

Oration from 1911

Oration Title:

Versatility in the Medical Profession

Orator:

John T. Duggan, M.D.

Abstract of Oration:

Dr. Duggan's "versatility" refers to a physician having skills, talents, and interests outside of the realm of medicine.

In flowery diction he uses Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes as an epitome of such versatility. Holmes' work was ranked alongside well-respected literature. "He could fill the position of lecturer in anatomy and physiology at Dartmouth, ... and, on the other hand, he could recite a poem of his own composition before a gathering of the brightest intellects and highly cultured minds of any community." He also writes of the American Dr. Page, who is credited with discovering the principle on which the telephone is based and for designing an efficient electro-magnetic engine. The next subject is the German, Rudolph Virchow, a shining example of versatility, who not only founded the field of cellular pathology, but served in many governmental positions and "put aside his microscope and assume[d] a new role as a champion of the peoples' rights in matters pertaining to their physical, social, and political welfare." The German surgeon Billroth is also mentioned for his deep appreciation for and skill in music. Duggan sees fit to include the Scottish physicians Abercrombie and Arbuthnot, both well-respected for their literary works. He also talks about the Arabic physician Avicenna's work in mineralogy, producing the first classification of minerals, and, in addition most significantly, his development of arithmetic, especially decimals. St. Luke's work with St. Paul and writings about religious subjects made him a versatile physician as well.

Duggan points out that many of his subjects had an active and worthy political life. He raises the question of whether it is advisable for a doctor to enter the political arena, whether such a move will be resented by those who deal solely in politics, and whether it will compromise his medical career. He draws the conclusion that as long as politics do not overshadow or replace medicine in a man's life, his participation in them can only produce good, especially, of course, in public health matters.

In the next section, Dr. Duggan talks about Drs. Heywood, Workman, Bemis, and Kelly who served in the upper echelons of Worcester City Government from its incorporation as a city. Other versatile physicians of Worcester, such as Dr. John Green, are noted.

Dr. Duggan is clearly in favor of physicians serving in public office. They are well-educated, intellectual men and their compassion, required by their profession, is an asset not common to all public officials. He admires the tireless and selfless service of his predecessors.