

An address to the Liverpool Medical Society, on being elected one of the Presidents : Read October 29, 1834 / [Thomas Jeffreys].

Contributors

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LIVERPOOL MEDICAL SCHOOL

ONE OF THE PRESIDENTS

ASSOCIATION

THOMAS JEFFREYS, M.D.



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AN ADDRESS
TO THE
LIVERPOOL MEDICAL SOCIETY,
ON BEING ELECTED
ONE OF THE PRESIDENTS:

READ OCTOBER 29, 1834,

BY
THOMAS JEFFREYS, M.D.

LIVERPOOL:
PRINTED BY MITCHELL AND CO. DUKE STREET.
1835.



GENTLEMEN,

I NOW proceed to fulfil my promise, by reading to you "An Address as one of the Presidents of this Society for the ensuing Session." Perhaps, however, I ought to apologize to the Members and Visitors now present, for the infringement which I adopt; and more especially to those Gentlemen, whom you have made choice of to co-operate with me officially in this chair. I have, however, two pleasurable prospects in view, by the introduction of this *novelty*, upon the present occasion. First, if the following communication should be favourably received by you, the expression of your approval will afford me unspeakable gratification. Secondly, should your impression be otherwise, I am sure that I shall profit by any critical comments which you may make, by affording me a useful lesson, which I shall not be ashamed to acknowledge, and may possibly act like a warning voice—as an echo from a more extended tribunal.

You must be aware that the very nature of an address of the description I have proposed, cannot afford any very extensive field for discussion; but there may be some points in the subject matter which may admit of useful comment, or, at least, to call forth some diversity of opinion, neither of which I hope will be suppressed or with-

held by you. I trust, therefore, you will not think them ill-timed or presumptuous, on thus taking my seat;—and, in presenting these remarks, the first and strongest impression upon my mind is, to return you my sincere and heartfelt thanks for the honour you have conferred upon me, by which, I assure you, I am the more flattered, from the liberal manner in which you have carried it into effect—for it was not only done at a time when I was myself unavoidably absent, but also when I neither sought for it, nor expected it; consequently, however unworthy I may be to obtain it, and inadequate I may feel to fill such an office in a manner which may be satisfactory to myself and the Society, it does not, I assure you, lessen the gratitude I feel for this complimentary mark of your confidence, but, on the contrary, will stimulate my most ardent efforts, to prove to you that I may stand fair, although I may not convince you that I feel, strongly feel, the full force of such an unprejudiced election. No man can have a warmer feeling than I have, to contribute, by every means in my power, to the harmony, the respectability, and the intellectual improvement of the profession to which I belong, and it still is, and I hope will ever remain, my pride as well as my pleasure not only to promote by my actions, but also to profit by the produce of that information, which, we all well know, an association of this description is both able and calculated to convey; for I have not yet forgotten a remark, made by a venerable Professor in Edinburgh (the late Dr. Duncan, Sen.) in one of his introductory Lectures, “that a medical man must make up his mind to be a student all his life;”—and I can with truth aver, that every year, nay, every day, adds further experience to fully confirm, in my mind, the truth and the accuracy of the remark; for although, to the best of my recollection, I have never omitted a

single opportunity, in the whole course of my professional career, of mentally profiting by whatever information came within the sphere of my observation, I have no hesitation in asserting, that when my judgment is called into action, at a period of life now that I feel it strengthened by maturity, it is, notwithstanding, accompanied, if not laden, with double the doubt and difficulty in decision upon points which, *thirty* years ago, I should have decided upon, not only with confidence, but, I fear, with presumption. To hold, therefore, the scales of justice and equity in the midst of conflicting opinions, you all must be aware, involves a responsibility of character, which, in my mind, ought to make a President of any society always willing, and never ashamed, to avail himself of every idea and sentiment, either written or uttered by the most humble and youngest member among us; although it must be evident, that some little tact may be requisite, to keep in good training the ardour of a youthful mind, enveloped in rapid eloquence, brilliant talent, and highly-cultivated attainments, all of which may be found in this Society too conspicuous to require any heightened colouring from my pen. A society composed of the class of men I now address, has advantages too numerous for me to take up your time in detailing, if conducted with zeal, discretion, and latitude to encourage modest merit, and such latent talent as I have alluded to; and although there are few of us who have diligently laboured in the field of Physic, who are not capable of distinguishing themselves in one line of communication more than another, it is sometimes, however, very difficult to say where every man's forte and force of ability is to be found. We are told by the noble and learned Bacon, who may be said to be immortal in literature and science, that "Reading makes a full man; speaking makes a ready man; and that writing makes a

correct man.” On each of these three characters, I will now take the liberty of offering a few remarks.

The first, or reading man, must be one among us, from necessity and habit, and I firmly believe that there is no class of men who stand more conspicuous than those of the medical profession, for solid and extensive attainments, who are less anxious to make a display of it; and I have been told by one of my oldest and most scientific friends, that, in his intercourse with men of all classes, throughout a long and prosperous life, he had no hesitation in saying, that he had derived more satisfaction, pleasure, and information, from medical men, than any other class of his acquaintance, and this remark was made after he had acquired an independent fortune in a lucrative business in London, which he was solely stimulated to pursue, that he might enjoy the fruits of labour, and his “*Otium cum dignitate*,” in rural retirement and scientific recreations, and which he has carried into effect with such beauty and taste as are rarely to be met with, and no where, that I know of, to be surpassed, giving full scope to his scientific ardour in such rational and inoffensive pursuits, as the wide field of natural history affords. Botany and mineralogy have been his most conspicuous delights, but he has no mean ideas upon geology and entomology—all of which are branches of education which frequently occupy a place in the accomplishments of a well-educated member of the medical profession.*

* I will here avail myself of a singular state of mind in this valuable friend of mine, which may be interesting to the Society, as I do not recollect to have met with the same modification of impaired memory in the whole course of my practice. He is now in the 75th year of his age, was always a man subject to nervous depression upon naturally weak animal spirits, and had, about two years ago, some threatenings of cerebral determination, which occasioned such a diminution of sensorial power, as to excite a feeling of anxiety in his friends and relations, though it was believed he was not aware of it himself; but, upon my

“The talking, or ready man,” is one, perhaps, who is rather more suited for our purpose in this Society ; for where is the use of the most extensive reading, if we cannot convey our information to others. It was the opinion of the late distinguished and learned Professor of Moral Philosophy, in Edinburgh (Dugald Stewart) that the spring of all human actions may be referred to *self-love* ; and perhaps, if we analyze our thoughts, such a principle may be very closely traced, if not openly detected ;—but surely, Gentlemen, that man who gathers the harvest must have some gratification in feeding the hungry, and planting a few seeds now and then, in a barren soil ; at least, if he has not, he is not one of us, in either thought, word, or deed. If, then, the ready man has fewer ideas, and those may not be profound, he has the power of expanding them in such a manner, as may not only attract, but delight his hearers, to an enviable pitch, and by which he often succeeds in gaining a popularity for his eloquence, which supersedes his reading competitor, the latter of whom treads his weary way in all the sober seriousness of profound cogitation. Although, then, Gentlemen, we may not be able to evince the oratorical powers which Demosthenes attained, or that which Cicero displayed, we have it in our

visiting him this last summer, he convinced me that their impressions were erroneous, for he not only related to me candidly the nature of his attack, but stated also the singular fact I have now to convey to the Society, viz. that of his not being able to recollect or repeat any *strange* names mentioned to him, and such was his mental distress, by the effort of recollection, that he could neither eat, drink, nor sleep, and was obliged frequently to rise in the night, to appeal to any one who could satisfy his doubts ; therefore, upon my first coming into his house, he said to me, without assigning any reason, “ Now, Doctor, when you are talking to me of any people whose names I am not acquainted with, say, Mr. A. or Mr. B. or Dr. A. or Dr. B.—for if you tell me their names it distresses me to think of them.” Notwithstanding which, Gentlemen, this reading man would, I am sure, though not of the medical profession, delight in passing one intellectual evening among us.

power to evince an ardent zeal, both useful to ourselves and creditable to the society. I was lately assured by Sir Astley Cooper, that zeal had done more for him as a Lecturer, than all the eloquence he possessed, or the knowledge he could attain ; for without such zeal, he was convinced, that a public teacher would soon find he had to address nothing but empty benches. I may also here quote a passage from a work just now issued from the press, by my learned friend, the Rev. Dr. Card, Vicar of Malvern, in his Dissertation on the Priory of Great Malvern, page 9, who says that, “Whenever a writer is firmly assured of whatever he relates, his narrations generally bear an impression of truth to others.” I come now to the writing, or, as our learned instructor says, “the correct man,” for whom there is also a place among us ; aye, and a very useful one too, for the obvious reason of that which appears upon paper, should be the result of both reading and reflection, and is diametrically opposed to the line represented to be that of the talking man ; for, as I have told you that the latter often expands a *few* ideas, and magnifies small things into great, the former, or writing man, must condense *many* ideas into a small compass, or he will not only both waste paper and ink, but he will find comparatively few who will peruse his “labour of love” with the same delight with which he penned it. There is, too, another point to be noticed in the writing man, which I have myself often laboured to regulate, without success—and that is, the great difference in the activity of our minds, not only under different impressions, but under the same impressions at different times of the day ; but so it is, like the body which we know is heightened and enlarged in the morning by the repose of night, so often the mind has enjoyed tranquil sleep, the sensorial power is accumulated, and, consequently, the mind invigo-

rated to such an extent, that I recollect the late eloquent Professor of the Practice of Physic in Edinburgh (Dr. Gregory) to say, that he had made marginal notes in books upon abstruse points, in the morning, which he could not himself comprehend at night. I have, therefore, often exercised my mind in this way, as a digest of my thoughts, for the purpose of coming to a correct conclusion, upon some specific point, and have found it answer the purpose. I therefore at once determined to think all I could upon paper, and, in this respect, to a certain extent, may be considered as a *selfish man*; but being flattered by the auspices of this Society, I am induced to travel a little out of my beaten track, and thus escape from my closet: although the *fire* of ambition is quenched, and the spark of emulation nearly extinguished, it is now feebly ignited for your amusement, although not, perhaps, for your information and edification.

I will, therefore, at the risk of being thought a little egotistical, wander a little from the path of my purpose, by transcribing for you, *verbatim et literatim*, that which I wrote so far back as the month of April, 1819, in confirmation of what I have advanced: the subject being

“ON THE ADVANTAGE OF METHOD.”

Convinced of the utility of system in the daily occurrences of life, first suggested to me the advantage to be derived from my establishing a regular plan for committing my thoughts to paper: first, because it gives a facility to expression; secondly, because sentiments committed to writing must force and command a digest of the subject which leads to conclusion. The keeping, therefore, a well-arranged common-place book, for this purpose, enables you to revise your ideas, and, as passing events occur, of also adding to that stock of knowledge which every individual finds it useful to apply, be his situation

in life whatever it may, and particularly to those of the medical profession. Many men, for want of method in thinking, but otherwise of strong intellect, are deterred from arranging their thoughts, thereby many useful ideas may be lost, which, if recorded, may have been gratifying to themselves, and instructive to others; whereas, if he would determine to express himself upon paper, and fancy himself writing for the criticism of the Press, he would soon find the habit would give him excellence more than sufficient to brave the ordeal of criticism, or the jaundiced eye of sarcasm; at the same time, it so impresses the subject upon the memory, as to give the individual a great advantage over those who think more superficially. For these reasons, and these alone, I now wish to commence a series of remarks, which may be a digest for the present, and a reference in case of future need: not that I have the vanity to suppose that any thing I may thus arrange will be worthy the perusal of others; but it fills up a vacant hour, and is to me a greater source of recreation, than most of the amusements which the wealth and population of this great and growing town of Liverpool affords.

I have long laboured to adopt some satisfactory system of this kind, and have been in the constant habit of retailing such trifles, as many may think unimportant, because I have found them to lead to important results.

What, therefore, can be more delightful than this exercise of thought, and what more satisfactory than having recourse to it methodically arranged, to assist future decision upon important points which you may have to digest at your leisure, and compelled to decide upon with a promptitude which may threaten the strength of your judgment, and the purity of your intentions?

I have thus, Gentlemen, ventured to offer these few remarks, at the risk of forfeiting your approbation, both

in matter and manner of its communication ; and which I have been prompted the more to do, under the feeling that you have a right to demand from me some acknowledgement of the responsibility I feel, by the situation you have thought proper to place me in ; and be assured that, though I may fail in making that impression I would fain hope to effect, I will yield to none in my anxiety to effect it. I could enter much more into detail of the advantages to be derived from any body of men thus associating themselves, but as I conceive we are all alive to its utility, and many may soon feel its power and extent, as it “grows with its growth, and strengthens with its strength,” I forbear to trespass much longer on your indulgence. I fancy, however, I have in perspective the influence which this Society may be capable of calling into action—powers which neither prejudice nor opposition can supplant.

I have thus, Gentlemen, given you a brief outline of my feelings towards the Society, and also slightly glanced at the general cast of characters who compose it. You may possibly expect that I should not leave untouched the duties of those who preside, and also the conduct of those whom we are called upon to listen to : such a detail would, however, I fear, not only be trespassing too long on your indulgence, but anticipating actions which must depend upon fortuitous events, and which may be beyond the control of any individual, however exalted, conspicuous, or meritorious that individual may be.

I wish, therefore, merely to state, that as far as regards myself, it is my most anxious and zealous intention to foster and encourage intellectual talent, and meritorious attainments, come from whatever quarter they may ; to suppress undue or ill-timed presumption by every gentle means in my power ; and more especially to discourage all personalities, as being the essence of discord, and a

poison to the harmony and good fellowship which ought, and I hope ever will, bind us together, as brethren, in unity of purpose, in benevolence of design, and magnanimity of sentiment; and that whilst we labour to show that "knowledge is power," unless that knowledge is clothed with humility, it availeth not the possessor, but will, as I have before alluded to, sooner or later, prove

"Res detestabilis et caduca."

Permit me, Gentlemen, to beg you will accept my most heartfelt thanks, for having favoured me with your attention to this, I fear, imperfect address. It is, however, a production, I may say, an effusion, I could not resist, for the purpose of showing you, that however much I may be deficient I may be in contributing, by the efforts of my mind, and the experience of my years, to present to you such information as the situation you have placed me in not only calls for, but demands, I could not allow this opportunity to pass, without thus evincing the disposition to effect it.

This Society, consequently, has the possession of my warmest feelings to promote, by every means in my power, its respectability, to uphold the honour of its members, and every advantage to be derived from it, "through evil report, and good report," in whatever way you think proper to call for it.

