

**THE FUTURE OF SANITARY
SCIENCE: AN ADDRESS DELIVERED
BEFORE THE SANITARY INSTITUTE
OF GREAT BRITAIN AT THE ROYAL
INSTITUTION, ON JULY 5TH, 1877**

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The Future of Sanitary Science: An Address Delivered Before the Sanitary Institute of Great Britain at the Royal Institution, on July 5th, 1877 by Benjamin Ward Richardson

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BENJAMIN WARD RICHARDSON

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FUTURE OF SANITARY SCIENCE.

A

THE FUTURE
OF
SANITARY SCIENCE.

An Address

*Delivered before the Sanitary Institute of Great Britain at the
Royal Institution, on July 5th, 1877.*

BY

BENJAMIN WARD RICHARDSON, M.D., LL.D. F.R.S.

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THE FUTURE OF SANITARY SCIENCE:

POLITICAL, MEDICAL, SOCIAL.

I COULD have wished it had been in my power on the present occasion to produce one of those essays which appeal to the imagination while they prepare the mind for the reception of sanitary principles and practice. Such essays are tempting, and, in their place, instructive. To-day I am bound on a voyage less pleasant, yet I hope not less useful.

There has recently been called into existence a new society under whose summons we now meet. The society has assumed to itself the expressive name of The Sanitary Institute of Great Britain. It starts as a voluntary effort by men and women who are willing and anxious to give effect to those teachings of sanitary science which the past half-century

has revealed. It invites all who are concerned to utilise the knowledge that has been acquired in that time. It wishes to encourage new research. But it has for its most anxious care to render useful to mankind at large the accumulated store of knowledge which at this moment lies ready for so many grand purposes relating to health. It accepts as its object, work for health, health of all the human family.

Shall some one say the object is ambitious? Yea, we reply, it is confessedly ambitious. Shall some one say the means at command for the work to be attempted are limited? Even so. Life is short, art long. Yet the short yields the long, and but for the short the long could not be. It is out of these littlenesses of human effort that the greatneses follow. Or, as Benjamin Rush very forcibly puts it, and simply as forcibly: "There are mites in science as well as in charity, and the ultimate results of each are often alike important and beneficial."

It is my fortune, good or bad, to have to preside over the council of this new society. Of the ability of those who form the council, and of their experience, I need not speak in detail, for their names are familiar to the world. They represent, I may say, sanitary science in all its branches, and from

them, working harmoniously together, good results must be expected.

It seems fitting, therefore, as we enter on our work, to look forward to the future. It is a part at least of our duty to look towards the future with the view of seeing in what directions we may best proceed; what assistances we may have to call upon; and chiefly, what great powers we may have to consult and propitiate.

The three great powers with which our society will have to treat are the Political, the Medical, the Social. From each of them we shall expect constant assistance. To one or other of them, whatever we do, our work will be transmitted or transferred. They will bring it into practical form and effect, or they will reduce it to nothingness. We can suggest and set forth initiatives, and with that our functions are complete in each particular branch to which we address ourselves.

It is our special duty to keep this special fact steadily in view, and to limit our labours by it. It too often happens that young societies, like young men, are apt to believe that they can conduct national processes as easily as they can conceive them, and under this belief fail most signally with the best of attempts. I remember in my early

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career getting a lesson from one of our late well-known statesmen on this very point. I was explaining to him the efforts I had made in 1855 and the succeeding three years to establish a registration of the diseases of this kingdom, and I bewailed the hard experience which proved that the greater the scientific success of the effort the more impossible it became to carry it out. "In fact," said I, in a pitiful strain, "the success almost ruined me in mind, body, and estate." "Served you right," was the immediate reply, "served you right. If individual men could carry out national projects where would be the nation?" The reply was hard as it was unanswerable, and from that time to this I have given up all thoughts of doing more than sowing seed in the field of literature, and leaving it to the chance of fructification on that extensive soil; or in showing some mere model of experiment which, perchance, may grow into working form. And this, I think, is the whole natural scope of our Institute—to sow the seed of sanitation; to think out plans of projects for working methods; to lend its many minds, as if they made up the mind of one man, for devising from the past the best for the present, and respectfully to declare our conclusions.

The directions in which we shall have to move,

the lines on which we shall have to move, are, I repeat, chiefly three—the Political, the Medical, the Social. The powers on these lines must be approached in every work of ours, however simple, however complicate it may be. I shall try, as the title of my discourse explains, to indicate certain points in which we are most likely to come in contact with these powers, and the changes we may expect to work in and through them.

THE POLITICAL PART.

In this country political action has been varied in relation to sanitary improvements. Sometimes political necessity has crossed sanitary progress, as, for example, in the imposition of a tax on sunlight, on foods that are essential to life, and in the granting of licences for the sale of pernicious drinks. At other times, and by fits and starts, political action has been in aid of sanitary work. So far back as the reign of Edward the Third, 1361, a royal proclamation was made through Parliament for preventing the slaughter of cattle in the streets of London, because of the pollution of the streets and the drains which arose from that cause. From that time under great emergencies other similar