

**Valedictory address delivered at the presentation of prizes at the Army Medical School at Netley, on August 2nd, 1889 / by Sir Dyce Duckworth.**

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*Tracts  
1195*

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE  
PRESENTATION OF PRIZES  
AT THE ARMY MEDICAL SCHOOL AT NETLEY,  
ON AUGUST 2ND, 1889,

BY

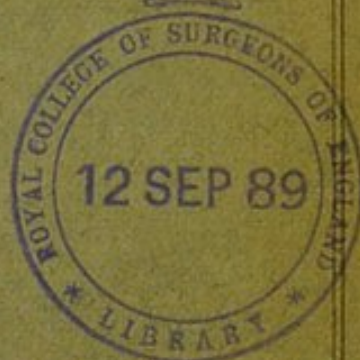
SIR DYCE DUCKWORTH, M.D.,

*Fellow and Treasurer of the Royal College of Physicians ;  
Physician to St. Bartholomew's Hospital.*

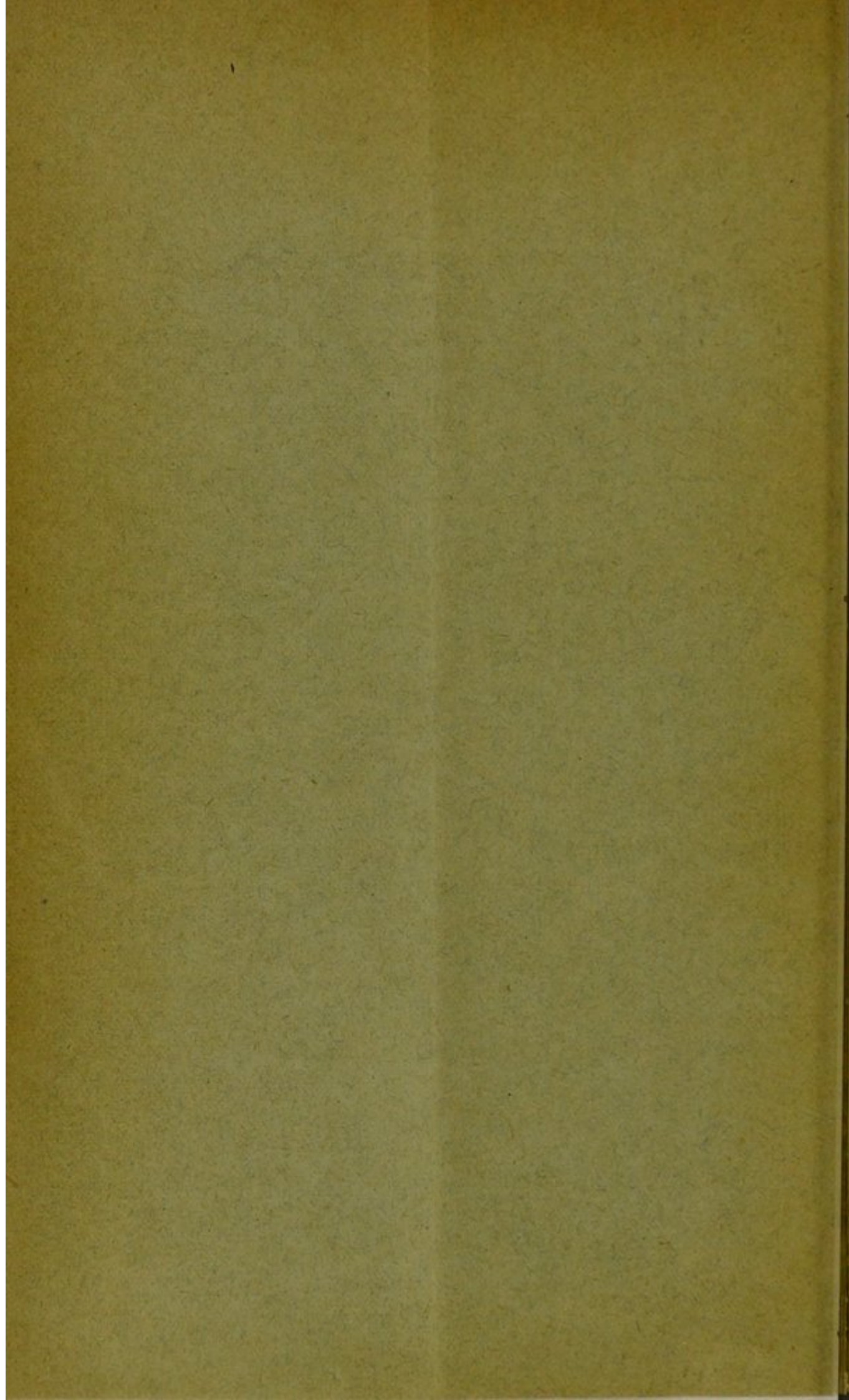
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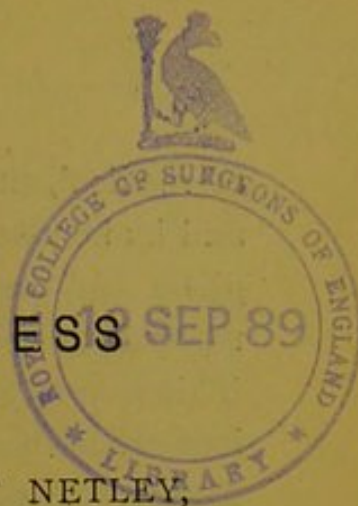
*On August 2nd, 1889,*

BY SIR DYCE DUCKWORTH, M.D.,

*Fellow and Treasurer of the Royal College of Physicians ; Physician to  
St. Bartholomew's Hospital.*

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GENTLEMEN,—It affords me much gratification to come amongst you and to bear a part in the ceremonial of to-day, and my thanks are due to the courtesy of my good friend the Director-General of your department, and the Senate of the Army Medical School, for the honour they do me in inviting me on this occasion. This is not my first visit to Netley. In 1866 I and a small party of friends had a narrow escape from a watery grave in front of this Royal Hospital, being all but capsized in a small sailing-boat. We landed here in a very drenched condition, and were at once taken care of by that great and good man whose name is, and ever will be, a talisman in this place, Dr. Edmund Parkes. I here and then first made his acquaintance, and I am proud to remember that I knew him in the flesh. About two years ago I had the honour of being present at a prize-giving ceremonial in this theatre, when my friend Sir Thomas Crawford directed your department. From my earliest student days I have always had a high regard for Netley, and for the excellent work done here both by its professors and pupils. I say without hesitation that this school has been one of the most valuable centres





of medical, surgical, and hygienic training in the empire, and its benefits have radiated hence to all quarters of the globe, and been fruitful in numberless instances, as well to the civil as to the military communities they have reached. This is surely a strong assertion to make on behalf of any institution, but it cannot, I believe, be denied in respect of Netley. This school has been a model for others, and has excited admiration on the part of all who have appreciated its merits. When, therefore, I learned some time ago that it was in contemplation to curtail the advantages of this school, I confess that I was astonished. I could only account for such a proposal as the outcome of a spirit which is too prevalent in the present day—a spirit which is satisfied with nothing as it is, and which seeks to uproot and disturb everything for the mere sake of change, and in response to a restless phase of unphilosophical and purely experimental radicalism. I had thought that this school was rather undermanned, and needed, if anything, further development of its powers for usefulness. And now, I understand, the proposal is that those who would naturally come here to be trained for service in India should receive their training in that country. I know a good deal about students of medicine, having had to do with them for nearly thirty years. I have been in India, and know something of the conditions of life in that great dependency; and I form the opinion that such a plan as is proposed will prove little less than a failure. India is not a country in which Europeans can readily pursue with zeal and profit any line of study. I am well aware that this assertion can be instantly challenged, and the fruitful labours of men like Norman Chevers, Fayrer, Vandyke Carter, Lewis, Ewart, Cunningham, with many others in your department alone, be adduced in contradiction to it. While accepting this, I yet hold that the conditions under which the average young



candidate would receive his training in India would be unfavourable, and the results distinctly less satisfactory than those which can be attained in this school.

Lest I should appear to be unmindful of the excellent work done in the universities and medical colleges of India, I would add that I fully appreciate this, and often wonder how so many of my countrymen can toil so untiringly and successfully under tropical conditions. I could better understand the necessity for the change proposed were it shown, which it has not been, that the training given here is inadequate, or that it could be conducted by better teachers and with more complete equipment in any part of India. I can only express the hope, therefore, that your successors may long frequent these walls and find higher advantages, if possible, than you have done.

Since I was last here you have suffered two great losses in the persons of Dr. de Chaumont and Dr. David Boyes Smith. They were both friends and fellow-graduates of mine. It is not for me, here and now, to try to gauge the full measure of the loss to this school of two such men. I may add my humble testimony to the worth of each of them, and recall the solid scientific attainments of the one, recognized the world over wherever the subject of public health is studied ; and remind you of the modesty, high-mindedness, and heroism of the other, whose merits were best known to those who knew him best, but whose noble spirit will long inspire his pupils and his brother-officers. The example and influence of men of such parts as these constitute enduring traditions for the school they served, and I would bid you to emulate their conduct and moral loftiness.

I must now offer you my congratulations on having completed your term of study here, and in particular add my commendation to those who have won honours in the



school. Netley honours are not easy to secure; they can only testify to solid and good work, and I cannot doubt that here, as elsewhere, the officers who gain prizes will probably be amongst the best at a later period of their career. I say, advisedly, *amongst* the best, for nowhere is "the race always to the swift"; and I confess to some degree of shyness coming over me when I find myself in the presence of the man who carries off too many honours. I am rather afraid of that man. He is not always quite human, and in my experience he is not always the biggest man of his batch twenty years afterwards. In these terrible days of competition, a man must strike out vigorously, and put his back into any work he wishes to excel in; no harm comes of that. But there is a grasping spirit abroad which sets itself to gain everything, and goes so straightly to the goal that it loses a great deal of humanity and sweetness in the process. The professional prize-taker picks up his medals and books, and sits down again; but he is often rather alone with himself in his own little world, and may, perchance, have failed to cultivate and cement friendships, to develop his muscles and his agility, and in short to be quite the good "all round" fellow he ought to be. This is a shocking heresy to utter at such a time, and in such a place; but I believe you would like me to say to you what I really think of these matters.

I have certain knowledge of the fact that competition, as such, has done much to injure the *camaraderie* in all the services it has been introduced into, and I am old-fashioned enough to believe in the *invincible* power of *camaraderie*, especially in our fighting departments. Hence, I have no doubt that some of the "passmen" of to-day will in the future do good and true service, and I suppose it is not beyond the bounds of probability that even in the person of one of them now before me I may be addressing a director-general of the future.



I congratulate you on taking service under the Crown. Most of you, I believe, will shortly proceed to India. Some of you are what I may term "seasoned" officers, and as you are the seniors, my remarks are for you in the first instance. The fact that you are here is itself much to your credit, and also shows wisdom on the part of the heads of the department. I can well-understand your position. I had the honour to be an assistant surgeon in H.M. Navy at an early period of my career. I therefore know something of the delights of discipline, and of being in a position to do what one is told, and not what one likes. In the first few years of your service it is hardly possible for you to see much practice or to bear much responsibility. With increasing rank these come. But you naturally wish to furbish up your knowledge, and to know more and more of your professional business, to learn the newest methods of treatment, and to take part in carrying them out. Here, you have every means for this at your disposal. Your presence is also valuable for your juniors; but it has also, I hope, entailed upon you the responsibility of setting them high examples, and of attracting them to their duties and to the service they have chosen.

To those of you who will soon begin work in India I may well bid God speed. Your sphere will be full of novelty and interest in that great country. You will see the British soldier at his best, and take your respective parts in that most marvellous accomplishment, the holding of the vast dependency of India, with its teeming millions, in the hands of a comparatively few thousands of trained troops. You, as part of that army, begin well, for you go out at an age when it is proper for an European to begin life in the tropics. It is a very different matter, as I fear you will soon learn, for an immature man to begin a man's work in India. I have had to do with five of the great railways in



India for twenty-three years, and have, therefore, had some experience of the climatic and other influences of that country on Europeans of all ages. That experience compels me to affirm—and I do so in all seriousness, for it is a grave matter—that it is wrong to send a young man to do hard work in India until he is twenty-three years of age. My hospital experience has long since taught me that a large number of the recruits for the Queen's regiments enlist at the ages of sixteen and seventeen, and I have known lads of seventeen landed in India and reckoned as efficient soldiers. I have also known them come back again within eighteen months, used up and ruined in health. My experience, on the other hand, goes to show that after the age of twenty-three a man can do man's work in the tropics, and commonly ceases to be as vulnerable as he would have been in the six previous years. Those are very critical years in any young man's life. You will remember, for one thing, that the epiphyses of the bones are not firmly ossified till the age of twenty-two, and if development is not completed in the osseous system, we may fairly assume that it is still imperfect in other systems. In any case, the power of resisting endemic fever, solar influence, and enteric fever is greatly increased in the critical years I have mentioned, while at the same time there is often an attainment of greater moral stability. I say nothing as to the way in which such a waste of military power should be met. I know there are difficulties in securing and retaining matured soldiers, but your business and duty as guardians of the health of our troops compel you to make these mistakes known, and to persist in pointing out faults which come officially under your cognizance. Do you suppose that if these facts were known and appreciated by the tax-paying public, the present wasteful system of sending so many immature soldiers to the tropics would



be continued? You must never cry Peace when there is no peace.

India is the best country wherein to learn many things that you will require to know in military medical practice. All is real and "work-a-day," and you will find fewer "make-believes" there than at home. I suppose it is not too much to assert that but for our Indian military experience, our fighting capacity as a nation would be vastly inferior to that now possessed by us; and in using the expression fighting capacity of an army, I distinctly include the Medical Department, which always has formed, and will continue to form, one of the most important units of any aggressive or defensive force. Your department is probably not less perplexed with grievances than any other administrative one. I forbear to strike any notes to-day which may jar on the harmony which should prevail on such an occasion as brings us together, but I know that one *questio vexata* which much concerns you has lately been discussed before a Commission, and with the results of its deliberation we are not yet familiar. The points immediately concerned in this important question of rank relate, as I believe, exclusively to military matters, and hence the mass of the civilian profession is hardly qualified to form an opinion that should carry weight with it on such a subject. (Your brethren in civil life, however, are quite competent to appreciate such an indignity as had lately to be submitted to by some of your seniors in India, when the *insignia* of their position as members of the Viceroy's medical staff were taken from them. I trust to hear that this matter will soon be rectified.) The question I take to be important, because it concerns not only the comfort and peace of mind of the individual officers concerned, but also the harmonious working of our military forces, and, what is of greater moment, the sanitary welfare of



the army. You have always sought and found, in any legitimate efforts, support from the profession at large, and this will assuredly not fail you now, if it should be needed. But I would utter a warning against agitations, and any but constitutional means of remedying grievances, if they exist. When I remind you that you are soldiers, I have in view the especial virtues of such men—viz., discipline and loyalty,—and, above all, their happy freedom from the petty thralldom of politics.

What the country has to look for in medico-military matters is perfect efficiency, and the endeavour to secure that knows, and shall know, no end. The question arises here whether the modern conditions of your department secure the best medical attendance for the officers, rank and file, and all persons belonging to an individual regiment. I understand that your arrangements are adapted with a view to war time, and not to meet the wants of a state of peace. As, happily, our troops are more engaged in keeping the peace than in making war, it is a fair question to ask whether the old system of regimental surgeons is rightly done away with. I have been led to form the opinion that it was a mistake to detach medical officers from, at all events, some continuity of service with regiments; and I venture to state that I think it would be well if one or two surgeons were definitely attached for a term of years to each regiment. The advantages of this plan are at once obvious, and I conceive that it might be carried out without any violent dislocation of existing arrangements. In war-time surgeons are attached to regiments, but they then do not know the men, and the men do not know the surgeon. It is impossible to work both in quarters and in the field on a Procrustean system, and we must not look for guidance in this matter to the military services of other countries, inasmuch as no other army is called on for such varied duties and experiences as our own.



I regret to find that the military authorities are beginning to call on civilian members of the profession to do military medical work for them. I fail to see the necessity of such a proceeding. There can be, and there ought to be, no difficulty in finding trained officers to do this work, and if such are ready to act, I consider it unfair to pass them by.

I believe that young men who now enter either the Army Medical Department or the Indian branch of it are to be congratulated on the careers they have selected. The "plums" of private practice in civil life are now none too many. Our profession is, in fact, overstocked, and the strife to gain a living in it is very great. Competition is now so keen that some of our humbler brethren are compelled to undertake duties entailing anxiety and serious responsibility for the most miserable remuneration. In times of commercial depression young men are wont to resort to our profession, and so, of late years, our ranks have been preternaturally filled. Happily, this source of supply has now ceased to run. In my opinion, the most wholesome checks on over-admission to our ranks will be found in the institution of higher entrance examinations, and in the prolongation of the curriculum of study from four to a minimum of five years, the last year being mainly devoted to clinical work. Amongst the peculiar advantages of your position are, that you see much of the world, and may thus become in the best sense men of the world; that you have leisure for higher mental cultivation if you will avail yourselves of it; and that after twenty years' service you can retire with a pension, still young men, and take up your profession in civil life, with excellent chances of advancement. Not many men at the age of forty-two can make a fresh start in life with an equipment so solid in all respects as yours may be at that time. I maintain that with such prospects the career you have chosen is a very desirable one, and



should attract some of the choicest men from every great school of medicine.

Of your teachers here it would ill become me to speak. The names of many of them, past and present, are household words in our profession. I know that your department as a whole venerates them, and you, best of all, know the worth of those who have so lately guided your studies. For myself, I can only say that I should count myself happy to sit at the feet of Maclean, of Longmore, and of Aitken, and to imbibe not only the lore they could infuse into me, but also some of the sterling qualities and graces that they bear aloft so well. It is for you to run with, and carry on to others, the torches of knowledge which they have put into your hands.

I take this opportunity, which seldom comes to one in my position, of making a few remarks before military surgeons on the subject of the abolition of the Contagious Diseases Acts. I regret to think that you will soon have sad experience of the unwisdom of that measure. You and I are young enough to hope to see those Acts restored to their place on the statute book. That they were ever repealed testifies to a degree of ignorance and folly that we, as a people, should be ashamed of. We can but regret and pity the want of resolution and firmness in those who control the affairs of the nation, and who find themselves charged with the power to govern, but unable to fulfil the office of a government, yielding to sensational clamour, and letting loose again a plague that we had in great measure controlled. Many hard words have been uttered in this noisome controversy; but remember that "hard words break no bones." You who agree with me, and who have the best right to your opinions, know, or soon will know, too well how grievous is the havoc wrought by the undoing of this legislation. We care not for any amount of obloquy



that may be uttered against us for denouncing this folly, and we must not cease to declaim vigorously against it.

It is almost grotesque to watch the undulations and inconsistencies of public opinion in respect of contagious diseases. A few days since the inhabitants of London were scared by the discovery of a solitary, and practically harmless, leper in the community ; but the five millions of the metropolis are quite unconcerned in the presence of perhaps ten thousand or more persons suffering from all forms of distinctly contagious syphilis. That is of no consequence, I suppose. Not only for the navy and the army, but for every city, town, and community, should a Contagious Diseases Act be passed. That is the logical claim forced on us as physicians and guardians of the public health, and we urge it no less in our capacity both as Christian men and loyal citizens. It is very satisfactory to learn that the new local governing body in Malta have at once restored these Acts, and are enforcing them with much benefit to the garrison and the town of Valetta.

Gentlemen, it is one of the penalties of venturing to think and act for yourself that you are often alone and exposed to obloquy and misapprehension. It is not a popular course to follow, but popularity is, after all, a very poor thing. Our duty in all the concerns of life is to do what we believe to be right, and to submit to any consequences. I have detained you too long. In conclusion I have only to express my best wishes for the career of each one of you. Your position is already a very enviable one. You have a splendid sphere of duty. You will go out to see England beyond the seas. You will come in contact with some of the best men who are doing their best work. You will aid your country in maintaining in vigour her right to govern other nations ; you will, I feel sure, carry everywhere with you the traditions, not only of this great school, but of your



respective universities and medical colleges ; you will dispense to others the blessings you have learned to value in our common mother country ; you will always think and act as educated British gentlemen ; and you will, I hope, earn fresh laurels for medicine, and especially for that branch of it you are now so well-fitted to represent. Let me urge you in particular to cultivate firmness and dependability of character, qualities which are quite consistent with the graces of modesty, tact, and good temper. Success in any calling is as much a matter of personality as of great accomplishments. In your profession, above all, duty has the first claim, and all else must bend before it. "He who serves best afterwards rules best." And you will, I hope, not learn to ignore or despise sentiment. I have been speaking of sentiment already, but I then alluded to mawkish and hysterical sentiment. None of that, if you please. But in matters military, medical, and otherwise, there are, and ever will be, true and noble sentiments. Yes, gentlemen, there is a sentiment in a button, in a badge, in a monogram, and in a facing ; there is a sentiment in a reminiscence ; you know it already, you will soon know it better ; and any one of these, or of a hundred other like things, may come in a moment to nerve you to face an ugly duty, to shun an evil course, to set a bold example, or, if need be, even to meet the death-stroke of a hero. *Vale !* And to each one of you I add, "*quod felix, faustumque sit !*"



