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### INTRODUCTORY TO THE ANNUAL COURSE OF INSTRUCTION.

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CHICAGO.

A custom which has the force of an unwritten law has ordained that a course of instruction in a medical school shall be opened by a more or less formal address to be given by some member of the Faculty or by some one who shall be designated by the Faculty. This year the choice has fallen upon me, and I therefore take my place on the program in obedience to the dictates of my colleagues. While my remarks will be specifically directed to the class, they ought to have quite as much interest for our guests who have honored us with their presence this evening, since whatever interests our profession concerns our friends of the laity to an equal degree.

It is now almost fifty years since a woman first forced her way into the medical profession, against the judgment of the great majority of the laity of both sexes, and in spite of the opposition of an overwhelming majority of medical men. One can not read the simple story of Elizabeth Blackwell, narrating her early experiences as medical student and physician without being profoundly impressed with the fact that she paid very dearly for her triumphs and her honors. Yet she *did triumph* and she *did* achieve undying honor; but more than that, she *did* open to her successors—to you, students of the present class—the doors to professional preferment so wide that they will never be closed again.

But, notwithstanding the fact that woman has been fifty years in medicine, her position is not yet quite assured; her claims to professional equality with men are not yet quite admitted; her place in the ranks of citizenship not yet quite settled; and, in fact, the woman physician is still by many people—otherwise sensible and self-poised—regarded as a kind of curiosity or freak of nature.

I therefore ask your attention for a short time, to a consideration of a few of these questions.

1. How shall the woman physician establish her claim to professional equality with men? I answer: First, by simply being a *physician*. If woman is to practice medicine at all, she must practice *all* medicine; she must be an "*all-round*" physician; she must be the family physician, subject to calls from all members of the family—the father, the mother and the children; she must treat all diseases in all sorts of persons, at all times and seasons, without regard to age, sex or social position. In this way—and in this way only—can she establish and maintain her equality

with man as a physician. The very moment the woman physician attempts to draw the line and treat only women, or only children, or only certain diseases, she abandons her claims to equality. She erects a barrier as high as the Chinese wall, which separates her from association with physicians on terms of equality. I have very many times heard the criticism from medical men that women were only "half" physicians, because they only practice in a limited way. All this must be changed if the woman physician aims at professional equality; she should be satisfied with nothing less. Just as soon as the woman physician voluntarily limits the sphere of her practice, and thus admits, in an undeniable manner, her inability to maintain her parity with men, just as soon will she begin to lag behind in the race for professional distinction. And then will begin the process of professional degeneration in women, which can only end in her ultimate professional extinction.

I answer, in the second place, that women must show their capability for original investigation in the various departments of medicine, and especially in laboratory work; must, in fact, demonstrate that they are capable of doing quite as good work as men, if they expect to reach the scientific altitude which men occupy. I have always maintained that women ought to do better research work than men, because they are endowed with capabilities for such work of the very highest order. More than that, I believe that there are women in the classes before me, who can hardly excuse themselves if they do not do original scientific work which shall redound to the honor of themselves and of their alma mater. I have more than once urged upon the ladies of our classes the necessity for a "forward movement" in this matter of patient, painstaking, toilsome, and especially thoughtful, original research work; in fact, upon one or two occasions I fear I have pressed my views with almost unwelcome emphasis. But I feel that my long service in the cause of medical education for women gives me the right to some positive convictions; and it is my positive conviction that we hardworking medical men have the right to expect more efficient help from medical women in the solution of the dark problems in pathology and bacteriology yet unsolved than we have yet had; and that this very graduating class before me ought to enrich the field of pathology by the addition of some facts now hidden in the dark portals of the future. It is by such work as I now indicate, ladies, that you shall gain admission to the profession as the peers and equals of Sternberg and Klein and Ziegler, and other princes who now occupy the field to which you should aspire. Some women have achieved such distinction; we need not go far from home to find at least one; but we should have more, and this Woman's Medical School hungers for daughters who will honor her by painstaking original research, with test-tube and microscope.

2. What position shall the woman physician occupy as a citizen, or in her relations to the body politic. To this I answer, without a particle of hesitation, that the woman physician should be a large-brained, large-hearted citizen, with a definite and positive work to do—a work which she may not delegate or neglect without incurring serious personal blame. And just here I wish to say—in parenthesis—that physicians of the sterner sex are too often recreant to their duties in this respect. When a hard and a close battle is to be fought against any current evil, the leaders are hardly ever physicians, and it is frequently hard work to get them to lift their voices or use their pens, or even go to the polls when a great moral or political question is at issue. I always have had a measure of contempt for Nélaton, who declined to serve in the French Assembly because it would damage his professional dignity; but who does not honor the great Virchow all the more because of his long and eminent services in the German House of Deputies as a statesman and lawmaker? Away with the nonsense that because a man is a physician he must therefore be a cloistered monk, unfit for political responsibilities or duties. But what relation shall the woman physician sustain to community, to society, to her neighbors? She can not vote—not yet. The time may come; *will* come, I believe, when women can vote on all political and economic questions. Personally, I do not care a farthing whether women vote or not. I certainly have no objection to their voting, and if the responsibility of deciding the question were left to me, I should confer the ballot upon women and, then, with profound interest, I should watch the result. But a woman physician should not sit and do nothing because she can not vote. There is plenty of work for her to do—plenty of opportunities for practical usefulness.

She can be a practical teacher of sanitary science in the community where she lives, and this is a sadly-needed work. Every physician ought to be an educator—a teacher—from whom should radiate knowledge which the laity need, which they will gladly receive and which they can not get elsewhere. But the woman physician has special facilities for teaching mothers and nurses the essentials of sanitary science as applied to the home, and therefore she has a special responsibility in that direction. How frequently it happens in practical life, that a few words spoken to a mother may save her child from sickness—perhaps death. How easily the woman physician, with her woman's tact and sympathy, can reach the ear of a nurse or mother, when a male physician who tried to do the same thing would only incur the charge of impertinence or meddlesomeness. And so in other matters, the woman physician can, if she will, exercise an educating, elevating, indeed an almost evangelizing influence in the homes of her *clientèle*. In matters of dress, diet, ventilation, exercise—in all things which relate to healthy homes, healthy mothers and healthy children—the woman skilled in medical science can exert an influence for good for which she must be held responsible in the final reckoning. And as her opportunities are greater than those of the male physician, so is her responsibility greater. A woman can enter where we can not; a woman can utter what we can not; a woman can do what we can not; therefore, she can exercise an influence and accomplish much that we can not.

Remember this, young ladies when you begin your lifework; and remember also that when you are

teaching the people the essentials of practical sanitary science, you are likewise preventing disease, which is an infinitely higher function than curing disease. We are no idle dreamers when we say that, when all the people become practical sanitarians disease will be robbed of half its terrors; and we must add in the same breath that the principles of sanitation must be taught to the people nine times out of ten by their medical advisers. And you—lady students whom I now address—must have a hand in this most beneficent work.

Again: Many of you will be so situated that you can take a practical and active interest in the common schools of your neighborhood. The chief glory of our Republic is the common school. Indeed, so long as the common school—the “district” school, the “little red schoolhouse”—is open to the children of our majestic country, liberty is safe, the people can never be enslaved, and government “by the people, for the people, and of the people” can never cease. But the citizen has duties toward the common school, and the woman physician is a citizen, and that means you. What can you do for the common schools? First, you can take a loving and living interest in it, and thus, by the force of your example, you can arouse interest in others. You can visit the common school, seek the acquaintance of the teacher, if the teacher is a woman, and help her in her work. Some of you have been teachers; you can help some youthful and inexperienced teacher over the rough places that beset her way and thus lend a helping hand to one who is in real perplexity. If you are a good politician, you can get elected as a member of the school board and thus enable yourself to speak and act with authority. The first and only political office for which I was ever a candidate, was Superintendent of Schools in a little New England village. As party lines were strictly drawn, and my party was in the minority, I was promptly defeated, and grievously disappointed, because, among other reasons, I was in rather acute need of the salary, which was \$25 a year. I hope that you will have better success. I hope you will become winning candidates for positions on school boards, with salaries as munificent as the one I missed, and opportunities for usefulness infinitely greater than the one to which I aspired in vain. There is no higher or more imperative duty devolving upon the citizen than the care of the common school, and there is no edifice so important as the schoolhouse, no spot of ground more sacred or more hallowed than the dry and verdureless patch, on which the children of the common school expend their pent-up vitality. You should make this priceless institution your care. You can lecture on hygiene; you can instruct the children, and through them their parents, concerning the laws of health; you can exercise a mighty influence in the improvement of the school buildings, in improving methods of teaching; and in many ways which I can not suggest, but which you can see, as the occasion arises, you can exercise the influence with which you are endowed by reason of your position and education for the improvement and elevation of the common school.

In that beautiful old story, “Locke Amsden or the School Master”—which I read so many times in my boyhood—there occurs an incident which illustrates the precept that I am trying to impress upon you. The “district school” in the little Vermont town, commenced its winter's work under an enthusi-

astic sophomore, and in a bran' new schoolhouse. The frigid weather came, the old "box stove" in the center of the schoolroom buzzed cheerfully as it got hotter and hotter day after day, the new windows fitted so tightly that they could not be opened, and the air became foul from accumulation of "carbonic dioxid"; but the sophomore communicated his own enthusiasm to the scholars, and for a time all things went swimmingly, and everybody was delighted. But by and by a strange languor began to creep over the school; the children sickened and dragged themselves about, listless and forlorn; one of them broke forth in his sleep and repeated the whole multiplication table without dropping a stitch, while another arose from his bed, solved a problem in arithmetic which he could not solve when awake, and went back to bed utterly unconscious of his exploit until he awakened next morning. Meantime the schoolmaster had several times broken forth in school hours, and recited Latin quotations which were all "Greek" to the scholars—and probably to the teacher—and passages from Shakespeare, with wild and frantic gestures, and various facial contortions, in truly sophomoric style; indeed, on one occasion, when an uncommon apathy had stolen over the scholars, he wildly shouted that his name was "Norval," and that his father fed his flocks "on yon Grampian hills," when every scholar knew his name was Jeremiah Jenkins, and that the "hills" were only the Green mountains; and hence it began to be darkly whispered that the schoolmaster had formed a league with the evil one, and was practising the "black art" and "bewitching" the children. So on a cold dreary winter's night, a school meeting was called in the schoolhouse for the purpose of "investigating" the schoolmaster, and riding the excited community of his baleful presence; but while the people were solemnly discussing the awful situation in the close and heated room, the village doctor came in, sniffed the tainted air, and calmly informed the anxious group of citizens that ventilation was the cure needed for the form of witchcraft which they were fighting, and after the carpenter had lowered the upper window sash, and thus allowed the evil air to escape, the people sheepishly went home in a happier frame of mind—and the bright young sophomore became, of course, an apostle of sanitary science. It is useless to add that he married the beautiful daughter of the richest man in town, that he went to Congress, and after a glorious and useful career, was gathered to his fathers. Whether the story is true, or not, its lessons are true so far as they relate to the schoolhouse and its occupants, and the timely service of the village doctor, who did not confine his practice merely to administering Dover's powder and boneset tea to the sick, but who stepped out into a larger sphere, and became the guardian of the health and lives of the children of the common school. Similar opportunities will come to you; not that you will encounter such superstitions as lead to belief in witchcraft and the "black art," but you will find plenty of schoolrooms, churches, halls, and even houses, where you can confer a real blessing by pointing out the necessity for fresh air and ventilation. May I hope that you will improve the opportunities as they arise, and thus prove yourselves good citizens, as well as good physicians.

I have pointed out a few of the duties which will legitimately devolve upon you, both in your relation to the profession and to society or the body politic.

Other duties or other opportunities for usefulness will arise as you accumulate experience and acquire influence. I fully believe that you will make the most of your opportunities, and as a necessary corollary, that you will make the most of your lives.

Let me in conclusion glance for a moment at the past, and then for a moment at the future. In an earlier part of this address I have said that about fifty years have elapsed since a woman made her entrance into the medical profession in this country. At first glance one is inclined to think these fifty years have been rather barren of results; that too few women have reached professional eminence and made themselves felt in the medical world. It is indeed true that the number of women who have distinguished themselves, either in practical or theoretic medicine; either in the hospital ward, the lecture-room or the laboratory, is small in comparison with the number who have graduated. Nay, I will go a step further, and say that the ratio of distinguished medical women is smaller than the ratio of distinguished medical men, in comparison with the number of graduates. Let us inquire briefly into the reason for this. I do not think we will have far to seek.

In the first place, twenty-five of these fifty years were spent in battering down the walls of opposition and prejudice on the part of both physicians and laity, which barred the way of the woman aspirant for medical honors. Twenty-five years ago the woman who announced herself as a medical student had to encounter opposition, ridicule and not infrequently absolute insult, as she made her weary way toward a medical degree, which brought her few privileges and less honors. She was not welcomed in the lecture-room, in the clinical amphitheater or the hospital ward. It was not uncommon for the clinical professors to indulge in remarks which would bring the blush of shame to the cheeks of the lady students, and arouse indignation on the part of male students who were gentlemen as well. It would be impossible for a woman to do her best work under such dispiriting circumstances, and it is no wonder that but few reached the goal of their ambition. But again, at the time of which I am speaking, after the female student graduated, she generally met with a very frigid welcome on the part of the profession, and hence she was alone in her glory. She lacked that inspiration which a community of effort engenders; it is impossible for one to permanently keep the fires of enthusiasm alive in complete isolation. Interchange of thought, interchange of counsel, comparison of efforts and comparison of results are necessary for the professional mind of woman as well as man; but these all-important aids were frequently denied to the woman physician.

Pardon me, ladies, if I mention one other fact which militates against the greatest success of women. It is the fact that a majority of young medical women do not settle down to months and even years of hard, and often unrequited, labor, as the indispensable prerequisite of success. There is no other road to success. You must work incessantly—pay or no pay. You must work in your libraries, in dispensary service, among the poor, anywhere, everywhere, night or day, so that you acquire experience, dexterity and knowledge. Young medical women often shrink from the trying ordeal that awaits every young physician who seeks success in a large city, where competition is hot, and every desirable position is fought for

by a hundred applicants. And especially is this true, if our young graduate happens to be in a condition of financial anemia, as is too often the case. Alonzo Clark—the greatest physician New York has ever produced—a man who stood as the acknowledged head of the profession in the field of pathology and practice, whose consultation practice became so enormous that at last he had to refuse as many calls as he answered, spent his early years in dire poverty, haunting the hospitals, clinics and morgues of New York like a spectre—frequently lacking the means to buy a dinner—but always at work—at work—at work. “Go thou and do likewise;” go hungry if you must; dress plainly if you must; endure neglect from society if you must; but study, observe, experiment, think, write—work hard and constantly, and success is sure to come. I know; I have been through the same hard school myself, and so have some of my colleagues now here present.

The position of woman in medicine is assured. She has come to stay. The past fifty years have been years of pioneer work; all honor to the noble women who have cleared away the obstacles and opened up a great highway for you. Their work was necessary; see to it that you appreciate it at its just value, and render unto them the honor that is their due.

Meantime a new woman is being slowly evolved. For twenty-one years I have watched the evolution of the medical woman myself. Fifty years more, or three generations from Elizabeth Blackwell, will be required to complete the work. The medical woman,—the woman with the scientific cast of mind,—the hard-working, patient, self-denying, plodding student is almost here. Her representative, her *avant courier*, is here—is in this very class, in the plural number—au earnest, a promise, a prophecy of the host yet to follow. I shall not see the fruition of the promise; but, as I look back on my career as a medical teacher, now drawing to its close, I glory chiefly in the fact that I have had something to do in the work of opening the doors of medical advancement to American women.