**Address to the medical students of London : session 1850-1 / by J. Stevenson Bushnan.**

# ADDRESS

TO THE

# MEDICAL STUDENTS OF LONDON.

SESSION 1850-1.


BY

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# PREFACE.

In compliance with the request of several Friends, I have been induced to publish, in the present form, the Address to the Medical Students of London for the Session 1850-1, which appeared as the leading article in the "Medical Times" of the 27th of September last.

In so doing I have no hesitation in avowing the Authorship; and I trust that its circulation will prove useful, and realize the object I had in contemplation.

J. S. B.

7, Nottingham-place, Regent's-park.
*October* 1, 1850.

# ADDRESS.

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"And beshrew our soul,
But we do love the favour and the form
Of this most fair occasion."

KING JOHN.

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THE Session of Medical Study for the year 1850-1851 is now about to commence; the College and Hospital Professors have their Lectures prepared; students are arriving from all parts of the country, and we cheerfully lay before them in our present Number a full programme of the various courses of instruction provided for them in the different schools of this great metropolis. We also avail ourselves of this anniversary *réunion* to address a few words of encouragement and advice, to those who are about to enter upon paths which we have ourselves trodden with blithesome footsteps, and which may be regarded as so many avenues opening into the future prosperity of life.

With a light heart the first year's student arrives in London, just emancipated from the thraldom of an old-fashioned apprenticeship, or it may be from the discipline of College; and albeit he may cast many "a longing, lingering look behind" on the scenes of his boyhood, and sigh to think of the comforts of his home—and it may be of the "maid of his love"—yet will his mind infallibly be excited by the novelty of his position. The museums, hospitals, and lecture-rooms; the crowd of new companions that will throng around him on every side; his curiosity to see and hear the most celebrated of our medical professors:—these objects will naturally enough lead to a diversity of thought, which may for awhile produce some little bewilderment, in the midst of which, if he begin seriously to

consider the chart of knowledge through which he is expected to travel in order that he may obtain the information that will be required of him, he will find his heart sink within him at the prospective difficulties he has to encounter. "How," he will ask himself, "can it be possible to learn so much? How can such a vast variety of subjects be grappled with and retained in the memory?" What a cloud of mystery seems to obscure the threshold of the temple! But be of good cheer. It is most encouraging to observe how much may be achieved gradually—by little and little—nay by a very few hours of study, steadily followed up and daily repeated. The error of many young students is that they often begin by aiming at too much; they would fain go too fast; they fancy the citadel of Science is to be vanquished by storm, instead of being taken possession of gradually and quietly. The attack is too hot to last; on a sudden they slacken their labours; and, during an unwise intermission, lose the 'vantage-ground they had already obtained. This is bad generalship. It is almost incredible how quickly the much that may be learned may be forgotten:

"Love flows like the Solway, but ebbs like its tide."

So does knowledge. It flows into the mind slowly, and sometimes by painful degrees; and if attention, like a sleepy sentinel, forgets to close the flood-gate, its stream ebbs away with inconceivable rapidity. There are however some students who will argue, that the idleness of to-day may be made up for by the industry of to-morrow—that the deficiencies of one session may be made good by extra application during another. Be not deceived!—The ground that is lost cannot easily be recovered. It is by studying systematically a given number of hours *de die in diem*, that the information required to make an accomplished surgeon or physician alone can be obtained. The soil must be tilled slowly and carefully to yield a sure and abundant harvest. If the student will only from the beginning pursue his studies regularly—be punctual in his attendance in the lecture-room and hospital—if he will follow up his observations by reading methodically:—he will not towards the end

of his studentship find it necessary to harass his mind and impair his health by inordinate application and midnight study. To return home, even with his long-wished-for diploma in his pocket, with cheeks blanched by the unhealthiness of late hours, and a "brow sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," is a bad sign; it indicates an amount of negligence or dissipation in the early part of the season, the reparation of which has demanded a sacrifice which the strength of the constitution has not been able to sustain. Besides which, a healthful cheerfulness during study facilitates the acquisition of knowledge and invigorates the faculties of the mind. Nothing can be well learned in a hurry; galloping over the course only jades the memory and prostrates its energies. Again: some students fancy they can recover lost time by having recourse to a grinder, as if knowledge could be crammed into the human mind like food into the crop of a turkey. We do not object to what is called "*grinding*"—the Socratic mode of teaching by questions is, for aught we know to the contrary, excellent; but then it should be adopted soon, and continued through the whole course of study, instead of being had recourse to as a *dernier ressort* at the eleventh hour. It is then the idle student goes to his grinder like a penitent to his priest, flattering himself that he will absolve him from his past errors, and somehow or other contrive to ferry him through his difficulties. Here again he deceives himself; for supposing his lucky star does protect him, and that he does escape being "plucked:" —after all his examination and the triumph he thinks he has achieved, what is his position? Does he really know his profession? The public now-a-days, both in town and country, is sufficiently intelligent to distinguish the competent from the incompetent, the skilful from the unskilful medical practitioner. And here we would fain impress most emphatically upon the mind of every student, that the great object of his attending our medical schools is not simply to pass an examination at the Hall, College, or University. He must look beyond this. He must qualify himself to practise his profession with knowledge and ability: he must be ever in readiness to

be tried by a severer tribunal than the one impending; for when the details of his examination have long since passed from out his mind, he will find himself in positions of responsibility wherein he must rely solely on his own resources. If then through his incompetency a fellow-creature become a cripple for life, or if through his ignorance at the bed-side a single human life should be sacrificed, how heavy would be the penalty that must await him; yet such may be the irretrievably bitter consequences of the misspent hours of a student's life. To pass through the ordeal of an academical examination, however, with credit and honour is of the highest importance; it soon becomes whispered abroad; the Professors regard such young men with interest, and they commence their professional career under the happiest auspices.

The study of medicine has to the beginner its difficulties. He will, in the first instance, be puzzled to understand many technical terms, which he may often feel inclined to pass over with a negligent guess at their meaning. This is bad policy; for it is leaving so many stumbling-blocks in the way of his future progress. It is of the utmost consequence not only to understand the meaning of every word, but to trace its derivation, which will always point out its proper application. Words, then, become the helpmate of memory. Here, also, we may remark that the student, in the course of his reading, should pay attention to the literary construction of the passages before him; for in after life he may be called upon to correspond officially and publicly on many occasions, when an illiterate expression or inelegance of style may seriously injure his reputation. Furthermore, he ought to translate every Greek or Latin sentence he may incidentally meet with; for experience shows that these languages are easily forgotten, and it is a sad sacrifice of time in the last year of study to be under the necessity of recommencing the labours of his school-days, or, which is the same thing, to be obliged to engage a private tutor. Hence, it is well to keep up the knowledge of the classics by reading some portions of them daily. The choice of books, in the first year of study, is a matter of great importance.

Upon this point the student should consult and be advised by his Professor; and when selected we recommend him not to change his books capriciously, or fancy that one elementary work is better than another. He should adhere to his original text-book, and not ramble about in search of others; indeed, he ought in the beginning of his studies to confine his attention to the subjects of the daily lectures, or the cases which he may have seen in hospital. He must not object to go over and over again the same ground. The multiplication table was never learned by reading it once or twice over, or the problems of Euclid by simple inspection. Sir Edward Sugden, who attained so much fame for his learning and eloquence at the bar, when asked to explain the secret of his success, answered, "I resolved when beginning to read upon law to make everything I acquired perfectly my own, and never go to a second thing till I had entirely accomplished the first. Many of my competitors read as much in a day as I read in a week; but at the end of twelve months my knowledge was as fresh as the day it was acquired, while theirs had glided away from recollection." In the same way the principles and elementary facts of medical science cannot be too deliberately and strongly impressed upon the mind. The whole secret of grinding consists in making the student reiterate the same thing until he remembers it; and the only advantage the grinder seems to possess over the book is, that he is a talking, the other a silent monitor. His manner of speaking and way of explanation are more impressive than reading to an inattentive mind; for after all it is an affair only of attention. The schoolboy learns his Greek and Latin grammar by recurring constantly to the same lesson; going over again the same rules:—he continues, indeed, conning over the same book until its very leaves upbraid his dullness by turning round upon him and becoming dog-eared. The same kind of application and perseverance are absolutely necessary in order to learn anatomy, physiology, chemistry, materia medica, and the collateral branches of medical science.

Some difference of opinion prevails respecting the expediency of taking notes. We are inclined to think, that when very

much extended, the plan is a bad one; because the student then is apt to rely upon them rather than upon the actual exercise of his memory. Nevertheless, short notes, frequently consulted, may be useful. Another point of doubt has arisen respecting the competition for prizes. Nothing can be more honourable than for a young student to be crowned with laurels;—his own vanity cannot fail to be infinitely flattered thereby, and his friends at a distance will also be delighted. But we must not mislead ourselves. Economy of time and industry is of great importance to the young student; he cannot afford to concentrate all his energies and devote all his attention to any exclusive subject. In competing for a prize his attention is drawn from all other pursuits; and we cannot help thinking, however successful he may be, that too often he will have earned his victory at the expense of other studies which ought not to have been neglected. It is, indeed, an evil for medical students, before completing their education, to take up any one subject of study as a speciality. He who indulges this kind of favouritism will necessarily be led to only one point of the compass, and he will remain ignorant of many others with which he should be familiar. There are some young men, however, who commence life with an ardent desire for personal distinction—an intuitive notion of self-idolatry—the idea of the love of fame with them resembles a brilliant but delusive meteor, which irradiates only for awhile the distant horizon of existence. The experience of the world will soon dispel this vision. They, then, must fall back upon the stern realities of life, and will discover that it is upon their success in their profession only that they must depend for their very subsistence. We have known some youths of an imaginative turn of mind fancy themselves Poets;—nay, invoke the Muses in the dissecting-room, and write verses while they were dissecting blood-vessels. There are very few young men of any talent and education who cannot string together a score or two of rhymes, ay, and write good poetry, too; but it is a grievous loss of time to supersede more serious study by so unprofitable an occupation. It is better any day to be a good physician than an indifferent poet. In walking the hospitals,

therefore, eschew the Muses. Others, again, of a metaphysical turn of mind, rush headlong into recondite and abstruse disquisitions, and before they are well acquainted with the most elementary facts of science, flounder about in search of shrimp-like abstractions and subtleties. These are the unfledged philosophers of the schools. They pretend to be very profound, but when they have gone out of their depth, and taken a dive into the mud, they do not rise to the surface any wiser than their fellow-students. Abjure, we entreat you, all such shadowy speculations, and ascertain what are the truths of science before endeavouring to unravel their mysteries.

But let us return to the matters of fact which claim the more immediate attention of the first-year student upon his arrival in London. Where shall he live? What shall he do? Who will become his friends and future companions? The moral position of the student during the session that is now about to open must needs be a subject of painful anxiety to those parents who know well that the time has arrived when it is fitting and necessary that even their favourite son shall face the temptations, and begin to take his share in the great business of the world. What will then be his conduct? Will it reflect honour on them, and be creditable to himself?—or will some evil genius throw its malignant influence around him, and seduce him from the paths of rectitude into those of idleness and dissipation, where he will squander his means, revel in vice and folly, blur his family escutcheon, and bring gray hairs with sorrow to the grave? Will he escape, uncontaminated, the snares which notoriously lie in wait for the youthful traveller when he has left his parental hearth, and is wandering through the high-ways and by-ways —the broad streets and narrow alleys—of a great and over-peopled city, in which wealth and poverty, luxury and starvation, virtue and vice, seem huddled together in striking and revolting contrast? How will he return to the home of his fathers? These are questions of deep and solemn import which at this moment make the life-blood quiver in many a mother's heart. It behoves us now, therefore, to view the

student's life under its moral aspect. And, first, it is of consequence that his place of residence should be judiciously chosen; and there cannot be a question that the best policy which can be adopted will be for him to board in a respectable private family, or, if possible, in the house of a physician or surgeon, who will superintend his studies, and whose society will always be instructive and bear upon the great object he has in contemplation. Lodgings, the best of them, are dreary solitudes, which the brightest fire on a winter's night will hardly cheer up into anything like domestic comfort. "I am never domesticated," said Robert Southey, "in lodgings; the hearth is unhallowed; the Penates do not abide there." The student, with all his home associations fresh about him, feels this, and soon leaves his solitary fire-side to enjoy the gaieties of the theatre, the licentiousness of the tavern, or the society of new acquaintances, with whom he is tempted to smoke cigars, drink punch, and tell merry stories—"pleasant, but wrong"—until the hour arrives when Hamlet's ghost, in the shape of a policeman in blue armour, "sniffs the morning air," and meeting him in the deserted street, perhaps "marshals him the way that he should go." Habits of irregularity and intemperance are hereby engendered which are incompatible with study, and which never would occur or be tolerated in a private family. But however important for his personal comfort the place of his abode may be, the choice of his new companions is of infinitely greater consequence to his future happiness, for this is the initiatory step which will govern for good or for evil all his future movements. The purest stream may become contaminated by running through poisoned ores. Vicious habits are more contagious than the leprosy of old, and disfigure the mind, more than that Eastern plague ever did the body. Once infected, there is no escape. Beware, therefore, of new acquaintances. The lustre of a young man's honour soon becomes tarnished in an impure atmosphere. Use caution and discretion in the selection of your friends, and cultivate an intimacy only with those who are of studious and temperate habits, and who can, directly or indirectly, in conversation

suggest new ideas, or impart information. For the mind, even in its hours of recreation, should be as active as the swallow on its wing. There are many young men who exhibit no apparent or outward vices, whose society, nevertheless, it would be well to avoid. Such are the following :—We would avoid those who are gay, thoughtless, and prodigal, who lavish their money foolishly away, and whose lodging-house cupboards are miniature wine stores and gin palaces. We would avoid fashionably-dressed youths, who profess to understand and be fond of horses and dogs, and the mysteries of the race-course and the ring, and who leave the hospital for the livery-stable, to associate with grooms, pugilists, horse-breakers, and dog-fanciers. We would avoid those who delight in billiard-playing, whist, écarté, and games of chance, their proficiency in which has been purchased at the expense of their professional education. We would avoid men who habitually haunt the theatre and the tavern, who "vex the drowsy ear of night" with their uproarious mirth, and go forth to their class-room next morning with faces pale, and cadaverous, and suffused with the fumes of the previous night's debauch. We have, too, a prejudice against any young man whom we may meet with moustache on his lip, and "imperial" on his chin, elbowing his way along the street with a student's cap upon his head, and a cigar reeking in his mouth. The habit of smoking in early life is ungentlemanlike, and suggests the suspicion that such youths are addicted to other vices. Their cigar is the symbol, in our eyes, of the tap-room and the wine-cellar. We would avoid associating with men who are much richer than ourselves, for we could not prudently compete with them in their expenses, and it should always be our pride never to be ashamed of an honourable poverty. We would, also, for our own peace of mind, avoid over-talkative men—everlasting chatterers—the magpies of debating-societies. We know many such, but they have no health in them. "There is nothing tires one more," says old Feltham, "than words when they clatter like a loose window shaken by the wind. A talkative fellow may be compared to an unbraced drum, which beats a wise man out of his wits. Surely nature

did not guard the tongue with a double fence of teeth and lips, without meaning that it should not move too nimbly." There are many other descriptions of men we would avoid, and there is much more advice respecting the moralities of life that we could give. What says the immortal Shakspere? "Let not the creaking of shoes, or the rustling of silks, betray thy poor heart to woman; keep thy foot out of brothels, thy hand out of plackets, thy pen from lenders' books, and defy the foul fiend."

The more advanced student, on his return to the Modern Babylon, will, we presume, be acquainted with its localities; its handsome squares, wide streets, and many of its narrow by-lanes; he will know his "whereabouts," having already, in all probability, "defied the foul fiend." The present session we will suppose to be his last. He must therefore return with increased assiduity to his studies. It is now that he will find frequent self-examination of the greatest assistance. He should ascertain upon what points he is deficient, and sift the elements of his learning, in order to separate the ore from the dross. He must endeavour so to arrange his capital as to have it at command, and be ever ready, as it were, to give change for the smallest coin. In other words, he should be prepared to give every explanation required upon minor elementary points, which are often overlooked as insignificant for those which, on account of their difficulty, appear to be of greater consequence. We have known a candidate for a physician's degree capable of describing with great accuracy the nervous and arterial systems in detail, and their relations with the minutest points of relative anatomy, who nevertheless had not thought of asking himself how many teeth he had in his head? In chemistry, too, men will often perplex themselves to learn and remember the most complicated theories of chemical action, and at the same time neglect to observe and carry in their mind the characteristic properties of the most simple substances. The error of the advanced student, as he approaches the first trial-scene of anxiety he has ever experienced is, that he does not ask himself whether he *really* understands this or that subject, but puzzles himself to know how divers questions may be

met and parried, and by what clever *ruse* he may, like a fox, escape through some hole and corner, and evade being caught in the trap of error. His idea of the character of the examination which awaits him is often erroneous. He is apt to entertain an unfitful fancy that the Examiners will, like the Spanish inquisitors of old, put him to the torture of cross-examination, only to convict him of something he does not know, or may have forgotten. The reverse is the fact. Their object is to ascertain whether he has thoroughly, and in a comprehensive manner, qualified himself to be a competent practitioner; and whether they will be justified in giving him his diploma, or passport into the profession. The well-informed candidate need anticipate no difficulty. He should go up with a cheerful countenance, and be not flurried by the notion that any undue advantage will be taken of an inadvertent mistake. The consciousness of having spent his whole term of study, session after session, diligently and studiously, will inspire him with an internal feeling of confidence, which will enable him to answer questions with presence of mind. His faculties will not be paralyzed; his knowledge will not be frightened out of him by the sight of the professors in their silken robes. We have known young men turn pale and sick in the waiting-room; and we believe that Sir Walter Raleigh faced death on the scaffold with more courage than many of these youths have shown when called upon to face the Court of Examiners of the College of Surgeons. Truly, this lack of self-possession is absurd, and must originate in the consciousness of time misspent, and in a sense of great self-deficiency; for, be it observed, no man is rejected for being unable to answer some few unimportant and collateral questions. The Examiners have a sacred duty to perform, which we know they discharge conscientiously, and always towards the student with kind and liberal feelings. They discern clearly the distinction between mistakes arising from nervousness or lapse of memory, and positive ignorance and blundering; they soon discover whether or not the candidate has studied his profession with diligence; whether he has availed himself of

the advantages which have been placed at his disposal, or idled away his time in vain and unprofitable pursuits; they, too, have had, in many instances, an eye upon his reputed moral character, and his conduct during the whole term of his studentship; and we are satisfied that they exercise a fair and wise discrimination, and pronounce on all occasions a verdict that is just and unimpeachable. No man need be afraid of passing the Hall, the College of Surgeons, or the Universities, who is qualified to practise his profession. It is upon such principles only that the Professors, who are the guardians of public health, can protect the welfare of society, and uphold the reputation and honour of the medical schools over which they preside.

To conclude. We congratulate Medical students, young and old, who are now arriving in this metropolis to enter on the Session 1850-1. They have our best and most cordial good wishes, and they will always find the "MEDICAL TIMES" a steady and zealous advocate of their interests. The advice we have felt ourselves called upon to give upon "this most fair occasion," they will, we trust, receive in the spirit with which it is tendered; and we would fain hope that when many of those, who are now only students, have attained an honourable distinction in their profession, they will look back with satisfaction and pleasure to the present period, and that every day of the ensuing session may be so passed as to enable them to verify hereafter the prediction of Æneas:

"Forsan et hæc olim meminisse juvabit."

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