

Original Communications.

Introductory Lecture to the Fifth Session of the Medical Faculty of the University of Bishop's College, delivered 1st Oct., 1875.—By GEORGE WILKINS, M.D., M.R.C.S., Eng., *Professor of Pathology and Lecturer on Practical Physiology.*

GENTLEMEN:

According to a long-continued custom amongst Medical Colleges, we open our Winter Session with an introductory lecture. This year, the duty of delivering that lecture devolves upon me. The first portion of that duty is to convey to you the extreme pleasure it is to my colleagues and myself to see the familiar faces which during the winter months of former years studiously followed our instruction; also to see the new faces which will soon be familiar ones. I think it almost needless to say, you are all heartily welcome.

But, gentlemen, may I ask you, have you seriously thought over the object you have in view in coming here? Do you think that when you have completed your term of four years study and passed the necessary examinations, and in consequence obtained your diploma, your student days will be over? Do you imagine that after that happy event, all you will have to do will be to sit quietly in your office awaiting the commands of your patients; that your spare time (of which there will be no scarcity the first few years) you may spend in idleness and frivolity? Gentlemen, thoughts such as these are the shoals of medical life. Strand upon them and there is almost a certainty of mending.

Doubtless your object in coming here is, that you can ultimately obtain the degree of Doctor of Medicine. To enable you to succeed in that object, it will be our duty and endeavor to impart to you the desired information. But you must constantly bear in mind that in our endeavors to convey to you a certain amount of information, we really do much more than that. The direction of your thoughts will be more defined. You will be taught to think systematically. You will be taught what to look for, and how to enquire. Just as the tourist bound for some foreign clime will spend much time previous to his departure pouring over hand-books, studying the route he should take, also the objects of interest on that route, you will have a mental route to pursue, and many objects of deep interest will be opened to your view before you reach your first goal. Those of you, who have already spent

one or more years in the study of your profession, will have some idea of the nature of these interesting objects as well as the amount of work before you.

To you especially I wish to address myself, at first, for a few minutes. For that purpose I will step aside a little from the usual course of introductory lectures by bringing under your notice now a few of the more prominent advances made in Medicine within the last few years. This I do to impress upon you the rapidly progressive nature of the Science to which all of you, I presume, purpose devoting the remainder of your days.

It is but fifty years since Sir Charles Bell, by careful dissection of the roots of the nerves, discovered that those of motion and sensation were quite distinct. This discovery gave rise to the still greater advance made by Dr. Marshall Hall, the reflex action of the spinal cord, by unravelling which he showed us how all the functions of the animal economy are performed independent of the will, a discovery almost as great as that of the circulation of the blood. Before the time of these great physiologists it was all darkness as to the beautiful machinery by which the functions of life were carried on. No one knew why when the light fell upon the eye the pupil contracted, and when a still greater illumination fell, the eyelids closed to shut it out altogether; why the fauces grasped anything placed within its reach; or why even in sleep the hand immediately moves away any object that may be irritating the skin. The reflex action of the nervous system at once furnished a clue to many obscure pains that had been treated locally, but which might have resulted from the altogether unsuspected irritation of some internal organ.

Following in quick succession the wake of these discoveries was that of the governing power of nerves over contraction of vessels and over the work of the glands and secretion of membranes. The recognition of nervous centres; of the comparative independence, so to speak, of ganglia; of the effect produced on their centres by reflex irritation and by direct irritation by the circulation of poisoned blood. All these and other similar discoveries have occurred within very few years. Our knowledge of these explain the group of symptoms which under the name of Metastases used so to puzzle our forefathers.

Within the last five years, most important experiments have been made, resulting in being able to localize the functions of the brain. Contrary to the universally received opinion, the cortical grey matter of the brain—the Cerebral Hemispheres—have been