Sir, J. McGrigor Bart.

From Dr. Forbes.

to his friend

Sir James M'Gregor,

By whose kind suggestions these Lectures were undertaken, and by whose Patronage they have been since supported.

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Introductory Lecture on the Practice of Physic.

Delivered January 20th 1849.

By

Charles Ferguson Forbes. M.D.

Deputy Inspector of Hospitals.

These Lectures are open for the Benefit of the Medical Officers of the Navy and Army, who are admitted to attend them on presenting a Recommendation from the Head of their respective Departments.

Introductory.

It is not to be expected, that the Project of delivering a Course of Lectures in this Place, should be received as a Matter of course, or pass without Animadversion, when there are so many Schools of Medicine open in every part of the Metropolis, conducted by able and experienced Teachers.

The Responsibility, Gentlemen, must, I fear, devolve on the humble Individual, who has now the honour to address you. —

Professions of Inadequacy to the execution, and Apologies for Temerity in thus ap-

-pearing before you, would ill requite you for the time occupied with such matter. I came here, partly, at the Suggestion of some (perhaps too zealous) Friends, and partly, from my own determination; and I will execute the Task I have undertaken to perform, to the best of my Ability. Your indulgence, there-fore, shall only be claimed, for allowing me to make a rapid Transition from this part of my Subject to another, in which I hope to make it appear, that the Plan of these Lectures is supported by pretensions, far more solid than can be derived from anything personal. —— Previously to entering however on this part of the Subject, it will be most consistent with our plan, to say Something of Medical Study in general.

The Pomp of System has

long dazzled and misled the Medical Student, and Classification itself, in its most simple form, is not free from mischievous Tendency.

The course of daily practice, which obliges us continually to compare its methods with Nature, very soon evinces the incorrectness of such Arrangement, and makes us feel the necessity of recurring to the Observation of Facts.

The false application, too, of other Sciences to Medicine — the Mechanical & Chemical Sciences, in their turn, have been attended with consequences, fatal to its progressive Improvement.

The Mass of incoherent opinions, which have mutually subverted each other, forms almost the only Fruit of this Alliance, which

the Pride of Science was desirous to establish, between Physic and the other Branches of Knowledge.

How much reason have we then to deplore the Errors, to which, Practition-ers, for the most part, only become sensible after they have proved fatal to a number of unfortunate Victims. —

How many cruel, and premature deaths, have been the Consequence! And how many impaired and debilitated Constitutions, have paid for the follies of Theorists!

Happily for Mankind, the delusion is nearly at an End. — The real Treasures of Medical Science are now unfolding, and consist in permanent and universally ac-knowledged Truths, & not in the Pomp of Theory or the parade of System.

It was the observation of our justly celebrated Pringle that, from the Greeks down to the present time, Medicine was a Science, in which there was a great deal of Reasoning upon a small number of Facts, and that in future, on the contrary, there ought to be little reasoning upon a great number of Facts. —

We live to see this Sentiment, in a great degree, realized; and may anticipate, with confidence, its general Adoption.

Disposed however, as we are, to deprecate the overweening influence of System in our practical Views, and so dispense with the incumbrances which have impeded the path of useful Labour, we would by no means appear desirous of discountenancing Arrangement and Method — in such degrees, as may facil-

-itate our Study, without imposing on the Stu-
-dent irrelevant or gratuitous matter. —

The Sciences accessory to the Improvement of Medicine, should always be held subservi-
-ent. — Their Laws and their Phenomena may be employed for Illustration; — Never, however strong the Analogy, for Conclusion.

Facts, multiplied, varied, and compared, are, alone, to be held adequate to this Pur-
-pose.

We are ready to admit that no Art or Science can be acquired, since none can be clearly treated of, or communicated, without Arrangement; but in the Science of Medicine, hitherto so imperfectly defined, so uncertain, & so variable, too much Cau-

-tion cannot be exercised, in entering any Ave-
-nue that leads to avowed System.

Whether we look to the different works of the most able Nosologists, or to the daring System which for twenty years has pervaded Europe under the Name of Brunonian, we encounter perplexity on the one hand, and mad and fallacious Theories on the other.— Hence it is scarcely necessary to observe, how difficult it becomes to render a Course of Lectures of this kind, conformable to any prevailing Doctrines, without compromising the Cause of Truth and Genuine Information

Our Plan will therefore be, to avail ourselves of whatever may be found useful in all, borrowing, at the same time, our m

Method and Arrangement from that which appears most simple, & Conformable to Nature.

In this Selection, we are influenced, by more than One Cause, to fix on the Cullenian Nosology.

If it be not superior, it is at least equal to any; it is more simple than most; and lastly, it is better known to the generality of Students than any other: — Its general Arrangement we therefore propose to follow, reserving such Comments as may be found necessary in Cases of discrepancy, or Objection.

From the time that Medicine has been cultivated as a Science, some Arrangement or Method has directed its study.

Celsus furnishes us with an excellent Exam-ple of its division into Parts, Books, Chapters, & Sections, while others have had recourse to different Modifications & Plans:— Some, to w that of the duration of diseases, as divided into Acute and Chronic, exemplified in the Works of Aretaeus & Cœlius Aurelianus; Some, to the Anatomy of the Human Frame as a ground-work for Division, and consequently for as-sorting diseases, as has been done by Jonston, Sennert, & Morgagni; and since recommend-ed by Dr. Mead in his Medical Precepts and Cautions, into those of the Head, Chest, Belly, Limbs, and other parts. A fourth Invention has fixed on the supposed causes of Diseases as a Basis of distribution, and to this has been ap-plied the Term Etiological from Αἰτία a cause and this was especially embraced by Boerhaave, Riverius, & Hoffman.

A mixed Modification was attempted by Macbride who takes Extent for his first two general Divisions, as being universal or local; Sex, for his third; and the age of Infancy, for his fourth and last. Of late Years, the nosological System has been built upon the distinctive symptoms of diseases, which is the principle adopted by Sauvages, Linneus, Cullen, and all the most celebrated Nosologists of recent times.

In a Lecture of this kind, we are compelled to abridge more than may be desired, & must therefore be content with giving this short History of Nosology, which brings us down to the Schools of the present day, wherein the imperfections of the best framed Systems, have been, in their turn, condemned, as inadequate to the End proposed. —

— It would however be unwise to conclude from hence that no Advantage can accrue from perusing Nosological Works. —

The Student, on the Contrary, may derive most valuable information from them, and particularly from the Nosologia Methodica of Sauvages, a work of considerable Elegance and perspicuity, the ground-work of almost all the succeeding Systems of Nosology, and replete with varied and useful descriptions of diseases rarely to be met with in other Authors.

Let the student however be aware, in reviewing at one glance, the principal Objects of the science he cultivates, how easily he may persuade himself that he is acquainted with these Objects, because he knows their Titles & definitions; and this, unfortunately, has been the great Allurement of Systems in general. —

The Language incidental to new Systems becomes another Source of Perplexity in the Study of Medicine.

Mr. Mason Good, in a work which has, for its Object, the Correction of these imperfections, describes them with so much force that to do him the justice his eminent Talents deserve, we must convey his Observations in his own language: —

"The last source of imperfection & perplexity it is necessary to notice, is the Coinage of new Terms upon the coinage of new Systems. — This has been a very ample and inveterate Medium of Error, and one which has not merely run through our Nomenclature, but through our reasonings; insomuch, that, through its prolific Influence, the language of Medicine

is become a curious Mosaic of the chief specu-
-lations of ancient & modern times. — The
dogmatic, Empiric, and Methodic theories
still contribute something towards this gener-
-al Effect; the Corpuscular has added much, the
humoral, still more; the Alchemical has kept
pace with the humoral, and the Geometrical
has not stopt far behind. The spasmodic Hy-
-pothesis of Hoffman & Cullen are by no means
unamenable to this remark. In effect, the new
and unsatisfactory Character of much of its
phraseology formed no inconsiderable source
of the Brunonian Opposition to it, and laid
the first foundation of the Brunonian Doctrine.
— Yet the followers of this last Speculation have
no great Reason to triumph."

"The terms introduced by Dr. Brown are sel-
-dom strictly correct in themselves, to say nothing
of the looseness with which they are employed,

both in his own writings, and in those of his warmest Advocates; while in the more elegant display of the same Opinions in the Zoonomia, the Reader is dazzled rather than enlightened, & furnished with fine words rather than with accurate Notions."

"It is almost superfluous to give Examples under this general Remark:- Crudity & Crisis; pores & Corpuscles, acute and chronic; Humour & Idiosyncrasy; digestion, Concoction, and dissolution; Effervescence, Fermentation, and putrefaction; Lentor & error loci; Choleric and Nervous; phlogistic & Antiphlogistic; Tonic & Clonic Spasm; Action & Condition; Miasm, Contagion, and Infection; Sthenic and Asthenic; Excitement & Excitability, Accumulation and Exhaustion; Sensitive and irritative Motions; decreased Volitions; direct & reverse Sympathies; Nature, Non-Naturals Vis Naturæ vis insita,

forced State of Life; procataretic; proegumenal, remote & proximate, continent, and incontinent Causes; — these terms are sufficient to convey an Idea of the Succession of Influences here referred to; and as they are all to be found in our lexicons, and other Books of general Reference, often indeed in Conjunction with terms still more clashing and contradictory, they cannot fail to indicate the discordia concors of the Medical language of the day, the embarrassment of its phraseology, and the difficulties which the Student has to encounter from this Source alone, in the progress of his professional Education."

Our Observations on this Topic must terminate here, as they will necessarily be detailed in our History of Physic.

It is no part of our Subject to descant on early Medical education. The Views which have been taken of it in general by different Writers, are so warped by individual Feeling, or particular Prejudice, and there is so little Concordance among them, that we shall be well-pleased to dispense with the Task of scrutinizing, and weighing Opinions where there is no fixed standard for decision.

If called upon to point out the best plan for Medical Acquirements, we would add to what has already been expressed in the Course of this Lecture, that Instruction should be sought at an early Period, when the Mind and Habit may be trained to Scenes of a Nature highly disgusting to those who have passed their earlier years in total Absence from them. A modern Writer has stated that it matters not whether there be

anything appertaining to Physic, in an University where a Man, intended for Medicine, is educated, or not: — there is plenty of time, he adds, for physic afterwards. —

This Author seems to have forgotten the Ars longa Vita brevis of our great Master. Our opinion is that after or even during a proper classical Education, the Student cannot too early be immersed in those Scenes, and be employed in those duties, in which are to constitute his future Walk in Life: — Nay, we would go farther, and in assert, that unless he be a participater in the Agency of his Profession, and in all its details, from an early Period, he will never be a ready and efficient practitioner.

In no Calling in life, are the active qualities of so much Importance

as in Medicine. – The Speculative Philoso-
-pher, who deals his Maxims from his Closet,
makes often but a sorry figure at the Bed-
-side of the Patient. He may boast his m
Knowledge of Languages dead & living, n
his researches in Philosophy, and endless
Compositions; but if his talents have not
been exercised by anxious attention on the
Sick; if his perception has not been sharp-
-ened by difficulties in which he himself m
bore responsibility, and his Judgement for-
-tified by repeated trials, he is not – and never
can be, the Physician, however great the m
Philosopher.

Were we to recommend
the Study of any one of the Branches of Med-
-ical education, more than another, at this
time, our Eyes would be turned to Morbid
Anatomy.

It is difficult to say why the works of Lieutaud, Morgagni, Bonetus, and others, have thrown so little light on diseases in proportion to their labours;— but certain it is that the practice of Physic does not appear to have been materially improved by them.—

In our own times, the works of Baillie and others have drawn the attention of the Profession nearer to the Subject, insomuch that we are arriving, particularly in the instance of Fevers, at conclusions of the first importance; and possibly, when more minutely acquainted with Morbid changes in the Human Structure, we may decipher Causes of diseases hitherto undetected. Dissections were formerly tolerated on extraordinary Occasions only, and could not therefore have been productive of much Advantage:— it

is in the ordinary and daily occurrences, that it will be of most importance to trace the fatal Cause. Curiosity may be gratified by the inspection of an incurable disease; but useful information can be elicited from those Cases only in which life might have been saved, had the Cause been known, and that Cause within the Control of Medicine. —

The Pathology of Fever, Dysentery, Apoplexy, Hydrocephalus, and many other diseases, has been, and is daily becoming more luminous by Researches in the dead Body. The prejudices of Mankind against this practice, have, in a great measure, subsided. Let us hope therefore that by a Multiplicity of Investigations, a Body of Evidence & discovery may be collected, little inferior in

Utility to any Part of the healing Art. —

You are all aware, Gentlemen, that the Science of Medicine has, in many of it's most essential Improvements, owed much to the Practice & Communications of Public Medical Officers: — The Names of Pringle, of the Munroes, of Cleghorn, Lind, John Hunter, and of others, must be familiar to you all; and even Cullen himself acquired his early Experience in Military Practice.

These Characters were eminent in their day; but it was reserved for the unprecedented Struggle in which our Country has been engaged, to furnish such a field of Observation as had never occurred before, and consequently to enlarge the Sphere of Medical Knowledge

beyond all precedent. —

Does it not then become imperative on those who have laboured in that Field, to adopt some plan to perpetuate and ripen that Knowledge? — Or would it not rather be culpable Neglect, to suffer the valuable Information so collected, to be dissipated or consigned to Oblivion? ——

I say valuable, for so it may be considered in two points of view: — It is valuable from that Accuracy which can scarcely ever be attained in private Practice. The Power of enforcing Regulations, the Order & precision in Execution, the Correctness of Report, the Absence of Interference by Friends & Attendants, are all contributory to the Establishment of that genuine Truth which can alone benefit Science, &

are, almost exclusively, the Attributes of Military Practice.

Another Source of extraordinary Advantage in Military Practice, is to be contemplated in the diversity which it has of late presented.—

Whether we refer to the duration of the Scenes in which it has been engaged, the Extent of Country, Variety of Character, difference of Climate, Vicissitudes of Condition, and unprecedented Trials both moral & physical, we cannot hesitate to acknowledge that such a School of Information has no Parallel in our History. It surely therefore cannot be assuming too much, to assign to the Naval and Military departments, the distinction to which they have so just a a Claim. ———

How far the labourers in this field have availed themselves of their Opportunities, & how far established a corresponding Reputation, does not become me to determine; but it must be acknowledged, on all hands, that their Works entitle them to a Place among the most eminent of their Profession.

At a period like the present, when the Prospect of a long Peace precludes the chance of renewed labours and experience in the Field, it behoves those who possess the Means, to impart to their youthful Successors, the Knowledge which they themselves may never again have an opportunity of exercising. —

Posterity must reap the Benefit of

such a proceeding. — The materials now collected ought to form a System of Medical Education which, while it qualifies the Student for practice in civil life, shall extend to him all the Information requisite for public Service, and enable him, when Inclination or opportunity bring him forward, to enter on his duty with adequate Pretensions. — If such Advantages be offered to the junior part of the Profession by our plan, their Seniors will not be in without their Gratification: — they will have the satisfaction to know that their Labours have not been fruitless, and will enjoy the Pleasure of seeing that Spirit of Enquiry and ardent pursuit, by which they were themselves distinguished, continued in their Successors for the Benefit of Mankind. —

The dignity and high character to which Medical science is aspiring, will be main--tained and cherished, and improvement will be hailed as the natural Offspring of the teaching, and the Taught.

It is impossible for me to quit this part of my subject, without paying that Tribute of praise which has been so well merited by the Source of those Advantages which have accrued to the Public Medi--cal Service within the last few years:— I allude to the fostering hand and discern--ing Judgment of the Illustrious Personage at the head of the Army. Superior to preju--dice, devoted to the good of the Service, a friend to merit, and just to all, His Royal Highness has been the Patron & Protector

of all whose Talents and Exertions have advanced their Claims.

Of the present Regulations, and System of the public Medical Service, it may be considered unnecessary for me to speak; but I am confident, it will, in this place, be only meeting the general Assent to declare, that there never was a Period in which the department was more ably filled, or more honourably conducted, than the present. —— The Individuals concerned are entitled to this public testimony of their Talents & Conduct. — To their Exertions, we have to ascribe the establishment of a System in the Medical department of the British Army, replete with present good, and pregnant with future Benefit, to the Service and to Mankind. —

If in the course of this Address, we

may seem to have passed over many of the Sciences connected with Medicine, without the Notice due to their importance, the Omission is to be ascribed to our Conviction that none of our Hearers are destitute of a competent Knowledge of their Value and Utility.

Our limits on the present occasion must confine us to the discussion of such Topics as may be considered the most essential, and on that account we may appear to have been defective in attention to Chemistry, Botany, Moral Philosophy, and Physics. —

But you must allow that in a Course of practical Lectures as these are, some Preference is justifiable, as has been shewn in the preceding observations on Medical Study. —

It by no means follows however, that because the choice has been directed to things of the highest value, the assistance of all the Sister Arts, tho' inferior in consequence, is not to be courted. An acquaintance with them to a certain extent, is indispensible for the formation of such a Character as a Medical Practitioner ought to be.

In point of Utility, Chemistry perhaps stands most prominent. — It is not however, as a celebrated Author has justly observed, by the Perusal of Books that we can hope to learn Chemistry & Pharmacy; but by witnessing the various Processes of these Arts, by performing them ourselves, and by rendering ourselves familiar with the Subjects of them, and the Instruments by which they are effected. — This method, we must again beg leave to observe, applicable as it is to all

practical Studies, is so excellent in itself, that the talents of the Professor become in a manner superfluous, and Nature herself – that is the presence of the Objects of Research, corrects almost all the mistakes, which he may commit in his oral Instructions.

Next in utility to Chemistry, as an auxiliary to the Practice of Medicine, may be considered Botany, the Study of which will always repay the labour bestowed, by Gratifications of Taste, independently of Professional Advantage.

I find, Gentlemen, that I must no longer trespass on your time and patience; but there is a lurking Hope which would urge me still further – the Hope that I may not entirely fail to substantiate some claim

for such a course of Lectures as I am now entering upon. — Aided by Military Medical Information & public records, cherished by the kind Attentions, and enriched by the valuable contributions, of many of the most distinguished Officers in the department, I cannot but entertain some Confidence that you will give Countenance to my Pretensions. — My anxiety however that something like Justice should be done to the Subject, so undertaken, is not so readily appeased.

I shrink from the apprehension of Failure in the Execution, and I am but too sensible how much I shall have to expect from your Indulgence in this my first Essay. ———

A consciousness of the best intentions and a full Conviction of the Utility of the Design, will remain to me, whatever be the result of my Efforts; and, in Case of failure, the consoling persuasion, that whenever the Task shall devolve into hands more worthy of it than mine, all that has been here predicted of it, and much more, will be the Fruit of such an Under-taking.

Finis.