

**Inaugural address delivered in the Mater Misericordiae Hospital, on the opening of the annual session, November, 1880 / by Thomas More Madden.**

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Madden, Thomas More, 1838-1902.  
Royal College of Surgeons of England

**Publication/Creation**

Dublin : John Falconer, 1880.

**Persistent URL**

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INAUGURAL

DISCOURSE

WATER MISERICO

ON THE OPENING OF THE ANNUAL

BY  
THOMAS MORE MAI

CONSTITUTIONAL PHYSICIAN

PHYSICIAN TO ST. JAMES'S HOSPITAL

LICENSÉ CLERIC IN CONSTITUTIONAL MEDICINE

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JOHN FALCONER, ESQ. URB

DUBLIN

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# INAUGURAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED IN THE

## MATER MISERICORDIÆ HOSPITAL,

*ON THE OPENING OF THE ANNUAL SESSION, NOVEMBER, 1880.*

BY

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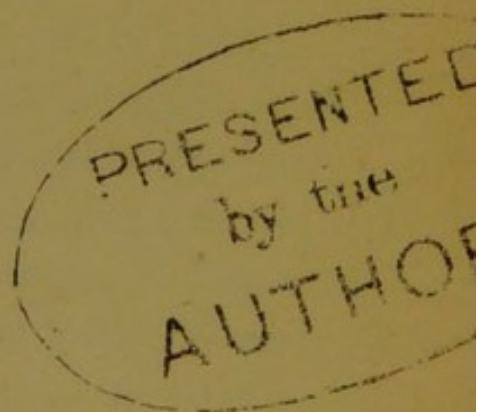
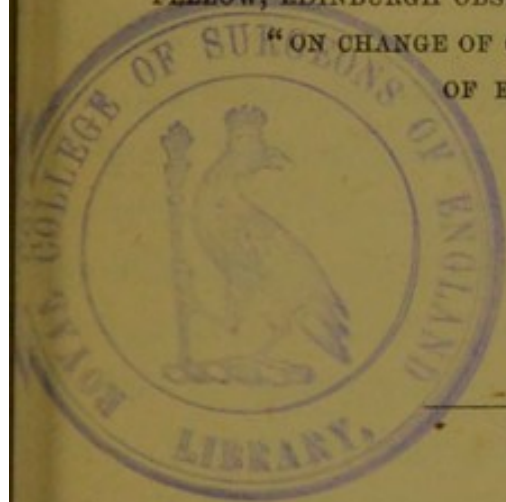
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OF EUROPE AND AFRICA,"

ETC., ETC.



DUBLIN :

JOHN FALCONER, 53, UPPER SACKVILLE-STREET.

1880.





## INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

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GENTLEMEN,

In addressing you this morning, on the occasion of the opening of the twenty-first annual session of the Mater Misericordiæ Hospital, I shall not detain you by any lengthened observations on the recent progress of medical science by which our art has attained its present position; for so vast is the field of clinical medicine which we are here to cultivate—into so many distinct parts has it now become subdivided—that it would be impossible at a *coup d'œil* to take even the most cursory view over its wide extent. The great advances in the practice of medicine which have resulted from the development of the physical and biological sciences, and the application of exact methods of investigation to the study of pathology, will be best demonstrated by the Physicians of the Hospital from whom you will learn the value of the clinical thermometer, the sphygmograph, the endoscope, for which we are indebted to our distinguished colleague, Dr. Cruise, the laryngoscope, and all those other aids to diagnosis and therapeutics, or weapons of precision with which science has now armed the medical practitioner for his contest with disease. Neither does it come within my province to dwell on the triumphs of modern conservative and antiseptic surgery, the advantages of which have been nowhere more strikingly proved than in this operating theatre and in the practice of the Surgeons of this Institution.

Passing all these by, I shall, therefore, now address a few words to those among you who are to-day about to join our



ranks, on the nature of the profession you have chosen and the method by which you may here prepare yourselves for its responsibilities. Trite as such observations must be to many of you, it can never be entirely useless to those embarking on the voyage of professional life to have some general view of the unknown sea which lies before them, and some preliminary advice as to the course they should steer to reach in safety its distant haven.

In embracing the Medical Profession, then, you have made a choice which you need never repent, for although it may not perhaps lead you to great affluence or high position, it has advantages above these. In the first place the exercise of this calling affords the largest possible opportunities of doing good to others; and in the second, by its practice, you may with tolerable certainty count on being able to earn a sufficient and honourable maintenance in any land. For unlike other professions medicine is cosmopolitan, and, whenever learned, may be practised in all countries and under all circumstances in which men are stricken by disease or accident and seek to escape from death.

Comparatively few attain affluence by medical practice, nor does the State offer to us any of those positions of honour or emolument to which others may look forward. The eloquent or learned lawyer aspires one day to climb the judicial bench, and in its dignified repose to crown

“A youth of labour with an age of ease.”

The successful soldier is ungrudgingly accorded the rewards of his valour; the versatile politician is spurred on by the cheers of an excited mob, or receives the plaudits of an admiring senate.

If such incentives to the performance of duty are not for us, we have a reward which is far higher, and it is one for which we are beholden to no man's favour. For it consists in the power



of exercising the nearest human approach to the Godlike faculty of saving life, warding off pestilence, assuaging pain, restoring banished reason to its dominion over matter, prolonging the span of existence, and, when the stroke of death can no longer be averted, of, at least, mitigating the physical suffering attending the parting of soul and body.

No greater powers can be conferred on man than these. Let us, therefore, never suffer ourselves to be misled by any want of external recognition into a false or low estimate of the importance and dignity of our profession—than which there is no higher earthly calling.

The profession to which we owe so much has assuredly some claim on us in return. This debt we can only discharge by contributing to its progress by our labours and sustaining its reputation by our personal character. If we thus do our best, be it much or little, we shall at least have striven for a noble cause, and may hope to make some little addition to that great cairn of science which has been built up by the aggregation of the individual experience of others like ourselves.

The paramount importance of clinical study is such that it would be impossible for you to overestimate its value or to devote too much of your time to it. No portion of your medical training, none of the multitudinous studies by which you must fit yourselves for your profession can for a moment vie with that engaging you in the hospital, and to which all other branches of medical education should be made subservient. They are indeed essential as constituting the alphabet of that language of nature which speaks to you from the bedside, and hence you should acquire as soon as possible as much rudimentary scientific knowledge as will enable you to interpret the otherwise unknown tongue in which disease reveals itself, and in which the secrets of pathology are concealed. But having gained this, let me again urge you to



look upon the hospital as the only safe text-book in which the art of medicine can be learned.

There could be no better preparation for clinical study in a great metropolitan institution like this, than a preliminary attendance on the practice of some of those Union hospitals such as those at Cashel and elsewhere throughout the country, which are now recognised by the Medical Council for the discharge of this important function.

To utilise clinical study, however, the most diligent attendance on hospital practice will avail little if you do not also cultivate the art of noting the history of the cases brought before you. Such notes will not only be an invaluable store of experience for future reference, but will serve to cultivate your powers of observation, teaching you to seize at once on the important and salient features of any case, and thus acquire the *mens medica* so essential for the physician. To stimulate you to this necessary portion of your education by some immediate reward, the Leonard Prizes are offered to your competition, and Dr. Hayden has further placed within your reach a gold medal for the best answering in pulmonary and cardiac disease, as determined by examination at the bedside.

In this great institution, the largest of its kind in Ireland, into which every form of disease and variety of accident is freely admitted, the number of difficult and interesting cases from all parts of the country under treatment, the crowds attending the extern departments, as well as the special wards set aside for various classes of disease, will afford you opportunities for the practical study of every branch of your profession which cannot be surpassed in any hospital in Europe.

From the youngest tyro on these benches to the oldest member of the medical staff, we are all here bound together by the reciprocal ties of mutual consideration and respect, which befit those who, whether senior or junior, are fellow-students



in the great school of medical science. Pupilage does not end on emancipation from the errors of examination. These but guard the portals of that wide domain of science, which the longest life will not suffice you to explore thoroughly, and in the intricate mazes of which you would infallibly lose your way were it not directed by that compass of scientific principles and illumined by those lights of practice with which you may here provide yourselves before setting out on the journey of professional life.

I may remind those of you who are about to commence hospital attendance that in the wards your demeanour should be grave, sympathetic, and reverent, standing, as you here do, in the temple of suffering humanity and in the immediate presence of death. If you recollect this whilst in the sick chamber, you will, I am certain, soon learn to imitate the subdued and kindly manner of those gentle ladies whom you will see ministering to their suffering fellow-creatures.

The duties performed in this institution by the Sisters of Mercy, by whose exertions it was founded and is maintained, exemplify, in its perfection, woman's true and high mission in relation to medicine. At the present time the physicians and surgeons of two of the London Hospitals are impeded in their duties and rivalled in their functions by those who should be their trusty assistants in the care of the sick poor. But here, as in the three other Hospitals in this city which are blessed by the presence of the self-sacrificing Sisters of Mercy, or that kindred Order, the Sisters of Charity, we find the most zealous, untiring, and willing, as well as the most intelligent possible co-labourers with the medical staff in charge of the patients.

In Dublin we have, up to this time, escaped any permanent settlement of those erratic medical hybrids, the lady doctors, despite the encouragement afforded them by the Irish College of Physicians, in their hopeless contest against Nature's laws.



That some women have passed unscathed through the ordeal of studentship—to which none of you would wish to see any lady of your own families subjected—is, I am sure, true; and that a few of these persons have shown considerable medical ability is beyond doubt. There are some masculine women, just as there are some effeminate men. Neither are good types of their kind; and it needs no serious argument to prove the futility of any attempt founded on such exceptional cases, on the part of either sex, to fill the place and assume the functions of the other.

In speaking of the primary importance of clinical study I need hardly disclaim any intention of undervaluing the allied sciences on which medicine rests. The medical practitioner should take an intelligent interest in every branch of science which may either directly illumine or shed its reflected light on pathology and therapeutics. It is, therefore, essential for you to possess some knowledge of the natural laws which govern all those agencies that may influence either physical or mental health. For our art deals not merely with the ailments of the body, but also with those affecting the noblest work of the Omnipotent, the human mind; and thus leads directly to that mysterious boundary which separates the physical from the immaterial nature of man.

To master a task so vast in the few years of student life would be impossible were it not that the rugged mountains of science have been now so explored by modern research, and their ascent so facilitated by many new ways and short cuts that you may, even in a short space, gain those heights of knowledge which the labour of a life could not enable our professional ancestors to attain.

But even the most perfect acquaintance with every branch of medical science is not sufficient to constitute a true physician. *Ex quolibet ligno Mercurius non fit.* He who



would worthily fill this office should possess a heart attuned to sympathy with suffering humanity as well as a mind stored with the science which ministers to its relief—

“Not for minds profane,  
Or hands to tamper with in practice vain.  
Like to a woman's virtue is man's health,  
A heavenly gift within a holy shrine!  
To be approached and touch'd with serious fear,  
By hands made pure and hearts of faith severe,  
Even as the Priesthood of the One Divine.”

If you are thus happily constituted, then, indeed, will you be kind as well as skilful attendants by that bed of agony in which man is born into this world, faithful protectors from the poisoned arrows of disease during his passage through it, and fit watchers of that last scene of suffering in which the taper of life is quenched. Then, too, will you be found trusty counsellors in troubles which to none others are confided; and to your keeping may be well committed, as will be the case, the health and the lives of your fellow-men, and the honour and happiness of their families.

Whilst recognising to the fullest the triumphs of modern scientific medicine, I would venture to warn you against the too prevalent fallacy of completely disregarding all the teachings of ancient medical experience.

The history of many so-called discoveries and improvements in medical science illustrates the observation of the inspired writer, that “all novelty is but oblivion;” and every day we find new proof of this in the modern revival of ancient arts. Elsewhere I have enlarged on this subject, and have shown that the employment of anæsthetics before surgical operations, the use of the midwifery forceps, the speculum, the uterine sound and porte-caustique, and the employment of sponge tents and nitric acid in uterine diseases (on the credit of which, in our own time, some have risen



into reputation and fortune), were all long ago well known, but in the course of time had fallen into that desuetude and oblivion which will as surely one day overtake our boasted inventions, and from which they may in due course be again resuscitated and claimed by future discoverers. I will not, however, go quite so far as Chaucer, who says—

“For out of the olde fieldis, as men saieth,  
Comith the newe corne, fro yere to yere;  
And out of olde bokis, in good faith,  
Comith all this newe science, that men lere.”

But, as Lord Bacon has well expressed it, “the river of Lethe runneth as well over as under ground,” and certain it is that the student of the now-neglected works of the ancient medical writers will find many striking coincidences between so-called recent inventions and the long-forgotten ideas of our predecessors.

By the cultivation of a taste for literary pursuits, and especially for the ancient literature of your profession, you will moreover best fortify yourselves against those disappointments and weary hours of hope deferred which may lie before even the most successful aspirant to medical practice. Some such tincture of literature will not only be a sure solace in those moments of trial, but will strengthen you for the battle of life, and fit you for your position as members of a liberal and learned profession.

The Irish medical profession inherits no mean traditions. In ancient days our country was not less noted as a seat of learning—*insula doctorum*—than it was as an abode of sanctity—*insula sanctorum*; and at a period when the flickering flame of science was almost extinct in many parts of Europe it still burned comparatively brilliantly in this remote island. In the library of the Royal Irish Academy there exists an extensive collection of ancient Irish medical manuscripts. Some years ago, having had occasion to consult



(with the assistance of an eminent Celtic scholar, the late Mr. O'Longan) these manuscripts, I found convincing proof of the erudition of the ancient Irish physicians, whose office was hereditary—their sole licence to practise consisting in the possession of family manuscripts which were only handed over by the Celtic physician, when dying, to his eldest son, and were thus transmitted for countless generations. In some of these documents, written in the twelfth century, we have evidence of a higher degree of intellectual and scientific culture, as well as a more intimate acquaintance with classic medical literature, than any contained in the volumes of the contemporaneous "Saxon Leechdoms," published by direction of the Master of the Rolls. But in the later Irish medical manuscripts there is the clearest proof of the gradual deterioration of science, and of the importation of the grosser medical superstitions of the Saxon Leechdoms from England into this country.

Even in the seventeenth century the fame of our professional ancestors was celebrated throughout Europe, and was eulogised by Van Helmont in terms which time will not allow me to quote here. But I have already perhaps lingered too long on a subject on which I confess I would gladly dwell longer, and therefore shall make no allusion to the part medical men have ever occupied in sustaining the reputation of our country for genius and literary ability. Nor need I say a word as to the benevolence of our predecessors, of which we have proofs in this city in those hospitals such as Dr. Steevens', Jervis-street, Sir Patrick Dun's, the Rotunda, and others, which are lasting memorials of the philanthropy and self-sacrifice of the medical profession.

Those of you who are now about to commence the study of medicine may be congratulated on the near prospect of having a feasible system of university education within your reach. Heretofore in this country medical men professing the religion



of the majority of its people were either debarred from university degrees or obliged to seek them in institutions disapproved of by their Church. Thus Roman Catholic medical practitioners were and still are heavily overweighted in the race of life, and in great measure practically excluded from those higher professional positions and honours to which the possession of collegiate degrees is essential. It is fortunate for you, gentlemen, that your days have fallen in what appears to be the dawning of a brighter era, when, in the new Royal University we may hope to find an institution in which every Irish medical student may seek, and if he be worthy, may obtain the great advantage of a university stamp on his medical qualifications.

Ours is, perhaps, the most unstable of all the arts, not only necessarily varying with the progress of the sciences on which it is founded, but also undergoing at frequent intervals other changes of a purely arbitrary character. For the influence of fashion is not more marked in the modes of dress than it is in the prevailing medical practice of any period; and as the poet tells us—

In physic, as in fashion, we find  
The newest has always the run of mankind.

Hardly a generation passes in which the practice of medicine is not revolutionised in this way. Thus, for a long period an almost absolute submission to the authority of the classic works of Hippocrates and Gallen was the rule in physic. At another time we find the visions of the alchemists, and much later on the wild ravings of that gifted madman, Paracelsus, replacing the influence of the philosophic teachings of the Hippocratic treatises, which as long as time endures will remain unrivalled treasures of clinical observation. Less than a century ago the rival theories of Brown and Cullen divided the medical world into hostile camps. And in our time how many little systems have we not seen loudly heralded into



existence, and then, having had their day, quickly hurried into the limbo of oblivion.

At the present moment the most striking characteristic of medical practice is the splitting up of the healing art into various special branches. Thus gynæcology, midwifery, ophthalmic and aural surgery; spinal affections and orthopedics; mental and nervous disorders; dermatology, dental surgery, the diseases of the throat, as well as those of the lungs and heart, are, with many others, separately cultivated by those who, by confining their practice to so limited a field, are presumed to acquire a more thorough knowledge of each special subject.

Under some circumstances and in large centres of population there can be no doubt that this specialising system is called for by the exigency of modern civilisation and in the interests of the profession, and it is probable that each special branch of medicine is thereby brought to greater perfection. But whether our art has thus suffered more than its separate parts have gained by this subdivision is quite another question, and one altogether too wide to be here discussed. In this great School of Clinical Medicine it is our primary duty to recognise the existing condition and requirements of the profession, and to prepare you for its present practice. Therefore, in addition to the usual lectures on general medical and surgical subjects daily delivered by the physicians and surgeons, and the opportunities afforded for the bed-side study of epidemic and contagious diseases in our fever wards—which have lately done the State some service in the person of our colleague, Dr. Nixon, who here acquired that knowledge which fitted him for the important office of Commissioner of Inquiry into the recent epidemic in the West of Ireland, to which he was appointed by the Government—the Medical Board has now instituted various special clinical lectures. Thus, for instance, you will have an opportunity



of studying ophthalmic surgery in the wards which, in accordance with recent regulations of the Licensing Bodies, are placed under the charge of Mr. Coppinger, one of the surgical staff, who has also been appointed Ophthalmic Surgeon to the Hospital. The diseases of the throat and use of the laryngoscope will be illustrated by Dr. Redmond; the newly-created and important branch of dermatology will be taught you by Dr. Kennedy; whilst in the Gynæcological Ward and Extern Department I hope to be able to bring before you the various Diseases Peculiar to Women.

In a general introductory lecture any minute details concerning that special branch of medicine with which I am most familiar might be out of place. I should, therefore, reserve these for a future occasion, and now merely say a word on the importance of your giving some consideration to this subject.

Whatever may be your future line of medical practice, you will find no small share of your attention occupied by the diseases of women, and without some knowledge of gynæcology you will be unable to keep pace with the requirements of the present day. To fit you for these, however, the preparation demanded by the rival licensing bodies—which are still suffered to keep the gates through which the profession is entered—is lamentably deficient. As a rule, medical examinations are, as I can vouch from some experience as an Examiner in Obstetric Medicine in the Queen's University, severe enough in all conscience, and embrace a more than sufficiently extended range of subjects. But whilst care is thus taken to secure an acquaintance with many branches of science which you may possibly never have necessity to apply, there is no step taken to ensure your attendance on a single lecture on one of the most important branches of practical medicine—the diseases peculiar to women, which you will hereafter have daily occasion to treat.

This deficiency you may, however, to some extent provide



against by voluntarily availing yourselves of clinical lectures on that subject, and such lectures will be delivered in this hospital during the coming session.

None of the special branches of modern medical practice have made more rapid progress than gynæcology. Thus, when I first entered on hospital study some "twenty golden years ago," many of the complaints included in this province were either unknown or entirely ignored by the ablest clinical teachers of that time, who had not the advantage of those methods of investigation, by the aid of which the humblest medical practitioner can now easily recognise diseases which then baffled the most eminent members of the profession.

In medical, as in most matters, converts are generally warmer in their zeal than others. Thus new opinions are controverted or new inventions are opposed until, if they be deserving of success, the resistless force of truth bears them in safety beyond the storm of prejudice. Then who so enthusiastic in favour of the last-born of science as those who have striven to prevent its nascence. So it was with the development of gynæcology. At one time the use of the speculum was denounced in terms of exaggerated reproach, at another the employment of the uterine sound was reprobated as a dangerous and useless innovation; in like manner an operation, the value of which in certain cases is now conceded, led to the expulsion of its advocate from the London Obstetrical Society. The various flexions of the uterus, to which so much importance is now ascribed, were said to exist only in the imagination of those who described them; and yet, within a very few years, these, with many other once-reproved practices or opinions, have come to be generally adopted. Nay, so far has the pendulum of professional opinion swung back from one extreme to the other, that each of these theories and methods of treatment has been pushed into undue importance, and abuse has thus succeeded to neglect.



Such transitions of medical opinion on matters of practical importance well illustrate the first aphorism of Hippocrates—"Experience is fallacious and judgment is difficult," and show the risk of the premature acceptance or rejection of new ideas, and of acting in your future practice on views which, if adopted in haste, will too often have to be repented at leisure.

At the same time I would strongly advise you, whilst availing yourselves of every new light of science, to be most cautious in departing from the well-known and approved rules of practice. The medical care of the lives and health of others is no light responsibility, and it is one which you should here so well train yourselves to bear that none may hereafter have cause to repent the trust they have reposed in you. In your future practice difficulties will present themselves and complications will arise which no mere book-learning would enable you to deal with fitly. In such moments of trial, when human life must depend on soundness of judgment and promptitude of action, you will face the emergency calmly, and act judiciously, in proportion as you now avail yourselves of the present opportunities of acquiring that sound clinical knowledge which will, I sincerely trust, hereafter make you successful and justly-honoured ministers of the healing art.

