

# CANADA MEDICAL JOURNAL.

## ORIGINAL COMMUNICATIONS.

*Introductory Lecture to the Session 1870-71, delivered on the 4th October, 1870.* By WILLIAM FRASER, M. D., Professor of the Institutes of Medicine, McGill University.

GENTLEMEN.—At the commencement of another session, I am happy to meet again those of you who have already attended here, and to you who do so for the first time, I, in the name of my colleagues, offer a hearty welcome. In after days of ceaseless occupation, amidst the cares and struggles of the world, the remembrance of the time you may pass here, will, I trust, never fail to call up pleasant associations.

On the present occasion it has become my duty to give the time honoured introductory lecture, a task which, till very recently, I had entirely overlooked. After some deliberation as to the most suitable subject on which to address those of you who are about to commence the study, and which may not be without interest to students of what ever standing, I have determined to make a few remarks: 1st. on the past history of medicine. 2nd. on its present condition. 3rd. on the mode in which it should be studied.

*Past History.*—To Ancient Greece, we are indebted for the earliest records of medicine. By its fathers or founders it was fancied that all matter consisted of the four elements, *fire, water, earth and air*. Some believed that in water the secret of life was to be found, others that it was in the air, others that it was in the earth, while Pythagoras and his followers thought that it was to be found in heat. Strange to say this old Pythagorean idea, which originated twenty-four centuries ago, is now a popular tenet with some of the leading men of the present day. In those early ages when human dissection was forbidden by religion, by custom and by prejudice, and medical practitioners were continually seeking to solve the problem of life and the processes of health and disease by dissecting the lower animals, we can easily understand how uncertain the practice of our art must have been.

Last of the fathers of medicine came Galen, who lived seventeen centuries ago; a man of brilliant genius, who eagerly studied anatomy and the functions discharged by the various organs of the body. His