

**Valedictory address to the graduates of the medical department of the University of Nashville : delivered February 28, 1857 / by Thomas R. Jennings.**

### **Contributors**

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Jennings (T. R.)

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS

TO THE

Graduates of the Medical Department

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF NASHVILLE,

DELIVERED FEBRUARY 28, 1857,

BY

THOMAS R. JENNINGS, M.D.,

PROFESSOR OF ANATOMY.

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1857.



## VALEDICTORY ADDRESS.

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GENTLEMEN :

At this, the parting interview between you and those who have been for a time your instructors—who have stood by your side, to be your guides and auxiliaries in your efforts to obtain that knowledge which is requisite to fit you for the practice of the arduous profession, on the duties of which you are now about to enter—no more appropriate theme for reflection can be suggested than that which will fix your attention on the course of training to which you have thus for so long a period been subjected. So far as your corps of teachers is concerned, being their spokesman on this occasion, I know such a retrospect will be to them a matter both of pleasure and of profit: of pleasure, because it will recall the enjoyment of those frequent communions with you, when their earnest efforts to impart useful information were crowned by the assurance that they were not, in the nature of labor, expended in vain: of profit, because such reminiscences cannot fail to nerve them with fresh determination to prosecute with energy the great task of the same nature, which their hope



of prolonged life and usefulness, so excited, will open out to their mental vision in long and brilliant perspective. In your bosoms, too, animated as they are and as they should be by the vivid emotions and the bright anticipations characteristic of youth, I am confident that the same glance at the late events of your educational career will elicit similar joyous feelings, and give birth to like felicitous results. The fault, indeed, will be in the speaker and not in his theme, if, whilst you follow him in the course of the meditations proposed as the employment of the passing hour, you do not dwell with rapture on visions recalled to your imaginations, of toil rewarded by the fruition of success exceeding even your most high-wrought expectations, and are not at the same time transported by enthusiastic resolutions that the future of your career shall exhibit a complete fulfilment of all the expectations which your education has excited, not only in the minds of your relatives and friends, and of the community in which you live, but in your own visions—highly colored as they may be—of future success and ultimate distinction.

But two years since, at a recurrence of these anniversary exercises, one of my colleagues joyously exclaimed, whilst performing the duty I have now undertaken, "We are all here." Alas! that it is not in my power now to repeat such a congratulation. Two of those who were lately of our number, (one a preceptor, the other a pupil,) are not here. They have vanished from our midst; and the exclamation now most suited to our circumstances proclaims, "What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue!"

In regard to the decease of both, however, we may indulge, without impropriety, in a feeling of exultation, mingled though it be with melancholy associations. Death with both was the death of martyrs. One of them fell a victim to his ardor in the work of imparting, the other, to his assiduity in the task of acquiring, knowledge. These our lamented colleagues, then, being, like ourselves, sworn soldiers in the cause of humanity, have fallen whilst at the post of duty. Do I not, therefore, give utterance to a supplication which meets a response in the heart of every one of us, when I implore that we too may thus die the death of the righteous, and that our last end may be like theirs?

I have invited you to a review of the course of instruction through which you have just passed. As a fitting preface, and as a proper tribute to the memory of departed worth, I give you an assurance that Dr. Porter, who was one of the founders of this school of medicine, was also one of its ablest and purest counsellors. If its success in respect to the attraction and the qualification of students is in any degree attributable to honesty and wisdom in its policy, he, then, is entitled to a full share of the credit due on account of the origination and perfection of the system by which it has been conducted. I appeal with confidence to his surviving colleagues, when I ask them to sustain me in the assertion, that during our deliberations he always manifested a steady, fearless, and supreme regard for the honor of our profession, the cause of medical science, and the interests of those who confided in him as an instructor; never looking either to the right or, to the left, to effect an



object of self-aggrandizement. His influence over us, whilst he lived, was the salutary influence which a magnanimous spirit ever exercises over all who come within the sphere of its manifestations: his power over us hereafter, will be of a nature that should not be resisted, and, if it were, could not be successfully opposed. Men may disregard, nay, pass rough-shod over the counsels of the wisest and the best of their living coadjutors; but they change their course with horror, when convinced that it leads them to trample on the ashes of the dead, by whose precepts they were once enlightened, and by whose example they were wont to be swayed.

The retrospection which we are now to commence, we are assured will afford abundant material on which to base a confident assertion, that you will stand forth, without hesitation, to bear testimony to the fact that we have labored faithfully to teach you the science of medicine, and to indoctrinate you touching its art and practice, by the only method which the principles of philosophy can ever indicate. We know that, on summons, you will prove yourselves swift witnesses for us, that our efforts have been unremitting to fit you for the practice of the profession you have chosen, not by the inculcation of the doctrines of any authoritative leaders or teachers, but by extending a helping hand to guide you on to the true fountains of the knowledge of which you were in pursuit. You know well, that in the school of whose highest honors you are now in receipt, you have never been directed to sit down at the feet of any Gamaliel in medicine, to imbibe his notions, and

to become adepts in the slavish work of defending his dogmas. On the contrary, you must have a feeling of conviction that we have acted as mere recruiting-officers, to enlist you under no banner but that of nature. Your response must be in the affirmative, when we appeal to you to know whether, from first to last of the long course of tuition through which we have conducted you, we have not exerted ourselves strenuously to impress it on your minds that, as it was your intention to devote your lives to the work of healing, and, when you could not heal, of mitigating the diseases of man, you could qualify yourselves for the task in no other way than by a diligent study of the physical, intellectual, and moral structure of man; next, of the vital manifestations, which are the results, or, more properly speaking, the constant concomitants of that structure; next, by the assiduous investigation of the derangements of that structure, and those miraculous manifestations, which constitute the diseases the treatment of which is to be your life-long employment; and, lastly, of the means, by the skilful application of which you may be enabled either to arrest such derangements, or, when irremediable, to soothe their attendant sufferings. So taught, then, by your own admission in regard to the true foundations of medicine, may we not venture on a confident assertion in regard to your future career, that, whatever others may do, you will acknowledge no master but truth; and that, whilst you refuse to bow down in adoration even of the demigods of medicine, you will look with ineffable scorn on the stocks and stones which are the idols of those pitiable pagans in



medicine, the deluded followers of a Mesmer, or a Preissnitz, or a Hahnemann!

Taught in accordance with the system just indicated, each one of you has been required, as a preliminary condition of your application for the honors now to be conferred, that you should give diligent attention to two thousand lectures, demonstrations, and exhibitions, carefully prepared and studiously enforced on your attention by eight teachers, who, whilst they look with all proper feelings of humility to an enlightened community for an estimate of their abilities, appeal with confidence to you for a testimonial of their fidelity and assiduity.

Censure of the medical profession, on account of alleged negligence in regard to the initiative training of those who enter its ranks, is a thing of common occurrence. How clearly does the recital of your course of studies refute every accusation of the kind! Where is there another craft or calling to be found in our society that exacts a series of preparatory exercises one-half so tedious or so thorough? The apprentice to mechanical pursuits passes the period of his indenture, for the most part, with no more instruction than that which suits the interest of his employer. The clerk in the counting-house, with some honorable exceptions, is treated more like the drudge than the pupil of him who is the head of the establishment. The future mariners of our great seafaring republic, who are hereafter to carry our flag in triumph through the exterminating battles of the ocean, or to display it proudly in quest of gain in every part of the navigable globe, are even now, at the outset of their

adventurous career, required to waste a long period of their lives serving in the capacity of mere scullions and shoe-blacks for the crew in which they are enrolled. Of our students of law, little else is exacted than a lounge of a few months in the office of an established counsellor or attorney. The mass of our politicians are self-constituted; being as well qualified to be pillars of the State as is a mushroom to be a column of support and decoration in a magnificent temple. In one word, no candidate for admission, either into the callings enumerated, or into any other which is important to the public interest, is required to go through a course of preparation one-half so rigid as that which has been exacted of you; and yet, for the want of sufficient enlightenment on the subject, the mass of the community wink at the great and real abuses we have enumerated, and are loud in their denunciations of one that is in great degree imaginary. We desire, however, not to be misunderstood on this head, either by yourselves or by any portion of the intelligent audience we address. We do not contend that our system of medical education is faultless. So far are we, indeed, from assuming such a defenceless position, that we are willing to admit that there are other countries than our own which greatly surpass us in this respect. What we contend for is embodied in the proposition that, regard being had to our age and circumstances and condition as a people, our scheme of preparatory training for our physicians is in advance of that which we countenance in almost every other important calling which either necessity or custom has established in our



midst. Reforms, to be sure, may be and should be effected in our medical schools; but, like other educational reforms, they must be gradual, to be salutary. A nation's mode of training its youth is not a thing of isolation. Inextricably interwoven with all the peculiarities of every given age and period of its existence, such a system must change either with those peculiarities, or but slightly in advance of them. It was because of a failure to appreciate this truth, on the part of two of the greatest minds that were ever exhibited in human form, that Milton and Locke—an observer no less acute than Dr. Johnson being the witness—did, in their day and generation, serious injury to the cause of learning in Great Britain, by their writings, profound and ingenious as they were, on the subject of education.

Make your entrance then, gentlemen, on the theatre of active life with your heads erect, and your feelings of confidence fully nerved, so far as regards your passport to public confidence. Confront those who would gainsay your pretensions by instituting a comparison between your own and any that they themselves can rightfully set up. Your education as physicians has been conducted in accordance with a plan shaped out by the wisdom of some of the most practical amongst the many great minds of the early days of our republic,—by Rush, and Kuhn, and Shippen, and Wistar; a plan, too, which has been freely canvassed, with a view to reform, and has been reformed from time to time, so far as our national peculiarities would permit; the whole of the work, whether of original design and construction, or of change and reformation, having been carried on in

accordance with the counsels of a medical public independent in its mode of thinking, and unbiased alike by the fascinations of novelty or the heavy clogs of inveterate custom and prejudice. Who will you meet with, be he divine, lawyer, agriculturist, merchant, or mechanic, that can boast of better or more careful training? Boldly, too, may you challenge those about you to point to any device for furnishing useful members of society that has been more prolific than that which ushers you into the world as practitioners of the healing art. Our modes of teaching theology have undoubtedly furnished us with an average supply of able, eloquent, learned, and truly devout spiritual guides and teachers; and similar asseverations may with truth be made in regard to our national stock in the shape of statesmen, lawyers, merchants, and mechanics. Yet assertions of the same kind are equally if not more true when applied to the body of physicians which at any given period has been diffused throughout our land. Medicine has always been administered to our people with as much skill and fidelity as has attended upon the supply of any of their other demands, whether of necessity or convenience. At every period, moreover, of our existence as a nation, under the practical operation of the system we defend, the medical profession has contributed its full proportion to the list of men who, by the eminence of their talents, and attainments, and virtues, have given tone to public sentiment at home, and increased the consideration which, as a nation, we enjoy throughout the world.

Such and so founded is the advice which we give you



touching the mode in which you should prefer your claims to public esteem and confidence. If that advice be followed, we fearlessly predict that out of your ranks our society will receive as large an accession to the members who are to be its future props and ornaments, as from any other corps of equal force that anywhere, during the present epoch of our national existence, may be ushered, as you are about to be, out of the scenes of preparation for active life, into the midst of the bustle and anxieties and toils and dangers of that life itself.

Again, we admonish you not to think that because, as the representative of the Faculty of the Medical College, through the exercises of which you have passed, we have defended the scheme of education adopted and carried out there into practice, either myself or my colleagues are so wedded to our plan of operations as not to admit the propriety of reform, or that we will not with alacrity engage in a work of improvement, whenever such improvement becomes practicable. Without the fear of contradiction, we maintain that you have never heard from us one word in defence of that old fogysm which clings to present usages, either because of veneration for their antiquity, or of greed for the lucre which may vanish with their permanency. On the contrary, we feel assured that what you have heard of our sentiments and seen of our conduct, has wrought the conviction in your minds that we are eager to co-operate in any work of educational reform which the medical public of our Union may suggest. Such a work of improvement would of course have in view a prolonga-

tion of the term now prescribed for the study of medicine, and an enlargement of the field of investigation which that course of study now includes. The two changes thus indicated must unquestionably be made together. Present usage designates three years as the novitiate of a candidate for a degree in medicine. The departments of knowledge he is required to review during that period of time are already of disproportioned magnitude. If, therefore, more be added, increased time must be allotted, to insure the performance of such an increased amount of labor. Moreover, a remodelling of the present order of studies is proper, and would become necessary as a part of the projected reform. According to the system now in vogue, but little distinction is made in respect to priority between the branches of medical knowledge which are elementary in their nature, and those which are compounded and practical. The last, it is plain, can be readily and fully comprehended only by those who have mastered the first. Beyond dispute, he who has not studied anatomy, cannot learn to perform the operations of surgery: he who has no knowledge of chemistry, cannot understand the processes of the pharmacist; and he who is ignorant of the structure and functions of the human body, cannot be indoctrinated touching the nature of its disorders, and the mode of their remedy. Yet, in despite of these plain teachings of common sense, we see at every session of every one of our medical colleges, multitudes of students who should scarcely be permitted to set foot on the threshold of the Temple of Medicine, ushered uncereemoniously into its



inmost recesses, there to listen to prelections and to gaze at demonstrations, the value of which must in the very nature of things be to them an impenetrable mystery.

Let what we have said, then, suffice to prove that your late instructors are alive to the existence of faults in the system of teaching through which you have just passed, and that they are ready at all times to stand forth as the champions of a reformation. What we have to say further in the same connection, will relate to the mode in which such a work of amelioration may be accomplished, and the part, the very important part—for such we think it will appear to be—which you yourselves may play in its accomplishment.

A little reflection will make it evident that no thorough and radical change of the kind indicated can be effected suddenly, or after a wholesale fashion. Such a revolution, if it ever occur, must be the work of time, and of efforts directed in a way to affect the conduct of individuals rather than the movement of masses. Medical tuition in our country, by a custom too inveterate to be readily uprooted, is divided into two periods. During the first, the student pursues his investigations under the direction of a single preceptor, selected because of his eminence as a practitioner of medicine; whilst the second is consumed in attendance on the lectures and demonstrations of a college. Accordingly, to correct the abuses we have designated, a work of cooperation becomes necessary, including amongst the agents by whom it is to be performed, the mass of our profession on the one hand, and the professors of our schools on the other. The first-

named division of instructors, having control, as they do, of the pupil before his mind can have received any wrong bias, must labor to impress upon it the necessity of a long, and patient, and thorough investigation of the elementary branches of medicine—of Anatomy, of Chemistry, of Botany, and of Physiology—as indispensable preparatives to every judicious attempt to fathom the mysteries of the practical departments of our profession. Whilst this work of reform is pressed vigorously, the second division of the instructors we have designated should urge truths of a similar nature on the attention of the same class of aspirants, and should labor by every artifice to induce such as resort to them to complete their studies, to devote at least one year of their collegiate course exclusively to the acquirement of elementary knowledge.

It is evident, therefore, from the practical view of the subject just propounded, that each one of you may very soon, if you will, become active and efficient collaborators with us in the reform of which we speak, and which we all regard as so desirable: each one of you may and should soon become a teacher of medicine. Our earnest advice is, that you will do so; that, in a word, one of your first efforts to attract the attention of the community, should consist in an attempt to impart knowledge to those about you who have entered on the career which you have just concluded. Having taken this important step towards eminence in your profession,—for such beyond question it will prove to be,—inculcate the truths we have just announced on the minds of your pupils. Confine their early



investigations, as far as practicable, to the elements of medical science, and urge them to protract their course of study beyond the usual period, and to extend it far beyond the limits of our present custom. This task being faithfully performed, your responsibility as preceptors in your offices will cease, being the consummation of a faithful discharge of your duty ; and all accountability for the future on the same score will be cast upon us, or others who, like us, control the conduct of an institution empowered to give passports into the domain of medicine. That balance of accountability, moreover, under such circumstances, will be far from being easy of avoidance. Those on whom it rests will thereby be plainly designated, at the same time that they will be shorn of all excuse for future derelictions, inasmuch as a large portion of the difficulties which now lie in their way, and seem insurmountable, will then be in a great degree either removed or overcome.

I have thus advised, as it were incidentally, that you should, as speedily as practicable, become teachers of medicine. Let me, because of its importance, make a special inculcation of this wholesome counsel touching the efforts you should make to reach professional distinction, and, what is a more worthy object of your ambition, a position in which you may enjoy the delights springing from the consciousness that in your day and generation you are passing lives of honor and of usefulness.

That a step such as we have counselled would carry you on in the way of preferment as physicians, is a proposition to which a little reflection on your part will insure a ready



assent. Thereby, whilst you bring yourselves in an advantageous point of view before the public, you will at the same time be making your own improvement in knowledge, and in the habit of seeking and ensuing it, and of loving it to the extent even of devotion, a matter of assurance. It is far from being an easy matter to impart to others the information which you have not acquired for yourselves, and stored away in your own minds, in a shape of perfect order and accuracy. Your students, too, if you are faithful and assiduous in the performance of your duties to them, become, as the result of one of the strongest ties by which the youthful and generous heart can be bound, the present heralds of your reputation, and its future most enduring monuments. You can find, then, no serious obstacle to hinder you in the adoption of the expedient we suggest, other than your own apprehensions arising from your inexperience. Feelings of distrust, springing from that source, may induce you to decline the task we enjoin, because you may think it one better suited to the mature judgments of those elders in the profession by whom you will not fail to find yourselves surrounded. If you take this view of the subject, moreover, we must admit that your notions have some show of reason in their favor. Nevertheless, when carefully scanned, you will discover that such apprehensions suggest no impediment that cannot be either overcome or circumvented. Whilst it must be conceded that physicians older than yourselves, who have learned practical medicine where alone it can be thoroughly learned, in the field of practice itself, and under the feelings of responsibility which,



in every mind endued with proper responsibility, must be awakened by the attempt to apply the rules of our art for the relief of suffering and the salvation of lives, have on this score claims to the preceptorship of those who aspire to become their associates, which are eminently worthy of consideration: on the other hand, you will not fail to find an offset to this view of the subject, when you reflect that you, at the outset of your attempt to secure the confidence of the community, will have much more time to devote to the work of instruction than can be spared by others who are already established in character; and that, besides, the very branches of medicine which should receive the almost exclusive attention of the office-pupil, are just those in which you are the most proficient; and, above all, that inasmuch as you are fresh from your own studies, you are thereby peculiarly fitted to aid those who are about to commence them, since no one can be better qualified to assist others in surmounting a series of difficulties than he who has just overcome them himself. Moreover, if you are not convinced by considerations such as we have propounded, every possible objection in the way of the course we are urging you to adopt will be obviated, provided you ally yourself in the work of instruction with some practitioner of eminence. Thereby, whilst you supplied any deficiency which might arise from his want of leisure and of familiarity with the elements of medicine, he, on the other hand, would bring up, in aid of your efforts, his practical tact and matured experience.

To stop the mouths of gainsayers, we have just passed



in brief review the large amount of knowledge which has been spread before you during the period of your pupilage. Vast undoubtedly it is, compared with the means of acquisition which are made accessible to such of your contemporaries as are seeking admission into other honorable pursuits. Still, when what you have learned touching medicine and its associate departments of science is set over against what you may yet acquire, the difference between the two is like that which exists in pecuniary affairs between a decent competence and boundless wealth and magnificence. You well know that we have never taught you to think that, by a few years of application, no matter how unremitting, you could make such acquisitions of knowledge as would give you a warrant to fold your hands in idleness, even for a single day of your future career as practitioners of medicine. To be sure, we have maintained, as we do now maintain, that by a mastery of the general principles of our art, such as we think you have gained, you could qualify yourselves for immediate activity in a wide sphere of usefulness, and could display a title that would be unquestionable to precedence over all others, no matter what might be their eminence in other branches of learning, who had never gone through your series of investigations, and had never been subjected to your course of discipline. This idea we have impressed on your minds, and, convinced of the truth of such an estimate of your worth, we have urged you to step fearlessly into the arena of life, and to treat with mingled scorn and compassion the pretensions of those who, devoid of your education, would assume to be



your professional rivals, or to controvert your professional opinions. But at the same time we have taught you, as we now counsel you, not to look to a comparison between yourselves and others who have never enjoyed or availed themselves of your advantages, as to a standard of excellence. On the contrary, our admonition to you has been, as it is now, to employ yourselves much more in learning the lessons of humility, which are inculcated by noting the distance that intervenes between you and those who have stood heretofore, and who now stand, on the pinnacle of eminence, than in harboring the unworthy feelings of self-satisfaction, paralyzing as they are to your efforts at improvement, that will always be incited by a parallel between yourselves and those who are, in certain senses of the term, immeasurably your inferiors. At the same time that we reiterate our previous counsels on this head, we take pleasure in the expression of our convictions that one of the good fruits produced by the seeds of knowledge we have been instrumental in implanting in your minds, is made manifest by the fact that you now derive, and will hereafter continue to derive, more pleasure from a contrast which indicates your inferiority to those far in advance of you, than in a vainglorious survey of the interval which you have placed between yourselves and those who cannot be and who never should pretend to be your competitors. We have indeed formed a very erroneous estimate of the dignity of your sentiments, if you are not able to contemplate without feelings of annoyance, nay, with feelings of the purest delight, even such excellence as you can never hope to



reach, whilst that degree of it which you know to be attainable, as the result of patient toil and persevering industry, affords you a theme for contemplation infinitely more animating and pleasurable, as it is infinitely more ameliorating in its tendencies, than any picture, however vivid, of that inferiority above which you have a rightful confidence of elevation.

So much for the purpose of reminding you that we have not instructed you after such a fashion as would tend to make you self-satisfied and careless in regard to future improvement. Thence we proceed to another consideration relative to what has been already achieved in the work of your education—beyond doubt the great work of your lives—and a consideration, too, which is closely allied to that one on which we have just dwelt. This is embodied in the assurance that, valuable as the information may be with which you have stored your minds whilst your studies were carried on under our direction, it is as nothing when compared with the invigoration of the powers of your understanding, and their increased aptitude for application, which are the certain results of your late course of instruction.

You will readily comprehend, thus, how it has come to pass that we have all along attached more value to your habits than to your acquisitions; to the love we may have seen you manifest for knowledge, than to the amount of it which you may have attained for the time being. We know that you might fit yourselves for the ordeal of an examination, actuated by no other feeling than the love of praise or the fear of reproach and disgrace; a feeling which might sub-



side with the occasion that gave it birth, and might, therefore, be productive of no good results of a permanent nature. On the contrary, when we noted in you a thirst for knowledge, which would lead you in its pursuit, regardless of any ulterior object, and in defiance of all obstacles, we hailed such a demonstration as a bright omen of a life of usefulness and distinction. Again, then, we summon you to stand forth as our witnesses that, though it has been our effort as your preceptors to make you learned, and that although, in making that effort, we have carefully culled out of the stores of medical science such of its treasures as ought to be amongst your earliest acquisitions; still, acting under the assurance that profound scholarship could not be the result of our brief labors for your benefit, we have directed our attention to the more attainable purpose of so forming your habits of observation and reflection, and of so training your tastes and inclinations, as to fill your minds with steady resolves that the investigations you have here commenced should be carried on to the very termination of your lives, with a perseverance that would be untiring, and a zeal that would grow purer and brighter with every hour of its indulgence.

In taking leave of this topic, to which we have been so careful to direct your attention, we cannot resist the temptation to quote a series of observations, of the same purport, once addressed to a class of his pupils by a distinguished teacher of Mental Philosophy, himself a member of our profession. Speaking of the mode of instruction by which he would ever be guided, he says: "Though I shall endea-



vor to give as full a view as my limits will permit of all the objects of inquiry which are to come before us, it will be my chief wish to awaken in you, or to cherish, a love of those sublime inquiries themselves. There is a philosophic spirit which is far more valuable than any limited acquirements of philosophy, and the cultivation of which, therefore, is the most precious advantage that can be derived from the lessons and studies of many academic years; a spirit which is quick to pursue whatever is within the reach of human intellect, but which is not less quick to discern the limit of every human inquiry, and which, therefore, in seeking much, seeks only what man may learn; which learns how to distinguish what is great in itself from what is merely accredited by illustrious names; adopting a truth which no one has sanctioned, and rejecting an error of which all approve, with the same calmness as if no judgment were opposed to its own, but which, at the same time, alive with congenial feeling to every intellectual excellence, and candid to the weakness from which no excellence is wholly privileged, can dissent and confute without triumph, as it admires without envy; applauding gladly whatever is worthy of applause in a rival system, and venerating the very genius which it demonstrates to have erred."

Such is the spirit of medical philosophy, far more valuable than any limited acquirements of that philosophy itself, with which it has been our chief desire that you should become imbued. The acquirements you have made may fade—nay, they will fade—from your memories, unless



their impression be constantly renewed; but the temper and disposition to which they give birth will be enduring. Scholarship, according to the ideas which have guided us in your instruction, consists not so much in the stores of learning already in the memory and the understanding, as in that discipline of the mind which fits it for a ready discernment of truth, no matter how impenetrable to ordinary observation, and for its prompt application to the varied purposes of practical life, in despite of all the obstacles that may spring from intricacies and complexities. If you are trained, as we trust you are, in accordance with our intent, though stripped of all your knowledge, were such a procedure practicable, you would still be left in the enjoyment of the most valuable part of your education. There will certainly come to all of us a time when knowledge, as we are assured from the pen of inspiration, will vanish away. In another and a better state of existence, the learning we have here acquired will perish from our memories, with the perishable objects to which it related; but our aptitude for the attainment and appreciation and enjoyment of knowledge, having become as it were a constituent portion of the only immortal part of our being, will remain as ever-during and as imperishable as the soul itself.

Another consideration which we have endeavored to impress on your minds, and which is well worthy of reminiscence on the present occasion, relates to the value which you should attach to your profession: that, we have ever maintained, should be of a high rate. We have taught you to respect the profession of medicine, because of its useful-



ness ; to love it, because of its intimate alliance with all the virtues that follow in the train of benevolence ; to venerate it, because it reckons among its ornaments many of the most powerful minds whose existence is graven on the records of history, and because of the vast amount of profound truth and sublime speculation which distinguishes it as a science, and signalizes its achievements as an art. Forming so high an estimate of the calling in the ranks of which you are now enrolled, we repeat our earnest solicitations that you do all that lies within the limits of your power to assure it, not an undue preponderance in society, but that great weight and that large consideration to which it is justly entitled. This view of the subject opens up to you a field of reform requiring your most assiduous efforts, in order to a fulfilment of your duties. In every million of our population there may be found, on an average, two thousand physicians. Such a body of educated men must and do have weight and consideration with the public. Still, they have not that degree of influence to which they are justly entitled. They, in common with the clergy, the farmers, the merchants, and the mechanics, are eclipsed in honor by the members of a truly great and noble profession, which, however, should not be permitted—as there are other professions equally great and noble—to get so far the start of this our majestic New World, and bear the palm alone. All the posts of honor and of profit, growing out of necessary public trusts, exhibit amongst their incumbents a proportion of five lawyers to one individual of any other pursuit. This inequality is, in part, the inevitable result of the close rela-



tionship which subsists between the profession of law and our government in its two great departments of legislation and the administration of justice. In regard to the effects of such a condition of things, we are free to admit that they are such as the philanthropist loves to contemplate. Lawyers have always been and are now found in the lead of all the noble enterprises of our nation. We must grant, too, that no body of men, outside of the body of physicians themselves, have ever evinced a greater spirit of liberality towards the promotion of the interests of our own science. Still, with all its great advantages, great evils grow out of the existing condition of things. It is wrong, in the first place, that any one calling in society should be permitted to make a monopoly of its high places. Then the thing, as a system, does not work well. If it did, the most deserving of our legal oligarchy should fill the most important offices. This, however, is not the true state of affairs. On the contrary, the largest portion of our eminent lawyers, devoted to the duties of their profession, do not solicit, and will not take, posts of political distinction. It has come to pass, accordingly, that our government, instead of being a lawyerarchy, which might be an endurable evil, has taken on the degenerate form of a pettifoggerarchy. In that shape, admirably contrived as it is otherwise, it performs its evolutions in a low sphere, seldom if ever being brought to bear for the accomplishment of any great object, or the furtherance of any noble enterprise. Strive, therefore, to counteract this state of evil, as far as lies within your power. Lend your influence, on all occasions, to the elevation of men of



worth, without regard to their pursuits ; and with the same fearless impartiality set your face sternly in opposition to the pretensions of all impudent upstarts. So far as your own aspirations may be concerned, do not think that, by the counsel just given, we would urge you to seek political preferment for yourselves. We do say to you, however, that if inducements of a sufficient character offer themselves, you should not decline office because of inferiority in respect of qualification to most of those who will be your competitors. We know your attainments and your talents, and are convinced that there is amongst you as much material, out of which to make useful public servants, as is to be found in the same number of graduates of any law school in any quarter of the Union.

As an important corollary of the general advice just given, we counsel you always to exert yourselves, to the utmost, to place the broad arrow of public disapprobation upon every one, within the circle of your influence, who entertains and advocates opinions that are derogatory to the value of our profession, or that tend to countenance any system of quackery or delusion. If by any fair means you can keep out of public employ, and of course off of a vantage-ground for the dissemination of his pernicious heresies, any advocate of empiricism, do not fail to put them in requisition. Such a course of conduct is due, not only to your own feelings of self-respect, but also to the interests of humanity. Mark it well that you will be working to effect your own degradation, and will be derelict to the highest trust confided to you by society, if by direct aid or by re-



missness you assist in placing any individual of the tribes we have designated in any post of influence, whether political or educational. Of the man who has not correct ideas of medicine you should form the notion which the great poet has propounded of the man who has not music in his soul. Say of such a one everywhere, by your voice and your vote, "Let no such man be trusted." And here, as something naturally suggested by the train of thought which we are now pursuing, I cannot refrain from stating to you, as something worthy of note in the annals of the State where you have closed your course of medical instruction, that although every one of its legislatures, for the last twenty-five years, has included amongst the number of its members a considerable portion of regular physicians, the appearance of any of the tribe of quacks in that body has been an unusual event. This felicitous state of affairs has been due in part doubtless to the general good sense of our community; in part, also, to the fact that few men who have either the sense, or the information, or the tact which might give them eminence, will defile themselves so far as to wallow in the cesspools of quackery; but it is with as much certainty, in good part, due to the influence exercised by the corps of two thousand educated physicians, which, as already intimated, are disseminated throughout the length and breadth of our commonwealth.

You are yourselves ushered before the public under a fiat in regard to your professional qualifications, issuing from an institution that is governed by medical men, and by them exclusively. There, accordingly, you have been



taught, both by precept and example, that in order to insure a healthful condition of the general interests of physicians, so much of them as relates to the mode of medical education must be retained in the keeping of the profession itself. If resigned into other hands, they must be confided either to the public at large or to associations of individuals. In the public, the profession might place reliance, for the mass of the community, though a minority may err, are not prone to give countenance to systems of charlatanry. But the community has other engagements, and cannot give such concerns the attention they demand. Hence, the government of medical institutions, if surrendered by physicians, must be given up into the hands of associations, in the nature of boards of trustees; and such associations, carefully selected as they may be, are always prone to take on the form of cliques, and to be controlled more by feelings of whim, or by a selfish desire for the aggrandizement of their own families, or their own political party, or their own religious sect, than by a sense of propriety. For proofs of the practical evil results growing out of such a state of things, we need point to but two instances—one in our own country, the other in Europe. In the University of Detroit, a Board of Regents have lately attempted to foist an advocate of the doctrines of homœopathy into one of the chairs of its medical department; and the same sacrilege has been actually perpetrated, by a set of authorities similarly constituted, in the heretofore venerated College of Edinburgh. Take warning, therefore, from the observance of such desecrations, and do all that lies in your



power to prevent their repetition. The chief means of accomplishing an object of so much importance, has already been designated. No other precaution can be taken that will prove of much avail. To prevent its high places from being filled with impostors, the medical profession has, we repeat, no other resource left to them than that of grasping the reins for themselves, and becoming the exclusive arbiters of all questions affecting their own interest. Take your stand, then, firmly on this ground. Resolve neither to be teachers in, nor patrons of, any institution for medical instruction which, by any procedure of the kind designated, commits an outrage on the general sense of the medical world.

In thus advising you to stand by the rights of your profession to self-government, we do not counsel you to any course which should be deemed unreasonable. On the contrary, we only call on you to observe a universal custom of society. The members of every other calling and trade assert their right to regulate the customs of their craft. With what show of justice, therefore, can your pretensions of a similar kind be gainsaid? Would the divine submit without resistance, if we assumed to control the ecclesiastical seminaries of our country; or the lawyer, if we affirmed a right to prescribe a course of legal studies? On what just ground of pretension, then, can they, or any other class of society, undertake to do for us what they will not permit us to do for them? In the history of unjustifiable interference, or at least as much of that history as is furnished by the annals of our own nation, there is



perhaps but one other instance which equals in flagrancy the attempts that have been made from time to time to place the educational interests of the medical world beyond the control of physicians themselves.

That has been evinced in the various efforts that have been made to take the control of our judicial tribunals out of the hands of men learned in the law, by placing side by side on the bench with a judge so qualified for the performance of his duties, two others, to overrule his opinions, and to expound and administer faithfully those rules of justice, of whose very existence they must of necessity have been wholly ignorant. This outrage on common sense, the offspring, as it has ever been, of low demagoguism and mean jealousy of the legal profession, has always been strenuously, and, in most instances, successfully resisted. Emulate, accordingly, the example thus set before you, and assent to no arrangement whereby the avenues to our calling shall be guarded otherwise than by the vigilance and discrimination of its own members. Your reward for the observance of this injunction will be found in the assurance, of life-long duration, that you are a member of an honored and honorable association: your punishment for its neglect, on the other hand, will come in the shape of the humiliating conviction that a large body of your colleagues are charlatans and impostors, and that you yourselves, being judged of by the company in which you are found, hold a place but a degree higher in public estimation.

In connection with the topic on which we have just des-



canted, we cannot refrain from paying what we would have regarded as a marked tribute of respect to the Board of Trustees, to whose care the authorities of the State, in whose metropolis we are assembled, have confided the interests of the University, of one of whose highest honors you are now the recipients. That body, ever since its first organization, has comprised, as it now does, some of the first citizens of our republic. Its acts, too, have been in keeping with its composition. And of those acts, leaving upon them the stamp of liberality of feeling, and of an earnest, unselfish desire for the advancement of the cause of learning, none is more worthy of eulogy than that which laid the foundation and insured the success of the school of medicine which you have selected as your Alma Mater. Thereby the control of the institution which it founded is given without reservation into the hands of an association of physicians. No layman can intermeddle with its policy, nor can, by intrigue nor by influence, foist any empiric into any of its seats of instruction. Such a display of disinterested munificence is as single in its defiance of the clamors of demagoguism as in its regard for the public welfare. If, therefore, in after times, you note that the Medical School of the University of Nashville maintains itself uncontaminated by every foul imposture—standing forth proud and unblemished, whilst others which are its contemporaries show a tarnished escutcheon—you will know to what source to ascribe the chief portion of the honor due on account of such a pre-eminence. One pledge, to be sure, was exacted by the founders of our college from those to whom they sur-



rendered its control, embodied in a covenant that they would establish a school of medicine, and maintain it on a respectable footing. The pledge was given without hesitation. The security for its redemption is found in the fact, as already stated, that those who are obligated are themselves physicians, who know the foundations on which the honor of their profession reposes, and whose interests and duties in that respect can never come into conflict. Before high Heaven, then, and the cloud of witnesses here assembled, we renew the vows we have taken. Conscious of the sincerity of our determinations, we now accordingly proclaim that, let others do as they may, we will stoop to no unworthy expedients. Others hereafter, as others have done before, and are doing now, may offer their degrees on cheap terms—cheap, we mean, so far as expenditure of time and labor is concerned—for the purpose of swelling the catalogue of their pupils: we will continue, as we now do, to deplore their errors and to prevent the contagion of their example. You well know that we never enticed you into the walls of our College by syren songs, having for their burden the abridgment of the course of preparatory study enjoined by the established custom of the country. On the contrary, you have the evidence on record, that we have always been ready to prolong rather than to curtail that course, and that, whilst we have lamented the errors which it involved, and have called for reform, our cry has been, not for amendments which would shorten, but for such as would protract both the period and the number of the



studies of those who are anxious to enter the ranks of our profession.

In carrying out the determination, thus expressed, to move firmly on in the path of duty, we are deterred by no fear of consequences. Honesty, we confidently believe, will in this, as in all other instances, prove to be the best policy. Some pupils may, and no doubt will, be induced to give a preference to the schools which pretend to designate a short route to the really distant summit of knowledge. The majority, however, we are convinced, will, with yourselves, prefer a certificate of qualification coming from some other quarter. Nothing, indeed, in the present condition of the medical profession in the United States, tends more clearly to prove that the feeling which pervades and actuates it is of a healthful character, and such as may well challenge the admiration of the community, than the fact that the schools of medicine which set up and adhere to a high standard of education are the most flourishing and prosperous; whilst those who flaunt other, and, of course, illusive banners, have a patronage as scanty as their deserts are diminutive. Such is undoubtedly the present condition of things, and such we trust it will ever continue to be. Should a revolution occur in times to come, we hope that our hold on your confidence will command your belief, when we give you an assurance that it shall not involve us in its direful vortex. We know, that in times to come, it will be a matter of pride and pleasure to you to learn that the institution through which you entered the



ranks of your profession, stands high in esteem and patronage; but we know, furthermore, that you would prize its honor beyond its prosperity. When you hear of it, then, as you will often hear in future, you may learn that its classes, numerous as they have been of late, are diminished in numbers, perhaps that its halls are closed because they are no longer, as now, a place of throng for instruction; but you shall never hear that, through a grovelling lust for pupils, it has sacrificed its principles. The Medical Department of the University of Nashville stands to you now, so far as your education is concerned, in the relation of a parent. You may hear, perhaps, before you complete your own earthly career, of the dissolution of that parent; but it shall never discredit your birth into the world of science, by dying in disgrace, and being huddled unceremoniously and undeplored into a grave of dishonor.

What we have just said touching the extraneous influences bearing upon our professional interests, has relation exclusively to the action of individuals or small associations. Closely allied to that topic, there is another, which leads us to a consideration of the amount of governmental interference with our concerns which is compatible with our interests and the good of the community. On this head, we have said all that we deem it necessary to say, when we notify you that, in the existing condition of public sentiment, you are likely to be but little annoyed by any officiousness on the part of our legislatures. They may, it is true, create boards of censors or examiners, to open or close our doors of admittance; but the authority of such



tribunals, though by no means pernicious in its exercise, will be rendered comparatively null by the custom of the country, which gives to the diploma of a medical school a large degree of credence as a passport to public confidence, whilst it quite ignores a certificate of qualifications issued by a Board of State Censors. Equally inefficient, too, as experience has demonstrated, will prove to be all enactments which may be from time to time made for the purpose of thwarting the devices of quackery. Until the spirit of the times has undergone that change which is ever a gradual, and never a violent revolution, large amounts of nostrums will be manufactured, puffed, and vended, and swallowed; and such amounts would be rather increased than diminished under the perversity of feeling too often engendered by prohibitory statutes.

If, therefore, your opinions accord with ours on these points—and scrutiny of the subject cannot fail, we think, to bring about such an agreement—you will not be found amongst the number of those who are clamorous for legislative aid, either to our recruiting service, or to the defensive works which we may be striving to erect against the assaults of quackery. Nevertheless, we are ready to unite with you in an earnest endeavor—the importance of which you should never for a moment lose sight of—to keep it well impressed on the minds of our legislators that, in all the attempts which they make to fulfil their obligations as the guardians of education—obligations which the wise framers of our constitutions here inscribed high on the list of their duties—they should not give to medical education

less than its due share of regard. Make them to understand the importance which is attached to it in every other portion of the civilized world. Be prepared, also, to inform them in regard to the munificence of many of their predecessors in our own country. Let them know, on all fitting occasions, that the States of New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio, South Carolina, Georgia, Kentucky, and Louisiana, have all, from time to time, made large bequests to medical colleges. Enforce particularly on their attention those views of the subject which, whilst they set forth in strong light the necessity of medical knowledge to the well-being of the community in time of peace, will demonstrate clearly that, in time of war, it enters into the structure of the right arm of our public defence. Remind them often that even in the countries of the old world, where the common soldier is for the most part culled out from amongst the offscouring of the earth, and esteemed only as fit food for gunpowder, the public sense of humanity would be excited, to the extent of an outbreak, were it proposed to send an army into the tented field, to encounter the risks and the horrors of war, without the appendage of an able, skilful, and well-appointed corps of medical attendants. Then the memories of those who for the time being control our public affairs, being so refreshed, force them to the conclusion that a neglect which would disgrace any nation of the old world, would be a horrible atrocity amongst us. Let them never forget that, when our republic engages in the dreadful work of war, her armies are made up for the most part, not of



base hirelings, but of gallant volunteers; that the blood which is shed in our defence on the field of battle flows from no caitiff's veins, but is the best blood of all the land; and that, therefore, it is among the highest and most solemn of their obligations to provide all the means that may be necessary to give assurance that not one drop of the precious fluid shall ever be spilled unnecessarily or in wantonness.

Another appeal, which we make to you with confidence, touching the nature of your response, relates to the practical nature of the training which you have received at our hands. Certain we are that there is nothing in our mode of instruction which would tend to make you mere book-worms, men of learning without tact in respect to its application. Books have been recommended to you, not because their contents were the real treasures of which you were in pursuit, but because they were aids, great, nay indispensable aids to the attainment of those treasures which are to be found in actual embodiment only in the store-houses of nature herself. All along have we endeavored to make you understand, that after the acquisitions of science which you may have made in the mere preliminary task of observation, contemplation, and meditation, your work would remain unfinished, until you had gained the more important knowledge which relates to the mode of turning those acquisitions to account, by applying them to useful purposes. At the same time that we so instructed you, we endeavored to guard you against the erroneous opinion too commonly entertained, that you could acquire such an amount of



learning as would prove an impediment in any sphere of the active duties of life.—That learning is never in truth that

———“Cobweb of the brain—  
That art of encumbering part and wit,  
And rendering both for nothing fit,”

which many regard it.—That, on the contrary, he who is designated as a mere book-worm—whose mind is nothing more than a lumber-room, filled with good things of which he is able to make no use—is the victim not of an excess, but of a deficiency of knowledge.—That such a one, in a word, is unfitted for the duties which his education assigns to him, not because he is too learned, but because either through error of his own or of his teachers, or through lack of capacity, he is but half learned, having never yet acquired the art of making an application of his knowledge to useful purposes. What proves the correctness of the views we thus propound and reiterate as a matter of vast importance to you, is the undeniable proposition that we would not either improve or reform the book-worm by stripping him of any portion of his acquirements. Thereby we would only subtract from his claims to consideration without adding a mite to his capacity for usefulness. The latter metamorphosis could be effected only in one mode. That, when adopted and carried out, would reject no part of his learning as useless and cumbersome, but would bind him down assiduously to the task of making new acquisitions. He would come into our hands in some sense a scholar. Our training, to be successful, must make him not less, but more, a scholar. Facts in great abundance are already stored away in



his understanding. We would make him a fool if we robbed him of such wealth. We complete, on the other hand, the work of wisdom already begun in him, when we give him more knowledge—knowledge, to be sure, which exceeds all other kinds of attainment in value, but none the less knowledge on that account—knowledge of the modes in which knowledge may be displayed in such a fashion as to heap honor on its possessor, and inestimable benefits on the race to which he belongs.

You go hence to enter upon scenes of trial and difficulty. Enrol yourselves as a member of what community you may, the task before you is one hard of accomplishment—one indeed that, but for the lights of experience, would seem almost impracticable. If you seek to make a home amongst strangers, herculean efforts will be required to bring those around you to the conviction that it would be a thing of prudence on their part to commit the keeping of their health to a youthful and unknown applicant for a trust of such magnitude. If you return to the homes of your infancy and boyhood, whilst you will there no doubt enjoy every manifestation of that kindness and regard to which your known character and the strength and respectability of your connections give you an indisputable title, you will not fail to find many of your best friends slow of heart to believe that the stripling who lived amongst them theretofore as a claimant of their guardianship and protection, has attained to a maturity in understanding and in wisdom such as fits him to play a tutelar part in matters which involve the very being of themselves and of all who are bound to them by

the dearest ties of affection. Let such obstacles, great as they may be, and great as they undeniably are, awaken in you feelings of animation, not of despondency and discouragement. What would the prize be worth that could be won without a struggle? Nerve yourselves, therefore, for a determined effort, and having commenced it, strive on with that firm assurance of success with which you must be inspired when you reflect on the success of your predecessors. Prove by your assiduity in study, in observation, and in attendance at the bedside of the sick, that you are enthusiasts in the cause of suffering humanity, which you have espoused. Demonstrate to all around you, what at first thought may seem incredible, that man when prostrate in his physical and intellectual and moral powers, nay, when loathsome to ordinary contemplation from the effects of sickness, is to you an object not only of the deepest solicitude, but of the most eager curiosity. Show by your conduct that, whilst others devote themselves with rapture to the work of scrutinizing the human body in its might and magnificence, when its every lineament is radiant with strength and beauty and intelligence, and its every movement and attitude is the perfection of grace and majesty, you can, with no less display of earnestness and devotion, consecrate yourselves to the same masterpiece of creation, when it is so metamorphosed, as it may be, by the foul spell of disease, that its presence brings before the senses and imagination a world of horrors and disgust, instead of its wonted world of wonder and delight. This point having been attained, complete success will soon be the reward of your perseverance.



Monuments of your skill, too, will soon rise in numbers about you—monuments not of inanimate material, bearing flattering inscriptions, such as would tend rather to awaken distrust than to command belief, but living, moving monuments, whereon a record to your honor will be found engraven in unmistakable characters—the characters which indicate restored health and renewed vigor of body and of mind—characters which, being the device of Heaven itself, can never be counterfeited or made the vehicle of falsehood.

The brightest results that you can confidently anticipate as the reward of the toil and privation through which you have heretofore passed, and through which you have yet to struggle, is distinctly indicated in one of the most animated pages of Scripture history. There it is recorded of the most afflicted of mortals, that, in the course of the sublime speculations and profound reflections illumined by bursts of eloquence such as have never been surpassed, into which he was led by the events of his adversity, he passed over in review all the enjoyments which poured in upon him like a flood during the days of his unparalleled prosperity. In this melancholy retrospect, what do we note him to designate as constituting the climax of his felicity? Was it the splendor with which unbounded wealth had surrounded him? No; for he had well learned to place its proper estimate on the vanity of absurd pomp. Was it the luxuries that were strewed around him in a profusion that made him a stranger to want, and almost ignorant of the very nature of desire? No; for sensuality had been long expunged from his nature by a taste for purer, more lasting,



and more ennobling pleasures. Was it the honied adulation poured in his ear by troops of professed friends, in words and tones of choicest selection, at every opportunity? No; for his present experience impressed too forcibly in his mind a sense of the just value of summer admirers and sunshine sycophants. Was it the honor and distinction which were heaped upon himself and his family by the world around, ready then, as it is now, to bestow its favors where they are least required and less merited? No; for he had just had a most impressive lesson touching the fleeting nature of earthly honor and earthly preferment. On what one, then, of his recollections of bygone rapture do we find him dwelling with most transport? Making light comparatively of all things else, we note him rapt in ecstasy while he recounts the fact that there was once a period of his life when "the blessing of him who was ready to perish came upon him." "The blessing," he exclaims, "of him who was ready to perish came upon me." Here, then, gentlemen, as just intimated, your highest hope of reward is clearly indicated. Toil on, as you have heretofore toiled, in fulfilment of the great task you have imposed upon yourselves; and whether wealth or poverty be your lot, whether you pass your lives surrounded by a throng of admirers, or in the solitude of neglect; whether you are loaded with distinction, or live but obscurely useful; still, you can pass through your existence here, supremely happy in the assurance that, over and over again, "the blessing of him who was ready to perish has come upon you!"



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