An oration delivered before the Medical Society of London, at their anniversary meeting, March 8, 1834 / [William Shearman].

I place great dependance on large doses of opium and calomel in all cases after bleeding and purging. They must be exhibited in such doses as will make a decided impression on the sensorial functions, and speedily bring the constitution under the specific influence of mercury; and when we succeed in doing this, the case will generally assume a favourable character.

Camphor in scruple doses, combined with opium, will be found a very efficient anodyne in cases of great restlessness with comparatively little acute suffering.

Digitalis, *Nitrate of potass*, *Ipecacuanha*, and *Antimony*, are of great value as adjuvants, but cannot be exclusively relied upon, because irreparable mischief may take place while waiting for their operation. The *infusion* of digitalis is most speedy in its influence, most decided in its effects, and most capable of being controlled in its operation.

In presenting to the Hunterian Society this avowedly imperfect and intentionally rapid sketch, or mere outline of one of the most obscure, interesting, and unmanageable of the complaints of women, I wish it to be distinctly understood that what I have offered has been with feelings of the highest deference. I have purposely thrown my materials together in the most familiar and colloquial style, and I am aware that I may be charged with reiteration, from a wish to press home my own painful experience and convictions. I have ventured to lay down only general governing principles, faithful pathological statements, and practical suggestions, such as will, I hope, be acknowledged to be cautious and impartial deductions from incontrovertible facts, forced on my observation at the bed-side of patients during moments of intense anxiety. Should a particle of information have been conveyed, a single doubt removed, or more correct diagnosis established, I shall deem this one of the most useful days of my professional existence.

London: Printed by W. Clowes, Stamford-street.

AN

ORATION

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE

MEDICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON,

AT THEIR

ANNIVERSARY MEETING, MARCH 8, 1834,

By WILLIAM SHEARMAN, M.D.

SENIOR PHYSICIAN TO THE CHARING-CROSS HOSPITAL.

Printed at the request of the Society.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY STEWART AND CO. OLD BAILEY.

1834.

ORATION.

Mr. President and Gentlemen,

When I first received the announcement of the honour the Society had done me, in appointing me to deliver the Oration, this year, it became a matter of consideration, whether it would be politic in an individual, of such humble pretensions as myself, to occupy this chair, which has been so often filled by men of distinguished talent, and commanding eloquence, who were wont to impart instruction and delight to an admiring audience; and thus subject myself to so mortifying a comparison. I was, however, induced to accept the task assigned me, from a principle of action which has always regulated my conduct: never to shrink from the performance of whatever duty was incident to the situation I might at any time hold, when required to undertake it, by those who have a right to de-

mand it. I therefore present myself before you, relying upon that indulgence, which I have so frequently experienced from the Fellows of this Society, in my long intercourse and connexion with them, to excuse, with their usual kindness, the numerous defects, both of composition and delivery, which they must unavoidably discover.

The determination once taken, it remained a question, upon what subject I should fix. It were vain to hope, that in any of the various departments of medical science, it would be in my power, as many of my predecessors have done, to convey any information, which could possess either much of novelty or of interest to this learned audience. There seems, however, to be a prevailing taste for biographical notices and historical sketches; and if the birth, parentage, progress through life, and course of prosperity of an individual, are matters of interest, to his contemporaries and to posterity, why should not the origin and progress, vicissitudes and prosperity of this society, of which, many now present are active associates, furnish a theme for a short discourse on the present occasion? I intend then to lay before you a brief outline of the origin and progress of our Society, to point out some of the advantages, which it offers, in common with other societies of the same description, to the members of our profession; and to inquire whether the intentions and objects of its founders have been in

any degree answered, during the long period, which it has continued to exist.

It is customary with biographers, to commence with taking a retrospective glance at the state of the times, in which their hero was ushered upon the stage of action. If we advert to the state of the medical profession, at the period of the commencement of our Society, we shall perceive it to have been very materially different from that, which it exhibits at the present moment. The different branches of practice were then separated by broad and distinct lines, both in public institutions, and in the private walks of life. The physician, the surgeon, and the apothecary, interfered very little, or scarcely at all, with each other. The last, indeed, was qualified in some degree by the nature of his education and pursuits, to supersede the attendance of the physician, but he seldom did so, until an advanced period of his life, when a long course of practice had deservedly procured him the confidence of his patients; for it must be admitted, I think, that the genuine apothecary of the last century, occupied in the appropriate business of his own department, superintending the administration of the medicines prescribed, observing their beneficial or prejudicial effects, and watching in his frequent visits to the patient's bedside, the progress of the disease, and change of symptoms, preparatory to his periodical consultations with the phy-

sician, possessed within himself, so to speak, the elements necessary to the formation of a successful practitioner, in a far superior degree, to whatever will be found to exist in the mere pathological anatomist, however expert in his science he may be. The physician and the surgeon were totally distinct; and almost every family, even of the middle classes, had its separate physician, surgeon, and apothecary; the latter alone managed cases of illness of little importance; were the case more serious, the physician was joined with him, and only in cases of accidental violence, or external disease, were the services of the surgeon put in requisition. In the public hospitals, at that period, a surgeon scarcely ventured farther into the walk of medicine, than to order a dose of opium, a few grains of calomel, or an ounce of salts. Every surgical patient was consigned also to the care of a physician, and the surgeon seldom knew what internal medicines were prescribed by the doctor, when his assistance in the case was demanded.

Whether such an arrangement was judicious or not, or whether it was preferable to the present confused and anomalous condition of the profession, is not now the question; the circumstance is noticed to show, that there existed not those causes of jealousy, and that constant clashing of interests, which we now witness to so great a degree, and that, therefore, the period

was propitious to the cordial union of all the various branches of the profession. Causes, which have in late days exerted so baneful an influence, in sowing discord among the members of our profession, and in disturbing that harmony, which it is essential for the promotion of its interests and for extending the sphere of its utility should always subsist, had not then existence. No attempts had then been made to advance the prosperity of one branch, on the ruins of another; each pursued its own proper course, without interruption from the rest.

If the axiom, that the division of labour is conducive to improvement, be as applicable to science, as it is to the arts, it might be expected, that the exclusive attention of an individual to a distinct branch of medical science, would perfect him in the knowledge of that branch, and that so, the curative art, taken as a whole, would attain a degree of perfection commensurate to the labour employed. But there is so natural and inseparable a connection between medicine and surgery, that perfection can never be attained in the one, to the total exclusion of the other; and experience has demonstrated, that the improvement of both, has advanced at a greater rate, since the preliminary education for each has been more closely assimilated: it is possible, however, to run into the opposite extreme, and by endeavouring to attain perfection in such multifarious pursuits, to

fail of beooming a proficient in any. It is most conducive to the improvement of medical science as a whole, that after a certain course of education, one branch of practice should alone be cultivated, rather than the whole of them indiscriminately.

It is to be remembered, that at the period of which I have spoken, one powerful means of extending scientific information, and which produces such beneficial effects in the present day, had not then an existence; a periodical medical press, that mighty engine, which, whilst it is capable of effecting much good, is not without its alloy of concomitant evil.

We who are accustomed to an abundant supply of quarterly, monthly, and even weekly intelligence, can but imperfectly appreciate the value of an institution like our Society, which, in the almost total dearth of medical communication, facilitated the interchange of the discoveries and improvements of experienced practitioners. Occasionally indeed, and at uncertain intervals, there appeared a volume comprising papers furnished by different individuals; but these were almost necessarily confined to rare and extraordinary cases, whilst the more important, but less ostentatious mass of information, obtained in the routine of daily practice, was altogether lost, or could only be disseminated by the narrow channel of private intercourse.

In our enlightened times, and in these days of

liberalism, the species of feudalism which then existed in the medical profession, may be a matter of wonder, or it may, perhaps, excite a smile of contempt. The superior station then assigned to the physician, accords not with modern ideas, which favour the abolition of all distinctions, and the maintaining perfect equality in the republic of medicine. But if antiquity confers any title to priority of rank, the distinction was in some measure well founded; for let us not forget, that the physicians were, by the laws of the land, incorporated into a learned and scientific body, before the surgeons had disentangled themselves from their connexion with the barbers, and whilst the apothecaries exercised the threefold trade of pharmaceutist, vintner, and grocer.

The distinction thus acquired by the physicians, was, however sustained with moderation, and was unaccompanied by any arrogant pretensions to superiority of talent; they bore their honours meekly on them; and I am now to mention, that it was to the suggestion and exertions of physicians our Society owes its origin, the first, I believe, in which the members of every branch of the profession were admitted on a footing of perfect equality.

Nothing is more conducive to the growth of liberalism in the mind, than a sense of unmerited persecution; and the majority of physicians had long been subjected to a species of persecution,

in their unjust exclusion from a college, which had been established for the general benefit of the whole class, without distinction.

The college of physicians, which was founded by charter and an act of parliament, rendering it compulsory on all physicians intending to practise in London and its vicinity, to obtain admission into its body, except the graduates of Oxford and Cambridge, (who were by special favour exempted from that necessity) had by one of those strange revolutions, sometimes effected by the silent lapse of time, undergone a complete change. Not content with the privilege of being allowed to practice their profession without interference or controul of the college, the graduates of Oxford and Cambridge actually contrived to usurp the entire management of its affairs, and framing a bye-law, as illegal as it was arbitrary, it was by it enacted, that henceforth, they alone should constitute the college, whilst all other physicians, of whatever University, were considered *alieni homines, minus docti,* and were only allowed to practise in London, by their sufferance, and under their licence.

The greater part of the physicians practising in London, about the middle of the last century, especially in the eastern part of the metropolis, were graduates of Leyden, or of Edinburgh, the two most celebrated Universities for medical education of any in Europe. But the disciples of the

school of Boerhaave, or of that of Cullen, the two Monros and Gregory, although amply stored with medical science, could obtain no entrance within the penetralia of the College, not having sipped the classical waters of the Isis, or the Cam, upon the banks of which streams, however, the opportunities of acquiring medical knowledge, were miserably deficient. But the public did not altogether form their estimate of professional talent, by the standard of the College, and the degraded licentiates, accordingly, obtained no inconsiderable share of business. The practical information, with which they were abundantly fraught, they were disposed liberally to communicate to their fellow labourers in the field of science, and unrestrained by the aristocratic feelings, which governed the proceedings of the incorporated body, they sought to establish an intercourse with the other two branches of the profession, which might conduce to the mutual improvement of all. The desire thus manifested by the licentiates, was met by a corresponding inclination on the part of the surgeons, and the apothecaries, and the foundation was laid of our Society, which has now subsisted during a period of upwards of sixty years.

To secure that equality of privileges, and that community of interests, which it was the object of this Society to confer on all its fellows, care was taken at its formation, that no undue preponder-

ance should be given to any one class of practitioners, but that each should be placed precisely on the same footing. The society was at first limited to ninety members; thirty physicians, thirty surgeons, and thirty apothecaries. The council was also formed on the same principle, being composed of an equal number, taken from each branch of the profession. Committees were appointed for the promotion of every department of our science; one the committee of the theory and practice of physic, consisting of five physicians; another, the committee of surgery and anatomy, consisting of five surgeons; and a third, the committee of chemistry and pharmacy, consisting of five apothecaries. To these committees were referred for consideration all papers which were delivered to the Society, on subjects connected with their respective departments.

All the different offices in the Society, were equally open to every member of the body, with a single exception, that of president, which alone could be filled by a physician. The reason for this exclusive preference might be found in the superiority of rank, which the physician at that time enjoyed, by common consent; but what, perhaps, may by many be thought a still better reason, was, the effect such a measure would have in maintaining the society in its due station, and supporting its proper dignity, in the estimation of foreign nations, among whom the distinction of

ranks in the profession was still more strictly observed than by ourselves, and who would have thought it an anomaly to have any other person than a learned physician to preside over a medical society, and that they should have taken their president from one of what they considered the inferior grades.

The Society once organized, meetings of the fellows took place at stated periods, at first once a fortnight, and afterwards weekly, during the autumn and winter; and this practice has been continued to the present time. The information elicited at these meetings must have been interesting and valuable to all who attended them, especially when, as I have stated, the sources of intercommunication were so few. But to no portion of the society could these meetings be so beneficial as to the apothecaries who formed part of them, and who, from the deficient state of their professional education, compared with that which it is now compulsory upon them to obtain, were necessarily less informed on many subjects of medical science than the other branches of the profession. This must be understood to apply to the collective body generally, for there were then, as at all times, some men among them of superior talent and eminent skill; but it is not in the nature of things to expect, that at a time when no particular standard of education was prescribed by law, and the routine sanctioned by custom, was

of the most limited description, the body, taken as a whole, should be distinguished for professional erudition and acquirements. But the evident improvement which had taken place, in these respects, among this class of practitioners in the metropolis, long before the celebrated act of 1815 could have effect, was mainly owing to this Society, and is one proof, among others, of the utility it was calculated to produce.

In a society formed as ours is, and where the meetings are so frequent as in this, the experience of every individual who forms a part of it, becomes, as it were, the property of the whole. The most free and unreserved communication takes place, and the very junior member present may avail himself of opportunities of acquiring practical knowledge, which, were he left to the resources of his own individual experience, it would cost him years to attain. The former part of every evening of meeting was devoted to the communication of medical intelligence, the latter part was employed in the reading a short paper, furnished by some one of the fellows; and both the one plan and the other was attended with corresponding benefit. Subjects of temporary interest were chiefly included in the former arrangement; the latter provided the means of a more extended diffusion of such elaborate discussions as were suitable to the ponderous volume.

Of the value of medical news, we may form

some opinion, when we consider that the return of epidemic diseases is generally confined, for a time, to some particular locality; and that these diseases, on their epidemic return, frequently, at first, display some new, or anomalous character, in consequence of some peculiar constitution of the seasons, requiring a corresponding variation in the method of treatment, but which is only to be ascertained by the actual superintendence of a few cases. This is a fact mentioned by Sydenham, the father of English medicine, who acknowledges himself to have been at a loss how to treat the same disease, at the different periods of its epidemic invasion, and frequently to have lost some of his first patients, before he hit upon the right method. Without such communication, as was afforded by our Society, some new disease might have committed ravages in the eastern part of the metropolis, before its existence would have been heard of in the west, and every individual practitioner would be left to his own sagacity alone, to ascertain its true character and requisite treatment. But after this Society was in full operation, more than a week would not elapse, before the experience of the first witness of the disease, was communicated to the profession in general; and, as the same maxim holds good in medicine as in common life, *premonitus, premunitus*, every practitioner became prepared, beforehand, to encounter the formidable enemy.

The catarrhal fever, or influenza, which prevailed in the spring of last year, might easily, at its first approach, have been mistaken by inexperienced practitioners, for common thoracic inflammation; and it would only have been after the failure of the treatment adapted to the erroneous view thus taken, they would become convinced of the essential difference between the epidemic disease, and the ordinary bronchitis of other seasons. The fact, once pointed out by those who first witnessed the disease, served as a beacon for the guidance of others.

The intelligence conveyed to the fellows of this Society, at their ordinary meetings, was not confined to the occurrences in the metropolis; they had corresponding members in almost every part of the country, some of whom displayed no common diligence in transmitting their observations to head-quarters. The diploma of the society was also presented to foreign physicians and surgeons of great eminence, many of whom became valuable correspondents; and the list of our members, domestic and foreign, included the names of some of the most distinguished contributors to medical science.

The division of the business of the evening into oral and written communications, was productive of some advantage, as it secured a constant succession of papers, the most interesting of which were afterwards communicated to the public; and

the six volumes of memoirs, published by the society, are an evidence of the zeal and industry of its members; as some of the papers contained in those volumes, although they may have been equalled, have not been surpassed by those which have appeared in any collection whatever. Of so much importance, indeed, did the founders of the society consider written communications, that even the candidates who were waiting for admission among its members, as vacancies occurred, the number, as I have said, being limited, were expected to contribute their share; for I find a minute of a resolution passed in the second year of its existence, in these words:—"The Society, considering that few of the candidates have exerted themselves in sending papers, do recommend it warmly to every candidate to be, for the future, more industrious." In this respect, as in some others, we have greatly deviated from the practice of our predecessors.

A small society is but an epitome of larger collections of men into kingdoms and states; and the same passions, the same motives of action, which, exerted on a larger scale, would convulse the latter, may effectually disturb the harmony of the former; it were vain, therefore, to expect uninterrupted concord in either; our Society, accordingly, has at times experienced the inconvenience resulting from a want of unanimity among its members. Of the little bickerings and disagree-

ments which occasionally took place in its earlier days, I shall say nothing; but I must not pass over in silence, an event, which, whilst it threatened the very existence of the Society, forms a memorable epoch in its history. The causes which gave rise to a schism of such magnitude, it is unnecessary particularly to advert to, although they might be traced to a deviation from the excellent rules established by its original founders; but it ended in the secession of very many of its most efficient members, who, uniting together, established a new society,* which, although it became at first a formidable rival to the parent society, has for some time past continued on terms of friendship with it, and each, after some abortive attempts at a re-union, has pursued its separate career, to the increase of public utility.

The separation of the Society into two distinct bodies, was, perhaps, the means of imparting an additional degree of zeal and of energy to each; but the paths pursued by the two, have been somewhat different. Whilst the Parent Society has confined itself, almost solely, to the interchange of oral communications, its offspring has distinguished itself by the publication of several excellent volumes of transactions. One common purpose animates each of them, the improvement

* The Medico Chirugical Society.

of medical science; and there are many individuals who are, at the same time, members of both.

The long course of years during which the Society has existed, has enabled it to collect a library of no inconsiderable magnitude: in it are to be found many works of antiquity, which are now become scarce; nor is it deficient in modern works of merit;—the whole forming an extensive library of reference, to which all the fellows have free access. This, of itself, constitutes an advantage of no little importance, which will not fail to be duly appreciated.

It cannot be inappropriate to the purpose of the day, to advert for a moment to the original founders, and early supporters of this society. They have finished their course; but our gratitude is due to them for the succession of benefits they have been the means of conferring on more than one generation. Dr. Millar, Dr. Hulme, Dr. Lettsom, Mr. Hewson the anatomist, Dr. Hugh Smith, Dr. Cogan, the founder of the Royal Humane Society, were a few of those who planned, and first supported this society; but to none of them are we more indebted, than to Dr. John Coakley Lettsom, whose active mind was constantly engaged in promoting some plan of benevolence, or some measure conducive to the advancement of science. He continued the firm friend to the Society, from its first establishment

during the long period of forty-three years, in its prosperity and its adversity; for societies, as well as individuals, have their vicissitudes of fortune. When thwarted in his designs, or opposed in his measures, he did not withdraw his name from the Society in petulant disgust, like a froward child, who, when he cannot have every thing his own way, will play no longer: but he stood firm at his post, and patiently waited for better days, using, in the mean time, all his endeavours to effect a return of them. In addition to his other exertions for the welfare of the institution, he furnished large pecuniary aids. As a means of forwarding the intentions of its founders, the improvement of medical science, he bestowed the annual sum of ten guineas, to be laid out in the purchase of a gold medal, to be given to the author of some dissertation, approved of by the Society; and, as a testimony of respect to the memory of his lately deceased friend, Dr. John Fothergill, whose name stands high in professional estimation, it was called the Fothergillian Medal, (bearing on its obverse a likeness of the deceased doctor.) This donation, after a time, was withdrawn; and Dr. Lettsom then granted to the society, in perpetuity, the freehold house in Bolt Court, in which the fellows now hold their ordinary meetings.

Some years after this, Dr. Anthony Fothergill, who formerly practised at Bath, and afterwards

removed to America, bequeathed 500*l.* to the society, for the purpose of enabling it to award a gold medal annually, to the author of some dissertation, on a subject to be proposed by the council, the presentation of one of which by our excellent president, you have just witnessed. These two gentlemen gave substantial proof of their desire to promote the prosperity of the Society, and the advancement of medical science. They are examples of a liberality of sentiment, which does honour to our profession, and which, it is to be hoped, will be often followed by those, who, with the possession of adequate wealth, possess also, the more enviable blessing of a free-spirited and generous disposition.

Among the more recent occurrences which interest us as a body, we have to notice with feelings of deep regret, the removal by the stern hand of death, of two of our oldest fellows, to both of whom the Society has been indebted for valuable services. For no less a period than fifty-six years, did one belong to our association, during some part of which, he discharged the duties of the office I have the honour to hold.* Our other late associate had so many claims upon his time and attention, from the high estimation in which he was held as a physician, as to leave him little leisure to show himself amongst us so often as his

* Dr. Andrée.

inclination would have led him to do. Of his continued good wishes for our success he gave us a proof, by joining, as if in anticipation of his final farewell, our festive board at the last anniversary.*

If we compare the present state of our Society, with its condition at some of the former periods of its existence, we may be led to conclude, that it does not exhibit such a degree of prosperity, as its original founders might have fondly anticipated. All human concerns are fluctuating, and unstable; if there have been times, when the number of fellows has exceeded the present amount, there have been other times, when it has fallen far, very far below it. We can boast of including in our present list, the names of men of considerable talent, devoted to science, and ardent in the pursuit of it, whose frequent attendance at our ordinary meetings, is evidence of their desire to extend the utility of it, and the additions which have been made to it within the last year, afford a pleasing proof of the high estimation in which we are at present held. And if at any time, from the apathy and indifference of those, whose duty it is, and whose pride it should be, to maintain and increase its reputation, the Society should manifest symptoms of a declining state, a Clutterbuck and a firm small phalanx may again arise, to arrest its downward

* Dr. Babington.

steps: there exists no permanent obstacle to impede its progressive prosperity. The causes which have prevented its more rapid growth are sufficiently obvious; the multiplication of similar institutions in different parts of the metropolis, which may, indeed, be considered as offsets from this, the parent stock; the facility of diffusing medical information by means of the periodical press, by means of which also, the youthful aspirant after fame, may see himself in print, sooner, and perhaps with more certainty, than he could expect to do, in the annals of an established society; and the opportunities afforded by the practice of reporting, to those who are more desirous of appropriating to themselves the fruits of other people's experience, than of contributing any thing to the common stock. But still there are advantages attending the meeting together of our members, which the press cannot supply, and which will be duly appreciated by those who seek to profit by them.

It is by comparing our own acquirements with those of other persons, that we are able to form a just estimate of their true value. The importance, which a man, occupied in the contemplation alone, of his fancied superior attainments, assumes, is diminished in proportion as he has opportunities, by intercourse, of witnessing the still superior abilities of others. Many a man who has appeared to himself a giant in knowledge, when

reflected from the magnifying mirror of self-partiality, has found himself dwindle to a mere pigmy, when viewed through the more correct medium of just comparison.

It is also by the collision of opinions, that truth is elicited, and truth should ever be the object in view in all our researches. The hypothesis, framed with so much care in the closet, captivating as it seems to us, from its apparent simplicity, and the symmetry of its proportions, is often demolished to atoms, when subjected to the test of free discussion. The system, learned with so much diligence in the schools, which we fancied to be sufficiently comprehensive to explain all the operations of nature, in a state of health, and to enable us to controul all her erratic wanderings, in a state of disease, is found to be out of joint, and to become unserviceable, when we rely upon it, as a guide to direct us, in the daily walks of practice.

The sooner in our professional career, we become convinced of these truths, the greater the advantage; and there are no speedier means of arriving at a knowledge of them, than by intercourse with our professional brethren, in meetings like those of our Society, where the theoretical speculations of the young and inexperienced, receive their due correction from the matured judgment of the more advanced practitioner. Here each finds his proper sphere of action; the young practitioner, having more leisure for reading and for study, sooner be-

comes acquainted with new facts, and new opinions, which are almost daily brought before the medical public, and these constitute his quota of contributions to the general stock; whilst the active practitioner, who has long grappled with disease, at the bed-side, and thus accumulated a large fund of practical knowledge, freely communicates the result of his experience. For knowledge is like light, the most extensive diffusion of it, diminishes not the source whence it proceeds. A man does not decrease his own stock, by freely imparting it to others; on the contrary, his doing so, frequently becomes the means of increasing it; his ideas present themselves to his mind, under various aspects, and he is thus enabled to detect whatever of error may have mixed itself with truth. *Disco docendo* is a maxim verified by long experience.

Another advantage, and that certainly of no little value, which attends the meeting together of our members, is the opportunity thereby afforded, of cultivating a friendly disposition towards each other, and of softening down those jealousies which unavoidably more or less arise in the rivalry of business. Temptations to take a mean and unfair advantage of a professional brother, although they may not be less frequent, will be more effectually resisted, when the individual exposed to them, recollects, that the person whom he might thereby injure, is shortly about to communicate

with him, in unsuspicious confidence, and when he knows that his conduct would be reprobated by every one of his associates, were they made acquainted with it. To stand high in the estimation of his professional brethren, must naturally be the wish of every man, who mixes largely with them, and a consciousness of deserving their censure, one of the most uncomfortable of feelings, and he will take no little pains to preserve himself from the one, and to deserve the other. A man who constantly keeps aloof from his fellows, and shuns all opportunities of mixing in unreserved communication with them, may be suspected of harbouring designs, or following practices, which he is ashamed to avow, and is afraid should be detected.

Unfortunately, no profession is more exposed to obloquy, than our own. Called upon to administer relief in sickness and in pain, and to avert threatening death, we often incur blame when we fail to perform what is expected from us, and our failure is sometimes attributed, not to the incurable nature of the disease, and the inadequacy of our means, but to negligence and ignorance of the practitioner. To raise, or to encourage such a suspicion in the mind of a relative, however congenial it may be (such is the weakness of human nature) to the feelings of a person suffering under disappointment, will be studiously avoided by every practitioner of candid and liberal disposi-

tion. To lessen the dignity of the profession, or to degrade any of its members, is to reflect a certain portion of disgrace upon himself. A cordial union among all the members of the medical profession, and a kind and liberal feeling towards each other, are the most effectual means of maintaining its dignity, supporting its interests, and increasing its general utility. The numerous vexations we daily experience in the performance of our arduous duties, are more easily borne, when we are satisfied that they are neither produced, nor increased by the unhandsome conduct of our professional brethren. They are sufficiently numerous, indeed, without any addition from that quarter.

If, then, some of the purposes, for the attainment of which, this society was first instituted, can now be effected by other means, which did not then exist, still, it appears, there is much good to be derived through the instrumentality of it. Those who have been most constant in their attendance at our meetings, can best testify the benefit they individually receive, and how well calculated it is to advance medical science. There are few persons,—indeed I may say, where is the individual?—so far advanced in the knowledge of our art, as not to leave something still to be learned, and who may not receive useful information, sometimes even from a mere tyro. A constant intercourse, therefore with men who have seen much,

have observed much, and who are willing to communicate the result of their observations, must be in the highest degree desireable to those just entering upon their career of practice. The young man on first emerging from the trammels of the schools, may here be induced to exchange his partial view of the bearings of the different branches of learning on the science of medicine, as a whole, for more enlarged notions. Too great reliance, for instance, seems at the present day to be placed by those about to enter the profession, (in accordance with the doctrine of some popular teachers,) on the sufficiency of anatomical pathology, as a means of enabling us to understand and to treat disease; but valuable as this knowledge is, and I am far from depreciating its value as an auxiliary to medical science, too exclusive a cultivation of it, is not the best method of qualifying ourselves for our practical duties. Indeed the mind of the medical public seems to be in a perpetual state of vacillation, devoid of all stability, easily seizing upon any novel opinion, and clinging to it enthusiastically for a period, discarding it with facility in favour of something more novel, and the more opposite to the former one is the latter, so much the better. We move in a circle amidst the constant change of objects and of means. Morbid anatomy is the rage of the present day, and substituting the term pathological condition for that of proximate cause, but meaning

the same thing, we join ardently in the pursuit, flattering ourselves that we are on the high road to, and actually in sight of the goal of all our most anxious wishes, the perfection of medical science. To know accurately the seat of disease, however, and change of structure produced by it, is possible, without our being able to predict its probable course, or conduct it to a safe termination. The man who knows every timber, and every plank in the ship, and who knows also, where the greatest strain will be, when she is pressed by the gale, is not necessarily the best pilot to conduct the vessel among the rocks and quicksands of a dangerous coast; but he who has often traversed the passage, and is well acquainted with every sea mark, and every beacon. Experience is the grand *desideratum*, but individual experience is necessarily, and especially in our early days too limited. We must rely more upon collective than individual experience, and where can this auxiliary be better obtained, than by oral information from the Nestors of our profession, sobered down as they are by being repeatedly disappointed of finding that short royal road to curing all diseases, so confidently described by the visionary theorist, but which is found only to exist in the fertile imagination of his own excited brain.

Every step in the improvement of medical science, is the means of diminishing the sum of human misery, and of increasing the general welfare of

mankind. The medical philanthropist, therefore, may feel a laudable pride and honest satisfaction, in belonging to a Society, which has already done so much in this respect, and is still pursuing its useful career. We should be stimulated to increased exertions, and careful that its high character be not diminished, through our negligence and supineness. It should, on the contrary, be our earnest endeavour to support its reputation, and to extend the sphere of its utility ; to imitate, and if possible to excel those of our predecessors, who have heretofore by their professional labours benefited mankind in the important concerns of health and life, and thus obtain the sweetest of all rewards, the consciousness of doing good.

If, gentlemen, in this short sketch which I have now had the honour to present to your notice, of the origin and purpose of the Society, I shall have fallen very far short of the spirit of the law, which enacts " that at our anniversary, a discourse shall be delivered by one of the members, on the best means of promoting the intentions of the Society, and the general improvement of medical knowledge," I yet trust that the statement I have given may not be altogether unacceptable, and that the imperfect outline here exhibited may hereafter be filled up by some one better qualified for the task. Inadequate as I felt myself to be, to do justice to the subject, the only merit I claim consists in promptly responding to your wishes

that I should attempt it. For I may say in the words of the Roman orator, "Mea fuit semper hæc in hac re, voluntas et sententia, quemvis, ut hoc mallem, de iis qui essent idonei suscipere quam me, me ut mallem, quam neminem."

STEWART AND CO., PRINTERS, OLD BAILEY.