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	PAGE		PAGE
DR. KENNEDY'S ADDRESS TO THE DUBLIN MEDICO-CHIRURGICAL SOCIETY	241	REVIEWS AND ANALYSES OF WORKS—	
GUIN'S HOSPITAL—		Review of Davis on Hydrocephalus.....	251
Disease of the Heart. Hemiplegia	244	On the Resuscitation of Still-born Children, by Jonathan Toogood, Esq., Bridgewater.....	254
NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE INFIRMARY—		Presentation of Plate to Dr. Evory Kennedy.....	255
Senile Gangrene, followed by Tetanus.....	245	FOREIGN MEDICAL INTELLIGENCE—	
ROYAL BERKSHIRE HOSPITAL—		Remedies against Tape-worm	ib.
Dislocation of the Femur	ib.	Secondary Capsular Cataract	ib.
Report from the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh.....	246	Diarrhoea in Infants.....	ib.
EPIDEMIC DISEASES, THEIR CAUSES AND MORTALITY. SMALL-POX. RESEARCHES OF MR. FARR	249	Vaccination and Revaccination in France.....	ib.
SELF-REFORM OF THE CORPORATIONS	251	London Hospital	ib.
		Death of Sir Francis Smyth	256

INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS,

DELIVERED TO THE MEMBERS OF THE MEDICO-CHIRURGICAL SOCIETY OF DUBLIN,

BY DR. EVORY KENNEDY, VICE-PRESIDENT.

Sir PHILIP CRAMPTON, Bart., President, in the Chair.*

MR. PRESIDENT, AND GENTLEMEN,—The prevalent opinion with the public is, that medicine is a science involved in total uncertainty, the practice of which depends upon the chance efforts of the professor, and consequently resting for its successful issue more upon the ingenuity or natural endowments of the physician, than any certain data or principles known or established in the art itself. This opinion, I fear, some medical men have, by their conduct towards each other, and their intercourse with the public, so far sanctioned, as to weaken public confidence in us as a profession, and thus drawn the shafts of ridicule and the sarcasms of the dyspeptic satirist upon us *en masse*.

We have on record some curious examples of the want of faith in medicine evinced by great men, which, however, appears to have arisen more from the irritation attendant upon disease acting upon the wayward dispositions of men of extraordinary talent, than from a conviction of the inutility of medicine itself. Byron furnishes us with such an example, and himself fell a sacrifice to this irritation and obstinacy. Napoleon affords us a similar example, although from the nature of his malady his reluctance to put himself under treatment had little effect upon its fatal result. His was the most sweeping of all attacks upon medicine, as an art; when, in one of the many disputes he maintained on the subject with those about him, in his last illness, he answered his Italian physician, Antomarchi reasoning thus, "Doctor, no phrasing; we are, as I already told you, a machine made to live; we are organized for that purpose, and such is our nature. Do not counteract the living principle; let it alone: leave it the liberty of defending itself; it will do better than your drugs. Our body is a watch, that is intended to go for a given time; the watch-maker cannot open it, and must, on handling, grope his way blindfold and at random; for once that he assists and relieves it, by dint of torturing it with his crooked instruments, he injures it ten times, and at last destroys it." If such sentiments be uttered with regard to us, and by such individuals, we owe it to the science we profess, we owe it to our dignity and respectability, as an enlightened body,

to command public respect by elevating, as far as in us lies, our profession in the scale of public opinion; but above all, we owe it, as men and Christians, undertaking at the hands of our fellow-creatures a most vital trust, to render ourselves as competent as possible to its performance.

And, gentlemen, although difficulties and uncertainties bestrew our path in the cultivation of this science, which may to our present view appear insuperable, and calculated to deter us from ever reducing it in all its branches to one of demonstration; let us not despair when we recollect that by patient observation, the astronomer has been able to predict the phenomena of the planetary system, and that we have the authority of a Brewster for expecting that meteorological science will, by a multiplication of observations, ere long be reduced to fixed laws, giving us a power of predetermining those hitherto esteemed most uncertain of all phenomena—atmospherical changes.

If life and death, then, may, in human language, be said to rest with us, or rather on the knowledge we possess, what an awful responsibility does that individual incur who neglects to avail himself of every possible means of extending his knowledge of disease? Picture to yourselves, gentlemen, the idle or self-opinionated physician, who makes light of our efforts here, nor can be persuaded of any benefit to be derived from such societies; see him at the bedside of his patient, possibly the only child of fond parents, or the idolized partner of a devoted wife, on whose exertions an infant family are dependant for support. He stumbles along in his treatment, guided by the dim and scanty light which he possesses, imbibed from the doctrines current in the schools some twenty years ago: the disease proceeds from bad to worse; he pronounces it obstinate, still continues his routine efforts, and at length when matters become hopeless, perhaps, suggests a consultation; an enlightened member of our profession is called in, but, alas! only to pronounce the patient's doom, and explain to his self-opinionated brother, that a certain plan of treatment adopted earlier in the disease, would have prevented the catastrophe. Of this plan the doctor was totally ignorant, although its merits may have been over and over again discussed by students on this very floor, a fact mentioned, perhaps, at the moment by his consultant. Observe this individual return to the bed of death to announce to the distracted and bereaved family the completion of his work. What must be his self-degradation! What his agony of regrets! Nay, so acute are these, that even the dread of suffering in professional character, is lost sight of in his stronger feelings of the moment.

But, alas! remorse is unavailing; the grave has closed over the victim of his ignorance, and the cup of bereavement and misery has been dealt out by his hand to the

* This address was delivered by Dr. Kennedy to a very crowded public meeting of the society. There were present, Sir P. Crampton, and Sir H. Marsh, Barts.; Professors Graves, Harrison, Stokes, Beatty, &c. with most of the other heads of the profession in Dublin, and many members of the Irish bar.