INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS

ON

THE OPENING OF THE TWENTY-SIXTH SESSION
OF THE ARMY MEDICAL SCHOOL.*Delivered at Netley, on April 2nd, 1873.*

BY

F. S. B. F. DE CHAUMONT, M.D., F.R.C.S.E., Surgeon-Major,
Assistant-Professor of Hygiene.

GENTLEMEN,—On this the opening of the twenty-sixth session of the Army Medical School, I have been deputed to address to you the few formal words of welcome with which it has been the custom to usher in the work of the course. This I do most heartily in the name of my colleagues and in my own, and beg to express a hope that you may find both pleasure and profit from your sojourn here. This is now the fourth session since the establishment became truly an united service school, and since we first had the pleasure of addressing in this place candidates for the Medical Department of Her Majesty's Navy. For some years previously, we had formed a closer union with our Indian brethren; and, indeed, the very first session when the school was opened at Chatham, we had candidates for the Indian service, although their entry was afterwards for a time suspended during a period of uncertainty as to the future status of the Medical Department of our Eastern Empire. During this time, we have had none but pleasurable results from this happy bringing together of the members of the different services; and it is with the highest satisfaction that we welcome to-day the presence of commissioned officers of the Royal Navy, who are about to take advantage of the opportunity now for the first time afforded them, of going through the school course, and renewing their acquaintance with branches of study which have been less familiar to them during protracted foreign service, and under the pressure of the various functions entailed upon them by the exigencies of public duty. We have long had the pleasure of meeting here officers of both the Indian army and our own, who have come from time to time to rub off a little of the rust that must accumulate even on the most active minds, and we hope that these opportunities will continue to be embraced by all three services as far as they can be afforded. Indeed, we look upon this as a most important function that the school fulfils, as furnishing a place of study to which officers can return and acquire (like Antæus) fresh intellectual vigour by once again touching the ground from which they sprung. Our only regret is that our accommodation hitherto has been so limited—indeed, quite inadequate for the complete fulfilment of what is desired or wanted; and we can only hope that the time may come when the imperative nature of our wants may be appreciated, and our teaching be no longer hampered by deficiency of time and space. Still, however, we endeavour to make the best of what we have; and if at times we have to hurry up somewhat points in our teaching which might well repay more elaborate treatment, we have the reflection that a great part of the instruction is practical and so more valuable, even though it be brief, than mere oral instruction ever can be. This, in fact, has all along been the main feature of the school—to make, as far as possible, every man who studies at it go through every process himself, believing that an ounce of practice is worth a ton of theory. Of course, principles must be taught; but the principles of a practical science like ours are but little remembered, unless their concrete application accompanies the enunciation of the theory. On the whole, I may say, and I think justly, that we lecture our pupils as little as any school in existence, considering the multiplicity of subjects that we must necessarily bring before them. Some of our friends who have already gone through the school may smile at this, and think that after all they had quite enough of it. Well, lectures are essentially dreary things, and after one has passed already through some years of them elsewhere, they may appear a little irksome; but when you come to reflect on the question, you will, I think, find that we have pretty well reduced this part of the work to a minimum. Of theoretical lectures proper, we have only one a day for five days in the week, which gives in a session of sixteen or seventeen weeks only eighty to eighty-five lectures in all, in which to overtake the subjects of Military Surgery and Medicine, Pathology, and Hygiene. In addition to these, my colleague Dr. Macdonald has a short special course for our naval friends, in which to initiate them into the peculiarities of ships and their architecture, a mystery to us landmen. Whatever else there is in the way of lecturing, is really in the shape of such explanations and instructions as are necessary for conducting the practical courses of chemical analysis

and microscopic examination, and clinical and pathological teaching in the wards and *post mortem* theatre. Many of the points brought before your notice will be new to all or most of you, and although some parts of the course may seem trite and well known to a few, yet no one will be the worse for going over a subject a second or even a third time; whilst the more intellectually gifted must exercise a friendly forbearance, and suffer gladly even a weariness of repetition, for their weaker brethren's sake. To all, however, even the most accomplished of students, there are opportunities for enlarging the boundaries of a knowledge which can never be too wide; there are means of making yourselves practically acquainted with various instruments, such as the ophthalmoscope, laryngoscope, sphygmograph, etc., which there is not always time during the studies in the civil schools for all to familiarise themselves with; there are opportunities for operation on the dead subject, which, in your capacities as surgeons of the public service, cannot be too frequently embraced; there are microscopes always at your disposal for any researches you choose to take up, and a chemical laboratory always open, to which we will gladly welcome you at any hour—from morn to dewy eve. We are glad to think that the impetus given here to original study and research has already borne good fruit, and that many of our former pupils are now prosecuting inquiries in different parts of the world—inquiries which have already brought forth important results, and which give even greater promise of future productiveness. A certain stimulus is also given here to emulation, by the influence which the final examinations have in determining the place of a candidate on the general list, and by the record of our most successful competitors we keep here on our walls. Hitherto our Indian friends have had a monopoly of the first honours, the highest place having been invariably adjudged to one of their number when any candidates for that service have been at the school. I trust, however, it will be not long before a generous rivalry will enable one or other of the sister services to wrest the laurel from them. We have this year no candidates for the home army, and therefore the brunt of the battle must fall upon the navy, and our only wish is that the struggle may be a tough one, and that the best man may win. As regards the Herbert Prize, which has been for some years back awarded to the first man on the list of the military candidates, it was the wish of the Senate that it should be open to the naval service as well. It seems, however, that the terms of the original trust are considered by the legal advisers of the War Office to refer only to the military services, and thus, for the present at least, to exclude the naval.*

In looking, gentlemen, at the career you have chosen for yourselves, a number of considerations present themselves, whether we view the profession of medicine as a whole or those particular branches of it to which you have signified your intention to devote yourselves, namely, the different services of the Crown. As regards the former, the selection of the profession itself, that is a point which your positions as already qualified practitioners show has been maturely weighed and decided upon, and which must now, in all but a few instances, determine your future lives. It, therefore, calls for but little remark of any but a general kind, yet I cannot help honestly congratulating you on the choice that you have made. Honourable as other professions may be, and more *honoured* as they certainly *are* in this world, there is none that I myself would have willingly embraced in preference; nay, more, I may state my belief, that there is none in which a man may, if he so wills it, keep his vessel of honour in more, I had almost said in as, unsullied purity. As long as ignorance prevails among the multitude, impostors will thrive and quacks grow fat upon its foolishness; but as long as we honestly work, taking scientific truth for our foundation, they need not vex our souls, and we may suffer fools gladly, seeing that we have at least the wisdom of patience and reverence for the truth.

As regards, however, your future position as officers of the public services, a good deal more may be said, as from this day forth you enter upon a new career and undertake duties which differ considerably, at least in form, from those which you have hitherto discharged. Your choice in this point also is, to a certain extent, a matter for congratulation. It is true that you cannot look forward to the high emoluments of successful civil practice; but it is to be remembered that such are only the prizes of the few, whilst, on the other hand, you will be spared much of the drudgery, anxiety, and uncertainty, not to mention the many annoyances and even humiliations, which too often fall to the lot of our hard-working and deserving brethren in general practice. The comforts of a fixed home can only be partially enjoyed by you, but after all the home is less the place than those who fill it, whilst the opportunities afforded to you of seeing men and countries are the fulfilment of what are merely the wild and unattainable dreams of the toiling worker at home. Indeed, many have been induced to enter the public

* This difficulty has since been removed; and the Herbert Prize is now open to all candidates, naval included, attending the school.

service, particularly that of the navy, attracted by those very advantages of travel and scientific research which it procures. For my own part, however, my congratulations to those about to enter the navy must savour a little of hypocrisy, as I am one of those unfortunate individuals to whom a ship is simply poison, and I doubt if any amount of apprenticeship would have ever enabled me to overcome the inconveniences attending the perpetual search after my centre of gravity. This, however, is but a question of idiosyncrasy; and, fortunately for our country, not general, and, setting such individual inconveniences aside, we may say that the public service, both afloat and ashore, opens up a large field of inquiry both in professional matters and in the collateral sciences. It is to the medical officers of the army and navy that the solution and elucidation of some of the most important questions have been due, and in certain directions the opportunities enjoyed by them are unrivalled, dealing as they do with a body of men under more or less constant observation and control, whose histories, medical and otherwise, are known and can be traced through a considerable period. In this way it is possible to watch the effects of a special line of treatment and its results in a more complete manner than often falls to the lot of a civilian. Thus, to the medical officers of the navy is due the successful treatment of scurvy, which was formerly such a deadly foe to our sailors, and which unfortunately from time to time makes its appearance again wherever those wise principles laid down a century ago are neglected. To the medical officers of the army again we owe some of the severest blows given to the reckless antiphlogistic treatment once so general, and to them is due still more the final defeat of the even more reckless mercurialism which so long shattered the frames of its unfortunate victims.

In later times the responsibility for the health of a large body of men gave an impetus to the study of the laws of health; and the first course of hygiene proper ever delivered in this country was that begun in this school, and the first English work on the subject worthy of the name was the treatise by our distinguished professor, Dr. Parkes. I do not think I am claiming too much credit for the Army Medical School, when I say that the great and growing interest evinced on all sides on sanitary matters, and the foundation of chairs and lectureships on hygiene, have been largely due to the teaching given here, and to the way in which the efforts made to improve the health of both the army and the navy have awakened the attention of the public. It is true that we are still merely at the beginning of the matter; but a thing begun is half ended, and merely to have, we may say, codified the rules of health, which were previously scattered vaguely over medical minds and medical books, is of itself a great work; it furnishes a framework which may not, perhaps, be of itself eternal, but which may at least usefully support the rising edifice till increased knowledge and more exact science shall have filled up the weak places in the structure. The startling facts, first, that the mortality in the army, both at home and abroad, had been reduced by fully one-half in the short space of ten years; and, second, that there die in these islands at least 150,000 persons yearly from preventable disease, have combined to strike even the Philistine mind that a great national crime was being committed so long as means were not taken to ascertain the causes of those diseases; and that, as Lord Palmerston wisely said, no amount of days of humiliation and prayer would avail unless our filthy alleys and noisome dens were first cleansed, and those causes, as far as we can find them out, swept away. We are now beginning to see the result in the appointment all over the country of sanitary officers, whose special duty it will be to trace out the causes of preventable disease as completely as possible, and call upon the proper authorities to effect their removal. It is quite true that the measures are as yet very crude, and that in many cases the practical working of the system has been rendered useless by the perverseness of the Philistine mind already referred to; but this we may consider as merely one of the phases through which every great movement has to go before its value can be sufficiently brought home to the average intellect. Much of it is due to the great ignorance of the class from which the local authorities are necessarily drawn—an ignorance, however, which, we trust, becoming daily less, and will in due time so far cease out of the land as to let the imperative necessities of health be known, and even its money value appreciated, if no higher motive can be found to force its principles home.

Seeing, then, that the medical departments of the public services have exercised so powerful an influence on the community at large, it behoves us to consider well our position and its responsibilities. That the influence must be considerable is evident, if we take the mere numbers alone. The British and Indian armies and the Royal Navy do not muster fewer than 2,500 medical officers; and the work done by such a body must be powerful for good or evil, both in the country which they are serving and in every other land in due proportion. The importance of this position has, however, hardly been as yet sufficiently estimated, for various reasons. In the first place, it is only lately that anything like

a true bond of union has been formed between the three services; and we hope that the fact of the candidates for those services having sat on the same benches here, studied the same subjects, and striven with each other in friendly rivalry, may have a great influence in this direction, not to mention the more intimate social relations and friendships formed by living together at the same mess, and uniting in field-sports and other means of relaxation in their leisure hours. Another cause which has operated to diminish the influence that otherwise might have been exercised, has been the regimental system in the army; not that I desire to pronounce any sweeping condemnation of that system, which has many advantages, and has been productive of much good. I spent a number of years myself as assistant-surgeon in one of the most distinguished regiments in the service, and can look back upon the time spent there with happiness and pleasure, and I feel sure that the vast majority of men can speak of their old corps in similar terms. But the danger of the system seemed to me always to be, that the medical officer was liable to identify himself more with the regiment he served in than with the department to which he primarily belonged. This was simply reversing what ought to have been. He ought before all things to feel that he belongs first and foremost to the medical department of the service, and that his connection with the special corps he serves with is temporary and accidental. There was hardly the same source of danger in the navy, from the different arrangements prevailing; a ship's company not being so separately defined a body, except during its actual commission, as a regiment, whilst the fact of the uniform remaining the same throughout was a continual reminder of the unity of the department. But in the army, where the medical officer wore the uniform of his corps, he was, I am afraid, apt to forget that the gay jacket of the Hussar or the elegant costume of the Rifleman was a mere accident of position, and noway an essential quality of his real status. In this way there was a want of unity as a medical body, and on this account we may so far welcome the recently published Royal Warrant, in that it shadows forth the unification of the Army Medical Department, although it may otherwise fall short of what was desired or hoped. Had I been addressing candidates for the British Army Service, I should have taken this opportunity of saying a few words on the changes which the provisions of this Warrant (and the other accompanying documents) are about to usher in. For you, gentlemen, these can, however, have only an indirect interest, and therefore I think it unnecessary to dwell especially upon them. I would simply state my belief that the step taken is one of very great importance, and that it will ultimately lead to changes of vital nature—changes which must naturally follow the increase of influence of the Medical Department, and the slow but inevitable pressure of public opinion.

[To be concluded.]

OBSTETRIC MEMORANDA.

REPEATED ABNORMAL PRESENTATIONS.

DR. MOLONY, in the JOURNAL of April 12th, reports a case, or rather cases, of abnormal presentation of the fetus in labour, occurring several times in the same patient, and suggests that others should communicate any similar cases with which they may have met in their practice. I attended a woman some years since, in four successive confinements. In the first she was delivered of twins, the head of the first child presenting, and the arm of the second. Turning was easily accomplished, and both children lived some time. The second labour was complicated with placental presentation, attended with hæmorrhage, but not of a very alarming character. Turning was resorted to successfully. In the next labour I found the same state of affairs, and delivered easily, in the same manner. Still more astonished was I, when, about two years afterwards, during my temporary absence from home, my assistant was sent for, and detected again the placental presentation. A messenger being despatched to meet me, I speedily was in attendance, and turned again, without any untoward symptoms. These labours occurred at nearly the full term of gestation, and were not preceded by any of the ordinary signs of placental presentation, and in fact, so easily was the placenta pushed on one side to allow the hand to pass, that I could not but entertain the idea that possibly the placenta might have been detached, and fallen over the os uteri. The woman had several children previously to my attending her, but I do not know that those labours were attended with any unusual circumstances. More recently, I have met with another patient, whose only two confinements were complicated with arm-presentations. In the first, matters had progressed so far that evisceration was necessary; and in the last, pains being very slight, delivery by turning was easily accomplished.

JOHN EWENS, L.R.C.P., Cerne Abbas.