INTRODUCTORY LECTURE,

TO THE

COURSE OF INSTRUCTION

IN THE

FEMALE MEDICAL COLLEGE

OF PENNSYLVANIA,

FOR THE SESSION 1855–6,

BY ANN PRESTON, M. D.

PROFESSOR OF PHYSIOLOGY.

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1855.

ANN P. E. SCROOGE, M. D.

Esteemed Friend: The audience before whom you delivered your Introductory Lecture at the Female Medical College of Pennsylvania, at the opening of the present session, adopted a resolution unanimously, requesting a copy of your Lecture for publication.

As a Committee on their behalf, we take pleasure in making known to you their request, and are,

Very respectfully,

[Signature]


Esteemed Friends: Your note of the 10th inst., requesting a copy of my Introductory Lecture has just been received.

The Lecture was prepared for those only to whom it was addressed, without the least expectation of its publication; but in compliance with the wish of the audience, as expressed through you, I cheerfully place it at your disposal.

Yours, truly,

[Signature]
LADIES OF THE CLASS:

This is the sixth time that women have come to this institution to prosecute the study of medicine.

It is my privilege to welcome you here, to-day, on behalf of the Faculty, and in the name of "the good cause."

Often, in the progress of the world, there have come periods when old usages have been discarded; when society, in its upward tread upon the ascending steps of civilization, has perceived that certain time-honored opinions and customs were false and unnatural.

Wise men, through all the centuries, had maintained that the earth was the fixed centre around which circled the starry hosts of heaven,—they had the testimony of their own eyes, and seeing is believing, and when Galileo, looking from a higher point of vision, beheld the earth in motion, his announcement was answered by prison and torture!

The sage poet, not very long since, gravely enunciated the fixed, long-sanctioned fact, that

"Just experience shows in every soil,
That those who think should govern those who toil!"

but while the world was complacently humming over the couplet, hard-handed, clear-headed men went to the ballot box, and through continents ran the electric words—"all men are created equal," and "governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed."
Even when Harvey, but little more than two hundred years ago, proclaimed the circulation of the blood, his cotemporaries, at first, received with scorn this "new-fashioned doctrine;" for was this man wiser than Hippocrates and Galen, and all the old Fathers of medicine? But the blood coursed on through its myriad channels nevertheless!

Notwithstanding that conservatism of our human nature which shrinks from what seems to be innovation, and which "makes us rather bear those ills we have than fly" from old customs to the new and untried, the world stands not still—the irresistible tendency is onwards!

In few things, perhaps, have the transitions of society been more interesting than in regard to the relation of women to the healing art.

In the earlier and simpler ages, when medicine, as a profession, was embraced by only a few, and probably the mass of the people were born, and sickened, and died, without aid from educated physicians, events in reference to these things took their natural course, uninfluenced by adverse public sentiment or professional jealousy. Then domestic remedies were administered by those whose insight and natural fitness best adapted them to the office, and from the scattered records that have come down to us upon the page of history, it appears that women were, quite commonly, the physicians of the household. Walter Scott, who will hardly be suspected of doing any great violence to the probabilities of history, represents the noble and lovely Rebecca, as surgeon as well as physician to the perishing soldier. "She performed her task," says the writer, "with a dignified simplicity and modesty, which might, even in more civilized times, have served to redeem it from whatever might seem repugnant to female delicacy. The idea of so young and beautiful a person engaged in attendance on a sick bed, or in dressing the wound of one of a different sex, was melted away, and lost in that of a beneficent being contributing her effectual aid to relieve pain and to avert the stroke of death."

The practice of employing men in the obstetric department appears to belong to modern times. In Europe, two hundred years ago, it seems to have been a rare occurrence. The Midwives are frequently alluded to in the Bible, as an important and recognized class of women; of some of these it is said, the midwives feared God and he made them houses!

In later times, as the barbarous ages with their virtues and vices were receding—in the morning twilight of the coming civilization, it seemed to be felt, more generally, that every community required the services of educated physicians. The doors of colleges and places of learning then were but rarely entered by our sex; and although the names of a few distinguished
medical women gleam brightly from out the past, and the writings of some of these are now cited as high authority in the schools; yet it was inevitable that, along with the education and learning, the practice of medicine should fall, principally, into the hands of men.

But the world moved,—the light grew broader, and there came another demand! Science was necessary, but "instinct" too was "a great matter." The idea took possession of many noble minds, that the profession was not complete, nor could it be made so, without the addition of another element. The quick perceptions, the clear intuitions, the refined sensibilities of woman were also needed. Her peculiar opportunities for observing and understanding certain classes of cases were known, and good men and women asked why should not education combine with natural endowments to qualify woman for acting as physician?

A Professor in one of the most popular medical schools of this city and country, speaking of the difficulty of rendering early and effectual assistance in certain classes of cases, says, "all these evils of medical practice spring, in the main, not from any want of competency in medicines and medical men, but from the delicacy of the relations existing between the sexes; and also," he adds, "for want of information among the population in general, as to the import meaning, and tendency of disorders manifested by certain trains of symptoms."

In virtue of the great law of nature which adapts the relations of demand and supply, there were found women prepared to respond to the want of the times, and amid many difficulties to prosecute the study of medicine.

Only one woman in this country, to our knowledge, had been able to obtain admission at a regular medical school, and graduate as a physician, when this institution was founded. Since then several colleges have admitted lady students, and the number of women engaging in the study has been rapidly increasing.

It is no cause of wonder that opposition should be arrayed against these early efforts.

Among inferior minds in the profession, the jealousy of trade was excited when privileges and profits they had deemed securely their own, were open to the competition of another, and long excluded moiety of society.

Nor need we marvel that many among that nobler class of physicians who loved their profession, and desired to see the standard of its learning and attainments elevated, should look with distrust upon a movement which they had imagined might have a tendency to lower these, and clothe those with responsibilities who were not adequate to meet them!
We do not deny the fact, ladies, that, while this opposition exists, women cannot possess the advantages in some directions, which are accessible to their brothers. A few public Hospitals, both in this country and in Europe, have been opened at the solicitations of medical women, but they are generous exceptions to a general rule. Here, in this city, the doors of its noble charities have been closed, except in the case of two individuals, when women have asked to enter them for the purpose of qualifying themselves to practise, more intelligently, the art of healing. It will not long be thus; our day will come; we will work in faith, and bide our time!

Nor are we disposed to deny, that some women may, and do engage in this department, whose abilities and acquirements do not pre-eminently qualify them to adorn it. Such things must needs be in all the directions of human activity, and surely has its full share of parallel examples in that medical fraternity in which women are not included!

But I congratulate you and myself that of those who have embarked in this cause, a considerable portion belong to that class of whom society and womanhood shall yet be proud,—women earnest and true, glowing with high aspirations, who are prompted by an internal force to enter into this work as a means of self-development, and a glorious field of usefulness and independence,—women who recognize that "the skill of the physician shall lift up his head," and who ask no excuse for incompetence upon the ground of their sex. I congratulate you and myself that so many of you have entered upon the study of medicine with that quiet determination and patience which must insure success; that you perceive something of the breadth amid range of the subject, and have determined to give time to it, in the conviction that years of study are the needful preliminary to an intelligent and discriminating practice.

A certain class of pretentious students, and others, who have no adequate conception of the nobility and grand scope of medical inquiry, may sneer at women as practitioners, and hint about the impropriety or indecency of their engaging in the study of the structure and functions of the human body; but to these we have nothing whatever to reply. You and I have decided for ourselves that in pursuing the study of medicine, we are within our own appropriate and legitimate sphere; and society, in its advancing civilization is sanctioning our opinions.

You and I feel that "our true sphere is that circle which we are able to fill;" that it was fixed by God in the capabilities and adaptations of our nature; and we can well afford to look with quiet pity upon those self-elected arbitors, who, gratuitously, have taken upon themselves the labor of marking out for us its boundaries, and of drawing around them the cobweb chains of their own presumption.
Nor would you feel it to be womanly to meet the arguments of those perverted minds who could look upon the human body, with its marvellous beauty of structure and office, all instinct with divinity, repeating in “each minute and unseen part” the primal benediction “it is good,”—attuned even in its inmost motions to that harmonious and eternal rhythm which is echoed by circling star and pulsing sea, and talk of indelicacy!

So, dismissing the opposition of the coarse and ignorant as something with which we have nothing to do, undisturbed, we will address ourselves to the labors and studies before us. Women must subdue opposition by showing the world that it is unjust. No champion can vindicate their claims if they do not establish them for themselves. They must earn a reputation before they can rightly enjoy its advantages; and their position, both social and professional, will depend, at last, upon what they themselves are. There is a moral gravitation, a sure law, in virtue of which men and women sooner or later find their true level, their natural place. Prejudice is the mist that vanishes away: integrity and ability sue not for respect, but they receive it nevertheless.

“Ever the night comes uppermost,
And ever is justice done,”

in the end; and well may we rely trustingly upon the serene forces of the universe, feeling that nature and the divine fitness of things are on our side—that “our allies are exultations, agonies, and man’s unconquerable mind,” and God’s eternal providence.

I congratulate you, ladies, also, upon the interesting field of study before you. While so many women finish their superficial education at the boarding school, and live afterwards without satisfying employment and without mental development, your education, I trust, is to be the invigorating and blessed labor of a lifetime. For the wise performance of the duties of the physician, it is necessary ever to retain the child’s docility and simplicity. Prejudices and pre-formed theories must be laid aside; humility and modesty belong to those who enter the temple of nature and penetrate its sacred mysteries, so as to add knowledge to knowledge, and attainment to attainment.

You will pursue the study of Chemistry. You will witness the curious attractions and repulsions, the affinities and antipathies of insensate matter; and your hearts, I know, will thrill with admiration to behold, how, amid all changes of form and varieties of motion, there are stable forces presiding, ever bringing out definite and sure results; how, while matter itself is unstable, the invisible law that governs its changes is fixed as the pillars of the universe.
You will study the anatomy of the human body with its wonderful revelations of design and adaptation! Physiology that explains its functions and the conditions under which they are normally performed; Pathology which relates to the perversion of structure and function caused by disease; the Principles and Practice of Medicine, and the rules of Surgery, which, when correct, are deduced from physiological and anatomical facts;—all mutually linked together, and every one throwing light upon the others, are to be the subjects of your investigations.

You will study the nature of healing and preserving agencies in the Materia Medica, and in Hygienic rules. Although few of the present day can claim, like the royal botanists of old, to understand all plants, “from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows upon the wall,” yet extensive acquaintance with these is as indispensible to the accomplished physician, as it is interesting to the lover of nature.

You will find these subjects points of crystallization, around which, all the knowledge that has been gained in other departments of learning and observation will naturally arrange itself; and the higher the general intelligence and mental tone of the student, the more beautiful and interesting will become these special studies!

Ladies, we who believe that it is fitting for qualified women to share with men in the benign task of healing the sick and comforting the sorrowing, hope much from you. We hope for that nice appreciation of the influence of habits and daily surroundings upon the constitution, which is so much wanting in medical practice; we hope for those enlightened views of the operations of nature, which are the only antidote to a destructive empiricism!

The frightful amount of ill health in this country, especially among our women, is arousing attention and calling for some change in our regulations. Physicians abound, but health comes not! The people, in their ignorance and desperation, have caught at every absurd new theory, rushing blindly from one extreme of medication to its opposite, like trees tossed to and fro in a gale. Witness the flippant advertisements of cure-all medicines in the newspapers: see the magic Panaceas paraded everywhere,—in city and country,—on board fence, and lamp-post, on bridge and wayside wall.

Physicians may do much to remedy these popular evils. But unfortunately, too frequently, they have considered it their especial business to give medicine more plentifully than sound advice; it has paid better, and so their attention has been too much directed to one aspect of their calling;—this ought they to have done and not to leave the other undone.
But I am happy to say, that the most influential and enlightened minds in the profession are now more and more directing their attention to the importance of hygienic regulations: they feel that their sublime office is that of priests in the temple of Nature,—interpreters of her secret oracles. In the estimation of these, pure air, proper diet, well regulated exercise, the right government of passions and emotions, come first in the catalogue of healing and preserving agencies, and "medicines," which we are told "the Lord hath created out of the earth," are always subsidiaries. It has been well said, that "by diet and regimen, you may turn a man inside out;" it takes time; but the slow processes are the sure—the invisible things are the potential.

The healing power of nature—the "Vis Medicatrix Naturee" of which the old writers so often speak, is that on which we must still rely, and the only purpose of medicine, it must ever be remembered, is to remove obstructions from the pathway of Nature.

This study of the conditions of health involved in hygienic rules is as broad as it is important: it involves the chemistry of that living laboratory,—the human body, as well as of many of the substances surrounding it;—it is connected with Physiology in all its details, both the known, and alas! the unknown: the imponderable "physical forces"—Light, Heat, Electricity, Magnetism, &c., with their mutual correlation, here come into important play; the mysteries of mind as well as the forces of matter, bear upon the subject,—its range is co-extensive with human welfare, wide as the regions of human thought.

Ladies, I am very jealous for the honor of my sex in its connection with the study of medicine. I would have it, as Cesar desired to have that of his wife, clear and even from the taint of suspicion; and you will permit me to express myself freely, even though "I can only speak right on, and tell you that which ye yourselves do know." Every woman who enters this department of life will be the more narrowly watched and severely criticised, because she is a woman. If she bear not herself wisely and well, many will suffer for her sake. She needs prudence, which the sagacious Greeks numbered among the cardinal virtues; she needs to ponder that text which says: be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

Far be it from me to desire to see her, more than any other woman, guard and stiffen, and formalize herself until all freedom and naturalness are gone; but true self-discipline is only an added grace.
There has been an idea in many minds, that something of the refined beauty—the delicate bloom of the spirit, must be brushed away, before a woman can be ready for the duties of the physician.

If I believed this were so, I should feel in my inmost soul, that we had made a mistake;—that indeed, medicine was outside of our appropriate sphere.

In the enthusiasm with which you hail that watchword—reform, and in your disgust for that mawkish affectation of sentiment which, shrieking at a shadow, and ever ready to "die of a rose in aromatic pain," so often usurps and profanes the sacred name of delicacy, let me remind you of the importance, on the other hand, of avoiding any unnecessary violation of what are considered the proprieties of life. It is a nice matter to steer clear of Scylla on the one side, without being wrecked on Charybdis upon the other.

We shrink, instinctively, from what is coarse, and the woman who fain would raise the moral tone of the profession, and teach reverence and purity to the grossness of the world, must ever wear about her the spotless robe of delicacy as her own protecting investment! Need I say, what you feel, that gentleness of manner, and the adornment of a quiet spirit, are as important to the physician as to the woman? Need I add, that these are naturally related to that noble firmness and majestic patience, which are the highest endowments of the human being?

The female physician, as well as her brother, requires that sound common sense, which sees things in their just and natural relations, and upon all sides! She needs habits of careful observation, and that ability to study, compare, and weigh, which will prevent her from hastily jumping to her conclusions.

In addition to order and neatness, to taste and tact, she requires that despatch and practical business ability, which will enable her to accomplish her purposes, without giving time for a patient to be lost while fastidiously, before her glass, she is tying her bonnet or watching the effect of a stray curl.

Shall I echo your own thoughts further, by saying that she needs a cheerful, noble spirit, far above all petty jealousies and meannesses, and that she must possess that grand test of character, reliability?

In short, all that makes

"A perfect woman nobly planned
To warn, to comfort and command"

is desirable in her who is to be the repository of human sorrows, and the bearer of health and hope to the bed of languishing.
She will often be called to look in upon the dark places of life, to witness anguish of mind as well as pain of body; and something of the tone of her own spirit,—the fragrance of her virtues, the repose of her trust, will be imparted to those to whom she ministers.

A genuine love of humanity, prompting its possessor to forget self in interest for the welfare of others, a profound reverence for truth and right, and a serene and full reliance on their Eternal Centre, are as important to the physician as to any other human being; and without these, neither learning nor accomplishments can either produce happiness or ensure the highest success. Somehow it happens, that the same amount of intellectual ability becomes doubly available when it is associated with moral power, and directed by it. It is only when we are striving to realize our highest idea of excellence, that, balanced upon "the Rock of Ages," the whole being can put forth its fullest powers.

Ladies, in welcoming you here to-day, let me extend to you the warm hand of sisterly sympathy. I know the heart of a woman, and especially that of one entering upon a new and untried course, like that before you.

I, too, have felt the hopes, and the aspirations after a fuller and more satisfying life, which have struggled and arisen in the souls of some of you.

I know your fears and misgivings. There is much to be mastered; you know not whether success or failure is before you! But you have entered upon a course right in itself, and sanctioned by your own hearts, and there is nothing to dread.

We have to live but one day only at a time, to learn things one by one, and difficulties vanish, and the pathway "opens as we go along."

We, of the Faculty, desire to do all within our power to facilitate your studies and promote your welfare, and we rely confidently upon your kindness and generous co-operation to make joyful our labors. With our intercourse with some of you there are linked pleasant and cherished memories, as well as glad hopes, and to one and all we extend the fraternal welcome.

Whether you study to qualify yourselves to engage in the Christ-like office of healing, or merely to enlarge your sphere of knowledge and thought, it is a source of congratulation to know that you will be brought into closer communion with Nature; that you will find new and glorious illustrations of the unity of plan which pervades all her diversities of form, and of the simplicity of the mode of operation by which the wondrous complications and varieties of structure are evolved; that you will have a fuller insight into the Temple of Beauty, and catch clearer tones of the Eternal Melody!
Though clouds may sometimes be over you, yet, through their rifts, I trust you may look up into the quiet deeps of heaven, and realize in your happy experience that to you has been given not only "a south land," but "also springs of water!"
FACULTY.

ELLWOOD HARVEY, M. D.,
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EDWIN FUSSELL, M. D.,
Professor of Anatomy.

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Demonstrator of Anatomy.

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FEMALE MEDICAL COLLEGE OF PENNSYLVANIA,
No. 229 Arch Street, Philadelphia.

SESSION 1856-7.

The Seventh Annual Session of this Institution will commence on Wednesday, October 2, 1856, and continue twenty weeks.

THE FEES ARE AS FOLLOWS:

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No charge is made for the Lectures on Medical Jurisprudence.

For the encouragement of Ladies whose means will not allow of the usual expenditure, a limited number of Students will be admitted, on the payment of Twenty Dollars per Session, exclusive of the Matriculation and Graduation Fees. Such arrangements will be strictly confidential, and no distinction in point of courtesy and attention will be made between the beneficiary and other students.

Any person who does not incline to become a physician, yet desires instruction in some of the branches taught in a Medical College, as a part of a liberal education, may attend the Lectures of any one or more of the Professors without being at the expense of a full Course on all the branches.