

**The oration delivered March 8, 1852, before the Medical Society of London at the seventy-ninth anniversary / by Edwin Canton.**

**Contributors**

Canton, Edwin, 1817-1885.  
Royal College of Surgeons of England

**Publication/Creation**

London : Printed by Hobday and Roberts, 1852.

**Persistent URL**

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/e3k8ek67>

**Provider**

Royal College of Surgeons

**License and attribution**

This material has been provided by This material has been provided by The Royal College of Surgeons of England. The original may be consulted at The Royal College of Surgeons of England. where the originals may be consulted. This work has been identified as being free of known restrictions under copyright law, including all related and neighbouring rights and is being made available under the Creative Commons, Public Domain Mark.

You can copy, modify, distribute and perform the work, even for commercial purposes, without asking permission.



Wellcome Collection  
183 Euston Road  
London NW1 2BE UK  
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722  
E [library@wellcomecollection.org](mailto:library@wellcomecollection.org)  
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

THE ORATION 5

DELIVERED MARCH 8, 1852,

BEFORE THE

MEDICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON

AT THE

SEVENTY-NINTH ANNIVERSARY,

BY

EDWIN CANTON,

FELLOW OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS OF ENGLAND;  
VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE MEDICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON;  
CONSULTING-SURGEON TO THE KENT OPHTHALMIC HOSPITAL;  
ASSISTANT-SURGEON TO THE ROYAL WESTMINSTER OPHTHALMIC HOSPITAL;  
SURGEON TO THE ROYAL INFIRMARY FOR CHILDREN;  
LECTURER ON DESCRIPTIVE AND SURGICAL ANATOMY IN THE CHARING  
CROSS HOSPITAL MEDICAL SCHOOL;  
AND CORRESPONDING FELLOW OF THE SURGICAL SOCIETY OF MADRID.

---

PRINTED AT THE REQUEST OF THE SOCIETY.

---

LONDON, 1852.

LONDON :

PRINTED BY HOBDAY AND ROBERTS, 27, OLD CHANGE.

# THE ORATION,

1852.

---

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN,

In appearing before you as the Orator of this day, various feelings naturally arise in my mind, to which, before I proceed to the more urgent topics which press upon my attention, I pray you to allow me to give utterance. Foremost amongst these, is a sense of gratitude for the honourable office which you have assigned to me,—an office which has been held in times past by men of the highest character and attainments in the profession;—men who, having been in their day the benefactors of their race, have departed from this transitory scene, not only leaving the odor of a good name behind them, but exciting, by their example, those who survive them to walk perseveringly in the same path which led them to the envied goal of professional eminence and distinction. And does not this very fact suggest to me the unwelcome fear lest I should discharge the duties

of this day in a manner little calculated to bear a favourable comparison with the successful efforts of those who have preceded me? It may be—nay, naturally, must be so: but, I have withal, the gratifying reflection to console me, that the duty has been imposed by those who have ever shown themselves an indulgent audience, and who will make every allowance for the imperfections of one who, in obedience to a call which admitted of no hesitation in the response, has devoted his best energies to fulfil, satisfactorily, the duty expected of him.

First, then, the present prosperous state of our Society calls for mutual congratulation; for I am proud to say that it maintains a high reputation not only with the Medical profession, but with the Public at large, whose interests are so intimately blended with the well-being of an Institution devoted to the improvement of that knowledge which ministers to the health of the community. Originally a little sapling—planted by the forethought of men whose praise is recorded in the annals of Fame—it has become a vigorous tree, under the shade of which the inquiring practitioner may rest awhile from his more laborious avocations, and not only listen to the words of wisdom from his associates, but himself contribute to those stores of knowledge, the increase and perpetuation of which it has ever been the aim of the Medical Society of London to ensure: and it is impossible to estimate too highly the effects which such a Society must have upon the gradual deve-

lopement and advancement of the healing art. True it is that the Press is ever teeming with works devoted to the investigation of subjects directly or indirectly connected with that art; and undoubtedly great benefit has been derived from the labours both of authors and contributors. But over these our Medical Society has, unquestionably, this advantage; that, whereas the opinions expressed by them can only be regarded as *ex parte* statements—the expressions of the sentiments of individuals—this Society, in its meetings speaks, not individually, but collectively; sifting crude theories, detecting fallacies, and establishing sound principles and practice in its public discussions. We may well conceive that, had such a Society existed in the days of Harvey, it would have paved the way to the more speedy reception of his immortal discovery, and the theory of the circulation of the blood would have been at once adopted as a truth, strictly conformable to the soundest principles of physiological science.

But we have still to notice the effects produced by the meetings of our Society upon the members themselves, whether it regards the mutual communication of knowledge arising out of the medical topics of the day, or, the sentiments of brotherly good-will which its social character is so well calculated to foster and disseminate. That Truth has nothing to fear from fair and legitimate discussion, none can deny; for such discussion has rather a tendency to exhibit it in all its beauty—in

all its majesty. Most aptly has Horne Tooke remarked "Truth needs no ornament, and what she borrows of the pencil is deformity;" but in all our public discussion there is, unhappily, a disposition to exalt a particular theory without due reference to its general bearings upon that truth which is one and indivisible. Doubtless, it is hard to divest ourselves of partiality for an hypothesis upon which we have read much and thought more; but we should ever bear in mind the old proverb "*Humanum est errare*," and he who obstinately persists in contending for a favorite theory after it has been shown to be untenable, proves himself to be inaccessible to argument, and can only plead the "*Sit pro ratione voluntas*" as palliating his continued adherence to error. For we must be aware that logical accuracy is as necessary to the medical practitioner as to the lawyer or divine; and I know no arena more suited to the application of this test than the meetings of our Society, where no induction is likely to be sanctioned save such as is based upon the most careful and repeated investigations.

But we are not, as members of this Society, indebted only to our public discussions and the able papers upon which those discussions are founded, for accessions to our stock of medical knowledge; for would it not be unjust to pass over, unnoticed, the valuable library which unfolds its treasures to all desirous of drinking deeply at the fountain of the healing stream? To commune with those who, in ancient times, were

the "*facile principes*" of the profession; to ponder over their labours with thoughtful care, and to reap the rich fruits of their rare experience must, at all times, be a pleasurable and enlightening task: and the opportunity of so doing this Society proffers in surpassing abundance. For not only have we the privilege of consulting works of standard excellence in every branch of our profession, but the transactions of foreign medical bodies are, year after year, added to our stores; so that the means of rising to professional eminence are furnished to all who with due diligence apply themselves to gather wisdom from the annals of the past, and glean instruction from the records of the present. And were further incentives wanting to urge us onward in the ennobling race, the portraits of the founders of our Society—the venerable Fothergill and philanthropic Lettsom—now grace our walls and smile approval upon our labours. The busts, too, of the amiable and accomplished Babington, and the no less kind-hearted and indefatigable Cooper, are present to cheer and encourage us—in our recollection of the originals—to still more active exertions in the cause which they loved, and to the advancement of which they devoted, with ready cheerfulness, the boundless homage of their useful lives.

With respect to the first of the venerated founders of our Society, honour be to his memory for the medal which has been awarded to many an aspirant for professional distinction: and let it be

remembered, that though one only can obtain the envied prize, yet the very competition for it is a source of incalculable benefit to the unsuccessful candidates; for, has it not stimulated them to the acquirement of knowledge? The contest may have terminated unfavourably as regards the object in view, but it has amassed for them knowledge which might otherwise have been unattained; and the habit of patient investigation thereby engendered will have better fitted them for a renewal of the contest, with a greater chance of success hereafter.

The recent institution of Professorships which bear the time-honoured name of Lettsom cannot fail to have a most important bearing upon the future prospects of a Society which he loved so well. How ably the duties confided to our Lecturers have been discharged is fresh in the recollection of us all; and their successful efforts will, doubtless, add a stimulus to those who may be called upon to succeed them. Nor should I omit to congratulate our Society upon the advantageous disposal of that property in Bolt Court which the liberality of Mr. Lettsom has now made our own, and from which we are in the yearly receipt of a handsome accession to our income.

I have said above, that the social character of the body to which we belong is well calculated to foster sentiments of good-will amongst its members. Need I enlarge upon this head? For my own part, I gratefully acknowledge that such has been the effect upon myself: and have we not all met men

of kindred dispositions, equally bent, not only upon the acquisition, but upon the mutual communication of knowledge? Have not the intimacies which have commenced here been still further cemented by constant and friendly intercourse; and may we not sincerely hope that they are destined to continue, and that the only spirit of rivalry which will be admitted among us, may be that of endeavouring to outstrip each other in the endearing intercourse of brotherly feeling, and in the desire to confer the greatest possible amount of good upon those whom it is our province to rescue from the ills which flesh is heir to?

From a particular consideration of the benefits which the Medical Society of London offers, both to the public at large and to its individual members, we pass on to subjects of more general interest; namely, to the improvements and discoveries bearing upon Medical Science, and upon the modes of treatment of disease. But let me first entreat that your indulgence may be extended to me for the desultory method in which I shall present these topics to your notice: for the subjects upon which I shall have to request your attention are so numerous and so diverse, that to attempt a methodical arrangement would defeat the purpose which I have in view, which is to give a discursive summary of points interesting to us as members of the medical body.

To commence, then, with that instrument which Dr. Babington has so happily denominated "the sixth

sense"—the microscope, and the improvements introduced by its use (for those of its structure are evidently not within my province,) I would ask, is it possible to estimate at too high a rate the advantage to be derived from it either in a philosophical, physiological, or practical point of view? By it, forms and combinations which were hitherto unknown have been subjected to the accurate analysis of the eye: the heretofore unexplored arcana of Nature has been disclosed to the delighted observer; and the skill displayed by the Parent of Good in the formation of the Mammoth and the Monad—the alpha and the omega of Creation—has been scrutinised with a minuteness of investigation till now little dreamt of in our philosophy. And is it too much to expect that by its increased application we may be enabled to penetrate still further into the causes of disease, and to introduce modes of treatment more in unison with such increased knowledge? Or that a more intimate acquaintance with the organic changes of matter may be made subservient to the highest aim of medical enquiry—that of the *prevention* of disease?

As connected with Sanitary Improvement, the microscope has done the state some service: for has it not disclosed the fearful adulterations which have been practised by iniquitous dealers in articles of food intended for human consumption? Has it not revealed the nauseous composition of that animalculised element which it is the lot of the inhabitants

of this metropolis to imbibe? And may we not look forward to still more important discoveries from the judicious use of this valuable instrument? As yet the hidden sources of Cholera have not been detected, and the origin of Cancer and allied forms of malignant disease have escaped the anxious researches of the most curious and careful investigators: but in all probability these problems will, sooner or later, be solved by the powers of the microscope, and lead to the introduction of such remedies as are best calculated to stay the progress of diseases so formidable, and hitherto so intractable.

Nor is the microscope less worthy of admiration when viewed as an auxiliary in medico-legal inquiries: for it is well known to us all that it is capable of supplying, as it has already done in more than one instance, important links in the chain of circumstantial evidence: thus rendering our judicial investigations more satisfactory in their results, and more likely to ensure the conviction of the criminal.

It will be seen that—despite the satirical remarks of the *Spectator* upon “those innumerable retainers to physic, who, for want of other patients, amuse themselves with the stifling of cats in air-pumps, or impaling insects upon the point of needles for microscopic observations”—I have devoted some time to this subject; not only for the reasons above stated, but because there is a fascination about such researches which rivets the attention of those who apply themselves to these investigations. And it is not the

medical practitioner alone who is benefited by the employment of the microscope in his histological inquiries; but the geologist, the botanist, the zoologist, owe a deep debt of gratitude to the aid which it has contributed to their respective sciences: for has it not enabled them to investigate, link by link, that wondrous chain of animated existence which connects the most tiny animalcule with the First Great Cause? and to scan, with curious eye, the still undefined and debatable ground which constitutes the separation between the vegetable and animal kingdoms?

Let, then, what has already been done stimulate us to the yet further developement of the capabilities of this magic instrument: the study of such minutiae indeed may appear to the shallow sciolist unworthy of the philosopher's anxious attention, but let us bear in mind that even the giant masses which emboss the varied surface of this mighty globe are, withal, composed of countless particles of minutest size, each in itself as unspeakably perfect as that wondrous whole which, in their apparent insignificance, they help to form. And need I, in further illustration, remind a scientific audience that the catacombs of the myriads of animal tribes which enter into the composition of the lime-stone strata, the aggregation of the skeletons of Infusoria which form the basis of immense mountainous tracts, the beds of rock—the elaborate architecture of the diminutive zoophyte—all bespeak the magnificent simplicity of that science which thus, insensibly, guides

us in the contemplation of Nature's works, upwards unto Nature's God.

The subject of Empiricism will naturally suggest itself to the notice of one whose office it is to review the state of Medical Science in the present day: for, as all animals have their parasitic adjuncts, so will it be seen that the empiric infests the medical body; hence the duty incumbent upon us to endeavour to check the ravages of the noxious creature, and cleanse the body medical of the impurities which are engendered by it. It might be thought, perhaps, that the shameless quack supplies the antidote to the bane he offers by his very effrontery, and that the so-called universal medicine has only to be universally exposed in order to lessen the number of those in whom, if it does not insure their dissolution, it plants too often the seeds of chronic and incurable disease. But such a conclusion can only proceed from a very imperfect acquaintance with human nature: for is it not obvious that the desire for preserving and prolonging the duration of life is natural to man, and renders him but too liable to be imposed upon by every quack whose nostrum promises such a blessing? It is the knowledge of this prevailing weakness of humanity which does more for the empiric than his very impudence, and which enables him, more fortunate than the alchemist of yore, to convert his patent abomination into gold. The only remedy for this deplorable error is the education,—not of the medical practitioner, for he has already attained to a high degree of intel-

lectual acquirement,—but, of his patient. Let the standard of intelligence be raised, not only in the lower ranks of society, but in the upper also, (for too many of the latter have had the folly to listen to the crafty delusions of the designing quack,) and the empiric's occupation's gone. Stripped of his borrowed plumes, he will stand confessed in all his naked deformity: his imposture exposed, and himself retributively subjected to the execration which his shallow fraud has so justly merited.

But I would ask, with feelings both of sorrow and of shame, is empiricism excluded from the pale of the profession itself? Are there no would-be Hygeists in the ranks of those who, by education at least, are fitted to assume the responsible post of medical advisers? Would that I could answer these questions in the negative! But alas! as long as Homœopathy taints the atmosphere of the profession, so long will the savour of quackery—however we may be desirous of denying the fearful imputation—attach to the medical body. To enter at large upon this painful subject would be far from desirable, even if time would permit it; and perhaps the manifesto which has been issued by this Society will be generally deemed a sufficient protest against Homœopathic principles and practice. Yet I would fain be allowed a few observations upon a point so intimately connected with the objects contemplated by the Institution of which we are members; inasmuch as I am convinced that the repudiation of any feelings of

sympathy with the professors of what is, at the least, a system based upon false principles of reasoning, is essential to the respectability and well-being of our body. Now the creed of the Homœopath is totally opposed to all experience, and subversive of all previously acquired knowledge; and to prove the truth of this assertion we need not enter into an elaborate argument, for if it be proved to be true in one particular instance, the remainder of the Hahnemannian delusions must of necessity become evident. With respect then to infinitesimal doses, it may be easily shown that the exhibition of them can have no effect whatever upon the system: "Nay," says Dr. Williams, "the very terms the *trecillionth* and *decillionth* of a grain are sheer nonsense when applied to experimental agents. For is it possible to conceive that disease is to be counteracted by a dose a million times less than the smallest quantity to be detected by the finest chemical test that was ever discovered?"

Even if it be said that such a mode of treatment has proved successful, it is plain that the dose which has been administered, being utterly powerless as a remedial agent, cannot have contributed to the cure, the cause of which must be sought either in the *vis conservatrix naturæ*, or in that blind faith in the treatment adopted which is so characteristic of patients of this school. That the imagination has a powerful influence upon the human mind, and that it is capable of producing effects like this, especially when in a morbid state, no one acquainted with the

philosophy of that mind will attempt to deny. In the hypochondriac it is well known to ensure terrible results: in the homœopathic patient it assumes a different phase, productive of quite an opposite effect; and the desire to be healed is quickly followed by the cure. Moreover,—and I would again quote the high authority already adduced—“this system of charlatanry is subversive of all previously acquired knowledge which has resulted from the experience of ages: which is continually undergoing the tests of judgement and experience at the hands of hundreds of thousands of regular practitioners dispersed throughout the civilised world. If homœopathy be true, then we are all believing a lie as our forefathers have done: the slowly-growing and ever-deepening truths accumulated during the course of ages are to be discarded without ceremony, and we are for the future to pin our faith upon the sleeve of an enthusiastic visionary, despite our reasoning faculties and all those means by which the human mind is regulated.” Truly may the homœopath adopt as his motto, *Mallem errare cum Hahnemannno quam cum Hippocrate recte sentire.*

Since writing the above, I have been much interested by the perusal of a work, entitled “The Fallacies of Homœopathy,” from the pen of one of our excellent and indefatigable Secretaries, from which, as entirely coinciding with my views, and as evincing much research, I extract his conclusions, which are fully borne out by the statistical premises, on which they are founded. First:—In the homœo-

pathic cures effected, globulism is absolutely for nothing, and the practitioner who would attribute such cures to globulism must be considered as either full of simplicity, or a friend to quackery—but that they are due—

To the influence of the mind on the body, through the voluntary or emotional systems.

To the *vis medicatrix naturæ*.

To excellent dietetic regimen.

To allopathic treatment surreptitiously conjoined.

And Secondly:—That in many cases the homœopaths are inexact and inaccurate in their diagnosis.

That, therefore their statistical returns are in many cases falsified.

That they allow nothing for the varied circumstances under which different patients are placed as to type, comfort, locality, idiosyncrasy, &c.

That, therefore, their comparisons with allopathic practice are unfair and not to be depended upon."

One word more before we quit this unpleasant theme with respect to that gross perversion of Scripture, and the violence done to its natural and literal sense, by which this shameless imposture is attempted to be supported. That our lively neighbours across the Channel should designate the founder of this school by the title of the new Evangelist is doubtless inexcusable: but still more reprehensible is it when we find a divine of our own Church promulgating sentiments of a similar outrageous nature. However, let us console ourselves with the reflection, that where folly and impiety are leagued together in the defence

of error we need be under no apprehension as to the result, but firmly adhere to the old adage, *Magna est veritas et prevalebit*.

Nor can we dismiss the homœopath, with his psoraic hallucinations and infinitesimal absurdities, more suitably than by adopting the language of the poet Cowper in exclaiming:—

“Defend me common sense, say I,  
From reveries so airy!—from the toil  
Of dropping buckets into empty wells,  
And growing old in drawing nothing up!”

The question of Sanitary Improvement is one fraught with the utmost importance; one which is intimately associated with the well-being of society at large. To the mind of the medical man, the motto *Salus populi suprema lex*, should be ever present: self-interest may indeed suggest to some—but they must be men of a mean and grovelling spirit, fitted only to wallow in the filth which they are desirous of perpetuating,—that if the causes which are so rife in occasioning disease be removed, a great source of profit is at once removed also. But the profession at large have long since felt, and acted too, upon the conviction that the general welfare of the community is to be secured, even at the sacrifice of individual interest; and most cordially therefore do they enter into any scheme which may tend to benefit their fellow men in a sanitary point of view.

Among the measures which have such a tendency, attention to the state of the sewerage of this great

metropolis and other large towns, is indispensable. Till within the last few years, this vast city and its suburbs, with its two millions of inhabitants, formed one vast temple of Cloacina, at whose shrine thousands of victims were annually sacrificed: accumulations of human ordure tainted the air, and scattered the seeds of disease and death around. In a great measure this abomination has been removed by a more careful attention to the state of the sewerage; but the evil has only been transferred to another, and perhaps quite as objectionable, a quarter—for have not the contents of these sewers been conducted into the channel of the Thames, the waters of which the teeming thousands dwelling upon its banks are condemned to drink? Those waters have been carefully analysed, and the result is found to be, that animalculæ of most disgusting forms, gases of a most deleterious character, oozing from the foul animal matter yielded by cess-pools and slaughter-houses, constitute the basis of this staple article of human consumption. One of the most important subjects therefore, which can occupy the attention of all who are anxious for sanitary improvement is that of furnishing a purer supply of water to the inhabitants of large towns: and the most effectual mode of accomplishing so desirable an end, as regards this great metropolis, appears to be that which has lately been devised, viz.—of no longer permitting the sewers to discharge themselves into the Thames, but to carry their contents down (by means of tunnels constructed

on each side of the river) to reservoirs provided for their reception: thus, not only would the waters of the stream be better adapted to human consumption, but much valuable manure be secured for the service of the agriculturist. The expense indeed may be formidable, but that, at least, should not be taken into account when the health of the population is concerned.

Another great source of disease is the defective ventilation which characterises the crowded alleys and other densely inhabited portions of this city. The registers of mortality prove to demonstration, that the purer air which pervades our squares and open streets is more favourable to the sanitary condition of these localities than is the tainted atmosphere which pollutes the dwellings of the artisan and the poor; and were the philanthropic Howard now a denizen of earth he would find a wide scope for his benevolent exertions in removing such a cause of epidemic infection. The parks which, are now in progress in more than one direction will, doubtless, in a measure obviate this evil; but many have not the time, and more after the labours of the day have not the inclination, to seek a purer air at such a distance from their humble homes. Would it not be more conformable to reason, and more conducive to the comfort of the poorer classes, to improve the quality of the air which they breathe, by purifying it through the medium of some of the ingenious methods of ventilation now attainable, and by devoting

greater care to the construction of the dwellings of those who, as the sinews and thews of the community, are deserving of all our anxious solicitude? And with respect to these improvements in ventilation, a highly esteemed member\* of this Society has contributed much valuable aid by his recent discoveries, and his system may be seen in operation at various public Institutions. As the views upon which this system is founded are at once novel, and based upon the soundest principles of philosophy, I hope to be excused if I allude to them somewhat in detail. From experiments conducted with the greatest care, the discoverer has succeeded in establishing two points of the greatest importance, and which are in various ways applicable to hygienic purposes. First, it is found that at night a column of air *beyond* the reach of the London atmosphere and of any source of artificial heat, enclosed within a perpendicular zinc tube reaching to the height of sixty feet, retains, throughout its whole length, a *higher temperature than the external air surrounding it*. Secondly, that altho' during nights which are clear and bright, or nearly so, and which admit of the radiation of heat, both natural and artificial, from the earth into space, the atmospheric air *within* the sphere of the London atmosphere, sheltered from the view of the clear sky by sheds or mere horizontal coverings, or by other means, preserves a *higher temperature than the external, or exposed air*: yet, on nights when the sky is densely covered by clouds, the surfaces of which are illumi-

\* Dr. Chowne.

nated and red with reflected light—the quantity of natural heat from the earth's surface, together with the *prodigious volumes* of artificial heat sent up from the thousands of fires and gas luminaries below, being reflected by the clouds back upon the earth—the air within and under the sheltered places has a *temperature lower than the exposed air*. Hence, on nights thus clouded and obscured, the relations as to temperature between the external, or exposed air, under sheds or similarly sheltered places, are analogous to those existing in the day-time when the sun is shining—a meteorological fact which is calculated to have important bearings on the hygienic condition at night of the atmosphere of London and other large and gas-lighted towns. A system of ventilation founded upon data such as those just mentioned constitutes a highly valuable discovery, ministering, as it does, not only to the health but to the general comfort of civilised man. To adopt the language of a public journalist;—"we see no end to its application. There is not a sanitary measure suggested to which it may not form a beneficial adjunct. There is not a hovel, a crypt, or a black close hole anywhere, that it may not cleanse and disinfect, and we foresee no impediment to its being immediately adopted and universally applied for the public weal."

As to the more careful construction of the habitations of the poor, an example has been set by the illustrious Prince Consort, who, for this and other reasons, has earned the hearty good-will of all inter-

ested in the welfare of the industrial portion of the community; and it is to be hoped that those who have the means of carrying out such benevolent intentions may cheerfully devote their best energies to the furtherance of so praiseworthy an object.

May we not, in connection with this subject and as caused in a great measure by the neglect of proper sanitary precautions, mention the fearful epidemics, especially cholera, with regard to the nature, mode of propagation, and treatment of which this Society was more than two years since occupied in repeated discussions? Doubtless we are bound to believe that the cholera was a visitation of Heaven, and that it was designed, as in many instances where the hand of a higher power has been visible, to bring good out of evil. For though the desolating tornado sweeps the unhappy mariner into the abyss, and levels to the ground—without respect to the lordly habitant or the humble occupant—both the princely palace and the lowly cot, is not its effect to purify the air and render it more fit for the support of animal life? Herculaneum and Pompeii, it is true, were overwhelmed by the lava from Vesuvius, but that mountain only acted as the safety-valve of the labouring globe, and probably prevented the wide-spread and desolating earthquake which, otherwise, might have involved imperial Rome and other celebrated cities in one common ruin. At the same time, with respect to the prevalence of epidemic disease, is it not in some degree to be traced to the neglect of precau-

tionary measures, which might have mitigated at least, if they did not altogether prevent, its fatal ravages? In ancient dramatic representations, it was customary to introduce the Deity as solving difficulties which human foresight should have been able to unravel: much in the same light the cholera was represented as *dignus tali vindice nodus*, and the share which the indifference of man to due sanitary precautions had in contributing to its fatal symptoms was too often overlooked. For the future, let "forewarned forearmed" be our motto: seeing that, with the wagoner in the fable, we shall in vain invoke the assistance of Heaven to remove its avenging hand, unless we manfully put our shoulders to the wheel, and remove the predisposing causes of this and other desolating epidemics.

The recent foundation of the Epidemiological Society, the object of which is to trace the causes of epidemic diseases, as far as may be, to their source will, in a great measure, facilitate researches of this nature; and we cannot but heartily wish success to the labours of a Society constituted upon so excellent a basis, and so distinguished by the zeal and energy which actuate its members in such a philanthropic cause.

Before I bring my observations upon Sanitary reform to a close, I would fain take a passing glance at another subject intimately associated with the promotion of hygienic measures. For is it not obvious that the most strenuous exertions of a life devoted

to this noble cause will be thrown away if our mortal remains are suffered to be prejudicial to the health of those who survive us: hence the question of extra-mural interment must enter largely into any scheme which can be devised for the improvement of the sanitary state of the population. Year after year, thousands of our fellow-creatures have been crowded into our narrow churchyards: no care for the living has, hitherto, been manifested in the anxiety which all felt to conceal their dead from sight: noxious miasmata have been suffered to exhale from overflowing charnel-houses, polluting the very air with deadly vapours: endangering the health of the living, and contributing to swell the triumph of decimating epidemics. Henceforth, however, it is to be hoped that the deep feeling of affection for the dead,—which I do not hesitate to call mistaken, though perhaps, excusable,—will be no longer permitted to operate, for extra-mural interment has received the sanction of the Legislature, and the Act we trust will be speedily carried into execution: and when prejudice shall have given way before calm and dispassionate reasoning, it will be admitted that the carefully-tended sod of a rural cemetery will be visited by sorrowing relatives with more devout feelings, than the monumental slab in some dank and dreary metropolitan graveyard. In this respect we do well to take a lesson from our continental brethren: and who that has traversed the cemetery of Père la Chaise has not been impressed with a conviction that respect for the dead is better

evinced by a visit to their sepulchres, on the anniversary of death and by the affecting mementos there deposited, than by our too common practice of avoiding the spot where they lie, after interment? Even the heathen could, by their *Siste viator!* call upon the survivor to ponder upon the uncertainty of life: and a passing glance at the way-side tomb formed a touching *Memento mori!* to the heedless traveller. We may now reasonably expect that the removal of bodies from the crowded and ill-ventilated courts and alleys, which is enjoined by the provisions of the Act within a given time after death, will in a great measure tend to obviate that infection which their being kept for too long a period uninterred has hitherto engendered: and, indeed, I doubt not that in this case private feeling will cheerfully be sacrificed to the public good, and a cause of much mischief, both to individuals and the community, be gradually removed.

The last year, from its connection with the Industrial Exhibition—in fact we might justly call it the Exhibition-year—will form a memorable epoch in the annals, not only of our own country, but also of the civilised world; nor should the bearing which it has had upon matters medical be overlooked. From all quarters of the globe, men of renown in every art and every science congregated upon the occasion, and never, at any period, was there a more imposing gathering of *savans* than in the metropolis at this season. During their visit, the public medical Insti-

tutions were cheerfully opened to all; and many freely availed themselves of the opportunities of observation thus afforded to them: moreover, lectures were delivered at the Royal Colleges, so that our foreign medical brethren, though they conferred much benefit upon us by the scientific information they afforded, did not, we trust, leave our shores without receiving corresponding advantages in return. Of the surgical instruments, which industry and ingenuity had so abundantly brought together at the International Exhibition, I would fain say a few words—for the other departments of Medicine had, obviously, little opportunity of being benefitted by it.

The instruments of the Surgeon may be regarded as the representatives and vicegerents of the motive powers, that is—his hands. To supply such aids as the Surgeon requires is the object contemplated by the mechanical skill and inventive ingenuity of the instrument-maker, and in the pursuit of that object he must have a two-fold aim:—first, to supply the operator with suitable instruments, wherewith to facilitate the performance of his operations,—and secondly, to furnish the patient himself with a compensation for defects, by the production of substitutes for those parts which have required removal: and in this latter portion of his art there is a danger lest he should adopt unnecessary mechanical refinement and pernicious complexity, for it is obvious that the nearer any instrument, consistent with its use, resembles the organics implicit of Nature's handi-

work, unembarrassed by mechanical details and complex adaptations, the nearer will be its approach to perfection.\* Upon this point, however, it is manifestly impossible to enter into much detail; I will content myself, therefore, with remarking that the prizes were well deserved, and that the improvement in both the branches of that mechanical art to which I have alluded, was very marked, and not the least to be commended among the various ingenious contrivances for which the Exhibition at large was conspicuous.

Though aware that an apology is due to my hearers for having so long engrossed their attention, I feel that I must yet trespass upon their patience to ask, what are the present state, and what the future prospects, of the Profession to which we belong?—a satisfactory answer to which question will, in a great measure, depend upon ourselves. If it can be shown that the education of that body has advanced *pari passu* with that of the other learned professions, undoubtedly those prospects are cheering, and I speak not so much of strictly professional studies—for, little stress need be laid, in the present advanced stage of medical science, upon the necessity of being perfectly acquainted with that noble science in all its branches;—but upon the attainment of that general knowledge which will, at all times, be found indispensable to complete the education of the medical practitioner, and qualify him to mix with advantage with the members of the sister-professions. His patients are

\* Report of Sub-jury, xc.

men of every rank and every phase of human life : both rich and poor, learned and unlearned, noble and ignoble, look up to him—not only as an adviser when suffering under the inroads of disease, but, as a friend whom they may consult in any emergency, unconnected with professional attendance, which may arise. How important a point is it, then, to make a favourable impression upon the patient; to gain his good-will, and thus to accelerate his cure. With the scholar, for instance, what so likely to interest him when bodily affliction weighs down his spirit as the consciousness that he is attended by one who is capable of appreciating the works of those whose labours have formed his consolation by day and have exercised their influence over his waking dreams by night. Probably, the very intensity of his application may have given rise to the symptoms, the removal of which calls for the aid of the medical attendant: his spirit—as is too often the case with men of genius and superior attainments—may be too powerful for his bodily frame—the casket too frail for the precious gem within; and who so capable of ministering to the *mind diseased* as he who has slaked his thirst at the same classic fount, and thus rendered himself keenly alive to the more hidden points of diagnosis, than one who has never felt the burning zeal which kindles in the breast of the student, whose researches after knowledge are but too likely to render him indifferent to the preservation of his bodily health? Nor is this a visionary idea :

it is formed upon a knowledge of the sympathies of human nature which always yearn towards men of kindred pursuits: and it is a principle of action which will often effect more to render medical treatment successful, by operating upon the mind, than will the skilful exhibition of drugs by one who is not possessed of this master-key to the hidden springs of the human heart. The truth of the hacknied quotation "*Ingenuas didicisse, fideliter artes,*" &c., is here particularly felt, and it is with feelings of gratification that we hail the new regulations of our examining bodies, which require for the attainment of a diploma, in addition to professional information, a more extended acquaintance with classical literature and the principles of mathematical science, than has hitherto been considered necessary.

In bringing to a close the observations which I have felt it my duty to make upon the present occasion, I do not think that I can adopt a better course than to allude to the present prosperous position of our Society in a financial point of view. Much—I might say everything—in this matter-of-fact world, depends upon the nature of the pecuniary resources, whether of an individual or a community: Horace has truly said "*Virtus post nummos.*" In respect to our resources, I am happy to say that we are most fortunate: not only are we uncumbered with debt, but our annual expenditure is more than covered by our annual income. Be it then our care to extend the sphere of our Society's

usefulness, by increasing devotion to the interests which are committed to our charge, whether as office-bearers or members: and as the welfare of every body is to be estimated by the individual soundness of its component parts, so may we ever recollect that even the least influential among us may add lustre to the community to which he belongs, by his ardent aspirations after an increase of professional knowledge.

Nor would I take my leave without expressing the gratitude which I feel for the patience with which you have listened to the subjects upon which I have touched ; and though I am conscious that I have not brought to the task one tithe of the ability which has distinguished so many of my predecessors, still I have at least the consolation of reflecting that I have cheerfully devoted my best energies to your service, and have yet to learn that honesty of purpose will ever fail of securing respect, though it may not always command success.

