

Address Given by Lenore Robbins Drew to Medical Students (after 1950)

Below you will find a speech given by Dr. Drew's wife to a group of medical students, after his death. After reading the speech, begin developing your précis.

One fall day on a college campus in New England a young football star was wheeled into the infirmary with a football injury to his knee. The wound grew worse and finally became badly infected. The treatment took a long time and when the patient grew better and could get into a wheelchair, doctors permitted him to wheel himself all about the hospital. So fascinated did this player become with hospital procedure that his dream of becoming an engineer faded and in the place came the desire to become a physician.

The patient's name was Charles Drew, and according to his own account in that hospital wheelchair was born his determination to become a doctor.

However, it appears to me that in the field of teaching medicine my late husband found his greatest fulfillment. The question was often asked in his lifetime, "Why did a man with this man's background of formal training and rich experience choose to devote himself to teaching?" The financial advantages alone which open to a well prepared surgeon are very great and many patients came to him from great distances - even from places outside the United States for surgery. - It would have been easy to satisfy his love of his work and to make a handsome income beside. I submit that the rewards of teaching young men to take their places as competent physicians and surgeons so attracted him that there was no choice.

He became a teacher on a relatively small salary and worked under this management not only gladly but with tremendous enthusiasm.

His dedication to his task was complete. The teaching program at Howard University College of Medicine in the department of surgery exists as it does largely as a result of his prodigious efforts.

His major thesis which he developed in the ten year period from 1940 to 1950 was this: Young Negro doctors can be trained in a Negro institution to take their place with surgeons of any group any where as their complete equals. This he believed with his whole heart. The teaching program at Howard in Surgery was a very closely worked out program. The professors worked as a team and when in 1943 a group of surgeons went to Johns Hopkins University to take the examinations to make them members of the American Board of Surgery it was a matter of great pride to the entire department that two men who had gone through this training program had rated by competitive examination the #1 and #2 places. You might

further be interested to know that one of these men was your own Dr. Waldo Scott. The other was Dr. Asa Yancey.

In the mind of each of us it is likely that one teacher stands out above all others as the most worthy. An unknown author puts it this way: "A teacher affects eternity. He never knows where his influence stops." In Dr. Drew's life, I cannot say which teacher that was but certainly I know that the surgeon who influenced him most profoundly was Dr. Allen O. Whipple of C.U. C of P.S. This professor not only taught him skills and helped him gain knowledge but also a philosophy - a word to live by in the practice of his art. In turn Dr. Drew passed along these things to the men he taught. Charles Drew repeated many, many times his belief that surgery is a discipleship. In its highest concept all teaching is a discipleship and I think the highest education is obtained by living with a noble being.¹

Before my husband died, we lived in a comfortable old, big house on Howard University Campus. It was like being a student again in a way. I want to tell you that it is a thrilling and an inspiring experience to see each class of graduating physicians standing straight and tall, clear-eyed and full of eagerness to go forth to their chosen great calling - repeat together The Oath of Hippocrates. Hippocrates, as some of you doubtless know was a Greek, often called "The Father of Medicine." These words of his which so many good doctors live by were set down long, long ago somewhere in the 6th or 7th century. I want to read one short paragraph of this oath: "I will look upon him who shall have taught me this Art even as one of my parents. I will share by substance with him and will supply his necessities, if he be in need. I will reward his offspring even as my own brethren, and I will teach them this Art, if thy would learn it, without fee or covenant. I will impart this Art by precept, or by lecture and by every mode of teaching, not only to my own sons but to the sons of him who has taught me, and to disciples bound by covenant and oath, according to the Law of Medicine."

You students are too young to remember anything about the 5 year plan which Russia talked about so much after the revolution. The 5 year plan was nothing more than a plan providing in detail just what should be built and how much should be produced in every field in a 5 year period. The idea caught on and was used quite a lot in this country. Dr. Drew made his the ten year plan - from 1940 to 1950. He knew how many men could be accredited surgeons in that period and every step of their programs. He was as careful of each man's career as though he had indeed been his own son. It is no exaggeration of the facts that every surgeon who qualified at Freedmen's in surgery in this 10 year period owes a great deal to the quality of teaching of the surgical faculty. If time shows that this man had any historical significance, in my opinion it will be for his work in inspiring young surgeons and training them by precept and example.

¹ In the original handwritten speech, this sentence was added to the paragraph as an afterthought on a separate sheet of paper.

He could not see that death would put a period at the end of this time, yet it almost seems that destiny walked hand in hand with him and that when 1950 came he quietly laid down his tools and said as Paul in the Bible, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

His work in blood brought him a great deal of public note, and ex President Truman said that through this work countless thousands of our soldiers were saved from death, yet in his heart he always thought of himself as a teacher.

Robbins, Lenore. Address given by Lenore (Robbins) Drew to medical students. Charles R. Drew Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. Washington, D.C.
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