

**Address to the members of the Hunterian Medical Society, delivered on  
Wednesday, November 16, 1831 / [Nathaniel Rogers].**

**Contributors**

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*Hunter, Esq.*


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ADDRESS  
TO  
THE MEMBERS  
OF THE  
HUNTERIAN MEDICAL SOCIETY,

DELIVERED ON  
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 1831.

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BY NATHANIEL ROGERS,  
SENIOR PRESIDENT.

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*Societatis humanæ vinculum est ratio; et oratio, quæ docendo, discendo, communi-  
cando, disceptando, judicando, conciliat inter se homines, conjungitque.*

*CIC. DE OFFICIIS, L. i. Cap. 16.*

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EDINBURGH:

MDCCCXXXI.

ADDRESS

THE MEMBERS

HUNTERIAN MEDICAL SOCIETY

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 1911



EDINBURGH

MOXTIN



TO THE  
REV. THOMAS CHALMERS, D.D.

PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY  
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH,

BY WHOM  
THE ELOQUENCE OF THE PULPIT  
HAS BEEN RAISED TO A HEIGHT UNEXAMPLED

IN THE  
ANNALS OF OUR LANGUAGE,

THIS TRIBUTE OF RESPECT IS OFFERED

BY ONE  
WHO ESTEEMS IT THE CHOICEST PRIVILEGE

OF HIS VISIT TO EDINBURGH,

THAT IT  
PERMITS AN ATTENDANCE ON THE PRELECTIONS

OF THE  
THEOLOGICAL CHAIR.



## ADDRESS.

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GENTLEMEN,

I CANNOT permit myself to take possession of the Chair to which your kindness has elevated me, without endeavouring to express to you the high sense I entertain of the distinguished honour which is thus conferred. Were I to consult only my own sense of deficiency, I might be led to dilate at some length, and perhaps no less justice, on the disproportion between the honour itself, and the merits of him on whom it is conferred. This much only, however, I will trust myself with observing; that for my elevation to so distinguished a post, I am indebted more to your goodness than to my deserts. But it is of comparatively little moment to inquire, what has obtained for me the Chair. A much more important consideration is, how it is to be filled. And, though fearful of my inability to realize the expectations your good opinion has raised, I am encouraged by the persuasion,



that the kindness which has placed me here, will still be continued ; and, that although I may have to trespass much on your indulgence, that indulgence will not be withheld.

But I gladly hasten, Gentlemen, to quit this egotistic topic ; and would seek in the Society itself, a more grateful theme of contemplation. And here we can surely be at no loss. It cannot be necessary that I should point out to you the superior accommodations this year provided ; for every one has felt and admired them : or the increased facilities enjoyed by Members in the Library department ; for all acknowledge their value. For the whole, indeed, of the excellent arrangements made by the Council, the thanks of the Society have been already expressed. But the members themselves are a much more important consideration. And here, Gentlemen, permit me to congratulate you, on the very flattering auspices under which we enter on the present Session. The number of applications for admission is such, as to prove the high estimation in which the Society is held ; and at the same time to furnish a pledge, that it will this year maintain, to the very utmost, the distinguished rank it holds among the scientific institutions of this classic metropolis. And the mention of these institutions, Gentlemen, leads me to express a confident assurance, that both in our feelings and



conduct to societies of kindred objects with our own, we shall ever maintain that courteous urbanity, which is not more honourable to its object than its offerer. In the republic of letters, Gentlemen, nothing is so unseemly as petty feuds, and party animosities. It is in the very nature of true philosophy to raise her votaries above the unworthy jealousies which agitate minds less happily trained and tutored. Be it ours to prove that we have deeply imbibed her salutary lessons ; and, let the whole tenor of our conduct manifest, that there may be rivalry without opposition—emulation without animosity.

And, to turn, Gentlemen, from our conduct to others, to our conduct among ourselves, the very same principle will be found of essential service. I shall not attempt to prove, what no one will be inclined to question, the value of those discussions, which form so prominent a feature in the business of the Society. It is by them that talent is elicited, that attention is awakened, that industry is stimulated, that facts are collected, that new doctrines are canvassed, and old opinions weighed ; in short, it is from this concentration of the energies of many upon one point, that the most beneficial results may be expected, both as to individual improvement, and the general advancement of medical science. But, in order that discussions may be as productive of



advantage as possible, they must not only be *right*, but *rightly* conducted. And, in the first place, it must be evident, that the greater the number of speakers, the more efficiently will the advantages of which I have spoken, be secured ; and I would, therefore, respectfully intreat that more speakers will come forward. It is true, that during the last Session we were seldom at a loss ; but it is equally true, that the oratory was confined within too limited a circle. The speakers on a given subject, were often known as regularly beforehand, as the subject itself. And as little can it be denied, that with all their exertions, an awful pause, both as to length and stillness, did sometimes ensue ; and was only interrupted by some indefatigable adherent, alarmed at the continuance of the portentous silence. More than once, Gentlemen, have I been induced unwillingly to obtrude myself on your notice, lest the flagging discussion should become totally extinct ; and I assure you, that the most inveterate talker of us all, would often gladly give way to some new aspirant.

In these discussions, Gentlemen, to quote the language of our distinguished Professor of Divinity,—the ornament, not merely of our University, but of our country, and our age,—in his language I would observe,—“It is a mistake to suppose there is no-



thing to *say*, when there is nothing to *object*." It is sufficient if we can add, or can elucidate ; if we can adduce new arguments, or place old ones in a new light. It would be to introduce a most mischievous principle, to compel us tenaciously to adhere to our seats, unless we could quarrel with the last speaker. It would not only chill the modest, and check the diffident, and thus confine discussion to still narrower limits ; but would throw over the whole a shade of rancour and hostility, not more detrimental to our individual peace, than to our general interest. And this leads me to express a confident hope,—nay, my perfect assurance,—that our discussions will ever be conducted with that dignified and courteous demeanour, so inseparably characteristic of the scholar and the gentleman. It is true, nothing is more difficult in the heat of debate, than to maintain that calm and unruffled serenity, so essential for the elucidation of truth. But the more difficult the attainment, the greater the necessity for constant exertion to secure it ; for remember, Gentlemen, that if you have the best of the argument, a more ingenious method could not be devised, for turning the scale in your opponent's favour, than losing your self-possession. We all remember the story of the person, who, on being asked why he attended discussions in Latin, replied, that although he did not understand the



language, he knew perfectly well who was getting the worst of it, for he could easily see who was first in a passion. It is surely, Gentlemen, the most unfortunate of all expedients for foiling our adversary, to forget ourselves. Many a man would have gained his cause, if he had not lost his temper.

And here, Gentlemen, if I might be permitted to trespass on your indulgence one step farther, I would beg leave to express my confident persuasion, that in the course of these discussions nothing will escape us, at which delicacy the most sensitive could reasonably take offence. There are no *professional* subjects, which may not legitimately come under our notice; let us only take care that they are *professionally* treated. I ask you, Gentlemen, if in any profession more than another the most scrupulous delicacy be demanded, is it not in ours, where the dearest interests of the dearest members of the community are so often committed to our honour? And I should think myself betraying the trust confided to me, if, from any feeling of unworthy shame, or false delicacy, I hesitated for one moment to employ the influence which the possession of this Chair confers, in behalf of the great principles of morality and virtue. It is for us, Gentlemen, by our conduct, to refute the calumny that has gone abroad, that there is inseparably connected

with the study of our profession, anything to blunt the moral sense, or to blight the moral feeling. It is for us to prove that no such sinister influences exist, as some have represented : or, that if they do exist, we have risen superior to them all. That, on the one hand, all those proprieties of sentiment and demeanour, which elevate and ennoble the character, are by none more respected than ourselves ; and that, on the other, all those sympathies which link man to his fellow, and impart grace and ornament to social life, are felt by us in their full force ; and that “ the milk of human kindness ” flows through the breast of a Surgeon, in as pure and pellucid a stream, as in his who never entered a dissecting room.

But I feel it quite unnecessary to pursue the subject farther ; especially when I recollect, that any approach to the conduct to which I have alluded, has always been met by the Society with the most decided reprobation. And it is only by a continued perseverance in the same course, and by attention to the other general rules to which I have adverted, that we can hope to make the Society worthy of the distinguished man whose name it bears ; or that the hopes of its well-wishers can ever be realized, of seeing the HUNTERIAN SOCIETY, a SOCIETY of HUNTERS !



But the mention of that venerated name awakens feelings in my bosom, to which before sitting down, you will permit me to give utterance. True it is a chord often struck ; but it has never failed to vibrate ! True it is a spell often uttered ; but it has never failed of effect ! And cold indeed must be our hearts to the best emotions of our nature, and dead indeed, must be our feelings to the advancement of science, and the well-being of our race, when our pulse refuses to beat with a kindlier throb, and our bosom to glow with a more generous ardour, at the talismanic name of JOHN HUNTER !

It would be utterly unsuited to the present occasion, were I to call on you to travel over the history of that remarkable man. But a most instructive history it is ; and one which cannot be too earnestly recommended, as the subject of emulation to the members of our profession. Who can think of his patient and laborious investigations ; his unwearying assiduity ; his unquenchable ardour ; his unflinching perseverance for nearly half a century, without imbibing some portion of his spirit, and catching some portion of his zeal ? To use the expressive language of one, to whose surpassing eloquence I have before adverted,—“ He but gamboled with the difficulties, that would have depressed and overborne other men ! We have known,” he continues,—“ we have known

men of great power ; but they wanted promptitude : and we have known men of great promptitude ; but they wanted power." But as he said of THOMSON, so may I say of HUNTER, that in him power and promptitude were most eminently combined.

But I shall not attempt to enlarge on a topic, which has exhausted the eloquence of many a panegyrist. Its intrinsic claims to regard, will plead more in its favour than the representations of the most powerful advocate ; and will secure for it a warmer reception, than the most impassioned eulogies could obtain. I would only ask you, for an instant, to visit in imagination, that stupendous record of his fame,—that "*monumentum ære perennius*," the Museum which bears his name. And as you gaze around on that magnificent product of his gigantic exertions ;—on the seventeen thousand preparations, the result of the diligent and discriminating labours of one man,—I ask you whether his most appropriate epitaph would not be, that sublimely simple inscription to the memory of SIR CHRISTOPHER WREN in St. Paul's Cathedral :

"LECTOR, SI MONUMENTUM QUÆRIS, CIRCUMSPICE."



men of great power; but they wanted promptness; and we have known men of great promptness; but they wanted power." That is the motto of Thomson, as may I say of Murray, that is his power and promptness were most eminently established.

But I shall not attempt to enlarge on a topic which has engaged the eloquence of many a patriot. Its intrinsic claims to regard will place it more in its favour than the representations of the most powerful advocate; and will secure for it a warmer reception than the most important subject.

J. THOMSON, PRINTER, MILNE SQUARE, EDINBURGH.

to the in imagination, that the person of the Lord of the Rings, that "magnificent and personable" the person, which bears his name. And as you have agreed on that magnificent product of his gigantic exertions;—on the thirteen thousand pages, the result of the diligent and discriminating labour of our man;—I ask you whether the most appropriate epithet would not be that which is chiefly applied to the memory of Sir Christopher Wren in St Paul's Cathedral: "The Architect."