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Abstract
Those of us who saw Dylan Thomas's version of the Burke and Hare story at the festival “The doctor and the devils" would not only have been delighted at the play itself, which was outstanding, but might also have noticed something of interest to the Society. For there, to the left of the stage, was an eight foot tall reproduction of that print which the Society has used in its Christmas cards, showing side by side, Knox’s school of anatomy, and the Royal Medical Society’s first hall. This stimulated in us a curiosity as to the part our members may have played in the finding of anatomical material. It is to be hoped that they were not involved in murder; but certainly they knew of the “ resurrectionists": for in 1828 John Reid, a member of our Society wrote in a letter “I am busy dissecting, now the subjects are pretty plentyiful. People may watch us as they may, but we will have them in spite of then. There are rascals here who will do anything for money, and these are fit hands for such jobs."

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AN EXERPT FROM THE PRESIDENT'S VALEDICTORY ADDRESS, 1962

Those of us who saw Dylan Thomas's version of the Burke and Hare story at the festival, "The doctor and the devils" would not only have been delighted at the play itself, which was outstanding, but might also have noticed something of interest to the Society. For there, to the left of the stage, was an eight foot tall reproduction of that print which the Society has used in its Christmas cards, showing side by side, Knox's school of anatomy, and the Royal Medical Society's first hall. This stimulated in us a curiosity as to the part our members may have played in the finding of anatomical material. It is to be hoped that they were not involved in murder; but certainly they knew of the "resurrectionists"; for in 1828 John Reid, a member of our Society wrote in a letter "I am busy dissecting, now the subjects are pretty plentyiful. People may watch us as they may, but we will have them in spite of them. There are rascals here who will do anything for money, and these are fit hands for such jobs."

At times, indeed, the students themselves lent a hand; an earlier account from the diary of John Knyveton, which was written in 1751 while he was a student in Dr. Urquhart's School of Anatomy, is so dramatic as to be worthy of quotation in full.

"Nov. 7th.—Vastly tired this morning as a result of an Escapade from which I count myself lucky to escape without Grievous harm to life and limb. Mr Bloomfield did yester-eve put to me that we should disinter the body of the hanged woman for the advancement of our anatomy and the glory of medicine; and so after some talk I agreed and we approached our worthy teacher, who warning us of the dangers—for hanging is not the least penalty, one is likely to be torn to pieces by the mob should they learn of it—did then commend our diligence and whilst saying that he would have no hand in it and would know nothing of it should it come to light, did call his huge manservant to him and give instruction that he was to help us . . . and so to Dr. Urquhart's to enter it by the small gate to find that the Doctor had gone out but his man and Mr. Bloomfield and Messrs. Pope and Sinclair gathered in the Anatomy room very comfortable before a fire, smoking and discussing a glass of wine. So with them to pass the evening in pleasant discourse. I growing drunk on the wine, very potent, and when the clocks had struck the half after twelve to collect spades and grapples and to muffle ourselves in thick cloaks

. . . And so into the lane and to the graveyard where Mr. Pope did Belch so loud causing Dr. Urquhart's man to swear vilely vowing that he would rather have a school of apes to help him than such turnip heads. The grave not easy to find, there being very many in a small place, and the moon did come out from behind the clouds which I did not care for as we were more likely to be seen but with its aid to find where the mould had been newly turned. George Bloomfield very vehement to dig up the coffin only to find this being opened did prove to contain an old woman very foul. The Mr. Sinclair on sitting down did find the ground give way under him, and so we found the hanged wench and dragged her out and put in the sack which Mr. Pope and I did carry between us and with great haste to the lane and so to the Doctor's again, all mired and sweaty. George Bloomfield did brew us a bowl of punch and we in need of such a specific.

Lord, what a business this be, this quickening of the Aweful dead, at night when the powers of evil be abroad, amongst the tombs and the earth and the dreadful worms! Fit work only for men of Brutish Minds! Did resolve then to have no more of it, but on reflection did realise that nothing is gained without labour and so as Medicine be the most noble of the arts so the gateway to it is correspondingly difficult and arduous to pass. Slept on a couch at the Doctors, and to home this morning at Mr. Hunt's and with him and Mrs Hunt to church, where I heard a tolerable sermon aptly enough on the resurrection, and wonder what his Reverence would say of my night's activities. Shall to bed early this night."

ON THE BANDWAGGON?

Each year a great deal is written, and far more is spoken, about the failings of our system of medical education. While this is a most healthy sign, let us realise that in exaggerating faults there is a most unfortunate tendency to forget the virtues. Let us not bury our talents beneath the soil of conflicting criticism.

We all recognise the cynic who says that our lecturers must make us think medicine, not swallow it. Surely, on these occasions, it is the speaker who is most able to remedy the situation, in one particular case at least. Moreover, there is much to be gained by highlighting the features of our curriculum which have been found most valuable. We all readily admit that a system cannot be uniformly good, but it is just as unlikely that it is uniformly bad.

Throughout the medical course, a variety of teaching methods are experienced, and a number have been well received. What springs to mind immediately, is the series of clinico-pathological conferences organised by the pathology department at the end of the systematic course of lectures. While a number of the class felt that, as examinations were drawing near, their time could be more wisely spent, those who attended found them extremely valu-

able. Those who were chosen to prepare and present the clinical and pathological data, found this a good way of assessing their knowledge of the particular subject. This type of teaching is useful because it demonstrates the value of relating all aspects of disease, medical, biochemical and pathological.

There are few who deny the value of learning medicine, 'at the bedside'. Naturally there are those who are unfortunate on their choice of hospital or ward for this purpose, but generally the medical staff welcome the opportunity to discuss the cases on their wards. Those who are able to see in full the emergency treatment of status asthmaticus, for example, will then be far more certain of the best procedures to employ when they themselves must diagnose and treat such a condition. It is important, also, to see patients immediately after admission, before a sure diagnosis has been established. In reasoning out the most likely diagnosis and in justifying it to others, one soon learns to pinpoint the most relevant findings of the history and physical examination.

During clinical clerkships there is still more that can be learnt. There is much more time to take histories from each patient than there is later on, as a harassed houseman. Talking to each patient is a good way of broadening ones own experience of people, quite apart from the practice obtained in enquiring after the relevant symptoms. The future doctor ought to have experience in dealing with all types of patient, as well as with all types of disease. It was wisely said that he who knows only medicine, does not even know medicine.

The centre of a great deal of adverse criticism, is the 'formal' lecture. Before we make any further attack on this form of teaching, well established at Edinburgh, we should realise that there are two very distinct types of lectures; the one makes us think around the subject, whatever it may be, and the other supplies the basic principles in an easily classified form. To each there is a very useful purpose. The first is probably of most value later on in the course, after a suitable introduction. It is about the second that most criticism is heard. At this stage of our academic careers, it is argued, we should not require to be spoonfed with facts which are to be found in any textbook. This is a perfectly valid opinion, but a great number will still wish to be told the essentials, so that in their reading, they are not confused by so much unnecessary detail. A system based on one or other type of lecture will never please everyone. What must be realised is that both types of lecture are of value and consequently they can be complementary. The introduction to a subject, in terms of the 'basic facts' type of lecture, could be followed by more general lectures on the 'growing points'.

We realise that in most organised systems there is much to be commended and much to be criticised. Let us mention the advantages of the present system along with the disadvantages, so that those who are in a position to make the necessary changes can do so with a clear idea of the merits. It is on these merits that new schemes can be based. It is too easy for us to jump on the band-waggon of destructive criticism instead of putting forward serious suggestions for improvement.

" Oh, wad some powr the giftie gie us,
To see ourselves as ithers see us,
It wad frae mony a blunder free us . . . "

(Burns)