

Address of John W. Francis, M. D., late President of the New-York Academy of Medicine, on the 7th of February, 1849 : to the President-Elect, Valentine Mott, M. D.

Contributors

Francis, John W.
New York Academy of Medicine.
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Francis (J.W.)

ADDRESS

OF

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JOHN W. FRANCIS, M.D.,

LATE PRESIDENT

OF THE

NEW-YORK ACADEMY OF MEDICINE,

ON THE

7th of FEBRUARY, 1849.

TO

THE PRESIDENT ELECT,

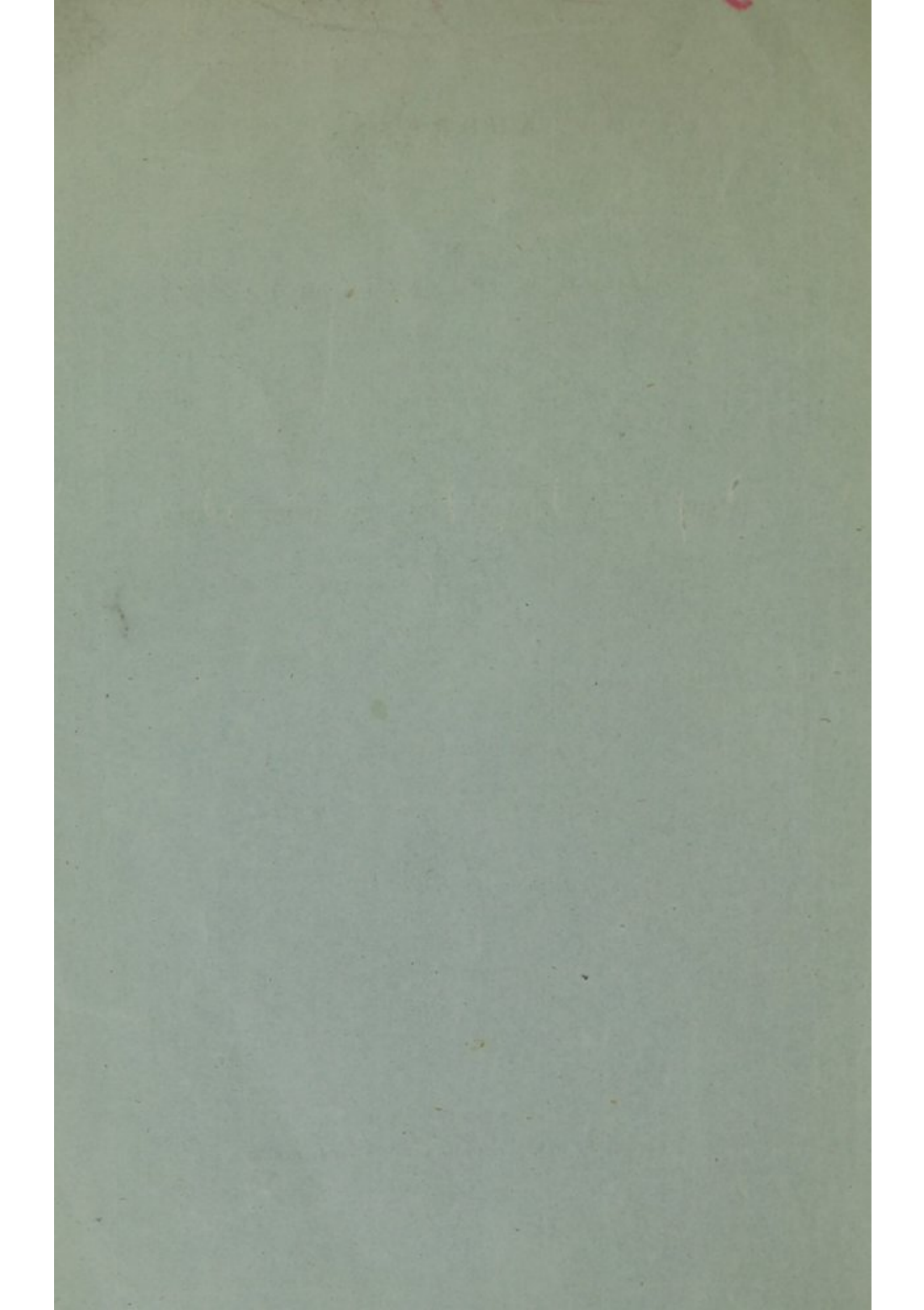
VALENTINE MOTT, M.D.

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New-York:

PRINTED BY HENRY LUDWIG & CO., 70 VESEY STREET.

1849.



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JOHN W. FRANCIS, M.D.,

LATE PRESIDENT

OF THE

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ON THE

7th of FEBRUARY, 1849.

TO

THE PRESIDENT ELECT,

VALENTINE MOTT, M.D.

Surgeon General
LIBRARY
55706
Washington

New-York:

PRINTED BY HENRY LUDWIG & CO., 70 VESEY STREET.

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CHAPTER II

THE HISTORY OF THE

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ADDRESS
OF
DR. FRANCIS TO THE PRESIDENT ELECT
OF THE
NEW YORK ACADEMY OF MEDICINE.

Associates of the Academy :

This is a joyous meeting. The occasion which has brought us together is one of peculiar interest. The Academy of Medicine is convened according to constitutional provision, with the expressed intention of inducting its newly-elected Head into that office which your suffrages have chosen him to occupy. It may, therefore, well be considered an epoch in our annals. While it admonishes us of the march of time, while it notes the progress of our labors in the advancement of philosophical truth, it reminds us of the associations of friendship which we have formed ; it awakens recollections of the pleasures which flow from intellectual culture, and of that harmony which at all times has characterized our deliberations, alike honorable to science and humanity. But while I am not permitted to indulge in any lengthened expressions of my individual feelings on the prosperous career of the Academy during the year just terminated, as relates to its order of business, the subject-matter of its discussions, and the nature and spirit of the

communications of its members which have come under its cognizance, yet I am allowed to say, in all truthfulness, that our academic sittings demonstrate that we have among us observers and recorders, members of zeal in research, astute in reasoning, and faithful in deduction ; individuals who know how fruitful is the field of medical science, in all that pertains to man's physical and intellectual happiness, and disciples in knowledge whose ardor is not to be chilled in exploring new regions for new results, the better to enlighten the path of philosophical investigation for the benefit of our successors.

Such is briefly the view which I have taken of the proceedings of the Academy, derived from personal observation and the ample and faithful minutes of our Secretary, from its first foundation down to the present time. A new era is now opening for our contemplation. From among its many distinguished associates, the Society in its judicious canvass has called you, Sir, to preside over its deliberations. In the wisdom of their choice all will concur. They have, indeed, manifested a promising acumen in their selection. If medical science has been sometimes deemed by the superficial vague and indeterminate, there are positive results in surgery which enforce the admiration of the most unthinking, as well as erudite minds. As the recognised leader in this noble branch of our profession, on this continent, and as the honored recipient of a transatlantic reputation, in placing you at the head of the New-York Academy of Medicine, we virtually claim for a new

and important society, the respectful recognition of the cultivators of medical and chirurgical knowledge both at home and abroad. Your wide experience and professional skill need not the rhetorician's power to make them known. Fortified in all that deep investigation, long study, and an almost unexampled observation can furnish, you are enabled to become the just umpire in questions involving the principles and advancement of our art, while the deference which acknowledged superiority ever secures must enhance the salutary influence which this Academy, we confidently trust, is destined to exert upon the interests of medical science, and the welfare of the community.

I know not how it may be with you, Sir, in the accidental hours of relief from your professional responsibilities, when you cast a retrospective survey over the history of our art from the period when you first took an interest in its welfare : I assume with Boerhaave, that the art of healing, in common with all elevated pursuits, under proper regulation, is capable of purifying the affections and spiritualizing the mind ; that it is an indication of a higher destiny that awaits us, and disciplines the intellect for the sublimest enjoyment. That it has encountered many trials and overcome them ; that its conquests are many, and have crowned it with signal lustre in behalf of humanity, are undisputed facts. Notwithstanding the incredulity of the ignorant, its march is onward, and you will tolerate me when I add, that your achievements in your special province, with

which your fame is entwined, are alone sufficient to stamp veracity on my declaration. Yet, for my own part I must admit, that at times I feel deeply concerned for the conduct of some who call themselves physicians, as well as for others who are of the uninitiated. The valuable and the positive seem to be too often supplanted by the worthless and the uncertain; and hence our therapeutics, so signally enlarged even of late, by remedial agents of the greatest powers, are often, without scruple, ignominiously rejected for the exploded materia medica of by-gone days, or subjected to that wretched minimum practice which robs them of all their efficacy.

But we are not to stop short in our endeavors at improvement, because of obstacles which a mischievous theory interposes; they are hindrances to be overcome; they are extraneous to the science itself, and perseverance and energy will assuredly in due season free it of them. We do not the less estimate the character of the real statesman, because many who aim at the philosophy of government are disfigured by vulgar associations, with the corruptions of party politics; and parental authority early taught you that mere doctrinal theology is a widely different affair from the pure doctrines of primitive Christianity. Let it be our consolation to derive hope from reflections of this nature, and believe that medical science, after all, proffers claims to our regard, equally commanding as those of other essential departments of knowledge. No cross, no

crown, should be as much the watchword of the physician as of William Penn : While we sedulously guard against the reproach of lukewarmness, let us conscientiously estimate the blessings of a benignant spirit and demeanor. After all, it is not improbable that many who, with seeming satisfaction, still persist in stigmatizing the great principles of the art, by the absurd novelties of the day, will live to repudiate their error and repent of their folly. If I mistake not, I occasionally detect instances of this nature, the results of a contrition sufficiently disturbing to any honest heart. It is, too, a gratifying consideration, that of our numerous Medical Schools throughout the Union, not one has yet ventured to abjure the saving principles which the investigations of two thousand years have established ; an instructive demonstration of their excellence and purity ; thus securing the great truths, already reached, for higher and still more practical inductions, and perpetuating the inestimable legacy of wisdom, obtained at so great price for the alleviation of suffering mortals.

But the feelings which originally prompted the foundation of this institution afford the best guarantee that its objects will ever be of vital consideration in your estimation, and render any further remarks on my part superfluous. I deliver to you, Sir, the Constitution and By-laws of the Academy : I feel assured they are safe in your trust : You will cherish inviolate the one, and give all proper deference to the other. They have been found effectual in rearing our institution to its present eminent consideration ;

they will prove adequate to our continuance in the noble cause which we are pledged to elevate and advance. Indeed, when I cast a glance around me, and witness the injustice which our calling receives from ignorance and delusion, from empiricism and the crafty devices of the times ; how life is cut off by the concerted views and sordid expedients of those aliens to science, whom the recent iniquitous laws of our State Legislature, (the offspring of an inscrutable ignorance,) still permit to annoy, unmolested, our vocation, the better, however, setting forth the excellence of medical philosophy, when illuminated by sound culture, and fortified by institutions like our own, I am authorized to affirm that no prophetic power can foretel the delightful results to the common weal ultimately consequent upon our united efforts, upon our faithful devotion to Hippocratic science, and the proper exercise of the advantages which this Academy proffers to its enlightened disciples.

It only remains, therefore, that I congratulate you, Sir, most sincerely, upon the enlarged opportunity to advance its interests, which the office into which you are now inducted gives ; and the members upon the felicitous auspices under which, by their judicious election, our academic year commences. With pride and satisfaction I resign to you a responsibility dear from the kind consideration which has solaced its duties, and honorable from its grateful associations and elevated aims.

