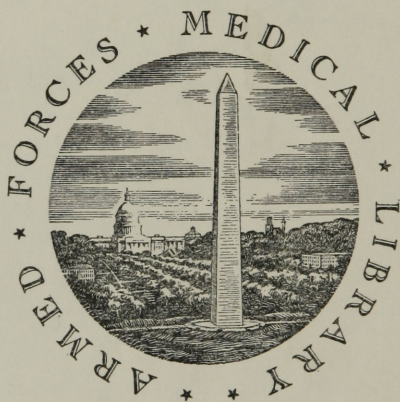




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WASHINGTON, D.C.





A

POEM

ON

PROFESSIONAL LIFE,

DELIVERED BY APPOINTMENT

OF THE SOCIETY OF

PHI BETA KAPPA,

AT THEIR ANNIVERSARY

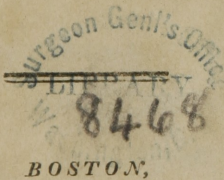
August 29, 1811.

BY JACOB BIGELOW, M.D.

BOSTON,

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1811.



THE following Poem considered as a general view of its subject, is incomplete. This is owing in part to the short time allotted for its preparation, and in part to the limits prescribed by the occasion.

# A POEM

ON

## PROFESSIONAL LIFE.

---

UNUSED before the public bar to rise,  
And meet the terrors of expecting eyes ;  
Void of those powers the season should require,  
The forum's impulse and the pulpit's fire ;  
Fain would the muse repress her venturing wing  
Convinced "the bard had better muse than sing."

And since the day to science long allied  
Returns with claims, that may not be denied,  
Would that a cause so good, a claim so strong,  
Had found a mightier voice, a better song.

Long as in life's precarious scenes we dwell,  
Hard are our toils, and efforts to excel ;  
Above the world preeminence to claim  
Is but a partial lot though general aim ;  
To the high goal, where multitudes aspire,  
We see a few advance, a host retire.

There are, who born in fortune's brightest day  
To rank and riches meet a speedy way  
Through golden heaps of unexpected gain,  
Reaped on the field, or gathered on the main.  
There are, more sure and more industrious they,  
Who win by gradual steps a tardy way ;  
Scrape with hard hand their slow penurious gains,  
Till a rich will succeed a life of pains.  
There are, ordained to fill a humbler state,  
The sons of labour, useful more than great,  
Whom favouring fate some recompense allows,  
For oft exerted arms and moistened brows.



We, whom the fates from active scenes confine  
 In long noviciate at the muse's shrine ;  
 Whom listless hours of sedentary toil  
 Unfit to wield the axe, or turn the soil ;  
 We, whom hard chance with pitiless commands  
 Ordains to work with heads, and not with hands ;  
 How shall we strive in the tumultuous race,  
 And hold, or seem to hold a signal place ?  
 How through the path of clogg'd professions tread,  
 And force our arduous way to fame and bread ?

The world has many a want to be supplied,  
 Man is beset with ills on every side ;  
 His complex catalogue of pain and grief  
 Fancied or real, all demand relief.  
 If wronged, aggrieved, defrauded or opprest,  
 His ills must be repaired, his wrongs redrest ;  
 Till due revenge by law and justice' aid  
 Make virtue bold and villainy afraid.

If stretched enfeebled on the couch of pain,  
 By heart tumultuous or disordered brain,  
 Skill must the sinking flame of life relume,—  
 Or smooth at least the transit to the tomb.  
 When joy departs, and worldly blessings fly,  
 When grief is present, or when death is nigh,  
 The holy voice the anxious soul must cheer,  
 And ghostly comfort chase distress and fear.

So thinks the youth, by hope and fear address,  
 When just dismissed from Alma mater's breast ;  
 Who pausing doubts, and fain would know the way,  
 That yields the easiest task and promptest pay ;  
 Who undecided, cautious, slow and loth,  
 Weighs the profession, faculty and cloth ;  
 Till tired of doubting much, and halting long,  
 He makes his desperate choice, or right or wrong.  
 So thinks he too when, three years left behind,  
 He issues forth equipped to serve mankind ;

Ripe for his task, and to his calling true,  
With books well read, and well digested too ;  
He rents a room on first, or second floor,  
And hoists his gilded name above the door ;  
Ready on this, and each succeeding day,  
To do a world of good, and take a world of pay.

Great seemed the epoch, and yet, strange to tell,  
No comets glitter'd, and no meteors fell ;  
Not even the busy crowd respect his door,  
But keep their way as tranquil as before.  
Amazed he sees them pass unheeding by,  
And wonders much his sign escapes their eye.  
Day follows day, and week succeeds to week,  
And scarce a pauper deigns advice to seek ;  
The spring has past, the summer and the fall,  
Few friends have called, and few are like to call ;  
Nor fees to cheer, nor prospects to inflame,  
This hopeful candidate for wealth and fame ;

Till forced at last his visions to dismiss,  
He sighs, " what trade on earth so dull as this ?  
Better plant grapes in Greenland's frozen soil,  
Or retail sand at Desolation isle !"

Ye, that long since the dubious ordeal tried,  
And know what ills a learned life betide ;  
Say, since perchance experience made you wise,  
How shall the titled novice seek to rise ?  
How break the confines of obscure neglect,  
Intrude on notice, and enforce respect ?  
Say, since the cause to many a heart is near,  
And many a brother may not shrink to hear ;  
If such there be, who feel the humbling sense,  
That lack of patronage is lack of pence.

By various roads the gowned host aspire  
To gain the boon, which all so much desire ;  
If to their doors no wished employment come,  
The slippery phantom must be sought from home ;

And many an art, and stratagem pursued  
To hold the shade, that would their grasp elude.

One vext with care and anxious at delay,  
To power and note would plan a speedy way ;  
Unused to grasp the fruit of gainful job,  
He stoops to ask it of the mighty mob.  
Courting their smiles, profest with selfish end  
The rabble's leader, and the people's friend ;  
Found in their ranks, and in their dwellings known,  
Ready to make each rascal's cause his own,  
He sounds the pedlar's wish, the sweeper's whim,  
And bridewell's outcasts learn their rights of him,—  
Well suited he their homage to engross,  
A mighty *magnus inter minimos*.

Tired of the scant employ, his means afford,  
Another flies to join the festive board ;  
Sure to awake, as slumbering in the bowl,  
Friendship, and patronage, and warmth of soul.

He, first at club, and last to quit the ground ;  
 Loudest in song, in toast the most profound ;  
 With many a shake of hand, and pledge of soul,  
 O'er fuddled heads assumes supreme control.  
 The jovial crew, whom mirth and wine inspire,  
 Applaud his humour, and his pith admire ;  
 And many a comrade tottering to his fall  
 Swears to stand by him, while he stands at all.

A party's aid is rarely sought in vain,  
 Leagued in religion, politics or gain.  
 From views combined a fellow feeling grows,  
 And mutual interest fashions friends of foes.  
 The bold assertor of a party's cause  
 Some sure advantage in the conflict draws,  
 Success may crown or disappointment foil,  
 Yet friends at least will recompense his toil.

Such is the sphere, and such the arts, that claim  
 A partial power, a transitory fame ;

Destined at best to flourish, or to close  
With the precarious stock, from which it rose.  
Unworthy these to tempt the generous soul,  
Whose high ambition marks a loftier goal ;  
Whose settled eye awaits a distant scene,  
Heedless of narrower fields, that intervene.  
His sure resolve, and firm unbending soul,  
No luring hopes, nor threatening fears control ;  
Fixed in the high, but rough ascent to fame  
With ardent step, and undivided aim,  
Nor bars, nor years his progress can abate,  
Firm to excel, and patient to be great.  
I know what ills the arduous march betide,  
What baffled confidence, and injured pride ;  
Few are the smiles to cheer, or tongues to praise  
Secluded nights, and long laborious days.  
Yet studious hours of solitude and toil,  
The arduous culture of the mental soil,  
These shall in proud preeminence repay  
The golden harvest of a future day.

Let not the mind in such a cause enrolled  
 With lighter aims seducing converse hold;  
 Nor fancy's power, nor passion's wild control,  
 Divert the steady purpose of the soul.  
 As in the Sibyl's cave, where stood confest  
 A nation's fate, on fluttering leaves imprest;  
 Did one rude blast the expressive calm assail,  
 The airy prophets mounted on the gale.  
 So in the mind by deep devotion held,  
 To one great aim collected and impelled;  
 All wavering thoughts, and all intruding views,  
 Distract its powers, its energy confuse.

And must the youth from fancy's vision pause,  
 Soon as embarked in a profession's cause?  
 Forsake the muse's bower, nor hear the swell  
 Of PAN's sweet pipe, and PHŒBUS' chorded shell?  
 Desert the recess of bucolic loves,  
 In vales of TEMPE, and ARCADIAN groves?



Nor hear the song which inspiration gave,  
 From TIBUR'S haunts, and MINCIO'S classic wave ?  
 No, to these welcome founts the mind should fly,  
 When deeper toils have tired the studious eye ;  
 When the long effort, and the thought intense,  
 Have worn the intellect, and numbed the sense ;  
 Then shall the classic strain its force display,  
 To bind the soul, and charm fatigue away ;  
 Then shall awake the muse's pristine fire,  
 And all the raptures of the ancient lyre.

Hail glorious bards, whose energy sublime  
 A thousand years has stemmed the tide of time ;  
 Whose soaring song, triumphant o'er decay,  
 Has charmed the world, while ages rolled away !  
 Long shall the power of your immortal name  
 Live on the tongue, and swell the peal of fame.  
 And should AMBITION'S hand with ruffian sway  
 To science' grove pursue its blasting way ;

And on the muses' holiest refuge pour  
 Death's iron clang, and war's discordant roar :  
 Till shrinking genius quit the hateful day,  
 And taste and art are silenced in dismay ;  
 Till every muse the altered world disown,  
 And ancient darkness reascend his throne—  
 Your sacred names to suffering science dear  
 Long shall elude the storm, and linger near ;  
 Long o'er the scene on buoyant wing aspire,  
 And sink the last on learning's funeral pyre.

YE that each year on willing steps have strayed  
 To these fair haunts, your own maternal shade ;  
 Brothers of kindred soul, accept, I pray,  
 The bard's warm wish, and gratulating lay.—  
 High be the honours, your desert shall claim,  
 And short, and splendid be your path to fame ;  
 To your fond vows propitious be the fair,  
 And kind as heaven, who heaven's own image wear ;

Glad be the hours, that lead you o'er the stage,  
Blithe be your manhood, soft your couch of age :  
And while returning years conduct your feet,  
To hail the muses' consecrated seat ;  
May truth and faith your meeting bliss prolong,  
And happier minstrels wake your annual song.







