

An inaugural address, delivered before the New-York Academy of Medicine, February 7, 1849 / by Valentine Mott ; to which is prefixed, an address by J.W. Francis to the president elect.

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MOTT (Valentine)

AN

INAUGURAL ADDRESS,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

NEW-YORK ACADEMY OF MEDICINE,

February 7, 1849.

BY VALENTINE MOTT, M. D.

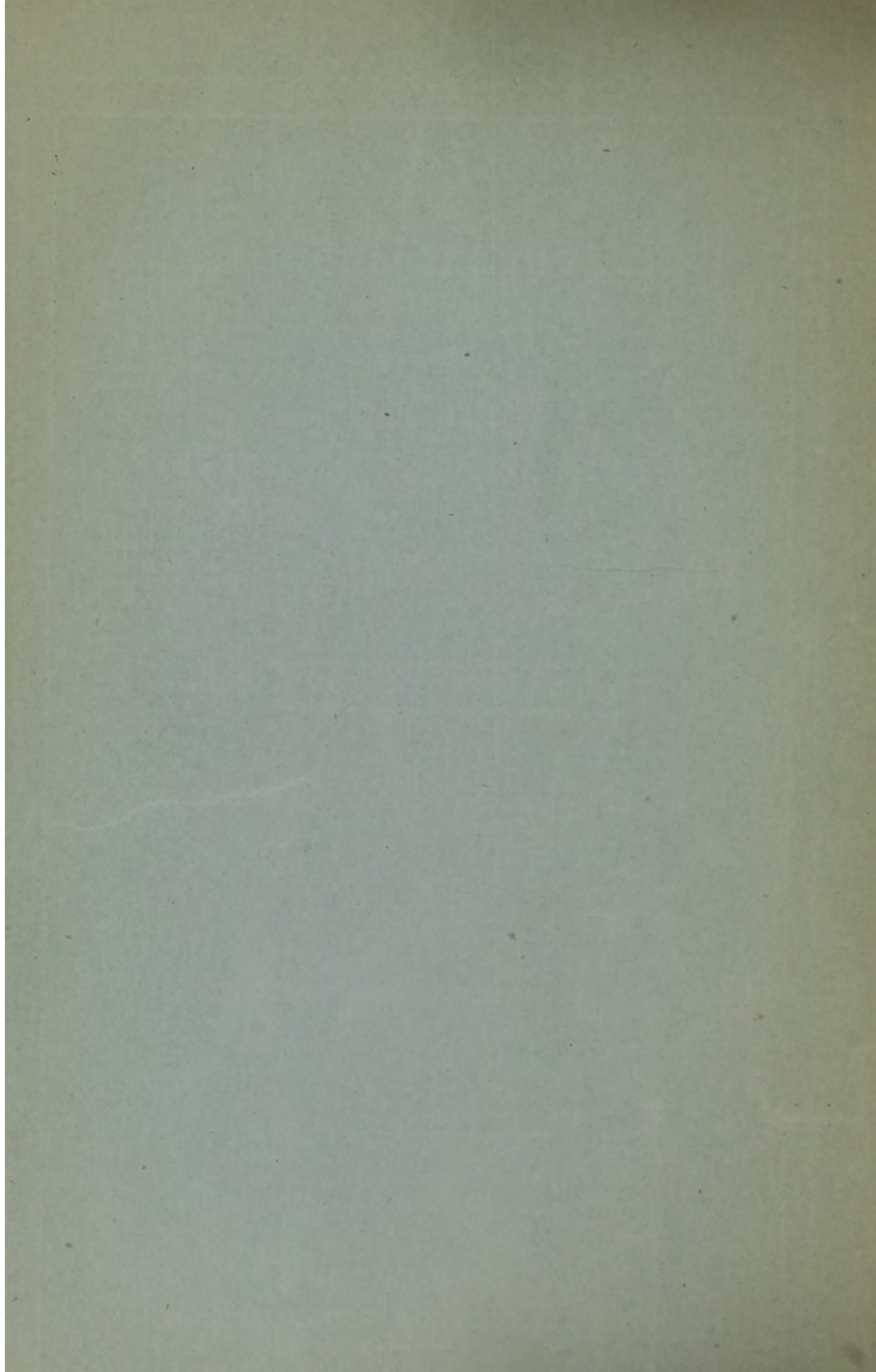
TO WHICH IS PREFIXED, AN ADDRESS BY DR. J. W. FRANCIS, TO
THE PRESIDENT ELECT.

PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF THE ACADEMY.

NEW-YORK:

PRINTED BY H. LUDWIG & CO, 70 VESEY-STREET.

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ANNUAL ADDRESS

NEW YORK

1900

THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

535 NORTH DEARBORN STREET, CHICAGO, ILL.

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NEW YORK

1900

THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

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 reputa-

tion, 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 on-

ward, 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.

DR. MOTT'S
INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

Gentlemen, Fellows of the Academy of Medicine :

You must feel well assured, that nothing but the pressure of my professional engagements, and my duties as a teacher in the University, engrossing as they do almost every moment of my time, could have induced me to decline, as I did at first, the compliment tendered to me of President or Presiding Officer of the Academy of Medicine.

I ought, perhaps, at my time of life, to be thinking of "putting my house in order," and of gradually curtailing and circumscribing my out-door connections with the world, to be thus the better prepared for that event, which none of us can, or ought to wish to avert, and which must at no distant day separate me from you all.

But I have held it to be a paramount duty, that while Divine Providence has deigned to extend to me, more perhaps than the usual share of vigorous health, than is generally allotted to one of my age, that whatever energy I possess, both intellectual and physical, should still continue to be expended, advanta-

geously, if possible, in the humane calling to which I have the honor to belong.

I feel that I am, in fact, thus more fully carrying out the purpose, which would appear to have been intended by this rather unusual dispensation in my favor, and that no personal or domestic considerations, therefore, ought to weigh in the balance, alongside of those more extended and responsible obligations and duties, which our profession calls upon us to perform, and to which so many long years of my life have been so faithfully and incessantly devoted.

The reiterated expression, therefore, of your desire, that I should accept the high honor which I at first declined, comes to me under circumstances so flattering, that any further reluctance on my part to comply, might rather seem to be an affectation, or be construed into the selfish motive, that I apprehended that the duties of the office might clash with those that were of a more immediately personal character.

You all know to what a lamentable state of decadence and dilapidation, the very character and integrity of our profession, in public estimation, both in this great metropolis, and throughout this empire State, had from various causes fallen into, during the course of the last quarter of a century.

Yes, gentlemen, and what renders the fact still more mortifying, this occurred during precisely that identical brilliant cycle of our annals, when the progress and discoveries of Medical and Surgical Science all over the world besides, have shed such undying lustre on its history.

Certainly this is a sad reflection on our great city and great state. And the more humiliating, because this degradation which had been brought upon us in this deplorable interregnum, enabled all other parts of the Union to take advantage of our suicidal course, which, by our divisions and distractions, thus became the soil, on which sprung up a luxuriant growth of other schools and institutions, and protective laws. A salutary reaction of good out of evil, but to us the bitter fruit that accelerated our dissolution. While within our own State limits, the rank weeds of empiricism took a deeper root in this congenial soil, and casts a deadlier gloom over the bright hopes of the future.

That dark epoch—that medieval night of barbarism, thank Heaven, has passed, and the *millennium* has arrived, in which at last,

“ Our bruised arms are hung up for monuments,”

and

“ Our brows bound with victorious wreaths.”

We, of all others, who have had so deep an interest in these by-gone transactions, will cheerfully look upon them as “*by-gones*,” and make no further allusion to them professionally, than to say, to all who may now feel any “*compunctious visitings*” of remorse for past acts of injustice, oppression, or persecution towards their brethren, or who may have thus conspired at any time to bring down the derision of the world, and thereby provoked legislative patron-

age, in opposition to legitimate medicine, *we say*, we repeat :

“ Let the galled jade wince ;”

for if not now, sooner or later

“ The poisoned chalice will be returned to their own lips.”

While, on the other hand, they have the consolation to know, that they have it in their power to appropriate some of the remaining years of their life to a more zealous and liberal course. Previous errors and transgressions, whatever they may have been, whether from professional, personal, or political antipathies, may thus the more speedily be redressed, and the remembrance of these unpleasant passages in our history, be forever hereafter,

“ In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.”

You have seen, and some of you have keenly felt and appreciated, the stern and imperative necessity of *the union*—the *cohesion*, of our profession. The battle we were waging had ripened into a ferocious death-struggle, which it was designed should crush us and our proud science to the earth, under the *Moloch* of quackery.

Imbued with a spirit of magnanimity, so beautifully in keeping with a profession, whose whole superstructure rests upon the immutable basis of *Christian charity*, and upon the noblest purposes, and most liberal principles ;—a profession ever intended *to be*, and which never can be otherwise than *one*, as

purely scientific in its philosophy, as it is sublimely sacred in its moral responsibilities; you have come shoulder to shoulder to the rescue, and you have redeemed your pledge to the world, that as far as your example goes, neither this city nor state shall be irredeemably consigned to ignominy.

We celebrate then the *Restoration*—the dawn of a new *era*—a brighter and more prosperous day for New York, and its medical fraternity.

We have courted, and we have succeeded *triumphantly*, in associating together here in a bond of honorable brotherhood, vigorously impressed with the solemnity of the task they have undertaken, by far the greater portion, we venture to assert, of what constitutes the true elements, of the industry, learning, talent, education, and respectability of the great body of the medical profession in our city.

We do not pretend to aver, that it requires the enrolment of a name upon our Academic list, to confer upon it medical respectability;—but we do affirm, that the composition of this Academy is such, and in our view, so far as its numbers, and the standing of its members go, so entirely embodies, if I may use the expression—the *beau ideal*, of what a representation, or exponent, of the force and talent of the *medical corps* of this great city, should be; that no one will dispute, that it should be deemed an *honor to all*, who may be enregistered upon its catalogue.

We repel every imputation of cliqueism and aristocratic pretension. Our doors are open to every gen-

tleman of undisputed merit. The birth of our Academy was, as we have said, the result of a spontaneous *rushing together* of our *clans*, to hedge ourselves around the banner, and the honor of our profession. A most worthy impulse—a bold and courageous movement. The crisis had arrived—the storm was gathering—the tempest roared louder and deeper—it was the time for manly hearts to come to the rescue—to stand by the helm—to breast the lashing billows—that the ship to which we belong—that on which we have embarked all our hopes and all our pride, should not go down—should not founder under the continued and piratical assaults of our natural enemies.

It was high time to put a stop to these aggressions, to carry this holy crusade into the very heart of the *Saracen*—to convince the world that we are not so litigious or quarrelsome, that we cannot fight together as *one man*, when the glory of our noble profession is at stake. It is thus we may hope to disarm ridicule of the weapons which she has borrowed, to our disparagement, from the arsenal of ignorance and pretension.

We have made, as I trust, a glorious beginning in this work of redemption. Let us then advance with deliberate, but determined resolution, on gathering around us successively all that is worthy or estimable in our ranks, until we present such a consolidation of talent, learning, and moral power, before this community, and an *esprit de corps* so indomitable, that we

shall extort, if not command, and call back, their long-lost respect and veneration, and thus set all opposition at defiance.

Let us, in accordance with the great cardinal feature of our association, labor assiduously and harmoniously, as *one united fraternity*, guarding and upholding with sleepless and jealous vigilance, the dignity and the prerogatives of our profession; and exhibiting to the world by our acts, and by the useful contributions and investigations with which we enrich our science, the proof that we merit the confidence of all our fellow-citizens.

Our city then may hope to acquire, if in fact she did not once possess, the enviable reputation, of being the great principal seat and school of medical science and learning in our country—a position and rank, to which she is so pre-eminently and legitimately entitled.

It would be almost a waste of time, and of words, to recapitulate to you, what has so often been dwelt upon, in proof of the extraordinary and unrivalled facilities which our city possesses, as a school for the teaching of medical and surgical science, and the acquirement of the soundest principles of practice, in every branch of the healing art.

Precisely by the same remarkable combination of circumstances, which have constituted New-York, the London of this western world, by its population—its location—the peculiarities of its climate—its vast internal as well as external navigable communications, making our city the undisputed commercial

emporium, between all the rest of the globe and this continent. So does she also become possessed of, and enriched by, the full and ample fruition of all those materials and facts, and of that exhaustless fund, supply and development of medical and surgical cases and phenomena, which present the most varied, and the widest possible field for the investigations of the physician.

Within a few short years we have had these truths brought home forcibly, and often painfully to our convictions.

Apart from the interesting forms of disease which every year and season, in their changing revolutions, present to our notice, as those which are the common lot of humanity, we have others of a more alarming character, which from time to time cross the track of our orbit, and spread fear and havoc over the world.

This city, as the great portal or highway through which almost all foreign commerce must pass, must of necessity, frequently accumulate at this point, in addition to our large resident population, vast hordes of European emigrants, in search of a freer and happier home than that which they have left behind.

From the melancholy condition of the poor abroad, and the numerous and formidable diseases which result from the privations and sufferings of this class of persons in foreign countries, our sea-port has within the last three or four years, been thus literally overwhelmed, with pestilential infection in every shape, thereby propagated or engendered.

Ship Typhus, as it has been by the fact of its importation, thus not inappropriately denominated, has been spread before us in our hospitals, and other public charities, to an extent as to numbers, wholly unparalleled in the history of our country. The thousands of cases of miserable sufferers, thus brought to our doors, have opened up a practical school to our students, and to many of our practitioners, replete with the most absorbing interest, and one which they may never again have so admirable an opportunity of cultivating.

The more valuable has this field of inquiry been, because to many it may be said, if not to most of our physicians, it has been one entirely new. For in our beloved country, blessed as we are with all the comforts of life, and having no degraded or oppressed class of serfs or peasants, or factory or work-house paupers, opportunities rarely or never occur, of studying the disease in question, in its terrific character as an epidemic pestilence.

While on the contrary, to European physicians, these harrowing scenes are but too familiar, giving them, however, in this respect, an advantageous position over our medical men, in the matter of practical knowledge, on the subject of that type of fever.

Had it not been in fact for this accidental concentration, and accumulation of Typhous infection, at this sea-port, there would have been, and there promises to be, but very limited opportunities of prosecuting such inquiries to any very considerable extent. For such I repeat, are the comforts of our social con-

dition, the healthy and roomy structure generally of our towns, cities and dwellings—the absence of crowded masses of population, and the purity of our air, and let me add, the moral element, of the purity of our institutions, that Typhus will never probably, in our day at least, diffuse itself in our country over any widely-extended region or district.

This *Ship-Typhus* has also presented itself not only to *all* our medical brethren in America, but to those also of Europe, under modifications still more calculated to rivet our attention.

Thus we have nowhere for centuries past, until the occurrence of the late epidemic Typhus in Ireland, a recorded prevalence of this disease, as the almost exclusive result, in its original inception of *starvation* or *famine*.

The germ thus engendered, was rapidly propagated or re-produced, through the impure atmosphere of crowded masses of the desolate poor, in confined, damp, and unwholesome hamlets.

The type of Typhus thus resulting, has been one of a peculiar character,—literally the *Typhus of Famine*, or *Inanition*, or Marasmus ; in which, while studying its symptoms, we could not study them with advantage, without keeping our mind constantly directed upon the sources whence the disease originated.

With this *primary implication*, others of quite as interesting a description, to the careful observer of disease, were found mingled up with the type of the pestilence, in every diversified form, of local, and organic complication, dependent upon the season of the year

chiefly, when these emigrations arrived to our shores, and also upon other causes.

Thus we saw Typhus, or Typhoid Fever, as the basis or type, with organic and local complications, as the variant elements engrafted upon it. In winter, with Whooping Cough, Measles, Erysipelas, &c.; and in the summer and autumn, on entering into our sunny and bile-producing climate, various super-additions of hepatic, gastric, and biliary phenomena, and especially Dysentery, to a remarkable extent, with more or less of enteric lesions. These latter forms, in fact, with intestinal abrasions or erosions, ulcerations, abscesses, and perforations, might almost have been safely predicted *à priori*, as a reigning complication in most of the cases, both here and in Europe; being the natural product of the principal and original source of mischief, to wit, the privation of food, or sustenance, or nourishment, or its unwholesome quality.

To such golden opportunities, I speak, gentlemen, in a scientific sense, and which I trust our students especially have not neglected, might be added others, yearly, presented to their notice, in such other pestilential and malignant forms of disease, which in derision of a system so utterly impracticable, burdensome and extortionate, as that of our Quarantine laws, are yearly imported and introduced, and emptied upon us like another Pandora's box, in the very midst of our population.

Of these I need scarcely mention, *Small Pox* and *Yellow Fever*, as prominent examples.

One of a more appalling physiognomy, and with the lineaments of which, we had hitherto had but a limited and partial acquaintance in this country, has now again invaded our shores ; assuming under the more genial atmosphere of the South, a mortality truly frightful.

Asiatic Cholera, in a more fatal form apparently than it has ever prevailed even in Europe, has desolated a part of the population of our sister city, New Orleans, in a manner not unlike some of its devastations among the impoverished and enervated Hindoos, from whom it is supposed first to have originated.

By the Divine interposition alone, of a severe winter, this pestilence has apparently been nipped in the bud in our own city, where, however, it may possibly still linger, temporarily smothered, or asphyxiated only, until the opening warmth of the spring shall resuscitate its vitality. By that time also it is quite probable, we shall have fresh importations of this pestilence direct from Europe ; to say nothing of an indirect domestic supply, by a fire from the rear, as well as in front, giving us an abundant crop of cases, by the way of the great routes communicating with the great cities upon the Mississippi and other Western waters.

But we will not predict the future—while at the same time, however, we would beg leave, respectfully, to give you warning *now*, to be prepared for a general epidemic diffusion of this Oriental distemper, throughout our land in the ensuing mild seasons of summer and autumn, as in 1832 and '34.

We trust we shall be forearmed to meet such a calamity, so far as personal and professional courage are concerned. We doubt very much, however, from the recent experience in Europe and at New Orleans, and the unyielding mortality of the pestilence, maintaining itself as it does, at a steady point, or *ratio*, in spite of all medicaments, whether we shall be the better armed, professionally speaking, to combat its ravages with success, than we were in the two prevalences of 1832 and '34, above alluded to.

Direct medication in this disease, both external and internal, appear to have had but little or no beneficial result, except in the preliminary stage of the *premonitory symptoms* so called.

In its present, and apparently more concentrated forms, unfortunately, such anticipatory admonitions have this year been seldom encountered; while the victim, on the contrary, has generally been struck down at once with the most fatal symptoms, the moment the deadly blast of the *Sirocco* reached him—finishing his course in the space of a very few hours.

Unquestionably,—the prophylactic or preventive treatment, is that, upon which we should rely with most confidence. And herein a kind Providence has placed armor in our hands, with which we may hope to diminish or abridge, to a great extent, the dominion of this frightful malady.

As vices, crimes, and evils, everywhere, when they reach a certain extreme point, seem providentially, to generate of themselves, or suggest their own antidote

or punishment; so have we here in the spread of Asiatic Cholera, a key or clue furnished, which may be converted into a remedial measure of incalculable importance.

Thus, the unnatural crowding of human beings into confined, filthy dwellings, necessarily creates an irrespirable atmosphere, which to the same degree that it depresses and diminishes the tone of vitality in the system, predisposes to the reception of any morbid principle whatever, floating in the air, whether from human effluvia, or from atmospheric sources.

Such dwellings as those referred to, among the masses of the poor emigrants, crowding upon our shores, are clearly demonstrated to be the hot-beds, where every species of human pestilence rapidly germinates to maturity, and is, thereby, re-propagated and multiplied, under this concentrated form, with an uncontrollable malignity.

You must, therefore, perceive at once, without the necessity of my going further into detail in this rapid sketch, that the great *sheet-anchor* of your hopes, the only certain means in fact, by which you can grapple successfully with this *Monster-Pestilence*, is literally to seize him in his den, and before he is let loose upon the community. Not allow him to be nursed up in the stove-heated wards of Hospitals, and by this course, artificially accumulate his strength and power of mischief; but strangle him as it were, in the haunts that he most frequents, and where alone he can obtain sustenance.

Long before the warm season comes upon us, therefore, gentlemen, it should be our bounden and constant duty, to impress upon our fellow-citizens, and especially upon those owning collections of small tenements, in narrow and unventilated streets, the absolute necessity of *thinning out* the occupants of such residences, to a point that shall no longer permit the atmosphere therein to remain infected—and of making use of such thorough cleansing, ventilating and disinfecting processes, at least twice a week, or oftener, as shall retain and preserve the air of all such apartments in a perfectly sweet and healthy condition.

If such means do not prove sufficient to arrest the commencement of the pestilence—for it will always commence in such places, then resort at once to the *depopulation* of all such districts, or localities, and dwellings—and to their temporary *sequestration*, at least from all contaminating communication with healthy neighborhoods.

Gentlemen, I trust that you will excuse me for entering at this moment, and upon an occasion like this, upon subjects that might perhaps seem somewhat irrelevant to the immediate business before us. They are of such vast and absorbing consequence, however, to all our citizens, and press at this moment upon us with such exciting interest, that I could not well avoid touching upon them; while I knew at the same time, that whatever might be the occasion, any suggestions aiming at farther scientific inquiries, and improve-

ments, however unpretending, would never be deemed out of place here in this learned body.

I now *again*, beg to thank you, for the honor you have conferred upon me, and to assure you, that I will use my utmost endeavors to preside over your deliberations, in such a manner, as will indicate, that I am ambitious at least, *to obtain*, though I may not deserve *to receive*, your kind approbation.

