

SEVEN PILLARS OF A PROFESSION

There is an old expression, "Seven Pillars of Wisdom." With this concept and phrase in mind, I am bold enough to suggest seven pillars of a profession as I conceive them to be - in terms of the individual.

The first; technical skill and craftsmanship, received by continuing education. That is a basic essential.

The second; a sense of social responsibility with an interest in community life. This is the best corrective to a narrow concern with professional matters. Too exclusive a concern, whether with one's specialty or with the world of book learning, makes for mediocrity and tameness. Tameness because such persons have never been seared by the facts as they exist in the world outside their little provinces.

The third; a knowledge of history. This is essential for the cultivated mind and provides perspective. It is a corrective for the squirrel-like accumulation of facts which passes for education in these days.

The fourth; a knowledge of literature and the arts. This acts as a catalyst; here are to be found the world of values and the repository of what has been said and done by the best minds. Such knowledge provides a philosophy of excellence, and insight that comes from sensitiveness. It is well to remember, looking back no further than the years of this century, that the barbarians do not destroy science and technology. They destroy the vessels of liberal culture - the roots of the past - libraries, the press, religion, music, art, the belief in the essential dignity of man.

The fifth pillar; a personal integrity. On this quality rests the concept of duty, a sense of responsibility. And on such things depend the dignity and the honour of a profession.

The sixth; a faith that there is some meaning and value in life. This belief must stand high in the credo of any physician worthy of the name. It is the great bulwark in a world in which, in Thoreau's words, "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation." And we cannot live on the capital of idealism built up by past generations.

The seventh and last; the grace of humility. The constant reflection, in the searching words of John Bradford, "There, but for the grace of God, go I." In this attitude is to be found one of the finest flowers of the human spirit. It is the solvent of intolerance and selfishness and the other deadly sins.

These, I suggest are some of the qualities that make for the equilibrium of mind which is the mark of the professional man. Their expression in action and thought is what make a profession great.

An excerpt from "The Medical Jackdaw"  
by E.P. Scarlett, M.B.

**Collection Number: A1132**

**Collection Name: Patrick LEWIS Papers, 1949-1987**

***PUBLISHER:***

*Publisher:* Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

*Location:* Johannesburg

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