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INTRODUCTORY LECTURE

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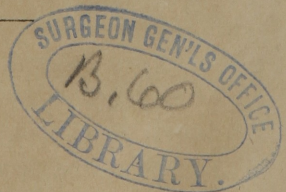
BEFORE THE CLASS

OF THE

PHILADELPHIA SCHOOL OF MEDICINE.

BY WILLIAM RUSH, M.D.

LECTURER ON MATERIA MEDICA AND THERAPEUTICS, IN THE PHILADELPHIA
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE.



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INTRODUCTORY LECTURE

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INTRODUCTORY LECTURE.

It is my intention to-day, gentlemen, merely to offer you a few remarks introductory to a Course of Lectures on *Materia Medica* and *Therapeutics*, to be delivered by me in this Institution.

I need scarcely apologise for appearing before you without a chosen *Medical* subject, when I reflect upon my inability to cater to your tastes upon this point—already amply satisfied with the rich intellectual viands that my colleagues have recently set before you. You have all, however, heard, that in the earlier days of medicine, it was common, by certain prescriptions, to prepare the system for *particular diseases*. So, perhaps, it may be proper, previous to my Course of Instruction, to prepare your minds—not for *disease*, I trust, gentlemen—but for the reception of MEDICAL KNOWLEDGE, OR TRUTH. In other words, you are about to travel with me on a path hitherto much overlooked in the pursuit of the *practical* objects of medical education. In order therefore to clear away some of the obstructions that oppose you at its entrance, allow me to indulge in a few excursive remarks, illustrating the only *effective means* by which Knowledge in every department of human pursuit is attained. Nor are these means difficult of acquisition. In fact, you all possess them. Be not distrustful of yourselves—for there exists within every one of you, qualities that only require to be thoroughly awakened, never again to slumber upon the *true* interests of your medical education. They are like the tuneless and neglected harp, that when strung to the proper pitch, will sound in unison with all that your *taste* and *ear* for medical knowledge can desire.

What are those means? you will ask. I answer, your Senses and your Reason, unfettered by opinionative authority; which *time* or *fashion* alone has consecrated. Means, which, in our finite condition of existence, form the only bond of union between Truth and ourselves. When Nature called us into existence, she generously bestowed these inestimable gifts upon us; and they vary not in value, save by the difference of proper and faithful cultivation. Mark also her Wisdom, as well as her Benevolence. In her infinite knowledge of the fitness of things, she has placed us amidst her *outward phenomena*, and has given us our Senses, as the best, the only means to appreciate them. Her ultimate causation she hides from their scrutiny; but whilst she is ever willing to present us with the great and beautiful drama of her effects, ought we to complain, when she refuses to admit us behind the scenes? We were born, gentlemen, with greater capacity for knowledge than we are aware of. In obedience to the dictates of nature, we early and eagerly pursue the knowledge of *things*, rather than the vexatious study of *profitless words*. When young, we were all in a measure *philosophers*; lovers of wisdom, of nature, and her effects. None of us have yet outlived the remembrance of those busy sports of boyhood; all of them *practical* illustrations of the principles of natural philosophy. Nature, man's best teacher, well knowing our tender capacities, wisely combined *amusement* with her early lessons of *instruction*. But we were then unapprised of her wisdom. Her effects were our *playthings*, and we were delighted with them. We were then intimate with nature; but errors of education, like false friends, afterwards made mental mischief between us; and we have since only become reconciled to her, by our scientific acquirements, which offered to us an explanation of the principles of these predilections of our childhood.

Since, then, the Senses are our best, our earliest friends, ought

we in after life to desert them? Believe not that instruction, through these humble, though natural sources, is beneath your notice; nor that they offer to you merely a dull or insulated register of facts. In their unassociated action, I grant they are useless; as in the hapless Idiot. But it is of *intelligent humanity* that I speak; of those, who have *within* them a power, to which the senses act as sentinels, to take faithful notice of what goes on *without*: And it is only the infinite and changeful combination of intelligence brought by these sentinels to that power *within*, which constitutes what I need scarcely tell you is called the Mind.

The senses and the mind therefore are inseparably connected by nature. Though from defective culture, they are often at variance with their mutual interests—so much so, that it may be made a question, whether that power which makes man foremost in creation, would not have been his enduring curse, had not HE who rules the universe from a throne of mercy, sent forth an emanation in the form of Reason, to temper and unite these heterogeneous elements. Thus wisely combined, they form a Whole; a Unit, capable of universal application. It is this unit that makes the Philosopher, the Painter, the Poet, the Mechanic, and the Musician. The human mind, in its wise constitution, like nature in her bounty, affords the means by which all can live, and grow to eminence. What constitutes the ingenuity of the Mechanic? It is the cultivation of his senses; his reason, and his judgment, pointing out at once the proper adaptation of *means* to effect his *ends*. What makes the fame of the Poet? He cultivates his senses, and his judgment well knows how to apply them. Why do his beautiful illustrations find such ready access to your hearts? And why do you never forget them? The poet's lesson, gentlemen, is no task to the memory; because his illustrations are drawn from *his* senses, and applied to *yours*: and do they not delight you in proportion as their objects are

simple and familiar? This is what you call his GENIUS—his IMAGINATION.

Though the *means* to attain perfection in these pursuits of men are the same, their *ends* are different. The business of the Mechanic relates to the physical benefit of man. That of the Poet, to his moral pleasure and improvement—but the *cause* is the same: It is the Mind, modified by opposite application. Nor is this strange; since your observation of nature has taught you that similar causes do not always produce like effects. The spark, which in dreaded contact with gunpowder, blows the stately edifice to atoms, falls harmless on your hands. Such are the laws by which Nature operates; inscrutable in their causation, but manifest in their effects. There are yet two other plain and unostentatious qualities or results of the senses, that I have not mentioned; namely, *Past Experience*, and *Present Observation*. These are the simple tools with which science completes her handiwork. They act *slowly*; but finally to their purpose.

I know that there have lived in the world those exalted geniuses who, neglecting these steady energies, have pursued an eccentric and uncurbed career through the regions of imagination, until lost in its mazes. Others, in eager and emulous pursuit of the prize of fame, have followed their fate; and, like Comets in their rapid course, they have left behind them their scintillations of truth, for more patient votaries of science to use at their leisure.

There are those who run mad in science, as well as those who are confined within the precincts of a hospital. Indeed, we are at all times nearer to the limits of sanity than we are aware of. Let me ask you, gentlemen, have you not all been madmen in your dreams? Nay more: look to your waking thoughts—place them on paper as they fly in swift succession through your minds, without reference to reason and judgment, and thus recorded, present them to a jury of your

compeers: they will pronounce the verdict of Insanity. At this moment, you are thinking of what I say; the next, perhaps, may transfer you to the remembrance of domestic joys, which many of you have recently forsaken. Yet what is the connexion between these thoughts? None. Are they not like those of a maniac? Such is the human mind without its proper constitution.

It is therefore only by the steady cultivation of the qualities which I have incidentally glanced at, that the mind, like a well disciplined army, can hope to achieve the victory of truth. Knowledge, in her slow and cautious progress, is ever beckoned by the hand of Time; and though imagination, on its eagle wings, may soar in high contempt over her grovelling pace, yet these tortoise steps shall first arrive at their destined goal of truth; and in time too, to forget in victorious repose, the taunts of her contumelious adversary. Let me illustrate this by examples.

Archimedes, in his glory, boasted that if he had a spot on which to place a fulcrum, he could move the Earth. But, gentlemen, the earth was never moved by Archimedes. This spot existed only in imagination—It was a fiction; but a dream—interpreting what *might* be the future power of knowledge over nature. Now let me bring you from ancient fiction to modern fact. What has made FRANKLIN'S name immortal? Why is America proud to own him as one of her noblest sons? Why stands his name enrolled upon her imperishable charter of rights, and upon her tablets of science? Why is his memory revered at home, and honoured abroad? For see, in yonder Church-yard, the envied path which strangers tread, that leads to his modest tomb. What takes them there? For

“No sad tear upon his grave is shed,
That *common* tribute, of the *common* dead;
But there, the *wise*, the *generous* and the *brave*,
With God-like envy sigh for such a grave.”

What were his original claims to distinction? Was he clothed in the robes of riches or authority? Did the busy breath of popularity blow *him*, like some of its paper puppets, into worldly notice? No. In early life he was poor and friendless; but he had within him treasures, the price of which posterity will pay. What were these treasures? His senses; with knowledge of their *use* and *application*; observation and experience as their results. He cultivated his senses, and acquired knowledge of *things* and their *effects*. He saw their resemblances; classified these; and when he perceived *disagreement* between them, as he would have done with *quarrelsome* men, he separated them. He cultivated his sense of hearing by attention to sounds; so that when an agreeable succession and modulation of them struck his ear from a single or combined source, he acquired knowledge of melody and harmony; thence he became a Musician. He studied men and their minds, but he looked at them as *things*; he saw their incongruities, their want of proper classification or arrangement; but having more power over *things*, than he had over men and their minds, he smiled at them, and often by apt analogies drawn from the exercise of his *senses*, publicly, though delicately, ridiculed them. This was his Wit, his Imagination. And lastly, gentlemen, when he saw want of agreement, or resemblance between the *station*, and *pecuniary circumstances* of his neighbour, he proposed the proper remedy; and was wont, as you all remember, to quote an analogical admonition, drawn even from his childish experience, to wit: "that his friend was paying too much for his whistle." Thus, Franklin was an Economist. These were among the treasures that Franklin possessed in early life; and when he sought the road to science, he knew too well their value to leave them behind. Let us next inquire what did he do, thus to merit the unlimited eulogium of the world? Nothing else, but endeavour to perfect by *proper*

education those qualities which the God of nature bestowed upon him. Of the means I have already spoken, and what was effected as their end. He observed the phenomena of lightning, and recorded these as experience: He was also familiar with the effects of electricity; and marking their resemblance, as you would in the countenances of your companions, he classified them together, and thus, with the universal consent of science, established or discovered their identity. This is the secret of Franklin's scientific fame, and immortality is the reward that posterity will pay him for the discovery.

Thus I have humbly endeavoured to draw from human example, a hasty sketch of the means by which you may acquire Knowledge, Power, Fame and Affluence;—for Franklin finally possessed them all.

But, gentlemen, the means of his fame shall now with *me* subserve another purpose. I offer them as a moral lesson, for the improvement of Medicine; for I hope to convince you that the same means which, in *Franklin's hands*, brought strokes of lightning harmless down from heaven, in *yours* may raise our science to the pinnacle of truth.

Pontius Pilate once asked, "What is truth?" The question was not answered; but *Philosophy* has since replied,—it is a Unit; unchangeable, everlasting; and has added in a simple rule, that the means to reach it, in one department of knowledge, are the same to arrive at it in another. To Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, and Mechanics, you will admit these means may be successfully applied; but to *our* science, you will not. Why? What evil hath Medicine done to deserve such exclusion? Why should she be an outcast from their privileges? What is the subject of medicine? Is it a chimera; an essence, or notion? Something beyond the analysis of the senses, and their proper constitution? No! It is the human body; a

material object, exhibiting phenomena, or properties, constantly to our senses.

I have but one insinuation to cast upon medicine, and it is, that she neglects her national advantages. Am I not supported in this assertion, by the fact, that she possesses many more than the science of Astronomy; for which of her votaries has more than *seen* the order and motions of the planetary system, and this effected too, by the ingenuity of man with his senses? Yet how far beyond comparison in certainty, is this celestial science with medicine! Such means, you will reply, cannot in our science detect her *intricate* and *hidden causations*. These are the rocks upon which the *true* interests of medicine for ever split. The *former*, our senses may be taught to unravel; with the *latter*, we have as yet nothing to do, any more than with the rewards of PARADISE, until we have deserved them.

Reflect, what observation and experience have effected in Astronomy, and let us anticipate their satisfactory results when properly applied to Medicine. Why should not the diseased conditions of the human system be as familiarly taught, and as easily understood, as the natural functions of the heavenly bodies? It is true, Astronomy tells her stories of distant planets inhabited by man, and *imagines* his manners and his customs; but with senses ever active, she talks in her *sleep*—Remember she travels to a far country, and is *tired*—she hath a right to sleep—aye, and have pleasant dreams too, as a reward for her labour. But medicine is at *home*; in her *own house*, as it were, sleeping away the morning of her strength, whilst her intelligent and wakeful visitors, the *Senses*, are loudly knocking at her doors to court her envied acquaintance.

But Science, gentlemen, always opens her gates to *evident causes*—such as will lead the mind to correct conclusions, and invariably closes them upon such as are imaginary, or

hypothetical; for, like thieves, they would come in and rob her of her treasures.

These few remarks, which I have hastily thrown out, will, I trust, prepare your minds to believe, that the *means* are the same to acquire knowledge in every department of human pursuit. How are you taught Anatomy, Surgery and Chemistry? By observation and experience. How *ought* you to be taught the Practice of Physic? By the same means. This last named department of medicine has its phenomena, and relationships to be observed, and properly classified, or else it exists not as a subject of scientific investigation.

These are the means, therefore, gentlemen, which I shall modestly use in my endeavour to give you the elements of medical instruction; and I will submit it to your judgment to determine whether I have effected the purpose. By your verdict here, I am willing to fail, or shall be proud to succeed. Come not with Prejudice, in *favour*, or *against* this mode of instruction. I am too *young* to be entitled to either—but throw aside these mantles, and “listen to the Stranger, Truth.”

How came *you* by it? I hear you ask. With instruction I found it *every where*. Its principles have been gathered from amidst medicine’s baneful errors, just as you have often plucked beautiful flowers from contact with most poisonous weeds. There is not a modern work on medicine that does not contain them. Yet the *senses*, from want of proper culture, do not perceive or apply them. I could show them to you, here and there, like stars through the clouds of night—and it shall be my humble aim to collect these scattered rays of intellectual light into a sun-like focus, to guide you on your path of *practical* knowledge.

I do not wish of modern systems of medicine, as Nero did of the human race, that they had but *one head*, that I might *cut it off*. They are too rich in the scattered gems of in-

tellect, to part with. Read them, and attentively too; but with Nature always at your elbows: she will correct their mistakes, and teach you to distinguish their *true* from their *counterfeit* coin. They *all* contain Truth, but inseparably connected with Error; so much so, that like the blending of colours, you cannot tell where *one* begins, or the *other* ends. The system of instruction that I propose to offer to you, if you will listen to it throughout, draws a faithful line of demarkation between them.

Nor is it medical novelty in which I would endeavour to interest you. It is as *old* as observation; and it is only a subject of surprise, that they who formerly lived by medical teaching, did not perceive it.

Newton was neither the author of the Apple, nor of its downfall to the Earth; he *saw* the phenomenon, and reasoning upon it, deduced the principle, called Gravity, and no other cause has yet been assigned for it. Newton's system was observative, yet its objects existed from the foundation of the world.

I have said the system I intend to teach you, *is old*. Let not this be its sentence of condemnation. NATURE IS OLD; yet she wears well withal. TRUTH IS OLD. TRUTH WAS YOUNG; TRUTH IS eternal. Heed it, therefore, gentlemen, wherever you hear it. Honour it, in medicine, when it proceeds from the venerable head—and reject it not, though uttered to you by the lips of Youth: for remember, the sun that arose upon the morning of creation, is the same in its nature, the same in its effects, as that which, I trust, will smile upon you all to-morrow.

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