

An address delivered before the Medical Society of the State of New-York, and the members of the legislature : at the capitol in the city of Albany, the 2d. of February, 1820, on the influence of the mind upon the body in the production and cure of diseases / by John Stearns, M.D. president of the society.

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Stearns, John, 1770-1848.

Medical Society of the State of New York (1807-)

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Publication/Creation

Albany : Printed by E. and E. Hosford, 1820.

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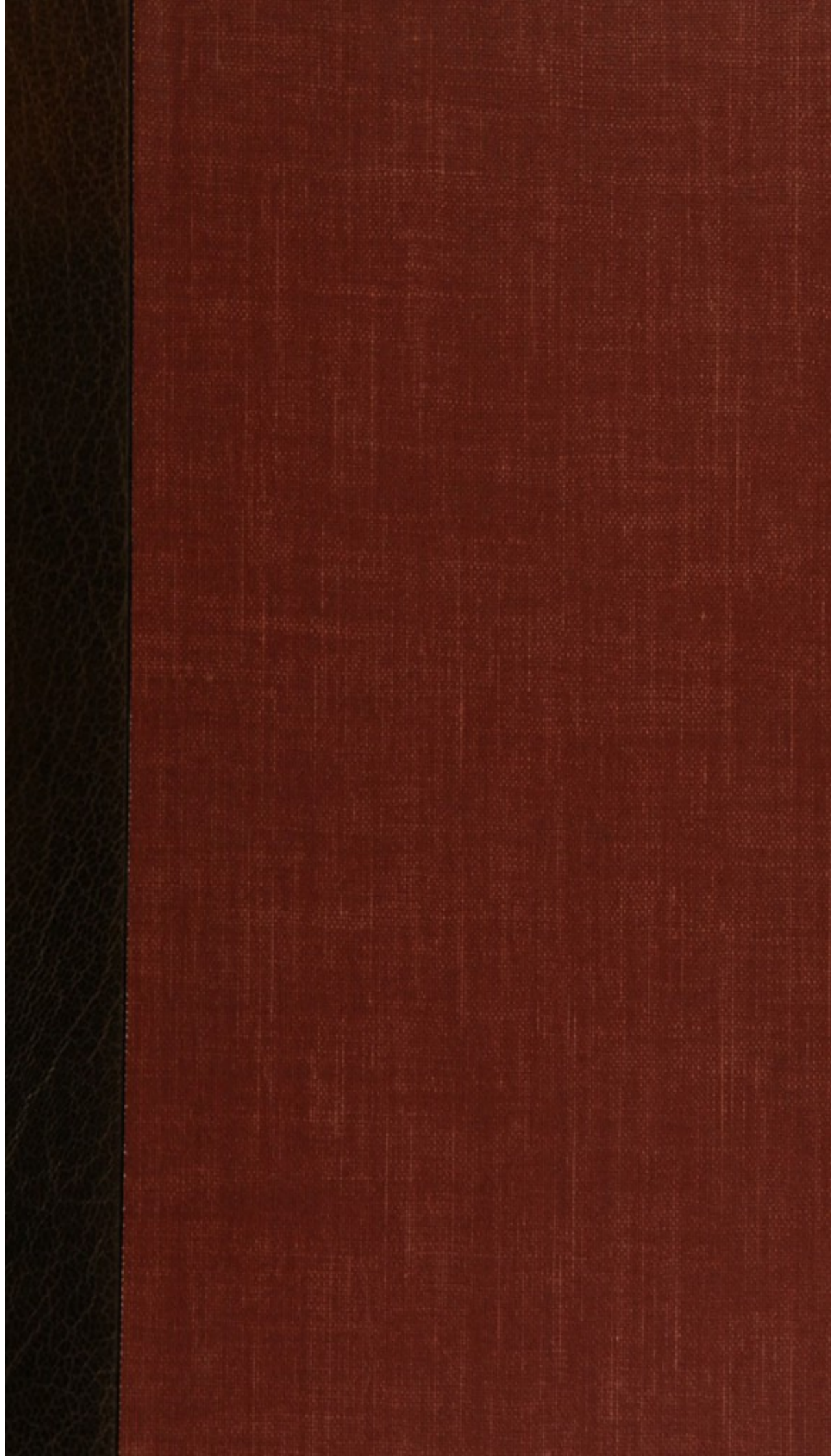
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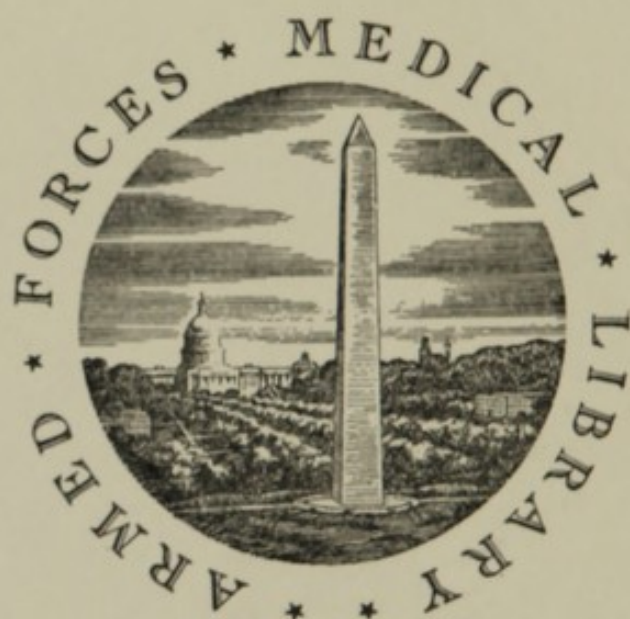
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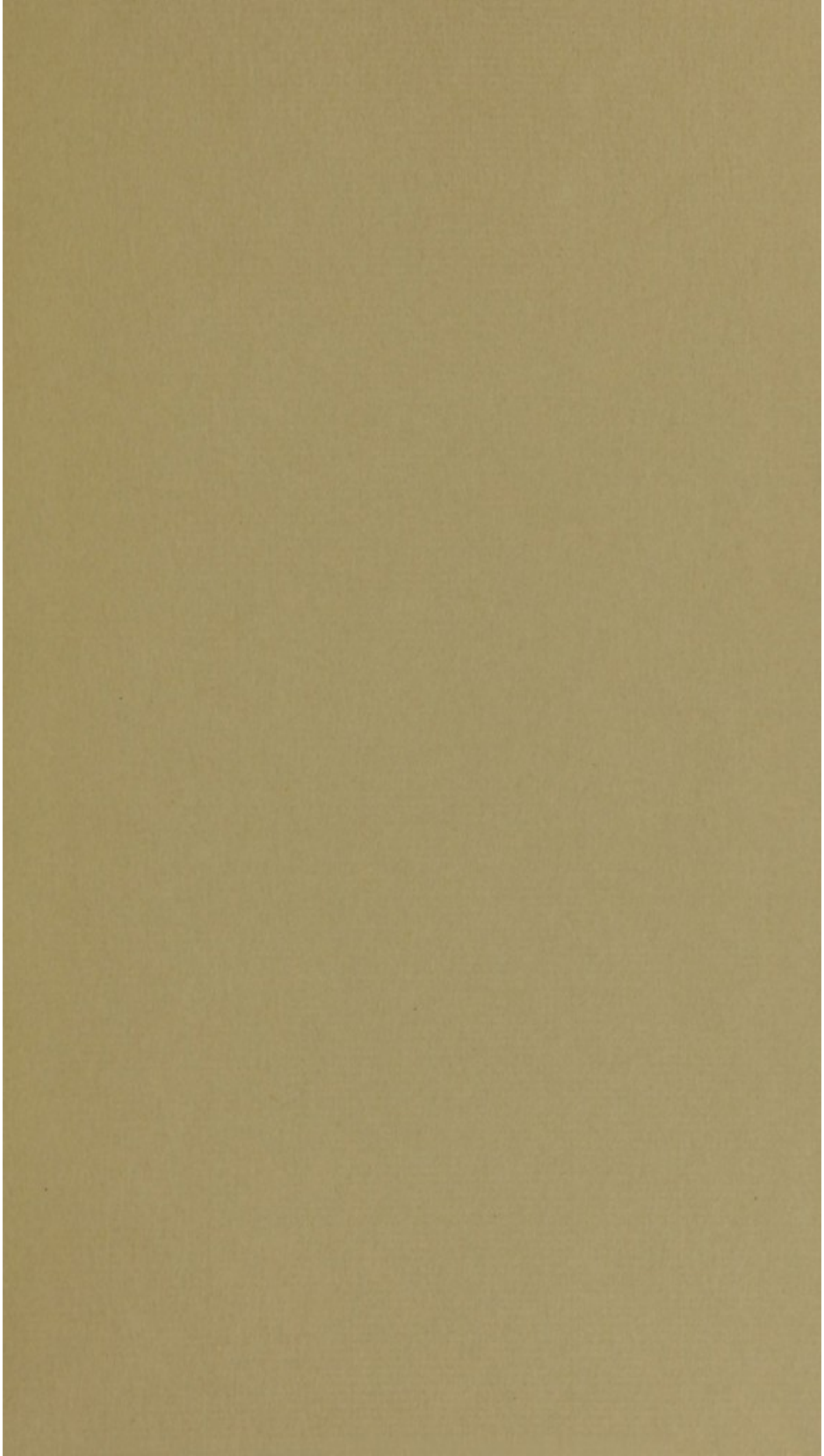


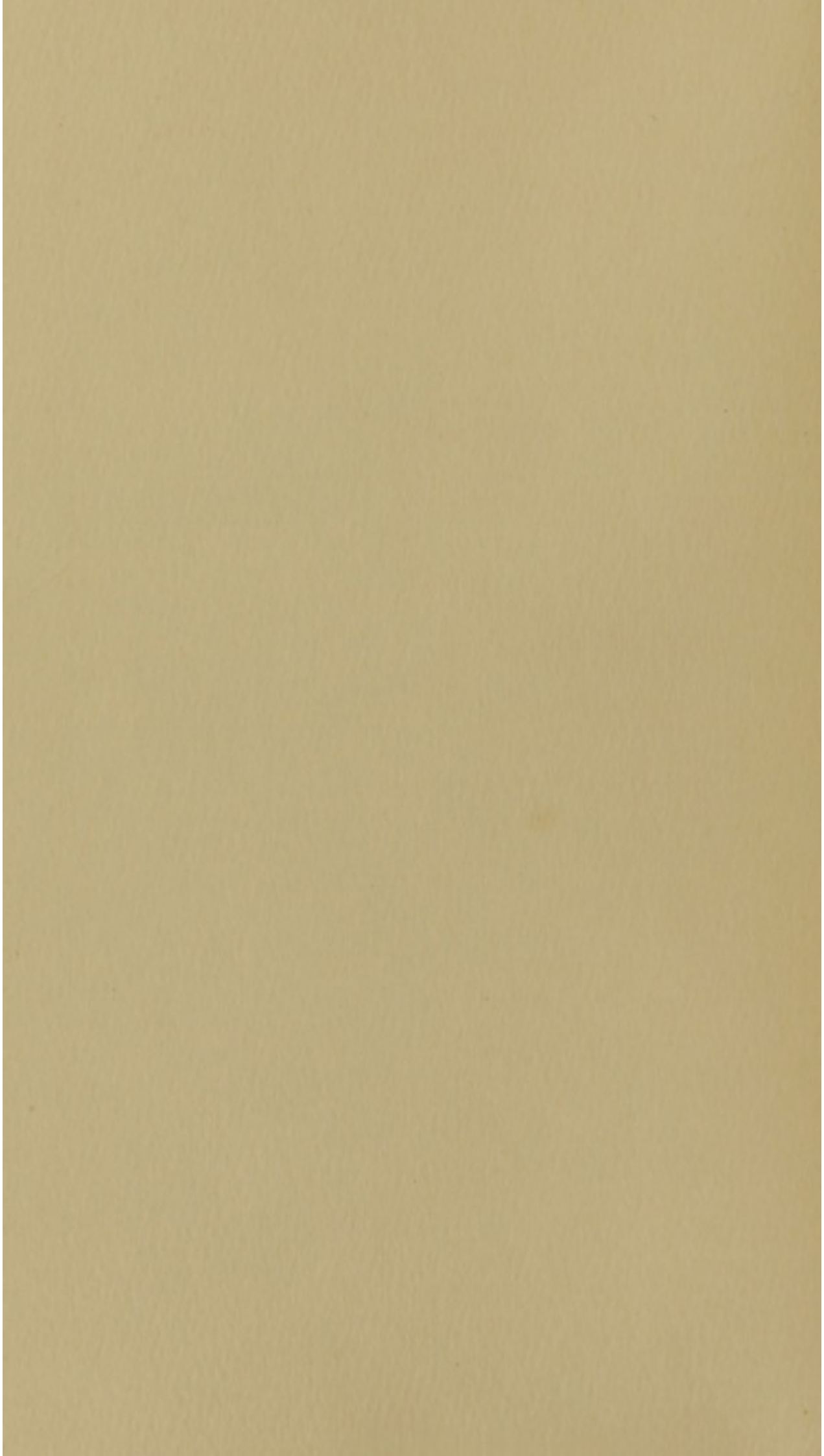
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ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE MEDICAL SOCIETY

OF THE

STATE OF NEW-YORK,

AND

THE MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATURE,

AT THE CAPITOL IN THE CITY OF ALBANY,

THE 2d. OF FEBRUARY, 1820,

ON THE INFLUENCE OF THE MIND UPON THE BODY IN THE
PRODUCTION AND CURE OF DISEASES.

BY JOHN STEARNS, M. D.

PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY.

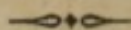
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1820.



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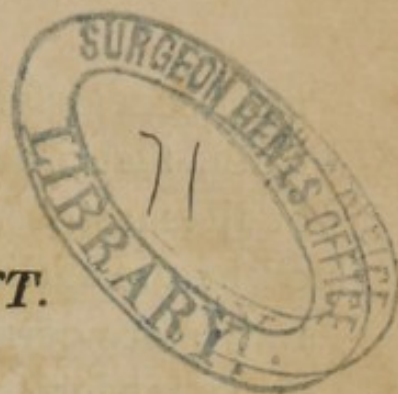
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ADDRESS.

BY THE PRESIDENT.



GENTLEMEN,

ANATOMISTS have long since attained to such perfection in demonstrating the parts of the human frame, as to preclude their successors from any important discoveries. The more variable science of diseases and their remedies, has been subjected to an investigation equally minute and complete ; and although the human mind has been explored, and alike exhausted of that interest, which the novelty of extravagant theories once attached to it, still a consideration of its operations and relations, in connection with the body, may be productive of benefit to the practitioner of medicine.

In his attempts to explain the operations of the mind, the metaphysician often passes the confines of common sense, and envelopes the whole in a mystery, which reason cannot penetrate nor comprehend. Thus confused, it seeks refuge in the sceptic philosophy of Berkley and of Hume—adopting Locke's theory of ideas as competent to explain all the phenomena of nature, it rejects the existence of the whole external world ; or with Leibnitz errs in the opposite extreme, and fills universal space with an infinite variety of monads.—Without resorting to these and all similar speculations, unaided reason would investigate the operations of its own mind

more successfully, and perhaps more consistently with truth, than when deluded by the fanciful inventions of the most brilliant genius. The systems published by the earliest Philosophers are therefore generally more correct, than the elaborate researches of more modern times; and it is even questionable whether Newton and Locke, with all their towering genius, have added any thing new or useful to the discoveries of Plato and Aristotle. It is not my intention to delineate the faculties of the mind, the different theories invented to explain its operations, its peculiar modes of acquiring ideas, or their respective location in the brain. These subjects may amuse the metaphysician, but can never aid the practitioner.

The soul, in its separate existence, presents to the Theologian a theme most important and inexhaustible; but it is our province to consider man an entire compound of soul and body, inseparably and indissolubly connected. A Physician, destitute of a perfect knowledge of the mind, is a very incompetent judge of the influence which it exerts upon the body, in the production and cure of diseases. He cannot avail himself of the use of a remedy, more efficacious than the most potent articles of the *Materia Medica*. Dr. Reid justly observes, that all such practitioners are like a Surgeon, who, while he secures one artery, suffers his patient to bleed to death by another.

A few reflections to illustrate this influence and to render it subservient in practice, will constitute the subject of this address.

To obviate the difficulty of explaining the opera-

tion of spirit upon matter, some have assumed the materiality of the mind; others have ascribed all its operations to a certain organization of the body; while neither could advance one step farther in a process, which infinitely exceeds the comprehensive powers of feeble, presumptuous man.—Who can ascend to heaven and unfold the laws of the universe, or explain their operation upon earth in the creation or reproduction of a single particle of matter? In the original creation of man, his body was distinguished for strength and beauty, and animated by a soul which sustained the image of its Creator.—Such perfection of mind and body, justly balanced in all their operations, was destined to endure forever, and to enjoy that supreme felicity which is known only to the inhabitants of Paradise. Exempt from disease and undisturbed by any inordinate passion, this harmonious compound flourished in the health and vigour of youth, till a poison, artfully infused into the mind, contaminated the body with pain, disease, and death. The effects of this infection were instantly evinced in the conviction of shame and guilt, which therefore may be deemed the real source of all the diseases which subsequently afflicted mankind. Although the seeds of dissolution, thus planted by the act of disobedience, proved the literal execution of the threat, “in the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die,” they did not produce their mature and ultimate effects in depraving the mind and deteriorating the body, till after that most corrupt period of the world, the general deluge, when the duration of life was thereby reduced to the stationary limits of seventy years.

Whether Enoch and Elijah were personally and by descent so pre-eminent for virtue, as to exempt their bodies from the evils incident to depraved nature, are suggestions which their miraculous translation to a new existence seems to confirm, and which acquire additional strength from the extraordinary longevity of the predecessors and immediate successors of the former. The same cause probably preserved Moses in the full enjoyment of his mental and corporeal faculties, at the advanced age of one hundred and twenty years.

Experience and Revelation afford ample evidence that a life of virtue is necessarily connected with moral happiness, and if perpetuated through a lineal succession of generations, would probably restore that beauty, health, and felicity which man lost in Paradise. That mental depravity produces not only disease, but also corporeal deformity, may be inferred from that Jewish law which precluded deformed persons from performing, and consequently "prophaning" the holy rites of the Priesthood, and also prohibited the oblation of all animals with similar defects.—This inference is fortified by tracing a similar connection between virtue and beauty even to its figurative perfection in the Deity, and to its visible exemplification in the body which Christ animated on earth.—It is for this reason that beautiful objects naturally excite the most ardent affections of the heart, which always increase as those objects approach the perfection of beauty, till they are consummated in the rapturous enjoyment of God himself. The propriety of this love and its necessary connection with our happiness, are susceptible

of mathematical demonstration. The soul which exerts such mighty powers upon this mass of inert matter, must, by its continued operation, produce an impress strong and durable as existence; and thence may be deduced important illustrations of the science of Physiognomy. The time may yet arrive when a due culture of this science, founded upon correct principles, may disclose to the physiognomist the secret thoughts of the heart, and thus introduce the unerring language of truth preparatory to its universal reign on earth. Much of this may be accomplished through the organs of the eyes, which are emphatically denominated the windows of the soul. The irresistible lustre and energy which they sometimes impart, can only be explained by the peculiar concentration of the soul in this organ.—Suetonius says, “Augustus had such piercing eyes that spectators could no more endure their brightness than the rays of the sun.” Barnardius says the same of Christ, and Peter Morales, of the Virgin Mary; and all agree that the eyes of the two latter, were so peculiarly expressive of holy affection, that they excited a similar emotion in all beholders. But none could withstand that torrent of fire and indignation which flowed from the eyes of Christ, in the frequent reproofs which he administered to the hypocritical Pharisees. What else could have clothed with terrific power a single individual, armed only with a scourge of small cords, who so precipitately expelled from their favourite resort, the hosts of merchants that thronged the temple; and which, on the night of his final apprehension, inspired such terror, as to prostrate the hostile multitude at his feet. The near

approach of Moses to the Deity, in Mount Sinai, so animated his soul, that his countenance was illumined by a lustre, equally terrific to the Jews. Dr. Rush, who has devoted much practical attention to this subject, says, the ferocity of the Bull and the Maniac may be perfectly subdued by an eye properly graduated.

May not this power of the eye result from the efforts of souls, to unite with kindred souls, or to repulse the adverse, and thus exhibit a feeble specimen of their affinities and repulsions which, when disembodied, they powerfully exert either to effect an infinite separation between the good and the bad, or to unite the former in close connection with each other, and ultimately with the great source of all spirit, "the rock from which they were hewed." This has been aptly compared to the attractive and repulsive properties of matter; and of which the soul while incarcerated in the body is as perfectly unconscious, as the stone in the wall, is of its own gravity. The powerful influence of spirit when rendered visible to man, even to the severance of soul and body, is further illustrated by the prevalent opinion among the Jews, authorized by the express declaration of God to Moses, "no man shall see me and live." This subject is replete with sublime contemplations which excite our astonishment at the unexplored regions of a world of spirits, and the immensity of power which they exert.—But this is the exclusive province of the Theologian—a consecrated ground which I dare not invade.

From this sublime scene we must descend to the humbler task of contemplating a tenement of clay, moulded, fashioned, and changed by the varied and incessant operations of the tenant within.

The peculiar location of this inhabitant, is a subject to which philosophers have for a long time directed their inquiries. But whether the soul has erected her throne upon the pineal gland, the brain and nerves, or pervades every part of the human frame, are questions which afford unprofitable discussions, and which the wisdom of man never can decide. To observe and apply the effects of this union to some practical use, constitute the summit of human attainments.

From the well known influence of physical causes and a certain configuration of the head upon the faculties of the mind, may be deduced a reciprocity of action between soul and body, that improves or impairs both, according to their respective operation.—To a peculiarity of form transmitted through successive generations, may, therefore, be traced that species of insanity and other diseases of the mind, denominated hereditary.

If the soul is an infinite decimal part of the Deity, and consequently the same in all bodies, the great variety in mankind must result from the multifarious operations of these causes upon the mind.—This opinion is fortified by an equal susceptibility of improvement in all who possess a similar conformation of body.—It was a common remark of Sir Isaac Newton that if he had any advantage over others, it arose from the more perfect control which he exercised over his attention.—This observation has been confirmed by others, and may conduce to a more successful mode of improving the mind and of curing its diseases.

Drs. Alderson and Ferriar cured several patients,

who were repeatedly afflicted with the apparitions of their deceased friends, and other terrific spectres, by depletion, purgatives, and sudorifics.—They consequently imputed all such delusive appearances to a morbid state of the corporeal organs, or to some strong and durable impression upon the mind.—That the fluids also have some agency in producing similar effects, may be inferred from the following fact :

Dionis says, that “all those in France who were the subjects of that fashionable, but erroneous practice, the transfusion of blood, died of mental derangement.”

Pinel examined many skulls of idiots and of the insane to ascertain the precise shape that predisposed to either of those diseases of the mind.—His investigations produced the following results—That the proportion between the length of the heads of idiots and their whole stature, is one tenth, and that of the insane, is one seventh and an half ; being much less than those just proportions which designate the wise and the sane.—Also, that the two demi-ellipses of the skull are not placed in a symmetrical order on the two sides of the principal axis ; but that on the right, makes a prominent curve to the anterior side, while on the posterior it is flattened ; and that on the left side of the anterior curve is flattened and the posterior more projecting. The conjugate axes also differ ; that from right to left is twenty-two centimetres, and that from left to right only seventeen—he found the difference in one child nineteen centimetres.—The skulls of idiots are also preternaturally thick, and their capacity thereby essentially diminished.—In one female idiot he found a large collection of blood effuse

ed upon the brain, which had considerably altered its appearance.—It is unnecessary to state the incurable nature of this species of disease.

So powerfully versatile is the mind, that it will not only produce effects perfectly analogous to the operations of medicines, but will also counterfeit almost every disease incident to our natures.

When we review the wonderful facts illustrative of this power, in the writings of Burton, Chrichton, Cheyne, and others, and discover the mighty efforts of the will in counterfeiting disease and death, we are equally astonished at the magnitude of its powers and the indifference to apply them to the cure of diseases.

Dr. Cheyne cites a case in which the pulse, respiration, and all the vital functions were so entirely suspended, by a simple effort of the will, as to induce an apparent death, that eluded his most rigid detection; the powers of life, in a few hours, were again gradually evolved in his perfect resuscitation; which was instantly succeeded by a presentiment of immediate dissolution, and which on the same day, actually closed the tragic scene.—Celsus, Cardan, Matthew Paris, and Burton mention similar facts, and enumerate a variety of diseases, from the mildest to the most malignant, that have been induced by volition alone.

The exercise of the understanding, and various amusements have cured headache, delirium, mania, and other mental and corporeal maladies.—Dr. Ash was cured of mania, by studying mathematics; Cowper, by translating Homer, and a Lady, by playing at cards.

The irregular operation of the passions produces the following morbid effects.

1st. Fear causes tremors, quick pulse, hurried respiration, hysteria, diarrhœa, aphonia, fever, convulsions, syncope, mania, asphyxia, and death. In some instances recorded by Cheyne, Burton and Brooks, it has produced small pox and plague without any exposure to those diseases.

2d. Grief, when acute produces sound sleep, syncope, insensibility, asphyxia, apoplexy, and death. When chronic, it causes fever, dyspepsia, hypochondriasis and loss of memory.

3d. Anger produces convulsions, hysteria, epistaxis, tremors, quick respiration, vomiting, syncope, asphyxia, apoplexia, and death.

4th. Joy causes pain in the heart, thirst, tears, syncope, and death.

5th. Envy has no remission, and produces slow fevers and a long train of nervous diseases.

6th. Love causes dyspepsia, hysteria, hypochondriasis, fever, madness, and death.

7. Avarice. This passion is daily exemplified in a variety of sporadic cases, but at certain periods becomes epidemic, imparting its baleful effects to the whole community. Its operation is manifested according to the frowns or smiles of fortune. The former produces depression of spirits, dyspepsia, melancholy, hypochondriasis, apoplexy and death; and is strongly illustrated in the present embarrassed state of the civilized world. The nature of the cases which are rapidly accumulating in our lunatic Asylums, and the unprecedented increase of apoplexies and suicides are melancholy proofs of this fact.

The latter causes insanity, in a paroxysm of joy at unexpected elevation to prosperity—a remarkable evidence of this occurred in 1790, when the fortunes suddenly acquired by the scrip speculators of that day, deranged the minds of hundreds and filled our public houses and our asylums with the *fortunate* insane.

This brief sketch of the morbid effects of the passions evinces their powerful influence, and dangerous tendency, when imprudently excited. Their medicinal character will constitute the subject for our next consideration.

1st. Fear. This passion may be excited to aid the operation of those remedies usually prescribed to reduce morbid excitement. Its salutary effects have been repeatedly witnessed in reducing the pulse, promoting perspiration and even in preventing the necessity of bleeding after preparation had been made for that purpose. Those who have persisted in the operation after these effects were produced, have generally induced a degree of debility unexpected, and evidently injurious.

Fear produces a remission of fever, pain, spasms, a mitigation of all inflammatory symptoms and pervades the system with a celerity unknown to other remedies. It promotes absorption, retards the effusion of water in dropsical swellings, and in some cases effects a radical cure. A sailor was cured of ascites by an accidental fall from the mast of a ship into the sea, which, according to his own expression, “frightened him almost to death.” Another was cured of an hydrocele, by the total absorption of the water, in the night, preceding the day assigned for the

operation. The alarming progress of a convulsive disease, rapidly diffused among the paupers at Haerlem, was suddenly arrested and a great number effectually cured, by the terror, which, the bold and well known experiment of Boerhaave powerfully impressed upon the victims. Its success in hiccough, hysteria, and epilepsy, is notorious.

2d. Anger. This passion accelerates the circulation, gives tone to the whole nervous system, is salutary in cold and torpid diseases, and has cured agues and palsies. It has excited an understanding and memory which had lain dormant for years, and cured fevers of long duration, chronic gout, hypochondriasis and rheumatism. May not a judicious combination of this with other passions excite those latent faculties of the mind in idiocy, which are not the effect of organic structure, or of such lesions as have radically changed the condition of the brain?

3d. Terror. Although some diseases have been cured by the sudden excitement of terror; it is too uncontrollable ever to be introduced into practice, except in the most desperate cases.

4th. Avarice. A Lady in France was cured of lethargy, by putting French crowns into her hands.

5th. Joy. The different gradations of this passion have performed wonders in removing visceral obstructions and in exciting those torpid parts of the system, which the most diffusible stimuli never can penetrate. Hence the prognosis, in diseases of debility and torpor, may be regulated by the susceptibility of patients to this emotion. The influence of a cheerful equanimity in preserving life through diseases of the most doubtful issue, has given origin to the common

expression, "their spirits kept them alive." By a judicious excitement of joy, thousands have been saved from the tomb, on whom the skill of the physician had been exhausted in vain.

6th. Faith. If joy has cured its thousands, faith has rescued its ten thousands from the grasp of death. Nothing but the credulity of patients could render successful the operation of metallic tractors, the inert prescriptions of the ignorant empiric, magic incantations, and the oracular responses of the Delphic impostors.

The success of a physician is proportioned to the confidence reposed in him by his patients. Avicenna "prefers it to art, precept and all other remedies." Hippocrates says, "he does most cures in whom most trust." Cardan says, "opinion alone mars or makes the physician." Paracelsus asserts, that "the success of Hippocrates arose more from the conceit the people had of his worth, than from his own skill."

Faith imparts a peculiar energy and tone to the system, and often performs half of the cure, before the physician prescribes for the disease. If the want of faith in the Nazarenes prevented the successful operation of the miracles of Christ, how ill must be the success of that physician who neglects to acquire the confidence of his patients.—Without this excitement, the will of the hypochondriac will remain for ever torpid, and incapable of being roused to any active exertion; and the physician will prescribe in vain for one, who contemns his want of skill.—To direct exercise to such a patient, would be equally absurd, as to say to one sick of the palsy, arise and walk.

The important influence of a proper direction of the mind, in promoting health and longevity, may be deduced from this summary view of the passions.—To render them subservient to this great object, it is equally important that they should be subjected to our perfect control. I am aware of the difficulty of deriving this power from the science of medicine or philosophy.—Exhaust all our art, and they will still have their periods of ebullition.—Fortunately an effectual remedy is presented from another source. Religion calms the boisterous tempest within, infuses an equanimity that invigorates health, excites the system, and restores that balance to its operations, which was lost in the destruction of primeval innocence.—It combines the concentrated operation of faith, hope, love, joy, and all the benevolent affections in one efficient compound, whose successful operation can be defeated, only by the incurable nature of the disease, necessarily resulting from inherent depravity.

The levity and derision with which some of our profession may be disposed to treat this view of the subject, will never deter me from the performance of a duty which I deem most important; but which I never witness without feelings of sincere regret. Such opinions result entirely from inattention, and a false notion of the real operation of a religious mind. Hence the consoling instruction of pious conversation, is utterly prohibited in that stage when the disease assumes a critical aspect.

Religion is important to prevent disease, but when sickness occurs with all its agonizing afflictions, when the mind is tortured with the gloomy prospect of an

unknown existence, and the certainty of approaching dissolution, its value is duly appreciated.—Then does it produce that calm composure and serene resignation which mitigate pain and smooth the exit of life, and above all medicinal remedies, tend to induce a favourable crisis of the disease.—Its astonishing effects were exemplified in converting the painful tortures inflicted upon those Martyrs who suffered death in its cause, into sources of consolation, felicity, and even bliss extatic.

What imagination can depict the horrors of an impious mind, conscious of the speedy and unerring approach of death? What frightful convulsions, what aggravations of fever, what delirious ravings, and finally what a death does it produce?

Is there one of the medical profession, who would not be solicitous to prevent such a catastrophe? Let him aid the operation of his corporeal remedies, by administering the balm of consolation to the despairing mind: let him excite hope, by pledging that felicity which penitence and faith alone will secure—let him encourage the frequent visits of the clergy, and may the fervent and pious advice of the eloquent Massillon, enforce the early performance of those duties, which a frigid indifference, or false delicacy, often defer to the hopeless, fatal hour.

On this rampart will I plant the standard of our profession, and invite to its protection all who are emulous of the fame thus acquired, which has distinguished the most brilliant constellation of worthies that have ever adorned the medical character.

Gentlemen of the Society,

Since our last meeting, the law regulating the practice of Physic and Surgery, has been so amended as to promote the respectability of our Colleges, the usefulness of the Medical Societies, and to improve the qualifications of the students. But the wisdom of Legislative regulation is often evaded, by appropriating to other objects, much of the time necessarily required in pursuing the study of Medicine. This evasion can be remedied, only by the fidelity and skill of the Censors, in the performance of their important duties.

The Medical Profession throughout the state, is acquiring a distinctive character, honourable to our country. The Junior members evince a talent for research and improvement, not surpassed in any part of the world.

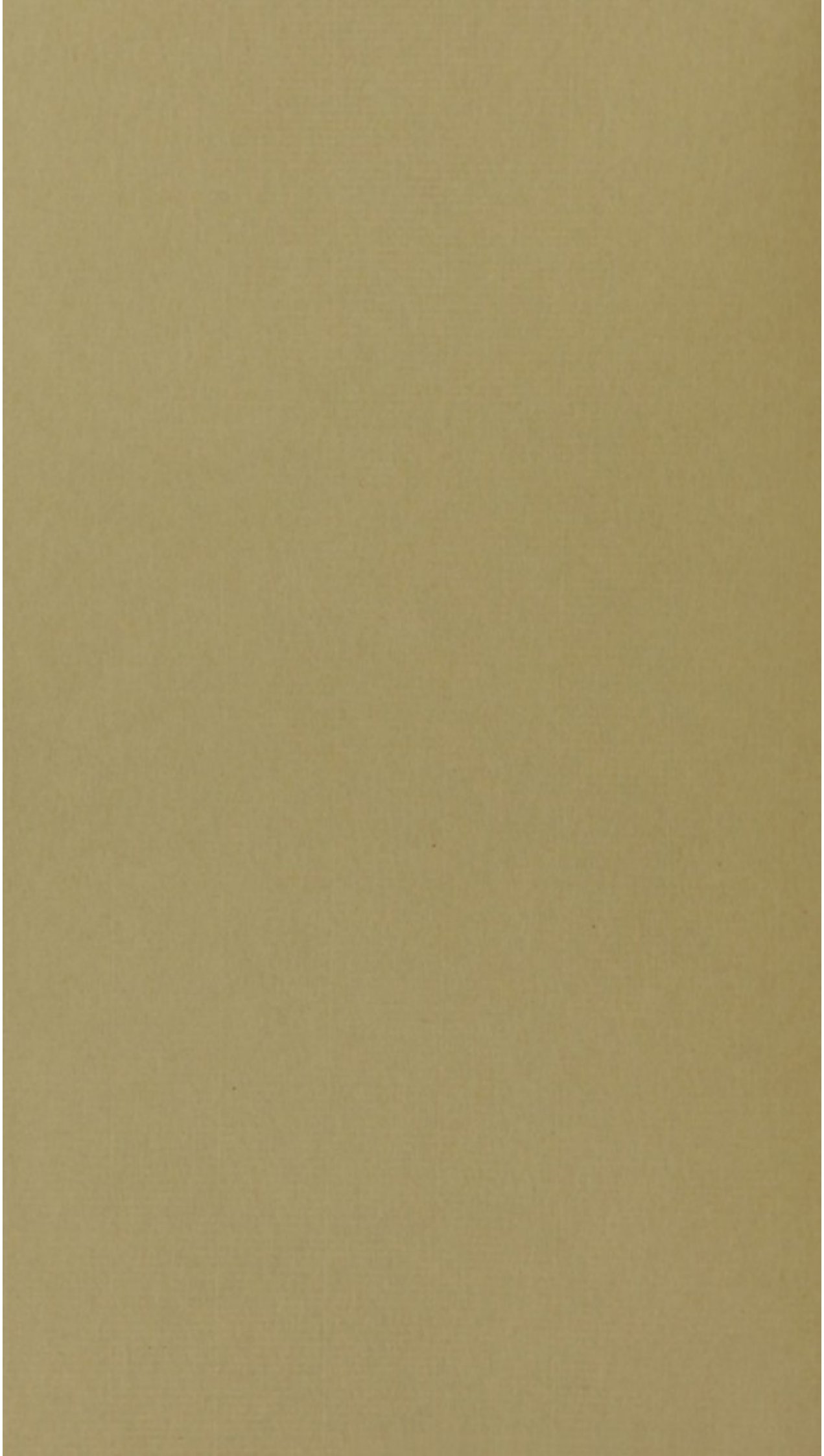
The Medical Repository, the Transactions of the Physico Medical Society, the Register of Medical and Surgical Cases of Hospital Practice, all periodically published in the City of New-York, with other similar Journals in the United States, afford ample evidence of this fact.

I trust the time is not remote when the opinions of American Physicians will be referred to as the highest authorities in medicine. This event will be accelerated by the liberality of opinion and discussion that is tolerated in our schools, unshackled by the restraints of authority imposed upon the graduates of the Colleges of Europe. The late effort to form a National Pharmacopœia, is a strong illustration of this position. An effort which has never been equalled, and the magnitude of which intimidated many

of its ardent friends: but which our diversified climate, abounding in Medicinal plants, alone sufficient for the indigenous diseases of our country, urgently required.

The Delegates originally appointed by this Society, performed the duties assigned them, in the City of New-York, and reported a complete Pharmacopœia to the District Convention of the Middle States, assembled, in June last, at Philadelphia. The work executed by this, and the other District Conventions, held at Boston for the Eastern, at Lexington for the Western, and at Columbia for the Southern States, was reported to the General Convention of the United States, recently held at Washington. From the whole of which, a judicious and satisfactory selection has been made. It is, therefore, with no ordinary satisfaction, that I announce the final completion of a work which will constitute a new era in medical history. The benefits will be extended to every Practitioner, and perhaps to every Individual in the United States. We search the annals of the world, in vain, for a precedent.

From Maine to Georgia, from the Atlantic to the Mississippi, we behold the Medical public, animated by one spirit, merging all private considerations in this grand object, and spontaneously congregating in State, District, and General United States Conventions. An intercourse and correspondence thus commenced, have excited the Medical energies of America, and will produce important consequences, co-extensive with our empire, and durable as its existence.



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