

**An introductory lecture : on the coinciding tendencies of medicines / by
Jared P. Kirtland.**

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Hirtland (J. P.)
AN

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE,
ON THE
COINCIDING TENDENCIES
OF
MEDICINES.

BY
JARED P. KIRTLAND, M. D.,

PROF. OF THEORY AND PRACTICE OF MEDICINE, AND PHYSICAL DIAGNOSIS, IN
THE MEDICAL DEPARTMENT OF THE WESTERN RESERVE
COLLEGE, AT CLEVELAND, O.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

OF THE CITY OF CHICAGO

JOHN P. RICHARDSON, M.D.

CLEVELAND, Nov. 6th, 1848.

PROF. J. P. KIRTLAND, SIR:

At a meeting of the Class of the Medical College, held Nov. 4th, PETER B. HAWKS, Jun., was chosen President, and A. G. McCANDLESS, Secretary. On motion, the undersigned were appointed a Committee to express to you, on behalf of the Class whom they have the honor to represent, the gratification and delight afforded by your learned and interesting Introductory Lecture, their high appreciation of its intrinsic value and importance, and their earnest solicitations that you will be pleased to furnish them a copy of the same for publication.

The Committee would not only cordially confirm the sentiments and wishes already expressed, but also add their individual assurances of esteem and regard, and their desires for your health and prosperity.

Very Respectfully Yours,

A. G. McCANDLESS, Penn.

A. M. GRIFFING, Miss.

G. W. CARHARTT, Mich.

A. T. HOWE, Va.

D. WILLIAMS, Ohio.

P. B. HAVENS, Jun., New York.

F. M. SHIELDS, Iowa.

C. T. WELLS, Alabama.

I. M. EVANS, Indiana.

L. E. OBER, Illinois.

S. L. GROW, Wisconsin.

MEDICAL DEPARTMENT, W. R. COLLEGE,
CLEVELAND, Nov. 10th, 1848. }

*To Messrs. McCandless, Griffing, Carhartt, Howe, Williams, Havens, Shields,
Wells, Evans, Ober, and Grow:*

Your polite note was duly received. In compliance with your request, I herewith place at your disposal a copy of the Lecture to which you refer.

Through you, as a Committee, I would affectionately reciprocate the kind sentiments expressed by the Class, and would accompany them with the assurance of my esteem and respect for you individually.

Very truly, Yours,

JARED P. KIRTLAND.

LECTURE.

FROM that momentous period, when man's first disobedience

“Brought death into the world,
And all our woe,”

down to the present, pain and disease have afflicted the human family. The profession of medicine must have originated, as a consequence, coeval, perhaps, with that great event; the practice has called forth the efforts of the learned, and ignorant, wise, and unwise, regular, and irregular, of every age, in the pursuit of one common object, the discovery and application of means for the relief of suffering humanity.

All have known to some extent, that remedies, under certain circumstances, will counteract disease. Attention seems however to have been directed, exclusively, to their *curative* powers, while their *coinciding* tendencies have been overlooked. These tendencies have never been observed, by any sect of irregular practitioners, nor by community at large, and too frequently have been disregarded by members of the regular profession.

Every agent, capable of making an impression, if employed, during the existence of disease, will exert some influence. It will either *counteract*, or *coincide*. In the one event, it will either diminish, or cure the disease; in the other, augment or modify it, into some anomalous, and more malignant form. The result will depend on the contingencies, whether the article is indicated, or contra-indicated, and skillfully, or unskillfully employed.

There is more sophistry than truth, in the common-place assertion, which is so frequently addressed by intruders and meddlers, to the physician, that “this or that article of medicine will do no harm if it does no good.” It will act, by the stimulus of quantity, if not by its medicinal qualities, and in a severe disease, may occasion much harm. Thousands have died, by the weight of *placeboes*, super-added to the original disorder.

The same classes, who overlook the coinciding tendencies of medicines, generally err, in making the system, in the condition of health, a standard, to regulate their judgments while treating disease. They are not aware, that both functional and organic changes may occur, from disease, and susceptibilities be created, that do not exist in health. Pathology is a subject, of which they entertain no correct views. Their practice, founded on a basis so false, and limited, will of course result in creating factitious disease, by calling into operation the coinciding tendencies of the means they employ.

The scientific physician makes himself familiar with the pathological condition of his case, and correctly estimates its character. He settles, clearly, the indications of cure, and aims to accomplish some definite purpose, by every article that he prescribes. Its effects are carefully watched, and if not favorable, it is withdrawn before it has inflicted any serious injury by coinciding with the disease.

The limits of an introductory address, will not allow me to refer to all the instances, in which the coinciding tendencies of medicines may create factitious disease. The following are sufficient to illustrate my views :

1st. *Remedies will coincide, if not adapted to the fulfillment of the indications.*

Acute disease always occurs as one of two qualities of action—either *sthenic* or *asthenic*. On employing these terms, permit me to say, that we use them, only in their usual acceptation, and not with any reference to the Brunonian system. Each quality is manifested by essential symptoms, and requires its appropriate, and peculiar means for cure.

The *STHENIC* is attended with a morbid accumulation of vitality, the principle of life, which imparts an increased power of acting.

The *ASTHENIC* is, on the other hand, attended with a diminished amount of vitality ; consequently the power to act, in the system, is less than during health. These conditions of disease may be either local or general, and modified by the addition of morbid irritability.

In order to treat them successfully, it is necessary in the *STHENIC*, to *reduce* the excess of vitality, and *counteract* disordered action, and in the *ASTHENIC*, to *counteract* disordered action and *support* the system. Hence it follows that the indications to be fulfilled in the treatment of *sthenic diseases* are,—

1st. Reduction.

2d. Counteraction.

And of *asthenic*,—

1st. Counteraction.

2d. Support.

In practice it frequently happens that we are required to reverse the order of the two last indications, and we may often fulfill both indications of either quality at the same time. Any attempt at treating one by the use of means adapted to the other, will be certain to produce factitious disease.

Every nurse, every person of ordinary judgment knows, that alcohol, capsicum and quinine, exhibited in *sthenic* action, will aggravate the disease. Many practitioners do not know, what is equally true, that neutral salts, antimonials and the lancet, are as likely to coincide with *asthenic* action and morbid irritability.

The Thompsonian may resort to steam and stimulants, with safety, and even advantage, in certain forms and grades of *asthenic* disease. If congestion of the lungs exist, as in *Pneumonia Typhoides*, he may add to his means, lobelia emetics.

Such were the quality and grades of the great epidemic that prevailed over most of North America in 1812—13. The indications required the most prompt and efficient course of counteracting and supporting remedies.

The regular profession rejected the use of all reducing agents, and employed diffusible stimulants, capsicum, external heat, steam, and mild emetics. If the reports of that day were correct, Thompson was engaged in the capacity of nurse, to carry out the prescriptions of regular physicians. Discovering the ~~successes~~ ~~that~~ attended those prescriptions, he purloined them, and after dressing them in a specious garb, at length palmed them on community as a new and improved system of medicine.

So long as the epidemic constitution continued to develop diseases of a low, asthenic quality, this plan of treatment, in the hands of competent persons, was successful, but if managed by empirics, even at that day it produced much factitious evil.

The epidemic constitution has gradually changed, and the grade of diseased action risen, yet it has never reached that high sthenic condition, that distinguished it previous to the change, which occurred with the appearance of the epidemic of 1812—13. It has however, long since, attained a point, at which, an indiscriminate use of this *counteracting* and *supporting* plan, that constitutes the steam system, is very liable to exert powerful coinciding tendencies.

A new feature was impressed upon acute disease, in northern Ohio, by the influence of the cholera in 1832 and 34—an unusual disposition to morbid irritability and inflammation in the mucous structures of the digestive system, which has continued down to the present day.

These changes raised an insurmountable barrier to the further progress of this empirical system, and the results of its application have been so strikingly injurious, and often fatal of late, that it has lost its temporary popularity.

Thompsonism is now numbered among the things that were. Its disciples have not improved by experience, but have generally taken shelter under other ephemeral systems of empiricism. Quacks never grow wiser or better, except in their own estimation.

The Hydropathist may successfully shock and drench the system with cold water, provided a sufficient stock of vitality remains to insure a re-action, and no extensive inflammation exist in any internal or vital organ. If, however, either of these contingencies interpose, the Hydropathic plan is attended with danger.

Dr. Currie's Reports, published early in the present century, and now occupying a place in almost every medical library, embrace all that is valuable and safe in regard to the use of this agent, and much that is important respecting its coinciding tendencies, which modern aquatic mongers do not understand. Their author points out the dangers that may arise from those tendencies.

Both the Thompsonian and Hydropathic systems, as they are termed, are mere branches, stealthily lepped from the regular system of medicine. They are better understood and more successfully practiced upon, when occasion requires, by scientific physicians, than by charlatans.

HOMŒOPATHY is not likely to produce factitious disease, by the exertion of its remedies—they are mere nullities—but it may, perhaps, occasion factitious symptoms by the operations of the imagination—the only medium through which it ever acts.

The whole system is an absurdity that has been fostered a few years by credulity. In this country it is spinning out a weakly existence, while it has ceased to be recognized in Europe.

It has exerted an injurious influence over the public in two ways :

First, By diverting the attention of patients and their friends, and occasioning them to neglect or delay the use of safe and efficient means in severe disease.

Second, By furnishing a cloak to dishonest practitioners, under which, they employ powerful medicines, and impose upon community.

Such practitioners often induce severe forms of factitious disease by using clandestinely efficient means, and they generally have the skill to convince their employers that such disease is either produced by nature, or by remedies previously prescribed by regular Physicians.

2d. *Remedies will coincide if not adapted to the grade of disease.*

Cases of similar quality of action may differ in their grades, one may be higher, another lower in the scale. For instance, two cases of Sthenic Dysentery may occur, occupying remote extremes, so far as the quality of the action is concerned.

Each will require its appropriate plan of treatment, which, if applied to the other, will hardly fail to induce factitious symptoms.

It is not every case of sthenic inflammation that requires, or that will tolerate blood-letting, by quarts; nor of asthenic fever that will admit of the use of supporting remedies.

Scarlet Fever, so far as my experience has extended, has always occurred of an asthenic quality, but during different epidemics that have prevailed within the last thirty five years, it has presented itself, from the highest to the lowest grades, of that quality.

In one season the grade was so high, and at the same time, the amount of disease so small and non-malignant, that a mild alterative and sponging with cold water, were all the means required.

In another season, so low was the grade, and diminished the vitality, attended at the same time, with such a vast amount of disease, that liberal and oft-repeated doses of French Brandy, Capsicum, Opium, and Quinine, were required, to sustain the system from hour to hour.

The *quality of disease*, was the same,—*asthenic* in both seasons,—but the grades were remotely separated.

It must be evident to any skillful Physician, that the means adapt-

ed to one of these grades, would coincide, if employed in the other. Every intervening grade of scarlatina, has occurred at the West during that period of time. It has required much discrimination to adapt remedies to individual cases. When this point has been neglected, and a routine, or an indiscriminate course pursued, severe trains of factitious symptoms have been produced.

3d. *Remedies will coincide, if not timed to the stage of disease.*

It was said of old, "There is a time for all things."

There is an appropriate time for medicines, and if employed out of that time, they are sure, soon to furnish the most prominent symptoms in the case.

Both continued and malarious fevers, that have so frequently occurred in the west, for a quarter of a century, have generally assumed about the medium between Sthenia and Asthenia, the Synochus of Dr. Cullen. Experience has demonstrated that a mild, mercurial course, judiciously pursued, has generally succeeded in establishing either a perfect crisis, or a sub-crisis, that admits of the use of tonics, and a speedy convalescence.

To accomplish a purpose so desirable, it is necessary to administer this course, either during the forming, or early in the active stages. If delayed beyond these, especially till organic lesions are produced, and the vitality much impaired, the course of medication is liable to concur with the disease. Irritable sore mouth, inflamed mucous membranes, vitiated secretions, morbid sweats, and disturbance of the sensorium, will constitute a portion of the factitious productions.

It is proper to add that this mild, mercurial course has been less favorable in its results, since the cholera left entailed upon our fevers an increased tendency to morbid irritability.

The art of timing remedies to the stage of disease, often constitutes the difference between a skillful practitioner and an empiric. One times his means to the case, the other employs them at random, or by routine.

4th. *Remedies will coincide, if disproportioned in power, to the amount of disease.*

A state of predisposition—a balancing between health and disease, often precedes the more active stages of fever. If at that juncture a violent emetic, drastic cathartic, or other harsh means are employed, the confirmed stage will be at once established, and a factitious malignancy imparted. At this day, too many cases are rendered violent, perhaps fatal, by the use of Lee's Pills, Brandreth's Pills, Neutral Salts, Tartar Emetic, and various quack nostrums. They waste the vitality, irritate the mucous membranes, and excite an irritable action of the biliary apparatus, without counteracting the original disorder. Their effects constitute so much factitious disease, imposed upon the system, already oppressed by the original fever.

Common observation frequently detects the tendency of such practice. Patients laboring under the stage of predisposition, will often refuse to employ a Physician, or his means, from an apprehension that if they "attempt to doctor, they shall be thrown at once into the fever." Their fears may not be groundless if they should be thrown into the hands of indiscriminate practitioners.

A result so unfavorable, may, in many instances, be obviated by a correct course of management.

The disease is not fully established. Nature is oppressed, but if gently aided, may throw off the weight, and restore the functions to their healthy condition. Mild means are best adapted to the accomplishment of this purpose.

Abstinence from food a few hours longer than usual, attention to the condition of the skin and the digestive system, with rest and quietness sufficient to soothe the excited, irritated, or exhausted nervous system, may arrest and correct the threatening evil, in a majority of cases.

Should this method fail, the system is better prepared to resist the disease, and nature is left to combat it single-handed; but, if the other plan has been pursued, she is compelled to sustain herself against both the Disease and its Factitious auxiliaries.

Some of the most unmanageable cases have occurred in this section of the country since the prevalence of the cholera, in 1834, and seem to have consisted, originally, of malarious fevers, modified by the coinciding powers of Neutral Salts and Tartar Emetic, and occasionally of mercurials.

The last named preparations do not produce those peculiar effects imputed to them by popular opinion, nor are they those safe and successful agents, in all instances, which they are extolled to be, by some of our profession. Mercurials are liable to coincide with lower grades of asthenic fever, and their use should be resorted to with much care. The mode of employing them in any variety of fever, in the exorbitant doses that found favor in one of the leading medical Institutions of the west, a few years since, is the most objectionable. From *sixty* to *eighty* grains of calomel, were considered as a mere Homœopathic dose. Such quantities are almost sure to establish in the system a train of factitious actions that no future course of medication can control, and which will ultimately result either in death, or breaking down the constitution of the patient.

This plan has lost its popularity at this day, and is rejected by every prudent physician.

I am no medical demagogue, that would decry the use of any powerful medicine, for the purpose of siding with popular caprice. Calomel, the Blue Mass, and other mercurials, I prescribe daily. They are indispensable and efficient agents in treating our western diseases. Like all medicines, their tendency to coincide, exists in an exact ratio to their curative powers.

It is against this coinciding tendency, and their use in exorbitant doses, that I would caution the younger members of our profession.

The *Cholera Infantum*, the Bowel Complaint of children, of common language, is a disease that frequently affords melancholy illustrations of the truth of my position. This disease commences with an irritated condition of the digestive organs. Some officious or, ill-qualified person, probably prescribes a harsh Cathartic, Calomel-castor oil, salts, or other incompatible agent. It immediately coincides with that irritated state, local inflammation ensues, the irritation is augmented, the brain sympathizing, stupor and convulsions supervene, and death terminates the case.

Truth compels us to say, that at least one half of the symptoms were factitious. A milder and better adapted course might have saved the little patient's life, and obviated half of its sufferings.

Under this head, it is proper to allude to a practice which gives origin to no small share of factitious disease—the practice of employing harsh and powerful cathartics for family physic. Show me the family that resorts to the use of calomel, Lee's pills, Brandreth's pills, or other drastic agents, for every slight ailment, and I will in return, show you, a family of dyspeptic invalids.

Medicines of this character excite an irritable action of the organs of digestion, different from the actions of health. Nature may tolerate the transgression for a few times, but will ultimately inflict the penalty, if the course be continued. It impairs the tone and perhaps the structure of the stomach, and will result at last in laying the foundation of some chronic affection. Much that is termed predisposition to chronic disorders, can be traced for its origin to this source.

Akin to this practice, is that of employing quack nostrums. Their composition is a secret, and the most skillful cannot judge of their adaptation to any particular case. They are either inert, or they possess medicinal powers. If *inert*, they are an imposition upon the purchaser—if they possess virtues and powers, they are dangerous, just in proportion to those properties.

A credulous person, who purchases a quack medicine, may therefore be certain, that he either throws away his money for an imposition, or endangers health and life, by the coinciding tendency of a secret poison.

The vending and consuming of quack medicines, is no detriment to the regular physician, so far as his pecuniary interest is concerned; for they serve to increase the number of chronic cases, which will sooner or later fall into his hands. As a philanthropist, he regrets to see so much injury inflicted upon community.

Life and health are precious. It is natural that every person should be anxious to preserve them. An infatuation seems however to have seized upon the public, in regard to the use of articles of this character. The amount consumed, and the extent of injury they inflict,

are not truly estimated, except by those whose attention has been particularly attracted to the subject.

Individuals, from whose knowledge and judgment we should expect a wiser course, frequently place implicit confidence in the pretensions of medical impostors, and quack advertisements. On a recent occasion I was called to visit a worthy lady, who was rapidly sinking, under the combined influences of a severe chronic disease, and a popular quack nostrum. Pointing out the true nature of her case to the husband, a man of more than ordinary attainments and experience, he was shocked at my incredulity as to the safety of the nostrum. To convince me of my error, he gravely read to me the printed labels and affidavits, accompanying the article. They stated that six bottles are certain to accomplish a cure. She had already taken *four*, when death arrested the further progress towards convalescence. He is now whimpering his regrets, that she did not, by some means, swallow the other two; and has full confidence, in that event, a cure would have been effected, in spite of Death and Disease.

Such credulity—such misplaced confidence, are lamentable; but an awful responsibility rests on the originators and venders of these impositions.

5th. *Remedies will coincide if employed under a false Diagnosis.*

Diagnosis is the distinguishing one species of disease from another. A false diagnosis, will be followed by an improper prescription, and the result will be, the production of artificial disease. Irritation may be mistaken for inflammation, and the reverse. The means adapted to the treatment of one, will not fail to concur with the other.

A careless practitioner may mistake a fever and local disturbance, arising from worms, and teething, for peritoneal inflammation. He resorts to blood-letting and antimonials—they coincide; morbid irritability rages, and at length the brain sympathizes, and convulsions end the scene. Perhaps such a practitioner never considers how much he contributed to the result.

Malaria, the cause of Fever and Ague, extends its influence over the west, and imparts peculiar tendencies to our diseases. Its effects are masked under the form of every ailment that occurs.

In its irregularities, it more frequently manifests itself under the symptoms of a disordered state of the nervous system. One case may be neuralgia, another apoplexy, and a third, epilepsy, and so on through the list of nervous diseases. In one instance, it may appear as irritation, another inflammation, and another a compound of both.

A practitioner, not intimately acquainted with this subject, would, probably, at the first step, make a false diagnosis, and before the expiration of two days of treatment, he would be surrounded by so many perplexities and anomalies, that he would be disposed to give up the case in despair.

6th. *Remedies will coincide, if their use be continued after they have accomplished certain changes in the system.*

To decide correctly when to suspend a course of treatment, is often a difficult matter.

If it be employed for a time, it may excite a new action, more compatible with the actions of health than was the disease; but if continued too long, or carried beyond a certain extent, it frequently will coincide, or its actions will become disease. The transition from an artificial action, either into the actions of health, or of modified disease, may be so obscure as to deceive the most discriminating.

As an illustration, we will state, that in some forms of asthenic fever, Fowler's Solution and Tincture of Opium, combined, furnish a safe and very certain remedy, if employed in suitable doses, and its use be continued until it produces its specific effects, puffings beneath the eyes and flushed cheeks.

If carried beyond this point, it will coincide. Nausea, pains in the stomach, tumid abdomen, and morbid sweats, will enter into the train of factitious symptoms.

Calomel, exhibited in some of our autumnal fevers, will counteract the disease until it effects certain changes in the system; but if carried still farther, it will coincide, and produce symptoms that have been mistaken for the original disease.

8th. Remedies will coincide, if disproportioned in power to the amount of vitality remaining in the system.

During the stage of exhaustion of Fevers, both the disease and vitality are nearly expended. Any harsh or violent effort to break up the remaining disease, is apt to waste the vitality and destroy the patient.

A similar state of things may exist in chronic disorders. The Physician who attempts to carry such cases by storm, is very certain to expend, with a prodigal hand, the vitality, and finally fail of performing a cure. On the other hand, the medical man, who makes his approaches with care, economizing the vitality, and gradually correcting the diseased action, will generally restore his patients to health.

8th. Remedies will coincide, if not suitably qualified.

Medical testimony frequently differs in regard to the efficacy of even active remedies. One practitioner will assert, that he cannot employ Fowler's Solution, Nitrate of Silver and Bichloride of Mercury—that they will irritate and disturb his patients. Another will affirm, that he frequently employs those articles with impunity and success.

The difference is explained by a knowledge of the fact, that one uses them without qualification, the other combines them with Opium, Hyosciamus, or other qualifying agents.

Remedies may show evidence of the coinciding effects, remote from the time they are employed.

Improper medication does not usually destroy life at the moment it is exhibited; nor, perhaps, even produce any decided change in the

symptoms; but the occurrence of a crisis, particularly in acute diseases, is the time when the coinciding effects may become obvious.

A sudden, and in many instances, an unexpected and unfavorable preponderance of the scale may happen at that juncture, from the impression of remedies employed days or weeks previous.

In other instances the effects may be postponed beyond the crisis, and ultimately manifest themselves in the form of a chronic disease. Excessive depletion may arrest a sthenic disease, and at length show its ultimate effects by the formation of tubercles.

An apology is perhaps due to this respectable and popular audience for bringing before it a medical subject, as a theme for an introductory lecture. Mature deliberation has, however, convinced me of the correctness of the procedure. There is a proneness to dabble with powerful articles of medicine, employ secret nostrums, and patronize quackery and imposition, that is, at this time, sacrificing an immense amount of health and life in this community. It is the duty of every one to exert his influence, however limited, to correct the evil. In the station I occupy, I hesitate not to speak plain, and to warn the public of the dangers that attend the course pursued.

It is not my desire to wound the feelings, or offend the patrons of any species of quackery, nor even the practitioners of the imposition. Many view their course in a more favorable light than I do, but the truth I am bound to tell without regard to persons.

On reviewing our subject, it becomes evident

1st. *That it is unsafe, under any circumstances, to employ secret no strums.*

2d. *That Quacks, Empirics, and Irregulars of all denominations, are not qualified to practice medicine with safety.*

It may, at first view, seem a sweeping condemnation, thus to embrace every class of Irregulars, but if their pretensions be fully scrutinized, it will be found that no injustice is done to any of them.

The practice of medicine has been followed in all ages, and the profession, both as an art and a science, is indebted to the *regular* members for its advancement and improvement. They have always occupied the same relative position in society, as regards usefulness and learning—advancing with the progress of science, and often leading the way.

Upon their flanks the Irregulars have as constantly skirmished—but the latter have never made a discovery, or an improvement, that has conduced to the benefit of suffering humanity.

They cannot point to the circulation of the blood, the introduction of the vaccine disease, the use of the stethoscope, and of ether and chloroform, as their discoveries.

The capital on which they have ever flourished, has consisted either of *sheer imposition, or some branch purloined from the regular profession, and perverted to a base use.* They have existed as a class of practitioners, since about the time our first parent left the Garden of

Eden; but it is an error to suppose that they have grown better or wiser by experience.

They have ever attempted to play on popular prejudice, caprice, and credulity, and have waxed and waned, for a brief time, in one form; and then, insect like, have undergone a transformation into another, to flirt out an ephemeral existence.

No species of quackery, however imposing, has ever endured, in any form, for any length of time.

Some obsolete system may be revived under a new garb, and new names applied to old and exploded absurdities. As one has disappeared another has taken its place. Like

“Wave succeeding wave,”

they have followed one after another in rapid succession.

Two traits of character have ever been distinctive of this class of practitioners, to wit: Ignorance and Arrogance. Ignorant of the principles and practice of medicine, and arrogant in their pretensions to skill and attainments, and in claiming that they are about to vanquish the regular profession.

No empiric ever lived, if credit could be placed in his assertions, but

“Whose skill was almost as great as his honesty; had it stretched so far, ’twould have made Nature immortal, and Death should have played, for lack of work.”

They have been as much alike in all ages of the world, as Pope’s Heroes,—

“From Macedonia’s madman to the Swede.”

To the Young Gentlemen, who are about to attend the course of instruction in these Halls, I would, in a particular manner, address the subject of the coinciding tendencies of Medicine.

Important as it is, this Institution, I believe, is the only one in our country, in which an hour is devoted, during each term, to its consideration. It is slightly alluded to in a few authors. In Minier and Tully’s work on Fevers, it occupies an interesting chapter.

With those gentlemen, I was intimately associated in early life, and to them was originally indebted for many of the views I have laid before you on this occasion. An extensive experience has subsequently confirmed their correctness.

It is my ardent wish that they may prove to you, in your future practice, as valuable guides as they have to me in days that are past.

From the moment the Student of Medicine first opens a treatise on Theory and Practice, till he receives the honors of the Institution, he is taught, in most schools, to consider Medicines as simply the antagonists of Disease; and is not initiated into the important secret, that Medicines, under certain circumstances, may, themselves, become the source of disease. He enters upon the stage of action with the

firm persuasion, that he has only to administer medicine with a bold and liberal hand, and he will at once convert disease into health; that, like Alladin, in oriental fable, he has only to rub the lamp, command, and it will be executed. Experience soon convinces him that his views are incorrect. On treating disease, he finds himself surrounded with new and anomalous symptoms, of which he had no previous conception, and which increase by every effort at extirpating them, —ignorant of the source of the perplexities—he becomes distrustful of the certainties of medical science.

If he be a man of principle, he will most likely retire in disgust from the profession, and ever after remain the most confirmed of medical skeptics. If, by chance, he be destitute of principle, he will probably continue to practice it, as a mere trade or art, for the purpose of obtaining his daily bread, but will dwindle into insignificance as he advances in age.

You have been furnished with a key to such perplexities.

These doctrines, I am aware, are not palatable to young and ardent students. They dislike to be told, that prudence, and not boldness, should be exercised in treating the sick.

These principles I have taught many years. They have been received with coldness by a majority of my classes. That matters not; it is not my duty to pamper students' tastes in my teaching; but it is both my duty and pleasure to fit them to be skillful and judicious practitioners.

I know that in a few years you will recal to mind those sober truths, and put upon them a just estimate. Receive them, then, young gentlemen! store them away in your memories, and when you have matured in experience and professional knowledge, recal them to mind, and test them in the strictest manner.

Among the few pleasures that reward the skillful Physician for his trials and hardships, is the reflection, that as an agent, in the hands of Providence, he has occasionally been the means of alleviating the sufferings of his fellow beings, and rescuing them from Death. This consoles and stimulates him to renewed exertions amidst his darkest hours. It may, however, be embittered by the consciousness, that through ignorance or inattention, his remedies, in other instances, have occasioned more than a counterbalancing amount of injury.