

Dr. Harveij
with the writer and Lady

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES
LEADING TO AND ATTENDING THE
REINTOMBMENT OF THE REMAINS
OF
DR. WILLIAM HARVEY
The Discoverer of the Circulation of the Blood
IN THE
CHURCH OF HEMPSTEAD IN ESSEX
On the 18th of October, 1883
LONDON
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1883

Reintombment of William Harvey.

On St. Luke's Day, October 18th, 1883, a ceremony of more than ordinary interest took place in the ruinous church of Hempstead, in the county of Essex. On that day the remains of Dr. William Harvey, the discoverer of the circulation of the blood, were removed from the vault under Hempstead Church, in which they have rested, with others of Harvey's kin, for two centuries and a quarter, and were deposited in a marble sarcophagus, which had been provided by the Royal College of Physicians, and placed within the church itself, and in the centre of the Harvey Chapel there.

Harvey died on the 3rd of June, 1657. On that day the heart of the author of the celebrated treatise *De Motu Cordis* ceased to beat, the blood of the immortal discoverer of the circulation to move.—"Guilelmi Harvaei fortissimissimi Anatomici *desit Sanguis Moxeri* tertio Idus Junii '57," wrote his contemporary and friend Dr. Baldwin Hamer.*

An interval of more than three weeks elapsed between the death of Harvey and his burial. On the 25th of June, 1657, such of the Fellows of the College of Physicians as wished to follow the body of its greatest ornament and benefactor, the next day on its way to the place of its interment at Hempstead, in Essex, were instructed by the College to do so, habited in the gowns of their respective offices or of their university degree.† And on the morning of the following day, June 26, the body of Harvey was attended by the President, Dr. Alston, and a large number of the Fellows of the College far beyond the city walls. Aubrey, who accompanied the body to its destination, and was one of those who bore Harvey's coffin into the vault, tells us "he was buried in a vault at Hempstead in Essex, which his brother Eliab had built; he was laid in lead and on his breast in great letters his name, Dr. William Harvey."

There, for a period of more than two hundred years the body of Harvey

* "Busterum Aliquot Reliquis," a MS. in the library of the College of Physicians.
† "Comitia solemnia trimestris 25^o Junii 1657. Monasteri socii, ut topati prosequi veint excoquis Janua D^{na} Harvaei postero die celebranda."

remained, if not forgotten, presumably unnoticed and uncaared for, alike it would seem by the College of Physicians and by his own family. About the end of that period remains began to reach the College of the defective and battered, and it must be admitted, discreditable state into which the leaden coffin and the remains of its benefactor had been allowed to fall. At the extraordinary comitia of May 13, 1859, the College deputed two of its fellows, Dr. Quain and Dr. Alexander P. Stewart, to visit Hempstead Church, make all necessary inquiries into the subject, and report thereon to the College.

Dr. Quain and Dr. Stewart visited Hempstead on the 9th of June, 1859, and from their report, which was read to the College on the 14th of July following, we gather that the vault which contained the remains of Harvey is a large apartment, the ceiling of which rises a few feet above the floor of the church. In this chamber they found forty-six coffins placed on the floor more or less irregularly. Light and air were freely and abundantly admitted to the vault by three open grated windows. The leaden coffin which contains Harvey's remains was in the more distant part of the vault, in the centre of a row of twelve other coffins, all similar in form and structure. The coffin of Harvey, easily recognized by his name, which appears in raised letters in the usual situation, was placed immediately beneath one of the open windows. The coffins in this row are all peculiar in shape. They resemble Egyptian mummy cases, even to the extent of presenting a mask of the features. Several of these cases or coffins have collapsed in part, leaving a concave or well-like cavity on the upper surface. This is the case in a marked degree with the coffin of Harvey. The result has been that the ribs, beating through the open window exposed to the east, had accumulated in the hollow on the upper surface and passed thence into the coffin through a fissure situated towards the feet. At the time of the visit certainly the lower third, and most probably the whole coffin, was filled with dirty water. The attendant told Drs. Quain and Stewart that, to the best of her belief, the coffin had been in that state for many years.

"With a view to remedying this state of things, which," say the reporters, "should no longer be suffered to exist, we recommend that means be taken to remove the water; that the coffin be repaired; and that, being removed to a less exposed situation in the vault, it be enclosed in an open stone case."

The President of the College, Dr. Mayo, in compliance with a vote of the fellows, having communicated the substance of this report to the representatives of the Harvey family, requested that the College of Physicians might be permitted to undertake the duty of adjoining the measures therein recommended for the better preservation of the remains of their great benefactor. But such permission was withheld, and after considerable delay Dr. Mayo was informed that "necessary repairs" had been carried out by the family.

These repairs proved, however, in the sequel, to be inadequate; and on the 23rd of February, 1882, Dr. Benjamin Ward Richardson—who within the last five-and-thirty years has made frequent visits to Harvey's resting-place, and to whom, more than to any other individual, is due the attention which has been given to

Harvey's remains and the efforts which the College of Physicians has now made to preserve them—informed the College that the great tower of Hempstead Church had fallen to the ground,* that the coffin of Harvey, fortunately, had not been injured by the fall; but that it had become, from time and natural causes, so decayed that the rain had again ready access to its interior.† A committee of five Fellows was at once appointed to visit Hempstead and advise the College what steps should be taken for the more efficient preservation of Harvey's remains.

In the report which was received and adopted by the College on the 23rd of May, 1882, it is stated that many suggestions had been made on the subject to the committee, but that only one of these appeared to them to be deserving of serious consideration—namely, that which proposed to transfer the remains of Dr. Harvey from their present quiet resting-place at Hempstead to Westminster Abbey. But with that suggestion the committee did not concur. They concluded that the most suitable resting-place for Harvey is still among his kindred, so many of whom are in the vault at Hempstead in which his body was deposited two hundred years since. The committee, therefore, recommended that the leaden coffin containing Dr. Harvey's remains should be removed from the Harvey vault under the church, and be deposited in a granite or marble sarcophagus to be erected in the centre of the Harvey Chapel within the said church, and situated immediately over the vault in which it has lain so long. This recommendation of the committee was approved by the College, and the permission of the present representatives of the Harvey family, which was now readily and graciously given, having been obtained, the works were commenced. On the 24th of June, 1883, the President of the College announced to the Fellows that the sarcophagus was completed, and that on the 18th of October, being St. Luke's Day, 1883, the remains of Harvey would be placed within it.

On that day, at about 4 o'clock, P.M., the representatives of the College of Physicians, the President, all the office bearers, and many other Fellows of the College of Physicians, reached Hempstead Church. The President and most, if not all, of the representatives present, proceeded at once into the vault to view the mortuary chamber of the Harveys,‡ and especially that which had rendered it

* Half of the church of Hempstead is in ruins. On Saturday, the 25th of January, 1882, shortly after two persons who went to visit up the clock had descended, the whole of the fine and massive tower fell to the ground and bore down with it a half of the nave of the church. Nothing has yet been done to restore the edifice. These piles of stones and rubble encumber the churchyard and add to the dissolution of the place. The east of the church laid open to the west has been roughly closed by boarding, and through the narrow door in it the coffin of Harvey was borne, not without difficulty, into the church.

† The rift or fissure in the lead, through which the water entered, was limited on both occasions of its occurrence to the lower third of the coffin. It was from six to six and a half inches, and at its widest part, as I learn from Dr. Richardson, would scarcely admit the four fingers of the hand.

‡ Eliab Harvey, the Doctor's younger and favourite brother, when he purchased the Hempstead and Sampford properties, acquired also the advowson of Great Sampford with Hempstead. Having built the vault and chapel at Hempstead, in or before 1655, it became the chief burial-place of his

remarkable, the coffin enclosing the body, or what remains of it, of Dr. William Harvey.† This mummy-shaped chest, or coffin, as described by Drs. Quain and Stewart, still somewhat collapsed in its lower third, had been thoroughly repaired, and this without obtaining any insight into its interior; the water within had been allowed to drain away through a small opening made in the bottom of the coffin, and subsequently closed, and the whole of it had been carefully and judiciously restored. "On his breast in great letters," as Aubrey tells us, was still to be distinctly seen his name—

DOCTOR
WILLIAM HARVEY.
DECEASED THE 3^d
OF JUNE 1657.
AGED 79 YEARS.

The President and Officers of the College and the Regius Professors of Physic of Oxford and of Cambridge then withdrew to the vestry, and, having there put on their gowns of their several offices, returned to the steps leading into the vault. The coffin of Harvey having been raised from the vault into the churchyard, placed upon a bier, and covered with a pall, was then borne by eight Fellows of the college—Dr. Owen Rees, Sir Rispden Bennett, Dr. Quain, Dr. Sterekins, Dr. Richardson, Dr. Duckworth, Dr. Shepherd, and Dr. Norman Moore—round the eastern end of the church to the south porch, through it and across the ruined portion of the building into the church itself. It was preceded in procession by the Vicar of Hempstead, the Rev. R. H. Eustace, and his curate, the Rev. J. Escreet, and immediately followed by the representatives of the Harvey family—Col. Lloyd, Col. Harvey Bramstone, Mr. Francis Lloyd, and Mr. Rosendale Lloyd.†

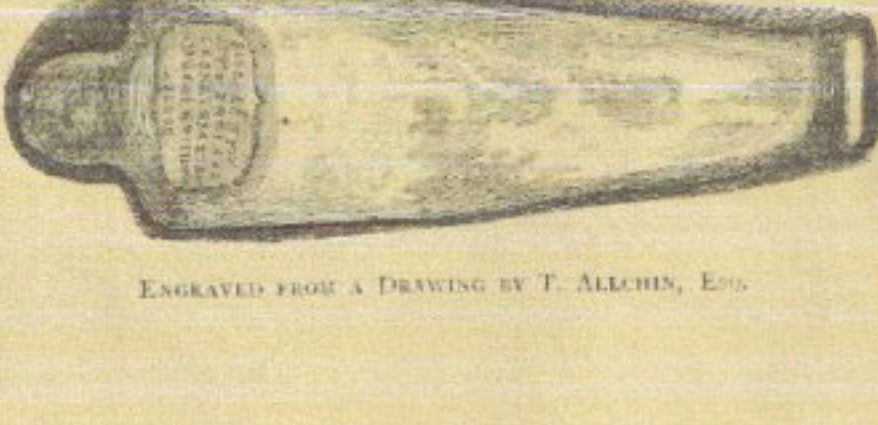
family and so continued down to Sir Eliab Harvey, K.C.B., his last male descendant, and indeed the last male of the Harveys. William Harvey, the physician, was the first adult person laid in this vault. His coffin was doubtless then deposited in the very spot in the more distant part of the vault, with the feet towards the east, and immediately under the east window, where it was seen by Drs. Quain and Stewart on the 9th of June, 1859. Admitted Sir Eliab Harvey, who died the 20th February, 1830, was the last person buried there. In the interval of some forty-four months the Harvey family seems to have found their burial-place in this vault. Drs. Quain and Stewart counted forty-six coffins in all—twelve of these of lead, and similar in form and structure to that of Dr. Harvey, and many other fellows of the College of Physicians (whose names are hereunto appended), was recently translated from the Harvey vault to this sarcophagus, raised by the College for its reception and preservation.

† The heavy monolith cover was then rolled on to the sarcophagus, and, having been securely fixed there, the proceedings terminated.

The sarcophagus, of white Sicilian marble, and plain. It is placed due north and south in the centre of the Harvey chapel. At its end towards the south is cut "The Remains of William Harvey, Discoverer of the Circulation of the Blood, were reverentially placed in this sarcophagus by the Royal College of Physicians of London in the year 1883."

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*Fellow and Harveian Librarian of the
Royal College of Physicians.*

* Appended to this are the names of all the representatives of the Harvey family, and of the members of the College of Physicians present and taking part in the ceremony.



ENGRAVED FROM A DRAWING BY T. ALLCHIN, ESQ.