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VALEDICTORY ADDRESS

DELIVERED TO

THE GRADUATES

OF THE

JEFFERSON MEDICAL COLLEGE.

BY GEORGE M'CLELLAN, M. D.

MARCH, 1836.

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PHILADELPHIA, MARCH 14, 1836.

At a meeting of the graduates of Jefferson Medical College, held to-day, it was unanimously resolved, that a copy of your very eloquent address, delivered to them, be requested for publication; and we, a committee appointed for the purpose, take great pleasure in presenting this request—at the same time adding our own earnest solicitations.

With much respect we are,
Truly and affectionately yours,

FRS. M. HEREFORD,
THOMAS FOSTER,
GEO. G. TAIT,
T. STANLEY BECKWITH,
GEO. S. METZGER,
} *Committee.*

TO PROFESSOR G. M'CLELLAN,

PHILADELPHIA, MARCH 14, 1836.

GENTLEMEN:

The enclosed manuscript was written for you, and is of course at your disposal. You will excuse its brevity, because you know that the occasion did not permit the delivery of a more extended address. With the sincerest wishes for your welfare, I subscribe myself your friend,

GEO. M'CLELLAN.

TO MESSRS. HEREFORD,
FOSTER,
TAIT,
BECKWITH,
METZGER,
} *Committee of the Graduates.*

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN:

THIS is one of the most interesting and agitating moments of your existence. You will remember it as long as any thing belonging to this world shall continue to occupy your minds. It does not merely terminate the labours of your pupilage, and alter the relations in which you have stood to a limited number of individuals, on whom you have relied, perhaps too much, for instruction and improvement. It is not a mere period, in which you are passing from one moment of time to another, without casting behind intense regrets, or looking forward with eager anticipation. You are passing from one distinct mode of existence to another. You are leaving one of the stages of life. The transformed chrysalis does not feel a greater change than you will experience, when you shall have left these walls.

Hitherto you have led a life of anticipation, as well as of preparation. Your dull hours of elementary study have been enlivened by the bright prospects of future eminence; and the inconveniences, nay, even the sufferings of each present moment, have been forgotten in the enjoyment of every succeeding hope. All the shackles of minority have heretofore been fastened upon your hearts. You must have felt your-

selves to have been more or less dependent on others for the supply of intellectual, as well as of corporeal attainments; and a habit of relying on external aid in your undertakings and difficulties must, therefore, have become a part of your very nature and mode of existence.

Almost every action of your lives has, also, been associated with those of companions engaged in the same pursuits, and intimately united with you in one common feeling of interest and ambition.

Now the scene is changing. Already your long-cherished and fondest associations are becoming dissevered, link by link; and the props on which you have leaned for support and for security, are dropping from beneath your rest. Shortly your most confident anticipations will begin to be disappointed. You will have to encounter the plain and sad realities of life. Your airy castles will dwindle down to cottages; and the lofty mountains that your imaginations have pictured at a distance, towering among the golden and resplendent clouds, will become mere ridges, over which you will travel without interest, or perhaps even consciousness.

This momentous period will be marked in your recollections by circumstances of strong and bold relief. The solemn farewell of your companions and teachers —the irreparable loss of your most valued sources of knowledge—the desertion of scenes in which you have felt emotions, indulged hopes, and planned whole schemes of life—will all remain among the more

dimly shadowed thoughts of time and place. The bare circumstance that you now form the prominent group of an assemblage which has been congregated for the very purpose of witnessing your admission into the ranks of a most useful and honourable profession—and the fact that you have received your legalized diplomas from the same venerated hands* that, for so long a series of years, have been extended with paternal benedictions over the hopes of those who have since been distinguished for their talents, their learning, and influence in all the states of this vast country—will, of themselves, prove lasting memorials of this occasion and its objects.

But let us not lose sight of the immediate aim of this address, which was not intended merely to congratulate you on the present occasion, and its attendant circumstances; but also to warn you against impending dangers; to guard you from the difficulties with which you must be prepared to contend in your progress through life; and to stir up such an exalting ambition for professional eminence, as shall render you objects of our pride, at the same time that you become the safeguards of society.

The first subject to which I shall call your attention, is that concerning which many of you have already consulted me—the choice of a place of residence for the purpose of practising the duties of our

*The Rev. Ashbel Green, D. D. LL. D., formerly President of Princeton College, New Jersey, now President of the Board of Trustees of Jefferson Medical College.

common profession. In regard to this point you will probably find yourselves more perplexed than with any other problem of life. Your selection is not limited to two or more localities, between which you can balance difficulties and advantages. The *whole world* lies before you; and you can extend your views to the remotest regions where man has ever fixed his habitation, or you may confine your footsteps within the narrow circle in which you have heretofore walked. You will find profitable opportunities for exercising your skill among the crowded populace of our cities; or, if you moderate your desires, to the occupation of a log house in the remote wilderness, the tide of emigration will soon reach you, and the sufferings of humanity will call loudly on you for relief. There is no situation in which you will not find yourselves useful, in proportion to the power with which you have armed yourselves against disease; and the question, as far as your benevolence or philanthropy is concerned, may, therefore, be decided without the trouble of deliberation.

But it is natural that you should look for a support, nay, even for a great superfluity of emolument from the exercise of so onerous and self-denying a profession as ours. Although it is easy to talk of disinterestedness and of a zeal for the public welfare, still I presume it will be hard to point out any one among you, who has not some reference in his calculations to the degree of remuneration he is to receive for the long and expensive course of preparation he has un-

dergone, and for the life of severe and unremitting labour he is to lead. The great point, therefore, to which your inquiry should be directed, will be the extent of the professional vacancy you may be invited to supply, and the prospects it may hold out for an income beyond what may be necessary for your mere support.

The state of the community, and the manners of its inhabitants, will also exert a strong influence on your minds; and the particular society in which you are likely to move, should be considered as attentively as the heavens are regarded by the mariner before he enters an unknown sea. In some places it will prove impossible to mingle with the people, without indulging in their prejudices and habits. Let a candidate for public favour establish himself in a district of country under the control of an aping circle of aristocracy, of a society of abolitionists, of odd fellows, of devoted masons, or even of unflinching anti-masons, and he may as well attempt to escape the influence of the atmosphere, as of their combinations. They will either draw him into the circumscribed vortex of their current, and bear him, like a piece of drift-wood, down the stream of oblivion—or they will cast him on a barren shore to linger and to die. Were it not indelicate to allude to our cotemporaries, an instructive history could be given of those physicians and scientific men who were deluded into the folly of uniting their fortunes with the visionary Owen. But it is unnecessary to

specify cases. It is obviously the duty, as well as interest of professional men, to keep their hearts open to all denominations and parties. The influence even of religious persuasions is likely to obstruct their progress, and interfere with their usefulness. The hopes of young physicians are often shipwrecked by associating with political or sectarian branches of society, which involve them in trammels they can never shake off.

Not only should the locality and natural advantages of the place, therefore, be regarded; but every circumstance, either intimately or remotely connected with it, whether of a moral, a social, or a political nature, must be attended to, before you start on the high road which may lead you to success or ruin.

But you should not content yourselves with examining the place, the people, and their customs; in order to judge wisely you should study *yourselves.* There is no point in which young professional men are so liable to be mistaken as in their opinion concerning their own powers and qualifications. If you rely upon mere professional acquirements, and do not take into consideration your peculiar fitness for accommodating yourselves to the habits of the people among whom you intend to reside, you will be in danger of finding all your labour vain, and all your deserts unrewarded. A quiet, unobtrusive, and timorous young man, although he may receive as much credit for prudence and judgment as he actually possesses, will hardly push his way through the bustling

population of a city: and on the other hand, a high-minded, or spirited and ambitious practitioner placed in a settlement of Friends, will only find his genius in the way of his advancement. Every where the degree of correspondence which may exist between your own disposition and habits and those of the society with which you may be surrounded should be studied. For although some have the happy genius of accommodating themselves to all circumstances and to all people, few of you can calculate on such powers or advantages.

But I will not perplex you by alluding to more of the contingencies with which in this important consideration your minds must necessarily be embarrassed. After all the preliminaries that can possibly be calculated on, you will find that it is chiefly from your subsequent conduct and application that your success will be derived. To those of you who are anxiously inquiring whither shall I go? and where shall I cast my lot for life? I would answer, select such a situation as may appear likely to afford you a fair prospect of professional employment—no matter where, provided it correspond in most repects to your own views and habits, and in case you have good reason to conclude yourselves to be adapted to the circumstances under which you will be situated.

Do not be deceived too readily by your present partialities. Because you are just now delighted with the artificial habits and luxuries of the city, do not suppose that they are more congenial to your nature

or your prospects. Although your minds may be active in forming romantic images of retired and picturesque retreats, it will not necessarily happen that a country life shall contribute most to your happiness, or success. A very short period of time will often make a striking change in your propensities: and it is really a difficult thing for a young man to say what course of life he shall eventually be most pleased with. Recollect, however, for your consolation, what was once a maxim in morals—"choose that which is most profitable, and habit will soon make it agreeable."

The greatest difficulty which you will have to meet with in establishing yourselves in any place, will be from *competition*, on the part of older and already established members of the profession. It will be hardly possible for you to avoid this, notwithstanding all the pains you may take in selecting even an unoccupied region; for there is no district in our country which is not ridden over by neighbouring practitioners, or claimed as a territorial possession by some veteran in the cause of humanity. You must prepare yourselves, therefore, for encountering this unavoidable difficulty by a careful examination of its extent and peculiarities in every case. Nothing can be more idle or ruinous than to plunge headlong into a competition which you are not able to sustain; especially in a thinly peopled or poorly provided region of the country, which can hardly afford employment or support to a single well-educated practitioner.

On the other hand, a moderate competition in a

populous and wealthy neighbourhood, provided it be conducted on honourable principles, will prove beneficial to all parties concerned, by exciting a spirit of improvement which can always be promoted by consultations and mutual interchanges of opinion.

The great point, however, is always to conduct your competition so as to make it really redound to your own advantage—which can only be attained by an *honourable, straight-forward, open* course of conduct. All sinister designs and unworthy attempts will revert upon your own heads, and throw the weight of influence into the scale of your opponents.

If you have a low, crafty, and hostile competitor to deal with, let him alone and he will work out your own reputation for you. The opposition of such a man can never do you harm. His insinuations, and even his slanders will all contribute to your advancement. But you must remember not to disturb him in his course. If you take the trouble to refute his calumnies too often, he will, in some measure, bring you down to his own level in public estimation. A sensible author has somewhere observed, that there are two ways of attaining prosperity in the world—the first is by the praises of honest men, the other and the surest is by the abuse of rogues.

When your competitor is an honest and high-minded man, the proper way to make him serviceable to you, is to maintain the same character yourselves. Treat him as one gentleman should always treat another, with liberality and magnanimity; and not with

a mere scrupulous regard to those mean and sorry points of etiquette in which little minds suppose all the virtues of life to be centred. Such conduct, even when exhibited towards inferior mortals, will always give you an advantage over them, while it will at the same time place you on equal ground with the most elevated. It will make you respect yourselves, and thereby supply you with more moral strength than any thing, excepting the purest Christianity, can inspire.

The method which many of the young medical men in our community have adopted of stealing by, and avoiding competition, instead of encountering it manfully; of succumbing, and truckling for patronage, instead of depending on their own manly exertions and talents, is the poorest of all the possible ways of attempting to get on in this world. You never see them succeed, as long as they adhere to such a course. They must remain in the third and fourth ranks of the profession, and for this simple reason, that they have to perform second parts to men who stand before them, and will reward them with nothing but promises and smiles. Come out, my young friends, and stand on your own foundation before the world. Cringe to no man—to no set of men, for favour. Tie yourselves to no party, and then you will have to do the small business of no party. The sooner you learn to depend wholly on yourselves the better. Intellectual independence will prove of vastly more consequence to you than political. A man who has once become thoroughly possessed of it may bid de-

fiance to the frowns of opposition, and to the efforts of calumny. He towers above the influence of courtiers and of kings, even under governments where he is not permitted to express his wishes by a vote. No earthly potentate can withstand the power of genius, when combined with independence of spirit. Tyranny cowers in its presence.

Recollect the successful stand which the great minister of France once made, against the edicts of the absolute monarch, his master, "Sire! you *cannot* enact these laws! They ARE UNJUST!"

But I will not allow myself to grow warm upon this animating subject; it will be sufficient that I tell you neither to *avoid competition*, nor to *seek patronage*. In an open, frank, and uncompromising conduct, consist all your duties towards your brethren and competitors. They who expect more, deserve no consideration at your hands; their friendship would prove a bane to you, and their patronage a curse.

In reference to your conduct towards the public, I would observe, that the simplest and plainest rules are infinitely the best. Shun all policy, and every thing which the world calls management. While you are taking care to avoid imprudence, appear, if possible, to feel that you *could afford* to be imprudent. Behave as though you had forgotten yourselves, and had consciousness only of your integrity and honour. Aim at the favourable judgment of your peers, instead of your inferiors. Set your mark on the high places of intelligence and of merit, and do not grovel in the

under-currents of human infirmity for success. I pity the weakness and the meanness of "*that small infantry*," which attempts to gain a reputation by artifice. Though its members sometimes become the successful portion of our profession, they are never to be envied for their achievements. They are obliged to devote more time and labour to the business of ingratiating themselves with garrulous nurses, than their superiors have ever done in attaining the highest eminences of science.—Manœuvering men cannot carry on their game long, without detection. They may assume great credit for cunning; but the world will soon see through the flimsy veil, with which they have attempted to disguise themselves. They overreach nobody but themselves. They forget that Satan has never been honoured with the character of wisdom, and that few of his admirers can hope to deserve as much credit for sagacity.

Let no temptation induce you to join a religious society, for the mere purpose of securing popularity. Religion is too awful a subject to be handled with impunity. If you approach it, speak of it with unaffected lips; and touch it with unspotted hands. Remember, it is the great key-stone of morals, which will fall, and crush you to pieces, if you come under it with insincerity and unworthiness. Hypocrisy is the most degrading, as well as dangerous, vice of humanity. It lowers a man in his own estimation; and will be sure, sooner or later, to lower him in the estimation of every body else.

Towards your patients, I would most urgently advise you to conduct yourselves unreservedly, with frankness and candour. Although it is not always necessary to communicate every thought you may indulge, never attempt to impose upon them, with a disguising varnish of your motives, or your opinions. If your intentions are honourable, and your judgments well founded, you need never be afraid to show them in the day-light. Although the demure look, and the wisely guarded speech, may pass, like an owl's face, for the countenance of wisdom; still you will find that in the course of time, openness of character, and manliness of spirit, will rise superior to all the value which may be put on the fabrications and subterfuges of small policy.

In regard to the best mode of cultivating your profession, I shall have time to say but a few words. Recollect what I have so often, and so constantly urged on your attention, respecting the rules of inductive science. Be always governed by the observation of symptoms, and not by the imaginary causes of them. The whole science of nature consists in the classification of phenomena. We can do but very little in the way of theory, and nothing in the way of hypothesis. Be content, I beg of you, to follow the dictates of common sense, in all cases, and under all circumstances. Be satisfied with the opinions you can form, from a plain and careful examination of the indications which nature holds up to your view; and reject all inquiry into the secret and undefinable causes

of life and disease. You cannot imagine the advantages which you will gain, by such a course of practice, over those who are governed by the long exploded precepts of the schoolmen,—revived and repolished, as it must be confessed they have been, by the innovators of France. While they are balancing doubts and difficulties, and vibrating from one conjecture to another, you will be fortified by the calm and unchangeable dictates of sound reason and philosophy.

I need say nothing for the purpose of inciting you to the active and enthusiastic pursuit of your profession. You must be perfectly acquainted with the inducements and rewards it holds out to your view.

But the wealth you may acquire from the most brilliant success, will be nothing; the reputation which you may hope to gain, throughout the whole civilized globe, by a long life of industry and genius, will be nothing; in comparison with the heart-cheering satisfaction which you will experience, in being conscious of your *usefulness*. You will serve the deepest interests of humanity. You will alleviate anguish.—You will cure disease. You will accomplish the same purposes in the *physical*, which the Son of God has so mercifully done in the *moral* world.

THE END.