

Memorial of Josiah Meigs, and others : for an act of incorporation of a national vaccine institution for the United States of America. January 5, 1820. Read, and referred to a select committee.

Contributors

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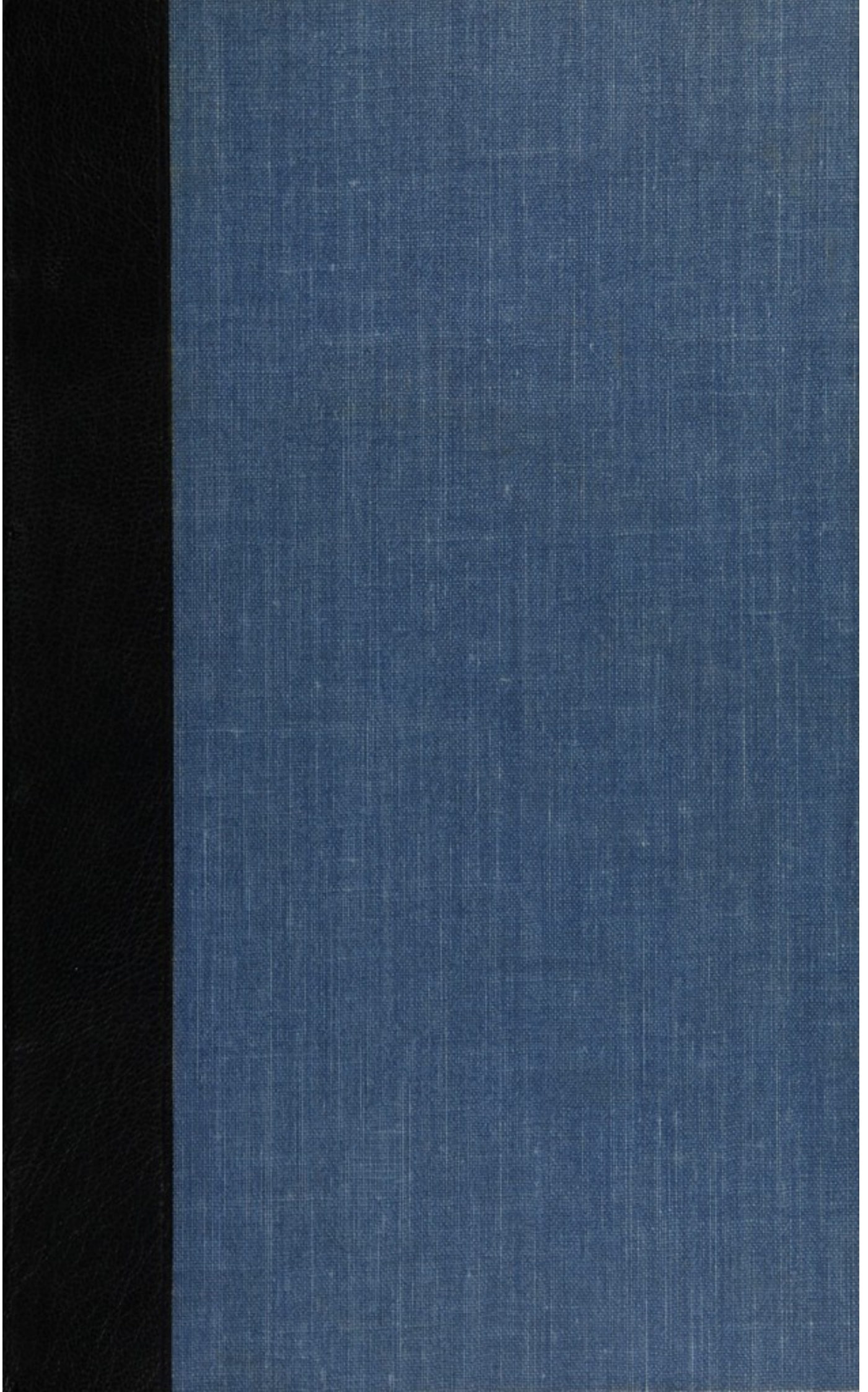
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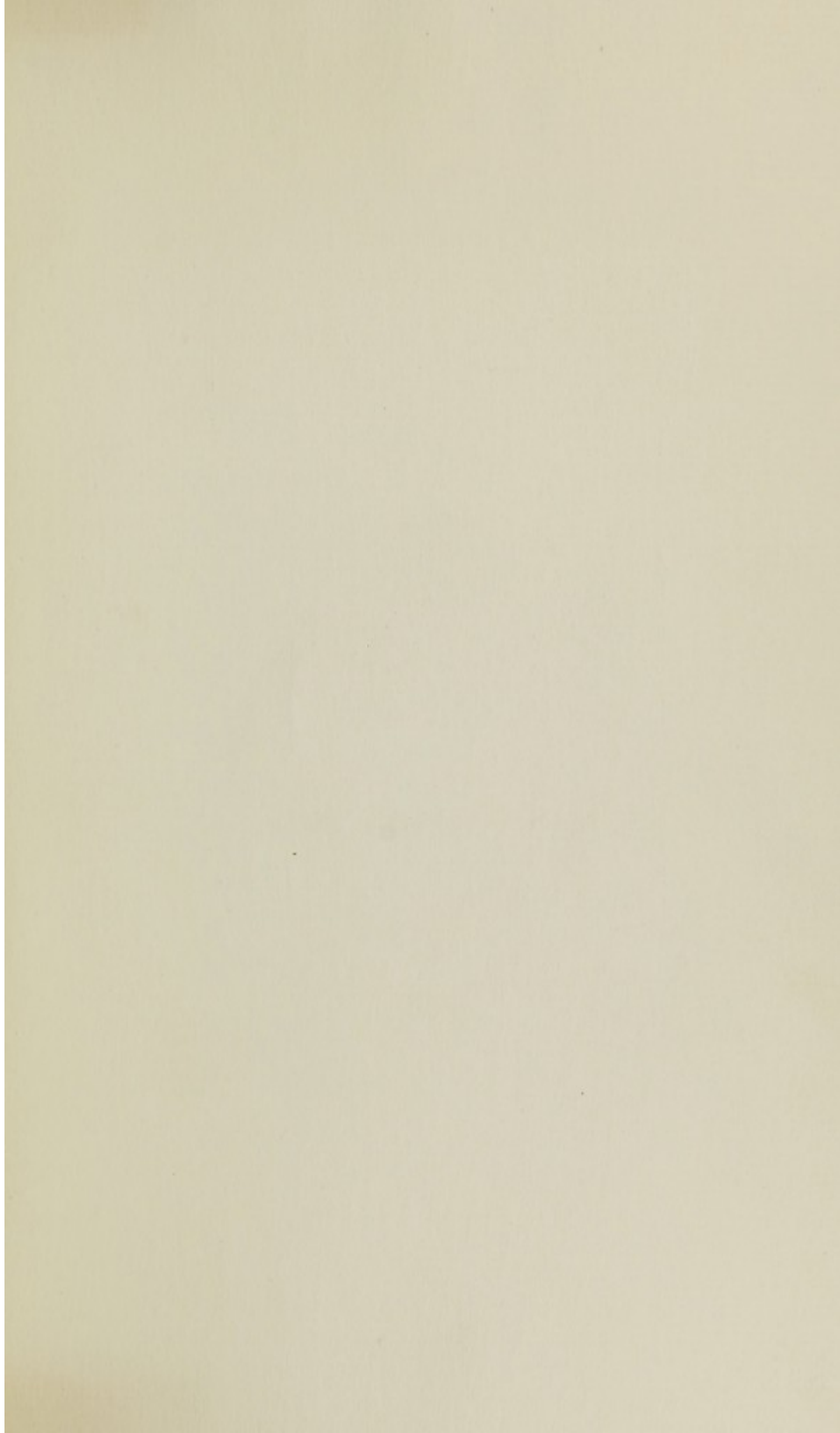


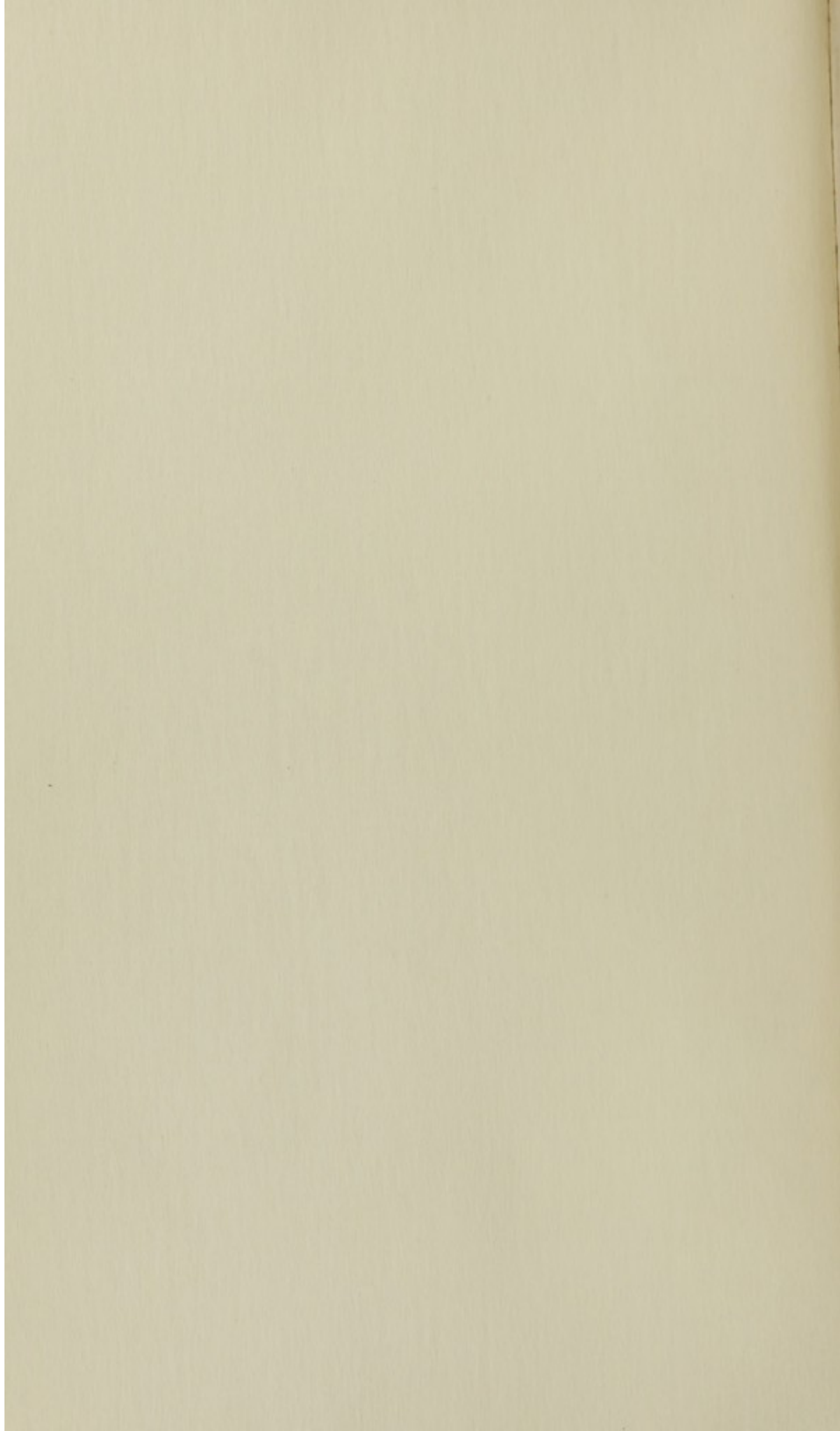
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MEMORIAL

OF

JOSIAH MEIGS, AND OTHERS,

FOR AN

ACT OF INCORPORATION

OF

**A NATIONAL VACCINE INSTITUTION FOR THE UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA.**



JANUARY 5, 1820.

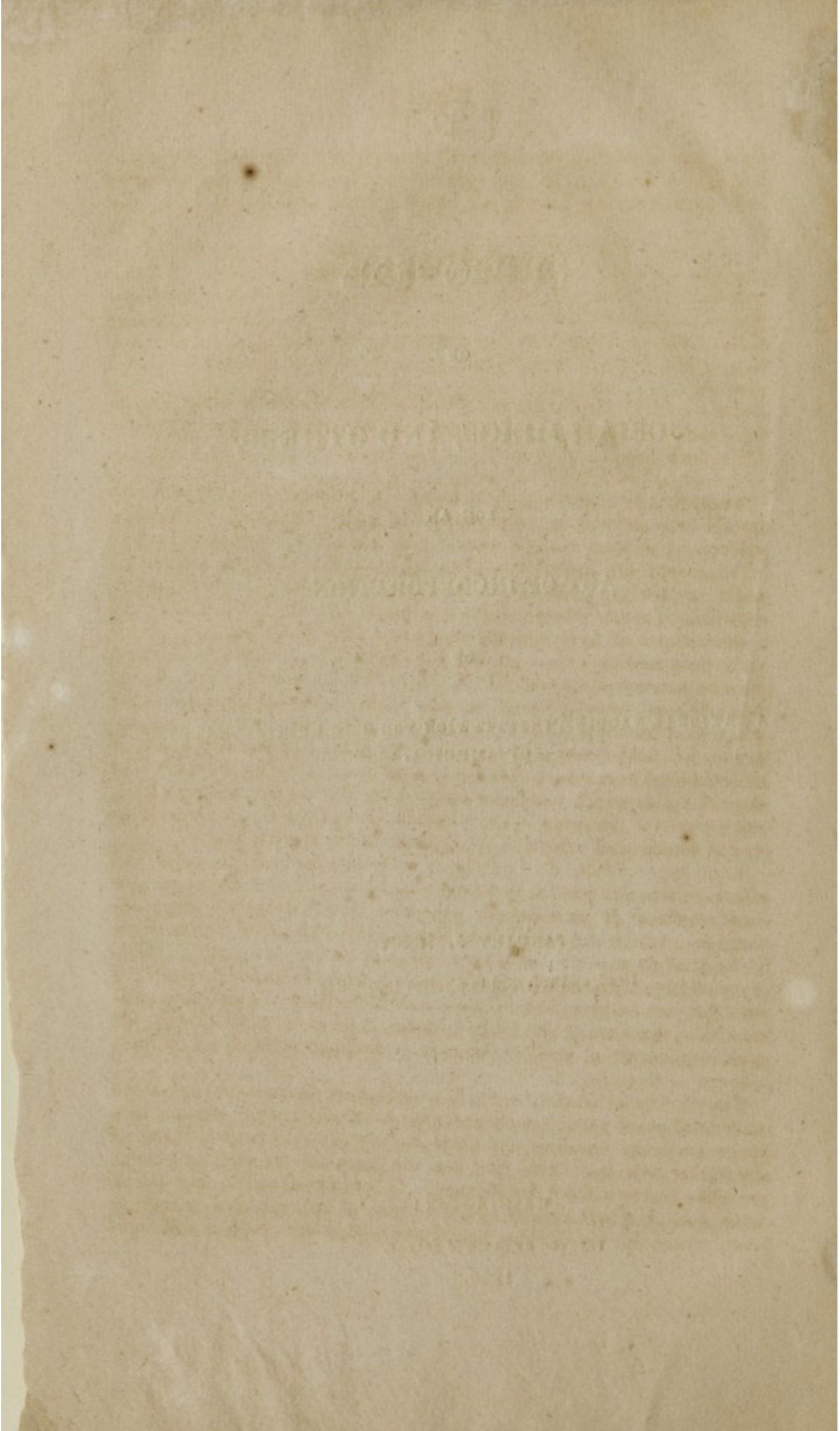
Read, and referred to a select Committee.



WASHINGTON :

PRINTED BY GALES & SEATON.

1820.



MEMORIAL.

To the honorable the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, the memorial of the undersigned respectfully represents:

That, at a late meeting of a number of gentlemen, friendly to vaccination, held in this city, in pursuance of a public notice given for that purpose, your memorialists were chosen a board of managers, in conjunction with Dr. James Smith, the agent appointed by the President, under authority of the act of Congress, entitled, An act to encourage Vaccination, "to organize a national vaccine institution for the United States of America, agreeably to a plan which had been previously proposed by him, and for the support of which considerable sums have been subscribed." It has therefore become the duty of your memorialists to solicit your serious attention to this important subject, and if the views of our association fully meet with your approbation, we most respectfully petition and pray, that you will grant us an act of incorporation, to enable us with more certainty to carry into effect the plan which has been adopted by the society we represent, "to secure the preservation and distribution of the true vaccine matter for the use and benefit of the citizens of the United States.

Your memorialists do not deem it necessary to enter into any detail of facts to prove to you the necessity which exists of your giving greater encouragement to vaccination; nor yet to demonstrate the many advantages, which the public may reasonably expect to derive from the institution now proposed to be established for this purpose. But, in an undertaking, which appears to us to be so intimately connected with the convenience, health, and general welfare of our fellow citizens, in every part of the United States, it becomes us to submit, for your consideration, some of the most prominent reasons which have induced us to engage in it.

FIRST. The small pox, which is a contagious disease, and one of the most fatal and destructive plagues that ever afflicted the human race, yet exists in our country, and annually destroys the lives of many of our fellow citizens. The rich and the poor, the old and the young, are alike liable to take this disease. It is not confined to any particular place, but pervades alike our cities and villages; and, searching every where for its victims, penetrates within our inmost and most

solitary settlements. Neither are the untutored natives of our land secure from this plague; it is frequently carried into their camps and villages, and produces among them the utmost consternation and despair.

SECOND. It is now proven, in a manner so fully and clearly as to admit of no doubt whatever, that the true kine pock is a certain preventive of small pox, as well as of all the calamities which are naturally attendant on it. This remedy is never attended with any danger, and may be safely applied by any intelligent person, who is furnished with the matter; due care being taken to follow the simple and easy directions which are now given with it for its proper management.

THIRD. The matter of the true kine pock, and no other can have any effect to prevent the small pox, is of foreign origin, and is not known, as has been asserted by some, to be indigenous in our country. The peculiarly delicate nature of this matter, likewise, renders it so extremely liable to perish, that, even when we have it in our possession, we cannot keep it active in our hands, except for very short periods of time, (depending much upon the state of the weather,) without renewing it from one subject to another, with the greatest regularity, care, and attention. From these unalterable circumstances and peculiar qualities in the nature of the vaccine fluid, there are but few persons who can ever pay such constant and unremitting attention to its preservation, as would enable them to furnish it with any degree of certainty, when it might be most wanted. The act of Congress to encourage vaccination has been attended with many good effects. The agent appointed under this law has been successful in his endeavors to preserve the genuine virus; and from him the surgeons of the army and navy, as well as the citizens of the United States in every section of our country, have obtained, without interruption, a supply of this remedy, as often as they have found it necessary to apply to him for it.

In England, where the vaccine remedy was first discovered, a solicitude proportionate to the difficulty of preserving it, has been uniformly manifested; and various institutions have been established there for this purpose, under the direction of the most respectable characters. Of these establishments, the London Vaccine Institution is perhaps the most celebrated in the world. In many other parts of enlightened Europe, the most zealous philanthropists have taken an active part in disseminating the Kine Pock; and in protecting their fellow men from destruction by small pox.

FOURTH. The use of spurious and other kinds of improper infection, taken in mistake for the real Kine Pock matter, has often occasioned fatal accidents, and checked the progress of Vaccination, in places where otherwise it would have been cherished and esteemed. This was particularly the case, when the Kine Pock was first attempted to be introduced into New York, Marblehead, Norfolk, and some

other places in this country. Citizens, who have been disappointed in this way, or who take the Small Pox after being assured, that they have had the true Kine Pock, are very apt to be led to doubt the efficacy of Vaccination; and to turn a deaf ear, for ever thereafter, to every proof or fact, which can be adduced in support of the Jennerian discovery. There is no point, indeed, in which the friends of Vaccination are so liable to be assailed; or in which they are so often found vulnerable, as in their liability to use spurious instead of the genuine virus. The most skilful physicians have not been always exempt from making mistakes in this particular. The illustrious Jenner, when he at first promulgated his discovery to the world, had more difficulties to contend with on this score, than on any other. He then informed us of "the extreme delicacy of the nature of the Vaccine fluid," and shewed us how easily it could be "disorganized." He also informed us, that, with all his care and attention, "an unnatural deviation in this virus from its perfect state, frequently occurred to him." Dr. Waterhouse, of Boston, likewise informs us, that, "about the latter end of the autumn, or beginning of the winter of 1800, the Vaccine disease had deviated, in his opinion, from its original character, and assumed a face with which he was not acquainted." In a discovery, which has been so recently made known to the world, and which is yet so imperfectly understood by any of us, all these difficulties may be reasonably expected: and whenever they do occur to any practitioner, it is indispensably requisite, that he should desist at once from operating; and not attempt to vaccinate any one, until furnished with fresh matter, taken from some true and genuine source. The application of the vaccine matter is in itself a very simple business; and has been often entrusted to operators of very little skill. But it requires some considerable knowledge of this matter, to enable any practitioner to select the best for his use; or to discriminate, with accuracy, between the true vaccine, and the many counterfeit affections which are liable to be mistaken for it. We, therefore, deem it to be of essential importance, that some central and responsible institution should be established, wherein an uninterrupted supply of genuine matter should be maintained; and from which it ought to be regularly dispensed, on the most free and liberal terms possible, to all who want it. To relieve the public from all doubt or uncertainty, in a matter of so much importance to them, the purity and efficacy of this virus should be occasionally tested: and the result of these necessary precautions should be faithfully communicated to the public, from time to time.

FIFTH. Another, and a very important advantage of such an institution, as has been proposed, must arise from its great convenience to the whole community. The public authorities, as well as private citizens, are all alike interested in this establishment. The surgeons of the army and navy require a constant supply of the vaccine matter; and they cannot procure it with certainty, on any terms, except

through the medium of some institution of this kind. An honorable Committee of the House of Representatives, in a report on this subject, dated 3d February, 1818, gave it as their opinion, and the government of our country has adopted it as a just and proper precaution, that "the vaccination of those persons belonging to the army and navy, who had never had the small pox, was dictated by duty as well as interest." But the preservation of the vaccine matter, as has been already intimated, is altogether incompatible with the duties, which the surgeons in service are bound to perform; it therefore becomes necessary for us to supply them with this remedy, as often as they may have occasion to use it. But, independent of these facilities, which the public authorities will derive from this Institution, our fellow citizens, of every description, will be most happily accommodated, (when necessity perhaps may compel them to resort to it,) by knowing how and where they can obtain, with certainty, a proper supply of this matter. There are but few among us, who regard, as we ought, any danger which is at a distance, or out of our immediate view: and there are many, who, under these circumstances, cannot be persuaded to make any provision whatever against it. Many families, who, when the best opportunity was offered, could not be prevailed on to use the Kine Pock, have afterwards, when they became accidentally exposed to the contagion of Small Pox, searched with avidity for this remedy, and risked their lives upon the first portion of matter they could procure from any source. Many persons, in the moment of danger to a whole neighborhood, have sent messenger after messenger, and one express after another to very distant places, in the greatest precipitation, and sometimes without being able to procure any matter, upon which they could place their dependence. The fatal consequences, which are liable to flow from proceedings of this kind, point out to us, in the plainest and most forcible manner, the necessity of preserving this invaluable matter with the greatest care, in some convenient and well known place, from whence it may be obtained at a moment's notice, and distributed free of every impediment, and to any extent it may be demanded.

SIXTH. There is, at this present time, a very large majority of the citizens of the United States, liable to take the variolous disease; and of those who are liable to be affected by it, there is not one half of them who are willing to submit to be vaccinated, unless they are urged to it by their immediate exposure to the contagion of Small Pox. This universal carelessness, or unwillingness, in most people, to give themselves any trouble, or to incur any expense on this account, unless compelled by some immediate danger, cannot be too harshly condemned—it is discouraging in the extreme, and seems to forbode to our country, at some future period of time, a more serious calamity by Small Pox, than we have ever experienced from it. We should therefore take heed in time, and endeavor, by our constant care, and unremitting attention, to preserve the Kine Pock in it puri-

ty and excellence. The more universal its use, the more effectual and certain will be our future protection and safety from Small Pox.

In the years 1815 and 1816, the cities of New York and Philadelphia became much infected with the Small Pox; and from them it was soon carried into many other towns, and seaports, within the United States; from these again it was communicated to others, and carried into the interior of our country, where it has existed ever since. Between the months of February, 1815, and April, 1816, their records inform us, that *one thousand one hundred* persons had been diseased of Small Pox, in the city of New York alone; and that of these, *two hundred and ninety-three* had died. In Philadelphia, from the 2d of January, 1807, to first of same month, 1817, (omitting three years, for which no account was received,) *six hundred and twenty-five* persons died of Small Pox! We have thus indubitable proof, that upwards of *nine hundred* of our fellow citizens have fallen a sacrifice, within a few years past, to this plague, in these two cities alone. But, if it were possible for us to bring into one view the sum total of all the mortality, and consequent injury, which has been sustained, in different parts of the United States, by Small Pox, *within even a few years past*, the exposition could not fail to excite a correspondent feeling in yours, as well as in the mind of every person, who was capable of comprehending its extent or magnitude. If this destruction of our fellow creatures was unavoidable, it would certainly be most proper for us to be silent, and to submit to them with due humility of heart, as is our duty under every dispensation of Providence. But the evils here complained of are not unavoidable—they might, with greater propriety, be said to be of our own creating; for, most certainly, they are the natural effects of our neglecting an acknowledged duty. In corroboration of this opinion, we can state to you, on authority which cannot be controverted, that, during the same period of time, above mentioned, when the Small Pox committed such ravages in New York and Philadelphia, it was likewise introduced into the city of Baltimore, but it was soon extinguished again, with very little difficulty, and we are well convinced, from experience, that if proper care was always taken, to vaccinate immediately, when the Small Pox first appears in any place, we could soon subdue and eradicate this plague entirely from our country. If that disheartening apathy, however, which pervades the community, in regard to the danger of Small Pox, when out of view, cannot be roused into action, by any means within our power—the Small Pox must continue to exist among us; and we must occasionally suffer severely for our neglect of the extraordinary remedy, which a merciful and kind Providence has furnished us to prevent it.

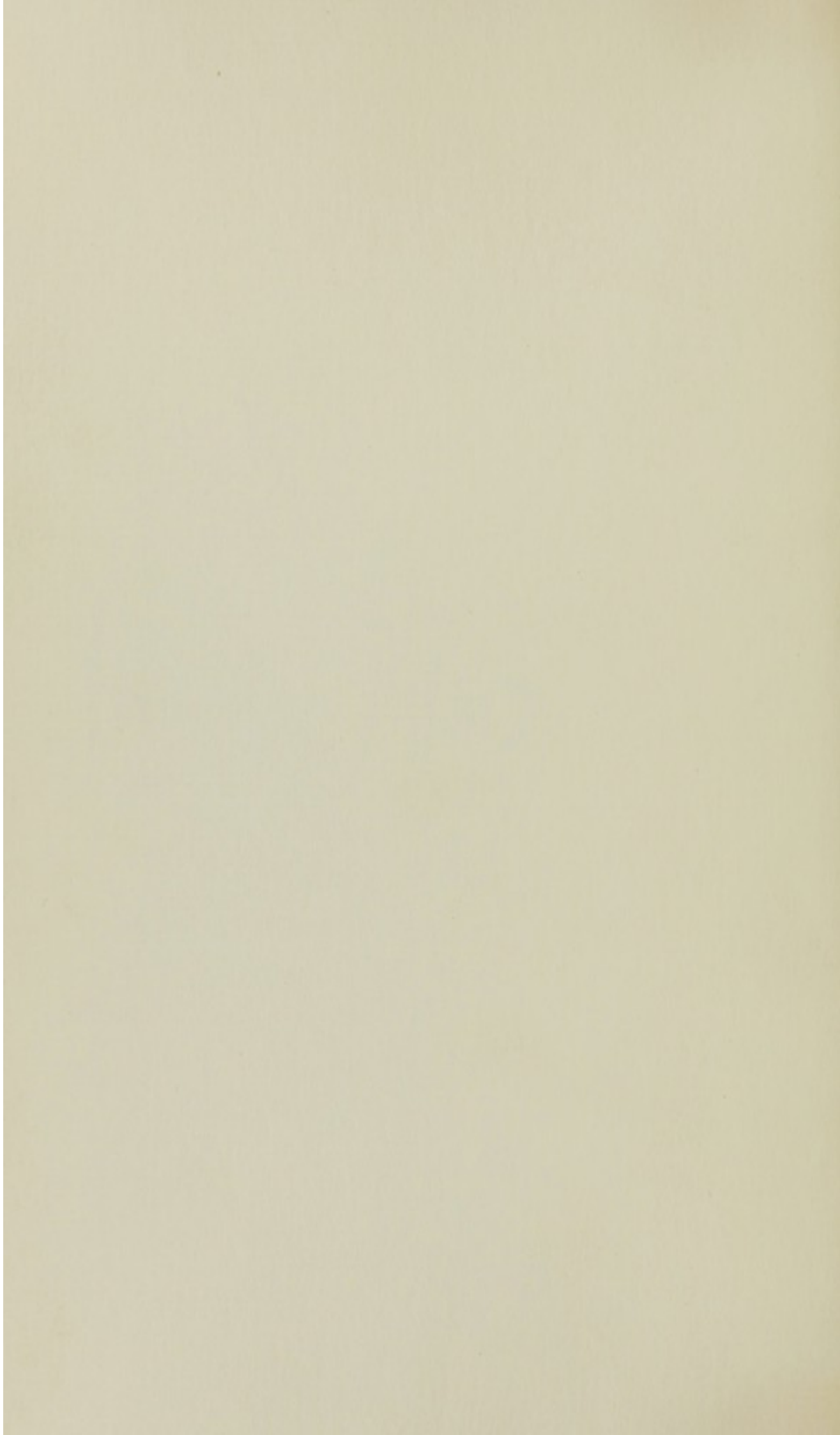
Every citizen, therefore, of a discerning mind, who has the prosperity of his country, and welfare of the human family, sincerely at his heart, will, we hope, give the proposed plan of a "*National Vaccine Institution*," his zealous support; and endeavor to bring as many

individuals as he can, under the healing influence of vaccination. Every child, properly vaccinated, will afford to the rest of the community one additional security, at least, against the future prevalence of Small Pox. And, in the same proportion, as we can increase these securities, so, also, we will raise up numerous impregnable barriers to the introduction and spreading of the variolous contagion among us.

JOSIAH MEIGS,
W. H. CLENDINEN,
TH. HENDERSON,
STEPHEN B. BALCH,
E. B. CALDWELL,
JAMES SMITH.

WASHINGTON CITY, D. C.
January 1st, 1820.





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