

Anatomy : proceedings at the National Political Union, respecting legislative interference in the study of anatomy, and the supply of bodies for anatomical research.

Contributors

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Royal College of Surgeons of England

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ANATOMY.

PROCEEDINGS

AT THE

NATIONAL POLITICAL UNION,

RESPECTING LEGISLATIVE INTERFERENCE

IN THE

STUDY OF ANATOMY,

AND THE

SUPPLY OF BODIES FOR ANATOMICAL
RESEARCH.

NOT FOR SALE.



BARNES, PRINTER, BRIDGE-HOUSE PLACE, NEWINGTON CAUSEWAY.

—
1832.

ANATOMY.

To persons who are not members of the National Political Union, it may be necessary to premise, that soon after the formation of that society it was determined that the meeting of the Council should be held in the presence of such of the members as might chuse to attend its sittings, and rooms having been taken at Saville House, Leicester Square, arrangements were made to admit about two hundred members; each member contributing one shilling at the least every quarter of a year, and the further sum of one penny every evening he attended. The space allotted for the members has been crowded every time the Council have assembled, and a much larger number of members would probably attend could accommodation be made for them.

The science of Anatomy generally, and Mr. Warburton's Bill on that subject more particularly, having excited attention among all classes of the people, a member of the Council, who thought it would be useful to ascertain the opinions of the members of the Union on this important subject, brought it before the meeting held on the twenty-fifth of January, when it was resolved unanimously,

“That Anatomy being a fit subject for discussion in this Council, it be again introduced at the earliest opportunity.”

Previous, however, to its having been brought before the meeting, the member alluded to wrote to another member of the Council, a working man, much acquainted with numbers of other working men, and well respected by them; requesting his opinion of the propriety of asking working men to sign petitions, praying the legislature to take measures for encouraging Anatomy and supplying the schools with bodies. To this application he received the following reply.

Dear Sir,—You ask whether petitions could be got up in favor of Mr. Warburton's Anatomy Bill. My answer is, that if a man wished to have his head broken, and to go a short way to get it done, he would pursue a very direct and certain course to such an end, by collecting together a large number of persons and advising them to petition in favor of that measure. Depend upon it, that out of the immediate circle of those who *think deeply*, there is a much greater disposition to make *subjects* of the hospital surgeons, than to become their *subjects*.

There is a means of doing something to forward the object you have in view, which I think might be easily employed, and would be interesting and useful to those engaged in it.

The source of all the obstacles to the supply of bodies is, of course, the great prejudice which exists against dissection. The whole of the difficulties which beset this subject originate in this cause; and I have very strong doubts whether much can be done even by the government itself towards overcoming these difficulties, without some progress being first made in removing the prejudice. It seems to me then, that the short way of accomplishing the object (supply of bodies), is by attempting to effect a change in public opinion upon this subject: and no where can it be more successfully done than in political unions.

Here is my plan:—

Let as many as please prepare a requisition from the members of our Union, requiring the Council to appoint a time when a discussion may take place at the rooms.

First—As to the necessity of dissection to the skilful practice of surgery.

Second—As to the means of supplying the schools with subjects.

The consent of the Council being obtained, I would next carefully prepare a series of propositions, framed so as to make the discussion an *exhaustive* one; that is to say, so that it might elicit all that could be said upon the subject. Let these be then printed, and sent to the Westminster Medical Society; to the King's College School; to the London University; to the medical publications; &c. &c. and, at the same time, convey the information, that the subscription to the Union is so small, that persons not members may easily become such.

By these means we might have a most interesting, and perhaps instructive, discussion; as well as the credit with the world, of having originated an useful enquiry. This being done, and care taken to publish the proceedings extensively, we should in a short time see a great number of other societies discussing the same subject in a similar manner; and ultimately, the death of the prejudice against dissection.

Yours, truly, &c.

The matter having met with a more favorable reception than that anticipated in the letter; the Council, in conformity to the resolution it had passed, appointed Wednesday, the twenty-ninth of February, for the discussion of the subject, when the member, who first introduced it, addressed himself to the Council thus:

When a short time since I ventured to introduce the subject of Anatomy to the Council, it was by way of experiment, I was uncertain as to the manner in which it would be received. That it was a subject of serious import all were ready to allow; that it deserved the most serious attention few who understood its merits were prepared to deny; but almost every one feared that any attempt to discuss it in the presence of any considerable body of the working people would be fruitless.

I was told that it was directly in the teeth of their most inveterate prejudices; so abhorrent to their feelings, so opposed to their wishes that I ought not to expect the least countenance, much less any support, and might think myself well off if I did not meet with severe reprehension.

I was however satisfied that the progress which had been made in right thinking must have had some effect in lessening the prejudices which I knew had existed against the practice of Anatomy, though I could not calculate on the cordial reception of what I thought proper to say on that occasion, which it met with. I had seen too much of the working people to believe that they had not kept pace on the path of knowledge with any other description of persons; and I thought it was but fair towards them to state the matter in a very general way, that I might ascertain the propriety of proposing it for more particular notice, or of letting it remain until circumstances should warrant me in again introducing it.

I recollected that not long ago a human body was exhibited at the Mechanics' Institution, partly dissected, and was lectured upon by that excellent man, that sincere and invaluable friend of the working classes, Dr. Birkbeck, with Mr. W. Colson as his demonstrator. It was a bold step; it was known that only a very few years before that time, the very men who were called upon to view the body in the different stages of its dissection, during the time the lectures were being delivered, would have pulled down the house in which a dead body had been deposited for the purpose of public dissection.

But mark the result of better knowledge—the Theatre of the Institution, which will accommodate upwards of a thousand persons, was crowded to excess with members. The attention of these spectators was profound, the amount of instruction they received considerable, and many must have been instigated to desire and to obtain a larger share of information not only on this but on other subjects than they then possessed, and so potent is the excitement of thought when directed to useful purposes, that it would be difficult to appreciate the beneficial consequences of these lectures.

The lectures delivered on this subject at the Mechanics' Institution are amongst the circumstances which, from time to time, mark the changes which occur, and demonstrate the improvement which has been made, giving confidence and increasing the courage necessary to the pursuit of knowledge. The subject now before us is another of these occurrences, and nothing can so clearly, so widely and so completely prove the advantages arising from unions, no matter under what name; since men may remain for ever isolated without knowing the amount of their own information or that of others. It is only by occasionally meeting in numbers that they can ascertain the progress which has been made, estimate that which is likely to be made, and encourage and stimulate one another to push on.

Five years ago no one would have ventured to introduce the subject of Anatomy and recommend the dissection of human bodies in any assemblage of working people, much less have attempted to discuss the subject as it will probably be discussed this evening.

I shall therefore proceed with pleasure, premising that I can only take notice of some of the more important parts of the extensive and very important subject.

I have, as carefully as I could, examined the reasons which have been adduced why Anatomy should be studied, and think they are conclusive in its favor.

I have as carefully examined the objections and think they are all founded in error.

I do not mean to be understood as affirming that the provisions of Mr. Warburton's Bill are such as the wisest man living would have proposed. I know, indeed, that they are not entirely such as he himself would most approve, but they are such as are most likely to be the least offensive to the largest amount of persons, such as are likely to be highly useful, and such as may easily be amended at any time, should amendment be deemed advisable.

This then like other subjects founded on utility, will be more useful the more it is freely examined and the better it is understood. If, however, it can be shewn that my notions are erroneous; if it shall be proved that Anatomy is not the science of humanity, or that being the science of humanity it may be advantageously and sufficiently studied by means of plates, and books, and models, and by dissection of animals, I and others shall be enlightened, shall be benefitted thereby, and shall cease to advocate the propriety of examining human bodies. I am not one of those who fear lest truth should be elicited; I do not dread being beaten in argument, for I do not contend for victory. I and every other man must gain by becoming

wiser, and one great means of becoming wiser consists in being shewn one's errors. I care little in any case to what conclusions discussion or enquiry may lead, I am not afraid lest the result should be directly the reverse of my present opinions, for many opinions I now hold are directly the reverse of notions I formerly entertained and thought them opinions. I have received much satisfaction from discovering errors and so I hope I shall always do, and especially on all subjects which, like the present, may appear to me to be of great importance.

If then we discuss this matter, and think of it, not as one of feeling, not for the sole purpose of confirming any previous opinion, but candidly and on its own merits, we shall probably ere long come to the same conclusions.

It appears to me that the matter may be divided thus:

1. Is the study of Anatomy necessary to surgeons and physicians, and can a competent knowledge be gained by means of books, plates, figures, lectures and the dissection of animals?
2. Is it necessary that the legislature should prescribe regulations for its study.
3. Are the regulations proposed by Mr. Warburton such as should be approved by reasonable men?

It may perhaps appear, to some persons, presumptuous in any one not a surgeon who shall attempt to expound these propositions. I confess I see nothing presumptuous in the case. It is a very curious fact that a man is seldom called presumptuous if he confine himself merely to finding fault with and abusing almost any thing he does not comprehend, but that the moment he undertakes to explain any matter which is supposed to be ever so little what is called out of his way, he is called presumptuous, and this is a distinction I wish you to bear in mind on the present occasion.

I cannot be presumptuous in talking of what we all understand to the extent we have examined it—I mean the general bearing of the question, on which we may all come to as rational conclusions as we could were we all surgeons. If, indeed, I were to set about describing the particular treatment of diseases, and the modes of operating, then, indeed, I should be equally presumptuous and absurd; but sure I am there can be no presumption in any attempt I may make to explain the grounds of opinions I cannot help entertaining; none in laying these explanations before a body of thinking men, every one of whom like myself, has, because he cannot but have, an opinion on the subject.

Is Anatomy then necessary to the instruction of sur-

geons, and can it be taught by books, plates, models and dissections of animals?

Till lately the surgeon and physician were distinct professions, and to some extent they are still so, but they are fast merging into one, as they ought always to have been:

How is a man to become a surgeon and physician?

The answer is easy—by learning his art just in the same way that a man becomes a carpenter or a shoemaker by learning his trade.

What is it we expect from the surgeon or physician? What but these things.

That he shall be able as accurately as possible to discriminate between different diseases.

That he shall know their causes.

That he shall understand the best means of curing them.

That he shall know why any function is deranged and be able to remove the cause.

That he shall be qualified to perform any operation that may be necessary, with the least pain and suffering to his patient; that he shall be able to perform it in the shortest possible time, with the greatest certainty, and the utmost chance of a successful termination.

All this is required of him, and there is nothing unreasonable in the request. Any man who does not possess all the necessary requisites, should be prevented, or at least prohibited from either prescribing for, or operating on, any human being.

Then comes the next question, how is a man to obtain the requisite knowledge?—how, indeed!

The answers to these questions have been given by the opponents of Anatomy: they have said

Let him consult books—let him examine plates.

Let him study models—let him dissect animals.

Let him attend operations—let him hear lectures, and he will thus acquire the requisite information.

I have read almost all that has been said in favor of this mode of teaching, and I will venture to say that no man ever was or ever can be sufficiently instructed by these means.

Every student should consult books.

Every student should consult plates—every teacher not only tells his pupils to do so, but he tells him also which are the best books and plates for him to consult.

In like manner is every other thing which has been enumerated recommended to the student; but if the teacher did no more than this, his pupils would do no credit either to him or to themselves.

Very different indeed is an actual operation on a living

human being from any that can be performed on animals; very different indeed is the care and attention and knowledge required in him who is to perform operations on living human beings in cases of disease, from those which can be performed on the bodies of healthy animals; so different indeed that in multitudes of cases there can be no analogy. How monstrously absurd then is it to imagine, that these modes of teaching can be efficient.

There is a species of Anatomy which can be taught in no way but by the actual dissection of human bodies. I mean morbid Anatomy. I do not intend to make the matter mysterious by the use of scientific terms, and will therefore explain the meaning of the words by calling them, anatomy of diseased parts. Now we are liable to a great many diseases to which animals are not liable, and in such cases there can be no studying of such diseases in animals which have them not; and even in maladies which equally afflict man and beast, the nature of these maladies, however much they seem alike, do not affect the human being in the same manner they do the beast; the difference is in many cases very remarkable, and it would be absurd to judge of the one either from the mode of treatment or the inspection of the body of the other. All this is highly important, but it is not the most important part of the subject, of the anatomy of diseased parts.

It frequently happens that the disease is in one part and the cause of the disease is in another and remote part. How is this to be investigated without dissection of human bodies? It is well known that one part produces effects on another part by what is called sympathy, that is, when one part is disordered or diseased, other parts by means of the nerves are also affected and disordered; and the cause of disease in the stomach and intestines must sometimes be sought for in the brain, and the cause of a disordered brain must sometimes be sought for in the stomach. Yet how could these things have been known but by dissection? They might have been surmised in some cases, but they could be traced only by dissection, and if this had not been done, the chances of cure would have been much diminished; not only indeed would this have been so, but the old modes of practice would have continued; applications would still be made to the wrong places, and medicines much more likely to kill than to cure would still be administered. These then, if there were no other reasons, would I think be sufficient to recommend the study of Anatomy, and induce every one to promote it as far as he could.

Let us, however, look a little at the nature of actual operations. Let us ask ourselves how pupils are to be taught

Lithotomy, that is cutting for stone in the bladder. Any man who understands the process would laugh to scorn him who should say that this could be taught by plates and models and operations on animals, either living or dead, and by the few actual operations any pupil could witness with sufficient minuteness in hospitals.

Again, in most of the principal operations the difficulties are not much less than they are in Lithotomy, but in many nice yet highly important operations there can be no guide at all but that which is obtained by operations carefully repeated on the dead body.

No operation can be successfully performed unless the hand of the operator be steady, and what also is of equal importance, sure; yet how is the hand to be steady if the mind be in doubt? and how is doubt to be prevented but by a minute and correct acquaintance with each particular muscle, vein and artery, and how is this knowledge to be acquired but by repeatedly dissecting the human body?

Then as to certainty. I mean by certainty that the operator's knife shall do neither more nor less than is intended, that it shall do just what is intended in the cleanest manner and in the shortest space of time. Let us take as an example the cutting off of a limb; this never can be learnt by cutting off the limbs of an animal: nothing but repeated amputations of the human subject can give this certainty, and nothing short of considerable practice in this way ever could have led to the certainty, the safety, and the incredibly short time in which amputation is now performed.

Then as to the nicer operations. I will mention one, a gentleman had a complaint on one side of his face, it went through into his mouth, the whole of the upper jaw on that side became diseased, and the bone was carious, that is, it was, what is called rotten. A surgeon well-known to me, seeing there was no chance of saving his patient's life unless he could remove the bone, and a considerable portion of the cheek, contemplated doing so, and what do you suppose he did? he carefully examined his patient, and then dissected the face of a dead body, the operation he contemplated was a desperate one, and doubtful of success, he reasoned on the case, examined and re-examined his patient, dissected other faces, and thus he went on for some time dissecting, examining and reasoning, until he had so fortified himself that he durst venture on the actual operation; he succeeded, and the gentleman is now alive. Other such cases and cures have since occurred, and particularly one in St. Bartholomew's Hospital. Who then, I ask, that is acquainted with such facts as these, will deny that the dissection of human

bodies is essential to the surgeon, and to the well-being, not only of multitudes of people, but to every person in the nation.

The study of Anatomy, is then of the very first importance to the perfection of surgery and medicine, and for these purposes bodies must be had, will be had. Every body will admit that since operations on living bodies are painful, they ought to be skilfully performed, but without repeated dissection of dead bodies, the requisite skill never can be obtained. Who does not know that for a man to be skilful in any trade, requires time and practice. No carpenter will expect a man to be able to plane a board or pannel out of winding, until he has had experience by planing many boards. No smith will expect a man to be able to file flat who has not acquired the art by repeated trials. No man used to turning will expect a man to turn a shaft or spindle true who has not spent a good deal of time in acquiring the necessary manual dexterity; and this is the case in all trades, and it surely cannot be less necessary nor of less moment that the surgeon should by repeated trials acquire the manual dexterity necessary to his art, or that he should learn all the particulars of his trade before he commenced practice. The carpenter may spoil his stuff, the smith may waste his time, and this is bad enough; but the surgeon must not be left in such ignorance of his profession, as to spoil the living human being.

There is a common error which deserves some notice, and on which I shall make some observations, I mean the prevalent notion that students and teachers of Anatomy, and surgeons take delight in cutting up human bodies, merely for the pleasure they derive from doing so, and some persons who ought to know better have disgraced themselves by calling them human butchers.

How often indeed do we hear professional men described as careless, hardhearted brutal men, caring nothing for decency or humanity, and yet, the very reverse is the truth. My attention when I was very young was drawn to the structure of the human body by my good and worthy schoolmaster, and I have never lost the desire he excited in me, for information on this very important subject, and sure I am that every man who thinks seriously on the subject, will admit that it is a laudable desire. We all desire to understand a curious piece of machinery, and I doubt much whether there be one man who hears me who has not looked with attentive curiosity at the inside of a watch, admired the machinery and wished to understand it, and if a man be thus curious, and thus laudably desirous of information respecting the construction of his watch, how much more

laudable is it in him to desire to understand the mechanism of his own body, of a machine infinitely more curious than a watch, and let me add, a machine of which the most material parts, and their general operations, thanks to Anatomy, may be known by a little diligence, and at a reasonable expence. Sure I am that the better a man is acquainted with the structure of his own body, the more convinced will he be of the necessity there is, that the science of Anatomy should be encouraged and promoted.

My desire for information on this subject led me to seek the acquaintance of medical men, and I have had the happiness to number amongst my friends, some eminently instructed surgeons. I have witnessed operations, have assisted at the examination of dead bodies, have visited dissecting rooms, but never in any instance did I see any act, or hear any expression which could be called indecent, never did I witness conduct which indicated want of humanity, but I have witnessed conduct precisely the reverse.

Dissection is not in itself a pleasant practice, it is indeed just the reverse of pleasant, it is not in itself inticing, but revolting; so revolting to many persons as not even to be endurable. If I have not seen the things which prejudice has concluded are common, which the imagination of those who never having witnessed the practice of Anatomy, has led them erroneously to suppose were common, I have seen what was much more afflicting; I have seen young men pursuing their studies with their "*hearts in their mouths,*" I have seen them with countenances so anxious, so indicative of feelings scarcely to be born, that I have wondered at their perseverance, and pitied the condition of a dissecting student. I have been told that some have not been able to continue their studies, and have consequently abandoned them altogether, so utterly unindurable has been the dissection of dead bodies to these persons.

I can testify in my own case to the advantages which even a slight and superficial knowledge of Anatomy, may be of to every man. About six years ago, I was exposed to the cold for so long a period, that I was cold through, thoroughly cold, so cold indeed, that notwithstanding I came home a distance of nearly four miles, at as rapid a rate as I could move, I could not recover my natural warmth; it was dusk when I returned home, I had eaten nothing since eight o'clock in the morning, and having a very severe pain in my left side, I feared it might become or was an inflammation of the peritoneum, that is of the membrane which lines the belly. I therefore took some warm tea, went to bed, covered myself with plenty of clothes, and soon produced perspir-

ation; I slept till after four o'clock in the morning, and then awoke in dreadful pain, the abdomen, (belly) was very much swelled and very hard; knowing what was the matter with me, I dispatched one of my family for an apothecary, telling him not to come back without some person who should have his lancets with him; in a short time the apothecary's assistant was with me, and I immediately desired him to bleed me until I fainted; having examined me, he did so, and I was cured, that is, the inflammation was stopped; proper care was of course taken, but the disorder was killed outright by the bleeding. So rapid was the inflammation that had bleeding been delayed but a few hours, I should have died, and but for the little knowledge I had acquired of surgery and Anatomy, instead of sending so promptly for assistance, I, who had never before required the aid of either surgeon or doctor, should as is common in such cases have had recourse to warm liquids, and assisted by the ignorance of those about me, should probably have taken hot brandy and water, and the surgeon would not have been sent for until all domestic processes had failed, and thus like many others who have been similarly circumstanced, I should have died. Thus you see how very valuable is even a little knowledge of Anatomy and surgery. Let us then do what we can to make the acquisition of surgical knowledge cheap to the professors of that science, and then they will make it, in its general bearings, familiar to every one who may wish to have the information.

No one denies that good surgeons and doctors are desirable, but still few seem to have noticed the fact, that it is most desirable to those who earn their bread by the labour of their hands, not only is this the case, but it is especially for their advantage that they should be well instructed, that there should be plenty of them; it is indeed much more for their advantage than it can ever be to any other class of persons that good surgeons and doctors should abound. Yet they cannot abound if difficulties to the acquisition of the requisite knowledge be thrown in their way, if the acquisition of this knowledge be made difficult and expensive, their number will be proportionably decreased, and the consequence must be that the rich, and they who can afford to pay large sums will have able men to attend them, and they who are not rich, and not able to pay large sums, will have none to attend them but such as never ought to be allowed to attend any body; and the treatment will accord with their ignorance. Ignorance alone will prescribe for the people when sick, and when by accident or disease operations may be necessary, they will

either not be performed at all, or performed so unskilfully, that death will be the consequence in many cases, lameness and decrepitude in other cases, and confinement and suffering to an almost unlimited extent in all cases, where the patient is not killed. No man who has thought on the subject, will say, that this is an exaggerated statement. I know that it is not, that so far from being exaggerated, it is a mere sketch, and not by any means a finished picture.

There are circumstances connected with this part of the subject, of scarcely less importance to the working people, than any of those which have been noticed, nor less deserving of their serious attention, nor less conclusive as to the necessity which exists for making anatomical knowledge cheap, and the number of good surgeons and doctors large; they are these.

1. That the number of working people greatly exceeds all the rest of the community, that they are more liable to disease, and more exposed to accidents. All workmen are either exposed to the effects of the weather, or the unwholesome air of workshops, or to close rooms, whilst their families are almost wholly confined to small close rooms, they cannot watch the commencement of illness, as they who have leisure can. They cannot at once refrain from exposing themselves to exciting causes. They cannot retire to large and airy, and warm apartments, and call in the best assistance, they must go on as well as they can, and as long as they can, and when compelled to discontinue working and seek advice; disease, be it whatever it may, has generally got fast hold of them, and skilful treatment is therefore of all things the most needed.

2. The accidents to men who do not labour, are few, when compared with those which happen to workmen, and it is probable that for one operation performed on others, several are performed on working men, so that, let us look at the matter how we will, in every view we can take, we see reasons why the dissection of human bodies as the means of providing able surgeons and doctors in sufficient numbers, is most important to the working people.

We now come to the question, how can bodies in sufficient number be obtained, and this question involves several circumstances of considerable importance, I shall notice three of them.—

1. The difficulties occasioned by the persuasion that they who have endeavoured to promote the science of Anatomy, have desired to sacrifice the poor for the advantage of the rich.

2. The dislike one has to the dissection of the body of any person who is near and dear to us.

3. The mode which must be adopted if the science is to be adequately taught.

If pains be taken to investigate the matter, it will be found that so far from the desire supposed to be entertained, that the poor should be sacrificed to the rich, it will be found that they who have been the most forward to induce the legislature to consider the best mode of procuring bodies, are undoubted active sincere friends of the working people, and I have shown, I think very plainly, that encouraging the practice of Anatomy, is benefitting the people.

The dislike entertained by us to having the dead bodies of our friends made useful to the living, is called a natural feeling, this is probably an error; to me it seems much more likely to be produced by the habits and modes of thinking adopted by civilized people, than to have been entertained by men in a state of nature, and that instead of being a natural, it is an acquired feeling. We cannot certainly know what may have been the feelings of human beings in a state of nature, because we have never seen them in this state; we have never seen any people amongst whom no advance towards civilization has been made; even the natives of Van Dieman's Land had made advances; but we do know that the nearer men have been found to a state of nature, the less they have cared for the dead. Words are however very potent, and men will not generally be prevailed upon to do that to which, right or wrong, the words, not natural, are likely to be applied.

The reluctance to permit our own bodies, or the bodies of our relatives to be dissected, has arisen from notions of decency, delicacy, and humanity, which have grown up as society advanced to a half civilized state; these notions will to a certain extent be modified, as society advances to a more civilized state; and when the time shall come that all men shall see clearly the use the dead may be made to the living, there will be no disputes on this subject, no impediments to the study of Anatomy.

Some respect is however due to feelings, based in notions of humanity, however mistaken these notions may be, since events have proved that it has been necessary for mankind to go through ages of error in their slow and painful progress towards truth, it is therefore the more incumbent on every one who thinks he has discovered a useful truth, to endeavour to make it known, as he should be to expose any injurious error, and to give his reasons for the one and the other.

I have shewn I think sufficiently, that there is neither indelicacy nor indecency in the practice of Anatomy. Some of the objections which have been made on the score of in-

delicacy and indecency, are odd enough, for the very men who have objected to the particular examination of bodies for special purposes, have admitted that similar examinations on living bodies are not indecent, thus making a distinction in respect to dead bodies, which by their own confession did not apply to living bodies.

Then as to humanity, how permitting dead bodies to be made useful to the living, can be injurious, by making us less humane, is what I cannot conceive. In France, as I shall shew presently, anatomists are plentifully supplied with subjects for dissection at a cost so small, as scarcely to be worth mentioning, and they might if it were necessary, be supplied with more bodies, at the same reasonable rate. Yet the French are a humane people, I am not a man to depreciate my own country-men, but it is admitted by most men who have had opportunities of comparing the people of the two countries, that whatever difference there is in this respect, is in favor of the people of France. Why then the plan adopted in France, which has not made the people less humane, should make the people of England inhumane, cannot, I think, be shewn by any man. My belief is that the French system if adopted here, would tend to make us more humane, yet, such are the prejudices to be overcome here, that no one would venture to demand the full adoption of the French system,

The necessity we are under of practising Anatomy, like most other things, which mark the condition of human beings is a choice of evils, and we are therefore bound to consider the case in all its bearings, that we may be able to chuse the least evil. It is an evil since humanity revolts at it, that bodies should be dissected at all. It is an evil that men should be compelled to go through the disagreeable drudgery from time to time, and for hours together of separating the parts, with the utmost care and the greatest possible dexterity; of bodies so putrid and offensive, that an adequate conception of the distaste it occasions, cannot be formed by any one unaccustomed to the practice. It is an evil as well to the practitioner as to the patient, that he should have to perform the most disgusting operations on the living, that he should have to inspect and sometimes to analyse the most nauseous and offensive excretions and dejections from all parts of the body; but he has no choice of evils here, he must do these things without the least hesitation, and he must do them over and over again, or he will never attain proficiency in his profession. On the other side are reasons which make all these evils shrink into a small compass—the good which results from them—these are the mitigation of pain and suffering in hopeless cases,

and the cure of diseases and injuries from accidents when practicable, by medicines and operations. The curative process is in itself an evil, but it is less so, than continual pain and suffering, it is more indurable than death. If then we take pains rightly to understand and appreciate these matters, we shall no longer object to any mode of obtaining subjects, until we are prepared to propose some other mode equally practicable and more agreeable to our feelings.

So far I have spoken my own opinions, formed on observations and reflections made by myself; made observe too, long before this question came to be discussed here; made too, without the most distant view to any advantage whatever to myself. I shall now quote authorities, and shall select two of the most eminent men of our time, the late Doctor Baillie and Sir Astley Cooper; Sir Astley told the Committee of the House of Commons, on Anatomy, "that surgery was improved in the diminution of operations. That at the time when he first entered the profession, there were three operations performed for one at the present time. At that time, a man who had an injury done to his head, was very generally trepanned, but now, that operation was seldom performed. At that time, limbs were amputated for compound fractures, which is now seldom done, and on being asked to what he ascribed the diminution of operations, he replied, to the inspection of the dead, leading to the knowledge of the changes, which parts have undergone from accidents and disease."

In answer to another question, he speaks thus. "My opinion is, not only that no person should practice surgery without privately performing all the operations on the dead, but he should also exhibit his powers of operating upon the dead in the presence of great numbers of persons."

Sir Astley is shewn a passage in a posthumous work of Dr. Baillie—as follows.

Question. "Dr. Baillie states in a further passage. 'Anatomy cannot be learnt without the employment of the knife, upon the dead body, that great basis on which we are to build the knowledge, which is to guide us in distributing life and health to our fellow creatures: need I say more to influence men of conscience and humanity to be zealous and industrious.'" "He further states; 'the parts of the animal body are so numerous and complicated, that in order to be retained in the memory, they require a strong impression; this cannot be made by the eye alone, the eye is quick and so impatient, that it runs over a number of objects in a short time, it is therefore necessary, that the hand should be employed, to confine the wandering of the

eye, and to attach it for a sufficient length of time to one object: it is for this reason that lectures by themselves never did, nor never can make a good anatomist."

Do you concur in that?

Answer. "In these sentiments I entirely concur, and every medical man must accord."

Every medical man does accord, for the one or two exceptions, of men who do not accord, need not be noticed amongst the multitude who have testified to the truth of Sir Astley's statement. I shall not trouble you with further quotations, as several copies of the "report of the committee," is, and has been on the table for some time past.

It must be evident to all who hear me, that what I have said, is a very brief account of so large a subject, and that this is all which can be done at our meetings. I do however flatter myself, that I have said enough to satisfy every one, that the study of Anatomy is absolutely necessary to the well being of the living, and that it is equally necessary that some plan should be adopted, by which bodies may be procured for this important purpose.

I know of but one plan, and that is contained in Mr. Warburton's bill. I have heard, and I have read, many objections to the bill, but I have neither seen nor heard of any detailed plan to supersede it. If such a plan were produced, and should appear on comparison to be better, and equally likely to be adopted, it should have my approbation, and I doubt not it would have the approbation of every man, who is neither prejudiced nor operated upon by private interest. Sure enough I am that it would meet with the approbation and have the support of Mr. Warburton.

Many, indeed most of the objections made to the bill, have originated in good feelings, unregulated by a sufficient acquaintance with the whole of the subject; other objections have been made by parties who had sinister interests to promote, and some from apprehension, least advantage should be taken of the wording of the bill, and lead to the sale of bodies; and thus, in time, raise the price so high, as to encourage murder.

To me none of these objections seem valid.

Words, as I have before observed used as epithets, have had great influence on men's actions, none have been more mischievously used or misused, than the word LIBERTY, which has sometimes meant slavery. WHIG and TORY are two other words, by means of which, long continued mischief was done to this country, for the sole advantage of some amongst those who composed the factions; and we all know the evils consequent on men being stigmatized, first as JACOBINS and then as RADICALS, in the present

case for want of fair argument, the bill of which I am speaking, has been called "THE DEAD BODY BILL," I should have no objection to this being the actual title of the bill, for the tittle would signify little, but I complain that the words are used, for the purpose of exciting mens passions, and preventing them exercising their reason.

There is another objection, a very vague one certainly, but it has not been harmless; It is this: that no interference of the Legislature is necessary. Had the Legislature never interfered, this might be a proper objection, but under our circumstances, it is necessary that the Legislature should interfere.

1. Because, as the law is at present, Anatomy is stigmatized and held up to the people, as more disgraceful, than being hanged at the gallows is, since it is added to the punishment, for murder, not only is it made an addition to the gallows, but it authorises brutal and disgusting exhibitions of the murderer's body, thus practically inculcating a horror of Anatomy. Saying to the people, thus shall any one of you be served, who commits murder, but in no other case shall your bodies be dissected; they shall never be touched for any useful purpose, they shall only be used as bug-a-boos, in the way ignorant people attempt to frighten children.

2. The law will punish any one who has a body in his possession for anatomical purposes. Yet the college of surgeons will admit no one to practice, who has not been constantly and for a considerable period violating the law. Such laws as these should no longer be permitted to disgrace the nation; I will not say as is usually said "disgrace the Statute book," for nothing can be a disgrace to that book, but I will say that it is a disgrace to the people, who do not compel its legislature to repeal such laws.

3. We dislike the base and truly indecent and horrible robbery of the grave.

4. We abhor murder, and will not permit the existence of laws which lead to burking.

Bodies must be had, will be had, to some extent, and nothing which can be enacted will ever prevent some being obtained by fair or foul means, and the more the laws are really preventive of the crime of exhumation, (church yard robbing) the higher will be the price, and the greater the bounty for such robberies, and for committing murders. It is useless to enact, that bodies shall neither be bought nor sold, since many modes may be adopted of satisfying the expectations of resurrectionists and burkers, without actually paying them. The legislature must then look to

it, and since Anatomy ought to be pursued, and will be pursued, it is the duty of the legislature to remove impediments, and to prevent, as it may easily do, the violation of the grave and the murdering of people.

MR. WARBURTON'S BILL.

The principal enactments are,

- 1.—The repeal of the barbarous law, which directs the bodies of murderers to be dissected.
- 2.—It permits members and fellows of colleges, physicians and surgeons, graduates in medicine, persons lawfully qualified to practise medicine, professors, teachers, and students of anatomy, to have bodies for anatomical examination.
- 3.—It requires that all places where anatomy is practised to be registered.
- 4.—It permits executors and other persons having the lawful custody of a body to have the power of allowing anatomical examinations, unless the person previous to his or her death shall have forbidden such examination.
- 5.—It permits persons to leave their own bodies for anatomical purposes, but it prohibits any anatomical examination of such bodies, if the husband or wife, or the nearest of kin, shall object to such examination.
- 6.—It forbids the removal of any body for the purpose of anatomical examination, until after twenty-four hours notice of such intention shall have been given to the inspector appointed by the act.
- 7.—It compels every qualified person who receives a body to receive with it a certificate from the medical man who attended the deceased, or if no medical man attended the deceased, then of some medical man who has viewed the body; and every such certificate must state the disease of which the person died. The certificate must also contain the Christian and surname of the deceased, the date, place of death, and age.
- 8.—It orders every qualified person within twenty-four hours from the time a body is received to send the certificate he has received with the body, and another certificate from himself, containing all the necessary particulars, to the inspector, and to enter the same in a book to be kept for the purpose.
- 9.—The inspector must receive the certificates, and enter them in a book to be kept for the purpose; he must

- inspect places where anatomy is practised, and enquire into the condition of all such places.
- 10.—All unqualified persons, and persons not registering there places where anatomy is carried on, are liable to the penalties of the present laws.
- 11.—It directs that Christian burial shall be made of bodies after examination.
- 12.—The attorney general is directed to prosecute all persons offending against this act; thus taking care that the law shall be executed, instead of as at present leaving its execution to every one, and no one, to prosecute or not.*

Here then are provisions which, if they become law, will effectually prevent the robbery of church-yards, and the murdering of people, to obtain subjects; and so conclusive are these as to the good consequences which must ensue, that I should have been disposed to have left the matter here, were it not that a member of this Council, as good a friend to Anatomy as any man can be, because no man better understood its importance, has objected to the Bill, lest it should lead to the sale of bodies, and thus hold out a premium for murder. If his apprehensions on this ground were well founded, I should concur with him, and do my utmost to assist him, either to amend or to destroy the Bill. The member to whom I have alluded is Mr. Wakley, and the objection he has made will be found in that very useful work, the *Lancet*. But Mr. Wakley does not deprecate the mode practised in Paris, which is really more than the Bill proposes should be enacted.

In the report of the Committee of the House of Commons, are these words:

“The administration of all the hospitals at Paris, since the period of the Revolution, has been confided to a public board of management. The rule at the hospitals is, that every patient who dies shall be attended by a priest, and that after the performance of the usual ceremonies of the Catholic Church, the body shall be removed from the chapel attached to the hospital to the dead room, and there remain for twenty-four hours, if not sooner claimed by the relatives. Bodies may be examined after death by the medical officers attached to a hospital, in order to ascertain the cause of death; but may not be dissected by them.

* This clause has been altered in the committee, and now stands thus:—“Offences against this act shall be a misdemeanor, and liable to be prosecuted for the same before any of his Majesty’s courts of justice, and in Scotland before the courts of justice there. Penalties three months imprisonment, or fine not exceeding fifty pounds.

A body, if claimed by the friends after examination, is sewed up in a clean cloth before being delivered to them. If not claimed within twenty-four hours after death, after being enveloped in a cloth in a similar manner, it is sent, in the manner hereafter described, to one of the dissecting schools."

"There are no private dissecting schools at Paris, but two public ones; that of the *Ecole de la Medicine* (School of Medicine), and that adjoining the *Hopital de la Pitié*, (Hospital of Pity). These are supplied exclusively from the different hospitals, and from the institutions for maintaining paupers; the supply from certain of these establishments being appropriated to one school, and that from the remaining establishments to the other."

"The distribution of subjects to the two schools is confided to a public officer, the *Chéf des Travaux Anatomiques*, (the Chief of the Anatomical Works). He causes them to be conveyed from the hospitals at an early hour, in a covered carriage, so constructed as not to attract notice, to a building at the schools set apart for that purpose. They are then distributed by the *prosecteurs* to the students; and after dissection, being again enveloped in cloth, are conveyed to the nearest place of interment."

"The students at the *Ecole de la Medicine* (School of Medicine) consist of young men who have distinguished themselves at a public examination, though the person at the head of the establishment is also allowed to admit pupils to dissect. The school of *la Pitié* is open to students of all nations, who, on entering themselves, may be supplied with as many subjects as they may require, at a price varying, according to the state of the body, from three to twelve francs (from half-a-crown to ten shillings); priority of choice, however, being given to the *élèves internes* (the regular scholars) of the different hospitals, and the subjects being delivered to them at a reduced price."

"——From the protection and facilities which have thus been afforded to the study of Anatomy at Paris, it has become the resort of the medical students of all nations; the *practice of exhumation* (*church-yard robbing*) is wholly unknown, and the feelings of the people are not violated."

MR. THOMAS WAKLEY'S EVIDENCE.—p. 116.

Question.—"Do you think, that if subjects could be procured in a sufficient quantity from the continent, and if prepared in the manner just described, they would be fit subjects for anatomical purposes?"

Answer.—"Yes; but I think we can obtain, without

difficulty, much better subjects *here*, and without violating any of the feelings or prejudices of the public. I believe that not more than from five hundred to seven hundred subjects are wanted for the purposes of dissection in any one year, and I consider there are more than one thousand unclaimed persons who die in our public institutions, such as hospitals, workhouses, and prisons, during the same period. If we were to rely upon a foreign source, in the event of a war, the supply would be instantaneously cut off. If, on the other hand, we were to have the bodies of unclaimed persons for dissection, we should be certain of an abundant supply; and there would be no outrage to public feeling, because people are quite indifferent as long as the subjects are not their own relatives or friends. The great prejudice which exists in this country against the practice of dissections, appears to arise from that enactment of the legislature which consigns the bodies of murderers to dissection; also from the disgusting and filthy practice of exhumation, which employs, I believe, nearly one hundred men, who are continually violating both law and decency."

I heartily concur in every word I have quoted from Mr. Wakley's evidence. His opinions are founded on experience, observation, and reflection, which cannot deceive him.

Mr. Wakley approves of the practice, and does not object to the charge; and I cannot see anything in Mr. Warburton's Bill, that can lead to the sale of bodies here, any more than it has done at Paris. I must be exceedingly mistaken, if it will not put an end to the sale of bodies. The expences of removal and other charges are defrayed at Paris by payment of a sum varying from half-a-crown to ten shillings; and if the bill be passed, there can be no doubt at all, that, as Mr. Wakley has shewn in his evidence, there will be a plentiful supply of bodies, and consequently, there can be no price. The expences of removal will be greater here than they are at Paris, as the charge for every thing here is; but these charges can scarcely amount to twenty shillings—a sum far too small to make it worth any body's trouble to rob the grave, or to incur the risk of being haaged for murder; especially as in either case the offender could, under the provisions of the Bill, have no hope of escaping detection.

Having laid before the Council reasons which appear to me to vindicate the study of Anatomy from the aspersions which have been cast upon it, having shown its utility, and the necessity there is that it should be regulated by legislative enactments, having too, I trust, shown that the

enactments of Mr. Warburton's Bill are such as reasonable men may approve, though not in every respect such as they might have been, I will conclude by reading the last paragraph of "The Report made to the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, on the 6th of January, 1831," on the subject of Anatomy, and the necessity of providing subjects for the teachers, students, and practitioners of surgery and medicine; observing only that Massachusetts is one of the most enlightened, and freest, of the several commonwealths which form the great republic of Anglo-Americans, called the United States.

In this commonwealth the people really do govern themselves, and that too at an expence so small, as would seem incredible to the people of this country. In that commonwealth, every appointment emanates from the people, their parliament is annually chosen by universal suffrage, and the voting is by ballot. In this free state, the committee conclude an excellent report in these words:—

"Your Committee fully believe, that whatever provisions on this interesting subject the Legislature may adopt, they will receive the support and countenance of the intelligent and liberal community, whom it is our high privilege to represent."

"And is not an improved and liberalized legislation, in favor of Anatomical Science, due to the high character of our constituents, for liberality and intelligence? Massachusetts has ever been foremost in overcoming prejudice, and in pressing forwards in the onward march of improvement. The men who first settled Massachusetts, were far above the religious and political prejudices of their age. The men of Massachusetts, in the perils of the revolution, were ever foremost in battling for the cause of freedom, and in resisting those prejudices in favor of the rights of the British monarch, which made some of the best hearts in America quail, and shrink from an irrevocable 'Declaration of Independence.' In the constitution of Massachusetts, the encouragement of 'Arts, Sciences, and all good Literature,' is expressly declared to be a part of the duty of the Legislature. When, therefore, it appears that a science, perhaps more deeply than any other, interesting to every portion of the community, is suffering and languishing for the want of a liberal legislation, is not the honor of the Commonwealth, as well as the general interests of science, civilization and humanity, concerned, that the Legislature should promptly interfere, to extricate this

important branch of human knowledge from the trammels and incumbrances which prejudice has placed around it.*

Some remarks were made on two clauses of Mr. Warburton's Bill, when the further discussion was adjourned to Wednesday, the seventh of March, at eight o'clock in the evening.

* The Bill contains enactments, authorising "physicians, duly licenced, and medical students under the authority of such physicians, to have in their possession, to use and employ, human dead bodies, or parts thereof, for purposes of anatomical inquiry or instruction."

It enacts also, "that the Board of Health, overseers of the poor, and select men of any town in the Commonwealth, and for the directors of the House of Industry, Board of Health, overseers of the poor, and mayor and aldermen of the city of Boston, in the said Commonwealth, to surrender the dead bodies of such persons as may be required to be buried at the public expence, to any regular physician duly licenced, according to the laws of this Commonwealth, to be, by said physician, used for the advancement of Anatomical Science; preference being always given to the medical schools that were, are, or hereafter may be, established by law in this Commonwealth." It then allows twenty-four hours for relatives to claim bodies, and directs that, if not claimed within that time, they shall be disposed of as directed by the act; and that when bodies have been used for anatomical purposes, the remains shall be "decently inhumed."