

Sayre (L. A.)

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE

OF

1868-'69,

AT

BELLEVUE HOSPITAL

Medical College.

BY

LEWIS A. SAYRE, M.D.,

PROFESSOR OF ORTHOPÆDIC SURGERY.



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BELLEVUE HOSPITAL MEDICAL COLLEGE,

October 22d, 1868.

PROFESSOR LEWIS A. SAYRE,

*Dear Sir:*

At a meeting of the Class of Bellevue Hospital Medical College, held this day, Dr. J. C. Bryant, Chairman, Geo. R. Phillips, Secretary, we were appointed a Committee to solicit a copy of your lecture introductory to the course of 1868-9. Hoping that this request will meet with favor, we have the pleasure of remaining,

Very respectfully yours,

J. C. CONOVER,  
ROBT. TAYLOR,  
H. R. WILLIAMS,  
H. C. GORHAM,  
C. W. DUNLAP, } *Committee.*



285 5th AVENUE, October 22d, 1868.

To Messrs.

J. C. CONOVER,  
ROBT. TAYLOR,  
H. R. WILLIAMS, } *Committee.*  
H. C. GORHAM,  
C. W. DUNLAP, }

*Gentlemen :*

Your note of this day, requesting a copy of my introductory lecture, to the course of 1868-9, at Bellevue Hospital Medical College, has just been received.

With pleasure I accede to the wishes of the Class, and if the advice given, shall serve to stimulate the Students to constant effort in their professional acquirements, I shall be more than gratified.

With thanks to the Class for the compliment, and wishing you all success in your professional career,

I remain,

Yours, very respectfully,

LEWIS A. SAYRE.



## LECTURE.

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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN : I am placed in my present unenviable position very much against my wishes by the inexorable decree of the unanimous vote of the faculty of this institution. To lecture to the students either in a didactic course, or more particularly in the clinic at the bedside of the patient, is to me the greatest of all my professional delights ; but to lecture to a public audience, without a selected topic, is not congenial to my taste, and is something for which I feel very much disqualified, and would have avoided if possible. But the duty has been imposed upon me, by my colleagues, and I thought I could not do better than occupy your time for a few moments this evening, in considering the relative obligations existing between the medical profession and the public, and the duties and obligations between the one and the other. It is very necessary for the advantage of both, that it should be definitely and thoroughly understood, that neither should fail through ignorance, to discharge its duty toward the other. What then, are the duties, the obligations, and the responsibilities of the medical man ? What is his position, toward the public ? In my opinion he stands above all others. His profession rightly understood and honorably practiced, gives to him the greatest responsibility, and a position nobler than that held by those engaged in any other pursuit in life. He must be a man of the strictest honor and integrity, for to him are confided the secrets of families, the honor of wives and daughters ; sacred trusts that are committed to no other. Every medical man should feel the responsibility of these trusts, or he is unworthy of being a physician. The physician who practices his profession merely as a trade, for the amount of money that can be made by it, is unworthy of his calling. If he has no nobler and higher motive than the mere gain that can be made by it, he is unfit to be trusted, with the lives of human beings ; he would be more interested in keeping his patients sick, than in curing their diseases, for more money would be made in that way, than by the other. The higher and nobler motive of doing good to others, of relieving human

suffering, of prolonging human life, is the only incentive that ever has or ever will make the great physician.

In proportion to the weight of his responsibility, should be the honor and the integrity of his character. How easy is it for the physician to control the destiny of his patients. On him they rest; and confide in his knowledge and truth. He decides for them questions of life and death. Happiness or unhappiness it is in his power to give, and why? Because by devoted study he has learned the mysteries and marvels of that wondrous machine, the human body. He has studied the laws which govern and control its action, and has become acquainted with the proper mode of assisting nature, in carrying out those laws, so that health may be secured and disease banished. The greater his knowledge, the greater is his power. He has knowledge of how to do good, and consequently the power to do evil, and hence, the necessity of his being governed by the strictest honor and integrity, in order to use that knowledge rightly.

We naturally love those who confer upon us great and good gifts, and what boon is so great as that of life and perfect health? "All that a man hath, will he give for his life," it was said of old. Are the men of the present day different from those of the past?

A clergyman without health is unable to perform his duties toward his fellow man, and is comparatively useless. So the lawyer, the man of business, the merchant, and the laborer. All human beings regard health as the first and the greatest of gifts, and honor and reverence him who is able to protect and preserve it. The physician is entrusted with the protection of health and life—life which is the breath of God breathed into us at our birth, and without which we are but dust and ashes. Should he not feel, therefore, that to his care has been committed the most sacred of all human trusts, and that a fearful responsibility rests upon him; and that to him has been allotted the duty not only of preserving life, but keeping that life in perfect health, which is the normal condition of the human body. Shall he fail in that duty? Shall he neglect that which he has undertaken to perform? Shall selfish fear, or the desire of personal ease, prevent him from undergoing the labor necessary to qualify himself to assume this fearful responsibility?

This is an important question, and upon the answer you give to it, depends the future standing and position of every medical student.

Wait not until you have obtained your degree, before you consider this momentous question: whether you will take an elevated rank in your profession, or merely follow it as a trade. Determine now,

at the commencement of your student life, that you will take the very highest rank as a student. Devote all your energies, all your time, by the closest application, to obtain a most perfect and minute knowledge of the *elementary* branches of the science of medicine, for upon the accuracy and minuteness of your knowledge of *these* branches, the *alphabet* of your profession, rests all the superstructure, upon which you are to secure the monument of your future fame. Have it so broad, so deep and well laid, so strong, that to whatever height your fame may reach it can never be shaken from its firm foundation.

If you are deficient in these elementary branches, the only enduring basis for a permanent reputation, you will never obtain a distinguished position. You, therefore, must see the necessity for the closest application even at the commencement of your career, for it is at this period of the student's life that these elementary branches are taught. No man can become a classical scholar, in either the Greek or Hebrew languages, without first comprehending and fully understanding both its character and alphabet, and having an intimate knowledge of its structure. The attempt to gain a knowledge of the beautiful orations and other compositions, in these classic tongues, by translations, without a knowledge of the rudiments of the language will fail, and you will obtain but a faint impression of the ideas intended to be conveyed by the author you are reading. So in regard to your profession. The alphabet of which is anatomy, physiology, chemistry, pathology, and *materia medica*. Without understanding these fully and minutely, so as first to know exactly, what is the healthy condition of man, you never can comprehend the changes that occur from a healthy state to a diseased one, or know accurately when disease exists. The duty of the medical man is not to give physic, but to learn *when* and *how* to give it, and above all, when *not* to give it. Brandreth, Ayers, and all the host of advertising quacks, that sell their nostrums by the thousands, can *give* physic, and so can the so-called homœopathic doctors; in fact their principle is to give medicine, and a great objection, if not the greatest, to their system is that they are always giving physic, prescribing for *symptoms* instead of eradicating the *causes* that have produced those symptoms. The swallowing of drugs which they constantly recommend, by pellets or in potions, is the greatest objection to their practice. The object of the medical man should be to instruct his patient how to live, so as to prevent disease, or if disease exists, to ascertain its causes, and by the removal of those causes permit nature to restore the body, as it almost always will, to perfect health, or to render such assistance as may occasionally be necessary.

To obtain this intimate knowledge of the structure of the human frame and the laws that govern it, how little do the public know of the sacrifices the student is compelled to undergo.

Follow with me in imagination a student's life, during the three years of his devoted study to acquire a knowledge of his profession requisite to enable him to assume and discharge the duties and the responsibilities I have before described.

Coming, it may be, from some quiet country home, where he has been surrounded by all the pleasures of social life; fond parents, loving brothers and sisters, dear friends with whom he has had many a happy hour, all these are to be sacrificed. He comes to the great city, it may be for the first time, surrounded with all its allurements and enticements for pleasure and enjoyment, which he must forego, and the first introduction he has, is into the dissecting room. Those of you who have never been placed in this position can scarcely realize the effect that is often produced by this first exhibition even upon the strongest and most stoical mind. Yet here, in this charnel house, in close communion with the dead, must he spend his hours for three long years, in the minutest dissection of the human body in order to obtain an accurate knowledge of its structure. "We must dissect the dead or we must mangle the living," was said by one of former days. The saying is as true to-day, as at the time of its utterance, as it is only by the minutest investigation that we can possess ourselves of the intimate knowledge of its structure. Not only must *this* knowledge be possessed, but so also a knowledge of physiology, a knowledge of the *functions* of all the various organs, which are thus revealed to us; of the various complicated actions of secretion, absorption, nutrition, growth and decay, and all the mysterious changes that occur in the life of a human being. This knowledge can only be obtained by a constant and close observation of the functions of the different organs, as displayed by the physiologist, in his observations and experiments upon the lower order of animals.

The dangers of the dissecting room are not a few, yet they must be faced, as it is only by the minutest knowledge of anatomy that the student can be properly qualified to diagnosticate diseases. The battle with death, which every student meets when in the dissecting room, is a risk of life which the public little comprehend. The slightest scratch upon his finger (as has been instanced in numerous cases), may terminate his life. These are the constant risks he runs, in order to obtain the knowledge which is necessary to do good in the future, and yet this knowledge can only be obtained by devoted labor in the dissecting room. The superficial knowledge of the

organic structure of the human frame, which may be obtained from books and drawings, and from the lecture room, is not sufficient to enable the student or the physician to diagnosticate with accuracy the various diseases and accidents to which we are liable. The minutest relative anatomy of the parts is often called into play, as to the exact location of disease, whether it be within a joint or exterior to it—whether it in reality involves a blood vessel or an organ, or is simply in contact with one or the other. Scarcely a month passes that cases are not brought to me, frequently by men of eminence in our profession, where just these errors have been made from the want of that very accuracy of anatomical knowledge, but which they are excusable for not possessing, in as much as anatomy was not permitted to be taught when they were students, with the freedom of the present time. All honor to the law-givers of our noble State, who have legalized this necessary means of instruction. New York was the first State to legalize anatomy, and by conferring upon the medical student the privilege of an examination of the dead, they have granted him the power of obtaining a knowledge which will enable him to preserve the living.

This minuteness of knowledge and accuracy of observation is not only necessary to enable you to do justice to your patient, but it is also absolutely requisite to enable you to protect yourself. For you may find persons, even in our own profession, who, from ignorance, envy, or malice, will combine with some pettifogging lawyer of no repute, to trump up a suit for mal-practice against you, in order to injure your professional standing and reputation.

If you are not certain of the accuracy of your diagnosis and the correctness of your treatment, you will, through fear, yield to their demands, and pay the hush money desired to prevent a public exposition, and thus benefit the "black-mailers" and ruin yourself. But if you are conscious of the accuracy of your diagnosis and correctness of your treatment, you will not only court, but *demand*, the strictest investigation, perfectly conscious that when facts are brought to the observation of intelligent, *competent* medical judges, the infamy of your traducers will be fully exposed, and the justice of your course sustained.

As with a knowledge of anatomy, so, too, with a knowledge of chemistry and materia medica; they must be equally minute. The effects of poisons upon the system, the influence of various remedies upon the different secretions, must be minutely investigated, to be thoroughly understood. To obtain this knowledge requires the most careful and devoted study, and constant labor in the chemical laboratory. So, too, in regard to the actions and effects of the vari-

ous drugs and medicines upon the human frame. Your knowledge of them all must be equally minute, and can only be obtained by a careful study of the *materia medica*, and, to comprehend it, a knowledge of botany is also necessary. As an instance of the necessity of this knowledge and its importance, allow me to refer to a case which recently occurred. Summoned in haste to a fashionable hotel, to see two gentlemen who were supposed to be dangerously intoxicated, I found them with feeble pulse, and the greatest muscular prostration, with dilated pupils, and partial loss of vision. In a recumbent posture, apparently perfectly well, with the exception of the feeble circulation and want of muscular power before mentioned, with the intellect unclouded, and exhibiting no signs of intoxication. In an erect posture the heart almost ceased to beat, and they fell almost lifeless to the ground, exhibiting in fact all the symptoms of poisoning with prussic acid. Both were affected in a similar manner, but the one more seriously than the other, the symptoms being of the same character, only differing in degree. The question now was, how had the prussic acid been administered—whether by accident or design? A friend present, who was perfectly sober, stated that he had dined with them, and that previous to the dinner they were in perfect health; that they had all drank of the same wine, in apparently nearly equal proportion, and as he was entirely unaffected, that what they had drank could not have been the cause of their present condition. He stated that these two gentlemen who were sick had dined upon partridge, whilst he had partaken of a different dish, and that the one whose symptoms were the worst had eaten more of the partridge than the other; and the symptoms began to develop themselves in both gentlemen very nearly at the same time, about forty minutes after the commencement of their dinner.

Finding no source of poison in any thing else that had been partaken of by them, I naturally inferred that it was obtained from the partridge. How did it get there? Happening to be a long winter, when there had been seven weeks of continuous snow, and the ground constantly covered, these birds had been prevented from obtaining their ordinary food, and had been compelled to feed upon the berries of the laurel; therefore their flesh had become charged with the potent poison of prussic acid, which in a minute quantity is found in the berry of the laurel. Then looking at the characteristic symptoms presented, paralysis of the heart, dilated pupil, peculiar weak faintness, and the clear intellect, indicative of prussic acid, cause and effect were rightly understood; and by administering the antidote of prussic acid both gentlemen were speedily restored to perfect health.

Take another case, as an example of the necessity of an accurate knowledge of chemistry, as well as anatomy and physiology, and the influence of poisonous drugs upon the general system. A person affected with paralysis of the exterior muscles of both fore-arms, supposed to have been dependent upon a disease of the spine, and for which she had been treated with a spinal brace, which she had worn for two years, and described by a recent author as a case of "carnomania,"\* or insanity of the flesh (if any one knows what that means), came to me a short time since.

She had been treated for disease of the spine, a brace had been applied, and she had been assured that the paralysis of the arms would be removed in two or three months, or at all events in a very short time, so soon as the disease in the spinal column had been cured. She was sent to her distant home, and for two long years has worn the spinal brace, with still increasing deficiency of the power of the fore-arms, until within the last few months; she had become perfectly paralyzed, and was helpless, unable to pin her clothes, comb her hair, or feed herself, or indeed, do anything more than simply close her fingers. Upon making a most careful investigation of the case, I could find no disease of the spinal column, or in any part of the body that would justify this peculiar condition of the fore-arms, and there was nothing that could produce it, except the potent influence of the poisonous power of lead.

The peculiar characteristic of lead poison is, that the hands drop, and are incapable of being *extended*, although the power of *flexion* exists. We have other varieties of paralysis, attacking different limbs; but there is no other characteristic paralysis of the hand that simulates the action of lead. I gave it as my diagnosis, therefore, that this was a case of lead palsy. The next question was to ascertain how the lead got there. It is a common thing in New York, where we drink water through leaden pipes, to see these cases. Others are poisoned by drinking champagne from bottles that have been washed with leaden shot, and the lead left in the bottle.

In this instance no lead had been obtained in that way; the mother stated that the water was brought from a spring, kept in a bucket, and drank from a gourd. I wanted to know if the house had been painted recently. No, "she had not been exposed to lead in any way." So, I was unable to ascertain any source from which lead could have been obtained. I found the lady had ridden a horse which had run off with her, for some distance, one or two miles, and she was disposed to attribute this loss of power to excessive muscu-

\* This case is reported by Dr. C. F. Taylor, in the *Quarterly Journal of Psychological Medicine*, April No., 1863, pp. 282-283, as a case of "Carnomania."

lar action. Still the peculiar characteristics of lead being so marked, I could not give up my hunt for the poison, which had been, in some way, so insidiously introduced. After two or three days of close questioning, the lady very innocently asked me "if whiting would do it?" When I asked her what it was, she handed me a beautiful little bottle, and said, it was "this," and on looking at the label I found it was "Laird's Bloom of Youth," a cosmetic which you will see advertised on all the curb-stones, which had been used upon the face, and here was the practical result. "The Bloom of Youth," producing the palsy of age. Taking the bottle to Prof. Doremus, I received an analysis the following day, stating that it was highly charged with lead. I immediately administered to her the proper antidote for lead. And collecting some of the secretions for a number of days, gave them also to Prof. Doremus for analysis, and I am happy to state that that distinguished chemist has presented to me a specimen of the lead in its metallic form, obtained from these secretions—thereby fully corroborating the accuracy of my diagnosis, and the correctness of the treatment. As the lead is being eliminated from the body—I am happy to state that muscular contractions are returning to the paralyzed limbs, and thus ends our case of "carnomania."

These cases show you the necessity of an intimate knowledge of chemistry, and the superior advantage of its application, in the removal of disease, as compared to the plan of mechanical support. It might, in fact, be called a case of lead versus steel. The lead to paralyze, the steel to brace, and as soon as the lead is removed, the steel is not required.

We have thus proved that the minutest knowledge of anatomy and physiology, is absolutely essential in order to recognize when the body is in its healthy condition. Without this knowledge, no one can tell when disease exists, or when it may be feigned. We have also proved that an intimate knowledge of chemistry and the *materia medica*, are equally essential for the proper discharge of your professional duties.

After three years of laborious study, the student finally receives his diploma, and then commences his struggle in the actual practice of life.

In the hovels of the poor, in the garrets and back alleys, amidst suffering and sorrow, most of his days and nights are spent, witnessing disease in all its forms, complicated with wretchedness, misery and poverty. His first few months, or even years, of practice are among the poor, who can give him no compensation, or else cases that have been abandoned by others as incurable, and which come

to him as a *dernier resort*; his only reward being in the constant discharge of duty, the relief of suffering and the doing of good to others; his own personal comfort or even personal interests, sacrificed upon the altar of professional duty. The ordinary pleasures and enjoyments even of social life which the merchant, the lawyer and other professions enjoy are not allotted to him. He has no hour that he can call his own, not even in the night, nor on the Sabbath. There is no day of rest for the physician, he receives no advantage from the *eight hour system*. The amount of professional service rendered at the hospitals, dispensaries, infirmaries, and other charitable institutions; the number of operations performed, and the amount of advice given, and the number of hours consumed, cannot be measured by money.

An estimate was made some twenty years ago, taking into consideration the number of visits made at the dispensaries, and at the hospitals, and the advice given at fifty per cent. less than the ordinary charge, even at that time it amounted to \$600,000 per year, and with the increasing growth of the city these labors have multiplied tenfold. What other class of men make this donation to the poor?

The hospitals exist upon the capacity and the knowledge of the medical man, who gives his time and his labor without compensation. The door-keeper is paid; the butcher is paid, the housekeeper is paid, all services are paid, the whole establishment is an expense except the doctor, and if it were not for him, the hospital would not exist, for it is for his advice the patients come. If a new hospital is to be built, the lawyer who examines the title to the ground receives a fee for his services, the artist who makes the drawings receives a fee for his services, the contractors who construct the building receive a bonus for their labor from the day of its commencement to the day of its completest organization, and during its continuance every person receives compensation for his services, except the physician.

These sacrifices by our profession should be known and recognized by the community.

These hurried glances which I have taken, will give you a faint idea and outline of the laborious duty which the student is compelled to undergo, in order to obtain the ground-work upon which to commence his practical professional duties; and the sacrifices the medical man makes for the public good in the discharge of his professional obligations.

The pecuniary reward he obtains from his labor is a secondary consideration; this will always be sufficient to maintain him in comfort, at least, if not in affluence. This reward is one of the *results* of his

labor; it is not the *object* of his pursuit or the ambition of his life. If his whole object is to make money, he will pursue that object and become dangerous to the community.

We have described the student's life as being one of constant application and study. So must the physician's life be a continuance of this same duty, until he gives up the practice of his profession. The improvements in our art, the daily advance in medical science is now so rapid, that whenever any medical man ceases to be a student, he falls behind, and is not capable of doing that full justice towards his patients which they have a right to demand—no matter what the disease or deformity he is called upon to treat, if he cannot give it the best and most proper treatment known at the time, he has failed in his duty. It is the right every patient has to claim from his attending physician, that his disease, whatever it may be, shall be treated according to the best and most recent information to be obtained upon that particular disease. There is no excuse which can justify him in being ignorant of any new or improved method of treatment, after it has been made public through the medical journals. I do not mean that all vaunted novelties are improvements, that the *pretended* originators of improvements have a right to any recognition, until they have proved them to be facts; but what I refer to, is absolute, positive, new truths that are developed, truths that are immutable and that can stand the test of all coming time. These are the improvements the medical man should bring into his practice, and which, for the failure to employ, he has not only no excuse, but is culpably ignorant, if he neglect. The doctor is a perpetual student. It is the obligation resting upon him, in order to do justice to his patient, that he constantly keep himself familiar with the improvements and discoveries that may be made in the science of medicine. Time will not permit me to refer to many of the great discoveries and improvements of the profession within the last few years, but I will merely mention a few of the new instruments now employed in a physical diagnosis, to illustrate the constant study necessary for the physician who desires to keep up with the advance of science. The *Ophthalmoscope*, with which we are able to examine with the greatest accuracy the minutest structure of the human eye. The *Laryngoscope*, with which we can see a large portion of the internal organs of respiration, and witness, with perfect certainty, the delicate movements of the vocal chords, and ascertain the exact locality of disease, and make our applications with mathematical certainty. The *Sphygmograph*, with which we trace with perfect accuracy every pulse wave from the human heart. The *Æsthesiometer*, with which we register with perfect certainty the

changes of sensibility in every portion of the delicate and sensitive nervous system. These, and a thousand other improvements, I might adduce as an evidence of the onward march of our profession, and a proof of the necessity of constant study.

Let us now for one moment pause, and, resting from the consideration of the duties and the responsibilities of the medical man, ask what are the duties of the public toward him?

If the true physician, as I have described him, is one who has devoted his whole life to the study of disease, its causes and its best method of treatment, he is certainly entitled to public confidence, and his opinions and views on all matters of disease and its treatment should be relied on, and his decision, as to the value of any new plan of treatment, or remedy, proposed for the cure of disease, should be taken in preference to that of the ignorant pretenders who vaunt their nostrums and novelties for the purpose of personal gain without any reference to the public good.

If you wish to have a magnificent building erected, you would not consult your tailor, or if you wish to have a garment fitted, you would not consult your blacksmith. If you wish to examine the title of a piece of property, upon which you are about to invest a large amount of money, you would not employ your coachman to perform this duty, but would seek the advice of some lawyer competent to protect your pecuniary interests—and yet how often do we see men of high standing in the community, of respectable intelligence upon almost all other subjects, trusting their lives and health to the merest pretenders, who are without the slightest knowledge of the structure of the human frame, the functions performed by any of its organs, or the effects or influences of remedies upon them.

Even the clergy, and sometimes members of the bar, have been found who have dared to take the responsibility of advising the people to trust their lives in the hands of persons such as I have just described; thus lending the influence of their professional position, to the injury of legitimate medicine and the detriment of the public health.

In all the other transactions of life, people are in the habit of consulting those who are, or who are supposed to be, the most conversant with the subject upon which they need information, and yet in a matter of life and health, they trust themselves to persons without the slightest pretension to any knowledge of the organic structure of the human frame, or the laws that govern it—and the medical man is severely censured because he refuses to meet in consultation with such pretenders.

This is one ground of complaint the profession has to make against the public, which certainly should be corrected.

The public owe also to the medical man protection against unjust persecution and malicious annoyance, and the laws which are now inefficient should be so modified as to give him that protection.

At the present time, a pauper can apply to a medical man for advice, and receive the best attendance that science and professional skill can afford, without fee or reward, and afterward, when actuated either by malice or ignorance in himself, or incited thereto by the envy, jealousy, or ill-will of other persons, he is at liberty to bring a suit in the law courts against the physician for mal-practice.

This the physician is obliged to submit to, and have the case tried before a jury of men perfectly ignorant of medical and surgical subjects; his time occupied by the law suit, and he, himself, prevented from attending to his professional engagements, thereby being forced by law to violate his duty toward his patients and his own oath. This should not be. Such charges on the part of patients should be heard before a commission of medical experts, capable of pronouncing whether such a charge is tenable, and in accordance with their decision, the trial should be held or not. At the same time, the patient should be obliged to give bonds, with ample security, that, in case the verdict should sustain the physician, he should be paid for the loss of time and annoyance to which he has been subjected, and the defamation of character from which he had suffered.

These suggestions are thrown out for the benefit of our Legislators, upon whom I would urge the necessity of the enactment of a law, which would give the protection required, and in the passage of which the public should be deeply interested, for in protecting the physician they protect themselves.

“The wise physician, skilled our wounds to heal  
Is more than armies to the public weal.”



