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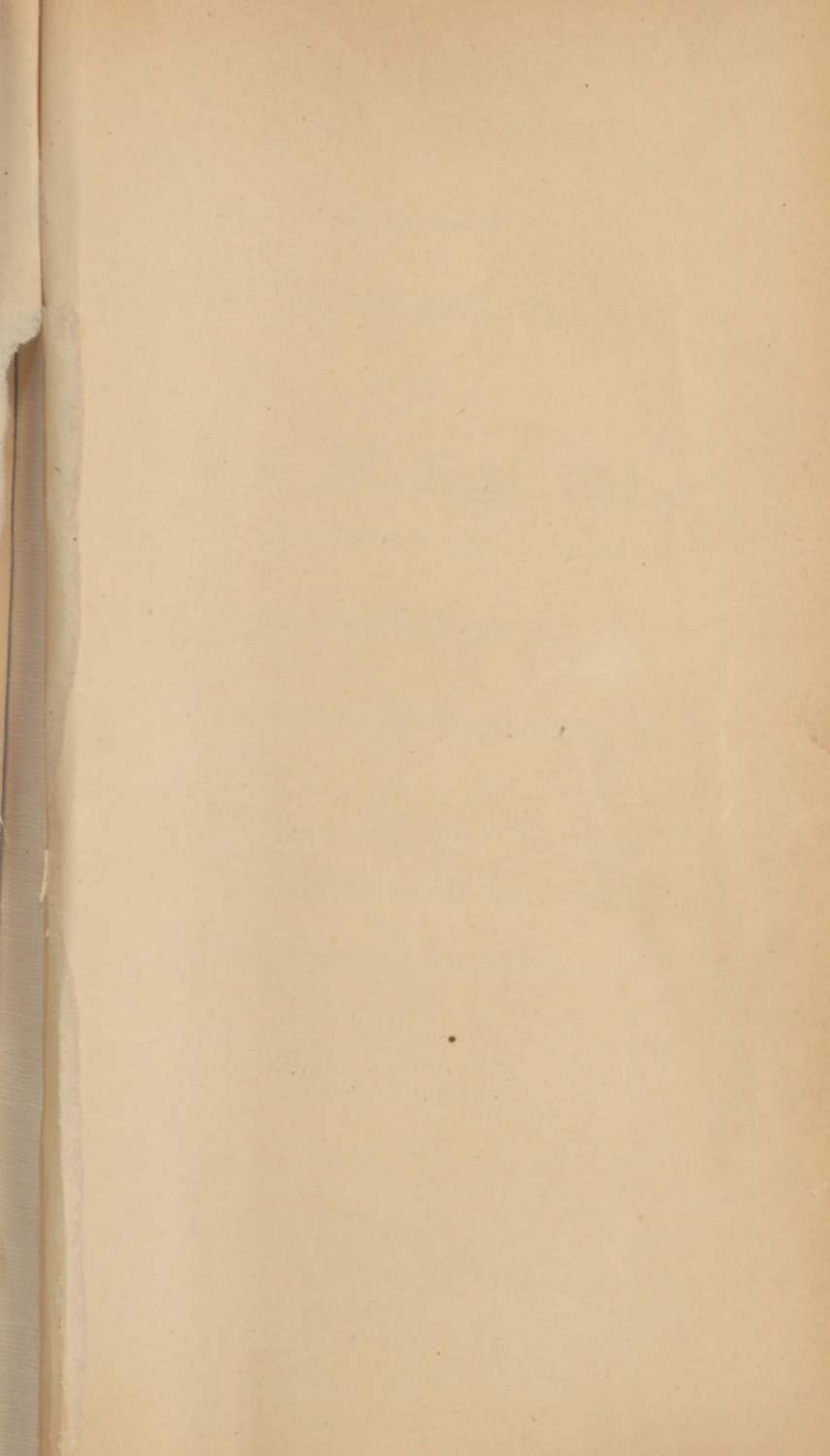
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VALEDICTORY ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE GRADUATED CLASS

OF THE

National Medical College,

(MEDICAL DEPARTMENT COLUMBIAN COLLEGE,)

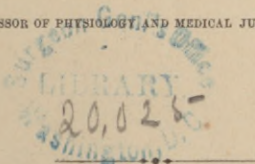
WASHINGTON, D. C.,

ON WEDNESDAY EVENING, MARCH 6, 1867,

BY

JOHN ORDRONAU, M. D., LL.B.,

PROFESSOR OF PHYSIOLOGY AND MEDICAL JURISPRUDENCE.



WASHINGTON, D. C. :

McGILL & WITHEROW, PRINTERS AND STEREOTYPERS,

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WASHINGTON, D. C., *March 8, 1867.*

Dr. JOHN ORDRONAU, X,

Professor of Physiology and Medical Jurisprudence:

DEAR SIR: At a meeting of the Students of the National Medical College, held on Thursday evening, March 7, 1867, the undersigned were appointed a committee to solicit, for publication, a copy of the Valedictory Address delivered by you to the graduated class.

Hoping it may be your pleasure to accede to this request, we remain,

Very respectfully, yours,

F. A. ASHFORD,
GEO. C. SAMSON,
C. W. FRANZONI,

Committee.

WASHINGTON, D. C., *March 9, 1867.*

GENTLEMEN:

I am happy to be able to comply with the request conveyed in your complimentary note of yesterday, and accordingly transmit, with this, the Address solicited.

I am, very respectfully, yours,

JNO. ORDRONAU.

Messrs. F. A. ASHFORD,
GEO. C. SAMSON,
C. W. FRANZONI,

Committee.

ADDRESS.

My honorable colleagues in the Faculty having assigned me the duty of addressing you their Vaedictory, I shall crave your indulgent attention for a few moments only, while engaged in discharging this solemn task.

There are few occasions in life which provoke more self-distrust and hesitation than those which summon us to give counsel and advice to the young. Every good admonition should rest upon some ultimate truth which, though seen plainly enough by the eye of conscience, cannot always be traced in the complex relations of life; for, after all, great truths, however intuitional in their nature, require to be crystallized into ideas, and those ideas symbolized by articulate utterances, before they can be transmitted from man to man as principles of thought, or rules for human conduct. This difficult task I could wish had fallen to worthier hands, since there is an esthetic ingredient in it, which, like the aroma of flowers, is alone capable of attracting our attention and enchaining our reason, while the sterner lesson behind is being both unfolded and inculcated. The efficiency of counsel, therefore, will depend as much upon the good taste in which it is administered, as upon the sound sense which it embodies; for the rule of dramatic excellence finds full application here,

and the unities of *time*, *place*, and *circumstance* must coalesce in order to insure the most perfect success.

To-day marks an era in your lives which is no less important to others than to yourselves. The world is interested in knowing the name, the intention, and the promise of every new workman who enters its arena, and intends to compete for its honest rewards. It has the right to demand guarantees that you are earnest in your intentions, and possessed of the requisite qualifications and merits to wear the livery of a noble profession. It does you the honor to take you upon credit and expectation. It welcomes you to all its opportunities and its trials, and, in return, accords you a share in all the fruits which its bounty dispenses. There is no exclusivism of reward—there are no favored classes, with royal prerogatives of acquisition or enjoyment; but each honest workman, wherever toiling, is as sure to reap a measure of the great universal harvest, as he is that the promises of God, expressed in His seasonal benefactions, will never fail. In the republic of science or letters no legislation is required to define the status of the individual citizen. All are equally peers on entering, and no department is closed to any one who will diligently fit himself to serve in it. Yet preparation is needed everywhere — preparation for learning as well as preparation for executing. The law of progressive development is inexorable—*nemo nascitur artifex*—and the same labor *acquisitive* must be performed by all, before labor *constructive* can be undertaken. Hence all have a mental childhood, with varying capacities to emerge from it, and, while all are equal upon the threshold, all differences begin beyond it. Every man eventually makes his own rank and deter-

mines his own position in the republic of letters. Nowhere may it more truly be said that

"We make our fortunes, and we call it
Fate!"

The indolent lag behind; the timid and vacillating cling to routine and tradition, seeking everywhere for precedents by which to justify themselves before the world, and to shift individual responsibility to the shoulders of the recorded past; while the industrious and earnest thinker, trusting chiefly in himself, finds all obstacles dissolving before the power of a strong will. Heat, light, electricity, galvanism, rule over matter in its every form; but the human will alone rules the master, Intellect, and causes it to unfold for our use the hundred eyes of an Argus, and the hundred arms of a Briareus. Every adventitious aid which relieves us from the necessity of personal effort is a hindrance, rather than a help, to our growth, and we are dwarfed in whatever direction we employ them. Only childhood needs supports from without. When we have reached the full stature of manhood we should take down these scaffoldings, as not alone useless, but cumbersome to bear. A healthy mind should never go upon crutches, and it is certain that a manly spirit will never ask for them. When Louis XIV, in the arrogance of his imperial power, once asked the merchants of a French city what he could do to advance their interests, they unanimously replied, "*Let us alone.*" And, in a similar independence of spirit, I fancy that every scholar who comes well prepared into the field of professional life asks for no odds in his favor, but simply to be let alone.

You have now been invested with the mantle of medical discipleship. You have reaped the honors of this Academy and been presented with its credentials

of qualification for admission into the ranks of an honorable calling. We are your sponsors for at least this much of proficiency and moral excellence, and we ask in return that the expectations justly founded upon these merits shall not be wholly disappointed. The honor of this institution is in many senses committed to your keeping; for while your glory and success will reflect lustre upon it, your failure and your condemnation will in like manner cast shadows upon its fame. But we entertain no such fears of the future; for, though all cannot attain the summit of professional excellence, all may at least fill the measure of that usefulness which is honorable from quality, rather than from degree. In this reliance, therefore, upon your virtue no less than upon your attainments, we welcome you into the noble fraternity of medicine. We give you the hand of friendship and the heart of sympathy; the greeting of well-cherished brethren, and our best wishes and hopes for your speedy success.

We have led you to the entrance of that great battlefield of life upon which it is God's will that all should contend. Clad in the armor of your professional knight-hood you must now learn to depend upon your own powers alone; for here all equality ceases and all inequality begins. Before you lie two paths; the one broad, smooth, easy, bedecked with hedgerows of flowering plants that make the air drowsy with the heavy incense of their fragrance, while beyond stretches a landscape of emerald meadows, and sparkling brooks, and bosky dells filled with syren voices of birds and passing breezes and silvery cascades, all inviting you to linger and bathe your soul in the sunshine of their Arcadian splendor; while the other path, narrow, tortuous, rocky, leads up

weary ascents of interminable length, here and there revealing cloud-capped summits yet to be scaled, and suggestive of patient toil and danger, and it may be even death; but remember that,

If there be *danger* in the path,
There is *glory*, too!

For above all, and enthroned amid the effulgence of unobscured sunshine, stands that fair Temple in which the Muse of History prepares an immortal niche for every pilgrim who attains to her shrine. His must be a craven spirit, indeed, who, with the certainty of such a reward before him, would not climb the battlements of Heaven to obtain it.

It is for you, gentlemen, to choose which of these two paths you shall follow. It is for you to say whether, giving way to soft, antinomian moods of Corinthian indulgence, you will spend your youth in sowing to the wind, putting off *labor* and patient industry to a more convenient day, and leaving *earnestness* to come with old age. Oh, the deceitfulness and self-delusion of the human heart. Did God begin the work of creation on Saturday afternoon? And would you give your youth to sporting with life, intending to employ only such shreds and fragments of it as remain in old age with which to do your appointed part in the drama of existence? Is this noble; is it manly; is it just to the Giver of all talents thus to misuse our own?

Or will you not choose that other path which, full of sternness and sincerity, leads always to ultimate satisfaction? Will you not determine to concentrate and focalize every energy in your power in order to advance your calling—to protect and defend its honor; to make it a beacon-light among the sciences and a glory to God—

by determining to do justice to that profession through the example of your own lives ; and firmly resolved that, come weal, come woe, come devil or human enemy, you will push forward in search of truth—toiling, climbing, suffering, achieving—until you shall finally plant the flag of your professional excellence upon the highest pinnacle of the professional Acropolis. There let it wave as “ a sign, betwixt the meadow and the cloud,” of your great achievement, and an example to posterity of the value of a sincere life.

This honorable path, however, will be beset with dangers commensurate with the prize sought for. In the great law of compensation every gift carries with it some counteracting defect, and this principle in nature, recognizing as it does that the harmony of life depends upon the equilibrium of all its forces, prepares us to expect more of bias than equipoise in our dual constitution. The despotism of temperament, the insatiable appetite of the intellect, the promptings of inflated ambition all seek to subjugate our inner life ; while customs and traditions, associations and professions—idols of the tribe or idols of the market-place—limit and circumscribe our external freedom. It is perhaps too late to cry out against that social tyranny which demands conformity as the price of success, and compels each man to fuse his nature into that of the community at the peril of ostracism. The Vicar of Bray was a rare instance of the faculty of adaptation to circumstances, and his reward was as regular as the succession of princes under whom he served. Even Harvey dared not for many years declare his discovery, for fear either of displeasing his profession or the church. And we all know what the brave Galileo underwent for his temer-

ity in unfolding a law of nature not yet accepted by his generation.

It is pleasant indeed to sit in a protected corner eating the bread of indolence, at the price only of bowing acquiescence to hoary customs and treading in the ancient ways without murmur or question. Do you not see how happy the horse or the mule are? Do they question this or that custom, institution, or law? Be a horse or a mule and your bread will be secured to you; but be a MAN, of uncompromising individuality, of earnest convictions, of determined action, and that same bread must now be fought for, since the world is at once in arms against you. Let that not affright you. The best men, like the best soldiers, are those who have fought the most battles; and adversity is often not only the best teacher, but even the truest friend. It is the weak and craven who clamor and whimper about fate and fore-ordination; the strong only pray for opportunity and divine grace, since "*one, with God, is a majority.*" The true man at every period of his life is only so by the excess and power of his individuality, and he takes his own proper place, which is ever waiting for him, whenever he demands it as his right. This is the secret of success in all ages, that the multitude have no self-reliance or courage for independent action, while only here and there a noble spirit, obeying the voice of consciousness, and not waiting for logical demonstration, leaps forward to an easy triumph in obedience to the intuitions of truth. No man ever performed a sublime action who first paused to consider the logical consequences of it, and he who would attain distinction in any direction, must first put *self* behind him, obeying only those great convictions which

fill the soul with the imperative necessity of action, and teach us in all conditions of life—

“That men may rise on stepping stones
Of their dead selves, to higher things.”

The power of a great truth, whether in physics or in morals, is out of all relation to the condition of him who utters it. The Christian religion, preached from the lips of ignorant fishermen, silences the eloquence of Tully or Demosthenes, and brings all systems of Philosophy, ancient or modern, toppling to the ground. Rank or position add nothing to the essential dignity of a principle, and kings, it is to be noticed, have never been the heralds of a new dispensation to civilization. God always works from below upwards—He fashions the pedestal before he forms the column or super-imposes the capital. He first made the earth, and afterwards man, as the ruler of it. So in us every great truth springs first from the *heart*, before it ascends to the head to be made the subject of reflection. All written constitutions—all laws—are but the crystallized expression of public sentiment, long agitating the heart of nations, until they have finally insisted upon uttering it through the voice of legislative enactments. And so has it been with discoveries in science. God never entrusts the secret to one mind alone. Had Servetus not perished at the stake, he might have announced the circulation of the blood before Harvey; had Watt not put his ideas of steam into mechanical execution, Fulton might have anticipated him; had Morse not applied electricity to the transmission of messages, Wheatstone might have done it; had Leverrier not discovered the planet Neptune, Adams might first have announced it. No revelation of a great truth is ever

entrusted to the chance execution of a single mind ; but when, in the fullness of time, the appointed day of its announcement arrives, the sun of this new dispensation rises in the heavens, and the tall mountain peaks, wherever situated, receive it simultaneously.

Trust, therefore, less to *conformity* than to yourselves. Life is not a mathematical problem, to be solved by a piece of chalk on a blackboard. No single equation will serve to unfold all its elements. The perturbations of the planet Mars cost Laplace three hundred equations to resolve them ; but how many equations, think you, would suffice to resolve the perturbations of that human nature into which enter such factors as necessity and free-will, organization and education, knowledge and faith, reason and conscience, duty and expediency ? Is there any chemical laboratory which will furnish tests for determining the qualitative character of these shifting elements ? Or is there any Bible of human opinions, in which you can find a revelation of their worth or dogmatic weight ? Every man, then, must seek within himself for that power of both creating and improving the opportunity, which renders him the master of any situation in which he may be placed. If the talent be the call, the opportunity is plainly the instrument for exercising it, and he will ever advance towards the goal of success who acts in harmony with the occasion. The baseness of conformity consists in the obsequiousness which it imposes upon its followers. Surely, any state of vassalage is to be deprecated ; but how far below and beyond all others in degradation is that vassalage of the human mind which abolishes its sovereignty, and reduces it from the imperial state of a monarch to the insignificant condition of a serf ! No man can fail to see, therefore,

that, in entering into any new relation, he may be called upon to surrender the priceless heritage of *freedom of thought*, for the tinsel gewgaws of parchment titles and empty names.

In entering upon the practice of medicine, you will find nothing so tempting or easy as to tread into the paths of routine, and perform a daily treadmill labor. The majority traveling in that highway, you will never want sympathy nor companionship, and as among that majority you will find many who are esteemed distinguished, you will have an additional stimulus and incentive to follow them. It is so easy to believe we are doing well, because we are simply following the majority and basking in the sunshine of custom, that it requires a change in the self-consciousness, akin to regeneration, to perceive the gross error which we may be committing. If you look at your profession simply as an art, then the more closely you follow routine the better. If you look at it in the higher and nobler aspect of a science, then you will feel that your life-duty is to advance its usefulness, regardless of personal advantages, so that not only medicine, but the world, may be the better for your having lived in it. Think what would have been the consequences to the world if Harvey or Ambroise Paré, or Vesalius, or Jenner, or Laennec, or Bichat, or Marshall Hall, had been mere routinists? Think of the medicine of the Chinese, the Hindoos, or the Japanese, which still stands precisely where it stood when Europe was but half civilized, and Gaul and Britain were still practicing the mystic rites of Druidical worship! Routine is ever the refuge of little minds. It is that form of conservatism which mistakes a *rule* for a principle, and uses the argument of infancy against the development of manhood. It would check

God's system of creation, by destroying those laws of analogy which are the prefigurations of higher types in the physical and spiritual world. Routine is only another name for fanaticism in experience. When the Turkish Sultan burned the incomparable library at Alexandria, he is said to have remarked, in justification, that, if it contained more than the Koran, it was blasphemous and deserved to be burnt ; if it contained less than the Koran, it was useless and not worth preserving. And so, too, could Cromwell and his followers, as iconoclasts, have carried their spirit of fanaticism into the most complete execution, they would have destroyed every monument of art in Great Britain, and burnt even the sublime productions of Shakspeare.

Let me warn you against that spirit of routine which not only dwarfs individual growth, but breeds the most pestilent forms of *intolerance*. No man, in entering into a learned profession, is compelled to surrender his individual liberty of opinion touching its relations to him. He comes into it a freeman, and he alone can enslave himself. The choice is left to him—either to stand as a man and a high priest at the altar of science delivering the law as he interprets it for himself, and not as it was written by another, from a different stand-point of observation, and for application to a different occasion ; or, surrendering this high prerogative, to follow rules blindly, oblivious of the fact that the principle underlying the rule is always broader than the rule itself, and therefore calculated for adaptation to variety of circumstance, while the rule only adapts itself to uniformity of circumstance. This truly is reducing a profession to the condition of an art, and putting Chinese shoes upon its feet. I know it is highly respectable to do so—it is popular to do so, and popularity

sometimes means *bread*, and that is an unanswerable argument with many ; but even bread may be purchased at too high a price, and there are men enough everywhere who are eating that bread of servility, which brings eternal condemnation, as well as loss of self-respect in this world. These are the dangers which beset our manhood at every stage. Each tribe has its idols—each market-place its shrine—each class its dogmas of custom, tradition, and reverence, so that, upon entering it, each new comer soon perceives on which side lie the soft seats—the opportunities and emoluments, the places of trust and honor, and the sympathies of the multitude. But it is better and more honorable to be unpopular, than to surrender a principle, which the earnest convictions of your soul have forced upon you as an article of supreme belief ; for, in the changes of human opinion, that which is in advance of public sentiment to-day may be far behind it to-morrow, and, ere the ashes of martyrdom are cooled, the same spot may witness the apotheosis of the newly calendared Saint.

What, then, shall a young man do? Whom shall he consult? Were he a heathen, he would indeed merit our pity, for great Pan is dead—the oracles are dumb—Delphi and Dodona speak no longer. But to the Christian the way is clear ; the voice of Revelation teaches him when clouds and darkness settle on his path and obscure his outer vision, to invoke the holy light within—

“So much the rather, thou, Celestial Light,
Shine inward, and the mind, through all her powers,
Irradiate.”

It is at such moments of earnest self-introspection as these that God comes near to us. It is then that the genetic force of the human will, animated by the Di-

vine sympathy, exerts its imperial power, and the man rises like an inspired saint, equal to any occasion. Search for the truth everywhere, but, having found her, cling to her as you would to your life, never deserting her because of the menaces of the crowd, or a cry of unpopularity. Only the brave man dares to be unpopular—he alone can face the unsympathizing multitude, or stand unshaken before their odium.

“For to side with Truth is noble, when we share her
wretched crust;
Ere her cause bring fame or profit, and 'tis prosperous
to be just,
Then it is the brave man chooses, while the coward
stands aside,
Doubting, in his abject spirit, till his Lord is
crucified,
And the multitude make virtue of the Faith they
had denied.”

At no age of the world has there been such necessity for independence of thought and opinion as now. In science, in philosophy, or government, we need to review and recast principles and settle definitely their origin and their authority. We cannot accept tradition alone as law, and especially in the physical sciences must we exact proofs of authenticity for whatever things are susceptible of analysis. We must no longer be captivated by high-sounding names or specious qualities, but explore for ourselves whether that be truly good which claims to be so, and that truly honest which is called so by the multitude. The difference between ancient and modern society is the difference between the influence of the person, as set opposite to the influence of the family or tribe. Men in that day were counted by series, now they are counted by individuals. It is the great power accorded to the person as a sepa-

rate and potential unit, which, in modern society makes it so necessary for every individual to be educated morally as well as intellectually ; for, though the power of any bold, bad man is less dangerous now than formerly, yet it is to be remembered that there is still a corrupting quality in his contact which may, through time and sympathy, be communicated to others, since education without religion is too often but a sword in the hands of a madman.

It is a great privilege nevertheless to live in such an age, and to assist as it were at the birth of new ideas in medicine, in philosophy, and in social science. Every new laborer admitted into the great arena cannot but feel that he has an individual part to play in the drama of the century. The world moves in all its parts; humanity with the promises of a millennium before it cannot recede ; the clock of the ages strikes each passing hour more loudly than ever before, as if to remind us of their greater emphasis, while an under-current of feverishness pervades all human action. Even the sciences, conservative as are their systems, feel the influence of this great throb of the universe, since all great events are heralded by signs which prefigure their coming.

We have placed in your hands, gentlemen, the arcana of medicine. You have accepted their custody, and impliedly promised that they shall lose nothing while in your keeping ; but let us not forget that all the wisdom of the world is not contained in them alone. Other and kindred sciences must be cultivated ; the laws of analogy and connecting principles must be investigated, and knowledge sought for in all, even the most recondite directions. Be patient in this great undertaking. Be indefatigable in your searchings after truth, letting

no day pass without its gathered fruits, no opportunity escape that can minister to your progress. For, it is ever from the humblest beginnings that have sprung those principles of eternal relation upon which systems are founded, and whose existence depends upon their immutability. With you it should ever be the rule to know well rather than much, for in fact the former is the tap-root whence grows the latter. He who knows a little, but that little well, has already mastered the alphabet of all human knowledge.

To this point we feel assured that you have successfully arrived in your studies. You have mastered the elements of that science which we confidently trust you will some day adorn. The way before you may be rough; the labor wearisome and unsatisfactory; the rewards may be slow in their coming; but remember that the best rewards are those which come to us from *within*, in the convictions of duty well discharged and a conscience approving our conduct.

"That which nothing earthly gives, nor can destroy,
The soul's calm sunshine and the heartfelt joy,"

are not the rewards of mankind, but the more enduring ones of God, speaking through the voice of conscience. And when with the calm and quiet eye of age you look back over the petty strifes and contentions of life, its bickerings and heart-burnings, its disappointments and failures, you will wonder that these trifles could have been allowed to poison your happiness, when all the while the antidote of faith was offering itself to your heart. It is of the very essence of wisdom to hope. Let us be optimists upon scientific no less than moral grounds. Let us believe in the ultimate triumph of truth, justice, and mercy; that all things were intended

for good to man, whose happiness is the perpetual desire of his Maker. In that conviction the weakest becomes strong, the vacillating and timid lose sight of obstacles, the path grows smooth, the heart is light, our feet seem treading on air; while within a new and mysterious power inspires us to the greatest undertakings. Such is the power of that faith in self, springing from faith in God; a power capable of all things and to which we owe the greatest triumphs of man, in whatever direction accomplished. It is that something nameless within us which only asserts itself in moments of supreme earnestness, and like the still, small voice on Sinai, or the tongues of flame upon the heads of the Apostles, transfuses the heart with the sentiment of a divine ordination.

With the hope, gentlemen, that your strength may be always as your day; and that no cloud may ever dim the lustre of your fair fame, we bid you both hail and farewell at this threshold of your dawning usefulness. We are conscious of having attempted, at least, to direct you in the right way, and now that the hour for sundering the Academic tie has come, we leave you as Pilgrims, with the golden skies of youth above and a widening future of promise before you, to journey "in fresh fields and pastures new."

National Medical College,

(MEDICAL DEPARTMENT COLUMBIAN COLLEGE.)

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ON

Wednesday Evening, March 6, 1867,

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JOHN ORDRONAU, M. D., LL. B.,

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