

**ANOTHER LETTER TO A  
YOUNG PHYSICIAN: TO  
WHICH ARE APPENDED SOME  
OTHER MEDICAL PAPERS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649383801

Another letter to a young physician: to which are appended some other medical papers by  
James Jackson

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**JAMES JACKSON**

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SOME OTHER MEDICAL PAPERS.

BY

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BOSTON:  
TICKNOR AND FIELDS.  
1861.

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## PREFACE.

A FEW years since I published a book entitled "Letters to a Young Physician." I did this with some hesitation, fearing that I was too old to venture on any work for the public. Nevertheless, I have now taken courage to prepare one more letter. Probably I should not have done this, if that book had not been very kindly received. Emboldened by that reception, I have more than once had it in my mind to write one or more letters on subjects, which, from time to time, have engaged my attention. But on reflection I have thought it wiser to leave the work to younger and abler men. Within the last year a grave question has been agitated among us, on which one, whose experience has extended



through more than half a century, may be thought qualified to form an opinion.

The question is whether there is any good to be derived from the practice of medicine. Our public in this little Commonwealth of Massachusetts was led to this question by the discourse delivered before our Medical Society at their annual meeting in May, 1860, by Oliver Wendell Holmes, M. D. Whatever is said, or written by that gentleman, will always produce an impression among us, and probably in other parts of the world.

Dr. Holmes did not present the question as I have stated it; but the matter has been treated as if he had done so. At least, some of our brethren have regarded him, as denying the utility of our art, and it was so understood by many persons not of the medical profession. It is because this question has been before the public that I have prepared the following letter. It may be admitted as some apology for

offering my thoughts upon this subject, that a large proportion of the present fathers and leading practitioners of medicine in our Commonwealth were pupils in our principal Medical School, while I was a professor there.

In regard to Dr. Holmes, it has seemed to me that he was misunderstood by those, who suppose that he maintained the negative upon the question above stated. His great object was to inculcate caution in the practice of medicine. He placed in a strong light the evils, which may be occasioned by the action of potent drugs upon a living body. He urged us to put a reliance on nature and to pursue what has been called the *expectant* plan of treating the sick in all cases, where the evidences in favor of some active practice are not clearly shown by experience.

Without discussing precisely the opinions advanced by my learned friend, I have met the question, which has in fact been en-

tertained among us since the delivery of his discourse. And in regard to this question I have not taken a side for, or against, the utility of medicine, in the style of a partizan. The stand I take is somewhat that of a witness, called upon in the character of an expert.

I trust it will be found that I have given my testimony fairly, with a regard to the oath that a witness is supposed to take. So far as it goes, I believe that this testimony will afford some support to the claims of medicine to be a useful art. I do not deny, but affirm that our art is imperfect. Taking the cases of disease as they are brought to us, it is not often that we are justified in employing heroic practice. But much may be done without adopting this practice. When a surgeon is called to a man with a broken leg, he places the limb of his patient, and in some measure his whole body, in a fixed position, using splints and bandages; and then he