

Valedictory address delivered before the graduating class of the Baltimore College of Dental Surgery, at the annual commencement for the session of 1849-50 / By S.P. Hullihen.

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VALEDICTORY ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

GRADUATING CLASS

OF THE

Baltimore College of Dental Surgery,

AT THE

ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT

FOR THE SESSION OF 1849-50,

BY

S. P. HULLIHEN, M.D., D.D.S.

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ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN GRADUATES:

I AM delegated by the Faculty of the Baltimore College of Dental Surgery, to congratulate you upon the successful termination of your studies—to welcome you into the ranks of the Dental profession—to present to you some of the cares and responsibilities of a professional life—to offer you a few words of general advice, and then to dissolve the connection existing between yourselves and the faculty.

In presenting myself before you, to discharge the mission just announced, there is no affectation on my part, when I assure you that I was not selected by your faculty on account of any fitness I possess for an occasion like this, but solely as a compliment to the Dental profession in the great Valley of the Mississippi, in which region of country I reside. I am here then without pretension, a plain, blunt man, to discourse to you in a plain way.

Your instructions in this institution being now ended—your examinations closed—you hold in your hands the just evidence of your diligence and efficiency in the study of the profession of your choice. Under the broad seal of this institution, you are now admitted into the ranks of authorized professional men. You are now entitled to the confidence and respect due to science and to art. You are now prepared to go forth into the world and to do honor to yourselves, good to the afflicted, and to add standing and dignity to the character of your adopted profession. These are rare and unusual qualifications for Dental gentlemen, at your time of life, to attain; qualifications which no where else within the range of civilization can be so well, so readily, attained as in the United States. No nation but ours can boast

of a legalized Dental institution. In no country but ours are men admitted to practice the Dental profession by statutory provisions. And, to *Americans*, the greatest proficiency in this branch of the healing art is frankly and justly accorded, wherever the profession is known; aye—even by the proud and jealous Britons themselves.*

With advantages so rare, with an education so complete, your professors had no hesitation to permit your examination to be conducted by strangers; *and, as if to banter on your proficiency*, they composed an examining committee of gentlemen from the Medical as well as from the Dental profession.

This was an unusual, embarrassing, and a severe test for you, gentlemen, to sustain. But I am proud to bear witness that you passed through this ordeal in a manner that did great honor to yourselves, and more than honor to your professors. Well, then, may you be proud of such a conquest! Well, then, may you be congratulated upon your success in reaching thus early the high cliff on which the laurels of honor are to be gathered.

At such an eminence, with such an education, trained as you are in all the necessary branches of medical science, you will justly hold a commanding influence, a mighty power, over the rise, progress and future destinies of the Dental profession.

Carry up, then, the standard of your profession—plant it upon the broad platform of Medical Science—claim for yourselves and for your profession the same respect and importance awarded to other branches of the healing art; and that, too, upon the same ground—the ground of a *thorough scientific education*.

Until within the last ten years—until the establishment of this College—the Dental profession was looked upon as a *trade*, and its practitioners as mere mechanics; while gentlemen who devoted themselves to the treatment of the eye, the ear or skin, took rank at once with the physician or general surgeon. On what ground was this distinction predicated? By what authority was it sanctioned, and by whom promulgated? A disgraceful ignorance of medical science among the Dental practitioners was the groundwork. The medical faculty were the willing accusers, and the untiring persecutors.

They condemned, without stint, a calling they knew not how to practice, and a practice they knew not how to improve. Such

* See Robinson on the Teeth, page 15-16.

of the faculty as were learned in their profession, were found always competent and fully prepared, to be Oculists, Aurists or Lithotomists, or to devote themselves to any other branch of the profession which their interest, inclination, or talents might determine, *except* that of Dental Surgery. This branch seemed to require something more than medical knowledge. It required great mechanical skill—"an education of the hand as well as of the head." A kind of education they had not received, and knew not where to acquire, and yet affected to despise. The necessities of the community cried aloud to them for help—a help which they could not bestow. This drove many sufferers to seek dental aid out of the medical profession, and to obtain that help which mechanical genius alone could supply. At this the profession seemed mortified and chagrined, and loudly mocked at those who dared to supply their delinquencies; and united as one man in deriding the uneducated Dental mechanic.

They first created the necessity for an empiric, and then croaked forth their withering contempt on the creature their own ignorance had made.

On the other hand, the Dental practitioners, as a mass, deserved well the execrations of all honest, high-minded and intelligent men. A mere herd of mountebanks—without common education—without the least medical knowledge—without even common honesty—they arrogated to themselves a knowledge that many were incompetent to learn, and a learning they never sought to acquire. They most presumptuously called themselves Surgeon Dentists, but were in fact only rough bungling mechanics. They called their mutilations of the teeth necessary operations; and the injuries they did to those organs, extraordinary cures. In short, their impositions became a proverb—their ignorance a by-word—and their claims to science, a shameful reproach.

Thus was the science of Dental Surgery neglected, and thus abused, and thus did it fall low down into the very depths of general disrepute. In the meantime, with each succeeding year, the light of medical science blazed higher and higher; disease long hidden in darkness became revealed; suffering humanity rejoiced in the triumphs of intellect, whilst all the branches of the healing art moved on vigorously towards greater and greater improvements, *except* that of Dental Surgery. Over this branch the demon of quackery still reigned with all its hateful, degrad-

ing and destructive rule. It is true, there were some noble exceptions—some proud examples of individual effort, of individual enterprise—of great talents and industry, bestowed, in every age, upon the almost hopeless work of improving the Dental profession. Yet the labor of such worthies served but little more than to raise to themselves monuments of greatness for after generations to honor and admire.

How, then, to improve the character of the Dental profession, became a problem, and one which appeared to baffle all efforts to solve. The lapse of ages had added nothing to its claims. In the onward march of all the sciences, Dental Surgery lagged far behind. Great medical acquirements had been carefully tried and found sadly insufficient. Great mechanical skill had been fully tested, and found equally incompetent to improve and to overcome the great and obvious imperfections of Dental practice.

At last, a periodical devoted to Dental literature was established; then the American Society of Dental Surgeons was organized; and, in the deliberations of that body, a thought was promulgated—a thought which trembled on the lips of its author with more than timid apprehension, as he pronounced the sentence—“*To combine in the same person a thorough medical and mechanical education. An efficacious union of medical and mechanical skill is the only course, the only plan to make an accomplished Dental Surgeon.*” The truth flashed like vivid light upon every mind. The solution of the problem so long sought for was clearly made out, and Dental Surgery was at last disenthralled. Yes, from this little light did Dental Surgery begin to rise, Phoenix-like, from its bed of ashes did it rise, nerved with redoubled strength, and fully destined to soar on up through coming years, until it finally gains the highest summit of honor and renown.

The Dental profession now became roused as by one impulse, and that impulse was to improve Dental practice. Though, it is true, great good was thereby accomplished, yet it was not until the founding of this College—until medical science and mechanical skill were here first taught, both separately and combined, “as the only plan to make an accomplished Dental Surgeon,” that Dental Surgery became a science in spirit and in truth. Coming then, as you do, from such an institution, with all the character, accomplishments and influences you bring, I gladly

extend to you the right hand of fellowship, and cordially welcome you into the ranks of the Dental profession.

In your enrollment with this body of professional men, you are expected in due time to play a prominent part—a part consonant with the great advantages your superior education has conferred. You are not only expected to practice your profession worthily; but you are to improve its practice. You are not only to maintain the dignity of your calling; but you are to elevate its standard. You are not only to act for yourselves and your interests; but for the interest and welfare of the whole community. You are not only to declare war on the horde of impostors that infest our borders; but you are to land on the enemy's shore, and burn your boats. You are to bestow on all things pertaining to your profession an industry that "knows no fatigue, and a zeal that recoils at no disappointments."

Nor end your responsibilities here. You will now be called upon to sit in judgment upon the nature and character of disease; and upon the correctness of your judgment—and the care and skill displayed in your treatment, will depend the appearance—the personal comfort—the health—and sometimes, even the lives of your patients. You will be responsible for all departures in personal appearance, actions and conversation, from what is becoming a true and educated gentleman. You will be held responsible for any want of honesty, industry, firmness and perseverance, that may be necessary to accomplish the greatest good in the discharge of your professional duties. In short, you are held responsible—awfully responsible to God and man, for a full and faithful rendering of all your talents and attainments, "in all things and for all things." See that you do no violence to your trust.

Although you are now prepared to enter the arena of professional life with an honorable title, with admitted qualifications, encouraged by friends, and urged on by a tireless ambition, you may yet fail, aye, you are bound to fail, unless you square your conduct in all things, by that golden rule which was handed from Heaven to earth, in those words of love and mercy—"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Upon the principles of this precept, you are most solemnly bound to use that same diligence in the accumulation of knowledge, in the perfecting of practice, in the acquiring of tact, in

the display of skill, that you would crave in "others," to whom you might apply for important professional aid. Upon this precept, you are bound to extend to all men that politeness, that courtesy, that benevolence and good will, that you would have all men extend to you. By this precept, you are required to treat the name and fame of all worthy co-laborers in the Dental profession, with that same kindness, that same candor and respect that would be most grateful to yourselves, to receive from the hands and the hearts of your professional brethren.

Governed by this principle, you will bestow the same impartial care, interest and anxiety, upon the necessities and sufferings of the child of poverty, obscurity, or of crime, that you would lavish upon the wealthy, the distinguished, or the virtuous. It will teach you to relieve with great good-will, all disease and pain that may be in your power to relieve; and that to demand pecuniary reward from the poor, the truly indigent, for such needful services would be worse than oppression, and more cruel than tyranny. In short, this precept points out to you the highest duties of your profession, the most exalted code of morals; the most refined politeness, aye, more, it fully and singularly inculcates all that is worth toiling for—all that is worth living for—all that is worth man's love, or God's approval in the doings of men.

But were it even possible for you to live blameless, to attain that excellency of conduct shadowed forth in this precept of precepts; think not that you would escape censure, abuse and outrage, in all its most wanton, cruel and disgusting accents. So long as the prince of liars reigns, so long as envy, hatred and ignorance darken the minds of men, so long will the path of every man be strewn with many thorns, and his heart pierced with many sorrows.

Be not dismayed then, should you, for a season, be neglected, decried, defamed. Time and patience will discover your merit, and will lead you forth from your obscurity, to crown you with success, and mark you for distinction. Be not discouraged, should your best efforts be unacknowledged: your greatest labors unrequited: your proudest achievements shamefully outraged. No! Toil on, toil on, with an unshaken purpose; a high resolve; a noble bearing; and you will rear to yourselves temples, and fill them with your fame. Arm yourselves then

with a self-reliance ; a determined purpose ; a conscious rectitude. Nerve yourselves to do right, though all the world do wrong. Wear about your hearts a mail of shining honor, for that cannot be pierced or broken. But you will not only be unjustly censured by one portion of the community, but you will likewise be unjustly praised by another, and that too, for selfish ends and sordid motives. Beware of all such men, I pray you. They praise, but to please—they smile, but to deceive—they flatter, but to betray. The most dreadful of traitors betrayed his Divine Master with the sincerest token of regard ; so, in like manner, do all traitors and flatterers betray. Shrink back, then, from false praise, as you would from the fangs of the speckled serpent. It is the baneful weapon of hypocrites, the shield of impostors, and the glory of fools.

But, although you may be sorely annoyed by defamers, and beset by dissemblers, still be of good cheer. If you truly deserve and need friends, you will always be surrounded by a host, friends too who will throw their virtuous influence—their impenetrable shield around you, and protect you from all impending harm. Friends who will make your cause their cause—your sorrow their sorrow—and your joy their joy. True talents and useful acquirements, consecrated to the service of the community, are great blessings, and have in all times that are past, and will, in all time to come, secure troops of real permanent and devoted friends. Friendship is the worthy reward of usefulness, and usefulness the true measure of honor ; therefore, he that can make himself most useful to his kind, is always most honored and loved. Strive then, to make yourselves useful men, particularly, to the afflicted ; and your noble efforts will be crowned with the honest approbation of all good men—the tender blessings of grateful woman—the thankful look of prattling innocence—and the fervent benediction of the aged and infirm.

The duties, then, you owe to your profession, to the community, and to yourselves, are clear and imperative. They are founded upon no new and untried ethics ; but upon those blessed principles of right and virtue, which every Christian mother has carefully taught her sons,—principles that are written in characters of light upon every moral and intelligent mind,—principles for which, in the conscience of every man, there is a sleepless pleader.

But, if the duties of your professional and moral career be thus plainly and clearly indicated, so are the rewards which follow the faithful discharge of those duties. Do you desire Fortune? Your profession will secure it. Do you desire Fame? Mankind will bestow it. Do you desire more? Such duties open a way from earth, "though straight and narrow," even to the Throne of God.

Engage, then, at once, in all that pertains to the great business of life;—engage in it "with all your mind, with all your soul, and with all your strength." Let your moral rectitude be a great and shining example. Your charity as boundless as the extent of human wretchedness. And your devotion to your profession next to that to your God.

And now, gentlemen, the moment of parting has come. The period you have so long desired is here. The title you have so diligently toiled for is yours. Disgrace not that title, I beg you. Use it as your ensign, but not as your bulwark, in the great battle of life, in which you are about to engage. Rely upon your own personal efforts, and upon your own mental prowess. Let your shield be your honor—your sword, truth—your watchword, victory—and your conquest, the good of all men:—and your day shall smile with the blessings it has scattered, and its record glow with gratitude from hearts it has cheered and consoled.

Gentlemen, my task is done. And now, in my own name, and in that of the Faculty whom I represent, I bid you **ALL** an affectionate **FAREWELL**.