

Norton (S. A.)

A  
VALEDICTORY ADDRESS,

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE CLASS

*Graduating February 29th, 1872,*

FROM THE

Miami Medical College

OF CINCINNATI,

BY

SIDNEY A. NORTON, M. D.

PROFESSOR OF CHEMISTRY AND TOXICOLOGY.

PUBLISHED BY THE CLASS.

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CINCINNATI, March 1st, 1872.

PROF. S. A. NORTON,

DEAR SIR :—At an informal Meeting held last Evening, the undersigned were appointed a Committee to solicit for publication a copy of your Valedictory Address, delivered at the Closing Exercises of the Session of 1871-72.

Respectfully Yours,

JOHN SHATTUCK, M. D.,  
*Marion, Lawrence Co., O.*

L. A. SHEPARD,  
*Cincinnati.*

WILLIAM JUDKINS,  
*Cincinnati.*

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MIAMI MEDICAL COLLEGE,  
143 TWELFTH ST.  
CINCINNATI, March 2d, 1872.

GENTLEMEN :

Please accept for yourselves, and those in whose behalf you are acting, my grateful acknowledgment for your compliment. The Address is very cheerfully placed at your disposal.

Your Friend and Servant,

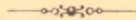
SIDNEY A. NORTON.

To MESSRS. SHATTUCK, SHEPARD and JUDKINS,  
Committee.



A

## VALEDICTORY ADDRESS.



MR. PRESIDENT,

*Ladies and Gentlemen :*

WE have met here to-night for the purpose of conferring the doctorate upon this class of young men. We do this cheerfully, because we feel that they are deserving of the honor. Our relations with them have been of the most pleasant character. We have found them courteous, attentive and diligent. Their examination has been eminently satisfactory, and we believe that they are prepared to commence professional life with the assurance of success.

We, therefore, commend them to you, or to whatever community they may elect to serve, as men to whom the most important issues may be entrusted and of whom much may be expected.

GENTLEMEN OF THE CLASS :—Privilege and duty are inseparably connected. Every life, however humble, has its duties which are part of the inheritance of our common humanity. These duties are inalienable. You can not perform them by proxy. So far as you shake them off, you do violence to nature : you become to that

extent outlaws and forfeit the privileges which attend their faithful performance. As you are men, nothing that relates to man should be foreign to your sympathies. So far as you have received talents which place you above the vulgar herd, so far are you bound to exercise these gifts, not only for your own gain, but also for the good of others.

Every advance that you make in life, every advantage that you acquire, every increased facility for attaining wealth or honor brings with it an additional obligation. As the wave of life widens, it extends beyond the family, beyond the neighborhood, beyond the state, beyond all bounds of space and time. It includes all that breathe, and, whether designedly or not, its influence descends to generations yet unborn.

The specific part that you are called to play in life is, happily, unknown. The world is all before you, where to choose. The role you are to enact, will be largely of your own selection. The applause you may win or the censure you may provoke, will be in the main dependent on your merits. The judgment that men will pass upon you, will in the long run, be found to be fair, although tempered, at times, with a little wholesome severity. The hypocrite and the knave can not long escape detection: the wise man and the fool are soon recognized and assigned to the stations for which they are suited.

Whether your part be humble or high, you can, at the least, play the role of the gentleman. You can be honest to yourselves and to all the world; you can be good and faithful citizens; you can be courteous to your peers; you can be generous to the unfortunate; you can be magnanimous to your enemies; you can be just to all men.

Few reach the pinnacle of fame, but every man can so live and work that his life shall be almost a miracle to

those that know him. Every man can enshrine his memory in courtesy and kindness, in love and good deeds. Every man can so live that the world shall be the better for his having tarried in it and not the worse. He can play the part that falls to him, faithfully ; and even if he obtains but little glory or wealth, he will at least obtain the reward of an approving conscience, and stand, at the last, uncondemned before the final Judge of all.

The pleasant duty has been assigned to me of welcoming you to an ancient and honorable profession. This evening you are invested with all the legal rights and privileges which belong to the physician. You are become inheritors of an illustrious line continued from generation to generation by a kinship of genius and of labor. If you choose to accept the inheritance, you must also assume the duties which are entailed with it.

I have no doubt that most of you entered upon the study of medicine from deliberate choice. I will not seek to extol your chosen profession by presenting it as an almost unequalled field for doing good. The world little knows, nor cares to acknowledge its indebtedness to your predecessors. It easily forgets the suffering which they have alleviated ; the anxieties, bitter as the stroke of death, that they have dispelled from loving and aching hearts ; the useful lives that they have prolonged by an intelligent and watchful care.

On the other hand, let it be the constant object of your thoughts to magnify your profession by your lives. You can best do this, not by boasting of the results you may attain, not by expatiating on the amount of good you are doing, nor by comparing these results with those attained by men in other walks in life ; but by so fulfilling the duties which fall to you that others shall confide in and rely upon you, and feel that your calling is a need to them and a blessing to the world.

Let us now consider some of the conditions which pertain to this calling and especially those that concern you who find at this time your commencement.

A Grecian myth relates that when Daedalus wished to escape from Crete, he obtained wings and fastened them, by means of wax, to himself and to his son Icarus. So equipped, they flew away toward the north. Daedalus, following the middle course, arrived safe at the further shore. Icarus flew too near the sun; the wax, by which his wings were fastened, melted, and he fell into the Aegean Sea and was drowned.

The fable has been thought to teach that the middle course is the safest. This conclusion is indeed a valid one. He who is content with mediocre rewards, who wishes to avoid accidents and dangers, and to reach, with safety, the ordinary goal, can do no better than to make it the guide of his life. But the fable does not teach that man should not have high aims in life. Icarus failed, not because the sun's rays scorched him, but because his wings were not securely fastened. The lesson, gentlemen, which you are to draw from his fate is that it should be your first care to see that your wings are well made, and that they are cemented on by something more enduring than wax. Something that will stand not merely the heat of the summer's sun, but the biting of the winter's frost and the beating of the fiercest storms. In other words, if you would command success you must omit no precaution that is essential to success. The months you have passed in study open to you the portals of professional life. Do not mistake me. The labors of the past, the work already done, the learning acquired, merely open the gates. You are free to enter within them and to attempt any course, low, middle or high. You can grovel, if you choose, and not assay the strength of your wings. You can flit along from one



twig to another ; you can pipe your little song and twitter away contentedly till the night comes, and do this so safely that nothing less than an universal cataclysm shall ruffle your pinions. Or you can soar aloft into the free and unclouded expanse until you reach a height worthy of attainment, honorable to yourselves, respected by your peers and revered by the world.

If you have aspirations, let them be high, but do not imagine that you can dream yourselves into greatness. That is not the way by which the prizes of life are won. Life is not a lottery in which a blind chance presides at a wheel and thrusts her favors upon undeserving hands. It is only by unremitting toil and incessant pains that praiseworthy and enduring rewards are attained. Labor is the first essential to success. Neither is the notion of constant work an unpleasant one when it is rightly considered. Labor is itself a pleasure, for it brings with it at every turn the sweet sense of something accomplished. It breaks up the dull monotony of leisure. It exchanges the dream of the visionary for the prophecy of the seer and makes its accomplishment certain.

But your labor should be well directed. It will avail you but little to discover for yourselves that which has been long known by others. In fact, you can save time and energy by availing yourselves of the accumulated knowledge of the past and the fresh investigations of the present. This means study, not a random and haphazard reading taken up by accident and dependent on the caprice of the moment, but study, well contrived, diligently pursued and never ending. The ravenous appetite of the leech profits him nothing ; he assimilates nothing but remains after his engorgement as he was before. The only study that is profitable is that which nourishes. It must be well masticated, well digested, and so enter into the channels of nutrition that it becomes a part of the

vital structure. It must be so accepted and absorbed by the mind that the experience of other men becomes a part of your experience. This thorough study fits you to try all things, to judge between false hypotheses and the irrefragable conclusions of truth. It affords you an immovable fulcrum upon which you can weigh the facts of your own observation and assign to them their due worth and their proper place.

Hippocrates, the father of medicine, embalmed his experience in five short, pithy maxims. "Life is short: Art is long: The occasion is fleeting: Experience is fallacious: Judgment is difficult." Nowhere are the last three more specifically applicable than at the bed-side of the invalid. The fleeting moments demand that you should exclude the fallacies of experience and make at the instant that judgment which he pronounces to be difficult. You can not do this, unless reading has made you a full man, and the continual application of your studies has made you a ready man, fertile in resource, prompt in action; unless you have trained your mind to think in accordance with the method of science, which collates all related facts, excludes those that are merely coincident or accessory, retains and duly estimates those that are essential and assigns them to their proper category. More than this, you must not be merely recipients or even distributors of knowledge. You must also be, to some extent at least, inventors and discoverers. It is only by becoming investigators that you can make yourselves the acknowledged masters in your profession.

It should be a part of your aspirations to leave the art of medicine better than you find it. You owe this as a part of your debt to our common humanity. As you have received freely you are bound to give freely. You owe it as a duty to your profession. Art is long because it is taken up and continued by the votaries of successive

generations. Its duration is vitalized by the assiduous care that these votaries bestow upon it.

In any art there are excrescences that must be pruned down; there are dead and decaying branches that must be lopped off; there are new and vital germs that must be grafted in. You are bound to take part in this work. If, in your experience, you find that old methods are faulty, that a new treatment is practicable and warranted by a sound judgment, let the fact be known. The least mite you can add to the stock of knowledge is certain, at some time or other, to become of practical use. You are not called upon to estimate the value of your observation or experience. Leave that matter to take care of itself. The suffrages of others will settle the question of its worth.

The great lesson of the present century is a continual iteration of the old truth that small beginnings may have great endings. The countless applications of the electro-magnet have sprung from Oersted's observation, that a copper wire, while forming a part of the electrical circuit, becomes endued with magnetic properties; the steam engine, from Savery's observation that, when a flask filled with heated vapors is cooled, a partial vacuum is formed within it; the enormous growth of organic chemistry to a few happy experiments of Scheele, Woehler and Bunsen; the practice of vaccination from a random remark of a dairy maid accidentally heard by an observant and thoughtful physician. I mention these examples, merely as types of what may be expected. What fresh secrets of nature are yet to be discovered no one can imagine; but surely among those that may be looked for with confidence, among the new motors, the new contrivances for making life happier and better, may be mighty additions to physiology, hygiene and therapeutics.

All this should be an incentive to constant work. I

do not offer, as an inducement, that labor will bring you wealth or honor ; but simply add that diligent labor can not fail to bring you increased resources and increased ability to help those who entrust themselves to your care, and to enable you to pay your debt to your profession and to the world.

Among the many points that may profitably claim a share of your attention none promise greater results than those which relate to the conservation of the public health. The experience of the past winter in this city has shown that the general public may either be ignorant of, or indifferent to a method so long known and so effectually demonstrated to be useful as vaccination.

The experience of every day life shows an almost utter disregard of the most evident principles of heating, ventilation and sewerage. So, too, the sanatory measures which essentially mitigate the scourges of the typhus and the cholera are very apt to be underrated and neglected, even when officially presented by competent and sagacious men. Many of our dwellings, even the most pretentious, are not unfrequently so constructed as to be very efficient traps for their inmates ; effectually shutting out pure air and the disinfectant sunshine and inviting disease in its most insidious forms.

There is great need that physicians should be not only ministers to depraved bodies, but also apostles of hygiene. They may accomplish an infinite amount of good by the frequent reiteration and enforcement of those principles which contribute to the prevention of disease and the maintenance of health. It is a standing reproach to the age that after all the investigations which have been made upon the causes of epidemics, nay more, in regard to maladies which are known to be, in a large degree, preventable, and whose mode of prevention is easily applied and effective, that these disorders are still rife among us.

Pure water, fresh air and abundant sun-light are not hard to be obtained by those who know the need of them. Food is plentiful enough among us ; but the community is sadly ignorant as to what constitutes wholesome food. I need not give you statistics to prove that these essentials to health are sadly ignored. You are well aware that not one child in twelve survives in the ill-ventilated homes of Iceland ; that the typhus becomes an epidemic when the drinking water is poisoned by decomposing organic matters ; that the cholera is disseminated by foul water, if not by foul air ; that the human stomach is maltreated by food and drink that it can not digest ; that the majority of mankind eat, drink and sleep, taking no thought for their bodies, nor for their higher faculties, so far as these are dependant on their physical health.

Besides these, there is another evil which is extending its ravages, and is becoming daily more virulent. I allude to the purely American characteristic of incessant and hurried exertion both of body and mind. Hundreds of our best men break down every year, simply because they do not allow themselves the rest that they give their brutes. The spirit of enterprise which drives our business men, makes their lives too often feverish and impatient and burus them up before they have lived out half their days.

In regard to these and other matters which concern the general health, you are bound to disseminate the seeds of truth as widely as you have opportunity, and not to be content with the mere sowing of the seed. You must enforce the need of diet, temperance and repose by all legitimate means. Your first care must be to prevent disease.

But sickness will come, and it can not be denied that your principal occupation will be in the treatment of disease.

In regard to your intercourse with your patients, the advice of Polonius to Laertes is not inappropriate:

“ This above all—To your own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou cans't not then be false to any man.”

The man who makes it a cardinal principal to be conscious to himself of right motives will not fail to earn the respect of all. He may err like other men, but his errors will lean to virtue's side. The reputation for probity, or what is better, the possession of it, is essential to any man who is likely to be the confidant of others. How necessary then for the physician who is admitted to confidences which are withheld from the most trusted companions! Reputation is no bubble to such a man. It is a solid reality, without which study is in vain, knowledge is worthless, and the fruits of experience unprized and unsought.

Confidence is a plant of slow growth. You will find it so in your experience after the flush of youthful enthusiasm has subsided. Even in the matter of technical skill, you will find it hard to work off the distrust which you entertain for your own abilities and still harder to inspire confidence in others. So many things enter into consideration, knowledge, experience, judgment, discretion, and even the outer trappings of a pleasant address. And yet it is very necessary that you acquire the confidence of your patients and especially for their good. The influence of the mind in disease can hardly be over-estimated. Hundreds of cures, seemingly wonderful, have been effected by the simple exercise of the imagination. How else could Perkinism have attained such a development? How else can you account for the long array of certificates which are attached to so many inert nostrums?

The coming of the trusted physician into the sick-room is oftentimes as inspiring as the advent of Sheridan at

Winchester. The patient feels that the master is at hand and the countless troop of imaginary troubles fade away like the mists before the sun. These imaginary troubles beget doubt and despair and are of themselves enough to prostrate the sufferer. It is of great importance in dealing with sick persons, and especially with those disposed to be hypochondriacal, that you be cheerful; that your voice does not carry with it the subdued and funereal accents of the undertaker and presage disaster with every breath.

Extremes should be avoided. You can be cheerful without being boisterous, without finding it necessary to deafen your patient or to bruise him with clownish caresses.

It has been shown that politeness has its foundation in a conscientious regard for the feelings of others. If a person has this, he has only to make this regard intelligent in order to attain to true politeness. Now, no man can feel otherwise than kindly towards another who is, or who thinks he is dangerously sick. More than this, the very word *kindly* implies that this feeling is innate. It is the feeling that we have towards our kin or kind and that we should cherish toward all mankind. If, then, we habitually inquire of ourselves what is likely to be agreeable to others: that is, if we instruct our conscience and act upon its dictates, we shall attain (if we do not already possess) the highest style of politeness. It is true that there are some who are naturally rude and there are others who affect rudeness, thinking it to be an external characteristic of genius, and such men have their place. I counsel you to avoid their ways. Boorishness never attains a high degree of esteem, although it may fascinate the vulgar for a time. The address of the physician should be always well poised; calm and deliberate, but not apathetic; sedate, but not gloomy; cheerful, but not

clownish ; kind, but not obtrusive ; unruffled by trifles, but careful of every thing that concerns his reputation.

Discreetness in speech is a cardinal virtue in a physician—to know when it is “ a time to speak ” and when it is “ a time to refrain from speaking.” The whole truth to an agitated household, spoken when it is not necessary, may work damage to your patient. You yourselves may overrate the danger, and by indiscreet remarks beget a want of confidence in your skill. Do I counsel you to dissimulate ? Not at all. Lying is never necessary except to the inventor of it, but it does not follow that you are to proclaim from the house-tops all the truth that you imagine you know. The truth and nothing but the truth, spoken when necessary, with due regard of time and place, and with a solemn sense of the great importance that must often attend your words ; but it is quite as culpable to overstate the danger of your patient and arouse unnecessary anxiety, as it is to withhold the true knowledge of his condition when you feel that your skill is all in vain.

If, then, you should be discreet in the sick-room, how much the more should you hedge your tongue in speaking of what occurs within its sacred privacies to a gossiping world ! Apart from the bad taste of making the ills of suffering humanity the theme of your conversation, it is your duty to be reticent in all things that may not properly concern his sympathizing friends.

The intercourse between the patient and his physician should be of the most confidential, loving nature. He entrusts to you, who are yourselves mortal, the issues of life and death. You become to him his sole earthly reliance ; he trusts to you in full assurance, or he clings to you with the clutch of despair. Be it yours to meet this trust, not only with skill, not only with the faithful exercise of an experienced judgment, but also with the



loving heart of a fellow-man, who hastens to alleviate the sorrows he may remove or to sympathize in the misfortunes he cannot prevent.

If time permitted, I should be glad to enlarge upon a few of the fields of usefulness which only indirectly concern you as physicians. One of these is so dear to my heart that you must permit a word or two.

As you are professedly men of science, some things may be expected of you that are not required of the laity. You can wield a powerful influence in extending other sciences than that of medicine. Some of these, as Botany and Chemistry, are closely related to practical medicine; but all sciences are so interlaced that the gain of one is the gain of the other. The profession has not been backward in this respect in the past, nor is it at the present. All the physical sciences have been largely advanced by men who have passed some part of their lives as students of medicine. If you do not choose to enter upon these fields yourselves, you can at least lend a helping hand in the fostering of general scientific studies.

Our young land has much to do in cultivating scientific pursuits and much to gain from the achievements of science. She calls upon all men who make any pretensions to education, to unite in advancing every kind of knowledge that is calculated to advance the interests of her people, whether in material wealth or in the grander gain of a perfect civilization.

Finally, my dear friends, it remains to say farewell. These exercises close the official relations between you and your instructors. We do not thereby lose our interest in you. We shall watch your progress with friendly eyes and shall rejoice with you or lament with you, according as you meet with success or disaster. We hope well of you and pray that your future may be one of prosperity, of usefulness and of happiness. We entreat

you to be watchful of your fair reputations and to allow nothing to sully your lives, either as men or as physicians.

We place the reputation of the college in your keeping and trust that your ALMA MATER will find in you sons that will do her honor and that will cluster around her in love.





