On the importance of personal character in the profession of medicine : an address delivered at the opening of the winter session of the Medical Department of the Yorkshire College, Leeds, October 3, 1898 / by Charles J. Cullingworth.

9.

ON THE

IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL CHARACTER IN THE PROFESSION OF MEDICINE.

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE OPENING OF THE WINTER SESSION OF THE MEDICAL DEPARTMENT OF THE YORKSHIRE COLLEGE, LEEDS, OCTOBER 3, 1898.

BY

CHARLES J. CULLINGWORTH,

M.D., D.C.L., F.R.C.P.

OBSTETRIC PHYSICIAN TO ST. THOMAS'S HOSPITAL, LONDON; PRESIDENT OF THE OBSTETRICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON, ETC.

London:

HENRY J. GLAISHER,

57, WIGMORE STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE, W.

1898.

ON THE

IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL CHARACTER IN THE PROFESSION OF MEDICINE.

I CONSIDER it a very great honour to have been invited to take so prominent a part in the interesting ceremony of to-day. As an old Leeds student and a native of this city, it is with both pride and pleasure that I observe the unmistakeable signs of healthy prosperity in my old school, now the Medical Department of the Yorkshire College. Your buildings, your laboratories, your teaching appliances, and, of course, your fine hospital, will not only bear comparison with other similar institutions in this country, but are so modern and so complete as to warrant a passing twinge of envy in the breast of a London teacher. I should, however, be making but ill use of an exceptional opportunity if I wasted the few minutes at my disposal in elaborate compliments, however well-deserved they may be. My desire, to-day, is to say a few words that shall, if possible, be encouraging and helpful, first to those of my younger brethren who are still *in statu pupillari*, and, secondly, to those who have just completed their curriculum and are about to engage in

that struggle for existence which is apparently becoming every year more severe and more hazardous to the well-being of the individual practitioner, both "in mind, body, and estate."

First, then, allow me to address myself to those who are still students. It is now a good many years since Sir James Paget published, in the "St. Bartholomew's Hospital Reports," a short paper embodying the results of an enquiry as to what became of a thousand of his pupils within fifteen years of their entrance at St. Bartholomew's Hospital. It was a most interesting article, and is still well worth reading in its entirety. For what was true of the medical student of thirty years ago is, in the main, equally true of the medical student of to-day, and, so far as I am aware, no similar enquiry has been made either before or since. Of the total number of Sir James's pupils during the period embraced in the enquiry (1839—59), many had, of course, been lost sight of, but the career of a thousand of them was known either to Sir James Paget himself or to his colleagues, the late Mr. Callender and Mr. (now Sir) Thomas Smith, both of whom were engaged with him in the investigation. The result is shown in the accompanying table. Of the thousand :—

23 had achieved distinguished success ;
66 ,, ,, considerable success ;
507 ,, ,, fair success ;
124 ,, ,, very limited success ;
56 had failed entirely ;
96 had left the profession ;

87 had died within twelve years of commencing practice (twenty-one of them from diseases incurred in the exercise of their professional duties).

41 died during their pupilage (seventeen of them from consumption).

It may be explained that, in this summary, "distinguished success" means that those classed under this heading had gained leading practices in counties or very large towns, or held important public offices, or had become medical officers of large hospitals, or teachers in great schools. Those are stated to have attained "considerable success" who had gained and still held, at the time the paper was written, "high positions in the public services or leading practices in good districts," or who had already retired on their earnings, or who had won for themselves "much more than ordinary esteem and influence in society." The rest of those who could be said to have achieved any sort of real success constituted the third class. This class, which might be called the moderates, embraced more than half the total number of those whose histories were known. Of the other classes I need not here speak in detail, beyond calling attention to the curiously large number that left the profession, nearly ten per cent. of the whole. Most of those who are classed under this heading discarded the medical profession for other pursuits, the church, the army, the stage, commerce and agriculture. It is the concluding portion of the paper, however, that made at the time the strongest impression on my mind, and that induced me, even

after this lapse of years, to bring it before you to-day. "Of course," says Sir James Paget, "in watching and reflecting on the careers of my pupils, I have come to some strong beliefs on subjects of medical education, but this is not the place for publishing them. Only one I will set down, which may be of use to future pupils, and is justified by some hundreds of personal recollections. In remembering those with whom I was year after year associated, and whom it was my duty to study, nothing appears more certain than that the personal character, the very nature, the will of each student, had far greater force in determining his career than any helps or hindrances whatever. All my recollections," he continues, "would lead me to say that every student may draw from his daily life a very likely forecast of his life in practice, for it will depend on himself a hundredfold more than on circumstances. The time and the place, the work to be done and its responsibilities, will change; but the man will be the same except in so far as he may change himself."

It may be said that this was all very well thirty years ago, but that times have changed, and that whereas it may have been, and no doubt was then, possible for a man with character and perseverance by sheer force of good behaviour and steady plodding to come eventually to the front, no man could do so to-day unless he also possessed a more than average share of intelligence. For the general standard of knowledge in our profession has been raised, and the range of knowledge greatly widened, so that much more is required to-day both in quantity and quality even of

the ordinary pass-man, to say nothing of the honours men and prize-winners. This way of putting the matter sounds exceedingly plausible, but it leaves out of view the fact that entrance into the profession is now guarded in a way that it was not guarded during the period of which Sir James Paget was writing, and that whereas a man could then enter upon his course of medical study without having given any proof of having received a fairly liberal education, it is impossible for him to do so now. The preliminary examination in general education which must be passed before a student can register, though not a very severe test, is quite severe enough to keep back the hopelessly ill-educated man, whatever good qualities he may possess. Hence, the struggle is not, as might be supposed, between the man who has character without intellectual training and the man who has character with it, but between the man who has intellectual training *with* character and the man who has intellectual training without. In such a struggle victory rests in the end with the man who, to his intellectual attainments, adds *character*. As Sir James Paget says: "The time and the place, the work to be done and its responsibilities, may change," but the personal character of the student remains now as then the chief factor in determining his ultimate career.

It is sometimes said that the men who win prizes during their student-life are not the best men, and seldom fulfil the expectations of their teachers and friends. I have a shrewd suspicion that the author of this dictum was some ingenious but lazy man who

thought to cover his own deficiencies by belittling the successes of his more industrious fellow-students. Let anyone who is interested in the subject, and anxious to arrive at a correct estimate of the amount of truth in this statement, take up a "London University Calendar," and refer to the Honours Lists in the various subjects of examination for the degrees in Medicine. Here and there, of course, he will find an unfamiliar name amongst those who from year to year have taken the highest honours, but he will probably be astonished at the comparatively large number of names that have since become well-known, and, in many cases, even distinguished, as those of recognised leaders of our profession. Amongst those, for instance, who in the years long gone by obtained scholarships and exhibitions in the examination for the degree of Bachelor of Medicine, will be found the familiar names of Richard Quain, Edmund Parkes, George Johnson, Alfred B. Garrod, William S. Savory, Samuel Habershon, John S. Bristowe, J. Russell Reynolds, Henry Thompson, Joseph Lister, William Roberts, and William H. Broadbent, all of whom may certainly be said to have fulfilled the promise thus given of future distinction and success. I speak of the London University because I happen to know it best. I have no doubt the same is true of the other universities, including your own still youthful Victoria University, in which, as some of you know, I take a special interest as having borne a somewhat active part in the work of administration during the anxious and perilous years of its early infancy. Holding this view of academic

distinctions, the spectacle of a student stepping forward to receive a prize has for me far more than a mere passing interest. I am conscious of having witnessed an important scene in the drama of a life. He must be a singularly unemotional person who can, for instance, witness such a ceremony as we have witnessed to-day without having his pulses stirred and his sympathies excited. For, surely, no study is so absorbing as that of the development of the story of a human life, especially when events have shown that life to be one of more than ordinary promise. I shall certainly hope and expect to hear again of the recipients of to-day's honours, and to learn that the successes of to-day have been a mere forecast of the many that are to follow. The conditions of success are pretty much the same in student-life as they are elsewhere. The essentials—those conditions, namely, upon which all the others necessarily rest—have long ago been summarized in the well-known motto, *Mens sana in corpore sano*. There is at present no need to emphasize the latter part of this motto. The tendency appears to me rather in the direction of giving it undue prominence. I do not yield to any in my sense of the importance both to the race and to the individual of out-door games, athletic exercises, sports, and all the various means of developing the capacities of the body, and keeping them at their best. But when I find them the all-absorbing topic of conversation, when I realise that athletic achievements are the surest way to distinction and popularity, when I observe that an increasingly large part of our newspapers is filled with

the record of them, and that no part of the day's news is read so widely or so eagerly, and when I am assured that schools and colleges are actually being selected on considerations affecting their athletic fame rather than their reputation for scholarship, I am tempted to wonder whether the first part of the motto I have quoted is receiving sufficient attention, and whether the needs of the body are not absorbing a little more than their share.* "Propose this test," says Browning,

> "Thy body at its best,
> How far can that project thy soul on its lone way?"

I have said enough, however, on this head. The strong common sense of our English-speaking race may be depended upon for sooner or later adjusting the balance, and for taking care that whilst the body receives its due share of cultivation, the needs of the mind shall not be seriously overlooked.

"There is no profession," said an English bishop, preaching recently to a medical congregation in St. Paul's Cathedral, "except perhaps that of the church, in which character counts for so much as it does in the profession of medicine." If that be true, and I feel certain it *is* true, it becomes of the highest importance to keep up during student-life a high moral standard. The true greatness of any school or college, medical or otherwise, must always depend, in the long run,

* To show that this is not an overstatement of the exaggerated and even absurd importance at present attached to these matters, let me give an instance in point. In one of the University Cricket Matches, played recently at Lord's, a representative of Oxford made a heavy score, what is called in cricketing language a century. I am told that this gentleman thereupon received two telegrams, each of them offering him a mastership in one of our public schools.

not upon its athletic or academic achievements, but upon the high standard of its moral tone. If you desire your own College to enjoy the best kind of pre-eminence, it must be by everyone of you, senior and junior, helping to keep up the standard. You who are here to-day for the first time, will find it a great change from ordinary school or college life, with its discipline and supervision, to the life of a medical student. During a great part of every day you will be free to go where you like and do what you like, and your future much depends upon the use you make of this freedom. And you who are seniors must remember that the juniors will take their tone from you. The influence of the senior students upon the junior is incomparably greater than that of the teachers on either, and gives the senior student a position of great responsibility.

I must now, however, pass on to say a word to those of you who will no longer be students in the technical sense of the word; those, I mean, who have completed their curriculum and obtained their diploma to practise. Students in the broader and equally true sense of the word, you will, I hope and believe, continue to be to the end of your lives. In fact, your experience will be very different from that of the majority of your brethren if, after being a few years in practice, you do not find that you have learnt more of your profession *since* you became qualified than you did before. At present, no doubt, the feeling uppermost in your minds is one of thankfulness that you have at last come to the end of what, at one time, must have appeared to

be an almost interminable series of examinations. I entirely sympathise with my old friend and teacher, Mr. Pridgin Teale, in his opinion that the medical student is over-examined. And yet it is difficult to see in what other way than by examination his knowledge and fitness to practise his profession can be adequately tested. I am quite sure of this, however, that although Mr. Teale did not succeed in carrying his resolution in the General Medical Council, his forcible speech in moving his proposition, and the discussion that followed, will prove to have had an excellent effect upon the examiners. It is well that examiners should be reminded from time to time of the main object of examination, namely, to test the fitness of the candidate to be entrusted with the care of the sick. The importance of keeping this in view was brought home very forcibly to all who were present by an amusing incident that took place at a meeting of the Board of Studies when the regulations of the Victoria University were under discussion. A member of the Board, overflowing with compassion for the unfortunate candidate, proposed to lower the pass-standard for the M.B. degree from one half of the maximum number obtainable to one third. It was a bold suggestion, and, after the resolution had been duly seconded, there was for a few moments an ominous silence. Then one of the Arts professors rose and asked the Chairman, in the most innocent manner, if he was correct in supposing that this degree would confer upon its possessor a legal qualification to practise his profession. The Chairman replied that it would. "Then, I presume,"

continued the Professor, still in the blandest tone, "that if we vote in favour of this resolution, it will be equivalent to saying that we shall be quite satisfied if, when the newly-qualified graduate has become the medical attendant in our families, he is correct in his diagnosis and treatment once out of three times." It is needless to say that nothing more was heard of the resolution. Obviously, the community must be considered in this matter as well as the candidate.

But I am now addressing those more especially to whom the question of examinations has fortunately ceased to be of immediate personal concern, and I may, therefore, leave a subject which is always liable to awaken at least *some* unpleasant recollections.

It is well for those of you who are about to enter upon the practice of your profession to be reminded at the outset that the practice of the medical profession is not altogether a life of luxury and ease. You will have a great many unpleasant experiences. You will find, for example, that you will not have one hour out of the twenty-four that you can positively call your own, in the sense, that is, of being free from the liability to interruption by a professional call. You will sometimes feel, when you have an anxious case under your care, overwhelmed by a sense of awful responsibility. You will then realise what it is to have in *your* hands, resting on *your* decision, the issues of life and death. Nothing can make these things endurable but enthusiasm. You must *love* your profession with a devotion not merely sufficient to counterbalance all its difficulties and drawbacks, but intense enough to make you blind to them.

Given this devotion, and the vocation of the doctor becomes to my mind the finest in the world.

I spoke a few moments ago of the danger of men during their student-life, in their eagerness to promote the health of the body, neglecting the cultivation of the mind. This danger is by no means at an end when a man has left the school and hospital and entered upon active practice. Henceforward, it takes the form of a tendency to become absorbed in his profession and to neglect other means of mental cultivation. None of us is strong enough to bear with impunity the strain of professional life without some kind of habitual mental recreation. It is, therefore, of the highest importance to set up a hobby. It does not much matter whether the hobby be a branch of natural science, or a department of general literature, or something different from either. The essential thing is to have an intellectual hobby of *some* kind, so as to be saved during the absorbing activities of our professional life from professional narrowness and that partial atrophy of the mental faculties that comes of disuse, and also in order to be provided, when our working days are over, with an unceasing source of wholesome interest.

The keenness of the struggle for existence is constantly in danger of making us forget our high calling, —forget that we are members, not of a trades' guild, but of a learned profession. I would not, on any account, utter one word in disparagement of trade. It would particularly ill become me to do so in a city whose trade is the source of her greatness. But I hope I may, without offence, venture to point out that the commer-

cial code of ethics differs in some important respects from the professional code. The first consideration with the business man, for example, in regard to any given transaction, is how it will affect his own interests or the interests of those whom he represents. It is for his customers to judge for themselves how far *they* are likely to benefit by the bargain. The professional adviser, on the other hand, is expected to make his patients' well-being his chief care, and not to be influenced in the advice he gives by motives of self-interest.

Mr. Brudenell Carter tells us that the late Sir Prescott Hewett was in the habit of saying that it was not enough for a medical man to be honest, he must be chivalrous. We are ready enough to take to ourselves the title of a noble profession, but we must remember that to be truly noble our profession must set before it, and act up to, a high ethical standard. Its spirit and its methods must leave no room for the taunts of cynicism. There must be amongst its members no mean attempt to displace professional rivals by offers of cheaper service, or to discredit them by whispered suggestions of professional incompetence. There must be no practising for private gain under the misleading name of a dispensary, or indiscriminate recommendation of costly methods of treatment in which the prescriber has a pecuniary interest. There must be no aping of the advertising methods of the charlatan, or lowering of our professional societies by the introduction of some of the more objectionable features of trades-unionism. And yet, I fear, some of these things are not altogether unknown amongst us. We want you of the

coming generation to realise that the fair fame of our beloved profession in the immediate future rests with *you*. We trust to *you* to keep up its best traditions and to maintain that reputation for nobility of aim and conduct which it has hitherto possessed, and which of right belongs to it.

Let me conclude with one or two extracts from a very ancient document, dating from the fifth century before the Christian era, and known as the oath of Hippocrates. The best authorities consider it highly probable that the document was actually written by the great sage himself. If not, it is practically certain, from internal evidence, that it was written in the Hippocratic age. It appears to be in the nature of a declaration made by the pupil when the master is about to undertake his instruction in the art of medicine. "I swear," says the youth, "by Apollo the Physician and Æsculapius and Hygeia and Panacea, and all the gods and goddesses, that according to my ability and judgment, I will keep this oath and stipulation. I will reckon him who taught me this art of medicine as dear to me as my parents. I will share my substance with him, and relieve his necessities if required. I will look upon his offspring as my brothers, and if they wish to learn medicine will teach them without fee..... I will prescribe such a regimen for my patients as shall, according to my ability and judgment, conduce to their benefit. I will avoid whatever is evil and unjust..... In innocence and in purity I will pass my life and practise my art..... Whatever houses I enter, I will enter them for the benefit of the sick, and I will

abstain from every intentional act of mischief and corruption..... If I see or hear, in the exercise of my professional practice, or apart from it, anything in the life of men which ought not to be spoken of abroad, I will not divulge it, regarding in such case discretion as a duty. While I continue to keep this oath unviolated, may it be granted to me to enjoy life and the practice of the art, held in perpetual respect by all men! If I violate it and perjure myself, may the contrary be my lot."

Is it possible to conceive a finer testimony to the high standard of professional conduct aimed at in those remote days? May you and I, throughout our professional lives, emulate the generous and pure spirit that inspired these famous words! If, in the battle of life that is before you, anything that I may happen to have said to-day may help you to fight manfully and to win your way to honour and success, I shall indeed be glad. "I have great confidence," says our dear old friend, Wendell Holmes, "in young men who believe in themselves..... When a resolute young fellow steps up to the great bully, the World, and takes him boldly by the beard, he is often surprised to find it come off in his hand, and that it was only tied on to scare away timid adventurers." And so, with these closing words of encouragement, I bid you, one and all, God speed.