Address delivered in the theatre of the Queen's College, at Birmingham, on the 2nd October, 1857 / by John K. Booth.

15

ADDRESS

DELIVERED IN THE THEATRE

OF

THE QUEEN'S COLLEGE,

AT

BIRMINGHAM,

ON THE 2ND OCTOBER, 1857,

BY

JOHN K. BOOTH, M.D.,

THE PRINCIPAL.

PRINTED BY DESIRE OF THE PROFESSORS OF THE COLLEGE.

ADDRESS.

UNFEIGNEDLY could I have desired that the honourable and gratifying charge of addressing you on this occasion had devolved on my noble antecessor, whose distinguished talents and eminent virtues adorned, while his elevated rank and influence sustained with effect, the position of Principal of this College, during the period of eleven years. Since, however, upon Lord Lyttelton's secession, it fell to my lot to be invited to replace, in whatever degree, the void destined to intervene in the administration of the office, I had not the temerity to repudiate your kindness, nor the pusillanimity to shrink from the duties it imposed, although I deeply felt the largeness of the measure of indulgence I must exact from your candour in the imperfect fulfilment of its requirements. The distribution of Prizes, which you will just have witnessed in this theatre, constitutes the first subject to which, in the order of my address, I will venture at once to proceed. The appropriation of Honours, as the guerdons of meritorious success in the career of collegiate competition, presents a spectacle ever calculated to influence the sympathies of its witnesses, and most lastingly to impress the youthful minds of those who pass the ordeal. Prizes thus emulously contended for, and fairly won, bear no evanescent import or value to the winners of them. They seem to carry onward into futurity

their prestige of high character, while they operate as incentives to sustained exertion, and of progressive excellence. In noble minds Praise is certainly a spur if not a reward to exertion. Tacitus remarks "etiam sapientibus cupido gloriæ novissima exuitur"—the desire of glory is the last garment which even wise men lay aside. Eminence, however, in the walks of science, involves either a devoted and sustained application, as the means by which it has been attained, or genius as the wing on which the aspirant has been borne and has soared above the range of mediocrity.

But genius, as an original quality or endowment of the mind, is most rare! It requires but a little self examination to be assured that much of the bias manifested, or predilection entertained, for a particular pursuit often springs from some sense of self-complacency or of imagined superiority of knowledge; in certain studies, as, for instance, in Anatomy, and the Mathematics, it is found sometimes expedient to make a Student sensible of his progress, before he can begin to feel anything like enthusiasm, or even partiality for the pursuit. That which is of more solid worth than whatever is apt to take the name of genius, is a habit of the mind—an intense mental activity, steadily directed to some leading object. Take, for instance, as an illustration the celebrated John Hunter. The great and leading feature of Mr. Hunter's mind was that it was steadily and eagerly devoted to its object; and that no change of external circumstances had the power, for one moment, of turning him aside from it. Was he in his study, or in his dissecting room, or mingling with men in the common occupations of life, or was he in the field of battle with bullets flying or

men falling around him, one great object was continually before him; and he never lost an opportunity of seizing upon every thing that could, in any way, be made to bear upon it.

Such is the master-key that unlocks the doors of all impediments in the path of excellence. In intensity and coherency of effort behold the hidden mystery of that way which pusillanimity and love of ease or indolence are prone to prompt and suggest as inaccessible and impenetrable to the general mind. Spurn the base and noxious fallacy.

> "It was not by vile loitering in ease
> That Greece obtained the brighter palm of art,
> That soft yet ardent Athens learned to please,
> To keen the wit, and to sublime the heart,
> In all supreme, complete in every part!
> It was not thence majestic Rome arose,
> And o'er the nations shook her conquering dart.
> For sluggard's brow the laurel never grows:
> Renown is not the child of indolent repose."

The Queen's College at Birmingham, or more properly, and, let us trust, eventually and admissibly to be called both in terms and endowment,—the Queen's University for the Midland Counties of England, stands now boldly forth, challenging the nation's support and Birmingham's civic gratitude. Established, strengthened, honoured, it presents to contemplation a monument durably worthy of and commensurate with the scientific and commercial greatness of Birmingham.

The College is based on the highest, that is to say, on Christian principle, without which no branch of Education

will be conducive either to the happiness of the individual or the welfare of the state.

The centrality of the University (in this metropolis of the Midland Counties of England) and contiguity with a vast, prosperous and enterprising district, invite within its walls the youth around, more especially, perhaps, those of the middle classes, desirous of a sound and practical education, and to whom will be spared here much of the risk, expence, and domestic estrangement consequent upon a more remote destination. The University comprehends within its ample sphere of instruction the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery, (the great staple of its first foundation) also the Faculties of Theology and Law, and the department of Arts and Engineering. Thus, it embraces a comprehensive area of apt intellectual and industrial acquisition for the business of active life, therewith ever joining and inculcating religious precept and practice. The pastoral provisions of the pious and munificent founder of the Theological Faculty have been and are being carried out with the happiest effect, and all his views are realized. Eventually let it be our humble yet assured hope that the well-earned estimation redounding to this University in all its departments from every quarter may prove conducive and effectual in obtaining for it, and at no remote period, the politic grace of affiliation with the two venerable Universities of the realm. Thus might Oxford and Cambridge lengthen their cords and strengthen their stakes throughout the breadth of the land, drawing within the precints of their patriarchal protection and watchfulness the education of the middle classes—the very strength of the nation !

The department of Arts might be said to be indigenous to Birmingham. And here let us remember the illustrious Watt, who, guided by the lamp of chemistry, at Soho, in the vicinity of Birmingham, instituted, produced, and perfected his investigations and developement of the latent and expansive powers and properties of Steam, and thus established the dominion of Science over the Arts, Commerce, and Civilization of the Globe.

The department of Arts provides within this University a thoroughly scientific and practical preparation for the profession of Civil Engineering; wherein by Charter it confers Degrees, as instanced to day. The resources of the department will be found applicable to any position in life where sound Mathematical Science and acquaintance with Chemistry and Mechanical Philosophy are likely to be beneficial. An extendible power and ample convenience for the admission of pupils is possessed by the department. Here it were impossible not to hail with gladness and cordiality the recommendations of the President and Fellows of the Royal Society of London, as stated in their Memorial presented to Lord Palmerston. There is a great analogy if not an exact parallelism of principle, and almost of language, in this memorial with most of the Provisions of this College.

The President and Council of the Royal Society recommend,

1.—The establishment of Classes in Metropolitan and Provincial Schools, in which the Elements of Science may be taught on a systematic plan, and the said Classes be promoted by Government grants in aid of Local funds.

2.—The establishment of Provincial Lectures in aid of the above Classes.

3.—The establishment of Examinations.

4.—The formation of Provincial Museums.

5.—The distribution and circulation of Duplicate Specimens from the British Museum and other similar Institutions.

6.—The formation of Public Libraries.

7.—The more extensive distribution of National Publications, bearing upon the cultivation and advancement of Science.

8.—The augmentation of the Parliamentary Grant for the reward of useful discoveries in Science, attainments in Literature and the Arts, so as to admit of Good Service Pensions to men of eminent educational merit.

9.—The augmentation of the annual grant of £1000 to the Royal Society, whenever special reasons may be assigned for this increase.

10.—The formal recognition of the President and Council as a body authorized to advise the government (inter alia,) on the measures necessary to be adopted for the more general diffusion of a knowledge of Physical Science among the nation at large.

11.—The alteration proposed of substituting a Government Board for the President and Council of the Royal Society (?)

12.—And lastly, that such of the above recommendations as involve an expenditure of public money might eventually be carried out by appropriating a certain portion of the fees received from Patents; and the memorial concludes with the expression of the President and Council of the Royal Society, that no application of these Fees more appropriate could be devised than the devotion of them to the encouragement of Science, to which practical Art is under a many and justly important obligations.

We come next to the department of Laws. In this department the tribute of liberal acknowledgement may be claimed by the College for the enlarged scope embraced, and the lucid practical power of analysis evinced, in the framing of this course.

In this extensive and opulent community, ever prompt to exercise (commercially, politically, and competitively,) a perfectly free and large latitude of judgement, some safe and pure lights, to be derived from constitutional legal principles, will ever be precious.

In the technical portion of the Course, the particular knowledge of the forms and rules by which the law is administered, an acknowledged deficiency in education, will be obviated.

I now arrive at the Faculty of MEDICINE. Prepossess your minds, I would beseech my young auditors, with a

deep sense of the dignity (using that term morally) of the art which antiquity both sacred and profane alike esteemed as divine. "Homines ad deos nulla re proprius accedunt quam salutem hominibus dando" is the well-known sentiment of Cicero. Of all the Arts the Healing Art is the highest, and offers to genius and benevolence their noblest field. Casting no disparagement on those brave and noble spirits who have guarded and do guard our country, her shores and territories, or some of whom falling in the ranks of battle have offered most illustrious examples of soldiers true both to an earthly crown and a Saviour's cross,—yet we know that the aim of a warrior is ingeniously to invent, and his business effectually to use, instruments of destruction. His greatest achievements are wrought where deadly wounds are suffered; his proudest triumphs are won where burning cities blaze over blood-stained hearths, and, horrible to think of, where fields are fattened with human gore; his laurels are watered with tears: his course. like the hurricane, is marked by destruction; and it is his unhappy lot (perhaps the unhappiest view of arms as a profession) that he cannot conquer foes but at the expense of friends.

Now, in the eye of reason, and of humanity that weeps over a suffering world, his is the nobler vocation—and, if not the more honoured, the more honourable calling—who sheds blood, not to kill, but to save; who wounds, not that the wounded may die, but live; and whose genius ransacks earth and ocean in search of means to save life, to remove deformity, to repair decay, to invigorate failing powers, and restore the rose of health to pallid cheeks. His aim is not to destroy a father, but, standing between him and death,

to save his trembling wife from widowhood, and their little children from an orphan's lot.

In embracing the Study of a profession at College, it were well that the young Student should be reminded of the advice of Cicero to his Son.

The eloquent Cicero, a Philosopher, a Statesman, and a man of the world, profoundly versed in the motives which actuate the human heart, thus premonishes his son, when sent to Athens to pursue his Education; "Sustines enim non parvam exspectationem imitandae industriae nostrae, magnam honorum, nonnullam fortasse nominis. Suscepisti onus praeterea grave et Athenarum et Cratippi; ad quos cum tamquam ad mercaturam bonarum artium sis profectus, inanem redire turpissimum est, dedecorantem et urbis auctoritatem et magistri; quare quantum conniti animo potes, quantum labore contendere, (si discendi labor est potius, quam voluptas,) tantum fac ut efficias; neve committas, ut, cum omnia suppeditata sint a nobis, tute tibi defuisse videare." You, my young friends, will not be recreant to yourselves, nor to your friends who have supplied your viaticum and sent you to this your Athenae, tamquam ad Mercaturam, as it is metaphorically styled by Cicero. Launched on the wide ocean of an active world, you will disdain to float with supineness on the waves, becalmed in indolence; you will rather hoist the sail, and with vigorous arm ply the oar, that your skiff may bear you speedily and safely to the haven of your hope and your destiny.

Let me now turn for a brief space, in behalf of Medicine, to something of what Medicine has done during the

last one hundred years. The reality of what the art has accomplished—the proof of what it really does—of the vast blessing it is to the human race—rests on the broad basis of Statistics. It must be acknowledged that the prolongation of human life, which has remarkably occurred at particular periods of this country's history, is due to causes which are well ascertained. Let, for the present, our attention be confined to the period within the last one hundred years; and we shall find abundant reason to conclude that, owing directly to our advancement in the knowledge of Medicine, in its comprehensive sense, human life has in a large measure been spared,—disease in a great degree prevented.

The Returns of the Registrar General of England shew a steady and notable decrease in the rate of annual mortality from 1838, when the returns were commenced, to 1845. In France it is stated that the duration of life has been increasing in ratio equal to fifty-two days for each year from 1776 to 1842, or nine-and-a-half years for the whole period.

In the interval between the close of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries human life gained an equivalent equal to a fourth part of its whole term. The increase in the value of life in the first half of the nineteenth century, we cannot strictly determine, there being no Tontine, as in the former periods, by means of which Finlaison has fixed the proportion to which Macaulay in his history, Dr. Southwood Smith, and others have referred. "But, it cannot be doubted," as Dr. Smith observes, "that the value of life continues progressively to increase." Take the mortality of

the earlier years of life. Last century, from fifty to sixty children out of every hundred born in London died before they had reached their fifth year. Now, not above thirty or thirty-five in every hundred die at that early period.

There are at the present time above Six Hundred Thousand Children born annually in Great Britain. According to the above scale of mortality, Three Hundred Thousand would have perished formerly before they were five years old. Now, only about Two Hundred Thousand die during the first five years of life.—Thus shewing a saving of life to the extent of at least One Hundred Thousand human beings in the year! That the happy result here indicated is to a certain extent to be attributed to the cause I have adverted to, admits of no reasonable doubt. Now take the Deaths in Child-bed. One hundred and fifty years ago, (according to Dr. Merriman,) one in forty died. In the middle of the seventeenth century, writes Professor Simpson, about one in every forty or fifty women delivered in London died of Child-birth or its consequences. But gradually, as Medicine has advanced, that mortality has decreased, till now not above one in one hundred and fifty die.

We have in Great Britain about Six hundred thousand deliveries annually, and still above Three thousand of the Mothers perish in child-birth. If the old mortality, however, of the seventeenth century yet held good, and this department of practice had not greatly progressed and improved, not less than Eleven or Twelve thousand maternal lives would now be lost by the present proportion of annual births ;—the advancement of Medicine as a Modern

Science thus effecting in this instance alone a saving of the lives of Seven or Eight thousand Mothers every year. But were I to address myself to the pleasing task of pointing out or attempting to indicate and analyse all the improvements which have been accomplished in our comparatively modern times in the practice of Medicine, (and here I of course include Surgery,) I should be necessitated to swell this address into a voluminous treatise, and I feel I have trespassed already abundantly on your indulgence.

From these disquisitions I turn once more to a consideration of the labours within these walls which, whether our lives be short, or long, we know we may usefully and honourably pursue. The progress of this University has been detailed in the Reports of the Council. Its increasing number of Students, the objects which it ever keeps steadily in view, the men it has already placed before the public in conspicuous and responsible stations, and the useful labours it is ambitious to pursue and to extend, are known. In future years, when many who have honoured and now honour this theatre by their presence, and impart to the assembly the character of their own intelligence and high respectability, shall be no more seen among us; when I who now deliver these perishable words to you, and many who hear them; when even that estimable man

> "Ever witness for him"
> This seat "of learning—
> "So excellent in art and still so rising"

the man to whom Birmingham owes these happy, noble, and incalculably precious advantages of erudition, and

to whom this Edifice itself will be a durable monument, shall be no more actors in this arena;—let us hope that this Institution, still secured from enmity and oppression, and still dedicated to its great and good objects, will still remain a rallying point for youth who feel interested in maintaining the honour of their Alma Mater. We have no reason to suppose that our successors will look back on the proceedings of the College with any feelings but those of respect: they will see that our regards, not narrowed to our own little day, were extended forward to their days, and to the hidden days beyond them. Animated by the same pure ambition as the Founder and Promoters, they will advance knowledge in all branches beyond the point at which they themselves become engaged in its pursuit; and in their turn will cheerfully transmit it, by them increased, to other generations; by whom, with the permission of Providence, it may be more cultivated, to the end of time.