

**An address delivered at the first medical commencement of the
Massachusetts Medical College, March 7, 1855 / by D. Humphreys Storer.**

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AN

ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT

The First Medical Commencement

OF THE

MASSACHUSETTS MEDICAL COLLEGE,

MARCH 7, 1855,

BY ✓

D. HUMPHREYS STORER, M.D.

PROFESSOR OF OBSTETRICS AND MEDICAL JURISPRUDENCE.

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1855.

Boston, March 8, 1855.

PROF. D. H. STORER.

DEAR SIR, — At a meeting of the Graduating Class, held immediately after the exercises yesterday, a Committee of three, consisting of Messrs. FREDERICK WINSOR, SAMUEL KEEP, and CALVIN G. PAGE, were appointed to solicit a copy of your very able and interesting Address for publication. Hoping that you will give an early and favorable reply to this unanimous desire, I remain, with sentiments of much esteem,

Your Friend and Servant,

For the Committee,

CALVIN G. PAGE.

Boston, March 8, 1855.

To CALVIN G. PAGE, M.D.

DEAR SIR, — Your kind Note, requesting a copy of my Address for publication, has been received. Prepared as it was at the termination of a course of Lectures, when my time was necessarily unusually occupied, I must confess that I am not a little surprised to have been so fortunate as to have made my remarks entirely acceptable to the Class. As, however, for them the Address was prepared, I feel to them it belongs, if they think proper to ask it.

Please present my respects to the gentlemen associated with you, and accept the assurances of regard of,

Yours truly,

D. HUMPHREYS STORER.

A D D R E S S .

GENTLEMEN, — Now that the period of your pupilage has expired ; that you have reached the goal to which you have so long and so anxiously looked ; that you have proved yourselves worthy to enter the arena of the profession, and competent to assume its varied responsibilities, — your instructors, whose privilege it has been to watch your daily progress, are unwilling to separate from you, perhaps for ever, without at least publicly expressing their gratification at the proofs you have exhibited of zeal, industry, and patient, earnest endeavor.

The relation of pupil and instructor has ceased ; but that relation had long since ripened into esteem and friendship, which outlive time.

Upon me has devolved the grateful duty of congratulating you upon your success thus far ; of presenting you, at parting, a few words of advice and encouragement.

You are now free ; free to think, free to act : you are your own arbiters.

Upon yourselves, and upon yourselves alone, depends your future history.

At the very threshold of your profession, before you have advanced a single step, let me entreat you to take a solemn pledge, — that it shall be your constant effort to be true to its objects; that you will strive faithfully to discharge all the duties devolving upon you; that you will endeavor to prove, by your daily acts, that you are the members of a profession, than which none can be more worthy to engage the thoughts of man.

At the commencement of your career, your time will be principally your own. Mark out for yourselves a course of study, and zealously pursue it. Most young gentlemen, upon leaving the office of their instructor, feel that in some departments of medicine they are more deficient, or less familiar with them, than others. Endeavor, first, to supply such deficiencies; to remove this consciousness of inferiority. Waste not your time in reading the refuse productions of unreliable authors, but concentrate your thoughts upon the invaluable facts constantly furnished by the true men of the profession. Endeavor to make yourselves familiar with all the important discoveries which from time to time shall be presented. Investigate, patiently and thoroughly, every case of disease, however unimportant it may appear, which shall fall under your observation, not omitting to take daily notes of the same: in connection with

such cases, read the best authors upon the several subjects, within your reach. You will thus acquire a method, the value of which will be more apparent each succeeding year.

Let no opportunity escape you of frequenting the medical institutions to which you may obtain access. You will now examine the cases with very different feelings from those which you have previously entertained: in all, you will find something to interest and instruct you. Should any of you decide to establish yourselves in this vicinity, I would most strenuously advise you, regularly, constantly, to accompany the physicians and surgeons of the Massachusetts General Hospital, in their daily visits to that noble institution. You will there obtain a familiarity in diagnosing disease, and in administering remedies, which will do much to remove that want of confidence, which, not unfrequently, is a great obstacle to a young physician's success. I feel at liberty to assure you, you will ever be most kindly received by every medical gentleman connected with it.

Thus engaged in the study of your profession, preparing for its practice, the greater portion of your time will be employed. There will yet remain hours, long, lonely hours, — the mind wearied with effort, the spirit harrowed by penury or depressed by anxiety, — when the present will appear dark and gloomy, and the future desolate. Conscious that you are exerting yourselves to the utmost, do not allow such

feelings to control you, to make you unhappy: by a determination not to be thus subdued, you will spare yourselves incalculable suffering. Upon such occasions, your thoughts should be diverted from ordinary avocations; other objects should occupy your attention. Do not engage in amusements which merely annihilate time, which afford no real present pleasure, which are always looked back upon with regret; but let your leisure hours be employed in rational recreation, that, while your bodies are refreshed and exhilarated, your spirits may be tranquillized, your thoughts elevated, your natures improved. The time has gone by, gentlemen, when the student of Natural History finds it necessary to bolt the door of his study when consulting a work on his favorite science, or to flee to his attic if he wishes to describe, or even to examine, a specimen in any of its departments. The day has gone by when the young physician finds himself neglected and ridiculed for thus improving a small portion of his superfluous time; and he is now even expected to be familiar with at least the *important collateral* branches of his profession.

Those of you who may have a taste for natural science need no incentive to its pursuit. Should there be any among you, however, who have cultivated no one of its branches, let me assure such, that from no source can be derived purer pleasure, truer enjoyment: at all seasons of the year, in health or in sickness, you will find an inexhaustible fountain. I

will not particularize any department, as being more conducive to your happiness ; nor could I, if I would. Whether you direct your investigations to former epochs, or confine your attention to objects now existing, — from the conferva to the gigantic forest-tree ; from the infusoria to man, — you will find the gradual, progressive development of a grand, vast, infinite scheme of creation. Commence its study ; it will never cause you regret for misspent time ; during the years of your early professional life, it will solace and comfort you ; it will be the strongest check upon any temptation to swerve from the path of duty ; it will keep constantly alive your great moral obligations. And, when advancing years shall have so increased your professional duties as to leave you not a solitary hour to engage in your beloved pursuits, while you regret the necessity which thus compels their relinquishment, you will revel in the delightful associations which are constantly recalled.

Thus far, step by step, you have advanced with constantly increasing zeal and devotion. The study of the profession which was commenced with perhaps no peculiar predilection, as soon as its elementary steps were trodden, gradually became more and more interesting. A degree almost of fascination has at times existed, as the structure of the different organs of the body has become understood ; as their various functions have been interpreted ; as the means by which these organs, when deranged, may be restored, have

been presented to your view. The resources you have thus garnered are to be your capital for life: judiciously invest them, and your principal will be ever augmenting.

Do not commence your career with the expectation that, upon the first day or the first week, your services will be required. Do not despair of final success, if months pass by, without your professional advice having been asked in a single instance. Those who are best able to remunerate, will extend their patronage when your skill is acknowledged, your reputation is established. The worst aspect of the profession will welcome you: welcome *it*. The poor, the degraded, the vicious, are the young physician's patients. Extend to all your prompt, willing, faithful services. Let the needy feel, that, while you sympathize with them in their affliction, you commiserate their condition in life; cheer, and encourage to reformation, the disgraced; turn not a deaf ear even to the suffering of the criminal. Never refuse your aid where there exists actual distress: even if that distress should have been voluntarily imposed, do your duty, if another has failed to do his.

Independent of the experience thus gained, and the consequent self-reliance, by carefully watching cases, which others may refuse to take charge of, on account of the revolting circumstances connected with them, should you need any additional inducement for your course, I would assure you, that in no possible way

can you more permanently advance your true interests. However destitute, however degraded, however depraved an individual may be, that individual has relations or connections or acquaintances differently situated in life, who still feel a greater or less degree of interest. By such, your attentions and sympathy and kindness are appreciated and remembered and referred to, years after they have been by you entirely forgotten. No physician ever faithfully discharged his duty to the poor, without having been directly benefited. But I feel you will need no urging to perform this portion of your calling. It is not the young man just commencing life, whose heart is full of the warmest and deepest sympathy, who looks about him, and calculates the expediency of every step before he takes it; and I will not, for a single moment, imagine that you would shrink from any duty, however irksome. Slight as may be the pecuniary recompense you receive, you will be amply repaid, in such cases as I have referred to, by the consciousness of doing good; by the reflection that you have lessened the poignancy of others' griefs, that you will be remembered in the prayers of the widow and the orphan.

In the discharge of your professional avocations, you will be admitted into families with the most perfect freedom; you will be often looked upon with the same confidence as if you were a member. Thus you will become intimately acquainted with the cha-

racters and peculiarities of the inmates, and their local history. You will be expected never to betray the confidence entrusted in you, but religiously to keep within your own bosom what your peculiar relation has enabled you to learn. Never converse of your patients' derangements, unless they are of such a nature as may be referred to without any impropriety. Nothing is more injurious to the standing of a physician, than a knowledge that he is addicted to such a course. It is a breach of a sacred trust, unbecoming a member of a liberal profession, unbecoming a true man. Should you be so unfortunate as to become conversant professionally with any circumstances implicating the character of an individual, let no other consideration induce you to reveal it, than the laws of the land which you have tacitly pledged yourselves to obey.

Form for yourselves a *professional standard*: keep constantly before your minds some of the distinguished men who by their characters have elevated the reputation, or by their talents have advanced the boundaries, of our science. Do not fix your attention upon a point which can be readily attained; which a short period, however great the exertion used, will enable you to acquire. But let the eminence be so lofty as to require the effort of your lifetime to reach its summit. You cannot perhaps arrive at the distinction for which you strive; you may fall far short of your expectation: but, if you faithfully exert your-

selves, if you have constantly one great object in view, and the returning seasons find you ever toiling uninterruptedly on, you will have acted well your part; you will have accomplished what thousands similarly situated have failed to do.

Should you not become known as men of science; should you not be able to add a single grain to the already limitless amount of human knowledge, you may yet make yourselves most valuable members of the profession and the community. To possess the respect, esteem, confidence, of your brethren should be your anxious desire. You are to be constantly associated with them in the discharge of your daily duties, in your social intercourse: you should wish to claim them as your friends; make them such by your frank, unreserved, gentlemanly bearing; by your readiness to allow the true value to all suggestions which may be made; your desire to overlook any trifling error of judgment which may exist; your willingness to acknowledge that the age and experience of your seniors ought to add some weight to their opinions; and by the modesty with which you present your own.

The kind feeling and intimacy which may have existed for years between physicians is sometimes suddenly dissolved by an unavoidable misunderstanding; or, more frequently, by the reprehensible, the utterly inexcusable, interference of some officious friend. Should such an unfortunate occurrence befall either of you, gentlemen; should you have any reason to

suppose, from the conduct of any professional brother whom you esteem, that he has become alienated in his feelings, let me earnestly advise you *at once* to seek an interview; to know the cause of the estrangement, the indifference which has been evinced. Generally speaking, you will find some misconception has existed, or some misrepresentation has been made: a reconciliation is readily effected, and your peace of mind restored. Never think it derogatory to your character to make any explanations which your best feelings prompt.

Never withhold from your fellow-laborer what of real merit he possesses. Never detract from his efforts to advance himself, if those efforts are not dishonorable. The course he pursues may differ from that you would suggest; the means he employs may shock your sensibility: you may smile at the manner in which he casts his line, or blush at the carelessness with which he baits his hook; but don't find fault with his fishing. He may occasionally allure an unwary individual; but the barb is generally seen through its superficial covering, and but few seize it with sufficient avidity to be drawn to the shore.

The young physician is not unfrequently called upon by the dissolute and unprincipled to screen them from merited punishment. He is not yet known. Except among his immediate friends, he has established no decided character. Or perhaps he is supposed to be destitute, and even suffering; and that,

under such circumstances, his services can be easily procured. Strong indeed is the temptation. He whose advice is asked is perhaps deeply embarrassed; for his education, even, he is indebted: he knows not how he shall subsist from week to week; he is compelled to deny himself daily almost the necessaries of life. Alone, depressed, wretched, he receives a request for professional advice, accompanied with a remuneration, which to him is immense, which will relieve his necessities for months. This service he can render; and, with it, his employer alone need be conversant. This may be your position, as it has been that of others. Hesitate not a moment; allow not the struggle to commence, even, between your destitution and your conscience. As yet, you have committed no crime. You are penniless, you feel perhaps friendless; but you are still yourselves. Return the gold to the tempter, untouched; and thus teach him that your integrity is priceless. However frequently such demands may subsequently be made, the remembrance of the joyous satisfaction with which you indignantly repelled the first advance will prompt you, without a moment's delay, to pursue a similar course.

Whenever you can conscientiously, speak favorably of your peers; whatever faults they may possess, you will always find some traits worthy of your acknowledgment and approbation. Never allow yourselves so to speak or to act, that existing confidence in a competitor shall be diminished. A single unkind

insinuation, a single unguarded expression, may cause another irreparable injury. Remember the happiness you receive from the slightest expression of regard, the depth of the wound when you are contemptuously referred to. If you would do your utmost to render our profession respected, let your intercourse with your brethren be that of high-minded, true-hearted gentlemen; conscious of the nobleness of your calling, and above detraction.

The estimation in which you are held by the community will depend, in a great measure, upon your standing in the profession, upon the opinion formed of you and expressed by your brethren. And thus it obviously should be; for they have the best opportunities of becoming intimately acquainted with your character and your attainments. To the kind words of older medical friends, many a young man can date the commencement of his progress; and to this same source, many, far advanced in life, look back with the memory of the heart.

Gentlemen, although you may, you must, encounter many difficulties; although months and years must pass before your situation shall become altogether desirable, — you have much to cheer and encourage you, to excite you to continued, unabated industry. The different systems of charlatanism may perhaps, within the past few years, have extended more rapidly, and at times amazed the cursory observer; but such changes are constantly occurring:

every age is rife with quackery. Never, in the history of our profession, have its members been more respected by the community; never has there existed so great a degree of reciprocated esteem among themselves, as at the present hour. You enter our ranks at a most propitious period. I would extend to you a cordial welcome; and, in the name of my colleagues, I would offer the earnest wish, ay, the heartfelt prayer, that each and all of you may obtain that success in life, which, we feel confident, it will be your unceasing effort to deserve.

Mr. President and Gentlemen, — Since the commencement of the course of Lectures which has just closed, the most distinguished member of this school — who possessed our undivided esteem, in whose judgment we all confided, of whose varied attainments we all were proud — has resigned his connection with it. To his efforts and his influence, much of our present prosperous condition is due. He has labored long and well. Thousands gratefully remember his instructions; and, as long as true science shall have a votary, so long will the heart beat the quicker, and the current flow the deeper and the stronger, at the name of BIGELOW.