

**Valedictory address to the graduating class of Jefferson Medical College,  
at the fifty-first annual commencement : delivered in the Academy of  
Music, March 11, 1876 / by William H. Pancoast.**

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Royal College of Surgeons of England

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# VALEDICTORY ADDRESS

TO THE

GRADUATING CLASS

OF

JEFFERSON MEDICAL COLLEGE,

AT THE

FIFTY-FIRST ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT.

DELIVERED IN THE

ACADEMY OF MUSIC

*MARCH 11, 1876.*

BY

WILLIAM H. PANCOAST, M.D.,

PROFESSOR OF GENERAL, DESCRIPTIVE, AND SURGICAL ANATOMY.

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PUBLISHED BY THE CLASS.

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PHILADELPHIA:

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## CORRESPONDENCE.

JEFFERSON MEDICAL COLLEGE,  
March 10, 1876.

At a meeting of the Class held this morning, it was—

*Resolved*, That a committee, consisting of one from each State and Nationality represented, should be appointed to present the compliments of the Class to Professor Wm. H. Pancoast, and request a copy of his Valedictory Address for publication.

P. J. RAGAN, *President*.

J. A. CARNCROSS, *Secretary*.

PHILADELPHIA, March 2, 1876.

Prof. WM. H. PANCOAST—

DEAR SIR: We, the undersigned, a committee appointed by the Graduating Class of 1876, take great pleasure in expressing the unanimous desire of the Class for a copy of your Valedictory Address for publication. And we earnestly hope, that many future students may have the opportunity, of listening to the very clear and instructive lectures delivered by you, which we feel to have been of inestimable value to us.

Yours, most respectfully,

SAMUEL W. WOODRUFF, Pennsylvania.  
R. BRUCE BENHAM, Ohio.  
ENOCH T. PRITCHARD, Indiana.  
WILLARD H. ROGERS, New York.  
CHAS. M. NOBLE, Illinois.  
WM. A. JOHNSTON, Iowa.  
ENOCH CALLOWAY, Georgia.  
ALLEN D. GILMER, North Carolina.  
GEORGE W. MARSHALL, Delaware.  
THOS. H. PRICE, West Virginia.  
THEODORE A. KEETON, Missouri.  
JOHN J. KANE, Kentucky.  
STACY B. COLLINS, California.  
THOS P. PALMER, Tennessee.  
HENRY H. RACE, New Jersey.  
WM. F. DAVIS, Maryland.

JAS. G. STEPHENS, Virginia.  
GUILLERMO MACHADO PLANA, Cuba.  
T. ERSKINE TODD, South Carolina.  
J. B. M. BONNEFIL, Costa Rica.  
WM. L. KELSEY, Connecticut.  
PETER BURGI, Idaho.  
WILHELM THIES, Germany.  
LOUIS BAZET, France.  
J. J. HARLAN, Alabama.  
FRANK L. WEIR, Rhode Island.  
B. J. FEHRENKAMP, Texas.  
J. A. HAMILTON, Louisiana.  
B. R. SOMERVILLE, New Brunswick.  
LOUIS GORIBAR, Mexico.  
OTTOCAR KOPETSCHNY, Bohemia.

1100 WALNUT STREET,

Philadelphia, March 11, 1876.

GENTLEMEN: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your favor of yesterday. My address was written for the Class, and I take great pleasure in placing it at their disposal. Pray accept for yourselves, and tender to the Class you represent, my sincere acknowledgments for the kind expressions which accompany their request.

With warmest wishes for the future welfare and happiness of yourselves and the other members of the Class,

I am, with great regard, faithfully yours,

WM. H. PANCOAST.

To Messrs. SAMUEL W. WOODRUFF, R. BRUCE BENHAM, ENOCH T. PRITCHARD, WILLARD H. ROGERS, CHAS. M. NOBLE, WM. A. JOHNSTON, ENOCH CALLOWAY, ALLEN D. GILMER, and other members of the committee.

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Dear Sir,

I have the pleasure to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 10th inst. in relation to the above matter.

I am sorry to hear that you are having trouble with the machine. I will try to get you a new one as soon as possible.

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## VALEDICTORY ADDRESS.

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It is my pleasant duty, gentlemen graduates, as the representative of the faculty of Jefferson Medical College, to address you on this interesting occasion.

You have each one of you, on the bestowal of this day's honors, arrived at a brilliant point in your life's history. You have been waiting long, and striven, as we know, anxiously to obtain these honors.

I can readily recall my student days, and I well understand the nature of the wearying and intricate studies to which you have been night and day devoted: and I feel convinced that you well merit the rewards that follow such patient devotion.

This day the honor you have received and have so fairly won, makes you objects of great interest to us all.

You see the evidence of it, in a measure, in this great array of distinguished men and beautiful women, who come to do you respect, as the heroes of this hour.

The hearts of the older and more experienced are filled, I have little doubt, with hopeful anticipations for your success in the future; and soft and earnest eyes express in their kindly beams, deep interest in your behalf.

It is not improper then that your triumph of this day should be adorned with flowers, and ushered in with music and rejoicings.

From the hands of our distinguished president, you have just received the diploma of the Jefferson Medical College of Philadelphia, stamped with its broad seal, attesting to your full qualifications, for the practice of the sacred art of medicine.

By this act you are now elevated, so far as regards titular rank, to a level with the highest in the land. I may then well congratulate you, gentlemen graduates, on this halcyon



termination to your labors, and, in the name of the faculty and trustees of Jefferson Medical College, welcome you—warmly welcome you—into the ranks of our honored profession.

You are now about to leave the hum and bustle of the schools, behind you. Like the knights of old, you have patiently performed your ordeal at the shrine of science and duty, have been dubbed with your rank, and are prepared to go forth over this broad land in the search of adventures and renown. You go out in a more quiet guise than the errant knights of old, but with even a nobler object, to war with the demons of disease and pain; not to inflict injuries, but to relieve the injured, to succor the suffering, and strengthen the weak. In this benevolent view of your ministrations, it might almost become you to bedeck yourselves, with the palmer's shoon and the scallop shell.

From the point now reached, you must necessarily have your attention turned toward the future path which you are about to tread, and which seems, I have no doubt, to stretch out vaguely and mistily before you.

You may regard it anxiously, but you must not despairingly. You are in a good measure prepared for the undertaking, and are charged, as I well know, with high expectations and noble impulses; for such high qualities are the natural fruits of the devoted study of a philanthropic profession.

I wish, gentlemen, that I were only able to peer into the sea of the great future before you, as I now look into this sea of upturned faces; then I would cast your horoscope, and tell when and where and how you ought to proceed, with the more perfect assurance of success. But this cannot be; you must go forth under your own guidance.

You must be the architect of your own fortunes.

Youth, I know, must have its dreams, and Hope is a goddess ever ready to bless us on this earth.

Busy Fancy will be with you, sketching out in her beautiful rainbow pigments a *beau ideale* of the brilliant career that each one of you would wish to run.

Mistrust this fairy mistress a little, who, overlooking the asperities of the path to be trodden, directs attention only



to the glittering prizes to be attained at the end of the struggle. But banish her not altogether. She may lead you to undertake higher emprises than you will be able to master. But never mind. He who starts in his career, and goes persistingly on, with high and noble aims, though he would scarcely expect to realize them all, will raise himself highest in the estimation of all good men, and leave the idler and the sluggard far behind him in the race.

Be not satisfied, therefore, to rest upon your present laurels, lest they wither while you yet caress them.

Be ever on the alert to qualify yourselves for new undertakings; actively endeavoring to improve yourselves day by day, in an increasing knowledge of your profession.

Let few leisure hours be wasted in indolent ease.

Employ them in the investigation of such medical subjects as excite the nearest interests, gathering up knowledge to be laid away in the storehouse of memory. Though you may not for the moment see, when the occasion will come, that you may employ it most advantageously; yet it will come, sooner or later, to increase your usefulness and enhance your reputation.

If each day's setting sun shows something newly gained in your profession, then you may feel satisfied that you are doing well in the student's path of duty. No one should be so presumptuous as to think, that the time is or will ever come, when the necessity of self-improvement is unneeded. That time comes truly to none. I want you, and I will repeat the wish—now while flushed and gratified with your present success, to lay down your plans for future and continuous study. Remember that with all our aid, you have been able as yet to establish little more than a solid foundation, upon which you are to build in the future.

With minds firmly bent, on fitting yourselves to hold a high place, in the estimation of the good and wise, you need not be fearful of the future; friends will form around you to aid in your advancement, and sooner or later you will be greeted with grateful whispers, in the voice of praise, for favors that you have bestowed and professional successes that you have won.

Seek in your location no secluded spot, far away from



competition. Honest competition, with able compeers, will serve to give point to your energies, and push you on in the way of distinction.

However crowded the profession may seem to be around you, despair not on that account. Take but the greater pains to fit yourselves, for the treatment of every malady that may come before you, and recollect what was said by Webster, "That in every profession, there is always room enough at the top."

You see that I am urging you, not to cease your efforts at mental improvement: for I know that every physician, whether young or old, feels its need, and that you will find your interest and pleasure in this philosophical pursuit, to increase with every step you make in your advancement, for

"How charming is divine philosophy,  
Not harsh and crabbed as dull fools suppose,  
But a perpetual feast of nectared sweets,  
Where no crude surfeit reigns."

Though there are many pathways to distinction in the different branches of our profession, there are none of them, as you will find, smooth or polished. They are more or less rugged and rough, with stones and brambles in the way, and crowded with jostling aspirants, emulous of being the first to reach the goal. Along these routes you must patiently and persistently struggle, trusting not to the chance accidents of birth and fortune, but to the powers of the solid acquirements, that each may gather to himself. For by this means you will conquer success. And it is certain that such powers, when massed like strong battalions, and well applied, always carry the day. Some of you may enter this struggle, with the advantages of fine training and unusual native ability; others less richly endowed at the start, may find a full compensation for this seeming want, in greater fervor of zeal, and more determined application. Which of the two, the native genius, or the plodding and indefatigable inquirer, is to become the most successful in the end, the touchstone of time only can determine. Could you lift the veil that covers the working chambers of men, who are distinguishing themselves in their professions, you would find them in the leisure moments of the day, and in the stillness of the night, work-



ing—working—with a diligence beyond ordinary toil, to fit themselves for the positions to which they aspire.

For in truth, as has been before said, nothing valuable can be truly gained without industrious application, even by those endowed with native genius.

Was this the case even in the reference so frequently made to Napoleon the first, who rose to almost superhuman eminence, though springing as he did from a very humble origin?

“A spark, that from a suburb hovel hearth  
Ascending, wrapt the capitals in flames.”

He was unquestionably a genius. But think you not that the little midnight lamp, that glimmered so constantly from his window during his student days at Brienne, had not much to do in fitting him, for the great part he was to play in the future? Yes, gentlemen, that little flickering midnight gleam, was the embryonic star of his destiny.

The science of medicine, now more than three thousand years old, did not come into the world perfect, like Minerva, when she sprang from the brain of Jove. It has been slowly built up by the successive labors of great men, from the time of Hippocrates down to the present day, swelling the little original rill of science till it has now become a mighty torrent.

It is curious to trace the great wave of scientific learning in its spread from the east to the west: To be returned finally, as is possible, with increased fulness and force, in the opposite direction, through the efforts of American genius and the ingenuity of American inventors.

The star of empire, as we all know, had its origin in the east.

The intellectual development which had its birth in that region, was impressed upon all the nations over which it spread, on its march towards the west. In the earliest days, Chaldea, Assyria, India, and then Egypt, were the great centres of the knowledge and science of the world. The Greeks drew much of their knowledge and inspiration, from the two latter sources.

From the time of Alexander the Great, or rather I might say, from the time of his great teacher Aristotle, knowledge



began rapidly to be diffused, especially after his conquest of the shores of the Nile. The city which he founded at the mouth of that great river soon became under the Ptolemies, and especially Ptolemy Philadelphus, whose name should sound gratefully to us, the most beautiful one in the ancient world. By Greek architects it was filled with temples and monuments, and in its famed Pharos possessed the first great lighthouse in the world. It was enriched with libraries and schools, and became the home of the learned and studious. Students flocked to it from all quarters, and to the number, it is said, of many thousands.

But at last came its downfall, and its schools were annihilated. First it suffered from its Roman conquerors; and finally from the Mahommedan blight which completed its ruin. Though its schools were destroyed, their influence was not lost. It was extended to the Roman literati. It impressed most powerfully the better part of the Arab race, and thus seems to have conquered its very conquerors; for in succeeding years the Saracenic Arabs, translating the Greek books, became almost the only learned men, and kept burning the lamp of science of the time, which, but for them, might have been utterly extinguished. From these Arabians the returning crusaders brought back much knowledge into Europe.

Schools of science were first established in Europe, at Salerno, near Naples, and Arab teachers, it is said, filled some of the chairs in that school. From this small city, science was rapidly diffused over Europe. Academies of renown were established, as at Bologna and Padua, and students from nearly all parts of Europe gathered at those shrines.

Under the influence of this spread of learning, the darkness of the superstitious and war-like middle ages gradually melted away, like a dense fog before the morning sun. Great schools subsequently grew up in Paris, Vienna, London, and Edinburgh. To these great centres of clinical instruction and hospital experience, went the early students from this new and then little known land, our Rushes, Physicks, and Chapmans.

The flame of medical science soon began to burn brightly in America. The first important course of scientific medi-



cine in this country was given in a small building in an obscure portion of this city. Now its influence has spread broadly over the land, and is appreciated abroad.

Steam communication on the Pacific has made, what was once the most distant east, the then remote Indies, our western neighbor. Our country is now directly intermediate, between those east, on the Atlantic side, and west on the Pacific, midway between the true Orient and the true Occident. Our continent may now be considered the highway of the world. When intellectual development reaches here its full height and keeps on its westward march, may it not be possible that it may be the means of rekindling the flame of science in the far Indies west of the Pacific? Thus we may be able to return the knowledge with great and valuable additions, to those antique nations, from whom we received it by the way of Alexandria; and it may be, possibly to have it to commence again the round of our earthly orb.

Remember that all the fruits of the labors and magnificent researches of the generations that have preceded us, are now opened out before you, for careful study and investigation.

The science as yet, however, is by no means complete or perfect. There may be something that you, each one, can do to aid in its advancement, and join yourselves to the great body of its improvers, that have gone before.

And if you should be successful, in making some new discoveries in anatomy or physiology; find some improved methods of combating disease; some important virtues in our native medical plants; anything indeed, that may remove or alleviate the miseries of disease and lengthen out human existence; then you will in truth, be able at the close of your career, to wrap your cloak about you and sleep your last sleep in honor.

Cicero said that men in no way approached nearer to the gods, than in giving health to their fellow men. The great and the rich, look to us for aid in their hours of weakness and suffering, and receive our behests with respectful consideration. The poor, who are always with us, will think, for such is the common estimate of the philanthropy of our profes-



sion, that they are entitled to receive from it the aid they seek.

To the immortal honor of our profession, it is commonly awarded with care and kindness, not only in hospitals and dispensaries, but in private practice, without fee or reward.

A prominent French surgeon of other days, was called to give professional assistance to a great man of France. "Bear in mind," said this proud man to the surgeon, "that you have not a hospital pauper under your hands, but the Prime Minister of France." "Monsignor," replied the surgeon, "in my eyes, every poor patient in the hospital, is a Prime Minister of France."

He spoke but the common feeling characteristic of our profession.

Pray permit me to make you some suggestions, that may prove useful in the furtherance of your future prospects. First of all things, avoid exclusive sects in medicine, and all blind empiricism. Recollect that there is but one science of medicine, and that sanctioned by experience; which includes all justifiable means of curing disease and alleviating human anguish. Should some of you give yourselves most to the pursuit of surgery, you must not at the same time neglect your medical studies, for every surgeon has need also to be a good physician. Very many of you may be placed in rural districts, remote from clinics and hospitals, and will have to be on occasions your own surgeon, ophthalmologist, gynecologist, auscultator, percussor, and laryngoscopist. Endeavor to keep up your anatomical knowledge, in all its varied relations to functions and diseases, such as we have endeavored to teach you.

Keep pace as far as you well can, with the progress of the various sciences and the polite literature of the day. But let not this be done, to the disadvantage of your proper professional avocations. Though the world at large, is disposed to judge of a man in proportion to the excellence of his general accomplishments and varied knowledge, yet every one's reliance in sickness, will be in the physician, who shows the greatest mastery of his art, and can most quickly relieve him when sick or suffering.

Shall I conjure up a picture, such as I think that many of



you here, who do not settle in large towns, will present, and such as I have often had the pleasure to witness—the possessors of a pretty cottage in some country village, with a spacious and well cultivated garden behind it, with a cheerful porch and a neatly kept lawn in front, where you will sit in fine weather to read, embowered with woodbine and jessamine. Within, a cheerful office and library, containing besides some gracious fairy to brighten and bless the place. On the shelves arranged around are your books, not numerous at first, but well chosen, and lying on the table, one or two medical journals and popular magazines. Your books should be of the newest and the best; each as far as can be, encyclopedic in its character, like the great work of your professor of surgery on his branch, so that you may at will, have reference at hand in each department of your science.

In order to make your reading more serviceable to yourselves, I would suggest that you always keep a note book at your side, in which to jot down the important facts, which, you would wish to fix in your memory.

In important cases that come under your notice, and especially if they be malignant or novel ones, make regular entries in your medical diary, of the symptoms and changes from day to day. Enter the prescriptions which you make; the effects that you wish to produce by them; and mark down the results. You will keep thus a history of your practice.

By so doing the physician is all the time giving point and value to his personal observations, gains a more thorough knowledge of the therapeutic use of medicines, and will soon learn to prescribe, with a greater assurance of success.

In obscure and difficult cases, it will be always well for you to consult carefully the different writers that treat on the particular subjects in question; and when you have doubts in regard to the proper line of practice to be followed, do not hesitate to call in the assistance of the most reliable practitioners within your reach.

In plain country physicians, you will often find, as I have done, an accumulated fund of rich personal experience and a directness in prescribing for familiar diseases, that will excite your admiration.

From such men you may have much to learn, and it will



be to your decided interest, as it should be your pleasure, to treat them with the most respectful attention.

They may be behind you, perhaps, in a knowledge of the novelties of medicine, but they will have gleaned much which you have yet to learn, from the most reliable of all teachers, long personal experience.

We are all stirred too much perhaps with the announcements of new and wonder-working medicines, with strange and doubtful theories of practice, and processes of operations that are of little value, until they have become sanctioned by experience. This is not to be regretted. It but shows the wonderful activity of medical teachers of the present day, and though it may be pushed to extremes, it is even far better so, than that the profession should keep too exclusively in its old ruts or settle down upon its lees.

But you will do well to observe great caution in replacing the old and well-sanctioned ways of practice, by any new and doubtful measures. You will feel your way gradually if you step out of the beaten ways of old experience. In the trial of new measures, not fully sanctioned by reliable men, always be studiously careful, never to endanger in the least by so doing, the interests of your patients.

But as everything changes around us from time to time, the climate, the emanations from the soil, even the constitutions of the atmosphere, modified by choleraic and other infectious diseases, so must our views at times undergo corresponding modifications, in regard to treatment. When you read back along the descending records of our science, you will observe how the ablest of the old chroniclers of our profession, men of great observation and the highest practical wisdom, who, if they were living in this day, might make many of us droop our heads before them, pursued plans of practice in various diseases, very different from those which we now uphold.

But were they wrong? Were not their modes of treatment well suited to the cases of the time in which they lived? We bleed rarely from the arm now, for, since the first general spread of Asiatic cholera over this country in 1832, diseases have been of the lower and typhoid type, and



the supporting, rather than the reducing plans of treatment, have been found the most beneficial.

But were Sydenham, Cullen, Rush, Hartshorne, and Parrish wrong when they used phlebotomy so freely, at the times they did? We do not see such cases of high inflammatory fever now as they did, though there are many yet in practice in this city, who in former times have done so.

But let the time come back, from the operation of natural causes to which we have alluded, when, instead of the feeble, irritable pulse, and the low tendency of our present fevers, we have again presented to us the florid faces, the bursting headaches, the burning skin, the bounding pulses, and the turgid veins, we may have again to bleed as our ancestors did.

There are many of the old members of our profession now living, who can well recollect what unspeakable relief was oft-times afforded in such cases, when a turgid vein was opened, and the venous blood, which had been so hurried about the system, burst out at first with a florid hue almost like that of the arterial fluid. To this I allude—to these well-known changes of disease, and the modification of the plans of treatment—in order that you may preserve a due respect for the opinions of the experienced practitioners of old; for the observations of men of learning and experience, in whatever age, have their own specific value.

At the close of this ceremonial you will leave, most of you, for your homes, to display the honors you have gained, and to receive the congratulations of parents and relatives who have watched over your youth, and regarded with tender solicitude your opening manhood and prospective career. But you will leave many endeared to you, remaining behind, anxious to hear of your future fortunes, to whom your own memories will often fondly turn.

During the succeeding spring and summer our great metropolis will present unusual attractions to strangers, and probably induce many of you to make us another visit. You have, during the present winter, witnessed the bustle of preparation for this gigantic undertaking, and heard faintly, the coming hum of the triumphant jubilation, that will attend the celebration of the centennial birth-day of our



glorious Union. Here will be assembled from every zone, and almost every land stretched between the equator and the poles, all that they can supply that is beautiful in art, and wonderful in mechanical construction. There will be, in addition, fabrics from the looms of "Ormus and of Ind," the wonderful production of the needle-work of the Persian maids, fair representations of the glittering jewels that have been won from the mines of Potosi, Brazil, Golconda, and the Cape; specimens of mosques, kiosks, and pagodas, and other temples in which the heathen worship. This exhibition will probably be the most perfect of the kind that the world has yet seen, and may perhaps be the last we shall have displayed before us. Here will be shown evidences of all that the brilliant genius and exhaustless ingenuity of the present age have developed and placed at man's use and disposal, as well as full representations of the beautiful arts of painting and sculpture, both ancient and modern; a fair knowledge of which serves ever to embellish and ennoble one's existence. All this, I trust many of you will come to see; and if you survey intelligently and well, all the wonders that will there be accumulated, it will serve you as another liberal education. Come, then, to this feast of knowledge and marvel, and we will renew our memories of the past.

And in parting with you, if it should not seem presumptuous, I would invoke the blessing of Providence, to protect you against the storms of life, and to shower down manifold blessings on your career.

And now Farewell—a word that must be and hath been;  
A word that makes us linger, yet farewell.