

An address, delivered to the Medical Society : on Friday May 1. 1778 / By Caleb Parry.

Contributors

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A N
A D D R E S S S,

DELIVERED TO THE
MEDICAL SOCIETY

ON FRIDAY MAY 1. 1778.

BY
CALEB PARRY,
ANNUAL PRESIDENT.

EDINBURGH:

Printed by BALFOUR AND SMELLIE.

M,DCC,LXXVIII.

Dr. Haskey

from his humble Servant

The Author

Annual President.

KRINBURGH

Printed by BATHUR AND SMELIE

MDCCLXXVIII

A N

A D D R E S S S, &c.

GENTLEMEN,

WHEN I look around me, and see myself encircled by so many respectable names, whose approbation I esteem, whose abilities and extensive erudition I admire, and whose established reputation I reverence, I feel myself covered with confusion, and shrink back, as conscious of my inequality to the task which has been assigned me. On the other hand, when I reflect, that censure is the peculiar attribute of little minds, I reproach myself for my former timidity, and draw confidence from the very source which before filled me with confusion. It will be your's, then,
to

to exert that attribute, which is the honour of human nature, and which tends to exalt it even to DIVINITY itself. You will feel a high pleasure from the exercise of this generous affection ; and, in this respect, at least, you will thank me for having addressed you.

The pleasures and advantages resulting from the mutual intercourse of mankind, few are disposed to deny. They seem to be, as it were, congenial to our native inclinations ; and there is not a savage, in the most uncultivated wilds of America, who is unconnected with some others of his own species. It is the same throughout the whole of animated nature ; and beasts, birds, fishes, and even insects themselves, give ^{very} ~~pretty~~ general evidence of the same mutual attraction.

Whence springs this magnetism in the animal world ? Is it, that Nature has implanted in their breasts an instinct, an irresistible propensity to such connections ? We need

need no better proof to convince us of their utility. If they arise from the dictates of reason, from the remembrance of some experienced good, the conclusion is equally favourable.

Yet, to these orders of beings, the advantages resulting from society must be, comparatively, small, and, probably, extend no farther than to the secure enjoyment of the means by which they can gratify their hunger, and propagate their several species.

In Man, these are combined with pleasures of a more exalted nature ; and the exercise of the social affections, of gratitude, of benevolence, of compassion, of friendship, of love, is pregnant with delights, which he, alone, of the whole animal creation, is comparatively, at least, permitted to enjoy.

While these impell us to labour all we can to promote the happiness of others, we feel in ourselves a strong desire to pursue those objects which more immediately lead

to

to our own. We are sensible of a native inquisitiveness, a desire of experiencing and enjoying what is not in our possession: And this extends not merely to the immediate indulgence of the senses, but to the gratification of our mental powers. The Mind, impatient of restraint, springs upwards, and strives to soar above every cloud which can preclude her from the enjoyment of perfect day. Nor does she disdain to borrow wings from the labours, the improvements, and even the errors of those around her.

The only source of knowledge is experience; and the whole of science seems to consist in an examination of the relations of objects to each other, and their arrangement in consequence of those relations. But the experience of any single person must of necessity be confined within very narrow limits. Numberless objects must be to him unknown; and many of those, with the existence of which he is acquainted, must have been viewed partially and superficially, in

not erroneously. Farther, it is with the mental as with the corporeal eye. The latter, disease may delude, or even darken. The former may be deceived by fancy, or blinded by prejudice, the most obstinate of all maladies. Well chosen society and conversation must be the mind's physicians. Hence new objects will be pointed out ; those known held up in different lights ; new relations and arrangements suggested ; and thus, our prejudices will be removed, and our knowledge extended and enlarged.

With these views, Societies have been instituted throughout Europe, by men eager in the pursuit of knowledge. These have generally had reference to some single branch of science, and have been conducted by regulations, which have been presumed best adapted to answer the purposes for which they were intended. The improvements which have been derived from them to the various sciences and arts, are sufficiently known.

Animated

Animated with similar prospects, at the latter end of the year 1737, a few gentlemen in this University instituted, for the purpose of improvement in medical knowledge, that Society of which we now make a part. On the merits of these fathers of our institution, it were unnecessary to enlarge. But, if there be among our number any, who has seen a parent, whose tenderness has watched over his growing years, and who has, without respite, laboured for his good; or a beloved mistress, for whose safety he would have esteemed the last drop of his blood an insufficient ransom, groaning under disease, or struggling in the last agonies of death—*his* feelings will rise up in gratitude to the memory of our benevolent founders. No material monument, though of brass or adamant, can withstand the attacks of undermining and all-subverting time; but a monument of praise will never be wanting to the founders of *this* institution, while disease ranges

at large with such fell cruelty, while there is one mortal to agonize, and one heart to bleed at his distress.

Ever since the first institution of the MEDICAL SOCIETY, it has continued to grow and flourish. Its debates have been conducted with a liberal spirit of inquiry. Truth has been allured from her deepest recesses, and exhibited in all her native charms; and Error, wherever sheltered, and however disguised, has been boldly arrested, stripped of every adventitious ornament, and exposed in all his genuine deformity. The knowing have freely communicated their knowledge; the uninformed have profited; and all have reaped their shares of the general harvest of science. When we peruse the list of our members, and see, among that number, names, which stand among the highest in the scale of Medical Philosophy, we cannot help imagining that they were indebted for a considerable share of their reputation to the MEDICAL SO-

CIETY. Indeed, did no other advantage result from our meetings, they evidently lead us to pay attention to particular subjects, to inquire into them with diligence, and to view them in all their various lights. Farther, it is natural, especially for youthful minds, to be zealously attached to their own opinions, the children of their own industry or fancy. Like other parents, they view their offspring with the most partial fondness ; see in them a thousand perfections which escape the observation of others ; are blind to their failings ; and even convert their very defects into beauties. Opinions which militate against their favourite prejudices are heresies, which deserve to be extirpated with fire and sword. In this SOCIETY, however, it has been seen, that no sentiments are approved of but such as are most conformable to reason ; and that, as in the natural world, Truth seldom flies to the embraces of her most extravagant admirers. And thus, from our debates, we not only

only derive present improvement in knowledge, but form habits of attentive inquiry, sound reasoning, and philosophical coolness, which will be subservient to us in each future scene, and at every succeeding period of our lives. That these advantages have in fact been derived, can scarcely be doubted; and the reputation of the MEDICAL SOCIETY has extended over every quarter of the world.

During a long residence in this University, I have been myself a witness of its growing worth; and can with truth declare, that I have never seen that period when it has been adorned with so many able speakers, or enriched with so many excellent dissertations, as during the past session. We have been favoured with numerous essays, which would have done honour to the most active experimenter, the profoundest reasoner, the most experienced practitioner, or even the ablest rhetorician.

During

During the same space of time, our possessions have been amply increased. We enjoy a library, consisting of about fifteen hundred volumes, judiciously selected from the vast chaos of medical literature; and to these we have free and almost unrestrained access. What gratitude is also due to those who, with generosity so disinterested, have contributed to the extension of our utility, by assisting us to rear an edifice, in which we might hold our debates secure from interruption, either from the caprice or the malevolence of others! Thanks to their liberal donations, the building in which we are assembled, the first stone of which many of ourselves saw deposited, has now made a considerable progress towards completion. And thus have we given to the MEDICAL SOCIETY, that "airy nothing, a local habitation."

Would to God I could add, that we had also given it "a name!" Enriched with our present possessions, and with the prospect

spect of acquiring others, we were naturally led to wish that some method might be thought of, by which these might be permanently secured to us. With the different proposals which have been made for this purpose, you are already well acquainted. I would only observe, that, at a very full meeting, held about the latter end of the last session, it was unanimously determined to apply to the Magistrates and Town-Council of Edinburgh for a charter of incorporation, as being that step which tended to place our property upon the most secure, convenient, and honourable foundation. Having nothing in view but the extension of our literary usefulness, soliciting no exclusive privileges, requesting only that we might be enabled to hold our property, as a body, with the same powers which each of us, who is not a minor, enjoys over his own as an individual, we thought, we flattered ourselves that our request would have been instantly complied with : We
were

were therefore astonished, when we learned that our superiors had taken another view of the matter, and were sufficiently mortified that a set of cadies were granted privileges of which we were judged unworthy. It is true, we aimed at a much inferior mark ; and a desire of preserving the lives of our fellow-creatures was a foundation on which we could presume to build no hopes.

Far be it from us to arraign the views of those who see into our projects with so piercing an eye, and whose penetration so greatly exceeds our own.

“ Brutus says we are ambitious :

“ And Brutus is an honourable man.”

Yet, though we have hitherto failed, every member here present can congratulate himself upon his having taken the most active part in promoting the true interests of the Society.

Let us still not altogether despair of a favourable answer from the Town-council.

But,

But, though disappointed, shall we faint in our laudable pursuit? No! Let our repulse be rather an incitement to new and more vigorous exertion! The present funds of the Society will not admit of application to higher powers. But let this, my fellow members, be the object which you have constantly in view; and doubt not, that a zealous perseverance will insure the desired success. How advantageous, how creditable this pursuit to yourselves! How honourable to that university of which you make a part! What just encomiums will be heaped on those, to whom you owe your earliest medical instruction, for having inspired you with such unbounded thirst after useful science, as to induce you to seek and to obtain so remarkable a distinction?

In the mean while, endeavour to make yourselves worthy of this pre-eminence. Redouble your efforts; persevere in your search after knowledge; and rest not, till you come near, or even arrive at perfection.

Then,

Then, whether you succeed or fail, you will force those to blush who have opposed you.

Many of us are now going to take our final leave of this Society : But, shall we forget this Friend who has served us, who has so amply promoted our welfare ? Forbid it gratitude ! We cannot be ignorant, that, of its building, much still remains to be done ; and, that its funds of knowledge can never overflow. Wherever we are, we can communicate such useful information as may have been afforded us by others, or our own experience suggested. Wherever we are, we may still, according to our respective powers, contribute and promote those contributions, which may tend to forward the completion of this building ; and, for the ability to perform which, in our own persons, we may all one day acknowledge ourselves greatly indebted to the institution of this very Society. May it still grow in fame and usefulness ! May it
rise

rise superior to every attempt which can be made either to disturb or to destroy it! May it survive the solid walls of this building, and flourish, when its present possessions are crumbled into dust!

Allow me to add a few words more to those who are still to remain. You have often in your memory, and have now constantly before your eyes*, him, whose character you have long and justly revered. May his presence fire you with a noble zeal to imitate so bright a pattern! Imagine that he inspects your conduct, and hears your debates; and act up to that example which he, and his joint teachers, have manifested in their own persons, and which they cannot fail to approve. Both in this SOCIETY, and in that world, in the busy scenes of which many of you will soon be

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* In allusion to an excellent half-length picture of DR CULLEN, painted at the expence of the Society, and lately hung up in their Hall.

called to mix, emulate their application, their active industry, their unwearied assiduity in promoting the happiness of their fellow-creatures. Possessed, as you are, of the richest means of acquiring excellence, if you exert your own best endeavours, you cannot fail of insuring that success which they have obtained, and may become, like them, the **DICTATORS** of the **MEDICAL WORLD**.

F I N I S.