

**SCIENCE AND MEDIEVAL
THOUGHT: THE HARVEIAN
ORATION DELIVERED BEFORE THE
ROYAL COLLEGE OF
PHYSICIANS, OCTOBER 18, 1900**

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THOMAS CLIFFORD ALLBUTT

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THE HARVEIAN ORATION DELIVERED BEFORE
THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS,
OCTOBER 18, 1900, ✓

BY

THOMAS CLIFFORD ALLBUTT, M.A., M.D. CANTAB.

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NOFFITT

"Duo enim sunt modi cognoscendi, scilicet per argumentum et experimentum. Argumentum concludit, et facit nos concludere quæstionem, sed non certificat, neque removet dubitationem, ut quiescat animus in intuitu veritatis, nisi eam inveniat via experientis." ROGER BACON, *Op. Major*, Venet. 1750, p. 336.

TO

SIR WILLIAM SELBY CHURCH, BART., M.D.

PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS OF LONDON,

THIS ORATION,
DELIVERED AT HIS REQUEST,
IS DEDICATED.

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PREFACE.

IN the Middle Ages the old world had passed, and the vision of a new world came near to the eager and passionate hearts of many peoples. Lincoln and Wells, Amiens and Chartres, Florence and Assisi tell us of the glory of that vision; and bear witness of its flight: for with Gilbert, Galileo, Harvey and Newton the Middle Ages themselves became a phantom, and again the spirit of a new world appeared. Thus in the phases of time the world dies and is born again; fulfilling greater destinies. But the new are born in the cold bed of the elder worlds, and the young life is chilled, or a lustier offspring turns unnaturally to curse the dead; so in their decrepitude lay the Middle Ages upon modern life; and the Middle Ages were accursed, until certain pious men sought to reanimate their vestments and their formulas, and to set the hands back on the dial of the

centuries ; as many-minded man seeks wistfully to reanimate the simple wonders and beliefs of his childhood. Their ministry was no more than pious ; the method of modern history wins the fruits of the past while casting away the shadow of its withered branches. This comparative method, first applied to the art and romance of the Middle Ages, so that every dilettante may now discourse to us of their evolution, has been applied also to the thought of the period ; but its results, laid up in the closets of a few scholars, are as yet unfamiliar. It may then become one, who in no sense a scholar has strayed into these secret places, to try to distribute some lessons of the medieval thought which, to many of us, seems as sere and outworn as did the relics of Gothic shrines to our great-grandfathers. For, as in those medieval generations which lay nearest us the furnace had cooled, impatiently we had thrown metal and dross aside, and let our contempt for the dryness and pedantry of its latter days prevent our vision of the earlier time when the passion for knowledge bore up the world, and sought even to contain it. That dogma is not eternal is manifest to every wanderer in the streets of Toledo, yet the historian may well recall us to

the study of a time when, by mystical or intellectual inspirations, men strove eagerly to know the meaning of life, its origins, and its issues; and may lead us to the discovery of the seeds and wells of its fertility. The Greeks prophesied that before man can determine his place and service in this world he must form some theory of the world as a whole; the ages of faith prophesied that great deeds must be born of great faith and of great conceptions.

To those who live only in the past, or only in the present, there seems in the discriminations of the comparative historian to be a certain cold-bloodedness. Are not the ears of this critic, so aloof from the murmuring of creed and controversy, are they not deaf to the voices of the spirit which he would interpret to us? A distinguished bishop who was among my hearers, with the fervour and gentle humour so well known in him, rallied me not for celebrating science but for putting religion to rout. Yet in our own day surely the argument is changed, not in form only but in very nature; so changed by the conceptions of evolution, which have entered the mind of churchman and layman alike, that not a few