1849 Charge to the Graduates of Jefferson Medical College

Robert M. Huston, MD
PROFESSOR HUSTON'S

CHARGE TO THE GRADUATES OF

Jefferson Medical College of Philadelphia.

MARCH 28, 1849.

WITH A LIST OF THE GRADUATES.
CHARGE
TO
THE GRADUATES
OF
JEFFERSON MEDICAL COLLEGE OF PHILADELPHIA;
DELIVERED AT THE
PUBLIC COMMENCEMENT HELD MARCH 28, 1849.

BY
ROBERT M. HUSTON, M. D.

WITH
A LIST OF THE GRADUATES.

Published by the Graduating Class.

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1849.
CHARGE
TO
THE GRADUATES
OF
THE MEDICAL COLLEGE OF PHILADELPHIA

Presented Commencement, May Second, 1868,

ROBERT M. HESTON, M.D.

with

A PROOF OF THE CHARGE

Imprinted by the Graduates' Class

1870
JEFFERSON MEDICAL COLLEGE, March 22d, 1849.

Prof. R. M. Huston:—

Dear Sir,—At a meeting of the Graduating Class, the undersigned were appointed a Committee to request from you, for publication, a copy of the Valedictory Address which you intend delivering at the approaching Commencement.

In conveying the wishes of those they represent, the undersigned beg leave to unite their solicitations that you will add another to the many obligations which you have already conferred upon

Your obedient servants,

JOSEPH W. ELLIS, M. S.
JOHN T. PAGE, N. H.
JOHN N. MURDOCK, Mass.
A. K. SMITH, Conn.
D. G. PERRY, N. Y.
CALEB W. HORNER, N. J.
ALEXANDER SHARP, Jr., Pa.
I. L. ADKINS, Del.
ALEX HARDCASTLE, Md.
LEWELLYN HATCHETT, Va.
JOHN T. BELLAMY, N. C.
FURMAN E. WILSON, S. C.
FRANCIS M. PITTS, Ga.
JOHN W. EPPES, Florida.
EUGENE T. DENT, Ala.

W. R. RAGSDALE, Miss.
HENDERSON McFARLAND, La.
JOSEPH ADDISON SIMS, Ark.
JOHN C. JENNINGS, Mo.
EDWARD C. ELLET, Ill.
PATRICK H. JAMESON, Ia.
JAMES H. PAGE, Ohio.
JAMES H. TAYLOR, Ky.
ROBERT C. TULLOSS, Tenn.
JOS. TUNNICLIFF, M. D., Mich.
TIMOTHY S. CROWLY, Ireland.

GENTLEMEN:—

I have received your communication of to-day, asking, on behalf of the Graduating Class of Jefferson Medical College, for a copy of my Valedictory Address for publication. I am greatly flattered by this renewed evidence of the respect of the Class, and, as the address will be exclusively for them, I feel that they are entitled to possess it in any form they may think proper. In a day or two it shall be at your disposal.

I am, gentlemen, with the greatest respect,
Your obliged friend and preceptor,
R. M. HUSTON.

To Messrs. S. A. Campbell, President,
D. J. Johnson, Secretary,
Joseph W. Ellis, and others,
Committee, &c.
GENTLEMEN:

You are now arrived at the goal of your long cherished hopes. Your noviciate is passed, and you are legitimately installed as members of an honourable profession. The Trustees of Jefferson Medical College, through their President, have pronounced you, with all the authority of the laws of this Commonwealth, Doctors of Medicine "inter nos et ubique gentium."

This is an event of great importance to you; of deep interest to your friends and relatives, and—as the presence of this numerous audience attests—to the whole community.

The distinction you have received is not an empty one; but like every other worth acknowledging, it is accompanied with peculiar responsibilities. In conferring upon you the highest honours of the institution, the Trustees and Faculty have been influenced by the belief, not only that you are qualified, by education, for the performance of the duties of the medical profession, but that your time and talents will be faithfully devoted to its interests; to the relief of the sick and suffering; to the
extension and improvement of the healing art, and to the pro-
motion, in every way, of its honour and usefulness.

In accepting the title which has just been conferred upon
you, you have impliedly agreed to these conditions, and have pro-
mised, as effectually as by an oath, in the estimation of honour-
able minds, a full and unreserved acquiescence in their letter
and spirit.

Having entered into this covenant, I cannot, probably, better
occupy the few minutes assigned to this Address than by briefly
glancing at some of the obligations you have assumed, and the
proper mode of discharging them.

The duties which will devolve upon you are two-fold; such
as relate to those who may become your patients, and such as
you owe to the profession which has admitted you into its fra-
ternity.

The first great duty of a physician towards his patients is to
qualify himself, by the extent and accuracy of his knowledge,
for advising them in all matters concerning their health. It is
not sufficient that he shall counsel them according to his judg-
ment, unless that judgment is founded on a full knowledge of
the resources of the art. You have been instructed in the prin-
ciples of medicine, as now understood, and, as far as practi-
cable, in the application of those principles; yet much, very
much, remains for you to learn. Medicine, in common with
the other departments of human knowledge, is progressive,
and they who would keep pace with its rapid strides at the pre-
sent day, must be continually advancing. Indulge not then, for
a moment, the idea that you have arrived at the conclusion of your
studies, and that having obtained a Degree, you may, even for a time, rest from your labours. Such a feeling would be unworthy of you, and discreditable to the institution which has inscribed your names on the long list of her alumni, many of whom have attained merited distinction.

In future, your studies will be of a different character from the past. Your lessons of instruction, instead of coming from the lips of preceptors, must be derived in a considerable degree from personal observation of disease in its various phases, under all the modifying influences of climate, age, occupation, habit, constitutional predisposition, and the numerous other causes that influence human health.

In the course of your inquiries, you will have continual opportunities for comparing what you have read, and what you have learned from the lectures you have heard, with the phenomena of disease, and with the results of treatment, as disclosed to your own observation. By all means, commence at the threshold of your career to cultivate this habit of observation. Without it, no man ever acquires eminence in any department of knowledge. The life of a practising physician, to a well trained mind, is one of daily and unceasing observation. Each case, as it presents itself to his mental view, enlarges his sphere of knowledge, by elucidating some principle, correcting some misapprehension, or adding to the collection of facts from which sound conclusions have to be drawn.

Into this interesting, this boundless field of observation, you are now about to enter. Engage in the enterprise with the simplicity of mind becoming honest inquirers. Carry with you no
prejudices—no predilections; have no hobbies; but, in the true spirit of philosophy and philanthropy, exercise your powers of observation untrammelled by authority, and free from all other influences than the love of truth.

Do not understand me, however, as recommending you to discard all testimony but that of your own senses. In the first instance you will have to learn how to observe; and to acquire this great accomplishment, you will find it necessary to look into the labours of those who have preceded you, and to watch closely the course of others who are engaged with you in the same investigations. For, after all, even your experience, to be eminently useful, must be derived from a broader, deeper fount than your own unaided observation. What is the experience of one individual, compared with that of the thousands and tens of thousands who are as capable of observing as himself! The most superficial and least competent practitioners of our art are those who are continually boasting of what they have seen, but know little of what others have witnessed and recorded.

If, then, you would faithfully qualify yourselves for the important duties of your profession, observe carefully what falls under your notice in the daily round of your duties, and compare what you see with the published experience of others. To do this, supply yourselves with the writings of the best authors, and always with the latest editions; and that you may be aware of these, and maintain yourselves on a level with the science in its onward progress, it is indispensable for you to be in the receipt of one or more good medical journals. Without such assistance, it is not easy for the most enthusiastic to keep their
minds interested in the progress of medicine, or even to retain what they already possess, or to rightly appreciate what they see.

As regards your duty to patients in other respects, I can give you no better rule than the very comprehensive law of Christian conduct, to do unto them as you would that they should do unto you. An ethical rule of our profession proclaims, that from the moment you take charge of a case you are bound, by every consideration of honour and of self-respect, to treat it "with attention, steadiness and humanity." Should it not comport with your inclination or convenience to devote to it the necessary time and attention, it is your duty promptly to say so, that the services of some other adviser may be obtained. To act otherwise is to practise a deception of the most prejudicial kind; for in its consequences may be involved the life of one, who, by invoking your aid, has reposed in you the greatest confidence.

I need hardly say to you, that your conduct towards the sick should ever be characterized by humanity—"that sensibility of heart which makes us feel for the distresses of our fellow creatures, and which, of consequence, incites us in the most powerful manner to relieve them." The man who has not the milk of human kindness is unfit to be a physician. "Sympathy," it has been well said, "produces an anxious attention to a thousand little circumstances that may tend to relieve a patient; an attention which money can never purchase. It naturally engages the affection and confidence, which in many cases is of the utmost consequence to recovery." Especially would I exhort
you to the fullest exercise of this compassionate feeling towards
the poor. Deprived of many of the comfortable enjoyments of the
more fortunate,—when sickness overtakes them, they are truly
afflicted, and need all your sympathy and kind attention. With­
out the means to compensate a physician for his services, many,
it is to be feared, turn away and "are not healed." To all such
objects of compassion, extend freely the blessings of your divine
art. It is upon the younger members of the profession that this
task most appropriately falls. Not yet absorbed in the cares of
large practice, nor broken down by the fatigue consequent upon
a long career of active occupations, they have time and strength
for the discharge of this duty, which they who are in "the sear
and yellow leaf" no longer enjoy.

All admit how important it is to the success of a physician to
gain the confidence of his patient; but all are not so well agreed
as to his mode of arriving at this object. The unscrupulous
empiric proceeds as it were by storm, and forces his way into
the citadel by his bold pretensions and confident assurances of
success. The intelligent and conscientious physician, however,
has but one course to pursue on this as on other occasions.
Let his deportment be frank and gentlemanly, not only towards
the sick, but in all his intercourse with the community in which
he resides. Confidence under such circumstances will, in the
estimation of the ardent and impatient, be a plant of slow
growth, but it will be perennial; always fragrant, and there­
fore in every respect preferable to the fungous luxuriance that
springs up and withers in an hour.
Avoid deceiving your patients *professionally*. To pretend to great success in the treatment of disease, or of particular diseases, or to magnify the danger or importance of a case, savours of charlatanry; while to conceal danger where it really exists, beside the chance of being thought ignorant when the termination is different from your anticipations, is uncandid and unjust towards those who have the greatest interest in knowing the truth.

It is true, that sometimes great prudence and good sense are required in the exercise of this perfect candour, particularly when giving a gloomy prognosis. Neither the patient nor his friends should be unnecessarily alarmed by an untimely expression on the part of the physician of what may at last prove to have been only an exaggerated apprehension. In lingering maladies, and in nervous constitutions, the flame of hope should be kept brightly burning in the breast, so long as anything remains for its support. A bard of our own profession has beautifully sung:

> —"Whatever cheerful or serene
> Supports the mind, supports the body too:
> Hence, the most vital movement mortals feel
> Is hope; the balm and life blood of the soul;
> It pleases and it lasts."

That the community may feel assured of obtaining your services when they may be required, and that you may be able to discharge your duties satisfactorily to yourselves, confine your engagements within reasonable bounds, and in a great measure to objects more or less directly connected with your voca-
tion. Such is the restless spirit of our enterprizing country, that it is apt to infect the most sedate, and it is with difficulty the best poised minds can resist the seductive influences of extraneous pursuits, and especially of the various topics of discord and discussion, that are continually springing up among us to abstract attention from legitimate objects; and yet, for the successful cultivation and practice of our art, a steady devotion to it is indispensable. By this remark I do not wish to be understood, that physicians should confine themselves exclusively to their books and the chambers of the sick; but these should be with them primary objects.

Nor can such a course be to you a source of regret. Instead of the wild confusion and excitement of the busy world, you have, for your enjoyment and cultivation, the boundless fields of Science and of Literature; and the most ardent philanthropist will ever find enough to do in promoting the noble objects of Charity and Benevolence. Of the late eminent Dr. Benjamin Rush it has been said, and said truly, that, “He was the institutor and promoter of charities of every description.” In the language of a biographer, “he hazarded his life, without faltering, when pestilence in its most terrific form multiplied its dead around him. He professed religion; and he did everything in his power to promote its influence. He founded the first African Church, and he drafted the first constitution of a Bible Society, in the United States. In a word, he threw the whole weight of his character, and often the whole effect of his personal exertions, into schemes and enterprises, for the promotion of humanity, of
charity, of learning, and of religion. The blessings of thousands came upon his head while he lived, and ascended with him to his great reward when he died: while the regrets and lamentations of other thousands attended his mortal part to the grave."

Would you seek for a brighter example or for higher enjoyments than are presented in this sketch? Faithful as is the picture to the life of the eminent original, it would serve for the portrait of many an excellent physician.

Of the duties you owe to the profession, I shall say but a few words. In all your intercourse with your brethren, remember that they are your peers, and that to disparage them is to degrade yourselves. "To advance professional improvement, a friendly and unreserved intercourse should subsist between gentlemen of the faculty, with a free communication of whatever is extraordinary or interesting in the course of their practice." When this is the case, mutual benefits beget personal friendship and mean jealousies and low competition can seldom arise.

Nothing conduces so much to the preservation of harmony and good feeling among physicians as social and professional communion. I need offer to you no better proof of this than the condition of the profession in this city, where its members meet daily and hourly together in attendance upon the sick, in private practice, and in the public institutions. Here, feuds rarely occur; and they, whose conduct is at variance with this
general harmony, never long retain the respect of their brethren or the people.

It is especially the duty, as it is the interest, of young physicians to cultivate agreeable relations with their professional neighbours, and particularly with their seniors. In severe cases, the patients of young practitioners will often require a consultation with an older head. The request cannot, and ought not, to be refused, except for very special reasons; and I need not say how embarrassing such occasions must be to the young practitioner who has neglected to conciliate the respect of his elder brethren. It is well, too, for those who would decline to accede to such a demand to remember the old proverb, that “no man is so foolish, but he may give good counsel at a time; no man so wise, but he may err, if he take no counsel but his own.” It will ever be found, indeed, that they, who are most careful to preserve a good understanding with their fellows, best promote their own interests, the honor of the profession, and the welfare of their patients. To this end nothing more is necessary than a liberal, manly, and confiding course of conduct towards competitors, which, whilst it gains friends, vanquishes opponents; and, what is equally important, secures self-respect.

But, gentlemen, you owe something more than this to our common profession, to science and to humanity. Returning, qualified as you are, to the various sections of this vast country, you may accomplish much by investigating the causes of endemic diseases; watching and recording the rise, progress,
and phenomena of epidemics; and you may enrich our Materia Medica with valuable additions drawn from the recesses of our wildernesses and prairies. Keep these objects steadily in view. Be industrious; persevering; liberal in feeling; upright in all your actions;—and success is certain. Every one may not be distinguished for discoveries or brilliant achievements; but it is in the power of all to become respectable physicians and honourable men. Less than this will not be creditable to you, or to your Alma Mater, and more will not be required to constitute you the pride and ornaments of society.

My young friends! With these parting observations—dictated by sincere and abiding friendship—my province, as your instructor, terminates; and it only remains for me, in the name of the Trustees and Faculty, to express to you our warmest wishes for your future happiness and prosperity, and to affectionately bid you—Farewell!
GRADUATES
OF
JEFFERSON MEDICAL COLLEGE OF PHILADELPHIA,
MARCH, 1849.

At a Public Commencement held on the 28th of March, 1849, the degree of Doctor of Medicine was conferred on the following gentlemen by the Rev. C. C. Cuyler, D. D., President of the Institution; after which a charge to the Graduates was delivered by Professor Huston.

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Hemorrhage by Exhalation.
Dysentery.
Acute Pneumonia.
Science of Medicine.

Abortion.
Cerebral Apoplexy.
Conception.
Pericarditis.
Rubeola.
Piper Angustifolium.
Fetal Circulation.
Acute Gastritis.
Vis Medicatrix Naturae.
Remittent Fever.
Cynanche Trachealis.
Diagnosis.
Cataract.
Hysteria.
Typhoid Fever.
Diagnosis.
Asiatic Cholera.

Menstruation.

Total, 188.

R. M. HUSTON, M. D., Dean.

March 31, 1849.