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CHANCE AND THE PREPARED MIND¹

(“In the fields of observation chance favors only the mind which is prepared.”—Pasteur.)

It was at the opening of the Faculté des Sciences at Lille on December 7, 1854, that Pasteur, only thirty-two years of age at the time, but already professor and dean of the faculty, uttered these words in upholding, in his inaugural address, the value, on the one hand, of practical laboratory instruction as an aid to the solution of industrial problems, and on the other the importance of investigation in pure science, even though the resulting discoveries might have no immediate application. The point of view may have been novel when it was uttered, but in the sixty years that have elapsed how familiar it has become. How closely it approximates the ideals of those who are striving to improve the conditions of medical education and of medical research in our own day and country. What better argument can the most ardent advocate of detailed practical instruction in laboratory or hospital (medical training at first hand) present, than that which Pasteur offered in 1854. He asks:

Where will you find a young man whose curiosity and interest will not immediately be awakened when you put into his hands a potato, when with that potato he may produce sugar, with that sugar, alcohol, with that alcohol, æther and vinegar? Where is he that will not be happy to tell his family in the evening that he has just been working out an electric telegraph? And, gentlemen, be convinced of this, such studies are seldom if ever

¹An address on medical education, by Richard M. Pearce, M.D., University of Pennsylvania, delivered at Syracuse University, May 21, 1912, under the auspices of the Alpha Omega Alpha Honorary Medical Fraternity.