

**THE HARVEIAN ORATION,  
DELIVERED AT THE ROYAL  
COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS,  
JUNE 26TH, 1879**

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The Harveian oration, delivered at the Royal college of physicians, June 26th, 1879 by Samuel Wilks

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**SAMUEL WILKS**

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SAMUEL WILKS, M.D., F.R.S.



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## THE HARVEIAN ORATION.

1879.

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MR. PRESIDENT AND FELLOWS,

We meet here to-day to commemorate the name of Harvey. It is fortunate that the College has prescribed no rules and framed no restrictions as to the mode in which we celebrate this anniversary, but that its Fellows are left to refreshen his memory from springs of every source, hoping thereby, to derive some new inspiration from the contemplation, during a few minutes of the year, of one whom they may almost call their founder. Each Fellow may, therefore, in turn, endeavour to expound his theme in the manner which is most befitting his own powers and inclinations. Thus, at one time, we have portrayed before us the personal history and living picture of Harvey, at another, an exposition of his great discovery, and at another time, as at our last anniversary, we have a discourse by one of the

most distinguished physiologists of our College, showing the relation of his discovery to the knowledge of the period and to that which succeeded it. I dare not attempt to improve on these well-exhausted themes, but falling back on the object which Harvey had in view, in wishing to perpetuate the remembrance of this day, I find that I have a text sufficient for me. I need not remind you what his object was, since Harvey's injunction to the College is ever before us, "to study and search out the secrets of nature by way of experiment." Let this then be my theme—That we members of this College, practising physicians like himself, should occupy ourselves with the investigation of nature. Harvey could not have had in contemplation all departments of natural history, but only those which pertained to man or, as we may say, animal life. His wish was, that his followers should continue in the path which he had indicated, and that they should remember that one of their duties was the acquisition of further physiological knowledge. I ask, have his precepts been followed and his hopes been fulfilled? The answer is before us. We need but look through the long roll of our College, lately

published by our learned librarian, to find it. In that goodly list will be seen the record of the work performed by our members, some of which may bear comparison with that of the master himself. Much of course may be regarded as a mere drop in the great ocean of knowledge; some, however, of the work contains great and elementary truths which eclipse all beside them—fundamental truths which immediately swallow up or form a culmination to the teaching of centuries, and cause mankind to take one long stride in the path of knowledge. Although it may be true that this great edifice of science which is slowly growing up before us, is one on which comparatively few Englishmen have laboured, yet they have been skilled workmen and have laid some of the weightiest of its foundation stones. Amongst these is Harvey, whose pedestal may be placed by the side of that of Newton, a man whom we justly regard as the father of English scientific philosophy. I need not specify the well-known names on our list, but cannot refrain from speaking of Marshall Hall and his great discovery, which may, in the future, be ranked in importance equal to that of Harvey's. His, like Harvey's, was not the discovery merely of an