

Johnson who was no great admirer of physicians, and who defined their profession as a melancholy attendance on misery, a mean submission to peevishness, and a continual interruption of pleasure, was nevertheless pleased to admit that every man has found in physicians great liberality and dignity of sentiment, very prompt effusion of beneficence, and willingness to exert a lucrative art where there was no hope of lucre. Indeed there is no calling which more constantly demands the exercise of sympathy, and in which it is more freely yielded than in ours, and complaints of want of sympathy are most commonly heard from those who least deserve it. What can be more trying than to be obliged to listen by the hour—when pressed perhaps by important business to the lugubrious outpourings of some malade imaginaire, whose chief ailment consists in the fact of his having no other subject than himself to think about. Wrapped up in himself he lies “like a porcupine rolled the wrong way, tormenting himself with his prickles.” But to the true physician, the sufferings arising from a perverted or even from a depraved imagination, are diseases as real as those depending on more obvious physical alterations, and equally demand the exercise of his skill, and call forth that sympathy and pity which droppeth as the gentle dew from heaven upon the place beneath, and by its moral effect is of as much real benefit in many cases as more potent medicines. If the physician possesses gentleness of manners, and a compassionate heart (says Dr. Gregory) and what Shakspeare so emphatically calls the milk of human kindness, the patient feels his approach like that of a guardian angel, while every visit of a physician who is unfeeling and rough in his manners, makes his heart sink within him as at the presence of one come to pronounce his doom. Towards your brother practitioners you cannot be too scrupulously careful in your behaviour. Ever bear in mind the golden rule, ‘To do as you would be done by.’ It will not unfrequently happen that you may be called upon to supersede a fellow practitioner, and then, more especially if he be personally obnoxious to you, the utmost caution is required in order to avoid inflicting an additional injury upon him by seeming to give your sanction to and concur in the complaints of inefficiency or ignorance which disappointed patients frequently make. I do not mean to imply that any consideration should interfere with your duty to your patient, or that gross ignorance or carelessness should go unrebuked, but I do say, be slow to receive such complaints, remembering that at some time or other you may be placed in a similar position yourselves, and endeavour to act in that large hearted spirit of charity which is kind, which vaunteth not itself, and thinketh no evil. Above all