

James Grattan

Born: 1673
President: 1714-1715, 1722-1723, 1738-1739
Died: 1749

James Grattan, President on three occasions, was the third of seven sons of Rev Patrick Grattan. The family was prominent in eighteenth century Ireland; one of James' brothers was the grandfather of Henry Grattan MP, a leader of the Patriot Party in the Irish Parliament who was one of those who led the resistance in the Irish Parliament to the Act of Union of 1800.

Grattan entered Trinity College in 1689, aged 16, graduating BA in 1695 and MA in 1700 and then studied medicine at Leiden. At this time, Hermann Boerhaave, referred to as 'the Father of Clinical Medicine', was beginning his career at Leyden. It is almost certain that Grattan knew him, and may have been one of his students. Whether he was or not, Grattan's time at Leyden exposed him to the most advanced medical thinking of his day and must have influenced the contribution he made to Irish medicine on returning to Dublin.

On 1 May 1704, James Grattan was admitted a Candidate of the College of Physicians, and was elected Fellow the same day.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Dublin was not a leading place for medical education. Those wishing to best equip themselves to practice medicine went abroad to study; Edinburgh, Bologna and Leiden had leading medical schools. The College of Physicians had been founded with a view to redressing this lack, and great strides were being made in the development of the medical school at Trinity College. James Grattan was deeply involved in this.

Sir Patrick Dun (qv) died in 1713 and his will made provisions intended to advance the cause of establishing Dublin as a first-rate centre of medical education. One of these provisions was for the funding of a professorship, to be known as the King's Professor of Physic in the Trinity School of Physic. In 1717, Robert Griffith (qv) was appointed as first holder of the post. However, the income from Dun's estate that was intended to support the professorship could not be applied during the lifetime of Lady Dun as it was to form part of her income until her death. Griffith died in 1719 and James Grattan succeeded him holding the post until his own death in 1749. Lady Dun predeceased him by only a matter of months, and so for almost his entire tenure he drew no emoluments from his position, and accordingly was not required to perform its duties. During this prolonged period of inactivity in the professorship matters had not stood still as regards the development of medical teaching, and other professorships and lectureships were being established so that, by the 1740s, it was felt that the King's professorship was redundant and should be abolished at the arising of the next vacancy, to be replaced by professorships in Theory



and Practice of Medicine, in Surgery and Midwifery and in Ancient and Modern Pharmacy and Materia Medica. James Grattan was one of those pressing for this reform. This reform not only indicates the great strides which had been made in Dublin medicine since 1713; it also appears to reflect the influence of Boerhaave and Leiden.

Lady Dun exercised her rights to the income from her late husband's estate which she was fully entitled to do, and which was not in itself remarkable, but the behaviour of another Lady, occurring at the same time, provided a total contrast both in approach and in result. Grizell Steevens, twin sister of Richard Steevens (qv), found herself in an analogous situation: her brother died in 1710 leaving a considerable fortune, which he left in trust to her for her lifetime, to be used thereafter to establish a hospital. Grizell Steevens, however, immediately set about establishing the hospital, appointing trustees in 1717 and with unceasing effort Dr Steevens' Hospital opened in 1733. James Grattan was one of the Visiting Physicians, and a member of the Board of Governors. Grattan also then established the Infirmary at the Dublin Blue Coat School.

Grattan was a friend of Jonathan Swift and a member of that group of talented people who gathered around Dean Swift and discussed the society of their day. He was also a friend of Thomas, Lord Howth, to whom Swift was also close. On one occasion, Lord Howth persuaded Swift to have his portrait painted; his lordship arranged that on completion of the portrait Grattan should take it home, lest some sleight of hand should result in a copy, rather than the original, being delivered to Howth. There are many other tributes to James Grattan's reputation for reliability. Another friend of Grattan's was Richard Helsham (qv), one of the eminent physicians of the day.

JOM

