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Thomas Percival

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Medical Ethics

A physician and medical reformer enthused by the scientific and cultural progress of the Enlightenment as it took hold in Britain, Thomas Percival (1740–1804) wrote on many topics, but he was particularly concerned about public health issues arising from the factory conditions of the Industrial Revolution. Calling for improved standards of care, he believed that the working poor should be treated the same as wealthy private clients. Following a disastrous dispute in 1792 which closed the Manchester Infirmary's Fever Hospital during an epidemic, Percival was asked to draft regulations on professional medical conduct. In 1794 he privately circulated a tract, *Medical Jurisprudence*, which he later revised for this 1803 publication. Based on Hippocratic and Christian principles, Percival's work is considered the first modern formulation of doctor–patient etiquette. His *Essays Medical and Experimental* (revised edition, 1772–3) and the four volumes of his collected works (1807) are also reissued in this series.

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MEDICAL ETHICS;

OR, A CODE OF

Institutes and Precepts,

ADAPTED TO THE

PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

OF

PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS;

I. In Hospital Practice.

II. In private, or general Practice.

III. In relation to Apothecaries.

IV. In Cases which may require
a knowledge of Law.

To which is added

An Appendix;

containing

A DISCOURSE ON HOSPITAL DUTIES;

ALSO

NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

BY

THOMAS PERCIVAL, M. D.

F. R. S. AND A. S. LOND. F. R. S. AND R. M. S. EDINB. &c. &c.

Manchester :

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TO
SIR GEORGE BAKER, BART.
PHYSICIAN TO THEIR MAJESTIES;
FELLOW OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY;
AND
LATE PRESIDENT OF THE COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS;
&c. &c.
THIS CODE OF
PROFESSIONAL ETHICS;
WHICH HE HAS
HONOURED WITH HIS SANCTION,
AND IMPROVED BY HIS COMMUNICATIONS,
IS GRATEFULLY AND RESPECTFULLY
INSCRIBED,
BY HIS
OBLIGED AND AFFECTIONATE FRIEND,
THE AUTHOR.

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TO

E. C. PERCIVAL.

PERMIT me, my dear son, to offer to your acceptance this little Manual of MEDICAL ETHICS. In the composition of it, my thoughts were directed towards your late excellent Brother, with the tenderest impulse of paternal love : And not a single moral rule was framed without a secret view to his designation ; and an anxious wish that it might influence his future conduct.

To you, who possess, in no inferior degree, my esteem and attachment ; who are prosecuting the
the

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the same studies, and with the same object ; my solitudes are naturally transferred. And I am persuaded, these united considerations will powerfully and permanently operate upon your ingenuous mind.

It is the characteristic of a wise man to act on determinate principles ; and of a good man to be assured that they are conformable to rectitude and virtue. The relations in which a physician stands to his patients, to his brethren, and to the public, are complicated, and multifarious ; involving much knowledge of human nature, and extensive moral duties. The study of professional Ethics, therefore, cannot fail to invigorate and enlarge your understanding ; whilst the

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the observance of the duties which they enjoin, will soften your manners, expand your affections, and form you to that propriety and dignity of conduct, which are essential to the character of a GENTLEMAN. The academical advantages you have enjoyed at Cambridge, and those you now possess in Edinburgh, will qualify you, I trust, for an ample and honourable sphere of action. And I devoutly pray, that the blessing of God may attend all your pursuits ; rendering them at once subservient to your own felicity, and the good of your fellow-creatures.

Sensible that I begin to experience the pressure of advancing years, I regard the present publication

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cation as the conclusion, in this way, of my professional labours. I may, therefore, without impropriety, claim the privilege of consecrating them to you, as a paternal legacy. And I feel cordial satisfaction in the occasion, of thus testifying the esteem and tenderness with which, whilst life subsists, I shall remain,

Your affectionate friend,

THOMAS PERCIVAL.

Manchester, February 20, 1803.

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P R E F A C E.



THE first chapter of the following work was composed in the spring of 1792, at the request of the physicians and surgeons of the Manchester Infirmary: And the substance of it constitutes the code of laws, by which the practice of that comprehensive institution is now governed. (*a*) The author was afterwards induced, by an earnest desire to promote the honour and advancement of his profession, to enlarge the plan of his undertaking, and to frame a general system of **MEDICAL ETHICS**; that the official conduct, and mutual intercourse of the faculty, might be regulated by precise and acknowledged principles of urbanity and rectitude. Printed copies of the scheme were, therefore, distributed amongst his numerous correspondents;

(*a*) See Notes and Illustrations, No. I.

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dents; by most of whom it was warmly encouraged; and by many of them was honoured with valuable suggestions for its improvement. (*b*)

Whilst the author was thus extending his views, and carrying on his work with ardour, he lost the strongest incentive to its prosecution, by the death of a beloved son, who had nearly completed the course of his academical education; and whose talents, acquirements, and virtues, promised to render him an ornament to the healing art. This melancholy event was followed, not many years afterwards, by a second family loss equally afflictive; and the design has ever since been wholly suspended. The author now resumes it, animated by the hope that it may prove beneficial to another son, who has lately exchanged the pursuits of general science at Cambridge, for the study of medicine at Edinburgh: He feels at the same time, impressed with the conviction, that the languor

(*b*) See Notes and Illustrations, No. II.

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languor of sorrow becomes culpable, when it obstructs the offices of an active vocation. “ I hold every man,” says Lord Bacon, in the preface to his Elements of the Common Laws of England, “ a debtor to his profession; from the which as men of course do seek to receive countenance and profit, so ought they of duty to endeavour themselves, by way of amends, to be a help and ornament thereunto. This is performed, in some degree, by the honest and liberal practice of a profession; when men shall carry a respect not to descend into any course that is corrupt and unworthy thereof; and preserve themselves free from the abuses wherewith the same profession is noted to be infected; But much more is this performed, if a man be able to visit and strengthen the roots and foundation of the science itself; thereby not only gracing it in reputation and dignity, but also amplifying it in profession and substance,”

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It was the author's original intention to have treated of the POWERS, PRIVILEGES, HONOURS, and EMOLUMENTS of the FACULTY. But he now conceives, that this would lead him into a field of investigation too wide and digressive; and therefore chooses to confine himself to what more strictly belongs to Medical Ethics.

To these institutes he has annexed an Anniversary Discourse, delivered by the late Rev. Thomas Bassnett Percival, LL. B. before the president, and governors of the Infirmary, at Liverpool. As it is an address to the gentlemen of the faculty, the officers, the clergy, and the trustees of the charity, on their respective hospital duties, by one competent to the subject from his early studies, it cannot but be deemed sufficiently appropriate to the present work, exclusively of a father's claim to the privilege of its insertion.

The aphoristic form of this code of Medical Ethics, though adapted to such an undertaking, forbids in a great measure, all digression

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gression; and even precludes the discussion of many interesting points, nearly connected with the subject. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS, therefore, are necessary to the completion of the author's plan: And he trusts the candid reader will grant him the liberty of thus stating his opinions more at large; of rectifying misconceptions, to which the brevity essential to the work may give rise; and of correcting whatever subsequent reflection, or the judicious observations of his friends, may discover to be erroneous.

A considerable portion of these sheets was communicated to the REV. THOMAS GISBORNE, M. A. whilst engaged in the composition of his ENQUIRY into the DUTIES of MEN; a work that reflects the highest honour on the abilities, and philanthropy of the author; and which may be justly regarded as the most complete system, extant, of PRACTICAL ETHICS. The chapter concerning physicians contains a reference to these institutes, expressed

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pressed in the most gratifying terms of friendship: And it treats so largely of the duties of the faculty, as to seem, at first view, to supersede the use of the present manual. But the two publications differ not only in their plan, but in many of their leading objects; and it may be hoped they will rather illustrate than interfere with each other. The same remarks may be applied to the excellent lectures of Dr. Gregory. Even the *STATUTA MORALIA* of the college of physicians, whatever merit or authority they possess, are not sufficiently comprehensive for the existing sphere of medical and surgical duty: And by the few regulations which they establish, they tacitly sanction the recommendation of a fuller and more adequate code of professional offices.

Copies of the former unfinished impression of this work have been transmitted to the libraries of several Infirmaries, in different parts of the kingdom: And the author has reason to hope, that they have contributed to excite attention

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attention to the subject of hospital police. Amongst other pleasing proofs of this truth, he refers with peculiar satisfaction to the late publications of his friends, Sir G. O. Paul, Bart. and Dr. Clark, of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

This work was originally entitled “MEDICAL JURISPRUDENCE”; but some friends having objected to the term JURISPRUDENCE, it has been changed to ETHICS. According to the definition of Justinian, however, Jurisprudence may be understood to include moral injunctions as well as positive ordinances. *Juris præcepta sunt hæc; honestè vivere; alterum non lædere; suum cuique tribuere.* INST. JUSTIN: LIB. I. p. 3.

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-- QUICQUID DIGNUM SAPIENTE BONO-QUE EST.

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