

**The real rewards of medicine : the valedictory address delivered at the commencement of the Jefferson Medical College, May 2, 1893 / by W.W. Keen.**

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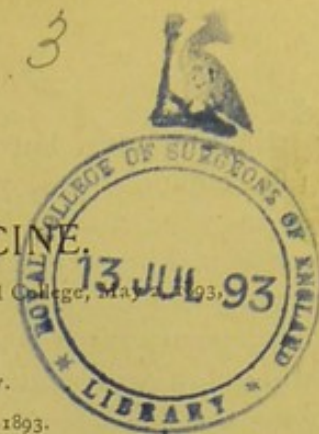
## THE REAL REWARDS OF MEDICINE.

The Valedictory Address Delivered at the Commencement of the Jefferson Medical College, May 13, 1893.

BY W. W. KEEN, M. D., LL.D.

Professor of the Principles of Surgery and of Clinical Surgery.

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### GENTLEMEN OF THE GRADUATING CLASS:

The revolving cycle of the passing years makes it to-day my pleasing duty to say a parting word of advice, of caution, and of cheer to you. And first let me say the word of cheer; not only because it is the pleasantest to be spoken, but because in your earlier years of practice you will need it far more than any other word I could speak to you. I am sure that the public do not understand, nor do they appreciate, not only the many years of study before a young doctor can even begin to be self-supporting, but the many years of discouragement, with an empty purse and accumulating bills, which beset his early professional life. Should he desire to enter upon the profession *thoroughly* equipped it means, first, the years of preparation in the common schools, from seven to eighteen; then four years in college, then three, or as soon will be the case, four years of study in the Medical School, then at least a year in a Hospital, and, if possible, a year or two abroad. In other words, twenty-one years of study are practically what is required, completely to fit a man even to begin to earn his living by the practice of medicine in any of its branches.

And in his earlier years the doctor is paid in many cases far less than the pittance which is bestowed even on the humble day-laborer. I remember very well one of the brightest young men in the profession, who had all the advantages I have just described, and who, some time after having "hung out his shingle," came to me greatly discouraged and said, "I think I shall have to give up the practice of medicine." "Why so, Doctor?" said I in surprise, knowing his ability and future promise. "Because," said he, "I do not

think I can earn enough to support myself and my wife" (for he was already married), "and I do not wish to be dependent all my life on my father." "How much have you earned by your practice since your graduation?" I asked. He replied, "It is now seven months since I opened my office, and I have received exactly \$2.50." In other words, in 210 days he had received a little more than one cent a day! And in my own personal experience, when I had been in practice for five years, in the month of June I paid and received all told seven visits, of which three were charity visits, two patients ran away and paid me nothing, and two paid me \$1.00 each.

Many years ago I was returning in the street cars, at six o'clock in the morning, from St. Mary's Hospital, where I had spent the entire night in attending to the victims of a terrible fire in a mill, and, seeing my case of instruments, a laborer, evidently an intelligent man, just starting for his summer day's work, accosted me and wanted to know where I had been. Upon my telling him what I had been doing, he said to me, "I suppose you'll get a right good salary for working all night and doing a lot of operations;" and he was completely dumbfounded when he learned that not only had I gone to the hospital at my own expense, but had served the institution for years without charge, and that every hospital surgeon, and hospital physician, and hospital resident in the city gave his labor and the best work of his life for years entirely free of charge to the patients under his care.

Yet time brings its rewards, and you will find if you do good work that your friends and neighbors will after a time surely recognize your merit. If you have genius you



may gain a fortune, but even mediocrity is sure of a competence if you are faithful and honest in your work. No man need ever despair of making at least a decent living by the practice of medicine.

But pecuniary rewards are not the best that you will get, if you cultivate everything that ennobles the profession and discourage all that tends to make it merely a trade by which to make money. What, then, are the real rewards which the profession of medicine holds out to you? They may be sketched somewhat in the following manner: First, you will enjoy a sense of daily duty faithfully performed. This fills a noble heart with a glow, far beyond the satisfaction of an expanding balance in bank or a growing hoard of stocks and bonds.

“Count that day lost, whose low descending sun  
Views from thy hand no noble action done;”

if you do you may be sure that no day will be lost, but will be counted among your great gains. Duty is often irksome drudgery, but put your heart into it and the lowest drudgery becomes the highest service and will not fail of its reward. As quaint old George Herbert says:—

“A servant with this clause  
Makes drudgery divine;  
Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws  
Makes that and the action fine.”

Life for the most part is a matter of trivial details. The growth of character, like all other growth in nature, is the result of the steady multiplied activity of many small parts. The giant oak which resists the stoutest storm does so because in the many days of soft rain and bright sunshine its roots were spreading far and wide in the fertile soil by the growth of cell upon cell and fibre after fibre, its strength being tested and confirmed by summer breezes and occasional wintry winds, and at last when the storm comes in its fury the mighty tree has so faithfully done its duty in its minute but constant growth, that it stands unmoved and unassailable. So the small daily duties of life, if faithfully performed, will gradually develop your character and fix your princi-

ples so firmly that the storm of temptation, however violent, cannot bend or swerve you from the path of duty.

This daily duty may lead you into danger, which you must face with the coolness and courage of the soldier on the field of battle. True, for the soldier of science and of duty there is no blare of trumpets, no beating of drums, no shouts of the combatants, no public honors, no laurel wreath: for the young physician is in the lowly home of poverty, battling with the angel of death, exposed to the poison of diphtheria, of yellow fever, of cholera or of typhus, and may himself fall in the encounter, a victim to his brave sense of duty to his patient; and the surgeon in the hospital exposes himself daily to the dangers of blood-poisoning, dangers which I have seen in more than one case cut short a life of promise and hide it in the grave. But he lives in grateful hearts, unknown though he may be to the pages of history, or even beyond a small circle of equally obscure friends. But their prayers and cries are heard of the good God, and the Recording Angel will enter every such unselfish deed in God's Book of Remembrances.

“They have no place in storied page,  
No rest in marble shrine;  
They are past and gone with a vanished age,  
They died and ‘made no sign.’  
But work that shall find its wages yet,  
And deeds that their God did not forget,  
Done for their love divine—  
These were the mourners, and these shall be  
The crowns of their immortality.”  
O! seek them not where sleep the dead,  
Ye shall not find their trace:  
No graven stone is at their head,  
No green grass hides their face;  
But sad and unseen is their silent grave—  
It may be the sand or the deep sea wave,  
Or a lonely desert place;  
For they need no prayers and no mourning bell—  
They were tombed in true hearts that knew them  
well.”

No other calling has ever had such a multitude of brave, unselfish, unknown, silent martyrs, who have freely risked all that is dearest and best, even to life itself, as our own profession. But their lives have not been lost,



for, as Ruskin has well said, "Every noble life leaves the fibre of it interwoven forever in the work of the world."

But not only will you have this sense of daily duty well done, but if you use your time well there will be a daily personal growth in knowledge. To this end, study after you have graduated, as you have never done in your so-called "student-life." Make even your failures a fertile soil for a larger growth and better achievement, for

"The tree

Sucks kindlier nurture from a soil enriched  
By its own fallen leaves; and man is made,  
In heart and spirit, from deciduous hopes,  
And things that seem to perish."

You will have earned each day a certain modicum of money, but you will also have added to the store of knowledge in your mind, to be of use to your future patients; so that your gains cannot be measured merely in dollars and cents, but in wider knowledge, in pregnant ideas, in mental growth, in better judgment, in a better balanced mind, and in masterful ability to cope with dangers by reason of such larger knowledge.

More than this; you promote the general welfare and add to the prosperity of the community in which you live, by directly diminishing the loss of time and money to the wage-earners of the community. You restore the sick mother to the charge of her household, the disabled father to his family—nay, in not a few cases you save life itself. And how much a single life may mean to a man's wife, his children, his business, his church, his community, his nation. Even if you cannot save life, you lessen suffering and bring cheer into the sick-room, and you smooth the pillow of death itself.

In Preventive Medicine you can do still more, and on a far larger scale, by educating the community as to personal and municipal health, by pointing out the evils of dirt, of filthy streets, of foul sewers, of impure water, of tuberculous meat and milk, of crowded tenements, of unwise clothing, of want of exercise, of want of the daily bath, of errors of food and drink, of vile habits, and a host of other

enemies to human health and happiness. This, believe me, is to be the greatest function, the most splendid achievement of the coming years.

And lastly, in this brief sketch which I am giving you, you should do one thing more. Remember that science looks to you for enlargement of its boundaries, by conquests in the domain of ignorance. I envy you your position on the threshold of the glorious twentieth century. The passing century has seen great victories, but the next one will see far more. Our profession is not complete, "totus, teres, atque rotundus," but I believe it has, as it were, just begun its beneficent career. The discovery of Anesthetics and of Antisepsis, and the creation of the science of Bacteriology have been the three great triumphs in medicine of the nineteenth century. You enter upon this great heritage, freely bequeathed to you by your predecessors; you begin where they left off. With such advantages you should make still greater advances, and I believe that you are on the eve of still more blessed and portentous discoveries. The cause and the cure of the great destroyers of human happiness and human life are to be discovered by you. You may vanquish cholera, consumption, typhus, yellow fever, scarlet fever, and other demons of disease, and there may be even in your own class—why not?—an unsuspected peer of Harvey, of Jenner, of Lister, of Pasteur. By carrying on to its utmost limits the good work already begun in the Jefferson Medical College, by earnestness in study, by exactness in observation, by gathering your facts, shrewdly comparing and correlating them, by wise experiments to ascertain the correctness of your conclusions, and then by publishing them for the information and enlightenment of the profession, you will fill out the duty you owe to the Community, the College and the Profession. The Alumni of the Jefferson Medical College, whose ranks you join to-day, have reason to be proud of the contributions to science made by the dear old College. Its large and constantly enlarging body of Instructors have always been in the forefront in the intellectual



arena of Medicine. It was not less a matter of pride than of delighted surprise to me, not long since, when, apart from all the splendid work of its other Alumni scattered all over the world, *a partial compilation of the books and papers published in two years only by the teachers connected with the Jefferson showed that they had published 267 contributions to knowledge*—almost one paper every two working days. See that you keep up—nay more, that you extend this scientific spirit, so fruitful of blessings to humanity.

We are about entering on a new era in the history of the College. Its educational and charitable work have both been hampered for the past twenty years, to a degree only appreciated by those engaged in the daily work of teaching in the College and in caring for the immense number of patients in the dispensary service of the Hospital. Here again the community is in utter ignorance of the enormous amount of charitable work done in the Hospital. At the end of my recent term of service of only *eight weeks* in the clinic, I reported to the Trustees that in addition to all the work in the surgical wards, in which there were nearly 50 patients requiring daily care, *there had been 5005 visits and operations in these 48 working days, and exactly 200 operations done*, many of them of the most serious character, and without a single death.

This, mark you, is only the record of eight weeks of the entire year and in one department alone. If to these figures you add all the cases in the clinics for Medicine, Obstetrics, Gynecology, Diseases of the Eye, of the Throat, of the Ear, of the Nervous System, of Children, of Orthopedic Surgery, of the Skin, etc., the sum total is simply enormous. And all this is done in a Hospital built before these numerous clinics were even thought of,

and in quarters lamentably deficient in space, air and light.

Besides this charitable and scientific work, you know even better than I can tell you the absolute need for enlargement of the facilities in the various laboratories and lecture rooms, requisite for teaching over 600 earnest young men every year. The simple fact is that we have outgrown, immensely outgrown the facilities which our buildings afford. The four years graded course, now voluntary, must soon be compulsory, and we will be worse off than ever. Hence the bold plan for the new buildings in a new and splendid location. The Trustees and Faculty are cordially united in their efforts for a "New Jefferson," and we appeal to the public of the State and of the City for aid.

Colleges, theological and technical schools, and hospitals have been endowed with millions, but who except Johns Hopkins has ever endowed a medical school? Yet here are educated the doctors who make or mar human lives in these very hospitals and in the entire community. As alumni of this now ancient and honorable school, you can assist in shaping public sentiment in this direction. We appeal to this charitable community to aid us in the great work of training their medical attendants to the very highest point of scientific and practical skill by gifts which will be repaid to them an hundred fold in their own lives and health and that of those dearest to them.

I welcome you then, finally, into the goodly company of earnest workers and soldiers of knowledge in the campaign against ignorance and disease. Be an honor to the College, true to yourselves and faithful to your fellow men and to God throughout your lives, and His gracious benediction, "Well done, good and faithful servant," will be your final and blessed reward.