

Oration from 1891

Oration Title:

A Quarter Section

Orator:

Frederick A. Wilmarth, M.D.

Abstract of Oration:

[Dr. Wilmarth spoke for his father Jerome, who died while orator-elect.]

Dr. Wilmarth has chosen to speak, twenty-five years after his medical school graduation, of the lessons he has learned and the experiences he has had as a physician. The first lesson is professional courtesy, best embodied by the golden rule. After establishing this maxim, Wilmarth discusses the doctor's pervasive challenge to change a patient's long and firmly-held traditions, even though the change will be beneficial to the patient's health. The difficulty of convincing patients to utilize water treatment to aid recovery illustrates this physicians' challenge. He uses this example to begin his case for supporting water treatment as strongly as he does. He describes how beneficial cold water may be in soothing scarlet fever "eruptions." He admonishes his colleagues for not using so simple and abundant a resource as water more often in their practices. Dr. Wilmarth bemoans the quacks who "lower the good morals of both profession and public."

The doctor then stresses the importance of careful and detailed observation in the practice of sound medicine. Such observation is exercised with the observer using all five of his physical senses. But "these [senses] are but poor guides, without KEEN PERCEPTION, LOGICAL REASONING, and GOOD MEMORY" and "COMMON SENSE." He closes with a short evaluation of the current medical institution as embodied in the microcosm of the Worcester District Medical Society. Wilmarth seems proud of the progress he has witnessed in the twenty-five years he has been a doctor. He mentions the growing ranks of female doctors. He commends his colleagues for being open to the rapid progress of the day and for taking a scientific approach to their practice, "looking for the fundamental laws underlying the different modes of treatment, separating truth from error, modest worth from blazing charlatanism, and quietly, but perseveringly, progressing on sound principles toward the acme of professional work."