

**A sermon preached by request before the medical class of the university in the city of Buffalo, December 28, 1851.**

**Contributors**

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**Publication/Creation**

Buffalo : E. A. Maynard, 1852.

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Thompson (M. L. R. P.)

Boyer

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THE STUDY AND PRACTICE OF MEDICINE  
NOT UNFAVORABLE TO THE CULTIVATION OF A  
RELIGIOUS CHARACTER.

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NEW YORK

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1880

MEDICAL CLASSES OF THE UNIVERSITY

IN THE CITY OF BOSTON

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OF JAMES B. THOMPSON, M.D.

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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A

S E R M O N

PREACHED BY REQUEST

BEFORE THE

MEDICAL CLASS OF THE UNIVERSITY

IN THE CITY OF BUFFALO,

DECEMBER 28, 1851,

BY

M. LARUE P. THOMPSON, D. D.,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

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"PROFESSING THEMSELVES TO BE WISE, THEY BECAME FOOLS."

*Rom. I. 22.*

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BUFFALO:

E. A. MAYNARD'S STEAM POWER PRESS, PRINT.

1852.

MEMORANDUM

FOR THE RECORD

PREPARED BY THE SECRETARY

Washington, D. C., 1911

ACT BY THOMSON

REPUBLICAN PARTY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

IN THE CITY OF WASHINGTON

AND

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

The Honorable Secretary of the Department of Justice, Washington, D. C., is hereby notified that the Republican Party of the District of Columbia has filed with the Department of Justice a copy of its constitution and by-laws, and that the same have been approved by the Department of Justice.

Very truly yours,  
M. L. THOMSON  
Secretary

RECEIVED  
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE  
MAY 1 1911

## CORRESPONDENCE.

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BUFFALO, DEC. 30, 1851.

REV. DR. THOMPSON,

SIR : The Medical Class of Buffalo University, being earnestly desirous of the publication of your sermon, delivered before them at the North Presbyterian Church, on Sunday evening last, do therefore, through the undersigned Committee, respectfully solicit a copy of the same.

Your obedient servants,

CHA. AP. A. BOWEN,  
GEO. B. BARRUS,  
D. B. VAN SLYCK.

[COPY.]

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TO MESSRS. BOWEN, BARRUS AND VAN SLYCK,

GENTLEMEN : If the request of the Medical Class, to be furnished with a copy of the sermon, which I had the honor to preach before them last Sabbath evening, was intended only as a compliment, to which they thought me entitled, I am sincerely grateful for it, and proud of such a testimony of their approbation. Here, it will be entirely satisfactory to me, if the matter shall be suffered to remain. If, however, they really judge that the publication will be useful, and desire it, I shall take pleasure in submitting it to their disposal.

With the best wishes for your happiness, and success in life,

I am, Gentlemen,

Most sincerely your friend,

M. LARUE P. THOMPSON.

*Buffalo, Dec. 31, 1851.*

GORRESPONDENCE

BRISTOL, Dec. 10, 1851

REV. MR. THOMSON,

Sir: The Medical Officers (Labourers), being earnestly desirous of the publication of your account, delivered before them in the North-Western Church on Sunday evening last, in relation to the undersigned Committee especially, send you a copy of the same.

CHA. A. A. BOWEN,  
GEO. B. HARRIS,  
D. B. VAN BUREN.

The Editor of the *Journal* has been very kind to appoint me to be with him during the present week. I have had the pleasure of receiving a copy of the paper which I had the honor to present before them at the recent meeting, and I am glad to find that it has been so favorably received. I have had the pleasure of seeing a copy of the paper which I had the honor to present before them at the recent meeting, and I am glad to find that it has been so favorably received. I have had the pleasure of seeing a copy of the paper which I had the honor to present before them at the recent meeting, and I am glad to find that it has been so favorably received.



## S E R M O N.

COLOSSIANS, IV. 14.—“LUKE, THE BELOVED PHYSICIAN.”

This Luke was one of the twelve disciples of our Lord, whom he appointed to be with him during the period of his earthly labors, and on whom, afterwards, he devolved the apostolic office of forming and founding his church. He was distinguished among his associates, by eminent personal cultivation, the result of superior literary and social advantages, which he had enjoyed in previous years, and no less by his deep intelligence of divine things, and his remarkable devotion and devotional spirit as a christian. Hence, he was designated to be the author of one of the four gospels, and of that invaluable narrative of the first times of christianity, which we have among the canonical scriptures, under the title of “The Acts of the Apostles.” From the manner in which he is mentioned in the text, we infer that his whole character was peculiarly amiable and attractive, and that he was held in very high and special esteem by his brethren, and by all who knew him.



Luke was not by birth a Jew, but is supposed to have been an African, of the city of Cyrene. According to the best authorities, he died in Achaia, soon after Paul's martyrdom, at the advanced age of eighty-four years. He is mentioned in the text as a *physician*, and there are besides incidental evidences in all his writings, that he was familiar with the subject of medicine, and that he observed the events which he recorded with the eye of one who understood, and had been used to practice the healing art.

I have selected the text as furnishing me with a happy occasion for attempting two things which I propose, namely :

First, To vindicate the study and practice of medicine against an impression which I apprehend to be prevalent, that it has a tendency to beget and foster a spirit of religious scepticism ; and

Second, To urge the peculiar claims of religion upon the attention and regard of medical men, as being eminently needful in their case, and eminently becoming.

First, I am to vindicate the study and practice of medicine, against what I believe to be an unfounded impression, that it has a peculiar tendency to beget and foster a spirit of religious scepticism.

This is the *main* purpose of my discourse. I am unwilling that such an impression should prevail, because I think that in many ways it is injurious ; and I am especially unwilling that our young men, who are in a course of preparatory training for the medical profession, should be under the influence of an idea, at once so false, and so dangerous to them. I say, *dangerous to them* ; for however free their pursuit, in its own true nature may be, from the tendencies attributed to it, the bare thought that it is



otherwise, and that great physicians have generally been great unbelievers, begets very naturally for the ambitious and aspiring, a temptation of peculiar force to be unbelievers themselves, or at least, to affect to be so, which easily ends in the thing affected becoming a reality.

If the medical profession has been, in any degree, in point of fact, which I do not believe, more infected with sceptical sentiments than other classes of educated men, I am convinced it must be owing chiefly, if not entirely to the influence of this false idea on the the minds of its inexperienced neophytes; for after the most careful consideration, I remain profoundly ignorant of any other cause at all adequate to produce such a result.

I have, myself, been a young man, and have felt the promptings of a misdirected ambition as well as others. It is therefore not inconceivable with me, that a young man should feel the power of that temptation to which I have alluded. I well remember that in my student days, it was insinuated into my mind, that great men, profound scholars, profound thinkers, men of vast and comprehensive intellects, whether of this profession or of that, had generally been contemners of religion, and that their contempt for religion, was in some manner a quality of their greatness; either that religion was really a folly, and they had the sagacity to perceive it, or else, that if religion were true, there was nevertheless, in the essential nature of greatness, something constitutionally hostile to it, so that in any case, view it as I might, infidelity was a badge of greatness. I supposed that it marked a superior mind, that it afforded evidence of a deep insight into things which lay beyond the reach of vulgar eyes, or else, at any rate, of indepen-



dent thought, of high moral daring, and of intellectual emancipation. The result was, that I too, wishing to be suspected of having something marvelous in me, began to pucker my eyebrows, and to utter grave doubts about God and the bible, and all religion. It was an achievement that greatly swelled my pride to browbeat some modest believer in christianity, and overwhelm him with cavils which he could not answer. I loved to vaunt my irreligion in all companies where such gross indecency could be tolerated; and though I knew that my infidelity was the merest affectation, and my coward heart reproved me bitterly, and sometimes terrified me with its own consciousness of truths which I pretended to disbelieve, yet I fancied, a sad delusion often I am sure, that I at least seemed to those who were about me, to be a very profound and extraordinary young gentleman. Into what a snare of Satan had I fallen! How easily might I have wrought myself into a veritable disciple of Voltaire or Paine! To the verge of what an abyss had my silly and vain ambition conducted me! I refer it solely to the grace of a most indulgent God, that I was not left to "eat the fruit of my own ways, and to be filled with my own devices."

I trust I may be excused, after detailing such a passage in my own history, if I intimate in the presence of a class of medical students, that it is possible for them to be led into infidelity by the supposition, false though it be, that there is something in the study of medicine, when pursued far, and with deep insight into its mysteries, which strongly tends to disaffect the mind towards religion. I impute to you no weakness with which I do not charge myself, at the same period of my life. I



charge indeed nothing upon you. I only accuse human nature. Let the impression that I speak of be strongly fixed upon your minds, and it is not in your human nature to be wholly insensible to its influence. You are brought under the power of a temptation, to which, if you be not already fortified by christian principle, it is incredible that some of you should not yield, at least, somewhat. And the danger is greater, the more you are fired with ambition to excel. The desire to excel, when not regulated by christian principle, begets, generally, if not invariably, the desire to be *esteemed* excellent, and this tends to nothing more naturally than to a copying of those peculiarities which are supposed to have been, or to be, the usual concomitants of excellence in others. Let the idea be once propagated and cordially received in a medical college, that a deep study of, and insight into medical science, is incompatible, or nearly so, with the maintenance of religious faith, and I care not how untrue or absurd such an idea may be, that medical college, in spite of all ordinary counteractions, will be a school of infidelity, graduating hardly fewer infidels than doctors.

I desire to save you, young gentlemen, from such a peril, and at the same time to vindicate the highly honorable and useful profession which you have chosen, from a disgraceful imputation. I wish to vindicate Religion herself, for it is a base slander upon her, to insinuate that proficiency in any department of human knowledge, is unfriendly to her honors. It is the *pride* of "science, falsely so called"; it is the ambitious affectation of it, where the *thing* is wanting, that vaunts itself against the simplicity of religious faith. The more men truly know,



the more they are inclined to bow to the revelations of God in the scriptures. Else, religion is indeed an imposture, and the bible a compilation of the grandest lies that ever were invented. We leave to that arch fabricator of falsehoods who sits baptised, but neither cleansed nor converted, among the Pagan idolatries of Rome, the sentiment, that "ignorance is the mother of devotion." We believe just the contrary; and when we shall find that facts no more sustain us in proclaiming true science to be the handmaid of religion, we will cease to proclaim religion. We will abjure its ministry, and, despairing any farther of being serviceable to men's souls, as the next best method of beneficence, we will become physicians, and seek to be of service to their bodies.

It is undoubtedly true, that a smattering of science, and even this, not directly, but indirectly, may sometimes prove unfriendly to religion, through the vain presumption of knowledge which it begets, and the wretched conceit of superiority with which it inflames the mind. Hence, it has been beautifully said, in a couplet with which you are all familiar,

"A little learning is a dangerous thing ;  
"Drink deep, or taste not the Pyerian spring."

You shall be satisfied, the more you make observations among men, especially in schools and seminaries of learning, and among the real and would-be literati of any age or land, that,

—"Shallow draughts intoxicate the brain ;  
"But drinking largely, sobers us again!"

The second year of a collegiate education produces a "Sophomore"—a wise fool—a Solomon in diapers, compared with whom, in their several estimates of them-



selves, Sir Isaac Newton was a very common-place individual, and the veritable Solomon himself, a mere nobody.

Nobly was it written by Dr. Young—

— “Look on truth unbroken, and entire ;  
 “ Truth in the system, the full orb ; where truths  
 “ By truths enlightened, and sustained, afford  
 “ An arch-like, strong foundation, to support  
 “ Th’ incumbent weight of absolute, complete  
 “ Conviction ; here, the more we press, we stand  
 “ More firm ; who most examine, most believe.  
 “ Parts, like half sentences, confound ; the whole  
 “ Conveys the sense, and God is understood,  
 “ Who not in fragments speaks to human race ?  
 “ Read his whole volume, sceptic ! then reply.”

It is not what men know, that ever does them an injury, but what they imagine themselves to know. It is the presumption of much knowledge, based on a little. Intoxication of the brain may be *occasioned* by shallow draughts of learning, but it is *caused* by a disturbance in the vacuum which remains unfilled. Much knowledge always renders a man humble and unassuming ; for the more we actually know, after attaining a certain degree of advancement, the more we see of the vast fields of knowledge that lie beyond us, and beyond our search. Solomon, who professes to have given his “heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under the sun ;” and of whom it is said, that “his wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the East country, and all the wisdom of Egypt, for he was wiser than all men ; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol ; and his fame was in all nations round about ; and he spake three thousand proverbs, and his songs were a thousand and five ; and he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is



in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall; he spake also of beasts and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes"—even Solomon complained that "all is vanity and vexation of spirit," because "that which is crooked cannot be made straight; and that which is wanting cannot be numbered." The import of his complaint is, that with all he knew, he was only mortified and made sad with the reflection that he knew so many things imperfectly; and that on such numberless deeply interesting and important themes, after the sorest travail of study, any degree of knowledge remained hopelessly and forever unattainable. I need hardly remind you of that saying of Newton, that comparing what he knew with what he desired to know, he seemed to himself like a little child playing with pebbles along the shore, while the wide ocean lay extended before him.

That true learning is not in fact adverse to religious faith, is abundantly proved, when you consider that the most incomparably learned men that the world has ever known, were firm and unwavering believers in Christianity. With that name that has just been mentioned, shining like a star above all the names of uninspired men that have adorned the walks of science, are associated such others as that of Bacon, the father of the inductive system, to whose ineffable genius, in pointing out the true method of philosophical enquiry, your own profession, young gentlemen, is more deeply indebted than that of any human being besides—Pascal, Hon. Robert Boyle, Sir Thomas More, Erasmus, Butler, Dr. Johnson, and a host besides of not inferior fame. In countries, where other causes have not operated to produce and nurture sceptical tendencies, the very highest and purest lite-



rary names have always been the names of men of religious character ; and throughout the entire class of educated minds, it is undeniable that a fair and full proportion, as compared with other classes, have been upon the side of religion. This I affirm is the fact at the present day, as no intelligent person will venture to deny, both in England and America.

Still it is true, in the sense in which Paul wrote it in his first epistle to the Corinthians, "that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called ; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are ; that no flesh should glory in His presence." The providence of God has taken care that the success of his cause in the world should never seem to be dependent on the influence of great names. Besides, nothing is more true than that the position of men occupying exalted stations, and crowned with worldly honors, is, of all others, unfavorable to the cultivation of religious character. Not because of their higher mental endowments, and their larger attainments in knowledge, but because of the peculiar temptations to which they are exposed to the indulgence of a worldly spirit. The fact on this account, is the more remarkable, that from the ranks of truly learned men, religion has found so many and such devoted disciples.

I am far from denying that vast numbers of most eminent scholars have been infidels ; but it is a most



unreasonable assumption, even if the assumption were not contradicted by adverse facts, that their learning was in any sense the direct cause of their infidelity. It is more fairly to be presumed, that in the absorbing pursuit of other studies, the claims of religion were never subjected by them to a candid and careful examination.

Sir Isaac Newton was at first a clamorous unbeliever, but on a careful investigation of the claims of christianity, he found cause to change his opinions. The celebrated Dr. Edmund Halley was once arguing with him against the scriptures, when Sir Isaac cut him short with words like these: "Dr. Halley, I am always delighted to hear you speak of astronomy, or other parts of mathematics, for these subjects you have studied, and I know you understand them; but Sir, you should let christianity alone, for that subject you have not studied. I have, and I am certain that you know nothing of the matter." I am persuaded that a similar reproof might be justly administered to nine in ten of the educated infidels of any country. Dr. Johnson observed that "no honest man could be a deist, for no man could be so, after a fair examination of the proofs of christianity." On the name of Hume being mentioned to him, "No, sir," said he, "Hume owned to a clergyman in the bishopric of Durham, that he had never read the New Testament with attention."

A young lawyer in company with others of his profession was dining once at Poughkeepsie, in this state, with Alexander Hamilton, a name ever to be mentioned with reverence and tears, and in the course of the



dinner, wishing to promote hilarity, he ventured a story the point of which was to cast ridicule upon christians and their creed. When he was done, instead of the responsive merriment which he hoped would be excited, Hamilton gravely asked him if he knew what he had been talking of? Seeing the young man overwhelmed with embarrassment, he added that he had not designed to give him pain, but to call his attention to his own case. "Not many months ago," said he, "I was as you are, doubtful of the truths of christianity, but some circumstances turned my thoughts to the investigation of that subject, and I now think differently." This anecdote is given on the authority of bishop Chase, who received it from the lips of the very individual to whom Hamilton administered his reproof.

It would be easy to show from the written and published confessions of many converted infidels, and from authentic admissions of infidels who were never converted, so far as is known to men, that, as a general thing, infidelity has had its origin from men's ignorance rather than their knowledge; and that your learned unbelievers have been those who, from the absorbing nature of their other studies, or from distaste for this, have been led wholly to neglect the study of religion, and have formed their opinions solely from their prejudices, or from the slanders of enemies as ignorant and as prejudiced as themselves.

But it is assumed that there is something *especially* hostile to religion in the study and practice of the noble science of medicine. On what ground this assumption stands, I am utterly unable to conceive. My own judgment, formed upon a simple consideration of appa-



rent facts, would be exactly the reverse. I should say, looking at the subject without a bias, that of all human studies and pursuits, save those of the christian minister himself, if such an exception, even, is needful to be made, none is so well and so admirably adapted to form a religious character of the highest order, as the study and pursuit of the physician. It seems to me that the physician is the very man, almost of all others, who should see most of God, and most of the tokens and attractions of immortality, in the scenes and experiences of his daily life.

Yet the impression on the popular mind that the fact is otherwise, is deep and of long standing. In a book entitled "Religio Medici"—The religion of a doctor—written by Sir Thomas Browne, K<sup>T</sup>., M. D., and first published in 1640, a book of singular power, though of great quaintness, which I could wish were in the hands of every medical man, I find at the very opening passage the following admission: "For my religion, though there be several circumstances that might persuade the world I have none at all, as the general scandal of my profession, the natural course of my studies," &c. He proceeds to avow himself a decided and firm believer in the doctrines of christianity.

Popular impressions, however, though they be very general, and of long standing, are not certain criterions by which to judge of truth. If time permitted me I might illustrate this remark by numerous examples. If you say, there must be some ground for these popular impressions, I reply, that very small ground suffices. A few physicians in every age, of profligate lives, and infidel opinions, though their character were



really the exception, and not the rule to the profession as a whole, would furnish all the requisite conditions of that vague conclusion which I now repudiate.

The world delights in marvelous combinations; and nothing obtains an easier currency among men, than that, if it have only a moderate pretext, and can get a start, which occasions wonderment and falls athwart some just and reasonable expectation. Now I am entirely satisfied that one chief secret of the popular prejudice that exists against the medical profession, lies in the fact that the studies and pursuit of that profession seem to be, and in a sober judgment are, so eminently adapted to exert an influence favorable to religion rather than adverse to it. In every class and in every department of life there are bad men. There are infidel lawyers, infidel merchants, infidel farmers, infidel mechanics, and infidels who belong to no profession or trade. But in all this the world sees nothing to wonder at, and nothing, in fact, to be especially regarded. But that a physician should be an irreligious person or an infidel; a physician, a man whose great study has been God's masterpiece of creative wisdom and workmanship, and whose daily occupation has led him into the closest intimacy with the august solemnities of death, and all those trials of humanity, from which men in general derive their most impressive lessons of religion's value, and their most affecting intimations of an eternity to come; that a physician should spurn the revelations of the bible, and cast away religious restraints, and make a mock of God, and deny an hereafter, here is a marvelous thing, whose very marvelousness, in our wonder-loving world, has, no doubt,



marvelously helped the impression, so unfavorable to the religious character of the medical fraternity. It is like the belief which has obtained an equally unfounded popularity that the children of pious parents, and especially of christian ministers, are more inclined to be vicious than the children of other people ; the untruth of which would be apparent on the slightest exposition of the facts.

It may be said farther, by way of accounting for the impression which exists on this subject, that physicians being public men, associating on terms of the utmost familiarity with all classes of people, there is a certain degree of prominence acquired by them, which makes them more freely talked of than others, and gives a greater notoriety to whatever is strange or peculiar in their character and opinions. It results from this, that one physician may do more to form the general sentiment respecting his profession, than a hundred men of any other profession or pursuit whatever, excepting only the clerical, if indeed that must be excepted, respecting theirs ; and since a physician of vile and irreligious character, or of infidel principles is indefinitely more noticeable than one of a better stamp, because we least expect to meet with such an one, such a physician does more to form the general sentiment respecting his profession than a hundred other physicians of pure morals and a christian faith.

Besides, I can readily understand why an infidel physician should be the worst kind of an infidel, and the most resolute and clamorous in proclaiming, and in attempting to propagate his errors. It is just because he is an infidel in circumstances whose natural influences would most strongly incline him to be some-



thing else. The unbelief begotten and nurtured in a position so adverse to it, is, by an obvious law of the human mind, of the most extreme and malignant character, and this alone is sufficient to give peculiar conspicuity to the example.

One thing is yet to be mentioned which, perhaps, has had more to do in exciting the popular prejudice against the medical profession than any other. I refer to the method to which physicians have been compelled to resort for advancing their science, and qualifying themselves to be its successful practitioners, *by the dissection of dead subjects*. Here they have come directly athwart the most deep-rooted prejudices of our nature, and prejudices too, most intimately associated with our religious sentiments and susceptibilities. Often, being unprovided in any less objectionable way, with the means of pursuing their investigations, they have been forced to be the plunderers of grave-yards ; but whether thus, or otherwise, they have been enabled to prosecute their study of the wonderful mechanism of human life, by anatomical demonstrations, the superstitious ignorance of mankind has revolted at them as the most abandoned of all sacrilegists, and they have been classed with ghouls and vampires, whom it was pollution but to touch or know. To millions upon millions of men, physicians have seemed to be inspired with the utmost contempt of all the most awful sentiments of religion, and the most sacred instincts of humanity. If nothing else could be mentioned, this, which I trust does not stamp the profession as irreligious in our more intelligent regards, would be ample to account for that popular impression against it of which I complain, and which I am seeking to show has no foundation in realities.



I may appeal to facts. The world affirms that the study and practice of medicine tends to infidelity. Where are the proofs by which such an accusation is supported? My own observation confirms the opposite statement. Among the physicians with whom I am personally acquainted, a very large proportion are professedly pious men, and an infidel among them I do not know, unless one of another city be such, of whom I have barely heard the suspicion intimated. With the medical gentlemen of Philadelphia, esteemed as able and learned as any in the land, I am largely acquainted, and a body of men, less liable to the charge of infidelity or irreligion, I am sure cannot be found. Among them are some truly eminent for their faithfulness as christian professors. They are leading men, and officers in the churches, forward in every noble and philanthropic undertaking. The same, I am satisfied, may be said of the profession in New York and Boston, and generally throughout the length and breadth of our land. Look at our own city. Who is the infidel physician here? I shall receive light when I am informed of one. I hope to be pardoned, if I say, look at the faculty of your own college. I believe without an exception, they are religious men, nearly all of them so by an open profession in one or other of our christian churches. I have not access extensively to medical biographies, but in turning over the pages of a single volume in my possession, I find a very large proportion of the names, to be names of men who were by profession christians, and of not one, so far as I discover, is there an intimation that he was hostile to religion. I wish I had the means of verifying this subject, by a reference to the eminent physicians of the other continent and



especially, of England and Scotland. I have no doubt that the testimony of facts there, would be the same as here, and that we should find the names of Boerhaave, and Boudon, and Walker, and Fothergill, and Smith, and Marshall, and Abercrombie, associated with a host of others equally celebrated for learning in their profession, and for devoted attachment to the doctrines of christianity.

Why, as a glaring and outstanding fact, it is not true that the study and practice of medicine are unfriendly to religious faith. The reverse is true. If in a comparison of facts with reference to this subject, you contrast the medical with the other secular profession, that of law, I feel not the slightest hesitation in affirming, that the profession of medicine has greatly the advantage.

And now let us glance briefly at the interior nature of this subject, for a more philosophical investigation of it.

Three considerations of paramount influence and importance instantly present themselves.

First: The study of the physician brings him into direct familiarity with the strongest proofs furnished in the whole range of the universe, of the existence, and the creative wisdom and power of God.

It is said of Dr. Marshall, who was a distinguished lecturer on anatomy, and a firm believer in the doctrines of the bible, that in one instance, having devoted an entire allocution to the demonstration of the evidences of design in the structure of the double hinges of the joints in the human frame, he so impressed the mind of an intelligent but sceptical individual who happened to be present on the occasion, that he suddenly exclaimed with great emphasis, "A man must be a fool, who after duly studying his own body, can be an atheist."



Of Claudius Galen himself, who flourished in the second century, one of the very demi-gods of the medical profession, it is related that he was strongly inclined to atheism, but when he at length anatomised a human body, and carefully surveyed the frame of it, the use and adaptation of its several parts, the purposes served by each muscle and bone and ligament and vein, and the perfect arrangement and beauty of the whole, he became deeply devotional, and composed a hymn of praise to the Creator. From a notice which I have seen of him in some medical review, I infer that he became permanently a religious man.

A somewhat similar account is given of Celsus, who flourished in Rome under the reign of Augustus, and who is regarded as having been the most eminent medical philosopher, and one of the profoundest geniuses of his time.

I could feel little respect for either the reasoning powers, or the moral honesty of one, who after a careful anatomical investigation of the human eye, or hand, or indeed of any important organ of the human body, should seriously question the existence of an all-wise and benignant Creator.

Second: The physician, by his daily practice, is made conversant with facts and scenes which are eminently fitted to direct his thoughts to another state of existence.

It may occur to some that the constant repetition of these facts and scenes to which I now refer, is rather calculated to indurate his mind against their influence, as the mind of the soldier is schooled to insensibility by his constant familiarity with death and suffering. It is to be considered, however, that the physician and the



soldier are placed in widely different circumstances. The former goes through his rounds of duty among the sick and the dying alone, with no checks to the serious reflections which naturally arise upon the scenes which he beholds, while the latter has his experiences in the midst of an excited and tumultuous crowd. The business of the former is to cure, to alleviate suffering, and it is expected of him that he will be tender and sympathetic in all his treatment of the afflicted ones to whom he ministers. The latter goes forth for the express purpose of destroying life, taught to regard pity as a weakness, and absolute indifference amid scenes of blood and carnage, as one of the noblest and most admired graces of his profession. Besides, suffering and death in the stillness and seclusion of the sick chamber are very different in their own nature from the same things on a battle field. It must be obvious at a glance that there is very little real analogy between the physician's life and the soldier's. I know it is an ordinary law of the human mind that habit begets indifference, and I do not at all suppose that a practising physician will be affected by the scenes of his daily experience, as another person would be. I can readily believe that he will be calm and self-possessed where another would be wholly overpowered by emotion and excitement; but I see nothing in the natural tendency of his daily experiences that should of necessity deprave his mind, or hinder the obvious reflections which those experiences are certainly fitted to produce. I cannot imagine how one whose whole business is to strive against death, and who so often finds his utmost skill and endeavors thwarted, should not for himself, be more keenly alive to death's



inevitable power, and to the necessity of preparing for it. Neither can I conceive how one, who on almost every death bed receives demonstrations of a universal instinct of man's nature, pointing to a retributive hereafter, should be incredulous of that hereafter or reckless of his interests in it. No sermons ever preached on earth are like the sermons of death beds, and these sermons proclaimed as it were from the very world of spirits, though kept by necessity or by choice from the house of God, the physician cannot help but hear. No one so often as he is a listener to the despairing cry of the dying sinner, and to the triumphant song of the dying saint. None witnesses so many and such varied demonstrations of the power and value of religion, and of its adaptation to sustain the soul when all other supports have failed. I can understand the calm and steady composure with which he performs his duty in the presence of suffering and death, while others are overwhelmed and powerless, but I cannot understand the religious infidelity or indifference which goes unrebuked and unconverted from scenes like these to which I have alluded. Much less can I understand how such scenes should nurture the irreligious tendencies of any human mind.

The third remark which I have to make is this, that there is no human occupation which affords so wide and admirable a field for the cultivation of the highest and purest of the religious affections, as the occupation of a physician. His whole life is cast among those who eminently need the sympathy and aid of their fellow creatures. Not a day of his existence passes that he is not directly called into scenes where a natural tax is levied no less upon the gentleness and kindness of his nature



than upon his professional abilities. Even in the chambers of the rich, the eye of pain appeals as truly to his compassion as to his skill. But his walks extend as well to the hovels of the poor as to the mansions of the affluent, and squalid disease coupled with squalid pauperism demands his care. I have been with the physician at his hours of office consultation, when the poor have come in troops around him with their attenuated forms, their hectic cheeks, their mutilated limbs, their gangrenous sores, and their empty srips, and I have felt that if any man's life afforded a field for a closer imitation of the example of the Son of God, than all others, it was his. I have almost envied his practical advantages for the cultivation of a Christ-like character. And that office scene is but a grouping of things that he ceaselessly encounters in his rounds of daily practice.

Compare with such a life, the life of the attorney, or the tradesman, or the mechanic, and what approximation or resemblance is there, in relation to the opportunities afforded for developing by exercise the most ennobling and generous, and pure, and Christ-like affections of our humanity?

It is a fact, I believe, which no one will think of doubting, that there is no class of men in the world, in any of the lucrative callings, who perform a tithe of the gratuitous labor that is performed by physicians.

I might multiply similar considerations to disprove the allegation of an infidel or irreligious tendency in the study and practice of medicine, to any extent, but I am already extending my discourse too far. The allegation, I affirm, has neither facts nor philosophy to support it. It rests upon a baseless popular delusion, which I shall



feel most happy, if I may be in any measure instrumental in correcting.

I proposed, in the second branch of my discourse, to urge the peculiar claims of religion upon the attention and regard of medical men, whether students or practitioners, as eminently needful in their case, and eminently becoming.

What I have to say under this head must be said very briefly.

Physicians, from the position which they occupy as educated men, and especially from the terms of easy intimacy on which they are admitted to the families in which they practice, from the strong affection which is ordinarily felt for them, and the high degree of confidence with which they are regarded, cannot fail to exert a vast influence, either for good or for evil, in their several communities. If they are irreligious men, none can tell the mischief of which they may be the authors; if, on the contrary, they are men of decided christian principle and practice, none can estimate the good. Both God and society have a special claim upon them that they shall be men of pure lives and of religious character.

But there is a consideration, in the special uses which a physician may make of christian truth and fidelity in his visitations among the sick, that illustrates his duty in this respect with peculiar force. How often is he called where the minister of religion cannot go, and where medicine for the soul is a thousand times more needful than medicine for the body! Is it right, is it becoming and proper, gentlemen of the medical profession, that you should stand by the bedsides of the sick and the dying, and have no word to say to them of Christ, and of the



world to come; that you should accompany them down to the very gate of death, and see it open to receive them, and whisper in their ears no thought of God and Heaven, and make no effort to direct their fainting vision to the cross of the sin-atoning Jesus? Oh, how might you in innumerable instances be ministers of heavenly consolation and immortal hopes to those whom your skill suffices not to rescue from the grave! I will even venture the opinion that your very skill as physicians might be made more effectual by uniting with it the soothing influences of christian encouragement and prayer. And I must here take the liberty to express my entire dissent, confirmed by no little experience, from the superlative and most unwise caution of those physicians who would exclude the ministers of religion from the bed-sides of their patients, from an apprehension that injury would be done them by the admission of such visits. I know that in many cases, nothing is more important to the sick than rest and quiet, but I have yet to meet with the first case, in my own observation, in which the voice of christian sympathy and prayer has not rather tended to promote quiet than to disturb it. Its influence is to calm more than to agitate.

The minister of religion must know how to conduct himself in the presence of the sick, as well as the physician, and if he understands his duty, I affirm that his visits and offices in their chambers will rather aid than hinder the efficacy of medical advices. But if, as you sometimes think, the visits of ministers cannot be allowed, how much more important does it seem that you yourselves should be qualified to perform their functions? It is possible that at certain critical moments



of disease, the sight of an unaccustomed face might produce an agitation unfavorable to the patient's recovery. Should not then, the attending physician, with his own familiar face, be prepared to kneel at his patient's pillow, and conduct him through that sharp crisis with the soothing voice of prayer to that great Being with whom alone are the issues of life and death!

I know of no sight on earth more engaging and lovely than that of a pious physician, mingling with his medical ministrations, the ministrations of religious hopes and consolations to the sick and suffering ones among whom his life and labors are appointed.

It would be easy to urge many special considerations that commend religion to physicians, but I shall conclude with one, which appeals to every man alike. Your profession gives you no exemption from that lot which is common to all mankind. A day will come when you shall cease to be called to others—when yourselves shall need the physician's care, and be the patients. A day will come when you shall contend against death aiming his shafts at your own bosoms. You will need religion then for the stay and consolation of your own souls. A day will come when you must die, when you must meet God, when you must give an account of your stewardships, when you must enter on the awards of eternity, receiving every one of you, in your own souls, according to your works. I urge you to the faith and obedience of the Gospel, that when your work on earth is done, you may be received into that world of glory, where there shall be no more need of the physician's art, because no inhabitant of it shall ever say, "I am sick."





