

ADDRESS  
TO THE GRADUATES  
OF THE  
KENTUCKY  
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE,  
SESSION 1853-4.

BY

R. J. BRECKINRIDGE,

*Prof. Materia Medica and Clinical Medicine.*

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# ADDRESS.

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GENTLEMEN GRADUATES:—

To each one of you this night is a veritable era. The event, to which, for months past, you have been looking forward, with hope not unmingled with fear, and on which, in years to come, you ought to look back with pleasure or pain, according as you adorn or disgrace the profession you have embraced, has at length occurred. The period of your probation is past: the regular preliminary course of study is accomplished: the requisite proofs of your industry, zeal and proficiency have been exhibited: you have entered the fiery furnace of the green-room, and come forth unscathed, with neither the hairs of your head singed, nor the smell of fire on your garments; and for witness of all this, have received the honors of the Doctorate, and the certificate of your fitness to begin the great work of the Physician. This diploma, this little piece of parchment, on which are a few printed words, a single seal and a dozen autographs, is to you, and to the world, not *merely* a piece of printed, stamped and bescribbled sheepskin. It has, or ought to have, a deep significance. In it, yourselves, your patients, and your teachers have a profound interest. It tells a tale for you of watchfulness and study, of reading and reflection, of multitudinous, and, doubtless, oftentimes wearisome lectures, of aching brow and throbbing brain, of resolution, patience and perseverance. It is a testimony which we bear to the world of your past success, in mastering the elements of this difficult knowledge, and a promise for the future of their successful application. In becoming Physicians, you have assumed a part of the vast debt owed by science and art to humanity: this parchment is your bond for its payment, and we are your endorsers.

From this hour, gentlemen, if you are true to the office you have assumed, you enter upon labors far more arduous than any you have yet undertaken. To obtain a diploma as a reward of merit, is a light matter in comparison with obtain-

ing that genuine position of eminence which so many aspire to, and so few reach. This comes only with a life-long struggle—by starting out with a determination to be daunted by no opposition, turned aside by no obstacle, and baffled by no difficulty—by an earnest, constant devotion to this one thing—a devotion based on a purpose of excelling, quickened by a desire to do good, and vivified by a sincere love for this imperfect but noble science, and this faulty yet beneficent art. And I tell you now, in the outset of your career, if in your hearts there be not this love—deep, true and genuine—for your profession, you had better abandon it this night—at once, and forever. I am persuaded, however, that this feeling glows within you, and, therefore, by authority of the Regents, and in the name of the Faculty of the Kentucky School of Medicine, I welcome you into the ranks of the combatants with disease, invoking for you the aid, not of the fabulous Goddess of Health, but of Him from whom indeed cometh all life, in the warfare you have begun, and bidding you, in every contest, a hearty “God speed.”

The Profession of Medicine is an ancient and honorable one. The former is shown by its records—the latter, by its mission and work. To heal the sick, to preserve the well—what a mission and work is this! In these few words what a volume of human happiness is spoken! Mathematicians may calculate the exact distance of the remotest planet, and the precise dimensions of the vastest body in the universe, but which one of them can estimate the value of life and health? Who can sum up the total of suffering and sorrow as the results of disease and death? No figures can express, nor the grandest human intellect conceive the magnitude of either.

To have a mission, however, is one thing; to accomplish that mission is another thing altogether. To have a work to do, is very far from doing that work; and so, while all admit the beneficence of the designs of our profession, some wholly deny, and not a few seriously doubt their practical fulfilment; while many restrict within a very narrow compass, the powers and capacities for good, of the art of medicine. Much, unquestionably, of every man's success in the pursuit in which he is engaged, depends upon the views with which he engages in it, and the ardor with which he follows it. Nothing can tend so much to weaken energy, as to entertain a low

or degrading opinion of one's business. In the practice of medicine, particularly, he is most likely to be successful, in the fullest sense of the term, who entertains the clearest conception of the dignity, the honor and the usefulness of his work. I do not know, therefore, how better to spend the last moments we are together than in considering this point; nor what more appropriate farewell words I can say to you, than such as will give you just, and at the same time, gratifying views of the powers of medical art.

There are very many difficulties, not to say impossibilities, in the way of a rigid and wholly reliable answer to the the questions, *How far* is Art trustworthy? What is the precise control of medicine over disease? How much of each particular result, or of the great aggregate results of cases for good, is due to the unaided efforts of nature, and how much to the skill of the physician? To these, an exact answer is simply impossible. Their investigation involves necessarily, problems of existence yet unsolved; and their calculation requires data which no human being possesses, and which there is not the smallest likelihood, any human being ever will possess. When all the causes of disease are revealed, all the laws of life made known, all the links of organization thoroughly exposed, as to everybody; when all the effects of all medicines on all constitutions, as modified by all circumstances, are thoroughly appreciated—that is to say, when an infinite number of things impossible to be known, and infinitely hard to comprehend, are known and comprehended, then will be seen clearly enough the *exact* relation borne by medicine to disease. While the *degree* of effect, however, is so difficult to estimate, the *nature* of it is not so. There are very many reasons for believing that medical art has a decided control over disease—that a large aggregate good is the result of its application. This view might be sustained by divers considerations. I call your attention to two of them only—the first relative to the *science* and the second to the *art* of medicine.

Now the Science of medicine is one of the most comprehensive of all sciences, or to speak more truly, it is composed of many sciences. Some of these are comparatively exact—others not nearly so. The science of Anatomy, for example

is very nearly a perfect one. All parts of the human body are known—the most delicate nervous fibrils; the minutest vascular ramifications; the intimate structure of every organ; the remotest elements of its tissues; the nature and composition of the fluids as well as the solids; the precise position and relations of all—so that this body, “so fearfully and wonderfully made,” complex in its structure and opaque to others, is to the anatomist as transparent as ether, and as perfectly known as the simplest fact. Now the physical structure of man—a knowledge of Anatomy in other words, is the very corner stone upon which the whole of our superstructure is erected. We have, at least, a firm foundation.

Less perfectly known and less thoroughly understood than the science of organization, is the science of life—or Physiology. This is deducible from that, and yet not wholly so. Obviously the construction of a machine must be known before its action can be truly comprehended; but a knowledge of movement by no means necessarily follows a knowledge of mechanism; and hence our knowledge of the function of one or two structures is conjectural, while a perfect and absolutely faultless conception of most of them individually and of all in the mass is not yet attained if attainable; because it has pleased God to hide from our understandings the great principle of vitality—that principle by which and in which and through which all these offices are performed. Nevertheless you know what a wonderful degree of precision considering these things, this beautiful and important study has attained. There are now in Physiology a great variety and vast number of carefully observed facts, from which we deduce fairly and rigidly the most important general principles. The circulation of the blood, its agency in secretion and its office in nourishing, building up and vivifying the body—the processes of respiration—the function of digestion—the curious work of the glands—even the labor performed by the nervous system—all these and many more are told us by Physiology, besides the revelations it makes in regard to the general laws of life.

Look at the science of Chemistry, in its double relation to medical science, as the exponent of Physiology, and as supplying to art some of its most precious defences against

disease—in the one case as perfect, as far as it goes, as any can be, in the other, contributing to the solution of problems otherwise inexplicable. Look at Pharmacology—the science of remedies. We know that there are a great many substances which have the power of effecting certain changes, or doing certain specific things when brought in contact with the living tissue or under the control of vitality; that these effects are, upon the whole, constant and determinate; that they are modified in certain ways by certain altered or abnormal states of the constitution; and essentially what these modifications and states are. And though we do not know the remote effect of a given medicine in the cure of a given disease, we do know, in the main, the immediate effect of its administration on particular parts or the great whole. Here again is a vast number and great variety of observed facts from which are deduced fairly and rigidly, governing general principles.

Or, observe Pathology—the science of disease. Now, of the *essential nature* of disease we know no more than we do of the nature of the vital principle: but we do know a great deal of its mode of occurrence, the symptoms and signs by which it manifests itself, the changes it produces, and the laws regulating its progress and termination. Thus, as to most diseases the causes have been pointed out, the proportionate mortality established, the absolute and relative frequency disclosed, while the autopsy reveals an astonishingly large proportion of correct diagnoses. It is certainly and sadly true, that the principles of diagnosis are very imperfect, and that their application is often unreliable and incorrect; but it is also true that its comparative certainty is under, rather than over-estimated.. Now see. Here is a nearly absolute knowledge of the structure of man; *much*, of the laws of his being and the healthful play of his organs; *much*, of the perversions of both structure and function; *much*, of the nature and effect of remedies; from which, it seems to me, there must result, of necessity, a partially reliable set of general principles regulating the management of disease, and *these*, corrected by observation and experience, personal and traditional, are the Science of medicine.

The second consideration refers to the *Art* of medicine. Some

of the processes of this art are too apparent to be denied or misconceived. Take, for example, an accident by which an artery is severed; instantly the rich red current flows in exhausting streams, and the cheek grows pale, and the heart faint, and life ebbs rapidly away. By art, this current is dammed up, the hue comes back to the pallid skin, the muscles regain their wonted strength, the heart returns cheerily to its work, and the flickering spark burns again with a steady and genial glow. Or take an eye, which, by disease within itself, has lost the power of sight—from which a veil has shut out the glorious light of heaven, and shrouded the soul in darkness. A little needle introduced in the delicate structure of this organ, a few manipulations with a cautious hand, and lo, the veil is rent in twain, light re-visits the dusky chambers of the soul, and forms of beauty greet again the enraptured vision. Broken bones coaptated, dislocated joints reduced, deformities removed or remedied &c.; these strike at once the senses of every observer. But the processes of art in general are not so evident, and as to nearly every case it is impossible to estimate the influence of the treatment on the final result—no man knowing whether the remedies used, hinder or hasten the cure, prolong or shorten the life of the patient. But there is very clear and convincing proof, on a large scale, which absolutely sets at rest all doubts as to the *general* influence of the healing art. And this is found in two facts made known by records open to every man: First, That the relative mortality has very materially diminished in the last two hundred years, to go no further back. It is true that civilization, and refinement, and increasing population, and over-crowding, have a decided influence in multiplying the number of cases of disease; and yet nothing is more certain than that their fatality has diminished; so much so, that, in that time, the relative mortality is lessened nearly, if not quite, one-half; and this is proved by hospital reports, by statistical mortuary returns, and by the concurrent testimony of physicians and historians. Second, That trials, specially with a view of investigating the effect of remedies, have been made on a very extensive plan, with the most gratifying results. For example: in large hospitals, daily receiving many persons, Pneumonia was taken, as a type of disease.

This is a severe inflammation, attacking one of the most important and vital organs. For a series of years all the patients who came in were divided: some received no treatment, the others were subjected to it. Those who received none were as tenderly nursed and as carefully watched as the others; yet the proportion of recoveries among the latter was very decidedly larger than the former—although they were subjected to a routine treatment, without reference to modifying circumstances. The proportion, beyond a doubt, would have been considerably increased, if those medicated had received, each one, that particular combination of remedies, more especially adapted to his particular case. These two facts are indisputable, and certainly they have a deeper significance than grumblings of the uninformed about the inefficiency of art, or the sneers of those who pretend to say that Doctors do more harm than good. But I may go farther, and assert that not only is the *present* application of medical art one full of benefit to the human race, but that the *nett result*, as to the whole thing, sustains the claims of the profession. In other words, that not only is the practice of medicine the source of a great deal more good than harm now, but that the sum of its effects has been an aggregate of advantage to mankind; that the good it has done, and is now doing, overbalances the harm it has altogether caused. In noticing this point it would be sufficient, so far as the mere argument is concerned, to throw the burden of proof on the other side, and demand *evidence*, after all, that it has been the source of so much evil. It is one thing to prove that a man is mistaken in his philosophy, and another thing altogether to show that he is wrong in his actions. The Physician *may* have false conceptions of *the nature* of the disease he has to deal with, and yet administer remedies which are well calculated to control it; and granting, therefore, that the theories of disease, formerly held, were incorrect, it by no means necessarily follows, that the practice of those holding these theories was murderous. I am willing to admit, however, that there is a great deal of false doctrine and a great deal of bad practice in medicine, and I acknowledge that oftentimes the Doctor does more harm than good, and that this was still more frequently the case formerly than now; in other words, I



honestly believe, that with the best intentions, Physicians often do, and still oftener have done, an infinite deal of damage. But a little reflection will, I am sure, satisfy any man of the truth of the proposition here advanced. If one considers for a moment, a very striking fact bearing upon this point will immediately suggest itself to his mind, viz: that during the larger part of the world's history, art was entirely destitute of what are now its more formidable weapons—that many of those very substances which, as remedial agents, are capable of doing most injury, were then wholly unknown. Mercury, and its preparations, for example, were not introduced into practice until the time of Paracelsus; Antimony until some time in the fifteenth century; Prussic acid very recently; and so of others. So that if art lacked some of its present efficiency, it lacked also some of its *present capacity for evil*. Again, while we laugh now at the folly and absurdity of most of the theories which have prevailed heretofore, and with reason, deride the medical philosophy, and scoff at the doctrines held in the olden times, and felicitate ourselves on the vast superiority of modern practice, we are bound to acknowledge that as to some diseases, frequent in their occurrence and grave in their nature, the treatment is to this day little altered in its general scope or even its minute details.

But it is rather to some of the universal, wide-spread, and far-reaching benefits conferred upon mankind by modern medicine, that I wish to direct your attention, as confirmatory of this proposition. Let us take two diseases, not as the only, but as among the more striking illustrations of what medical science really has done. Each of them, though in a different way, makes the idea I wish to convey, perfectly intelligible. For the first, take small-pox. As it exists now, we hardly know what it once was. "One of the most fearful scourges of our race: loathsome and malignant in its character: but very slightly influenced or controlled by art, propagating and extending itself: multiplying and reproducing its contagious poison with a constancy and a prolific energy belonging to no other disease: attacking with a like remorseless fury all ages and all constitutions; the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the robust and the feeble; and when it failed to

destroy, leaving behind it its disfiguring traces: limited by no circumstance of time or place, but prevailing throughout all seasons and in every climate. Such was this terror of princes and people." In England alone from 30,000 to 50,000 persons died *annually* of it, and in the whole world probably more than 500,000 were its yearly victims. Now, how stands it? The disease has become infinitely less frequent. It has been stripped in a great measure of its terrors. Besides being comparatively rare in its occurrence, it is much milder in its attacks and very much more under the control of art: and all this as the result of the introduction of vaccination—itself a triumph of true philosophy. So that it comes out, that by a single gift of science to the human race, more lives have been saved in the last fifty years, than have been destroyed by the terrible wars and bloody campaigns of that period. This is a stupendous achievement, without a parallel in any other science or art.

For the second illustration take *consumption*; one of the commonest, the most formidable and least controllable of all diseases; existing everywhere; attacking all classes; once firmly established, seldom, if ever, cured by medicine; destroying vastly more lives than any other disease to which the human race is liable. This constitutes a sort of standing reproach to medicine, and is certainly a fair representative, on all these accounts, of what we term *incurable* diseases—maladies beyond the reach of art. Now in this very thing is found an illustration of some of the too little heeded conquests of science. At least three grand results have been accomplished as to this. First, Its diagnosis has been rendered positive. Though the organ involved cannot be seen, nor its actual condition inspected, yet the history of the case, the rational symptoms and physical signs determine its existence with an almost absolute certainty; a matter of great importance even if it were not at all subject to the influence of remedies. Second, This precision of diagnosis, may, in a large majority of cases, be attained in the incipiency of the disease; a period when it is subject to such influence; when it may be arrested, if not extirpated. Third, The causes which give rise to it have been clearly pointed out; the causes which excite, as well as those which predispose to it. Medical

investigation has resulted in showing not only what these causes are, but that they are in large part avoidable, and *how* to avoid them. The great frequency of its occurrence is not, therefore a reproach to science, but a commentary on the folly of man in disregarding her warnings. If he will not heed her monitions she is scarcely to be held responsible for the consequences. What she has done for this malady, and more, she has done for others, and absolutely, if *art* had no control over disease, science at least is entitled to respect and gratitude for the great hygienic truths it has announced and the great sanitary reforms it has worked. And herein, to my mind, consists a large part of the real glory of medicine.

I have thus given you some reasons for believing, First, that medical art does vastly more good than harm. Second, That as to all time, the good which it has done, more than balances the evil it has wrought. Now I wish to go still further and show you, that probably there has never been a period when its beneficial results did not exceed its injurious ones; that taking it at its lowest ebb, when it had the most absurdity in its doctrines and the most error in its practice, it had enough of soundness to counter-balance the one, and enough of truth to redeem the other. Of this, there can be, of course, no *satisfactory proof*; but several considerations seem to me to make it very probable. First, *The law of compensation*, which manifestly, as a law, exists in the universe. I mean by this, that general provision by which disturbances of every kind, moral and physical, may be set at rest. I do not mean simply to say that there is no such thing as unmix'd evil—for good in one way or another may come out of it always; but to express the belief that for every bad thing there is not only a consolation but a counteraction: that as to sickness, for example, in the providence of God, there is not only a reason, but a remedy. That such was the intention, is probable from the goodness of Him who cares for us all and who has deigned to call himself the Great Physician, even more than from the fact that throughout every habitable part of the globe, are found diffused articles which the experience of the world has shown capable of acting medicinally.

If this be not, of itself, sufficient, I would confirm it by the

mention of two noteworthy facts, viz : The ancient date and and the universal existence of the art of healing. No man can go back to its beginning. In all likelihood it is coeval with human suffering. Feeble and unsatisfactory, necessarily it must have been for many a weary, groaning century—a mere collection of isolated experiences, themselves, possibly, wholly unreliable: rude and conjectural, but yet an art—having a record of its own to the remotest times, in every corner of the earth. Among the Egyptians, before the birth of Abraham; among the Jews, as a part of their earliest ceremonial law; among the Greeks and Romans, as one of the highest duties of their priests; among the Chaldees, long before the glories of Babylon; among the Indians of this country, cut off from all communication with the old world; in the most distant countries and the most ancient periods, there have always been found the rudiments of this art. No spot of earth, inhabited by man, has ever been discovered where it did not exist to a greater or less extent. The antiquity and the universality of the thing are a testimony to its value not lightly to be discredited. Strongly confirmatory of the same point is another fact, even more pregnant with meaning, viz: the confidence universally reposed in it, and the estimation in which its followers have always been held. It is true that some persons wholly deny its efficacy; but they are very few in number; and I am sure I speak the truth when I tell you, that even in this age of enlightened skepticism, there is in the popular mind, a strong and unwavering faith in the resources of art, and the skill of the Physician. Now it seems to me a thing almost incredible, that this sentiment should have always and everywhere existed, if it were based on a shadow instead of a substance. I know very well, that what we call public opinion is far from being always trustworthy. I know that mankind, in the aggregate, may be deceived like men individually. *Vox populi, vox Dei* is the cry of demagoguery, and not the teaching of philosophy or experience. But if a man may not *lightly* set aside public opinion, on what principle can he reject as untrue, and unworthy of belief, the concurrent testimony of the whole world, as to a thing taking place daily and hourly, immediately under its observation? If the benefits rendered by art to humanity are but the “base-

less fabric of a vision," what is the source of the confidence reposed? What is the explanation of the uniform appeal to the Physician when sickness occurs? How is it, and why is it, that in all times the Physician has been looked to at the bedside as the veritable oracle? How is it that a little word from him shrouds in sorrow and in gloom the family circle, or makes its every pulse throb with joy? Why has it ever been, that

" At his approach, complaint grew mild,  
And when his hand unbarred the shutter,  
The clammy lips of fever smiled  
The welcome, that they could not utter."

Why is it that the mere office of a Physician is a passport to respect? and that he always, as such, ranks among the first in general esteem? The ancients worshipped the Goddess of health, and cherished the priests who ministered at her altars; and if there has ever been a time when Practitioners of the healing art had not, as a class, the respect and esteem of the world at large, it was during that period well named the "dark ages," when the ministers of God were contemned, when the interpreters of law and the advocates of justice were despised, and when a man of gentle birth and noble blood, considered the accusation of being able to read and write, the foulest aspersion that could be cast on his character.

The last suggestion I desire to make in this connexion is the argument drawn from the personal character of the men composing the great body of the profession. I am not disposed, gentlemen, to pass any eulogy upon the character of Physicians. I certainly might do so with truth, and with propriety. With truth, because they deserve it; with propriety, because the glory of the body is a just heritage of every member of it. But no one will deny that, in the mass, they are intelligent, well-informed, capable and honest; and if this be so, how is *their* testimony to be discredited? They have more opportunities of testing the value of treatment; from the nature of their studies and pursuits are better qualified to form a reliable opinion as to its results—and certainly they possess an average amount of candor. Now if there does not a far greater sum of benefits than of injury come out of the practice of medicine, then the common voice of the world is mistaken, and the vast majority of practitioners are either huge self-deceivers, or

One member of our profession—an American by birth—Dr. Wells, whose name is so inseparably connected with the discovery of the true philosophy of dew, in his famous letter to Lord Kenyon, in regard to the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, draws a portraiture of an eminent English Physician, a model to his brethren, an ornament to his profession, and an honor to his race—Dr. William Heberden—the justice of which his cotemporaries acknowledged by acclamation.

“Were I, my lord,” he writes, “possessed of talents adequate to the undertaking, I should here endeavor, at full length, to describe that illustrious man. In this attempt, I should first mark his various and extensive learning, his modesty in the use of it, and his philosophical distrust of human opinions in science, however sanctioned by time or the authority of great names. I should then exhibit him in the exercise of his profession, without envy or jealousy; too proud to court employment, yet undervaluing his services after they were performed; unwearied even when a veteran in his art, in ascertaining the minutest circumstances of the sick, who placed themselves under his care; taking nothing for granted that might be learned by inquiry, and trusting nothing of importance that concerned them to his memory. To demonstrate his greatness of mind, I should mention his repeatedly declining to accept those offices of honor and profit at the British Court, which are regarded by other Physicians as objects of their highest ambition, and are therefore sought by them with the utmost assiduity. I should afterwards take notice of his simple, yet dignified manners, his piety to God, his love for his country, and his exemplary discharge of the duties of all the private relations, in which he stood to society; and I should conclude by observing, that his whole life had been regulated by the most exquisite prudence, by means of which his other virtues were rendered more conspicuous and useful, and whatever failings he might, as a human being, possess, were either shaded or altogether concealed.

Men like this, gentlemen, are not apt to be so grossly deluded, or to make their lives a standing lie.

I do not claim, nor does anybody else, who has any sense, or any knowledge of the matter, that this science is exact, or this art faultless with even the wisest of men. Such is very

far from being the truth, and it is one of your most glorious privileges, as well as one of your highest duties to attempt the improvement of both. No man can fairly deny their great superiority, *at present*, as compared with the past: no man can reasonably doubt a corresponding, or far exceeding superiority *in the future*, as compared with the present. Whether or not you have any share in this great work, depends wholly upon yourselves. Labor, study, thought, energy are no more wasted in your profession than elsewhere. If your affection be true, your devotion constant, your attention ceaseless, science will bestow in return her most cheering smiles, her sweetest caresses, her choicest tokens of endearment. She will be to you a companion more beautiful and a mistress more fruitful than the golden-haired Evangeline, of whom it is said,

‘Sunshine of St Eulalie, was she called, for that was the sunshine,  
Which, as farmers believed, would load their orchards with apples:  
So she, would bring to her husband’s house delight and abundance,  
Filling it full of love and the ruddy faces of children.’”

Without these qualities you can expect to become—nothing. It is a *sure* thing, that you will not become *great* Physicians, without labor, diligence, and perseverance—continuous labor, ceaseless diligence, and untiring perseverance. It will not do to be careless and indifferent; lest the Genius of art point at you its scornful finger, and quote the divine curse to the church of Laodicea: “I know thy works that thou art neither cold nor hot—I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.”

But if you devote yourselves in singleness of purpose to this great work, and bestow upon your profession that time and that labor of which it is worthy, the strong likelihood is that you will reflect back honor on your Alma Mater, who now honors you, and who, from this night watches over you with a tender solicitude, ready to rejoice in your glory as she must drink the bitter cup of your disgrace; and make her old familiar face glow with exultation as she beholds that same Genius writing your names upon the scroll of fame, in letters of living fire. And if, in the orderings of Providence, you do not achieve those things for which you strive so hard, you will at least receive the approbation and respect of your conscience, and hear that just judge within you, whisper consolation sweeter than that

“Nectarous breath of summer  
Which earth sends upwards to her lord, the sun,  
When he kisses her cheek at parting.”