

Introductory lecture to the course of clinical instruction in surgery, at the Pennsylvania Hospital : delivered November 1st, 1848 / by George W. Morris.

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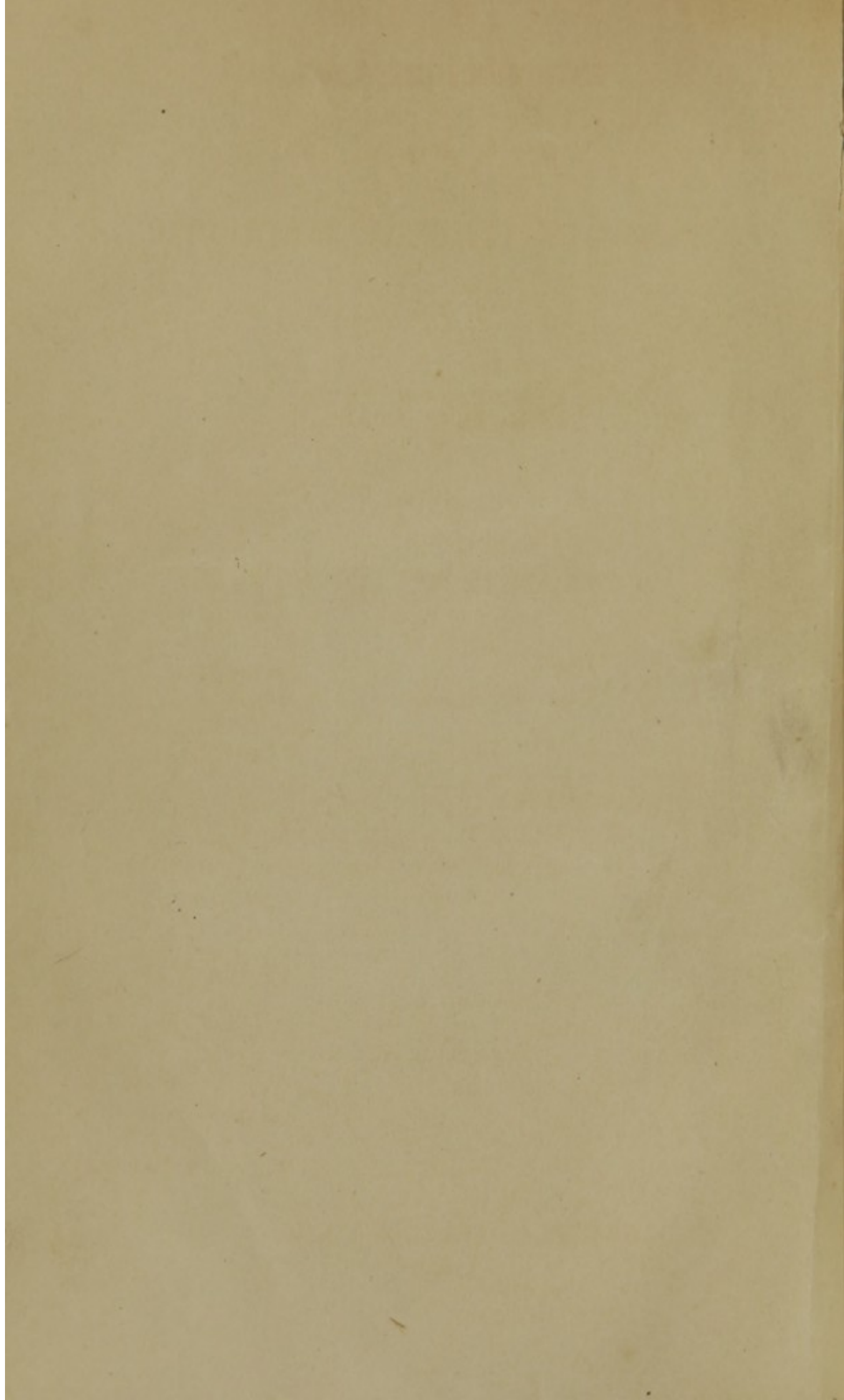


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DR. NORRIS'

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE.



INTRODUCTORY LECTURE
TO THE
COURSE OF CLINICAL INSTRUCTION
IN
SURGERY,

AT THE
PENNSYLVANIA HOSPITAL.

Delivered November 1st, 1848.

✓
BY GEORGE W. NORRIS, M.D.

One of the Surgeons of that Institution.

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PENNSYLVANIA HOSPITAL, }
December 2d, 1848. }

DR. NORRIS.

SIR :

The undersigned Committee of the Class of the Pennsylvania Hospital were appointed to request a copy of your Introductory Lecture for publication.

In conveying this request, we would express the esteem in which your abilities are held by the Class, and ourselves individually.

Very respectfully,

MATTHEW CLAY, Alabama.

ADDENELL HEWSON, Pennsylvania.

WM. H. H. MILLER, Pennsylvania.

To Messrs. Clay, Hewson and Miller, Committee of the Class of the Pennsylvania Hospital.

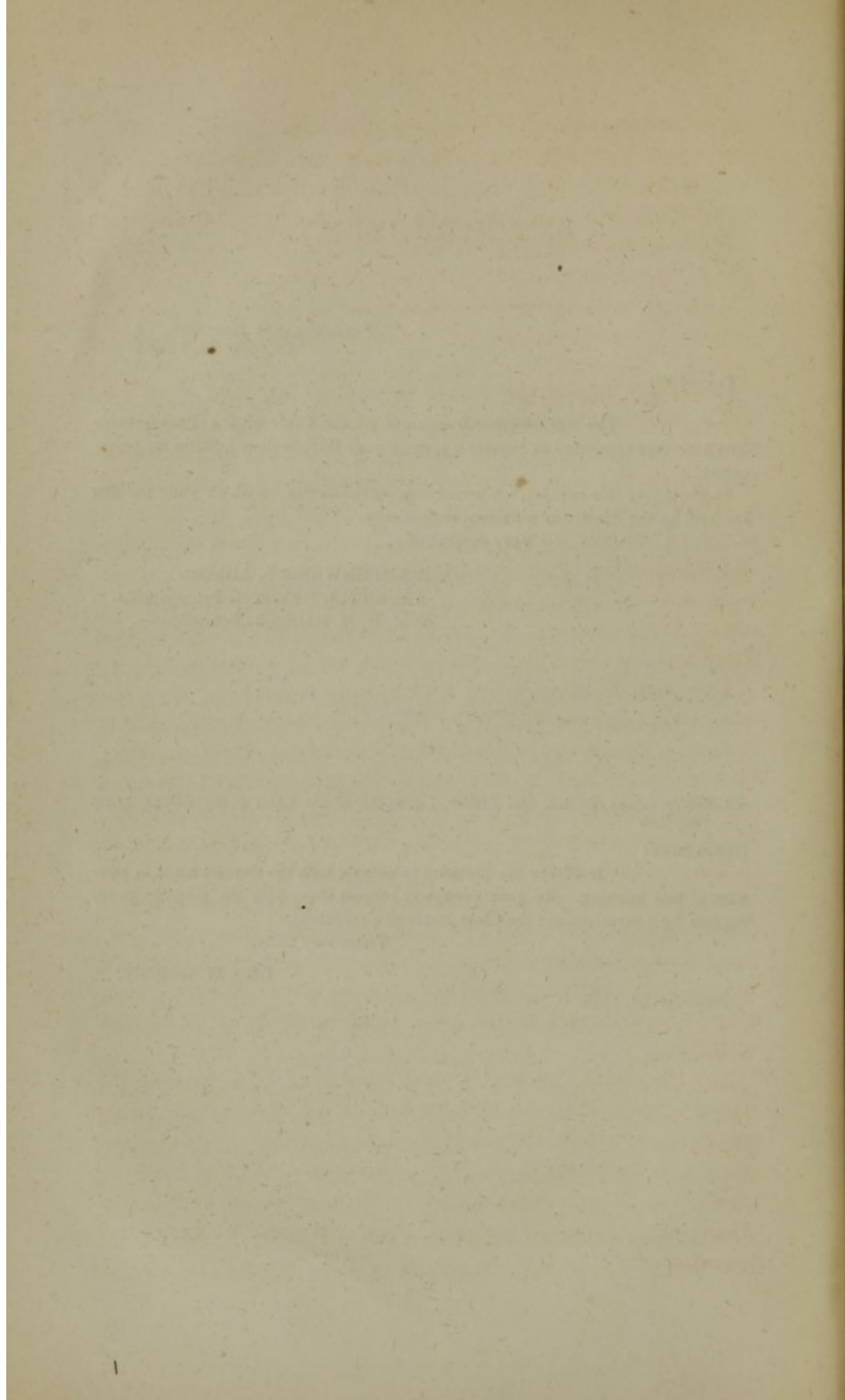
GENTLEMEN :

It affords me pleasure to comply with the request made in your note of this morning. Be good enough to receive along with the manuscript my regards for yourselves and the Class whom you represent.

Yours very truly,

GEO. W. NORRIS.

December 2d, 1848.



INTRODUCTORY.

IN commencing any course of instruction, custom has decreed that a little time should be taken up by the teacher in making known his views or opinions on subjects connected with his course, which shall serve as a sort of introduction between his auditors and himself; and in obedience to this custom, in coming before you this day as a teacher of Surgery, I beg to ask your attention to a few brief remarks on the organization of our Hospital and its means of clinical instruction—the nature of the instruction it is proposed to give—the classes of cases which will be most frequently presented to you—together with some desultory observations on operations and operative surgery.

The Hospital, in which you are now collected, gentlemen, is a private charity, and was founded by a number of benevolent individuals in 1751. The design of the charity is general, its charter providing for the relief of such poor as are afflicted with curable diseases, not infectious, lunatics, and for a lying-in ward for poor married women. The whole of the building in which we are now assembled is devoted to the accommodation of the sick and wounded—the western wing being appropriated to females, and the eastern to males, and the lower floors in each of these wings are occupied entirely by surgical cases. Being intended solely for the cure of disease, and not as a permanent asylum for poverty or decrepitude, all patients are discharged, who, after a reasonable time of trial, are deemed incurable by the medical attendants.

The Hospital is governed by twelve managers, who are annually elected by the contributors, and the medical and surgical departments are respectively under the charge of three physicians and three surgeons, who are yearly chosen by the managers. Two graduates in medicine reside in the hospital and take charge alternately of the medical and surgical wards, under the direction of the visiting surgeons and physicians.

The services of all the above mentioned gentlemen are gratuitous—the students' fees, which are, as in the English hospitals, the perquisites of the medical attendants, having been always devoted by them to the endowment and support of a medical library, which at present contains upwards of 10,000 volumes, comprising a large proportion of the most valuable ancient and modern works on the science of medicine, the privilege of using which is granted, under the regulations common in similar institutions, to those students who attend the hospital practice. A right to the use of the library during life may also be acquired by purchase, besides which permission may be obtained from the managers by scientific persons for its free use for limited periods, or on special occasions.

For the means of Clinical Instruction, no institution in the country surpasses this hospital, and none has more largely contributed than it has done to the diffusion of sound professional experience.

Up to the period of its foundation, no college of medicine existed in this country, and the Hospital, under the care of some of the first medical men of the period, soon attracted a number of students by the lectures—the first delivered in the country—of her physicians. Among these may be mentioned the names of Bond, Shippen and Morgan; and in later times, Rush, Wistar, Physick, Dorsey, Parrish, Otto and Randolph, were among those who energetically continued the plan of teaching introduced by them.

Our managers are not, as has been asserted, backward in giving opportunity for medical instruction, but have invariably countenanced and aided it, when conducted in a proper spirit and without injury to the feelings and frames of the numerous dependants on their bounty.

So far as you are concerned, I am sure, this proper spirit will be observed, and I will here take the liberty of asking from you, gentlemen, that all marks of applause or of disapprobation may in this theatre be avoided. When you consider that you are here at all times surrounded by the suffering—that there are always in the apartments immediately adjoining us and within the sound of your voices some who might be disturbed by noise, and that the ignorance of others who are not suffering might induce a fear that they are to be brought before you to exhibit their infirmities merely as for a theatrical exhibition, I feel confident that this request need but be mentioned by me in order to secure your observance of it. Our profession is eminently a humane one, and humanity to the poor and friendless who

are here thrown upon us for support and assistance, is shown perhaps more strongly by some sympathy for their sufferings, and the avoidance of every thing which may induce them to believe that those sufferings or their feelings are sported with, than in any other manner.

The number of patients treated in this hospital during the past year was 1681, and the average number of patients under treatment during the same period was 142, so that you will perceive ample means are here afforded for the observing of both acute and chronic affections.

In our surgical wards, a great proportion of the serious contusions, wounds, fractures, and dislocations met with by the labouring classes of the city and surrounding counties are to be found, while inasmuch as the choice of patients is made from a very large number of individuals applying for admission, excellent opportunities are also offered of witnessing all other varieties of chirurgical disease.

Of legitimate surgical operations, such as the extirpation of tumours, lithotomy, lithotripsy, the ligature of arteries, amputations, &c., we have during the year a fair proportion, though this branch of surgery has never been, and it will be my earnest endeavour that it here never shall be, pressed upon the attention of the student to the exclusion of what is vastly more important, viz., medical surgery. But though cases for operation will not be sought after, yet during the winter such as present themselves will be brought before you. In an institution such as this, many opportunities are necessarily offered for exhibiting wounds and fractures which could not be presented to you elsewhere, and such cases will be frequently shown you, for in addition to their study leading to the investigation of the principles of surgery rather than to the operative parts of it, there are no injuries which demand of you a more attentive study, or none which it is your interest as well as duty, so thoroughly to understand. The subjects are certainly common ones, but their importance may be judged of by you from the fact of their having at all times engaged much of the attention of the most eminent practitioners and teachers. Of such importance did the late Dr. Physick consider the complete understanding of them, that in all his various courses of lectures, both in this hospital and elsewhere, he gave much more time to the consideration of wounds and injuries of the bones and their consequences, than to any other topics which he treated of; and though the subjects may want the charm of novelty, yet you will find them of great practical interest. Their variety and frequent occurrence, the serious

complications which they oftentimes present, the violent constitutional symptoms to which they may give rise, and the importance of their proper treatment, not only to the patient, but to the lasting reputation of the practitioner, added to the necessity of often determining promptly one of the most difficult and delicate questions which the surgeon is ever called on to decide, viz., whether a limb must be sacrificed in an attempt to save life, or whether the injury is one which will allow of a reasonable hope of recovery without amputation—all make them worthy of your closest attention.

I have long thought, gentlemen, that a crying and increasing defect in the teaching of the present day, is a neglect of the principles of surgery. Beginners in the study of our science naturally enough become weary of the detail of principles, and when opportunities offer, love to wander off to witness operations. These, when determined upon with judgment, while they distract the mind from tiresome rules, instruct in what is certainly a highly important part of the profession, and to a wholesome degree should be encouraged; but important and dazzling as the calmness of mind and ability to perform them well may be, it is to be remembered that their acquisition is the least part of a surgeon's education, and a necessity for their performance the opprobrium of our science. To understand the nature of the affections in which operations are demanded, and to distinguish accurately these from such as are remediable by medical means, to determine the moment when the knife should be resorted to, and under what circumstances it is to be withheld, to know precisely what should be done before an operation, and the best course of treatment after it, are the great and difficult points to which attention should at all times be principally directed. Operative surgery, much as it should be valued, is, when compared to these, of only secondary importance; and incessantly to dwell upon it and magnify its results and consequence, is again to degrade our science to the rank which in former times it held when connected with the barbers.

Within the last half century, operative surgery has very much diminished, and will be still more so as our science advances.

The cultivation of morbid anatomy and pathology, which has within the period mentioned been followed with an ardor previously unknown, by indicating better methods of treatment, as well as by exposing the constitutional origin of what were before regarded as purely local diseases, and by pointing out the grave affections of the

general system which so frequently supervene on diseases which in their origin are purely local, has greatly diminished the number of really necessary operations, and I think it would be to the benefit of the student, as well as more honourable to our profession, if instead of dwelling so much upon operative procedures, teachers would more constantly direct the attention of their pupils to the attainment of this really useful knowledge. Ulcers and diseased joints, classes of diseases in which amputation was formerly so common, are now by improved methods of treatment in the great majority of cases cured without resort to operative means. Castration, which in former days was so common an operation in chronic diseases of the testis, is now rarely done—so rarely, that in this hospital, with which I have been connected for fifteen years, and in which many such affections are treated, I have never seen it once performed here. The application of the trephine, too, at one period so frequent, is now rarely resorted to, and within a very short time, the treatment of aneurisms by pressure has been so improved upon by an accurate study of the process employed by nature in her spontaneous cures of that disease, and such an adaptation of the treatment as to imitate her, that there is good reason to hope that in the extremities at least, another bloody operation will be henceforth in many cases deemed unnecessary.

Students are very apt to take up the false notion that it is by operations that a great and lasting surgical reputation is to be attained. Nothing is further from truth. Consult the history of surgery, and you will find that those who have been most distinguished for their daring and the frequent use of the knife, are hardly remembered, while such as have studied and taught the principles of the science are constantly noticed and referred to. The mere operative part of surgery may be acquired without the study of principles, and has often been possessed in an eminent degree without even anatomical knowledge. I have somewhere seen it stated, that one of the most celebrated performers of the Cæsarean operation that ever lived was an ignorant old woman, and Dr. Madden, in his pleasant book of travels in the east, describes an old and uninstructed boatman, whom he met with on the river Jordan, who acted in the capacity of lithotomist to that region of country, and was remarkable for his expertness and success. The greatest surgeon that England has ever had, is, unquestionably, John Hunter—his name is classical, and you all have already doubtless become acquainted with it, but which of you ever heard of John Hunter as an operator.

Of the mode of performing operations, Mr. Hunter has written but little. "Surgery," says he in one of his lectures, "consists, in my opinion, in the curing of a disease, rather than in the removal of it by mechanical means. But generally so differently is it thought, that the surgeon who gives most pain, and performs most operations, is now-a-days thought the most of."

It was not by the knife that he attained distinction, but by his investigation of diseases, and his expounding the principles of our science, and in a word, by his study of medical surgery. The greatest surgeon our own country has produced, was his pupil—Dr. Physick. I have been assured that he was great as an operator, though many of his own day fully equalled him—but it is not in this way that Physick's claims to distinction can be upheld. It was by mastering the principles of his preceptor and transplanting them to his native clime—by insisting upon them in all his teachings, demonstrating them to his students—adopting them in his practice—and thus avoiding the performance of rash operations or such as were not really necessary, that his name was carried, and is now revered by every admirer of surgery from one extreme of our continent to the other.

In a biographical notice of the late Mr. Liston it is asserted, that he observed to a friend some years previously to his decease, that "his principal avocation now was to prevent others from operating," a remarkable observation to come from one whose reputation was thought chiefly to rest on his skill as an operator, and one going to show that after all the vast experience which he had had, how much more he prized the reputation of a philosophic surgeon, and the preserver of limbs and joints, than that of the mere knife-man.

Operations are ever the last resort of the true surgeon, and though it is necessary to become acquainted with the proper and best mode of performing them—still let me urge you in an especial manner to study the principles upon which they are founded, and the medical treatment of surgical affections which may do away with their necessity, and when they are done, to give as much attention to the treatment adopted before, and after their performance, as to the operation itself, and to mark carefully their results. From these remarks, do not suppose, gentlemen, that I would have you think operations are never necessary, or slight operative surgery—it is an useful and necessary study, and a competent knowledge of the mode of doing them well is a matter of much importance. All this and much more I

would urge upon you. But I believe that too many of the teachers and writers of the present day exaggerate the benefits to be derived from operations, and that too often an impression is given to students by the frequency with which they are sought after, and brought before their notice—that the whole or the greater part of a surgeon's duties consist in an attention to them. I will again repeat that they are the smallest and least important of all his duties, and when you go abroad into the world to practice for yourselves, you can judge whether or not the statement is a correct one. The practitioner who has the knowledge which enables him to decide when they are necessary, and when they are to be avoided, is every where and by all competent persons, justly looked to as the best surgeon.

It is in the schools for the most part that you must get the principles which are to guide you in the treatment of injuries and diseases. Upon the elements which you there acquire, a superstructure is afterwards to be reared, the materials for which are to be obtained nowhere but at the bed-side, and in the dead-house. To assist you in the acquisition of this by pointing out the symptoms of disease or injury—the means of diagnosis—the indications to be fulfilled for its cure, the proper mode of applying the various dressings and apparatus, and when opportunities offer, by exhibiting to you the diseased parts, with a statement of the causes which have led to a fatal result, will be my chief objects during the winter.

The instruction furnished in an hospital, should not, in my opinion, be didactic only, but as much as possible demonstrative. Clinical instruction is not intended to give the history and general character of a disease, but to direct the attention of pupils to the particular case presented to them. The patient before them is to be examined, and the diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment of it given. To do this properly, it should be done daily at the bedside of the patient. This is the true method of studying clinical medicine, and possesses great advantages over that which has been introduced among us, of bringing the patient before you in an amphitheatre, inasmuch as instead of making the student see and hear only through his teacher, it allows each individual an opportunity of acquainting himself with the symptoms by a personal examination, of marking day by day, the advance or diminution of the disease, and of himself testing the accuracy of all statements made in regard to it.

This is the plan of proceeding, which is pursued by my colleagues

here during the spring, summer, and autumnal months, but as it is impossible to carry it out with a very large class, I shall in a great measure be forced to adopt the Edinburgh plan, viz., of giving you some general remarks upon a subject and afterwards illustrating it by particular cases. Our attention will not be confined to the great operations, or rare cases of disease, but will be directed to both acute and chronic surgical affections and injuries such as every day come under the notice of the practitioner, and I will endeavour in all cases to show you as much as possible the method of examining diseases together with the modes of dressing, and will dwell particularly on the more practical points. The history of the patient's disease—the circumstances under which it appeared—its first symptoms—often aid us in diagnosis and sometimes influence our treatment. The examination of a patient so as to gain useful information however is sometimes difficult, and like every thing else, requires practice to bring it out. One great object of clinical teaching is to show the student how to conduct this as well as other parts of his examination of the sick, and though such a course, and an exhibition of the common cases of disease or injury may possibly at times be not very attractive, and by some, may even be considered as trifling and unworthy of much attention, yet when you yourselves come to prescribe for the sick, you will appreciate their utility and the benefit derived from an attention to them.

Students naturally are desirous to excel in the more showy parts of surgery, and this, if not carried too far or to the neglect of the minor details of practice, is in no way reprehensible. You should remember, however, that there is no branch of surgery so humble as to be beneath your notice, and that it is in minor operations, and in the apparently trifling details of business, rather than by the eclat of a brilliant operation, that either the benefits of our profession are most strikingly shown, or that you are to arrive at great results. The most successful and most honoured of the surgeons of the present day, Sir Benjamin Brodie, has emitted the opinion, "that small operations constitute the best part of operative surgery. They reflect," says he, "most credit on the profession, and do most good to society." Rare and uncommon cases of surgery, and great operations, fall under the notice of but few even of those who are extensively engaged in practice; it is the minor matters that must build up the reputation of every man commencing our profession.

But a very small number of all of you whom I now address, will probably ever be called upon to do a great surgical operation, at least in the early part of his career; but I will venture to affirm that no one of you will practice medicine for a single year, without being more than once teased and chagrined either at your slow progress, or total want of success, in the treatment of some trifling affection of frequent occurrence, which as a student, you have either never had the opportunity of seeing, or paid but little attention to. Besides, whatever opinion you may entertain, I assure you, that sufferers from them consider these trifling matters as affairs of consequence, and very soon take up the idea, and generally it is a correct one, that persons who will give attention to, and can manage well and efficiently trifling matters, are best qualified to be entrusted with those of greater moment. These trifling matters in fact, in the vast majority of cases, either introduce a man into practice, or pave the way for his future eminence, and it is in proportion as they are well or ill performed by the young practitioner, that an opinion is formed of his professional abilities by his seniors. A very striking instance of the study which is often given to the great operations, and the little attention which is devoted to minor details, not very long since came under my own notice. A gentleman soon after graduating was fortunate enough (at least so he was thought to be) to have a case of stone in the bladder. He was at a great distance from such professional aid as he desired to have, yet being anxious to practice surgery, did not feel himself justified in refusing the case. He cut the patient, and succeeded in extracting a pretty large calculus from him. Things went on well for a day or two, at the end of which time finding urine still passing through the wound, he wrote in haste to a friend detailing what he had done—expressing surprise that the urine continued to flow through the wound—frankly owning his want of knowledge of the manner in which it would close and the proper treatment of it, and begging to be at once informed of them. He had been enabled to perform what is perhaps the most serious operation in surgery, without knowing any thing about the process employed by nature in the healing of wounds, and until made acquainted with it, suffered not a little, as well from fear of losing a case which had been well operated on, as from anxiety lest his ignorance of so important a part of his science should be discovered by those who had placed confidence in him, and blast all his prospects of success in the part of the country in which

he had settled. He was well instructed in the great operations, but knew little about what he had before considered a trifling matter. Since I have been connected with this Institution, I have seen many gentlemen who had graduated at the different schools of the country with honour, who were unable practically to diagnosticate or treat a simple fracture. Theoretically they knew all about it: could narrate correctly the appearances which they expected to find after the different accidents, and the different steps to be pursued for them, and even talk somewhat learnedly of the advantages of the several methods of treatment recommended for them, yet these gentlemen were deficient in nearly all the various important practical matters relating to them: the striking points of diagnosis; the frequency of change of dressing; the exact mode of applying those dressings; the length of time the apparatus used was to be continued; and the various little et ceteras about it, which add so much to the ease of mind and reputation of the practitioner, were all unknown to them. Nor is this to be wondered at; the schools can give at best but the principles which are to guide the student in practice; the thing itself can be learned only in an hospital, for it is there alone that the mode of doing it can be frequently witnessed and the case followed out throughout its progress to cure. To these little trifling matters, gentlemen, it will be my duty and study constantly to direct your attention, and in order to impress them upon your memories, it is possible at times, that I may urge them so as even to weary you. If such be the case you will be apt to leave us thinking an hospital a dull place, but when you enter upon the active duties of that profession which you have now commenced, when you find and *feel* the lives and limbs of your fellow-creatures entirely entrusted to your own hands, you will begin to look upon matters a little differently from what you did as students, and then the trifling and tedious matters which you witnessed in an hospital, will, I think, be remembered with both pleasure and satisfaction. Though I have been honoured by the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania with the appointment of Professor of Clinical Surgery in their Institution, still I am not here as attached to any particular school, and my duty as well as my inclination, as one of the surgeons of this hospital, would make me anxious to impart to all, come from whatever quarter they may, equal advantages and every information in my power. My lamented friend and colleague who preceded me here, the late Dr. Randolph, in addition to a surgical tact which is

not often excelled, possessed great fluency, and long experience and practice as a lecturer, which combined with his love of truth and strict adherence to facts, admirably fitted him for the post of Clinical Instructor. Some of you whom I now address, will recollect his happy manner and his plain but forcible language, and I need not disguise from these that I feel much hesitancy in standing before you in his place. As a teacher, I have had no experience, having, as I stated at the commencement of these remarks, come before you for the first time in that capacity. If, however, love for my profession as a science, and a heartfelt desire to impart to you in a very familiar way, such information as I have myself derived from this hospital, and to make you feel an interest in the study which you have begun, give me any claims to your attention, I will only say, gentlemen, that no exertions on my part shall be wanting to merit it.

