An introductory address delivered at the Westminster Hospital, October 1st, 1868, on the occasion of the opening of the medical session / by Francis Mason.

AN

INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS,

DELIVERED AT

THE WESTMINSTER HOSPITAL,

OCTOBER 1ST, 1868.

ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF THE MEDICAL SESSION.

BY

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Dear Dr Gibb

Very many thanks for the books which I shall read with much interest and pleasure.

Faithfully yours
James Mason

Sir Geo. D. Gibb. Bart.

INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS:

&c. &c.

"I hold the world but as the world,
A stage, where every man must play his part."

Shakespeare.

GENTLEMEN,

ON the great stage of the world, whatever may be our calling, we have many important parts to play. Whether we be engaged in the study of science for its own sake—whether we be occupied in professional pursuits, or whether we be employed in the more lucrative work of commerce, we all have assigned to us our little sphere of usefulness, and just as "small sands make the mountain, moments make the year, and trifles life," so the strength, the industry — nay, the welfare of the whole community, all depend on the manner in which each individual plays his part in the drama of every-day life.

This evening I appear in a character to which I confess I am somewhat unaccustomed. It is my privilege, as indeed it is my great pleasure, in opening this session, to raise the curtain and present what to us is the first scene on the stage our professional career.

I am here in obedience to the wishes of my colleagues; and in thanking them for the compliment they have paid me, I cannot conceal the profound gratification I expe-

rience in being permitted to address you on the present occasion. It is, moreover, a source of increased satisfaction to me, because, having received my professional education elsewhere, I came amongst you but two years ago, when I was appointed to this hospital, as a comparative stranger. Believe me, gentlemen, that in this brief period I have commenced attachments, and have formed friendships, which I trust may last as long as the stream of life runs through these veins.

It is this reflection that makes the task I have undertaken the more arduous, for I cannot repress the thought that my predecessors on similar occasions have been gentlemen holding the highest places in the profession, possessing more mature judgment than can be expected from me, and whose power of eloquence is far beyond what I can ever hope to emulate. In the poverty of my own language, therefore, I take refuge in the words of England's mighty dramatist, and say—

> "Thus stooping to your clemency,
> I beg your hearing patiently."

Such meetings as this are not without their advantages, inasmuch as they present a convenient opportunity of extending the right hand of fellowship to those who are on the threshold of their professional studies; and also of offering increased encouragement to others who, having advanced a certain distance on the road of life, are—

> "Stepping from hindrance on to hindrance,
> As a boy crosses on the stones the stream ;"

and are steadily approaching that goal of success which is the honest aspiration and the purest ambition of every hard-working, industrious man.

On looking, around, however, there are many others

whom we should not and cannot forget—the students of former years—who do us the distinguished honour of annually revisiting the scene of their past labours and triumphs, and whose presence sufficiently indicates the unflagging interest they take in their Alma Mater. To these we give a specially hearty welcome.

But it would be ungracious on my part were I not to offer my personal acknowledgments to my colleagues for their presence, as well as to the numerous friends by whom I am surrounded. It is peculiarly gratifying to me to recognise many of those old familiar faces which link the present with the past, and recall to the memory those bright and happy days when we were yet strangers to the stern realities of the world.

The 1st of October marks an era in the history of every Medical man's life. To-day the several schools in this great metropolis meet in friendly rivalry, and we, as a section of a vast educational system, take up the gauntlet, and with no spirit of petty jealousy, no ill-feeling, no bitter envy, but with the fullest confidence in our own prowess, boldly and fearlessly enter the arena prepared, come what may, to fight the battle with courage and determination, so that when the contest is o'er, and the star of peace returns, each one may lay his hand on his heart and say with the warrior of old, "Verily, I have laboured in a good cause, and I have endeavoured to do my duty manfully."

The study of medicine commends itself. We are told (by Mr. Ruskin) that "there are five great intellectual professions relating to the daily necessities of life—the soldier's to defend it; the pastor's to instruct it; the physician's to keep it in health; the lawyer's to enforce justice in it, and the merchant's to provide for it." Of these daily necessities,

by no means the least worthy of consideration, is the duty of the physician to keep the body in health. *That is the part we have to play.*

Our profession is one of great usefulness, and is as free from allurements to dishonesty as any other calling. No right-minded man will employ the public for his own interest; he will rather make it the interest of the public to employ him. Again, the very nature of our education affords the exercise of the highest faculties of the mind.

> "The flower, the tree, the birds, the running brook,
> Are all to us material for thought."

It is impossible to study Anatomy, Physiology, or Chemistry, three of the most comprehensive subjects in science, forming the solid basis upon which we have to build our superstructure, without being deeply impressed with the infinite wisdom of Divine power. In reading the volume of Nature, we are animated by a passionate yearning for increased research in exact proportion as our ideas become more developed, our tastes more elevated, and our intellects more refined. If we view the beautiful symmetry and the variety of Nature's forms, the grace and regularity of her designs, our minds must be led to purer notions and happier thoughts.

True, indeed, is it that the man who is most to be pitied under misfortune is he whose happiness depends on outward circumstances. To be really happy, he should be capable of finding resources in himself, and what more ennobling or what more useful employment than the study of that science which relates to the phenomenon of life?

"Knowledge," says a distinguished writer, "is essentially and directly power: and it is indirectly virtue. Knowledge

is also happiness. There is no other pastime that can be compared with it in variety. Even to him who has been longest conversant with it, it has still as much novelty to offer as at first. It may be resorted to by all in all circumstances, by the young and by the old. It converts solitude into the most delightful society."* As our reading comprises an endless variety of subjects, it is no matter of surprise that, from time immemorial, medicine should have been studied for its own sake by those possessing the keenest reasoning powers; but when it is cultivated for the sake of aiding others, then it is like the quality of mercy—

"It is twice bless'd—
It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes."

"The constant object," says Brodie, "of our profession is to confer benefit on others. The advocate at one time pleads for the guilty, and at another endeavours to convict the innocent. The soldier engages to go wherever he is sent, that he may destroy the lives of those from whom he never received an injury; but the Physician and Surgeon are engaged only in lessening the affliction and prolonging the existence of their fellow-creatures." In the pursuit of a profession which has for its object such lofty and beneficent aims—the cure of disease—the relief of suffering, the keeping the body in health, it is no wonder that the good physician should be taken as the highest type of humanity.

Further, if we regard the worldly emolument to be derived from the practice of our profession, we have, even on this score, not much reason to complain. Were we all to attain great wealth, high station, or enormous influence, our natural emulation would be quickly dispelled, and our

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* Craik.

motives for acquiring superior skill speedily crushed. Such honours are but to the few; yet the prizes are open to all, and just as the race is to the swift, and the battle to the strong, so he who arms himself with perseverance, self-reliance, and endurance, will be the first to reach the winning post. We may all, however, expect a modest competency; but we acquire a far richer reward which gold cannot purchase—the heartfelt gratitude and thanks of suffering humanity—as well as the intense satisfaction we ourselves derive from pursuing a vocation whose object is at once sacred, unselfish, and sublime.

Is it nothing that science has discovered an agent which produces complete temporary insensibility, so that the surgeon is enabled to perform the most trivial as well as the most formidable operation with absolute painlessness? Is it nothing that we have entrusted to our keeping the power of restoring sight to the blind, and of making the lame walk? Is it nothing that when a child is suffering from impending suffocation—when indeed the last spark of life has well nigh fled, we, by our art, can snatch that child as it were from the very jaws of death? Is it nothing for us to know that when a patient is bleeding profusely and dangerously, that we have committed to our care the means of instantly stemming that hæmorrhage? Is it nothing that in our daily practice, our skill, properly applied, often changes the scene from one of utter grief and desolation to one of perfect joy and gladness? Is all this nothing? Then science is nothing, art is nothing, and our profession is nothing!

But in order that we may play our part in the gigantic machinery of the world with credit to ourselves, and thus attain that meed of success to which we believe we are

entitled, it is absolutely necessary that we should apply ourselves diligently and cheerfully, heart and soul, to the duties and exigencies of our profession. It seems superfluous for me to impress upon the student the importance —nay, the necessity, for his taking advantage of the splendid opportunities afforded at such an hospital as this of making himself thoroughly proficient in the various branches of the healing art. In speaking of the hospital, I venture to think that some account of its early history, which I shall make very brief, may not be uninteresting; for as every man is expected to know something of the history of his native country, so every pupil should surely know something of the place at which he is educated. For most of the following details I am indebted to Mr. Wilson, our Secretary.

It appears that from the time of the Reformation until the beginning of the last century, the only public establishments for the Medical and Surgical relief to the poor of London were the Royal Foundation Hospitals of St. Bartholomew and of St. Thomas. It was not until the year 1715 that a project was set on foot for furnishing the sick with medical advice by means of private subscriptions. This measure was first suggested by Mr. Henry Hoare, then a banker in Fleet street, at a meeting held at St. Dunstan's Coffee House on the 14th of January in that year. A room as a repository of medicines was opened in the Bird-cage Walk, St. James's Park, and after increased exertions, a house for the accommodation of thirty persons was opened in what was then called Petty France, but now named York street, Westminster. On this building were inscribed the words, "Publick Infirmary for the Sick and Needy." At the instigation of the Duchess of Marlbo-

rough, who took great interest in this charity, a petition was addressed in 1721 to King George the First for his Royal protection to it, grounded in part on an apprehension then entertained that the plague was likely to visit these dominions. The Princess Royal became a subscriber, and the gradual increase of its funds to about £700 a year at length enabled the governors to open a house in Chapel Street for sixty patients on the 10th of June, 1724. Two years afterwards the distinguished lithotomist, Cheselden, became Surgeon to the hospital, which appointment he held for fifteen years. His portrait is in the Board-room together with those of many other eminent Surgeons and Physicians who have at different periods rendered their services to the hospital.

The removal of the establishment to James street took place in 1733, but not until after much controversy amongst the Governors, many of whom preferred the site of Lanesborough House, near Hyde Park Corner, and accordingly gave their interest to establish what is now St. George's Hospital. Cheselden and the celebrated Dr. Mead adhered to the parent institution. I cannot pass these names unnoticed, for it is well known that Dr. Mead was an intimate friend of the poet Pope, and of Newton. Pope, in speaking of his medical attendants, says :—

> "Weak tho' I am in limb, and short of sight,
> Far from a lynx, and not a giant quite,
> I'd do what Mead and Cheselden advise,
> To keep these limbs, and to preserve these eyes."

Notwithstanding its vicissitudes at that time, the Royal patronage has never been withdrawn from it. Queen Charlotte became its patroness, and at her death the title of patron was accepted by his Majesty George the Fourth,

then Prince Regent. Soon after the accession of King William the Fourth and Queen Adelaide, their Majesties graciously allowed their names to appear as patron and patroness; and, lastly, her present Majesty has, from the commencement of her reign, taken the hospital under her Royal patronage.

I may mention one memorable instance of the interest taken by Royalty in this Institution. It occurred at the Commemoration of Handel in Westminster Abbey, under the sanction of George the Third. It was the original intention of the projectors of these performances in 1784, that the entire profits should be given to the Fund for the Support of Decayed Musicians. The claims of this Hospital were, however, deemed by his Majesty of sufficient importance to entitle it to share with the Musical Fund, and accordingly it received from the four successive Annual Commemorations no less a sum than £5,500.

Upon the Coronation of her present Majesty in 1838, the Dean and Chapter of Westminster granted the use of the Abbey for a musical performance in aid of the St. John's Day Schools, the Western Dispensary, and this Hospital, and the very large amount of £5,000 was realised on that occasion.

After a time the house in James street became very dilapidated, as well as insufficient in size and accommodation. A meeting was therefore held at the Thatched House Tavern in 1819, when a subscription was commenced under the auspices of the then Duke of Northumberland, President of the Institution. The ground upon which we stand was then purchased, and on it was built this hospital under the shades of the "brave old Abbey," and "cradled alike in all its holy influences," which could

it but speak might tell many a sad tale of sickness, poverty, and distress. as well as testify to the numberless glorious triumphs achieved by our noble art over those accidents, a nd diseases, which all human flesh is heir to.

I will not dwell on the long list of names of the medical officers who have, within the last one hundred and fifty years, held appointments and have laboured in its service. It would, however, be scant justice to their memory were I not to say that whether in social or professional rank they have held positions inferior to none in the history of our great metropolitan hospitals. They have been men of cultivated intellect, of noble character, of perfect integrity, and of the most refined scientific attainments. Many, alas! like the soldier on the battie field, have fallen in the full vigour of active life. Yet in sinking thus early to their rest, they are worthily crowned with unfading and eternal honours. Such men are bright examples that we may well admire and imitate; for their memory—the best emblem of what is good and true—blossoms in the dust, and lives amongst us for evermore.

Such, then, is a cursory glance of the history of this hospital, within the girdle of whose walls we meet to-day. Whether we regard its antiquity, whether we consider it as a centre of professional learning, or whether we contemplate the incalculable benefits that it confers on the sick poor, we may well raise our hearts with pride and thankfulness that we succeed to such an inheritance. We have, indeed, a sacred trust bequeathed to us, and it is our bounden duty, as it should be our earnest wish, to hand it down to our posterity not only as we find it, but greatly improved.

As a school of medicine it is one in which any pupil,

with ordinary industry, may make himself familiar with disease in all its varied forms. It is not so large, nor is it, perhaps, so rich as some other hospitals, but it nevertheless possesses all the resources, if properly applied, of affording a most complete training to make the perfectly educated medical practitioner.

At first the student will, no doubt, be somewhat disheartened at the immense amount of work before him; and I should be doing far from right were I to underrate the difficulties which will beset him on all sides. But let him be of good cheer. Nothing is easy but what was at first difficult. By earnest undivided attention all the obstacles that impede his progress will fade and vanish as surely as the sun rising in the morning chases away the darkness of night.

In attending the lectures, in accordance with the regulations of the Examining Boards, there are two special advantages. In the first place, much valuable information may be acquired; and, secondly, that by regular attention are inculcated habits of self-discipline, punctuality, method, and exactness—in short, just those qualities essential to success not only in our profession, but in every other walk of life.

With respect to the practice of note-taking—a point on which there is much difference of opinion—I believe that short notes will be found invaluable; whereas, copious notes make confusion worse confounded. I would venture to recommend for consideration the following plan:—The student should invariably carry a small note-book, in which he should enter every fact he thinks worthy of being recorded. He should transfer these notes or memoranda daily into a scribbling diary or common-place book, taking

especial care to mark the date of each entry. By pursuing such a course it is incredible what an amount of information accumulates day by day. Such notes may be crude and rough; but as they are intended only for the student's own eye, they are sufficient to afford him a rich store of material, which, by proper culture, may at some time yield an abundant harvest. By carrying out such a suggestion he will find that, to quote Whately, "he will write not as if he wanted to say something, but as if he has something to say."

Respecting books, too, it is a useful plan to have the latest editions of the standard works interleaved with blank pages. On these may be inserted references or scraps of information which otherwise might be lost for ever.

There is nothing, we may be sure, that conduces more to accuracy of observation and clearness of perception than the plan of committing our ideas to writing; for—

> "Sounds which address the ear are lost and die
> In one short hour, while that which strikes the eye
> Lives long upon the mind."

Whilst I am myself in favour of the larger and more comprehensive works, it would be unjust were I not to give a word of praise to the numerous admirable manuals now published, for many of them are written by the highest authorities on the subjects of which they treat. But the student should choose them cautiously, for in the present day the *cacoëthes scribendi* is so prevalent that many writers would appear to agree with the celebrated poetess of Annandale,* who in the preface to one of her books put the following distich:—

> "'Tis pleasant sure to see one's name in print;
> A book's a book, although there's nothing in't."

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* Susannah Hawkins.

The instruction that we give here is to be regarded as a means to an end—namely, that of qualifying the pupil to practise his profession. We do not pretend to teach him all he is required to know, but we pride ourselves in teaching him how to learn for himself. We put before him the scattered threads of knowledge, and leave him to weave them into a lasting and substantial texture.

In hospital practice, whether in the wards or in the out-patient department, he will find ample opportunity for thought and consideration. All his senses will, at various times be called into action—the sense of touch, the sense of sight—that great gateway of the mind, the sense of hearing, the sense of smell, and sometimes the sense of taste. All these have to be educated. He will have endless incentives to work. Whilst he should never neglect to visit the wards at the proper time, let him not think lightly of the practice in the out-patient department, for it is well known that the cases that come under observation here are those that make up the bulk of private practice. Let him "Be wise in small things, and ponder well the greatness of the little." We read in "Pattigrew's Lives," vol. I. "That Sir Anthony Carlisle, formerly one of the Surgeons to the hospital, was always anxious to impress upon the minds of the students the necessity of attending to the *ordinary* duties of their profession, and repressing the zeal which usually animates them in search of the severer operations in surgery. This practice is of little use to the pupil as an operator himself, and is detrimental to him as a general practitioner, as he must unavoidably neglect those cases which, from their frequent occurrence, are of more importance in his vocation. In the pursuit of any science, the greatest difficulty we all more

or less experience is the want of power of sustained thought. In order to overcome this, it is obvious that we must work with design, and with downright earnestness of purpose, remembering the old rhyme :—

"Tender-handed touch the nettle,
It will sting you for your pains ;
Grasp it like a man of mettle,
And it soft as silk remains."

We often hear persons complain of having a treacherous memory, which is in reality nothing more than a want of attention on their part. "Memory," says Abercrombie, "is very much influenced by attention, or a full and distinct perception of the fact or object, with a view to its being remembered ; and the utmost care should be taken to cultivate the mind *intensely* to whatever comes before it either in reading or observation."

"Who reads
Incessantly, and to his reading bring not
A spirit and judgment equal or superior,
Uncertain and unsettled still remains."

I need scarcely remind my hearers that when Sir Isaac Newton was asked how he worked out his discoveries, he replied, "By always thinking unto them ; I keep the subject continually before me."

Another important element in the acquisition of knowledge is self-examination—taking stock as it were of what we know. As medical men, our motto should be "*Semper paratus ;*" for in our profession, more, perhaps, than in any other, we have not only to be men of learning, but men of prompt action. We have to think when others are paralyzed ; we have to decide when others are wavering ; we are in fact always under examination, and we must be prepared

for all emergencies. And oh! how eloquent are our looks. A mother nursing her sick child will anxiously watch our every movement, our every expression, and one whisper, one hint, or even one gesture, will often suffice to snap the last and slenderest thread of hope.

But apart from all professional learning, we, as men of education, are reasonably expected to cultivate all those qualities which are considered essential to the bearing of a gentleman. We especially have to study the ordinary amenities of life, and without stooping to base motives, or cringing to abject servility, we are called upon to exercise and rightly understand what, in a word, is aptly termed "the art of pleasing." One patient, for example, will require our constant attendance, which we may think unnecessary, whilst another will be greatly displeased if unsolicited we pay him a second visit. It is this discrimination—the keen perception of individual character—the knowledge of the world, tact, judgment, common sense—call it what you will—the dealing with each case as each case requires, that we are forced to observe. We read in the "Lives of British Physicians," that it was a maxim with the celebrated Matthew Baillie that the most successful treatment of patients depended upon the exertion of sagacity or good common sense, guided by a competent, mark he says, "competent professional knowledge." "It is" very seldom, he used to say, that "diseases are found pure and unmixed, as they are commonly described by authors, and there is almost an endless variety of constitution. The treatment must be adopted to the mixture and variety, in order to be as successful as circumstances will permit, and this allows of a very wide field for the

exercise of good common sense on the part of the medical practitioner."

Again, we are naturally expected to be prompt in our attendance and punctual in our engagements. "Punctuality," says Louis XIV., "is the politeness of kings. It is also the duty of gentlemen, and the necessity of men of business." In these days we cannot say with impunity to our patients, as Abernethy did, "Live on sixpence a day and earn it;" nor are we permitted to apply the gold-headed cane to their backs as was the custom formerly. The children in those days, by the way, came badly off, for we read—

"Et si sit juvenis, et non obedire flagelleter frequenter et fortiter."

No! We cannot afford to be regardless of the ordinary courtesies of every-day life, and if, as sometimes happens, our benevolence, our civility, our true integrity, meet with but a poor reward, we can always console ourselves in the reflection that whilst we satisfy our own consciences, we are endeavouring to confer benefit upon others; for

"Great minds, like heaven, are pleased in doing good,
Tho' the ungrateful subjects of their favours
Are barren in return."

Assuming that we have to earn our daily bread by our profession, it is abundantly evident that the duties and obligations of that profession must be our first consideration, our primary thought. All other occupations, all our social pleasures and enjoyments, must be subservient to the great aim we have in view. The student must train himself to be self-reliant; for if he depend solely upon others, he will soon discover the truth of the maxim, that it is far easier to make our patients our friends than to make our friends

our patients. He will also have to exercise much self-denial, for whilst others are making merry he will be required at the post of duty :—

> " Attending always, but attending more
> Where sorrow asks his presence than before."

If in life we cannot create opportunities, it is manifestly in our power, having our minds rightly prepared by previous knowledge and reflection, to profit by the opportunities when they are presented to us. If there be, as we are led to believe, a tide in the affairs of man, which if taken at the flood is to lead us on to fortune, it is our duty and business to watch for that flood. We must, however, wait *patiently ;* and, as De Maistre says, " To know how to wait is the great secret of success." We must be wise, we must be prudent, we must be circumspect—in a word, always working with a contented mind, and having at all times a due consideration for the feelings of others, we must cultivate self-discipline, self-control, and self-respect. All these, combined with unflinching industry, untiring perseverance, and strict integrity, constitute the rungs that form the ladder of prosperity.

And now, gentlemen, in conclusion, before the curtain drops, I earnestly ask you, on behalf of my colleagues as well as in my own name, to play your part as we hope to play ours—zealously, cheerfully, and faithfully—so that, whilst we endeavour to fulfil the Royal law of Scripture which directs us to do unto others as we would have them do unto us, we may always rejoice in the boundless resources our noble profession affords of " looking through Nature up to Nature's God."

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Sir Geo. Duncan Bart.
Westminster Hospital