

**THE HUNTERIAN ORATION:
ROYAL COLLEGE OF
SURGEONS OF ENGLAND,
FEBRUARY 14TH, 1895**

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The Hunterian Oration: Royal College of Surgeons of England, February 14th, 1895 by J. W. Hulke

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J. W. HULKE

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HUNTERIAN ORATION.

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THE
HUNTERIAN ORATION:

ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS OF ENGLAND.

FEBRUARY 14TH, 1895.

for the
BY
J. W. HULKE, F.R.S.,

PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS OF ENGLAND.

LONDON:
TAYLOR & FRANCIS, RED LION COURT, FLEET STREET.

1895.



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AND LION COURT, FLEET STREET.

DEDICATION.

THIS ORATION, DELIVERED IN THE THEATRE OF
THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS OF ENGLAND ON
FEBRUARY 14TH, 1895, THE 167TH ANNIVERSARY OF
JOHN HUNTER'S BIRTH,
BY J. W. HULKE, PRESIDENT, IS BY HIM DEDICATED TO
HIS COLLEAGUES IN THE COUNCIL, AT WHOSE INSTANCE IT
IS PUBLISHED.

NOTE.

The above dedication was prepared by the Author of this Oration in anticipation of the Council's usual request; but his death from inflammation of the lungs on February 19th—five days after the celebration of the Hunterian Anniversary—deprived the Council of the opportunity of expressing its wishes. Under these sad and exceptional circumstances, the Council has undertaken the publication of its late President's Oration as a tribute to the memory of one for whom all its Members had a high regard, and has delegated the duty of seeing the work through the press to Mr. Thomas Bryant, a past President of the College, who, at a few hours' notice, kindly read the Address on February 14th.

THE
HUNTERIAN ORATION.

MR. VICE-PRESIDENT, VISITORS, FELLOWS AND MEMBERS
OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS OF ENGLAND,

We meet to-day to commemorate the 167th anniversary of the birth of John Hunter, that remarkable man whose name in this College is as a living presence, who did so much and with such great success, last century, to raise Surgery from the lower grade of an empirical handicraft, which it then too greatly resembled, to the dignity of a branch of science by basing the principles that should guide its practice on the combined foundation of Anatomy, Physiology, and Pathology.

His great achievements as a Surgeon, his life-history, and his personality have been so frequently dwelt on here that I may pass these by and at once take up the theme on which I would speak to-day:—its subject is, John Hunter, the *Biologist*, the sagacious

investigator and interpreter of "Organic Nature." Of John Hunter in this character I can, however, offer you only a very incomplete sketch, since even if the time at my disposal permitted, and had I the necessary ability for such a task (a gift I may not claim), the materials for a complete presentment of him as a Biologist do not now exist; for ten large bound volumes of manuscript, written mostly by his assistants at his dictation, and then revised, added to and corrected by himself, embodying the records of the labours of many years, purchased together with his museum by the nation, which made our College their custodian, were about 30 years after John Hunter's death designedly burned by Sir Everard Home, his brother-in-law and executor. When interrogated by the Board of Curators respecting this act, he alleged that he had destroyed these MSS. by John Hunter's expressed desire, as being by him considered too imperfect for the public eye.

That these ten volumes of MSS. were included under the words "collections and everything belonging thereto," which John Hunter in his last will directed should be offered to the Government "in one lot," is not open to doubt; yet Sir Everard Home, shortly before the transfer of the "Collections" from Leicester Square to Lincoln's Inn Fields, and therefore after their purchase, had them removed to his own house. The Board of Curators of the Museum of the College appear not to have known that the MSS. had existed until after their destruction.