

**The introductory address delivered at the opening of the Medical Department of King's College, London, session 1865-66 / by William O. Priestley.**

**Contributors**

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THE  
INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE OPENING OF THE  
MEDICAL DEPARTMENT

OF  
King's College, London

SESSION 1865-66

BY  
WILLIAM O. PRIESTLEY, M.D.

FELLOW OF THE ROYAL COLLEGES OF PHYSICIANS OF LONDON AND EDINBURGH ;  
PROFESSOR OF OBSTETRIC MEDICINE IN KING'S COLLEGE, ETC.

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## AN ADDRESS.

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DR JELF AND GENTLEMEN,

AT the commencement of another Medical year, my colleagues have imposed upon me the duty of opening the Session with an Introductory Address, and greeting alike new and old students.

The office of the lecturer on such an occasion as this is not an easy one. Besides the various provincial schools, there are no less than eleven Schools of Medicine in London, each of which inaugurates to-day, the beginning of the *Annus Medicus*, with a general address to students; and as this ceremony is repeated year after year, it may well be surmised there is not much scope left for originality, and that the mine of materials suitable for such addresses is long since worked out. My task is, however, rendered easier by the recollection that many of my audience are new students, just entering on their professional studies, to whom the whole realm of Medicine is as yet a *terra incognita*, and the simplest facts of the science shut up as it were in a sealed book. More advanced students may occasionally be the better for having their memories refreshed with what they have learned before; for there are some subjects which do not suffer by repetition, and certain truths which are so important that they cannot be too often reiterated.



The utterances of introductory lecturers may become wearisome from the frequency of their recurrence, and it may be scarcely possible to avoid the charge of indulging in what appear mere platitudes to the initiated; yet\* the custom of delivering an inaugural discourse can scarcely be dispensed with. It gives the Professor who is charged with the duty an opportunity of speaking on matters which cannot with propriety be entered into in the ordinary course of class-work; and he may speak of general principles and rules of conduct applicable to the whole domain of medical study without trenching on the special departments of his colleagues. To-day I may be as one who ascends a high tower, to take a general view of the country to be possessed, and looking over the high walls and enclosures separating the various departments of work, regard the several relations of each to the other, and the aspect as a whole; to-morrow we must descend into the several sections of our appointed work, and familiarise ourselves with the details.

In all the attempts of the rational medical practitioner to attain the objects of his art—the prolongation of human life, and the mitigation of human suffering—there are certain general principles, and, so to speak, modes of thought, which influence his conduct and practice, and this seems to me a very suitable occasion for endeavouring to indicate certain prominent medical truths, which may serve as land-marks during the course of your medical studies.

Like all other branches of knowledge, the science and art of Medicine has gone through vicissitudes, and passed through various phases of development.

There can be little doubt that the practice of Medicine has a most remote antiquity. Disease is probably almost as old as the human race itself, and co-extensive with its geographical distribution. As death made its inevitable invasion, various



expedients were had recourse to, with varying success, in the hope of warding off the dread enemy. The properties of certain substances, animal, vegetable, and mineral, could not long remain undiscovered even among the rudest people. In the range for articles of food, particular effects on the human body would be accidentally brought out, and the knowledge treasured up—the accumulated experience of individuals and families tending towards a common fund. We see this primitive stage of Physic among those savage tribes, whose habits and customs have been made known to us by travellers, and it closely resembles that described by authors as existing among more civilised nations at an early period of their history.

As time advanced, this simple medical empiricism became mixed up and clouded by mythology and superstition. Diseases were imputed to the vengeance of the gods, and cures were sought mainly through supernatural agencies. The priests thus became the dispensers of healing-power; and as the admitted favourites of the deities, professed to employ their mediatorial efforts with the offended god, while they administered remedies which were falsely pretended to be suggested by the now appeased deity himself. The terror and weakness of the credulous and ignorant patient made him, when suffering, an easy prey to a designing priesthood. When potions and lenitives failed, “verses were chanted to the sick, charmed words whispered into the ear, and magic sentences, in the form of amulets or talismans, hung about the neck.” If recovery followed, the priest took credit to himself; if the case was unsuccessful, he threw the whole blame on the implacable enmity of the gods.\*

\* See Meryon's *History of Medicine*.



Later we find the practice of Medicine mixed up with philosophical speculation ; ideas being substituted for facts, and conjecture taking the place of careful observation. The most ingenious theories were promulgated as to the causes and cure of disease ; and the most logical deductions were drawn from uncertain or false premises. With unstable foundations medical opinion swayed to and fro, oscillating between the two extremes, of heroic practice on the one hand, or mere trifling on the other. The world was thus distracted by an endless diversity of opinions. Medical men were divided into sects, called dogmatists, empirics, methodics or pneumatists ; each bent on upholding some ingenious hypothesis, bewildering themselves amid dialectic subtleties and wars of words, and all alike neglecting the simple observation of nature.

Again, we find even intelligent practitioners placing the most unbounded confidence in the good and evil influence of the heavenly bodies—regarding some as propitious, others as adverse to health—being careful to gather herbs when the moon was rising, full, or waning, and endeavouring to regulate the art of healing by astrological signs and symbols. It is not to be supposed, however, notwithstanding all this unscientific and superstitious practice of Medicine, and all the unsound theorising and dogmatising, that no advances were being made towards a better knowledge of the true scope and value of medical science. Every now and then a great stride was made in the right direction. Some master-mind, shaking off the soiling influence of mysticism and superstition, would rise above the shadows, and shed light on the path of truth.

As early as the 5th century before Christ, Medicine began to be really studied as a science, and practised as an art. At this period, intellectual progress in Greece made one of those sudden bounds, which even in these days of



mental culture seem marvellous. At this time Thucydides wrote his history of the Peloponnesian war ; Socrates and Plato, by their teachings in philosophy, conferred a dignity on our human nature ; Euripides and Aristophanes made their wonderful, and, indeed, unsurpassed achievements in dramatic art, and Zeuxis and Phidias astonished the world by their marvels of painting and sculpture.\*

It was a great epoch also in Medicine, for among these great contemporaries rose the divine man of Cos—the great father of Physic, Hippocrates. To his sagacity we owe so much, that it is almost impossible to overestimate it. Appearing at a time when Medicine was only a form of empirical deceit or unscientific dogma, he cleared the ground from all the dross and rubbish with which it was encumbered, and by his genius and industry, laid the foundations of Medicine on a philosophical basis. It is indeed surprising to look through his writings, and find there some of the great canons of our modern creed, the very corner-stones of our modern practice, appearing intensely luminous by contrast with the night of barbarism from which they were evolved. After Hippocrates came Aristotle, Celsus, Aretæus, Pliny, Galen, and Paulus Œgineta, all aiding in a greater or less degree to establish Medicine on a scientific basis ; and although the grain of their science was often mixed with abundance of chaff, yet all contributed materials of genuine worth to the profession they adorned. We *may* be surprised with our present light, to learn that Hippocrates believed the human body to be composed of four primary elements, air, fire, earth, and water, variously combined to produce the four cardinal humours—blood, phlegm, bile, and black bile ; to the equipoise

\* See Moir's *History of Medicine*.



of which he attributed health, and to the loss of such balance, disease : or to know that Plato considered continued fever to be occasioned by excess of fire ; quotidian by excess of air ; tertians of water ; and quartans of earth : that Aristotle over-liberally gave the heart three ventricles ; or that Galen believed the veins to have their origin in the liver. But it could scarcely be expected that when the world was mantled in the thick darkness of ignorance and superstition, physicians should be enabled fully and at once to emerge into pure sunlight. With but the most meagre knowledge of the fundamental sciences of Medicine, they “groped about in the pursuit of truth, proceeding with uncertain steps like men wandering about in darkness ;” but collectively they made Titanic efforts to raise it to the dignity of a science, and thus earned the gratitude of mankind.

We learn from Dr Meryon's *History of Medicine*, that what good work had been hitherto done was all but entirely undone during the middle ages. A great intellectual darkness overspread the lands, all the fountains of knowledge were dried up, and what of science there was, dwindled and well-nigh died out. The day-spring did not appear again until the anatomists of the 16th century gave the first stimulus to the study of the intimate structure of the human body. From this time forth the progress of Medicine as a science steadily advanced ; with uncertain steps it may be—the very nature of the subject rendering rapid progress difficult. The more recent researches of Naturalists, Physiologists, Pathologists, Chemists, Botanists, Pharmacutists, Physicians, Surgeons, and Obstetricians, have made more secure the foundations on which scientific Medicine rests ; and the discoveries of such men as Harvey and the Hunters have poured a flood of light on what was previously obscure and uncertain.



I have taken this cursory glimpse of the history of Medicine mainly to point out that the science of Medicine has been of slow and difficult development. "Science comes not by intuition. It is the accumulated experience, generalised into Law, of whole generations, of thinking men who have devoted themselves to its study;" and an intimate acquaintance with it is absolutely indispensable to him who would be a sound practitioner. One of the most important medical truths, which has been evoked from all the confusion of clashing hypotheses, and endless variety of opinion, is, that in the human body resides a power which not only sustains and preserves it in health, and enables it to oppose resistance to adverse influence—but more than this, recovers it, if suitable conditions can be procured, when stricken with injury or disease.

This great truth was long ago pointed out by Hippocrates, and though often lost sight of for a time, now stands out as a guiding-star, clear and bright, to influence every proceeding of the scientific physician and surgeon.

What the laws of *attraction* are to Astronomy, and those of *affinity* to Chemistry, such are those of what are termed *vital* force to Medicine. Without a due recognition and appreciation of these, the medical practitioner would be constantly at fault. On the one hand, overestimating the power he possesses to control diseased action; or on the other, going hopelessly wrong in his efforts at cure. All the attempts at healing on the part of the philosophical physician are based on an acquaintance with that *vis vitæ*, that *vis medicatrix naturæ*, which pervades the living organism, and preserves it in its integrity. As he knows that nature has ways and means peculiar to herself of throwing off the burdens imposed upon her by disease; that she is prepared for the storms, as well as for the calms of life;



instead of prescribing remedies, which may in theory be supposed to act specifically, homœopathically, or even allopathically, in uprooting illnesses, he endeavours to trace the source of the mischief, watches the indications which point towards restoration and cure, and by all means at his disposal, assists nature to adjust the balance of health.

Now, mark how different this method of healing is from the generally supposed way in which diseases are combated and cured. True, it may be said of the intelligent classes in our day, that they are no longer deluded by the expectation of miraculous interpositions for the cure of disease; neither do they rely on charms, or amulets, or astrological symbols; but educated and ignorant people in common entertain ideas of the art of healing which are entirely at variance with its actual state and progress, and which are far too mechanical in their tendencies. The common impression seems to be, that all diseases are entities, which, like parasites, attack the human body, or like poisons, corrupt the fountains of life; and that the physician has, or ought to have, or will have, when the science is more perfected, a specific remedy for each, a panacea for every physical ill. We see indications of this bias at every turn, in common conversation, in our intercourse with patients; even the press, so powerful for good or for evil, represents the same idea, and in our daily and weekly newspapers we find copied and recopied details of cures by newly-discovered specific remedies. Nay, further, certain heretical medical writers, possessed by the same notion, while asserting that rational practitioners, whom they nickname "Allopaths," cannot cure diseases by antagonistic medicines, propose another method, even more unsound, viz., to cure diseases *specifically* by medicines selected on the principle of "*similia similibus curantur.*" Nothing can be more erroneous or



more fallacious than this. The number of diseases traceable to morbid poisons is comparatively small, and the number of specifics we possess, or are likely to possess, is still smaller. And if we look closely into the *modus operandi* of a so-called specific—take quinine, for example, as a remedy for ague—it is very doubtful if it acts in any other way than as a powerful tonic, strengthening the vital force, and enabling it to oppose greater resistance to the invasion of disease. Indeed, in the larger proportion of ailments which affect the human frame, there is no ingrafting of a *materies morbi* which can be attacked and destroyed like a parasite, or neutralised, as we neutralise an acid, by an alkali; the disease is rather the result of unnatural conditions of life, which have altered or impaired nutrition and have ended in degeneration or destruction of the part affected. Thus, the healthy performance of function is prevented, and inconvenience, pain, and death are the consequences.

From this point of view, the practice of Medicine becomes a much more difficult and complicated process than it is ordinarily supposed to be. For, instead of being comprised in a number of recipes, or learning empirically what drug is best in this complaint or for that symptom, normal Anatomy and Physiology must be studied, the natural history of morbid changes must be mastered, the causes of disease understood, and the treatment, in most cases, must consist not so much in prescribing medicines, as in insuring those healthy conditions, which will give nature a chance of resuming her sway and performing *her own* method of cure.

I trust I may not be misunderstood. I would not lead the medical student to trust so implicitly to the restorative powers of nature, as to make him despise the resources of art, or



undervalue the services that medicines judiciously administered may render in the treatment of disease. A wise physician has truly said, "there is no curing diseases by Art, without first knowing how they are cured by Nature;" but the parody is not true, that the art of Medicine consists in amusing the patient while Nature cures the disease. Unfortunately, we have only to make acquaintance with this vital force, which possesses such wonderful attributes, speedily to learn, that unaided it is in many cases unable to oppose sufficient resistance to adverse influences, and is borne down and extinguished whenever the intensity of diseased action predominates. Nay, further, it is well established, that this force, however salutary in its general operations, may—as the force which drives a locomotive headlong to destruction when once it leaves its usual track—be so perverted as to lead to infinite mischief. On this point an eloquent friend has written, "Though Nature knits up wounds with her adhesive inflammation, by the very same method she glues the intestines into fatal entanglements, shackles the heart, and chokes up the wind-pipe. In *this* man, she soothes the grief of a wound by pouring out serum; in *that*, she makes the same effusion effectually close the rima glottidis. She spirts blood from the hæmorrhoidal vessels of Paul, who blesses her for saving him from apoplexy, of which very disease poor Peter dies, because she poured the very same fluid into his lateral ventricles, and so on; for man's body is a microcosm, in which one sees the play of Zoroaster's antagonist principles. Nature is ever the same—blessings are mixed with curses—the poisonous berry and the nutritious root are found on the same plant—there are balmy dews and pestilent fogs—fertilising streams and destroying deluges—and the lair of the murderous



lightning is in the cloud that floats across the blessed sunshine." \*

Such, gentlemen, are the incongruities you have to understand and contend with. And in reference to the administration of Medicines and the other resources of art, be not led to discard them or disbelieve in their efficiency, when you learn that they cannot act specifically, as you previously believed ; or know that in numberless cases Nature will work her own cure unaided. In the operations of the surgeon and obstetrician, the benefits are at once apparent in the removal of some cause of suffering, or in the deliverance from some imminent peril ; and in the management of medical cases by the physician, although the relation between cause and effect may not be so readily observable, yet the advantage is not the less real. Although he may have no specific for the poison of fever, he can assist its elimination by medicines which act on the excretory organs—he can palliate the distressing symptoms, and support the strength until the crisis is past. And in a case of pulmonary consumption, where no medicine can be expected to have the power of replacing the injured and lost lung tissue, he may yet hope to sustain the vital power, temper the amount of morbid action, and give Nature time to cicatrise and heal those yawning caverns he detects with such sad forebodings by the aid of his stethoscope. In treating diseases, the physician is, as a rule, if I may so speak, in the position of a constitutional minister ; only in exceptional cases, in that of a master. He interprets Nature's wants, removes hindrances out of her way ; sometimes, it may be, restrains and controls her. As Lord Bacon expresses it, "he is the servant and interpreter of Nature, and

\* Dr J. Addington Symonds, *Med. Chir. Rev.*, 1846.



feels that he can only understand and act in proportion as he observes and contemplates the order of Nature ; more he can neither know nor do."

The function of the medical practitioner is not, however, confined to the treatment of diseases and injuries *in præsentia*. A new department of science has sprung up, little known to the ancients, and which has been almost created in our time, called "preventive medicine." In this, the medical practitioner has an almost illimitable field for the use of his talents, unbounded scope for the exercise of benevolence and philanthropy. On him now devolves the duty of tracing upwards to their very well-springs those death-streams, which, small and imperceptible at first, converge to swell the flood of preventable mortality, and to stem them, it may be, before, by widening, deepening, and strengthening, they overwhelm whole communities of our fellow-men. And it is not alone the medical officer of health who is privileged to ward off dangers which everywhere beset individuals and families. The physician, surgeon, the general practitioner (however humble their sphere), have, as they move about among their patients, incessant opportunities of diffusing a better knowledge of the laws of health, and inculcating more intelligent views as to the way in which derangements in the animal economy are properly adjusted. In these boasted days of intelligence, it is marvellous to contemplate the dearth and destitution of sanitary knowledge which prevails among rich and poor, and the carelessness or wilfulness which is evinced in matters of vital importance to health. It has always seemed to me that there is much in common between the duties of the clergyman and medical man. They divide together, obedience to the Divine command, "preach the Gospel, and heal the sick." One-half the duty of the medical man consists in teaching



and preaching how people may, in a physical sense, lead better lives, and if his heart be in his work, as he sees young and old stricken down by diseases which might have been prevented, "he burns with a passionate earnestness to bring back the bodily economy to its allegiance to the supreme guide," just as the conscientious clergyman of the Gospel yearns to bring back the erring soul to its Maker. And rely upon it, the Healing Art is in more than one sense, as it has been designated, "the right arm of the Church," for, if it makes men stronger, longer-lived, and healthier, it will make them also wiser, and happier, and better Christians.

It will be within your province, putting aside your own selfish interests, to instruct the mother how she should feed and clothe and nurse her tender infant, so that that terrible mortality-bill may be lessened, which tells us that one child in every three dies before the completion of its fifth year; to counsel the young how they may best attain a vigorous and healthy adult life; to persuade the wealthy to enjoy their riches moderately, and thus avoid the ailments incident to too luxurious living; to teach the poor how, with scanty means, good ventilation and cleanliness, with sobriety, are the more necessary, and that the open sewers and dust-heaps at his very door are hot-beds for pests and fevers; to shame the landlord who, for greed of gain, lets tenements to the ignorant poor, so unwholesome that he would scarcely keep his own dogs in them; to stand between the utterly destitute, who have sickness added to poverty, and the overseers or guardians who, it may be, are more careful about the increase of rates than the relief of distress; to warn employers, who crowd their workmen and women in close rooms, that they are wholesale demoralisers of their species, and that the employed, under such circumstances, must break down in health, or go to the



gin-shop to palliate the effects of foul air; to intercede with an over-parsimonious government for an improvement in the diet and lodging of soldiers and sailors; in a word, to "carry Hygiène into the army, the factory, and the nursery, down rivers, and across fields."\*

And how, gentlemen, are you to qualify yourselves for these great duties, for these great responsibilities. Long ago, Hippocrates wrote that there were four qualities indispensable to every good physician, and in using the appellation physician, he used it generically, as I do to-day, and included all medical men. These qualities were *learning*, *sagacity*, *humanity*, and *probity*. And although this aphorism was put on record before the commencement of the Christian era, it is just as true now in the middle of the 19th century. *Learning* you must have, even if you content yourselves merely with acquiring just so much knowledge as will safely carry you through the various examinations which form the portals for admission to the Medical Profession. It has recently been wisely ordered, that every student, at the very commencement of his medical classes, shall afford evidence that his general education has not been neglected, and that his mind has been so far exercised by preliminary studies, that he is the better fitted to enter a professional career, and to solve those great problems of life which come especially within the province of the medical man. And, although it may at first seem hard that for you the portals have been narrowed, the entrance made more difficult as compared with former times, yet I am convinced that in after-days, when the ordeals have been passed through, and the difficulties surmounted, you will see that the alterations made are just and right, and that they are only

\* *Horæ Subsecivæ*, by John Brown, M.D.



in consonance with the spirit and demand of the times. We have now competitive examinations for the public services, and University middle-class examinations, and, looking at the mighty interests involved, the great charge of health and life committed to the medical man, the early mental discipline surely ought not to be too lax, lest, later, the grasp of those professional branches also come to be imperfect; and imperfect, because the early training has been loose and defective. Dr Latham, one of the most thoughtful of the fathers in Physic, says, "I wish to see physicians still instructed in the same discipline, and still reared in fellowship and communion with the wisest and best men, and that not for the sake of what is ornamental merely, and becoming to their character, but because I am persuaded that that discipline which renders the mind most capacious of wisdom, and most capable of virtue, can hold the torch and light the path to the sublimest discoveries in every science." And, although not many of those here present may aspire to practise eventually as physicians, yet the same learning and discipline are equally important to the general practitioner. The lines of demarcation between the various grades of the profession, as education is more generally diffused, grow fainter and fainter. It is now mainly a question of means or opportunity which determines whether a medical student shall in the future practise as a consulting physician, or surgeon, or as a general practitioner. In ordinary, everyday life, the same weighty responsibilities rest on all, and the learning of him who takes medical charge of his humbler brethren, must be as profound as that of him who prescribes for the wealthier. In truth, gentlemen, the amount and diversity of knowledge which must be possessed by the well-informed medical man may well deter you from entering so laborious a profession, unless you have well counted the cost,



and have determined to conquer the difficulties. Medicine, in its application, is the sum and complement of so many arts and sciences, that it seems to range over the whole domain of human acquirements, and cull from each for its own purposes. The curriculum laid down for your guidance, carefully adjusted though it be, when fully developed, merely sows the seeds of what ought to produce, when properly fostered, in future years, a mature and luxuriant crop. As students in a Medical School, you learn, as it were, the mere alphabet of your profession ; you lay but the foundations of medical knowledge. The superstructure must be built afterwards. You need Classical knowledge, as well for mental discipline as to know what has been secured for science by those who flourished in years gone by ; and a knowledge of modern tongues, that you may be made acquainted with what is being done by contemporaries in other countries, and be able to keep pace with science in its constant advances. You need to study general literature, that you may learn much of men and manners, and get an insight into the depths of that human nature which is common both to physician and patient. Probably a sense of the necessity of this made Sydenham say, as much in earnest as in jest, when asked what was the best course of study for a medical student, "Read *Don Quixote* ; it is a very good book ; I read it still."

And, besides what store of acquirements he needs to draw upon for professional uses, the medical man, if he is to retain that position in society which is justly accorded to him as a member of one of the learned professions, must be versed more or less in such current knowledge and literature, and be familiar with such topics as form food for reflection and discussion among well-educated men generally. Depend upon it, he will make none the less a good practical physician,



because his mind is well stored with a diversity of subjects not purely medical. It is a special feature of King's College, that it offers large inducements to medical students to extend their acquirements beyond the mere range of necessary medical subjects, and may well attract gentlemen who discern that Medicine is not a handicraft to be followed as a means of living, but a study that may cultivate his entire mind, and exercise the whole of its powers.

*Sagacity* a medical man must have, because otherwise, however learned he may be, he will scarcely be able to cope "with the complicated and fugitive, and often equivocal phenomena of disease," requiring, as Dugald Stewart the philosopher remarks, "a far greater proportion of discriminating sagacity than those of Physics, strictly so called, resembling more nearly the phenomena about which metaphysics, ethics, and politics are conversant." This sagacity seems to be a combination of the power of accurately observing, and the power of forming a correct judgment from the premises. I fancy it is more than any other of the necessary furnishings of a physician, a natural gift, the possession of which, other things being equal, makes all the difference between the strong and weak practitioner in the exercise of his art. Just as we have one man a poet born; just as Cuvier was the prince of naturalists, and the late Robert Brown *facile princeps* of botanists, on account of natural gifts; so we have some medical men with minds so organised, that they see intuitively, as it were, the significance of obscure signs, and judge more truly than others the indications for accurate guidance. Still, even in respect to this sagacity, much may be done by all to strengthen the faculty, even if it be originally weak. The early liberal training formerly noticed—some of those studies, such as *Materia Medica*, Botany, Chemistry, Natural History, which form the



subjects of your first year's studies, and which are apt to be lightly valued by the medical student, because they are regarded as not essentially practical—all these, besides imparting special information, so aid in cultivating observation, in strengthening the power of discriminating minute differences in colour, shape, size, smell, and touch—a power of such infinite value in practical Medicine—that even on this account, if for no other, they deserve to be zealously cultivated.

It cannot be too strongly insisted upon, that a medical curriculum ought to have its chief value in the habit of thought it impresses on the student, in the way it teaches him how to observe on his own account, and how to draw correct inferences from what he observes. Professors can do no more than indicate general principles; the application of those principles must be made by yourselves. In the treatment of disease, the teacher can explain how experience and an average of results point out one class of means and remedies as efficient, others as hurtful and dangerous. But practically, every case has its own peculiarities, every one is in itself a special study. And the effect of Medicines is so varied, the difficulty of discriminating between the *post hoc* and the *propter hoc* so great, there are so many perturbations, as astronomers would call them, which disturb direct inference, that the mind must have a special training, and be well balanced to draw accurate conclusions. Medicine, indeed, never can be an exact science, because, to accidental varieties of diseased action there is no limit. Thus a great surgeon writes, “In performing an operation on the living body, we are not in the condition of a blacksmith or carpenter who understands precisely the qualities of the materials upon which he works, and can depend on their always being the same. The varieties of human constitution must always expose our proceedings to a degree of uncertainty,



and render even the slightest liberties possibly productive of the most serious consequences; so that the extraction of a tooth, the opening of a vein, or the removal of a small tumour has been known to prove fatal.”\*

And so for Medicine. There is no worse sign of a medical man's intelligence or honesty, than to find him boasting of the cures he can effect, or prognosticating dogmatically what may be the result of any given procedure. The result of extended knowledge rather creates modest doubt and diffidence, —certainly not unseemly immodesty and vainglory.

The medical man must ever be acting on probabilities, often seeing “as through a glass darkly,” and yet he must act promptly and decisively, as though dealing with certainties. Can it be wondered at, that medical opinions should sometimes be erroneous? that mistakes should ever and anon be committed, even by the most skilful? It is, I suspect, only those physicians and surgeons who have no practice who never make mistakes; those of large experience often find themselves at fault. Medicine shares uncertainties with many other professions, however—with politics, with ethics, with law and navigation—and although our brethren of the bar may rail because doctors differ, we may instance with equal force the glorious uncertainties of the law. Listen to a single instance of the way in which the opinions of the most eminent interpreters of the law may clash. I quote from a published address by Dr Walshe, “A man enters into a contract of marriage; shortly after the contract has been duly and legally made, he is seized with hæmoptysis of the gravest character, all the symptoms of rapid phthisis ensuing. He declines to marry on account of this change in his health. The lady

\* Professor Syme.



proves recalcitrant, and eventually brings her action for breach of promise. The medical and lay evidence goes to prove that the defendant could not proceed with the marriage without probably inflicting mischief on himself, and possibly endangering his life. The jury accept this view, and find a verdict in his favour, absolving him in effect from his engagement. But the judge reserves a point of law after this fashion; it being fully conceded, through the finding of the jury, that the defendant would have jeopardised his life by fulfilling his contract, was he legally justified by that danger in withdrawing from its performance? The question was sent up for decision to the Court above. There the presiding judges differed. Subsequently, the moot-point was referred to the thirteen judges, and in this learned conclave, the difference of opinion reached the conceivable maximum. For not only were six of the number for the defendant, six against him (the presiding judge giving a casting vote), but the individuals of each group of six, who agreed on the main issue, disagreed as to the grounds leading to their agreement, and the arguments by which the learned persons supported the same opinion not only seriously differed, but in some instances were mutually destructive."

But to return, "Medicine," as Dr John Brown says, "is a tentative art, to succeed in which demands a quickness of eye, thought, tact, and invention, exercised by patient observation;" and the medical man must have that fertility of resource which is not baffled whenever a case arises which seems not defined by the rules of art. There is no better training for the emergencies of future practice, than that afforded by the out and indoor departments of a general hospital, and the student, however industrious, who does not constantly test his medical knowledge at the hospital, and as gold in the



refiner's fire, try it at the bedside of the patient, is very apt in after-years of practice on his own responsibility, to find every case an exception to the ordinary definition of disease laid down in the class-room or in class-books, and to be constantly at a loss how to proceed. He is, as Montaigne says, "like him who paints the sea, rocks, and havens, and draws the model of a ship as he sits safe at his table ; but send him to sea, and he knows not how or where to steer."

Some short time ago, I heard of a physician of well-deserved reputation, who was summoned to the bedside of a little child, evidently suffering acutely. He was well versed in that language of signs by which alone we can gain indications for guidance in the ailments of infants ; but after a careful examination *secundum artem*, he failed to discover what ailed the child, and had the rare courage to say so. He expressed his interest and perplexity, and promised to return. The loss of a train, or some other accident, brought him back more speedily than was expected, and having carefully sat watching the writhing of his little patient for some time, he began carefully to feel, inch by inch, the whole surface of the child's body. The friends thought him mad, but watched with redoubled anxiety. Suddenly he exclaimed, "here it is." His finger had encountered something, and the child evinced still greater anguish. The enemy was a broken pin, deeply imbedded near the spine, which was speedily extracted, and the mystery solved.

This illustrates a physician's sagacity as well as fertility of resource. It teaches also the necessity of not overlooking causes which may be close at hand, and perfectly simple in all their bearings, from the too habitual search for some far-off and recondite source of suffering. The practice of



Medicine, both in reference to the prevention and cure of disease, consists much more in the exercise of common-sense than is usually supposed, and sagacity in Medicine often becomes more conspicuous in the exercise of common-sense than of any of the so-called special senses.

Again, the medical man must have *humanity*, a genuine sympathy for those who are sick and suffering. The exercise of pure science and art will often have but a very partial influence for good, unless you can pour balm upon the wounded spirit, and give that hope and encouragement which is so important a help to cure. And if it be true, as I believe it is, that a remedy may be useful when prescribed by one physician, and inert or powerless when prescribed by another, simply because the one exerts a more powerful moral influence over the mind of his patient; it is of the greatest importance to study carefully the minds of men, to dip down into the depths of our common nature, and thus be able to strike with strong, and yet gentle touch, the cords of sympathy which make us all akin; and in our conversation with patients, thoughtfully to consider before speaking, lest perchance our way of saying a thing may do more harm than our prescription can do good. True it is, that in deciding what is best for a patient, we must allow our judgment to be biassed by nothing which would militate against his chief good—the pure white light of science must be tintured by no coloured rays, which may disturb mental vision; but the physician may permit the admission of those warming rays of sympathy and kindness, which so often gladden the hearts of patients, and may cheer and console even those he cannot cure.

The constant drain upon the sympathy and feeling of a medical man often produces just as much wear and tear in



his organisation as those anxious days and weary nights of watching incident to his calling. A distinguished physiologist and physician, when asked how best a busy practitioner might preserve his health and prolong life, replied, "have no emotions." And, doubtless, could this advice be followed, a great expenditure of force would be avoided. But who among us is so utterly hardened that he can refuse compassion for the many woes he meets? or shut his heart so securely that no appeal shall find an entrance there? And it is not desirable, gentlemen, that it should be otherwise. We should thus lose the softening and sanctifying influences of our profession on our own lives and consciences. Better, far better that we should live but half our days, than have our hearts so hardened that sorrow and suffering, poverty and wretchedness, cannot touch us; and it is, I think, wisely ordered that the sick speedily and instinctively discover the measure of sympathy possessed by the medical attendant, and in proportion trust him the more implicitly. In the exercise of humanity, it is desirable you should regard nothing that is useful as beneath your dignity—nothing menial or insignificant which will conduce to the welfare of a patient. The mere placing of a pin is eminently worthy of your care, if it contributes to the comfort even of the meanest, and it is of the last importance to cultivate gentleness, both in manner and in touch, so that on all occasions you inflict the least possible inconvenience on your patients.

In attending the poor, who will be your first patients, you will do well to remember that the beggar, once stretched on the bed of sickness, at home or in hospital, is just as sensitive and yearns as much for sympathy as the king in his chamber. He needs as much cheering, as much watching and humouring, as if he were wealthier. The sick-bed levels all distinctions,



and you may evince as much chivalry, and reap as large a reward of satisfaction, in easing the pain and smoothing the pillow of the poor, in conscientiously taking charge of the destitute, as in attending a richer patient, who thinks he has discharged all his obligations to you when he has paid his fee. I would fain impress on all hospital pupils, how great is their responsibility, and at the same time their privilege, when they are intrusted with the care of the sick poor. Their steady and punctual work, their cheerful readiness to act in emergencies, are almost as essential to the well working of a hospital as efficient services from the medical officers. And, in justice to medical students, I can testify that they are seldom found wanting. Occasionally we find one who allows his pleasure or self-indulgence to override his duty, but he is an exception. The poor owe an immense debt of gratitude to medical students as a body, and their patience and self-denial will not lack the approval of Him who said, "inasmuch as ye have done unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

And what can I say of *probity* that you do not all know? Is not truthfulness always desirable? Is not honesty the best policy in all professions and occupations? I may be excused for dwelling a moment on this quality, because the medical man is exposed to unusual temptations, and the very nature of his pursuits makes even self-deception easy. The defective knowledge of physiology, and of the scope and power of the medical art, which prevails in the community; the whims and caprices of patients; the demand for specific methods of cure; render it extremely difficult for the medical man, conscientious though he be, to steer a straight-forward course. He, perhaps, very soon discovers that it is far simpler, less laborious, and more remunerative, to pander



to popular prejudices, and that in the end he gets little credit for the various attempts he makes to treat patients on rational principles. Most likely he is charged with being of the old school, and behind the advances of science. Under another form, the spirit of Naaman the Syrian most extensively prevails. "Did not I think he would give me some specific remedy for my ailment, instead of indicating so homely a way of cure." It is but too true that any designing charlatan who will proclaim an infallible and newly-discovered cure, finds numberless votaries; and if he is shrewd enough to make no gross mistakes, Nature will help him to a certain number of recoveries, notwithstanding the worthlessness of his method. "The spontaneous curability of most diseases is to the medical charlatan what the regular and calculable, but generally unlooked-for, recurrence of certain natural phenomena is to the juggler and mountebank." It is as though a civilised traveller, thrown among savages, predicted a solar eclipse, and claimed the fulfilment of his prediction as testimony of his power over Nature.

And it is not alone the uneducated who are led astray by the pretensions of quacks. It is not long ago that the British Parliament gave a subsidy of £5000 for a specific for stone, the main ingredients of which, as it turned out, consisted of egg-shells and snails. It is not forty years since an ignorant and notorious quack, called St John Long, who was twice tried for manslaughter, made an income of at least £13,000 a year out of the credulity of dupes in this metropolis. But *now*, at our very doors, we have had a *pest* of quackery polluting the moral atmosphere with its presence, which all our appeals to magistrates and vestries could not remove, and which was at last extinguished, not because there was a



scarcity of dupes, but because the promoter was fool as well as rogue, and laid himself open to an action for malpractice. It has been well said, "If Physic be a trade, it is a trade of all others the most cut out for a rogue." To some people, a new sensation in Medicine is as necessary as a new hat, or a new bonnet, and sooner than not be gratified in their desires, they will accept the most exaggerated theory as eagerly as they will don the most extravagant costume. We have had "brandy and salt" cures, "movement cures," "mesmeric cures," "homœopathic and allopathic cures," "cancer cures" without number! We know not what may come next! Truly! exclaims a transatlantic confrère,\* the medical man, and particularly the struggling one, has need to pray that he may not be led into temptation; but if he has none other than sordid motives, his prayer is a useless mockery. It is as though he should beseech to be saved from poison, which he is swallowing voluntarily and of his own accord. Better the little produced by honest and unpretending industry, with conscience preserved bright as a polished shield, than to rise out of a slough dishonoured, clutching, it may be, the coveted prize, but covered with the filth and degradation of its surroundings.

Then, besides the acts of open dishonesty, there are so many covert ways which may be practised by him whose conscience is not over-sensitive. He may exaggerate a patient's condition, either to magnify his own skill, or as a worldly-wise man once said, "to make the most of him." If not scrupulous, he may employ a diversity of means to undermine the skill of a brother-practitioner, and then dispossess him of his charge. The medical man has no right to

\* See *Introductory Lectures and Addresses*, by Dr G. B. Wood.



sacrifice the patient's true interests to trifling punctilios, but he has equally no right to deprive another practitioner of his patient by wily arts and mean insinuations. The relations of doctors to their patients, and of doctors to each other, cannot but be complicated, seeing that there are often many contending interests, and whole volumes have been written on what are called medical ethics. All the rules of medical etiquette are, however, intended merely to be the application to particular circumstances of that great precept, "Do unto others as you would that they should do unto you;" and what will not bear the touch of this test, either as between doctor and patient, or doctors with each other, cometh of evil.

In addition to the mental and moral qualities requisite for a good physician, let me impress upon you the importance of a robust constitution, and of sound physical health. The *mens sana* requires for its full development to be *in sano corpore*, and in other professions, as well as in Medicine, physical power and long endurance are most important elements of success. Recollect that as medical students and practitioners you are exposed to sources of contagion which it would be deemed cowardice to shrink from, but which, with impaired health, you may be unable to withstand; while at college, therefore, avoid late hours and dissipation, avoid over-straining your minds by cramming in a short space of time mental food which cannot be digested, and which ought to have been imbibed more slowly and progressively. Examiners for diplomas do not now pride themselves on puzzling candidates with catch questions. I believe they conscientiously strive to take an accurate measure of a man's general attainments and practical knowledge, and they speedily distinguish who has merely "ground up" for examination, and who has studied carefully from the first.



And let your studies be so judiciously blended with exercise and relaxation, that, even in your novitiate, you set an example to other people of the way you observe sanitary laws. You have your rowing and cricket clubs, your volunteer exercises. By all means avail yourselves of them, taking care that use is not abuse, and that they interfere with no obvious duties.

I rejoice that it is not necessary to warn you against certain pernicious practices still prevalent in the older universities abroad. I was shocked last year, while in Heidelberg, a city justly proud both of its beauty and learning, and with natural advantages, giving every facility for athletic sports, to find that relic of barbarism, the *Duel*, still in full force. Scarcely a student I passed whose scarred face did not give evidence of previous encounters. Some had fresh wounds from which the surgical stitches were not removed. Surely it is time to know that personal offences and ungentlemanly acts cannot be atoned for by scratching or piercing each other like brute beasts, and thus defacing the image of God. The practice is a disgrace, both to the authorities and students. It not only fosters false notions of honour; but the man is a moral coward, and fails in loyalty to his better nature, who, having given pain to a brother, offers to meet him in combat rather than make a suitable apology. Fortunately, unseemly conduct is rare here. King's, is proverbially a college of gentlemen. Its alumni are proud of their position in university lists; proud of the eminence they have attained in after-life, and the *esprit de corps*, the mutual respect of professors and pupils, each for the other, is such, that I have no need to warn new-comers against breaches of discipline. They will, I trust, soon find that there is a contagion for good as well as for evil, and that a breach of good-conduct is likely to be felt as an indignity to the whole school.



Time does not permit me to dwell on the *rewards* in store for the medical practitioner. Briefly, I may point out that you must not look for wealth and large fortune, such as merchandise and some other professions offer to their votaries. There is keen competition for medical practice; it is difficult to get placed, and even with opportunity and eminence riches flow but slowly. I believe, however, that few other occupations afford eventually so certain a means of gaining a livelihood, if ability and industry be combined. Be not too greedy of gain, or you will defeat your own purpose. Give the love of your art the first place, and success in every other way is the more likely to follow.

The higher rewards are—the satisfaction of knowing that you are members of a profession which gives you the rank and title of gentlemen; the consciousness that the study of Medicine is a worthy exercise for the highest intellectual faculties, and that it was a favourite subject with such great men as Socrates, Aristotle, Bacon, Descartes, and Sir William Hamilton; the gratification of feeling that, as medical practitioners, you have almost an unlimited power of doing good, and that, if we except the Church, Medicine is perhaps of all professions the most important, the most universally useful to all classes of mankind. Ingratitude you will probably experience, even after your best efforts, but the gratitude you meet with will far outweigh it.

And the effect on the mind of the practitioner himself must not be overlooked. In “seeking others’ good, we find our own.” Exercising a constant benevolence, the mind must be elevated, and the understanding enlarged. Even in the study of disease, you may see evidences of divine wisdom and of God’s goodness. Getting a deep insight into men’s motives and qualities, their temptations and frailties, you may learn humility by finding



how fallible even the greatest are ; charity by seeing how even the best are prone to fall ; and how much of good there is in those whose characters are the worst ; you may learn lessons of patience and self-denial among the sick and poor. Constantly, you will be reminded how fleeting are all earthly interests, and may know how the death-bed of the good is cheered by the hope of a blissful immortality :

“The chamber where the good man meets his fate,  
Is privileged beyond the common walk  
Of virtuous life, quite in the verge of heaven.”

In conclusion, let me hope, gentlemen, that I have not wearied you. I trust I have not disheartened you by shewing what toils and difficulties beset your path. If the ascent seems perilous, the difficulties almost insurmountable, take courage in the fact, that those who will be your professors and teachers have passed through the same ordeal, have submitted to the same discipline, and that they know and sympathise with all your doubts. Herculean as seems the task before you, it is not greater than your capabilities, for others have gone before you, and now hold out a willing hand to help you. And the friendship thus tendered to you will not end with your departure hence. Only give evidence, by your steadiness of work, of a thorough earnestness of purpose, of a conscientious desire to do your duty, and help will not fail you in after-life on those many occasions when an authoritative opinion of your worth will be to you of more value than gold.

And we can tell you, with doubts and misgivings still in fresh memory, that beginning with the alphabet of science you will soon learn to spell, and then rapidly to read. The first steps of the professional ladder mounted, you will gradually become reassured, and the prospect will widen out and



brighten. If you begin in the right spirit, like the student in the old apologue, you will find that although the temple of knowledge may be closed by twelve gates, you have a master-key, which in opening one lock, opens all. Take care only not to be dazzled by the brightness of the contents, and as you advance inwards, lose not the humility which belongs to true manliness. Crave not to be thought knowing. Even when you have earned good positions, and exercise authority over others, cherish a meek and quiet spirit, and keep a conscience void of offence. The true man of science is always humble and always a student. The more he knows, the more he feels there is to know. The greatest of philosophers, in the plenitude of his knowledge, felt how small were his attainments compared with the vastness of science. He likened himself to a child picking up pebbles and shells on the sand, while the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered around him.

The medical man will the better perform all his duties the more he exemplifies in his own person all Christian virtues. It must be his aim, like the man described in the *Gentle Life*, "to be humble-minded, meek in spirit, but bold in thought and action; to be truthful, sincere, and generous;" to be more careful of wounding the susceptibilities of others than jealous for his own self-love; "to be pitiful to the poor and needy; respectful to all men; to guide the young, defer to old age; to enjoy and be thankful for our own lot, and to envy none"—this is indeed to be gentle, after the best model the world has ever seen, and there can be no better model for the character of a Physician.



