Dr John Macpherson
with sincere regards
Geo. D. Pollock

ADDRESS

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DELIVERED AT THE PRESENTATION OF PRIZES

AT THE

ARMY MEDICAL SCHOOL AT NETLEY

On the 2nd of February 1888

BY

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Printed by Request and for Private Use.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY
ADLARD AND SON, BARTHOLOMEW CLOSE.

1888.

ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN,—Permit me first to express to your distinguished Director-General, Sir Thomas Crawford, and to the Senate of the Army Medical School at Netley, my high appreciation of the great honour they have conferred on me in deputing me to distribute among the successful candidates the prizes awarded them for the excellence of their work during the past session.

It is, moreover, a great pleasure to me to be here on an occasion of this kind, to participate in those feelings of satisfaction which all must experience when able to look back upon work well done, meeting with encouragement and recognition from those who have had to direct, and have watched over, your course of studies, and who can alone appreciate and estimate the comparative worth and excellence which is the outcome of those studies now terminated.

This occasion recalls to my mind the feelings with which I had to receive a prize in surgery from the hands of the late Sir Benjamin Brodie, then attached to St. George's Hospital, in the wards of

which institution I endeavoured to follow, however imperfectly, the teaching and advice we received from that distinguished surgeon. I recollect with gratitude and admiration the energy and earnestness with which he strove to impress upon us the necessity of *work*, to render ourselves fitted for the important duties and responsibilities which devolved upon medical men, and that it was only by earnest, honest, and constant work in the wards, in the dead-house, and in the lecture room, that we should obtain that solid information which would efficiently qualify us to deal with the various disorders to "which flesh is heir." Compared with what you will hereafter have to contend with your past work has been easy. You have here trusted with confidence, and properly so, to the supervision of your teachers in the practical department of your work. You have consequently been rendered independent of much personal responsibility, and of all personal anxiety when watching those patients it has been your duty to take note of. But you will now pass to another sphere of work. You will commence your official life in a country of vast and interesting features; a country of much varying soil, and in many parts still deficient in sanitary conditions; a country which offers a great field for the investigation of disease, and in the investigation of which all your energies have to be exercised to the utmost if you desire to investigate or overcome their evil influences.

This change is the commencement of much res-

ponsibility. It is only by your professional conduct, rightly directed, and by the manner of your dealing with such responsibility, that your future will be satisfactory, or that your reputation will be established as skilful, thoughtful, and trustworthy members of your profession.

What can I say to encourage you to secure that success which all should desire, but which alone must depend on the amount to which you benefit those whom you have to attend? Your success will not merely depend on the knowledge of your profession, but somewhat on the mode in which you are able to apply it,—somewhat on your general character; your conduct, on your dealings with your patients. Be kind, be attentive to the requirements of your daily duties, and to the wants of those who seek and are dependent on your help, but

> "This, above all, to thine own self be true;
> And it must follow, as the night the day;
> Thou canst not then be false to any man."

The amount of benefit to be derived by those who need your advice must in great measure depend on the amount of work you have devoted to your profession; on the accuracy of your knowledge of disease; on the care and patience with which you examine each symptom of every varying case. But if you wish to be successful practitioners you must ever read the book of nature by the bedside of the sick. You must look at each case as presenting its own peculiar features of constitutional disturbance,

regardless of all theory. One patient may tell you of some idiosyncrasy, or you may detect one in the treatment of a case; a condition which may prove a most important point in your treatment. I have reason to say that we should always respect an idiosyncrasy of the most trifling character. As an instance the following well-authenticated case is a good illustration: A gentleman could not partake of rice without being attacked by such severe symptoms that it might be said that rice acted as a poison on his system. Some friends, sceptical of this peculiarity, had biscuits prepared with a grain of rice in each. The gentleman was invited to dinner, and after dinner partook of one or two. He soon complained of feeling ill and left the table, observing that were he not *morally* certain he had not partaken of rice at dinner, he should suspect he was being then poisoned by it.

It is impossible with our present knowledge to explain the conditions which give rise to idiosyncrasies, but it is highly important that we take practical cognizance of them, for we do not appear to possess any means by which to overcome or anticipate their injurious influences. These may appear trifles when compared with what may be considered more important questions in practice; but it is the attention to trifles, to these peculiarities of system, which marks the difference between the observant and the careless, the watchful and the indifferent practitioner.

Let me relate what occurred in my own experience. A lady consulted me for an acute attack of iritis. She mentioned that she was unable to take mercury without being attacked by an inflammatory eruption similar to erysipelas. I was somewhat incredulous, and considering the administration of some form of mercury desirable in her case, asked if she had ever taken "grey powder." She said she had not, and had no objection to do so if I wished it. She commenced with small doses, but two days after its trial her arms were covered with an erysipelatous blush with numerous bullæ scattered over the inflamed surface.

Has it ever occurred to you to note that just as we observe idiosyncrasies in individuals, so there occur idiosyncrasies in diseases themselves? We see under one condition of syphilis that the administration of mercury produces certain satisfactory results, but in a more advanced and different condition, in the same patient, we find sure benefit result on the internal use of iodide of potash; while in that same condition mercury would generally prove prejudicial.

Why does diabetes run a relentless course in those whom it affects in youth, while it may exist comparatively harmless in more advanced life? Then look at that cruel disease tubercle! What a variety of idiosyncrasies do we not discover in the history of this peculiar deposit and its consequences?

Have we then nothing to learn?

Are not these all questions to which your attention may be turned with profit to mankind, and consequently to yourselves? As we consider them at present, and ask for an explanation of cause and effect, it appears to me we have very little to show on the credit side in the big ledger of medical lore.

Let me now ask you how far does the use of medicine prove useful? What does it affect? Do we cure any disease by its administration?

I may say truly that we treat disorders not unfrequently with marked beneficial effects. We are useful in watching their variations and results. So far we benefit the sick man. But I think we should dismiss from our medical literature the word cure, until we can answer satisfactorily what disease is "cured" by medicine. Does it "cure" smallpox, rheumatic fever, or cancer? A case of typhoid fever will run its allotted time, and with the care bestowed and the treatment prescribed the patient may recover; and so in other disorders; but the disorder is not cut short, and the patient restored to health by the administration of the physic prescribed. Still, under your experienced management, accidents by the roadside are avoided; food, fresh air, and other matters are wisely considered, and taken advantage of, for the benefit of the invalid. He recovers, but bear in mind it is not under the sole influence of medicine he recovers; he has not been, what is too commonly but incorrectly termed "cured." If there is one thing which should humble us in our own esti-

mation, it is this fact, that we watch the progress of diseases and, as far as our knowledge extends, help towards their removal, but we do no more, we cannot take to ourselves the credit that we have as yet discovered the secret of "curing" disease.

While on the subject of treatment excuse my drawing your attention to a point of no little importance in practice, which when neglected often leads to trouble. It is the tendency to take things for granted without sufficient evidence. Never trust too much to what may be related to you, nor attach too much importance to suppositions or suspicions without proof. Prove to yourselves the soundness of the ground on which you act, and be not deceived by a hasty or superficial examination. In no instances are these precautions of more importance than when you have to deal with disorders of the urinary organs.

I must now refer to a point regarding yourselves personally. You go forth to practise your profession with advantages that were not to be obtained when I was a student. Do not let me be supposed to exaggerate them, but it is for you to prove by your future work that they have not been thrown away upon you.

My early days of medical education commenced in the country; and it was my good fortune to be associated with a most practical and thoughtful man. He taught me to estimate the value of a clean tongue. He insisted on the important bearing of a

continued quick pulse; he cautioned me ever to look to the character and colour of the discharges from the intestines, as well as to the qualities of the secretion from the kidneys; he would always draw attention to the importance of the condition of the skin and to the characteristics of aspect.

I not only learnt much of the practical importance of these considerations but I was also taught that simplicity in all treatment of disease, as far as drugs were concerned, was most favorably adapted to the larger number of cases; that careful attention to warmth, cleanliness, food, and fresh air were essential in the treatment of all disease. But my excellent teacher had not a clinical thermometer with which to estimate the fluctuations of temperature. He had no urinometer to gauge the specific gravity of urine. He had not then been taught the importance of much that is now familiar to every student as regards disease of the kidneys; anæsthetics had no place in practical surgery; lithotrity had not then been performed, or had only just been advocated in France, and yet my teacher was a most successful practitioner. I owe much to his instructions; his lessons have served me on many occasions through subsequent years.

Whatever work you may have accomplished ere you entered this great school at Netley, you must all have appreciated and benefited by the few months spent here in the acquirement of practical information by bedside work, to have been in a position to

observe closely and daily the course of disease, its intimate treatment, and its results, especially to have had the opportunity to observe the effects of disease acquired in that country which is to be the field of your active future.

What a contrast to the position of an assistant surgeon in former days, attached to a regiment as soon as he had landed in India. Without any previous knowledge of Indian climate or experience in the treatment of tropical disease, he had to contend against the most formidable and sudden epidemics which attack, and too often destroy by numbers untold, Europeans and natives alike. Was it to some of these fatal outbreaks of tropical disease that the Psalmist alludes when he wrote, "A thousand shall fall at thy side and ten thousand at thy right hand"?

The experience you have gained here and the field of inquiry now about to open out to you, should stimulate you largely to increase your knowledge and encourage a bold, inquisitive, and scientific spirit in all that relates to your profession. Recollect what has already been done by those who have preceded you in the service, who had but little to help them compared with that which you can carry to the field of investigation. Look at the works of Sir Ranald Martin, Sir Joseph Fayrer, Morehead, and others, all of whom commenced their professional lives in India with small professional advantages when weighed by the side of those you have had.

Some of you may think that where so much has already been accomplished there cannot be much left for you to investigate or improve. Turn your attention to the great field of observation which will soon lie at your feet, and you will then find that it will require all your energies, all your judgment, based on your past teaching and past experience, in any degree successfully to deal with the various diseases which occur with the varying seasons of India.

This school of Netley, rendered so perfect for clinical observation and instruction, under the supervision of Edmund Parkes, Aitken, Longmore, Maclean, and Du Chomont—and this Hospital, have been the means of sending into the sister services many men who have already done it great credit, and it is for you, gentlemen, to maintain and improve upon, by your work, the just reputation acquired by this school—I say great school and great, and deservedly great, Hospital. Both have done great good. The one has sent forth men, ready to cope with the formidable diseases of all climates, the other has been the means of affording relief, and of often restoring to health, those who have returned to their native land after having served their Queen abroad, and who, if not received here, would probably have rapidly succumbed for want of sufficient care and experienced advice.

I maintain that such an institution as Netley

Hospital and School has done and is doing an incalculable amount of good. We cannot too highly estimate its worth and work. It possesses all the means of ensuring many blessings, directly and indirectly, to an endless number of the human race, daily and yearly increasing its usefulness, not alone restricted to the European soldier in India or the Colonies, but extending those blessings to the vast native populations scattered over our great possessions in the East.

I must here give expression to the very strong opinion I entertain that this Hospital and this School have been the means of conferring great advantages on Her Majesty's Medical Services, and through them of diffusing those blessings among our fellow-creatures to which I have referred. This is the result of the able teaching carried on here. No too high an estimate can be taken of the good already effected, no too sanguine opinion can be formed of the good which may follow. This is an Institution in every true sense of the meaning, of the most truly Christian character; it ensures an education which is alone directed to the relief of the sufferings of man. It is an Institution raised on the broad foundations of Faith and Hope and Charity; Faith in its true and right principles; Hope that its results will always and ever be "Good;" and Charity, that good should be distributed to all who need it.

In any degree to diminish the utility of the

Hospital or interfere with the teaching in the School would entail a considerable and lamentable loss, a loss which would alone be appreciated by those who are familiar with the history, past and present, of Her Majesty's Medical Services.

I must remind you that you commence your professional life with some advantages which contrast favorably with those which attach to private practice. You start in the public service with an income which, though limited and not considerable, is yet a certain one, and should so far relieve you of those anxieties which many have to contend with, the "res angusta domi." But have a care that this very certainty does not spoil your future. Do not be satisfied to eat the bread of idleness by avoiding all work that is not absolutely required of you. Remember now, and always, that it is not only your duty, but that it should be your ambition and pride, to earn honestly and thoroughly the stipend you have to receive as medical officers in Her Majesty's service.

India offers a great and magnificent field for future good and useful work, and innumerable opportunities of study in a great variety of subjects, quite independent of the actual practice of your profession; and should your tastes, or your talents, incline you to direct your attention to other paths of science, you have ample choice.

You will find there is much to learn in the investigation of the causes of fever, cholera, dysentery, and

other influences of climate or soil prejudicial to health, all which point to the many sanitary improvements which much of that country still needs, ere you can effectually stay "the pestilence that walketh in darkness, and the destruction that wasteth at noonday." Again, there is a considerable field for research, and delightful occupation for all, whose tastes and inclinations lead to the study of any branch of natural history. Sir Joseph Fayrer has proved by his beautiful and valuable work on the 'Venemous snakes of the Indian Peninsula,' that one need not neglect the practical work of his profession, though he may, with advantage and interest to the scientific world, turn his attention to some of the natural products of the country. Let me also call your attention to the work done by my friend and former pupil Francis Day. He commenced his public life as an assistant surgeon in the Madras Army. Shortly after his arrival in India he devoted himself to the investigation of the fishes of the country, with the result of a most complete account of them, illustrated by his own drawings, and published at the expense of Government. The work is one of the most complete of its kind, and has acquired a just reputation, as also has his more recent work on the Salmonidæ.

There are other opportunities of work and distinction for those who care to take advantage of them. They have grown up with the increasing demands of the day and the spread of education, and

offer opportunities of distinction to the enterprising and fair reward to the labourer. I allude to the more modern hospitals and schools of medicine in the various districts of India.

It is not everyone who enters the medical profession who possesses all the aptitude requisite for the successful practice of that profession, but who may excel in the work of medical teaching. To such the medical schools offer opportunities of employment congenial to their tastes, and are available to any who prefer such employment.

But I would suggest to all who are equal to it, to combine practice with teaching, especially in the earlier portion of service in India. Until you commence to teach you are not cognizant of your own deficiency, while in medicine something new is ever to be effected. A hard working, original minded, thoughtful man is delving in soil rich in materials of importance, which will generally sooner or later reward his labour by the yield of something not yet known or understood.

In surgery you have ample opportunity to exercise your skill and ingenuity, should operative surgery be congenial to your professional tastes.

I use the word "congenial" advisedly; from long personal intercourse with pupils, I have found that all that relates to surgery is enthusiastically pursued by some, while in the hands of others a scalpel would be a source of discomfort to the operator, if not of some detriment to the patient. To such the

less demonstrative field of medicine is far more congenial.

Sir Benjamin Brodie has remarked that "it cannot be predicated of any individual to what exact extent he may obtain professional success, for that must depend partly on his physical powers, partly on the situation in which he is placed, and on other contingencies;" "but," he adds, "having had no small experience in the history of those who have been medical students, I venture to assert that no one who uses the means proper for the purpose will fail to succeed sufficiently to gratify a reasonable ambition." "You have entered on pursuits of the highest interest, in which you will have the no small satisfaction of knowing that you never acquire any real advantage for yourselves which is not the consequence of your having benefited others. It is true you have years of constant exertion before you, but you will eventually learn how preferable such a situation is to that of individuals who, born to what are called the advantages of fortune, but neglecting the duties of their station, believe that they can direct their minds to no more worthy objects than the multiplication of their selfish enjoyments. It will not be your lot, as it is often theirs, to suffer the miseries of ennui, or to be satiated and disappointed with life at an early period; nor will you have to regret as you advance in age that you have lived an unprofitable or useless life."*

* Brodie's 'Lectures on Pathology and Surgery,' p. 26.

"The discoveries of great men," says another author, "never leave us; they are immortal. They contain those eternal truths which survive the shock of empires, and outlive the struggles of rival creeds. These have their different measures and their different standards. They pass away like a dream; they are the fabric of a vision which leaves not a rack behind. The discoveries of genius alone remain. It is to them we owe all that we now have. They are for all ages and all time; never young and never old; they bear the seeds of their own life; they flow on in a perennial and widening stream; they are essentially cumulative; and giving birth to the additions they subsequently receive, they thus influence the most distant posterity, and after the lapse of centuries produce more effect than they were able to do at the moment of their promulgation."*

Can I say more to induce you to work in that profession which alone seeks to mitigate or remove the evils which afflict the human race?

> "'Tis not in mortals to command success,
> But we will do more, Sempronius, we will deserve it."

Let that be your guiding principle through life.

In conclusion, gentlemen, let me urge that it be your ambition to do all the good that lies in your power; that it be your ambition by your high standard of conduct to maintain the dignity of your profession; that it be your ambition to do all in your power to advance the study and knowledge of

* Buckle's 'History of Civilization in England,' vol. i, p. 226.

disease, and so render more useful the application of practical medicine; that it be your ambition to serve yourselves alone by serving your fellow-creatures. In all rightly directed ambition there will always be found, *as sure results*, many and various prizes; in all dissipation and idleness the certain result is nothing but an utter blank!

Gentlemen, I have to thank you all for the patience with which you have listened to me, and in saying "Farewell" I wish you most sincerely a happy, prosperous, and useful future.

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