

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

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OPENING ADDRESS.  
*to the Medical Society*

By the President, Sir JOSEPH FAYRER, K.O.S.I., M.D., F.R.S.

GENTLEMEN,—Before we proceed to the regular business of this evening's meeting, I desire, with your permission, to make a few introductory remarks on the occasion of our assembling after the recess to resume the work of the 111th session of this ancient Society, which though venerable in years and experience is always, I trust, vigorous, energetic, and flourishing as its many and more youthful compeers. I am sure you will agree with me that the present is an eventful period in the annals of the Medical Society, and one of such importance as to merit special notice, and whilst reminding you of this I would invite you, at the commencement of a new and important era in its history, to determine to do all in your power to infuse new energy and life into its work, so that it may not only continue to maintain the high position it has so long enjoyed, but that it may still further advance, keeping pace with the progress of scientific and intellectual culture which characterise the age in which we live generally, and so eminently distinguishes the profession of medicine in particular, thus extending the sphere of its influence and utility, and vindicating its title to the high place to which from its traditions, its ancient renown, its present work, and its relation to other societies which have sprung from it, it is so justly entitled. It is needless to recount to you the various events which have marked the origin, rise, and progress of the Medical Society of London. You probably all know that it was founded by a physician of great eminence when George III was king, that it is the oldest medical society in the metropolis, that from it other societies have taken rise and have so prospered as well-nigh to outgrow and overshadow their parent; and that a long roll of names distinguished in various departments of medicine enumerates its presidents, lecturers, orators, and prizemen, whilst its 'Transactions' contain numerous contributions to medicine of the greatest value.

Dr. Routh, a former President, and Dr. Symes Thompson, a former Orator, have told us in their interesting addresses of the ups and downs, the vicissitudes and changes of fortune it has undergone; how it was amalgamated with other societies, and from time to time changed its local habitation, though not its name; how, from small beginnings in the east, it gradually grew and migrated to the west of London, always tending upwards to a higher standard of practical excellence and utility, until it finally settled in its present home, where, we trust, a renewed career of usefulness will follow the recent step in onward progress which was so happily inaugurated last July by the presence of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, whose interest in the Society on that occasion was so warmly manifested and so graciously expressed. Now, all this has only been achieved by much labour and perseverance; and it is to the indomitable energy of the Fellows, the untiring labour and interest in its welfare which have been evinced by its officers, and to the firm determination of all concerned that the Society should prosper, that we owe the present happy position in which it is placed, and to which we turn with confidence as an augury of future success. And here, gentlemen, I am sure that I express the sentiments of the whole body of Fellows when I say how deeply we are indebted to our late President, our Council, Secretaries, Librarians, and Registrar, for all they have done, and for having secured for us the great advantages we now enjoy. It is for you to maintain the high prestige, scientific value, and practical utility of the Medical Society and to develop it to a further pitch of excellence that shall be commensurate with the aims of an institution which claims, in true catholicity of purpose, to represent the work of all branches or departments of medical science.

I am not going to weary you with a long address, and merely propose to occupy your attention for a brief space with a few observations germane to the present occasion and having reference to matters which concern the work of the session before us. I shall then make way for one to whom we shall all eagerly listen, for I am happy to think that our first meeting will be devoted to a subject which must be of deep interest when treated by the great surgeon who has already placed his name as high on the roll of benefactors of the human race as on that of men of science.

But let me first say a few words on the actual condition of the

Society, which, I rejoice to think, is altogether satisfactory. The Fellows now number as follows:—Honorary Fellows 39, Corresponding 60, Ordinary 376, Non-subscribing 70, making a total of 545. Of these 47 Ordinary Fellows were added between October, 1882, and May, 1883, and 18 since then are candidates for admission. I trust we shall add largely to that list during the present year.

Our financial position is satisfactory; we certainly are not rich, but we *are* in a position that may be considered as encouraging. The official reports have given you details of receipts and expenditure, and you would learn from them that our disbursements on account of building, furniture, &c., have been heavy.

The Treasurer's report will have informed you how we have met, or are going to meet, the heavy demands accruing from the building of the new rooms, and you probably have heard how much we have been indebted to a late President, Sir E. Wilson, for his generous assistance in this respect. We must all regret that he is not here to see the changes which he has so liberally aided in effecting, and still more regret that ill-health has deprived us of his presence, whilst we express a hope that at no very distant period we may again welcome him among us.

So far, gentlemen, I have had to speak of prosperity and success. I must now turn to the reverse, for we have that also to consider. Still I am thankful to say that, considering our numbers, the proportion of losses by death is not numerically large, though very severe when measured by the value of some of those removed. We have to deplore the death of three of our Fellows, and in one case under circumstances of so sad a nature as greatly to enhance the grief felt for his loss by the Society, the profession generally, and by his own family and numerous friends. It is with peculiar sorrow that I refer to the death of an old and distinguished Fellow, Dr. R. Boyd, who lost his life in company with his son and three other persons when endeavouring to save the lives of others during the disastrous fire which, at one fell swoop, deprived his family of a much-loved father and brother (and of their valuable property), the profession of an able and accomplished physician, and many, of a much-loved and respected friend.

Dr. R. Boyd was an M.D. of Edinburgh, F.R.C.P. of London, and a Fellow of the Medical and other Societies. He had reached the mature age of seventy-five, but was full of physical and intel-

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lectual vigour. He had long been known and eminent as an alienist physician, and had contributed largely to psycholological and pathological science; on these subjects his communications were numerous and valuable. At the time of his death he was superintendent and, I believe, proprietor of the Southall Park Asylum which, on the 14th August last, was totally destroyed by fire. It was in his efforts to save the lives of those committed to his care that he and his gallant son, Mr. W. B. Boyd, met with their deaths, and thus sadly though nobly terminated a life which had been devoted to good works. The Fellows of the Medical Society will join with me in an expression of deep sorrow for his loss and sympathy with his bereaved family and sorrowing friends, whose deep and lasting regret must, like ours, be mingled with admiration for the heroism with which he and his brave son gave up their lives in the attempt to save those of others.

Mr. Alfred Ebsworth, a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, and Licentiate of the Apothecaries Society, and who resided in Henrietta Street, became a Fellow of the Society in 1864. He read a paper on nursing institutions before the Society, but does not appear to have been a very frequent attendant at the meetings. Probably his professional avocations left him little leisure for other work. From all I have been able to learn he was a man of much general information, and was well known among the brethren of the mason's craft.

Mr. William Field, of Kingsbury, Middlesex, who died during the past year, was one of the oldest Fellows of the Society, having been elected in 1847. He was not a frequent attendant at the meetings, and does not appear to have made any communications, but showed his interest in it by liberally contributing to the funds of the Society.

The last and not the least of the losses we have sustained, though happily not by death, is that of our Treasurer, Dr. A. Wiltshire, and in alluding to him I feel sure that I shall enlist your warm sympathy and concurrence when I express the deep regret we all feel for the serious illness which has deprived us of a much-esteemed colleague. He joined the Society in 1870, and has been one of its most active supporters. He has filled the office of Vice-President, Secretary, Councillor, Lettsomian Lecturer, and was Treasurer until a few weeks ago, when serious illness compelled him temporarily to resign that office. He had worked hard

and written many valuable papers for the journals and societies, on midwifery, on tetanus, delirium tremens, and other subjects, and was, I believe, engaged on a new book when attacked by the disease which has deprived us of his valuable services. It seems but the other day that he presented all the appearance of vigorous health and intellectual activity, and to have been struck down just at that period of life and of his professional career when his energy and merit had attained for him a position which promised the realisation of his natural ambition and the well-earned reward of his lifelong devotion to his work. You will all join with me in condolence and sympathy for his affliction, and in the hope that he may soon be restored to health, to the Society of which he was a brilliant ornament, and to the family and friends who are in anxiety on his account.

Let me now briefly refer to the work of the session before us. I congratulate the Society on the prospect of receiving many communications on subjects of practical interest from men of the greatest eminence in various departments of medicine. I have already in a short circular letter which I had the honour of addressing to the Fellows alluded to these, and it is needless for me to repeat what I then said, but I may just remark that I think we are especially fortunate in the selection of the subject with which our first meeting is to be occupied, and that the Society will have the opportunity of enriching its annals with a paper of great interest. As with all other original investigators, Sir Joseph Lister's doctrines on the antiseptic system have been subjected to much criticism and severe experimental test, and, like them also, on the one hand they have been received and adopted generally with enthusiasm, whilst on the other, by a few with doubt and even distrust. Of the validity of the theory by which the distinguished author of the antiseptic system, explains its good effects there may perhaps be question, but of the valuable character of its results there can be, I think, but one opinion. Time and experience may modify the explanation of the *modus operandi* and the nature of the details of its practical application, but they can hardly detract from the value of the system itself. I trust that Professor Lister's paper may deal with the subject; that it will be fully discussed; and that your views and experience with regard both to the theory and its practical working may be freely expressed, and also that Sir Joseph Lister will tell us not only the actual state of the question from his own point

of view, but how far he may be disposed to modify any pre-existing views and any details of application which his more recent experience may have induced him to adopt. The list of papers in possession of our Secretaries certainly affords prospect of a most interesting session, for the subjects are especially suited to the Medical Society, which above all things desires to be practical, and I am happy to find that many of the promised communications come from Fellows or others who practise in different parts of the United Kingdom. Needless to add that I have no intention in saying this of appearing to undervalue those from our brethren in London. I mean that I am glad to find that our Society is sufficiently appreciated by non-resident Fellows and others at a distance to induce them to communicate to us their experience. I cannot now attempt to comment in detail on special papers in the programme, but I would merely say in anticipation that personally I look forward with unusual pleasure and prospect of profit to some of the subjects, and especially I would refer to one on "Cathe~~r~~ic Fever" by Sir A. Clark, and about which I have written not a little, as it will probably throw light on a subject that came much under my notice in India; and to that by Dr. S. Mackenzie on "Paroxysmal Hæmoglobinuria" which will be to me as to all most acceptable. And here, if I might be permitted to make a suggestion, it would be that the subject of the diagnostic and prognostic significance of albuminuria may be brought before this Society: it is one on which I think much of practical clinical value has yet to be said.

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Among other communications one from Surgeon-General Sir Guyer Hunter (who has recently returned from Egypt), on the epidemic of cholera which has prevailed during the last six months in the delta of the Nile, promises to be of special interest. I am sure the Medical Society will join with me in congratulating this distinguished medical officer on his safe return from an arduous and difficult duty, which has been performed with the ability, judgment, and success which were to be expected from an officer whose high professional character and administrative capacity were so conspicuously manifested during the tenure of his high office as Surgeon-General of the Bombay Presidency.

Sir Guyer Hunter's paper no doubt will give us valuable information as to the origin and diffusion of cholera in Egypt, and, if I mistake not, will go far to controvert certain views which have been advanced thereon and add further proof, were any needed, of

the futility of that incubus of commerce and international communication, *quarantine*, which still has so firm a hold on the belief of other European powers and which is still practised to the detriment alike of trade, of commerce, and of health.

The etiology of cholera is indeed a subject of vast interest in its practical bearing. To know the *vera causa* of any disease is of great importance, for it is not until we really have this knowledge that any really rational mode of dealing with its prevention can be postulated, and to ascertain it no effort in research should be spared. We are far from possessing that knowledge of it as yet in respect of cholera, and men of equal experience of the disease still differ totally as to the etiology. In dealing with it as sanitarians we are bound to act on ascertained facts and not on theories, and albeit we know much regarding the laws of its movement, I venture to think we are not yet in a position to declare that we have discovered either its real cause or the mode of its diffusion. It is satisfactory to know that the subject is occupying the attention of several great micro-pathologists at present, and let us hope that their efforts may meet with success.

Experience in India has certainly taught us that in the ordinary sense of the term cholera is not contagious, and has demonstrated the futility of all *quarantine measures*. Experience has also taught us the inestimable value of sanitation both in preventing its occurrence and limiting its propagation and diffusion, and there is no evidence to show that it has *ever* been conveyed to Egypt by ships during all the years that that have elapsed since the opening of the Suez Canal and the consequent continuous stream of traffic from Indian ports which are never free from the disease. And yet it has been attempted to show that the recent epidemic was so brought to Egypt until clear proof was demonstrated that such was not the case. I think it will be found that not the least valuable result of Dr. Hunter's mission is the light he has been able to throw on this aspect of the subject.

Happily, though different views are held both here and in India as to the etiology and the diffusion of cholera, all are agreed that quarantine is useless. According to those who hold the non-contagionist view, quarantine is as irrational as it is mischievous. Whilst those who believe in its transmissibility by human agency, in ships' cargoes, think quarantine is useless because it can never be practically and efficiently carried out. Our continental



friends argue, being firmly impressed with the contagionist view, that there is reason logically why quarantine should be made more strict, and they look with disfavour on our substitutes of inspection and segregation of those who are affected. The subject is one of vast importance not only from its medical, or rather I should say epidemiological point of view, but also as a political and international question of interest, and any information that can bear practically on it is of value. But this is neither the time nor the occasion for dwelling on the subject, interesting though it be; and I shall not trespass on your indulgence further, or anticipate what Dr. Hunter may have to say in regard to it. It only remains for me to say that I am delighted to meet you all again; that I trust the session will be a very prosperous one, that the attendance will be numerous, the discussions vigorous and critical as usual, and that everything we may do will be for the advancement of medicine and the furtherance of all the best interests of our noble profession.

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