

Introductory address delivered before the Medical Society of London on Monday, March 13, 1882 / by Francis Mason.

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INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

MEDICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON

ON MONDAY, MARCH 13, 1882.

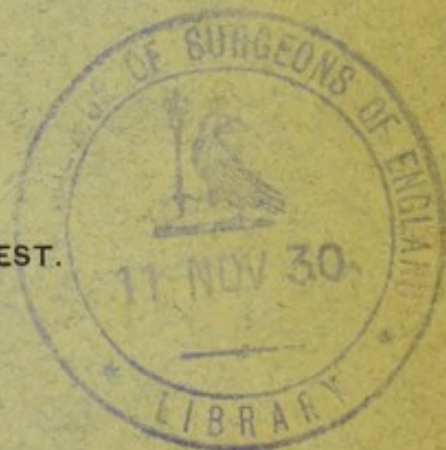
BY

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HOSPITAL; HON. FELLOW OF KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON,
ETC., ETC.

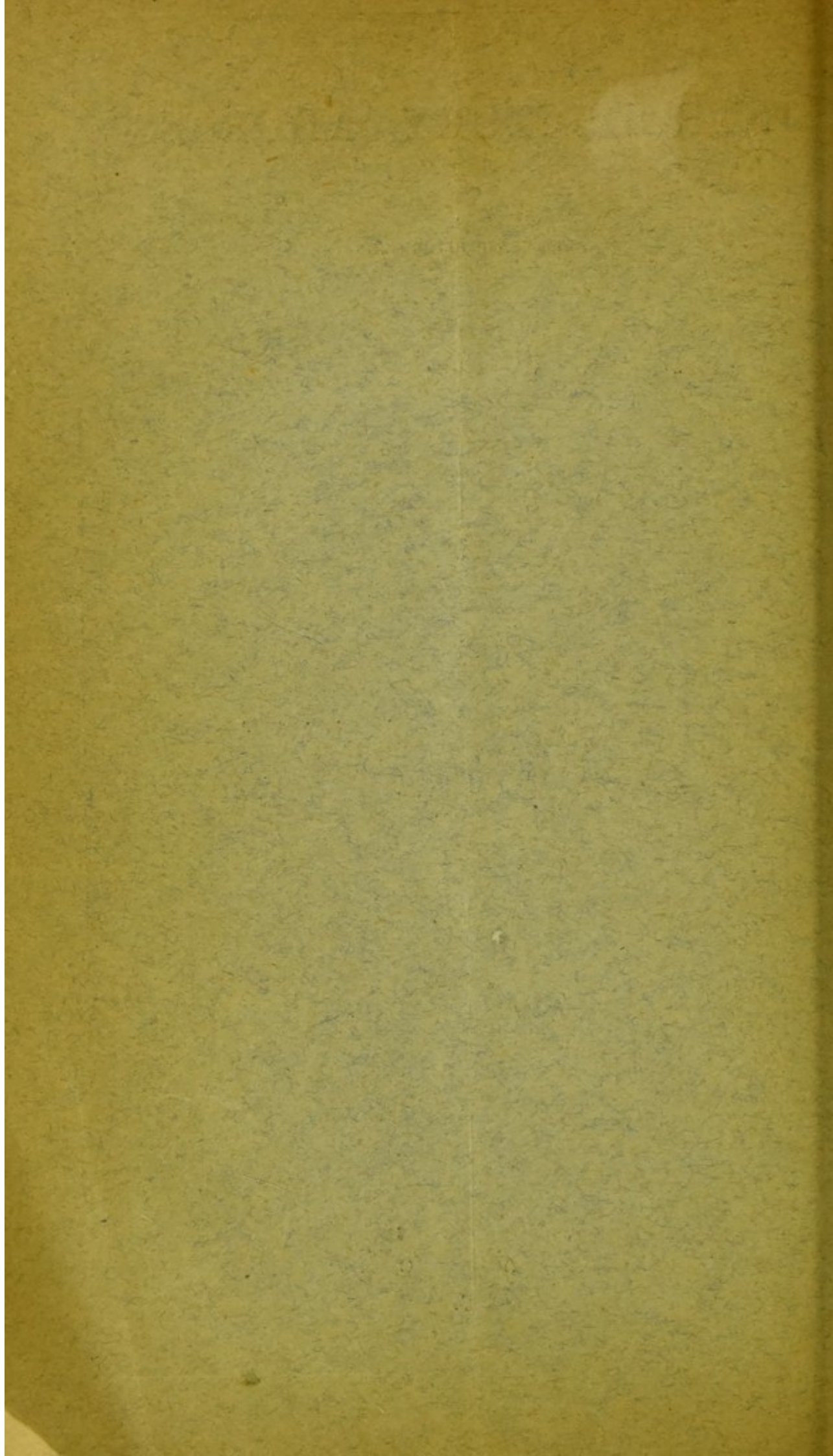
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LONDON:

J. E. ADLARD, BARTHOLOMEW CLOSE.

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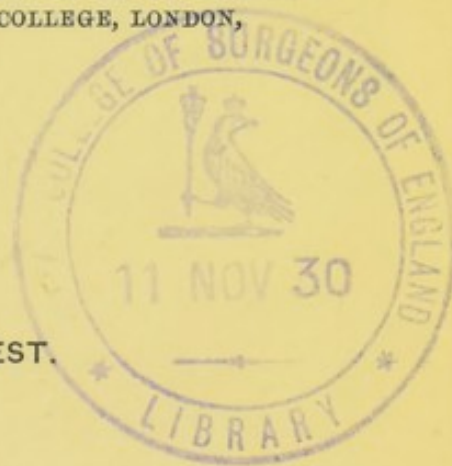
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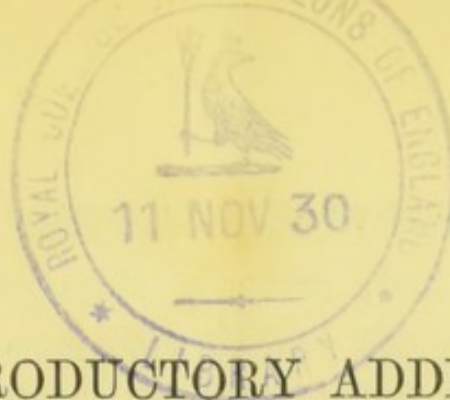
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INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN,—

IN taking my place as President of this Society for the first time, perhaps if I had consulted my own convenience I should have allowed the usual business, which has been so ably conducted by my esteemed predecessor, Dr. Broadbent, to continue its course uninterruptedly ; but, lest silence on my part might indicate a want of courtesy, or might imply that I do not sufficiently appreciate the distinguished honour you have conferred upon me by electing me as your President, I venture to ask you to give me your attention for a short time whilst I make a few observations in introducing myself to you.

In reflecting as to how I might best address you, the irresistible and unalterable fact forced itself upon me that I have had the honour of being associated with this Society for the last twenty years, and thus by a curious coincidence I shall during my presidential year attain, so to speak, my majority in the Society. It appeared to me, therefore, that the present occasion might afford a convenient and fitting opportunity to

give you a general but brief outline of the experience I have had, and the changes I have seen during that period ; and I may just add that inasmuch as what I shall have to say forms a kind of personal narrative, I hope I shall be forgiven if my remarks may seem to you to assume too much of a personal character.

There is an old and familiar saying that “ well begun is half done,” and I am confident I made a good start when I was allowed to join this Society, for I was admitted as a Fellow by the late Dr. Sibson. Those of you who knew that distinguished physician will remember the deep interest he took, not only in this Society, but in everything that tended to elevate the tone and improve the character of our profession. The kind, genial, and yet dignified manner in which he admitted the newly-elected Fellows was, I recollect, a subject of general remark. I know that it impressed me very deeply, and it left an impression so indelible as that I ever afterwards regarded him as a type of what was good and noble, and a bright example of one of nature’s true gentlemen.

In speaking of the late Dr. Sibson, I am reminded in glancing at the boards that hang “ within the girdle of these walls,” that a passing word of recognition is due to the memory of three more of our Presidents who have been called away to a higher tribunal—Mr. Isaac Baker

Brown, Mr. Peter Marshall, and Mr. Victor de Méric. It is only an act of justice to say that during their respective years of office they did honour to the Society, serving its best interests, presiding over its meetings with dignity, vigour, ability and self sacrifice,—thinking of themselves least and last of all. With regard to the remaining past Presidents, you will rejoice to know that they are all, I am happy to believe, still amongst us, and I am sure you will re-echo the sentiment and hope that I now take pleasure in expressing, that they may long be spared to give us the benefit of their experience, their counsel, their wisdom, and their judgment.

Five years after my admission I was elected one of the Honorary Secretaries, and I mention this fact because it affords me an opportunity of publicly offering my grateful acknowledgments to the two Presidents with whom I had the happiness and pleasure to work so harmoniously, Mr. Henry Smith and Dr. Richardson; and, again, because it enables me to refer to another circumstance that has largely influenced my conduct in life, and that is, that I had the good fortune of receiving the silver medal for my slender services. You will scarcely believe, gentlemen, what an enduring effect this mark of your approval has had on me, for although feeling as I do that I was rewarded far beyond my poor deserts, I have always regarded that medal as an emblem of an

honour that should for ever remain unsullied, and have ever prized and cherished it as the harbinger of many of my successes in life.

Soon after, I was appointed your Orator, and in due course Lettsomian Lecturer, and have, as you know, held the post of Treasurer for the last two years. And I part with this last appointment with some little pride and satisfaction, inasmuch as the annual balance-sheet shows that I have been enabled to hand over to my successor (Dr. Wiltshire) the largest balance we have had with one exception during the past twenty years. In mentioning this circumstance it would be unfair were I not to recognise what has been done in the interest of the Society by other Treasurers who have I know exercised quite as much, and even more fiscal economy than I have. The fact is that our financial success is due, not to any special effort on my part, but to the steadily increasing attractiveness and popularity of the Society itself.

I should, however, be sorry if I led you to suppose that we are rich—far from it—but you will be glad to learn that we are not at the present time, as we have been in former years, in pecuniary difficulties, and this is no slight matter of congratulation when we remember the heavy expenses we incurred in removing to these premises in October, 1874, which all will now admit was the best day's work that has been done

by the Council. I need scarcely remind you that for this important move we are mainly indebted to the prompt and decided action of Mr. Bryant. It is true we borrowed a sum of money which was generously placed at our disposal by the Trustees of the Fothergillian Fund, but we have now not only paid off that debt, but have invested £100 in Consols.

But still the Council is not without its anxieties, for first, out of the balance I have referred to, we have had to pay for the publication of the last volume of the 'Proceedings.' The volume is now in your hands, and you are the best judges of its merits, but I venture to say that it will compare favourably with any other similar publication, and that it reflects the highest credit on the editors, Dr. Gilbert-Smith and Mr. Edmund Owen, to whom we owe our grateful thanks for the painstaking and careful manner in which they have fulfilled their duties. Again, we have one more reason for anxiety, for the Council, ever consulting the convenience of the Fellows, are contemplating taking some adjoining premises so that we may have increased accommodation, especially for our Library, which as you know is one of the best of its kind in Europe, and the usefulness of which is somewhat limited for want of space. This step will of course involve certain expenses, and as I should myself much regret that there should be an extra

subscription, or that a "whip" should be imposed during my presidential year, it has occurred to me, that if every Fellow would undertake to introduce one more Fellow at least during the current year, the Council would heave a sigh of relief, and go to their work joyously, and in the fullest confidence that the success of the Society is permanently secured.

These remarks, gentlemen, lead up to the point which is at this moment nearest my heart, and indicate, I venture to think, that there are some reasons at least to justify the last and greatest honour you have conferred upon me, and certainly the greatest honour I have attained in life; and that is, to be placed in this chair as your President. For this manifest and priceless testimony of your approval and good opinion my best thanks are due, and I trust you will accept them in the same spirit in which they are tendered. I am truly conscious of the honour that has been conferred upon me, and I am equally aware of the responsibility that that honour brings, but I feel I cannot go far wrong if I strive to follow in the footsteps of my predecessors in this chair, and as imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, especially in those of my immediate predecessor Dr. Broadbent.

And in speaking of Dr. Broadbent I desire to mention one circumstance, that happened no less than eighteen years ago, and which even then

indicated his foresight as to the vitality of our Society. Many of you are probably aware that twenty years ago we held our meetings weekly as we do now, but in 1864 the Fellows elected to hold them fortnightly as is the custom in other societies. Now, Dr. Broadbent and Mr. Rogers-Harrison strenuously opposed and vigorously resisted, indeed, they stood alone as to this change. I am bound to say that I voted with the majority—that is, for the fortnightly meetings, but now seeing the unquestionable success of our weekly meetings, and believing that confession is good for the soul, I freely admit that I am sorry I did so. Well, thus we went on for four years, until in 1868, Dr. Richardson came to the rescue, when by his well-known energy, and the unceasing interest and zeal he has ever shown in the Society, the weekly meetings were resumed; and judging from about fourteen years' experience, it seems hardly likely that for the present there will be any change.

I am sure you will be glad to learn that our Society has never been more prosperous than it is at the present time, and I am certain that every loyal and good Fellow wishes it continued prosperity; and whilst I need not say that I shall do my best to maintain its reputation and further its interest, I confidently look to you for your support, your sympathy, your forbearance and encouragement. I ask for the experience of the

older Fellows, I solicit papers from the junior Fellows, and more than this I especially invite discussion from that large class of our Fellows who are in general practice, and who from their extensive experience can, if they only will, help us so materially and so usefully in our debates.

On looking through the records of our Society for the past twenty years, I have been astonished at the enormous amount of work that has been achieved—in a word, they contain a mine of intellectual and scientific wealth. There is scarcely a single subject connected with medicine and the allied sciences that has not been discussed, and with advantage, incontestibly proving that our Society has been, and will I hope continue to be, thoroughly representative of professional opinion.

But it seems to me, as the outcome of my researches, that there are many points still open to us for consideration, and I only mention a few, as others will necessarily suggest themselves to you. For example, we shall be glad to have your further experience, and matured opinions,

“On the treatment of Infantile Paralysis.”

“On Bloodletting as a point of Scientific Practice.”

“On Aneurism of the Aorta treated by Galvano-puncture.”

“On Diseases of the Brain, and many points in Lunacy.”

“On the treatment of Effusion into the Pleural Cavity.”

“On the Arcus Senilis as an evidence of Degeneration.”

“On the use of Sodium Ethylate in the treatment of Nævus.”

“On the propriety of completely extirpating certain organs, as the Kidney, the Larynx, the Pylorus, and the Uterus.”

“On the use of Sayre’s Jacket in Spinal Disease.”

“On the best method of performing Osteotomy for Deformity.”

“On Nerve-stretching.”

“On the treatment of Tetanus.”

“On the Electrolytic Treatment of Tumours.”

“On Bone-setting.”

“On the special advantage of Skin-grafting.”

“On the value of the Turkish Bath in Disease.”

“On the best treatment of Bronchocele.”

“On Maternal Impressions.”

“On the use of Esmarch’s Bandage in the treatment of Popliteal Aneurism.”

“On the diagnosis and treatment of Abdominal Tumours, and also of Intestinal Obstruction.”

“On the readiest method of performing Transfusion.”

“On the relative value of Bigelow’s operation of Lithotrity.”

“ On Anæsthetics generally.”

“ On the Dressing of Wounds.”

“ On operating in cases in which organic Disease of the Lung exists.”

“ On Excision of Joints.”

“ On the treatment of Fractured Patella.”

“ On the relation between Puerperal Fever and the Acute Fevers, especially Scarlet Fever and Erysipelas.”

“ On the influence of Athletic Sports on Health.”

In conclusion, I venture to say that any one who has attended our discussions will be ready to admit that he has no special reason to regret being a Fellow of this, the oldest medical society in London. Speaking for myself, I can honestly say that I have never gone away from a single meeting without feeling that I was a wiser and a better man—wiser, in the sense that I have always learned a great deal; and better, in that I have been taught to exercise forbearance, and to remember that although I might have opinions of my own, it has been my duty to respect the opinions of others. In this Society, gentlemen, there is no fear from free and full discussion, so long as our aim, and only aim, is to “ Prove all things,” and “ Hold fast that which is good.”

