

London School of Dental Surgery : address / delivered by Sir James Paget ... on the occasion of the second public distribution of prizes, October 4th, 1875.

Contributors

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Address delivered by

SIR JAMES PAGET, BART., F.R.S.,

PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS OF ENGLAND.

ON THE OCCASION OF

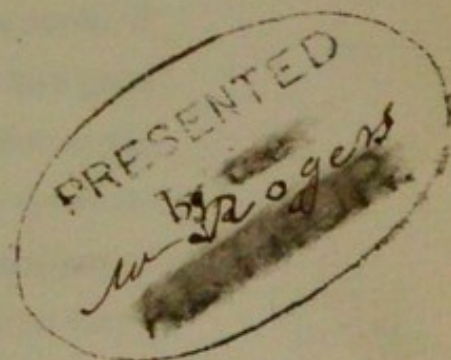
The Second Public Distribution of Prizes,

OCTOBER 4th, 1875.



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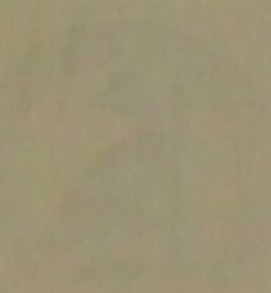
London

School of Dental Surgery

21 JAMES PAGE, B.A., F.R.S.

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WHEN I was asked to take the chair at this meeting, and had taken time to consider my answer, it seemed to me that there were at least two good reasons for complying—one of them that my office at the Royal College of Surgeons made it my duty to do whatever was in my power for the promotion of the welfare of the London School of Dental Surgery, and the other that I was bound, by all the force of very old friendship and

sincere esteem, to do whatever might be asked by my old pupil, the Dean of the School, Mr. Rogers. And having taken this place I suppose it to be my duty to assist, so far as I can, in the promotion of the day's design, which I take to be the conferring of honour upon the students of the Dental School who have gained prizes, and to make the occasion as useful as we can to them and to the other students of the School. In this design I apprehend I shall be approved by most, if not nearly all, of those present, for I presume that all are less or more interested in the students and the promotion of the art and science of the Dentist.

Let me first, then, gentlemen, congratulate you who have gained prizes to-day; and the grounds of congratulation are not few. You have gained pleasure for yourselves and pleasure for those whom you have made proud of you; and you have shown some of the first requisites for success in life—you have shown either mental or manual ability, or strength of will and purpose, or all these combined, above the rest of the students of your year. On all these grounds you are well to be congratulated, and I do not for a moment doubt that the institution of such examinations as you have passed, and the giving of prizes, although they are often ill spoken of, are in your case fully justified.

But I do not mean to speak about the prize-system now :

for all of you can read the admirable address given here last year by Mr. Savory; an address that should be read by all, for there is, perhaps, no one who knows more about prizes than does Mr. Savory. As I can tell, when he was my pupil he knew and went the way to win them. He was successful in every strife, and ever since, in his own brilliant career and in that of his pupils, he has had ample opportunity to study both the value of prizes and their utter worthlessness if they are supposed to signify anything more than that they who win them are the most likely to be fit for higher work.

I will speak, not only to those who have gained prizes, but to the whole class of students, of other examinations and other competitions yet to come; not, indeed, of examinations for licence and diploma; they are near, and I dare say you regard them as weighty enough; but after them comes a much longer and severer examination still, in which you must compete with all your might, whether you will or not—I mean the life-long competitive examination of which the prizes are what are called success in life. For surely we all of us live in a constant competitive examination. If I may speak for myself, I am sure I have been in one for at least forty years, winning some good prizes, but not yet free from the consciousness that I may

either spoil or lose all that I have gained, and that if I can still wish for anything more it can only be gained by constant work, and that such work as will bear comparison with the work of my contemporaries. It is upon such a competitive examination as this that you either now are or very soon will be entering; and the prizes are the various forms and degrees of success in life. For which of these will you go in? Well; choose good form, and then let the degree be the highest which you can achieve.

But what are these various forms of success in life? Well, first of them stands money. It is so useful; so easy for reckoning; the so many hundreds or thousands a year a man can earn, tell so exactly and, in one sense, so truly what is the measure of his success in life that it is almost inevitable that you should seek after it. A large practice with a large income will be the first thing by which you will be attracted; and under certain conditions it may be a right thing to strive for, for a large income consequent upon a large practice may indicate a large amount of good done very wisely and kindly to those who need it. But it is not so with those who regard money as the one and sole object of pursuit. For they are very rarely scrupulous in the way in which they get it; they are seldom liberal or fair to rivals; they very rarely are good colleagues such as the

members of an honorable profession like yours and mine should be. For the ways to unfair money-making are so easy, and some of them look so fair, and at the end the power of wealth seems so immense, and it is so easy to persuade ourselves that what we get by evil means we may use for good purposes, that all, at some time or other are apt to fall under the temptation, not, indeed, of the lowest forms of money-getting, but of those that look most nearly fair. Against all these things I can only advise you all to be most scrupulously on your watch, and to meet every temptation with the argument of the highest, that is, the Christian, morality. Fraud and unfairness and untruth, in all their forms and degrees, these and the like of them are all God-forbidden things. You should need no other motive; but if you do, I would ask you to think how utterly contemptible it is to defraud a man who asks your help, and is not your equal in the knowledge of the things with which you are dealing. The great trouble of our profession is that the larger part of those from whom we have to earn money are very unfit judges of our fitness to earn it, and a large crowd of patients are more attracted by the noisy advertisements of ignorant men than by the good repute of those who work honestly with skill and science.

I am half ashamed to be speaking as if I thought any of

you needed warning against unfair money-making; but a long experience has taught me that there are very few, if any, upon whom at some time the temptation does not fall; scarce any who do not need a warning, if not always, yet sometimes, or if not for themselves, yet for others whom they may influence. Let me therefore advise you all to look for some other forms of success in life, the pursuit of which may make the pursuit of money less unsafe.

And it is well for you that in your profession there are many ways to the better forms of success in life; such forms, I mean, as the happiness of mental exercise, the praise of the praiseworthy, the goodwill of good colleagues, a high social position, and, above all, the consciousness of having done your duty—that is, of having done, not what you must, but what you can, for the welfare of those among whom you have to live. I could not but be struck, as the several prizemen were presented, with the wisdom that has prevailed in the Dental School, in making the chief subjects of your study those which do not necessarily cease with the acquirement of the amount of knowledge which you need for a diploma, and by which you may be tempted onward to better things in life than the mere pursuit of practice.

For the first, say, great manual skill. It is a real privilege to have an occupation that encourages for very useful ends the acquirement of the best possible use of the hand—that perfect piece of Divine mechanism. Some of this skill you must acquire; you can hardly get an honest living without it, and every year increases the delicacy and the difficulty of your operations; but you should try for much more than is just enough; for so much as may bring in its exercise the same sense of satisfaction as, I suppose, great artists have in brilliant execution; so much as only years of watchful practice can attain; so much as only the most skilled judges can appreciate. You may then in this particular have the happiness of doing your whole duty, and you may win a good prize in the competition of life and may even enjoy the competition.

I may say the same, I think, about the opportunities for mechanical inventions and adjustments which your profession brings you. I may safely assume that the apparatus for Dental surgery is not yet perfect, that your armoury is not yet complete. Here, then, is good work for you to do; here is another way to real and just success in life. For I imagine—having never enjoyed it I can only imagine—that there is intense pleasure in mechanical invention; that is, not only in the discovery of defects, a pleasure which

all but the most stupid can enjoy, but in thinking, planning, making the means for mending the defects, and then in finding one's invention approved and generally adopted and counted among the means by which human suffering is lessened.

This pleasure may be yours ; and, for a motive for looking out for all chances of improvement, let me remind you that the world owes to Dentists, who were on the watch for anything that might improve their practice, the first use of the greatest blessing yet attained in medicine—the use of anæsthetics. I wish I could say that there had been an exercise of either intellect or scientific method nearly adequate to the great result that Morton and Wells reached or led to ; but at least their instance may illustrate the value of that watchfulness in which we should all live, the looking out for all the possible chances of utility, the readiness to use whatever may do good.

But it may be said that mechanical invention and manual skill are useful in many callings in life besides ours, and in some are much more highly rewarded. Let me then speak of other things less common than these, in which, consistently with devotion to your necessary duties, and even helpfully to them, you may compete for the higher prizes of success in life.

I think you cannot too highly value the introduction which your profession gives you to some of the chief branches of scientific study, and through them to intense intellectual pleasure, and to excellent repute, and to the society of the most cultivated persons of your time.

You cannot practise your profession without seeing the necessity and the occasions of scientific study. In every study of every disease and every remedy there is room for science and need of it.

For example—merely for example—some of the materials you have to use, your *materia medica*, bring you to metallurgy. It has been already referred to by Sir Benjamin Brodie, whose name I cannot speak in this room without admiration; for he has enlarged a reputation which seemed almost unbounded, bringing the old name into a new glory, the glory of the great science of chemistry. Following him, let me remind you that in your practice you acquire a technical acquaintance with some singular properties of the metals which you use. You would gladly increase this acquaintance to intimate knowledge, for your technical acquaintance, your rule of thumb, is incomplete and very slow to advance. Here there is room for science and need of it. Very skilful chemistry may detect just what you want to know; and it is certain that where-

ever science works with art, explaining artists' facts and embodying them in its own laws, it gives to the art fresh power and precision, or it may be new materials and new modes of work. I am not well read in literature of Dental Surgery, but I have read enough to know that you are not all satisfied with the amalgams you have to work with. Well, see whether careful scientific study cannot improve them; you may safely promise yourselves great pleasure in the study and reward adequate to your success; reward, it may be, in money, it is more likely to be in something better.

Still more in the proper objects of your study, in the teeth themselves, you must already have seen how they may be used for science and science for them. In zoology they are a basis for the classification of the most important groups, and, being of all organized structures most nearly indestructible, they have served more than any to teach the zoology of the older world. So, to have learned the structure of teeth and the means of studying it, it may be a good first step in natural history; or, if you would have your scientific studies nearer to your daily work, you know how you have to do with structures in which you may be certain that every improved means of inquiry, every increase in power of discernment, will find new truths, new

beauties, for the sight and for the intellect. Studied in their life, and whether in health or in disease or decay, the knowledge of the teeth may be enlightened from the largest principles of biology, and may in exchange throw light on them.

I would dwell on this subject, and try to show you how great are your opportunities for biological study—how great pleasure you may gain, how much good you may do, in it, but that I know these things are set before you by your teachers. But they will have told you that what they can teach are but the beginnings of knowledge. They may have led you to the mouth of the mine and shown you some pieces of its richest ore, but far beyond and on every side there are pieces richer than any yet dug up. This is certain, though some of the best of miners have been at the work—Hunter and Owen, Bell and Tomes, and others of your still living teachers—whom you may find honour in following, even though you may not attain such results as some of theirs.

Let me then repeat. Here, in the study of sciences near to the very business of your profession—sciences which will take you, not out of business, but far onward in it—you may win some of the best prizes in the competition of life, some of the highest success that you can reasonably

wish for. In these sciences you may find endless intellectual pleasure; you may gain mental power with which to grapple with some of the greatest difficulties of your practice; you may gain the consciousness of doing right, and a claim to membership in the most select, because the most cultivated, societies of your time.

I will only mention one thing more. You should strive, as for a form of success in life, for the good repute of being honorable members of the associations which are most intimately connected with your own profession. There is not a little advantage in all associations of men of good minds, for they increase honesty and right effort by the mutual pledges they require and by the quickened sense of responsibility to which they give rise. But the most good is to be obtained by being members of societies whose names bring memories of men of renown for mental or moral power. Such a Society the Royal College of Surgeons is, and such an one the Odontological Society is becoming. You will do well if you will use membership in these societies, not merely as a signal that you are fit for the practice of Dental Surgery, but as a means for promoting in your own minds the resolve to be imitators of the good men that have gone before you, to pursue, as they did, the highest paths of the scientific inquiries that come

within your range; to live as they lived, as brethren bound together, not for mere self and mutual defence, but for the maintenance of each other's honour, for the promotion of each other's interests in the highest pursuits of life. I speak the more earnestly on this because I have heard some say that you suffer as a profession because you are not incorporated, and have therefore no strongly marked *esprit de corps*. I cannot tell whether this be so or not, nor can I tell what would be the effect of a separate incorporation with especial legal rights. I cannot tell the chances of obtaining it or the advantages to come from it. I know that Acts of Parliament and charters do not exclude dishonesty from either medicine or surgery, and that they are not even capable of punishing dishonesty except in the most flagrant instances: and I know that all the best purposes of association can be obtained by the voluntary association of high-minded men, who resolve that the work to which they give themselves for their profession's sake shall be done in the best possible way, with a constant tendency to advance higher and more high. Therefore, speaking only to students, and for the present or near future, I cannot doubt that I am right in urging them to strive to be very honorable members of all the societies with which they are or with which they may become connected,

to hold fast to all the good associations of the Hospital and the School, of the College and the Society. Around these may be formed so compact a body of English Dental Surgeons, so distinguished before all by skill, by science, and by high moral character, that if they should ever wish for the further distinction of legal rights by special registration, this will not need to be asked for—it will be either given or claimed as a plain right.

Gentlemen students, I have tried to put before you some of those higher forms of success in life for which I would have you strive, and in which you may gain good repute and a just reward. Now, let me end. The motives I have set before you are not the highest by which you should be actuated : but they may consist with the highest ; and as the highest may give strength and purity to these, so these may give even to the highest a useful purpose, a definite direction.



Chas. M.



