

Buchanan (J. R.)

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INTRODUCTORY LECTURE.

Delivered by PROF. J. R. BUCHANAN, *on Tuesday evening, November 15th, 1853, at the Eclectic Medical Institute, on the subject of Elevating the Medical Profession.*

Medical journals and medical authors have said much about *elevating the character of the medical profession*. It has been a prominent subject of deliberation in the meetings of the National Medical Association, and medical professors have generally impressed upon their pupils the great importance of *elevating the standard of the profession*.

Now let me ask, since the profession has wielded heretofore so much of wealth and power—since it has possessed all the means necessary to elevate itself—let me ask, has the profession really been elevated to its proper position or not?

The universal complaining in our journals and conventions at the present time, is a sufficient proof that the past efforts have been unsuccessful. It is generally confessed that the profession is most extensively disgraced by quackery, and that it does not retain any firm hold on the public confidence. In a word, it has not maintained an elevated character, and I venture to add, that the profession never can rise to its most honorable position, until it entirely changes the policy which it has pursued, and forms a very different conception of what constitutes an elevation of the profession.

Let me proceed, then, to show why there has been such a failure, and what is needful to be done at present.

We are all interested in this matter. If the character of the profession is not kept up, it will tend to fall into the hands of very inferior men, and continue degenerating until every physician will feel ashamed of his calling, as it will bring but little, either of honor or profit.

The principal exertion for professional elevation, heretofore, has been directed to three measures:

- 1st. Rendering physicians more learned.
- 2d. Putting the profession under stricter discipline.
- 3d. Making our colleges more splendid, and access to them more difficult.

These three measures are all well meant, but, practically speaking, they are all wrong, and if they were all carried out, they would be no more capable of elevating the profession to its proper standing, than a dose of calomel is capable of curing consumption.

Let us suppose these measures all adopted with triumphant success. Let us suppose that every physician graduates with a profound knowledge of Latin, Greek, Hebrew and German—that he be well acquainted with the writings of Galen and Hippocrates in their own language—familiar with Celsus and Avicenna, and even with the Susrata, which contains the medical knowledge of the Hindoos—that he is familiar with metaphysics and conic sections—that he can determine the exact nature of the distinction between the *me* and the *not-me*—between objectivity and subjectivity, and the point of their harmonious fusion in one conception; that he can positively determine, by logical speculation, whether the great world *is or is not*; in short, he is a profound classical scholar after the fashion of the universities, and intermingles his microscopic anatomy with quotations from Homer's Iliad and the sonorous Latin verse of Virgil, and considers himself one of the most enlightened and progressive of men, since he understands ornithology, conchology, and comparative anatomy, and has even seen Marshall Hall dissect and galvanize a defunct frog, to prove some theory or fact as to reflex action, which never needed proof.

Fancy that we have a host of such learned physicians as these, all disciplined into strict obedience, like veteran grenadiers—ready to deny the evidence of their own reason, if it should be necessary to put down what they call quackery—all solemnly pledged in their graduation to adhere closely to the faith delivered to their keeping by their Faculty,—each having agreed that his diploma may be revoked by his Professors whenever he shall be deemed guilty of any heresy.

Fancy, too, each Medical School endowed with about \$200,000 to expend in magnificent buildings and equipments, and that about five years of study and \$2,000 of expense, are required to procure admission to this very dignified profession—a profession under such strict moral discipline that he who absolutely kills his patients by malpractice, may go free with much sympathy in his behalf, but he who is guilty of advertising in a newspaper, can never hope to be forgiven.

Let us have all these particulars fully realized, and then we have the very *beau ideal* of an elevated state of the profession, as it is commonly understood. But there is one insurmountable difficulty—it is like a beautiful machine for perpetual motion, with all its springs and wheels complete, with only one fault—that it will not go, for it has not the propelling power necessary.

In the first place, multitudes of the young men from whom physicians are to be made, will not, and cannot, submit to any heavy tax upon their time and money, for the superfluities and luxuries of education. They are willing to give just as much time and money

as are required to procure a solid, practical education—to make them really good physicians—but they cannot, conveniently, afford to give any more, either of time or money, and therefore they will not do it. Many have to earn all their money by manual labor, and one year of study costs them three years of life—that is, it detains them three years from their chosen profession. Others have to support brothers, sisters or parents, while educating themselves, and some have even matrimonial responsibilities. Such men cannot, and will not seek a slow and costly education. What they learn must be learned quickly, thoroughly and practically—and, if the colleges are so elevated as not to meet their demands, they will rise by the thousand, in their own strength, and grow up outside of colleges, learning from libraries, from nature, and from private preceptors, leaving the splendid halls of colleges to stand as empty monuments of the folly of their Faculties.

But there would soon be medical schools in abundance, adapted to the demands of the times, where medicine might be taught practically, without imposing the burthen of a classical and metaphysical education.

The old fashioned plan of elevating the profession is, therefore, totally impracticable, and even the oldest and strongest institutions in our country have not been able to sustain themselves in the simple measure of elongating their sessions from four months to six, aided by the moral influence of the National Association.

Moreover, if all of these schemes were perfectly practicable—and the profession were perfectly organized, of disciplined, learned practitioners, and aristocratic as could be desired—they might command a certain amount of respect, but they would not command the public confidence; because, with all their learning and dignity, their practical results would be no better than those of plain, unlearned men, and there would be hosts of practitioners outside of the regular profession, who would receive the public confidence, because they would produce, at least, as good results to their patients.

Hence, we are brought to the last measure for the elevation of the disciplined profession. They will demand a law for their protection. The people will not patronize them sufficiently, and they will demand a law to put down all outside competition. This is necessary to complete the system, and to protect all the other parts—and if this legal protection cannot be obtained, the whole system must tumble down together.

And, I may add, it has already tumbled down, and proved itself to be utterly impracticable in the United States—it is incompatible with the spirit of liberty—incompatible with republican institutions, for it goes upon the assumption that the people should be governed by the profession, and not the profession by the people—that the profession should be the supreme tribunal, and the people be governed by their decrees.

In a private discussion which I held with one of the most eminent

representatives of the old fashioned system—our respective positions were very clearly defined. It was maintained by him that we, as individuals, had no right to deviate so much as we do from the current doctrines of the leading authorities of the profession—that when different views were entertained, there must be some supreme tribunal to which such questions could be referred, and which could settle authoritatively what was or was not true. This I denied, emphatically, recognizing only the conscience and reason in each man, as his tribunal to determine what is truth for him and for him alone. To this my distinguished friend demurred, maintaining that there *must be* a tribunal in the profession itself, of supreme and final authority. I acknowledged that there might be a supreme tribunal *de facto*, because it had the power, and if it had the power we must submit of necessity—but that tribunal is not in the profession. The supreme tribunal, said I, consists of the great mass of mankind, of which you and I are a portion, and to which all the professions belong. They can raise up or put down any class or profession, and to their decision we must submit, because we cannot resist it—but there is no such tribunal in the profession itself.

This matter-of-fact statement was very unpalatable to my distinguished friend, but he was compelled to admit its correctness by saying, “I suppose they might cease to employ us, and we should cease to exist.” Yes, gentlemen, I may add, that all despotisms over the human mind must cease to exist, for the people will not pay for any imposition long.

What a preposterous idea, that the people are to be governed by decisions of the profession! The people are the buyers—the profession the sellers of medical services and skill—the people want the best—not the most showy, but the most useful. If the seller does not produce a satisfactory article, it is the right and duty of the buyer to withhold his patronage, or to go elsewhere. Consequently, as the buyer determines what he will purchase, and thereby controls the market, so the public determine what they will have in the medical profession. What they want is real healing skill, and the honor of the profession consists in supplying the demand.

This brings us back to the question of elevating the profession; and I maintain that it can be truly elevated only by rendering each practitioner a safe and successful physician—that alone will command the public confidence and esteem which have so long been forfeited by unsuccessful practice.

My plan of elevating the profession would be, first, to select young men of the best character and talents, as students to recruit its ranks; and as a large number of these are embarrassed by poverty, I would make their education as cheap as possible, that there might be no hindrance to drive back the future Hunters and Jenners from their proper profession.

Most heartily do I detest that old, aristocratic doctrine, that ad-

mission to the profession should be made as expensive as possible, in order to deter poor young men, and confine the profession to the heirs of wealth, who are generally more indolent and less qualified from their own prosperous situation, to sympathize with unfortunate and afflicted humanity—less qualified by their generally indolent habits, to respond promptly to the cry of suffering, and perform the arduous daily and nightly labors of a faithful physician. Physicians for the whole people must come from the classes that sympathize with the whole people; and when they come up to the great and holy labor of qualifying themselves for the salvation of life, instead of laying additional taxes to drive them back and diminish their education, I would rather see the State give them a bounty upon their attainments, and such honors and rewards for superior scholarship as would tempt them to go farther in the laborious pursuit of knowledge.

Many years ago, a poor young man in England—a common carpenter, felt desirous of becoming a physician. He had not the means to prosecute the study himself, and he had not distinguished himself as a carpenter; it might have been considered a very small matter whether a poor mechanic should or should not have the privilege of turning himself into a poor doctor. And if this poor carpenter had failed to get the money necessary, and been driven back to his jack-plane and hand-saw, the dignified Fellows of the Royal Society might have congratulated themselves on escaping the degradation of admitting that plebian to their ranks. But fortunately, his brother had the means to help him; and John, the carpenter, studied medicine, and performed his part so well, that *his name*, John Hunter, stood high above all the titles of that illustrious realm, and still stands as one of the immortal names of England.

It was fortunate for her glory that education was made cheap to this poor carpenter by his relative; and if I should ever hear from any representative of the two-penny aristocracy of medicine sneer at a cheap education, I would reply that my only objection to our cheap education is, that it is not yet entirely free, without money, and without price, like the cheap and pure air and sunlight, with which God sustains and educates mankind.

The idea is abroad and will yet be acted on, that all education should be entirely free of expense—from the lowest primary school to the highest University instruction. It is not charity, gentlemen, it is simple justice; for education is a public affair—it is the business of the commonwealth, not of the individual. The individual does not educate himself highly in order that he may make more money by the ignorance of his fellows—on the contrary the man who spends many years on his education, is generally rather disqualified for making money rapidly. The finished education renders the man a valuable citizen, but it is not a matter of personal profit. Therefore, I contend that all who are engaged in self-education, are laboring for the good of mankind—for the improvement of society—and instead of being taxed they should be rewarded.

If citizens voluntarily engage in military companies, preparing arms, artillery and fortifications for the public protection, the expense clearly ought to be borne by the State, for the discipline, the arms and the fortifications are for the benefit of the whole commonwealth, and not merely for the volunteers.

Yours, gentlemen, is a parallel case; you are the volunteers who are to protect the country from the invasions of pestilence, more dangerous than any military foe. You can go forth half equipped and half prepared for your duty; and the community must suffer; but if you spend several years in preparing yourselves for your duties, the community is vastly more benefitted by it than you are; consequently you are laboring mainly for the public good; and the public, therefore, should furnish you every facility for discharging your duty. I contend the public are bound by every consideration of justice and self-interest, to aid in sustaining medical schools free of expense to the student.

I am proud, indeed, that the principal school of medical reform has taken the lead in realizing this idea of cheap education, and proud of the part I have taken in the movement.

All that colleges can do to elevate the profession, is to elevate their own character, and to give all the facilities they can afford. We have done, gentlemen, all that we could; but the greater duty, gentlemen, devolves upon you. You can do more than any college; upon you mainly does it depend whether the profession shall rise in glory or sink in disgrace.

The character of the profession depends upon those who constitute the profession; and that depends upon your action.

Students resorting to medical colleges, are attracted by the representations of students who have been in attendance. Upon you we must depend for the character of the future medical profession—send us young men of talent, worth and energy, and the profession will become great and honored; send us poor, feeble characters, who think they can make doctors because they cannot make any thing else, and you will ever have cause to be ashamed of your profession. Every very inferior young man becomes a dead weight to drag down everything to his own level. Let me beg of you, then, to make it a leading object to seek out young men of talent and worth, and enlist them with yourselves in the army of reform.

Another measure that devolves upon you is to sustain honorably, the public representatives of your profession. The college which represents your profession before the public is naturally taken for the best exemplification of its character; and if your college be so poor an affair as to stand far inferior to other respectable schools, you are, of course, considered inferior to the mass of the profession to about the same extent; but if you find a Faculty worthy of being sustained, and able to compete with the ablest, and if by uniting your energies you can sustain such a Faculty in a proud and pre-eminent position—you place yourselves before the public as stand-

ing on the highest platform of the profession. But if on the other hand, you neglect this matter, and give no support or sympathy to your Alma Mater, or if you passively permit or encourage the subdivisions of little petty schools, and the struggles of those who are engaged in little, selfish schemes, not demanded by the public welfare; just in proportion as this occurs, the respectability of our cause declines, and a large amount of energy and zeal is expended only to injure the common reputation of all. You may remember the fluctuating, divided and unsuccessful efforts that have been made so long in the State of New York, to sustain some kind of a liberal, medical collegiate enterprise, and finally as division, confusion and failure overwhelmed the whole affair, the Medical Journal, which had been the organ of the principal attempts, candidly acknowledged that the whole undertaking had been so unsuccessful, that their cause in the State of New York would be in a better condition if it could be thrown back to where it stood about five years ago, before the imperfect and jarring collegiate enterprises had been undertaken. All their labor, in the opinion of the editor, had gone for nothing; or rather had proved a positive damage to their public reputation. And I will add, gentlemen, what I believe many respectable and educated gentlemen will tell you that unless a college is well sustained, and is really in high standing, it is a positive damage to the cause which it espouses.

If one has the power, as an individual practitioner, to establish a good reputation for himself, and a college is established, evidently inferior to the ordinary character of medical colleges, he will not sympathize with it; for he can only anticipate that an inferior college will educate inferior students; for as it is physically certain that water does not rise above the level of its source, it is morally true that inferior schools will turn out inferior graduates, partly because their instruction is inferior; but mainly because young men of superior talent will not resort to their halls; and they are, therefore, obliged to instruct an inferior class in an inferior manner; and thus stamp the whole profession with inferiority in fact, and inferiority in reputation, so far as their influence can reach. As a private practitioner, he cannot sympathize with such an enterprise, and of course he will not be willing to bear the burden of its reputation. On the contrary, even if he agrees with all the important principles and aims of the Faculty, he would be tempted to repudiate entirely all connection with them, and refuse to be considered a member of the same party. This is the view which will be taken generally by talented and respectable physicians of liberal sentiments, and I can assure you it is the view taken by many at present. They may sympathize with the leading ideas of medical reform, but if medical reform is represented before the public by inferior schools and illiterate practitioners, they will hold themselves aloof from the whole affair, because they are not willing to lower their own standing.

On the other hand, in proportion as medical reform presents a

bold, united front in a collegiate institution or institutions, that can be respected by all, it will gather strength from every quarter—those who secretly sympathize will gather courage to co-operate openly—and large numbers of young men who have sufficient talent to achieve a respectable standing, will feel that they are not ashamed to attend such a school, or belong to such a party, and thus it will build up the profession to a high and honorable condition.

What I am telling you is self-evident truth; and yet these truths have been too often overlooked among the friends of reform, and there are still many who do not fully appreciate the importance of union in sustaining such enterprises as will elevate the profession.

Next to the College, medical journals and medical text-books are the most conspicuous representatives of the profession; and if these are well sustained, they will become important and influential for good; but if not, they will dwindle and lose their power. I have not much faith in the public spirit or reformatory philanthropy of one who does not sustain the publications devoted to his principles.

I have now shown you, gentlemen, I trust, that the profession is to be elevated by pursuing the very opposite course of that which has been pursued heretofore by its leaders. Almost unanimously the great men of the profession have agreed in that policy which I pronounce false, unwise, and, in this country, utterly impracticable. And even those of the collateral professions have appeared to take the same view. When I conversed with one of the most eminent naturalists of Europe, who bears the palm of superiority too in our own country, his idea of elevating the character of the medical profession consisted in giving physicians a most extensive course of instruction (not in practical medicine, in clinics or pathology, or materia medica, which would really make them better physicians,) but in the collateral sciences—in comparative anatomy, geology, meteorology, paleontology, &c., all of which are strictly and entirely collateral matters not intimately connected with practical medicine. In like manner, gentlemen of learning insist that a classical education is the one thing needful—that Greek and Latin will elevate the profession. And, again, another class who have lost all confidence in practical medicine, merely because they have never witnessed any good, successful practice, turn in despair to chemistry, and think that the profession can be elevated to a truly scientific position only by a very profound study of chemistry, which is the most barren conception of all, since chemistry never has been more than of slight collateral assistance to the physician in his practice.

In view of all these barren and impracticable conceptions of the true mode of advancing medicine, I feel astonished at the poverty of the human mind and the deficiency of common sense in reference to one of the most important questions to the welfare of mankind.

I have endeavored to show you that the profession must be ele-

vated by taking directly the opposite course from that which has been pursued.

Not by Colleges, with proud, imposing architecture, whose lofty portals open only to enormous fees—not by Professors, eminent for their learning and their voluminous writings, but not at all eminent for practical skill—not by making physicians learned in every thing, which has no direct relation to the cure of their patients—not by teaching physicians to pride themselves upon a heterogeneous mass of learning, but to consider it very unimportant whether they lose more or less of their patients than other practitioners—not by teaching physicians to denounce it as quackery to claim superior success in the treatment of certain diseases—not by confining the profession in the hands of the wealthy or pecuniarily independent, who are able to defy the progress of public intelligence and disregard public opinion—not by keeping down young men and showering all honors upon old men who have no more ambition to gratify, and whose knowledge is twenty years behind the times—not by forming medical conspiracies to degrade and crush every man who departs from the creed of the National Medical Association—not by organizing young men into parties and teaching them to hate, to insult and to despise all who do not belong to their party—not by inducing young men under the influence of false representations to take a public and solemn pledge to follow the teachings of their professors, right or wrong, through all their lives, under the penalty of forfeiting their diploma—not by any such devices can the profession be elevated and redeemed, but by a course diametrically opposite—by opening our college halls to every one who is willing to devote himself faithfully to study, and by giving honors to those who gain attainments—by laying aside old, ignorant and incompetent men who are behind the times—by enabling young men to come forward in the public *concours* or trial, and by displaying their attainments publicly, to win the position that they deserve—by teaching physicians that while it is important that they should acquire as finished and extensive an education as possible, all these collateral subjects are insignificant in comparison with the power of healing the sick—by teaching that all the learning and personal respectability possible cannot excuse the man who allows the half of his patients in cholera to die, which has been authorized by the leaders of the profession, nor can they excuse one who poisons the constitution by mercurial salivation, or breaks down its strength by bleeding. We expect to elevate the profession by showing the proper treatment of disease in clinical practice, and demanding of every physician that he shall make it a point of honor to cure all curable forms of disease. We cannot expect the profession to be elevated by the course which has been pursued in this city, of drilling young men in the practice of a hospital, which has generally lost one-sixth of all its patients, and which has been accused by its own friends and former physicians, of losing even 30 per cent. We

cannot expect to benefit the community by sending forth young men believing that such practice is respectable, or believing that they can be tolerated in losing even the half of sixteen per cent.

No, gentlemen, we must elevate the profession far above the dreary and dreadful mortality which has heretofore been considered compatible with respectability.

This is the only true elevation—to elevate it from the character of the Angel of Death to that of the Messenger of Divine Benevolence—and believing that we have done this—ready to substantiate our assertions by authentic statistics—ready to prove that out of 100,000 patients treated on our national American Eclectic system, the total number of deaths would be, even during the most disastrous epidemics, far less than 2,000,—while the standard of medical science heretofore has been so low, according to the statistics of European Hospitals, that a loss of 10,000 lives out of the hundred thousand would have been considered respectable practice. Knowing these facts—knowing our strength—knowing that this is the true elevation of the profession, we go with an undaunted front before the great supreme tribunal, the common intelligence of mankind, and *demand* that all medical systems shall be tried upon their merits alone—shall be tested by the amount of life which they save or destroy. This demand the autocrats of medicine have refused to admit. They decry medical statistics—they studiously conceal the facts from their pupils and from the world, and it is a remarkable fact that the public have never been informed that it is the legitimate mortality of the most prevalent diseases—nay more, the great majority of the medical profession have little or no statistical information upon that subject.

But in lifting up the profession from its sad position to the high table-land which gives a mortality of from one to two per cent., we do not believe that it is to rest there as upon a permanent platform.

On the contrary, the great difference between ourselves and our predecessors is, that while the orthodox system demands that its followers shall adhere to a fixed position, subject to but little change and that from high quarters, we on the other hand demand that every man shall keep on the march from improvement to improvement. We are as anxious that our pupils should attain a high position in the healing art, as others can be that their pupils should adhere closely to the faith delivered from the professor's desk, and solemnly adopted in the public pledge of their graduates.

The difference between our movement and all other movements in the profession prior to this is, that while they were movements to a *certain end*, satisfied to gain that end, and there repose complacently, ours is a movement *without an end*—like the rolling of the earth through its orbit in the solar system, or like the onward progress of Humanity through endless ages.

In the natural indolence or dullness of the human mind, there is great disposition to flag in this onward march and drop down per-

manently at certain positions, saying this is the Eclectic system as I understand it now, and this routine must be adhered to. Dull and narrow-minded persons will be continually saying this, but the great stream of Eclectic progress I trust will go on, and those who do not legitimately belong to that stream may very well be cast ashore, like floating driftwood deposited on the mud banks and sand-bars of the stream, where they prefer to lie or sink to the bottom, imbedded in darkness and mud.

The true scientific teacher is no antiquarian; he is an onward-looking man; he lives in the present and looks to the future. The teacher of chemistry looks to the latest results of the researches of the present time and to the probable developments that are about coming forth. So the true teacher of progressive medicine looks to the very last results of clinical practice in the epidemics that are now ravaging the earth, and to the new doctrines and practice that are beginning to be established as an improvement upon the past.

This is the course which has brought us to our present position, and has enabled us to discard as useless, mercury and the lancet, and other resources that have heretofore been considered the most important of all in the healing art; and I am proud to say that however fast or far we may advance, the vast army of the profession is following on behind—traveling in the same direction in which we have led the way—thousands are nearer our footsteps than we may imagine.

They are reducing calomel to grain doses and smaller fractions—finding substitutes where they can for its use—discarding the lancet in fevers—pointing out the evils of tartar emetic—urging the cultivation of the indigenous materia medica, and changing radically their entire treatment of *cholera* and *consumption*. Thousands have adopted similar views of cholera to those by which we saved 95 per cent. in Cincinnati—the most successful treatment ever recorded abroad was upon the same principle substantially as our own—and as to consumption, since the establishment of the Brompton Hospital in England, the old ideas have received a death-blow, and I learn that a similar institution on an ample scale is about to be established at New York by leading physicians who do not hesitate to denounce the old practice in that disease as absolutely barbarous.

There is no doubt that the whole medical world is in a state of progress and revolution, abandoning its old localities and thoughts—abandoning them even from despair, from disgust and from skepticism—universal skepticism in medicine. Hydropathy and Homœopathy are leading men on away from their old idols; and if I am correctly informed, the medical colleges of the United States begin to feel the effects—the number of pupils which was diminished last year, is said to be materially diminished also the present season; it is evident we are at the beginning of a great revolution.

But let it be borne in mind that the great revolutionary doctrine

—the Protestant doctrine that every man has the right of private judgment in medicine, and that progress is the duty of all, is the outgrowth of our own soil, is an American thought first introduced in the action of the American Eclectic party, and although other parties may, like the nations of Europe, catch some portion of this spirit, and raise a wandering feeble cry for progress, reform and Eclecticism, the moral power of this revolution lies with us, and I trust we shall continue to be to all other medical parties, and individuals struggling for freedom and progress, like the American Republic before to the nations of Europe, a vast and blazing fire, from which they may gather brands to light the torch of liberty, and raise the fires of revolution at home.