



ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE OPENING
OF THE
WOMAN'S MEDICAL COLLEGE



OF THE
New York Infirmary,

126 SECOND AVENUE.

BY
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ADDRESS.

OUR Faculty has kindly insisted upon my saying the first words which our new College addresses to its friends; and I am bound to comply with their desire, although I could have wished that some abler person might have shown the broad significance of those principles which are involved in our work.

True growth is slow (as we measure time) and silent. The tiny sapling shoots up with invisible and noiseless force; so have we worked on, silently. Yet the truest growth has its striking phases of development. We watch with glad anticipation the first tender green of budding foliage; later still, we luxuriate in the delicious flowering of the apple-blossoms in May.

It was in 1853, in a parlor in University Place, (as some two or three of those now present will remember), that the little slip of a Medical Institution for Women was planted, which slowly grew till it budded into a small hospital in 1857. Many who are here to-night will recall the opening of the hospital wards in Bleecker Street, and the cordial words of encouragement then given. They will remember that noble young minister (cut down in his promising youth)

who hurried in from his pressing duties in a distant city, carpet-bag in hand, resolved to give us a hearty god-speed—because the good cause was unpopular.

Now the tree has blossomed into a college, and once more the friends gather round, to rejoice in its promise of larger usefulness.

It has required fifteen years of patient work—work by faith (for the way has been very dark) to lay the foundation of a college. This has seemed strange to most persons; for many women's colleges have sprung up meanwhile; hundreds of women have received the physician's diploma; some have become highly-respected practitioners, and some have gained large sums of money. Of the early friends of the Infirmary, many have died, and some have been discouraged by its slow growth.

It is an easy thing to found a poor college. Our liberal legislature grants a charter to any one who asks for it, and an audience can always be gathered together by speeches and music to witness the presentation of learned-looking parchment rolls to a class of well-dressed students; but charter and diploma do not necessarily guarantee the fitting education of a physician. To found a really good college is a work of great difficulty, and up to the present time has been impossible, for want of professional assistance—of skilful teachers, and ample clinical provision. To this difficulty has been added another—the want of funds.

We have been facing these two perpendicular cliffs—money and skill—for fifteen years, and striving in every possible way to climb them. Every one will sympathize with us in relation to the first difficulty;

but, at the same time, the promoters of ordinary benevolent enterprises can hardly realize the added difficulty of begging for a principle. People will give to a charity or popular enthusiasm, but very seldom to a principle, more seldom still to such an unpopular idea as the education of women in medicine.

Little by little, however, we have laid one stone upon another, until we have gained a foundation sufficient to stand on. It is small, certainly, but solid, and we all feel great hope of surmounting the first grand difficulty.

In relation to the second obstacle—the want of professional support—I need only refer to the prospectus of our College to show how happily we have at last been able to surmount this second difficulty. How this has been accomplished I really do not know. We are so accustomed to be “despised and rejected” that encouragement, welcome, success, seem unaccountable. It is like breathing a new and delightful atmosphere, which is, nevertheless, strange and dream-like; and one almost fears to wake up with a shock, and find again the cold, the gloom and struggle all around.

But from whatever cause proceeding, the support now given to the formation of the College is warm and cordial. Should we fulfil the expectations of the wise and experienced physicians who have sanctioned and counselled the formation of this school, professional assistance will be increased to the utmost extent the student may require.

We enter, then, upon this work under the most favorable auspices, and we are encouraged to undertake it by the earnest request of medical women from every part of the country. From the east and the west—

from California to Maine—have come the same heartfelt expressions of interest in the establishment of a sound plan of education; the same hope that other women may not enter upon their work under the disadvantages of imperfect preparation that they have had to contend with. The list of excellent women physicians who have enrolled themselves as fellows of the College, shows the trust which is felt in this undertaking by our respected co-workers.

We have endeavored to follow out the suggestions of our most experienced medical teachers, and incorporate the following features into our plan of instruction :

1. A three years' college course.
2. A larger proportion of time devoted to teaching and practical instruction than to lecturing.
3. A progressive succession of studies.

I shall only refer at this time to one of these, viz. : the three years' college course. I would remark for the information of those who are not familiar with medical tuition, that the legislature in granting to a school the right to confer the degree of Doctor in Medicine, requires that such degree shall only be given to those who have been studying medicine for three years. Three years, then, is the obligatory time of study, and no degree is legal which is granted on a less term of study. But in the ordinary course of instruction, the greater part of that time is spent in private reading, the college being only responsible for the instruction of two winter sessions of five months each; in other words, for ten months out of the thirty-six required by law. The remaining twenty-six months may or may not be well spent; it depends upon the

intelligence, resolution and opportunities possessed by each individual student. It is the great wish of the profession to increase the collegiate part of instruction, and require attendance at college during a portion of each of the three years of study. Many colleges have added spring and autumn courses; but the attendance of students is not obligatory, and it seems impossible to lengthen the college course without united action.

For women there exist so very few opportunities for profitable study, that these precious twenty-six months are, to a great extent, wasted. At the same time a weighty responsibility rests upon all those who introduce women into medicine to see that they are fitted to fulfil the trust worthily. Medicine is a learned and confidential profession, and should draw into its ranks the most highly educated, the most irreproachable in character. This most noble profession, like all high things, is susceptible of the worst abuse. The good which women may accomplish in medical practice is also the measure of the evil that they may do. Education, long and careful, should be the safeguard of society in this matter. From many causes, women are peculiarly exposed to a great temptation—that of practicing ignorantly and superficially. The college should foresee this danger, and provide the long and careful training which can alone discriminate between the worthy and unworthy candidate. This education, while it sifts out the incompetent, will give to the earnest student those advantages of drill, of substantial knowledge, of professional support, without which women enter upon the practical work of medicine under the most cruel disadvantages.

We propose, therefore, to adopt the most advanced

plan of instruction, and have arranged a progressive course of study, which will require for its completion attendance at college during three winter sessions of five months each, which we hope eventually to be able to extend to eight months. We shall thus be able not only to give to each student an additional term of systematic instruction, with all those advantages of hospital practice which belong only to a large city, but we shall be able to keep her under college influence during the remainder of each year, directing the intermediate studies, and forming much more accurate acquaintance than were otherwise possible, with the qualifications of each candidate for graduation.

We are compelled to face many difficulties by this plan. We must anticipate a smaller class at first, in consequence of the additional expense laid upon the student; for however low the price of tuition may be made, the added expense of boarding has to be met. The student also, at the outset of her career, is unable to appreciate the great advantages of this enlarged instruction, and is naturally tempted to go where a diploma may most easily be gained. We are quite sure, however, that in a few years, the thorough education given by our College, and the distinction conferred by its diploma, will draw to it the best students from every part of our country.

There is one other feature of our College that I must allude to, as I feel in it a profound and special interest. It is the introduction of hygiene into our course as a prominent and obligatory study.

It seems strange that the prevention of disease should not always have engaged the thought and instruction of the guardians of the public health at least

as fully as the cure of disease, and yet I believe that this is the first college in America to found a chair of hygiene. Consider the subjects involved in the development of a healthy human organization—a healthy race. Physical and moral training; the inheritance and transmission of qualities; the peculiarities of individual constitution; the nature and influences of climate, soil, food and customs; the prevention of epidemics; the municipal regulations of our cities, etc. All these subjects come directly and unavoidably into the department of hygiene. Surely every student who receives the degree of Doctor, should be thoroughly acquainted with all that science at present knows on these subjects. How else can he fulfil his noblest trust—the guardianship of individual and public health? For a specialist, with a narrowed range of duties, such knowledge may, perhaps, be of less importance; but for the family physician, the trusted friend and counsellor year after year, for the public-spirited physician, who would give to his wisdom and experience the largest usefulness, these studies are indispensable, and his initiation, his first impulse and interest in this knowledge should surely be given by his college.

There is one branch of this subject which I think must weigh heavily on the hearts of women physicians, and which will, I hope, through them, engage the attention of every thoughtful woman in our land. I refer to the frightful mortality of young children. Children are born to live, not die. There is a wonderful force of tenacious vitality in all growing organizations—far more proportionate vitality than in the old or even the adult, yet, notwithstanding this beneficent

provision of nature, we destroy our young children nearly five times as fast as the other members of our social body. If every woman in our city could hear the daily moan of these dying infants; could feel that every day multitudes of bereaved mothers were weeping over untimely graves, and that her own skirts were not clear of this shedding of innocent blood, we should see an army of earnest co-workers, eager to save this multitude of helpless children.

Infancy and early childhood are the especial charge of women, and how do they fulfil this trust? It does not do to look around upon a well-furnished home, bright with the smiling faces of happy children, and say, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Each one is his brother's keeper to the direct extent that knowing an evil can be cured he refrains from doing his part to cure it. Did the women of our city resolve to save these children, they might be saved. Year by year the mortality might be lessened by the sanitary knowledge diffused by women, and the sanitary regulations their influence might establish, until from their own little circle they could look with joy to a bright cloud of witnesses beyond—thousands of useful lives saved to their homes and their country through their aid!

This suggestion of important practical usefulness will give force to the great principle involved in our College—scientific training for women.

Interest in natural objects; careful, comprehensive observation of them; enthusiasm for unselfish and impersonal ends, are the main principles of scientific study—principles that would enter with invigorating force into the mental development of every girl; that would regenerate the life of women.

Science is no hard dry thing, as some imagine. It is the earnest study of this wonderful world around us. It will take the form of each individual mind. In a narrow unimaginative nature it will seem hard and dry; in a warm and loving nature it will flow into every form of benevolent action. It might work a most beneficent change in the relation that we all consider most sacred—the relation of a mother to her children.

The immense force of habit, second only to the original type of constitution, and often overpowering even the original tendencies, is, nevertheless, formed by the silent working of influences, hour by hour, and day by day, that are invisible and cannot be measured; that seem absolutely valueless, taken item by item, in the long account; and yet in the aggregate they will save or ruin the body and soul. A mother may instil the love of reading or the love of dress; she may form the habit of out-door exercise or the habit of gossip; not by set precept or even formal regulations, but by her own tastes unavoidably moulding the tastes of her children, and flowing out naturally into those external arrangements, that inevitably reflect the ruling spirit or affections of the individual. Did the mother possess a hearty interest in the wonders of field and forest, of sea and sky, what a treasury of delightful intercourse might be found in the varied environs of our city. A mother's love, joined to broad tastes and knowledge, would never weary of the ceaseless questioning of childhood; the older the child, the closer and more influential would be the companionship. The holiday by the sea-side or amongst the mountains, so wasted now in idleness and frivolity, might be a

rich harvest-time of delightful knowledge, drawn from the treasures of land and water.

It is, then, because of the great value that enthusiasm for natural science would be to woman—value to the individual life, to the home life, and to society, that I think this College will owe its greatest interest. From the fact that it is a Medical College, it will derive its practical efficiency in cultivating a taste for science.

A lady, now world-famous, once said to me before she began her noble career: "We Englishwomen can study anything under the sun that we desire to acquire. Not the slightest obstacle is placed in the way of our becoming learned to any extent; but any attempt to turn the knowledge to account, to work with it, is met with the bitterest opposition—is ridiculed, sneered at, frowned down. Yet the greatest impetus to study, the natural issues of study, lie in some noble career."

It is from this tendency of the human mind to pour its knowledge into some definite form, that our Medical College, with its broad practical uses, may prove so valuable as a centre for scientific study. As it becomes older and stronger, it will spread into those collateral branches, as botany, zoology, comparative anatomy, which will form so many points of union for the professional and non-professional. Classes would naturally form in connection with it for nursing, sanitary visiting, for botanical and other excursions. There is no limit to its practical usefulness, if the spirit that animates it be earnest, truthful and intelligent.

We enter then upon our college work with a bright hope that stretches beyond the college walls, into the

homes and the cities around; into the higher civilization of the future as well as the present.

Our excellent Faculty, in entire accordance with these views, commence their patient and laborious work with a sustained enthusiasm which recognizes the difficulties in our way, but is resolved to conquer them. They share the large and liberal views of modern medicine. They belong to no "pathy," to no narrow and bigoted sect. They are members of that great catholic community of science which, from the "Father of Medicine" onwards, in every age and country, under the most diverse practical forms, has sought for truth through observation, experiment and calm deduction; has proved all things, and held fast to that which is good.

We invite the co-operation of all in this noble work. Especially do we invite the co-operation of women. United action is of immense importance in so arduous an undertaking as this. We will do everything in our power to conciliate diverse interests. Principle only must not be sacrificed. The College must be an honest and earnest attempt to give to women the very highest education that modern science will afford. It is on this ground that union must take place. This school is the only one that the profession has confidence in, the only one it has sanctioned. It has laid its broad foundation by fifteen years of patient work, and it will quickly rise into an edifice of noble proportions, if all friendly helpers will unite in its construction.