Introductory remarks to a course of lectures on the history of medicine / by J. Warburton Begbie.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

TO

A COURSE OF LECTURES

ON

THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE.

BY

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PREFACE.

In publishing the following Introductory Lecture to his first course on the History of Medicine, the Author yields to a very general wish on the part of those who heard it delivered. The Lecture was written with no view to publication, and now appears in its original form, unaltered. He can neither wish for nor expect any more gratifying result from its publication, than an increased attention being directed to the important subject intended to be discussed in the course, more especially in that School of Medicine in which he has the honour to occupy the position of a Teacher. By the Students who have attended his Lectures, the Author trusts that the publication of these pages may be regarded as an evidence of the interest he feels in their professional progress, and success.

July 1, 1856.

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE

ON THE

HISTORY OF MEDICINE.

GENTLEMEN,—It has often occurred to me that, notwithstanding the apparent completeness of the foremost Medical Schools in this country (and I would mention that of Edinburgh in particular), as regards the courses of lectures delivered on the different branches of medical and surgical knowledge, a strange oversight has been committed, in not prominently directing the attention of Students of Medicine to the history of that profession which they have resolved to embrace. This feeling has, I know, been, and still is, shared by very many, as well as by those who, as yet, are only looking forward to honours in medicine, as by not a few who are now engaged in its practice, or are occupied in its teaching. Farther, the neglect to which I have alluded, has been noticed and commented on by some, who are not included within the pale of our profession. With a part of these, admiration for our calling, and the desire to witness, if not, indeed, in an indirect way, to contribute to its advancement, has been the motive; while, with others, there has been no such laudable intent, and we have been rather rudely twitted by such, for the too apparent ignorance which we have generally manifested regarding the history of medicine; while, at the same time, we have been informed that the study of that history could only reveal to us, the little progress that has been effected for our science. Along with many reflections that are alike true and apposite in regard to the cultivation of medicine in our own times, Sir William Hamilton, the learned and renowned Professor of Logic and Metaphysics in the University of Edinburgh,

in the most disparaging tone, puts the question, "Has the practice of Medicine made a single step since Hippocrates?"[1] Only yesterday morning, gentlemen, that is, many weeks after this lecture was written, the distinguished philosopher, whose name I have just mentioned, was removed by the hand of death. I trust that in what I have now said, and in what I shall yet say, regarding his opinions, you will acquit me of any desire but to speak with due respect of one whose place in the University of Edinburgh it will be impossible to fill. Very different is the expression of England's illustrious historian. "Medicine," says Mr Macaulay, when discussing the condition of England in 1685, "which in France was still in abject bondage, and afforded an inexhaustible subject of just ridicule to Moliere, had in England become an experimental and progressive science, and every day made some new advance, in defiance of Hippocrates and Galen. The attention of speculative men had been, for the first time, directed to the important subject of sanitary police."[2] Coinciding, in great measure, in the views of Sir William Hamilton, but in a very different spirit, another learned Professor writes:—"In the medical department of our University, justly celebrated as it is, who knows or expounds Hippocrates? Who cares for Greek? The list of our advertised lectures comprehends every division and subdivision of medical science, as at present understood, from the minute histological wonders of Dr Bennett, to the reconstruction of the gigantic framework of pre-Adamite mammoths and mastodons, by the anatomic skill of Professor Goodsir; but who gives us a course of lectures on the history and revolutions of medical opinion? I have not," continues Professor Blackie, "such a knowledge of the state of medical learning in this country, as to enable me to speak with much confidence on this point; but I know, that the highest honours which the medical faculty in Edinburgh can confer, may be obtained without any knowledge of Greek, and I know also, that

[1] Discussions on Philosophy, p. 257. 2d Edit. [2] 1st. Vol., p. 410.

the works of Hippocrates were translated and commented on, not by an Edinburgh Professor, but by a poor country surgeon in the far north. Here also I suspect, not from any fault in the able and efficient gentlemen who hold the chairs, but from a radical vice in our academical system. Our universities have failed to perform their distinctive work; and what they should have done in a grand style systematically, is either not done at all, or done by extra-academical men, partially, and in an accidental way."[1] In these reflections there is much truth, and it is with a single desire to see one grand error which has been so long committed, rectified, that, with a feeling of very great diffidence, and with very considerable reluctance, I have undertaken the self-imposed task of directing the attention of medical students in this place, for the first time, in a course of lectures, to the history of their profession. I say *course* of lectures, because I know that many teachers have, at the outset of their prelections on different medical subjects, in fewer or more lectures, spoken of the history of medicine. The illustrious Cullen, Dr Gregory and Dr John Thomson, were in the habit of delivering five or six lectures before they passed to the special consideration of diseases. It is entirely from the belief that, if at the present time, I do not attempt this, no one will, that I now appear before you. I am very ready to acknowledge, that many far better qualified for the duty might easily have been found; but I have felt keenly that delay is dangerous, that too much time has already been lost. In the fullest dependence on the kindness and consideration of those I am to address, I propose in this short course of lectures, to direct attention to the origin, but especially to the progress, of the healing art; and, as far as I am able, to lay before you the causes of those grand changes or revolutions in medical opinions which have so emphatically marked its history. Offering you a short sketch of the life and studies of the fore-

[1] On the Advancement of Learning in Scotland, by J. S. Blackie, Professor of Greek in the University of Edinburgh, pp. 17, 18. Edinburgh: Sutherland and Knox. 1855.

most cultivators of medicine in all ages, I shall chiefly direct your attention to the views and opinions upon important points, which they entertained and promulgated; and this examination I shall continue down to our own time; so that, instituting a comparison between the state of physic *now*, and what it was in the days of Hippocrates and Galen, and in the middle ages, we shall thus be enabled, in the most satisfactory manner, to answer the question of Sir William Hamilton, and not of him alone, but of many others, and, I feel confident, we shall be able to repel the more than unkind insinuation it conveys. If I shall succeed in directing attention to the study of the works of the older authors—not certainly to the neglect of the exercise of your observation of diseases in hospitals or elsewhere, or their characters as delineated in the writings of modern physicians, for that would be to commit a more fatal error still, but mainly in connection with these—I shall feel, indeed, amply rewarded, and that my most sanguine wishes have been fulfilled. In Paris and in Berlin, and I believe also in some of the other German medical schools, there are, at all events lately were, lectures given on the History of Medicine. The only other medical faculty, at the present day, of which I am aware, that requires attendance, or furnishes lectures on the history of medicine, is, singularly enough, that of Athens. In the "Monthly Journal of Medicine" for August 1854, the different courses of medical lectures at Athens are detailed, and among others, the History of Medicine once a week by Professor Prinares.

Of the advantages which are to be derived from the study of ancient medical literature, I cannot suppose any one to be ignorant. In his interesting notice of Dr Daremberg's recent publications, particularly his translation into French, of the works of Oribasius, Dr Adams of Banchory, that learned country surgeon to whom Professor Blackie refers, and of whom I shall, in the course of these lectures, have to speak oftener than of any other modern author or editor—a man for whom, person-

ally, I entertain the most exalted respect—thus writes :—" We regard the study of ancient literature in all its departments, as a process of mental culture, highly calculated to guard its possessor from the dangerous bias of prevalent errors. That there are, at the present time, many professional doctrines, sanctioned by authority and recommended by fashion, which will require, in the end, to be abandoned as erroneous, few physicians of sober judgment will hesitate to admit; and surely he, who is thoroughly instructed in the rise, progress, and decay of similar doctrines in former ages, will be more likely to keep his mind aloof from the dangerous contagion of error, than he who has never learned a lesson from the wisdom and follies of our forefathers."[1] To this let me only add the well-known observation of the illustrious *Scarpa*, " It has always been my habit, and I have found it a most beneficial one, to compare my own observations with those of the most distinguished authors in all ages, upon the same diseases."[2] Nor is it necessary that I should more pointedly refer to the ignorance which is so generally prevalent—not to say among students, for it is not confined to them—regarding the history of our profession. I will, however, venture to affirm, that owing, in great measure, to the manner in which medicine is taught in the universities and medical schools of this country, the student has little time left him for the prosecution of his inquiries in this as well as in many other directions of great interest. Then, as to the professors and teachers themselves, acknowledging as I feel sure they all will, and as I know my accomplished friends and colleagues, Drs W. T. Gairdner, Haldane, and Sanders, do, the importance of the study of the history of medicine, the time placed at their disposal for the illustration of the particular subject which each professes and teaches, is much too limited to admit of anything more than a preliminary notice of, or an incidental reference to, its historical bearings.

[1] " Monthly Journal of Medicine," August 1854.

[2] Trattato delle principali Malattie degli occhi. Pavia, 1816.

History, gentlemen, correctly defined, signifies an account of all important facts respecting nations or states, arranged, if not after a strict chronological order, at least with some regard to the sequence of the more remarkable events with which it is occupied. History of medicine, in the same way, is not to be limited to a mere examination of the lives of the most celebrated cultivators of our science in all ages; not to be confined, though either task were an ample one, to an enumeration or criticism of those works which have appeared during the same lengthened period, whether upon medicine itself generally, or any one of its branches in particular. A distinction little apt to be regarded, must, however, be established, as Sprengel has well observed, between the history properly so called, and the literature of medicine. The history of medicine, says the learned author I have alluded to, is occupied with a careful examination of the various systems which have successively prevailed; the different methods upon which has been based the treatment of diseases; and the revolutions which have been effected when theory as well as practice, have been put to the test."[1] But, gentlemen, the field occupied by the history of medicine is wider even than this. We should, indeed, be readily yielding our vantage-ground, were we not able to point to Harvey's grand discovery as equally a triumph of medicine with that of Jenner; the history of anatomy and of physiology are assuredly included in that of medicine; and so also, in many of their bearings, are the sciences of physics, chemistry, and natural history. Let us ever be prepared, gentlemen, when reproached, as we too often are, with ours being a stationary science, to claim the discoveries in anatomy and physiology, and in the kindred branches I have named, as advances in *medicine;* for, most assuredly, they are no less so than the application of physical laws to our diagnosis of disease, or any of the many means I shall hereafter have to notice, whereby the prevention or cure of disease have been

[1] Histoire de la Medicine. Introduction, p. 1.

effected. "Our science," says a recent American author, "is also reproached with being stationary. Thus, it is said, that while society has been flooded with light on other topics, and civilisation has improved steadily, medicine has contributed an inferior share to this progress. Nothing can be more unfounded than these statements. If we examine the great eras in civilisation, medicine will be found to have progressed as rapidly as the physical sciences generally. The discoveries of Columbus, and successive navigators, were not earlier nor more important in geography, than those of Mondini, Beranger, Vesalius, and Sylvius in anatomy. Copernicus did not earlier conceive the errors of the Ptolemaic astronomy, than Servetus, Realdus Columbus, and Cesalpine, the errors of Galenic physiology; and Galileo, who demonstrated the movements of the earth and planets around the sun, was a contemporary with Harvey, who demonstrated the circulation of the blood. The universal law of Newton for the solar system, was not greatly in advance of Haller of the laws and special forces of life."[1]

But, not only has it been alleged of our science, that it has made no advances—the so-called uncertainty of medicine has proved a fruitful theme, as well for observation as for vituperation; and but too readily has the taunting jeer been ever raised—

"Non nobis inter vos tantas componere lites?"

or, "Who shall decide when doctors disagree?"

The truth of the allegation of medicine's uncertainty, will hereafter receive a full inquiry. Meantime, I pray you to hold in remembrance that the perfection of medicine as an art or science has never been assumed, still less have physicians asserted this claim for it, for none feel, and none are more ready to confess its defects than its most ardent and devoted cultivators. What they do claim for medicine is, that, step by step, its benefit to mankind has been, and continues to be, augmented. As a

[1] Dr Comegy's Translation of Renouard's History of Medicine. Preface, p. x.

by no means unfitting introduction to a study of the history of medicine, let us examine a little more in detail those charges which have been brought against our science, and then hastily glance at some particulars in the progress which medicine has made during the last hundred years. With Sir William Hamilton, and with others who have expressed themselves in much the same way, it is, I venture to affirm, next to impossible, for one really interested in the progress of medicine as a science, not to feel a very considerable amount of sympathy. His article on the "Revolutions of Medicine," with special reference to Cullen,[1] is one which it behoves all to study. And, let no physician or student among us be deterred from doing so, or be induced to relinquish the task half performed, by reason of the more than caustic way in which he comments on all the bitter passages with which his memory supplies him—whether from Hippocrates, Celsus, Stahl, or Hoffmann, or from the writings of a once celebrated Professor in this University, Dr John Thomson, whose life of Cullen Sir William Hamilton had under review. Which of us, devoted to our profession, if at all acquainted with its history, and especially with its present condition, will fail to perceive the faithfulness of the lesson, or refuse to acknowledge the true bearing and application of it, when Hoffmann says, "Fuge medicos et medicamenta, si vis esse salvus;" when Celsus says, "Optima medicina est non uti medicina? when Avicenna writes, that the patient's confidence in the physician oftentimes prevaileth more than the physic itself; or, when Galen affirms, that it is very difficult to find a medicine that does very much good, but easy to find many that do no good at all. As well might we feel vexed and irritated with Hoffmann and with Celsus, with Avicenna and Galen, for these true sayings, as with a recent author, when he exclaims, "It is, without controversy, the saddest thing in the world, and beyond remedy that is visible, that, when humanity's plague-spot is ambition ungratified, the leech

[1] Discussions on Philosophy, p. 242.

says, Be of good cheer, lo, here is opodeldoc! or, when the inmost soul is racked by the frailty named woman, said body-cobbler notes down on paper, six inches by four, certain cabalistic characters, which none but 'pothecaries can interpret, but which has quinine for its refrain; or, when the victim sees nothing but the blackness of darkness in his ledger, the guinea adviser cries peace, peace, even rhubarb is at hand! Miserable comforters are ye all! When this universe was younger, by the matter of three hundred years, William Shakespeare sorrowfully asked you and yours, if you really could minister to a mind diseased, and since then you have groped about in nature's laboratory, till you have educed (or, if you did not, Harvey, for that matter) the dynamics of the blood, purification by cow-pock, and also various compounds tending to insensibility; but mind, mind eternal, immortal, invisible, is as far off from your unguents as ever. It will none of you." All this is too true. We are, however, entitled still to hope for a time when we may be able to affirm that we can "minister to a mind diseased." Compared with the days when Shakespeare flourished, nearly three hundred years ago, can we not, in sober earnestness, reply that, at all events, the ministration to a mind diseased is now better understood, and, when exerted, is followed by better effects than then? but this is a point, a short notice of which I reserve for a subsequent part of this lecture. The fact really is, that the quotations from Hoffmann and Celsus, and those I have added from Avicenna and Galen, are not to be regarded as expressing the sum and substance of the belief of their respective authors in medicine, but merely their opinions, founded on a long experience, and expressed, perhaps, in too strong language, upon doctrines which, in their days, were apt to be overlooked. Thus far we sympathize with Sir William Hamilton; but, when he affirms that "in truth, medicine, in the hands by which it is vulgarly dispensed, is a curse to humanity rather than a blessing," and the most intelligent authorities of the profession, "ἰατρῶν οἱ χαριέστατοι," from Hippocrates downwards, agree that, on an average, their science is,

in its practice, a nuisance, and "throw physic to the dogs"—like every true child of Esculapius, I feel bound to interpose my dictum against any such conclusion. I am also happy in being able to inform you, that the only authority whom Sir William Hamilton quoted, in the first edition of his Discussions, in favour of his sweeping assertion, was one in which you will probably—and certainly I do not—feel disposed to place the very smallest reliance—to wit, Dr Priessnitz, of whom, and whose system, modified and unalloyed, I shall have more to say hereafter—who has, somewhere or other, affirmed that "the most and worst afflictions which 'flesh is' not 'heir to,' but which water has to remedy, are the 'doctors and the drugs'"—a statement, I venture to aver, of about as much importance and bearing, in about the same degree on the question at issue, as the celebrated speech which has been attributed to an English physician, maintaining somewhat of the same character, and at one time enjoying a reputation of much the same celebrity as Dr Priessnitz, that "Soda Water and a thing called Gregory's Mixture put some thousands a-year into his pocket." In his second edition, Sir William Hamilton found it necessary, in consequence of by no means trifling objections which had been brought against his statements, to intrench himself behind some further quotations, this time from authors, to say the least, of greater weight. Hoffman's celebrated dissertation, "The Physician the cause of Disease" is appealed to. Hippocrates also is enlisted, and last of all, Dr Gregory, all of whom, even in Sir William Hamilton's hands, cannot be found to say one single word against the science; to raise a single doubt against the practice of medicine by those as Hoffmann says, "competently skilled in this divine art." What though Hippocrates complained, "there are *many* physicians in name and reputation, few in reality and effect." What though Hoffmann writes that the greatest "marvel" to him was to see "this art, so arduous and difficult, is commonly believed to be so obvious and easy, that there is no one who may not enter on its

practice. What though Dr Gregory affirms of the medical practitioners of his day—he must have been in bad humour when he did so—"I am sure, that I would not trust one paw of my great Newfoundland dog to a consultation of thirty, or of three hundred of them." All these statements concern the cultivators of medicine, and not medicine itself. Medicine still, according to Hippocrates, notwithstanding the ignorance of those who practise it, "is of all arts the most noble." It is, therefore, not against our profession, but against ourselves that the accusation is pointed. It is sufficiently remarkable, that in all ages this has been the case. In that extremely curious and now rather scarce old book, entitled "The vanity of Arts and Sciences by Sir Henry Cornelius Agrippa,[1] who flourished in 1550, there is a chapter on "Practical Physic." Sir Henry Agrippa has nothing to say against medicine itself, but a more unbridled and licentious calumniator of its professors I do not suppose ever existed. Take for example the following passages from his work, "To say the truth, physicians are the most wicked, quarrelsome, envious, lying persons in the world; for so they quarrel one among another, that there is not a physican to be found who shall approve one remedy prescribed by another, without exception, addition, or alteration, whence it is become a proverb '*the envy and discord of physicians.*' For what one approves, the other laughs at. There is nothing certain among them, but all their promises are mere trifles and airy lies. Hence the common people, when they would set out a noted lyer, they cry, *thou lyest as a physician.* For it is their chief study to follow their own new inventions, and neglect the wholesome precepts of antiquity; and those few things which they do know, they conceal, as if it did not consist with the authority of their art to divulge their knowledge, and out of envy to others, deprive our lives of the remedies which other men's labours have found out.

Again, in another passage,[2] "than to admit a physician to

[1] London, 1684, p. 289. [2] P. 291.

civil consultations, there is nothing more idle or fuller of folly, seeing that the art of physic neither treats of virtue or good manners; and we know that in many cities, by public decrees, physicians are neither admitted to their counsels, nor suffered to bear any office of magistracy; perhaps, not so much that they are foolish, vain or ill-tutored, as for their sordidness, and their spreading contagion (here Sir Henry Agrippa's true fear is more clearly exposed), with the continual visits of all sorts of diseases, not only infecting men, but the very seats and stones, as Lucillus has very well said of a certain physician—

> "Alcon but touches Jove's statue, straight the stone,
> Though marble, feels the hot contagion;
> Whence from his ancient temple, they remove
> The marble god, so much their health they love."

Such ribald accusations as these, gentlemen, need not surely disturb our equanimity. Medicine has outlived and will outlive all such denunciations. With no small amount of sincerity, may we join in the reflections of the learned French physician Eloy —"It is surprising, that medicine should have been able to overcome all the difficulties which have been put in the way of its advancement, and that it should not have been overwhelmed by the weight of the changes which, from the beginning, it has undergone. In all ages, one has seen malicious and unjust men rising up against our science; and, at times, even daring to dispute the good which so many centuries have recognised in it, and that men, more just because more judicious, have celebrated by their praises.[1]

Let us now very briefly inquire, if our short-comings are justly to be laid at our own door, or if, to a certain extent at least, they may not reasonably be attributed to other causes over which medical men themselves have little or no control. But firstly, let us determine if, and to what extent, these short-comings exist. This leads me to observe, that the real cause of

[1] Dictionnaire Historique de la Medicine Ancienne et Moderne, vol. iii.

Sir William Hamilton's objections, lies in the little incentive that is given to the requirement of a liberal education among those who are to profess and practice the healing art. "Very many physicians in this island," says Dr Gregory, whom Sir William Hamilton quotes, "have had no advantages in point of learning and liberal education; and, of course, despise most heartily such education, and take care to express very freely their contempt for it. Still worse, they frequently take occasion to convince the world, by their writings, that they are profoundly ignorant of the first principles of science, and of grammar. I think it more than possible," continues Dr Gregory, "that in fifty or an hundred years, the business of a physician will not be regarded even in England, as either a learned or a liberal profession." These are certainly strong expressions; and coming as they do from a master in our profession, should arrest our utmost attention. Without contending for what, no doubt, all would feel disposed willingly to allow, that the advantages of a liberal education are not strictly requisite for the practice of the medical profession, even in its higher walks; but, yielding in great measure, as I believe nearly all will be disposed to do, the point to Sir William Hamilton, it must be acknowledged that the requirements of a liberal education for all engaged in the practice of medicine, would add greatly to its usefulness; while, for physicians properly so called, they may be regarded as indispensable. I am not here going to enter upon the vexed question of how much or how little of preliminary or general education is necessary for the proper standing of the members of our profession, as well as for the faithful discharge of their duties; but, I feel sure, that all really interested in the progress, as well as in the dignity, of physic, will agree, that the broader and the more liberal the original foundation of learning is, the better; and that, at present, it stands much more in need of increase than of diminution or curtailing. Nor will I enter here upon the disputed question of strictly professional education, save to remark that it, too, in all departments had, for the dignity of

physic, better be as ample and diversified as possible—and this is one reason why I venture to crave your attention, for a brief time, to the History of Medicine.

I have thus indicated the chief particulars in which I conceive the fault to appertain to ourselves, the cultivators of medical science—in a word, the requirements of a liberal education, and the advancement of the strictly professional education of medical men, have not, we must confess, been determined either with a single view to the upholding of the dignity of our profession or the securing the best results in its practice. To the latter point there is a gradually increasing attention being directed. As an evidence of this, I would call your attention to an excellent pamphlet "On the Advancement of Midwifery Education in Scotland," by my friend, Dr Matthews Duncan.[1] Such appeals as his, and I wish there were more of them, are sure to be followed by the wished for improvement. The feeling I entertain has been well expressed by Dr Alison—"Our hopes of the increasing usefulness and efficacy of our art, must depend, partly on the improvement of medical education, and the more uniform diffusion, through the members of the profession, of the knowledge which we already possess."[2] But, acknowledging, as we are ready to do, that a more extended professional, and requirements of a more liberal nature in earlier education, would certainly add to the dignity of medicine, and of its cultivators; we must contend that the progress of our profession, when compared with the other pursuits which are regarded as being of a learned nature, suffers in no degree by the contrast. Instituting such a comparison, more particularly as regards the certainty or uncertainty of medicine, Dr Comegys, the translator of Renouard's History of Medicine, thus writes—"In theology, learned bodies are divided, not in regard to speculations about mysteries, more than in the meaning of words, and the interpretation of phrases, access being had by all parties to the same

[1] Sutherland and Knox. Edinburgh, 1856.

[2] Cyclopædia of Practical Medicine, p. 110.

sources of knowledge, to enable them to settle these questions. These varieties are seen in confessions of faith, administration of ordinances, and church government.

The law is said to be the perfection of human reason; but if medicine is proverbially uncertain, what may not be said of law? Its doctrines are written, its decisions are voluminous; and, moreover, the whole science may be narrowed down to a question of right and wrong, in which the whole moral faculties of man instinctively lead the judge to decide aright. In nothing have men more intuitive knowledge than in law. It may be said that legal decisions are uncertain, because evidence is defective. This is granted; but its uncertainty is seen as frequently in interpretations of organic as of common law. The opinions of lawyers are given with great deliberation, with ample opportunity for research, while doctors are expected to be ready, at a moment's warning, to decide the most momentous questions; and I have no hesitation in saying, that the opinions of medical men, thus given on the spur of the moment, are characterized by as much certainty as those of lawyers. Let us compare medicine with political economy. Are our statesmen unanimous in their views on the subjects of domestic manufactures, tariffs, banks of issue, internal improvements, educational systems, modes of taxation, currency, the general rights of citizens, or on other highly important topics. The movements of the mercantile and manufacturing world rest upon calculations or estimates; but of all pursuits none are so uncertain. A very small number of men who embark in commerce and manufacturing, succeed. These noble occupations, which are most important elements in the progress of civilization, offer but little hope of permanent success. Uncertainty marks, also, the estimates of engineers and architects, although it would seem that ample data are in their possession to give great precision to their statements. Navigation, so far as it relates to mathematics, is remarkably accurate. The ship is guided from port to port, and, throughout her voyage, her exact position on the surface of the ocean can be defined.

These calculations are founded on the movements of the heavenly bodies; but the opinions of the captain in regard to weather, or the duration of his voyage, are all uncertain. When he encounters the commotions of nature, the fierce tempest and the surging ocean, he has no more certainty of saving his ship and crew than the physician, who struggles with the conflicts of nature in the human organism.

"There is a marked resemblance," says another American physician, Dr Jackson, "in certain fundamental laws, between our art and that of the seaman. In the practice of each of these arts, we avail ourselves of the laws of nature to produce certain results. The seaman places his machine—his ship—upon the waters, and avails himself of the winds to propel it. These winds are uncertain; they are not in any way subject to his control; so that he cannot be sure as to the duration, the comfort, or even the safety of his voyage. He cannot furnish a pupil with positive rules, by which to conduct his bark across the Atlantic. The captain must have first a knowledge of the principles of navigation; but this is not enough. In applying them he must have regard to the qualities of his ship, to the strength of his crew, and to the constantly varying circumstances of the weather. The complexity here is much less than that attending the treatment of a disease; for in this we have to do with a living being. It is not strange, then, that the physician cannot always foretell the length, or the amount of suffering, of a disease, or the ultimate issue of it. All this is consistent with the wisest management on the part of the navigator, or that of the physician. While, then, we acknowledge the imperfection of our art, we must deny that this is a proper subject of reproach."[1]

Let us now turn for a brief space to something of what medicine has done for the human family during the last hundred

[1] Letters to a Young Physician just entering on Practice, page 11. Boston, 1855.

years. The reality of what it has accomplished—the proof of what it really does—of the vast blessing it is to the human race—rests on the broad results of vital statistics. In a subsequent lecture, when speaking of the relative duration of human life in different ages, I shall have occasion to examine the various causes upon which it depends. It must be acknowledged that the prolongation of human life, which has remarkably occurred at particular epochs of this country's history, for example, is due to causes, which it does not directly fall to my province here to discuss. Such causes are well summed up by Dr Southwood Smith, when he says—"An increase in the length of life is an expression and a measure of the sum of comfort experienced from the whole collective circumstances that make up national prosperity."[1] But apart from causes of this nature, all-important as they are, and the proper recognition of which we shall hereafter show to be due to the advance of sound medical knowledge and experience,—confining, for the present, our attention to the period within the last hundred years, we shall find abundant reason to conclude that, owing directly to the advancement of our knowledge of Medicine, human life has in large measure been spared—disease in great degree prevented. The returns of the Registrar-General of England show a steady and notable decrease in the rate of annual mortality from 1838, when these returns were commenced, to 1845. In France, it is stated that the duration of life has been increasing equal to fifty-two days for each year from 1776 to 1842, or nine and a half years for the whole period.

In the interval between the close of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, human life gained an equivalent equal to a fourth-part of its whole term. The exact increase in the value of life in the first half of the nineteenth century, we cannot strictly determine, there being no tontine, as in the former

[1] Lectures on Epidemics considered in Relation to their Common Nature, and to Climate and Civilization, pp. 40–43. Edinburgh, 1856.

periods, by means of which Mr Finlaison has fixed the proportion—to which Mr Macaulay in his history, Dr Southwood Smith, and others, have referred; but it cannot be doubted, as Dr Smith observes, "that there are not wanting evidences that the value of life continues progressively to increase." In 1685, writes Mr Macaulay, not a sickly year, one in twenty of the inhabitants of London died, while at present only one in forty dies. The difference between London in the seventeenth and London in the nineteenth century is as great as between London in ordinary years and London in those of the cholera.

"In 1700," says Dr Southwood Smith, "the estimated mortality of England and Wales was 1 in 39; in 1750, it was 1 in 40; in 1801, it was 1 in 44; in 1810, it was 1 in 49; in 1820, it was 1 in 55; in 1830, it was 1 in 58. In London, in 1700, the deaths were 1 in 25; in 1750,[1] 1 in 21; in 1801, 1 in 35; in 1810, 1 in 38; and in 1830, 1 in 45."

Then, take the mortality in the earlier years of life. Last century from fifty to sixty children out of every hundred born in London, died before they had reached their fifth year. Now, not above thirty or thirty-five in every hundred die at that early period. "At the present time," I quote from Professor Simpson's Inaugural Address to the Medico-Chirurgical Society,[2] "There are above 600,000 children born annually in Great Britain. According to the above scale of mortality, above 300,000 would have perished formerly before they were five years old; now, only about 200,000 die during the first five years of life—thus showing a saving of human life, in this item alone, to the extent of at least 100,000 human beings a year." That the happy result here indicated is to a certain extent to be attributed to the causes I have recently adverted to, admits of no reasonable

[1] According to Sir Gilbert Blane, it is conceived that the remarkable increase of the mortality in the middle of this century was mainly caused by the abuse of spirituous liquors, which was, about the same time, checked by the imposition of high dues.

[2] Physic and Physicians. By Professor Simpson. Edinburgh, 1856.

doubt; and that when large portions of our people, who still live in very much the same state and manner in which those who existed in the last and previous centuries did, shall have ceased to do so, we shall have a still greater reduction in the mortality, is equally clear; but, as little doubt is there, that a sounder and more extensive knowledge of diseases of children—especially of their pathology—a better discrimination in their treatment, and juster views of the hygiene and management of infancy, have largely and most importantly contributed to reduce the mortality. I cannot believe that any earnest student of his profession could rise from a perusal of Dr West's Lectures on the Diseases of Infancy and Childhood, with a different idea from the one I have expressed. Now, take the deaths in childbed, or in other words, the mortality in the practice of midwifery. One hundred and fifty years ago, according to Dr Merriman, 1 in 40 died. "In the middle of the seventeenth century," writes Dr Simpson, "about 1 in every 40 or 50 women delivered in London died of childbirth, or its consequences; but gradually, as medical science has advanced, that mortality has decreased, till now not above 1 in 150 or 200 die. We have, in Great Britain, about 600,000 deliveries annually, and still above 3000 of the mothers perish in childbirth. If the old mortality, however, of the seventeenth century yet held good, and this department of practice had not greatly progressed and improved, not less than 11,000 or 12,000 maternal lives would now be lost by the present proportion of annual births—the advancement of modern science thus effecting, in this item alone, a saving of the lives of 7000 or 8000 mothers every year." But, were I to address myself *now* to the pleasing task of pointing out the improvements which have been accomplished in the practice of medicine, and here I of course include surgery, I would be necessitated to prolong this lecture indefinitely, and I should, in doing so, deprive myself of one means by which I hope to be enabled to keep up the attention of my hearers unimpaired throughout the course, namely, by gradually tracing, where able, and we shall

best be able, during the past three centuries, the improvements in the practice of medicine in relation to particular diseases. Before I say a few words in regard to the literature of my subject, I would beg, with Dr Simpson, to direct any one anxious "for a test of the modern march and progress of practical medicine, to the strong and startling criterion of that progress, afforded by the internal history of any lunatic asylum fifty years ago, and contrasting it with what asylums are now. At the commencement of the present century, the poor lunatic, when once incarcerated in an asylum, seemed utterly and for ever cut off from the friendship and charity of his fellow-mortals. He was a man buried, as it were, while he was yet alive—a being deemed incapable of human feelings, and almost undeserving of human sympathy. Need I say," continues Professor Simpson, "how changed all this is now, or what the happy results have been since such poor sufferers were duly subjected to proper medical and moral management, and were treated as men still possessing the feelings, and impulses, and affections of man." For myself, I have ever found *this* the most cogent and convincing argument I could use, with those who, whether within or without the profession, have expressed the belief, or have doubted, whether medicine has made any progress during the period in which we and our fathers before us have lived. It is a mistake which manifests an utter incapability of appreciating the usefulness of medicine, to suppose that its triumphs are to be marked alone by such discoveries as distinguish the physical sciences; while we have such discoveries as those of *Jenner*, and of *Morton*, *Jackson*, and *Simpson*, to point to, and who would venture to depreciate them (?), the claims of our profession to the gratitude and confidence of mankind, appeared to me to rest, if not so evidently, certainly much more truly, upon such works as I have now briefly referred to, but a more minute examination of which is before us.

That the absence of legal recognition and protection, in their higher sense, have combined to throw discredit on the profession

of medicine, no discerning student of its progress can for a moment entertain a doubt. I might, and had at one time intended to offer, some observations upon this point in the present lecture, I defer them, however, till the concluding one, when, in speaking of the state of medicine, and the condition of the profession in our own times, and particularly in the United Kingdom, I shall find a more appropriate occasion for introducing the ideas which have occurred to me.

Gentlemen,—It is not a little remarkable, that in the English language, we have no large work on the History of Medicine, though in other languages there exist not a few; for example, in German, the subject has been ably treated by Dr Kurt Sprengel. He was born in 1766 at Boldekow, in Pomerania, and was appointed Professor of Botany in the University of Halle, in 1797, having previously been Professor extraordinary of Medicine in the same University. His illustrious work, to which I shall very frequently allude, was translated into French in 1815, from the second German edition, in five volumes, completed in 1800. Monsieur Jourdan was the translator; M. Bosquillon revised the translation. Then, in French itself, we have Daniel le Clerc's History of Medicine, published at Amsterdam in 1702; and again at the Hague twenty-seven years later. Le Clerc treats of the origin and progress of medicine down to the time of Galen—his last chapter being entitled "Physicians who lived at the same time as Galen." His account terminates Anno Domini 200. The work of an English physician, Dr Friend, may be regarded as a continuation of Le Clerc's. It is entitled "History of Physick, from the time of Galen to the beginning of the sixteenth century, chiefly with regard to practice, in a discourse written to Dr Mead." The first edition of it was published in 1723, in two vols. 8vo.

Since then, many works on this subject, or on more particular portions of it, have been written in French, German, and Italian, including those of Renouard and De Renzi—to these,

and many others, I shall have frequent occasion to allude—and whenever I can, I shall introduce the works, as well as the portraits of those physicians to whom they refer, to your notice. You are not to suppose, that from the circumstance of no larger works than those of Friend, Hamilton, Walker, William Black, or Moir, having appeared in our language, that little attention has in England been given to the study of the History of Medicine. Such is not the case, as I shall have frequent opportunities of proving to you. England may have produced no great historian of medicine, but England and Scotland have furnished learned and unsurpassed commentators on the older authors in medicine. Daremberg and Littré, are to France—what Greenhill is to England, and Francis Adams to Scotland. Gentlemen, there are in Edinburgh many individuals who could give—I had hoped, might have been induced to give—a course of lectures on the History of Medicine such as I should wish to hear delivered. Dr John Brown, in the North British Review for November 1849, writes the account of Locke and Sydenham, and thereby makes his knowledge of the subject patent to all who are interested in it. Dr Seller and Dr Charles Wilson, whose scholarlike attainments, and thorough capability for the duty, all who have the pleasure of their acquaintance, will believe. Dr William Gairdner, the perusal of whose learned essay on the "Acute Diseases of the Chest known to the Greeks,"[1] originally suggested to my mind the task of which I have this day given you the first fruits. Had one of these gentlemen, or had others I could name—indeed not one of two or three—but many appeared before you, there had been no occasion for the apologetic pleading from them—such as I feel myself, even at the outset, constrained to urge. I trust, however, that in the sincerity of my desire to serve this Medical School, and you, Gentlemen, its Students, you will feel inclined to overlook my shortcomings,

[1] British and Foreign Medico-Chirurgical Review, January 1855.

and pardon what, notwithstanding all I have said, you may regard as rashness and presumption.

Gentlemen,—You have heard in this Lecture not a few of the bitter things—some true, others not far from false—that have been said of our calling and of ourselves; I shall, therefore, while, at the same time, entreating you to ponder well over, and to consider the application to which these statements are entitled, happily conclude it by reading to you one of the noblest testimonies which has been offered in modern times to the dignity and usefulness of medicine.

"Excepting, of course, the preachers, for, with Paul, we magnify our office," writes one of the most eloquent and the most impressive of modern pulpit orators[1]—"Of all earthly employments, it appears to me that the physician's is the noblest, and that of all arts the healing art is the highest, and offers to genius and benevolence their noblest field. Casting no disparagement on the brave and gallant spirits who have guarded a country's shores, and some of whom, falling in the ranks of battle, have offered most illustrious examples of soldiers, true both to an earthly crown and a Saviour's cross—yet, we know, that the aim of a warrior is ingeniously to invent, and his business effectively to use, instruments of destruction. His greatest achievements are wrought where deadly wounds are suffered; his proudest triumphs are won where burning cities blaze over blood-stained hearths; and, horrible to think of! where fields are fattened with human gore; his laurels are watered with tears; his course, like the hurricane, is marked by destruction; and it is his unhappy lot—perhaps the unhappiest view of arms as a profession—that he cannot conquer foes but at the sacrifice of friends. Now, in the eye of reason, and of a humanity that weeps over a suffering world, his is the nobler vocation—and, if not more honoured, the more honourable calling—who sheds blood, not to kill, but to cure; who wounds, not that the wounded may die, but live;

[1] Dr Guthrie in the Gospel in Ezekiel.

and whose genius ransacks earth and ocean in search of means to save life, to remove deformity, to repair decay, to invigorate failing powers, and restore the rose of health to pallid cheeks. His aim is not to inflict pain, but relieve it; not to destroy a father, but, standing between him and death, to save his trembling wife from widowhood, and these little children from an orphan's lot."

THE END.

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