

Dolley (Sarah R. A.)

DUPLICATE

Closing Lecture

To the Class of 1873-74,

DELIVERED AT THE

WOMAN'S MEDICAL COLLEGE OF PENNSYLVANIA,

BY

SARAH R. A. DOLLEY, M. D.

March 5th, 1874.

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S. R. A. Dolley

PHILADELPHIA, March 16th, 1874.

Sarah R. A. Dolley, M. D.,

DEAR MADAM :—

Will you grant us the favor of a copy of your closing lecture at the Woman's Medical College, for publication?

We believe it will be of service to Students in Medicine, as well as those just entering upon the duties and labors of the profession.

Respectfully Yours,

JENNY R. GRANT,
EMILY A. TEFFT,
EMILY S. BROOK,
EMMA R. OGDEN,
ARAMINTA V. SCOTT.

OLIVE DEWEY ALDRICH, M. D.
MARY R. HUTCHINS, M. D.
ELLA M. RIDGWAY, M. D.
ANNE CALDWELL, M. D.
ELIZABETH C. WARRINGTON, M. D.
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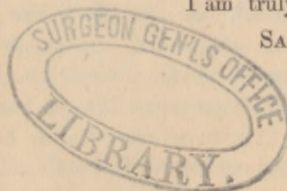
NO. 1107 GIRARD STREET,
PHILADELPHIA, PA., March 19, 1874.

LADIES :—

If any word of mine can be helpful to women in any worthy achievement, I cheerfully give it, and so accede to your request, and with assurance of my continued interest in you and your success as Physicians,

I am truly yours,

SARAH R. A. DOLLEY.



LECTURE.

LADIES :—

There are crises in our way, toward which the labor of months or years has been tending, and which are at the same time sudden breaks and new departures, when we reach some way-mark in our pilgrimage, which, while it long had been the point of invitation, now becomes the present acquisition, and the delectable mountains are still on, far on in the distance.

It is at such times we have an instinctive longing, not merely for a parting word, but for an encouraging one; something that will enlarge our vision, something that will be helpful, suggestive, inspiring, or talismanic; which, like the little resting places along the rugged mountain path, give us some refreshment from the toil of ascent, and glimpses of the hidden vista we long to reach.

If the fullness of my heart towards you could syllable itself in speech, and I had wit, or words, or wisdom, or grace of utterance, my desire would find expression, and would quicken you into new enthusiasm for the life-work of your choice, and strengthen the spirit of consecration with which I trust you would enter the Temple of Medicine.

Are women to be a power for good in the Medical Profession? is becoming a question of great moment, and one that you and I will help to answer.

It is no longer the case, as it once was, that when a lady takes her diploma, and enters the lines of the Medical Profession, every face she meets demands cause why she should have usurped the place, power and privilege of her father, husband, son, or brother, and implies that the great "head and front of her offending" has been an act of impertinence. No! with glad thankfulness we can say the most cultivated communities no longer regard the entrance of woman into the profession as an impertinence. But are our responsibilities lessened because of this one step in advance—of this one point gained which, while woman may be denied a *sphere*, still grants her a *hemisphere*? This is sufficient for a fulcrum, and if she can use a lever long enough, and strong enough, she will move the world. But because of this gain shall we boast of what we have attained, and supinely mutter the names of the honored absent and the honored dead, and say with enquiring challenge, "Have we not crowned ones in our ranks, and shall we not be saved?" No! The way is no less tortuous, nor the goal less distant, because here and there an obstacle has been removed, for the road to achievement, to success, to victory in any way, and ever and always in Medicine, takes you through Doubting Castle, the Slough of Despond, by Giant Grim, and over the Hill of Difficulty.

If you need not show cause why you have gone in the face of old-time prejudices, and essay to enter a profession which is justly given high place, and held in reverence by the people, you must show a *seriousness of moral purpose*, and must bring to the Medical Profession what it has a right to expect of you, a *moral power* which, like the "little leaven hid in three measures of meal," shall "leaven the whole lump," and so do your part—and not an insignificant or minor part—to maintain the integrity, to preserve the facts and profit by the traditions of Medicine.

Women have their limitations. For one I will not ignore them, and know no better way to abolish the difficulties that these limitations of woman may interpose, or difficulties of any kind, than by striving to comprehend them. "To walk between lions with closed eyes is evasion, and evasion is not conquest;" but *heroism*, open-eyed, acknowledges the right of every sort of opposition to bring out its heaviest force, and then goes through scarred and wounded though it be, to *success*, or to *defeat*, robbed of its shame because of fearful odds. Ladies, if we have not ten talents we will not sit mopingly with our five, (which perhaps make up in quality what they lack in quantity,) and say to our *Lord*, "Thou wert a hard master, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed, and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth—lo, there thou hast that is thine."

No! We will put to usury what endowments we have, and honor the talent that has been bestowed, the privileges that have been accorded, the opportunities that do invite us; and though we may not revolutionize Medicine with startling discoveries or brilliant inventions, that will go "sounding down the centuries," we will learn the science that is coming to be the science of sciences, which we revere, and we will make our hands deft and skillful in the art which we may now practice.

The wish, and hope that women might become physicians, was a dream of my childhood, an earnest of maturity, and the fact is a present satisfaction greater than I can express, and I am glad this satisfaction has not been weakened by my acquaintance with the class before me.

By your patient attention, you have incited me to more critical study, to wider range, and more thorough work, and, ladies, I feel that you have made me your debtor.

My imagination goes before you to your distant homes, and my earnest expectation gives me cheer that you will go on, step by step, honest in all your enquiries, respectful towards authority, and reverential at the shrine of truth—with the progress of time that of the one may possibly decrease, but that of the other will increase. If our purpose is genuine, we will seek *Truth* for its own sake, whether for us or against us, and then be submissive to its high behests, and leave *results* to HIM who is the fountain of all Truth.

Allow me to call your attention to a few homely virtues, compared with those more brilliant, and elevated in public esteem, which should especially belong to Physicians, and very especially to Lady Physicians.

Truthfulness, with patients, may be thought by some to be of little moment, but put yourself in the place of the invalid, and see how your respect would be lost, and your contempt challenged, by insincerity and subterfuge, by the bread pill or the pretending placebo. If you would not be thus approached by your Physician, neither will you so do towards those who put sacred trusts in your hands, and you will away from you all the tricks of the charlatan. The relation of Physician to patient is too sacred to admit of unworthy trifling—better, kind but *emphatic* reproof of morbid imaginings, or frank disclosures when the case has past, peradventure, beyond human skill, than resort by the medical attendant to any tricks—for the trade of the trickster, while tolerated in the art of jugglery and necromancy, becomes despicable in that of Medicine.

The temptation to partake of the temper of the time, is sometimes very great, and communities, like individuals, will have pet virtues, that may be cultivated at the expense of some less showy, but no less binding.

Honesty, in an age that produces splendid falsities, still has some who are so fossilized as to do it reverence, and who think that to render fair equivalent in skill, time or service, is not beneath those who have highest place in the profession, and must never be forgotten.

Physicians partake of the infirmities of human nature, and we may now and then find one who is mercenary; but I know of no body of men or women, so self-sacrificing, so ready to do good, regardless of reward, as Physicians. Professional philanthropists, who give of their abundance, are often better appreciated than Physicians, whose charities are not on set and stated occasions to be found in monthly reports or yearly summaries, where the right hand gets quick inkling of what the left hand is doing, but are part and parcel of the daily life that goes to make up the blessed ministries of the profession.

Tenderness and *Sympathy* will not hinder you in being thorough in doing what the necessities of the sick or injured may demand—and you will not ignore your own quick and tender sensibilities, though you cannot be expected to weep daily over all that is sad and shocking in human experience which may be revealed to you in your professional lives. The terrible, devastating epidemic may sweep thousands into premature graves, but you cannot “weep over a million sick any more than over a vulgar fraction.” You will meet the patient on a high plane of human reciprocity, and will regard her as something more than a static entity, or dynamic quantity, whose muscles, nerves and joints are not simply a bundle of levers, pulleys, and hinges, but are the instruments of that mysterious something which we call *Life*.

Achievement! Success! The world always has place, appreciation, and compensation, for professional success. It may be long coming, why should it

not be if it is genuine? and, like every other rooted thing, have time for succulent juices to bring stem, and bud, and flower in season to maturity.

No success is worth having which has not been preceded by a season of development and growth, for it is better to die without recognition than to feel that we have accepted what we have neither earned by patient endeavor, nor won by triumph of genius. There is something which the world calls *success*, which is an illusion, and, like the shifting quicksand, bears to sure and inevitable destruction. Invoke every failure and every triumph to contribute towards a worthy *success*—to bring moral power and moral purpose to permeate your whole professional life. At all cost, keep the vantage for the soul, for loss in this direction no intellectual attainment, however great, no triumph in any art or skill of hand will compensate, but only throw in bolder and more ugly relief, that affectation which would imitate the worst failings of men, or ignore the highest power of woman.

Should you go into communities where still exists great prejudices against women physicians, and you should be ignored, or possibly reviled, such discipline might even be "something between a hindrance and a help." That society may not be widely disorganized, there seems to be a feeling inherent in human nature, to put an innovator on trial. An ancient Locrian custom required that originators of new laws or propositions, should be brought before the assembled wisdom, with halters around their necks, ready for speedy execution if the innovation proved on examination to be utterly unsound or puerile.

Dr. Collyer tells how Yorkshire people say, "When you see a stranger, throw a stone at him." Why not? Communities have rights as well as individuals, and you must allow time for your motives to be understood, and your actions rightly interpreted. Society must act in part from habit, and be for a time intolerant of an individualized mind. Your principles, your intentions, your acquisitions, may be unknown to your assailants, and they would know by what right you would breathe their atmosphere, or share their privileges. Throw yourselves for a moment on the side of your assailants, and look out from the optics of your antagonists, and see if you can show cause why. Thus you may learn some lessons, and see some phases of human nature, that you could not have so readily realized from books or verbal descriptions.

Col. Higginson, in a late address favoring a new movement, urged that it should have a modest start, to insure success, and says: "For if it has an obviously exaggerated beginning, the community will be at once repelled, and ought to be." This contains so clear and emphatic statement of a truth which young aspirants are in danger of forgetting, and young Doctors in danger of ignoring, by being forced into positions beyond the possibilities of their growth and development, that I call your attention to it. Position, neither earned nor

won, will not be a satisfaction, but a shame; and false assumptions will be at once repelled, and ought to be. . . .

Legitimate Medicine has a great history. We have aphorisms of the Fathers, and classic writings of the moderns, of which we would do well to know something: and among the standard-bearers of Medicine, have been those who have robbed pestilence of its terror, "who have given the dumb lip utterance, the idiot clay a mind," brought light to sightless eyes and power to infirm limbs, invited reason back to her throne by gentle ministrations and brain-compelling conditions, and by organized sanitary laws have increased the ratio of human life. And here in this city, where Medicine first found shelter and facilities for imparting instruction to the sons, and eventually to the *daughters* of our grand Republic, are the laurel-crowned—who crowd our memories, and whose names have gone all over the world where there have been ears to hear Philadelphia's grander message of Liberty and Independence.

Should not the great opportunities of the present, the greater hopes of the future, and the reminiscences of the past incite to more earnest and worthy effort? Do I seem to discourage you? Like one who would ask the young artist, flushed with his first triumph, to go with him to the *Vatican*, and there, in the presence of the great Masters, say: "What are your achievements? Don't try to do more than imitate." No! I would not say this: each age has its needs.

"New occasions teach new duties, time makes ancient good uncouth,
We must upward still and onward, who would keep abreast of truth."

I would not humble you in the thought of your best efforts being feeble in comparison with the triumphs of illustrious Physicians, but remind you of our rich inheritance, and how jealously we should guard and add thereto, and from no fanatical enthusiasm, or noisy ostentation, be induced to "exchange our birth-right for a mess of pottage."

Our movement, like every other grand one, is not endangered by open opposition, but by amateur doctors—by learning, falsely so-called—which dignifies itself by assuming the airs of science, and may be compared to a strong undertow, which will not knock you down like the heavy ocean-swell, but creeping treacherously along, takes your feet from under you, betrays you into some indirection, and then mocks you. . . .

. . . . "Things desirable must be wrung out by our energy, they will not spontaneously drop into our laps as we approach, any more than the arrow-headed inscriptions in the desert yield the ancient history locked up in their cyphers, to the caravans and armies that so many ages ignorantly traveled by them." We must keep abreast of the knowledge of our day, and to those of you who may soon go out in practice, I would say, be careful readers of leading Medical Periodicals. Thus you will be apprized

of new discoveries, and will keep yourselves in sympathy with the spirit of scientific research and careful observation which marks our era, and will become familiar with the writings and teachings of those who are laborious cultivators of the Science of Medicine.

They who lightly estimate the demands on the Physician, or slightly appreciate the countless blessings to the human family due to Medical Science, cannot share in our earnest desire to exalt its usefulness, and extend its beneficent ministrations.

You will not honor your calling any the less, that it makes so large demand upon your best powers; that it requires learning as varied, as thorough, and accurate, (for those who would attain any worthy place, and realize its high trusts and rigid requirements,) as that of any department of human inquiry or labor. But this conquest of knowledge can only be made by painstaking—unremitting, severe, and with generous purpose.

If the great artists, musical and dramatic, are unwearied in keeping every sense attuned, and are indefatigable in effort to perfectly delineate some great conception, why may we not—why should we not—we who practice a *Diviner* art, keep every faculty equipped, and make every power tend to truer and larger attainment, and better performance.

If we lose sight of every unworthy motive, covet the best gifts, and direct our lives with unswerving integrity, we shall find a true vocation, which has its satisfactions, its joys, and triumphs, as well as its trials, perplexities, and distresses.

You have made noble endeavor—you will, I am sure, go on from strength to strength, ever animated by *L'esprit morale*, as well as *L'esprit scientifique*.

