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THE
OPPORTUNITIES OF THE EDINBURGH
MEDICAL STUDENT:



AN ADDRESS TO THE MEDICAL GRADUATES OF
AUGUST 1st, 1890.



ALEXANDER RUSSELL SIMPSON, M.D.,

PROFESSOR OF MIDWIFERY AND THE DISEASES OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN
THE UNIVERSITY ; PRESIDENT OF THE MEDICO-CHIRURGICAL
SOCIETY OF EDINBURGH, ETC.

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THE OPPORTUNITIES OF THE EDINBURGH MEDICAL STUDENT.

GENTLEMEN,—In America such a day as we are now passing through is called “Commencement Day.” The class, which some years ago set out on its curriculum, has run its college course. That its members have run successfully has not been settled here and now. That was finally determined elsewhere some weeks ago. The function of to-day, in one sense, crowns the runners; in another, it but sets them at the start on that real race for which all previous efforts have been, as it were, preparatory trials. The close of the University life marks the day when a new and independent life is ready to begin.

Two years ago Sir William Turner told the graduates their capping-day was like a wedding-day. From my point of view it may be likened to a birth-day. At any rate, in *The Saints’ Tragedy*, Kingsley makes Elizabeth speak thus as a newly-wedded bride:—

“ Ah ! poor self !
Thou took’st this for the term and bourne of troubles—
And now ’tis here, thou findest it the gate
Of new, sin-cursed infinities of labour,
Where thou must do, or die ! ”

During the half-hour that, as your Promoter, I address you, I must regard you as a company who have come up to the line whence you are prepared to start on your true career. I am sure you come to it with minds well made up to run not as uncertainly. I ground my confidence on the qualities already displayed in these preliminary heats by the men whom their American cousins would name after their graduation year, “The ’90 Class.” I had heard from colleagues, before whom they appear in earlier years, that there were men of exceptional ability and promise amongst their number; and I had occasion in my own class to remark that an unusually large proportion took honours in the class competitions, and with averages unusually high. The Ettles Scholar of your

year has won his distinction with a record that during the twenty years of my professorship I have only four times seen equalled and only once excelled.

RETROSPECT.

It will not be amiss for you, just where you are, to think of the opportunities you have had to prepare yourselves for your life career. I shall not detain you by dwelling on the special facilities for the study of the science and art of Medicine offered you in this University. The time for that would have been before you set foot within its gates. Its medical equipment was never more complete than it is now. What is expected of the men trained in it you may gather from some sentences in one of the best of Marion Crawford's tales. The heroine is smitten down with jungle fever at Simla, and an American journalist, interested in her fate, inquires of a Hindu gifted with quite transcendent powers—"Will Miss Westonhaugh recover?" 'No,' said Ram Lal, 'she will die at sundown.' 'How do you know, since you say you are no prophet?' 'Because I am a doctor of medicine. M.D. of Edinburgh.' 'Why can you not save her, then? A man who is a Scotch doctor . . . might do something!'"

It has been your supreme function, during your sojourn here, to learn how to take your place successfully in the ranks of the great army which is battling with disease and death all round the world, and to comport yourselves worthily of an institution to whose alumni East and West alike thus look for high achievements. But I take it you mean to be men and not mere medical drudges. There is a tendency, I suppose, in every profession to make its votaries its slaves. Certainly, in our profession the risk is great for those who follow it to become so exclusively engrossed in its pursuit as never to attain their full all-round development. We trace with interest the influence of exercise or the want of it in promoting the power of organs or in causing their arrest or atrophy, and forget that all the while there are organs and powers within ourselves that lie undeveloped and unused to our abiding,—yes, to our unending loss.

THE ATHLETIC CLUB.

I.—When I was a student there was nothing in the University provision to suggest that we were to be turned out as more than medical machines. There was, for instance, in my time no Athletic Club and no gymnasium. In your happier day this want has been supplied, and your teachers have been glad to see able men taking their place in the football team at an international match, or enrolled among the heroes of the cricket field. Of course, the temptation is near to spend time in this

direction that might be more profitably employed otherwise; and the ambition to excel in some feats of muscularity may even tempt a man to efforts that will damage instead of developing his physique. As yet the risk among us from this quarter is of the smallest; and the very existence of an athletic club does good, apart from the benefit accruing to those who take an active part in its exercises. It calls the attention of those who are to have charge of the health of a community to the need there is to make due provision in the training of the young for the proper balance of mental and muscular development. Now that every child is compelled to submit to some school training, it will more and more become the duty of medical men in general practice, who must take oversight of the recreations as well as of the maladies of the people, to note the influence of undue strain upon the nervous system, and to insist on the apportionment of time in every school for such amount and variety of physical exercise as will keep the children at the highest possible standard of health.

Some years ago an old alumnus of Amherst College gifted to his alma mater a gymnasium in which the students may enjoy every variety of muscular exertion. The Professor of Physiology and his assistant take stock of the vital condition of each freshman who comes up to College. He is weighed and measured in every possible direction; he is percussed and auscultated, and has prescribed for him the amount and kind of exercise most suited to his constitution. The weighings and measurements and general investigations are noted and repeated from time to time throughout his college course. All the men are compelled to attend a daily drill as regularly as any of the class lectures. It has been found that whereas, in former times, the freshmen were the healthiest, and evidence of deterioration in strength was seen in increasing sicknesses and irregularity of attendance in the successive years, till the men of the fourth year were the sickliest, the conditions have now become completely reversed. The vitality and vigour of the men improves year by year, and instead of being lessened, the insurance value of the student's life has distinctly increased by the time his curriculum is ended. It were greatly to be desired that such a happy result could be brought about in every college and in every school. It will come about when our profession has made up its mind as to its necessity. Make up your individual minds about it and help it on, so you may have the satisfaction of seeing it fulfilled before your life-work is at an end.

THE VOLUNTEERS.

II.—In my student days the Volunteer movement had not yet begun. We may welcome the signs that bid us hope the day is near when the fierce arbitraments of war are to give place to peaceful

arbitrations ; but we only expect that it will come all the sooner to a population well prepared for the defending of their homes. In any case, many of you feel already that the hours you have spent on the parade ground have not been wasted. Some of your companions idled them aimlessly away. With better judgment you gave the leisure hours to the evolutions of the 4th Company of the Queen's Edinburgh Rifle Volunteer Brigade, of the Edinburgh City Artillery Company, or of that recently instituted Volunteer Medical Staff Corps which is still more germane to the work of your profession ; and you find your reward in precision of mind and eye, and hand and foot, that will fit you all the better for the battle of life. For a man who has taken efficient part in these services cannot fail to come out of them with a mind drilled to prompt obedience to the call of duty, an eye accustomed to accuracy of measurement, a hand skilled to deft and firm manipulation of the sick and hurt, and a step disciplined to the march that carries the flag of freedom round the world.

In this connexion, one is tempted to dwell on the unwisdom of the military authorities in withholding from medical officers in the army that definite rank which is believed by those who have the best means of knowing to be necessary for the maintenance of the status of army surgeons, and the want of which is sure to act as an obstacle to the entrance of the abler members of our profession on that otherwise honourable field of service. But you and your fellow-students have already sent a memorial to the War Office on the subject. Let us hope that this will so enforce the representations which have been made by all the Medical Corporations of the United Kingdom, that the War Ministry may soon see its way to meet the just expectations of men who place high skill in the art of healing at the service of Her Majesty's forces by giving them a position that will command the respect of officers and men in all other departments of the army.

THE UNION.

III.—Again, in my time there was little opportunity for students holding social intercourse. Scattered units in the main, dispersed in solitary lodgings, when they wished to cultivate the friendship of their fellows they had to make the opportunities for themselves. Yet hardly less important than the education that is imparted in the class-room is the mutual influence exerted by fellow-students upon one another. When they meet in friendly intercourse they draw each other out in directions where their special studies would never lead them, and develop in many ways faculties that had otherwise lain dormant, and powers that would otherwise have gone to waste. There was always, to be sure, the old-established Royal Medical Society ; but, in addition, the various Colonial Clubs, the Musical Association, the Hall,

the Chalmers Settlement, and, above all, the Union, have come in recent times to offer a sphere for the cultivation of friendship and the development of social qualities that are calculated to tell for good on all the after life. I emphasize the value of the Union, for there men of the different Faculties have occasion to meet together and impart to one another the ideas and habits that most effectually guard against the formation of a one-sided character. There association with compeers devoted to other pursuits keeps the medical student alive to the wide range of subjects that must engage the interest of educated men, apart from those to which his life is dedicated. There he will learn to entertain respect for men of diverse ways of thinking, to maintain friendly relations with men of different avocations, and from amicable discussions upon political questions he may emerge into society prepared to do good service in keeping one class in the community from imagining that peers are all black sheep, and another from regarding all radicals as revolutionaries. You have the *entrée*, remember, into every order of society, as you daily follow in the track of disease and death on their equal-footed visits to the halls of the rich and the humbler dwellings of the poor, and you will do well to learn betimes to pay due reverence to all.

The cultivation of interests in this direction may even be carried farther afield; and in these days of freer communication between land and land, it may become easy for young Scotsmen to follow the customs of their predecessors of some centuries ago, and widen their horizons by forming friendships and receiving some part of their education at foreign Universities. If you read Mr Hume Brown's scholarly biography of the illustrious Humanist and Reformer from whose habiliments, as "old tradition teaches," was formed the magic cap by the aid of which the Chancellor transformed you into graduates, you will find that George Buchanan spent some of his years of study as a bursar in the Scots College at Paris. It may interest you to know that this Scots College, which has been in abeyance for a century, is about to be resuscitated; and if some of you are minded to spend a profitable season of study at Paris, it is quite possible that you may be able to find a home there in the coming winter.

THE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL.

IV.—Once more, in the work of the Students' Representative Council, there is a sphere for the development of qualities that may prove in later years to be of inestimable value. Here, of course, as in other spheres, the student may misuse his opportunities. A man may imagine himself a heaven-born reformer, and with much fuss and fluster set himself and others the task of disarranging and rearranging all around him, and teach-

ing everybody else his duty; till at the examination-room it is found that he has forgotten the chief end for which he came to College. He thinks he could have saved the University Commissioners their much trouble if their duties had devolved on him; but in the meantime his examiners are in some doubt as to whether he will be able to distinguish between a case of scarlet fever and one of measles, or will know what to do for a patient who is like to die of hæmorrhage. But where one man will abuse his opportunities to the detriment of himself and others, a hundred will get good and do good in devoting some portion of their time to the study of the questions that concern the general well-being of the institution of which they form an integral part—which exists, indeed, for their behoof, and in the full efficiency of which they have the deepest interest. They get to realize that they are something more to each other than chance atoms, having an occasional and transient class-room contact; they get pervaded with the *esprit de corps* that becomes an inspiration to present effort and a pledge of permanent interest; and they train themselves in business habits that will fit them for service in after years on Municipal and County Councils, School Boards, and even, it may be, in the highest Council in the land—spheres in which the members of our profession have, perhaps, been heretofore the more reluctant to play a part, because of the want of such training as the Representative Council now affords.

THE TEMPERANCE ASSOCIATION.

V.—Further, some of you have had the wisdom, and, I shall add, the courage to be members of the Total Abstinence Society. You have proved in your own experience what you also have been learning from your studies, that alcohol is no indispensable element in the daily diet of a healthy man. You will not be long in practice before you will prove also these five things:—

(1.) That alcohol, habitually used, can of itself produce disease from which the abstainer remains exempt.

(2.) That it will aggravate diseases to which all are liable.

(3.) That it renders those who habitually use it more open to attacks of various forms of illness.

(4.) That the alcoholicist has a worse chance of recovery from a fever or an injury than an abstainer; and

(5.) That in the crises of disease the alcoholicist gets less benefit from stimulants than the abstainer.

Those of you who have enjoyed the benefit of Dr Clouston's lectures have already had glimpses of the disastrous effects on the nervous system of undue use of alcohol; and all of you will do well to study his recent papers on "Diseased Cravings and Paralysed Control" in the *Edinburgh Medical Journal*, from which you

will learn that some of the woesome victims of alcohol, morphia, chloral, and cocaine have been drawn from the ranks of the professions. So you will go out to your medical practice with the conviction that it is clearly within the line of your professional duty to help forward any healthful movement for reclaiming the habitual drunkard, and to strengthen the hands of those who are striving to make it easier for all men to keep sober. Moreover, you will be scrupulous how you prescribe, or even sanction, the employment of stimulants and narcotics in individual cases. For there is this always to be remembered in regard to the use of alcohol—that on the one hand all kinds of patients and their friends, teetotal and all, will ask you if they may not take some form, some little measure of it; and hardly one of them will ever think of asking you if it isn't time to be dropping that prescription.

THE WHITE CROSS SOCIETY.

VI.—Then in the work of the White Cross Society, questions have been brought before you which fall especially within the province of our profession, the importance of which will force themselves upon you with growing urgency with the increase of your professional experience. If it is well for you to have had among you in your student days a society which recognises that obedience to the law of temperance is important for the health of the individual, it is also well for you to have been impressed with the conviction that obedience to the law of continence is essential to the health both of the individual and of the race. You are going out into a world where you will find the rudest and crudest ideas regarding the marriage relations propounded month after month in widely-circulating periodicals, in essays emanating from writers with piquant pens, but with somewhat muddled minds and sometimes muddy morals. One month, a litterateur, who has caught the ear of many readers, devotes an article to applauding a democracy which will “allow the widest latitude of marriage, divorce, rearrangement, modification,” and that is not a slave to what he is pleased to call “the unimaginative, business-like bourgeois conception of the relation of the sexes.” The following month, a pen in a woman's hand is not ashamed, unwomanly, to write thus:—“A union, really true to the ideas of marriage, never works smoothly, unless one or both of the yoke-fellows surrender what is strong and individual in the character. Indeed, to be quite frank, a thoroughly prosperous marriage (always granted that it be not achieved by conspiracy in rebellion) brings about—or rather is brought about by—a gradual process of brain-softening, which does much to deteriorate the raw material of society. . . . It is not yet recognised that what makes the ‘holy estate’ so firm and inflexible are its atrocious injustices—to

use no harsher word—and that if one firmly uses the surgeon's knife to these, he destroys nearly all that holds the thing together." And in the succeeding month you may read the digest of a novel in which the hero says,—“In the fourth year of our marriage we jointly came to the conclusion that there was no hope of our ever being able to understand each other, to agree with each other, so we ceased to make any further attempt to come to an agreement. . . . We were two prisoners, hating each other, and chained together: we poisoned each other's lives, and tried to shut our eyes to what we were doing. . . . 99 per cent. of all married people are plunged in just such a hell as mine.”

Where sentences such as these are circulating in a population too largely pagan, it becomes more than ever the duty of the student and master of the laws of health to acquaint himself with the true conditions for the normal propagation of the race. If you have learned the lessons of physiology aright, you will take your stand in a slippery time on the law of the Permanent Union of one with one, mutually consenting and openly contracting; for you must have learned that monogamy alone insures a numerous and healthy progeny; whilst polygyny, polyandry, promiscuity, and other communal forms of union, produce a dwindling population of deteriorating members. You will maintain that the same standard of morality is to be applied to both the sexes; and when proposals are ventilated for meeting the pathological consequences that follow from infringement of the laws of physiology, you will be jealous of any suggestion that tends to the degradation of women, for this reason, if for no other, that when the bounds of physiology are overstepped in this direction, it is usually not the woman, but the man, who is the principal in the transgression.

And at fitting time, despite the quips of Mr Grant Allen, and the quirks of Mrs Mona Caird, and the crankinesses of Count Tolstōi, you will do well to adorn your doctrine by your practice, and exchange your “diggings” for a home. But what, you ask, may be the fitting time? Four and thirty years ago the Promoter for the year advised the graduates all to get married early, telling them they would not be in all respects thoroughly qualified to take part in the sympathies of the family of another until they were rich enough to possess wives and children of their own. Their companions of the following year were warned, on the other hand, by their Promoter against the dangers of an early marriage, with its possible consequent hindrances in the way of progress. What were they to think of it all? I may tell you that for one of them it was his clearest duty for two years not to think of it at all. These were still years of further study. They were spent mainly in foreign schools, and he knew that all that time his continued education was a heavy strain on the resources of his parents. Then followed seven years of an in-door assistantship at a salary of £100

per annum, during which, you will agree, it had been still unwise to give much thought to the marriage problem. It was when these terms of filial duty and of service were succeeded by the years of independent practice that the question as to a wife began to assume an aspect of immediate urgency; and if your experience corresponds with his, you will find yourselves at such a time beset on many sides with all kinds of advice. When the wisest man he knew approached him on the subject, he tried to fence the question off by quoting the many and diverse counsels that had been volunteered to him regarding the choice of a wife, but got for reply, "It is time for you now to be getting married, all the same. What you have to mind is that you take a wife who will always please yourself." He took his father's advice. He has never rued it. He commends it now to you.

A CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY.

On the opportunities you have had in these various directions for the development of the different parts of your being—physical, intellectual, and social—you are much to be congratulated; and in many a crowded city or rural district at home, in the army or navy, or in far-off fields of practice, the lessons you have been learning will be applied, not only to the lengthening of men's lives and the lessening of their pains, but also to the expansion of their minds and the elevation of their morals. Yet, even so, the list of your privileges is not exhausted. Those of you who listened to the last inaugural address delivered by our late Principal, Sir Alexander Grant, will remember how he dwelt upon the circumstance that the trend of thought and work within this University went to show "that the hope of the Christian is not an idle dream;" and all of you may read in his *Story of the University* how its first foundation stones were laid by Christian patriots, who, in an era of great impulses, exerted the mightiest influence for good upon the Scottish nation, and set the education of the Scottish youth amoving upon the most enduring and far-reaching lines of progress.

There are, in our day, among the sons of science, not a few who take up a negative position towards the transcendently important question of the ages—Can God make Himself known to man? They call themselves—sometimes in pride, sometimes with more of pathos—Agnostics. Such position, Gentlemen, would be unworthy those who have become physicians, and who have come under the spell of the spirit of the place where you have studied. Unworthy of physicians; for when Dante lifts his brow to look upon "the Master of them that know" and scans the lineaments of Aristotle's philosophic train, he tells us that a fourth of them bear names familiar in the household of healing; and surely they who would

belong to the goodly fellowship of Hippocrates and Dioscorides, and Galen and Avicenna and Averrhöes, ought not to say, with regard to any department of human experience—"We are of them who do not know." You are serving yourselves this day heirs of the sages, and you will not lightly sell the noblest part of the inheritance.

Unworthy of physicians, I repeat; and again I add, unworthy of your University. If you have trod her courts untouched by the *genius loci*, you must at least bear witness that the master minds of the nineteenth century have felt its power and done it reverence. Perhaps there was never seen in history such a gathering of famous men as were found on this platform during the week when the Tercentenary of the foundation of our University was celebrated. Men great in politics, in art, in literature, in all the sciences and spheres of enterprise, had come from all the seats of learning and all the centres of power in every quarter of the globe to take part in the celebration. Your Representative Council had the wisdom to ask that a forenoon should be set apart for the students, when they might gather here in their hundreds to see and sit for a little space at the feet of the men whom, from amongst that brilliant throng, themselves might think it most worth while to see and hear. So, with Lord Iddesleigh as your Rector to preside, and Lord Reay as President of the Associated Societies to make reply, there stood up before you in succession at your call a group of the heroes highest in every intellectual sphere in the passing generation. Two of them have already gone in to the Unseen, the not to them Unknown. Robert Browning was here, whom we laid with reverence at New Year time among our illustrious dead in Westminster Abbey; and Count Aurelio Saffi, 'Triumvir of Rome, who, at Eastertide, was followed to his grave at Forli by twenty thousand of his countrymen—"not a town in Italy," said the newspapers of the day, "nor a public association of any kind, that did not send a representative to his funeral." It might have been anticipated that the Christian poet and the Christian patriot would speak to Scottish youth in sympathy with what is highest in the life of the Scottish people and of the Metropolitan University. So also would the versatile poet, philosopher, professor, politician, who at that time represented America at the Court of Great Britain. Mr Russell Lowell had made his German student

"know
That God may still be met with;
Nor groweth old, nor doth bestow
These senses fine, this brain aglow
To grovel and forget with."

But what, one wondered, would Pasteur say, and Virchow, Helmholtz, and Lesseps, a Dutch theologian and a Flemish sociologist? Surely nothing less than a Divine spirit guided Pasteur

when he spoke of youth as the period of enthusiasm, to bid you take note of the Divine within you and make sure to cultivate it; and made Virchow warn you against building life and character and conduct upon hypotheses instead of upon facts and realities. How else were Helmholtz and Lesseps moved to give these fragments of autobiography, which showed that men who could lead their fellows into new fields of scientific research, or dig new channels for commercial enterprise, had not been able to control their own career, but had themselves been moulded for their work by the "Divinity that shapes our ends?" The orator of Holland, Professor Beets, calling attention to the open book in the centre of our University coat of arms, recalled how Sir Walter Scott on his dying bed requested to be read to, and when asked, "From what book?" replied, "How do you ask? There is but one book;" and then went on to say, "The bravest student and the most learned scholar may come to a point when, after having read so many books, he may also say, 'There is but one book;' not because that one to which I allude, and the name of which you pronounce within your hearts—not because that book is a book of science or for promoting science, but because it is a book of wisdom, and of heavenly wisdom, preventing a man and a scholar from becoming a desperate thinker or a learned fool." While Professor Laveleye, who had been asked to speak the final word, pointed out that in studying the social sciences it was necessary not only to attend to facts, but to follow an ideal. "Know well," he said in closing, "that which is, but find out also that which ought to be. How attack the problem? Let me reply in two words, very humbly, what I think. Open on one hand—the left—the Economists, Adam Smith and Stuart Mill; but on the other—the right—open the Evangel. And if ever there be conflict, follow above all the Evangel, for between the good, the just, and the useful there can be no real contradiction. Remember that wonderful and profound word of Jesus, which, if it were listened to, would put an end to all our ills and discords,—'Seek first righteousness, and all other things will be added unto you.'"

You had not all of you the privilege of being present at that memorable gathering; but you have all had opportunity, from time to time, in the Oddfellows Hall, to hear the claims of Jesus Christ put before you by a man singularly gifted to make us students of science hear every man "in our own tongue the wonderful works of God," in your meetings with Professor Henry Drummond. You may well set out, therefore, on your career with the assured conviction that, as the years at the University have been a preparation for the longer years to come, so these will, in their turn, be moulding you into fitness for a measureless future—that at the close of your life-curriculum there will come for you a Commencement Day that is the dawn of your individual immortality, when the

segment of science you have delighted here to look at will round into the full-orbed circle, for that which is in part shall be done away, and you shall know even as also you are known.

What is truly worth the knowing both in the life that is and in the life that is to come, let your chosen poet, Robert Browning, tell you. He speaks in the *persona dramatis* of the last of the Apostles. They are the last academic words you are now to hear.

“For life, with all it yields of joy and woe
And hope and fear,—believe the aged friend,—
Is just our chance o’ the prize of learning love,
How love might be, hath been indeed, and is ;
And that we hold thenceforth to the uttermost
Such prize despite the envy of the world,
And, having gained truth, keep truth : that is all.”





