ADDRESS

OF

R. T. BROWN, M. D.,

Professor of Chemistry and President of Faculty

OF

INDIANA MEDICAL COLLEGE,

Delivered Oct. 17th, 1871,

AT THE OPENING OF THE SESSION.

PUBLISHED BY THE CLASS.

Indianapolis Printing and Publishing House.—J. M. Tilford, Pres't.

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INDIANA MEDICAL COLLEGE,
Delaware Street, opp. Court House,
INDIANAPOLIS, *January* 5, 1872.

PROF. R. T. BROWN,

SIR:—At a meeting of the students of the Indiana Medical College, the undersigned committee was appointed to solicit a copy of your address at the opening of the present session for publication.

Hoping that you will comply with this request of the students at your earliest convenience, we have the honor to be,

Yours very respectfully,

L. PRATER, Chm.,
G. B. SMITH, Sec'y,
A. A. HAMILTON,
Committee.

INDIANA MEDICAL COLLEGE,
Delaware Street, opp. Court House,
INDIANAPOLIS, *January* 6, 1872.

G. B. SMITH AND ASSOCIATES,

GENTLEMEN:—In compliance with your request, I herewith transmit to you a copy of my remarks to the class at the opening of the present season.

Yours truly,

RYLAND T. BROWN.

ANNUAL ADDRESS

TO THE

STUDENTS OF THE INDIANA MEDICAL COLLEGE,

BY

R. T. BROWN, M. D., PROFESSOR OF CHEMISTRY.

Gentlemen :—Your appearance here this evening is an expression of your intention to make the prefession of medicine the pursuit of your life. Standing now on the threshold of that profession, you will permit, from me, a word of encouragement—of advice and admonition. I know full well that this latter is often a thankless task, and always a delicate one; but I maintain a peculiar attitude to the profession, and in that attitude I claim the right to speak *to* the profession and *of* the profession with an independence which, under other circumstances, I might not feel free to exercise. After devoting one-third of a century to the preliminary study and practice of medicine, I retired from the field of active practice, and having devoted the last twelve years of my life to teaching, I am now able to take an outside view of the present condition of medical science and its relation to kindred sciences; to note the general character of the medical profession, its social position and its relation to all the great progressive movements of the nineteenth century. From this standpoint I hope you will indulge me in giving you my impressions of both the science of medicine and of the profession engaged in the practice of the art.

Medicine can hardly be called a science; it is both *more* and *less* than a science. It is more, because it involves

the knowledge of a whole family of sciences. In the field of anatomy it infringes on the territory of the mathematical and mechanical sciences; in physiology and in pharmacy it fairly embraces the new-born and vigorous science of chemistry; in materia medica it crosses the flowery fields of botany; and in the study of brain function, both healthy and morbid, it trenches largely on the province of the mental and moral sciences. It is, therefore, rather a compilation of sciences than a single science. It is less than a science, because there is scarcely one of the sciences of which it is compiled that can be regarded as complete, and several of them are yet in their infancy. The labor of the past centuries has been rather the work of collecting the material out of which to construct a true science of medicine, than that of building the science itself. In this labor, much of both time and expense have been bestowed on perishable material. All around us lie the crumbling ruins of many a theory on which its author has bestowed years of thought and ingenious labor, yet the ruthless hand of time, that spares nothing but the imperishable gems of *truth*, has so marred and defaced these works of art, that even their authors would hardly know them in their dilapidation and decay. This would be a melancholy reflection but for the compensating fact that in all these systems of medicine, however visionary and perishable they may have been, there were precious diamonds inwrought with their structure, which survive the decaying mass and furnish fit material to rear a science which shall be as enduring as time, and as indistructible as truth.

The science of medicine is, and in its nature must be, a purely inductive science, founded solely on carefully observed phenomena, collated and adjusted to the ever-varying conditions and circumstances, both subjectively and objectively.

No reason can be assigned for the action of medicines which would enable us to predict such action before we have observed their influence on the vital phenomena.

We often deceive ourselves by the use of language. We speak of ipecac *acting* as an emetic as though it were the active agent in the emesis, while it is really nothing more than the occasion which determines the vital action in that direction; and *why* it should set up that particular action, rather than any one of a score of others that were possible, we may not know. To know the *fact* and the circumstances under which that fact occurs, and the conditions in which it will not occur, are all the demands which science makes on this subject, and these demands can be met only by actual observation, and never by deductive reasoning. What is true of this individual case, is substantially true in every department of the science. It will be seen from this view, that while we may have many systems we can have but one *science* of medicine. That science is not the *invention* of any man—it is not the discovery of any age; it is a growth; the growth of ages. Slowly assimilating truth from a thousand observers, and claiming that precious gem in whosever hands it may be found, it has expanded and developed into its present fair proportions; and though we can not claim perfection for it to-day, yet we affirm that its advances toward that goal have been marked, and unmistakable. We do not propose to teach a system of medicine. We invite you to the study of the *science*, so far as that science has been established by the test of experience and observation, and beyond that point we invoke your assistance as fellow-workers with us in the construction of a true science on which may rest securely the "healing art."

Nothing has more effectually retarded the progress of medical science than the determination of the system-builders to project the cornice, raise the dome and declare the temple of medical science finished. The Galenists and the chemists each contended for their respective theories, as embodying the completeness of scientific truth, with a zeal that would have arrested all further investigation and suspended the development of the science in its fœtal state. The humoral pathologists were

equally certain that they had attained to absolute truth in its totality. At the close of the last century, when Hahnemann proposed to reduce the whole science of medicine to a single generalization—*simila similabus, curantum*—and the materia medica to a few specifics, in infinitesimal doses, he made a bold attempt to stop all further investigation and lull to sleep the restless spirit of inquiry. So in our own day the several contending systems, with shameless impudence, affirm that they have reached the goal of perfect knowledge, and whatever is not of their system is necessarily false and pernicious. This exclusiveness, as far as it operates, tends directly to obstruct the development of the science by suspending the search after truth, or limiting and narrowing the field in which that search is to be made.

The true devotee of science worships at the shrine of no system; he idolizes no theory. He recognizes and appropriates truth wherever he finds it, and claims the right to roam the wide world, in all its kingdoms, in search of that treasure. From the days of Hipocrates medicine has been progressively assuming the form of a true science by the accretion and assimilation of truths that have stood the ordeal of time and the severest tests of a wide experience and observation. In this accumulation of imperishable truths, the science is greatly indebted to the various systems of medicine to which we have already alluded. Theories and systems may spring up without number—their name is legion. They may flourish for a time and rise high in public favor, but sooner or later the visionary material inwoven with their structure will betray itself; and from its crumbling ruins whatever of truth may have entered into its composition, or have been elicited during its life, will be attracted to the central science, and as a component part of this will out-live all systems and theories.

There has arisen scarcely a single system, however exclusive and bigoted it may have been; scarcely a theory of medicine, however fanciful and visionary, that has not left a valuable legacy to the science. In their narrow

conceptions they sought to serve themselves, but all unwittingly they have rendered valuable service towards the advancement of science. Even the stupendous folly of the Alchemists, in their search for the universal panacea, the elixir of life, was not barren of good results; they bequeathed to us a knowledge of the mineral acids, of the true composition of the various salts, and of the medicinal properties of several of the most certain and efficient agents in the materia medica. The humoral pathologists, in their anxious and earnest efforts to disprove the doctrines of the solidists, gave to science the full and complete investigation of the function of secretion, and the important relation which this function, and the character of the secretions, bear to the healthy condition of the animal machinery. On the other hand, their opponents turned their attention to the nervous system and that mysterious chain of sympathies which substantially makes this diversified vitality of ours a unit. Both systems have disappeared, as such, but the science of medicine is enriched by the labors of both. Their follies and absurdities, about which chiefly they disputed, are dead and forgotten, or only provoke a smile when named; but the truths which they each discovered have come down to us, a legacy of no mean value to science.

So, also, has passed away the Brunonian theory, which by one sweeping generalization proposed to reduce the cumbrous nosology of its predecessors to the simple statement of *sthenic* and *asthenic* diseases. But the Brunonian system contributed to the science the important results of its researches into the effects of depletion and the action of stimulants. Viewed in the light of the past it requires no prophet's ken to read the future history of the medical sects of to-day. Their large pretensions to superior wisdom, and their loud boasting of unqualified success in the treatment of disease, can not save them from the fate of their predecessors; nor will their fate prevent other theories from being constructed, and other systems from rising on their ruins, to win the popular smile for their brief hour, and to die and be for-

gotten as those have died who went before. But even now these are fulfilling their mission. The "steam system" of forty years ago did much to correct the abuse of the lancet and the indiscriminate use of mercury. Homeopathy has contributed greatly to correct the excessive medication of the last century, and to simplify the officinal formulas. Hydropathy has introduced the use of the cold water treatment in recent wounds, and in surgical operations—a service for which it deserves the thanks of the profession and the gratitude of the world. Thus medical science enriches itself by the observations and discoveries of those who seek its destruction; it profits by the wisdom of its enemies.

You come not here, young gentlemen, to be inducted into the mysteries of any exclusive system of medical lore, ancient or modern—popular or unpopular. We propose to teach you *to seek for truth*, and to appropriate that gem wherever you may find it. It is yours by heaven's high charter; it is the common property of mankind; the heritage of science, no matter who may have woven it into his system.

One point of complaint against medical science is its uncertainty. To remove this assumed defect has been the self-constituted mission of nearly every new theory of medicine that has been propounded. He betrays a very shallow acquaintance with this world, who supposes that anything which deals with vital organism can have the certainty of a mathematical science attached to it. Vital actions are dependent on so many contingencies, and modified by so many circumstances, that it would be scarcely possible for a finite mind to foresee all these, and calculate the exact bearing of each on the other. From these strange reactions of vital force, we may have the paradoxical results of similar effects from directly opposite causes, as in the effect of the warm and cold bath; the one operating by direct action, and the other by reaction. While I do not doubt that vital laws are as absolute and as uniform as the axiomata of mathematics, yet we may never hope to reduce these to the same sim-

ple forms of expression to which mechanical principles may be reduced. In the very nature of the forces concerned, each individual case of disease must be the subject of a careful analysis, determining the primary and secondary influences that are operating, or may have operated, to produce, link by link, the chain of morbid actions which, as a unit, constitutes but a single disease. To complicate the matter still more, there are the modifying influences of sex, age, habits of life, previous health, and personal peculiarities. These must all be carefully considered and properly weighed in the diagnosis of each individual case.

A system which proposes to formulate medical knowledge, and reduce its practice to the operation of a few mechanical rules, must, in the very nature of things, be guilty of false pretenses. The physician is required to be something more than a mere automaton; he must have a brain and know how to use it; he must have the mental power to observe, to analyze and to discriminate; and, withal, he must have the power of cool, dispassionate judgment that will not be warped by the anxiety of friends nor the fears of the patient.

From the consideration of the science we pass to notice briefly the medical profession in its several relations. We shall not indulge in the too common cant about the dignity, etc., of the profession. My private opinion is that, in this country, and at this time, none of the professions have more of *dignity* than will maintain for them a medium respectability, and the medical has certainly no room to boast over her sister professions. But your appearance here, gentlemen, augurs well for the future of the healing art. The profession of your choice, whatever may be said of its dignity, is confessedly one of onerous labor and great responsbility. This fact alone should deter all from entering it who have not formed a firm resolve to arm themselves with the best qualifications that the country and the age afford, to meet this responsibility and qualify them to effectually perform this labor. I am happy to have the privilege of congratulating you,

this evening, on the favorable auspices under which you enter the profession. In this western country, the improvements which have astonished the world, have nowhere been more distinctly marked than in the medical profession—its personal character, its opportunities for scientific and practical improvement, and its relations to society. When I entered the profession, now more than forty years ago, there were but two medical schools west of the mountains, and the oldest of these, and that one which had perhaps the ablest faculty, had no hospital privileges, and scarcely anything that deserved the name of a clinic. Philadelphia, which then stood at the head of the medical literatum in this country, was more inexcessible to us than Paris or London is now.

But few young men attempted the study in the West, and most of these were graduates from the office of the village doctor. Many, however, by dint of industry, and a perseverance that yields to no obstacle, aided and borne onward by an indomitable energy, have achieved for themselves honorable positions in the profession, or, dying, have left behind them a reputation that will long be cherished in the grateful memory of their patients. Of the *personal* habits of the *average* doctor of Indiana, forty years ago, I hope you will excuse me from speaking particularly. The best that I can say on the subject is, that public opinion expected the doctor to be always profane, often drunken, and generally, to maintain a reputation for chastity not entirely above suspicion. It gives me pleasure to recall to memory several physicians who rose above the demands of public opinion, but I regret to say that these hardly gave character to the profession. Fortunately public opinion has changed, and the character of the profession is promptly conforming to the demands of that change.

Of this class of pioneer physicians, rude and uncouth as they generally were, I can speak only with feelings of the most profound respect. They had a herculean task to perform, and right bravely did they do the work. Practice was widely diffused over a country almost a

primitive forest, without roads; the streams unbridged, and the sloughs often impassable. The compensation was always meager, often precarious, and not unfrequently entirely wanting. The country was infested with swarms of arrogant and impudent quacks, who, taking advantage of the ignorance and superstition of the backwoodsman, threatened to exterminate the profession entirely. Against this army of evils your predecessors contended with a will and a courage, aye, and a success, too, worthy of all honor. Though you enter the profession under circumstances greatly improved in every respect, yet you will find the life of a physician one of labor and responsibility if you faithfully discharge its duties. The improvements of the country afford you many conveniences which were denied to us, and the compensation for your services will be more liberal and more certain. Not among the least of the advantages which will be afforded to you will be that springing from the improved state of society. Our common schools have diffused a degree of intelligence among our people of every grade. This will tend to make your practice more pleasant and more successful, as it is always safe to leave your prescriptions and your patients in the care of the intelligent and the educated, rather than with the untaught and the ignorant. Nothing so effectually breaks the force of quacks and charlatans as a little insight into the mysterious working of that vital machinery, whose normal action constitutes that undefinable something we call health. The diffusion of the very small amount of physiological knowledge, obtained through the general introduction of that study into our common schools, academies and colleges, is producing a marked improvement in the public intelligence on the whole question of disease and its cure. No amount of *general* knowledge will secure the public against the depredation of ignorant pretenders to the healing art. Among the most influential patrons of quacks and quack nostrums that I have ever known, I can name several learned and able members of the legal and

clerical professions. A little knowledge of themselves would have effectually cured them of that malady.

In choosing the medical profession you voluntarily assume duties and responsibilities which you are honorably bound to faithfully discharge, so long as you sustain this relation to the public. You bind yourself to a life of industry, not merely in the daily routine of business, but at your books as well. We have intimated that medicine is a progressive science, and with the forefront of that progress you are morally bound to keep pace. Your student days must never end. You owe this, not merely to your patients, but each to yourself individually, and all to the profession. *You* must strive to know all that is known pertaining to the science; you must struggle to reach the summit of the pyramid of your science, and to add your mite, however humble it may be, to raise it higher.

It is a delicate matter to speak to you of your personal habits in professional life, yet I trust you will indulge me in a few hints. In maintaining the honor and dignity of your profession, you will do more by faithfully devoting yourself to the duties of that profession, and industriously keeping yourself fully in the advanced ranks of the science, than by violent denunciations of ignorant quacks and unprincipled fortune hunters. Scrupulously avoid all collision with these, or any personal controversy with those who seek to make capital by assailing the science, or abusing its advocates. Let your devotion to your profession, and your success in it, be your commendation to the public, and, my word for it, business will come to you as fast as you desire it. The desire to control a large practice, which sometimes seizes the young physician, is a morbid desire, and if gratified, is often followed by a most disastrous reaction. If in the first five years, from the date of his diploma, a physician does business enough to defray expenses and keep him in books, he is doing well, very well. Let no anxiety about business, no force of competion, decoy you into the use of unprofessional puffs, whether in your own name or anonymously

made and paid for with your money. I know that the press have denounced this as an overweaning prudishness that belongs not to this age, when every man is supposed to be engaged in taking care of himself. But what would the gentlemen of the press say of the lawyer who would seek clients by illuminated advertisements, setting forth how many horse-thieves his legal ingenuity had saved from the penitentiary, or how many murderers had escaped the gallows through his superior knowledge of technical quibbles. My opinion is, that without further acquaintance they would pronounce him a pettifogger and a shyster. All self-laudation is unprofessional in whatever profession it may occur. In your intercourse with other members of the profession let no petty rivalry nor feeling of personal jealousy mislead you into a course of conduct that will compromise your professional honor, or betray selfishness to the public. To your brother physicians be courteous and accommodating, and treat quacks and self-constituted doctors according to their merit; as *men*, accord to them their social position; as pretenders to medical knowledge, treat them with that silent indifference that is indeed the severest rebuke you can give those pretensions.

Your position as medical adviser will often bring you into very intimate relations with the private affairs of families where you are made a confidant. Remember that your honor is pledged to maintain, inviolate, the privacy of the domestic hearth. Let no prying curiosity tempt you to forfeit that honor. The circumstances under which the visits of a physician are made are generally of that peculiar character which will demand of you the utmost circumspection in your deportment. You must not, by your levity, shock the feelings of the patient, or the friends, in the serious mood naturally inspired by disease; nor must you, by assuming the melancholy face, add to the gloom of the sick room. Let your manner be easy, serious and cheerful, that you may at once impress the patient and friends with that candor and honesty which should always charaterize the discharge of your profes-

sional duties. There is a folly which I have seen that always greatly shocked my sensibilities. It is when a physician turns away from the bedside of a patient, who is trembling on the verge of the "dark river," from the tears of anxious friends, and from the confiding glance of fond relatives, to mingle with the thoughtless throng, and join in their coarse, and often obscene, jests, and to clinch it all with great oaths of horrid profanity. Young gentlemen, it is my happy privilege to tell you that the day is past when drunkenness, obscenity and profanity can give you a passport to public favor as a physician. In discharging the duties of physician in the families of your patrons, your obligations do not terminate when you have diagnosed the case and prescribed for the particular patient that you have been called to visit. By virtue of your position you are, to some extent, the guardian of the health of the families in which you practice. Whatever may come to your notice in the personal habits of those who entrust themselves to your medical skill that will tend to impair their health, or invite disease, it is your duty, mildly, but faithfully, to warn them of the consequences of such habits. To cure your patients when sick, and to teach them how to live when well, that they may shun disease—these (within possibilities) constitute the doctor's mission, and we trust that you will faithfully fulfill it. I need hardly say to you, that to give your advice proper weight and sanction, it will be necessary that you be found following, scrupulously and faithfully, the course of life you prescribe to others. You can not enforce the importance of simplicity, regularity and moderation in diet as a means to good health, while you indulge in gluttonous eating of complex and highly seasoned food at irregular and unseasonable hours. You can not convince a discerning public that indulgence in intoxicating drinks endanger health, when they see you partaking of a social glass, or joining in the revelry of a wine supper. Let me urge on you the observance of these well-known sanitary laws, not merely for the sake of consistency, nor even for the good influence of your

example only, but for your own personal benefit. Before you is a life of physical and mental toil which will severely tax your energies, both of body and mind, and it behooves you to husband well these powers. In early life contract good habits—live moral, temperate, industrious lives, and when the gray hairs grow thin on your temples you will thank me for this advice.

Gentlemen, into your hands we must soon commit, as a sacred trust, the honor and dignity of the profession, and the advancement of the science. Bear its banner aloft, and preserve its escutcheon free alike from the stains of bigotry and quackery.