

Compton (J. W.)
MEDICINE,

THE

Present and Future.

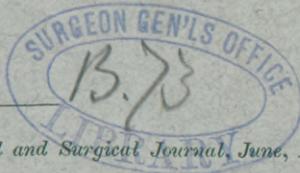
AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED TO THE GRADUATES OF EVANSVILLE MEDICAL
COLLEGE, FEBRUARY 27, 1878,

BY

J. W. COMPTON, M. D.,

PROFESSOR OF MATERIA MEDICA AND THERAPEUTICS IN EVANSVILLE MEDICAL COLLEGE.



[Reprinted from the *St. Louis Medical and Surgical Journal*, June, 1878.]

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MEDICINE, PRESENT AND FUTURE.

MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, AND MEMBERS OF THE GRADUATING CLASS:

Through the courtesies kindly extended by the faculty of the Medical College, I have been selected to deliver the annual address.

I am deeply sensible of the compliment conveyed by my colleagues in selecting me for so important a duty.

I desire to invite your attention to some thoughts on "Medicine, Present and Future." It is perhaps due to medicine of the past that I should bestow upon it a brief retrospective glance, in view of the venerable claim its ancient name, more than its correct principles or scientific achievements, has upon us.

Deserved eoniums have been justly lavished on the ancient founders of medicine, as each in his day dispelled some part of the murky clouds of superstition and ignorance that enveloped the dark ages in which he lived.

Far be it from me to even desire to pluck one star from the crown that encircles the brow of any ancient founder of our noble profession; but when I compare the complete and masterly works on the science of medicine of to-day with those of the ancient writers, the latter appear as very absurd rubbish, as glaring and abominable errors, furnishing a sad history of human ignorance, credulity and superstition.

These disfiguring blots on the fair name of medicine have been gradually disappearing whenever the light of science has been permitted to shine upon them at stated periods all along down the stream of time, and although error, bigotry and superstition have confronted science at almost every step in its onward march, the indomitable perseverance, suffering and courage of the ancient medical philosophers justly command our admiration and respect.

They had none of the opportunities that are the priceless heritage of the medical profession of to-day. Dependent on rude appliances for investigation, they struggled on, persecuted and prevented by every obstacle that dogmas, secular and divine, could interpose; in some instances, even death from the faggot and stake.

They succeeded in handing down to us those great fundamental truths, which form the foundation upon which the temple of medicine has been erected.

The facilities of to-day for the study of medicine offer to the earnest student unparalleled advantages. Magnificent medical colleges, and schools of more modest pretensions, but none the less earnest in availing themselves of all the new discoveries approved by the unerring test of science, are covering the civilized world; and the man who enters upon the responsible duties of a practitioner, without a good general knowledge of the science he professes to practice, is either destitute of application or ability. Such an individual should abandon the profession of medicine and seek employment in some calling that does not demand so much ability and labor; nor should he enter so noble a profession and prostitute it solely for selfish gain. Such a man is a living fraud on the community he maltreats, a detestable parasite, drawing his sustenance from the genius and labor of others and making no adequate return; he should be held up as a fit object for professional and public scorn. That noble devotee of science, Louis Agassiz, said, "I have not time to make money," nor will you, gentlemen, have time to make fortunes if you do justice to your profession and your fellow-men.

In the grand march of the sciences, medicine of to-day is maintaining its place in the front ranks of onward progression, and through the enlightened position it occupies is enabled to make all the sciences tributary to it.

The rapid multiplication of medical books and monographs, and the demand for new editions, show the avidity with which the latest improvements and discoveries are sought for by the profession.

The great temple erected to medicine has numerous compartments, which serve as the storehouses for scientific contributions, and the various avenues leading to it are constantly thronged with scientific contributors, bearing from the fertile fields of recent investigation new and valuable facts, and by the aid of new and improved instruments they are enabled to correct the errors of the past, and to furnish valuable additional truths to the great store already on hand. Among the instruments that are now brought into requisition and made tributary to the physician seeking to make investigations, I would mention the spectroscope. By the aid of this recently invented instrument the

chemist is enabled to reach out ninety-two millions of miles and detect the vaporized metals of iodine, lithium and iron, floating around the sun. With it it is possible to detect the one hundred-millionth part of a grain of sodium floating in our air, and the most minute presence of poison in a drop of human blood. By the aid of the laryngoscope and rhinoscope the physician is enabled, through the organs of vision, to inspect the dark and hitherto impenetrable recesses of the throat and nasal cavities, and instead of having to form a conjecture of the amount of disease existing in those hidden passages, he can illuminate them and examine the extent and character of the affection with the same facility that he can examine a disease upon the hand.

Of the collateral branches tributary to medicine we have chemistry, anatomy, physiology, pathology, materia medica, therapeutics, pharmacy, ophthalmology, etc.

Medicine of to-day, in fulfilling its exalted mission of developing and diffusing scientific knowledge throughout the ranks of the profession, is well up to the high tide of scientific advancement.

One fruitful factor that has furnished much aid in approaching that degree of perfection which so commends itself to the lover of science, is the devotion of a lifetime, by men of genius and self-sacrificing industry to distinct departments and special branches, by which valuable contributions are made to our science. Most of them are men distinguished for their thoroughness in all departments of medical learning; and by carefully extended observation and a thorough acquaintance with all branches of science, they are enabled to penetrate deep into the mysteries of science, and reflect clear and even brilliant light upon hitherto obscure points and arrive at safe and correct conclusions.

Students of to-day have the advantage of the carefully collected and written investigations of men who had become thoroughly conversant with those fundamental departments of medical science, viz., anatomy, physiology, pathological anatomy, materia medica and chemistry, finding the microscope to furnish them such valuable aid in the prosecution of these studies, yield up every other pursuit and devote a half century to the assiduous cultivation of this section of medicine, become expert microscopists. By aid of this wonderful instrument they are enabled to cultivate a large field of observation by magnifying the atoms

of matter which are much too small to be seen by the unassisted eye, making valuable additions to our knowledge by establishing the truth of the cell formation of all organized structures, the development of the embryo in plants and animals, and the relation between symptoms of disease and deranged organic structure in pathological anatomy. They have also established the fact that all of our infectious and contagious and many non-contagious diseases are caused by diseased germs, and that each disease has its separate and distinct germ; that each particular disease germ when propagated will reproduce its own kind, and when they find a lodgment in the human system will unerringly reproduce their own type of disease and not another.

The time allotted to this address will not permit me to mention in detail, but merely to devote a hasty glance at the many advantages derived from untiring investigation and careful study of separate departments of science, by men of gigantic intellect and thorough scientific education.

I should not feel, however, that I had discharged my duty if I failed to mention some of the many journals devoted to the dissemination of knowledge and discoveries pertaining to distinct and separate branches of science.

Chief among these may be mentioned journals of microscopy, journals of materia medica, journals of mental and nervous diseases, journals of surgery, obstetrical journals, journals of dermatology, of gynæcology, of chemistry and of pharmacy.

Encyclopædia of medicine, in which may be found as many authors as there are subjects treated of, each contributor being a master in his particular department, correct theories and well sustained facts constitute the ground work of their valuable contributions.

The important and practical aids rendered by scientific specialists have been largely instrumental during the last quarter of a century in securing the rapid advancement in literature and practical achievements, that have elevated medicine to that exalted plain on which we find it to-day. With the impetus it has received, and the persistent determination implanted in the American mind to reach the ideal, regardless of the obstacles to be overcome, affords us a rich foretaste of that brilliant progress toward complete perfection, which will mark the grand triumph of medicine during the future half century.

There is one department of science so fraught with vital in-

terest to all classes, a department that when properly cultivated promises to yield fruits that may be utilized, not only in the interest of science, but made to accomplish much good in the great cause of humanity.

I desire now to pass from the consideration of medicine present, to the presentation of some thoughts on this branch of science, and although it may now be said to be in its infancy, is destined in the future to bestow untold blessings on mankind.

This department is found in the vast field of sanitary science. This broad domain, so much neglected in the past, is now attracting the attention and receiving the careful consideration of many of the best educated minds in the world.

This subject is one so extensive in its scope of usefulness, and so commends itself to the philanthropic heart of humanity, that the professional mind may find ample room for the exercise of all its skill, and the non-professional may become valuable co-laborers in the work of banishing disease from the land.

Sanitarians, both within and outside of the profession, whose labor of love is to bless future generations, by the adoption of such measures as will not only effectually destroy the causes of disease, but by proper sanitary legislation will prevent their return, may find ample encouragement for their future labors in this direction, by contemplating that which has been accomplished in the past.

Those persons who will take the trouble to recall scenes in their memory of forty or fifty years ago, will not fail to recollect the very large proportion of Irish emigrants, who bore upon their faces the disfiguring marks of small-pox. The statistics from that country show that in the period existing between the years 1830 and 1840, the annual mortality from small-pox was 8,500, or, that in a period of ten years 85,000 persons died in Ireland from small-pox alone.

The physicians, the law makers, and the people combined, and vaccination was made compulsory. The number who died from that disease in 1867 was 20, in 1868, 18, and in the first half of 1869, 3, showing the result to have been a virtual stamping out of small-pox in that country.

Sanitary science, wherever encouraged, has been a prolific source of securing health and happiness to the people. Referring to its beneficial effects in England, Lord Macaulay says, "the difference between the salubrity of London of the nine-

teenth century, and the London of the seventeenth century is far greater than the difference between London in an ordinary season, and London in the cholera; that two hundred years ago men died faster in the purest country air than they now die in the most pestilential lanes of our towns."

Sanitary reform in doing this has added years to the average length of human life, and saved the people from a vast amount of expense, disease, suffering and sorrow.

For practical illustration of the beneficent work that may be performed by sanitary science, we have but to compare Evansville of to-day with Evansville of twenty or thirty years ago; then the town was decimated every few years with autumnal malignant fevers, now you must go outside of the improved parts of the city to find many cases of malarial fevers.

That a large majority of diseases are preventable, no longer admits of a doubt, and yet we find that the strength of American medicine has been so largely absorbed in developing science, having for its object and aim, the study of the means of cure, or the management and amelioration of disease, that the great benefits to be derived from sanitary science and legislation have been sadly neglected except in circumscribed localities.

The country generally is destitute of any organized force in this department of medicine. The State of Massachusetts has boldly taken the lead in this matter. Her State board of health is fully organized for effective work, and issues annually a large octavo book of 600 pages of transactions. Her health officers are gathering a fund of useful material of inestimable value to the present, and of particular advantage to future generations. When any form of epidemic disease makes its appearance in any part of the State, competent scientists are dispatched to the scene of suffering, and their duty is to investigate the source of disease in that locality, and prompt measures are taken to remove the cause and prevent its future repetition.

Some ten or more States have fallen into line and are industriously perfecting their plans for future usefulness.

Our sister State of Illinois has recently enacted wholesome laws for protecting her people against incompetent physicians, whether they be local practitioners or traveling dispensers of professional services. Each local physician must exhibit satisfactory evidences of qualification, and those traveling gentlemen (claiming superior ability, who may be here to-day and

gone to-morrow with a pocket full of fees from patients whom they promised to cure but important business elsewhere prevented their doing so), must pay into the treasury of the State twelve hundred dollars per annum for the privilege.

Every State in the union should have an efficient State board of health, and these should be governed and assisted by a national board and judicious laws.

In the accomplishment of a work so intimately connected with the welfare of future generations, earnest aid from the people is indispensable; they should be instructed in a cause that so directly interest them; they should learn that its beneficent objects are for their good. They should be instructed "to discriminate between the steady lights of true medical science and the *ignes fatui* of quackery."

The people are eager to be instructed in any thing that pertains to a knowledge of medicine, more particularly if it be curative medicine. They will read and place implicit confidence even in the absurd advertisements that crowd the newspapers, and the numerous almanacs that flood the country in the interest of unscrupulous nostrum venders. They may frequently be heard to say, "that must be a good medicine, for that doctor in the almanac described my symptoms better than I could tell them myself."

A lady friend of mine moved into a neighborhood not far from this city, and called on one of her neighbors. Their conversation incidentally included the subject of sickness, when the visitor asked, "what doctor do you employ?" The neighbor answered, "oh, we don't have no doctor; we takes the almanac."

In view of the dangerous elements contained in many of these nostrums, it is fearful to contemplate the amount that is swallowed and applied.

Hygienic legislation should be made to protect the people against the evils of medicines so potent of immediate destruction of life, or entailing injuries that may not be recovered from in a lifetime.

That class containing narcotics, and known as soothing syrup, cordials, etc., used to depress the delicate nervous systems of childhood and infancy, and force them to sleep, implants in their young life the first step in the formation of the horrible opium habit.

Some, as the ague specifics, contain poisonous elements,

arsenic, and others destructive to tissue by continuous and indiscriminate use.

If these be evils that imperatively call for sanitary legislation to protect the lives and future health and happiness of the people, what shall we say of that interminable list of invigorating cordials and strengthening bitters, declared panaceas for every disease possible or impossible. The people take them. The people feel that they need invigorating and these promise them strength. The strengthening principle of these medicines in a large proportion is alcohol, and constitutes to-day one of the most fruitful sources of creating an army of drunkards in our country. These insidious foes to the health and morals of the community are permitted on the shelves of our druggists side by side with the medicines dispensed by physicians.

Sanitary legislation should proclaim that there must be a stop to this vile traffic, that the druggist who deals in these patent and licensed poisons shall not fill prescriptions for physicians.

And now, gentlemen of the graduating class, we have arrived at the close of a pleasant, and to you, I hope, profitable session of the Evansville Medical College. It is not the least difficult part of my task this evening to command a few appropriate parting words. I should not refer to the past winter's association in the lecture-room and the clinics, were it not that they are inseparably connected to the present by recollections in the fruitful field of remedial science.

My aim has ever been to include in my course of instruction whatever I deemed as embracing the greatest practical importance to the physician, and in referring to the pleasant intercourse during the entire session which has just closed, I find myself deeply grateful to you for your earnest devotion to and diligent application of the principles advanced in the course of study; and also for your uniform courtesy and patient kindness during our association as students and teacher.

I shall ever feel a deep interest in your welfare, and shall at all times be pleased to hear of your professional triumphs in science and your personal and professional prosperity.

Whatever may have been suggested in this address calculated to direct your investigations toward the great work of sanitary science, you will find ample opportunities to put in practice in the various localities with which your professional labors will be

identified. Your professional and social intercourse with the separate communities in which your professional lives will be cast, will enable each of you to instruct the people and enlist their co-operation in hygienic work for the improvement of the sanitary condition of each individual locality. In the broad scope of hygienic medicine you will have ample room for the exercise of philanthropic investigations, and your names may become immortalized as benefactors of the human race.

There are other important medical questions that will lay claim to much of your spare time for investigation. Until the time that sanitary medicine and measures become perfect, there will be diseases that will imperatively demand earnest and scientific research to enable you to approximately arrive at correct conclusions deduced from cause and effect in regard to disease, and the rational, this is not enough, the scientific application of remedies. Where it is possible you should never stop short of realizing the latter desideratum.

"The high responsibility and important interests to the human race, involved in the discussion and investigation of questions connected with the science of medicine, should inspire a deep earnestness, an intense desire to arrive at exact truth. This truth, when reduced to practical application, if the science of medicine should ever reach the dignity of an exact science, will be found as exact and never failing as are the rules of mathematics."

Your first step in the investigation of disease should be a careful study of the condition upon which each complaint depends; then, if possible, learn its cause; next employ the remedial measure best calculated to correct that abnormal condition. You should study medicine as philosophers, reasoning, as I have said before, from cause to effect. Never idle away your time following visionary theories and unmeaning general principles. You should determine to continue your efforts until each pathological condition and cause upon which depends every symptom and physiological sign of disease, is fully demonstrated and understood. Then it will be easy for you to meet by scientific and efficient processes every well marked indication for treatment.

In conclusion, gentlemen, as time will not permit me to dwell at length on the importance of devoting your spare time to the study of the sciences, or on the manner of your department to-

ward your brother physicians and your fellow-men, in order to sustain the dignity and honor of your profession, permit me to recommend for your future government a short but comprehensive maxim, the golden rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

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