

**THE ANNUAL ORATION, DELIVERED
BEFORE THE MEDICAL SOCIETY OF
LONDON, MAY 1ST, 1882, ON THE
OLD FOUNDERS AND THE NEW
HONORARY FELLOWS**

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ORATION.

IN the life of a society as of an individual there are stepping stones, by which we may re-cross the stream, and mark the principal incidents of former days.

In regarding the past history of this now venerable Society, I would ask you for a moment to go back with me in thought to the time, twenty-six years ago, when I first attended a meeting of the Society, Dr. Chowne being in the chair, and the indefatigable Rogers Harrison in the secretary's place.

When my late father was President I was too young to feel the honour conferred upon him; and when he delivered the Oration, in 1838, I could not (being an infant) surmise that I should be called upon after the lapse of thirty-three years—when I did not accept the honour—and again eleven years later, to take upon me the same honorable and pleasant responsibility. I have had the privilege of knowing Sir Benjamin Brodie and Sir Charles Clarke, the founders of the old Westminster Society, besides thirty-five past Presidents (not, of course, including my good friend Mr. Mason, the present President); and the figure of *Dr. Clutterbuck*, whose portrait you see yonder, formed a marked feature

in the middle period of our Society. He was for the first time President in 1819, when many of the founders of this Society were active workers, and he continued to advocate what may be almost called indiscriminate bloodletting, until the time of Dr. (now Sir Risdon) Bennett's presidency, when the amalgamation with the Westminster Society was carried out.

Familiarity with the middle ages of our Society, then, must be my apology for bringing before you this evening some facts and incidents of an earlier past than I have just alluded to, rather than any new inquiries of special interest to myself.

No excuse, indeed, seems needed for this course, as you are already oppressed with the labours of the session, and may well in this last day of meeting look for something lighter than the fare supplied at ordinary gatherings.

The session which closes to-night has been characterised by extreme activity, and has been especially marked by the meeting of the International Medical Congress. The unprecedented success of that gathering was enhanced by the brilliant reception given to the Honorary Fellows in this room.

When Virchow and Charcot, Volkmann and Billings were sitting beneath this picture (see frontispiece), the idea occurred to me that I might devote the time allotted for this Oration to a description of these worthies of the present and those of the past.

Time would fail me to record the events of the twenty-five years during which I am proud to say I have been a Fellow of this Society, or to touch upon the subjects which have occupied our thoughts during the past session, varied and valuable as they have been.

If we try and realise the difficulties which our founders had to encounter when they stamped their individuality upon our Society, as well as upon society in its larger sense, we learn the motive power of enthusiasm. When we look at Lettsom and such as he, combining as they did common sense and capacity for work with this enthusiasm, we shall ask ourselves whether if living in those dark ages we should have been generators of light as they were; and thus be stimulated to be light-bearers too.

Then passing across the gulf of a century, let us gaze with no less respect (veneration being perhaps out of date) at the great ones of the present. In our profession we may proudly say that we do not wait for the death of a great man before we lay our honours at his feet. We have living celebrities, English as well as foreign. Let us gather from the stores of accumulated learning, and the results of original research, such helps as may strengthen, enlighten, and inspire.

Let us each strive to anticipate—and shall I say appropriate?—the discoveries and developments which the twentieth century is sure to bring, so that English names and English faces shall be those which the next International Medical Congress will most delight to honour.

To place ourselves in the mental condition of those who have not had the light of modern science is not easy. With individuals as with communities it is hard to retrace steps in knowledge.

A century ago, when the founders of our Society sat round that gorgeous table-cloth, London was very different from London as we know it now; the Society met, where most of the Fellows lived, in the

City, at first in Crane Court, and afterwards in Bolt Court, Fleet Street. It was not until 1850 that it removed to George Street, Hanover Square, taking a lease of twenty-one years, at the expiration of which time we determined, after long and laborious searching, to remove to our present resting place, the best it has hitherto occupied; and arrangements are now in progress by which it is hoped that the present rooms will be made more commodious, and that we may soon find ourselves occupying quarters more complete than those of any other medical society in the metropolis.

Years have passed since the orators have spoken of our founders. Meanwhile a new race of Fellows has joined us, to some of whom the details I am about to give may be new, and the older Fellows will forgive me if I enlarge upon the virtues of those they already appreciate, and be the first to admit that every Fellow should realise the debt he owes to those who made our Society what it is.

The picture behind our President's chair greatly helps us here, for Medley the artist was the associate and intimate companion of Lettson, Sims, Jenner, Babington, Blair and Hooper. It is fortunate that such was the case; so valuable a representation of the characteristic appearance of our founders would not otherwise have been handed down to us. Two of his paintings have also been kindly lent us for the evening by Sir Henry Thompson. One of these is a portrait of Medley's two daughters; the darker one of the two, Sir Henry Thompson's mother, being seen alone in the picture behind me.

We are constrained to admit that the first of these equals any work from Copley's hand, and might well

be attributed to his friend and Master Sir Joshua Reynolds.

As regards the artist himself, it may have been unfortunate for his reputation as an artist that he was so intimately acquainted with many members of our profession, for they all saw his worn appearance, and the earnest devotion with which he applied himself unrestingly to his art, and advised him to renounce it. He did not do so, however, until he had won many laurels, and had given promise of commanding skill.

Dr. John Fothergill, whose portrait has for many years made the Fellows of our Society familiar with his countenance, may well be regarded as one of the chief founders of the Society.

Succeeding generations are reminded of this by the medal struck to commemorate him, and bearing his name, just as they are of Lettsom by the lectures which bear his name.

A memoir of Fothergill was read before our Society (in 1782) exactly a century ago, and gives a graphic picture of his life and character, from which I have chiefly taken this short account of him.

Son of a Yorkshire physician, a member of the Society of Friends, John Fothergill was born at Wensleydale on March 8th, 1712. He worked hard in classics and mathematics till his sixteenth year, when he was apprenticed to an eminent apothecary at Bradford. His sagacity and intelligence induced his master, at an early period of apprenticeship, to entrust patients to his care, and when he removed to Edinburgh, to study systematic medicine, he had already gained a large share of practical knowledge of his profession.

Dr. Monro, his anatomical teacher, recognising Fothergill's unusual powers of mind, persuaded him to remain in Edinburgh, though his natural diffidence and slight appreciation of his own powers had led him to seek the life of a village apothecary.

At this time Fothergill formed the habit of taking notes of the heads of each lecture, and translating them into Latin, at the same time carefully comparing the opinions of the ancient and moderns on the subjects of the lectures. To these notes he added such remarks as his reading and reflection furnished. Thus he gained a knowledge of ancient and modern literature, he enlarged his ideas, early acquiring the habit of examining various authorities, and discriminating between the speculative and the practical.

The value of such a method, bringing with it as it does, powers of reflection and energy of judgment, cannot be over-estimated, and may still be recommended. But the variety of subjects now demanding at the same time the attention of the student, renders such a mode of noting and digesting lectures increasingly difficult.

Fothergill followed a similar method in practice. The poor who applied to him for relief were loud in proclaiming the success of his prescriptions, and he attributed his early introduction to "lucrative business," as he called it, to this source; he was, however, averse from speaking of the pecuniary results of his profession. "My only wish," he declares, "was to do what might fall to my share, as well as possible, and to banish all thoughts of practising physic as a money-getting trade, as I would the suggestion of vice and intemperance."

When thirty-six years of age (in 1748) he published an account of "Sore Throat attended with Ulcers,"

a disease which had swept over London, and excited much alarm. This essay was not a crude production prepared in haste, but the mature offspring of luxuriant genius, and produced a revolution in the treatment of the disease, which has obtained the sanction of enlightened physicians, even to the present time. The reputation of the author being thus secured, he set himself to the abolition of the cumbrous and heterogeneous prescriptions then in vogue; and principally contributed to the change which has made them simple and "elegant" as the chemists would call them.

Professor Huxley has lately called attention to the importance of studying vegetable as well as animal physiology, and Dr. Fothergill showed in his life the value of this extended biology.

He was the means of introducing into England, and also into the West Indies, plants previously unknown. From America he brought the catalpa, kalmia, magnolia, and several species of firs, oaks and maples, and transferred from his garden at Upton the tea plant to the South American Continent, and the bamboo cane from China to the West Indian Islands. He also suggested the cultivation of the sugar cane in Africa.

Dr. Fothergill was the first accurately to realise the properties of hemlock. He introduced astringent red gum from the Gambia. He improved the cultivation of scammony, and procured a cinchona plant from Peru.

It is as hard in our profession to command leisure as it is to secure fame. Happily Dr. Fothergill found, as we do, that in summer there are fewer residents in London and less sickness, and he managed to escape from the toils of practice to Upton or to Cheshire.