

THE ETHICS AND DEPARTMENT OF THE OPERATING ROOM.*

JOHN HUNTER, M.B.

How great would be the amazement of a barber-surgeon of the mediæval ages, when his operating-room was any place wherein the patient might happen to be—the living-room in the hovel of squalid misery, or in the richly-draped palatial chamber of the rich,—if he were to step into a modern operating-room, with its polished or mosaic floors, enamelled furniture, marble seats, brass railings, glazed walls and glass domes. With the barber-surgeon the buccaneering germs were free to gratify their insatiable appetites, whilst the modern surgeon forbids even their presence, and if, peradventure, they are found about the wound they are speedily exterminated by antiseptics.

The modern operating-room is an evolution of scientific surgery. To Lord Lister, Pasteur and a legion of other notable scientists, we of the twentieth century are greatly indebted. The heritage to which we, as members of the medical profession, become the legitimate heirs, brings with it great privileges, but also equally great responsibilities. This fact naturally leads up to the ethics of the operating-room.

ETHICS.

Since ethics can be defined as “a system of rules for regulating the actions and manners of men in society,” and as we are members of a great fraternal circle, the ethics of the operating-room rest on the common basic principles so tersely summed up in the so-called “Golden Rule.” But as every nation has its own language to give expression to its needs, emotions, and aspirations, so every calling has to evolve its own code of ethics from common fundamental principles, *e.g.*, the theft of money in social life finds its counterpart in the unprofessional taking of a patient from another physician. The work of the operating-room is of an exceedingly complicated character, as it involves the relationship of the surgeon to his patient, to his confreres, and to his profession. In no other vocation in life is a man’s honor put to a more severe test than in the operating-room. The subtle temptation comes to unduly urge on an operation that the surgeon’s reputation may be enhanced, a large fee obtained, or some one else prevented from getting

*Post-graduate clinic, Western Hospital.