

**ADDRESS IN MEDICINE,
DELIVERED AT THE MEETING OF
THE BRITISH MEDICAL
ASSOCIATION IN NORWICH,
1874**

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BRITISH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

IN NORWICH, 1874



BY

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THIS address is published in a separate form, in compliance with the request of numerous friends.

In revising it, I have made some additions which seem to me to give strength to the argument it contains, but which, if introduced beforehand, would have rendered it too long for delivery at the meeting of the Association.

It is an address in "Medicine," and its object is to show the influence which modern scientific thought and method are exerting, through the minds of the Physicians and Surgeons of the present day, upon the daily practice of their profession.

J. RUSSELL REYNOLDS.

GROSVENOR STREET,
October, 1874.

It is well that we should sometimes ask ourselves, with regard to the special sciences to which we devote our lives, the questions—Whence have we come? and Whither are we going?—and this has been obviously felt by those who, in directing the affairs of the British Medical Association, ordained that there should be an annual “Address in Medicine.”

We can appreciate the nature of our present position only by a regard to the past and an outlook towards the future. If we would know what the present condition of medicine or pathology really is, we must see whence it has come, and whither it is tending; inasmuch as reference to the past is necessary for the comprehension of work that is in progress now; and a glance towards that which is to come, and which must be the outcome of our present work, is also essential, if we would test its truth or attempt to measure its value.

If Linnæus asked like questions about man, with an outlook into regions which have not as yet been drawn within the limits of exact science, we, too, in our review of pathology, must sometimes pass beyond the lines within which that science has, perhaps too often, been confined, and by which it has been sometimes cramped. Medicine is no isolated science; we cannot draw a line round the group of facts which we so denote—nor, indeed, around any group of facts—in such fashion that we may truly say that within its enclosure the whole of any one science lies, and that outside such enclosure all facts must receive a different name. The whole of any one science is the whole of all; and pathology has its biological,

chemical, physical, and mathematical elements on the one hand, and its mental, moral, and social bearings on the other.

In the somewhat perilous task that I have set before myself it is not my intention to attempt to furnish an account of the details of recent scientific work in medicine; but rather, by an examination of our past and present relations to four great propositions, or—if I may use the term—articles of creed, to show how they have affected our modes of investigation in the past, how they are governing or guiding our labours now and what are the results which we see coming from the now existing and prevailing tendencies of thought.

The four articles of creed to which I refer as influencing, for good or for evil, the progress of scientific pathology, are a belief (1) in Life, (2) in Man, (3) in Individuality, and (4) in the Speciality of Disease. The relation of the worker to the notions entertained by him with regard to the facts connoted by each of those four expressions, must determine the character and bearing of his work, and it is my object to try to bring before you the nature and effects of that relation.

1. Those who have gone before us in the study and treatment of diseases have held, and that very strongly, to a belief, *first*, in Life, *i.e.*, in a power, force, or condition of matter which was *sui generis*; which could not be explained away; which could not be referred to any combination of physical powers; which had an origin, the nature of which was beyond the reach of our modes of investigation; the career of which was, although often "sore let and hindered," outside of, and above all temporary and material obstacles; and the end of which, as we see it here, was but the beginning of another development, for the features of which we must patiently wait until we ourselves had passed into another state of being.

It is obvious that this view of life often led investigators

of disease away from objects which they should have examined, drove them into conditions of thought which were fatal to a correct appreciation of the truths they wished to know, cramped their notions of the possibility of preventing or curing sundry affections of both mind and body, and perverted the efforts which they did make for the alleviation of ills they could neither arrest nor remove.

Some of the names of familiar diseases point to the nature and key-note of the pathology of the times in which they were first applied, and illustrate the first point that I have mentioned. The terms "morbus sacer," "morbus comitialis," "morbus sancti Weiti," the "king's evil," "St. Anthony's fire," and the like, conveyed meanings that are now happily lost to science. The affections thus denoted were only a few of many which it was profane to attempt to account for by other than occult and mysterious influences upon the greater mystery of life. The investigator was driven back and away from thoughts or processes of examination which should intrude into these secret places of the unknown.

Again, the notion that life-processes were totally dissimilar from all physical and chemical changes, so that the life-force held all these changes under its own control, effecting, by its direct agency, movements both coarse and molecular, such as bore no relation whatever to the results of well-known chemical and physical forces, led the minds of the most earnest thinkers away from the proper track of scientific and legitimate research, and placed them in a condition of hopelessness and confusion such as nothing but a strong, and, perhaps, excessive revulsion could remove.

Diseases which were held to be the result of some direct interference with the higher processes of life, such as insanity of mind and many of the disturbances of motility and hallucinations of the senses, were maltreated or only tended, by incantations, or by the administration of some