

ASSOCIATION MEDICAL JOURNAL.

EDITED BY JOHN ROSE CORMACK, M.D.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF LECTURES ON MEDICAL ETHICS.

If there is one just subject of complaint in the medical education of the present day, it is of the number of lectures the student is compelled to attend; and yet there still is a department in which he should be instructed, which is more likely to be impressed on his character by the words of his teacher than by books: we allude to MEDICAL ETHICS. There is no other profession than ours, in which its members are more frequently brought into collision with each other, in circumstances where their own interests and those of their patients are at stake, and which not only require the knowledge of what is right, as a matter of professional etiquette, but also correct principles of conduct, and tact in their application. The consequences of failure in these respects are often very severe. Many a young man throws himself back for years, or totally hinders his advancement to any high status among his brethren, by his ignorance or neglect of what is due from man to man in his early collisions with his fraternity. Those men who are born and bred in the higher classes of society get a facility of observation, a conventional sense of honour, and a knowledge of what is gentlemanlike or the reverse, from constant intercourse with gentlemen; and this training inclines them almost intuitively to do what is correct towards others, and just to themselves, in the intricate affairs of life. In short, they act as gentlemen, even although they may not be guided by the highest principles. Again, those who have been early brought up to do to others as they would have others do to them, and who have honest, simple hearts, arrive at the same results by a nobler path and a less complex method.

But the large intermediate class, who have neither had early nor high social education, nor possess the simple honesty of nature raised by religious training, learn what is right in these duties only from much blundering, from cruel mistakes, and from all the trials of an uneducated experience. To this large class, how many medical students belong, who are, when they leave the schools, to be cast upon the rough sea of life, without compasses or chart to guide them in their intercourse with society! Were they Christians in the high sense of the term, or were they thoroughly well bred, either of these disciplines would have sufficed; but, on the contrary, they have had none of that strict social training which compels them to think and to study the feelings of others, and perhaps they have never seriously considered that their success in life would greatly depend on their just, kindly, considerate, and honest treatment of their fellow men. In these respects, how many who have had a pretty good scientific education are still savages, and unable even to appreciate the value of the best manners, from an ignorance of the difficult discipline from earliest years of which they are the fruit! And thus how many medical students may be laboriously trained in the science of medicine, and yet left in ignorance of the duties which they owe as men to their patients, their fellow practitioners, their profession, and

to themselves!—a kind of knowledge which is essential to the proper practice of their art. The metropolitan teacher may watch with pleasure the scientific progress, the zeal and industry of his pupil; and may not suspect that the strong emulation he has been exciting by his prizes and praise, and the active diligence he has fostered by these encouragements, may both ere long be employed in endeavouring to get practice at all hazards, to gain success for himself, whoever is overthrown, *rem quocunque modo rem*; until he may discover that the world will not stand such conduct, when he may find himself suddenly thrown upon his back by its strong arm. Like a boy spinning a cockchafer, he never thought of the pain he was inflicting on another, he was so absorbed in himself.

Now, it is this ignorance we would wish to see reformed; and this selfishness, enlightened and corrected—this want of knowledge of what is due from one man of education to another, practising the same liberal profession, removed. Teachers who have gained the confidence and the affections of the students by superior knowledge, high character, and kindness, are their proper instructors in conduct. The influence founded on high acquirements and zeal, would give their advice in manners (*mores*) the weight of authority; and they might awaken in many a young heart a sense of duty to which it had been a stranger. The seniors of the profession have often made medical conduct the theme of introductory lectures; but though an introductory lecture affords a good opportunity for inculcating general principles, it does not afford an opportunity for going into the requisite details; and, impressed as we are with the importance of the subject, from the observation of the early course of young men in practice, we would, at this season of the year, urge on the professors and lecturers at the metropolitan schools the reasonableness of making medical ethics a part of medical education. This may be done, either by the delivery of a short course of systematic lectures, or by each professor of a practical branch devoting a few lectures to this subject, which is so closely connected with the pupil's success. Schools, which would make medical ethics a branch of medical education, would have a greater claim on parents, and on those masters who take a lively interest in their pupils' London career and subsequent well doing. Instruction in Medical Ethics might soon lay the foundation for the most solid reform in our profession—that which is based on the improvement in conduct of each of its members.

MR. SYME AND MR. HESTER.

It is doubtless fresh in the recollection of many members of the ASSOCIATION, that a complaint was made by Dr. Simpson, at our recent anniversary meeting, against the Association, for having published under its authority an attack upon Mr. Syme and the profession in Edinburgh.

The passage to which we refer is contained in the "Address in Surgery", delivered last year at Oxford, by Mr. Hester, of that city; and is as follows:—

"If we cast our eyes beyond the Tweed, we see the melancholy exhibition of a city, celebrated through long ages as the birth-place of genius, torn by two rival factions and a petty squabble about the perineal section. It is not in these days a question whether the operation originated with Dessault or Syme, nor whether it be adapted for the cases in which it has been recommended. The ultimate condition of the patient is lost sight of in fierce animosity and personal invective, and the two leading surgeons have appealed to a Court of Law upon a question of truth. *Proh pudor!* It were vain to expect them to issue from the contest humbler, better, and wiser men. But should their repentance be ever so great, it will never efface the scandal such proceedings bring upon the profession.

"That such scenes may shortly cease to be enacted in the modern Athens, is my most earnest prayer; and as to ourselves, may we ever be delivered from envy, hatred, malice, anger, and all such pestiferous perturbations, which militate in no small degree against that tranquillity of mind so essential to the practice of the healing art. Were we to take a retrospect of the whole of this unhappy quarrel, in which direction must we turn for liberality or courteous bearing? Where is the trace of industry or of research? It is not even clothed in sparkling wit or glowing language. No! The terms which have been selected would have better suited the tavern or the hustings. If there be value in the practice recommended, we, as independent but anxious trustees of the public health, have a right to ask for a new series of experiments, under circumstances which would admit of no misunderstanding. Until then, no violence of language, no unblushing assertion, even in the form of advertisements in the public journals, will have weight to influence our judgment."

Trusting that the decision adopted at Swansea would be deemed satisfactory, but being at the same time uncertain as to this, from the tenor of our private letters from Edinburgh, we abstained from noticing the subject when speaking, at p. 717, of the proceedings of the Swansea meeting; and now, it is not willingly, but from necessity, that we refer to so disagreeable a topic. Circumstances, however, have occurred which force us to break silence; but, in doing so, we shall keep in view the rules which we laid down for our guidance in our inaugural address published on the 7th of January.

Upon the motion of Dr. Sibson of London, seconded by Dr. Radford of Manchester, the following resolution was carried at the last anniversary meeting:—

"That the Association regrets that there should be any misunderstanding between Mr. Syme and Mr. Hester; but that the Association does not hold itself responsible for the sentiments expressed in the papers which may be published in the *Transactions*, and recommended for publication on account of their general merits."

In the opinion of Dr. Simpson, this resolution does not offer due reparation and redress for the publication of Mr. Hester's statements, which he characterises as calumnious and truthless. He thinks that the Association did not do enough when it withdrew its sanction from the passage complained of; and, under this conviction, he forwarded to us for publication a voluminous correspondence, which, for reasons explained in the following letter, we have resolved not to insert in the Journal:—

FROM DR. CORMACK TO PROFESSOR SIMPSON.

"Putney, Sep. 14, 1853.

"MY DEAR SIR,—Notwithstanding the arguments used in your recent letters, I am still of opinion that I ought not to insert in the ASSOCIATION JOURNAL the correspondence which you have transmitted to me for publication. It is my hope and my belief that the obnoxious paragraph is no longer the property of the Association, and that it was technically repudiated by the resolution adopted at Swansea. Mr. Hester must now, I think, be regarded as the sole proprietor of the paragraph.

As the Association certainly intended finally to settle this most unpleasant business, so far as they and Mr. Syme are concerned, by the decision to which I have referred, I feel that it is my duty not to open the Journal to its re-discussion. I therefore return to you the correspondence, as you intimate your intention of bringing it before the profession, even though I should decline to publish it in our Journal. The following are the letters which I return:—

"1. Dr. Simpson to the Editor of the ASSOCIATION JOURNAL, Aug. 26, 1853.

"2. Dr. Simpson to Sir Charles Hastings, May 1853.

"3. Sir Charles Hastings to Dr. Simpson, May 20, 1853.

"4. Dr. Simpson to Sir Charles Hastings, May 25, 1853.

"5. Sir Charles Hastings to Dr. Simpson, May 31, 1853.

"6. Dr. Simpson to Sir Charles Hastings, June 4, 1853.

"7. Sir Charles Hastings to Dr. Simpson, June 7, 1853.

"8. Dr. Simpson to Sir Charles Hastings, June 14, 1853.

"9. Sir Charles Hastings to Dr. Simpson, June 23, 1853.

"10. Dr. Simpson to Sir Charles Hastings, July 25, 1853.

"11. Sir Charles Hastings to Dr. Simpson, July 27, 1853.

"12. Sir Charles Hastings to Dr. Simpson, August 17, 1853.

[This letter enclosed the resolution adopted at Swansea.]

"13. Dr. Simpson to Sir Charles Hastings, August 26, 1853.

"Allow me to add that, as not a single member of our Association has adopted or defended Mr. Hester's sentiments since they appeared, and as the undoubted object of the Swansea resolution was to sever all connexion between those sentiments and the Association, you and Mr. Syme might, I think, with great propriety, allow the matter, as regards the Association, to rest where it is. In any case, I beg you will offer to Mr. Syme the expression of my high esteem, and that you will accept the same from

Yours very truly,

"JOHN ROSE CORMACK.

"To J. Y. SIMPSON, M.D., Professor of Midwifery in the University of Edinburgh."

While we close our pages against the re-discussion of Mr. Hester's paragraph, we cannot avoid expressing our extreme regret that the Association, in the twenty-second year of its existence, should still be without ethical laws for its guidance, and without a tribunal for the authoritative investigation and settlement of all cases in which members are accused of acting *contra bonos mores*.

REFORM OF THE CLUB SYSTEM.

TO-DAY we publish two admirable letters upon the Club System, a subject regarding which we propose next week to make some further remarks.

We trust that powerful committees may soon be constituted in all parts of the kingdom for the radical reform of the club system—committees similar to those which arose from our articles on gratuitous advice, and one of which is now investigating so diligently, and yet so unobtrusively, the gratis system, as it prevails within the bounds of the Metropolitan Counties Branch.

With reference to the suggestion of S. T., in favour of a five shilling semi-membership, we are not prepared to offer any decided opinion; but our present belief is, that such a project is utterly impracticable, and for this reason, that it would probably still farther increase a body of gentlemen already too numerous—those who read and applaud the Journal, and contribute nothing to its maintenance. At least, one member's copy visits weekly by post three practitioners who are not members, and who assign this accommodation as the cause of their not finding it necessary to join the Association. Again, at least four wealthy reading societies are supplied with the Journal by their secretaries (who belong to our body), giving their copies gratuitously, or for a consideration.