Evans (John)

Prof. J. B. S. Jackson M.D.
with the respects of
The Author

PROF. EVANS'

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS.

ADDRESS

TO THE

GRADUATING CLASS

OF

RUSH MEDICAL COLLEGE

ON THE

NATURE, UTILITY, AND OBLIGATIONS,

OF THE

MEDICAL PROFESSION.

DELIVERED FEBRUARY 7, 1850.

BY JOHN EVANS, M.D., PROF. &c.

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Rush Medical College,
Chicago, Jan. 1850.

PROF. EVANS:—

DEAR SIR—On the 25 Inst., the undersigned were appointed a Committee, to procure a copy of the Valedictory Address you are to deliver to the Graduating Class, for publication, which we respectfully solicit.

With the best wishes for your health and prosperity, we are,

Yours, Respectfully.

E. J. FRENCH of Illinois,
W. W. PERRY, of Michigan.
S. A. PEASE, of Wisconsin.
JNO. M. PHIPPS, of Indiana.
J. C. MACON, of Iowa.
JNO. H. MURPHY, of Minnesota.
ORSON C. HOYT, of New York.
J. R. SNELLING, of Ohio.
Committee.

To MESSRS. *French, Perry, Pease, Phipps, Macon, Murphy, Hoyt, and Snelling:*—

GENTLEMEN:—I herewith send you a copy of the Address, thanking you for the generous confidence manifested in asking its publication before you have heard it.

Please communicate to the class my thanks for their uniform kindness, with assurances of my warmest wishes for their future success and happiness.

Your friend, truly,

JOHN EVANS.

Chicago, February 2, 1850.

ADDRESS:

Graduates of Rush Medical College:—

With the ceremonies of this evening, which have conferred upon you the highest honors of our cherished institution, is closed the interesting relation that has for a time existed between you and its Faculty, of Pupils and Professors, and the pleasing task has been assigned to me, of welcoming you as brethren into the ranks of the Medical Profession. Accept then, my hearty congratulations upon your having attained to the high distinction of the Doctorate, and worthily assumed a fraternal relation, with the members of our time-honored and useful profession. The Diplomas which you have received from the hands of our President, give you our strongest recommendation. They will afford you an introduction to all honorable Physicians, and certify to them and to the world, (for they are in our vernacular tongue,) that you have entered the profession by the *straight gate*, and that you have attained that high degree of knowledge and skill that entitles you to their respect and confidence. We trust, that, by as diligent an application to your studies, and as faithful a discharge of your duties in after life, as have marked the period of your pupilage, you will never forfeit that respect, nor betray that confidence.

In giving you our parting address, no subject seems more appropriate for our consideration, than the nature, utility, and obligations of that profession, the cultivation and practice of which, is to be the business of your lives. Permit me, therefore, to call your attention to a few thoughts; 1st upon the nature of the science that we study and teach: 2d, upon the utility of the art we inculcate and practice, and 3d, upon the rsponsibilities imposed by the office of Physician: on each of which, I must necessarily be brief.

There is, in the public mind, a well settled conviction of the necessity of efforts for the relief of the afflicted, which not only has the sanction of Him who said "they that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick," but which has existed in all ages and countries since the time when man partook of

"———the fruit
"Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
"Brought death into the world, and all our woe."

This conviction has always secured patronage to those who pretend to the art of healing, whether they relied upon the agency of religious rites and ceremonies, superstitious incantations, the royal touch, the empirical use of medicines, or the well directed remedial agents, of the scientific physician.—Medicine as an art, then, however rude, has existed "time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary," but as a science, it cannot boast of such high antiquity; yet having originated with the cultivation of letters, being one of the elements of civilization, it has a growth of over two thousand years.

The science of medicine at the present day comprises all the facts which throw light upon the health and disease of man, and the means of preserving the former, and relieving the latter. It consists of several departments, each of which is a science of itself. But as it has been the object of years of

devoted study on your part, to become acquainted with these, by which your minds have been endued with their great and important principles, I pass them by with a simple enumeration and definition.

Anatomy, the foundation of our knowledge of the body, and of the nature and seat of the injuries and diseases of the system, comprises a complete understanding of the form, size, structure and situation of each organ and tissue, even to its minutest texture and composition, only perceptible through the power of the microscope, and the analytic crucible of the Chemist.

Physiology teaches the part that each organ and tissue plays in the great phenomenon of life, and reveals the laws of their action in health. It gives a knowledge of the various stages in the organization and development of living beings. Among other things, it shows how the blood performs its wonderful rounds of circulation; and is changed by nutrition, respiration and secretion,—being the medium through which the body is built up and pulled down. How the nervous system endows different parts of the body with sensation, and forms the mysterious channels of communication between them, and how the mind, through these telegraphic connections, with electrical velocity holds intercourse with different parts of the system, and exerts its control over them.

Pathology, teaches the nature of the various deviations from healthy action and natural structure which constitute disease, including their causes, symptoms, detection, situation and consequences.

Chemistry makes us familiar with the nature of the elementary substances by which we are surrounded, and of which all material objects are composed,—their various combinations, affinities, and laws of action in the composition and decomposition of bodies. It is of the greatest importance to the understanding of physiology, pathology, and the action of remedies.

Materia Medica imparts a knowledge of the long catalogue of remedial agents, their nature, effects, doses and modes of administration. *Pharmacy* is the science of preparing, preserving, and dispensing them.

Therapeutics is the science of applying remedies to the prevention, palliation and cure of disease, and is so extensive as to include the treatment of all the accidents and maladies that affect afflicted humanity. It is the application in practice of the knowledge of all the other branches of our science, and comprises the three extensive departments of Practical Medicine. Surgery, and Obstetrics.

Medical Jurisprudence makes us familiar with the proper modes of investigating and giving evidence in cases involving legal questions, and is often of the utmost importance to the ends of justice.

It has been said that medicine is an uncertain science, but it is only so in the imperfections of our senses, which limit our knowledge, and these are in many instances already partially overcome. But, when viewed in this light, what science is not uncertain? Theology, Law, Political Economy, Mechanics, Agriculture, Metaphysics, and all other departments of human knowledge are limited by these imperfections. If the certainty of a science may be determined by the number and accuracy of its known facts, then, indeed, may Medicine challenge a comparison with others, and comparatively, at least, repel the charge of uncertainty. No other includes so extensive a range of Knowledge; for in addition to the various departments already enumerated, there are collateral sciences which indirectly belong to it. Among these, are Natural Philosophy, which is necessary to explain the various actions in the living economy, and the influences of physical agents upon it—Natural History, Botany, and Mineralogy, the store houses of our remedial agents---Geography, Topography and Meteorology, which teach us how to understand the influences of locality, climate, and changes of weather, in causing, modifying, preventing and curing disease---Mental Philosophy,

which enables us more readily to understand the diseases of the mind, and its various influences over the physical system, in exciting, complicating, and controling its maladies. These, with all the social, political and religious influences that favorably or injuriously affect the health of body or mind, are proper, and to a certain extent, necessary studies for the physician. These departments of knowledge are quite full, and generally their facts are plain and demonstrative. Uncertainty, then, does not apply to the science, although a want of knowledge may often render its application uncertain.

Nor can a charge of falling behind the improvements of the age, bear against our science; for it is the economy of each department to adopt every improvement and discovery, so soon as ascertained and established. All that is useful and true, let it come through never so humble a channel, belongs to legitimate, scientific medicine; for it, unlike all special systems, has no rules of exclusion except for error and false doctrine—no boundaries within which it must be restricted, except those of truth—the whole, wide, boundless field of nature is its open theatre of action.

The science of medicine may well be compared to a stately edifice, whose firm foundations are laid broad and deep in immutable truth. Its superstructure is built of the indestructable materials of known facts, well arranged and cemented together by the intimate relation and correspondence between them. Its design is the theory that has guided her innumerable votaries in their labors upon its erection. Its various finished and furnished apartments are the bulwarks of safety against disease, and the downy pillows of repose from sickness, sorrow, and pain. Its lofty domes and triumphal arches are the trophies of success; and its heavenward reaching spires are the tendency, which, looking through Nature, has to point to Nature's God.

Although the plan has undergone many changes in its various parts, and the building is not completed, there are very many perfect apartments, and the sound of the imple-

ments of thousands of skilful workmen, is daily to be heard inspiring an abiding confidence in the maxim that "time, patience and perseverance will accomplish all things." But however perfect our science might be rendered, and however skillful its practice may become, it must not be expected to secure immortality to man, for the fiat of the Most High has gone forth—"dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

It has been said that the study of medicine leads to infidelity, and that its practice has a tendency to harden the heart.—But it is not so. To the Christian Philosopher, the contemplation of the wonderful works of Nature that our science reveals, can but inspire devotion; for at every step he is struck with a wisdom of design and a beauty of adaptation, that could alone be the offspring of an Allwise and Omnipotent Creator. And unless association with the most benign phase of Human Nature is injurious to moral and refined feeling—unless the practice of benevolence blunts the sensibilities, the physician is little exposed to the influences that tend to harden the heart. His associations with men are during their afflictions and greatest sufferings, when, if ever, they are humble, and moral, and religious; and his whole life is an active scene of practical benevolence, in which he spends a large part of his time and substance in gratuitously relieving the wants, the afflictions, and the sorrows of the poor.

We come now to the second topic of our discourse,—the utility of the art we inculcate and practice.

To the philosophic mind, further evidence of the utility of our art could scarcely be demanded, than a contemplation of the range of knowledge comprised by the science upon which it is founded; for certainly, he whose mind is stored with the facts and experience of the profession, could not fail to render useful service in the relief of disease. As he who understands the mechanism of the watch can repair it; and he who understands the compass, chart, and helm, confidently ventures to guide the ship in its way on the trackles ocean,—so he

who understands the materials and laws of our organization, in health and disease, together with the resources of medicine, can safely venture upon the duties of the physician.

But many, from inattention, or a want of comprehension, fail to see that in medicine, as in political economy, knowledge is power, and ask for the practical evidence and positive demonstration of our ability to combat disease. And here we shall be able to make our strongest claim upon public confidence, and our most invulnerable defence against the attacks of our enemies. But in casting around for a point at which to commence, so innumerable are the triumphs of our art, that their very abundance creates embarrassment. As all of the achievments of the mind cannot be arrayed at once to prove its power, so with the healing art. As neither mountain nor ocean impose a successful barrier to our onward progress, for we scale the lofty heights of the one, and ride securely upon the billowy bosom of the other; so neither the rapidly ebbing currents of life through the severed artery, nor the terrific throes of obstructed labour defy our skill, for we quietly pass a ligature around the vessel and stop the bleeding in one case, and by the application of a safe and efficient instrument give prompt relief to almost superhuman sufferings, and save two lives in the other. By our improved methods of treatment we cut short, generally within a few days, the commonly prevalent fevers of our Great West,---the remittent and intermittent, which, without our aid, prove fatal, or run a course of weeks, and even months. Our art has provided a safe-guard, that is efficient in preventing the most dangerous and loathsome disease that afflicted our ancestors, and simply by vaccination the small pox is robbed of its terrors. It frequently, even though the bones are much diseased, saves both life and limb in cases where the unskilful and ignorant certainly sacrifice one, and often both. By the use of antidotes, it neutralizes and renders harmless the most virulent poisons, or inserts the stomach pump and removes them. It often cuts short, in resolution, the most violent and

destructive inflammations. It divides the cords that draw awry the crooked limb, or neck, or eye, and restores it to comeliness and usefulness. It applies the local remedy within the larnyx and almost certainly cures the formerly fatal laryngeal consumption. When the throat is closed by tonsillitis so as to stop the breath and cause the patient to die of suffocation without our aid, by a small incsion and the insertion of a tube in the trachea, the breathing is often rendered easy and recovery safe. It removes the cataract and allows the light to penetrate the darkened chambers of the eye---closes up the natural deformity of the hare-lip---administers ether and chloroform and gives the subject of pain and torture perfect, and even delightful repose. It has recently provided a remedy, that, if it does not entirely cure consumption, certainly is annually saving multitudes of our race from sinking into the grave. It applies the ethereal solution of gun cotton to the nævus maternus and cures it without an operation---to the abraded, erysipelatous and burnt surface, relieving the pain and promoting recovery. It has taken the Lunatic from the public highway where he was the subject of the sports and jeers of the cruel and unfeeling---from the loathsome dungeon cell, where the light of hope for his recovery was shut out forever---from under the superstitious impression that his condition was the legitimate curse of God, and that it was impious to offer relief---proved that his derangement was a physical disease, subject to the action of remedies, and now annually from hospitals in various parts of the country, sends eighty-five out of every one hundred recent cases home to the glad embrace of rejoicing friends, clothed and in their right minds. But why need I continue an enumeration which volumes can alone contain.

Although we cannot restore life, we certainly can often ward off the poisonous arrows of death, and cause them to fall harmless at the feet of their intended victim. And in those cases that are beyond the reach of the curative resources of our art---when we are eompelled to see our arch enemy in his gloomy

pall ride triumphant over all our barriers, bearing our patients down to the mansions of the dead, we can still smooth the asperities of the rugged way, allay the torturing pang, and admonish them of our failure, that they may apply to the Great Physician, who, alone, can give them immortality. Surely, an art so rich in blessings to afflicted man, ought not to need an advocate in this enlightened age.

But notwithstanding the irrisistible evidence of the utility of our art which you have at your command, you will meet with those who doubt and refuse to employ you,—they may ptoperly be divided into four classes.

The first class is composed of candid and sensible people who have fallen into the hands of the unskilful in our ranks, by whom they judge the entire profession. These you will generally be able to reclaim by philosophical explanation, and the demonstration of intelligent and successful practice.

The second class, quite numerous, is made up of those who are ever on the look-out for some new way,---who, as soon as told that there is a new system promulged, either in politics, medicine, or religion, follow immediately after, all the way shouting praises to the progressive spirit of the age. They will scarcely pay for the labor necessary to convert them, as they will only remain convinced until some new breeze of doctrine strikes them.

The third class comprises the excessively credulous, who believe the recommendations and certificates of wonderful cures on the labels of nostrums, and in newspapers, to be true. Yes, they even believe the boastings of the quack himself, giving accounts of miraculous cures performed after all the doctors had failed. They follow first one "lo here," and then another, as they successively rise and vanish away. By no means should you stoop to the gasconade and self-laudation necessary to charm their ears.

The fourth class are the penurious. They prefer the uncertain, and generally, in the end, more expensive plan, of using domestic remedies and nostrums for fear of the doctor's

bill. Thus they tamper with life until they become alarmed, when post-haste they come after you. "Hurry, doctor, I fear you'l be too late!" is their anxious entreaty now. Go and attend them, they will be tedious cases, if curable, from the firm grasp the disease has been allowed to make. But you cannot reform this class. They are incorrigible.

But notwithstanding you may be harassed by each or all of these classes, let a spirit of forbearance govern you---let the law of kindness be written upon your hearts, for it generally is the fault of their delusion. Interested pretenders, by misrepresentation and abuse (for a quack who does not abuse the profession never thrives,) may continue to lead many astray, but true science will, as ever, remain permanently in the ascendant.

But I must pass to the third topic of my discourse,---the obligations imposed by the office of physician. These are threefold---to the profession of which you are members---to your patients, and to society at large.

For the government of your intercourse with your professional brethren, you will find the code of ethics adopted by the American Medical Association your best guide. Remember, as you exalt the character and standing of the profession by your own merits, and a just appreciation of the merits of others, you increase the public confidence in it, and extend its usefulness.

It it is your duty to diligently cultivate the field of science in which you have chosen to labor, by a devoted application to the study of that that is already known. and a close investigation of mooted questions and obscure and hidden points. For study, the leisure from practical duties that generally attends the commencement of practice, will afford you ample time, and in proportion as you improve it, will you be qualified afterward to prosecute these investigations.

We trust your minds are already fired by a laudable ambition to excel; as without this you cannot hope to attain to eminence. The ardent desire must precede in an underta-

king requiring so much toil and perseverance, or the successful effort will not be made. And as the whole field of our science is too broad for any one successfully to cultivate it in its entire extent, and attain to high distinction in all its departments, you will do well to direct your attention, more particularly, to special subjects for close and minute investigation. While it should be your aim to be generally well informed, bear in mind, that one subject thoroughly studied and completely mastered, is better than a smattering of many. I would also advise you in reference to the subjects you select for investigation, to be particular to choose those, a knowledge of which will be of the most practical utility to mankind: keeping constantly in mind that usefulness is the great object of life.

Would time permit, it would afford me much pleasure to point out some of what I conceive to be great and important errors that a neglect of this fundamental truth has caused in our systems of popular education. Too generally, students at college are instructed without any reference whatever to the calling they are to pursue through life. They pass through a curriculum of studies, a large part of which is afterwards so totally foreign to their pursuits, that it is entirely laid aside and forgotten.

But I must confine myself to the duties of the physician.—And here I cannot follow the popular course and advise you to attempt to compass all science, and to study many languages, holding up before you the fascinating prospect of a fame for universal erudition. There is a vast difference between the true merits and solid reputation of the *most learned* and the *best educated* man. While the former will discourse intelligently on a great variety of subjects, and perhaps not be able to apply a tithe of his information to the use of his calling in life; the latter from a complete and thorough under-

standing of all that pertains to his own field of labor, is not only prepared to tell yon *all* about it, but safely and correctly to serve you in it. If we turn for examples to the great men who have by their labors enriched our knowledge and improved our art, and who, by the brilliancy of their discoveries have ornamented the history of our profession with names as imperishable as the science itself, we find that they devoted themselves principally to the study and investigation of special subjects, and generally the greatest defect in their education has been time and labor spent in the acquisition of knowledge which was only attained to be laid aside and forgotten. Although John Hunter, whose name is as imperishable as brass, was not learned, in the popular acceptation of the term, to deny that he was well educated would be absurd. The secret of his great success is to be found in the devotion of his giant powers of intellect to special subjects, instead of following the popular infatuation of trying to learn every thing.—Had he spent his time in studying Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and other languages, instead of his patient, close and constant reading in the book of nature, do you suppose the world would have been more blessed with his labors, or the profession more enlightened by his discoveries? I would much like to see those who have been in the habit of deploring John Hunter's want of classical education, and advising the young to beware of his example, demonstrate the application of Hebrew to the discovery of physiological laws, and the nature of disease, or Sanscrit to therapeutic indications or the modus operandi of medicines.

But in addition to becoming profoundly learned in your profession, I have said it is your duty to investigate: to extend its boundaries. There are many subjects, that, from your location in a comparatively new country, you will be favorably situated to investigate. And when you have made discoveries that may be of importance to science or successful practice, publish them to the world. Let no venal spirit

actuate you to withhold knowledge that may be of service to science and mankind. And here let me guard you against an immoral practice, which I fear is too common, which has even disgraced high places, and is as injurious to the profession as it is unjust to community, being but another phase of the great quack system of nostrum vending. I mean pretending to have secret remedies or modes of curing disease, for the purpose of acquiring reputation and business. The physician who resorts to such expdients, degrades himself and his calling, and must either admit that he is withholding valuable knowledge from the profession and robbing mankind of its benefits, or that he is making false pretensions; either of which is both unprofessional and unjust.

Your duty to your patients requires that you should be thoroughly qualified to afford all the relief our art has provided and to pay strict attention to them. To be prompt in attending to their calls, for a short delay often puts the case beyond the reach of remedies. To be ready and at your post in the hour of trial and danger. The physician's life should be one of constant duty, for when not engaged in actual attention to the sick, the notes of preparation for duty must keep time with the fleeting moments as they pass. His recreation must be found rather in a change of labor than ease and relaxation from toil. The Holy Sabbath, the blessed day of Heavenly Rest to all Christendom beside, exempts him not from toil and practical duty, and "his nightly sleep is broken that others may have better rest."

Nor are your obligations to society less imperative. Your learning, and the constant intercourse which your calling requires you to have with the members of the commuity in which you reside, place you in a position to exert an influence in society, which it is of the utmost importance for you to rightly appreciate. Your opinions and precepts will almost necessarily be widely diffused, and your example constantly before the world. How important, then, that your high mission

of relief to the sick be accompanied by the refining and purifying influences of the christian virtues. And as pure water can flow only from the pure fountain, so pure morality and christian virtue only from the regenerate heart. For this qualification you must study in the school of CHRIST. Then, while you minister to the relief of the physical sufferings of the sons and daughters of Men, by your example and religious influence upon them, you may help to cure their moral infirmities, and apply the balm of consolation to the wounded and bleeding heart. Then truly may you emulate your Great Exemplar in going about doing good.

With such obligations upon you, and such influences around you, as the Medical Profession brings, may we not hope that you will be true to the interests of the profession and of society, and true to your own best temporal and eternal welfare.

Go, then, my young friends, with a heart brimmed with emotious of the warmest friendship, and an abiding confidence in the integrity of your purpose---I bid you go to the discharge of your arduous and responsible duties. And although your road will lead you in rugged and thorny paths of difficulty, and up mountain steeps of opposition, be steady to your purpose, and you will come to bright, green spots of consolation, pluck fragrant flowers of approbation, and drink from the pure gushing fountains of gratitude that will occasionally spring up to cheer you on your way.