

The Canadian Medical Association Journal

Vol. V.

NOVEMBER, 1915

No. 11

MEDICAL IDEALS IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

THE OPENING LECTURE OF THE 84TH SESSION OF THE MEDICAL
FACULTY OF MCGILL UNIVERSITY

BY PROFESSOR J. PLAYFAIR McMURRICH

University of Toronto

I DESIRE first of all to give an expression, necessarily imperfect, of my appreciation of the honour you have conferred upon me in inviting me to deliver the opening address of this eighty-fourth session of the Medical Department of McGill University. It is indeed a two-fold honour, for it is an honour to be invited to speak in the halls of a faculty which has so long and so splendid a record of progress and accomplishment as the Medical Faculty of McGill. And it is again an honour, more than personal, that I should be invited as a representative of a sister faculty to inaugurate your session of 1915-16. I may, I am sure, assume that your invitation is a testimony to the sincerity of the mutual esteem and amity which govern the two universities in all their relations, and an earnest of the continuation of friendly coöperation in all matters pertaining to the progress of medical education in Canada.

I desire also to congratulate the Medical Faculty and students of McGill on this splendid building, so well adapted to its purpose, so bountifully equipped, and withal an architectural ornament to the university, which may justly be proud of it. Truly those of us who are less sumptuously housed may be pardoned if with difficulty we suppress some feelings of that uncharitable emotion, envy, but we can suppress them because we know from past achievement that McGill has both teachers and students who will fully utilize their opportunities. Could the members of that small but

enthusiastic group who in 1823 founded the Montreal Medical Institution but "revisit the glimpses of the moon", with what satisfaction would they regard their offspring now grown to maturity, broad-shouldered, well set-up and handsome. Those men, Robertson, Stephenson, Caldwell and Holmes, builded wisely, and it is largely to their foresight in transferring their institution to McGill University as the first medical faculty that the splendid position of this university in medical education is due. They anticipated in 1829 the movement whose completion we are but now witnessing on this continent, the transformation of the better proprietary schools into university schools, with all the advantages that implies. Medicine has to-day become too complex, too extensive to be adequately taught by schools started as business ventures; it is only in schools which form an integral part of a progressive university or which possess an adequate endowment that the standards of medical education can be maintained and advanced. McGill is fortunate in that it anticipated so early this essential in medical education, and has been able to maintain without interruption, that relation of the medical school to the university without which the best results cannot be accomplished. Utility is not the only factor in medical education. There is in it also an academic element, without which progress is impossible and which finds its most congenial atmosphere in university surroundings.

But in thus commending the foresight of the founders of the medical department, I would not neglect what is due to those who in later days have had the guidance of affairs. For to them also McGill is deeply indebted for the honourable position she occupies among medical schools. To single out one or two names in this connexion might seem invidious when all members of the faculty have contributed so largely, but the faculty itself has from time to time set its stamp of approval upon certain names, for the interest they have shown in the advancement of medical education not only in their university, but throughout the whole Dominion. I may, therefore, without embarrassment mention the names of Howard and Craik, now no longer with you, and those of Roddick and Shepherd, still active in the good cause and, we trust, long to be spared to give us the benefits of their experience and counsel. Nor would I pass over in silence the name of Dean Birkett, who, with colleagues from this university, from Toronto and from Queen's, is demonstrating to the world the loyalty of Canadian universities and the unity of the Empire in this great crisis that has been forced upon us by Prussian arrogance.

Of the war and the part now being taken so loyally and efficiently by the medical schools of Canada, I need not speak. We are confident that sooner or later the cause for which we and our brave allies are sacrificing our best and bravest, the cause of freedom, honour and idealism, will prevail. But what of the future, what is the outlook for medicine as the result of this war? Prophecy is dangerous work, but one result seems to be so evident that I may venture to comment upon it. Germany long ago perceived the importance of encouraging scientific investigation as the handmaid of the arts, and by the encouragement and utilization of science she had gone far towards achieving for herself a monopoly in certain lines of scientific progress and its application. Students thronged her laboratories from all parts of the world, attracted by the reputation and activity of her teachers, and there was a tendency to look to Germany as a Mecca to which all the faithful must sooner or later make a pilgrimage. In respect to certain articles of manufacture, such as dye-stuffs and some important therapeutic substances, we had become absolutely dependent upon Germany. This war has brought us to a painful realization of our dependency and we are learning that we must become self-reliant and self-sufficient. Germany's scientific dominance is a thing of the past and we Canadians must seriously set ourselves to the task of contributing our quota to progress by the greater encouragement of scientific research and the application of its results. Progress in medicine, especially, must not be allowed to languish and we must take greater part in its maintenance and advancement. In the scientific laboratories you will find your opportunities, for it is through the laboratories that progress has come to medicine in the past, and it is through them that it will come in the future. A beginning has been made, interest has been awakened in medical research, but more than that is needed. It must become a prominent feature of our professional activity if one of the important lessons this terrible war is teaching us is not to be passed, unheeded.

It is customary on occasions such as this that the speaker should be more or less homiletic, giving freely of advice and warning, and perhaps extolling the noble aims and self-sacrifice of the profession you purpose to enter. "Good wine," however, "needs no bush," and the profession of medicine needs no panegyric to confirm you in your choice. As to advice and warning, so much as is individual—and I may hope that in your cases little of this will be required—must necessarily be administered by your teachers, so that there is left for me only what is general, and generalities are too often un-

impressive. Furthermore, these generalities have been repeated so frequently, with but slight variation according to the idiosyncrasies of the speakers, that were I to recite them again, even with further variations due to my particular idiosyncrasies, I might, with no little reason, be accused of plagiarism.

I feel myself, accordingly, on the horns of a dilemma. Admonition I would willingly bestow, but I fear comparisons, and so I purpose to seize boldly the horns of the proverbial dilemma, to make no pretensions to originality in what I may say, but to present to you the ideals set up by teachers of medicine in former days for the guidance and emulation of their pupils. I shall cite for your edification, not the teachers of a century ago, not even those of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when medicine awoke from the coma in which she had lain throughout the Middle Ages, but I shall go back some three and twenty centuries to the days when medicine began to be a science, and was emancipating itself from the burden of superstition under which it had languished in still earlier times. It may be thought, perhaps, that in these progressive days when the science and art of medicine are advancing by leaps and bounds, we have little to learn from those who practised and taught four hundred years before the Christian era. Their theories of disease were undoubtedly erroneous, their practice in many respects imperfect, but their knowledge of human nature was as thorough as our own and their ideals at least as high. It is especially of ideals that I wish to speak, for no profession demands higher ideals than that of medicine. In no other profession is one brought into such intimate relations with one's clients, no member of society has greater responsibilities than the physician and to those of you who are seeking qualifications for entering the medical profession I wish to try to bring a realization of these responsibilities. Reverence for the teachings of past ages has not quite passed away, and perhaps if I show you how high were the standards of conduct set for the physician many hundred years ago, your reverence for antiquity may gain for them greater consideration than would be granted a more modern exposition of medical ideals.

It is to Greece that, rightly or wrongly, we are accustomed to look for the foundations of all that we prize in literature, art and science, and it was in Greece, in the little island of Cos off the coast of Asia Minor, that the foundations of modern medicine were laid by Hippocrates. Of men who have made an epoch in the history of human achievement we long for personal details. We would, for

our example and profit, know of their early training, of their youthful associations, of their virtues both domestic and public, and even of their vices. We would like to know them in their relations to their fellowmen, as units in the complex of humanity. But of Hippocrates little that is authentic has come down to us, so little that one critic has even dared to question his actual existence, notwithstanding the fact that contemporaries, such as Plato and Aristophanes, refer to him under circumstances that sufficiently indicate the great renown to which, as a physician, he had attained even during his lifetime. What we actually know of him has been summed up by a medical historian in few words—"He lived in the time of the Peloponnesian war and he wrote works on medicine in Greek, in the Ionic dialect." Myth and legend have, of course, multiplied about his name, and many acts, sayings, and writings have been attributed to him of which he was undoubtedly guiltless. What we now term the Hippocratic writings consist of more than fifty treatises, but even a superficial examination of them reveals such differences of style and inconsistencies in both theory and practice, that one is forced to the conclusion that one has to do with a collection of treatises by different authors, rather than with the writings of a single man. Indeed the result of modern criticism has been to diminish more and more the number of treatises that can be ascribed to Hippocrates and the final word on this question of authenticity has not yet been spoken. The question is an interesting one for the historian of medicine, but is of but minor importance for the present purpose, since all of the treatises to which I shall refer, if they cannot be directly ascribed to Hippocrates, were at least written by members of the Hippocratic school, and probably were composed before the end of the fourth century before the Christian era. It is therefore the ideals of that time which they present to us, and remote though it be, I think you will find its standards worthy of adoption.

Most familiar to-day of all the Hippocratic writings is "The Oath," a document that should be writ large upon the walls of every medical school, instinct as it is with the spirit of true benevolence. Let me quote it to you:

"I swear by Apollo, the physician, by Asclepias, Hygeia and Panacea and by all the gods and goddesses, taking them to witness that I will fulfil, according to my power and judgement this oath and bond. My instructor in this art I shall esteem as I do my parents. What I have I shall share with him, and if the necessity arise I shall make provision for his needs. His sons I shall regard

as brothers and, if they desire to learn this art, I shall instruct them in it without reward or contract. I shall impart the precepts, the oral teaching, and all the rest of the instruction to my sons, to those of my instructor, to pupils bound by contract and by oath in accordance with the custom in medicine, and to no others. According to my ability and judgement I shall direct the regimen of my patients for their advantage, abstaining from all evil and wrong-doing. I shall give no deadly drug to any one, not even to one desiring it, not will I suggest such a desire. Similarly I shall not administer an abortive to any woman. I shall pass my life and practise my art in uprightness and holiness. And I shall never operate for stone, but will leave this to those who practise it. And whatsoever houses I may enter, my object shall be the good of my patients, keeping myself from all wilful wrong and destruction, and especially from all lustful desires for the bodies of both women and youths, whether slaves or free. And in the practice of my profession or even outside it, whatever I see or hear concerning the lives of men that should not be divulged, of such things I shall keep silence, regarding them as secrets. And if I fulfill this oath and do not fail in it, may I reap the reward both in my life and practice by the esteem of all men for all time, but if I be foresworn, may the opposite be my lot."

One must of course make some allowance for the conditions existent in B.C. 400 in applying this oath to the conditions of to-day. Until shortly before the time of Hippocrates the profession of medicine was a closed corporation to which only the sons of those who could trace descent from Æsculapius were eligible, and even in Hippocrates' time, when outsiders began to be accepted, their acceptance was guarded by definite restrictions. These facts explain certain portions of the oath which are hardly applicable to present day conditions, the modern teacher, for example, while grateful for recognition of his services, hardly expecting such extreme devotion as is demanded by the oath. Nor is the attitude with regard to lithotomy entirely in accordance with modern practice, for while one does hear at times suggestions from the specialists, that the general practitioners and surgeons infringe upon their assumed prerogatives, I am not aware that the righteousness of their pretensions has been admitted.

In other particulars the ideals set forth in the Hippocratic oath are well worthy of your emulation. Intelligence, rectitude, honour, discretion; these are the keynotes of the oath, and they are also those to which every medical man must attune his life

if he has at heart his own best interests and those of his profession. These virtues are expected of him, and if he fails in them, the greater is his fall.

Littré, in his prefatory remarks upon the oath, has well said "the profession of medicine is one of the most difficult that may fall to the lot of a man; with its grave responsibility, limited power, obscurity in many cases, fugitive opportunities and the impossibility of retracing one's steps. Certainly one may not trifle with the dangerous serpent of Epidaurus. Add to this the personal dangers of the study and practice, the perpetual contact with suffering and death, the scientific training that strengthens and aggrandizes the soul; the feelings of humanity which dominate in the exercise of an art essentially benevolent, and one will not be astonished that even in remote antiquity this serious profession should have inspired a work of so elevated a character as that known as the Hippocratic Oath."

But while the oath might well serve as the text of an edifying homily, it is not the only Hippocratic writing from which words of admonition to the intending practitioner may be cited. In other treatises we find more detailed statements of the requirements one should seek in a medical man, requirements not only mental and moral, but also physical.

Thus in the treatise *de medico* one finds the following: "It is essential for the physician that his complexion be of good colour and that he have that degree of rotundity which may be naturally suitable to him; for it is thought by the vulgar that those not thus physically equipped are incompetent to care properly for others." The Hippocratic writer was of Cæsar's opinion.

"Let me have men about me that are fat;
Sleek-headed men and such as sleep o' nights."

You may not all satisfactorily meet this requirement. The exigencies of student life do not encourage the development of embonpoint. But do not be discouraged, the day will come for many of you, I trust, when your anxiety will be aroused lest you may overdo, rather than fail in this requirement. The next items are, however, more under your control. "Further," it is said, "all things about him must be clean, his raiment appropriate and his perfumes agreeable, having an odour beyond all suspicion." Cleanliness is next to godliness, nay, from the surgical standpoint it is of even greater importance. Nowadays with our greater knowledge of the cause and dissemination of disease, lack of cleanliness is criminal

for a medical man; "all about him must be clean" and the sooner the habit of scrupulous cleanliness be formed, the better it will be for you and for your future patients. Your raiment should be appropriate, neat but not gaudy, and as to your perfumes, the less said about them the better, but be sure in any event that they are "beyond all suspicion."

And our author continues: "His manner must be both elegant and virtuous, manifesting to all both dignity and benevolence. . . . And he should appear thoughtful in demeanour but not austere, since austerity may appear to imply malevolence. On the other hand he who gives way to mirth and unseemly hilarity is regarded as vulgar. He must be strictly on his guard against this." And in another treatise, that *de habitu decenti*, the author adds the following admonitions: "It is necessary that the physician should possess a certain amount of urbanity, since austerity repels both the sick and the well. . . . He should not converse more than is necessary with those unskilled in the art. For if he does it will be regarded as a challenge of his treatment. And he must above all things avoid officiousness and ostentation."

What a paragon of perfection would be the man who could comply with all these requirements demanded by our medical ancestors twenty-three hundred years ago. And yet who can deny the appositeness of each and every demand. Medical practice is not alone a matter of diagnosis and treatment; it brings the practitioner into such intimate relations to his fellow-man that it demands the exercise of all the social virtues. The author of the *de habitu decenti* has well said that "there is little difference between medicine and philosophy. For all those qualities demanded by the one are required by the other, freedom from avarice, reverence, modesty, moderation, reputation, good judgement, tranquility, affability, cleanliness, intelligence, recognition of what is useful and necessary in life, the avoidance of impurity, freedom from superstition and a divine preëminence," and then, all this he sums up in one pregnant sentence, "The philosophic physician is the equal of the gods." That was the measure of the esteem in which the physicians of old held their profession, and shall we, favoured with all the vaunted progress of our day, permit any diminution of that esteem. But note, if you please, that it is to the "philosophic physician" that the highest encomium is awarded, for that is the type of a physician that a university school aims to produce.

But, splendid though it be and full of interest to us moderns, I may not linger over the wisdom of ancient Greece, since I wish also

to present to you some thoughts borrowed from another ancient civilization, that of India. Unfortunately I cannot give even an approximate date for the origin or formulation of the ideas I am about to quote, since in the case of Indian medicine none of the original texts seem to have survived the corroding tooth of time, and we must content ourselves with the writings of later authors by whom in all probability the teachings of their predecessors are more or less fully preserved. It seems, indeed, that none of the Hindoo medical writers, whose works we now possess, antedate the Christian era, but there is internal evidence in their writings that their sources go much farther back. Thus, for instance, it has been pointed out that in the Ayur-veda of Susruta only the worship of Brahma and Indra is mentioned and yet it is known that Buddhism was introduced about B.C. 600 and reached its height at the time of King Açoka, about B.C. 250. This evidence is, however, inconclusive, since it is possible that the writer was a member of the Vaidya caste, the Brahminical medical caste, nor is the evidence to be derived from the traditional origin of the writings any more definite. According to this the original author of the Ayur-veda was Atreya, one of the sacred sages who was taught by the god Indra and imparted the knowledge so obtained to his pupils, one of whom, Agnivesa, made a compilation of his teachings, and this compilation was later revised by Caraka. Similarly the Ayur-veda of Susruta, but little younger than that of Caraka, is said to have been composed by Brahma even before the creation of man and was given to Dhanvantari, the physician of the gods. He, out of pity for mankind, who had in the meantime appeared on the scene, came down from heaven and as King Divodasa took up his abode at Kasi, or as we now term it Benares, where he taught the principles of medicine to disciples who sought his court, Susruta, one of these, compiling from his lectures the work now known by the name of the compiler. The assignment of a supernatural origin to the Ayur-vedas suggests for them a high antiquity, but with all the evidence at present available the question of their original date remains unanswered.

But not for this reason alone are these writings of interest to the medical historian. We have become accustomed to associate the origin of medicine with Greece and especially with Hippocrates, and when therefore one finds in the Ayur-vedas several ideas long supposed to be Hippocratic, one naturally assumes that the Hindoo principles of medicine have been borrowed from the Greeks. Thus one finds both in the Hippocratic and in the Hindoo writings the

statement of a humoral pathology, disease being due to the relative excess or diminution of one of two, three or four dominant fluids. In some of the Hippocratic writings but two of these humours, mucus and bile, are mentioned, but in others four are recognized, viz., blood, mucus, yellow bile and black bile, medical theory being thus brought into greater harmony with prevailing philosophical doctrines. Three dominant fluids were recognized by the Hindoos, air, mucus and bile, and while there are thus differences in detail, the similarity in the fundamental idea of the two systems is particularly suggestive. Nor are the resemblances limited to this. The well-known Hippocratic description of the livid, pinched, drawn expression of countenance, frequently observed in articulo mortis and generally known as the facies Hippocratica, is also found in almost verbal similarity in the Ayur-veda of Susruta; the Hippocratic doctrine of critical days in connexion with febrile affections finds its counterpart in Hindoo medicine, and lastly, the similarity between the standards set up by Hippocratic and Hindoo writers is most striking.

It is possible, indeed, at first sight, probable, that these similarities may have resulted from the adoption of Greek ideas by the Hindoo writers and the uncertainty as to the date of the latter tends towards such a belief. It is noteworthy, however, that while we find references to Hindoo medicine even in the Hippocratic writings and know further that Ktesias, a contemporary of Hippocrates, was physician to the Persian court and wrote a description of India, we find in the Hindoo writings no references whatsoever to the Ionians (Yahvanas) as they termed the Greeks. In other words, there is evidence that some knowledge of Indian medicine was in possession of the Hippocratic writers, but there is none that points to the converse.

This is a problem of very great significance in the history of medicine, since upon its solution depends the correct determination of the original sources of scientific medicine. It is a problem, however, which need not be further discussed on this occasion, my excursion into this debatable territory being altogether for the purpose of indicating a possibly high antiquity for the standards set up by the Hindoo physician, Caraka, that I wish to quote to you.

The admonitions of Caraka are somewhat more detailed than those of the Hippocratic writers, and for comparison with the latter I may first quote what is said as to the requisites for a physician. "With his whole soul he must strive for the healing of his patients,

and even though his own life be in the balance he must avoid all injury to the sick. In his dress and in all outward adornment he must show simplicity; he must be no wine-bibber and must shun evil companions. His speech must be delicate, clear, pleasant, truthful, pertinent and modulated; he must always observe the conventions required by the time and place; he must be diligent in study, ever seeking to arouse, strengthen and improve his knowledge. . . . When, having the right, he enters the dwelling of a patient, he should be well-dressed and enter with bowed head, thoughtful, with a dignified bearing and yet with all possible respect. Having entered, his words, thoughts and senses must be devoted solely to the treatment of the patient and to the consideration of his condition. He must not babble concerning the affairs of the house, nor shall he communicate to the patient information of a threatened early demise if such information may bring detriment to the patient or to any one."

The similarity to the Hippocratic requirements is unmistakable, and Caraka as well as the Hippocratic writers, long ago formulated the main points of medical ethics, leaving little that is essential to be added in modern times. So much, however, for the physician and the ethical requirements he was and is expected to meet. Let us leave what is for you, gentlemen, the future and consider what Caraka has to say concerning the present.

Concerning the scholar he says: "He must be sedate and of honourable lineage. He must have straight eyes, mouth, nose and spine, a thin, red and clean tongue, regular teeth and lips, and he must not snuffle. His character must be strong, unselfish and considerate; he must have good judgement and memory and be specially well endowed. He should come from a family of physicians or at least he should have consorted with physicians. He must be a lover of truth, with perfect limbs and senses unimpaired, modest, simple in his attire, reliable, slow to anger, decent, clean, pious, faithful, unaffected and skilled. He must be anxious to learn and must strive without ceasing for the acquisition of both the theory and art of medicine. He must not be avaricious nor slothful, but benevolent to all, following all the instructions of his teacher and relying upon him. He who shows these characteristics may be named a scholar."

Surely, and he might also be named a saint. That is a standard of matriculation that some of us at least might find difficulty in satisfying. But do not let us be down-hearted. The requirements of such a standard seem almost impossible, and yet there were

undoubtedly students in Caraka's day, and undoubtedly the gates of mercy must have been opened in those days even as we of to-day, who sit in judgement upon you, open them.

But it is not alone for the physician and student that Caraka set up a standard. Some of us may find something of interest in the qualities he demands in the text-book to be used. "The student should select a text-book which he sees used by well-equipped and intelligent men, one rich in its contents, recommended by experts and suited to the comprehension of all classes of students. It must not weary by repetition, but give the facts, explanations and synopses in their proper order, always adhering to the subject. It must be correct and pleasing in style, rich in its terminology and methodical, the ideas being clearly expressed, and correlated facts brought together without confusion of the principal point. It should be easy to understand, and well-supplied with definitions and examples. For such a text-book scatters the darkness like the clear sun and illuminates everything."

And finally, hear what he has to say regarding the teacher. "The scholar," he says, "should look for a teacher whose instruction is public, whose practical skill is proven, who is clever, versatile, upright and blameless, whose hand knows how to rule, who has the necessary ability and all his senses, is familiar with normal conditions and skilled in treatment, full of true knowledge, unaffected, neither unfriendly nor passionate, patient; full of affection to his scholars and possessed of the gift of teaching. A man of such characteristics is a master. As the timely clouds endow the fertile field with fruit, so he quickly endows the good scholar with the characteristics of the physician."

This needs no comment. You will find among your teachers many who will measure up to such a standard. Let them be your guides and examples. But remember that all the virtue that may adorn your teachers cannot suffice to make of you a competent physician unless you too do your share. You are here not so much to be taught as to learn, the passive must give place to the active, and your part must not be that of fledglings who flutter about with mouths agape hoping that some succulent morsels may be thrust therein, but rather that of those who have tried their wings and seek and choose their own pabulum. That, I take it, is the difference, and it is an important one, between school and university training. To the one one goes to be taught, and to the other to learn. You come here to learn the principles and practices, the science and art of medicine, and you will find much to learn and abundant

opportunities for learning. But you will not find medicine an easy task-master and you will be able to utilize your opportunities adequately only by the exercise of the utmost diligence. That is the essential. "See'st thou a man diligent in his business; he shall not stand in the company of mean men." You have great opportunities before you and accordingly your responsibilities are great, responsibilities to your teachers, to the university, to the public and to yourselves.

"To your own selves be true
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou can'st not then be false to any man."

But I have fallen into the pit which I had determined to avoid. And yet, after all I am but emphasizing a requirement demanded by those of times remote. Let me add it to the keynotes of the Hippocratic oath, and in closing repeat them, that they may linger in your ears as requirements that will be demanded of you as members of the medical profession and graduates of McGill:

Intelligence, rectitude, honour, discretion and diligence.

THE Dutch steamship *Batavier III*, from Amsterdam, has landed at Havre a flying hospital, organized by private subscription and placed under the command of Dr. Bierens, of Haan, who has already directed organizations of this kind in the South African War of 1899-1901 and the Balkan Wars. The staff comprises, besides Dr. Bierens, 4 physicians, 26 female nurses and 5 male nurses. This Dutch hospital unit, composed of 200 beds and capable of being moved in forty-eight hours, was sent to Paris, where it was received at the Saint Lazare station by representatives of the assistant secretary of the medical service and by Medical Inspector-General Dziewomski, director of the medical service of the military government of Paris.—*Journal of the American Medical Association*.