in entering here was to acquire rather than to communicate knowledge ; for it is not only our duty to collect information, but it becomes us, as we value liberality of sentiment, to diffuse it for the good of others. If a proper sense of the advantages conferred by the founders of this institution have ever excited in you feelings of gratitude—if, among the number of illustrious names to be found in our list of members, there be any entitled to admiration ; let the enthusiasm displayed by them for the benefit of the society stimulate you to like exertions—let their busts and portraits which adorn this hall witness struggles on your part emulative of deeds performed by the originals—let their influence extend even from the tomb, so that centuries hence the transactions of this session may be pointed out as among the memorable eras in the Society's annals.

I need not, however, dwell only on the merits and abilities of those who have preceded us. I am surrounded, this evening, by members who combine among them a mass of learning, talent, and intelligence, which, if animated by the enthusiasm shewn by their predecessors, and brought to bear on our discussions, would render this year equal, if not superior to any of the past. I see many who have returned from various countries, laden with the experience and knowledge of foreign science. Many of

you have listened to the prelections of the greatest luminaries of medicine abroad—have visited the numerous ~~and~~ scientific institutions of France, Holland, Germany, and Italy, and are come hither this session, I trust, to communicate the result of your observations, as different topics in the course of debate may recall them to your recollection. The younger members should reflect, that as they at once reap all these advantages which the industry of others has collected for them, and that as they have enrolled their names on the list of the Society, they are bound to support it. This is only to be done effectively by cultivating their talents, and seizing every opportunity for improvement: regular attendance on the Society's meetings will contribute in no small degree to the advancement of both; and by listening attentively for a short time to the discussions of their seniors, and thus exposing themselves as it were to the sparks which the heat of debate occasions, they themselves will at length be inflamed with the desire of contributing to its brilliancy.

I have spoken of the intense interest and enthusiasm which former members exhibited; but this session has produced a most gratifying proof that these feelings, so necessary for continuing the honour and fame of the institution, are still kept alive, and exist undebased and unalloyed in the bosoms of our most respected and active members. None but those who have engaged in such a task can in any way appreciate the enormous labour which the formation of our Catalogue Raisonné has occasioned. It must be remembered that this is not a work that could

have been performed by a mere scrivener ; it evinces literary, professional, and scientific knowledge in an eminent degree ; while the judicious arrangement which characterises it throughout, stamps on it the feature of originality. Figure to yourselves the labour and toil of reviewing separately, the numerous works which compose our library—of even writing their names. Add to this the trouble of classifying them, and the necessity of perusing many, the ambiguity of whose titles was such as not to denote their nature. Reflect on these circumstances, gentlemen, and consider that all this was undertaken without the hope of reaping any of those rewards for which most men enter into literary composition,—without the satisfaction even of having their names attached to their own publication : yet was this herculean labour cheerfully performed for the good and advantage of that institution endeared to them by the remembrance of the benefits it had conferred, and at whose shrine they thus offered up the most disinterested and undoubted proofs of devotion. The records of history point out to us, that nations and states were most worthy renown, and that their honour and glory shone brightest at those times when the citizens evinced a pure patriotism, unmingled with the feelings of self-interest which debase our nature. We may judge of private associations by the same criterion ; and how proud ought we to be that in the hundredth year of the Society's existence, at a period when most institutions are crumbling into dust, that we can thus triumphantly point to an unerring test of its usefulness and stability.

I am conscious that the humble eulogium thus paid for such disinterested conduct is far from adequate, and that in alluding to this event, I have offered a very insufficient tribute to the labours of those gentlemen by whom the catalogue was completed,* and more particularly to those who superintended its progress through the press.† The latter, with a laudable anxiety to present the work at the commencement of this session, have performed incredible exertions. I myself have had occasion to observe some of these, and know that the rising sun, and midnight lamp have often been witnesses to their toil. They have all received the unanimous thanks of the Society; and although this was the only reward for which their labours were undertaken, they now also possess the inward satisfaction of not only having benefited their fellow members, but of having conferred no inconsiderable boon on the profession at large.

In addition to this, everything evinces that the laurels formerly acquired are still preserved by the Society green and flourishing. I have never witnessed or heard of a session which bids fair to become more prosperous than the present; for, besides the excellent series of papers provided for us, the eagerness with which members have come forward, and the number of communications on various interesting topics that have already been announced, promise a fertile field of instruction, and hold out the expectation of reaping a rich harvest of improvement.

* Drs. Wood, Balfour, Maclagan, Dyer, A. Thomson, Imlach, G. Paterson, Ransford, Taylor, and Mr. Seaton.

† Drs. Wood, Balfour, and Maclagan.

Long then may the Society continue its career of honour and usefulness ; may the prudence and talent which have been its support and guide through the past century continue to uphold and direct its progress for centuries to come, so that ages hence, when the transactions of this session shall be reckoned among the things that were—when all who are now present shall have long mouldered in the “ tomb of all the Capulets”—when arts and sciences, when knowledge and civilization shall have been introduced into countries yet unknown, this institution, I hope, will not merely serve “ to point a moral or adorn a tale,” but will then, as it has ever done, introduce into our profession some of its brightest ornaments, and perpetuate to succeeding years that thirst for improvement and persevering exertion which is the student’s only certain path to scientific renown.

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