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INTRODUCTORY LECTURE

ON THE

PRACTICE OF MEDICINE,

DELIVERED AT THE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE,
LIVERPOOL ROYAL INSTITUTION.

SESSION 1841-2.

October 6, 1841.

By ROGER WAKEFIELD SCOTT, M.D.

GENTLEMEN,—In reassembling for the performance of our annual labours, it is a useful custom for each lecturer to commence the business of the session with some general observations respecting the nature and objects of the course of instruction which he is about to impart, their necessity and importance, and the mode of study which may be most easily and profitably pursued.

These preliminary lectures afford also the most eligible opportunity of advertizing to various subjects, well deserving of attention and remembrance, relative to your professional studies, which are of general application, rather than referable to any particular department. If these preliminary remarks are useful in each division of medical science, they are still more so in the most important of them all, that of practical medicine, which is the great end of all your studies, and to which all the others are but preliminary and subservient. I trust that there are none of you who have entered upon a profession so important and difficult as our own, without a due sense of what it requires, and the serious responsibility which it imposes upon you, and without some portion of that enthusiasm in its pursuit, which is essential to its successful cultivation.

It must be in no careless or indifferent spirit that you enter upon the labours of this course, but with a deep conviction of the value of time at your present stage of life, and of the folly and culpability of negligence and indifference, and with a firm determination, not only to pay every attention to the public means of instruction afforded you, but also still farther to improve them by private meditation and study, not allowing yourselves to remain content with a mere superficial knowledge, but ambitious of obtaining one of a more profound and philosophic character, not merely adequate to secure your admission into the ranks of the profession, but to the skilful and conscientious fulfilment of its practical duties.

It will be my part to endeavour to treat the subjects confided to me in such a manner as may not only be intelligible to you, but as attractive and interesting as their peculiar nature will allow—not feeling too anxious to display my own ingenuity or research, by fatiguing you with abstract and

elaborate doctrines, but to simplify and condense the subject, in a way best calculated to ensure your comprehension and remembrance; and the experience which I have now had will, I trust, enable me to keep these objects steadily in view, so that, aided by attention and diligence on your part, I may have to congratulate myself, when arriving at the termination of the course, that my labours have not been wholly in vain.

The amount of knowledge of various collateral branches, as well as of medical science, which existing regulations require, is already of a high standard, and there is every probability, that if the alterations which are contemplated in the routine of preliminary professional education are carried into effect, a still higher degree will be necessary. The present extent, however, is not to be regarded with indifference, as it presupposes a competent degree of classical acquirements, and an extensive and accurate acquaintance with several sciences subservient to that of medicine, and it allows you but a comparatively brief period for their acquisition. In what a perplexing and distressing situation, then, is that young man placed, who, (as is but too frequently the case,) having neglected to take advantage of his early opportunities of instruction, puts off all serious efforts to the last period, and is compelled to undergo the most harassing and incessant labour to obtain sufficient knowledge even to escape rejection!

How different is the position of him, who, having accumulated a mass of knowledge by gradual and well-regulated study, looks forward without dread to the time when it shall be put to the test, and by this very calmness and consciousness of knowledge, is enabled to display it to its best advantage, and in a way which not unfrequently has a beneficial influence on his subsequent fortunes! It gives me much pleasure to state, that, as far as my own experience extends, we have not had to complain of inattention or indifference amongst the pupils of this school, but, on the contrary, have witnessed a general desire for improvement even beyond the means afforded them, as is manifested by the existence of a society amongst themselves for the promotion of professional objects, which we are anxious to encourage, as tending to make study fashionable, and affording a wide field for emulative exertions. Still, however, every season brings some fresh comers into our ranks, who may not yet be sufficiently aware of the importance of early application; and in every class there will generally be some individuals of more volatile and careless dispositions than others, who require to be reminded of the danger of being led away by the example of companions or the suggestion of their own feelings; nor are there usually wanting others, whose superior abilities and quickness of perception may lead them to suppose that they can, at some convenient period hereafter, readily make up for the time which they may now misapply. I would seriously

recommend such as these, who have been gifted with superior talents, (the proper cultivation of which is an imperative duty,) not to delude themselves with the vain hope, that mere ability, however eminent, will be sufficient to retrieve the loss which misemployed time will create, or will enable them to acquire, during the limited period which they allow themselves, anything more than a mere vague and superficial knowledge. In our profession there is so much of mere mechanical detail, of matters of observation and experiment, which appertain altogether to the province of memory, a knowledge of which is only to be acquired by careful study, and impressed upon the mind by reflection, that however much genius and talent may be calculated to impart a more philosophical character to the principles of our art, and tend to its extension and improvement, yet mere sound sense and correct judgment, aided by assiduous application, are perhaps better adapted for ensuring a deeper and more comprehensive knowledge of them.

There are few or none of you, I should hope, who have entered upon the study of your profession without having acquired a competent degree of knowledge in the Latin language at least, if not in the Greek.

Though I am no advocate for either extreme, yet I cannot but think that it is somewhat too much the fashion in these days to deprecate classical attainments, and to consider, as in a great measure misapplied, the time devoted to their acquisition; there is so much of an utilitarian spirit, so much of the "*cui bono*" principle existing at present, that the value of everything is questioned, which does not produce an immediate and conspicuous advantage; time is not allowed for the development and growth of those seeds which would produce the most perfect and valuable fruit, but those are preferred which soonest attain their maturity, however imperfect and inferior they may really be. This is not the fitting place, nor does it fall legitimately within my province, to enter into any arguments on this subject; but I may be permitted to state, that I do not agree with those who consider attention to classical studies only beneficial as a mere exercise of the faculties, a preliminary training of the mind; but I consider it of much higher advantage, not merely as exercising but enlarging and elevating the mind, and as cultivating and improving the taste, and as laying a foundation upon which all after studies may be more substantially based. Independently of the advantage which the classical scholar possesses of acquiring with greater facility a more accurate and comprehensive knowledge of his vernacular language, the whole range of medical science, and other branches allied to it, are so compounded of and based upon classical terms, that their acquisition and remembrance are extremely difficult to the mere English scholar, and the misapplication and mispronunciation of these terms are anything but conducive to his reputation as an accomplished practitioner, though they may not be real evidence of his want of scientific knowledge. I would not, by any means, be understood to advocate any undue attention, or to attach undeserved importance to, this department of education, to the prejudice or neglect of those more immediately connected with your profession, but merely to inculcate the utility of not suffering the knowledge

which you may have already obtained to become lost, as too many of you are apt to do, for want of subsequent study. Of modern languages, it would be too much to expect (unless you have more than ordinary opportunities) that you should devote your attention to the German, but a competent knowledge of French is of easy acquisition, and you will derive much valuable information from the productions of that country, especially in the department of pathology.

With regard to my own share of our labours, experience has sufficiently taught me, that in so extensive and complicated a field of inquiry as that of practical medicine, and amid the obscurity which surrounds so many of its most important objects, the great art of interesting and benefiting the pupil, especially if not far advanced in professional knowledge, is not to fatigue him, or render him careless and inattentive, by too minute a reference to the history or preceding knowledge of a disease, or by too elaborate a criticism of conflicting theories, or modes of treatment, which would be either altogether unintelligible, or, even if sufficiently understood, but little likely to be long remembered; but, on the contrary, to endeavour so far to simplify and familiarize a subject, as to render it interesting as well as intelligible. It is requisite for the lecturer to endeavour to bring into one distinct and perspicuous summary, the distinguishing features of a disease—to lay down recognized principles, without dwelling too minutely on the facts from which they have been deduced, and on which they are founded; he must, in short, rather endeavour to guide his hearers in their pursuit of knowledge, and to point out the sources from whence they may most easily and satisfactorily obtain it, than profess to furnish any full or perfect view of medical science. Still, however, it is necessary for him to present a general and comprehensive outline of the nature of disease, and the improved methods of treatment, which a more advanced state of chemical and pharmaceutical science, and the accumulated results of experience, have placed within our reach at the present time.

The study of theoretical medicine is generally the most captivating, at the outset of his career, to the medical aspirant—he is led away by the apparent ease with which so much that appeared obscure is elucidated; he is delighted with the elegant and plausible theories which seem to enable him to grasp, at one view, all the minutiae of a disease; but when he comes to bring these preconceived ideas to the test of practical operation, he is confounded by the difficulties he has to encounter; he finds them but as thin cobwebs to confine the multitudes of disease; he is constantly embarrassed by the occurrence of symptoms, which not only do not correspond with, but are actually at variance with, his adopted views, and which, necessarily, render him doubtful and unenergetic in his mode of treatment; and though he may have commenced his career with perhaps an overweening idea of his own knowledge of and power over disease, he soon finds that he has much to *unlearn*, as well as much to gain by his individual experience. Much of this embarrassment doubtlessly arises, not so much because his conception of the nature and cause of the particular disease is in reality incorrect, but because the peculiar idiosyncrasies of individuals, and the frequent co-existence of other

morbid conditions, cause such a deviation from the preconceived regularity of the symptoms, as to require considerable experience and sagacity to be able to ascertain the essential nature of the complaint.

I do not state these things with the design of discouraging your attention to the theory of medicine to a legitimate extent, but merely of moderating your fondness of it at the expense of more practical knowledge; and would recommend you, as far as may be in your power, to study it in connexion with actual observation; as you will thus commence your experience simultaneously with your abstract studies, the advantages of which will be sufficiently manifest to you in after life.

With regard to your more immediate professional studies, I need scarcely remind you that the foundation of them all must be laid in anatomy; for without a proper knowledge of the structure and functions of the body in health, as well as the alterations produced by morbid agents, nothing but a vague and superficial acquaintance can be obtained either of the nature of disease or of the agents required for its removal. You must therefore study it minutely and practically, as well as theoretically, and upon that knowledge base your subsequent study of the principles of medicine, and the effects of medical agents. Another branch of professional study will also require your early attention, which is chemistry. Independently of the gratification which must arise to the inquiring mind from the elucidation of so many of the mysterious operations of nature which chemistry affords, some knowledge of this science, from its wide diffusion through all ranks of the community, is essential to every one who has any pretensions to a liberal education, and is altogether indispensable to the medical student, since a knowledge of *materia medica* (some of the most powerful agents of which are derived from chemical combinations) cannot be acquired without it, especially in its present advanced and complicated state.

The study of physiology is so naturally associated with anatomy, that you will of course receive more full instructions from the lecturer on that department.

A knowledge of anatomy in the abstract is of but little value, as an acquaintance with structure alone can only be of practical importance, as it tends to an understanding of the nature and relations of the functions of which it is the instrument. It is upon this knowledge of the equable performance of function during a state of health, and the deviation from the natural standard by disease, and the effect of remedial agents in those two conditions, that the science of medicine is founded. It is therefore my intention to give you a brief view of the physiology of each particular part, previously to entering upon the consideration of the diseases to which it is liable.

There is no department of medical science which has been cultivated, of late years, to so great an extent as that of physiology, and many very important additions have been made to our previous knowledge. There is still, however, much uncertainty and obscurity involving it at the present moment, and many able experimentalists are engaged in investigating more particularly the functions of the nervous system, and the changes which take place in the constitution of the fluids,

so that if the time should ever arrive when the real nature of so mysterious an agent as the nervous element, and the separate as well as combined functions of particular nerves, should be distinctly understood, we cannot but feel that it may lead to a surprising revolution both in the theory and practice of medicine. A much more intimate acquaintance with the principles of physiology, than can be afforded as an adjunct to a course of lectures on its principles and practice, will be of essential importance to your study of medicine.

Another branch of study, which is perhaps still more important, and on which the foundation of medical science most safely rests, is that of pathology or morbid anatomy. Many diseases, it is true, are merely functional, or the result of actions which do not produce any change in the structure of parts, and which therefore do not admit of inquiry after death; in others, again, the alterations which have taken place are too minute to be obvious to our senses; yet there are others in which very perceptible alterations of structure take place, and these are the proper objects of examination. It is much to be regretted that the knowledge of morbid structure does not, in all cases, lead with certainty to the knowledge of morbid actions, although the one be the effect of the other; yet surely it lays the most solid foundation for prosecuting such inquiries with success. It is by tracing the connexion between the external manifestations and internal lesions, by accurately comparing the symptoms presented with the structural alterations manifested on anatomical examination, that vague conjectures are removed, erroneous theories superseded, and the first principles of science laid in an accurate knowledge of cause and effect. It has been chiefly through the instrumentality of pathology that so wide a difference exists between ancient and modern medicine, the former being distinguished by conjectures, and the latter by facts and legitimate deductions; and this superiority of modern science has chiefly arisen from the diminished dread of the cultivation of normal and morbid anatomy, which has of late years taken place, both in public bodies and private individuals.

You will find much greater facilities in prosecuting this department of study now than was formerly the case, and you would do well to avail yourselves of every opportunity that may be presented to you. In a subsequent lecture, I will enter more fully into details of what appears to me the best mode of pursuing these different studies, which I have now in general terms recommended.

After having thus briefly alluded to the necessity and advantage of various collateral studies, I must beg to remind you, that you must consider them but as means to an end, as a pleasant though perhaps difficult road by which you accomplish a contemplated journey; that your great object must be to make your accumulated knowledge subservient to a practical purpose, and to render yourselves ultimately sagacious and accomplished practitioners, in that department of the profession which may be your choice, and possessing that confidence in yourselves which a consciousness of adequate skill can alone impart, and by which alone you can hope to gain the confidence of others.

If, then, you are to enter upon a practical career almost immediately after the termination of these preliminary studies, it is absolutely necessary that you should neglect no possible opportunities of obtaining this species of knowledge, which may be available to you.

You are all of you either in some public institution, or with some practitioner who may have opportunities of affording you much instruction, and you cannot pay too much attention to the various features of any particular disease, the nature of which may be pointed out to you, and the effects which the administration of different remedies may have upon them; you will thus direct your theoretical knowledge to a practical end; for it is to practical knowledge, whether of medicine, surgery, or midwifery, that you are to look for the reward of your labours, and your power either of good or evil.

When we consider the complicated structure of the human frame—the minute and invisible nature of so many of its component parts—the innumerable operations which are constantly taking place—the unknown, or at least imperfectly understood, nature of so many of these operations, and the necessity that each of these structures should be properly organized; each of these operations, regularly and equally performed, so that the functions of the body may proceed in harmony, to constitute a state of health—when we reflect upon the multitude of agents, both external and internal, by which all these may be influenced or disturbed, and on our own ignorance, in too many cases, of the mode by which this disturbance is to be rectified—we cannot wonder at the long catalogue of ills to which our “flesh is heir,” but rather that we have such comparative immunity from physical sufferings. And we cannot sufficiently admire the wonderful resiliency and power of renovation with which the human frame is endowed, and the efforts which are made by nature to obviate and overcome disease.

And what, then, is the art of medicine? Does not its very essence consist in ascertaining upon what these powers depend, and by what means they are either to be assisted or restrained?

And thus it is, as in all other instances, that art is but the handmaid of nature.

One of the great errors of young practitioners of medicine is to trust too much to art, and too little to nature, and, by too officious or too energetic interference, convert what may be originally but simple and unimportant into a complicated and dangerous malady, and hence some diseases have been said to be “*Lethales tantum, nimia medici diligentia.*”

Infinitely more good is not unfrequently done, by quietly awaiting the development of natural actions, than by a hasty and rash interference. The great secret of successful practice is to know *when to be quiescent, and when and in what degree to bring the resources of art to the assistance of nature*; and you will hereafter be, perhaps, surprised to find that the most experienced and successful practitioners are frequently the most simple and unpretending in their modes of treatment.

This negative skill, as it may be termed, is however, perhaps, more difficult to acquire than that of a more active character, and requires for its adoption a more full reliance upon our own knowledge and sagacity, and cannot be obtained

without an accurate acquaintance with the nature and tendency of morbid actions, and the individual powers of resistance and reparation.

It is not for me to dwell too minutely on the difficulty which the study of medicine presents—our absolute ignorance of many things, and our imperfect knowledge of others, which it is essential to understand before we can hope for any degree of perfection. As you advance in your studies, all this will become sufficiently manifest; you will find ample fields open for your investigation, and abundant opportunities of distinction, which abilities and industry may procure for you. It will be my duty rather to stimulate your endeavours, by pointing out to you the abundance of what is already known and established, rather than to discourage you by dwelling too much upon what is mysterious and unknown.

I have, however, said enough to show you that it is no trifling undertaking to enter upon the study of medicine, and that the exercise of your best abilities, and the devotion of your utmost industry, will be imperatively required, as there is no other science, an accurate knowledge of which enables its cultivators, humanly speaking, to confer more extensive or important benefits on mankind, than that of medicine; while, on the other hand, no individual is more liable to produce such serious and irreparable injury than a rash and ignorant medical practitioner. I need, I hope, scarcely urge upon you the advantage of punctuality in your attendance on those lectures which you may determine upon. I am not, however, so absurd as to expect, amidst the multiplicity of your other engagements, and the necessity of occasional relaxation, any undeviating regularity of attendance. I am aware that many circumstances may compel your occasional absence; but I trust you will make it a conscientious rule, not to absent yourselves more frequently than reasonable causes may justify.

As for myself, I can sincerely state that my chief object will be to endeavour to promote your improvement in every way that I am able; and though, from the nature of the subject entrusted to me, I cannot promise to render these lectures the source of amusement, yet I trust you will not find them altogether destitute of interest or value; and I shall be at all times ready, as far as I am capable, to reply to your inquiries, to remove your doubts, and to facilitate the progress of your studies.

And, on the other hand, I trust that you will yourselves consider that you have voluntarily embarked in a profession, not only honourable but arduous, in which mediocrity is despicable, and superiority only to be obtained by the devotion of the best energies of your minds.

CASES

FROM THE EARLY NOTE-BOOKS OF THE LATE
SIR ASTLEY COOPER, BART.

EXTRACTED WITH PERMISSION OF B. E. COOPER, ESQ. F.R.S.

NO. XI.

DISLOCATED RADIUS.

A HAIRDRESSER in Leadenhall-street, fell down, at the same time putting out his hand to