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Valedictory Address

BY

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21071

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS

TO THE

Graduating Class

OF THE

Woman's Medical College

OF PENNSYLVANIA,

AT THE

EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT,

March 12th, 1870,

BY

ANN PRESTON, M. D.,

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21071
Washington, D. C.

PHILADELPHIA:

LOAG, Printer, Sansom Street Hall.

1870.

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THE EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT was held at Musical Fund Hall, Philadelphia, on Saturday, March 12th, 1870, at 12 M., when the Degree of Doctor of Medicine was conferred by the President, T. MORRIS PEROT, Esq., upon the following named ladies:

SIBELIA T. BAKER,
JENNIE G. BROWN,
JULIA W. CARPENTER,
HANNA T. CROASDALE,
SARAH C. HALL,

SARAH A. HIBBARD,
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ELIZA J. WOOD.

The Twenty-First Annual Session of the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania will open Thursday, October 13th, 1870, and continue five months.

VALEDICTORY.

LADIES, GRADUATES:—It is not merely in formal compliance with custom that I give you to-day, on behalf of the Faculty, a few parting words. We have watched your progress in study with interest and with pride; our hopes and sympathies go with you into the future, and we feel your welfare and success, henceforth, linked with our own. There are many to-day who look upon you with something, indeed, of sympathy, but with more of pity, believing that you have chosen a hard pathway, and that care and sorrow above the common measure must fall to your lot. We do not share in this feeling. If the care and anxiety be great, the compensations are yet greater; if the toil be heavy, we believe, with Ruskin: “That whenever the arts and labors of life are fulfilled in this spirit of striving against misrule, and doing whatever we have to do honorably and perfectly, they invariably bring happiness, as much as seems possible to the nature of man.”

We can none of us map out the exact road before you, nor foresee the changes and trials which await you; but there are unchanging principles of action which can guide

safely through all vicissitudes, and these we trust you will make your own.

What the world needs, is *truth* ; what the medical world needs is more of that nice, conscientious observation and investigation by which it may be elicited. In the stirring words of Professor Goodsir: "Let us have God's truth in the measurements—God's truth in everything." Loose observations, unsupported hypotheses, blind adherence to authorities, suffice no longer; here also,

"They must upward still and onward who would keep-abreast of truth."

Medicine is surely destined to become a richer blessing to humanity than it has yet been. The advances already made are prophecies of greater to come. If some widely-destructive scourges, as scurvy and small-pox, are almost banished from the civilized world; if epidemics are held in check, and the percentage of recoveries in ordinary diseases greatly increased; if, with advanced knowledge of hygiene, the average duration of human life becomes greater from decade to decade; still there is a vast amount of preventable disease and death, for which no effective remedy, as yet, has been systematically adopted.

But Physiology is now giving light and life to practical medicine. Therapeutics at last is widening into a science, as it begins to be recognized that all surrounding influences—air, sunlight, food, sleep, clothing, exercise, and mental stimuli—are within its legitimate domain as truly as iron, opium, bitters, and bromides.

Nor do its boundaries stop here. *Morals*, also, belong to Therapeutics. Temperance, purity, faith, hope, and charity modify bodily processes; they ward off disease and prolong life; and the physician who does not realize this

truth, and understand something of the reactions of the moral, intellectual, and physical life, does not possess the key to the best success in practice; is not yet initiated into the sacred mysteries of the divine art of healing. The earlier physicians were the priests of their time, and amid ignorance and superstition there was in this fact a dim recognition of the truth that the same great principles subserve the physical and moral life; and, in the words of a writer in the *British Medical Journal*: "Year by year we shall come to value dogmas and rules less, and principles more," in their application to both.

At present, nervous maladies, womanhood enfeebled and diseased, are the fashion of society; and perhaps the most frequent question that you will have to answer practically will be, "What can be done for our suffering women?" There is a deep conviction that these headaches, neuralgias, and weak backs are neither necessary nor destined to be the permanent condition of womanhood; and, Ladies, the philanthropist and scientist, who are seeking the remedy, look hopefully to the results of your knowledge and experience in their bearing upon this point.

When anxious fathers and mothers bring you their beautiful daughters, from whose young faces and steps the bloom and elasticity are departing, and ask your counsel, what shall you do? You look at those girls and at once take in their history. Kept long at school, and strained with many lessons at an age when the conditions of healthful growth and development were incompatible with sedentary habits and severe mental tasks; their bodies so tightly bound with clothing that by no possibility have the ever-moving vital organs been able fully to perform their functions; their extremities cold and thinly clad, and the weight of their cloth-

ing supported, not by their shoulders, made by God to bear burdens, but by parts totally unfitted to sustain them! Released from school, they have bent long in the same posture over piano, fancy work, or exciting novel, instead of rejoicing in the open air, or in active muscular exercise; their homes, luxurious, it may be, have yet been grudgingly supplied with pure air and quickening sunshine; the passion for dress and company has been fostered until these have become the staples rather than the stimulants of their lives; while late hours, artificial lights, and continuous excitements have interfered with the nutrition of nerve tissue, and perverted the distribution of nerve force. You know that quiet, interesting, imperative work,—work for hands and for mind,—is essential to their health; and as you sigh over their wasted, suffering, unsatisfied lives, you cannot be content with the mockery of merely prescribing drugs, needful and beneficent as these may often be.

Some morbid Michelet may speak of this feeble womanhood as the necessary result of advanced civilization, but it is very clear to us that it is not a high civilization, but the failure to reach it, to which this is due. The highest civilization will surely be in harmony with nature, with health, with the moral and Divine law. It will drive out follies as well as fevers; it will foster pure, quiet, simple tastes, and will find its models of beauty in form and drapery, not in the vulgar devices by which fashionable mantua-making distorts and burlesques human proportions, but in the grace and freedom of artistic Nature, and the corresponding fitness of clothing.

The woman of a true civilization will regard as pitiful and barbarous the idea that uselessness is elegance, or that disease and languor are womanly; and she will surely escape

the emptiness and dissatisfaction which oppress every human being—the proudest queen of fashion as well as the lowliest child of poverty—who does not cultivate and direct to ennobling uses, the powers and faculties which are the glorious birthright of humanity.

Ladies, society hails your advent into the field of medicine as among the heralds of this higher civilization—the civilization which is harmonious with Christianity; and you will prescribe for those who seek your advice in the knightly spirit of your profession, with all tenderness, but with all truth. Scorning make-believes and pretensions, with the authority of knowledge you will say: “These things ye cannot do and realize the joy of health.” Nor will you speak in vain. When an evil is once fully seen and admitted, and its cause understood, the remedy will surely be devised.

Whether giving advice to chronic invalids, or watching by the bed of pain and death, to whatever class of diseases and needs you may minister, you will share the life of “that common mass of humanity which toils along the weary ways of the world,” as none others do. You will be entrusted with secret sorrows, be initiated inevitably into the hidden springs of domestic life, and become, for the time, in interest and sympathy, a part of the families into which you enter. Your suggestions will be respected and repeated, and your influence for good will be limited only by your own abilities, attainments, and characters. How full of wisdom and knowledge should those be who thus penetrate household sanctities, and deal with the delicate machinery of life! how stainless in honor, how prudent in speech!

There is one principle that covers all medical as well as

general ethics, and this is embodied in the Divine rule: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." The practical carrying out of this rule will make you prompt, faithful, reliable. It will make the interests of your patients as sacred as your own, and their secrets as safe in your keeping as in the silence of the grave. In consultations, it will preserve you alike from the common temptation of agreeing with everything proposed by those with whom you consult, whether or not it really seem to you the best thing to be done; or the opposite fault of recommending a different treatment from selfish and unworthy motives. It will also suppress in you the injustice and pettiness of anger or resentment, in case your patients, in the exercise of their just rights, should chance to prefer other physicians to yourselves.

Ladies, you intend to be good practitioners, but you must not forget that to minister the most effectively to others, the mind and body should not be continually exhausted. So it should be ranked among your duties to husband your own vitality, whenever it is possible rightly to do so. Those who are the most active, mentally and physically, have especial need of constant renewal, and with proper care and determination, it is possible, under most circumstances, to secure time for regular meals, and for that great renovator—sleep. I am aware that in active practice, there come, at times, anxious and crowded days and nights; but in my observation, those who fail to take care of their health, fail quite as often through carelessness and the lack of methodical habits, as through the stern necessities of duty.

It is marvelous how much self-discipline and care in hygienic matters can do to strengthen delicate constitutions and increase available working power. Among the friends

of my earlier years was the late lamented President of the Pennsylvania Farm School—a man of powerful frame and robust health. During his studies in Germany, he wrote home that himself and another American student, who, like him, was making a choice collection of books, had made an agreement that on the death of either, the survivor should have the privilege of purchasing his library. But the writer added, that this was an opportunity which he believed his fellow-student would never have, as he was exceedingly delicate and a great sufferer, “although he takes more care of his health than any other man I ever knew.” When my friend died at the early age of thirty-two, clearly and directly from the effect of exposures which might have been avoided, this same delicate fellow-student was a Professor in a New England College!

You will need recreation and social enjoyment; but social communion should not be permitted to become, what it often is, a drain upon nervous power, a weariness instead of a rest and joy. Those whose time is less fully and richly occupied can scarcely appreciate the value of your hours for reading and rest, and unless you guard these from encroachment, you cannot be fresh and posted for your daily work. You must keep up with the times. You cannot afford to be unacquainted with the latest discoveries, and the most approved methods of treatment. You will need to take at least one or two good medical journals, to purchase new medical books, and to find time to read them. This acquaintance with the labors of others will not only often give you invaluable hints for practice, but it will also prevent loss of time, and wasteful experiments. I once knew an ingenious but uneducated mechanic, who spent toiling years over a machine for “perpetual motion,” when a frac-

tion of that time, devoted to studying what was already known, in some good manual on physics and mechanics, might have saved all his fruitless labor.

You will need also the influence of literature, and of other general interests, not only because all departments of life and thought send tributary streams to medicine, and furnish practical suggestions to the physician, but for your own refreshment and enlargement; for that change of thought, that lifting out of daily cares, so indispensable to the highest health of the spirit, and the continued fullness and freshness of life.

In your business transactions, permit me to suggest the importance of keeping clear records of your cases and visits, and of making out bills at regular periods. While you would disdain to enter the profession of medicine merely as a trade, you know at the same time, that pecuniary embarrassments must impair the efficiency of your work; and careful business habits, if not strictly moral virtues, are at least, among their legitimate guards. This care will enable you to be generous in the right places. Some will seek your counsel, worn with over-work, diseased because they could not rest from their toils and command the comforts essential to recovery. Ladies, you will, we are sure, as the true friends of those who trust you, deal generously with such as these. Striving to make your work a blessing to humanity as well as to yourselves, you will minister to the poor and needy, not with the conscious superiority that would toss "a piece of gold in scorn," but in the sympathizing spirit of Him who said: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me."

I trust there is no occasion to warn you against the fault

of those who habitually make their patients and practice a subject of conversation, and boast of their own superior skill and success. This form of egotism, hateful in men, would be certainly not less offensive in women. Persons of fine culture do not publish their special callings in common conversation.

Nor will you, we trust, waste your strength and sacrifice the repose and sweetness of life in personal dislikes and controversies. The jealousies of physicians have often been made the theme of vulgar comment, and those familiar with medical literature can but feel humiliated by the personalities which sometimes there intrude. Even in England, where so many medical writers have evinced a wise and large spirit, this offensive antagonism shows itself in certain medical journals; and a medical friend, who visited the hospitals in the metropolis of that kingdom, informs us that the fact of a cordial reception at one hospital, and attendance there, seemed to prevent the same full friendliness at the next.

Ladies, we hope other and more beautiful things from you; we trust you will live on a plane far above petty jealousies and dislikes; that you will be not only just, but also magnanimous and courteous to all. It is no Utopian dream that it is possible to live truthfully and generously in the world. The cynic and worldling may sneer at the simplicity that believes and trusts in humanity; but the right-minded and prudent who habitually appeal to the best in others, find that best respond; those who trust in the right, find the right a sure defence. It has been well said, "One, on the side of God, is a majority," and we have seen in some late occurrences in which we have all been deeply interested, that even the prestige of position, and the pride of learning,

brought to bear upon public feeling, may utterly fail of their object when put forth in defence of a wrong position.

We have no fears in regard to your reception by society. Others have gone before you, and up and down in the land are pleasant homes, of which the graduates of this school are the active and happy centres. These homes, in many cases, are the result of their success in practice; and those who know most of the needs and cravings of women are well aware that, after the first flush and dream of early youth have passed, there is, to them, no outward necessity so imperative as that of a restful *home*.

The progress which our cause is making throughout the world is truly marvelous. In free Switzerland, the Medical University of Zurich has for years admitted women to all its advantages; the great University of cosmopolitan Paris—l'Ecole de Medicine—has now dispensed to them its fullest privileges, and highest honors; the University of Edinburgh has opened its doors, creaking with the rime of ages, wide enough for their entrance; the University of Stockholm, in Sweden, we understand, is offering them facilities for medical education, and the Swedish *Government*, it is stated, is about to establish a medical college at Gothenburg, for women exclusively. In Austria, the candidates for the degree of Doctor of Obstetrics consist both of men and women; while in our own country, not only the great University of Michigan, but a number of smaller institutions also, have removed the barriers which forbade them to enter.

One of our graduates of last year is now a medical missionary in India, sent out by the Woman's Branch of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. With the angels' song—"On earth peace, goodwill to men"

resounding in her spirit, she bears with her that medical knowledge, so prized in the East, which will open to her the harems and homes that men physicians cannot enter. In a recent report of the Philadelphia Branch of the Woman's Union Missionary Society, are these words: "From all heathenism comes the call, send us the educated doctress, to teach our women how to take the medical care of women and children." It further adds: "Heathen men of high rank have offered to give funds to establish medical colleges for their women, if we will send the educated American ladies to teach."

The recent circumstances in this city which have called forth such a surprising expression of public sentiment through the general newspaper press of this country and of Europe, have shown it to be the conviction of the civilized world, that it is right and proper that women should study and practice medicine, and that they should have the means of education necessary to fit them to do so, effectively.

Nor would it be just for you to estimate *professional* sentiment by cases of individual illiberality. Great-hearted men illustrate and adorn this noble calling, and your best help and kindest welcome will come from some of these. Of the ladies who, last spring, went out from this college to practice medicine, two, unsolicited by themselves, have been elected members of the medical societies in their respective localities. Knowing the culture and attainments of these ladies, we congratulate those societies on having honored themselves as well as their new members, by this action. Still another of the class of last session, as assistant physician in the Woman's department of the State Lunatic Hospital at Worcester, Massachusetts, is associated, professionally, with distinguished physicians. She accepted

this untried post of duty with hesitation and diffidence ; but after six months of trial she has been officially informed that her services are entirely satisfactory and desirable ; and her salary, not less at first than the ordinary salary of a man assistant, for the first year, has been already increased.

Ladies, there are some parts of medical work that men doubtless can perform better than you—some that you can perform better than they ; but society expects from you the nicer sensibilities, the finer humanities that it ascribes to woman. Its standard of moral virtue is higher for woman than for man, and so it deems any disregard of it worse in her than in him.

Medical literature and medical feeling, it is all too obvious, need the refining and ennobling influences that the purity, and peculiar endowments of the true woman are calculated to give. You bring into the profession your womanly tact and insight, your quick sympathies, your watchful care, and your high ideal of the purity and delicacy befitting the sacred office you have assumed. As women, with the experiences of your womanhood, and looking at the subject from a fresh standpoint, you cannot fail to unfold new resources in the art of healing, and, if you are true to yourselves, the gifts you bring must *enrich* as well as refine the profession you enter.

Ladies, it is meet that you go forth to your labors, full indeed of that humility which belongs to wisdom, but full also of faith, hope, and glowing enthusiasm. And yet I know full well that your joy to-day is softened and tinged with something akin to sadness. You feel, indeed, the beauty and greatness of your work, but mingled with this is self-distrust, a sense of responsibility, the thought of an untried future ! It is true, you must encounter trials, but if

you avoid prejudices and keep your minds receptive and nobly ingenuous, you shall learn something from every person and circumstance about you, and be able to rejoice, day by day, in the consciousness of ever widening knowledge and continually increasing power for good.

You love the profession of your choice, and believe in its power to bless society; and, although true work is in itself true success, irrespective of rewards, yet the faithful performance of the duties of your calling will often bring results to surprise as well as gladden your hearts. Among the experiences of my life, and they have been many and varied, among the affections and kindnesses which often have made me feel that "the lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places," there have been few manifestations more touching than the devoted gratitude of some who, when languishing in weakness and suffering, have deemed themselves helped by such offices as I have been able to bestow; and, Ladies, among the enjoyments in store for you, next to the infinite peace that comes from the consciousness of duty performed, I could scarcely ask for you any sweeter than such as these.

Go forth prudently, truthfully, trusting in the eternal strength of the ever-living God, content "to labor and to wait," willing to accept toil and privation as well as ease and victory; and fear not but that a true and glorious success shall be yours—that this shall be to you the "Commencement" of a renewed life of enlarged activity, in which, amid cares and responsibilities, you shall often be led beside still waters, and lie down in green pastures.

