

**"RES MEDICA, RES  
PUBLICA": THE PROFESSION  
OF MEDICINE, ITS FUTURE  
WORK AND WAGE**

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"Res medica, res publica": The Profession of Medicine, Its Future Work and Wage by William Ewart

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**WILLIAM EWART**

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# 'RES MEDICA, RES PUBLICA'

THE PROFESSION OF MEDICINE

ITS FUTURE WORK AND WAGE

AN INAUGURAL ADDRESS DELIVERED AT ST. GEORGE'S  
HOSPITAL ON OCTOBER 1, 1907

BY

WILLIAM EWART, M.D. CANTAB., F.R.C.P.

SENIOR PHYSICIAN TO ST. GEORGE'S HOSPITAL, AND TO THE BELGRAVE HOSPITAL  
FOR CHILDREN



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1907

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## 'RES MEDICA, RES PUBLICA'

### THE PROFESSION OF MEDICINE: ITS FUTURE WORK AND WAGE

GOVERNORS, TREASURER, FELLOW-STUDENTS OLD AND NEW,—It is an honour, deeply felt, to convey to you the welcome of the medical staff. Long may it continue to be presided over by the Nestor of the profession, Sir Henry Pitman, who joined the school some eighty years ago, and to whom we wish health and happiness during this hundredth year of his long life! Our recent immeasurable loss—that of our teacher and friend, of our example and pride—leaves us as though broken-hearted, so great was our love and our worship for Timothy Holmes. The death of Dr. Robert Barnes is another grief, which can only be tempered by the thought of the fullness and fruitfulness of his days, and by his legacy of a great name to this school of his adoption, where a tablet has been erected to commemorate his munificence towards the foundation of our laboratories of research. All honour, also, to our lamented comrades who this year answer not the roll-call!

Two names have been added to our consulting

staff—that of Mr. W. Adams Frost, for long and distinguished service, and, sadly too early, that of Mr. F. Marmaduke Sheild, through cruel illness incurred in the service of the hospital. Dr. Wilfrid Fox, who has succeeded our eminent dermatologist, Dr. Wyndham Cottle, and Mr. Lawrence Jones, who has been elected to the assistant-surgeon staff, are both our distinguished former pupils.

Much that I have to say is inspired of teachings received not only from seniors and colleagues, but from house-physicians unexcelled, cherished pupils who taught great lessons, devoted nurses whose virtues adorn this charity, and faithful officers and servers, all contributing their best, under the leadership of our President and the rule of our munificent Governors, in that spirit of concord so long personified during his secretaryship by Mr. C. L. Todd.

Sentiment, which rules the world, is part of our own strength. It was fitting that the flag of St. George should continue to fly at this spot, under the very shadow of the Royal Standard, as an emblem of that national characteristic of our charity—the solidarity between the high and the lowly; and that the proudest site in the Empire should not be deemed too beautiful, too healthy, or too costly, for the service of the suffering poor, and for the teaching of a profession which has derived from this school no small part of what it is.



THE IDEAL.

Although my theme is not advice to juniors, there is just one lesson to be picked up on the way as a help to the tyro and a solace to the veteran—'to cultivate the ideal itself.' No calling needs it more, none offers it greater scope. Thought for the *corpus vile* of man is not our only lot and part. Ours too is the ideal—that essence and emanation from all things material; the one thing we can truly call 'our own'—for even the miser cannot annex his gold. But the ideal—call it 'appreciation' or 'a sense of the beautiful'—offers to our many-sided profession wealth beyond the dreams of avarice.

Veterans need no initiation. For you still at the threshold of Nature's great mysteries it were hardly fair to wish you those mighty visions which the poet reserves for long toil and pain—

'Der kennt Sie nicht Himmlische Mächte.'

But there are many delights you would regret to have missed were you to race with inattentive eyes through your student's journey of discovery round this world of wondrous beauty.

Above all, let the ideal enter into our conception of the profession itself and of its lofty mission, which needs neither magic nor mystery, but lies above common affairs and narrow fields. Our province is not any department of man's work, but man him-

self—not as a body alone, but as a mind, and as a soul, the entire man. Unless we can perceive that this is a totally different level from any other on earth, and not one of inferiority, we shall have mistaken our vocation, and could hardly do justice to it.

#### THE PROFESSION AND ITS TWENTIETH-CENTURY CRISIS.

I may put to you briefly as general propositions the views I have to express. Although the laity has much to discover in this constellation of ours, we are being a little better focussed and better understood. The sign of the profession is in the ascendant, and everything points to its gravitating into the orbit of the State. At the same time, strange perturbations are noticeable within it, and to these I have to call your attention under the name of our twentieth-century crisis.

Looking back, there is no profession of greater antiquity, yet none so truly young. The history of humanity is our history, and its future our future. Their joint record can be but beginning. Are we not still fighting for dear life against deadly foes? Ages ago it was the mammoth. Now the microbe only remains; but its days are numbered, and the era of health with its peaceful developments is in sight. The profession is only just cutting its back teeth, in the weirdness of puberty.

Had a man stepped forth in ancient Greece or

Rome equal in wonders to the youngest of our qualified men, he would have been accounted a demigod. We have 40,000 such in the kingdom, and they pass unnoticed as a negligible quantity. But a body controlling so much power cannot remain a cipher. We need only look back little more than a century, as the whole change has occurred in that time. Its wage, its status, and, alas! its routine, have remained what they were; but a transformation has been silently accomplished within it. It held the shadow of knowledge; it now holds the substance. It had laboured long in hopeless efforts to be of use; it now waits upon humanity with the most brilliant service. Yet it ingloriously remains 'Cinderella,' the humble maid-of-all-works.

#### OUR ATTRIBUTES.

The famous motto, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*, which has proved elsewhere not at all a good fit, would almost seem to have been borrowed from us, for we truly own those characteristics.

*Fraternity* ranks first. The telling title of 'confrères' will identify us anywhere as members of the profession. It implies our essential independence and equality, and the absence of any hierarchy among us beyond that of elder brotherhood; and it also suggests the reciprocity without which the profession cannot subsist.