

AFTERNOON SESSION

Dr J. M. Henderson, M.D., F.R.C.P., D.P.H. (vice-chairman, The College of General Practitioners) took the chair and opened the afternoon session.

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Dr H. W. Ashworth (*general practitioner, Manchester, Darbshire House, Health Centre, Manchester*): The Art and Science of General Practice—a title such as this might imply that I am an aged retiring professor delivering a farewell address to a gathering of final year medical students. You would be wrong in all these assumptions. In the first place I am not aged—though I might be rapidly ageing through the onerous duties of general practice. Nor am I a professor, but a general practitioner like you all, and I realize that I am speaking to a learned body of men and women, many of whom have had considerably more experience of life than I have; men who by your presence here this afternoon demonstrate your devotion to your calling and your determination to uphold the standard of our profession. Before you get paranoid after this morning's self-criticism session, you will remember what Robert Louis Stevenson wrote:

There are men and classes of men that stand above the common herd—the soldier, the sailor, and the shepherd not infrequently; the artist rarely; rarer still, the clergyman; the physician almost as a rule—he is the flower (such as it is of our civilization; and when that stage of man is done with, and only to be marvelled at in history, he will be thought to have shared as little as any in the defects of the period, and most notably exhibited the virtues of the race. Generosity he has, such as is possible to those that practice an art, never to those who drive a trade; discretion, tested by a hundred secrets; tact, tried in a thousand embarrassments; and what are more important, Herculean cheerfulness and courage so that he brings air and cheer into the sickroom, and often enough, though not so often as he wishes, brings healing.

and if you believe that the status of the general practitioner has gone down in public estimation, note the results of recent opinion polls.

If our thoughts and discussions this afternoon are to have meaning, I feel we should be quite clear about what we are thinking. May I draw your attention to the title once again: "The Art and Science of General Practice". We are not talking about medicine as a whole, but general practice. In what way does this branch of