

London School of Dental Surgery : address / delivered by W. Scovell Savory ... on the occasion of the first public distribution of prizes, October 5th, 1874.

Contributors

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Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
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London
School of Dental Surgery.



Address Delivered by

W. SCOVELL SAVORY, ESQ. F.R.S.

ON THE OCCASION OF

The First Public Distribution of Prizes,

OCTOBER 5th, 1874.

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JOHN BALE & SONS.

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FIRST of all let me offer my most earnest thanks to those who have paid me the great compliment of inviting me to occupy this place to day. When my friend, your Dean, Mr. Rogers, called on me with this request he will remember that I accepted the invitation without a moment's hesitation. Not unfamiliar with school work, I understood the compliment, but I fear it was only afterwards, when reflecting, that I fairly

realized the full measure of my responsibility. But if I were somewhat hasty at first, let me assure you that I amply atone for this now in an almost overwhelming sense of responsibility—of responsibility which must attach to words, not of mine, but to those of any one who ventures to stand where I do now. Let me however have done with myself. Again, I beg of you to accept my warmest thanks for your great kindness, and to bear with me only for a few minutes longer. Let me turn then to the pleasant duty of offering my most hearty congratulations to those gentlemen who have won the prizes which they have received to-day. The distinction is a most honourable one, and in gaining such honours they have given the best pledge at the outset of their career of future eminence and professional success. I would say to you gentlemen, simply, go on. Only accept these rewards not as in any way a title to relaxation of study, but rather as incentives to further exertion. If what you have already done has achieved so much, think of what you may do in the future after many years of still greater effort. Nay, but give yourselves heart and soul to your work without depending or even reckoning on the reward; cultivate by all means in your power the habit of steady and unflinching work—woo it until you come to love it, and then your whole life

will be its own exceeding great reward. But for all of you, whether you have gained prizes or striven hitherto unsuccessfully, or not contended at all, there is this great and single fact—that your future career in the profession you have chosen must depend on yourselves. Be not deceived about this. Grasp thoroughly at the outset the truth which sooner or later experience will confirm, that circumstances may be propitious or adverse—friends warm or cold, many or few, you may fancy that you owe much or little to chance or fortune; but in the long run success or failure will depend and depend only on yourselves. According to your conduct and your work so will your future be. Each one of you therefore, if health and strength be given to him is in this sense master of his destiny. Let me, however, say a word further on the subject of prizes. I know very well that we are not all of one opinion concerning their value, and some go so far as to think that the prize system is productive of more harm than good, inasmuch as by stimulating to the utmost, competition in particular directions, it entices the student into the practice of what is called cramming, and so spoils in him the habit of more sober and solid study which in the long run will lead to a much sounder education. And no doubt there is force in this objection. Only, I would

submit that it applies to the abuse rather than to the use of prizes. If a man should set his whole ambition upon prizes and think of nothing outside or beyond them, so much the worse for him. But surely it betrays some ignorance of what the nature of our work is, to suppose that working and working successfully for prizes is at all incompatible with gaining the very best education that any school can offer. If a prize system is judiciously appointed and skilfully carried out it should become a most important means of promoting this great end—it should so accord—be in such entire harmony with the best course of study that these distinctions should shine as lights on the sometimes dreary road which the student has to travel, guiding him by their cheering rays to the higher paths of professional eminence. And surely in these days of competitive examination, it is hardly the time to pass a vote of censure or condemnation on the system of giving prizes. While we struggle for everything else—for power, place, wealth, nay for our very existence, why are we not to struggle for prizes? And let me add this—which after all may go furthest—that a somewhat ample and prolonged experience as a teacher in one of our largest schools, and as an examiner at our colleges and universities has taught me this: that as a rule—subject to

occasional exceptions I admit—but as a very general rule the student who shines most in his school and college examinations does the best, is the best man in after life; and that with us at all events the so-called practical man, who affects to despise everything but what he is pleased to call practical knowledge, is too often the very worst of professional philistines. Why, gentlemen, do you for a moment question this. Then turn to the reports of our schools and the calendars of our universities, and see there if I am wrong. I say, therefore, make not prizes and distinctions of this class the end of your labours, but use them as helps upward and get them if you can. And this tempts me onward to say a few words on the great question—the greatest of all questions for us—the subject of professional education. Do not be alarmed. I have no intention whatever of dragging you through any lengthened discussion concerning past, present, or future legislation on this topic. I was about to add that you have a good guarantee that I shall not trouble you with this, for I myself know very little about it; only I remember, by the way, a remark of the American humourist, that he preferred to talk on those matters of which he knew nothing because he was then least hampered in expressing an opinion. But anyhow I will not trouble you with mine.

What I would say of education is only as it concerns you as students, and it comes to this. If I, as a surgeon, may venture to go so far as to offer any advice to you who are to become dentists, it would be, while you are students here, and as students, widen and extend and fortify the basis of your professional education. Be not in a hurry to complete your studies. Be rather anxious to make every step you take secure. Nay, if only you spend the time well you will do wisely to prolong your hospital studies, for it is hardly possible that such precious opportunities can ever recur. And, for a like reason, give good heed to those subjects of your studies which some will tell you are of no practical account. It is not because they are in every sense the most important—no one assumes this—but because when you give up their pursuit here, the chances are that you will never trouble yourself about them afterwards. Remember that all your future labours will be in a special direction; that your work, if it is to be successful in the business of your life, must be hereafter, and even now, directed upon a particular point, upon the attainment of skill in the practice of a special art, and that therefore it will be well for you while you have the best opportunity for it, to lay the foundation of what may be called a good general professional education. So that you may not merely

assent passively to the view, but may come thoroughly to realise the fact that the teeth are parts of the living body and hold certain important relations to various other parts; that they are not isolated structures in their diseases and morbid actions, but suffer in this way more or less like other parts; that in a word, although they have, as every other part has, a special—they have not nevertheless, an isolated pathology. And this because, although they have, as every other part has, a special, they have not, nevertheless, an isolated anatomy and physiology. Naturally parts of a whole, so are they in their defects and diseases. Therefore—and pardon me if the inference be a trite one—therefore to know the teeth well, you must know much of the whole body. You will best work out the diseases of the teeth, not by confining your attention to them alone, but by comparing these with the like morbid actions elsewhere, and so looking at disease here by the light thrown upon it from around. And to know what disease means at all, you must surely first of all know something of health, and so, believe me, you will cure a tooth ache, or prevent one, all the better by and bye by giving attention to anatomy and physiology now. And thus, gentlemen, because as the longer you live and the larger practice you have, so will your thoughts and ideas tend to become concentrated on a par-

ticular study, enlarge well and securely the field of your observation and reflection here.

And indeed, I do not think I can overrate the value of the advantages which you students of Dental Surgery at the present time enjoy. I do not know of any step which has of late been taken by our common profession so full of promise to those directly concerned in it as the establishment of a Dental Hospital and a School of Dental Surgery; so full of promise for the future, and even now yielding fruit. If you will only accept these advantages in a spirit worthy of those by whom this great work has been carried out, your profession in its resources will be developed so rapidly and largely that to those looking on it will appear to enter a new phase of existence. Yes, while the full advantage of your most useful art is now no longer limited to those with comparatively ample means, but is given freely—as all such blessings should be—to the poor; you have, as you should have, scope of investigation, opportunity of acquiring knowledge, such as the most illustrious of your predecessors have never enjoyed. And not only are these incalculable advantages secured to you, but you are now able to obtain the guarantee that you have used them in the Diploma of Dental Surgery, at the College of Surgeons. Here you become educated Dentists, and there you have

the means of satisfying the profession and the public that you are so. Am I not justified then in using strong terms when I speak of your present advantages in relation to the past? But, gentlemen, while, as I have said, I do not think I can overrate the advantages which are open to you here, or the value of such a Diploma as now lies conveniently within your reach, yet, need I say, that they even together can by no means supply all the conditions of success. No—you may go through hospital practice and lectures and study diligently, and then obtain without difficulty your Diploma, and still you know you are only on the threshold of your career. So far indeed all is well; but do not fall into the fatal error of concluding that because you have satisfied the examiners at the College of Surgeons, you ought therefore to be satisfied with yourselves. No—while you are earnest students of your art you may indeed, for your own and the public advantage, continue to practise it: but when any one comes to persuade himself that he is a master of it, I fancy the time is at hand when he would do well for his own sake and that of others, to retire from practice.

But indeed I should be sorry to doubt that there are some, many, amongst you, who are resolved to devote all their energy to the work which lies before them. Gentle-

men, if you rightly understand the responsibility of the duties you undertake to perform, you need no exhortation from me. You are happy, in that you have ample scope for the exercise of your ability. From a scientific point of view, whether in anatomy or physiology, human or comparative, in natural history, the teeth stand, in interest, second to no organs of the body. In their pathology too; in the diseases to which they are subject, and the changes they consequently undergo, they yield in interest to none. And in addition to the interest which they share with all other structures of the body during life, from their durability through long ages after death, they hold the record of man's remotest history. By the way, what a strange subject of reflection it is—that the teeth, so obstinately indestructible after death, are so prone to pass away during life. Thus, from the scientific side, there is work and difficulty and mystery enough; and from the side of practice, surely, the art of the dentist yields in usefulness to no other. Oh! the dentist is indeed a useful member of society. Well is it for those who know nothing of the beneficence of his ministrations. But how many are there who can boast thus? Not only is there so often urgent need of him, but the need of him is so universal, and although, as we must all earnestly wish, the art will doubt-

lessly, nay, must inevitably make great advances in time to come, yet, if I may venture to express an opinion, I would say its present very advanced state is a subject of deep congratulation to us all. Is not the perfection of art, *ars celare artem*, and in this the dentist has no rival.

And now, gentlemen, I have done, for I must no longer trespass on your time. I am not insensible to the patience with which you all have listened to me. To the ladies, especially, I tender grateful thanks, not on my own behalf only, but on yours also, for by their presence here to-day—Need I say how much the success of this proceeding has been thereby enhanced? If ever the time should come that students such as you will have to contend for the prizes of our profession, not with each other only, but with women, too, still I would fain indulge the hope there will always be left to us those women who will accept it as their mission to encourage the students of what may then prove to be the weaker sex. Ah, if amongst our students then anyone could try to win, for with all the talk which has of late beset this subject, a trifling fact seems to have escaped attention. Women—some women at least—may, and very easily if they will, rival, nay surpass men in competitive work; but can men, being men, ever be brought to rival, to contend with, women?

But be this as it may, I trust that meetings such as this will never lack the presence and countenance of ladies. They absent,—and these public honours would be without their chief charm. And as to day in your hour of triumph when all is bright around, you have not looked in vain for woman's approving smile, so henceforward, if clouds should gather and darker hours come, may you still have her help and then the consolation of her sympathy.

