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Jones (J. P.)

CHARGE

ADDRESSED TO

THE GRADUATES IN MEDICINE,

AT THE

COMMENCEMENT OF THE MEDICAL DEPARTMENT

OF THE

COLUMBIAN COLLEGE, D. C.

MARCH 10, 1830.

BY THOMAS P. JONES, M. D.

PROFESSOR OF CHEMISTRY AND DEAN OF THE MEDICAL FACULTY.

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CHARGE.

GENTLEMEN :

UPON me, as organ of the Medical Faculty of the Columbian College, devolves the pleasing duty of congratulating you upon the consummation of your labors as students of our Institution ; and, in expressing my own sentiments upon this subject, I know that I shall give utterance to those of every individual among my colleagues.

We now resign the relationship of teachers and pupils which has hitherto subsisted between us ; and the bidding you welcome as equals and associates, is accompanied with recollections of a very gratifying character. During the session which has terminated your collegiate studies, the deportment of the whole class, of which you have been members, has been marked by a general and a uniform decorum and propriety of conduct but rarely witnessed under similar circumstances ; so far as I am informed, the babbling tongue of rumor itself has been kept silent, and a character sustained by you, equally honorable to yourselves and to the Institution.

After the ceremonies of this day our intimate association with most of you will terminate ; you will become residents of other, and, several of you, of remote sections of our country, where you are to undertake those arduous and important duties which devolve upon you as professors of the healing art. When occupied in the performance of these duties, we cherish the confident hope that memory will, not unfrequently, conduct you back to those halls in which were breathed many of your most ardent aspirations after knowledge in the Æsculapian mysteries, and to an affectionate recollection of those whose most anxious

desire has been so to unfold these mysteries to you, as to give you a just title to the appellation of **INITIATED**.

On an occasion like the present it will scarcely be expected that there should be any thing of novelty, either in the observations which I may make, or the monitions which I may offer. The duties and the trials of the physician have been the subject of hundreds of addresses to graduates in medicine, and, in fact, appear to be almost the only appropriate themes for the season of parting. The heart is then peculiarly susceptible to those emotions which remind us of our intimate relationship to each other, as members of one great family; and is especially fitted to receive impressions which, if durable, must have a blessed influence upon our future course. Most happy, indeed, should I esteem myself, if, in this last official lesson which it is my duty to offer you, I might be the honored means of awakening, or of confirming, one noble sentiment, one manly resolution of power to assist in guiding and sustaining you in that career of virtue, honor, and usefulness, which I devoutly pray it may be your happy, glorious privilege to run.

You are now, gentlemen, invested with the title of Doctor in Medicine. In the estimation of those who have had the care of your medical education, and who feel a warm and jealous interest in the honor of the profession to which they belong, and of the particular school of which they are the guardians, you have fairly won your laurels by faithful attention to your studies, and by that progress in them which has enabled you to acquit yourselves, most satisfactorily, in an examination which we, and you, know was fair, impartial, and thorough. You have also presented theses, several of which have been marked by more than an ordinary degree of talent, and by a depth of research which would have done credit to much older heads. Be assured that, it is as gratifying to us, to bestow, as it can be to you to receive this well-earned praise; cherish the recollection of it—let it live in your hearts a perpetual monitor, reminding you of what you are capable, and of what you, consequently, owe to yourselves and to society.

You have *produced the debt*—the *discharge* of it must be the continued business of your lives.

Trite as is the observation, that the period of graduation should be considered as that in which your studies are most advantageously commenced, yet such are its truth and its importance, that it is well worthy of constant repetition, and of being indelibly impressed upon your hearts and minds. Whilst your diplomas may be to others the mere testimony of your rights, let them, upon yourselves, operate as perpetual evidences of your duties; of the obligations which you owe to the Institution from which you have received them, to yourselves, to mankind, and to Heaven.

Whilst, in the frame-work of human society, it becomes necessary to invest some with commissions to “burn, sink and destroy,” the “God-like attribute, to save,” will belong to you; and you will prove yourselves unworthy the name of Physician, should not this consideration operate with you, both as a motive and a reward. From this day, gentlemen, consider yourselves, as devoted offerings on the altar of suffering humanity; let the vow be recorded in Heaven, by which you engage to sacrifice every consideration, merely selfish, to the benefit of those, who confide to your skill, and your care, their most precious earthly blessings. Resolve, for the good of your fellow beings, to spend sleepless nights, and days of anxious unremitted research. A field of inquiry and observation, almost boundless, lies open before you; you have no time now, nor, if you are faithful to yourselves, will you ever have any, to devote to frivolous occupations; you must consider yourselves as perpetual sentinels appointed to guard the community against the ravages of disease and death; and never forget, that by a moment of inattention, you may betray the important trust committed to you. Countless thousands of our fellow-creatures have lingered out their lives in disease and pain, or been consigned to premature graves, because their Physicians have indulged in the evil habit of delay, or have neglected to store in their minds, and to render so familiar as to be called

to their aid at any required moment, those remedial applications which would have been effectual, if promptly used. Allow me to hope—nay, you have allowed me to do more than hope—prove well founded, then, the confidence you have established, that from among you, not one will be added to the list of drones in our profession; of those who, instead of its ornaments, become its opprobria, affording specious arguments to the contemners of the medical art.

It is not merely to the perfecting yourselves in the practice of Medicine and Surgery, that your attention should be hereafter devoted. You are now admitted members of one of the liberal professions, and one in which you can never acquire and sustain a high reputation, without a general knowledge of the circle of the sciences. The distinguished Physician must be a man of literature; it is not enough, that, in the every day business of life, he proves that he can converse with intelligence, and write his own language with correctness and purity; he must be the associate of the literary and the scientific of his district, and, in most departments, he ought to take the lead. Shrink not, gentlemen, at the idea of the labour, which a determination to sustain such a character will impose on you. *Labor ipse voluptas.* You are unworthy of the honours you have now received, and will never become fitted for the station which you ought to occupy, if your highest and most intimate enjoyments are not intellectual. There is, in nearly every instance, from the very nature of the profession you have chosen, a long season of probationary leisure, before its active duties will draw largely upon your time; in this season of leisure, you may complete the superstructure of your education, and open new avenues to honour, and to usefulness; let this time, then, be precious to you; instead of considering it as an evil, prize it as a valuable gift; regard it as an inheritance in which those fields that have been already cultivated, may be more highly improved, whilst new grounds may be cleared, and new harvests reaped, yielding a rich reward for the labor bestowed.

You live at a period of great moral and physical energy ; all is activity, both in the molecules, and in the masses of which society is composed, and you must either accelerate, or you must retard, the onward course of man's intellect and glory ; the former is equally your duty and your privilege ; but remember, as regards yourselves, that to stand still, is, in effect to retreat ; for if you are to-day on a line with the foremost in the march of improvement, and you rest until to-morrow, your more zealous and persevering companion will have left you, and you will find it no easy task to regain the relative station which you have lost.

I would stimulate you to exertion, by the highest motives ; by such alone, as accord with the dignity of learning, and the elevated nature of man, as a moral, an intellectual, and an immortal being ; yet, it may safely be averred, that, were your minds mercenary, your ambition for wealth would be most likely to be gratified by forming such a character, and establishing such a reputation, as habits of study will secure to you. Confirm your taste for intellectual culture, and you will be fortified against those allurements to ignoble gratifications, which have proved the bane of so many physicians, at once arresting the progress, and sapping the foundations of their fame and their usefulness. The temptations to which the Physician, and particularly the country practitioner, is exposed, have been the frequent subject of remark ; that of drinking stimulating liquids is the greatest, and the most baneful. You are too well instructed, gentlemen, in the functions of the human body, and in the effects which ardent spirits produce upon it, to need any arguments which I could offer, to strengthen your conviction of their deleterious tendency ; you know, too, that every excuse for their general, habitual use, is a mere attempt at an apology for what can never be defended or palliated. If one man is worthy of a more unqualified condemnation than every other, for intemperate drinking, surely it is the Physician ; to all the moral considerations which present themselves to every well-ordered mind, are, in him, superadded, a more intimate knowledge

of its necessary result, and to him are presented more frequent examples of the dreadful havoc made by it, in the moral and physical man.

In entering upon the practice of any art or duty, its claims and its obligations should be duly weighed; what we have a right to require, and what we are bound to give. In most instances, there is no little danger that the former will occupy an undue proportion of our attention, and certainly this danger is as great in the case of the Physician, as in any one that can be named. Every voice is loud in proclaiming that the man who undertakes the command of armies, or of navies, is unworthy of his station, if he harbors a single coward feeling, if he holds not his life, at every moment, a ready sacrifice to his country's good; should this require it, he must be the first to expose himself to danger, and the last to retreat from it. Such too, gentlemen, and so imperious are now the claims of society on you; I again exhort you then, from this hour, to surrender yourselves up, devotedly, entirely, unconditionally, to the relief of suffering humanity. Imbue your minds with a deep sense of the incommensurable value of that which is confided to your care, by your patients and their friends, and determine never to disappoint their hopes by your supineness, never to abuse their confidence by any neglect of duty. We all belong to society, but there are always certain individuals in it who have especial claims to our unremitting exertions; with you, those individuals will be your patients; their calls upon you must set aside every other engagement, must be considered as superior to every other claim; even the duties to your own household must be neglected, or deferred, unless they are of the same imperious character with those which demand your attendance, and your exertions elsewhere. You must prepare your minds to become familiar with the haunts of disease, of loathsome wretchedness, and, it may be, of pestilence; and to do this effectively and worthily, you must imitate the exalted philanthropy of Howard, that great exemplar of active, self-devoted benevolence; you must, like him, be ready "to dive into the depths of dungeons; to

plunge into the infection of hospitals; to survey the mansions of sorrow and pain; to take gauge and dimensions of misery, depression and contempt; to remember the forgotten; to attend to the neglected; to visit the forsaken."

It may, at some future period, gentlemen, be your lot to be stationed where pestilence, in defiance of your art, is spreading its ravages and its desolation around you; your professional brethren, in the devoted district, may all have fallen victims to the power of the destroyer, and you, alone, be left to do the Physician's heavenly works of love and mercy. In an hour of trial like this, the natural attachment to life, the silent, but powerful pleadings of affection in your own hearts, and a mistaken estimate of what you owe to those depending upon you, even as a husband and a father, may suggest thoughts to tempt you from your duty, may whisper that "self-preservation is the first law of nature," and that, therefore, you would be justified in deserting your post; but, will you not spurn the unworthy thought? **I KNOW YOU WILL.** It is only under trials such as these, that a manly firmness of purpose, a noble self-possession, and a generous and perfect devotion to duty and to humanity, can be fully manifested; and he who fails at such a time, should be viewed as a moral traitor, and degraded from a profession of which he is totally unworthy. You never may, and most probably you never will, be subjected to a test like that which I have been supposing, but you will, and frequently too, be called upon to act upon the principle that I would inculcate. You must run great personal risks, and you must run them unhesitatingly, fearlessly. Humanity must often be your only motive to exertion, and an approving conscience your only reward; this, however, is no mean one; to a mind capable of being operated on by the motive, the reward will be more precious than gold.

Were I to attempt to enforce precept by example, I should enter upon a field so abundant in its productions, that it would be difficult to determine which of them to cull. The history

of the lives of Physicians is replete with instances which, a thousand fold, redeem the profession from the opprobrium of selfishness, with which it has been charged, and place its professors among the most worthy, the most exalted of our race. I could relate facts respecting living Physicians, which would compare with any upon record ; I could tell of the most self-denying acts, performed in the hovels of wretchedness and disease, when praise would have been unheard, and remuneration was impossible ; but the agents in acts of benevolence like this, would “blush to find it fame,” and such histories must remain untold.

Venerating, as I do most devoutly, the memory of that eminent Physician and Teacher, Dr. Rush, whose life was dedicated to the best interests of humanity, and whose name grows more illustrious as time rolls on, I will indulge myself in briefly narrating one of the evidences of that benevolence, which formed a distinguishing feature in his character. In presenting it to you, I do not offer it as any thing extraordinary, but merely to exemplify a genus, by the exhibition of a single species. In the year 1795, a worthy and pious man, in Philadelphia, the father of a large family, was attacked with inflammation of the brain, which, though at first apparently subdued, returned, and terminated fatally. Rush, to whom the family had been previously unknown, was called in, as a consulting Physician. He attended day after day, and, in the consolation which he administered to the afflicted family, appeared like one of more than earthly mould, whilst he was exhausting the resources of art upon the patient ; the disease, however, was not to be arrested. When, after the lapse of some weeks, the affairs of the family were arranged, and it was found that there was enough to discharge the debts of the deceased, a messenger was sent to the Doctor, to thank him for his kindness, and to inform him, that the widow was ready to pay his bill. He made immediate and particular enquiry, respecting the number of children, and the circumstances of the family ; then wrote a few lines of kindness and condolence, and requested the acceptance of a sum, which was enclosed,

to aid, he said, the virtuous exertions of the bereaved mother. This is a simple tale, but it is a tale of simple truth. I was the honored messenger; a youth unknown to fame, and then altogether unlikely to become the recorder of an event which related to a family as undistinguished as myself. Gentlemen, as far as the heart is concerned in actions like this, I would say to you, "go ye, and do likewise."

There was a charm, too, in the manners of Dr. Rush, when visiting his patients, which I have never seen equalled, and of which the best chosen words could give but a faint description—there appeared to be in his character an assemblage of all the best affections of our nature, embellished by a grace of manner, which exhibited them in their loveliest forms. I could scarcely express for you a wish of greater kindness, than that you might in all points resemble him.

The cultivation of a disposition of kindness, and the expression of that disposition by manners which at once please the taste, and captivate the heart, are essential features in the character of a great Physician, and contribute to his success, as much as does the possession of extensive knowledge. Allow me earnestly to recommend to you, to cultivate this grace of manner; it ought to be one of the attributes of every gentleman, but, more especially, of every Physician: cultivate it as an invaluable appendage to that knowledge, which is indispensable. I do not say to you, "assume a virtue, if thou hast it not;" I would appoint you a nobler work; I would invite you to a more exalted conquest; instead of directing you to assume any thing, I would adjure you to acquire, and to cherish, and to perfect all those virtues, and assiduously to cultivate those manners, which exalt the man, and surround the Physician with a charm equally advantageous to himself, and welcome to his patients. Say not, that you have dispositions and habits which you cannot control; we form our own characters—establish our own habits—and are the arbiters of our own fortunes.

The duties and the associations of the Physician are better calculated to elevate the mind, to soften the heart, and to polish the manners, than those of any other profession. Whilst in the enjoyment of vigorous health and intellectual strength, he often witnesses the rapid prostration of those who, but a few hours before, were strong and vigorous as himself, and is thus taught frequent lessons of pious gratitude, and forcibly reminded that his motto should indeed be, *homo sum*; he sees humanity in situations of the greatest delicacy; he not only beholds the strongest arm unnerved, but the most delicate of our species called upon for endurance and exertions, which require, and which manifest, the greatest strength of mind; often, too, under circumstances which, in prospect, would appal a hero. In the performance of his professional duties, the Physician is as much called upon to strengthen and uphold the prostrate mind, and to bind up and sooth the wounded spirit, as to remove or mitigate the suffering of the diseased body; and if the repeated exhibitions of scenes of this description, the frequent exercise of feelings and of duties such as these, cannot obliterate all the asperities of his character, soften his manners, and confirm him in habits of untiring kindness and sympathy, he ought to relinquish the profession he has chosen, and betake himself to some pursuit more congenial to the feelings, the habits, and the manners, which he is determined to cherish.

I might enlarge upon this, and upon many kindred topics, but perhaps I have said as much as the occasion will justify; I, therefore, close this address by devoutly wishing that your whole course may be equally honorable and honored; that you may, in this world, reap the richest rewards of virtuous exertion; that, throughout your lives, you may imitate Him who went about doing good, and secure to yourselves that blissful, glorious immortality, which awaits every good and faithful servant.

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