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THE DIFFICULTIES, DUTIES AND REWARDS OF THE PHYSICIAN.

AN

ADDRESS

TO THE

GRADUATING CLASS

OF THE

FIFTH SESSION

OF THE

University of Nashville,

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BY

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ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN GRADUATES:—

By appointment of the Medical Faculty, I am here this evening to address you. It is an occasion full of thrilling interest, long to be remembered by every graduate present, as the termination of a routine of arduous study, and as the commencement of an era bright with buoyant hope. All of you, no doubt, have looked forward to this time, as the terminus of your labors. You have seen as yet, no mountain height to climb, higher than the point you have reached. And would that I were able, consistently with the truth, and consistently with the duty I have assumed towards you, to leave undisturbed, that state of repose, and happiness even, which the sturdy realities before you will but too surely destroy. I would not wantonly undertake this part of my task; nor are the remarks which I shall make, applicable to any young gentleman, who, having put his hand to the plough in this work, is willing to look back, or who vainly supposes, that having gained the honors of his institution, there is nothing left for him to do, but idly sleep and dream.

Far be it from me ever to place an obstacle in the pathway of that young man, who, with steady eye and well strung nerve is pressing on to the topmost points of science. For such an

one, however, it is but just, that in the way-bill of his professional life, the *difficulties* should be noted down, as well as the rule of conduct which should guide him in the performance of every *duty*, not neglecting to point out the *rewards* which await the faithful traveler; for here and there *may* be seen an oasis green and refreshing.

When the will is properly engaged, difficulties only serve to embolden our efforts:

“The wise and active conquer difficulties
By daring to oppose them. Sloth and folly
Shiver and sink at sight of toil and hazard,
And make the impossibility they fear.”

There is no end in all the range of human effort worth attaining, which is not to be reached through difficulties. When the Almighty sent forth his still unrepealed edict, that by the sweat of the brow man must gain his bread, the announcement applied equally to his mental as to his physical aliment and strength. The history of every man verifies the fact that great attainments in science are made only at the price of anxiety and toil; and we need not wonder that our profession should not be exempt from the operations of this universal law. Judge Story remarks, in substance, that Law is a science that has always tasked the highest minds to reach its ordinary boundaries—that he who strives for eminence in it, should never imagine that the ascent is easy or the labor light. There is no royal way to smooth the road to the summit; but the passes, like those of Alpine regions, are sometimes dark and narrow, sometimes bold and precipitous—that the Law is a science in which there is no substitute for diligence and labor. Dr. Adam Clarke, after he had been engaged in the study of languages for perhaps forty years, with a view of expounding the

Holy Scriptures, said, that he was just *beginning* to comprehend the subject of Philology—and Sir Isaac Newton, towards the close of his laborious life of Philosophical enquiry, said that he felt as a little child who had been playing with pebbles on the shore, while the vast, illimitable ocean of truth lay before him.

If these fields of human learning and investigation shall be found difficult to cultivate to their highest perfection, you should not be discouraged if you find it *hard* to reach and elaborate all truth in your profession. The intricacies of the human system, the complex character of our Physiological and Pathological relations, the influence of the thousand causes from the external world about us operating on these, are subjects which challenge the proudest intellect, and the best directed efforts.

The difficulties of our profession meet us at the very threshold of the undertaking. You have all become already, familiar with the toil of mastering the preparatory studies, which has entitled you to the enjoyment of the present occasion. Often in the history of some of you, have the evil promptings of fear arisen, and almost caused the heart to sink under the prospect of foreshadowed labor, necessary to understand the mysteries of our "frames, so wonderfully and fearfully made." That difficulty has, in some sense, been passed, and you enter into other relations. You seek now to illustrate your knowledge of disease, by your practice—by the administration of remedies for its cure. You are now to become the pilots to guide the frail and sometimes shattered barks of life, through the many breakers and angry waves that are before you. That is a noble task, suited only to noble minds, and should be nobly done.

Much difficulty will be encountered by you in the separation of truth from error in the many medical systems which will be presented to you. From the very infancy of the healing art, great minds have arisen, and attempted to mould medical opinion by their favorite theories. One after another has brought materials for the superstructure to be built on the foundations laid by a predecessor. These materials are multi-form and often incongruous.

The necessity of attention to theories may not be lightly passed by. According to one's principles, will be his conduct, it may be said of any engagement in life. A celebrated physician remarks, that every practitioner, however limited his theory, may be carried away by it at the bed side of his patient; because, by reason of some idea, false or true, wise or foolish, scientific or vulgar, he determines or is compelled to act in one way rather than any other, and on this account it is said, that the practice must ever submit to the yoke and exigencies of, even the most contemptible theories.

With the theories of the first centuries of the profession, you will probably have but little to do, except so far, perhaps, as they relate to the literature of medicine, and *that* historical literature.

According to Renouard, in his "History of Medicine," which I suppose is the most complete that has been given to the Profession, the theories of the nineteenth century may be classed as the Physio-Pathological, the Empiric and the Eclectic.

The first of these theories is built on the proposition, that Therapeutics is necessarily a deduction, a corollary from the ideas which are formed from the nature of disease as manifested by examination of the human system—that Pathological Physiology is the only rational and necessary basis of practical

medicine. On the other hand, the second contends that experience or pure observation of the sensible effects of remedies, is the fundamental basis of Therapeutics, and deny that the lights of Physiology and Pathology, can ever become the immediate source of curative indications, or furnish a rational explanation of therapeutical effects.

The third differs from the two preceding in not admitting any universal principle of treatment, and in deducing the curative indications either from the Physio-Pathological theory, or from pure experimentation.

It would be unsuited to this occasion, to enter into a discussion of the merits or faults of these three principal theories. As subordinate and belonging in part to one or the other, many sub-systems will necessarily come under your review in the future course of studies which you may enter on, in order to enable yourselves to determine the true from the false, the certain from the hypothetical. For all will claim your attention, and demand a hearing at the bar of your judgment.

And when you shall have tested the fact, that under the guidance of the best theory, the lights which will be desired to direct you at the bed-side will be but too dim, you will experience the truth that yours is an arduous undertaking. You will realize the difficulty of the adaptation of remedies to obscure and complicated assemblages of symptoms. Often, in the plane of your medical telescope will be seen only a dim star or two—often, all will be dark. How dreary that darkness, and how full of responsibility! When the life of a human being is entrusted to your care, and dangers are around you too plainly to be seen, but ill understood, with nothing to guide you through the labyrinth but the indistinct voice of conflicting

symptoms, your skill and fortitude will be tested to their fullest extent. Impressed with the value and delicacy of your charge, you will be often uncertain whither to go, to reach a point of safety. With precipices on the right, and the roaring flood on the left, you will be as the benighted way-farer finding his way over an unknown and narrow track. This is the unavoidable experience of all who have gone before you.

Without enumerating others, these are difficulties enough; but with the prospect before you dark as it has been presented, your *duties* are those of men who dare to do; and looking onward and upward to that proud eminence, which has been attained by some members of your profession, let not your motto be other than *Excelsior*. With firm and steady tread, press on to the temple which so invitingly encourages your aspirations.

As a cementing bond of union, by which all the great parts of human character are united, and made one mighty whole, a firm, unshaken and incorruptible morality is necessary. Many men in our profession, and in other pursuits of life, have been esteemed great, who have not been remarkable for that qualification which we call morality—but much greater had they been, more beautiful their characters and more useful their lives, had they under all circumstances submitted to the guidance of Him, who is not only our physical ruler, but our great moral Law-giver. Greatness without goodness is only attainable by him, who, with resplendent genius dazzles the eyes of his fellow men, but *that* only for a season, as the meteor, which glares with lustre in the night, is destined to be extinguished by the brightness of the rising orb of day.

It should ever be your object to learn and appreciate the

difference between that noble emulation which honorably strives for the mastery, but rejoices in the prosperity of a competitor; and that spirit of rivalry which always feels that elevation is necessarily built on the downfall of another. While the one is the sure harbinger of success, (for success always crowns well directed efforts,) the other is destined to defeat after a short lived triumph. The one declares, that there is no collision between the various interests of our profession, and that each may depend on his brother in a great work; the other only serves to narrow down the souls of men to envy, which, like "Nessus' shirt, affording no protection from without, only tends to consume the vitals within."

Fortified by the principles of high toned morals, and that liberality which can cheerfully aid a professional brother in his toils, you will be prepared to prosecute those studies which are necessary to great elevation of character. The study of the opinions of others, and the close examination of the cases you may be called upon to treat, will be a work more needful than even the course through which you have just passed, and which has concluded with the honors of your university. Close and diligent research will ever be your duty, studying the various combinations of symptoms, and the best means of alleviating disease, that great foe to human happiness. And if no other motive should urge you to this work and study, than the desire to succeed in your profession, it were enough. But how much grander and more ravishing scenes open to our view when we reflect, that, among the now hidden treasures of science, lies some sparkling diamond which may be the reward of our efforts. Who would not labor by night and by day, with the sweat and dust of unwearying travail, could he but believe that he was

to be the world-honored discoverer of a principle, which, like Jenner's vaccination, should throw around his fellow men, for all ages to come, a shield of protection from some of the many desolating scourges which now make our fair world little less than a Golgotha? Whose heart does not warm up with high and holy impulses at the thought of being the favored instrument under Heaven, of developing the character of that subtle vice of the human frame, which is now exhibited in the daily view of consumption or scrofula? And may it not fall to the lot of some gentleman of this graduating class, to show to a grateful world what is that mysterious something which flies on the wings of the wind, and in the darkness of the night, lights on the dwellings of the sleeping city, in the form of cholera, and bids the tender babe and the strong-armed man to awake and prepare for death?

The field is open before you—you should enter and cultivate—*on* its surface, though there are thorns and thistles, there is many a goodly fruit which may be gathered by the laborer. And *beneath* its surface, hidden now from our view, there are untold treasures, which, if brought to light, would be of more value to the medical world than all the treasures of the fabled genii. It will be your duty, to do this; and when perchance a valued discovery is made, unlike the digger after gold, who hoards it for his own individual benefit, you will have the high duty and honored privilege, to diffuse the good as far as the pages of medical literature shall go.

Medical skill, says an eminent Professor, is not the gift of nature, nor an accidental endowment. It is the result of a well educated and disciplined mind, acting on comprehensive stores of knowledge—and knowledge is the fruit of laborious appli-

cation and incessant research. It is never possessed by him who idly uses his profession only as a means of subsistence. I say *idly*, for idleness may sit as an incubus on mental culture, and keep it ever of a low and grovelling character, while industry may characterize the merely physical labors of his vocation. One may labor incessantly in the routine of first principles acquired in a fundamental education, and never advance towards the great end of our science, the accumulation of true facts, the deduction of true and valuable principles, and consequently, the amelioration of human suffering.

The mechanic with unceasing diligence labors to bring his genius into exercise, by which he blesses the world with useful inventions. Our statesman is taxing his powers in the perfection of the science of human government, and scans with an eager gaze, the rise and fall of other nations, endeavoring to comprehend the cause of the success or defeat of human liberty in other countries, by all of which he is enabled to perfect and perpetuate at home, the grandest of all political structures, on whose heights are floating now, to the free breeze, our own beloved stars and stripes. The philosopher ever toils to unravel the mysteries of Nature's laboratory, and with watchful eye, notes the works of his master and brings them obedient to his use, from the grain of sand under our feet, up to the forked arrow of the thunderbolt. Even the world on which we tread, and stars and systems of stars above us, all work and are ever on their trackless path, to do the high behest of Him who spake them into being.

Learning a lesson from all about you, it will become you, as diligent enquirers after truth, to have it constantly in view that it is *your* duty, to engage in work, to observe closely, and to

analyze facts and principles which present themselves to you. Nature, as it will be unfolded to you, should be your great oracle; and if in accordance with its teachings, your observation, experiments and reason shall be the ordeal which shall try the nature of facts, you will discover that all doctrines are not truths, and all authority is not canonical.

A duty which will be required of you from the very nature of your profession, and the universal demand of society, will be benevolence; not merely the giving of alms to the needy, but the free sacrifice of your time and comfort to the distressed. In whatever hovel there may be heard the groans of the sick, your presence and aid will be required. When fell war shall enter on its desolating march, you will be called to follow in its track, and pour the oil and wine of comfort into the wounds of its victims. And when the "pestilence that walketh in darkness, and the destruction that wasteth at noon-day" shall be around you, and although a thousand shall fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand, you will alone be expected to face the foe, and with undaunted courage fight on to the end of the battle.

And I would here pause, to pay a passing tribute to the memory of that noble band of martyr heroes, who lately fell so bravely struggling in the cause of humanity, in Norfolk and Portsmouth. A loud, long wail of woe was heard in every portion of our fair land. The angel of disease and death had spread his raven wings over the cities, and the tender maiden and the grey-haired sire were all alike aghast with terror. Obedient to the call, those noble men flew to the rescue, and without one thought of danger, rushed into the thickest of the conflict. Their fellow men were in peril, and with heroism superior to

that of the little band of Spartan warriors who perished at the straits of Thermopylæ, they fought on, and fell, and offered up their lives a sacrifice to that noblest principle of our profession, a fearlessness of danger in the great cause of human suffering. Honored be their names! and should no marble pillar bear the record down to after ages, let us at least, when the cause demands a like sacrifice, emulate the conduct of those who so gloriously fell at the medical Thermopylæ of Norfolk and Portsmouth.

“There is a tear for all who die,
A mourner o'er the humblest grave,
Let nations swell the funeral cry,
And — weep above the brave.”

Are you ready to ask, what then are the rewards of the faithful follower after the truths of his profession?

Would that I could enumerate them, equal in number to the difficulties you have to encounter, and the duties you will be called on to perform.

Every vocation in life is supposed to yield a subsistence to him, who undergoes its duties. *Your* profession, although not remarkable for the abundance of its remuneration, will nevertheless, give to industry its just allowance.

There is in all the pursuits of life, a reflective effect on the character of the man. It is known to all, that in order to draw out to its highest perfection any capability, it is necessary to tax it with constant and lasting exercise. The memory is rendered retentive and comprehensive by continued effort. The judgment is ripened by bringing into active use, our powers of observation and deduction. The discrimination of the beautiful, at first torpid and indistinct, becomes by cultivation, accurate

and just, and the source of our highest enjoyment. In the human system, as you have been taught, many organs are, by judicious cultivation and long continued exercise, enabled to perform their functions with redoubled ease and power. In the moral world it is peculiarly the case, that great growth and strength in the loftier attributes of our nature, those attributes which connect us with our Maker, must be the result of continued cultivation. Then, the practice of your profession will have a beneficial tendency to develop in the character, the finer feelings of the heart. Your benevolence, your charity, your sympathy with suffering humanity, will be constantly drawn into activity, and the effect will be, if left to operate unbiassed, that your lives will be a reflection in part, of all those holier feelings, which so clearly distinguish the good men of all ages and all climes.

The consciousness of being the means of alleviating human woe, is a great reward. In no view of my profession do I feel more lofty pride, than when I consider it the avenue through which flow so many blessings to my fellow men. It has been its object since the first record of medicine to the present time, to do good. It has endeavored to discover the cause of disease and its cure. It has sought to teach the world how to avoid the ills by which men in every department of life are surrounded. It has given the safety-lamp to the dungeon miner. It has robbed scurvy of half its horrors to the ocean traveler. It has disarmed small-pox of its terrific weapons; and it has grappled with a giant's power, with pain itself, and now the surgeon's bloody knife can pass through the most sensitive structures of the human frame, and the unconscious patient awakes, as from a gentle sleep.

According to the reports of the Registrar-General of England, of the Parisian Hospitals or those of our own country, undeniable statistics will show, that by the efforts of our profession, human life has been lengthened more than twenty-five per cent. in the last seventy-five years; and still physicians are asking for the privilege of benefitting mankind. Higher success of their science is the "dream of their lives. They gaze into a hopeful future, and are filled with glowing and bright pictures of the era, when their science shall be

Above the reach of sacrilegious hands,
Whose honors with increase of ages grow,
As streams roll down enlarging as they flow."

In all the walks of life, none exhibit such close and intimate friendships as the practice of medicine. The necessary relationships of the physician, his admittance into the very sanctum of private life, the confidence reposed in his honor and skill, all tend to foster the mutual exercise of the most enduring friendships. Surely, this is a reward not lightly to be bartered away.

You will often meet with instances of gratitude for services rendered your patients, which will be valued as jewels in the costly coronet. His heart must be of adamant hardness, who is not moved, when there wells up from the inmost soul, and drops from the quivering lips of the mother, a "God bless you doctor," when she receives her tender babe returned to her in safety, by his skill and attention, as snatched from the very embraces of the monster. Who would not esteem it a reward above all price, to feel that through his efforts, the friend of his bosom, the stay and ornament of his fireside

circle, who has been brought low by disease and almost sunk into the valley of the shadow of death, has been gently raised again, and in the strength and beauty of health given back to his loved ones, to bless them with many days of usefulness and ease.

And in conclusion, gentlemen, when you shall have smoothed the last wrinkled brow, and shall have comforted the last anguished heart, and when the storms of life which have broken over your head, shall have been stilled in the hush of the silent grave, then, if your conduct shall have been shaped in accordance with the principles of Him who spake as never man spake, your final and greatest reward will be, an admittance into the realms of the blest.