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ON

The Physician

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The Physician

Man, the sublimest work of Omnipotence, surrounded by all the relations that bind him to his God and fellow man, has been placed upon earth for a certain fixed purpose—the acting of the great drama of life. Each has his character to act. No matter who, where, or in what condition, each has his part to play. The humble peasant as well as the richest lord; the lowest specimen of humanity, as well as the most exalted and profound intellect, has his part to perform—an influence to wield. No one so insignificant, that he is a cipher.

The meanest wretch exerts an influence that shall weigh in all coming time. Great and responsible the duties of candidates for eternity: and short the time allotted to act. Life is but a dream! A passing cloud that dots the firmament for a moment, and then is gone! Time, as a stream, glides swiftly away, and the bark of life, soon lands in the gulf of eternity. There existence begins.

Within this short space, this span, this inch and a crowd ed the duties and requirements of moral and intelligent agents:—“the vast concerns of an eternal

scene". Upon their due performance or wilful neglect, depend our happiness or misery—here and hereafter.

How with tenfold import, should this strike the Physician! He to whom the lives of the community are entrusted: who holds, to speak a little extravagantly, their destinies in the hollow of his hand; who is able to say to this one die, and he dieth, and to that one live, and he liveth. High and awful his responsibilities; more so, because voluntarily assumed. To sustain with dignity the character of Physician, what then, and the qualities necessary.

First then, in order to be a good Physician, he should be an educated man; not only versed in literature strictly professional, but in that which is generally considered non-professional, and has no direct and immediate connection with it. I know I shall be met at the very threshold with the objection, that many have become distinguished, who did not possess liberal educations. We do not deny exceptions to general rules; but would answer by asking,

would not these individuals have been better Doctors, had they been educated men? Besides, this is often a seeming objection; for many a man, who has never set foot in a College, has a mind well stored with useful knowledge, and far superior to many, who can show with pompous pride, their college diplomas, with the signatures of the most learned of the land, testifying to their numerous attainments and excellencies. The plough-boy is often their superior. Where is the profession or occupation that is not advanced or indebted to its learned advocates? And shall Medicine, one of the most honoured and useful professions, be practiced with equal success by the intelligent Doctor and Quack? I opine not. Well has it been said, there is no profession, the honest practice of which, requires greater scope of knowledge. No science that is not tributary, no department of nature, not subsidiary to it. Nor is the physical world alone its vassal. The mind, the great motor power of

created matter, is to be regulated and governed.

"Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased;
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow;
Raze out the written troubles of the brain;
And with some sweet oblivious antidote,
Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff,
Which weighs upon the heart?"

is an interrogatory of the great anatomist of the human heart, that should engage the attention of every medical man.

This moral education is also an important element. The blackleg, the inebriate and debauchee are not fit practitioners of medicine. They are drawbacks and pest on society in any capacity, much less the responsible one of Physician. No man ever practiced with great success, without first having obtained the confidence of his patient: that this cannot be accomplished by a notorious profligate, need not here be asserted. He has the delicate and sensitive feelings of the female

often to treat; and they are to be dealt with feelingly, gentlemanly and religiously:— attributes foreign to his nature. "The mind and heart of the Practitioner, ought to be the shrine of truth and probity: his mind should not deceive itself, and his heart should not suffer itself to be deceived and misled, by any earthly temptation, from the narrow and rugged way of duty and conscientiousness"

That he should be thoroughly acquainted and fully conversant with strictly medical Knowledge, no one will attempt to gainsay. His duties compel him thus far; and culpable indeed is that man, who ignorant of these facts and principles, will pretend to the practice of physic. Culpable the body, who issue his license to Kill. The blood of the innocent slain, cries out against them, and it will be partly on their heads.

He should also be possessed of a

sound discriminating judgement, and a firm and unswerving determination to perform, that which his judgement pronounced to be right, in spite of opposition and detraction. For although he should be proficient in the profoundest depths of medical lore, :

“And know all learning, and all science know,
And all phenomena in heaven and earth,
Trace to their causes; trace the labyrinths
Of thought, association, passion, will;
And all the subtle nice affinities
Of matter trace; its virtues, motions, laws,
And most familiarly and deeply talk
Of mental, moral, natural, divine,”

yet if he has not that happy faculty of combining and bringing to bear, his medical knowledge to suit the indications of particular ^{cases}, he has heaped up this immense lore to no effect: he is but as “sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal”. Furthermore, should he omit to obey the mandates of his judgement,

either through want of confidence in his own ability, or the apprehensions and dissuasions of friends, in matters ^{of} import, he has failed in an essential point, and worse than vanity are his splendid attainments. He should act as duty, judgment and conscience direct, though fortune frown, patronage forsake, friends grow cold, and the finger of scorn and the tongue of slander meet him on every hand. Let his guiding principle be that so beautifully expressed by the Poet, "I'd rather stand up, with conscious pride assured Alone, than err with millions on my side."

In the next place, he should be sensitively alive to the obligations resting upon him. For although an individual might be considered a good Physician, abstractly contemplated, without this quality, yet would he not apt to be a good Practitioner; and certainly, worthless are his qualities, if not put into practice. Perhaps there is no avocation, nay no relation,

save perhaps, that of Parent, to which greater responsibility attaches itself. It should be entered upon then, with "fear and trembling"; and an eye single to the salvation of the patient. To this end, no opportunity of gaining useful knowledge should be neglected, no pains be spared, no efforts, however arduous or repugnant, be untried. No stone should be left unturned. Information should be caught from each passing event. A minute well improved, preserves the dying man. A passing event, pregnant with meaning, unnoticed, sends thousands to the grave. And yet it has been said,

"The man is yet unborn, who duly weighs an hour."

How unenviable then, the position of the Doctor? With what mighty impulse should his faltering energies be aroused! 'Tis needless to say, that an individual thus alive to the responsibilities of his position, would not be deficient in matters of minor importance. His patients would

not suffer from neglect: his sympathies would always be exhibited in acts of kindness. Conscious of being right, he would escape the necessity of continually enveloping himself in mystery and professional dignity; but calm, open and truly dignified, his intelligence would command their confidence, his judgement and probity of character, commend their approval.

Moreover, the Doctor should be a philanthropic man; a man, who has a heart that beats in sympathy with the sufferings and wants of his fellow beings; and who will willingly and cheerfully extend a helping and a charitable hand to the poor and needy. That Physician is far from acting on high and honourable principles, who values pecuniary considerations, as of primary importance. Under the great law of Humanity, every Doctor should enroll himself as a standard bearer. The great Fountain of moral ethics has declared, that though gifted with all graces, yet if

charity be wanting, they availed nothing. Without this principle, society could not exist. "Non nobis solum nati sumus;" is an aphorism as true as that ancient and eminent Philosopher ever uttered. He knew too well the nature and importance of human society to decide otherwise. Nor has it lost any of its vigour and authority by the long attrition of time, since it was penned. — Our Maker intended that we should be happy, and to effect this purpose, it is necessary that man should serve his fellow man. If not, why are men naturally gregarious? Why not each inhabit some vast wilderness, "some boundless contiguity of shade"? Whence this longing for the society of our fellows? Is it not then, the duty of man, if it be conducive to his happiness, to act thus? To be serviceable to his neighbour, and in turn receive similar service from him? The Physician has been endowed with certain talents which he has the power to direct as he chooses, but he has not the right to use them for selfish purposes alone. He has been

endowed with mental abilities, in order that he may enjoy himself, and obtain the greatest possible happiness, and as he is so constituted, that he derives the greater portion from society, it is but fair and just, that he give society the benefit of his capacities. It would be a violation of the rules of reciprocity, were he to act otherwise. Society secures to him his life, liberty and property. It offers him a refined and well cultivated intellect, the cost of many years experience; it curbs the vile tongue of slander, and hushes the voice of calumny. And for all these benefits, is he to sit unmoved, as the proud and haughty monarch, who disdains even a nod of recognition for the favours showered upon him? Shall he treat with base ingratitude the kindness of another? Such niggardly selfishness, would beggar the parsimony of the most avaricious.

Behold the aged and infirm, whose locks have been silvered o'er with the frosts of many years. They are now the subjects

of disease and want. They can no longer support themselves by their own industry. Shall the Physician let them perish for the want of his care? Shall he turn with cold indifference from these objects of charity, consoling himself with the conscience soothing thought, that man was born for self alone? But shall he not rather extend the helping and benevolent hand? Let conscience speak, and the natural feelings of the heart prove their way, and there here the response. It will be but a confirmation of the truth, that "we are not born for ourselves alone". As the amount of happiness the Physician bestows, so is the amount he receives. He gives but to receive. Let him remember, that he is an instrument of God's, sent into the world to administer to, and relieve suffering humanity, and that the poor, who know but gratitude to give, have an especial claim to his

attention. And he should be proud to receive such payment. Let him not toil for filthy lucre alone. Live not solely for self. Let a world-wide sympathy and universal love pervade his every sentiment, and direct his every action.

"Love thyself last; let all the ends thou aimst at, Be thy country's, thy Gods and truths" was spoken in wisdom.

Let a Physician but possess, and put in action such principles as these, and he will command the confidence, and receive the gratitude, respect and patronage of any community. He will be an honour to himself and his profession. A brilliant star in the mid-heavens, worthy of being followed and imitated.