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**Contributors**

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*Francis J. M.*

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INAUGURAL ADDRESS,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

NEW-YORK ACADEMY OF MEDICINE,

FEBRUARY 2d, 1848.

BY JOHN W. FRANCIS, M.D.

Published by order of the Academy.

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NEW-YORK:  
PRINTED BY HENRY LUDWIG & CO., 70 VESEY-ST.  
1848.



PROF. FRANCIS'  
INAUGURAL DISCOURSE.



1848.

ESSENTIALS OF

NEW YORK ACCOUNT OF

FROM

THE

IN A JOURNAL OF DISCOVERY

AT THE

1812

BY

NEW YORK

PRINTED BY

1812



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# INAUGURAL ADDRESS,

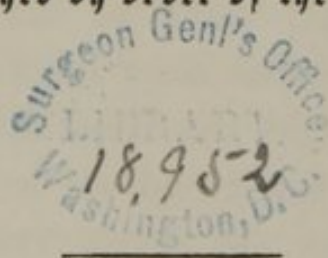
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INTEGRAL ADDRESS

NEW YORK ACADEMY OF MEDICINE

ESTABLISHED IN 1848

BY JOHN W. FLEMING, M.D.

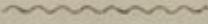
Published at the Academy

NEW-YORK:

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1848

## A D D R E S S .



GENTLEMEN :

IN assuming the duties of the responsible office to which I have been elected by your suffrage, allow me to tender to you my sincere thanks for this renewed evidence of your generous disposition, and to assure you, that it is not without a greater reliance on your co-operation than confidence in myself, that I undertake the task of presiding over the deliberations of so distinguished a body of my associates in the great art of healing. I am too well aware how ably the trust has been fulfilled by the talents of my predecessor,\* and his practical knowledge of deliberate assemblies, not to feel most anxious that my best endeavors may sometimes fail of their purposed ends, and that I shall often need your indulgence and counsel, the better to enable me to act with becoming wisdom in the promotion of the beneficent objects for which this Academy is organized. My task, however, I am disposed to believe, is lightened, when I consider the happy issue which has closed the proceedings of our first year, and the admirable manner in which the many subjects which from time to time have engaged your attention, have been considered and decided.

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\* John Stearns, M.D.



I do not think I exaggerate the importance of the labors which have occupied your attention the year just terminated, when I add, that many interesting subjects have challenged your consideration, and that the work has been well done. You, with surpassing unanimity, now meet together, under an improved and sound Constitution, and a code of By-Laws of clear and specific designation, well calculated to render obvious to all the duties of every member, and to secure permanency to our deliberations. Your Committees have, in part, reported with signal excellence on several important subjects assigned them; and we have the assurance that, with still deeper earnestness, others are now ready to bring forth for consideration, matters of interest to the cause of humanity, and deeply blended with the scientific and practical reputation of our Association. My prayer is, that the earnestness thus exhibited at the onset, may augment with the occasion which demands it, and that the papers which we shall receive from individual members, as well as from your Committees, may be marked by that cautious observation and precise collocation of facts, accompanied with that severe reasoning which will give to our transactions a practical character, which alone can secure usefulness and durability to our proceedings.

On the occasion of our anniversary, I enlarged upon the facilities for the effective operation of an Academy of Medicine, ensured by the extent, freedom and mental activity of our country. Permit me, as a just inference from such facts, once more to urge

upon you the absolute necessity of keeping practical results constantly in view. In no other way can this Institution win respect and confidence. A supine reliance on the past, and an extravagant trust in the future, are equally objectionable. The age and the community in which we live demand reality. Let the actual results of experience, the fruits of mature reflection, the products of exact and long observation and severe analysis, be offered at this common altar. Each physician should, as it were, apply his individual mind to the pursuit of truth, and not rest content with the deductions of another. Like that embodiment of aspiration and misanthropy, Childe Harold, we should reflect upon the ills of life with an intensity second to that of no class of men; not, indeed, to indulge a poetic melancholy, but to find out alleviations, trace suffering to its primal cause, remembering that benignant nature has provided an antidote for every bane.

It is most remarkably the case in our science, that however brilliant may have been the imaginations of those who have endeavored to promote the Hippocratic art, none seem to have secured a perpetuity of fame who have not most scrupulously adhered to the inductive system of philosophy, first adopted by Hippocrates himself, afterwards enforced with all the rhetoric and amplitude of truth by Lord Verulam, and exemplified in the writings of Sydenham, Boerhaave, Haller, Huxham, Rush, and other distinguished ornaments in our profession. The disastrous issues which have marked crude and untenable theories in all ages,



must perpetually admonish us, that on facts alone can our science be erected ; and he alone is to be deemed the benefactor of our art who wisely makes use of a cautious experience. I know that our Academy is rich in disciples of this school of wisdom : I only advert to this well-grounded truth, because of its vast importance in our conduct when solicitous to fulfil our best intentions.

As we all meet together, enlisted in one common cause, I cannot but infer that every member is actuated by a like motive to enhance the great profession of healing ; to add to the renown of that vocation which, in days now past, has maintained a decided consideration with the inhabitants of this extensive metropolis, and which has furnished its full quota of exalted names already inscribed on the roll of fame. But the edifice which the sagacity and wisdom of our predecessors have erected, towering as it may be, is to be elevated a story higher, by the present workmen, ere we rest satisfied with our labors. Let not our enthusiasm be chilled by any difficulties which may beset us ; an unwaivering faith must be cherished in the nobleness of our art and in its capabilities of progressive improvement ; intellect must be taxed, patience must be sustained, in our longings for positive utility : and with the ample means which we enjoy, there is no abuse of confidence in anticipating from the efforts of our Academicians the happiest consequences.

If there be anything like indifference to the noble objects we have in view among any of our members—if it be thought that, as the Academy is now founded,



it is capable of support without the earnest co-operation of its associates, I would disabuse all of such an opinion, by affirming that we now demand greater unanimity in council, more untiring zeal and emulation in our members than ever : nor is it by mere resolves that our sympathies in behalf of our profession are to find their full expression. An ingenious divine has said, that we never read of the resolves of the apostles : they have given us only their acts. Even by a like demonstration are we to exemplify our devotion, and realize that advancement which must inevitably secure the desiderata we so much need. The Academy seems to be already extensively known : its brief history is widely circulated in many periodicals ; favorable views of its objects have been promulgated ; the people are awaked to its action ; our City Council have, on several occasions, appealed to its decisions. Something, therefore, like renown, seems already to have been secured to its deliberations. All these circumstances imperatively urge to continuous labor among us. And, moreover, as we meet together on the platform of perfect equality, it behooves us sedulously to aid and encourage each other in investigation ; to act with a spirit superior to all low or grovelling disposition, with entire freedom from all envy, and with a cordial desire to facilitate each other's inquiries, as far as lies within our respective powers. In union there is strength ; in generous co-operation there is success. Let it not, therefore, even be whispered, that we suffer by distracted counsels, or from jealousy, or from an acrimonious tenacity of

individual opinion or belief. Reason is to be left free to encounter inquiry, because truth is secured by so wise and philosophic a procedure. Nor shall a vain-glorious reflection upon special merit ever obtrude itself to mar that grateful alliance to which we are all pledged one to another. Our generosity is never to be tardy in recognising individual excellence and services, which only augment our own renown: we will laud with wholesome approbation every new truth, and hail its discoverer as a benefactor to humanity. Yet with like propriety we will withhold the utterance of reproach on those who may not be so successful; for every one versed in the history of philosophy, knows that accident, as well as study, often brings forth the most commanding intellectual products.

As I intimated on a former occasion, I desire to repudiate the idea at once and decisively, that this Academy is based upon the slightest foundation of intolerance. It is not for the purpose of exercising an ostracism for honest difference of opinion, or to guard and cherish a privileged few, that we have associated ourselves together, but simply to give one another that mutual encouragement in the maintenance of a high standard of professional conduct, so essential to the advancement of medical knowledge, and, at the same time, to afford society a guarantee for the requisite attainment and professional integrity of those upon whom it calls in the hour of need. If I mistake not, the interchange of opinions which necessarily occurs at our meetings, the variety of facts



and doctrines thence arising in debate, and that mutual deference which it is hoped will never be lost sight of in our discussions, cannot but facilitate the important objects we originally contemplated at our primary organization.

You must all remember the instructive fact currently reported, as it is connected with the brilliant career of Sir Humphrey Davy. When the learned from every quarter were congratulating him on his great discoveries, in the language of panegyric almost superhuman, the mighty philosopher broke forth in these becoming accents : "I believe I have enlarged the empire of philosophical truth," said he ; "but, gentlemen, my greatest discovery is the discovery of Michael Faraday." You will bear in recollection that Count Rumford first brought forward Davy, the indigent youth in Penzance, and that Davy first discovered Faraday at work in the humble shop of a mechanic. What a noble, what a manly sentiment was this from such a man as Davy, in behalf of the merits just then unfolding of the boy who now, in ripe manhood, sits enthroned in the highest seat of philosophical glory, and who has almost eclipsed the world-spread renown of his illustrious predecessor. It was a common observation, among the class with whom I attended the lectures at the Royal Institution, by Brand, in the season of 1815-16, when Faraday was the assistant chemical manipulator, that he even then evinced an extraordinary genius for physical investigation.

I will venture another remark. Some of us, I fear, will too incautiously conclude, that as the Academy is

now formed under the best constitutional provision, there is less need of isolated or individual effort, and that the momentum it has received is adequate, with comparatively little toil, to secure its onward march. Not so: on the contrary, the Academy can advance only by the most persevering labors of its fellows: granting it has already secured some claims to consideration, still more strenuous exertions are to be invoked to confirm them and advance its interests. You all know and feel too painfully the justness of the remark, that every physician has to labor with no less zeal to preserve his practice, than he first applied to obtain it.

If we be considered as mere votaries of wealth, we know that incessant toil is requisite to obtain that object.—If we possess the higher quality of the soul, a desire of increased knowledge, a like devotion is demanded.—If we are to be deemed philanthropists, to whom knowledge is only a means of effecting the desires of the heart, a like ardor and unabated perseverance are summoned in order to furnish us with the real material of our cherished love.—If we sometimes observe that men of positive talent and deep learning are overlooked and neglected, we still know that the age has so stripped the faculty in this country, as well as that of others, of the appendages of many of the adventitious and picturesque costumes of former times, that the gold-headed cane is as much out of date as the serpent-wreath staff of *Æsculapius*; and that although impostures still occasionally succeed, to the disgrace of our art and the destruction of human life, yet that,



after all, in a profession so practical and so demonstrative, that confidence in those who need our assistance is oftenest secured by the possession of real knowledge, and the convincing manifestations, on our part, of a true solicitude to alleviate human suffering.\*

I well remember the evening, now some thirty years ago, when my valued preceptor, Dr. Hosack, returned home to meet his friends at a special entertainment at his own house: he apologized for his absence so long from his guests, and then turning to the distinguished statesman, Gouverneur Morris, he exclaimed, "Mr. Morris, I have been detained with some friends, who together this evening have founded a Philosophical Society." "Indeed!" responded the great politician. "Yes, sir," repeated the Doctor, "we have indeed this evening founded a Philosophical Society." "Well, well, that's no difficult matter," rejoined Morris, "but pray, Doctor, where are the philosophers?" The Doctor was quite embarrassed. And what is the moral of this anecdote? That something more than confederation is requisite; our earnestness must be made palpable by action; work must be done; investigation must be prosecuted; results must be presented. I believe, with all due consideration, we are much better off than the Philosophical Society was at that day. I believe we have many philosophers already enrolled in our association, and I now see before me many academicians who, I know, deserve that appellation, and who, I cherish the hope, will offer tributes on the altar at which we worship.

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\* Vide Coleridge.



Proud as I am, gentlemen, of the honor you have conferred on me, I trust that you will consider, that unless we advance the cause in which we are embarked, the official dignities of our officers will not protect them from the reproach which is sure to follow failure. We are not to rest satisfied with nominal appendages to the neglect of actual services : and here, too, we meet on perfect equality. It is by investigations that every member is to enhance his glory and promote a common interest ; and if that proper standard be sustained, touching human conduct in the affairs of men, that he who renders greatest services is actually the greatest man, mere accidental or official nominal distinction is lost, the true principle of rank is recognised, and our deference is bestowed according to a determined law of the social compact. Does not the history of philosophical discovery in all ages, and in various ways, bear out this truth with incontrovertible demonstration ? The true discoverer stands out in all his vastness : the real expositor, amidst a thousand conflicting doctrines, is the recognised master-mind whose deductions have shed the rays of pure light.

A paper from our youngest, equally as from our oldest member in the profession, will secure to its author the merits due the contributor. Our printed Transactions will render this all clear. Philosophical discovery transcends all nominal distinctions of rank or title. Who thinks of Principal Wishart, at the head of the University of Edinburgh, when reading the works of Alexander Munro, *primus* ? Who brings to recollection the existence of Sir Joseph



Banks, when studying the Bakerian lectures of Wollaston, in the Royal Society, because Sir Joseph at that time presided over that learned body? Every member of our association is sure of his just rewards from every fact or disquisition which he brings forward to give life and interest to our fraternity. And can any of us desire more? Let us then, heart in hand, united firmly, co-operate as one man in behalf of rational medicine and our cherished Society.

There is one other reflection which presses itself upon me at this time, to the utterance of an additional reason, why we all should be enlisted in behalf of the interests of the Academy. Our daily experience admonishes us of the uncertainty of the duration of life: the present is the only time we can boast: we have seen within the few months of our organization, that several of our members have, in the classic words of our descriptive poet, received their summons—

— to join th' innumerable caravan, that moves  
To the pale realm of shade.

To improve the present is, therefore, the dictate of wisdom. Is it not better that the listless be awakened, the indifferent excited, the tardy quickened, to give us the results of their long and ample experience; and thereby secure to themselves the credit which their laborious existence deserves? Priority in the statement of facts and of theory, is thus secured; for it needs not much observation, at this period of intellectual progress, to foresee that others will anticipate the disclosure of



truths that we have too cautiously, perhaps too indolently withheld. Charles Wesley, the great preacher, was wont to say, "God buries the workmen, but the work goes on:" it is equally so in our science, as in the labour of the ministry. These reflections are partly suggested by the memory of our late estimable brother, Dr. Washington, who, I am well aware, cherished an intention to present to this fraternity some of the most useful results of his studious experience.

It were inopportune specifically to designate at this time the several themes to which our attention might most advantageously be directed, in order to render us most efficient in the cause of our profession and humanity: so various are the topics which on different occasions must necessarily present themselves to our consideration, and such the aptitude of an association like this Academy, to turn to the happiest issue the vast opportunities which present themselves to its individual members, for enlarging the boundaries of philosophical truth, and gathering together for human benefit the most profitable materials for farther discovery and scientific development. Your acquaintance with the present progressive state of our science abroad, your knowledge of its history in our own country, its actual condition and its urgent wants, will serve as efficient prompting to remind us of our duty, and give that judicious election of subjects which can best subserve the interests of our vocation.

Nevertheless, there is one subject which, in conformity with the glorious spirit of the age, seems of



paramount importance in several relations, and which presses itself upon our mental vision with uncommon force, as among the cheering signs of true civilization. I allude to insanity and the various disordered manifestations of mind, and to idiocy. These vast topics have within our own day awaked a spirit of inquiry which redounds to the honor of the medical profession, and the physiological knowledge of the age; and it will prove a hard undertaking ever to obliterate the obligations which the science of mind owes to the sagacious investigations of Gall, Spurzheim, Combe, and Bell, respecting the physical development of the cerebral and nervous systems. The instructive truth is at length unfolded to us, that upon the structure and condition of bodily organization, both the mental and the moral condition of man most essentially depend; and physiological science has opened her stores of wisdom in furtherance of our benignant labors for the amelioration of the most deplorable, and heretofore most neglected of our species.

The sympathy of rational science is awakened to the consoling truth, that no individual of the vast human family, let him be never so low in intelligence, is to be deemed beyond the reach of improvement, either mentally or morally. The imbecile and the idiotic are consequently no longer to be debarred the provisions of relief, tendered by improved medical prescription and advanced legislative regulations. When we reflect upon the appropriate measures which have been found of late so available to better

the physical and moral state of the deaf, the dumb, and the blind, and give them a positive standing in society, it cheers the philanthropist in his endeavors, designed by the scientific philosopher to give tuition to those whom the lights of knowledge have never reached, and provide remedies for those who have heretofore been condemned and neglected as irremediable.

Statistics prove an undue ratio of insane cases in the United States, a result doubtless, in part, attributable to the life of excitement which characterizes our people. The freedom of action insured by our institutions, and the absence of hereditary distinctions, open to the aspiring large prospects both of honor and wealth. Hence the most extravagant hopes are indulged, and the most fallacious schemes undertaken. This state of feeling and action is directly opposed to the tranquil and permanent occupations which induce that equanimity so favorable to health and longevity; and the American physician is thus emphatically called upon to recognise what may be called the moral philosophy of his science.

Happily, the prevalence of mental disease to which I have alluded, is met by a corresponding philanthropy. The researches into the nature and causes of insanity have been prosecuted here with singular acumen and enlightened zeal. Europe bears emphatic testimony to the excellence of our asylums, the wisdom of our sanatory formulæ, and the conscientious supervision of such of our profession as have given special attention to this important branch of medical



art. I need not refer you, in illustration of these facts, to the assiduous labors of Dr. Woodward, of Massachusetts, who rendered the institution at Worcester so celebrated, nor to the practical services and writings of Dr. Brigham, based upon the latest cerebral discoveries, and drawn from physiological laws and mental philosophy.

Still more superfluous would it be for me to allude in detail to the distinguished career of our brothers, Dr. McDonald, and Dr. Pliny Earle, or to that noble monument of New-York charity at Bloomingdale, to the conduct and usefulness of which their best faculties have been so successfully appropriated. The history of that great and triumphant institution might indeed be dwelt upon with exemplary benefit to the other states of our vast Union. The devotion and patriotism of Thomas Eddy and of Dewitt Clinton, to secure legislative provision for its broad foundation and its perpetuity, are now among the many gratifying associations which encircle the halo that rests upon the memory of those illustrious citizens, once so prominent among the great and good of New-York.

If the Bicetrè at Paris, directed by the sagacity of Pinel, is to be considered the institution whence the improved moral management of the insane had its origin ; if the Retreat at York is the recognised asylum whence in England the modern philanthropic system of treatment was first adopted, the New-York Institution for the Insane can unquestionably claim the merit of being the next in the order of time ; and from an ample personal inspection of the numerous

establishments for the treatment of the deranged manifestations of mind, throughout Great Britain and on the Continent, during the years 1815 and 1816, I am satisfied that such is the honorable fact. I cannot, however, dismiss this prolific theme, without expressing my admiration, in which I am confident of your sympathy, at the indefatigable spirit of humanity which has actuated our countryman, Dr. Howe, and others of Boston, to induce the establishment of an Institution for the treatment of Idiocy. My limits utterly forbid me even a glance at the remarkable facts which the observation of this gentleman, Sumner, and other coadjutors, have elicited; facts rich in hope for that long neglected and desolate class of human beings.

Having long cherished the belief that the real practical prescriber can sustain his responsible character only by an exclusive devotion through life, to his high calling, and that among his foremost studies, is to be included a thorough acquaintance with the laws of mental and physiological phenomena; that the popular notion that specialities may be comprehended without such knowledge, is untenable in theory, and beset with difficulties in practice, I have been the more solicitous to urge the value of ethical philosophy founded on the moral and physical condition, the normal and the abnormal state, as a most important guide in our therapeutical administration. We with justice may award high commendation to Dr. Rush, for the hints which he has offered on this and other kindred subjects, and without betraying too Utopian



a sympathy, look forward for much improvement in medical jurisprudence and criminal legislation, by a proper adjustment of such knowledge to the exigencies of humanity.

The confidence which I, as an American, entertain of the capacity of my countrymen in toil, in energy, in newness of application, and this, too, for the benefit of humanity, corroborates my belief that we may command the approbation of the ablest minds in our profession, wherever they may be found, both abroad and at home, if we honestly carry out the work projected by the institutors of this Academy. The records of knowledge in so many arts, in such a variety of ways, are so rich in mental triumphs from the American intellect, that we would prove recreant to ourselves, had we any doubts that our country has the material, and our people the mind, in fullest abundance, from which to elicit new truths, and deduce the mightiest principles of value to the Hippocratic art. Our Eagle hovers, as a protecting genius, over our vast continent, from the waters of the Atlantic to the borders of the vast Pacific : she seems destined in her flight to wing her ærial journeyings over Oregon and Mexico. Fifty years hence, the precious facts in the healing art, and the great principles which this Society shall have promulgated, will be made known and unfolded by the medical teachers of the great universities then in operation among those remote inhabitants of our vast Republic. The language you use to convey your information, will have become the language of almost uni-

versal man ; and your very words, as well as doctrines, will be lisped and descanted on by the intelligent and active expositors of that period. How then can we be here idle ; how can we remain indifferent to the rewards so certain for all our toil ? The contemplation of circumstances, such as I have so imperfectly hinted at, must, it would seem, render the heart joyous, and sweeten every trial with more than adequate charms. Let then our associates put on the armor of labor : let them be urged by the consideration, that American science enrols among her discoveries the quadrant of Godfrey, the lightning-rod of Franklin, the planetarium of Rittenhouse, the steam-navigation of Fulton, the electric telegraph of Morse, the printing press of Hoe : that the philosophy of epidemics and their laws have had more light shed on them by American physicians than by the writers of any other nation : that numerous monographs by our authors are now consulted and quoted as standard authority : that surgery has enlarged her domain by disciples of the art, some of whom we have the honor to enrol on our list of members. Let us be cheered onwards by the consciousness that the American mind has recently accomplished for La Place what Leibnitz would have been incompetent to do ; and that Bowditch has given to the world elaborate and lucid annotations on that great astronomer's System of the World, a work which Newton could not read, and which labor Oxford and Cambridge admit that no fellows of their universities would venture to undertake. Let us be emboldened in the



reflection, that other gifts, splendid and useful, are still to be bestowed for the benefit of mankind, by individuals reared among such capacities, and participators in such achievements.

Gentlemen, the American Anglo-Saxon race is now furnishing to Europe's best scholars, dictionaries in divers languages, approved by the soundest classical proficient among them; text-books on numerous branches of science, adapted to their colleges and universities, and used by their principals; works on systematic theology, awaking the cogitative faculties of their greatest theologians; and systems on law and government, for the mental and practical edification of her soundest statesmen. What is to arrest the march of medical investigation? Abroad, no interest is so great among the friends of benevolence, as that summoned to a recognition of the writings of our professional brethren. What pretext have we for tardiness and delay? Is it organic matter alone, that is to be subjected to the lightning's speed: shall the primum mobile of all movements, man's intellect, suffer by a distempered and disproportioned inertia? How great then is the encouragement held out to us! Solemnly, then, let us pledge ourselves to press into service every faculty we possess in furtherance of the great, the noble designs of the New-York Academy of Medicine. As one, I shall strive to advance, though with unequal footsteps, with you; and I respectfully, and in all earnestness, invoke your talents and your zeal in the glorious cause for which we have associated.







