

Oration from 1910

Oration Title:

The Ideal Family Physician

Orator:

Charles A. Church, M.D.

Abstract of Oration:

Dr. Church states that there are six "moral senses" a man must possess to be a good doctor.

The first is a "sense of duty towards the patient." This feeling of obligation is borne of compassion for mankind. Similar is a doctor's feeling of responsibility for his patients which requires him to put his patient first, even if in doing so he swallows his pride and requests help from a colleague. Kindness is one of the most important facets of a physician. The medical profession requires kindness more than any other profession. Next is manual skill: most important for a surgeon, but still necessary in general practice. The physician's personality is crucial to his professional success for an affable, cultured, gentlemanly doctor will have more clout than one who does not have such a favorable personality. A good doctor must also have completed "thorough academic training" to learn what he needs to know, but also to make connections with fellow educated colleagues in order to "win success in a profession where there is sharp competition." A qualified physician should be multi-lingual, especially in French and German, so as to easily converse with his increasingly more ethnic patients, and should remain abreast of current events.

Church refutes popular claims that family medicine is a fast-dying field and will soon be obsolete. Without the family doctor to make an initial diagnosis and, if warranted, call in the appropriate specialist for treatment, many more lives would be lost than are currently. He applauds the physician's selflessness in preventatively treating his patients for diseases, even though it means cutting off a significant source of his income. However noble the practice, patients must pay their doctor for these prophylactic services, Church says. Such a system benefits both physician and patient, as the patient will be healthy and able to work rather than sick in bed.

Dr. Church points out that a significant portion of the family physician's patients are young children, and he seeks to describe the various temperaments of children and instructs his colleagues on the best way to approach and handle each type of child.

Next, he instructs his colleagues on their deportment around their patients. They must be friendly but not allow too much familiarity between themselves and their patients for, as he

reminds his audience, "familiarity breeds contempt." Also, they should never criticize their colleagues in front of patients. He warns that doctors should not contract out their services to specific groups because it lowers them as professionals in the eyes of those who receive his services. Doctors also have a responsibility "not only to cure the sick, but to give advice as to the prevention of disease, to warn the younger members of the family against the great social evil, and, if in his power, to prevent marriage that can result in nothing but unhappiness and perhaps death."

Church's oration calls medicine a noble calling. He urges his fellow physicians to live up to this status by molding their characteristics toward excellence.