

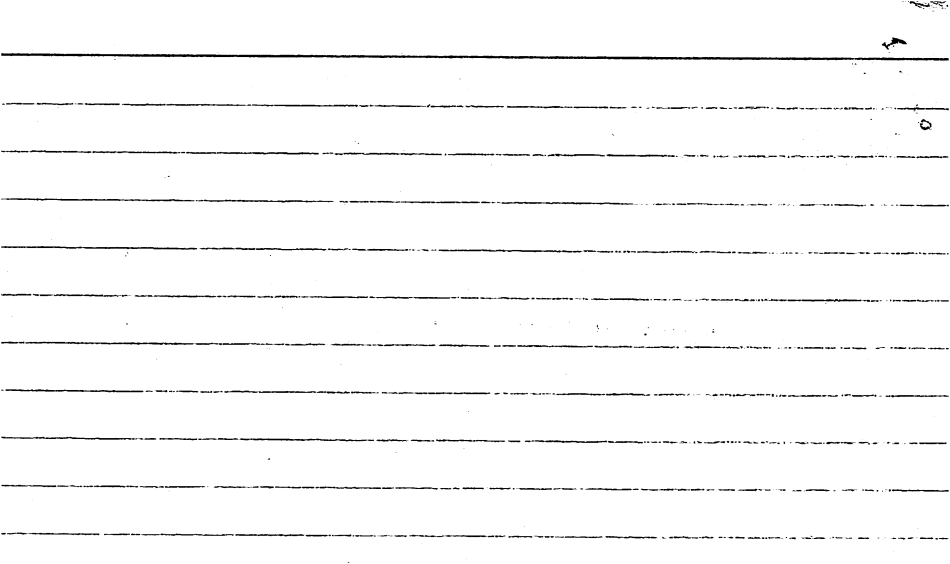
Speech given by:

Cassandra Pickett Durham,

The First Woman Doctor in Georgia.

She was the daughter of
John Jephthah Pickett, Junior,
and Nancy Bowlware, and
the granddaughter of Micajah
Pickett and Kizannah Hinson.

by: Cindy H. Rivers
308 Michelle Dr.
Bremen, Ga. 31008



CASSANDRA PICKETT DURHAM

ADDRESS GIVEN UPON GRADUATION FROM THE ECLECTIC MEDICAL COLLEGE, 1870

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In conformity to the usages and customs of this college I address you. Not, however, upon the themes usually discussed, but upon a theme that is more difficult to treat successfully and satisfactorily than a mere thesis upon the nature and treatment of physical disease.

It is with the mind of the public, the prejudices of the world, and with the newness of the effort by me to inaugurate a New Era in the practice of medicine in the South.

In order to properly appreciate the difficulties that surround me, you have but to view me as a woman, alone and helpless, but determined to inaugurate a New Era in the medical profession for the benefit of my sex.

From time immemorial we have, by the powers that be, and the prejudices of man, been denied the right to minister to the wants of our own sex as practicing physicians.

From the earlier ages of the world man has frowned upon the idea of lady physicians and has monopolized to himself the sole legal right to pry into the nature and treatment of diseases peculiar to women, thus stultifying and blunting the finer feelings of her nature which distinguish her from the opposite sex and make her lovely and attractive to men.

Such has been the general history of WOMAN. But I am, (I repeat), to say that in every age of the world there have been isolated cases where women, sustained by a few generous souled men, and the encouraging smiles of friends, have risen to the very top round of the ladder of fame in every department of life.

Thus have they proven to the world that God in his wisdom and goodness has created us self-reliant, self-sustaining, and useful members of society-not mere drones in the community, nor baubles to be cared for by a man in his leisure hours.

When we take a retrospective view of the past, and scan narrowly the history of its despotisms, we find that in the long line of kings and queens who have reigned from the time of the Queen of Sheba to that of Victoria of England, there have been as many eminent queens as kings according to numbers. Queens who have proven themselves capable of governing successfully and prosperously.

This proves to us that God has not made women to live lives of ease, but that he has endowed them with powers and capabilities which, when fully developed and properly directed, present them to the world women of full stature in knowledge and wisdom, and capable of discharging the many duties which devolve upon them as helpmeets of men.

In the literary and scientific world thousands of authoresses are known to have shown themselves capable of rivaling successfully the ablest of male authors, both in chasteness of style, and in force of diction or expression.

In our female novelists we find a thorough knowledge of human nature. And yet the female sex has, in the past, from false notions of propriety and refinement, been denied their rightful privilege of entering the medical profession where they might lawfully minister to the wants of their own sex, whose real physical condition may never be clearly and fully comprehended by the male physician.

Not by reason of incapacity upon the part of the physician. But women find it hard to subdue those long nourished feelings of reticence which characterize her for modesty. She cannot unbosom herself fully as to her condition in those diseases peculiar to her sex.

The thousands of emaciated forms of humanity—mere wrecks of womanhood—that today are breathing out a lingering existence upon earth, is no evidence of incompetency upon the part of the male physicians.

It does prove, however, that that refined and long cultivated modesty that adorns a woman must be blunted, or a physician of her own sex must be supplied—a physician whose sympathy for her patient will insure that degree of confidence that will enable her to arrive at a true diagnosis of the disease to be treated. For upon a true diagnosis of the disease depends, of course, a successful treatment of the case.

By way of illustrating the force of the ideas expressed, I deem it sufficient to call your attention to the results achieved by the organization and labors of the Sisters of Charity.

Without the right to practice as physicians, they have, as mere attendants upon the sick, and through the sympathy existing for other women, been enabled to learn acts which, when imparted to the attending physician, gave him power to diagnose and treat successfully the disease.

Ladies and Gentlemen, such are the facts which prompt me willingly to encounter the trials and difficulties which I know must follow my feeble efforts to inaugurate a new era in the medical profession.

Even a failure upon my part will not call forth one regret in regard to this undertaking. Success may not bring forth one approving smile to encourage me in my lone labors. Yet I have the greatest encouragement in a pure and exalted desire to confer a benefit upon my own sex.

My failure would not be the last effort made in this great reform. More brilliant intellects, with superior advantages, will rise up in the future and consummate the great and noble work commenced in 1870.

And this College and this Faculty will have the honor of first practically acknowledging the rights of women to enter his profession. And you, Gentlemen, will have the proud satisfaction of knowing that your lectures and your counsels have not been in vain. That your disinterested friendship to a lone reformer was like bread cast upon the waters—bread that will be gathered up many days hence to the form of greater privilege for Southern women.

Years may pass and the beginner of this reform will be laid low in the dust. No marble column may mark her resting place, but in the towns and cities of the South infirmaries and homes for the destitute sick will be found and recognized as standing monuments to the ultimate success of the reform now begun.

To the young gentlemen who have attended these lectures I wish to say that your conduct in the presence of a female auditor has been all that modest and decorum demand. The approbation of your conscience and the approving smile of Heaven will be your highest reward.

To the gentlemen composing this faculty I can only say that you have my most sincere thanks for the treatment I have received at your hands. My sojourn among you as a learner has been both pleasant and instructive. Again, I thank you.