

Crawcour (J. L.)
VALEDICTORY

A D D R E S S

TO THE

GRADUATING CLASS

OF THE

New Orleans School of Medicine,

box 3.

SESSION 1865--66.

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1866.

A D D R E S S

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*Gentlemen of the Graduating Class of the
New Orleans School of Medicine:*

Five years have passed since we last met in this Hall—years pregnant with great events—years of suffering and of sorrow, of toil, of trouble, of privation, but at length we assemble as of yore, to greet you, and celebrate your emancipation from the thralldom of scholastic discipline.

I will not deny, but that in common with yourselves, I have often sighed for the moment of release; all of us long for our holiday; but now when the time has come, and we unite but to say good bye, it is with feelings akin to regret that I hail it. The severance of any tie is painful, and the bond which unites teacher and pupil is so intimate and is of such peculiar strength, that one must be more insensible than most men, to contemplate with equanimity, the separation perhaps for all time, from those with whom we have passed so many pleasant hours of mutual labor. It may be gratifying for you to know, that I speak as the voice of your entire faculty, when I say that, never since the origin of the school, have we had a class so remarkable for propriety of conduct, so diligent, so earnest in the acquirement of knowledge.

To-day, in the ordinary language of the world, you have finished your studies. You have received your Diplomas, and are free to go forth and practice the noble profession you have chosen.

Many of you imagine that with the present attainment of medical honors, all your labors are to cease; that with your diplomas in your possession, you may hereafter banish all professional books and investigations from your thoughts, that you leave your college, not tyros, but proficients in your profession.

Banish such an idea (if you have had it) from your mind; regard to-day, as it is fitly termed, the commencement day, the true commencement of your studies, when the seed sown in the past may begin to bear fruit. To-day is at best, but a momentary halt, after the first and

easiest stage in the journey of professional life, and your march onward must be one, not of diminished but of renewed energy and diligence. To-day, instead of laying aside the books and implements of labor, begin rather to re-arrange them for future use. Remember in an art like ours there is no limit to knowledge; we have but begun to count the sands on the shore; science is eternally advancing, and unless you advance with it you will be left behind in the race of life.

The medical practitioner can never cease to be the medical student. His whole life is and must be a course of continued and accumulating instruction and research. The vast importance, as well as the vast extent and rapid march of our profession demand it. We who have taught you, are still learning, and are only by time and opportunity a little more advanced than you. Students we must be to the end of our lives. All that we have done has been to lay in your mind a sure, and we heartily trust a solid foundation of professional knowledge. The rest must be finished and adorned by your own individual zeal, your own individual industry, your own individual talents.

If, therefore, there is one single truth which you ought to engrave upon the tablet of your hearts more deeply than another, it is this: that if you aspire after professional distinction—if you wish to do your duty to those whom you will have to assist, you must assiduously enrich and extend your store of knowledge by continued and constant observation, reflection and reading. No branch of information will come amiss to you, there is no art, no science, which cannot be turned to account in the practice of your profession. *Laborare est orare*—to labor is to pray—and he prays best who most works for his fellow man. Never forget that our profession requires continuous application, constant energy; for the more we learn, the more remains to be learned, and all that can be said of the most accomplished philosopher is, that he was less ignorant than his fellows.

The profession you have chosen is the noblest to which man can devote himself: to endeavor to lessen the the sum of human suffering, to assuage the miseries of poor humanity, to lengthen life, to bid disease depart, is an occupation which assimilates man to his Divine Maker.

In those who know best their profession there is no scepticism; although success does not always crown our efforts, yet relief most frequently attends us, and if on the healthy body drugs produce an effect, equal results must follow their use on the diseased organ. It is the ignorant only who denies or deludes.

In the divine words of Cicero: "In nothing does man so resemble the Gods, as when he is restoring health to his fellow man.

There are occupations which hold forth the promise of greater gain, there are trades which lead more surely to affluence, but there is no occupation which while it enables us to gain a competent living, will permit us so well to carry forward the great end for which we were created, and to further the design of universal brotherhood. Ours, I repeat again, gentlemen, is a noble profession, the following of which honestly and to the best of our abilities, brings its own reward with it; one in which however ill requited we may sometimes be in a pecuniary sense, however ill acknowledged and ill understood our services now and then may appear, is yet the only one which will allow us at each sunset to reflect that we have not "wholly lost a day."

If you work well and diligently you may attain to the highest honors of your profession; let your motto ever be *Excelsior*, and never forget that all things may be achieved by will and perseverance. It is very doubtful if there be such a thing as chance or luck, and whether the success we sometimes designate by these terms is not in most instances the result of perseverance, skill and tact. Accidental successes are of rare occurrence, and I believe we hold much more frequently than is usually supposed the keys of the future in our own hands.

If in your career you should be harassed by seeing the apparent and occasional success of quackery, which is however but another name for dishonesty, do not be disheartened. Console yourselves that in every department of social life the supply of rogues is exactly proportioned to that of the fools, and that for the most part medical dishonesty is but the complement of non-medical folly.

And now permit me to say a few words to you as to your conduct to your patients. There is one golden rule to guide you: "Do unto others as you would be done

by." Put yourself in the place of those who are under your care. Think that is your own wife, your own child, your own parent, or brother, or sister you are treating. Daily remind yourselves that in your hands rest the lives and welfare of your fellow creatures; daily, nay hourly, think what this involves, and you will constantly decide, that not even your own lives could be more dear to you than the duties of your profession. Ponder well on the fearful responsibility you have undertaken; the life of a fellow creature is in your hands; the ignorance of a moment, the vacillation of a second, may make the difference between life and death. I verily believe, that did any of us realize beforehand the terrible weight we assume, not one of us would ever enter our profession.

In your intercourse with your patients let every word and action breathe a spirit of courtesy and kindness; remember that when the body is sick, the mind suffers also, and you have to soothe the spirit as well as the frame which encloses it. You will frequently be the confidants of your patients; you will hear secrets which must not be breathed into the ear of the nearest and dearest friend. Your counsel will be sought not only as a physician but as an adviser. You will be consulted in many of the intricate difficulties of private life. Revelations will be made to you of the frailties, the follies of humanity. Trusts will be confided to you, either by accident or necessity, dearer than life itself. The honour of families will be in your hands, and I am proud to say that the faith placed in our noble profession has never once been betrayed. Remember that the eye and the ear of the Physician must be as silent as the confessional of the Priest.

Your duties may sometimes call you to scenes where life itself may be imperiled. He who guards the portals of the grave must not fear Death.

When the pestilence stalks at noon-day, when the cheek of the warrior who has stood the brunt of a hundred battles pales with a nameless fear, when the dread plague is abroad, then does all that is noble and heroic in our profession show itself. No soldier must desert the ranks, but like the stern sentinel of Pompeii the physician must brave the fearful ordeal, and die if necessary at his post. The records of our profession are full of

names who have thus perished in the battle against the common enemy of mankind. From the heroism of Desgenettes, who under the shadow of the eternal pyramids slept with the plague-stricken soldier, to prove the plague was not contagious, and to re-assure the panic-stricken army of the great conqueror, to that of Sidney Barnard, who gave up his life in tending the fevered sufferers on the *Eclair*, the roll of honor is not a small one.

The latest whose name is inscribed in the Golden Book should be familiar to you all, and should shine forth a bright example of what a physician ought to be.

On that eventful Sunday morning, when the quiet of the Atlantic was broken by the roar of answering guns, when the noble Alabama sank beneath its waves, *virgin and undefiled by hostile tread*, there sank with her one whose name will live when those of its combatants have passed away. Honor to the memory of Herbert Llewellyn, the surgeon of the Alabama, who when pressed to leave the foundering vessel, nobly refused to quit the sick and wounded entrusted to his charge, and perished with them rather than desert those to whose service he was vowed.

I am proud to say, that in his own land, there have been found men who, (irrespective of political creeds), have been generous enough to erect a monument to the memory of him who sacrificed his life to duty, and sanctified the profession which counts him among her noblest sons.

Before we part, let me warn you against one frequent error. Young Physicians often dream that by extending the circle of their private acquaintances they thus afford themselves the best chance of extending the circle of their private patients. No view could be more chimerical, no error more fatal. No man will in any case of doubt or danger entrust to your professional care the guardianship of his own life, or the lives of those dear to him, merely because he is on terms of intimacy with you. Make yourselves known, but let it be for your professional acquirements. You must be respected not merely in your character of a social friend, but in your calling as a physician. The accomplishments which may render you acceptable in the parlor are not always those

which would make your visits longed for and valued in the chamber of sickness.

And now, gentlemen, let me say a few words to you as to your professional relations. The practitioners of legitimate medicine form one vast fraternity; with us we know no creed, no country, no difference of condition: one bond of universal brotherhood unites us. Do not forget this, and let nothing ever induce you to utter aught that may reflect upon your fellow practitioner. Remember that the misconduct of one, reflects disgrace upon the entire profession. Think of this, and I am sure you will never act in any way that may lower the high standard which it should ever be your aim to attain.

Gentlemen, I will not detain you longer, your bark is launched upon the waters of life, which we trust will always be calm for you. We bid you farewell. We shall watch with care your future career, your triumphs will be our triumphs, your successes our victories, your failures our reproach. You take with you the fervent prayers of my colleagues and myself for your future welfare. May God speed you and guard you in the noble mission you have undertaken. Farewell.