

**THE HARVEIAN ORATION:  
DELIVERED AT THE ROYAL  
COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS,  
LONDON, ON OCTOBER 18, 1884**

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The Harveian Oration: Delivered at the Royal College of Physicians, London, on October 18, 1884 ... by J. Russell Reynolds

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**J. RUSSELL REYNOLDS**

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LONDON, ON  
OCTOBER 18, 1884 ...**



THE  
HARVEIAN ORATION

DELIVERED AT

The Royal College of Physicians, London,

ON OCTOBER 18, 1884.

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BY

J. RUSSELL REYNOLDS, M.D., F.R.S.

FELLOW OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS;  
FELLOW OF THE IMPERIAL LEOPOLD-CAROLINA INSTITUTE OF NATURALISTS OF GERMANY;  
MEMBER OF THE NEUROLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA;  
EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF MEDICINE IN UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON;  
PHYSICIAN IN ORDINARY TO HER MAJESTY'S HOUSEHOLD;  
CONSULTING PHYSICIAN TO UNIVERSITY COLLEGE HOSPITAL.



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TO

SIR WILLIAM JENNER, BART., K.C.B.,

M.D. LOND., D.C.L. OXON., LL.D. CAMB. AND EDIN., F.R.S. ;

PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS OF LONDON ;

PHYSICIAN IN ORDINARY TO HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN AND TO HIS ROYAL  
HIGHNESS THE PRINCE OF WALES,

**This Oration is Dedicated**

WITH PROFOUND RESPECT AND AFFECTIONATE REGARD

BY

HIS FORMER PUPIL, COLLEAGUE, AND ALWAYS ATTACHED  
FRIEND,

J. RUSSELL REYNOLDS.





SIR WILLIAM JENNER,  
HONOURED PRESIDENT OF THIS LEARNED COLLEGE,

BEFORE entering on the subject which now brings us here, I must ask you to accept my thanks for the distinction you have conferred on me, in selecting me for the office I have the honour to fill to-day, an honour, allow me to add, which carries with it a special gratification to myself, inasmuch as among the many distinctions conferred by this College on my grandfather, the late Dr. Henry Revell Reynolds, there was not one he prized more highly than that of having delivered, as he did, before the President and Fellows of this College, one hundred and eight years ago,\* the

#### HARVEIAN ORATION.

MR. PRESIDENT, FELLOWS OF THIS COLLEGE, AND GENTLEMEN,

SIR THOMAS BROWNE has said, in one of his sadder moods, "Our fathers find their graves in our short memories, and sadly tell us how we may be buried in our survivors. . . . The greater part must be content to be as though they had not been,—to be found in the register of God, not in the memory of man."

\* Roll of the Royal College of Physicians of London. Edited by Dr. Munk, vol. ii., p. 300.

This is, without doubt, true, as he said, of the "greater part," but it is not true of all; for our meeting here to-day is an assertion that there is, at least, one who has not yet found his grave in our vanishing powers of recollection; but whose life, unburied, still breathes in the lives of living, acting men.

It is not of the sorrows and "unavailing tears" that were shed, nearly two hundred and thirty years ago, over Harvey's grave, that it behoves me now to speak; but rather of the fact that nearly three centuries have passed since he became a part of this College; and yet, that only last year, on the eighteenth day of October, our College repaired to his grave in Hempstead, to do honour to his memory; and with gratitude and gladness to assert, as we do again to-day, that he still lives "in his survivors;" and that, although the knells of three hundred and six years have been tolled since Harvey's life began, he, at the present hour is neither dead nor sleeping.

I. Let me ask you, for a few moments, to think over that act of last year. It is not meet to call it a "ceremony" or "performance," for those words may have a doubtful meaning. It was a something done; and that with purpose. It was done with reverence and solemnity, and fitting formal circumstance. The like of it has not often been seen in this country. It was simple, but it told of much complex thought and feeling. It was grave, but it was not sad; it was official, but it was not heartless. It was unnecessary, but it was urgent; it was a duty to the remains of Harvey, but it was also an honour to ourselves. Its voice could not "provoke the silent dust," but its tone—not that of "flattery" to "soothe the dull, cold ear of death"—was such as could stir the now living "ear" and heart, and quicken the still acting brain.

A. One thing that this College did last year was to show regard for the *bodily* remains of Harvey. There was a something of him—that neither painting nor bust could be—which it still wished to cherish. It would try to hold together, yet longer, the last remnants of what was once the medium through which he saw Nature, and by which he read many of her secrets, and revealed them. This wish is natural; and old because it is so. If some Eastern nations, in their great reverence for the Soul, have taken means to display their contempt for the Body which it has left, such peoples have been the exception. The Pyramids, the Abbeys, the great burial-grounds in town and country, and the world's great surface, scattered over with its complex or simple tombs, all tell the same story of regard for the dust and ashes of those who are gone. Even if the body has been burned, the Urn has been found to hold together the ashes that the flames have not had power to kill. We may know, and admit "to what base uses we may return;" but still, we resent or recoil from the degradation. There is a widely spread human struggle against allowing the bodies of those we have known, and revered, and loved, to merge into the common earth. We set up our barriers against it; we entomb, and we embalm; we carry on a fight, as strong in feeling as it may be futile in effect, but still, a real fight, against physical disintegration. This may be all very foolish and unscientific; but yet, we will, if we can, keep together something of the individual, so long as time and outside forces are not too strong for us; and we utter a parable, as we do so, of our regard not only for the bodies, but for the lives of those individual men, as we tell of, or come to know them, in the thousand biographies, that surround us, each one of which is, in its very essence, "a feeble struggle with death."

The notion that some spark or germ of life might lie hidden in the ashes that were buried or inurned ("lateat