

**An address to the graduating class of the Medical College of Georgia :
delivered on the 6th of March, 1844 / by George F. Pierce.**

Contributors

Pierce, George F. 1811-1884.
Medical College of Georgia (1833-1873)
National Library of Medicine (U.S.)

Publication/Creation

Augusta, Ga. : Printed at the Chronicle and Sentinel Office, 1844.

Persistent URL

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/v2a6ckbc>

License and attribution

This material has been provided by This material has been provided by the National Library of Medicine (U.S.), through the Medical Heritage Library. The original may be consulted at the National Library of Medicine (U.S.) where the originals may be consulted.

This work has been identified as being free of known restrictions under copyright law, including all related and neighbouring rights and is being made available under the Creative Commons, Public Domain Mark.

You can copy, modify, distribute and perform the work, even for commercial purposes, without asking permission.



Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

(Box 57) Pierce (G. F.)
AN

ADDRESS

TO THE

GRADUATING CLASS

OF THE

MEDICAL COLLEGE OF GEORGIA.

DELIVERED ON THE 6TH OF MARCH, 1844,

✓
BY GEORGE F. PIERCE.

~~~~~  
PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES.  
~~~~~

30237

AUGUSTA, GA.:

PRINTED AT THE CHRONICLE AND SENTINEL OFFICE

1844.

Medical College of Georgia.

THE LECTURES in this Institution commence on the Second Monday of each November, and continue to about the 10th of March following.

THE FACULTY CONSIST OF

G. M. NEWTON, M. D., *Professor of Anatomy.*

L. A. DUGAS, M. D., *Professor of Physiology and Pathological Anatomy.*

ALEX. MEANS, A. M., *Professor of Chemistry and Pharmacy.*

J. P. GARVIN, M. D., *Professor of Therapeutics and Materia Medica.*

JOS. A. EVE, M. D., *Professor of Obstetrics and Diseases of Women and Infants.*

L. D. FORD, M. D., *Professor of the Institutes and Practice of Medicine.*

PAUL F. EVE, M. D., *Professor of the Principles and Practice of Surgery.*

HENRY F. CAMPBELL, M. D., *Demonstrator.*

Augusta, May, 1844.

The Degree of M. D. was conferred on the following candidates at the recent Commencement of the Medical College:

E. R. Carswell,	Burke County, Ga.	R. W. Lovett,	Scriven Co. Ga.
E. V. Culver,	Sparta, "	J. L. Baker,	Double Wells, "
J. M. Cody,	Warrenton, "	J. B. Carlton,	Athens, "
J. G. Polhill,	Louisville, "	Pearse O'Leary,	Raytown, "
John O'Farral,	Maynooth Col., Ire.	S. B. Johnston,	Tuscaloosa, Ala.
G. H. Wooten,	Mallorysville, Ga.	C. C. Hammond,	Anderson, S. C.
D. M. Williams,	Jonesboro', "	W. N. Head,	Dahlonga, Ga.
J. W. Strawn,	Mallorysville, "	L. C. Belt,	Burke Co. "
W. G. Dunn,	Crawfordville, "	R. S. Key,	Edgefield, S. C.
U. G. Mitchell,	Lumpkin, "	T. J. Brooks,	Hamilton, Ga.
W. S. Leak,	Cassville, "	J. L. Lewis,	Clayton, Ala.
W. H. Felton,	Athens, "	J. L. Houston,	Augusta, Ga.
James Camak, Jr.	" "	T. J. Hart,	Social Circle, Ga.
A. M. R. Sessions,	Monticello, Flor.	J. G. W. Whale,	New York, N. Y.
W. E. Claybrooks,	Edgefield S. C.	B. C. H. Evans,	Macon, Ga.
E. F. Starr,	Clarksville, Ga.	B. H. Pearson,	New Hampshire.
H. G. Collier,	Decatur, "	Jackson Maddox,	Columbia, Ga.
J. T. Barton,	Richmond Co. "	J. A. Reid,	Augusta, "
John Lark,	Newbury, S. C.	John Knox,	Chester, S. C.
J. E. Walthall,	Butts County, Ga.		

ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN GRADUATES:

THE hour has arrived that marks the first grand epoch in the history of your medical career. The labors of your collegiate course have terminated,—the decision of the Faculty has been pronounced,—the President of the Board of Trust has conferred the degree, and the conclusion of these ceremonies will introduce you to the world as Doctors of Medicine.

You have, doubtless, looked to this period with an interest commensurate with its importance, and now, that the perturbation of anxiety has been succeeded by the comparative quietude of hope realized, you feel the complacency of generous minds in the verdict of your instructors. The sympathies of the good and refined are always enlisted in favor of the young, the studious and the honorable, as they launch the sea of life,—the bosom beats responsively to the bounding hopes, the high ambition of their early efforts, and an almost instinctive kindness invokes the blessing of heaven on their enterprise. The youthful are stirred to emulation as they gaze upon the inspiring scene,—the mature will greet you with a fostering smile, and the aged grow warm with admiration as memory revives the past, and, leaving their example to guide and cheer, resign to you the toils of the profession and the rewards of employment.

The gratification of feeling connected with this occasion is greatly augmented by the fact, that your previous character gives assurance of worthy citizenship in time to come. I rejoice, that my own observation corresponds with the universal testimony in assigning to you the honor due to great sobriety of deportment, and of that high moral elevation of principle and habit, without which knowledge is only a capacity for mischief, and a diploma a certificate of worthlessness.

I speak not the language of adulation when I say that your College is a monument of glory to the mind that conceived its establishment,—an honor to the State from whose authority she derived her charter,—a praise to the Faculty of Instruction; but no wisdom of design,—no le-

gitimacy of authority,—no excellence of knowledge, will perpetuate its hold on public confidence and public affection, if unsupported by the gentlemanly bearing, and, to say the least, the general morality of its students. A Board of Instruction, far less distinguished for the variety and adaptation of its talents, with an annual array of young men, honorable alike in life's public walks and private ways, might elevate the institution to fortune and to fame: for its graduates would be epistles of commendation.

The Medical College of Georgia has been fortunate in both respects. Let no man marvel at the rapidity of her march to equality of position with the kindred institutions of the country! The cause is obvious. The effect is legitimate. Let no man doubt her continued prosperity—her onward, upward motion! For virtue is her tutelary angel, and usefulness the goal of her enterprise. I but embody the general sentiment when I breathe the prayer—May she run a long, bright race of glory, and when she dies, if die she must, depart full of years and full of honors.

Let me warn you, young gentlemen, against an error into which there is almost every thing to betray you,—example—false views of necessity, and the ruling passion of the country, the love of money,—I mean the error of supposing that your education is finished, your furniture for business complete. The hasty spirit of the people, evinced in every department of life,—the ambition to do a great business upon small capital and large credit,—the feverish desire of accomplishing much with the least possible outlay of time and labor, inducing the substitution of reckless adventure for patient industry,—choosing bold and hazardous experiment rather than to rely upon the sure but sometimes dilatory rewards of intellectual and moral worth, all conspire to cheat you into the notion that the time for study is past, and that employment is your unquestionable right. The whole tendency of the age in which we live is to a superficial order of things. The force of example, with a multitude on its side, is inconceivable. To resist is hard. It is the highest effort of moral courage to stand fast by right and truth in such circumstances. There must be resolution, patience, a far-seeing wisdom, arranging means and ends by an exact adjustment, staying the heart delayed in its hopes, upon the broad conviction that knowledge is power and industry profit, and thus guarding against the despondency that would paralyze energy, and the seductions that would beguile with idle dreams and vagrant longings. To one who has devoted himself to it as a profession, and who would not be antiquated in

his practice, the study of medicine must, in the very nature of it, and from a thousand incidental causes, be protracted from year to year. The modifications of disease by climate, diet, local causes, and, perhaps, constitutional changes in the generations of mankind, with the discoveries of new remedies in the progress of natural science, and the facts developed by different systems of practice, all require that you should be reading, studious men. Without it, your profession will be mere drudgery, and your prescriptions a series of guesses.

Your profession, gentlemen, involves responsibilities too sacred, too awful, to allow the indulgence of constitutional sloth, or to permit the waste of time in the frivolities of dissipation and the inglorious luxury of ease. Your duties are arduous and multiplied. The secrets of your art are locked up in full many a volume that must be conned with care and analysis,—they lie scattered over the vegetable and mineral kingdoms, and must be sought at the expense of many a weary hour and painful step,—they are to be evolved in the labors of the laboratory,—nature must be persuaded to speak, in her solitary places, in the ear of science, and sometimes her answers must be wrung out by the fires of the crucible or extorted by the arts of alchemy. You go to make war upon the thousand ills to which flesh is heir, to drive them back in the fury of their onset, or to dislodge them from their strongholds in the human form. Disease—insidious foe of human life—often lurks in ambush, and in darkness and silence works out his destructive schemes; but you must detect his hiding places and circumvent his wiles.—Whether he sends out his predatory bands, the flying artillery of the skeleton king, or muster in serried ranks his regular forces, you must be bold to stand, prompt to resist, and wise to deliver. Whether he come in the burning sunlight, with fever in every glance, or ride upon the wind, with pestilence in every breath,—whether he make the vital air the storehouse of his fearful missiles, or evoke from the infected earth his poisonous agents, you are to meet him in the courage of a wisdom that cannot be dismayed, and in the plenitude of a preparation that cannot, unless God decree, be overdrawn.

The guardians of health and life, your very pretensions invest you with character, and, if supported by the acquirements that justify your title, will give you the currency of gentlemen and the confidence of friendship. The practitioners of the most benign art of civilization, the public have the right to expect and exact the utmost amenity of manners, the most constant benevolence of spirit, the kindness of word and deed, that shall assuage the bitterness of sorrow, and gild the gloom of despondency

with the radiance of hope. The light of your countenance should be to the heart of the sick as the face of an angel, and the sound of your footsteps the signal of sympathising tenderness. If life be spared and business prosper, you will see the human body in its most humiliating aspects—weak, shrunk, loathsome—"from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, nought but wounds, bruises and putrifying sores;" the mind raging in the frenzy of delirium, or drivelling in the imbecility of idiocy,—suffering in all its forms, hunger, sickness, thirst, poverty and disease, in the same ragged and comfortless habitation, parents and children involved in one general wo; pangs and tears and anguish, unseen by the common eye, unheard by the public ear, will all be familiar to you. You will see the blossoms of hope crushed in the icy grasp of death, and hear the wail of anguish as it goes up at midnight hour from a stricken household, wailing the departure of the loved and lost. Youth, stricken in the pride of beauty, pale, cold, breathless, ready for the tomb, "the only son of his mother and she a widow," will die before your eyes and leave no light or hope behind, and age, desolate and alone, will sink to the fellowship of the buried and the forgotten. With these scenes passing daily before you, you are in danger, from habit and hardening, of coming to look upon life without interest, except as it verges upon death, and to regard the infirmities of men simply as a source of revenue to the medical profession. If familiarity with suffering be combined with the love of filthy lucre, the almost inevitable result will be an induration of the heart—a sealing up of the fountains of feeling, that may leave you the artificial mildness of a worldly polish, the bespangled covering of the basest natures, the worthless, disgusting substitute of genuine politeness, but the charm, the glory of the heart will have fled forever. "Keep your hearts with all diligence." Beware lest interest beguile you of your simplicity and habit entomb your sympathies.

Unskilled, as I am, in Anatomy and Physiology, it is perhaps presumption in me to say, (yet I will venture the remark,) that there is a fatal error in your profession, in the mode of your dealing with the sick and the dying. I know the shock of painful intelligence sometimes unnerves, and that excitement exhausts and so enfeebles the functions of life, but where an immortal spirit, unanointed and unforgiven, is soon, very soon, to pass from earth to the presence of its Maker, if the intimation of the approaching crisis be withheld, and the suffering patient be allowed to hope for life, and refrain his lips from prayer till death comes, and he has gone to his last account unwarned, I think the

physician has assumed an awful responsibility. It is a compliment to the decisions of science, perhaps at the expense of a soul's salvation. It is adherence to a fallible judgment, rather than to that principle of morality which binds us, in a doubtful case, to take the safe side. In these circumstances the safe side ought to be determined by the magnitude and duration of the interests involved, and the life everlasting ought never to be jeopardized for the life that can, at best, be protected but a few days. If it savor of criminal weakness and of wicked devotion to medical opinion to withhold the truth, even where there is an honest, well-grounded fear that the announcement would result in the aggravation of the malady and the hastening of death, how shall I designate the savage meanness,—the heartless cruelty,—the awful impiety of inspiring false hopes, by light declarations of the nature of the disease, giving positive assurances of speedy restoration, when death is at the door, and all lest the contrary should seem to imply the acknowledgment (a confession never to be made, it seems, but in the last extremity) that the Doctor had met more than his match. This is trifling with a vengeance. Who? What is man, that a soul must die lest his vanity be wounded and his skill discredited? Who? What is man, that the defence of his system of practice should justify him in the utterance of a lie to a dying creature? I beseech you, gentlemen, never trifle, never deceive, though the temptation spring from the impulse of intended kindness, and is recommended to your adoption under the auspices of printed philosophy. Prudence is necessary, but is seldom or never inconsistent with truth. Yield to no unmanly fears—no nervous morbid excitement, “frightening yourself from your own propriety.” Be calm and undismayed whatever the trial, nor lose, in the confusion of alarm, the clue to the salvation of your patient. Express your hopes of recovery, if you have them, but never compromise the integrity of your profession. Rely not upon the sanative influence of deceit, nor consent to share with the Father of Lies the glory of success. Rest assured that honesty is the better policy, whether you regard the upbuilding of your reputation, the testimony of your conscience, or the accountability of the future.

The exclusion of the Minister of the Gospel and the interdict of religious exercises, is sometimes carried to an unwarrantable length in the exercise of an authority questionable in its origin, and certainly injudicious in its exercise. If it be the will of the sick one to seek the religious

consolation appropriate to his circumstances, I doubt whether the refusal is not an invasion of the rights of conscience, and that too at the very time when the exercise of them is the last chance for salvation. I do not suppose that the interdict involves corruption of heart and hostility to God, in the sense of criminal intention in the premises, but the deprivation is not less an act of illegitimate authority because it sprung from honesty of judgment and kindness of motive. There may be no taint of wickedness in the transaction as to the agent, and yet the effect upon the subject may be wofully disastrous. To extenuate the impropriety of an interference in a case of this kind, the reasons should be strong as demonstration, and not mere probabilities derived from general theory or vague analogies. The Physician's carelessness in reference to salvation, and it may be his skepticism as to the whole Christian scheme, may, and sometimes does (as I have seen,) so warp judgment and so infect his heart with the poison of infidelity, as to make him seize with avidity upon an occasion that afforded him an opportunity of expressing his contempt of all religion—and so under cover of the opinion that the patient needs repose, that whatever would agitate and excite must be kept away, he arbitrarily excludes preachers, Bibles and prayers. In such case he has wickedly usurped another's right of judgment, and, in my opinion, committed an offence of highest enormity against God and man.

I admit there may be peculiar cases where the exercise of such authority grows properly out of the Physician's responsibility. They, however, are rare. I mean, by the above remarks, only to inculcate the utmost caution and the greatest tenderness of conscience, lest you condemn yourselves by that which you refuse to allow. My experience in visiting the sick, in a great diversity of circumstances, has led me to the conclusion that the soothing effect of religious exercises often operates happily upon the body, and that prayer never injures the souls or bodies of men. The agitations of fear,—the pangs of remorse,—the fearful locking-for of judgment and fiery indignation, must be, as to their physical effects, quite as unfavorable to recovery as any that can ensue from the counsels of a judicious teacher. The minister or layman who would assail the dying or the sick with rude denunciation, or even loud and vehement exhortation, must be as dead to the tender sympathies of his kind as he is destitute of the spirit of his Master. The citation of the promises of the Bible, the repetition of the Saviour's name, the voice of prayer to a benignant Father can never, never harm the patient or commit the Doctor.

In this connection, permit me to remind you that while personally you occupy the common ground of your race and must needs give an account of yourselves to God, and therefore have no time to spare and no reason for delay, a variety of motives derived from your professional relations are superadded, demanding the consecration of your heart to God. You will be called to visit human beings in the hour of their weakness and their pain, when the past with its guilt rushes upon the memory, and the future with its untold terrors frights away the approaching spirit; at such times it should be part of your vocation to minister to the troubled conscience by recommending the balm of Gilead and the Physician there. If in some forlorn and isolated condition (as I have known to happen,) a despairing sinner, seized of death, beseech you to pray for him, when you have not learned to pray for yourselves, the time—the place—the subject—the petition, will bring before you in awful light the horrors of your own delinquency and scathe you with a remorse for which earth has no solace and time no cure. Prepare yourselves for every emergency. Learn to seek direction of God in all you do, and when occasion requires let the voice of prayer from your lips tell of sympathy with the suffering and of communion with heaven.

The history of life is a tale of varied and ever varying distress,—a roll of mourning, lamentation and wo, and the angel that unfolds it seems commissioned to waste and destroy. Go, seek to stay his ravages, and, in the two-fold character of Physician and comforter, mingle the alleviations of hope in the cup of earth's bitterness. Go, be eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, and let the blessing of him that is ready to perish come upon you. Emulate the masters of your art in your aspirations after knowledge. Abhor idleness. Resolve to be independent. Let religion sanctify your spirit. Consecrate your life to honor, to usefulness and to God. Then, whether life for you be robed in sunlight or darkened by trouble and tempest, glory's temple will be the tomb, and death itself be immortality.

