

JAMA Revisited

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To the Young Doctors of 1895

“Practice and experience are of the greatest moment in arts; and there is no kind of occupation in which men may not learn by their abortive attempts.”—COLUMELLA.

The schools have turned out this year an unusually large number of physicians. Where they will all go? what will they all do? and how many will succeed in reaching a high professional level? are questions that can only be answered by speculation. The medical statistician assures us, with the blunt rudeness of a mathematical slugger, that such a percentage die during the first year, that so many grow weary, and engage in other pursuits within a twelvemonth, or within two years at most, and the remainder, say 75 per cent. remain in the profession to work, and worry, and win success or failure as best they may.

To this last class we wish to indite a few words, although at a venture we presume they must have had a vast deal of advice in the semestre just closed.

We urge the young doctor to lose no time in joining the local medical society where he casts his lot. The men composing it may not be exactly to his mind, they may to outward view lack even some of the refinements of society, they may not care for them, they may have fallen distinctly below the level of the average knowledge of the times. But we advise the young doctor to pay attention and watch these wise old practitioners, for experience is a wonderful teacher, and many times he may learn very much from those he now thinks so far behind in pathology and laboratory lore.

Sometimes you may feel hurt at being treated like a raw recruit by these veterans, but you must remember that like

all veterans they will be with you when you win your spurs, in society debate, or at the bedside, and in proportion as you demonstrate your ability, their doubt of you will disappear. One thought will, we think, serve to give you a little closer relation with the old fellows, and that is that each one says to himself when he meets you, at the society or elsewhere: “Ah, if I were only young again like that young man! With the knowledge of the world, of men, of material things, that I have acquired, and his modern laboratory technique, what could I not accomplish in the average life time that is before him.”

Be guided, then, by the voice of experience in all things not controverted by recent facts, and try yourself to become that ideal being the old doctor would be, had he only your growth and recent knowledge to add to his tact and *savoir faire*. Watch him closely! he knows men as open books; he knows how to manage and control them; he knows when to smile and when to be grave. He has learned his community; he knows what he can do without offense, and how best to acquire its good will. He knows best how to set forth the knowledge he has to its best advantage. Take all you can of his method, it is the result of experience, and pay him that deference when you meet him, that you yourself would like to receive from the classman of 1945 freshly filled with the new doctrines of which you will have only heard through your journal.

EURIPIDES lamented, “Alas! why is it not permitted to mortals twice to be young, and thence return once more to old age? For in our domestic affairs if aught be ill conducted, we put it right by after thought, but we have not this power over life. If we could be twice young, twice old, when we made a mistake, having twofold life, we could correct it.”...

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