

Chandler (Mrs. H.)

ADDRESS

BEFORE THE

MASSACHUSETTS DENTAL SOCIETY,

AT ITS

FOURTH ANNUAL MEETING, MAY 21, 1868.

BY

THOMAS H. CHANDLER.



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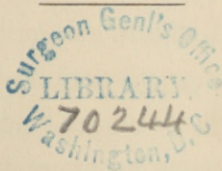
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A D D R E S S .

MR. PRESIDENT, AND GENTLEMEN OF THE MASSACHUSETTS
DENTAL SOCIETY :

NOW-A-DAYS the fathers who send their sons to college, and the young men who are striving to educate themselves, all look sharply at one great end, the saving of time in arriving at practical results. What is to be done must be done quickly. The hand must be taught practical work, the tongue actual speech, and no superfluous time or energy taken to acquire the great principles which underlie the one and the other, and on which alone a solid superstructure can possibly be built. In the haste to be rich, each seeks to join the busy throng of workers, and there is no time for aught that cannot be seen to bear at once, and directly, upon this great object. The ancient maxim "hasten slowly" is forgotten, and the superficial character of most of our knowledge is the consequence,—a general level of shallow dullness. Catering to this greedy haste of the public,

our institutions of learning modify their courses of study, and culpably yield where they should strenuously resist. And yet, the hobby of the age, riding above international quarrels and local politics, is Education, "the diffusion of knowledge"; and we Americans, New Englanders especially, pride ourselves upon our superior institutions of learning, our enhanced facilities for acquiring it. Schools are multiplied, Academies abound. The jealousies of cities and the silly rivalries of neighborhoods give rise to a myriad birth of institutions with high-sounding titles, which tempt the unwary student to his loss; while wealth untold, which, combined in one vast fund, would accomplish more than the most sanguine could desire, is wasted in detached and aimless efforts.

The terms "advancement" and "diffusion" of knowledge are by no means reciprocal, though they seem generally to be so considered, inasmuch as the farther it is spread, the thinner it may become; and that it is *diffused* chiefly by teaching one to another in crowds, or by means of books; is *advanced* by the solitary labors of the student in his closet. The object of our schools should be to diffuse knowledge, but in such a way as to impress upon each student the depth of his ignorance, to instil into his heart an

earnest longing for knowledge, and to cause him, by the labors of his life, to seek steadily and earnestly to obtain it. The *pride* of a little learning is dangerous, as it prevents the search for more; and the graduate who builds his faith upon a diploma which he can hardly read, sealed with a seal of whose origin or significance he knows nothing, is little better than a camp follower of the army of scholars, or a deserter from the cause for which he enlisted, and whose bounty he has received.

That graduates cease to study as soon as they have shaken off the embrace of their Alma Mater is notorious, and the fact proves the general remissness and incapacity of their teachers; in that their aim has been for a day and not for all time, to make *scholars*, not *students*. It has always been easy, too easy indeed, even in the best of our colleges and schools, for the dunce and the sluggard to pass over the course unscathed, and receive their diplomas at the end. In some, the course of study is so short, the studies so easy or so few, and the examinations of so little account, that but the merest smattering is requisite to enable the student to pass with *honor*, as it is called. Some have even descended so low as to sell their diplomas (on the sly) for money, not demanding so much as the form of an attendance, or an

examination. This is the worst form which it is possible for this disease to take ; but all our educational institutions, from the highest to the lowest, are more or less infected with it. It is a matter of pride and rivalry with them, as well as of revenue, which shall have the greatest number of undergraduates, and which, at the annual period, shall send out into the world the greatest number of Alumni ; therefore too great strictness in the requisitions for admission and graduation are impolitic and unprofitable. How many who retire from our colleges with the coveted parchment can turn about and enter again ? To how many of those graduated from our professional schools would we be willing to trust our lives or property, until they have received a new diploma from the school of experience ? The poor we have always with us, and we are very willing that “prentice hands” shall be tried upon them before we place full confidence in professional skill. It may be answered that it is not the object of these schools to make perfect practitioners at the outset, but to guide to proper methods of study and practice, and so start the neophyte on the right track. But how many do even this properly ? Are they careful enough whom they send out with their recommendation signed and sealed ? Are they not too regardful of their reputa-

tions and revenues to discriminate over closely? It is not well to have it said that a half or other large proportion of a class were not allowed to be graduated, because, in what they had pretended to study they were not sufficiently up to pass the examinations; *therefore*, that the Professors have not done their duty, and, *therefore*, that the institution is not what it pretends to be, but no better than an incorporated swindle. Theories of education are beautiful on paper. Plans are excellent till tried; and men of the best motives will often fail from want of courage to face and fight down difficulties. We pray "lead us not into temptation," and then walk deliberately into it, trusting to Providence or to luck to enable us to overcome it. However short-sighted mortals may err in their judgment, the right will eventually prevail, and any stepping aside from the path of rectitude in pursuit of interest is sure to be punished at last. The spirit of rivalry is the mocking fiend that deludes, more perhaps than any other, not only our college faculties, but the communities on which they depend. This divides interest, scatters wealth, fritters away revenues, and prevents a good, strong, healthy public spirit from attaching itself to any one institution. As in a city or town it is impossible to have a school-house next door to every home, and it is necessary to centralize that the aver-

age accommodation may be equal, so it is with our colleges. It is not wise policy for the profession, for the community, nor for the colleges, that there should be one at every practitioner's door. They should be so centralized as to concentrate upon themselves the full strength and interest of the profession, and should have for their object not the aggrandizement of this or that man or set of men, nor the fostering of the pride of any one section or locality, but the best good of the students who commit themselves to their maternal care, and of the profession upon which they depend. The good of the students, again, should be sought, not in making things easy, and launching them half-taught to deceive and prey upon an unsuspecting public, but in so regulating the studies that the worthy and industrious *can* get the education he seeks, while the lazy and the shirk *must* work or go without a diploma. The number of ignorant and worthless graduates from all our institutions of learning is notorious ; and the fact of having been graduated from one is daily becoming of less account, even in the eyes of the credulous and long-suffering people, who have hitherto suffered themselves to be beguiled by the name, and have been but too willing to accept as a lion any ass who will wear the skin.

It is disgraceful that it should be so, but so it is, and so it will continue to be, until our colleges re-

gard themselves, or are compelled by the community to act as something more than conductors by which the common fountain, the public purse, may be tapped, and as vehicles for the dissemination, not of knowledge, but of degrees among mankind.

It becomes us therefore, each and all who have the good of our profession at heart, to lay aside religiously all envy and uncharitableness, all petty jealousies and heart-burnings, individually and collectively, and throw our united influence to bear upon the elevation and improvement of our Dental Colleges who hold the fate of our profession in their hands. Let us insist upon it that "they be an example unto themselves"; that the spirit which inspires them, and emanates from them, be a lofty spirit, breathing life. Make them feel that even from a money point of view, an elevated standard, and a high-toned policy are the true ones; that cheap diplomas, short courses, and nominal examinations will not be tolerated. Make them extend their courses of study, and at the same time make them more thorough, that they may graduate *students*, earnest and faithful *seekers*, inspired by the zeal of their teachers to emulate them.

In this regard, it is worthy of consideration whether some preliminary examination for admission should

not be had. The man who has left the workshop of the mechanic, the day-laborer who can hardly write his own name correctly, and has had no intellectual training whatever, notwithstanding five years more or less of practice, is hardly in a condition to receive the lofty results of metaphysical research, to sound the depths of chemistry, or to thread the mazes of anatomy. What can he comprehend of the technical nicety of their nomenclature who cannot pronounce the names, or by what principle of association can he store away his new gleanings with his former intellectual gatherings? He is in the condition of the Danaïds, the sisters of heathen story, who for their crimes were forced to draw water in sieves; or of that other, Tantalus, ever tormented with hunger and thirst, seated in the middle of a fountain whose waters fled at the approach of his lips, and beneath refreshing fruits which hung just out of his reach.

How much of real knowledge does his diploma represent? How much of what he has acquired during his college course? Has he even learned how to study? Is he not rather disgusted with his useless efforts, and rejoiced when he is at last released? The giving such a man a degree is not only an imposition upon the public, as a certificate of superior knowledge, but an absolute injustice to his fellows,

as putting him upon a par, so far as it is in the power of the faculty to do, with his hard-working and intelligent companions. It seems then that some other preparation is necessary than mere time spent, and labor performed in an office. If a man has not been ambitious and industrious enough in his time past, if no sense of shame for his deficiencies in the presence of his patients or of his professional brethren has impelled him to acquire the merest rudiments of an English education, it is useless to hope that he ever will. His time past images his time to come ; his life intellectually hopeless and aimless, he exists, content with what he is, and strives for nothing more. His diploma is but an additional advertisement, framed and hung up as a bait for patients, and his D. D. S. is flaunted on all occasions, proper and improper, for a like purpose. No man is worthy the graduation of any college, whose thesis is the witness of his ignorance ; who cannot write a line without misspelling the commonest words, and whose ordinary conversation breaks every bone of the Queen's English. A degree given to such a man, is simply a declaration of the unworthiness and mercenary character of the Faculty by whom it is given, and places another clog in the way of the general advancement of our profession.

The objection to the granting of degrees upon exam-

ination merely, without requiring attendance upon lectures, is similar. All who have passed a literary examination of any kind, are familiar with the process of "cramming," as it is called. Where this is a wholesale review of previous studies gone over in course, and made somewhat familiar by that iteration and reiteration which our fallible powers of memory and association demand, it is not objectionable. But that other "cramming" which is the posting up on subjects altogether new, for a short period and a definite purpose, to be forgotten as soon as the occasion that calls for it is passed, is objectionable in the highest degree. A few days, and no trace is left other than those of the reaction of overwrought powers, like the wrecks of a last night's storm.

The diploma so obtained represents, on the one hand, little else than a few sleepless nights, a short and strong strain upon the memory, and a small sum of money; on the other, it tells of a criminal disregard for the advance of the profession, a heedless carelessness of professional duties, slight appreciation of the value of their diploma, and a greedy hankering after college revenues. Such action offers a premium upon charlatanism, and remorselessly undermines the fair edifice which we and they have striven so hard to erect. It is inferred that our and their object

is to elevate our business from the level of a handicraft to that of a science. To do this, those who have taken it upon themselves to declare in advance that it *is* a science, and to teach it as such, should beware how they hasten to open its gates to the unworthy. Let the past be past, and all who have come into our feast from the highways and by-ways and hedges, continue unrestrained in the full enjoyment thereof, each conscientiously striving to do his duty to those who place themselves and their families under his professional care: but let not the errors of the past be repeated in the future. Let the wise and the ignorant, the learned and the unlettered, with one mind and one accord, frown down all attempts to enter by any other way than by the wicket-gate at the beginning of the road. Make all to pass the slough of Despond, climb the hill Difficulty, and be caught by the giant Despair, before they enter our Delectable Land. Let not the time-server and the charlatan be hereafter recognized. Let us hold out our hands to our weaker brethren, and strive to lift them up; do our duty to those already with us, but see to it that no more come in. The dentists of to-day are all, or nearly all, members of some Dental Society, and as such have it in their power, if they will but work together, to control the future of the profession, by refusing to receive students who will

not agree to a full course of study. But the lower strata of our profession have been heretofore recruited chiefly from the help in our laboratories, and care should be taken that this is not repeated hereafter. It is a duty we owe to ourselves that we suffer not ourselves to be confounded with such; and to the public that, by our remissness, we permit them not to be deceived. Through the powerful influence of habit, we are apt to look at such matters with too much indifference, and even to sneer at those amongst us who hold high their heads, and keep aloof from the smaller fry as

“base knaves, and unmannerly,
To come betwixt the wind and their nobility.”

But even this is an error in the right direction. We would not, in private life, admit a stranger into our society, and associate with him upon terms of friendship, until he was proved to our satisfaction to be a gentleman. So it should be in professional life. When a man puts out a sign Dr. so and so, that should not, of itself, be a pass to recognition and full fellowship. By their works, we should know them. The public, indeed, by using so little discretion and common sense in their search for professional services, are as much to blame in this as we. It has, no doubt, often been said to all of us by strange

patients who had suffered by another's malepractice, that they thought "one dentist as good as another," forgetting that though men are "born equal" they do not long remain so. It becomes us then, in educating ourselves, and elevating our own standard, to strive to do the same for the public whom we profess to serve. When we show that we respect ourselves, they will begin to respect us. And here it is that the proper influence of our colleges will be greatly felt. When it is insisted that students shall be graduated at a Dental or Medical College before commencing to practise; when the older members of the profession, who have not enjoyed this privilege, show themselves worthy of it by earnestly working to raise their own attainments to the same standard which they require of their students; and when the Faculties of our colleges take such care in the selection of their graduates, that none shall be permitted to receive a diploma who is not likely to reflect honor upon his Alma Mater, — then public attention will be attracted, intelligent inquiry will be made, and our light will begin to shine. As things have been, can we blame the physician for not liking that his time-honored title of Doctor, should be adopted and desecrated by the ignorant charlatan fresh from the workshop or the plough? or for giving the cold shoulder to the whole body of dentists who make no distinc-

tion between the skilful and the clown? When we look around us, we cannot but observe how comparatively few there are who have received anything like a professional education, and how many who have stolen into our fold with the merest pretence at study, or any other proper preparation for its difficult and delicate duties. Some of these are men of talent, who arrive almost by instinct at correct results; others, merely men of assurance who have obtained their skill at the expense of their patients, and whom even practice cannot make perfect. This being so, we must feel and acknowledge the necessity that lies upon us, to labor with earnest and united effort to lift our profession to its proper position. All enmities, all jealousies, all unkindness, all lukewarmness should cease for the sake of our cause. These must give place to brotherly kindness, forbearing one another in love; to the charity that suffereth long and is kind, that envieth not, that vaunteth not itself and is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly, is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil, but beareth, believeth, hopeth, and endureth all things. The past is irretrievable, but the future is in our hands, and it is our own fault if we do not make such use of it that, at least, the youngest amongst us may live to find himself a member of an acknowledged learned profession.

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