

Address delivered to students of medicine in the University of Glasgow after graduation : session 1882-83 / by W.T. Gairdner, M.D., LL.D., Professor of Medicine.

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ADDRESS *P128-1884

DELIVERED TO STUDENTS OF MEDICINE IN
THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW AFTER
GRADUATION—SESSION 1882-83.

By W. T. GAIRDNER, M.D., LL.D.,

PROFESSOR OF MEDICINE, PHYSICIAN IN ORDINARY TO H.M. THE QUEEN
IN SCOTLAND.

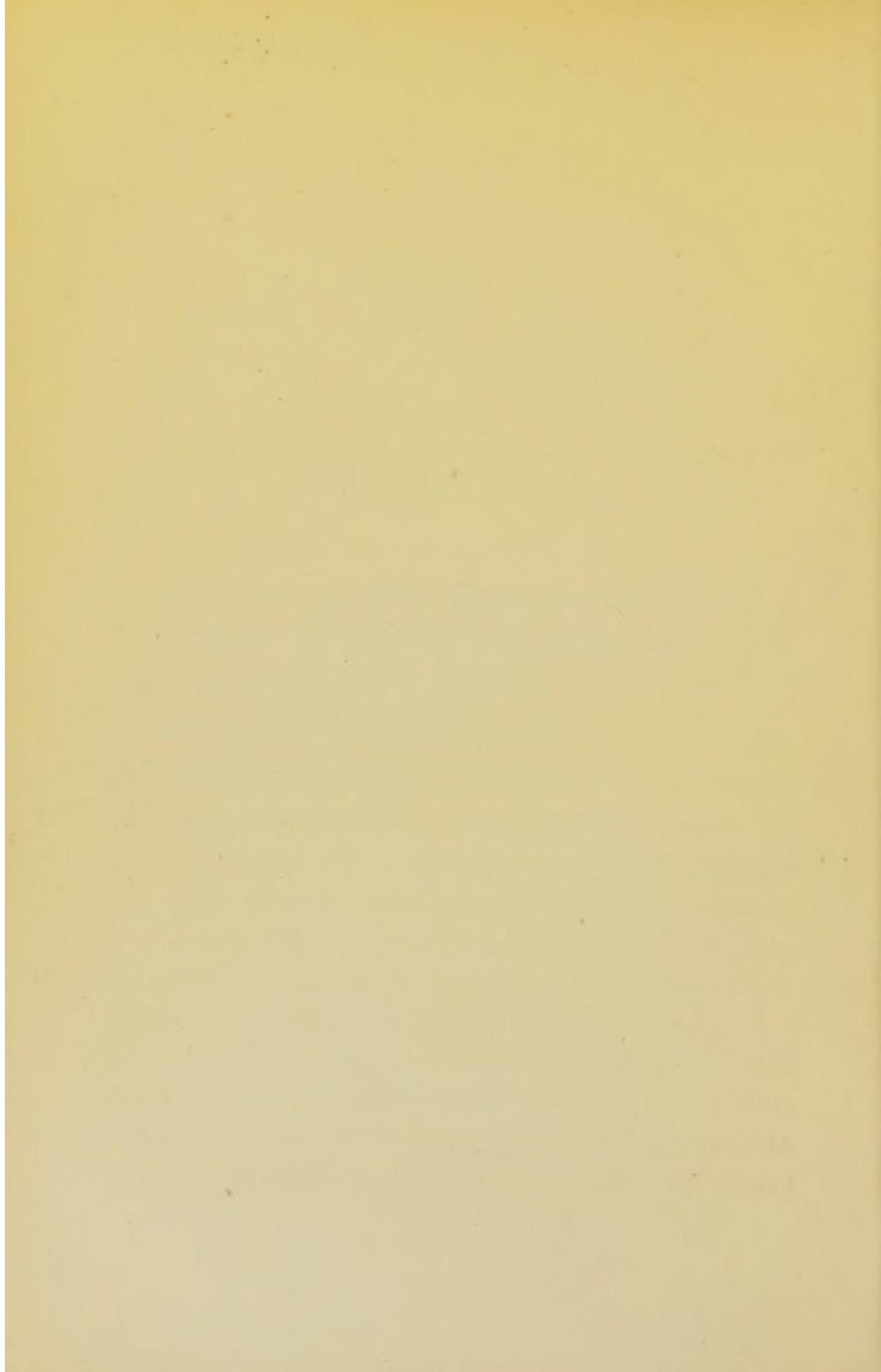
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PREFATORY NOTE.

The Address here printed chiefly for circulation among those concerned in it as graduates or candidates for graduation in this University, is the sequel and further application, under different circumstances, of the ideas as to medical education and academic discipline set forth in three Addresses — 1856 - 1882 — already published. Glasgow : MacLehose, 1883.



ADDRESS

DELIVERED TO STUDENTS OF MEDICINE IN THE
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GENTLEMEN,—I well remember, at a period of my life when youthful ambitions predominated—indeed at an age earlier by some years than that of any of you now before me—having my interest very strongly attracted by a lecture of Schiller, which is given in his collected works as introductory to a course on “Universal History,” delivered in the University of Jena. The lecture, as I still remember it, was eloquent and stimulating to thought at many points; but what chiefly concerns us at present, and what I can even now recall through the lapse of so many years as having had a great charm for my young mind, was the contempt which he poured upon a certain poor creature whom he called in the abstract “Brotgelehrte,” or bread scholar. Although I believe there is much in that lecture with which I could sympathise, even now, I am by no means sure that,

at the risk of being tabooed by Mr. Matthew Arnold as a "Philistine," I should not decline to advise you, as young men beginning the world, in terms of Schiller's denunciation and warning. One thing is pretty certain, that if I did so advise you I should fail in reaching your convictions, and in pressing upon you what I believe to be the most necessary lessons emerging from a medical education. You are not, it is true, to be "bread-scholars" in the low and mean sense of the word which Schiller denounced; but you will in a very important sense have failed of your purpose—the most of you at least—if the practice of your art does not become to you a means of livelihood—the chief means to you, indeed, of earning that bread which one might suppose, according to the German sage, the "scholar" was bound to leave out of his calculations altogether. And I might come even nearer home for a further illustration of what is here meant. A few years ago I was visiting with much admiration the splendid physiological laboratory at Cambridge, due to the care and devotion of one of the most eminent and admirable of professors—one on whom this University has most justly conferred the honourable title of LL.D.—Dr. Michael Foster. I found there at work an enthusiastic student of physiology engaged in an elaborate piece of original research. On remarking to him, what was uppermost in my own mind, the immense advantage which would accrue to medical science from such a laboratory as this, I was surprised, as though by a shock, to hear him break out

in an almost contemptuous disparagement of medical physiologists, whom he seemed to consider as quite out of their place in a physiological laboratory at all. "We want physiology," he remarked, "studied as a branch of pure biological science. The medical man, and especially the medical student, has quite other objects, and they are not at all in accordance with ours. He has got his Boards to satisfy, and then his bread to win. For research, in any true sense of the word, he is utterly useless, and even an impediment. We don't want any such men here." I take pains to add, and I do so without communication with either of them, that I believe neither Professor Foster nor my friend Professor Humphry, of Cambridge, would have endorsed this deliverance of an enthusiast without some considerable reservation. But as it stands it may serve to show what is the outcome of the feelings that were equally apparent in Schiller's lecture on the Brotgelehrte, when a purely scientific judgment is applied to such a subject as physiology—the very basis of all your regular studies in medicine here, and the only genuine and real foundation for the whole art of medicine, if it is ever to be lifted out of the slough of empiricism. In an enlightened and advanced physiology we—that is, the practitioners and teachers of the healing art—are daily coming to recognise more and more the whole method and direction, as it were, of the business of our lives. And just at this juncture we begin to find the advanced and purely

scientific physiologist or biologist standing on the threshold of his laboratory, with a "procul esto, profani!"—begone, ye sons of Æsculapius, healers, practical men, bread-scholars as you are! Physiology is emerging into the daylight of a pure and exact science, and will not endure any longer to be pursued for the sake of the healing art, or of any practical application to any art! It is true that biology, in its two great branches of vegetable and animal physiology, may be said to have been born and bred and nurtured under the wings of medicine as an art. But now, like the "daring duckling" in the recent political illustration of *Punch*, the pure scientific biologist is asserting himself, and desires to launch out into unknown waters, perhaps even a little to the astonishment and dread—if our distinguished LL.D. will permit me the expression—of his Foster-mother at Cambridge!

The situation is a curious one, and it may serve, if for no other purpose at present, to give point and emphasis to a few remarks which it is my duty to-day to address to you, the medical graduates of 1883, on your assuming the *toga virilis* of academic life, and in the same moment the status and responsible duties of independent practitioners of medicine. You leave us this day at the close of a long and arduous discipline, earnestly and patiently pursued, and now crowned with a first success. I am entitled at least to say this, and I do so with all the conviction derived from personal experience of you in the

recent final examinations; that there is not one of you that has not fought a good fight, and earnestly striven to master the elements out of which alone, as we believe, really good and great physicians and surgeons are made in the present day. You are, in a technical and legal sense, qualified to practise medicine, surgery, and midwifery. You are exempted, for a while at least, perhaps for ever, from further "final examinations." In this hour you have, and justly have, a great and satisfying sense of emancipation from restraint, a sensation of the full enjoyment of which it would be most cruel to deprive you. I congratulate you most heartily upon it, and venture to assure you that every one of my colleagues joins with me in entering most warmly into all your exultation this day. But remember, nevertheless, that there is a danger—it may be a fatal danger—in that exultation. You have won, and well won, a great victory; but the campaign is not ended, it is only just begun. If Hannibal had marched directly upon Rome after the battle of Cannae, there are not wanting great military authorities who will tell you that it might have been Rome, and not Carthage, that would have been blotted out of the page of human history during all these centuries. But he deferred his onward march, and, by what the historian Livy considers a yet more fatal error, went with his successful army into winter quarters at Capua. There, the bonds of discipline were suddenly relaxed; luxury, and the habit of lounging, with the dissipation consequent upon the unwonted sense of

comfort and leisure in the midst of an already corrupt civilisation ; and lastly, the mere habit of living for enjoyment and not for work, " so enervated both body and mind that thenceforward it was (we are told) their past victories rather than their present strength which saved them." The army with which the great general afterwards left Capua was in many respects, in its materials, in its moral tone, above all in its military discipline, a new and an inferior army, which had, by one fatal error, not only postponed victory, but lost the strength needed for victory. Gentlemen, I will say no more in detail on this point. Let not that error be yours. Let it never be said of any of you that the emancipation from your student life, the obtaining of your degree and your qualification to practise, has been to you like going into winter quarters at Capua.

But if the mental and moral, not to speak of the physical, discipline which we believe are the genuine and best fruits of your training here are to be maintained, you must have some definite plan and purpose before you as to how you are to spend the next few years of your independence. You cannot all at once hope to leap into the responsibilities, the occupations, and the emoluments of the best employed physicians and surgeons of our great cities. Some of you, by curtailing your ambitions, and yielding to the pressing demands of that bread-winning instinct which Schiller decries, may probably secure at once a field for your professional labours wide enough as regards

territory, and sparse enough as regards population, to satisfy the craving of the most active and energetic among you. I have in my mind at present a most admirable and well-equipped former pupil and hospital assistant, rich with all the wealth of an experience dearly bought and carefully matured, who thinks it an every-day affair to walk 20 or 25 miles across pathless mountains to attend a sick-bed, perhaps to dress an ulcer, or look to the setting of a broken limb. I knew another not very long ago who, with a range of many miles in every direction on the mainland, was subject at certain intervals, especially in winter, to claims on behalf of an island with 250 inhabitants, across a stormy strait accessible only to boats, and at the risk of life. There are still, perhaps, a few remote regions in Scotland and the Western Isles, of which it may be affirmed, as the late patriarch of Morven was wont to say of his ecclesiastical heritage when he took it in hand, that with many a torrent there was only one bridge in the parish. The peculiar charm of such a charge, if you like to undertake it, is that in a medical sense you may, if you so please, be the "monarch of all you survey." No jealous rival is likely to disturb your self-complacency, and there are practically no limits to your independence.

A good man in such a position acquires, or may acquire, early the priceless habit of self-reliance, and a certain deftness and presence of mind which are often wanting to a much older man of equal or greater attain-

ments if his field of practice is in a great city. He may also, and he certainly will if he is at once sympathetic and able, win the blessing in many instances of the widow and orphan and of those who are ready to perish. But I am bound to admit to you that the position has its disadvantages, even from the point of view of professional experience. The mere distance from a centre, the want of material resources, of books, of consultations, form very serious make-weights in the scale as against unlimited independence. And if we are, as a profession, to be relegated to the despised position of the "bread-scholar" of Schiller, it must be confessed that in these comparative solitudes the bread is usually very sparingly buttered. No one, I think, should commit himself to such a life unless he can honestly say that he can "endure hardness," and can enter into and love the simple ways and pursuits of a population perhaps too healthy and robust, and living too much in the open air, to have great need of doctors. To many of you a more eligible field for your activity will be found in acting as assistants to older and well-established practitioners. This is on many grounds to be commended, as are also the numerous public appointments, especially in our great towns, in which a young man accepts a certain degree of subordination, as the natural and on the whole the best mode of initiation into professional life. I have no hesitation in saying to you that too much independence at the outset is likely to be a delusion and a snare at the best. Confidence, it has often been said, is a

plant of slow growth ; and wherever there are great opportunities either of experience or of profit, there are likely to be older men than you who, for a while at least, will not be easily displaced from their familiar and well-won places in the arena. Some of you will probably seek in the colonies a field for your energies more promising than is open to you at home. Two of our best men of last year have gone to the Fiji Islands, with every prospect of usefulness and honour, in a charming climate, and amid surroundings, personal and social, which I sincerely trust may be a compensation for some years of absence from the old home. More than one graduate of this University, and one at least of my most valued hospital assistants, is at this moment following in the footsteps of Livingstone in Central Africa ; not a few are in Australia, in India, in Canada ; one at least is in Nova Scotia, and many, no doubt, are scattered over the wide world where memory fails to follow them up. One old Edinburgh pupil and friend, who has redeemed himself from being forgotten by occasional visits to this country full of pleasant memories to all concerned, has lately given me a surprise by the affectionate dedication of a book from St. Petersburg, where he has long been a thriving and most honoured physician. It is not a year since Dr. John M. Young, already distinguished here in all his examinations as an under-graduate, and probably known personally to several of you, obtained the first place in the Indian Medical Service examinations ; and only a year or two before this again a

high place in the same competition had been earned by Dr. Laurence A. Waddell, who, like Dr. Young, had been a medallist both in medicine and surgery, as also a most distinguished clinical student, and afterwards assistant medical officer in the Western Infirmary. I am sure you will all join with me in wishing for both of these gentlemen that eminent success in the future of which we have the best assurance in the distinctions they have already earned, and which are equally open to some of you, and to your successors in this University.

This brings me back to a position I was endeavouring to impress upon you a moment ago. Your University curriculum here is a *discipline*, in so far as it is intended to fit you for beginning life, in these and in many other offices of trust and responsibility; but, even although it has been just rounded and capped by a diploma and a legal qualification, it is by no means a *completed* discipline; and it will fail even of its most immediate purpose, if it is for even a moment so regarded by you. What you obtain by emancipation from tutelage and from examinations, is the opportunity of devoting your energies to the work of your choice, whether directly remunerative or not. What you ought not to obtain is the liberty to omit cultivating, and still further developing the powers and faculties that have been aroused into present activity by your academic training. You may become general practitioners, or specialists, or official men, or, perchance, naturalists and teachers of science, according as

your instincts or your opportunities may direct you. What is not to be thought of in any case, or thought of only as a disaster, is the disuse of the faculties you have acquired, and of the knowledge which has fed them. You have seen in our hospitals how the palsied and diseased limb wastes ; how the very nerve-cells which originated or diffused the trophic force into the muscles, disappear under inaction ; how a local lesion in the brain spreads its influence downwards, and in the nerves or spinal cord upwards, in the form of an ascending or descending paralysis, distinctly recognisable as a slow degeneration or *sclerosis* to the microscopically-aided sense. So it will be with you, gentlemen, if you go into winter quarters at Capua. The habit of working, that is of storing up and of utilizing energy where it is needed, will be lost, and every day's delay will tend, through changes in the very structure of your minds, to make the loss permanent instead of temporary. It is not for me to dictate to you how you should apply your energies, and I am far from suggesting that the discipline of experience is not to be acquired in many most diverse ways, with equal or nearly equal advantage to you. But what I would say to you all alike is—set your minds at once on doing *something*, and on doing it, if possible, from the love of it, and not merely as task-work. No matter (except as regards present necessities) whether your work is adequately remunerated or not. What you have now the great privilege of learning for yourselves, is the pure joy of working with a purpose

and with a will, for an object of your own choice, and therefore suitable to your own aspirations. It is here that I recognise, or seem to recognise, even in mature age, the residuum of truth and sound doctrine that underlies Schiller's too scornful remarks upon the bread-scholar. It is a great and noble thing, no doubt, to pursue a noble profession in the spirit of a profession, and not of a mere trade ; to be in it, and with it, heart and soul ; to feel that you are not *only* earning your bread, not *only* serving yourself, but also swimming with the stream of tendency (to use another phrase of Matthew Arnold's) that will bear you up and on towards a definite goal, and will place your work and your character together upon a higher platform than before ; perhaps even one of eminence in your profession.

As a first step towards this higher vocation, in connection with your medical and academic training, let me remind you of the only remaining tie, of a strictly technical kind, which you may still consider, if you will, as tending to prolong your academic career in this University. The wise and experienced heads which devised, under sanction of a Royal Commission in 1859, the Ordinances under which medical degrees are now conferred, did not see fit to enact that any new examination in medicine should take place in passing from the lower degree of M.B. to the doctorate or degree of M.D. ; but they did require that, besides some further evidence of general culture than what is absolutely essential for the

lower degree, there should be a lapse of two years, at least, from the date of the Bachelor's degree, and a minimum age of 24 years ; and that during the two years referred to the candidate should have been "engaged in professional study or avocation" (purposely, no doubt, left quite undefined), and, as in part evidence thereof, should present a thesis or "Inaugural Dissertation, certified by him to be composed by himself, on any subject included in the branches of knowledge embraced in the professional curriculum." The evident purpose of this regulation is that the young graduate, in the position in which you are to-day, should feel himself perfectly untrammelled as regards the method, subject, and opportunities of inquiry and research arising out of his two or three years of tentative but yet strenuous effort, before finally settling down to the regular business of life. He may make these years, if he pleases, both physically and morally, what the old German craftsman called "Wanderjahre"—*i.e.*, years of travel, in search of a business ; or he may, on the other hand, make them years of fixed, and, if possible, remunerative occupation. But, in either case, this is the inducement held out to him—if he can so direct and regulate the application of his faculties of mind and body, already cultivated by four years of academic discipline, as to produce some tangible and evident fruits of that discipline in the shape of research, or even well-matured personal study and experience, he will be eligible for the degree of M.D. The precise interpretation put by the

Senate upon this condition in the Ordinance is contained in these words :—“ No thesis will be approved unless it gives evidence of original observation, or, if it deal with the researches of others, gives a full statement of the literature of the question, with accurate references and critical investigation of the views or facts cited ; mere compilations will in no case be accepted.” And if you wish to see a most admirable and thorough-going example of what the Senate and the University authorities desire to encourage by this regulation, I am able, happily, to refer you to the thesis of one of our graduates of this day, Dr. David Newman ; which, I am glad to know, is about to be published at length in the *Glasgow Medical Journal* for August, 1883.

The ambition to prepare, and to write, a thesis such as Dr. Newman's, even if very far short of his in originality and absolute value, may be confidently recommended to you as a most admirable mental tonic, most suitable for correcting the results of what is properly called “cram,” and also for preventing that rusting of the faculties, and consequent loss of the fruits of academic discipline, against which I thought it my duty to warn you. I am not alluding now to idleness and dissipation, such as sapped the vigour and destroyed the success of Hannibal's army. I am speaking rather of the tendency that arises almost inevitably in the mind of the assistant or junior practitioner in the first years of his practice, to let these invaluable years slip away under the impression that he is too young, and has

not yet seen enough, to justify him in recording the results of his experience and research. The feeling is one creditable to your modesty, it may be, and certainly less injurious than a premature and empty desire to force your name before the public. But, none the less, it is an undesirable and therefore unworthy loss of a great opportunity. If it should chance to be your fate to be rapidly drafted into a lucrative and busy practice, or into a practice which is busy without being lucrative, you may never again have the chance, or even the bare possibility, of devoting a year or two of your life to the thorough and systematic working out of one definite subject—and that a subject of your own choice. And what a glorious choice it is! the whole round of the medical sciences, and of biology, which stands at the very threshold and (*pace* my Cambridge friend) ministers faithfully to them all! Even botanical research, which some of you are (not too wisely) disposed to lay aside as unprofitable when you have cleared your first professional examination, may be made, to such of you as have time and opportunity in the fallow years, or months, or days, of your earlier experience, the source at once of untold enjoyments and of the most fruitful suggestions for a practical career; while if it should be your lot to live in the country anywhere, or to go to colonies, or to new and undeveloped regions of the earth, it may enable you easily to add much to the sum of human knowledge. I concede at once that you cannot all be great, or even conspicuous, naturalists or

biologists. The legitimate object of an academic discipline is not to cast all minds into one mould, or to accomplish the impossibility of making one man perfect all round, and capable of every achievement; but to place you upon the vantage-ground of a large and liberal culture, before you enter on professional duty; so that when you have so entered, there may be tastes, and habits of thought, as well as positive knowledge, which, like the pollen transformed by insects from one flower to another, may fertilise the whole stock of your practical activities, and prevent the too close breeding-in-and-in of your strictly professional instincts.

I press upon you thus warmly the claims of the Thesis, because it consists with my knowledge and experience that those who, aspiring to the higher degree, do write theses, and sometimes quite respectable theses, as a matter of obligation, are still very imperfectly informed of the importance which we, the Senate and medical professors, attach to such inaugural dissertations. I have heard even good men say of a thesis for graduation—"Oh, anything will do for a thesis!" Now, it is of the greatest importance, not to the University chiefly, but to those of you who are to write them, to know at once that this is an entire misconception. Theses may in some measure, have unfortunately inherited and even retained, in the minds of some, the bad traditions of the days when they were almost purely perfunctory, as a part of the routine of the degree of M.D., when

that degree was a necessary part of the license to practise. But, under the arrangements consequent on the Universities Act of 1858, it cannot be said that any one is obliged to go on to the degree of M.D.; and in point of fact, I suppose, many of you will not do so. But to those who think at all of proceeding to the higher degree, it is simply a duty to say at once, that the thesis ought to be taken seriously into consideration from the first, and set before the mind deliberately as an effort in the direction of original and fruitful research; for if it does not tend, at least, in that direction, it will not only be unprofitable to you, but will fail to implement the conditions on which, in the opinion of the Senate, the degree of M.D. ought to be conferred, and which I have already read to you as a part of the regulations. And I am satisfied, also by experience, that in so regarding the thesis you will not only do something to increase your reputation, but, what is of far more consequence, you will do what is the very best thing possible towards reaping the fruits of your academic discipline, in a way tending to influence favourably your whole career. Of that discipline itself, as you have now escaped from whatever you may have felt to be its bondage, I will only say one thing more on behalf of my colleagues, as well as in my own name. We by no means regard it as perfect, but we do regard it as an effective, a sound, and a liberal discipline for the future practitioner of medicine. I take you to witness that it is in the main by honest, hard, steady work,

and not by what is called "cram," that you have been able to pass with credit your examinations in this University. The four years of study through which you have passed have been really what they purported to be. There have been no such abuses as we hear loudly complained of at the present moment in Dublin—sham lectures, sham certificates, irregular or perfunctory attendance. You know as well as I do that not one of these things would be tolerated for a moment in this, or I believe in any other Scottish University. Further, you know as well as I do that all your practical instruction, whether in the laboratory, the dissecting-room, the hospital, or the pathological theatre, has been, equally with the lectures, a regular, and therefore, we trust, an effective discipline. There has been no indefinite, and therefore valueless, "walking the hospitals" permitted in the Western Infirmary. If any one has been idle or irregular there, it cannot be said that any half-heartedness, or unpunctuality, or want of due control on the part of the teachers, can have been responsible for this; and most probably the idler in question has found his name among those which were not posted in the list displayed a few days ago at the college gate, and represented by the faces I now see before me. Every step in your training has been carried on deliberately and steadily, from the first enunciation of the processes of a bone or the parts of a flower, to the discussion at the bed-side, or in the clinical theatre, perhaps a week or two since, of the very last case

admitted to hospital of pleurisy or of locomotor ataxy. And in each of the four examinations by which you have been tested, I think I may frankly say that a perfectly genuine and honest effort has been made to do justice to every form of real capacity and diligence among you, and to eliminate those who were either incapable of learning or unwilling to learn in a regular and business-like manner. In the introductory address which I was charged to deliver at the beginning of the winter session, I claimed for the Scottish Universities to have organised medical study into a regular discipline, at a time when, in England, before the passing of the Medical Act of 1858, the Bob Sawyer and Ben Allen type, or let us say the "surgery boy" of the *Times* article which I quoted, was still rampant and practically unchecked. I now claim for them, *i.e.*, the Scottish Universities generally, not this University in particular, the steady and progressive development, for more than twenty years past, of practical methods, both of teaching and examination, previously but little understood, and even now very imperfectly followed out by many examining boards. The object of this address is not polemical, and I am very far from wishing to make you medical politicians; but I may be permitted to say that we look with confidence to the Government to see to it that a system of discipline which has done so much for medical education in the past shall not be in any material point injured or subverted by legislation. Whether there will be a Medical Act this year or not,

we know not yet; but, whatever happens, we will indulge the hope that the system of the Scottish Universities will be carefully respected and, if it may be, improved; and now that we have a younger sister engaged in following out an essentially similar system at Manchester, we heartily wish for the Victoria University every success and every kind of prosperity that we desire for our own Scottish institutions.

And now, gentlemen, I have perhaps more than exhausted the time that has been placed at my disposal for addressing you. I will only say, in dismissing you from *Alma Mater*, that the good wishes of all my colleagues go with you, and that we heartily pray that God may bless you, and watch over you all in the business of your lives, adding in each case such prosperity and success and wealth as is most in accordance with your real and greatest good.

