

Introductory address [to the Medical Society] / by the President, Sir Joseph Fayrer.

Contributors

Fayrer, Joseph, Sir, 1824-1907.
Medical Society of London.

Publication/Creation

[Place of publication not identified] : [publisher not identified], [1883.]

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March 12th, 1883.

INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS
to the Medical Society
By the PRESIDENT,

SIR JOSEPH FAYRER, K.C.S.I., M.D., F.R.S.

GENTLEMEN,—I think it would hardly be possible for any one who had studied the past history and traditions of this the most ancient medical society in London—now commencing the 111th year of its existence—or who was at all familiar with the long roll of names of distinguished men who, as presidents, have directed its progress until it has attained the high position which it now occupies—to contemplate the prospect of seeing his own name added to that list, without feeling—however much he might be gratified by the distinction—some misgiving as to the wisdom of the choice, and as to his own fitness for an office of such grave responsibility. This indeed is my case, and all I can say, in acknowledging the great honour you have conferred on me, is that, in deference to your wishes, having accepted an office for which personally I feel that I have small claim and less aptitude, I will endeavour to justify your election, and try at least to deserve, if I may not command, success. I cannot call myself altogether a stranger here, for I have received at your hands signal proof that you have not so regarded me; but am well aware that, coming among you as I did but ten years ago at a comparatively late period of life, I am after all but a junior member, and am sensible that my opportunities of serving the Society—albeit you have permitted me to fill certain of its offices—have been neither so frequent nor so favorable as I could have wished, though I claim, in common with the oldest members, a thorough appreciation of its utility, a deep interest in, and a sincere desire for, the promotion of its prosperity. It was the first society into which I was admitted when I returned after long absence in the East, and to it my first contribution, in the form of a paper on some subject connected with disease, was made. I shall not readily forget the kindness with which I was received, nor the encouragement I derived from the courteous interest evinced by those to whom I had the privilege of speaking. Let me thank you heartily for all this, and for the confidence you have placed in me.

To one, trained and accustomed as I had been during a long pro-

March 11th 1898

INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS

By the President

Dr. Joseph Barker, D.D., M.D., F.R.S.

My friends, I think it would hardly be possible for any one who had studied the past history and condition of this the most ancient medical society in London—now commemorating the 111th year of its existence—on who one of its members with the long roll of names of illustrious men who as presidents have directed its progress, would be so situated the high position which it now occupies—to underestimate the prospect of seeing his own name added to that list. Without doubt, however much he might be gratified by the distinction—more valuable as to the status of the scholar and as to his own future for an officer of such grave responsibility. This I think is my duty and all I can say, in recommending the great honour you have conferred on me, is that in reference to your wishes, having accepted an office for which I will personally feel that I have small claim and less aptitude, I will endeavor to justify your election and try to do so as best I may. My first response, however, I cannot call myself altogether a stranger here, for I have resided at your house again from time to time and so regarded me; but not only aware that working many years as I did but ten years ago as a comparatively late member of the I am after all but a junior member, and am sensible that my opportunities of serving the Society—a few years have permitted me to fill certain of its offices—have been neither as frequent nor as desirable as I could have wished. Though I spent, in connection with the office, much of a thoughtful appreciation of its duties, a deep interest in such matters being for the promotion of its progress. It was the first society into which I was admitted when I returned after having studied in the West, and for its first constitution in the form of a paper on some subject connected with the same was made. I shall not really regret the kindness with which I was received, and the encouragement I derived from the numerous friends who came to those to whom I had the pleasure of speaking. But the chief reason for my being here is the confidence you have placed in me. To me trained and accustomed as I had been during a long pro-

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fessional life, to deal with disease, accident, or emergency in every form in which they present themselves to a military medical officer, especially to a member of that service in India, where of necessity speciality is unknown, and where whatever comes within the legitimate domain of physic, as well as much that lies outside it, or appertains to other departments of science,—falls within the sphere of his duties,—a society constituted as this is of representatives of every department into which the division of labour rendered necessary by the exigencies of a great metropolitan population has ordered and arranged our profession of medicine, whether as physician, surgeon, or member of that large and important class who, in general practice, are *κατ' ἐξοχήν* the medical men of our country, commended itself to my warmest sympathy; and I have had no reason to modify the opinion I then formed of it; for not only have I heard many varied and important subjects discussed, but can honestly say that I have never left one of the meetings without carrying away some useful addition to such knowledge as I already possessed.

The friendly sociable spirit in which the work is carried on, and the keen, practical, yet always unacrimonious character of the discussions have impressed me, and many others, with a high sense of the utility, value, and importance of the proceedings. I can but tender my assurance that, as far as lies in my power, I will do my best to maintain the same desirable mode of procedure at our meetings, and trust, with your aid, in due time, to hand over the office to my successor, with the Society in a no less prosperous condition than that in which I received it from the accomplished surgeon, to whose courteous, able, and discriminating discharge of his presidential duties I venture to pay a tribute of respectful admiration, feeling, at the same time, very conscious how difficult I shall find it to fill the place he has vacated; and, gentlemen, let me remind you that even his efforts could only have availed when supported by you, and that I am no less dependent than he was on your countenance and encouragement. About this, however, I feel but little anxiety, for I know that these have always been freely accorded. Let me then only trust that you will be as generous and forbearing to me as you have been to my predecessor, and that you will overlook the shortcomings which are inevitable in one imperfectly qualified as I am for the duties of the office which you have called on me to perform.

Fortunately for you and me, this is not an occasion on which to inflict on you a long address ; but as it is the custom for a new President to inaugurate the tenure of his office by a few introductory remarks I shall venture to occupy your time for a few minutes ; but will make my remarks brief and quite of a general character, for there is other and much more important matter for you to consider this evening.

First, let me congratulate you on the prosperous state of the Society ; which now numbers 420 Fellows, being an increase of 54 in the last five years, the unprecedented number of 47 Fellows having been added during the past twelve months ; each year in fact showing that the list is increasing.

The financial condition, though we do not abound in wealth, is satisfactory. The Treasurer is able to show a satisfactory balance in hand (of over £200).

As you are doubtless aware, important changes are being made in the internal arrangement of our premises. A new and larger meeting room and library are being constructed ; and there is good reason to hope that these, with a new lavatory, and other conveniences, and new Registrar's apartments, will be ready for occupation by the time we reassemble in October next. Let us hope that many interesting papers and discussions in the new meeting room, and many valuable additions to the shelves of the new library will signalise the year in which they are inaugurated.

These important changes, as you will understand, have trenched heavily on the funds of the Society, and will involve an outlay of about £4000. But you will be gratified to learn that an old and valued friend and former President has, with the munificence which has made his name familiar as a household word, come forward to our aid in a most generous and liberal manner, for which the Society, like many other institutions which have a philanthropic object, owe him much gratitude. It will also be satisfactory to you to be assured that the pecuniary liability is covered by a mortgage on the sixty years' lease already promised on completion of the premises, and that the rents from subletting will more than cover interest and rent.

The object of this Society, if I understand it rightly, is of a very catholic character. It is to collect, collate, compare and discuss matters of practical interest relating to any or all of the morbid conditions to which flesh is heir—it seeks to discover and make

It is necessary for you and me to see an opinion on which to base our own. I have a long article, but as it is the opinion of a few persons, I cannot recommend it. I will try to be as clear as I can, but I will leave you to make your own mind up. I will leave you to make your own mind up. I will leave you to make your own mind up.

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known whatever can aid in ameliorating or mitigating, when we cannot avert or cure disease, but is not less concerned with prevention than with treatment. Limiting itself to no speciality; medical, surgical, obstetrical, pathological, therapeutic, etiological, psychological, or sanitary questions, all afford welcome subjects for discussion—the sole condition being that they shall be treated in a scientific and practical spirit, to the end that they may contribute to the good of man and the advancement of rational medicine. I ask you to continue to maintain and develop this high aim, and in this spirit to give as much time as you can spare to work which commends itself, not because it conduces to the benefit of individuals but to the good of all; for it is by comparing and discussing your varied views and experiences that hasty generalisations will be avoided and medicine will be advanced on a sound, rational, and scientific basis. The records abundantly prove that the Fellows of this Society have so dealt with it in the past, whilst the papers read and discussed during the last session bear ample testimony to the ever increasing energy and value of the work that is being done. I need only remind you of some of the papers of the session, for example, those by Mr. Mason, Dr. Stephen Mackenzie, Mr. Bryant, Mr. Pearce Gould (our new Secretary), Mr. Lund, Dr. Thorowgood, Mr. Gamgee, Dr. Richardson, Dr. Routh, Dr. Braxton Hicks, Dr. Symes Thompson, or the Lettsomian Lectures, to which I cannot refer without expressing admiration of the philosophical and masterly treatment of an important subject, which Dr. Sansom made clear and interesting as it was practical and original. No name among the Lettsomian lecturers will stand out more prominently than that of this learned physician to whom a well merited vote of thanks was so gracefully proposed and so cordially accorded. Gentlemen, I do not venture to dictate; but let me remind you how many subjects of great practical interest still wait further elucidation; and it seems to me that it especially behoves our Society to investigate and to see how far they may be made useful in our daily professional avocations, and be assimilated into medical practice.

Among such subjects, I may mention the very prominent question of the causal relations of minute organisms to disease. This has already engaged your attention on the occasions of the interesting papers and remarks of Drs. Whipham, Williams, Green, Heron, and others, and the beautiful demonstrations of Dr. Heneage Gibbes on

the bacillus of tubercle, in which the relation of that microphyte to the disease was discussed. I hope it may again come before you, for it is unquestionably a subject of vital importance, not only as regards the etiology and propagation of tuberculosis, about which much still remains to be said, but because other diseases such as malarial fevers and even cholera are by some ascribed to a similar cause. Indeed it would almost appear as if all disease is to be associated with a micro-organism of some form, which, though by some regarded rather as an accessory or epiphenomenon, by others is held to be the very cause itself.

It is very satisfactory to know that many able observers are engaged in the investigation of a subject so momentous, and that not a few are Fellows of this Society. For my own part, fully recognising the importance of the discovery of these germs, and most earnestly advocating a patient and persistent prosecution of the study of their life-history, convinced that they play an important part in the etiology and genesis of many diseases, I think we are hardly yet in a position to say what that part is, and must admit that the true interpretation of the relations of these microbes to disease has yet to be determined.

Again, the cognate subject, considered in its surgical aspects, is of vast interest and importance.

The antiseptic method of treatment has revolutionised the practice of surgery. Surgeons from all parts of the world have borne testimony to its value, and to the fact that operations, formerly impossible, may now be done with impunity. Yet hardly has it become an established mode of practice, than its value (admitted by many even who decline to accept the rationale propounded by its distinguished advocate) is called in question, and doubts are thrown on it by men of high authority and experience, who declare it to be little better than a delusion, whilst they roundly assert that equally good results may be obtained without it, and that to care and cleanliness are due the benefits assigned to the antiseptic; by them the carbolic spray and the bacteria are alike rejected or ignored. Can we do nothing to decide such a question, and to ascertain the real state of the case? Of the facts there would seem to be little doubt, though the rationale of their production is disputed. Or turning to a field of work in which I have taken much interest, I might suggest for consideration such questions as those so ably dealt with by Lewis, Manson, Bancroft, Sonsino,

The practice of surgery, in which the relation of that specialty to the disease is concerned. I repeat my words before you, for it is undoubtedly a subject of vital importance, not only as regards the etiology and propagation of tuberculosis, about which much still remains to be said, but because other diseases such as malaria, leprosy and even cholera are by some regarded as a similar cause. Indeed it would almost appear as if all diseases to be associated with a system of organs of some kind, which, though by some regarded rather as an accessory or epiphenomenon, by others is held to be the very cause itself.

It is very noteworthy to know that many able observers are engaged in the investigation of a subject so momentous, and that not a few are followers of the theory. The very fact that they are doing the investigation of the etiology of these various and most seriously advancing a patient and permanent prevention of the study of their pathology, convinced that they play an important part in the etiology and course of many diseases, I think we are hardly yet in a position to say what that part is and what extent that the true investigation of the etiology of these diseases to disease has yet to be determined.

Again, the organic subject, considered in its surgical aspect, is of great interest and importance.

The antiseptic method of treatment has revolutionized the practice of surgery. Surgeons from all parts of the world have been testifying to its value, and to the fact that operations formerly impossible may now be done with impunity. I do hardly see it because an established mode of practice that the value (admitted by many even who decline to accept the rationale put forward by the distinguished advocates) is called in question and doubt is thrown on it by men of high authority and experience who declare it to be little better than a delusion, whilst they loudly assert that equally good results may be obtained without it and that to care and cleanliness are the benefits assigned to the antiseptic. By whom the rabble spirit and the rabble are called a sound or ignored. Can we do nothing to decide such a question and to establish the real value of the fact? Of the fact there would seem to be little doubt, though the rationale of their practice is disputed. Of course in a field of work in which I have taken much interest, I might suggest for consideration such questions as those we are dealing with by Louis, Huguier, Blandin, Blandin,

Cobbold, Mackenzie, Harley, and others, in India, China, Australia, Egypt and other parts of Africa, as well as here and elsewhere, in regard to the parasitic origin of a group of diseases hitherto ascribed to other causes; or to the important question of the etiology of fevers, especially in tropical and subtropical climates, which is by no means conclusively settled there—I venture to question even if it be so *here*. Or the influence of climate, heat, malaria—whatever that may be—and of organic and inorganic miasmata, whether animal, vegetable, or gaseous, or of dynamic agencies operating through the nerve centres and vaso-motor apparatus, in producing certain diseases, or in influencing their propagation and diffusion; questions on the causation and diffusion of cholera, dysentery; questions in relation to hepatic disease, and to various forms of anæmia or cachexia, with their train of evil results to the nervous, vascular, and visceral arrangements, their dependance on climatic and malarial influences, which, with our ever extending communication with foreign countries, are daily becoming subjects of increasing interest, considering the numbers of persons who returning to this country affected by tropical disease in its chronic forms and sequelæ, must be constantly looking to you for relief from sufferings which change of climate alone has failed to effect.

Again, the true value of alcohol, whether therapeutic or dietetic, is still open to debate, and is a point on which a variety of opinions are held. Cannot more definite and settled views be arrived at on a subject of such vast importance about which reactionary opinions are largely influencing the whole nation? Or to turn to more specific matter, such for example as the histogenesis, pathology, treatment, and prognosis of morbid growths ranging from the simplest excrescence to the most flagrant carcinoma; how much has still to be learned, how many deeply interesting questions are to be answered. Many other subjects will suggest themselves to you affording fertile matter for consideration and discussion which does so much to extend and consolidate practical knowledge—that which avails us in the presence of actual disease, and gives confidence in diagnosis and reliance on treatment—which, after all, is the great object of our science and our art. Now I believe we are all quite alive to the importance of treating these matters in a practical way, whilst we fully recognise, at the same time, that the strictest principles of scientific induction should guide our reasoning in regard to them. But if there be a place in which the study of applied

science is appropriate, that place is the Medical Society whose object is the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of disease. Here let me suggest that our investigations need not necessarily be limited to rare, or what are commonly called *interesting* cases or pathological curiosities. There are cases apparently simple and at first sight of little interest, such as you might hesitate to bring before the Society, though they have puzzled even an experienced observer and remain to a great extent unexplained—cases occurring in the daily routine of professional experience about which discussion and comparison of notes would be of infinite value in clearing away doubts and ascertaining what others know about the matter. I invite you to bring such cases here, for out of them perhaps some important issue may arise by which light may be thrown, which may lead to practical deductions of greater value than the study of more abstruse pathological or therapeutical problems might afford. I could hardly illustrate what I mean better, than by referring you to the last paper read here, on the use of the cold douche in the treatment of what is unhappily not an uncommon form of disease. I think all will admit that Dr. Broadbent invested it with great interest, and made it very instructive.

Such, it appears to me, is the work that has been going on here for more than 100 years, and such I hope it will continue to be during the years to come, ever improving and extending as the circle of science is growing larger. I venture to hope that, with your help, our able secretaries will in due time produce fresh contributions to the literature of medicine in the biennial volumes of 'Transactions.' To these let us hope the younger Fellows will contribute of their rapidly advancing science; the seniors of that too, but also of their experience; for from these, and from the discussions they elicit, I know we may look forward to much that will be profitable wherever the 'Transactions' circulate and there are members of our profession to read them.

For my own part, I look forward with pleasure to the coming year, in hopeful anticipation that, with your support, we may do much good, and that I may be able to occupy this chair with benefit to the Society.

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 object is the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of disease. It is
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 matter. I think you to have such a habit, but out of them
 perhaps some important items may arise by which light may be
 thrown upon the general problem of diagnosis of greater value than
 the study of more obscure pathological or physiological problems
 might afford. I could hardly illustrate what I mean better than
 by referring you to the last paper read here on the use of the cold
 douche in the treatment of what is popularly but erroneously
 form of disease. I think it will show that the treatment involved
 is of great interest, and needs to be investigated.

Well, it appears to me that the work that has been going on here
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 will be valuable alike to the 'Transactions' committee and those
 and members of our profession to read them.

Let my own part I look forward with pleasure to the coming
 year, in hopeful anticipation that, with your support, we may do
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