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Simons (T. Y.)

AN

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE,

DELIVERED IN THE

MEDICAL COLLEGE

OF

SOUTH-CAROLINA,

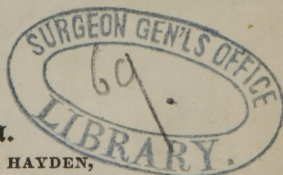
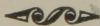
IN

NOVEMBER 1835.

By THOMAS Y. SIMONS, M. D.

PROFESSOR OF THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF PHYSIC IN THE
MEDICAL COLLEGE OF SO. CAROLINA, AND FORMERLY
PRESIDENT OF THE MEDICAL SOCIETY OF
SOUTH-CAROLINA.

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ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN,—

In accordance with the general custom of offering some introductory remarks, before commencing a regular course of Medical Instruction, I address you on the present, as I hope to do on all occasions, with that frankness and honesty which should always subsist between instructors and students. I will not attempt to captivate you with the beauties of Rhetoric—they are foreign to a Science, the object and intention of which are essentially practical. I shall speak to you in the plain unadorned language of truth. The language of Science is the language of simplicity—It appeals not to the imagination, passions nor feelings—but to the understanding—I shall endeavor as far as possible to pursue her path.

I know, gentlemen, of no profession more responsible or more important in its effects upon the human race, than the one you are about to adopt. The intelligent Physician in all civilized nations has sustained an exalted rank in the human family, and in less civilized nations, those who have displayed Medical skill, have been associated almost with Divinity—indeed it has been honored with the character of a Divine Art. To advocate the usefulness and importance therefore of the Medical profession, which the experience of all ages and conditions of men, have proved to be indispensable, would be as idle as to prove the genial influence of the sun in giving light and warmth to our planet. But although its usefulness and importance are unquestionable, still it has, oftentimes, from the ignorance of many of its followers, proved a scourge to the human race, and hence, from this cause a scepticism has existed among some, as to its actual utility. It has been seriously questioned whether the evil which ignorant Physicians have done, has not more than counterbalanced the good of the intelligent and skilful. Whatever may be said on this point in relation to Medicine, may with equal propriety be said of any other department of knowledge which does not come under the character of an exact science.—

What has been more abused or mal-administered in some instances, than the principles of law and equity? Do not statesmen, who should regulate governments in the principles of virtue and honor, frequently violate their solemn duties? and has not the sacred temple of God been profaned by ignorance and vice? Yet would we say that all law, all government, all religion, is undeserving of confidence because some men, either from incapacity or wickedness, do not put fully into practice the immutable principles of equity or the eternal truths of religion? It is true there have been some men, in all ages, who have been dignified with the character of philosophers, who have thrown the shafts of ridicule and proclaimed their anathemas against religion, because, under the garb of sanctity, some have polluted the temple of the Most High—and in like manner, the Medical profession has been satirized by the poet, and sneered at by the cynic—because of the ignorance and folly of some of its members. Indeed, when we reflect upon the conflicting doctrines which have been advanced in Medicine, when we reflect upon the continual efforts which are made by Medical men to bring themselves into notice and reputation, by decrying their competitors, and how many pursue the profession, who either by their attainments or power of observation or acumen, are unable to apply properly its principles, we have reason rather to wonder at the respect which is still paid to the dicta of Physicians than that there should be at times little or no distinction made by some portions of a community between the regularly educated physician and the empirical pretender.

Empiricism has prevailed in every country and in every age. In all professions, nay, in every pursuit of life, we find some men preferring the paths of treachery, cunning, and imposture, to that of honesty, intelligence and virtue; and among the vacillating, weak, and credulous, how many are entangled in its snares—while others, afflicted with incurable diseases, hope still fluttering in their bosoms, like the weary and benighted traveller pursue any false light which may be presented to them—the hapless victims of its fatal promises. Our profession has, however, no more to complain of than the pursuits of other men. Whenever the physician is thoroughly acquainted with the principles of his profession, he has nothing to fear, for knowledge, associated with virtue and honor, is a panoply, capable of resisting the shafts of envy, or the intrigues of designing men.

I know of no profession more responsible in its nature—nor more

important in its effects upon the human race, than the one you have chosen. Physicians are the guardians of the public health. In most enlightened nations of Europe, and in many portions of our own country, laws have been instituted, to prevent all who are not regularly educated, from pursuing the practice of Medicine, hence it is reasonably expected, that they who assume the important duty of instruction in this noble and useful branch of knowledge, embracing in its offices, so much of the higher order of intelligence and good intentions to afflicted humanity, should strongly impress upon their pupils, the absolute necessity of devoting all their time, and concentrating all their talents, to obtain that information which will enable them to discharge with fidelity the momentous duties which they will hereafter have to assume. God has implanted in our nature an instinctive love of existence—from childhood to the extremity of old age, we see the active operation of this all-pervading principle. Neither the troubles of the world, or the pains of loathsome disease, can annihilate this strong feeling. Hope flutters around even when the last embers of life are expiring. Men, therefore, when arrested in their pursuits of ambition or worldly gain or pleasure, by the poisonous touch of disease, turn to the physician as to their guardian angel, to shield them from the shafts of death, they expect, and have a right to expect, that they who assume that elevated, nay, I might add, sublime position, be fully prepared to perform the high trust to which they have been called.

Having these views of our profession, believing it to be one of the noblest in its offices, and responsible in its consequences, I wish you all so to regulate your studies, that you may not only do honor to the institution with which you may be associated, but be benefactors of the human race. I shall therefore address you with the freedom which these sentiments inspire.

It is a remark which I have frequently heard, and which my own observation has in some instances confirmed, that young gentlemen too often commence the study of some one of the learned professions without the necessary preparatory knowledge, and without using those proper exertions, and devoting that time and attention which is absolutely necessary, for success and eminence. That they are too often caught by the mere tinsels and glitter of knowledge—skim upon the surface—and are amused with technicalities and fine spun theories, neglect the attainment of that profound knowledge, the reward of laborious and patient investigation; and finding

themselves neglected and unemployed, that self-love induces them to attribute it to any other cause than the want of that fund of information which commands the confidence and admiration of mankind. It is indeed to the members of the learned professions in all countries, that the people look up for wisdom and instruction. They are, and ought to be, the active and efficient agents, in all moral and intellectual improvement. So diffusive is the benign influence of education, so enlightened from this source have most men become that they quickly detect ignorance. The learned professions give now no more rank to an individual than he may obtain by his merits. The character and respectability of all professions rest upon their proper basis, the capability and attainments of those who pursue them.

There is perhaps none in which success and public confidence is more slow in being obtained than the medical profession. Mankind are impressed with the belief, and reasonably too, that independent of a knowledge of the principles, an enlarged experience is likewise necessary to render a physician skilful, and that all who have commenced their medical career, even they who have previously devoted many years to it, and have taken the advantages of the opportunities of the first Medical Institutions to prepare themselves, have found they have had to await the issue of time. That they have ascended gradually, into public confidence—but in every step they have gained an influence which will sustain them in the elevated position in which they may be placed. If then it is but by slow and laborious efforts that the Physician, who has used every means of obtaining Medical knowledge, can succeed, what can he expect who is content with a superficial knowledge, whose attainments in Literature and Science, or the principles of those sciences, upon which Medicine is based are extremely limited, who cannot fully explain the structure or functions of the organs of the system upon which he is to apply his Medical agents, and therefore is unable to detect the seat and nature of disease. Such men may hope, by making great pretensions and assuming much consequence—for none are so confident and presumptuous as those who are ignorant—to succeed in life. But those tricks which may be successfully played off by the charlatan, would place the regularly educated Physician, or in other words, the Physician who has a diploma, in the most absolute contempt. Whether, gentlemen, you have taken up the profession as a mere means of gain, or from

the desire of making it subservient to higher and more ennobling purposes—policy as well as necessity require that you should make yourselves amply qualified for the discharge of its duties. “It cannot be concealed, (says Professor Jackson in his Introductory Address to the Medical Students of the University of Pennsylvania,) that public confidence in the knowledge and intelligence of the profession has been shaken—has been most materially impaired in some sections of our country. Every where does empiricism abound. In many districts it is warmly encouraged and patronized, not by the vulgar and ignorant, but by the respected and intelligent—‘whence, says he,’ arises this state of things—is it not from observation too apparent to the public from the inferior grade of Medical Instruction? Do they perceive that wide difference in the acquirement of the regular practitioner, and the empirical pretender which should always distinguish them?”

How far this serious charge against the system of education in the Medical institutions of our country is correct, it is not my intention to inquire, nor would it be suitable on the present occasion. If evils of this nature do exist, it behoves every patriotic Physician to use his best exertions to correct them. If young men, whose character or capabilities, or attainments, are not adequate to the discharge of the duties, are admitted to the honors and privileges of the Medical profession, it is an outrage upon a community, a degradation to the profession. But although some may receive Medical degrees who are unworthy of them, yet we have every reason to be proud of the distinguished medical gentlemen who by their writings have given additional lustre to our great and happy country. Whatever reforms may be required in all of our Medical Institutions, for they are all governed by similar regulations, there are abundant opportunities in the United States for Medical improvement if the Student thinks proper to take advantage of them. If he does not, he ought not to be permitted to receive the Medical honors. However strict this may seem, yet when it is known that a Medical degree cannot be obtained unless the individual is deserving, the aspirants will use proper exertions, and communities will benefit by them. It is no kindness to beguile a young man into the belief, that a slight knowledge of his profession will enable him to succeed in life—nor should the desire of making an institution popular, deter an instructor from warning him of his error—on the contrary, his solemn obligations and duty demand that

he should be honest and frank, and that he endeavour to guard his pupils against a delusion so fatal in its consequences—so injurious to the cause in which they are engaged. If, gentlemen, you will only do justice to yourselves, you will be able to put down empirical pretenders. They are not to be arrested so much by legal statutes, or by decrying them, as by convincing the public of the immeasurable distance between them and the Physician of science—I must confess with all that has been said about empirics, I have never yet known an intelligent Physician, if he had perseverance, industry, good manners, and withal virtue and honor, who had any thing to apprehend, or whose success was at all impeded by them. Empirics themselves are compelled to respect such men, who amidst the ebbs and flows of popular favour, retain their elevated position in the respect and confidence of a community. The true means of success in every profession, and in every pursuit of life, and the easiest, and certainly the most pleasurable, is to become, as far as possible, masters of that profession or pursuit, and thus by talents and acquirements, to command that station which others may aspire to obtain by low cunning, or condescensions, and who are hence constantly made the sport of fortune, or become the tools of designing and ambitious men.

Having made these general remarks, which I trust you will duly appreciate, as arising from an anxious desire for your future welfare, as well as from a patriotic and philanthropic wish, that those who are to become members of the Medical profession may hereafter sustain its character and usefulness. I beg leave now to direct your attention to the importance of a thorough study of some branches of a Medical education, which I fear have not been sufficiently attended to by most of our Medical Students—at least I am persuaded not as much so as by Medical Students in European Schools. These are the study of Anatomy and Physiology, and the attendance upon the Hospitals for practical instruction. To offer any arguments in favour of the study of Anatomy, would seem a useless task—a knowledge of the structure of the human frame—the treatment of the diseases of which becomes the object of the attention of the Physician, must at once be observed is indispensably requisite—yet, how many Students are there who content themselves with merely attending the Lectures of the Professor of Anatomy, and neglect that devoted attention to practical Anatomy in the dissecting rooms, by which they become intimately acquainted with the sub-

ject, and the neglect of which opportunities they may never be enabled to regain. Who that is ignorant of this branch, the basis upon which all Medical science rests, can pretend to obtain a knowledge of the seat of disease, or practise Medicine with any degree of certainty. A mere knowledge of the structure is not enough, you must likewise become proficient in the peculiar offices or functions of all the different organs of the system, constituting the phenomena of life. Disease is an irregularity of function as well as organic lesion, and to know these irregularities and deviations from a healthy action, you must have a knowledge of the action, of the functions, and of the organs as they are in health.

The value and importance of Anatomy and Physiology, the basis of Medicine as well as of Surgery, will be fully explained to you by the Professors of these respective chairs. All I am desirous of impressing upon you, is, that the practitioner of Medicine, who is ignorant of these two branches, cannot be regarded in any other light, than that of an empirical pretender. But, although they form the basis of Medical science, the Student before he can become prepared to enter upon the practice of the profession ought to learn the means of investigating the nature of disease, and the application of proper remedial agents, and these are to be acquired by practical observation, at the bedside of the patient. It is the duty of the Professor of the practice of Physic, to teach the various principles of Medicine—the different theories which have been advanced of the nature of disease—the causes which produce derangement of the system—the effects of those causes constituting disease, and to describe the various symptoms and methods of treatment. Still these duties, however minutely and adequately performed, are not enough to prepare the Student for the practice of Medicine, they are calculated to enlighten him so far that he may be prepared to derive advantage from practical observation. Thus the Hospitals in the principal Schools of Europe are the places where Students after having gone through the preparatory steps of education derived from the Lecturers, flock to complete their Medical attainments, and fit them for the practical duties of their profession. No Student can obtain a Medical degree who does not go through this ordeal. How many young men are there in this country who have been embarrassed, and mortified at their want of practical information, when they have entered into life. How many have deeply repented of the neglect of the opportunities of practical instruction when too

late. I have seen many intelligent young Physicians who with all their theoretical and scientific attainments, have lost public confidence, from their want of practical tact, and by an ignorance of the details of their profession. I warn you, gentlemen, that the mere closet Physician, whose knowledge of disease is derived alone from books—who indulges his imagination with the vagaries of theorists, when he should study from the great book of nature, will, with all his learning, be neglected, and never inspire full confidence. Such men seldom think or observe for themselves the indispensable requisites to become eminent, but as the weathercock is changed by every direction of the wind, so are their views of disease by every new theory which is advanced. They can tell you what other men have done, but can do nothing of themselves. Now I am to be understood not as depreciating a knowledge of Medical Literature, far from it, but I wish to impress upon you that theory alone will not answer. The history of Medicine shows the revolutions which have taken place in Medical theories where men of superior minds have like meteors, shone with momentary splendour, and then have sunk into night. The examination of Medical doctrines, which are highly instructive and useful, will convince you by how few the opinion of the world has frequently been governed—and with what slavish devotion men sometimes attach themselves to the dogmas of some distinguished character. It was the quaint remark of Bacon, ‘that credulity in respect to authors, and making them dictators in place of consuls, is the principal cause that the Sciences have no further advanced. For hence, though in mechanical arts the first writer falls short, time adds perfection, whilst in the Sciences, the first author goes farthest, and time only abates or corrupts.’ This thralldom of the human mind, has, however, been nearly destroyed.—That great philosopher has directed us to the proper course of investigation—to accumulate facts upon which to draw inferences, the only true principle of inductive philosophy. Now of all professions, there is none in which this important truth is more applicable, than the study of medicine, for although based upon scientific principles, it is still a practical art—a knowledge of which can never be obtained, but by observation. A disease studied at the bedside of a patient, makes an indelible impression, all the symptoms are strongly exhibited—we see what changes are going on in the functions; and how far the remedial agents applied, operate in removing morbid action. The Student is apt to be deceived with

the idea, that to learn practical Medicine, he must see extraordinary cases, or a great number of patients at once. But it must be remembered that every case, however otherwise trifling, is important to the Student inasmuch as he is learnt thereby to enquire into, and properly investigate the causes and seats of disease. He becomes thus gradually instructed by those whose experience afford the means which he will pursue, when he comes to depend upon his own resources. It is the system of Medical education which I have brought to your view, as now pursued in all well regulated institutions, which has contributed so largely to elevate the character of the profession, and to command for it a rank among the Sciences. France for centuries, bound down by a slavish devotion to authority, was under the guidance of the Hippocratic and Galenical Schools until Napoleon, who, whatever may have been his errors, arising from inordinate ambition, the result of extraordinary powers of mind, so regulated the Medical Institutions, as to bring into notice the genius and industry of the votaries of Medicine, and gave every facility, and extended every opportunity for the study of Anatomy, Physiology and Pathology, and spared no expense to make the Hospitals the great means of practical, Medical and Surgical Instruction. The result we all know. France stands now pre-eminent among the nations of the earth, alike for the immense advantages she presents in her Medical Colleges, and the distinguished abilities, researches, and labours of her Medical men—Medical gentlemen and Students from every portion of the world, are now attracted to her Metropolis, as to the great emporium of Medicine, Science, and the Arts. Having said thus much in reference to these branches of Medical education, I shall merely express the hope that our Students will become more profound in some of the collateral Sciences, especially Chemistry. It will be unnecessary to urge its importance and value, or to point out the great resources which it has unfolded to us, in explaining some of the sublimest phenomena of nature, or its immense contributions to the arts and luxuries, and conveniences as well as necessities of men. These will be eloquently and ably delineated, by the Professor of Chemistry. I may be allowed to remark, however, that independent of its advantage and interest in a scientific point of view—a knowledge of at least Pharmaceutical Chemistry is indispensably requisite to Physicians, more especially such as practise in the country. They

have to be their own Apothecaries, and hence should be acquainted with the Chemical principles of Medicines, as well as their various combinations and actions on each other—for by the attraction of certain substances a new compound is formed altogether differing in its properties, qualities, and Medicinal virtues. I offer these remarks, because in some instances I have observed that the importance of this branch of a Medical education has not been duly estimated. It has been too much regarded as a subordinate study, when it is one deserving your most devoted and assiduous attention.

There is but one more of the many interesting subjects to which I might call your attention, did time permit, and for a momentary consideration of which, I must ask your indulgence. It is the value of a classical education. In this enlightened age, it would be a matter of superogation to advocate the value or necessity of gentlemen, who are members of the learned professions having some classical attainments. I am not disposed to think that every Physician is to be like a PARR or a PORSON, a profound classical scholar; but he should at least have so much knowledge of Ancient and modern Literature as becomes the gentleman and scholar. It is true there have been several distinguished members of our profession, who have been deficient in a knowledge of classical literature, who have attained great eminence, for genius can remove many difficulties. But they have likewise, from this cause, been incapable of communicating to the world their immense fund of information and experience with perspicuity and precision, and violate, not only good taste, but logical reasoning. In our country, as in all enlightened nations, great advantages are afforded (and there are few of our young gentlemen who have not enjoyed them) of a classical education. The only source of regret is, that too many regarding classical attainment as not essential, neglect it as soon as they commence their professional studies. Now, if we are desirous of forming a Medical Literature, worthy of our great country, the propriety of devoting some of their leisure hours to improvement in Literature and Science, must be more deeply impressed upon the minds of Medical Students. Recal gentlemen, to your mind, the distinguished literary and scientific gentlemen, who have enlightened their country, you will find the members of none more eminent than those of the Medical profession. In natural and moral science, in literature, medical gentlemen have, and still hold an exalted rank. It is seldom that you find a Physician, educated in

Europe, no matter what his station, that has not at least a general knowledge of literature and science. It is this which has contributed so largely to elevate and give a dignity to medicine, in Great Britain and on the Continent of Europe. I have but one word more to offer in favor of the value of a knowledge of literature and science to the Physician. By his very avocations and the position which he must necessarily hold in society, a Physician is thrown into the circle of literary and scientific men, and as Medicine is to the great mass of mankind, as a sealed book, he will be estimated much by all intelligent men, according to his general attainments. It is astonishing what advantages it often gives—and how much it has rewarded and given eminence to those who have even not been profound in their profession.

In the remarks I have made, I trust, gentlemen, I shall not be misunderstood, nor my motives be mistaken. It is far from my purpose or intention to discourage you in the prosecution of your studies, but rather to awaken you to a full sense of the importance and responsibilities of our profession. The duties of the Physician are indeed arduous and responsible. He presents himself an offering at the shrine of humanity, to alleviate those who are afflicted with disease in all its varied and appalling forms. He has to stand firm amidst the ravages of epidemic disease, which comes with fearful power to devastate the human race, while the stoutest hearts fly from the scene of desolation. He has to be the friend and comforter of the poor and the afflicted. He has to sacrifice all selfish, all pleasurable pursuits in discharge of the higher and more solemn duty of devoting his life to the alleviation of those afflictions which have fallen upon the human race, either by their own imprudence or the operation of causes beyond their controul. The life of a Physician, is one of continued care, anxiety and study; no hour can he call his own. By night and by day are his services required, even the solemn day allotted by Almighty wisdom and mercy, as a day of rest to his creatures, is one of toil to him. But, how enlarged and elevated are his duties; what unbounded confidence is reposed in him, and with what gratitude and respect is he received and esteemed if he discharges, faithfully, his trust. He is indeed the arbiter of life and death—and as his acquirements and capacities are circumscribed or extended, will he be a blessing or a scourge. It is not wealth only which is to compen-

sate the Physician, but the elevated rank in which he is placed among his fellow-men—it is therefore for these reasons, I wish you to be enthusiastic and to exert your intellectual powers, in the proper attainment of Medical knowledge, that you may become, not only valuable members of society, but sustain the dignity and character of our profession. Read the lives of distinguished medical men. You will find them a series of untiring efforts and ceaseless exertions. To be truly great is to be useful, and to be useful we must associate to those powers with which God has endowed us, industry, perseverance and laborious research. Nothing of any importance has ever been attained without industry and labour. Much has frequently been said about natural talents—in these cases we may observe the coruscations of genius, as fleeting as the meteor or the *ignis fatuus*. No good has ever resulted to mankind from these evanescent displays. Genius and industry form the master spirits of every age; they are like the fixed stars in the firmament, constantly pointing out the sources of light, but genius, without industry, is like the comet which comes to disturb the harmony of the universe, without producing any known good. It is within the experience of every one of common observation, that men of ordinary minds, with a systematic arrangement of their studies, associated with zeal and perseverance, have after a series of years, risen to stations of usefulness and honor, while those who depend alone upon the gifts of nature, are unnoticed and unknown.

I fear, gentlemen, that I have tired your patience, in occupying your attention with the desultory remarks which I have made. If in my ardent desire, to arouse all the energies of your mind, to become collaborators in elevating and sustaining one of the noblest pursuits of man, I may have gone too far—I trust you will do me the justice to believe, that I am actuated alone by an anxiety for your future welfare and honor.

