

**SCIENTIFIC ASSOCIATIONS,
THEIR RISE, PROGRESS, AND
INFLUENCE: WITH A HISTORY OF
THE HUNTERIAN SOCIETY; AN
ORATION**

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Scientific Associations, Their Rise, Progress, and Influence: With a History of the Hunterian Society; An Oration by Henry I. Fotherby

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HENRY I. FOTHERBY

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SCIENTIFIC ASSOCIATIONS,

Their Rise, Progress, and Influence,

WITH

A HISTORY OF THE HUNTERIAN SOCIETY.

AN ORATION

Delivered on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the above Institution, February 10, 1869,

BY

HENRY I. FOTHERBY, M.D. LOND., F.G.S.,

Vice-President of the Hunterian Society.

“Ratio Societatis Vinculum.”



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1869.

TO
THE PRESIDENT,
COUNCIL, AND OTHER MEMBERS
OF
THE HUNTERIAN SOCIETY,
WITH MUCH ESTEEM,
THIS RECORD OF THE PAST
IS DEDICATED.

ORATION.

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN,

As you are all aware, we this day celebrate, not only the Anniversary of the Hunterian Society, but the Jubilee of its existence. It seems meet, therefore, that we should devote to the Institution itself our especial consideration this evening; and I propose accordingly to give you some account of its foundation, history and progress to the present time; also making such general observations on these associations as the story suggests, and time will allow.

The narrative of the Society's history derives no interest from the halo of romance or antiquity; it claims no heathen divinity in the mist of ages, as the founder, no portents of Nature attended its birth; nor did an Oracle give it laws. No, the particulars form a plain, prosaic, nineteenth-century description, unadorned by any brilliant discovery, and uncoloured by any sensational episode. "Art is long," and fifty years is but a brief space of time; yet we have lived fast during this last half-century, and what

similar period was ever so crowded with events, so fertile in inventions, so rich in discoveries, and so fraught with blessings to humanity!

But these advances in Art and Science are not the achievements of individuals existing, or of societies established during *this* century. All are alike the offspring of earlier movements, which have taken place in the world's history, at successive eras; and of which, one of the most important occurred during the life-time of the immortal genius, whose name this Society has taken for its title and watchword.

It will, therefore, be desirable to premise this particular history with some short details, respecting the rise and progress of Associations for the promotion of Art and Science, in order to appreciate the circumstances leading to their adoption, and the assistance their establishment has conferred on the several studies thus cultivated. It is indisputable, that they furnish most convenient and advantageous means for the promotion of science; and their universal existence in all periods of intellectual activity would alone prove this assertion. Indeed, their adoption is but the same instinct which leads the barbarian to unite with his fellow, for the mere purposes of support and defence. These ends being secured, the religious idea, as innate to humanity, appears to be the next cause of association; and very early do we find a class, society, or caste, set apart for the culture of religion, as the Druids, the Augurs, and the Levites. With them dwelt the influence and authority which wisdom and learning ever exercise over ignorance, and to them, in virtue of their supposed influence with the gods, was committed equally

the cure of souls and of bodies, and the formation of laws. In the classic systems of Greece and Rome this union of priest and physician was discontinued from the period of the Æsculapian institutions; but with the Gothic and other nations it was long maintained.* In the early progress of mankind towards civilisation, industry could at first only effect *rude* manufactures; then followed barter—regular trades—*WEALTH*; and with increasing means and leisure, *ART* was created,—simple at first, but ever improving, and developing by degrees—*skilled* manufactures. Thus, we find in the middle ages, the rise and growth of guilds, fraternities, and companies, for the promotion of these respective trade interests, which were as often held to consist in the guarding of a secret as in the promulgation of a discovery. Frequently, indeed, these unions had to serve another purpose, the defence of the commercial against the military or feudal power, which hitherto omnipotent, or dividing its empire with the church, became jealous of the growing strength of the new order. Hence the condition of chronic warfare, which existed between the free cities of Italy and the Netherlands, and the hereditary lords of the neighbouring soil. But intellect and liberty were on the one

* Even in the fourteenth century, as Meryon states "Europe still teemed with physico-spiritual advisers, by whom all sorts of ridiculous inferences were drawn from hypothetical data. But the dawn of a brighter era was at hand, by slow degrees medicine was made a distinct calling, although the ecclesiastics retained a most tenacious hold on it, seeing that it enhanced their wealth and power." But as Sprengel has it, "Their insatiable avidity, and flagrant incompetency, at length led to the adoption of a decision in the University of Vienna that the hospitals should thenceforth be conducted by the laity for the better care of the sick poor."

side, despotic power and brutal ignorance on the other, so the issue, however delayed, was never doubtful.

Increase of wealth and power in the rising middle class produced yet further improvement in arts and manufactures, and the conveniences and refinements of life. In Italy, the cradle of Art as well as of Science, we find, that societies for the culture of metal works, carving, decoration, furniture making, etc., as well as for painting, existed as early as the thirteenth century in Florence, Bologna, and Venice. By the stimulus they afforded, invention was quickened, and fresh acquisitions were continually made during the following century, until the discovery of Printing gave a mighty impulse to all learning. Indeed, with this art, commences a new era in the history of intellect, and from this period SCIENCE may be considered to take its rise. The accumulated knowledge of past ages was thereby freely disseminated, a taste for physical researches was aroused, fresh enquiries and experiments were set on foot, and their results being published, retrogression or even halting was thenceforth impossible. The discovery struck a fatal blow at MYSTICISM, in all the forms by which it had chained the human intellect through former ages. Knowledge could no longer be confined to individuals, nor to a class, with whom alone, as heretofore, it should live and perish. An art once revealed could no more be lost in the grave of its discoverer, and no fragment of scientific truth, however small, once quarried from the rock, could ever again be buried in the sands of time.

During the latter part of the fifteenth and the sixteenth

centuries, numerous universities and academies arose in Italy. Some of these were for the cultivation of literature and philosophy—at others mathematics and medicine were more especially studied; while yet others professed physical science as their peculiar object.

Tiraboschi mentions 171 of these, but the major portion were of a frivolous, superficial, or grotesque character, the only records of whose short existence are their silly appellations and rules. One of the most famous was the "Academia della Crusca" (of the sieve) a secession in 1582 from the Academy of Florence. Another, established in Rome, in 1603, under the title of "I Lincei," for physical investigations, and of which Galileo was a member, showed more scope and earnestness of purpose, but hardly survived the death of its founder, Cesi, in 1630. A descendant of these societies, "the Arcadians," established in Rome, 1690, and with an appropriate allegorical constitution, exists to this day. Goethe describes his initiation as a "shepherd," in 1788. Such a motley is characteristic of the Italian character, and could only flourish in a land of Carnivals.

During all this period, libraries of books were being extensively founded; but, besides printing, and, doubtless, as a consequence of its influence, another powerful agent arose to quicken the intellectual activity of the age. By the advent of Luther, the political and the religious world, and, indeed, the social one also, was rent in pieces, and a new class of societies, generated by the more solemn interests thus aroused, and striking deeper roots of thought, sprung up, flourished, and continued to