

Bullitt (H. M.)

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE

ADDRESSED TO THE

MEDICAL CLASS

OF

TRANSYLVANIA UNIVERSITY,

SESSION OF 1849-50.

Box 2

BY H. M. BULLITT, M. D.,
PROFESSOR OF MATERIA MEDICA AND THERAPEUTICS.

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LEXINGTON, KY.

PRINTED AT THE KENTUCKY STATESMAN OFFICE.

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1849.

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE,

*Presented by
Rolf-Peter*

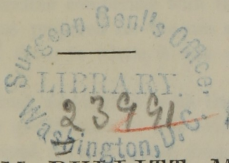
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CORRESPONDENCE.

LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY, NOVEMBER 15, 1849.

PROF. H. M. BULLITT, M. D.

Dear Sir:—At a called meeting of the Medical Class of Transylvania University, held in the Amphitheatre this afternoon, at 4 o'clock, Mr. WILLIAM H. ANDERSON was called to the chair, and Mr. ISAAC WEBB SCOTT chosen Secretary.

On motion, it was *Resolved unanimously*, That the undersigned be appointed a Committee to request a copy (for publication) of your very able, eloquent and highly interesting "Introductory Lecture," delivered before the Class on Monday evening, 5th instant. An answer at your earliest convenience is respectfully solicited.

Very respectfully,

I. WEBB SCOTT, Ch'm. }
R. M. SUTFIELD, Jr. } Committee.
W. R. EMBRY, }
H. P. HITCHCOCK, }

LEXINGTON, NOVEMBER 19, 1849.

Gentlemen:—I have just received your note containing the proceedings of the Medical Class of Transylvania University, by which you were appointed a Committee to request the manuscript of the Lecture delivered by me on the evening of the 5th inst., for publication. I cannot well decline complying with this flattering request, for the simple reason that the Lecture was prepared for the use and benefit of the Class, and became the common property of those to whom it was address'd, so soon as it was delivered.

I herewith send you the desired manuscript, with the hope that you will express to those whom you represent, my gratification at this evidence of their approval of my humble effort on the occasion referred to; and assure them, that I shall spare no effort to discharge my remaining obligations to them in an equally satisfactory manner.

With sentiments of highest regard for the Class, and for yourselves individually,
I am most truly yours, &c.

HENRY M. BULLITT.

Messrs. I. W. SCOTT,
R. M. SUTFIELD,
W. R. EMBRY, and
H. P. HITCHCOCK.

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE.



There is nothing which the student of medicine so much needs, at the outset of his career, as a plain and simple exposition of the nature and purposes of his profession; an exposition which not only exhibits to him what he has to do, but at the same time presents the motives, encouragements, and incentives to do it with suitable earnestness. Such an exposition it would not be practicable to condense into the narrow compass of an introductory lecture; but I trust I shall be able to offer some hints and suggestions, which may aid you in realizing the dignity and importance of your undertaking.

Man never labors well without some adequate inducement. To some men the strongest incentives to exertion are found in the prospect of private gain; others are urged to effort by the thirst for fame; and others again by the higher motive of serving their fellow men. Any one of these inducements—interest, ambition, or philanthropy—may urge men on to respectable and successful effort; but it is unquestionably true, that human labor is most earnest and most honorable, when the laborer aims to promote his own private interest, by endeavoring to accomplish that which may not only commend him to the admiration of the world, but, at the same time, minister to the good of his fellow men generally. It would be calculating too largely upon human disinterestedness to expect men to labor in any of the various pursuits of life purely for the public good, and yet it cannot be doubted that most men are so constituted by nature, as to require higher and purer inducements, to sustain them in protracted exertion, than such as are afforded by purely selfish and sordid considerations. The man who labors merely for money, may delve on, day after day, and week after week, but if his mind contemplates nothing beyond the prospect of accumulation, his labor will be cheerless and without zest, for it will be truly “Work without hope” and “Hope without an object.” Let, however, the desire to attract the attention and elicit the admiration of men be added to his inducements, and he is inspired with new zeal and increased energy; and if, in addition to

these inducements, he gets to be imbued with the nobler and more elevated ambition, to become the benefactor of his race, he is rendered equal to the most glorious achievements.

The profession which you have selected, combines, in a remarkable degree, all of these inducements to labor; and your success and position in life, will be more or less honorable, in proportion as you are actuated in the pursuit of it by the more generous and worthy of them. You may pursue the profession of medicine as a mere trade, with no higher object than private gain, and you may be successful, as the disciples of mammon in any mercenary employment, in the attainment of your end; but if this be your course, you will be false to the dignity of your calling, and forfeit many of the purest gratifications of which human nature is susceptible. You may, it is true, find many practitioners of your art, who have pursued this course, revelling in the luxuries of worldly fortune, whilst men of the highest professional and literary and scientific attainments remain comparatively neglected; and in view of this fact, you may, naturally enough, ask yourselves, for what end are we required to repeat the daily toil and trim the midnight lamp, if fortune can be made by men who never study, whilst those are neglected who have consumed their time in the pursuit of knowledge, and whose learning is every where admitted? If I were required to give a brief and conclusive answer to this question it would be in the eloquent language of Mrs. Barbould, that you will find your reward, for all your labor, in the possession of "a large comprehensive soul, well purged from vulgar fears and perturbations and prejudices; able to comprehend and interpret the works of man and God; a rich flourishing, cultivated mind, pregnant with inexhaustible stores of entertainment and reflection, a perpetual spring of fresh ideas, and the conscious dignity of superior intelligence." But allow me time to answer at large, and I will convince you that the question contemplates a case which is an exception to the general fact. During the solitary hours which, like most young men, I have passed in my office, awaiting the long deferred summons to professional duty, this very point was often a subject of reflection, and, like many others who have fancied themselves neglected, under the momentary feeling of disappointment I have regretted the time and money expended in the pursuit of professional knowledge, which seemed so little likely to bring a reward corresponding to the cost of its acquisition. But circumstances forced me to bide my time, and subsequent observation has fully satisfied me, that no well instructed physician will fail to triumph over an unlearned rival, provided he devotes himself to his profession with ordinary diligence and atten-

tion. It is sometimes the error of the well educated man in our profession to expect the world to become cognisant of his merits, and his claims to patronage, by a sort of intuition, or instinct, and hence to avoid rather than seek the society of his fellow men, lest he should be suspected of courting their favorable notice. This reserved and incommunicative manner is mistaken for indifference, and even when taxing himself to the utmost, in thought and reflection, at the bedside of his patient, he may seem to be destitute of sympathy and feeling, to a degree absolutely revolting to the tender sensibilities of the suffering patient, as well as his sympathising friends. On the other hand, the uneducated man, conscious of his own deficiencies, and convinced that if he succeeds at all it must be by the exercise of vigilance, kindness and devotion, obeys every call with alacrity, nurses his patients with assiduity; makes a display of sympathy and of interest in their behalf which rarely fail to win the hearts, if they do not satisfy the minds of his patrons. The modesty of true merit will generally realise the sentiment of Shakspeare,

"It is the witness still of excellency;
To put a strange face on his own perfection."

And I would be very far from advising you to assume the boastful swaggering air, or to practice the time-serving sycophancy, or solicitation, which are the distinguishing attributes of the empiric. But it is your especial right, and your becoming duty, to suffer the humane and benevolent impulses, which are natural to the human heart, to unfold and develop themselves in the exercise of a humane profession. It is your right, and your proper duty, to avail yourselves of legitimate means of becoming known in your calling; and you owe it to yourselves, and to your profession, to be uniformly kind, gentle and conciliatory, in your intercourse with the sick. This much is demanded of you, by considerations as well of philanthropy as of interest, and may be practiced without the slightest violation of professional honor, and in strict conformity with the most rigid decorum. Let the educated man pursue this course, and he will never have occasion to complain of the results of competition with his illiterate rivals.

But there are other and higher considerations, than this one of personal advantage, to influence you in the prosecution of your professional studies; and foremost amongst them, is the gratification which is derived from the ability to comprehend and interpret the phenomena of disease. There is no pleasure so satisfactory, as that of looking into the operations of nature, with a clear conception of their character and purposes. Akenside, himself a physician, tells us, that the rainbow never appeared so beautiful, even to his poetical

eye, as when he first beheld it after studying Newton's theory of light and colors :

“ Nor ever yet
The melting rainbow's vermeil tintured hues,
To me have shown so pleasing, as when first
The hand of science pointed out the path
In which the sun-beams, gleaming from the West,
Fall on the watery cloud, whose darksome veil
Involves the orient.”

Whoever practices medicine in ignorance of the principles of medical science, and without the aid of the lights which modern investigations have thrown upon its path, is necessarily a stranger to all such gratification as is here depicted by the poet. But he who has thoroughly and maturely studied the profession and mastered its peculiar philosophy, is daily encountering opportunities of reading from the book of nature,—where alone they are written in clear and intelligible characters, the laws which control and regulate morbid processes, as well as the rules by which he can interpret the signs which indicate the proper means of arresting them. He has thus placed within his reach, by the “hand of science,” a species of knowledge, from which he can extract pleasure, even when contemplating human suffering in its most appalling shapes; because, by its exercise, he not only recognizes the presence of disease, but at the same time comprehends its nature, and applies the remedy which his knowledge teaches him will arrest its progress, rescue his patient from impending death, and restore him to health and usefulness, and the fond embrace of desponding friends. On the other hand, to one uninitiated into the mysteries of our art, all cases of disease are mere blanks, upon which he can find no legible characters, and in the management of which he must of necessity play the part of the blind man in the fable—“Nature is fighting with disease; a blind man, armed with a club—that is the physician—comes to settle the difference. He first tries to make peace; when he cannot accomplish this, he lifts his club and strikes at random; if he strikes the disease, he kills the disease; if he strikes nature, he kills nature.” Now this is precisely the part enacted by every ignorant practitioner of medicine. In what different degrees, then, must the ignorant and the educated partake of the highest pleasure of our profession; that derived from the consciousness of doing good. In the case of the ignorant, there is none of the gratification which accompanies the enlightened exercise of the healing art; because all the results of his interposition are merely fortuitous. He prescribes or administers in the dark, without any rational expectation as to consequences. True, his very ignorance may save him from many most distressing emotions, which are so frequently awak-

ened in the mind of the enlightened physician, by the discovery of the existence of fatal disease in persons who have never suspected their danger; and in this single instance, in our profession, it may seem that "ignorance is bliss." But so far from its being "folly to be wise," these are often the very cases in which professional forecast and skill are most needed, and most thankfully appreciated; and as an offset to the painful duties which are discharged by the enlightened physician on such occasions, he has his moments of intense happiness, when, as not unfrequently happens, he can, by the exercise of a similar forecast, detect in cases in which recovery has long been despaired of, the signs of returning health, and thus raise the drooping spirits of his patients, and give them the benefits of well founded hope; which oft times may prove a better restorative than any afforded by the *materia medica*.

Again; I hardly need remind you that your social rank, as well as your standing as physicians, will depend in good measure, on your professional attainments. Literary and scientific men, it is true, will be apt to estimate you by your general scholarship; but the world, generally, will be governed in its estimate of you, by the degree of consideration and attention which you receive from your professional brethren. If your acquirements are of a high order, and your knowledge of disease accurate, you will command and receive the most respectful consideration from your professional brethren. Men will judge of your merits more by the deferential treatment which you receive from your rivals, than by the opinions which they may publicly express of you in words. You need have no fears, therefore, that your acquirements will be overlooked; on the contrary, medical men will always appreciate you according to your deserts, and as they appreciate you, generally speaking, so will the world.

You have every inducement, therefore, to engage, with zeal and energy, in the study of your profession. I have shown you that it will be to your advantage, in a pecuniary point of view, to acquire a thorough knowledge of medical science; that this knowledge will be fruitful of pleasure to you; that you will secure by its acquisition a two-fold gratification—that which is derived from its possession, and the higher gratification derived from the consciousness of ability to do good to your fellow men: finally, I have shown that your social and professional standing, will be fixed and graduated by the standard of your attainments. These are inducements which should call forth the fullest exercise of your faculties, and, I repeat that your future success, in reaping the rewards of your profession, and in administering its blessings, will be just in proportion to the industry and zeal with which you now labor.

Again; you may not unfrequently find yourselves discouraged, and have your interest in medical attainments impaired by hearing your art denounced, for its uncertainty. You will often hear it stated that its principles and its practice are continually changing; that what was taught, as established, a few years since, is now discarded as obsolete; and that the doctrines of to-day will soon be superseded by other and entirely different ones; that the science, in fact, is in a state of such rapid transition, that the student, who labors to master its present pathological and therapeutical principles, will in a short time have all his work to do over again, with the additional trouble of encumbering himself of old fashioned acquaintances.

Such reflections are well calculated to discourage the zealous student, and to confirm the indolent in his habits of inattention and idleness; and I therefore deem it my duty to endeavor to remove from your minds all excuse for indulging in any such doubts as to the profitableness of present labor.

Medicine is unquestionably a science of progress; but its rate and method of progression must not be determined by the countless announcements of new modes of cure, with which the newspaper press is daily filled; nor by the proclamations of discovery contained in the ephemeral Medical Journals. We can scarcely take up a newspaper that is not the herald of some new and infallible cure for one or more, or all the diseases to which "flesh is heir." And we are constrained to admit that our Medical Journals are not always superintended by men of sufficient research and discrimination, to secure them against participation in proclaiming as new, things which are venerable with age—as valuable, things which are wholly useless—as truths, hypotheses which have been "weighed and found wanting"—as logical, conclusions which prove, on examination, to be utterly absurd.

There is a class of medical journals, devoted to the advocacy of particular interests, whose conductors care less for the permanent good of science than for the advancement of temporary purposes; and it is sometimes the case that the temporary purpose to be subserved by them, requires a reckless support of some false system of pathology and practice. That this is the case, is evidenced by the existence of Homœopathic, Hydropathic, and Eclectic journals; and I fear it would be claiming too much for the regular practice, to doubt, that journals have been established, in times past, if indeed they do not now exist, for the especial purpose of maintaining and propagating the systems of their founders. That such journals can be fair exponents of the progress of medicine, it would be unreasonable to contend. As well might it be maintained, that the empirical publications

of the Brandreths and Morrisons of our day, are fair indications of the actual state of Pathology and Practice. In forming an estimate, therefore, of the progressive character of the profession, you can, by no means, rely upon the account of its ongoings, which you may gather from either the newspaper press, or the ephemeral medical journals.

If you would judge the claims of medicine fairly, you must trace the history of its progress as it develops itself in the higher class of periodicals; such as have lived through more than one generation; and in the formal treatises on the various branches of the science, which have emanated from the pens of the different medical writers who are recognized as the guiding lights of their respective epochs. It is from these sources alone that any thing like a truthful account of the changes which the doctrines of the profession have undergone from time to time, can be obtained. From such authorities you will learn, it is true, that there have been changes of doctrine, as well as of practice; but you will also learn that these changes have not been so frequent nor so revolutionary in their character, as is asserted by those who talk so much about the uncertainty of medical science. You will, indeed, even learn that the peculiar endowments and attainments which made Hypocrates, and Sydenham, and Cullen, and John Hunter, eminent in their several generations, would make distinguished practitioners of the present day. That is to say, that if these men were now living, and practicing medicine just as they did practice when they did live, that they would compare favorably with a large majority of the practitioners of the present time. But when we come to compare the general state of medical practice, in their several days, with that of the present age, we find the difference greatly in our favor. And I cheerfully admit that when we compare those shining lights of former days, with the illustrious names of our own time, the advantages of our own time appear still more clearly.

In all ages, the general practice of medicine has been considerably behind the actual state of the science; and I doubt if there has ever been a period when this was more strikingly the case than at the present time. For, although the general practice of the present time is much better, and much more rational than at any former period, it is, nevertheless, far from being as much in advance of the practice of the last century, as is the actual state of the science in advance of the science of that day. Any estimate, therefore, which we might form of the existing state of medical philosophy, from observation of the results of general practice, would be essentially faulty; because the insufficiency of education and the want of thorough discipline of

mind, render the mass of general practitioners incapable of observing with that correctness, and of reasoning with that precision, which are absolutely indispensable to enable them to practice medicine in such manner as to make all of its resources available. To do so, indeed, requires an extent of primary and professional education, and a degree of training in the arts of observing and theorising, and, withal, a force and compass of mind, which are rarely to be met with. It is, hence, in our profession, as in all other pursuits which require the exercise of a high order of talents, only occasionally, that we encounter one of those remarkable minds, gifted with the particular faculties, and possessed of the particular acquirements which fit it in all respects for its peculiar mission. But, we much more frequently meet with the faculties, than the acquirements. Bolingbroke has justly remarked, "The faculty of distinguishing true from false, right from wrong, and what is agreeable to nature from what is repugnant to her, has not been given with so sparing a hand as we are apt to believe." Most men, indeed, who engage in the study of medicine, have sufficient capacity to enable them to become ministers of infinite blessings to the communities in which they may practice; but it is to be feared, that too many of them, acting upon the idea, "*Plebs amat remedia*," cease to study so soon as they have acquired knowledge sufficient to enable them to dispense medicines with a moderate degree of safety.

There is no pursuit in life, which can boast a larger proportion of high minded, honorable, conscientious, faithful followers, than the profession of medicine; and it must be admitted, that much of the popular distrust, which we encounter, has been engendered by the vain boastings and false promises of ignorant pretenders.

But we cannot conceal the fact, that our profession would command a much larger share of the public confidence, were the acquirements of medical men generally commensurate with the present advanced state of medical science.

I would not delude you with the pretension, that medicine is one of the certain sciences. On the contrary, it has already been admitted, that it is a science of progress; and, as there can be no progress beyond perfection, it is of course imperfect, and to a certain extent, uncertain. But I would guard you against the fatal error, of attaching any such importance to this admitted uncertainty, as might tend to impair your confidence in the value of medical learning, or lessen your zeal for its acquisition. So far from the imperfections and defects of the science being of a character to do away with the necessity and advantages of study, their very existence renders it of vital importance that you should make yourselves masters of all of its ascer-

tained truths. Were it an entirely certain science it could be reduced to the form of general propositions and special formulæ, which might be applied in the treatment of disease, in the absence of any acquaintance with the tedious and laborious processes of observation, experiment and theoretical analysis, which were necessary to their discovery and establishment. But since this is not the case, it becomes necessary for you to be familiar, not only with its ascertained facts and principles, but also with the means by which a knowledge of them has been acquired, that you may be able to distinguish that which is positive from that which is only probable, and that which is only probable from what is purely conjectural; but an acquaintance with the methods of acquiring knowledge in medicine is more especially demanded, because much of the information, which is necessary to the successful management of disease, must be acquired at the bedside, at the very moment when the resources of therapeutics are to be called into requisition.

Taking it for granted, that you have left your several homes and repaired to this institution, with the determination to devote your best energies to the acquisition of medical knowledge, I must detain you a few moments longer with a brief examination of the nature and extent of the work which is before you.

The science of medicine, in its most comprehensive sense, embraces all those branches of knowledge which are necessary to the proper understanding of the healthy and diseased states of the human organism; as well as those which are necessary to the just appreciation of the relations which subsist between the organism and all external agents, whether therapeutical or toxical. Human anatomy, human chemistry, human physics, physiology, pathology, materia medica, and therapeutics, are branches of knowledge absolutely indispensable to the practical pursuit of your profession. Some of these consider the organism in repose; as anatomy, chemistry and physics. Anatomy is divided into special anatomy, which takes cognizance of the organs in their conformable condition, and into general anatomy, or histology, which analyses them into their constituent organic elements. Chemistry takes the organic elements from the hands of the histologist and determines their chemical composition, by reducing them to the condition of inorganic elements. Human physics considers those forces and properties of the organism, and its different parts, which belong to them in common with other matter, and which they enjoy independently of their peculiar mode of existence.

Physiology and pathology, on the other hand, consider it in action. Physiology regards the phenomena, modes of action and uses, of the

healthy organism, indeed, all the conditions which are peculiar to normal organic existence. Pathology, on the contrary, takes cognizance of the abnormal, or diseased, state of the system; and arranges itself naturally into the pathology of repose, or morbid anatomy, which considers the results of morbid processes as they are disclosed on "post mortem" inspection; and the pathology of action, which studies the phenomena, tendencies and essential nature, or modes of existence, of morbid action in the living body.

Materia Medica embraces the consideration of the origin, natural history, modes of preparation and exhibition, of all those external agents which are capable of exercising a sanative influence upon the body; as well as the chemical, physical and vital relations which they bear to the organism: whilst therapeutics is the art and science of applying these different agents, in the prevention and cure of disease.

I have not spoken of surgery as a distinct branch of medical science; because the knowledge used by the surgeon is embraced in the branches already designated. A good knowledge of anatomy and of human physics, of pathology, materia medica and therapeutics, will provide the surgeon with all that is peculiar to his art; materia medica embracing, properly, the consideration not only of medicinal substances, but of all agencies and appliances, which are employed in the prevention and cure of disease. Were we to regard surgery as a distinct branch of the healing art, we should be compelled to confine it to the manual and instrumental processes, which are demanded in the management of injuries, and in the removal of morbid products: but as all attempts to separate surgery from medicine, are irrational and unnatural, the schools of this country very wisely require of the candidate for the honors of the doctorate, a knowledge as well of surgical as medical therapeutics. For purposes of convenience, there is a separate professorship of surgery in all the American schools; but a licence to practice surgery simply, is never granted. Whoever would practice surgery, must be qualified to practice medicine also, before he can obtain the sanction of this or any other American school. And even in countries, where it is customary to grant license for the exclusive practice of surgery, or medicine, the licentiate is required to be familiar with all the branches of medical science, to which I have just called your attention; and, in reality, the distinction between surgery and medicine is kept up mainly for the purpose of perpetuating certain corporate privileges which enure to the benefit of individual corporators, and not to the advantage of the profession generally. No man can be a good surgeon who is not a good physician, and if the converse of the proposition is not true, it is simply because the suc-

cessful practice of surgery requires a certain manual dexterity, which is not necessary in the management of what are called medical diseases. But in the management of the very diseases, for the treatment of which this manual dexterity may be needed, all the knowledge and skill of the most accomplished physician may be demanded also. Whether it be your desire, therefore, to distinguish yourselves as surgeons, or as physicians, you must, in either case become masters of the whole circle of the medical sciences.

In carrying out the plan of this lecture, it now becomes proper for me to offer a few suggestions, in reference to the modes of acquiring a knowledge of the various branches of the science; but I shall be compelled to treat this part of my subject with much more brevity than comports with the importance of its topics.

Observation, experiment and theoretical analysis, are the means which we use in investigating the subjects belonging to the medical sciences.

By observation, we ascertain the phenomena of nature as they present themselves when uninfluenced by the interference of art.

By experiment, we reproduce these phenomena artificially, or develop incidental phenomena, which depend upon the reactions that take place between the organism and external agents.

By theoretical analysis, we arrange and classify phenomena, according to their natural relations, and deduce from them the general principles, or truths, which they warrant.

To observe the phenomena of nature, with entire faithfulness and accuracy, requires the exercise of the utmost care and attention. Hasty and incomplete observation has done much to falsify conclusions in medicine. Observation is truly an art, the exercise of which cannot be safely practiced, without a thorough training of the perceptive faculties of the mind. False facts have done more to retard the progress of medicine than false theories, and hence a thorough education of the powers of observation, is more important to the physician than any other species of mental training. The recorded observations of one who has not served a sort of apprenticeship to the art of observing, can never be relied upon in any branch of natural science, and there is no science in which accuracy of observation is so essential, as it is in medicine. In examining the facts of our art, the capacity of the observer, by whom they were recorded, is the first thing to be considered; for unless he possesses peculiar fitness for the task of observation, his facts are to be doubted.

By experiment, we undertake to test the correctness of observation; and in many of the natural sciences, as chemistry, and physics, we

may succeed in doing this. But in medicine, we can rarely succeed in reproducing phenomena, which may have been incompletely observed; and hence we are compelled to wait patiently upon nature, and profit by such occasional opportunities of repeating our observations, as may chance to present themselves. And even when we attempt to develop peculiar phenomena, by the action of foreign agents upon the living body, we have still to wait and watch, that we may be certain of the existence of the same condition of vital activity which may have been present at a former experiment. Neither observation nor experiment, therefore, can be safely trusted to the hands of a tyro. Both require, for their successful exercise, a long and faithful apprenticeship, and both are indispensable to the farther progress of medical science; as well as to the successful application of that which is already understood.

Theory, again, is as necessary in the practical pursuit of medical science as the observation of facts; neither indeed can be of much avail without the aid of the other. The term theory, is from the Greek word which signifies to behold or look at, and this is the sense in which it should be used. To look at, or examine, facts, that we may arrive at the conclusions which they warrant, is the whole business of theory. I am not ignorant of the fact, that it has been the fashion, of late years, with the adherents of the numerical school, to decry the use of theory in medicine, and to regard it as one of the chief impediments to the advance of rational therapeutics; but it is the abuse of theory and not its proper use, against which denunciation should be directed. Let it be remembered, that the proper use of theory is to arrange and systematize the deductions of experience; to facilitate the progress of knowledge, by classifying facts and explaining the unknown by the analogy of the known; in fine, to enable man to anticipate the future, by referring the past to general rules." Let it be employed with these rational views, and their can be no danger that it will ever hinder the progress of our art. On the contrary, when thus used, it constitutes the distinguishing and crowning excellency in the character of the philosophical physician. But like every good thing it is liable to be abused, and hence, it must be admitted that medicine has been retarded in its progress by hasty and presumptuous theory. Men have erred in their theories in all ages, and in our profession we have to contend with so much speculation, which has only hypothesis for its foundation, that it is scarcely surprising that prudent and over-cautious men are disposed to use with trembling hand, a power, to the proper control and direction of which, many of the mighty minds of past ages proved inadequate; even to turn their backs upon all pro-

gress, rather than countenance the exercise of a dangerous faculty. It would be far better, however, for the cause of truth, were such men sedulously engaged in pointing out the sources of error in the theories of the past, and in teaching the methods of avoiding them in future; that the march of improvement might cease to be obstructed by such impediments. It certainly is not wise to reject the aid of theory, in perfecting a system of Philosophy, because vain and presumptuous men have filled the world with idle speculation, conjectures and hypotheses, and miscalled them theories. There are vain men, who, refusing to recognize any limitation to their own wisdom, build up systems of philosophy to relieve their minds of doubts, and to gratify their self love, which would not be satisfied with any thing short of a claim to universal knowledge. There are presumptuous men, who

“Fancy that they feel
Divinity within them, breeding wings
Wherewith to scorn the earth.”

But the wild and crude vagaries of such characters can constitute no valid argument against the judicious use of theory, to the dominion of which, indeed, all discoveries of facts and principles must be subjected, before they can be made available to the advantage of true wisdom. Many of these abuses of theory are so gross and palpable, as to be entirely harmless, because they offend our common sense, by presenting propositions which are utterly absurd. Others, on the contrary, are so plausibly and beautifully elaborated as to strike the fancy with almost irresistible fascination, and often lead the mind into error, by inviting it to take the high ground of “a priori” reasoning, when, in reality, the premises upon which they rest may have no foundation, save in the dreamy imagination of their authors. Such baseless speculation can tend to no good result—can never, indeed, be indulged in, in our profession, without positive injury to the cause of truth. But speculation of this character is widely different from that better and wiser use of theory by which we “arrange and systematize the deductions of experience;” or, “facilitate the progress of knowledge by classifying facts.” Let the facts which are gathered from observation, or elicited by experiment, as well as such as are obtained from books and teachers, be subjected to the severe and rigid analysis which the judicious use of theory exacts, and you cannot widely wander from the path of true philosophy. But if you undertake to draw upon your imaginations for your data, no reliance can be placed upon your deductions; and you will find your fondly cherished dreams fade away, under the rigorous scrutiny of searching analysis, “like frost before the morning sun.” If you have suffered preconceived opinions, or opinions formed prematurely, and on inadequate data, to

take root in your minds, now is the time to eradicate them. As the first great lesson of true wisdom, you must learn to sacrifice the cherished dreams of your noviciate, as well as your pride of opinion, upon the altar of science, and prostrate yourselves before her shrine, even to the earth; that, Antæus like, you may draw your truest strength only from your extremest humiliation. With minds thus purged and purified, and divested of the "vain wisdom" and "false philosophy" which are so apt to find a congenial soil in the active and susceptible imaginations of early life, you will be prepared to make the "slow and toilsome ascent of patient analysis," so imperiously demanded in the prosecution of investigations in medical science.

Lord Bacon says, "If a man will begin with certainties he shall end in doubts, but if he will be content to begin with doubts he shall end in certainties." It is, hence, the part of true philosophy to be patient under the doubts and uncertainties, by which you will find your path beset, at the commencement of your studies. Gradually, but steadily, the mist will disappear before the brightening rays of accumulating knowledge; and you will find yourselves emerging slowly, but firmly, from darkness into light. What now seems obscure and difficult to understand, will, in time become clear and of easy comprehension; and where, at present, there is nothing but darkness and confusion and discord, you will discover, as you advance, light, and order, and harmony. You must not, therefore, be discouraged by present difficulties. You have engaged in a profession which opens before you a wider field of research, than any other you could have selected; and if you would cultivate it profitably, you must go to work in good earnest. The labor which you have to undergo, will tax your zeal and industry to the utmost degree; but you must remember that you have voluntarily taken upon yourselves to become the guardians of the health and lives of your fellow-men, and there is nothing left for you but to stand up, heroically, to the duties and responsibilities thus assumed, or retreat ingloriously from the field. There is no half way ground, upon which you can honorably fall back. You can offer no apology for incompetency or ignorance. The public has a right to expect of you the complete mastery of your sacred art, and nothing short of this will enable you to satisfy the demands of your own consciences, or cancel the obligations to society under which you have voluntarily placed yourselves.

It will be the business of your teachers to point out to you the reliable sources of information, and to indicate the ascertained and well established facts and principles of their respective departments of the science. Instead of attempting to amuse you with beautiful words

and well turned sentences, or to entertain you with dashes of humor, or effusions of poetry, or to surprise you with bursts of eloquence, or flashes of wit, it should be their endeavor by a studious simplicity of speech to compress into as limited compass as possible the positive knowledge, which may be made available in the practice of your profession. It would be worse than useless for them to bring before you the dusty tomes which are the repositories of the antiquated lore of our forefathers, and force you to burthen your memories with their fanciful superstitions, and luxuriant formulæ, which are no longer interesting save as curious reliques of a barbarous age. It would be most unprofitable, if, indeed, it would not be mischievous, for them to engage your attention with all the vague and baseless theories and the plausible conceits with which modern speculators have confounded themselves and disgusted philosophy. Such a course would only involve your minds in greater doubt and uncertainty than properly belong to your profession, and would leave you in the condition of the proud but fallen spirits, who, though they could still reason high of providence and fate, yet

“ Found no end in wondering mazes lost.”

It is justly remarked by a celebrated teacher of medicine, that “the object of lectures is to convey to the student in a condensed manner, that knowledge in abstract which will enable him to understand what he sees at the bed-side.” In accordance with this view, it should be the aim of every teacher to present what he has to impart in the most concise and preceptive form. Unnecessary amplification on topics which are the subjects of conjecture or groundless speculation should be avoided, as calculated to create too great a love for novel and startling theories. Irreparable mischief may be done by such a course, since the youthful mind is always too prone to be fascinated with beautiful speculation, and too apt to become confirmed in the evil habit of cruising in the regions of the ideal. The ascertained facts, established principles, and generally recognised truths of the profession, then, should be the objects of especial attention; and when these have been mastered, you will be in no danger of being led off from the path of true philosophy by the captivating, but visionary fancies, by which the science of medicine is so much encumbered.

In conclusion, I trust you will hold me excused, for taking advantage of the present opportunity, to express my thanks to the trustees of the University, as well as to the faculty of this, its medical department, for the honor which has been conferred upon me, by the appointment to the post in assuming the duties of which I now address you. Several years since, I received from the trustees of the medical

department of the St. Louis University, a similar honor; and for two years occupied the chair of physiology and pathology in that institution; with what success it is not for me to say. Notwithstanding the strong inducements to remain in St. Louis afforded by the rapid and almost unprecedented growth of the city; the bright prospects of the school—the class of which was nearly as large again the second winter of my connection with it as it was the first; and the agreeable and entirely satisfactory character of my relations with my colleagues, all of whom were accomplished and popular teachers; notwithstanding, I say, all of these inducements to remain, such was my unwillingness to abandon my native state, and rend asunder the various ties of early association and kindred, which bound me to her, that I determined to give up my position and return to Kentucky; and without the remotest expectation of being called upon to teach in any existing institution within her borders, I quietly resumed the practice of my profession. But just one year had passed away when I received an intimation from a member of this faculty that, with my permission, I would be nominated by the faculty, as a candidate for the professorship which I now hold. I here frankly admit, that there were considerations which forced me to hesitate about the advantages of such a connection. Foremost amongst these considerations was the fact, that, for several years past, the classes of Transylvania have been declining in numbers, whilst several of her sister and neighboring institutions were rapidly advancing. But when I came to analyse this difficulty, I found that it was of a purely selfish character—a mere question of dollars and cents; and that I had, on the other hand, inducements more than sufficient to silence every such objection. When I reflected, that I was called upon to become a teacher in the oldest medical school in the valley of the Mississippi; a school which, whatever may be the size of her classes, enjoys a reputation throughout the length and breadth of the Union, equal, to say the least, to that of any other west of the mountains, and that this reputation was identified with the fame of the illustrious surgeon, her honored founder, whose name and achievements were known and admired co-extensively with the enlightened exercise of the healing art; I could no longer doubt that it would give me a degree of consequence, amongst the medical teachers of the country, far above my deserts, to be announced as one of her professors. But independently of this consideration, which addressed itself chiefly to my vanity, I could not escape the conviction that her reputation rested upon a solid and enduring basis. I knew that the superior claims of her instruction in the important department of practical surgery, were so firmly and immova-

bly established, as to contribute much more than the proportional share of that department to the maintenance of her renown; and I knew, too, that her reputation in this respect, was of no *bubble* character, inflated into unworthy dimensions by the fulsome puffings of newspaper scribblers; but that it rested securely on the gratitude of the multitudes of men and women, dispersed throughout the Union, who have either experienced in their own persons, or witnessed in the case of friends or relatives, the inestimable benefits of the matured judgment and superior skill of her distinguished surgeon; that it reposed proudly upon the impregnable basis of *deeds*, which, like the achievements of the military chieftain, were fast anchored in the memories of men, by ligaments of strength sufficient to defy all the disparagements of rivals and the calumnies of the envious. And I knew full well that the duties of all the other departments were discharged with a degree of ability and efficiency not surpassed in any other school of which I had any knowledge. I knew too that she had, scattered broadcast over the the south and west, a larger number of alumni than any other western school, all, more or less, interested in her success, inasmuch as all who practice under the sanction of her *diploma* must desire to see her prosper and grow in renown; or, at least, maintain her hitherto proud position amongst her sister institutions. And knowing these things, I could not well avoid the conclusion, that the decline of her classes, was but temporary, and that by a little exertion on the part of her friends, she could readily recover her former patronage. It cannot be doubted, that by a suitable appeal, she can bring to her aid the larger portion of her numerous graduates; who, by virtue of their position as successful practioners and popular preceptors, have it in their power to render the most substantial assistance. And if she can once succeed in awakening into activity the latent affection of her accomplished alumni, and enlisting them in her interest, she may not only regain her former classes, but even realize a degree of prosperity which she has never yet enjoyed. She can never call upon her sons for any other aid than such as is entirely compatible with full justice to her cotemporaries. She would not, if she could, build herself up, by pulling down others. She is utterly incapable of disturbing, by any act of hers, the laurels which encircle the brow of a neighbor. She asks nothing but fair and honorable competition—competition prompted and sustained by the principle of emulation; not that which is animated and kept alive by the ignoble spirit of rivalry. Indeed, if I understand her aright, she desires and invites the emulation which may stimulate her cotemporaries to overtake or surpass her in the race of improvement, or to exceed her in

the more thorough and complete education of their pupils; or even to excel her in the interest and attractiveness of their style of teaching. These are all legitimate ends of honorable competition, and if we are excelled in these respects, I am confident no member of this faculty would feel otherwise than satisfied, if indeed he would not be pleased to know that the schools which surpassed us in merit also exceeded us in patronage. We are entirely willing to see other institutions elevate themselves by honorable exertion, to a degree of excellence far above our own standard; or rather we would not cherish, for such institutions, any other than feelings of admiration; however much we might be stimulated by their example. But when we have to contend with the envy, jealousy and hatred, engendered by the spirit of rivalry, which seeks to divert the natural affection even of our own alumni from its appropriate channel, by means of malicious disparagement and detraction, or positive misrepresentation of our condition and advantages, the case is widely different. Instead of regarding with interest, or complacency, the growth of institutions which seek to build themselves up by such unworthy means, it becomes us to be vigilant of their movements, and to counteract the effect of their calumnies, by exposing their motives and designs to the public gaze, that they may be visited by the just measure of scorn and contempt with which all honorable men must regard them. Such competition is every where to be condemned; but it is especially reprehensible in the case of medical schools, since its tendency is to hinder rather than assist the progress of improvement. No medical school should be sustained, in this enlightened age, which is not struggling to contribute something to the general advancement of medical science. Schools which have been established as schemes of speculation, and which are carried on and sustained as mere business or money making concerns, will generally prove the least worthy of support. But by reason of their unworthiness, of which there will be a lively consciousness in the bosoms of their presiding genii, they will be found, in season and out of season, disparaging all established competitors, and depreciating the creation of others which might be at all likely to interfere with their mercenary plans.

Such is not the character of the school which rests its claims to patronage upon the intrinsic excellency of its instruction. Desiring nothing so ardently as the promotion of the true interests of science, it will be found pursuing the even tenor of its way, rejoicing as much in all the honorable achievements of her cotemporaries, which tend to advance the cause of truth, as if they were the work of her own hands. And this is as it should be. The unseemly spirit of rivalry

should be suppressed and the laudable spirit of emulation encouraged. Envy and jealousy and hostile antagonism should be everywhere frowned down, whilst honorable competition should be invited and extended.

