

THE HARVEIAN ORATIONS, 1656-1947

A STUDY IN TRADITION

BY

W. J. BISHOP, F.L.A.

AND

F. N. L. POYNTER, B.A., F.L.A.

(From the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum)

The first Harveian Oration was given by Dr. Edward Emily in June or July, 1656, and the 233rd will be delivered by Dr. C. E. Lakin on St. Luke's Day, Oct. 18, 1947.

The Harveian is one of the oldest and probably the most widely known of all the many eponymous orations and lectures connected with the medical institutions of Great Britain. William Harvey gave to the College of Physicians during his lifetime his patrimonial estate of Burmarsh, in Essex, then valued at £56 a year. In the deed of trust dated June 26, 1656, he directed that "once every year there shall be given . . . an oration in Latin publicly in the said College, wherein shall be a commemoration of all the Benefactors of the said College by name . . . with an exhortation to the Fellows and Members to search and study out the secrets of Nature by way of experiment." An honorarium of £5 was to be paid to the Orator, and only in 1939 was this raised to ten guineas. For many years it was apparently the custom to nominate as Orator the most senior of the Fellows who had not held the office, but latterly the appointment has been made on other grounds than that of mere seniority. The actual appointment, which was originally vested in the President, the two senior Censors, and the two senior Elects (an order which died out in 1860), is now made by the President alone.

There are gaps in the yearly sequence of Orations, for in the first fifty years of its existence only twenty were delivered and only seven published. The last fifty years, on the other hand, presents an unbroken continuity, in spite of the two most disastrous wars in the world's history; but the second of these did force the College to make one great departure from tradition when Sir Edmund Spriggs delivered his Oration at the Royal Infirmary, Manchester, on St. Luke's Day, 1944.

A Few Interesting Facts

In earlier times Fellows were not infrequently called upon to deliver the Oration more than once. Two Harveian Orations were given by each of the following: Samuel Collins (1665, 1682), Charles Goodall (1694, 1709), Anthony Askew (1758, 1762), William Cadogan (1764, 1792), Sir Henry Halford (1800, 1835), and Sir James Alderson (1854, 1867). Walter Charleton was Orator three times, in 1680, 1701, and 1705, but the record is held by Walter Harris, with four Orations, delivered in 1699, 1707, 1713, and 1726. Charleton thought it a fact sufficiently remarkable to mention on the title-page of his second and third Orations that his age was 81 and 85 respectively at the time of their delivery. As contrast to this is the extreme youth of others, such as Charlton Wollaston, who was Harveian Orator (1763) at the age of 30 and died a year later.

Some very interesting sidelights on medicine as a hereditary profession emerge from a study of the list of Orators. William Heberden the elder was Orator in 1750 and his son William in 1809; John Latham in 1794 and his son Peter Mere in 1839; Richard Warren in 1768 and his son Pelham in 1826; George Rolleston in 1873 and his son Sir Humphry in 1928. Sir J. Russell Reynolds (H.O. 1884) was the grandson of H. R. Reynolds (H.O. 1776), but the most extraordinary instance is provided by the Monros, four generations of whom gave the Oration: James (1737), John (1757), Donald (1775), and Edward Thomas (1834); moreover, all four were noted alienists and all held the office of Physician to Bethlem Hospital.

Of the 232 Orations known to have been given since 1656, 163 have been printed, either separately or in a medical journal. The more recent are common enough, but some of the older Orations are very rare. They were divided by Osler into three groups: (1) Those which simply fulfil Harvey's injunction; (2) real contributions to the literature of the physiology of the circulation; and (3) those in which the Orator, after a few preliminary words of praise, discourses upon the work in which he is most interested. Not all of them fall naturally into one of these groups. At various times, especially in the period 1750-1850, the Harveian Oration fulfilled many of the functions of the Presidential Addresses, which were not given regularly until about 1870. In addition to the praise of benefactors many Orators comment on current trends in medical politics and education and include obituary notices or tributes to Fellows recently deceased. Several Orators have made valuable contributions to the biography of Harvey or to the history of the discovery of the circulation. Among the best Orations in this respect are those of Sir H. Acland (1865), Sir G. Paget (1866), G. Owen Rees (1869), T. K. Chambers (1871), G. Rolleston (1873), Sir E. Sieveking (1877), J. W. Ogle (1880), Sir H. Johnson (1882), Sir J. R. Reynolds (1884), J. F. Payne (1896), Sir R. Crawford (1919), H. R. Spencer (1921), Arnold Chaplin

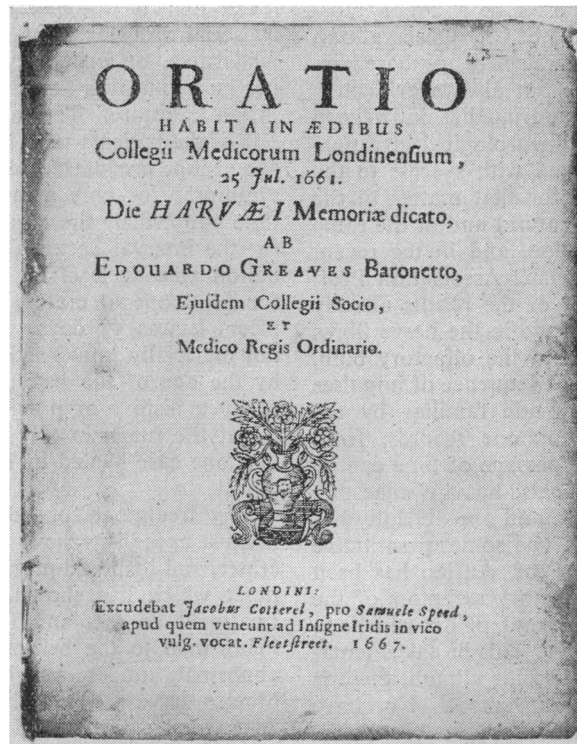
(1922), Sir W. Hale-White (1927), Sir H. Rolleston (1928), and Sir W. Herringham (1929).

The Oration has been delivered by some "so obscure as to make their appointment to that post their only claim to fame, and by men of such reputation as to make it their smallest title to distinction." The names of Akenside, Arbuthnot, Garth, Mead, Heberden, and Baillie are known to all; but who has heard of John Hawys, Charles Bale, Robert Hopwood, and Charles Feake?

Some Early Orators

The first Oration, that of Edward Emily (1617-57), was delivered some time between June 21 and July 28, 1656. The text has not survived, but Emily is said to have expressed himself a little too freely on the subject of the Army and the Commonwealth, a dangerous topic in 1656, and a vote of disapproval was passed and duly recorded in the Annals. His indiscretion led to the ruling that all future Orators submit their papers to the President for his approval, but this has long been ignored.

The second was given by Edmund Wilson (c. 1615-57) in June, 1657, a few days after the death of Harvey. It was not published, but it is known that Wilson took the opportunity to deny the spreading rumour that Harvey, to lessen his sufferings, had hastened his death by taking opiates. It is a curious



Title-page of the first printed Harveian Oration

coincidence that the first two Harveian Orators died within a few months of fulfilling their office.

Daniel Whistler (1619-84), the third Orator (1659), is remembered for the first clinical description of rickets. He held in succession the offices of Registrar, Treasurer, and President of the College, not entirely to the advantage of the College funds, and his conduct was censured in the Orations of Walter Harris (1707) and John Hawys (1721); but his friend Evelyn thought him "good company and a very ingenious man." Thomas Coxe (1615-85), Orator in 1660, is warmly referred to by Thomas Sydenham as "the patron and promoter of my first endeavours."

The fifth Oration, that of Sir Edward Greaves (1608-80), delivered on July 25, 1661, was the first to be printed. It appeared as a slim quarto of 32 pages in 1667. According to Sir Norman Moore, it "contains a few facts and many conceits, but some of these are happy. He says that before Harvey the source of the circulation was as unknown as that of the Nile, and compares England to a heart, whence the knowledge of the circulation was driven forth to other lands." The original manuscript is in the British Museum (Sloane 302).

The sixth Orator, Nathan Paget (1615-78), was the familiar friend of Milton, and among the guests at his Oration was John Evelyn, who records the fact in his Diary. Let it be recorded to the honour of Samuel Collins (1617-85), Orator in the Plague Year of 1665, that he was one of the physicians who remained in London throughout the epidemic. Happily, he survived to deliver the Oration a second time, in 1682.

Notable Orations

There are many remarkable features about Richard Mead's Oration of 1723. Not only was it the first to appear in an English translation (1763) but a French version appeared as late as 1774. The Oration proper, a brief argument in defence of the status of the physician in Greece and Rome, has been confused by eminent medical historians with the *Dissertatio de nummis* with which it was first published. This illustrated essay on ancient medical coins was not even Mead's own work, but that of Edmund Chishull, divine and antiquary (1671-1733). Mead's remarks on the high prestige of the ancient physicians led to a "pamphlet war" with Conyers Middleton, the Cambridge antiquary. In 1761 the elder Heberden found among the Harleian MSS. a final unpublished "Defensio" of Middleton's in which Mead was referred to in the most generous terms. He had a "few copies printed to be given away," and so publicly vindicated the honour of the medical profession and of one of its staunchest champions. The Oration (1751) of the eccentric Sir William Browne (1692-1774) is one of the finest from the typographical point of view. It has a handsome engraved title-page and the first page of the text bears a head-piece representing the Sheldonian Theatre at Oxford, the Senate House at Cambridge, and a view of the old College of Physicians in Warwick Lane. The Oration of Robert Taylor (1755), one of the most polished and elaborate of any, was the medium for disseminating the favourable opinion of the College with respect to inoculation for smallpox.

Contemporary Comment

With the rise of the medical journals in the early part of the nineteenth century we are provided with a wealth of contemporary comment on the Orators and their Orations. These are always interesting and sometimes startling. Thus, the *Lancet* of June 29, 1833, records that "the Harveian Oration was delivered at the College of Physicians, Pall Mall East, by Dr. Paris, on Tuesday afternoon last. It consisted of the usual twaddle uttered on such occasions. The meeting ended in a jollification, and the proceedings have been duly recorded in the theatrical portion of the columns of the daily journals."

Perusal of John Elliotson's Oration of 1846, which is a veritable apologia for mesmerism and for his own conduct with regard to it, recalls one of the bitterest episodes in British medical history. The Oration was delivered in Latin, but in order to give his views wider publicity Elliotson had it published in both Latin and English versions simultaneously. Apart from topical references to the cholera epidemic of 1849 (Wilson, 1850), the Crystal Palace (Spurgin, 1851), medical politics

(Alderson, 1854), and the Indian Mutiny (Wood, 1858), there is little of note in the few remaining Latin Orations. The last of these to be printed was that of A. J. Sutherland in 1863, and in the following year Robert Lee delivered the last Oration in Latin. This was not printed, but the original manuscript is preserved in the College Library.

Sir Henry Acland in 1865 made the final break with tradition by delivering and printing his Oration in English, and since that date no Orator has ventured to use the Latin tongue. The effect of this has been to instil reality into what had become a rather stultified performance, and the fine series of English Orations since that date contain many valuable observations on the advances made in physiology and clinical medicine, for of recent years Orators have taken the rational course of departing boldly from the somewhat narrow bounds laid down by Harvey in 1656, a course of which the great experimenter would surely have approved.

We are indebted to Dr. E. Ashworth Underwood, Director of the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum, for permission to reproduce the title-page of the very rare Harveian Oration of Sir Edward Greaves from the copy in his care.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF ACCIDENTS AND ACCIDENT PREVENTION*

BY

KENNETH SODDY, M.D., D.P.M.

Medical Director, National Association for Mental Health

Up to now there have been few organized attempts to understand either the emotions and instinctive impulses underlying road accidents or the social forces involved. Perhaps we have not sufficiently regarded accidents as an integral part of our community life. There is a temptation to regard them almost as interlopers, and it may be for this reason that they have not been studied systematically in their natural setting in the community.

Laboratory experience has demonstrated some relationship between accidents and fatigue, lack of experience, and poor general health. Road accidents, in particular, tend to occur more commonly among drivers who are not in good health or who are unskilful, among older people and the inexperienced young drivers, and among those with delinquent records. It is noticeable that nearly all these classes include complex combinations of human attributes or influences. Then there is so-called "accident proneness" to be considered. Scientific studies of drivers showed in one case that 10% of a group of drivers was responsible for 60% of all its accidents; and in another that 20% of the drivers had an accident rate 3½ times as high as the remainder. Certain laboratory tests of quickness of reaction and of muscular co-ordination have shown that poor performance in the tests was four times as common among the accident-prone group as among the remainder. Less decisive correlations were obtained with tests of intelligence and of temperament.

Accident proneness is related to lack of quickness, slow reaction time, poor muscular co-ordination, poor intelligence, instability of temperament, and distractibility. Once again, every one of these factors is complex and by no means constant in each individual all the time. For example, what is meant by instability of temperament and distractibility? During the recent war, when the Army had to select many thousands of men to become drivers, it was found that a combination of laboratory tests with careful assessment of past history and of present temperament achieved an encouraging success in reducing both the period of training and the occurrence of accidents during training. On the whole, men and women of under 40, with good civil records, a healthy attitude towards military service, with average intelligence, enjoying good health, and who did well in the tests, were the most successful. However, this type of person is wanted for every other responsible job, and

*Abridged from a paper read to a joint session of the Safety Education and the Home Safety Sections of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents' Silver Jubilee Congress at Brighton on Oct. 8.