

**INTRODUCTORY LECTURE  
DELIVERED IN THE THEATRE OF  
THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF  
SURGEONS ON THE 8TH OF MAY  
1820**

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Introductory Lecture Delivered in the Theatre of the Royal College of Surgeons on the 8th of May 1820 by B. C. Brodie

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**B. C. BRODIE**

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# INTRODUCTORY LECTURE

DELIVERED IN

## THE THEATRE

OF THE

ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS,

ON THE 8TH OF MAY 1820;

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BY

B. C. BRODIE, F. R. S.

PROFESSOR OF ANATOMY AND SURGERY TO THE COLLEGE,  
&c. &c.

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1820.



TO  
SIR WILLIAM BLIZARD, F. R. S.  
CHAIRMAN,

AND TO  
*THE OTHER MEMBERS*

OF THE  
**Board of Curators**

OF THE  
**MUSEUM**

OF THE  
**ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS,**

**THIS LECTURE**  
IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

BY

THEIR OBEDIENT SERVANT,

**B. C. BRODIE.**

*October 14, 1820.*

about to treat; and I am also conscious of the imperfect nature of my own qualifications. At the same time I feel well assured of the indulgence which I shall meet with from the liberality of those who compose my audience, when they consider that the subject of Comparative Anatomy and Physiology is one which might well occupy the undivided attention of an active mind during a long series of years; and that the knowledge of it, which it can fall to my lot to possess, is no more than can be acquired by an individual who joins the pursuit of science with that of an arduous profession.

It is undoubtedly to be regretted, and it may be a matter of just surprise, that examples are so rare of persons who have devoted themselves to these curious and important researches; and that they should have been almost wholly abandoned to those whose thoughts are occupied, and whose leisure is invaded, by other avoca-



tions. It must be owned, however, that there is no class of mankind to whom this department of knowledge can present such powerful attractions as to the members of our own profession. To understand the natural organization and the natural functions of living bodies seems to be a necessary preliminary step to the knowledge of those changes which disease induces; and to what source can we so confidently look for any essential improvements, which may be made hereafter in medicine and surgery, as to the more enlightened notions, and more comprehensive views, which may be derived from a further cultivation of anatomy and physiology? Besides, the dignity of our profession, and its rank in society, depend in a great degree on its scientific character; and those who are anxious to uphold it in the estimation of others would do well to bear in mind, that, whenever its connexion with science is dissolved, it

must sink to the level of meaner occupations.

Anatomy and physiology ought to be regarded as inseparable from each other. The study of the former would be uninteresting and useless if pursued alone; and that of the latter would lead only to vague and absurd opinions, were it not founded on the basis of anatomical structure. But the one is much more readily brought to a certain degree of perfection than the other. An extensive acquaintance with the organization of living bodies can scarcely fail to be attained by diligent dissections; but when we extend our inquiries further into the functions of the parts which anatomy displays, we find ourselves engaged in a complicated and difficult investigation, in which much laborious research may be rewarded by no more than a scanty addition to our previous knowledge.

I need not inform you how little progress the ancient philosophers had made

in these sciences. After the revival of letters, anatomy was cultivated with much success ; physiology was enriched with the discovery of the circulation of the blood : but, with this exception, it cannot be said that any very striking improvement was made in the latter science previously to the middle of the last century, when Baron Haller and Mr. Hunter set the example of a more philosophical mode of inquiry, by referring the phænomena of life to peculiar laws, instead of explaining them, as had been done before, by the mechanical and chemical laws, which operate on dead matter.

It is true that matter, when endowed with life, does not lose those properties which belong to it in its inorganic form. The living flesh is incapable of resisting the action of intense heat, or the operation of caustics. The light is refracted by the humours of the eye, as by a lens of glass or crystal. The body gravitates to the earth.