

Boardman (H. A.)

THE

CLAIMS OF RELIGION

UPON

MEDICAL MEN.

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN THE TENTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA, ON SUNDAY EVENING, NOV. 21, 1841.

↓  
BY H. A. BOARDMAN,

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH.

29298

PHILADELPHIA:

BOOK AND JOB PRINTING OFFICE, LEDGER BUILDING.

1841.

TO THE REV. H. A. BOARDMAN, D. D.

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA, Nov. 26, 1844.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR :

At a meeting of the Medical Class of the University of Pennsylvania, held yesterday afternoon, the undersigned were appointed a Committee to present their grateful acknowledgements for your impressive and eloquent discourse upon "*The claims of Religion upon Medical Men*," and to request a copy of it for publication.

We have the honor to be,

Very respectfully and gratefully,

Your ob't servants,

N. CHAPMAN.  
THOS. KING LEONARD, Fla.  
E. DUFFIELD, Md.  
JAS. MORROW, South Carolina.  
MATTHEW P. WALLER, Va.  
P. P. CLUFF, Mo.  
J. S. WELLFORD, Va.  
J. W. DULLES, Pa.  
TIMOTHY THORP, Ala.

WM. J. LEARY, N. C.  
JOHN P. LITTLE, Va.  
JOHN M. LANGHORNE, Va.  
J. WARREN ROYER, Pa.  
JAMES E. ROBERTSON, Va.  
ROBERT M. PORTER, Tenn.  
DOUGLASS CASE, Ohio.  
J. E. TYLER, Mass.

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PHILADELPHIA, 26th November, 1844.

*To the Rev. Mr. Boardman.*

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR :—The undersigned, a Committee from the Medical Class of Jefferson Medical College, appointed for the purpose, beg leave respectfully to tender to you the thanks of the students whom we represent, for the able and useful discourse on the religious duties of medical men, delivered on Sunday evening last. We are also directed to ask you to furnish us with a copy of that discourse, that by committing it to the press we may make it more extensively useful.

With sentiments of respect,

We are yours, &c.,

J. K. MITCHELL, M. D.  
N. E. CARGILL, Va.  
WM. K. BROWN, Ala.  
BENJ. F. BLACKMON, Ala.  
S. P. ZIEGLER, Pa.  
H. R. BRANHAM, Ga.  
J. P. ANDREWS, Pa.  
E. B. JONES, Va.  
J. E. HILL, Miss.

S. G. WHITE, Ga.  
JNO. DRAUCHAN, La.  
C. C. CAMPBELL, Ga.  
D. R. ROACH, Ala.  
H. Y. WEBB, Ala.  
J. H. LEFEVERE, Pa.  
B. C. SNOWDEN, Pa.  
A. H. HOFF, New York.

PHILADELPHIA, November 26th, 1844.

To the Committees of the University and Jefferson Medical Classes :

GENTLEMEN—Nothing could have been more gratifying to my feelings, than the favor with which the large and intelligent body of Medical Students at present in this city, have received my humble effort to serve them, on Sunday evening. The discourse which you have done me the honor to request for publication, was written amidst the varied and arduous duties incident to the pastoral care of a large congregation; but, as you have been pleased to express the opinion that its circulation, in a printed form, may conduce to the object for which it was prepared, I do not feel at liberty to withhold it. A copy of the discourse is herewith placed at your disposal.

I remain, gentlemen,

With great respect,

Your friend and servant,

H. A. BOARDMAN.

To

PROF. CHAPMAN.  
THOS. KING LEONARD, Fla.  
E. DUFFIELD, Md.  
JAMES MORROW, South Carolina.  
MATTHEW P. WALLER, Va.  
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Committee of the University  
School.

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## THE CLAIMS OF RELIGION UPON MEDICAL MEN.

COLOSSIANS, 4; 15. LUKE, THE BELOVED PHYSICIAN.

THE individual here named in so honorable a manner, is commonly believed to have been the Evangelist Luke, the author of one of the Gospels, and of the Book of Acts. He was the intimate friend and travelling companion of the Apostle Paul, and was evidently held in high estimation among the Christians of that age. It would be foreign from my present purpose to dwell upon the imperfect record we have of his life and labors. The mention of him by the Apostle as a "*Physician*," affords me an opportunity of saying (what, indeed, it may be superfluous to state here) that we must be careful, in reading the Bible, not to suffer the force of our modern associations to mislead us as to the precise import of its medical terms. Medicine had no existence under the Hebrew Theocracy, and among the cotemporaneous nations, as a science; and even as an art, it prevailed only in a very rude form. It was the general feeling that diseases were inflicted by a supernatural power, and that the same power must be looked to for the removal of them—an opinion, it may be added, which is still very common in the East. Diseased persons were in the habit of resorting to the priests and prophets, not merely to avail themselves of their medical skill, but to ascertain through them from Jehovah, or the false gods, as the case might be, whether they were to recover or not. This gave rise to "a class of pretenders, who professed, by means of certain secret charms, incantations and powerful rites or applications, to draw down and fix the healing power of the god." By this means, medicine came to be associated with soothsaying, astrology and witchcraft, and was regarded by many of the devout Jews as an abominable thing. The Rabbins entertained so bad an opinion of "physicians," that they said "the very best of them deserved hell;" and they advised "faithful Jews not to live in a city where the chief man was a physician." The art remained in this ele-

mentary state for ages. The people, in the time of the Saviour, seem to have had but little confidence in their medical guides, and brought their sick to him in great numbers to be healed. Lightfoot, in commenting on the case of the poor woman\* who, after spending all that she had upon physicians, to no purpose, stole a blessing from Christ by touching the hem of his garment, states, that the practice of that day was restricted to a series of simple or compound medicines for each disease, which were to be tried successively, as one after another failed. This series, in the disorder with which this woman was afflicted, extended to fourteen changes. All the medicines were to be taken in wine. Each was in turn abandoned, after a short trial. "If the case was found to be stubborn, superstitious practices were resorted to, in order to aid the medicine, and were gradually increased, till at last medicine was altogether relinquished, and the cure sought by other means." This identical system is still in vogue among some of the Oriental nations. In Christian countries, however, medicine has thrown off the superstitions and puerilities with which it was so long deformed and paralyzed, and taken its appropriate place among the sciences. This is neither the time nor the place to detail the steps by which it has vindicated its claim to the elevated position it now occupies. It is more to my purpose to observe that there is no science, theology excepted, which opens a nobler field of inquiry to the human intellect—none which is more intimately associated with our earthly happiness—none which is more entitled to the respect and veneration of society. The benevolent design of medicine is, indeed, its leading characteristic. While a large portion of mankind, even in civilized countries, are employed in avocations which are either destructive to human life, or which aim only at "multiplying the pleasures of the opulent, giving a higher zest to the fruitions of luxury, and gratifying the caprices of vanity and pride," the physician "interposes in the moment of exigence, and obeys the call of distress; he administers the cordial to the fainting spirit, re-kindles the expiring lamp of hope, and often decks the countenance with smiles, which death, under the ravages of disease, had marked for his victim, and covered with his shade. He leaves it to others to accompany the human race in their revelry and their triumphs;

\* Mark 5; 25—34.

while *they* bask on the bosom of the ocean, or spread their sails to the wind, he presents himself on the shore, and rescues the shipwrecked mariner from the waves. With a silent and invisible energy he contends with the powers of destruction, and often rescues from the grave him that seemed 'appointed to death.'"\*

A profession charged with so lofty and benign a ministration, and whose responsibilities are of so delicate and weighty a character, demands eminent qualifications, both of the head and heart, on the part of those who would assume its duties. Most of these qualifications, perhaps all, in a greater or less degree, are set forth with admirable ability and skill in the daily instructions of our medical schools. There is one, however, which is usually inculcated in the class-room only in an incidental way, and which, on every account, deserves your most candid and serious attention—I mean, PERSONAL RELIGION. The topic, then, I propose to bring before you, in the present discourse, is, THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL RELIGION TO MEDICAL MEN. The theme would better suit a volume than a sermon. I shall confine myself to a few hints on the more obvious aspects of the subject.

You will not understand me as meaning by the phrase "personal religion," either a bare intellectual assent to the truths of Christianity, or a rigid conformity to all the peculiarities of any particular denomination of Christians. I use the expression as synonymous with true piety. This consists, in general, in the renewing and sanctifying of the heart by the Holy Spirit, a cordial reliance upon the merits of Jesus Christ as the only ground of acceptance with God, and an habitual desire and aim to lead a holy life, and walk according to the pure morality of the Scriptures.

It is very obvious to remark, as a reason why medical men should give their attention to religion, that *they are involved in the common degeneracy and ruin of the race, and are, equally with other men, dependent upon Christianity for spiritual life and salvation.* The fundamental truths of the Gospel apply to all alike. We are all depraved—helpless—condemned—lost; and doomed to be lost eternally, except we repent of our sins, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We have a com-

\* Robert Hall.



mon interest in such solemn announcements as these:—"Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned." No eminence of gifts, no splendor of reputation, can shelter from the wrath of an offended God, the soul that goes unpardoned into eternity. He has provided salvation for our race at an infinite cost, and offered it to us "without money and without price." Our happiness, not less than our duty, requires us to accept of it. For we can have no solid peace of mind while in a state of alienation from God. He is the only adequate portion of the soul. It is not possible for avarice or ambition to satisfy its cravings. The entire resources of the globe, if placed at its disposal, would no more meet its demands than an April shower would convert the desert of Zahara into a verdant and fruitful province. A monarch, as illustrious for his wisdom as for the prosperity of his kingdom and the glory of his reign, once tried the experiment which men in humbler spheres have been trying since the apostacy of Adam, of seeing how far the world would go in satisfying the instincts of a rational being; and after levying a tribute upon universal nature, and putting art to its loftiest achievements, to furnish whatever could charm the senses or gratify the taste, he surveyed the whole, and, with a frankness worthy of his rank and station, exclaimed—"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!" So it must always be. It is no less the law of our intellectual constitution than the law of revelation, that man shall find true and substantial happiness in God only. He that "sinneth against God wrongeth his own soul." And they who forsake the fountain of living waters, for broken cisterns, must suffer the pangs of an eternal and quenchless thirst. Religion claims the attention of medical men, then, in common with the rest of mankind, because it is indispensable to the forgiveness of sin, and the salvation of the soul.

It has been often said that medicine, as a profession, was *favorable to infidelity*. And the very phrase *Religio Medici*, was once synonymous with irreligion. This imputation has been repelled with great energy by many medical writers. "Medicine," says Dr. Gregory, "of all professions, should be the least suspected of leading to impiety. An intimate acquaintance with the works of nature elevates the mind to the most sublime conceptions of the Supreme Being; and at the same

time dilates the heart with the most pleasing prospects of Providence. The difficulties that must necessarily attend all deep inquiries into a subject so disproportionate to the human faculties, should not be expected to surprise a physician, who in his daily practice is involved in perplexity and darkness, even in subjects exposed to the examination of his senses." Thus we should all reason *à priori* on the subject. If

"An undevout astronomer is mad,"

so, one would think, must be an undevout physician. Galen, it is said, was converted from atheism by the sight of a human skeleton. The dead man's frame weighed more with him than the arguments of the living. He must be a stubborn skeptic who can hold out against a skeleton. Still more stubborn must be he who can explore the mysteries of the entire animal economy, under the guidance of modern science, without seeing every where the impress of a God. This *à priori* presumption is, to a gratifying extent, confirmed by fact. Infidelity is far less prevalent among physicians than it was formerly: and no inconsiderable proportion of the names which grace the recent records of the profession, are adorned with the lustre which genuine piety alone can impart.

It has, however, been admitted, that there are facts in the earlier annals of the science, which *seem* to countenance the charge under consideration, that medical studies involve a lurking tendency to infidelity. I use the expression "seem," because in so far as the science itself is concerned, the imputation *must* be groundless. The principles of every science were established by the Divine Author of Christianity, and cannot, therefore, conflict with any of its doctrines or requirements. The legitimate tendency of all scientific investigations, is to lead the mind up to the Great First Cause, and to predispose it to bow to His mandates, whenever and howsoever they may be communicated. But that these studies are often perverted from their appropriate end, no one can deny. And this has perhaps happened as frequently in medicine as in any other science. Various reasons have been assigned for this fact.

1. There is the absorbing nature of the demands the profession makes upon the time and attention of its votaries, who are thereby deprived (as they suppose) of the opportunity for examining the subject of religion, and indeed rendered averse to it.

2. Successful scientific researches are apt, unless regulated



by religious considerations, to inspire men with inflated views of the sufficiency of human reason on *all* subjects; and thus, from questioning the necessity, they may easily come to deny the fact, of a Divine revelation.

3. The habit of reasoning from induction and analogy which belongs to every scientific physician, may unfit them, in a measure, for examining with impartiality the argument from miracles which constitutes so material a portion of the external evidences of Christianity.\*

4. I say it with regret, but nothing has impressed my own mind more unpleasantly, in the little attention I have given to medical works, than the want of a distinct recognition of the Creator's power and agency, on occasions when it would not only be natural to the writer to refer to the Deity, but even when the idea was evidently in his own mind, and could not be suppressed without an effort. "The student of medicine," says an excellent writer, "is often called on to bring his gift and deposit it, like the Athenian, on the altar of an 'unknown god.' A cloudy image, entitled 'nature,' is raised in the mind, to which high attributes of power, wisdom and goodness are often ascribed."† He might have added that the tendency of this habit, if persisted in, must be, in minds peculiarly constituted, to create a vague impression which may ultimately grow into a conviction, that this obscure divinity, "nature," is really the only Deity.

5. Physicians are conversant with those scenes of suffering which, above any others, appeal to our sympathies. These scenes do not necessarily blunt their humane feelings, but they can hardly fail of producing a decisive effect, for good or evil, upon their moral sensibilities. It may be worthy of consideration, whether familiarity with such spectacles has not sometimes assisted in fortifying them against the requisitions of Christianity, and even hastening them into infidelity.

6. The exposure of young men, while in training for the profession, to the temptations of large cities, and the consequent formation of dissolute habits, has, no doubt, been a hot-bed of skepticism.

7. The neglect of divine worship on the Sabbath, and of the

\* See Gisborne on Men, vol. ii, 194.

† "Is Medical Science Favorable to Skepticism?" An Essay, by James W. Dale, M. D.

other means of grace, has, it is to be feared, contributed in no small degree to foster infidelity among physicians. I shall enter into no argument on this point. It will probably be conceded, on all hands, that physicians frequently absent themselves from the sanctuary when no call of necessity or mercy pleads for it; that the occasional neglect of the house of God easily glides into a habit; and that this habit tends, by a natural process, to impair all suitable sense of religion, and to generate infidelity.

Such are some of the grounds on which the prevalence of skepticism among medical men has been explained. They show that however guiltless the science itself may be of the infidel tendency ascribed to it, there is real danger in the path of the physician. They certainly furnish a strong argument in favor of an early and persevering attention to the claims of religion, on the part of the profession. This would not only secure them from the ruinous illusions of infidelity, but furnish a triumphant vindication of their art from the stigma which has been unjustly affixed to it.

In estimating the value of true religion to medical men, we must take into account *its salutary influence upon the temper*. I design no reflection upon the profession by this remark; it is poets, not physicians, who, according to the proverb, constitute the "genus irritabile." The profession, as such, is probably not more infested with evil tempers than the other learned professions; and, if the fact were otherwise, it could excite no surprise; for physicians are certainly subjected to very great trials of temper. These proceed mainly from two sources—their patients and their professional brethren. The whims and caprices of the sick, and their officious relatives and neighbors, are brought to bear upon the physician in full force. He is blamed for his tardiness in responding to their call, when, perhaps, he stopped to prescribe for a patient whose life was in imminent peril. He comes too early or too late—too often, or not often enough; he gives the wrong medicines, or in wrong doses; he orders phlebotomy where calomel would answer, and administers a bolus where he should apply a cataplasm; his treatment differs from that of his predecessor—or, perhaps, accords with it—and in either case it is erroneous; his patient recovers, but he owes his recovery less to his skill than to a good constitution—or he dies, and then, by common consent, he has put him

in his grave. I am not denying that physicians may, and often do err in all these ways, nor that complaints like these may, in many cases, be too well founded; but it is no less true that people are apt, in dealing with them, to be unreasonable, capricious, unfeeling and reckless of their professional reputation. It is trials of this sort to which I am alluding in this connection.

And yet even these are not always their worst trials. David, in speaking of the treachery of his confidential counsellor, Ahithophel, says—"For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then could I have borne it; neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: but it was thou, a man, mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance." (Ps. 55: 12, 13.) So it is with physicians often. Their "worst foes are those of their own household." They have to encounter not merely an open and generous rivalry; not merely the assaults of avowed and, perhaps, malignant hostility; the former of which no liberal mind would deprecate, while the latter usually neutralizes itself, but the arts of a secret envy, which no sagacity can foil and no merit withstand. What these arts are it is not my place to specify. The fact is all that is essential to my argument. And I adduce the fact that physicians are exposed to peculiar *trials of temper*, as well from the unprofessional conduct of their brethren, as from the inconsiderateness, caprice and resentment of their patients, as a proof of the great importance of personal religion to them. Religion, it is true, cannot secure them an exemption from these vexations; although, by its various influences upon the character and reputation, it may contribute to lessen their number. But it can greatly enlarge their capacity of endurance, and fit them to bear what, without its aid, would be intolerable. The temper fostered by religion—the meek, patient, forgiving, benevolent, ingenuous temper everywhere inculcated in the Bible, not simply as a graceful appendage of Christianity, but as one of its essential elements—is the best safeguard a physician can have against the wrongs we have been contemplating, and his best antidote to them when they *are* inflicted. A man with this temper will be uniformly just to his brethren and his patients. He will be slow to give, and equally slow to take, offence. He will be free from envy and suspicion, and will put the best construction upon all doubtful passages. He will be as jealous of his professional

as of his popular reputation; and scorn to extend his practice by conniving at quackery, or catering to the empirical vagaries of his patients. Instead of attempting to supplant his competitors by artifice or fraud, by malign insinuations, or sneers at their mistakes, he will treat them, on all occasions, with the respect that is due to them, and rely for success not so much upon subverting their reputation, as upon his own assiduity and skill. Where he has perpetrated a wrong, he will not be ashamed, on discovering it, to acknowledge the offence, and make every reparation in his power.\* He will be careful to observe the established etiquette of the order; and avoid infringing that code of ethics which, though unwritten, is well understood, and the inflexible maintenance of which, even in its apparently trivial provisions, is of vital importance to the dignity and success of the profession. All this, and much more than this, a physician under the predominant influence of true piety will do, not because his interest will be promoted by it, nor simply because it is his duty to do it, but also because it is the very course to which his feelings prompt him, and which he finds his happiness in pursuing. That a physician of this character will ordinarily escape many of the annoyances and grievances which others encounter, and that when they do occur he will be better prepared to endure them, is too evident to stand in need of argument. I do not hesitate, therefore, to adduce *the salutary influence of religion upon the temper*, as a reason why medical men should give their early attention to it.

A still weightier motive may be found in the fact, that religion *imparts the spirit and fosters the habit of prayer*; and no class of men stand in more need of Divine illumination than physicians.

\* There is a striking illustration of this recorded in the life of the celebrated Dr. Cheyne. He describes his "Fluxionum Methodus Inversa," which had procured his election to the Royal Society, in 1705, as having been brought forth in ambition and bred up in vanity. "My defence of that work," he adds, "against the learned and acute Mr. Abraham De Moivre, being written in a spirit of levity and resentment, I most sincerely retract, and wish undone, so far as it is personal or peevish, and ask him and the world pardon for it; as I do for the defence of Dr. Pitcairn's Dissertations and the New Theory of Fevers, against the late learned and ingenious Dr. Oliphant. I heartily condemn and detest all personal reflections, all malitious and unmannerly terms, and all false and unjust representations, as unbecoming gentlemen, scholars, and Christians; and disprove and undo both performances, as far as in me lies, in every thing that does not strictly and barely relate to the argument."

The Supreme Being challenges the power of healing as one of his prerogatives: "I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal." (Deut. xxxii. 39.) "Bless the Lord, O my soul, who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases." It were well for physicians to bear this in mind—to remember that without God's blessing they may be baffled by the simplest diseases; with it, they may cope with the most intricate and malignant. It derogates nothing from the dignity and utility of the science, to assert its dependence upon Him in whom all creatures "live, and move, and have their being." Who should invoke the Divine guidance, if not they to whose guardianship the lives and health of communities are entrusted? How delicate, how arduous, how responsible, their duties! Consider the endless idiosyncrasies of the human constitution—the variety and subtlety of diseases—the haste with which, in many instances, it is necessary to determine upon the treatment—and the consequent liability even of the most accomplished practitioners, from these and other causes, to fall into fatal mistakes. The life of a fellow-being, and the earthly happiness of a family, may be suspended upon their decision of a question so nicely balanced that they shrink from deciding it either way. The load of anxiety they sometimes feel in these circumstances must well nigh crush them to the earth. The image of their patient follows them like their shadow; it puts them upon a re-examination of the authorities in their libraries; it throws a gloom over their fire-side enjoyments; it sits beside their couch at night; it makes them feel, for the time, that all the emoluments and honors of the profession are no equivalent for its trials. Now what saith the Scripture? "If any man lack wisdom, LET HIM ASK OF GOD, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." A physician, in the exigency supposed, will hail the least glimmer of light from any earthly source; shall he shut his mind to the light that comes from Heaven? Is not the wisdom from above as good as the wisdom of this world? Or does he who drinks with such eagerness from the turbid streams, compromise his dignity by going to the fountain?—It is gratifying to know that there are so many in the profession in the present day who fully appreciate this duty. I shall cite only a single example, that of a man whose celebrity as a physician, a scholar, and a Christian, entitles his opinions to the highest respect—I mean,



the late Dr. John Mason Good. His biographer, Dr. Olinthus Gregory,—a man of kindred spirit, and equally distinguished in the literary world,—makes this statement respecting him: “The sympathy he manifested for his patients was of the highest order. When he prescribed, he was in the habit of praying for Divine direction; on administering a medicine himself, he was often known to utter a short, ejaculatory prayer; and in cases where a fatal issue was inevitable, he most scrupulously avoided the cruel delusion too common on such occasions, but with the utmost delicacy and feeling announced his apprehensions.” Among his papers there was found, under date of July 27th, 1823, a Form of Prayer, ‘which,’ he says, ‘I purpose to use, among others, every morning, so long as it may please God that I shall continue in the exercise of my profession, and which is here copied out, not so much to assist my own memory, as to give a hint to many who may perhaps feel thankful for it when I am removed to a state where personal vanity can have no access, and the opinion of the world can be no longer of any importance. I should wish it to close the subsequent editions of my Study of Medicine.’ This prayer is as follows:

“O thou great bestower of health, strength, and comfort! grant thy blessing upon the professional duties in which this day I may engage. Give me judgment to discern disease, and skill to treat it; and crown with thy favor the means that may be devised for recovery: for, with thine assistance, the humblest instrument may succeed, as, without it, the ablest must prove unavailing.

“Save me from all sordid motives; and endow me with a spirit of pity and liberality towards the poor, and of tenderness and sympathy towards all; that I may enter into the various feelings by which they are respectively tried; may weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice.

“And sanctify thou their souls, as well as heal their bodies. Let faith and patience, and every Christian virtue they are called upon to exercise, have their perfect work: So that, in the gracious dealings of thy Spirit and of thy Providence, they may find in the end, whatever that end may be, that it has been good for them to have been afflicted.

“Grant this, O Heavenly Father, for the love of that adora-



ble Redeemer, who while on earth went about doing good, and now ever liveth to make intercession for us in heaven. Amen."\*

Happy would it be for themselves and for society, if all physicians were in the habit of maintaining this daily and intimate communion with Heaven.

I have repeatedly hinted at the value of religion to a physician, *as greatly enhancing his means of usefulness*; but this point is too important to be passed over in an incidental way. My remarks upon it, however, must necessarily be brief.

The *social position* of the medical profession presents us with one aspect of this subject. In this view the elements of power are largely accumulated in the hands of physicians. They have, as a class, numbers, education, popular respect and confidence, and maintain that kind of intercourse with society which affords the best opportunities for acquiring and exerting a potent influence for good or evil. While this observation holds true as to large cities, it is still more applicable to those who reside in small towns and villages; and it is among these that the great body of the profession are scattered. The influence of a physician in a situation of this sort, is not simply that of one respectable and intelligent citizen. It is the influence, frequently, of the *leading man* in the place as to literature and science, and of one who enjoys the confidence and affection of the community beyond any other individual in it, unless it may be the clergyman, and he is by no means an exception in all cases. It is highly honorable to the profession, that they are usually disposed to employ their great influence on the side of virtue and the general good. No class of citizens are more prompt, generous, or efficient in abating social evils, establishing public charities, fostering schools, and promoting judicious schemes for the substantial improvement of society. Instances of an opposite kind sometimes occur, it is true. There are not wanting examples of physicians who have combined with the genius of Paracelsus, his drunkenness and debauchery, and whose capabilities of mischief have furnished an apt illustration of the sentiment, publicly uttered some sixteen years ago, in the hearing of the preacher, by a distinguished professor of chemistry and geology, at the eastward, that, while "no man, except a clergyman, can do so much

\* Good's Life, pp. 273, 4.

good as a physician, no man whatever can do as much harm." Instances of this kind, however, are excrescences upon the profession,—its wens and carbuncles,—which are not to be taken into the account in forming a general estimate of its worth. But while the high character of the profession for humanity, public spirit, liberality, and other noble attributes, is cordially conceded, it will not be denied that true piety would establish all these virtues upon a firmer basis, and impart others of a still more benign and elevated character. This is its peculiar and godlike prerogative—to enhance whatever is honorable and praiseworthy, and to supply endowments which neither nature nor education can confer. One of the biographers of the late Dr. Ramsay says of him:—"The great concerns to which he constantly directed his reflections were, the improvement of the moral, social, intellectual, and physical state of his country. To disseminate the doctrines of the Bible, to promote public schools and colleges, and to carry commerce to every man's door by means of artificial roads and canals, and the channels which nature formed, were objects that lay near his heart. . . . For forty years the press teemed with the productions of his pen, designed exclusively to elevate the spirit, taste, and virtues of his fellow-citizens, and to improve, beautify, and felicitate their common country."\* I shall not attempt to show how far the character of this accomplished historian and physician was moulded by religion, and how far by other agencies. It may be safely left to your candor to decide whether religion did not impart an additional lustre to his character, and furnish a powerful incentive to his patriotic and self-sacrificing exertions for the good of his country. So it will usually be. The man who loves to "disseminate the doctrines of the Bible," will not be backward in "promoting public schools and colleges, carrying commerce to every man's door," and assisting in every suitable plan designed to "elevate the spirit, taste, and virtues of his fellow-citizens." And it is on this ground precisely, to wit, that religion is adapted to enlarge to such a degree *their means of usefulness as citizens*, that I am now urging its claims upon the medical profession.

But we may contemplate the physician's opportunities of doing good, in another and much more important aspect.

\* Rees' Cyclopaedia.

There is a field of usefulness peculiarly his own—a field always “white to the harvest,” and inviting him to thrust in his sickle and reap; I refer, of course, to *the chamber of sickness*. When I speak of this as his field, I have no wish to transfer to the physician the duties and responsibilities of the pastor: but religion binds us to do good to all men, as we have opportunity; and, as Baxter has remarked, what belongs to the pastor *ex officio*, belongs to the physician *ex charitate*. He has access to individuals whom no clergyman can reach; he can sometimes prepare the way for the introduction of a clergyman where he would otherwise be excluded; he can choose his opportunities for bringing forward the subject of religion, and select the most suitable mode and form for presenting it; the same counsels uttered by him, would be more likely to produce a good impression than if they came from the lips of a clergyman, because, in the latter case, they might be heard as the promptings of professional duty, while in the other, not only would they be ascribed to a generous and disinterested kindness, but they would derive additional weight from the presumption, on the part of the patient, that they proceeded from one who understood his physical condition. It is also to be considered that the relation in which a physician stands to his patient invites his confidence and awakens his gratitude. He “enters into the privacy of families, and penetrates even to the most retired chamber; he beholds the human character, disrobed, by the rude hands of mental and corporeal suffering, of all the coloring and drapery thrown around it by the forms of society, and thus becomes the depositary of facts which involve the happiness of individuals, and of society.”\* The feeling of dependence, which reveals itself in the lighting up of the invalid’s countenance when he enters the room, and the sense of comparative security he enjoys while he is sitting by his bed-side, shows that his physician has an ascendancy over him which no other person can have—that his imagination (to borrow the expressive language of a learned and venerable professor in one of our medical schools) has “conferred on him the attributes of a *tutelary divinity*.”† Would it be any perversion of the power thus placed in his hands, by a

\* Dr. Hodge’s Introductory Lecture, 1835.

† Dr. Chapman’s Introductory Lecture, 1838.

wise Providence, to employ it for the spiritual good of his patient? Would it compromise his professional character, while ministering to the body, to minister to the soul, too?—I am aware of the prejudice which is entertained by some respectable physicians, on the subject of pressing the claims of religion upon the sick. An indiscreet zeal may unquestionably do great harm in this way. A physician who should obtrude the subject of religion on all occasions, and upon all sorts of patients, would be likely to do more evil than good. But it is yet to be proved that the sick would receive any injury from having this subject presented to them by their medical attendants, in a judicious way. The form and manner in which it should be done, it is not my province to point out; different cases would require different treatment. In general, a hint or suggestion, kindly and incidentally thrown out, would probably be more useful than a formal argument or appeal. Such suggestions would not only, in most cases, be well received, but are secretly desired. There can be no doubt that the sick sometimes suffer intensely from *suppressed anxiety* in relation to their spiritual state. Their physicians forbid the mention of religion to them lest it may exacerbate their disease, when this is the very thing that is needed to allay an excitement which is fast precipitating their malady to a fatal issue. A few words of spiritual counsel, kindly offered, have, in some instances of this sort, done much to tranquilize the system, where the best pharmaceutical agents have failed. Besides, the responsibility of physicians is not restricted to their merely technical duties. No man is at liberty to slight a favorable opportunity of doing good to the soul of a fellow creature; and the sin of this neglect becomes more aggravated where, in the ordering of events by Divine Providence, he is the only one who *has* the opportunity of offering him a word of religious counsel. Am I going too far when I hazard the conjecture that this responsibility is sometimes *felt* by physicians, who are not pious men, in an intense degree? Are there not occasions, in the experience of such physicians, when all the sensibilities of their nature are stirred into action by the spectacle of a fellow-mortal just going, as they believe, *unprepared* into eternity—and when the consciousness that they have not even attempted to direct his eyes to “the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world,” is painful beyond expression? If this be the case, physicians

would consult as well their own peace of mind as the happiness of their patients, by cordially embracing the doctrines of Christianity, and making its precepts their rule of life.—On the whole, it must be too apparent to require further argument, that personal religion is adapted greatly to enlarge a physician's capabilities of usefulness. Its spirit blends with all his scientific attainments, and fosters those principles and habits which are most conducive to professional success; while it qualifies and disposes him to soothe the dying, and comfort the bereaved with the consolations of the Gospel. No man need desire a better eulogy than was once pronounced on a physician of this character—the celebrated Dr. Hey, of Leeds.

“Those means which med'cine and the Gospel give,  
To soul and body, Hey could well apply;  
Useful that skill which made the dying live,  
More useful that which taught him how to die.”

Such physicians cannot go unrewarded. The blessing of “many who were ready to perish” will be upon them, and they will hereafter share in the honor and felicity of those who, having “turned many to righteousness, shall shine as the stars forever and ever.”

I feel that I have done little more than glance at my subject, but I will not trespass upon your patience by pursuing it further. I should be unfaithful, however, to the trust I have ventured to assume this evening, were I to close this discourse without again adverting to that view of the subject which, after all, is of paramount importance. “Nothing,” says the great Pascal,\* “is so important to any man as his own condition; nothing so formidable as eternity. They, therefore, who are indifferent to the loss of their being, and to the risk of endless misery, are in an unnatural state. They act quite differently from this in all other matters: they fear the smallest inconveniences; they anticipate them; they feel them when they arrive; and he who passes days and nights in indignation and despair, at the loss of an employment, or for some fancied blemish on his honor, is the very same man who knows that he must lose all by death, and yet continues satisfied, fearless, and unmoved. Such an insensibility to things of the most tremendous consequences, in a heart so keenly alive to the merest tri-

\* Thoughts on Religion, Ch. vi.



fles, is an astonishing prodigy, an incomprehensible enchantment, a supernatural infatuation."

I am not about to arraign the medical profession as peculiarly fruitful of the moral "prodigies" so graphically delineated in this sketch; but medical men are equally liable with others to become absorbed in merely temporal objects and interests, to the utter and fatal neglect of the *eternal* consequences involved in our present probation. Standing as many of you do upon the threshold of your noble profession, and panting for the acquisition of its now distant honors, you will need frequently to be reminded that

"It is not all of life, to *live*,  
Nor all of death, to *die*."

It is recorded of Philip, king of Macedon, that when he was at the acme of his regal pomp and power, he required a servant to appear before him every morning, and utter the admonition, "Remember, Philip, thou art mortal!" Such a monitor we all need. Immersed in the cares or frivolities of life, we suffer as well its useful and necessary, as its trifling employments, to drive from our minds the sublime and awful realities of eternity. The sentiment that rules us is,—“Whatever pertains to this world *must* have our attention; what pertains to the next, may be safely postponed to an uncertain future.” The purpose of reformation and repentance, cleaves to men through life. It is not that they do not intend to repent, but that they do not repent. Their pathway, from the cradle to the tomb, is strewn with broken vows and promises.

"At *thirty*, man suspects himself a fool;  
Knows it at *forty*, and reforms his plan:  
At *fifty* chides his infamous delay—  
Pushes his prudent purpose to resolve;  
In all the magnanimity of thought,  
Resolves, and re-resolves; *then, dies the same!*"

Such is the history of thousands in every walk of life. And there are no examples of it more touching than those furnished by your profession. To a mind imbued with spiritual sensibilities, there is, perhaps, no character in society who is regarded with a deeper and more tender sympathy, than the physician who is so engrossed with the benevolent offices of his profession, that he allows year after year to glide away without reserving time to himself to look after the concerns of his own soul. It is the instinct of every generous nature to look up to such a



man with gratitude and reverence: and in proportion to the love and veneration we feel for him, are we pained by the apprehension that he may possibly defer the great work of life until it is forever too late. A similar contingency is involved in every man's case, who enters upon his professional life without piety. It is the dictate as well of sound reason as of revelation, that we "seek *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness." This is the only wise or safe course—the only course which befits our circumstances, or accords with our relations to the Author of our being.

Let the question, then, propounded by our Saviour, be written not merely upon your text-books but upon your hearts:— "*What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*" The laurels which reward an honorable professional career, are among the most laudable objects of human ambition. But they are a poor equivalent for the loss of the soul. The soul need not—ought not to be lost. "Life and immortality have been brought to light in the Gospel." It is true, there are ten thousand avenues which lead down to hell, and only one strait and narrow path that conducts to heaven. But this is all we require. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Men have their schemes of salvation. *Faith in Christ* is God's way. This, and this alone, meets our case. Others may, in a certain sense do to live by; this will do to live and die by. Every physician present might be called upon to testify to the sustaining and triumphant power of the Christian's faith in a dying hour. Let me give you, in concluding this discourse, the testimony of one whose name and fame must be familiar to you all, and whose early death science had so much reason to deplore—I refer to the late Dr. Godman. You will hear him as an impartial witness, and his words will carry a weight with them which no testimony of mine could have.

Dr. Godman was, for many years, a confirmed infidel. After his conversion, he had occasion to write to a professional brother of high reputation, who "had no confidence but that of the skeptic—no hope but that of ceasing to be." He was sinking into the grave, the victim of a lingering and incurable disorder, and had long been "arming himself to meet the king of terrors with composure, that he might die *like a philosopher*, with 'manly firmness.'" He was in this state when Dr. Godman's

letter reached him, and, through the blessing of God, it put him upon a serious inquiry into the truth of Christianity, which resulted in his dying, not like a philosopher, but like a Christian. The letter, which is dated "Germantown, December 25, 1828," is too long to be copied entire. I shall quote some portions of it.

"In relation to dying, my dear friend, you talk like a sick man, and just as I used to do when very despondent. \* \* \* Nature certainly has a strong abhorrence to this cessation of corporeal action, and all animals have a dread of death who are conscious of its approach. A part of our dread of death is purely physical, and is avoidable only by a philosophical conviction of its necessity; but the greater part of our dread, and the terrors with which the avenues to the grave are surrounded, are from another and a more potent source. 'Tis conscience that makes cowards of us all,' and forces us by our terrors to confess that we dread something beyond physical dissolution—and that we are terrified, not at merely ceasing to breathe, but that we have not lived as we ought to have done—have not effected the good that was within the compass of our abilities, and neglected to exercise the talents we possessed to the greatest advantage. The only remedy for this fear of death is to be sought by approaching the Author of all things in the way prescribed by himself, and not according to our own foolish imaginations.

"I was once an infidel, as I told you in the West Indies; I became a Christian from conviction, produced by the candid inquiry recommended to you. I know of no other way in which death can be stripped of its terrors; certainly none better can be wished. Philosophy is a fool, and pride a madman. Many persons die with what is called *manly firmness*—that is, having acted a part all their lives according to their prideful creed, they must die *game*. They put on as smooth a face as they can, to impose on the spectators, and die *firmly*. But this is all deception; the true state of their minds at the very time, nine times out of ten, is worse than the most horrible imaginings even of hell itself. Some who have led lives adapted to sear their consciences and petrify all the moral sensibilities, die with a kind of indifference similar to that with which a hardened convict submits to a new infliction of disgraceful punishment; but the man who dies as a man ought to die, is the humble-

mind, believing Christian ; one who has tasted all the blessings of creation—who has had an enlightened view of the wisdom and glory of his Creator—who has felt the vanity of mere worldly pursuits and motives, and been permitted to know the mercies of a blessed Redeemer as he approaches the narrow house appointed for all the living. Physical death may cause his senses to shrink and fail at the trial, but his mind, sustained by the Rock of ages, is serene and unwavering ; he relies not on his own righteousness, for that would be vain ; but the arms of mercy are beneath him, the ministering spirits of the Omnipotent are around him ; he does not die *manfully*, but he rests in Jesus ; he blesses his friends—he casts his hope on One all-powerful to sustain and mighty to save, then sleeps in peace. He is dead—but liveth ; for He, who is the resurrection and the life, has declared, ‘Whoso believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live ; and whoso liveth and believeth in me shall never die.’ ”

Eighteen months after penning this eloquent letter, the author of it followed his friend into eternity. One who was with him in the closing scene, says, “ ‘ Lord Jesus, receive my spirit ! ’ were the last words he uttered ; and his countenance appeared as if he had a foretaste of Heaven, even before his spirit left this world.”

Such, my friends, is the Christianity I have urged upon your attention in this discourse. May you all experience its power, share in its consolations, and live by its precepts ; and at length, in God’s appointed time, may you “ die the death of the righteous, and your last end be like his ! ”