

Da Costa (J. M.)

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Address

by

Dr. J. M. Da Costa

at the Dinner given Friday, April 6, 1888, to

Dr. D. Hayes Agnew

by the Medical Profession, in honor of the
Fiftieth Anniversary of his entrance
into the Profession.



Fifty years ago, on this very day, there stood, with the honors of a University just received, a young man on the threshold of his life. His thoughts were the pleasant ones of the occasion; his aspirations had hardly taken shape; he was the popular comrade of the hundred and fifty-five whose real life, like his own, was to begin. Fifty years have passed, and their Agnew has become our Agnew of the many thousands of the American profession.

HONORED GUEST :—In addressing you to-night I feel that I speak not simply for those who are gathered around you; nor for those in this Commonwealth whose interest will centre here; but for the whole profession who hold you in such esteem, and whose sympathetic thoughts, could they reach you, would come to you in messages of such goodwill and affection as to overwhelm you with their warmth.

Your career has been, indeed, a remarkable one; and you must pardon me, and let the occasion be my excuse, if, in your presence, I allude to its success, and to the main causes of that success. Nor is it wholly unfitting in one to do so who has known you, and watched your progress with friendly interest, almost since you came to this city, to try your powers in a wider field. The training you brought with you as a rural practitioner of note was indeed valuable. Self-reliance, cool judgment under difficult circumstances, are not the least reward of a country physician's hard life. You enrolled yourself as a teacher of medicine in its most laborious branch, and fittingly took charge of a school which has been the nursery of famous anatomists and surgeons,—where Godman's practical skill was displayed, and Joseph Pancoast laid the foundation of that intimate knowledge of the human frame which made him afterwards so great a surgeon.

This Philadelphia School of Anatomy, in College Avenue, has, indeed, left its mark in the history of medicine. It has been to us what the Windmill Street School was to the London of William and of John Hunter, of Hewson, of Cruikshank, of Baillie, of Benjamin Brodie, of

Charles Bell. Its rickety structure harbored not only anatomists—some of them your own pupils, who were to succeed you as celebrated teachers—but its dingy walls heard eloquent discourses on diverse branches from more than one of your future colleagues; in its garret, independent and fruitful researches on the textures of the body were pursued; in its cramped lower room, physiological experiments were carried on, which have made their deep impress on the science of our day.

For ten years working in this school of anatomy you lived laborious days and nights, and in its stern training your classes grew, until the narrow quarters would hold them no more, and you became the popular, admirable teacher you have proved yourself since, on a larger scale and on a different branch, as Professor of the Principles and Practice of Surgery in the famed University with which your reputation is forever identified. You learned to present facts plainly and impressively, to teach Nature's truths with Nature's simplicity, and without a deadly paralysis of words.

But in these ten years of unremitting work you did something more than teaching. You laid by exact knowledge, by steadiness of purpose and affability the foundations of that large practice which

you have since enjoyed, developing every day, more and more, into the trusted surgeon whose deft hand and cool judgment caused his advice to be generally sought. Every country shows in its professions the national traits. You certainly represent as a surgeon, besides much skill, the American characteristic of resolute common-sense.

You have been tried in many a hard case. In none harder, than when your reputation caused you to be selected among the counsellors at the wounded couch of one for whose relief millions were anxiously watching. That in these trying times you bore yourself with the same calmness and dignity we know in you, every one in these millions recognized.

Your success as a surgeon of great repute must, indeed, have been gratifying to you. Not only for the opportunities it afforded you of doing so much active work in your profession; not only because it gave a personal value to your writings, especially to your opinions expressed in your elaborate work on Surgery; but because it enabled you to carry out a plan of action, of which I may not speak,—one which showed you to be possessed of the same high sense of honor for which Sir Walter Scott has received the unbounded admiration of mankind.

May you, dear sir, who have these many claims to distinction and esteem; may you on this, the fiftieth anniversary of entrance into a profession which you have graced by your industry, your sagacity, your skill, your character; may you accept the homage of those who are engaged with you in the same pursuit as a sign of widely-felt regard and appreciation. May your vigorous frame preserve your power of doing good, of teaching truths, for many a long year. May there always remain with you the assurance that, as age gently lays its hand on you, the chilling finger of time will not lessen the respect, nor benumb the tenderness of feeling, with which old and young alike regard you.

