

**BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE LATE
DR. GOLDING BIRD: BEING AN
ADDRESS TO STUDENTS, DELIVERED
AT THE REQUEST OF THE EDINBURGH
MEDICAL MISSIONARY SOCIETY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649344666

Biographical sketch of the late Dr. Golding Bird: being an address to students, delivered at the request of the Edinburgh medical missionary society by John Hutton Balfour

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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JOHN HUTTON BALFOUR

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

THE EDINBURGH MEDICAL MISSIONARY SOCIETY, in resuming its meetings with medical students this season, proposes that these reunions should partake more of a conversational character than formerly, and that students, as well as medical practitioners and teachers, should be requested to take part in the proceedings. It is hoped that, in this way, a greater interest will be excited, and that friendly Christian intercourse will be promoted.

The Society's object in these meetings is not merely to bring direct medical missionary work under notice, but to call the attention of the students of medicine in this great school to the importance of those things which concern their eternal well-being—to the responsibility under which they lie to do all for God's glory,—and to the value of that "wisdom from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy

and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy." (James iii. 17.) We are anxious to guard you against oppositions of science, falsely so called—to point out the bearings of medicine as a hand-maid of religion—to stir up a missionary spirit, so that, by a holy walk and conversation, you may commend the Gospel of Christ to others, and to shew that the only means of a young man purifying his way is by attending thereto according to God's word, which is a lamp unto his feet and a light unto his path. (Psalm cxix. 9, 105.)

Medical men have abundant means of doing good. Their influence is felt in all ranks of society; and while they nobly minister to the bodily wants of their patients, they have frequent opportunities of speaking a word in season to the heart softened by affliction, and convinced by sad experience of the vanity of all mere earthly enjoyments. No class of men are more called upon to contemplate the uncertainty of time, or to behold the workings of the soul on a death-bed. When life is waning—when the insufficiency of all earthly pleasures is strongly impressed on the mind—when the converse of worldly companions is no longer relished—and when the soul struggles for some resting-place in the prospect of eternity,—how often may a word fitly spoken by the Christian physician be blessed in directing to the one

source of comfort and peace. And again, how does the heart of one who knows the Truth cling in moments of trial to such a physician, who becomes not merely a messenger of mercy to the body, but, as it were, an angel of comfort to the soul !

It cannot but be matter of congratulation that there has been of late years a marked improvement in medical men and in medical students on the subject of religion. Time was when infidelity and materialism prevailed in the profession, and when anything of a religious nature was banished from the curriculum. This opprobrium, we trust, is being wiped away. There is now much less scoffing, less of heterodox views ; more general respect for religion, and less persecution of those who profess it. There is, however, now-a-days some danger of indifference, of profession without principle, of a shew of religion without reality, of a mere name to live while there is spiritual deadness. In sifting times of trial, there is often more vital religion, more searching of heart ; whereas in days and countries in which a religious profession is thought respectable, there is a tendency to sink into carelessness and formalism.

Our desire is that all medical students should be stirred up to greater *earnestness* in the cause of truth. Some have thought that the zealous student of God's Word cannot be a successful student of science.

This is a delusion. He who is fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, will not be slothful in business. (Rom. xii. 11.) He who feels the deep responsibility he is under to the Almighty,—who fears God, loves his Saviour, and is under the influence of His Spirit, is sure to be influenced by high motives in the discharge of his daily duties on earth. He serves a higher Master than man, and is not carried away by sordid and avaricious views of recompense or worldly honour. While he receives his daily bread with thankfulness, he does his duty assiduously and conscientiously, knowing that he must at last give an account of all the deeds done in the body. Such a man does his duty honourably and fearlessly. In danger he has no misgivings about present safety, for even death is divested of its terrors. In the midst of the pestilence and in the battle-field, his mind is kept in peace—stayed on Him who alone reigneth, and who will make all things work together for the good of His people. That man can never act with the same coolness in the midst of danger who feels that he has not made his peace with God. It is delightful to think that many of our medical men now in the Crimea are animated by this spirit. I have had letters from former pupils, which indicate great devotion to their profession, combined with a faithful and humble waiting upon the Lord.

In the "Lancet," 13th January 1855, there is, I regret to say, an attempt made to decry the efforts of Christian Medical Associations such as our own. The writer proceeds on the supposition, that we wish to make proselytes to particular Church views, that we desire to bring medicine under the thralldom of some visible Church, and to impose theological fetters or religious tests. This is a most erroneous view of our proceedings, as well as of those of our brethren in London, engaged in the same cause. We have no wish to instil particular Church views. We are united in an evangelical alliance. Our committee is composed of men belonging to different denominations,—members of the Established Church and of the Free Church, United Presbyterians, Baptists, Independents, Episcopalians, &c. We are associated on the common basis of the Gospel, and overlooking minor differences, we embrace all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and in truth. Our object is not a narrow sectarian or selfish one. We desire the good of medical students independent of all systems of Church government, and we repudiate all bigotry, intolerance, or thralldom. We wish the student to breathe the free atmosphere of the gospel while he prosecutes his daily calling. It cannot be said in Scotland at least, that we labour under theological fetters

as regards our medical schools, whether in or out of the University. The days for peculiar church-tests here are at an end. We repel the insinuation, that we desire to exclude any man from our schools, or that we want to compel a student by unworthy motives of worldly benefit to adopt our views. Our proceedings are guided by the principle, that every one is bound to use his influence to make known the Word of God to others, and that he is guilty of dereliction of duty who fails to do so.

The writer in the "Lancet" admits that it may be praiseworthy to promote a religious spirit amongst medical students ; and he concludes by stating most truly, that medicine has no more natural or essential relation to one particular creed than to another ; and that it is the highest privilege of medicine to be the bearer of consolation to all mankind ; that the physician is welcomed everywhere ; that he opens the hearts of all ; and that even the missionary is more acceptable when he assumes the garb of the medical man.

We wish the medical man to prosecute his work, not in connexion with the particular tenets of any visible church, but as a servant of Christ. We desire that he should convey a higher consolation than any which mere professional treatment can give ; and we are anxious that while his vocation secures for him a reception where others are excluded, he