

**Address delivered at the commencement of the medical session in
Marischal College and University, on the 2nd November, 1857 / by Wm.
Henderson.**

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Angus Fraser Jun
Mar. Coll
Aberdee
Dec. 1857. 8.

ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE

COMMENCEMENT OF THE MEDICAL SESSION

IN

Marischal College and University,

ON THE 2ND NOVEMBER, 1857.

BY WM. HENDERSON, M.D.

Lecturer on Materia Medica.

PRINTED BY REQUEST.

ABERDEEN:

PRINTED BY WILLIAM BENNETT,
42 CASTLE STREET.

1857.

I HAD no thought of printing this Address; but a request having been made to me by some of those who had listened to it, that I would allow them to print it for distribution among their fellow Students, I did not feel myself at liberty to refuse, because, as it had been delivered in a public assembly of the Professors, Lecturers, and Medical Students of the University, I considered it as being already in some manner public property.

I feel gratified by the favourable opinion of the Address which prompted the request, (much more favourable than I myself entertain,) and shall be happy if it be found to conduce in any degree towards giving a right direction to the mind of any of the Students.

WILLIAM HENDERSON.

SCHOOLHILL, November, 1857.

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A D D R E S S, & c

GENTLEMEN,

Another Session of our Medical School is about to commence, and it has fallen upon me to address a few remarks to you, (in compliance with the commendable custom, which has of late been introduced in almost all the Medical Schools of this country,) previous to your entering on the study of the various departments of Medical Science to which your attention will be specially directed during the ensuing months.

There is some difficulty connected with the fulfilment of this duty ;—a difficulty which I doubt not has been felt by most who have been called to prepare an address for such an occasion,—namely, the difficulty of selecting the subject on which it might be most suitable to speak. The temptation is considerable, to enter into a review of the progress of Medical Science or Literature, either in their general aspects or with reference to some of their special departments ; but such an address would hardly be suitable to any except those who have already come nearly to the termination of their Academical course of Medical studies, and it would be nearly unintelligible, and altogether uninteresting, to those who are now about to enter, or have only just entered, on the study of Medicine. Other subjects, more or less strictly professional, have also presented themselves to my mind, but all of them liable, in greater or less degree, to the same objection ; and it has appeared to me to be on the whole best to limit myself to a few remarks such as may be intelligible to all, and which may be useful, some of them especially to the beginner, and others to the more advanced student ; and if these remarks assume in some degree the form of counsels or cautions, I may be permitted to hope that they will be received in the same frank and friendly spirit in which they are offered.

In the first place, then, let me observe that the study of

the Medical Sciences, in their various departments and relations, is abundantly sufficient to occupy the most active and energetic mind; and to those who really devote themselves to it, it possesses a fascination capable of exciting the deepest interest. Moreover, the object which is the end and aim of the Medical Profession—the preservation of health, and the alleviation of suffering—is one which all must feel to be well worthy of every exertion which the student can make, in pursuit of the knowledge that will enable him in some degree to attain it. An acquaintance with the Sciences and Arts involved in the general term, *the study of Medicine*, is not to be picked up by accident as it were, in the intervals of other and more agreeable occupations, but must be the result, and can only be the result, of long continued and laborious effort. The student, while he treasures up in his memory, and carefully weighs in his judgment, the facts, observations, and conclusions, recorded by others, must, at the same time, be continually observing, comparing, and generalizing facts, inferring consequences, and deducing conclusions from what passes under his own eye.

The first counsel which I would press on your attention then is, to give your mind wholly to your studies;—to allow no other object or pursuit to occupy you, so as to withdraw your chief attention from that which you have in view, namely, the acquisition of that knowledge which may fit you for becoming useful, intelligent, and successful practitioners of the Medical Art.

The next observation which I would make is, that it is not every young man who is fitted to become a student of Medical Science. It may be true that very slender abilities, and a very slight previous education, may be sufficient to enable a man to go through a routine of prescribing for the treatment of ordinary cases of disease;—to make a trade, in short, of the Practice of Medicine;—but the man who does so incurs a fearful responsibility, and cannot fail to bring guilt on his own soul. In order, however, to the intelligent cultivation of Medical Science, much previous training, and an extensive course of previous study, are requisite.

Very much information of the most valuable kind is contained in books written in other languages, both ancient and modern, and many of these are not translated, nor likely to be translated, into English;—it must be remembered too, that even when a translation is procurable,

it is liable to this disadvantage, that owing to peculiarity of style in the translator, or to misapprehension of the meaning of the author, or to other causes, passages are of frequent occurrence, in most translations of scientific works, which are either so obscure, or so palpably erroneous, as to destroy much of the confidence which is felt in appealing to an author's own statements of his researches or opinions. Those books which are not translated are of course sealed to every one who is not acquainted with the language in which they are written; and, thus, a Student of Medicine, who has not been prepared for entering on his studies by the previous study of those languages in which Medical facts and reasonings have been recorded, is shut out from an acquaintance with much that would be of the greatest use to him in the prosecution of his studies, and in the practice of his profession. It has of late years become not uncommon among Medical Students to underrate the study of the languages of Greece and Rome, because it is now a long time since medical authors used to write in these tongues, and the theories of Medicine that prevailed when they were in use have mostly become obsolete now. But, besides that the study of these languages, and of the Greek and Roman Classics, has a powerful and unquestionable influence in expanding and maturing the powers of the mind, there is a mistake here, arising, as it would seem, from a notion that the progress of the human intellect in the investigation of scientific truth is a straightforward one, like that of a man travelling on a straight road, who, the longer he travels, is the farther in advance of the places he has already passed, and will never (unless he goes out of the way), be brought back to them again. So far, however, is this from being the case, that a comparison almost precisely the reverse of this one has not unfrequently been used, and the mind of man, in its pursuit of scientific truth, has been likened to a man walking round and round the base of a hill, seeking in vain for a path that shall lead him to the top, trying again and again, at various intervals, those which he had formerly attempted without success, and perhaps pushing a little farther through the thicket than he had done in his previous attempts. So, it has been alleged, the speculations and theories that were at one time accepted as explanations of natural phenomena, but have long been discarded, may be expected to be revived again, perhaps with some slight modification derived from the discoveries

that have since been made. Without affirming the correctness of this allegation, or of the view on which it is founded, I have no hesitation in saying that, in relation to the investigation of Medical truth, there is sufficient foundation for it to warrant the conclusion, that the speculations of by-gone ages ought not to be neglected, inasmuch as several of them have made their appearance again in a new dress within a comparatively recent period. And while this consideration furnishes, as I think it does, a strong argument in favour of the Student of Medicine applying himself to the study of the Greek and Latin languages, let me add that there is no person acquainted with the immense accumulation of facts and practical observations contained in the works of the Medical Writers of ancient times, but must be sensible of the very great advantage which a student, possessing a knowledge of these languages, has over one to whom these stores of information are not accessible.

It seems less necessary to occupy time in recommending the study of those modern languages in which the recent researches and discoveries of the ablest Physicians on the Continent are recorded, because, owing to the frequency of intercourse, and other causes independent altogether of the Medical and Scientific investigations in which they have been used, a feeling of the necessity of studying them has, of late years, become much more general than it formerly was.

A great deal more, however, is required in order to fit a young man for entering on the study of Medicine, than a knowledge of certain living or dead languages. The Sciences of Mathematics, Natural History, Natural Philosophy, in all its branches, and Mental Philosophy, are all of them replete with facts and reasonings, which it is of the utmost consequence that the Student of Medicine should know, because, when he comes to be a Practitioner, and to have occasion to apply the principles which a knowledge of them would furnish, he will have neither time nor opportunity for learning them. On this point it is unnecessary to dwell at much length, as few will be inclined to dispute the truth of this statement. Let me as an instance just advert to the impossibility of reasoning with confidence on the forces and directions of the muscular actions of the body, without an acquaintance with Mathematical and Dynamical Science. In like manner the motions of the Fluids of the body and many other actions of the animal system, depending in great part on the laws of Hydrodynamics, must re-

main an inscrutable mystery to those who have not made these laws a subject of study ; and the reciprocal relations of the affections of the mind and the functions of the animal economy, receive from the Science of Mental Philosophy many important elucidations, which are of course altogether beyond the grasp of one who has not acquainted himself with that Science.

My second advice to you, therefore, is not to fall into the mistake of supposing that to enter on the study of Medicine requires no previous preparation, or that Medical Science is a subject by itself, having no connection with, or dependence on other kinds of knowledge ; for, in fact, there is scarcely one—perhaps there is not any—department of Science or Literature which is not capable of affording the Medical Student very material assistance. *Cæteris paribus*, the young man whose previous education has been the most liberal, will make the most satisfactory progress in his Medical Studies.

In the next place. When a young man enters on the study of Medicine, he finds himself called on to acquire a knowledge, not of a single Science, and an Art founded on it, but of a number of independent though related Sciences and Arts ; and if he neglect, or pass slightly over any of them, he will materially retard his own progress.

This being the case, it is obvious that in order to prevent his attention from being distracted and dissipated, and in order that each step he takes may serve not to confuse him, but to assist him in his further progress, it is necessary for him to conduct his studies methodically—to lay down and carefully adhere to a plan of study by which those subjects which form as it were the basis and foundation of a Medical education shall be the first to occupy his attention, while those other branches which teach the deductions from the principles furnished by them, and the application of these principles in practice, shall be left till a more advanced period of his studies. In regard to this, indeed, the regulations of the various examining boards, and still more clearly the plan of examination for degrees in Medicine adopted by this University, indicate in some measure the proper course to be pursued ; but serious mistakes are sometimes made in this matter, and therefore it may not be amiss to bestow a few moments on the consideration of a point so important to the Student ; for it must be remembered that a mistake of this kind, in the commencement of his studies, may have an

injurious influence in his progress and attainments during the whole course of his after life.

The object of the Medical Profession being the cure or alleviation of the diseases to which the human frame is liable, it is almost needless to say that the first step which a student has to take, in order to qualify himself for the intelligent practice of the Profession, is to make himself acquainted with the structure of that frame. This structure is diversified and complicated; and this very complication and diversity, while they render the study more difficult, render it at the same time more indispensable. The study of *Anatomy* then lies at the very outset of the student's career, and very much of his after success in his studies will depend on the diligence and accuracy with which he studies this first branch.

The next thing to which he requires to direct his attention is the consideration of the uses and functions to which the various organs of the body are subservient, and the laws by which their actions are regulated. This forms the province of the department sometimes known by the name of *Physiology*, and sometimes called the *Institutes of Medicine*.

Connected with these two branches and arising out of them are other two, embracing the changes which the structure and the functions of the body undergo in consequence of disease. To the former of these, the name of *Pathological Anatomy* is generally applied; sometimes, however, it is termed—(using rather a definition than a name)—*the Anatomy of Morbid Structure*, which is often contracted into the absurd appellation of *Morbid Anatomy*. The latter is termed simply *Pathology*, the epithets Surgical and Medical being sometimes prefixed to indicate differences in the nature of the cause by which the change of function has been produced, and of the means to be adopted for its removal.

Closely connected with the changes in structure and function produced by disease, is another subject, without a knowledge of which, the most intimate acquaintance with the structure and functions of the human frame, and with all the changes which these undergo in consequence of disease, will be practically of no avail. I mean, the inquiry into the symptoms or outward indications by which we are enabled to judge of the nature of the changes in structure or function that may be taking place beyond the reach of our direct observation.

Hitherto, in all the British Schools of Medicine, this subject, instead of being taught, as in my opinion it ought to be, as a separate and substantive branch of Medical Science, is included as a part of the study of Practical Medicine; but, if any proof be required that it differs essentially from this, it is furnished by an observation which was once made by the late Dr. Matthew Baillie. "I think," said he, "that I can distinguish a disease as well as most men, but there are many who can cure it as well or better than I." In several of the Continental Schools the difference is recognised, and this branch is made a separate subject of study, under the name of *Symptomatology*, or (in allusion to the chief object to be attained by its study, viz., the clearly distinguishing any disease from all others by the symptoms which attend it), *Diagnostics*.

Having proceeded thus far, the student requires now to turn his attention in another direction, and to inquire into the nature and modes of action of those substances which are capable of influencing the functions of the human body, and of preventing or correcting, by their timely and judicious use, any deviation in these functions from the state of health.

To investigate and ascertain these is the object of the branch of Medical Science denominated *Materia Medica*, which, in its largest and most legitimate acceptation, embraces the consideration of the nature, actions, and uses of all those means, agents, and substances, that are capable of being employed, either for the preservation of health or for the cure of diseases.

In the former respect, a close connection subsists between it and certain departments of Physics and of Mental Philosophy; while, in the latter relation, it is more closely allied to, and more immediately dependent on, a previous acquaintance with Natural History and Chemistry. Without a knowledge of the one, the student will be unable to recognise many natural productions, the use of which, as remedies against disease, is of the highest value; and unless he possess an acquaintance with the other, he will be not only incapable of preparing many most useful remedies which are the result of chemical action, but also unable to understand the clearest explanation that can be given of the modes in which they are prepared, or of their chemical relations to other substances.

After this course of preparatory study of what may be strictly called the Medical Sciences, the student will be in a

position to enter with advantage on the study of the practical application of the principles furnished by them to the cure or alleviation of disease.

This application constitutes, properly speaking, the *Medical Art*, which is commonly regarded as consisting of three departments, viz., *Medicine*, in relation to internal diseases ; *Surgery*, relating to external injuries ; and *Midwifery*, relating to pregnancy, parturition, and the diseases of infancy ; though the limits of these three departments are not very accurately defined, and it does not seem very desirable that they should be so.

There is, however, another branch of Medical knowledge which is of great and increasing importance, viz., *Medical Jurisprudence*, which may be said to serve (as Diagnostics and *Materia Medica* do), to connect the purely speculative Medical Sciences with the directly useful Medical Arts. The object of this branch, as it is stated by Paris and Fonblanque, is to render medicine "subservient to the construction, elucidation, and administration of the laws, and to the preservation of the public health."

To this branch will now be added, in this University, the subject of *Medical Logic*,—the laws of sound reasoning as applied to medical questions in general, and to medico-legal investigations in particular. As yet, this subject has not, in this country, received the attention which it deserves, and this University is the only British Medical School in which there is any provision for teaching it ; a circumstance which may well cause surprise in this age of boasted progress and improvement, when we consider how few books on medical subjects, especially of a practical nature, we can look into, without meeting with inconsequential reasoning, unsound deductions, and invalid arguments ; and when we remember that it has become almost proverbial, that a medical man, who is put into the witness box in a Court of Justice, scarcely ever comes out of it without exposing both himself and his profession. This stigma is certainly not true to the full extent ;—but it cannot be denied that it is so far well founded, that many medical men are lamentably deficient in a knowledge of the principles of sound reasoning.

In this brief view of the mutually-related branches of study to which the Medical Student is called to devote his attention successively, I have left out of view *the Hospital attendance*, which forms a prominent part of the occupation of every student, and which is very properly required by all the ex-

amining boards. My reason for this was, because it is necessarily spread over a great part of the course of his studies, and because its value to him is exceedingly different at the different points of his progress.

The student who is only commencing his Medical Studies can derive but little advantage from seeing, in the wards of an hospital, cases whose nature he knows nothing about, treated on principles with which he is unacquainted, by remedies of which he scarcely knows even the names, and these prescribed in a language with which he has probably little familiarity. But it is obvious that, at an after period, the very same cases might be most instructive to him. I do not question but that, when he has become in some degree acquainted with the principles of Medical Science, the recollection of the cases which he had previously seen, but did not at the time comprehend, may be in some degree useful to him; but I am disposed to think that this comparatively small measure of usefulness is obtained by an injudicious sacrifice of a good deal of valuable time, and that, in order to render his hospital attendance in the highest degree beneficial to him, the student would do well not to make it, as is sometimes done, the very first step towards the commencement of his Medical Studies, but to postpone it until he is in some degree qualified to make an intelligent use of the cases which present themselves in the wards of the hospital.

Another remark seems necessary before quitting this subject. The student may interfere greatly with his own progress, not only by misarranging the course of his studies, but also by endeavouring to accomplish too much at once;—by filling up his time with attendance on classes, so as to leave him little leisure, and probably less inclination, for private study. He ought constantly to remember that the object of a course of lectures is not, and cannot be, to communicate a full acquaintance with the subject lectured on, but to put him on a plan for instructing himself, and to furnish him with suggestions that may help him forward. There scarcely can be a greater mistake than that which students sometimes fall into, of attending so many classes at once, as to render it impossible for them to prosecute in private the study of the subjects they have heard lectured on in public.

Perhaps it may be expected that, after having given this summary view of the elements of which the Medical Education of a student is made up, I should proceed to point out the facilities and advantages which this University offers to

the student who is desirous of profiting by them. This task, however, I must beg leave to decline. I believe that there are such advantages and facilities, and I can with confidence say for my colleagues, as well as myself, that we endeavour to make the most of them for the benefit of the students; but those whom I now address have already made their selection of a Medical School, and do not need that I should commend to them the one which they have preferred; and those who have given the preference to other schools are not here to be told how they might have done better.

It is time, however, that I should now address a few words to those among you whose studies are approaching their academical termination, and who will shortly be entering on the active and responsible duties of the Medical Profession.

It is almost needless to say, what those among you who have prosecuted their studies with the greatest ardour and success will be the first to feel and acknowledge the truth of,—that the period of your studies, so far from being near its termination, is in fact only beginning; for it lasts throughout the whole life of every intelligent and conscientious Practitioner.

There are three objects which a man may propose to himself in practising the Medical Profession. Probably they are all present, and exert a certain influence on the mind of every young man when he enters on the active duties of a Medical life; and the proportion in which they do so, while it is liable to much variety in different individuals, and to gradual changes in the same individual, must necessarily give a character, either for good or evil, to all his professional conduct. These objects are—*First*, the Love of Science, and the desire to extend the limits of Medical knowledge by research and observation;—a most praiseworthy object when it is kept in its own place, but one which is quite capable of leading a young man far astray, if in the ardent prosecution of it he forgets that the end and aim of the Medical Profession is not the extension of Medical Science, but the cure or alleviation of disease. He should always remember that patients are not “things to try experiments on,” but his fellows, possessing rights equal to his own, which he ought to respect, and which a regard for the Divine rule, “all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them,” would keep him free of any wish to infringe. *Second*, the philanthropic desire to aid in relieving human suffering. This is the real object of all Medical treatment, and yet the feeling is one which may defeat its own object, through mistaken tender-

ness, or something akin to sentimentalism, under the guidance of which the treatment which is most appropriate for the cure of a disease may be left untried on account of the present suffering which its employment would give rise to. Even this, then, which is a feeling and desire that should always be present to the mind of the Medical man, requires to be properly regulated and directed. *Third*, the wish to acquire a competence by the exercise of a profession, in learning which no small amount of both money and time has been expended. As thus stated, the wish is to be commended; but if it be permitted to become the predominating object in a man's mind, it will assuredly give rise to sordid feelings and practices, of which, in a more healthy state, he would be ashamed. In connection with this point, I would observe that those who can spare little, or perhaps nothing, from their scanty means of support, for the remuneration of a Medical man, are nevertheless liable to the same diseases as their more wealthy neighbours, and in many cases their very poverty causes the disease to assume a more aggravated form. The right-thinking physician will, in treating the cases of the poor, consider only the duty that is incumbent on him, and in the zealous performance of it he will find a satisfaction that will amply reward him where he can look for no pecuniary recompence.

In approaching the conclusion of this address, let me say a few words on a subject which concerns you all equally.

The late venerated Mr. Simeon of Cambridge once put a question to me which made me feel uncomfortable, and which I could not answer. "Can you tell me" said he "why it is that so many of the members of a profession which is habitually employed in the study and investigation of the most excellent of God's works, and is daily called to observe most striking examples of His providential dealings with His creatures, are either avowed infidels, or altogether indifferent to evangelical truth?"

At that time there was but too good ground for this reproach against the Medical Profession. There were comparatively few among the Practitioners of Medicine, who, having the fear of God in their hearts, had the boldness to avow it before men. During the latter part of the last, and in the beginning of the present century, the poison of continental infidelity had so infected all the classes of society, that it was not to be expected that the Medical Profession should escape, but rather that it should take a lead, as the results of its investigations would seem naturally to fall in with the materialistic

speculations of the day. Yet there were even then some bright examples of men, who, while adorning their profession by their genius and their researches, were, at the same time, "not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, which is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth."

Through the mercy of God, the days of that darkness have in some measure passed away ; and it is not now (as it once was) regarded as a proof of a large intellect and a liberal mind, to reject the testimony of God, while accepting almost any other.

The number of those who sincerely believe the doctrines of Christianity, and give evidence of their sincerity by a conversation becoming the Gospel, has of late years been much increased ; and there are some considerations that encourage the hope that a progressively increasing proportion of the members of the Medical Profession are becoming alive to the claims of Divine truth on their attention and acceptance. I allude in particular to the increasing countenance which has recently been accorded to the cause of Medical Missions. These, until very lately, were regarded in any but a favourable light by the members of the Profession generally. But it is now acknowledged that as a Medical Practitioner will obtain access in many cases where a Missionary would be excluded, he may have opportunity, while relieving the diseases of the body, to direct the attention of his patients to the disease of the soul, which is not the less real, but only the more dangerous, because it is not felt ; and that it is his duty, and, if he be a Christian himself, will be his anxious desire, to avail himself of this opportunity.

Some still object to his doing so, and allege that it is ungenerous, as well as improper, in a Medical man, to take advantage of the influence which his Profession gives him to unsettle the religion of his patient. To this objection I conceive only one answer is necessary,—and that in the form of a question. Do those who make it really believe that the religion of Christ is the only true religion and that all others are false? Are they truly persuaded that "there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved?" Doubtless, discretion must be exercised in the choice of the time and manner of pressing the truth on the attention and acceptance of an invalid, and in this respect, Christian prudence, guided by the Holy Spirit vouchsafed in answer to earnest prayer, will furnish the best rule of action.

I will not detain you longer. I might have much enlarged my remarks on the subjects which I have noticed, and I

might have introduced other matters of not less importance, but my object being, not to prepare a treatise, but simply an introductory address, I did not conceive that it was necessary, or would be proper, to introduce every topic that might be interesting, or to undertake the full discussion of those which I might introduce.

Permit me, in conclusion, to express my earnest hope, that you may be enabled to prosecute your studies during the Session with that zeal which is sure, sooner or later, to meet with its reward.

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