

DOCTORING THE HEART OF THE ROBOT*

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Tonight, rightly or wrongly, I have chosen a philosophical subject. I am no philosopher, but it is part of my thesis that a man should have many interests; so I am trying philosophy.

In the face of the challenge of modern civilization, when techniques and mechanical developments and machines seem to outstrip our ability to live with them, and when we are on the very edge of man's qualitative leap to the stars—I ask myself the age-old questions: What makes a good doctor? What makes a good man?

Any day now I might open my newspaper and read: 'Man lands on the moon' or 'Man lands on Mars'. Wherever Man goes, there one will needs find his doctor, too. Can we carry our medicine into space? Would we be good doctors out there in space, without our aids to diagnosis and treatment? But what is good doctoring? Are we better doctors because of the years of contact with our patients and their families? Or is the ultimate criterion of good doctoring the passing of that final examination in medicine?

One of our established physician-teachers once said: 'I would much rather fall into the hands of a newly-qualified doctor; he is much better equipped than the older man'. On the other hand, Benjamin Franklin warned us: 'Beware of the young doctor and the old barber'.

Have we not a responsibility beyond that of merely doctoring our patients back to health with our maximum skill? Should we not exert our influence to return our patients to their own way of life with the minimum of disturbance, and with discretion and humanity allow them to make the most of their lives? Often patients have what seem to us to be peculiar ideas. For instance, I met an important man recently who strongly believes that a stocking, filled with chopped onions and wound round the neck, will cure a sore throat!

Should we not know what gives each patient confidence and courage to live—what makes life important to him? Should we not know what has done this for Man since the beginning

of history? As a boy, I once had the temerity to ask a bishop: 'If there is a law of mass and energy, sir, which says they cannot be lost or destroyed, can there be a beginning and an end?' Here we have the challenge. In the immensity of eternity, in our nothingness, what makes our doctoring, and the return of our patients to life and health, a passion and a vocation?

Today we are painfully hobbling on the worn-out stick of our established creeds, on the very fringe of their elimination, while we are prepared to allow our culture and personalities to be parcelled up and speeded off into space. Also, there is the conflict between outstanding achievement and the apparently uninspired normality of individuals. In our anti-like world, depth conflicts with breadth. The broad thinker is classified as unscientific, the detailed recorder empirical.

Great achievement, however, does not mean a one-track mind. Think of Churchill, Leonardo, David, Imhotep, and Schweitzer, and think of the many doctors who have made great contributions to the world outside the sphere of medicine. Countless names spring to mind—among them Galen, Vesalius and Osler, and, in this country, Dr. James Barry and, of course, Jan van Riebeeck, the company surgeon who was destined to make his mark on history.

Our profession, perhaps more than any other, is knit from birth to death with all aspects of life—the high and the low; and this has been so throughout the history of civilized Man. Can we, as doctors, in our diffidence of spirit, venture into fields beyond the ken of the greatest minds?

JOURNEY THROUGH TIME AND SPACE

Suppose we could make a journey in a space-time machine—a journey that might help us find answers to our many questions. We could soar through outer space past millions and millions of stars in the Milky Way, and farther afield through other galaxies uncountable by Man. Is it no more than conceit that we can think that there are no other planets with life on them just like ours? Suppose we could land on a planet where conditions were like, say, those of ancient

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Babylon. If I had to perform an operation there, and failed, would they cut my fingers off? Would the inhabitants accept our advances without the rest of the exhortations and functions supplied by the priests? Would we need to carry lizard's blood, swine's ears and teeth, tortoise's brains? Would we carry masks and rattles? Would our prayers be enough? Who can give us the answers?

But with our space-time machine let us now take a journey in time back to ancient China, that land which has produced such philosophers as Lin Yutang, Confucius, and Lao-tze. The Chinese, above all, seem to be the race who gave most thought to the problem of organizing their masses into a way of life. If we landed in our space-time machine in the China of about 600 B.C., what would we find? Trying to follow in the footsteps of the master, Lao-tze, we would eschew thought, which is a superficial affair. It is good only for argument. In this philosophy, the intellectual man is a danger to the state, because he thinks of rules and regulations and laws. He wishes to construct society like geometry, and does not realize that such regulations destroy the freedom and vigour of the parts.

Still in China, 50 years later, we would find Confucius. He tried to educate the family. Sincerity and knowledge was his aim. What the 'higher man' of Confucius seeks is in himself, what the 'lower man' seeks is in others. The 'higher man' is distressed by his want of ability, not by his lack of fame.

In medicine, China had produced great physicians long before Hippocrates. As far back as 1122 B.C., under the Chou dynasty, the state held yearly examinations for admission to medical practice, and fixed the salaries of the successful applicants according to their showing in the tests.

If we continue on our space-time journey, we might land in Egypt as it was in about 3150 B.C. We could meet Imhotep, the renowned physician and grand vizier of Egypt. He would be designing the first pyramid of Cheops and the lovely lotus columns and limestone-panelled walls of King Zoser's temple at Sakkhara. We would come to see how this man, through his personality and greatness, could have been deified later as Aesculapius, the father of medicine of the Greeks, and how the ethical code existing in Egypt could have been the basis of the Hippocratic Oath.

Here in Egypt we could find papyri dealing with the medicine of those times. The Edwin Smith papyrus of 1600 B.C. describes, systematically, 48 cases of clinical surgery. The treatment of dislocated jaw is, for instance, beautifully described in this papyrus. As we wander through Egypt we could learn from the words of Ptahhotep, written in 2280 B.C.: 'Be not proud because thou art learned, but discourse with the ignorant man as with the sage. Beware of making enmity by thy words. Overstep not the truth, neither repeat that which any man, be he prince or peasant, saith in opening the heart'.

The Egyptians worshipped the source of life, the sun, and almost every form of life. The animals were gods, and these gods were so numerous that they filled the Egyptian pantheon like a menagerie. How little different are our 'gods' of today—our gods of golf, of fishing, of photography, of gardening, and of bowls. What doctor, like the Egyptian physician, would not wish to use these gods to establish a contented mind receptive to his doctoring!

What would we think of Ikhnaton, the husband of lovely Nefrotete, who, in 1830 B.C., ruined the economy of the nation by closing the temples and declaring all creeds but his own to be illegal? Ikhnaton, through love, Cortez, through war, destroyed great nations. One cannot thrust philosophy or doctoring by force on anyone. People must want good doctors. Doctors must want good medicine.

We can move on in our space-time machine to India, whose age-long civilization was born when we were savages. Indian medicine has long ranked high, and the oath of the early Hindu physicians, of whom Sushruta of the fifth century B.C. was one of the greatest, stated: 'Not for self, not for fulfilment of any earthly desire for gain, but solely for the good of suffering humanity should you treat your patient, and so excel all'.

China, Egypt, and India can look back through thousands of years of civilized life, life of great religions and philosophies. Surely we, as doctors, can learn a way of life from them and,

by sifting the principles they held, arrive at a solution to our modern problems.

We can also learn much from the animal kingdom. We know that animals cannot exist without the primitive courage to fight for life itself. We know that the primitive humility of jungle law, of fear in the face of danger, is essential to life. We know also that without the primitive discipline of attentiveness and preparedness, life would soon be extinguished in the jungle. What we do not seem to know is that this law applies as stringently to us. Courage is demanded in different ways but is essential; the courage to stand against a flood of prejudice, the courage to fight (often alone) in a good cause, the courage to uphold tradition, the courage to lose and rise again.

CONCLUSION

What keeps us humble is the nature of our work and business. Marriage and family, too, play a part. Courtesy, modesty, and selflessness are all much-needed qualities in this critical world. Disciplines are inherent in the very structure of our lives; disciplines of family, parties, groups, rules and regulations, behaviour and occupation and, inevitably, our old enemy the clock. Courage, humility, and discipline are a universal requirement for life. Power, position, and money contain their own seeds of destruction. There is a mistaken idea prevalent today that Man has an instinct to overcome his fellow, to defeat him, to clamour for success. I am convinced that this is not so. The motto of the Olympic Games says: 'The important thing is not to win, but to compete'; likewise the essential thing in life is not to conquer but to learn how to fight in order to achieve victory over one's own problems in one's own way.

I believe also that in many ways we can create conditions which affect our character and our way of life. Confucius knew this. He said: 'Music regulates the heart and mind; it gives a natural, correct and gentle sincerity of the heart, it improves manners and customs'. This does not mean, for instance, that rock-'n'-roll music is wrong; it has its place and its time, and it has a beat and a rhythm which is incomparable. But the man who can appreciate great music is a man whose character is affected for the better. Confucius also said: 'Good manners too must be our care; when manners decay the nation decays with it'. And again: 'Add to the sage the graciousness of a gentleman'.

The Chinese, by creating culture, became the profoundest of men. They spoke, not of saints, but of sages, not of goodness, but of wisdom. The ideal was not the pious devotee but the mature and quiet mind. We must create conditions today where our doctors can have the time and the economic reward to give complete doctoring to the patient. We live in a unique era. We doctors are in a special position because of our long history of association with Man's health and, therefore, Man's happiness. I believe that anyone who contributes to the progress of civilization, in the way of service and healing and in the promotion of optimism and stability, or anyone who in any way works to improve living conditions or even knowledge, is adding to our way of life.

The world today is improvement-conscious. We have open minds, and we speak freely. We fight authority when we do not agree with it. We expect dangers and difficulties, criticism and opposition. We are our own tools, we plan our own lives, we are what we do.

Even as we grow older and begin to think we are no longer the useful doctors we were in former years, we will find that we are wrong. As Longfellow wrote:

It is too late! Ah, nothing is too late
Till the tired heart shall cease to palpitate.
Cato learned Greek at eighty; Sophocles
Wrote his grand Oedipus, and Simonides
Bore off the prize of verse from his compeers,
When each had numbered more than fourscore years;
Chaucer, at Woodstock with the nightingales,
At sixty wrote the Canterbury Tales;
Goethe at Weimar, toiling to the last,

Completed Faust when eighty years were past . . .
And as the evening twilight fades away
The sky is filled with stars, invisible by day.'

The doctor is the key link in all human activities. His

duties and his scope have no bounds. He can be the spearhead in the civilizing urge of today. In this space-age, when personality and humanity can so easily be swamped, let the doctor bring a quality to his contacts which gives meaning to what is still the greatest profession of all.