

**THE SOUTHERN PRACTITIONER: AN
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VARIOUS

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EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR

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Original Communications.

CHARGE TO THE GRADUATING CLASS, UNIVERSITY
OF TENNESSEE MEDICAL DEPARTMENT.

BY HILLIARD WOOD, M. D., OF NASHVILLE, TENN.

Gentlemen of the Graduating Class—

The time has come when those of you who have completed the curriculum and successfully passed your final examinations shall receive your diplomas, which shall be to the public the evidence of your proficiency. I congratulate you, gentlemen of the graduating class, upon this happy conclusion of your college course, and upon having won, by a rigorous examination, this degree which shall admit you to broader fields of study and of usefulness. For four long years your devotion to every detail

of your college work, and the enthusiasm which has marked your pursuit of medical knowledge constitute a favorable augury and happy omen of that successful career which, I trust, in the not distant future awaits each one of you.

From the day of your matriculation to this happy hour your thoughts have been fixed upon these certificates of your worth which you now have fairly won, and which it is the pleasure of your faculty you shall receive. Your college course has been both long and arduous; to it you have devoted laborious days and sleepless nights; your studies have been difficult and often technical, but the trials through which you are now happily passed have only exercised your devotion and demonstrated your zeal. Your faculty have closely watched, with feelings of mingled solicitude and admiration, the spirit in which you have discharged every duty, have mastered every subject, and have met every obligation placed upon you. Such moral worth and mental ability give birth to hopes of greater achievements still. It is, therefore, not grudgingly, or with reluctance, that we give you these diplomas, but with joy, believing that what you have by merit won, you will, by virtue, honor.

Although tonight you complete your college course, your education as members of a learned profession is far from complete. This you will notice as soon as you have entered the field of practice; for here you will meet with diseases that puzzle you, and complications which baffle your best endeavors. Thus, humbled by defeat and saddened by disappointment, your only safeguard and remedy will be found in earnest, patient, unremitting labor and study. These are the agencies which have helped others before you to higher planes of glory and broader fields of usefulness, and constitute the only "sesame" which can unlock to you the treasure-house where fame and knowledge dwell. No matter how high a record you may have made in your classes, how enviable a reputation you may have maintained with your faculty, or how auspicious may be your entrance upon a professional career, unremitting study and perseverance are essential, if you would keep abreast of the progressive and exacting science of medicine. The man who does less can not

reasonably hope, and does not deserve, to retain the confidence and patronage of the public, or the esteem of his fellow physicians.

In the pursuit of medical knowledge you have, so far, drawn only from two sources, from your teachers and from your textbooks. To these is now to be added a third and a larger supply—that is from the observation of nature, or from practice. This is the spring and fountainhead of all medical knowledge. So far you have been fed, as it were, with pre-digested food, but now you are to be fed with meat of the profession that you may grow strong. This meat is the observation of the patient in the sick room. Here you will learn your most valuable lessons, and here you will be subjected to the final test by which you must either stand or fall as a physician. Your study of your patient and his disease and the proper interpretation of the signs and symptoms will determine your success in practice. I do not mean to underrate the writings of the great men in our profession; these writings should be the subject of your daily and careful study. They have their value, but their value has its limit. You should believe and follow them in so far as they accord with nature, but no farther. Strictly speaking no man is an authority in medicine, although some are so styled, and vanity has induced some to so style themselves; but there is one, and only one authority in medicine, and that is the authority of nature. The more carefully you study that, the closer you keep to that, the better able you are to interpret that, the more successful you will be as physicians. No stream rises above its source, and no one learns more by reading a book than the writer knew. If, therefore, you would surpass in medical knowledge you must not only know the literature, but you must know nature, and from that pure and inexhaustible source draw fresh supplies.

Medical literature is not an end, but a means, a light to guide you in your search for truth. With the best literature, therefore, you should be always familiar. But you should use it as a crutch to help your understanding, not as a shackle to bind your mind, or to prevent independent thought. Medical progress through the ages has been marked by great discoveries. If we

study any one of these we find a man close to the heart of nature who, discarding dogma, has interpreted nature, and has interpreted it wisely. With what admiration and despair do we look upon these men; and yet any one of us, did we but use the same means might attain the same end. But originality is a virtue of the few, imitation a characteristic of the many. Gentlemen, I would have you study nature, I would have you study disease as it is found in your patient, not simply read it as it is written in your books. Nature is the great text-book, nature alone is infallible. To study it, to commune with it, to know it, should be your constant aim and effort. This alone can raise you above the dull monotony of routine to sublimer heights and grander views.

You should be not only ambitious to acquire, but also glad to communicate medical knowledge. You should be like a pump which not only receives, but also gives out. Medical knowledge has made its slow, and often intermittent progress through the ages. The present sum of this knowledge represents the observation, experience and wisdom of the centuries that are past. This is a precious heritage, and is offered to us practically without money and without price. The great men who have gone before have, by superior wisdom, projected themselves into the generations which followed them, and have made our present achievements possible. We are the heirs of all the past, and should show our appreciation of this priceless inheritance by gratitude to those who have gone before, and by our constant effort to add to the sum of medical knowledge that we, like them, may project ourselves into the generations which are to come.

Medicine is not a fixed, but a progressive science; and our knowledge of it, so long as we remain in the practice, should likewise progress. The constant acquisition of knowledge is one of the most pleasant experiences in the practice of medicine. It is food to the mind, it nourishes and makes strong; it is like refreshing showers upon parched ground, it gives new energy, and life, and hope. The mind may be compared to a sieve, into which information is poured, but through which, by defective memory, it leaks; so that if we would keep it filled we must

constantly add more. It is but due to your patient and to yourself that you should be the best doctor of which you are capable.

Pleasure in any avocation of life is in proportion to the excellence we attain in it. Merit breeds success, and success, happiness. Happiness is, therefore, based upon our merit, and this is wise. If we would have happiness, therefore, we must deserve it; and we can not deserve it without the approval of our conscience, that censor from which no secrets are hid.

Zeal and faith are as essential to the practice of medicine as fuel and steam are to the operation of a locomotive. If I had a mental thermometer, by which I could tonight test your zeal for medicine, I would know your medical future, as to who will fail and who will succeed. Zeal for a cause and faith in it, a willingness to toil for it, and if need be, to suffer for it, are the conditions of success. It has been said that no great movement ever succeeds unless some one is willing to suffer for it. We know that all great reformations have demanded toil and usually blood. Sacrifice and self-denial have ever been the price of achievement. If you would succeed in medicine you must be willing to spend and to be spent for it; you must be willing to toil, and, if need be, to suffer for it. I do not know any medical man of prominence who is not in a very material sense a slave to his profession. It is the price of his success.

Medicine will need and demand your full time; you can not successfully divide your attention between it and other pursuits; you can not at the same time be a good doctor and a good farmer or a good merchant. You will fail in one or the other, or more likely in all. Neither can the practice of medicine be laid down for a term of years and afterward successfully resumed. When once deserted it seldom, or never, returns. Medicine is exacting, demanding your whole time and thought, leaving you little opportunity to mingle in social or business life. Doctors are, therefore, known as poor business men, and are regarded as easy marks by the shrewd and, apparently, innumerable promoters of wild-cat schemes and mining companies. So poorly remunerative is medicine and so long and difficult is the

acquisition of a competency by practice that when a physician has saved up a few dollars it would seem he might be permitted to enjoy it at pleasure; but no sooner is a doctor suspected of having a dollar than his desk is flooded with the alluring literature of get-rich-quick concerns, and he is invited and actually expected to pour into this yawning chasm that which, he had hoped, would protect his age from poverty and want. And the sad thing about it is, that the doctor actually does it, and is then surprised when he discovers he has purchased a brick of a golden hue. We doctors inveigh against quack nostrums and patent medicines, and yet do we not fall victims to all the forms of financial quackery that are presented for the delectation of the credulous public? We are amused at patients who invest their money in patent medicines, and then are, ourselves, taken in by the first financial charlatan who comes along, and invest our money in visionary schemes that exist only, if they exist at all, in the fertile imagination of the promoter.

In delivering to you, gentlemen, this last charge of your faculty, I am filled with emotions of mingled hope and fear—of hope for your enduring success, and of fear lest the innumerable sources of error and defeat, often half hidden and concealed, may "Turn your day of youth to sullied night." As a mariner, traversing the wide waste of ocean, trusts not his feelings, but fixes his eyes upon his compass and upon the fixed stars and heavenly bodies and by their aid reaches in safety the haven of his desire, so you, traversing the tempestuous sea of life, with its ever shifting scenes, will do well to lay aside your prejudices and passions, and be guided only by those wise precepts and sage maxims which have been handed down to us by history. Churches have creeds, political parties platforms, and medicine has its code of ethics. I commend to your careful study and constant practice "The Code of Ethics of the American Medical Association." This code is based upon the Golden Rule, and in it is epitomized your various duties and obligations to your patient, your brother physician and yourself. By closely following its provisions you will exercise those virtues which, not only promote happiness, but which develop in you those