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*With the Authors Read &c*

# ADDRESS

ON THE OCCASION OF CONFERRING MEDICAL  
DEGREES IN THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW,

*July 28th, 1887,*

BY

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REGIUS PROFESSOR OF SURGERY AND SURGEON IN ORDINARY TO THE QUEEN.

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## ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN, GRADUATES IN MEDICINE,—After the interesting ceremony in which we have been engaged it is now my duty to address a few words to you before you leave this school to begin the career for which during many busy years you have been so laboriously preparing. In such an address words of congratulation and encouragement must, alas ! be mingled with words of valediction. That you have attained the end to which your studies pointed is doubtless to you a source of great satisfaction ; but to us, your teachers, it is a cause of real regret that a connection which for years has been so close and interesting must now in a large measure end. Even now, in the hour of your triumph, I would bespeak your gratitude for the University which has been your “nursing mother,” and for your instructors, who have done their utmost, as you well know, honestly, strenuously, and laboriously to prepare you for the serious and responsible work before you. To-day you have had the academic cap put on your heads to mark the completion and crowning of your studies here. It is the



modern substitute for that laurel wreath with which at Salernum the earliest medical graduates were crowned. You will receive the right hand of welcome to a profession which it will now be your duty to cultivate and practice in the spirit of the declaration you have subscribed. You are about to pass from the life and, if you will, the bondage of the schools, and are free to the privileges of a vocation which will demand, as it well deserves, your best energies and highest efforts. No word of mine will I hope detract from the full measure of your present satisfaction, though it is my duty to remind you that your real life-battle is only begun by this day's solemnity—it is in sober earnestness hardly begun. Our profession is one in which there is no finality and little rest. Its progressiveness is its greatest boast and glory. The longer we exercise it the more exacting and laborious does it become. Hitherto you have been but cadets learning your drill; now you must take your places in the ranks of that grand army whose vaunt it has ever been to fight not for selfish objects but for the good of our fellow-men—"Non sibi sed toti." As you pass these portals you leave behind you one memorable stage of your lives, with its labour and its trials and its happy associations. Here you leaned more or less on others, and received their instruction and ideas. Now you must waken up from this passive existence into independent practical life. All that you have learned, all the discipline you have been subjected to, all that you have become from the moulding influences



to which you have been submitted, will now have free scope for its development and display. Your future success will largely depend on what foundations you have laid. Whether the superstructure prove gold or precious stones or mere hay and stubble must now rest with yourselves. You will probably develop on the lines you have already laid down. Every stage of your progress will influence the succeeding one, and your position and character in the end will be the epitome and summing-up of the whole. Your teachers have with anxious but sanguine hope put into your hands weapons very potent for good or evil: it is now your part to keep these weapons untarnished, and to use them skilfully for the succour and comfort of your fellow-beings. You men of the younger generation have much to rejoice at in that you have been educated under what I may term the New Dispensation. Within my own time medicine has been revolutionized, and that in a large measure by the discoveries of Pasteur and the practical application of them by his school. So far as we can yet judge Medicine has been thereby advanced both as a science and an art more than by all the work of the preceding century. You who have acquired this knowledge possess abundant material to answer the scornful query of the late Sir William Hamilton—"Has the practice of medicine made a single step since Hippocrates?" and to rebut the savage allegation of Sir Astley Cooper that "the science of medicine was founded on conjecture and improved by murder."



Doubtless your first difficulty after leaving the schools will be to find a fit sphere for your future work. Few men can foresee where they will finally settle. The most trivial circumstance may within the next few weeks determine your whole future life. A chance call, a casual encounter on the street, the most apparently accidental circumstance has frequently within my own knowledge shaped a young doctor's destiny. In times without number his career has turned on the character he made for himself with his teachers. My advice to you now is not to be too exacting or difficult to please in the choice of a first situation, be content if you secure any opening where you can obtain experience and prepare for that crucial opportunity which Napoleon said often came only once to a man and might be decided for or against him in a few minutes. If the statement lately made by one of the medical journals is correct, that on an average three times the number of men annually enter the profession in Great Britain than leave it by death or otherwise, it is difficult to see where all our graduates can find a footing, however humble. The greatest boon which can be bestowed upon you is some position (as in a hospital or under an experienced practitioner) where you can be fully occupied with congenial and improving employment. "Blessed is he," says Carlyle, "who has found his work, let him ask no other blessedness." Let me implore of you, wherever you settle, to begin at once and in however modest a way, to observe and care-



fully record even the most commonplace facts in a systematic and orderly way. The practice eminently begets that accuracy which is so invaluable and it would also prove a source of much real pleasure as well. Such records will grow upon you and instruct you in a way no information culled from others possibly can. The knowledge gained will be your own and become a veritable part of yourselves. It is when waiting for practice that your reading and study must largely be done. When you get into work your time will be very limited, but even then if you have acquired the habit of carefully recording what you see you may in time be able to make most important and valuable contributions to the practice of your art. In reading lies one of the best protections against the bane of routine, which, if once it take possession of you, will stifle and destroy every hope of progress. "Work and read," said Carlyle, "but work more than read." That is true, but in reading, not professional works alone, but general literature, you have a resource which will at all times, and in every place, be a solace and pleasure. It will lighten your burden by encouraging, soothing, and bracing you. It will strengthen you for every trial, distract you from anxiety, make you the citizen of a larger republic and heir of a wider inheritance. Work then with all your might, but read also freely, discriminately, and judiciously, and you will never repent the labour.

"To know how to wait (and make use of that period) is the great secret of success." The best men have



often been most tried in this respect. "The man who succeeds above his fellows," says Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, "is the one who early in life clearly discerns his object and towards that object habitually directs his powers. Thus even genius itself is but fine observation strengthened by fixity of purpose. Every man who observes vigilantly and resolves steadfastly grows unconsciously into genius."

Gentlemen, there are one or two points of a general kind which it may not be out of place to allude to when addressing you at the outset of your professional life. I have just referred to the importance of careful observation and recording medical facts. It is perhaps from want of instruction and conscientious care in so doing that medicine has been most retarded, and it is to that defect those who disparage it have chiefly pointed when they have denied its claim to a scientific position. "I think it more than possible," wrote Sir William Hamilton, "that in fifty or a hundred years the business of a physician will not be regarded even in England as either a learned or a liberal profession." In this, however, he chiefly pointed to the want of general culture in the ranks of the profession; and Saxby replying to Akinside, who had been dilating on the high position of medicine, said, "After all my opinion of the profession is this, the Ancients endeavoured to make it a science and failed, and the Moderns to make it a trade and succeeded."

In discussing medical subjects, an educated man can hardly fail to notice the careless and slipshod language



and the looseness and inconsequence of the reasoning too often employed. Conclusions are frequently drawn from wholly insufficient data; accidental conditions treated as essential and invariable; and so the special treatment advocated and to which the statements lead up proves on trial useless, and the hypothesis on which it is founded valueless when tested by experiment. To follow the true Baconian method demands so much patience and such large opportunities that few in these hurried days can or will pursue it. It is no easy task to trace out and strip bare of all adventitious surroundings the root-principle which links together a wide assemblage of individual observations, to detect the harmony and weigh aright the disagreements which may themselves conceal and prove the principle sought for. Yet this must be done if any sound progress is to be made. The life of the individual is short and it is sometimes impossible securely and safely to combine the researches of different persons. To collect facts however laboriously only helps on a certain way: "a man may indeed acquire a mass of facts and yet mentally be an idiot." The logical mind is not given to all, but honest purpose and care will perform prodigies. It is alone the privilege of the few to extract a valuable gem from the mass of rubbish with which it is associated and establish a law which will be of wide or universal application, or which may at least serve as a basis for further progress. We recognize in Hippocrates a master who founded medicine on observation and careful generalization, wonderful for the age in which



he lived,—in the Hunters and in Harvey, men who followed the same method and tested every hypothesis by varied and well ordered experiment, or brought it to the proof of laws or principles before established. In the recent remarkable discoveries of Pasteur we have the best example in our time of the same method ; and if any genuine progress is to be achieved it must be on these same lines. Few have the ability and the opportunities to employ experimentation as it should be used, but without it an hypothesis is rarely secure, and cannot attain to the dignity of a law. It is then, I believe, because all this trouble and care is not taken as regards medical knowledge that there is so much halting and so much moving in a circle.

Of no science is it more true than of medicine that it takes longer to correct an error than to establish a truth ; and the effect has been largely to shake belief in many received opinions, and bring about that spirit of scepticism and criticism which of late years has been so prevalent. No doubt this is also in a great measure due to a natural reaction against that abject subjection to authority which so long ruled the medical world, and which strangled every effort at improvement. During the middle ages, and far on towards our own time, the *dicta* of the Schoolmen were implicitly received, and yet these were often the outcome of an hypothesis which rested on mere fancy or prejudice. Facts, which can be alone acquired by observation, they supposed could be evolved by an



ingenious syllogism. Remedies were employed merely because of some supposed resemblance to a bodily organ, or because of their colour or perfume ; and their value could, they imagined, be determined by arithmetical or musical combinations. Such follies are, of course, no longer known, but are our therapeutics even now always founded on reliable observations, and has the overshadowing influence of great names quite disappeared ? One thing we of the present race do claim over our predecessors, and it were well if the title were more widely asserted—viz., we recognize and ascribe a greater influence to “ Nature ” and less to art in the cure of disease. We study with care the natural history of disease, and thus we are able to recognise to an extent impossible in the old days what we can do and what we cannot do in regulating its course. That silent but most potent force which Hippocrates defined as “ the aggregate of all things which concur to perfect health, and the foundation of all right reasoning and practice in physic,” is not now oppressed and thwarted as it used to be. Veiled under innumerable forms and designations (“ pathies ” and “ isms ” and “ cures ”) this “ physician within the skin ” is ever the sick man’s friend, and while it imparts to some drugs all the good influence they possess, it ever leaves some means of escape from the dangers of mal-practice. Whatever you do, then, in your future career have faith and reliance on this ever-present and puissant force. Open your eyes wide to find its mode of action. Let neither your own



shadow nor the teaching of the schools come between you and that beneficent presence. With unbiassed mind take the hints thus given you, and follow up and study their import. Remember the wise saying, "Nature is only to be conquered by obeying her." The tendency of all young practitioners is to interfere too much,—to be too diligent and to have too much faith in their resources. Be not rash in your own conceit. All diseases have a natural evolution, and if the patient possess a sound constitution, there is in most instances a strong tendency to repair. When you are at a loss what road to follow wait and watch. To abstain from interfering is often the best thing to be done. Blind or empirical intervention may disarrange, thwart or arrest the most curative processes, and justify the saying of Voltaire that a physician with his remedies is like a giant armed with a club striking wildly about in the dark; or the conclusion of another philosopher that, considering all things, "Medicine in the hands in which it is vulgarly dispensed is a curse to humanity rather than a blessing."

Even with the help of all those numerous and much-vaunted mechanical aids to medical research, of which we are so proud, you will soon find how weak and impotent you are to bring about great results, or to defeat many of the malign influences with which you propose to war. Now that you have completed your initial studies you are at best but provided with "a respectable chaos of accidental knowledge," and will early recognize how vast and how dimly illuminated, not-



withstanding all the labour which has been expended on it, is the great plain over which you have to travel. No book nor instructor can do more than direct you in a very general way. You must in a large measure search out for yourselves the path you are to follow.

Some of you have distinguished yourselves when here, and your names are to-day recorded in our list of honours. Let me counsel these lucky men to be circumspect and to look on such distinctions merely as incentives to higher attainment. From past experience I have sometimes been led to doubt the advantage to many of these laurels. Unless a man is endowed with sober sense and no little balance, he is apt to over-estimate their value and meaning and be thereby injured in his future career. At best these distinctions but mark a pleasant and, it may be, a profitable introduction to the work of the great and unknown future. If they beget in him modesty, and a determination to increase his acquirements as all true knowledge should, and if they inspire him with reverence and respect for what others (often without his advantages) have already done, then only good can follow. Let me assure all such that among those who will applaud their future efforts and rejoice at their success, there are none who will be more sincere or more triumphant than their old teachers from whom they part this day. Success comes slowly—often painfully. It may never come at all, and to deserve it may be the only reward. It was 300 years



after Harvey's death before a monument was erected to him in his native place. The best reputations are often slowest in maturing, and it is not uncommon to find that a man is appreciated only when his career is near its end. Moderate success is all most of you can expect,—eminence is achieved by very few.

It is during your early years when a position and due endowments have not yet been secured that your unselfishness and your honesty will be most put to the test. The supposed imperious necessity of making a living has, I have heard it said, been pleaded by young practitioners as an excuse for giving way to demeaning and unscrupulous practices. No such excuse can be of any avail. Talleyrand puts the alternative sufficiently frankly in his well-known reply to a man who thus pleaded, "You know I must live," when he said, "I do not see that at all." There is no necessity you should live unless you contrive so to do honestly and righteously. The urgency to make a living is generally due to a common source of a young practitioner's difficulties—a premature or ill-assorted marriage. Nothing is more foolish, more disappointing, or more certain to prove disastrous than this. It often forces him to remain in inferior positions, and it prevents him from taking advantage of desirable openings abroad. My advice to you is not to entangle yourselves in such toils till you have a settled and reliable position. It is unmanly and ungenerous to expose a trusting woman to



the hardships and trials of an uncertain career, and it will put a burden on your shoulders which may completely weigh you down in the race. It is not always true in these days at anyrate that "he that getteth a wife beginneth a possession." The contrary is perhaps more commonly the rule.

Among the many topics about which I would have wished to speak there are two I cannot omit. Do not be carried away by every new fashion in medicine. From the earliest time epidemics of false and seducing doctrines have passed like a whirlwind, and it often requires no little courage to judge discreetly and cautiously of what all men for the time seem to believe. The history of medicine is full of warning on this subject. In our time new drugs are in the ascendent. If one could believe all that their compounders state our therapeutic difficulties would soon be at an end. Patients like to be ordered some new special preparation which their neighbours never heard of. Beware, however, of falling into the venal and debasing habit of prescribing such remedies merely to entrap and impose on unwary patients. To do so is the rankest quackery. Use new drugs certainly if they have been proved to possess really valuable properties, but do not risk your patient's welfare merely to promote your own success. Hear what Hippocrates said to his pupils on this subject, "Do not seek either pomp or riches; heal gratuitously with the sole desire to secure esteem and gratitude. When you can, aid the poor man and the stranger; and if you love man-



kind you will love your art. If you are consulted about an affection do not use long words, neither employ a studied or inflated discourse; for nothing more truly indicates incapacity as to imitate the empty buzzing of the hornet. In those diseases which allow of a choice of remedies the instructed man will employ the simplest and most convenient as being the least liable to lead to error." And he closes the oath he administered to his pupils with these remarkable words: "With purity and holiness I will pass my life and practice my art." If the old heathen physician cultivated such noble impulses, surely we, the heirs of all these long ages of Christian culture, should profoundly realize the high tone and the sacredness of a calling which, bringing us into the closest relationship to our fellowmen in their hours of greatest trial, makes us as it were fellow-workers with God in His merciful dealings towards them. If we walk worthy of such a calling, with "a conscience void of offence," we need fear no slander, which has been likened to the mephitic vapours of some grottos, that suffocates animals which grovel, but cannot hurt a man who walks erect.

Let me counsel you in your dealings with your professional brethren to avoid quarrels and petty jealousies. The misunderstandings and animosities of doctors are so often noticed as to be almost proverbial, and are supposed to be a special characteristic of our profession. This I venture to doubt, as my experience has been that they are quite as keen and bitter



in the legal and clerical professions as in our own. But I must admit that nothing tends more to demoralize our profession, and cause it to be evil spoken of and undervalued, than the mean, unworthy, and despicable way in which so many medical men speak and act towards their brother practitioners. To call it a "liberal profession" while such contemptible habits prevail is surely a misnomer.

For the misunderstandings of doctors the public are much to blame, as often from purely selfish purposes, and from want of moral courage, doctors are placed in false positions. In your dealing with the public, show them that you value highly the honour of your profession, and that you will countenance no underhand dealings. Such a course of action, steadfastly pursued, will raise the profession in the esteem of the public, and prevent much jealousy and heart-burning between medical men.

One other point, and I am done. You will early come face to face with a grave responsibility in having to use stimulants and narcotics in the treatment of disease. This responsibility you cannot evade or minimize. My decided impression is that intemperance in such things is largely on the increase. Over and over again I have heard these debasing habits ascribed to what was ordered during sickness. Is the admitted growth of morbid reflexes and insanity among us a cause or an effect of such habits? That both stimulants and narcotics may be advantageously used in an emergency, like other powerful remedies,



no one can deny ; but it is equally certain that the vast majority of our common ailments are better managed from first to last without them. Morphia, by sub-cutaneous injection, and chloral are invaluable in some few cases, but their abuse in our day has become a very formidable fact. Avoid these agents, then, if possible, or, at least, limit and control their use, and do not risk incurring the anathema of having contributed to ruin a fellow-creature.

Gentlemen, we now part, probably never to meet again.

It is a serious thought that not merely *your* usefulness and success, but probably the welfare and safety of thousands may depend on the soundness and efficiency of the instruction you have received here, While you are at the dawn of your career, many of us I fear approach the setting. Men of my age contemplate with no little envy young and ardent spirits entering a profession such as ours. Visions of former days rise before us, when the shouts and confusion of the coming battle, faintly borne to the ear, caused the blood to flash along the veins with as much joy and enthusiasm as it can do with you. The future is to you resplendent with a light and promise which sadly fades and diminishes to us, but accept the lesson which experience has taught us: it is this—that a happy and prosperous professional life does not wholly, or even largely, depend on mere medical or other knowledge, but rather on virtue, a good conscience, temperance, and a heart out of which comes



brotherly kindness and charity. It is these acquirements which will make you both fruitful in good works towards others, and happy and contented in yourselves. You will soon be scattered to the four quarters of the earth. My heart's desire is that you may prosper ; and as your love and reverence cannot fail to turn to this old University as surely as the needle seeks the pole, may I hope that in these recollections a place may be found for the humble but sincere friend who now bids you farewell ?



