

A lecture concluding the clinical course of instructions delivered to the pupils of the Coombe Hospital / by John Kirby.

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A
LECTURE
CONCLUDING
THE CLINICAL COURSE
OF
INSTRUCTIONS
DELIVERED TO THE
PUPILS
OF
THE COOMBE HOSPITAL.

By JOHN KIRBY,
ONE OF THE SURGEONS TO THE INSTITUTION, &c. &c.

SECOND EDITION.

DUBLIN:
PRINTED FOR HODGES AND M'ARTHUR, 21, COLLEGE-GREEN.

1825.

LECTURE
CONTAINING
THE CLINICAL COURSE
OF
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DELIVERED TO THE
PUPILS
OF THE
HOSPITAL
BY JOHN KIRBY
OF THE HOSPITAL TO THE LECTURES
SECOND EDITION
DUBLIN
Printed by R. Graisberry,

DEDICATED TO THE
APPRENTICES AND PUPILS

ATTENDING AT THE
COOMBE HOSPITAL,

BY
THEIR SINCERE FRIEND,

JOHN KIRBY.

*Harcourt-street,
May 2, 1825.*

NOTICE.

AS the first Edition of this Lecture was, in a few hours, hurried through the press, that it might be circulated amongst the Pupils to whom it is dedicated, before they went to the country, it appeared with numerous faults, which the author has corrected in this Edition, called for by the flattering reception of the first, notwithstanding all the inaccuracies it contained.

A
LECTURE,

&c. &c.

GENTLEMEN,

AT the conclusion of the Course of Clinical Instructions you have attended in this Hospital, I feel I cannot take my leave of you in the common language of farewell. I feel, that although this season dissolves the connection which existed between us, that dissolution takes place, only that we may be united by ties much stronger. The distance which our respective relations to each other set between us, our frequent intercourse daily diminished, until at length the coldness of reserve is lost in the warmer sentiments which friendship entertains. When I take a retrospective view of your conduct in this place, I am at a loss, whether I ought to commend most your uniform pro-

priety of demeanour, or the persevering attention you displayed towards every subject to which your notice was particularly directed. I am proud to say, that on the former ground you may bid defiance to the scrutiny of the most severe censor. On the latter, perhaps, there were some instances of blameable neglect; but these were so few and so partial, they may well be forgotten amidst the undeviating regularity of diligence to which the journal of the Hospital bears evidence.* So far I have borne strict testimony, which truth would not allow to be suppressed. It is creditable to you,—and the example you have left on record here, may excite those who will succeed you, to distinguish themselves, as you have distinguished yourselves, in gentlemanly propriety of conduct, and that zeal for professional attainments which gives so pleasing an earnest evidence of the rules by which

* In the Coombe Hospital it is the custom with the surgeons to enter in a book, which is kept for the purpose, the names of such pupils as are present, before the business of the house is commenced, and the same rule is observed at each Clinical Lecture.

you promise to be guided through the future years of your professional pursuits.

But, my young friends, I would sensibly feel, that was I to have done when those gratifying acknowledgments were made, I would ill requite you for your polite attention and eager listenings to whatever information your preceptors here were capable of affording you. Something within me tells me I have a further duty to perform. I yield to a dictate which I cannot—which I will not oppose,—and in obedience to a command which my friendship for you irresistably imposes, I presume still to be your teacher.

My years and experience have brought me to that time of life in which I may be esteemed capable of taking a just view of the profession in which you are engaged, and the result of both is, that it is a profession of awful responsibility ; one requiring the highest qualifications of the heart, and the best qualifications of the head. One, which exposes the professors of it to temptations of no trifling magnitude. One, which cannot be acquired

without great labour and patience, and which cannot be pursued without submission to deprivations and more painful mortifications than can be enumerated as attendants on any other pursuits in human life. Believe me, there is none other, which in an equal degree affords the wicked man the same opportunity to riot in the abandonment of every moral or divine principle. Neither is there any, that opens to the virtuous man so many channels, through which he may diffuse the numberless blessings the Almighty God, through its instrumentality, deigns to pour out upon our helpless nature.

If you have embraced the profession without circumspection, I implore you not to pursue it without a conviction of its sacred importance. True, without this conviction, you may obtain profit and independence,—but without a right idea of the duties it imposes, unless you are heartless beings, and regardless of every thing except the sordidness of emolument, you will lose the enjoyment of those silent and secret whisperings of conscience which mingle with

the morning reflections and shed a delicious peace on the pillow of repose.

If you attentively consider the period allotted to human existence ; if you reflect how much of it must be expended before you are prepared to appear upon the stage of life, and to take an active part in its trying concerns ; if you calculate the number of years necessarily consumed, even after you have reached the wished-for hour, which unites you to society, before you can contribute to your own happiness, or to its good,—you must all perceive the amount to which you are now committed, and how far your fate in life depends on the way in which you pursue the object you have chosen. To say, you will attach yourselves to the surgical or any other profession—that in this or that line you will take your part—that by this or another course you expect to arrive at independence and character, is to observe, with eyes that are hoodwinked, and to calculate with presumption. The fortuitous cast which determines the election, may fall precisely on the pursuit for which you are most eminently fitted, both by the te-

nor of your minds and the physical constitution of your bodies. If chance has thrown the path before you to which your dispositions lead you, and in which your powers are equal to your support, you will cheerfully enter on the way, and pursue its length with pleasure. When, however, the natural fitness by which men are suited for the various situations in life, from opposing circumstances, cannot be consulted, and they are obliged to resign the objects to which their affections most strongly attach them, with all their character and aggrandisement, it is wise to yield to a necessity with which they cannot successfully contend, and to give way where they are certain of being overcome. The history of mankind every where, displays how much they are under the control of necessity. Fixed by its commanding power to the sphere in which we move, we experience a consolation in reflecting amidst the opposition we regret, that there are before us numerous sources, which hold out the means of increasing our own happiness and of contributing to the happiness of society.

Whether necessity has compelled you to adopt, or the freedom of your choice directs you to pursue the profession of surgery, you will find two things eminently conducive to your progress. The one is a proper idea of the magnitude of the object. The other, a just calculation of the means by which that object is to be obtained.

If antiquity commands respect and fixes admiration, medical science must exercise a claim above all others to your veneration. Its origin is coeval with man. In the hour of his disobedience he felt the sentence of his doom. Then came pain and suffering into the world. Then too, those sympathies were awakened, which, while they display the weakness and wants of human nature, may be said to constitute its most ennobling attribute.

From the history of subsequent ages, numberless examples can be adduced, calculated to inspire a warm attachment to medical science. The best and wisest men devoted themselves to its pursuit. Even our Sa-

viour did not disdain to assume the medical character, when he wished to display the beauty of benevolence, and to shew forth the majesty of that power with which he came clothed from his Almighty Father. He taught eyes which were closed in darkness to open and receive the light, and into limbs, long fixed in palsied helplessness he infused the strength and vigour of former years.

Among the evils which deform the human heart, there are still some reclaiming feelings implanted by nature. These speak even to the most obdurate, and soften down the most savage ferociousness of man. They are essential to the existence of society. They compensate for our individual helplessness, and make each of us a contributor to the general stock of human happiness.

To nurture feelings which cannot be cultivated without delight, no situation in life affords more opportunity than the medical profession. It gives ample scope for every charitable office. It gives ample room to display every excellence of the heart. The relief of

human misery is the object of your profession. To receive the approbation of a chaste conscience is the sweetest and most solid reward of its professors.

Feelings so intimately connected with your own happiness, with the dignity of your profession, and the good of society, I am seriously anxious to recommend to your cultivation. From the intercourse I have had with you, and the means it has afforded me of judging, I do not entertain a doubt either as to your capability or willingness, to advance in the acquirements of professional knowledge. But I would have you more than mere traders in the medical profession. In you I would revive that character, which has been, in too many instances, long forfeited, and by the loss of which we have been deprived of the rank we long held, and we deserve to hold in the opinions of the world. I would have you wise in skill, that you may be useful in practice,—I would have you kind in heart, that you may fill the channels, which solicit your benevolence. I would have you free, candid, and undisguised in all your actions,—I would have you mild and conciliating

in your manners, gentle and modest in your language, and modest in your conduct. I would have you different from that groveling spirit which is fed by selfishness, in whose view nothing is bright that is not emolument, and nothing good, that does not bear the stamp of pecuniary remuneration. In a word, I would have you all that a medical man is expected to be. These are the qualifications which shed a lustre round the office you are designed to assume. They prepare you for the duties you may be called on to perform in the palace of the great, or in the abode of wretchedness—amidst the wants of poverty—in the exigencies of disease, and in the deep silence of domestic sorrow.

Having so far dwelt on this important topic, I propose to offer you a few observations on the best way of improving the opportunities you have had in this Institution. While good sense and humanity deter you from undertaking any case of serious importance until your experience is more matured, I hope both may induce you to apply the principles in

which you have been instructed to those of minor concern in which you may chance to be engaged. If you have observed some diseases to be readily known, you have also observed the difficulty and uncertainty with which we arrive at a knowledge of others. The power of quickly discovering the nature of disease, and of judging of its mildness or severity is to be acquired only by long habit, exercised where sufficient opportunity is afforded for practice, and cultivated according to those rules pointed out by philosophy, as the only means by which the mind can proceed in a proper course of inquiry.

Before you can successfully interrogate disease, you must acquire a standard notion of what is meant by the health of the human body. This state prevails when the functions of the several organs are performed according to the laws by which these powers were originally fixed and determined. When these laws operate with irregularity, the functions of the body no longer go on harmoniously; they become impaired, and then the human system

is in a situation the opposite of health, that is, in a state of disease. It must be borne in mind, that health is a condition of the body, which is relative as to the period of life. Between health and disease, you have seen some differences so strikingly obvious, as to be equally intelligible by all. But the knowledge of minute variations from health, and of the symptoms by which we detect the invasion of disease, by which we form an idea of its course, calculate its probable continuance, and can predict its final termination, is a degree of knowledge not to be attained without an acquaintance with the structure of the body—of the processes going forward within it, and the laws by which they are governed—of the sympathies by which one organ is associated with another, or made dependant upon it—of the relation the body maintains with external agents, and of the powerful and subtile influence which the mind exercises over it. Great as the difficulties of acquiring a correct notion of what we term health appear to be from this consideration, they are in no little degree augmented by the influence of climate on the

human economy, by the changes that are produced by peculiar habits of living—by the circumstance of difference between the sexes—by the alterations which affect the female during pregnancy, and in the various stages subsequent to it. How hard a matter it is to arrive at a correct standard you must clearly perceive. Even the imperfect one which medical science has erected cannot be easily comprehended, and cannot be dispensed with. To this standard you refer in your first intercourse with a patient. The interrogatories as to age, mode of living, occupation, &c. will have a reference to it.

There is something so material in the manner of questioning the sick, I beg leave to offer you a few observations on the subject. As your first intercourse will be, most probably, with the poor, I intreat you to divest yourselves of the prejudice, that they are insensible to kindness, and incapable of gratitude. Unless you strive to accommodate your manner and language to their humble situation in life, believe me, you will forfeit the greatest claim

to their attention and thankfulness, and you will sacrifice the most certain manner of securing for yourselves the good opinion and the confidence of those on whom the emoluments of your future exertions may in a great measure depend. Mildness of manner in a medical man soon inspires his patient with reliance, and dispels any feelings of restraint or embarrassment which the occasion of his presence may have excited. Thus the awkwardness of a first interview will easily be removed. You will gain upon the good opinion of your patient, and a confidence will be created, which will no longer withhold from you complaints and confessions, that a delicate mind finds it difficult to express.

When you find you are at liberty to proceed on the subject of your meeting, your good sense will suggest to you the best way of drawing your patient into a narration of his disease. When he has begun, permit him to continue without interruption. Listen to him with attention, and narrowly mark the language he uses. It is better calculated to give you the in-

formation you require than any other language your vanity could supply. When he has completed the history of his disease, any inquiry you think it necessary to urge will be well timed. In conducting this examination a little address is necessary. The questions should be proposed singly, and with conciseness. They should be delivered with perspicuous clearness, and with an arrangement regulated by the points to which reference has been particularly made in the narrative. In general, interrogatories may be put, with much directness. However, as you will sometimes have to do with persons of a very nervous disposition, which you can readily learn from the tenor of their manner, it is in such cases much better to propose them with a little obliquity, taking care to preserve the point of the question, without risking the suggestion of any particular answer. As the expression of the face, the color of the skin, and the reading of the features give much light in the investigation of disease, you should dispose yourselves favourably for their contemplation, and the study of these instructive guides. Whatever hints they

furnish, and the inferences you thence deduce, you should record in silence, without allowing yourselves to give way to any expression, either by word or gesture, calculated to convey surprise, or to declare apprehension. The convictions which strike upon your mind you should be careful to conceal, when to reveal them, would be only to plunge your patient into hopeless despondence, and destroy that spring of mind on which recovery so often depends.

If dissimulation is sometimes excusable in the chamber of the sick, it is inexcusable to the sick man's friends. To them you must not practise any disguise. Even to the sick man himself, you must sometimes expose the gloomy fears you entertain. When you have no hope, it is unwise, it is uncharitable and unchristian-like to conceal. Although death is an awful change, all men are not equally afraid to die. The good man receives the sentence of the near approach of that inevitable doom which awaits us all, with serenity and full reliance on the prospects of another and a better world.

Those who think less of death, and sleep in false security on the very border of the grave, it surely is our duty to alarm. The affairs of this life may be unsettled, and the more important concerns of the next may be yet unattended to. From this duty I trust you will not shrink. Irreligion may mock at you, and ridicule may assail you; but shielded by the armour of conscious rectitude, you need not be afraid of any weapons which either directs against you.

When you have acquired all the information you can obtain by conversing with your patient, or with those who may have marked the progress of his illness, with the auxiliary light of your own observation and experience, and your opinion is formed upon the nature of the disease, the next proceeding is to direct such remedies as are calculated to give relief from the oppressive hand of sickness.

Upon this subject I confess I find it difficult to guide you. As much rests on the judgment you have already formed, so much will depend

on the selection of the remedies you apply, and on the time in which they are administered, as well as the proportion and combination in which they are prescribed. Well knowing the obstacles which oppose you upon this ground, we have not lost any opportunity of instructing you how they are most easily removed. We have explained the reasons for the preference we have given to one remedy above others of the class to which it belonged. We have shewn you that remedies are suitable to one stage of a disease, which cannot be applied to another without injury, and oftentimes with danger. We have observed a simplicity in prescription, not only because it was least likely to embarrass your minds, but because simple formulæ are generally best calculated to produce the effects we desire. We have endeavoured to point out to you those cases in which medicine promises improvement, and where it is laid aside with advantage; we have often directed your attention to diseases in which all your reliance is to be reposed in the natural powers of the constitution, and when the numerous engines of our art are but certain in-

struments of danger. Permit me to caution you against an over-weening confidence in the powers, with which you think yourselves prepared to combat the attacks and resist the progress of disease. Against this fallacious confidence, inseparable from your time of life, and united to your inexperience, you cannot be too frequently warned. It is often the parent of irretrievable mischief. It satisfies the mind with its present attainments, and destroys that spring and energy which urge men forward in the acquisition of knowledge. The means of obviating a cause so directly operative against your advancement, rest, in a great measure, with yourselves. You should do nothing without seeing a connexion between the means you employ, and the end which you propose. Ask reasons for every thing that is suggested or done by others. Your inquiries may be conducted with modesty, which, while it secures you the solutions you require, will earn you esteem, and protect you against those mortifications and disappointments you would otherwise be exposed to.

I have had frequent occasion to remark your inattention to pharmaceutical subjects. On this head it would be unreasonable to blame you, knowing that you have been industriously engaged with matters of important concern. However, as many of the winter pursuits are no longer to be prosecuted, I would bespeak a portion of your time for a study so intimately connected with your profession. During the summer retirement, you can cultivate this branch of medicine. You will find in the Dispensatory a profitable companion, and in any neighbouring establishment, where pharmaceutic operations are conducted, you can devote to improvement hours that you would otherwise consume in languor, or lose in unprofitable pleasure. My acquaintance with the sentiments of young men has been too extensive not to know the reluctance they feel to acquire, in the house of the pharmacopolist, knowledge they never can arrive at in any other way, with equal certainty and rapidity. All feel the necessity of the acquirement, but few are disposed to improve the only means by which it can be attained. It is too much the custom to place in

an inferior light the character of the operator in pharmacy ; but the reason for its being so, I never could discover. Whatever they may have been of late years, we now know, they have raised themselves to the rank of a respectable profession, and that this body is composed of men of worth, intelligence and education. They must be very blind who do not perceive the useful situation they fill, and you must be very ignorant, if you do not know that they have shewn themselves capable of becoming excellent practitioners and large contributors to the general advancement of medical science.

In the properly chirurgical practice you have seen in this Institution, I earnestly hope you have received no injurious impression. When recollection brings to your mind, at a maturer period of your lives, the operations you have witnessed, I trust you will find no reason to charge us with a want of proper circumspection, or of humanity to those who were destined from their diseases, to suffer under our knives.

Firmness of mind is a qualification without which it is impossible that any man can become a good practical surgeon. By this firmness, we are not to understand a brutal intrepidity the offspring of ignorance and cruelty. True surgical firmness flows from a proper sentiment of humanity, and is tempered by the best feelings of the heart. This quality, by which we are prepared for operations, however severe their nature or dangerous their result, can be acquired only by the frequent dismemberment and dissection of the dead, by a minute and ready familiarity with those parts with which we may have to do, and by availing ourselves of every opportunity of witnessing the operations which are performed upon the living. Thus, will you be prepared for the exigencies of practice, and by these means you will acquire a rapidity of decision and promptness of execution, which you never can obtain from any other source. There are occasions in the practice of surgery, when we are obliged to call to our assistance not only our judgment, but also the intelligence of our senses. By the ear, we frequently determine the existence of fractures—the effusion of air—and the presence

of aneurism. From the eye we have many of the external features of disease, and by the touch we are guided in some of our nicest and most important decisions. On the necessity for cultivating those material auxiliaries to surgical excellence, I have frequently insisted. Many and serious are the mistakes which must otherwise beset the young practitioner; mistakes at once fatal to his reputation, and to his patient.

With the principles which guided us, you were always made acquainted; and as many of these occasions gave a favourable opportunity for insisting on the value of practical anatomy, I trust you can with truth acknowledge that we sacrificed none which could illustrate the applicability of anatomical science to the art of surgery.

Such, my young friends, are the observations suggested by the present period. They are designed for your improvement, and are given to you in sincerity.

Remember, you cannot raise any reasonable expectation of reaching eminence or distinction by any other means than professional excellence. Health is a valuable treasure; when society commits it to your care, it confers on you the highest mark of confidence and esteem. This is the greatest reward you can receive; and the inestimable consciousness of having discharged your duty, the dearest recompense of the human heart.

I now take my leave of you, promising that you will soon hear from me on other subjects, concerning your professional studies; earnestly wishing you the realization of those hopes which fill the distant prospect of your lives, and once more reminding you, that you have a serious duty to perform.—“Nulla enim
 “vitæ pars, neque publicis, neque privatis,
 “neque forensibus, neque domesticis in rebus;
 “neque si tecum agas quid, neque si cum al-
 “tero contrahas, vacare officio potest—in eo-
 “que colendo vitæ est honestas omnis, et in
 “negligendo turpitudine.”

FAREWELL!