

**An address, delivered at the first anniversary meeting of the Birmingham School of Medicine and Surgery / by James Thomas Law.**

**Contributors**

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AN ADDRESS,

DELIVERED AT

THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY MEETING

OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCHOOL OF MEDICINE  
AND SURGERY,

BY

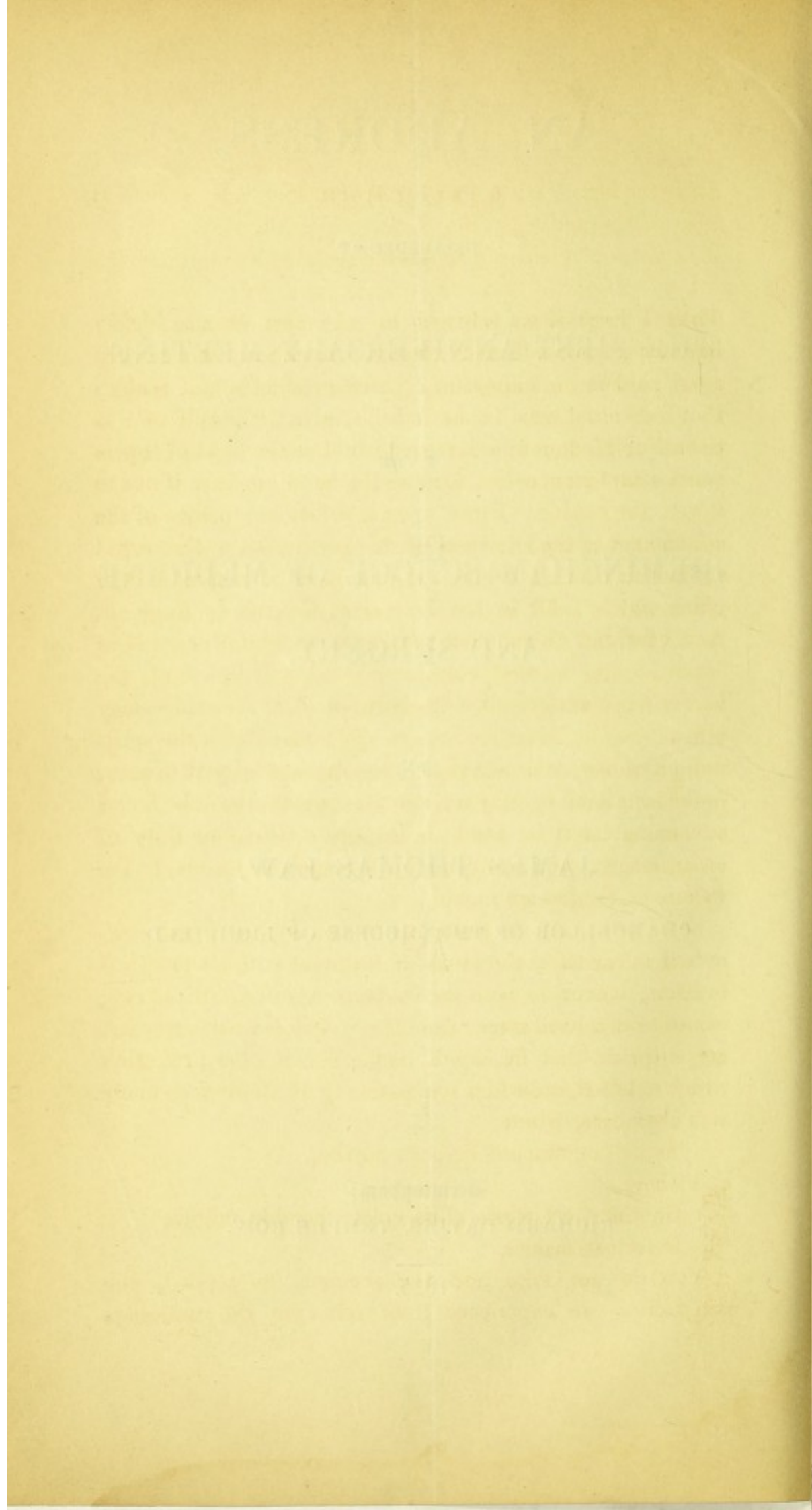
JAMES THOMAS LAW,

CHANCELLOR OF THE DIOCESE OF LICHFIELD.

Birmingham:  
RICHARD DAVIES, TEMPLE ROW.

—  
1835.







## ADDRESS.

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THAT I have been selected to take part in the highly interesting proceedings of to-day, I regard not as a compliment paid to an individual, (however sincere and zealous that individual may be, as indeed he is, in behalf of this School of Medicine;—I regard it not in the light of a personal compliment;—for that would be to confine, if not to lower, the motive. I look upon it rather as a pledge of the attachment of the Directors of this Institution to the sacred profession which I belong to; as a mark of respect for the office which I fill in the Protestant Church of England. And I fervently hope, that the physician who is engaged in administering to that most wonderful work of God, the bodily structure of man,—the frame-work of the soul,—may always thus be found anxious to ally himself with the spiritual physician, who would save the immaterial part of man,—the soul itself! May the two professions always be found advancing hand in hand in the great Christian duty of contributing, each according to its respective means, to the welfare of the human race!

Some years ago it happened to me, before I had connected in my mind the study of medicine with its practical benefits, to express, with the inadvertency of youth, to one, whose talents have since raised him to well-earned eminence, my surprise, that he should make choice of a profession which entailed upon him the necessity of visiting so many sick chambers, where,

*Tristi languescunt corpora morbo,*  
and where

*Continuo est ægris alius color: horrida vultum*  
*Deformat macies.*

You do not take into the account, he replied, the satisfaction we experience from relieving the sufferings



which you describe. You do not know what we feel, at seeing our patients rise from their sick beds with recruited strength, and spirits again made buoyant, by our means, under Providence. If we do witness, as indeed we do, scenes of misery, do we not also notice the brightening eye of returning health turned towards us with all the animation of gratitude?—A parent thanks us for his restored child; a child for his parent; a husband for his wife. We can often say, “There is joy in that house,” the result of our skill—the reward of our care: and our heart throbs with a satisfaction which is in alliance with the purest aspirations of noble feeling.

When I mention, that these were the sentiments of Sir Benjamin Brodie, early in life, I rest assured that I need say no more to give them their full weight in your eyes, from the estimation in which the character of that individual is held.

But observe—I do not bring this forward as a solitary or unusual instance of correct and generous feeling; being persuaded that Sir Benjamin Brodie is only one among many, who would return the same answer, in a profession which abounds with gentlemen of the most Christian-like tone and temper, and of singular humanity; remarkable alike for the strength—the correctness—the richness of their highly-cultivated and Christian minds.

But why do I advance my own opinion, when I am able to refer you to the invaluable testimony of such characters as Dr. Samuel Johnson, and such statesmen as Sir Robert Peel? You will believe, that I am not the less willing to quote their authority, from the connection of the name of Johnson with Lichfield, and that of Sir Robert with this county and neighbourhood.

Dr. Johnson, in his life of Garth, says, “Every one has found in physicians great liberality and dignity of sentiment; very prompt effusion of beneficence; and willingness to exert a lucrative art, where there is no hope of lucre.”



And Sir Robert Peel has publicly declared in the House of Commons, that "for the enlightened views, pure philanthropy, and liberal feelings of medical men generally, he felt so much respect, that he did not hesitate to pronounce them a blessing to their native land, and an honour to humanity."

My young friends, Students in this School, suffer me to hope, that the encomiums of Dr. Samuel Johnson and Sir Robert Peel, will by your means be made no less applicable to the rising generation, than they are to your immediate predecessors, and were to the ages before them.

Bear with me, as a Christian minister, if I appear to use language which sounds like exhortation. Regard for your future success in life emboldens me to say, If you would become great and good men, you must think and feel like Sir Benjamin Brodie; you must, if I may use the expression, breathe the same atmosphere of pure sentiment, and elevate and chastise your minds like his.

Of the particulars connected with your early education, or even of the detail of studies in this excellent Institution, I cannot be supposed a competent judge; but from the published statements of this and other places of professional instruction, it is apparent, that the attention of Lecturers and Governors is anxiously turned to the subject of Education generally. And I do not doubt, that in your case, every practical improvement in the system which sound judgment and matured experience can dictate, will be suggested by your Lecturers, and adopted by your Board.

On such a subject I presume not to offer counsel to my seniors; neither would I enter into detail even with the younger members of this School. But I may perhaps be allowed to remark upon that, of which no one who has attended at all to the subject of education can, I think, fail of being convinced, viz., the incalculable importance of laying a good foundation, and spending well the golden years of ripening manhood.

Qui studet optatam cursu contingere metam,  
Multa tulit fecitque puer, sudavit et alsit.



There may be some of extraordinary genius, as Mr. John Hunter, who have broken through the disadvantages of early neglect; but in the great majority of instances, as the sapling is bent the tree will grow.

The case of Mr. John Hunter seems to have been remarkable. We are told, that it was late and with difficulty that he was even taught to read, and that he grew up an uneducated and ill-governed youth, employed till the age of twenty as a carpenter and cabinet maker, at Glasgow. Then all at once he sprang forward to excellence with an ardour and enthusiasm which nothing could resist, bending intently the whole vigour of his genius to the study of physic. Such instances are peculiar, and must ever remain exceptions to all general rules. And if advanced by young men as an excuse for early sloth, I fear the error will too often prove fatal. For, in addition to what I have just stated respecting Mr. John Hunter, he had an elder brother, scarcely, if at all, less celebrated than himself, settled in London, able and willing to direct aright all the first efforts of his genius:—a very rare advantage.

I should have spoken before, and would speak now, to the younger members of this School, of that which in fact I place far before all other requisites, viz., correct morals, and an observance of religious obligations,\* but I am almost afraid you should accuse me of preaching to you. However, there is one reason why I should not altogether

\* In establishing a School of Medicine and Surgery in King's College, London, the Council observe, that they were influenced by the belief that many individuals, who intend their sons for the medical profession, would gladly embrace an opportunity of placing them in connection with an institution which has for its principal object to educate the rising generation in the doctrines of Christianity, as taught by the Established Church, and to fix in their minds the true principles of morality. They believe, likewise, that every one who has the welfare of society at heart, and who has considered the most effectual means of promoting it, will feel an especial interest in the success of this part of their undertaking, under the conviction, that the duties which devolve upon the medical profession are such as to render the religious and moral character of its members not less important than their practical and scientific attainments.

*Statement of King's College, p. 7.*



abstain from the subject. I mean, with reference to an opinion which I have heard some entertain—that the medical profession is inclined to scepticism. May I not consider this a false and malicious slander? For, who can be so well acquainted as yourselves with the admirable structure and mechanism of the human body; with the beauty of its symmetry, and the justness of its proportions? Little as I know of those delicate organs, the eye and ear, I am filled with admiration at the proofs they afford of contrivance, and aptitude of means to an end. Who can observe the beautiful mechanism of the eye, by means of which a distinct picture, occupying a space of many miles in circumference, is exquisitely formed upon the minute surface of the retina, which is scarcely half an inch in diameter; and impressions of persons and things, varying and succeeding each other with astonishing rapidity, are conveyed thence to the brain:—who can observe the care that is taken of that wonderful organ; how it is lodged in a place of safety, within a deep and hollow socket, formed of bones smoothed at their edges to afford it a soft bed; how it is defended by the eye-lid, which also serves as a curtain or covering to it; and how it is continually moistened to preserve its freshness and brightness, by a mucous secretion or limpid fluid, which, having spread itself over and washed the delicate surface of the orb, is carried off by a channel which seems purposely cut through a bone, till it meets, and mixes with, the current of air we breathe. Who can notice all this, and remain unmoved? Who can notice all this, and proclaim himself a sceptic? Chance cannot have done this, for Chance is ever varying, uncertain, blind, and reckless. To maintain order, harmony, stability, consistency, and due proportions in the almost boundless space which teems with life, there must be a presiding Intelligence; there must be a power, supreme, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent—*i. e.*, there must be a God! Yea, a God of love! A God of mercy! A God of tender compassion and infinite goodness towards us, His creatures!



Not only have the leading members of the medical profession, those who have been "*decus et tutamen*," the glory of their order, gone the full length in confessing all this: further, they have come forward as public advocates, they have published in favour of Christianity.

No one can doubt the consummate skill and pre-eminent learning of the illustrious Haller. He was a defender of Revelation, and an opponent of materialism and scepticism, in various learned works.

England is justly proud of the name of Mead, and he was a champion of our common faith.

Harvey will be remembered as long as the blood flows in our veins, and he had a profound veneration for the great God on high.

Boerhaave was even desirous to have taken upon himself the duties of a priest in the house of God. He asserted on all occasions the divine authority and sacred efficacy of the holy Scriptures. So far was he from being made sceptical by philosophy, or vain by knowledge, that he ascribed all his abilities to the goodness of God. And in one of his works, (an oration, or *sermo academicus*, before the University of Leyden,) he dwelt expressly on the very subject to which I have just alluded, proving the power and wisdom of the Creator, from the wonderful fabric of the human body. In the course of his remarks, exclaiming, Let all the chiefs of science meet together; let them take bread and wine, the food out of which nature forms the blood of man, and which by assimilation contributes to the sustenance and growth of the body; let them exercise all their knowledge and ingenuity; *they* shall not be able from these materials to produce one single drop of blood. So much is the most common act of nature beyond the utmost effort of human skill and science!

Nor are we without powerful advocates among the living members of the medical profession, who have given their public testimony in favour of the same great cause. The Bridgewater Treatises, which are now in the course of pub-



lication, whilst they build up a monument "*ære perennius*" of the munificence of the donor, will do much more: they will leave upon record an imperishable argument in proof of the power, wisdom, and goodness of God, as manifested in the adaptation of external nature to the moral and intellectual constitution, and the physical condition of man.

I mentioned the eye and ear as proofs of design. Sir Charles Bell, in one of the Bridgewater Treatises, devotes all the powers of his mind to draw the same conclusion from the mechanism and vital properties of the hand. And he says, Though, when he first thought upon the subject it appeared to him that he might have selected many other topics more prolific in proofs of design, and more interesting; yet he found there was no end of illustration, even with the hand as an instance, and that the subject branched out interminably.

Lest you may fear my observations also may branch out too luxuriantly on this most fascinating topic, I will proceed to another point.

"Allow me, then, to recommend young students to adopt such a line of general study, as, by enlarging the compass of their minds, may gain for them the power of discovering latent causes, and tracing the windings of the human heart to its secret sources. For oftentimes, I believe, diseases are generated by causes not apparent in the mechanical structure, or apparatus—if I may use the expression—of the human body, but proceed from the hidden working of some master-passion, acting sympathetically on the nerves, and baffling the utmost skill of the anatomist and demonstrator. It was a sudden and powerful emotion of the mind which is said to have caused the death of Mr. John Hunter, and which still continues to strike down its thousands and tens of thousands. Does not anger, by producing a violent rush of blood to the head and heart, endanger the vital organs by an excess of fulness and dilation? Do not even joyful emotions, which in moderation tend to light up the countenance with that animated glow of pleasure which is so beautiful to behold,



when carried to excess, sometimes occasion the destruction of life? Disappointment pines away. Grief drags its slow length along. They cause a deathlike paleness to overspread the countenance, by weakening the vascular system, and obstructing the circulation. The patient is seen to heave deep sighs and struggle for breath; the blood, which no longer circulates freely, being collected in the larger vessels to repletion, and gorging the lungs." \* \* \* \*

Which of us has not felt more or less of some one, perhaps of all, these various emotions of the mind? Is the rich man exempt? Ah, no! Can the poor man say, he is free? Alas! not so. Does learning raise its possessor above the operation of these causes? Many learned men surround me: will they not be the first to confess, they are but men? Are the ignorant, then, the sole exceptions? Not so, indeed; for then ignorance would be bliss. They are the weakest and the worst, for over them reason exercises the least control, and the passions reign more unsubdued, and tyrannize more imperiously.

"Let every one, who wishes to become a successful practitioner, study to make himself acquainted with the source of those thousand emotions of the mind, which set the bodily machine in motion—at one time propelling it violently forward, at another holding it back in torpid inaction. So much importance, indeed, do we attach to the study, that few physicians, we believe, will be found to have risen into eminence, and maintained an extensive practice, who neglect the philosophy of morals.

"But when I recommend an education which will enable the practitioner to deal with the affections and emotions of the mind, by means of his philosophic knowledge of men and things—a knowledge which '*interdum medicâ plus valet arte,*'—let me not for one moment be supposed capable of undervaluing an indefatigable and complete study of chemistry, anatomy, and physic: a study, in short, of whatever is necessary to constitute an accomplished practitioner. For though, as I just mentioned, many cases may defy the



usual applications of the learned sons of Æsculapius, and must be dealt with by a reference to the emotions and perceptions of the mind; yet it will not be doubted, that instances, without number, occur of complaints which depend for their cure entirely on skill in the properties of medicine, and on their judicious application, in conjunction with a knowledge of the mechanical structure of the body."

What Sir Joshua Reynolds said in his opening discourse at the Royal Academy, applies to our young students in medicine. I would recommend, he said, an *implicit obedience to rules*, as established by the practice of the greatest masters. Those models which have passed through the approbation of ages, should be considered as perfect and infallible guides to the young student; as subjects for his meditation, not his criticism. He adds, that he is confident this is the only efficacious method of making a progress in the arts and sciences; and that he who sets out with doubting, will find life finished before he becomes master of the rudiments. For it may be laid down as a maxim, that he who begins by *presuming* on his own sense has well nigh ended his studies before he commences them. Every opportunity, therefore, he tells us, should be taken to discountenance that false and vulgar notion, that rules are the fetters of genius. They are fetters only to men of no genius: as that armour which upon the strong is an ornament and defence, upon the weak and mis-shapen turns into a load.

How much liberty may be taken to break through rules, when pupils have become masters, need not be discussed here; but of one thing be careful, my young friends, not to destroy the scaffold before you have raised the building. Begin, at all events, then, with the "*limæ labor et mora.*" Whatever may be your genius, the medicinal properties of healing plants—the use of minerals—the application of chemical agents—a knowledge of the structure of the human body—skill in the operative department, are not to be acquired by intuition;—they cannot be understood and mastered without time and study, let your talents be even of



the first order. And in the great majority of cases, what can supply the want of accurate knowledge? What, in its absence, can pave the way to success—to fame—to fortune? Excuse me, then, for repeating—(yes, my wish that you may hereafter rise to eminence, induces me to repeat again and again)—if you would possess real excellence, it must be

“*Apis Matinæ*

More modoque.”

It must be at the expense of much time and study. There is no royal road to knowledge, whether in divinity, law, or physic. Excellence is a plant of slow growth, which requires much tender care in its nourishment: weeds spring up in a day. Whereas the hardy British oak rears its head gradually by little and little; but then it survives through many a winter's storm, and becomes at length our boast and glory.

In the observations which I have thus far ventured to address to you, my young friends, my object has been to avoid entering myself upon any inquiry into the detail of your studies, for very obvious reasons. In proceeding, therefore, now to notice one or two particulars, which should not, I think, be omitted, I avail myself of the printed regulations at the Surgeons' Hall, in Edinburgh, and the Apothecaries' Company, in London. It is of the utmost importance, they say, to the interest of the public, and to the future comfort and respectability of the practitioner, that all who apply to the study of surgery should have the benefit of *a liberal education*: therefore, they have introduced positive regulations which have this for their object. And they are inclined to hope, that medical practitioners in every part of the country will second their endeavours, by recommending to the young men who are placed under their care, or who may apply to them for advice, the study of the *Latin, Greek, and modern Languages*, and of *Mathematics and Natural Philosophy*, as the best preparation for entering on a course of medical and surgical education. And they strongly urge upon all practitioners not to take any young man as an ap-



*prentice*, until he shall have gone through this preliminary course. The profession of surgery, they say, is a *practical art*, which cannot be acquired without *actual experience*, and familiarity with the phenomena of disease. And they believe these objects to be best attained by *serving an apprenticeship* to a regular practitioner, under whose inspection young men may not only prosecute their studies with the greatest advantage, but have frequent opportunities of being *conversant with the sick*, and of assisting in the *preparation* and *application* of the means for their recovery. They further strongly recommend to all masters to give directions to their apprentices as to the classes which they ought to attend, and the books which they ought to read—to subject them to occasional *examination*, with a view to ascertain their progress in the different branches of their education—and to explain, as frequently and fully as possible, the nature of the cases entrusted to their care, and the principles on which the treatment ought to be conducted. Concluding with an earnest hope, that the efforts they are making to improve the course of study, will be seconded by the influence of parents, guardians, and teachers.

I now turn to the Noblemen and Gentlemen, the patrons and visitors of this Institution, many of whom have honoured it with their presence to day, and venture to ask, Who can witness what we have witnessed here, without being struck with the various proofs which the Museum of Natural History—the Collection of Anatomical Preparations—the Library—and the School, afford, of that unwearied zeal and creative energy, which has called this Institution into being, and which is still unceasingly at work in carrying it forward to perfection? May I not say, adapting the language of the Roman poet,

Instant ardentes (Medici): pars ducere muros,

Molirique arcem, et manibus subvolvere saxa.

Jura magistratusque legunt, sanctumque senatum.

O fortunati, quorum jam mœnia surgunt?



Where so many have co-operated in this great and good work, it might seem difficult to select any name in particular. But which of you does not anticipate me in pointing to one, who, as long as this Institution continues to shed its benefits on this great metropolis of the midland counties, will be held in affectionate remembrance? In the full vigour of his manhood, Mr. Sands Cox turned aside from devoting himself exclusively to the more lucrative beaten track of professional advancement, and gave himself, heart and soul, to this School of Medicine. I rejoice to think that he is now reaping the fruit of his exertions in the complete success of his plans; having thereby conferred a lasting benefit on the place of his birth, and secured to himself a claim upon the gratitude of his fellow townsmen. Oh, how little does the mere votary of pleasure know of the exquisite delight which the benevolent man experiences from the sweet labour of doing good! What would he give for that calm serenity of virtuous enjoyment which the beneficent Father of us all permits to accompany the Christian through his earthly pilgrimage, from the consciousness of having served his God, and benefited his fellow mortals!

From the published Laws and Regulations of this Institution we perceive, that it was instituted for the purpose of giving full instruction in *all the departments of Medicine and Surgery, and the auxiliary Sciences*. And when we look over the list of subjects, on which lectures have been given, including Vegetable Physiology, Botany, and Chemistry; and know, that it is in contemplation further to establish Lectures on the Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Natural History; do you not agree with me, that the purposes for which the Institution was founded, have been fully realized? And do not the names of Mr. Sands Cox, Dr. James Johnstone, Mr. Woolrich, Dr. Eccles, Dr. Birt Davies, Mr. Ingleby, Mr. Knowles, and Mr. Elkington, afford a sufficient guarantee of the efficiency and excellence of the Lectures?



The progress of the Students, also, I believe, has been found to correspond with the ability of the Lecturers. The very able Examiners present to-day have borne ample testimony to the general proficiency of the classes; whilst from the eloquent terms applied to the pupils last year by our distinguished scholar and physician, Dr. John Johnstone, we know that his valuable opinion is also decidedly in their favour. The treatises of Mr. James Wilkes and Mr. Hammond have been printed and given to the public; and the high authority just mentioned has told us that they deserve, and would have received, commendation from either of our Universities; and that the Preparations of Mr. John Elkington could not fail to extort praise, even exhibited to the experienced eyes of London and Paris Anatomists. In fine, he says, The fruits of the instruction received in the School have manifested themselves so conspicuously, that it is not only our pride to be able to point out gentlemen educated here, who have been marked with praise and distinction by the public Examiners in London, but, further, we can boast of practitioners settled in several counties around us, who are diffusing the benefits of their good education, and are already receiving their due honours and rewards from the public confidence.

The subject of this address I have found to be so deeply interesting—it has so gradually enticed me on from one remark to another, that I fear I may have engaged too much of your valuable time. Forgive me, if I have. And, in conclusion, accept my best thanks for the kind attention with which you have listened to me. Believe me, a sense of my utter inability to advocate, as I wished, the important objects of this Institution would have induced me, most respectfully, to decline the task, but I confess I was much gratified by the compliment paid in my person to the Clergy of this neighbourhood; and after all Mr. Sands Cox has done for this School of Medicine, and his utter disregard of self, who would not do their utmost to comply with his wishes?



If I shall not be thought presumptuous in using the expression, I would say, in the fulness of my heart, God's blessing be with this good work.

At all events, I may say, "Esto perpetua," of an Institution meant to prepare the rising generation for administering to the various infirmities and diseases to which the human frame is subject at every period of life. If health be the greatest of all human blessings—as without doubt it is—then the efficiency of those appointed to restore and preserve it, is a public benefit. Again, then, I say of this Institution, may it become, by the blessing of God,

*κτημα ες τον αιχρονον.*

*Finis.*



AN ADDRESS, &c.



