

## **Answer to a pamphlet entitled The medical school of Edinburgh.**

### **Contributors**

University of Edinburgh. Faculty of Medicine.

### **Publication/Creation**

Edinburgh : Printed for the Booksellers, 1819.

### **Persistent URL**

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/y2jps9kt>

### **License and attribution**

This work has been identified as being free of known restrictions under copyright law, including all related and neighbouring rights and is being made available under the Creative Commons, Public Domain Mark.

You can copy, modify, distribute and perform the work, even for commercial purposes, without asking permission.



Wellcome Collection  
183 Euston Road  
London NW1 2BE UK  
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722  
E [library@wellcomecollection.org](mailto:library@wellcomecollection.org)  
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

6

# A N S W E R

TO A

## PAMPHLET

ENTITLED

THE MEDICAL SCHOOL

OF

EDINBURGH.

---

“ Unballowed time,  
When man, forgetting every kindred tie  
That binds the living to departed friends,  
Can break the sacred silence of the tomb,  
For love of gain.”

---

---

EDINBURGH :

PRINTED FOR THE BOOKSELLERS.

1819.

J. N. S. W. R. R.

THE MEDICAL SCHOOL

PENNSYLVANIA

1870



## ANSWER, &c.

---

ANY man of common sense, who peruses the pamphlet just published, in vindication of the abominable practice of raising the newly-buried dead, after they have been quietly entombed in the silent grave, whither all flesh must go, must see the fallacy of our pamphleteer's reasoning. No man, who has the feelings of a human being, could stand and see this species of nocturnal villany, without harrowing up his very soul; it must make all honest men shudder to think that there are such be-

ings in the world ; but what will we not find men do. Do they ever think what are the feelings of a husband who buries his wife, a mother her child, or a child its parent, to think that they cannot lie in peace in the place appointed for all living, without their watching for months, to prevent their inanimate bodies from being brought to the dissecting room, and there to be cut in hundreds of pieces, their flesh torn from their bones by unfeeling students, and then committed to the flames, or to ravenous animals. What human being can stand silently and see all this practised, on perhaps all that was near and dear to him in life, and whom he had been at a great expence in decently interring, expecting their bones to lie in peace until the general resurrection ? I shall now notice, shortly, a few of the leading reasons by which our pamphleteer seems most to justify his practice ; as I have little doubt he must be either one of these people, or, at all events, connected with them.



In the first place, then, he begins by drawing a comparison between the Medical Schools of Dublin and Edinburgh ; which I do not mean to enter into an argument about, as it entirely foreign to my subject and also to his.

In the next place, he takes notice of the boxes, as he is pleased to call them, which are in some of the church-yards of Edinburgh. But let me ask him, whether the bones of the dead are better lying kicking about in the church-yard, or decently put in these receptacles ? Every person must see and judge for themselves ; but I have little doubt but the most of my readers will side with me in this particular. Again, about the inscription, “ The dead shall be raised incorruptible ;” for my part, I can see nothing improper or profane in this inscription, for from the holy Scriptures it is taken ; only the half of it happens to be left out. And as for blindfolding the people with regard to the meaning of it, I shall



leave this also to my readers to judge for themselves ; whether a parcel of bones are better hid from public view, or brought to a dissecting room, (as our pamphleteer would seem to wish), and there bleached and suspended from the ceiling by wires, for years.

Scripture warrants our burying our dead ; for in a beautiful passage of Job, it is said, “Dust thou art, and shalt to dust return ;” and so poetically expressed in our eighth Paraphrase. We all know (as well as our pamphleteer), that flesh and blood will not inherit the kingdom of Heaven ; but that is still no reason that our friends should be made subjects to lecture upon, and their dead bodies to be subject to the stare of hundreds. And I have heard from very able medical men, that the dissections in the Royal Infirmary, and of people who die of particular diseases, are quite enough for young men to learn the anatomy of the human frame. And I am sure



that relations would never object to have the particular part examined, provided the surgeons would not carry the half of the entrails away with them, which they are in the common practice of doing, and which I am sure is the reason that people will not allow their friends to be opened.

Our pamphleteer also means to contradict, that dead bodies were ever detected carrying through the streets. But I beg leave to differ from him there; they have been seen carrying through the public streets in open day, (in baskets, in gigs, in hackney coaches, in boxes, and in various other shapes,) by some of the most respectable inhabitants of Edinburgh; and more, they have been hung up at windows in the sight of several people, and there are persons living in Edinburgh, who make a common traffic of this, the only visible means they have for subsistence, and are now making money by this means, viz. by retailing human flesh to the



students for a certain price. What horrible wretches they must be, and what callous feelings they must have ;—but so it is ; and my readers may rest assured, that this is the case ; and they can enquire of hundreds of inhabitants who live about the different lecture-rooms, and who can testify what I allege. And more, our pamphleteer has forgot, that two bodies were detected at Leith, and one of the men received sentence from the High Court of Judiciary the other day, (which by the way was far too lenient a sentence for such a transgression ;) and also some of these surgeons, as they term themselves, (but who are a disgrace to the profession,) were taken at Linton, and will be tried for this offence shortly ; when, I hope, the whole rigour of the law will come down upon them.

When we take all these cases into our view, I trust, I have refuted our pamphleteer's assertions, that they were never seen carry-

ing through the streets; and there are people in Edinburgh, who burn the bodies after they have used them, in their back yards, almost every day. But I trust this practice will be put a stop to soon. With regard to interested people being on the watch, that is totally out of the question, as every inhabitant must be interested; and it was done in open day, and with such publicity, that there was not the slightest necessity to watch for detection; and which, but for that circumstance might have been carried on a long time (and I have no doubt it was,) without the least chance of being found out. But now I trust, the inhabitants of Edinburgh and its vicinity are aware of this, and watches will be so strict in the different burying-grounds, that it will be impossible to steal the bodies. And I would suggest at the same time, that in every parish in Edinburgh, a paper should be left in the Session Houses, for such people who would wish to watch the dead, there to put



down their names, with the place of their residence, so that they might be called upon to watch in their turns, in their respective burying-grounds, viz. where they are in the habit of interring their friends; and let three householders watch, respectable people, who would have no chance of being bribed. This would not come, to the inhabitants above three or four times a year; and also to discharge all the watchmen, for they are the most dangerous people. I am certain if this were the case, the bodies of our friends would lie in peace. Or if this was not done, machines ought to be made of iron, that would embrace the coffin, (the same as they have in many parts of Scotland,) and to lie there till the body mouldered.

He in the next place mentions, for our information, (as he takes it for granted we never heard of it before,) that in different countries they have different ways of disposing of their dead. But are we not

at the same time, well assured from history, that in those countries which our Pamphleteer is so kind to inform us of, (and to whom future generations will stand much indebted,) would they not rather part with their lives, than not dispose of their dead in the way which their religious tenets, and the practice of time dictates. Let a man try and prevent an Egyptian from embalming his dead, or a Japanese from burning them, or a Persian from exposing them to ravenous animals, and he will soon see the consequences. And have we not an equal right to protect our dead, at the hazard of our lives, from the contaminating hands of unfeeling, ignorant wretches, who are employed for this nefarious practice, and who, at the risk of their immortal souls, carry on this trade, in spite of all the laws which our wise legislature have adopted to put a stop to this abominable crime.

Our pamphleteer, in the next place, no-



tices the hundreds who were unhouelled (as he is pleased to term it) for the accommodation of the Parliament Square, the Police Office, the New Road, &c., and yet no insurrection happened. Does our pamphleteer think that these public improvements were done to make a mob? I trust no such intention was ever entertained by our rulers; and I am sure nothing but the public weal was intended. And even then, these were not done till the bodies, and even the bones, were all mouldered to their mother earth. Besides, it was public improvements, which all the town seemed to concur in. As to the Calton burying-ground, it was a pity to take that away, as they might have done without it: but it was done in that sort of way so as to hurt the feelings of the inhabitants as little as possible, and it was only removed then from one burying-ground to another; and as for the unhallowed or unconsecrated ground, we are not quite so bigotted as our pamphleteer seems to be. We all know,

that it can make little difference to a dead body where it is buried; only common decency requires, that a spot of ground should be set aside for that purpose. I am sure the generality of my readers will agree with me here also.

Again, he notices, about the body of a patient who died in the Royal Infirmary, being observed in the act of carrying away by two men, and who were detected, but made their escape. But our pamphleteer seems, or rather wishes us to believe, that he could not find out the meaning of carrying the body back to the church. But every one of common sense must know, it was carried there to be owned, and to be decently interred again; but, as the poor man or woman (for I do not know which it might have been) had no friends or relations to take charge of the body, after remaining a reasonable time, it was again committed to the clay; and not for the purpose of raising an insurrection of the



populace, as our pamphleteer seems to think. I am sure no such intention was ever entertained by those who had the conducting of this piece of necessary duty to the body of a fellow creature.

In the next place, our pamphleteer seems to think that a certain class of people, when life is no more, ought to be brought to the lecture-room for the use of students of medicine, as their lives were so bad, that it was the only thing they deserved. But let me put it to himself, may he not have a brother or sister who have gone astray from the path of virtue? pray how would he like to see them, when dead, brought to a dissecting room? As our pamphleteer wishes this done, he should show the example, and when his wife, his child, or his brother, or any other relation dies, he should send them to the dissecting room; and this would show an example, and perhaps might be followed by all who are of our pamphleteer's opinion: And then the

School of Anatomy would not fall to the ground.

But I beg leave to remark, at the same time, that I differ in opinion entirely from our pamphleteer as to the Medical School of Edinburgh falling to the ground; for they can do very well, as I remarked before, with the bodies of people who die of particular diseases in the Royal Infirmary. And it is only a trade which is carried on to supply medical men in different parts with human bodies, to fill the coffers of a few individuals whom I well know; but, as I trust they will be soon made public, it is useless for me to expose them. Why may not the rich, the poor, and the worthless lie in peace, when they have gone "the way of all flesh?" may they not have repented before death has seized them. But our pamphleteer seems to think this impossible; or at all events, very improbable. Many a hardened sinner before death has



shewn genuine signs of repentance, and I trust are now in eternal happiness.

In the next place, our pamphleteer tells us, that the illustrious Dr Pitcairn first formed a theatre of anatomy in Edinburgh. But our pamphleteer does not seem to be aware (at least wants us to believe so) of the restrictions they were put under; viz. they were only allowed one body in the Winter Session, and the intestines of that body were to be buried in forty-eight hours, and the rest of the body in ten days at farthest, at their expence; or the Town Council's grant becomes null and void.

And again, our pamphleteer takes little notice of the petition of the surgeons of Edinburgh to the Town Council, about the lifting of the bodies out of the Greyfriar's church-yard, and of their abhorrence of this crime, and assuring the Council, that if any of their body be detected stealing bodies from the grave, they shall be expelled their socie-

ty, their names razed out of their books, their acts of admission torn, and be deprived of all privileges as freemen of their corporation. And if any apprentice be found at this practice, they shall forfeit their indentures, and be dismissed their service with disgrace. What does our pamphleteer say to this? Not a word; but wants to make us believe, that our Medical Schools cannot exist unless they have liberty to ransack all the churchyards of the country for subjects. This idea is most ridiculous; and I am sure every surgeon in Edinburgh will side with me, at least all of any respectability: and for the rest, I care little about, for their deeds will find them some day or other to their cost.

In the next place, our pamphleteer begins with a high encomium on Provost Drummond; which I do not mean to condemn, as Provost Drummond was an excellent man, and made such wise regulations for the town, that I am sure no



man would have punished offenders of this stamp more than he. Again, he speaks of *Monro Primus*, to whose abilities the University of Edinburgh is much indebted, and who would have scorned such a thing, as to lift bodies from their graves.

Our pamphleteer next informs us of the sums the students must spend in Edinburgh, and what wealth they bring to their native country; and I may safely say, that the prevention of lifting bodies from their graves will never hinder students from attending the University of Edinburgh, when we have such able Professors at the head of every branch of education. This practice is more likely to hurt our University, than to raise its fame above other schools of learning in Europe; and we may safely rank ourselves among the first, at all events of medicine, in the world.

I shall now conclude these remarks, with wishing, that the surgeons of Edin-

burgh would vindicate themselves, and publish to the world their abhorrence of this crime, as their predecessors did before them. It is a duty they owe to the public; and I am sure it is a duty they will cheerfully obey. I myself acquit (and I dare say the public do the same) every respectable surgeon in Edinburgh of such a foul crime. I know there are only a few individuals who delight in this nefarious traffic, and whose names I hope soon to see razed from the corporation of surgeons in Edinburgh.

I now take leave of the public, hoping these few lines may have the desired effect; and if I have carried the subject too far, I leave it to a generous public to pardon me, as my mind, on hearing that an old acquaintance and teacher was lifted, has dictated to me what I have inscribed in these pages.

*A Friend to Humanity.*



though would vindicate themselves, and  
 push to the world their abhorrence of  
 this crime, as their predecessors did before  
 them. It is a duty they owe to the pub-  
 lic; and I am sure it is a duty they will  
 cheerfully obey. I myself repeat (and I  
 dare say the public do the same) every  
 respectable surgeon in Edinburgh of such  
 a foul crime. I know there are only a few  
 individuals who delight in this detestable  
 traffic, and whose names I here soon to  
 be razed from the corporation of surgeons  
 in Edinburgh.

I now take leave of the public, hoping  
 these few lines may have the desired ef-  
 fect; and if I have carried the subject too  
 far, I leave it to a generous public to per-  
 son me, as my mind, on hearing that an  
 old acquaintance and teacher was lifted,  
 has dictated to me what I have inscribed  
 in these pages.

A Friend to Humanity.