

Letter on febrile contagion: addressed to David Hosack / [John W. Francis].

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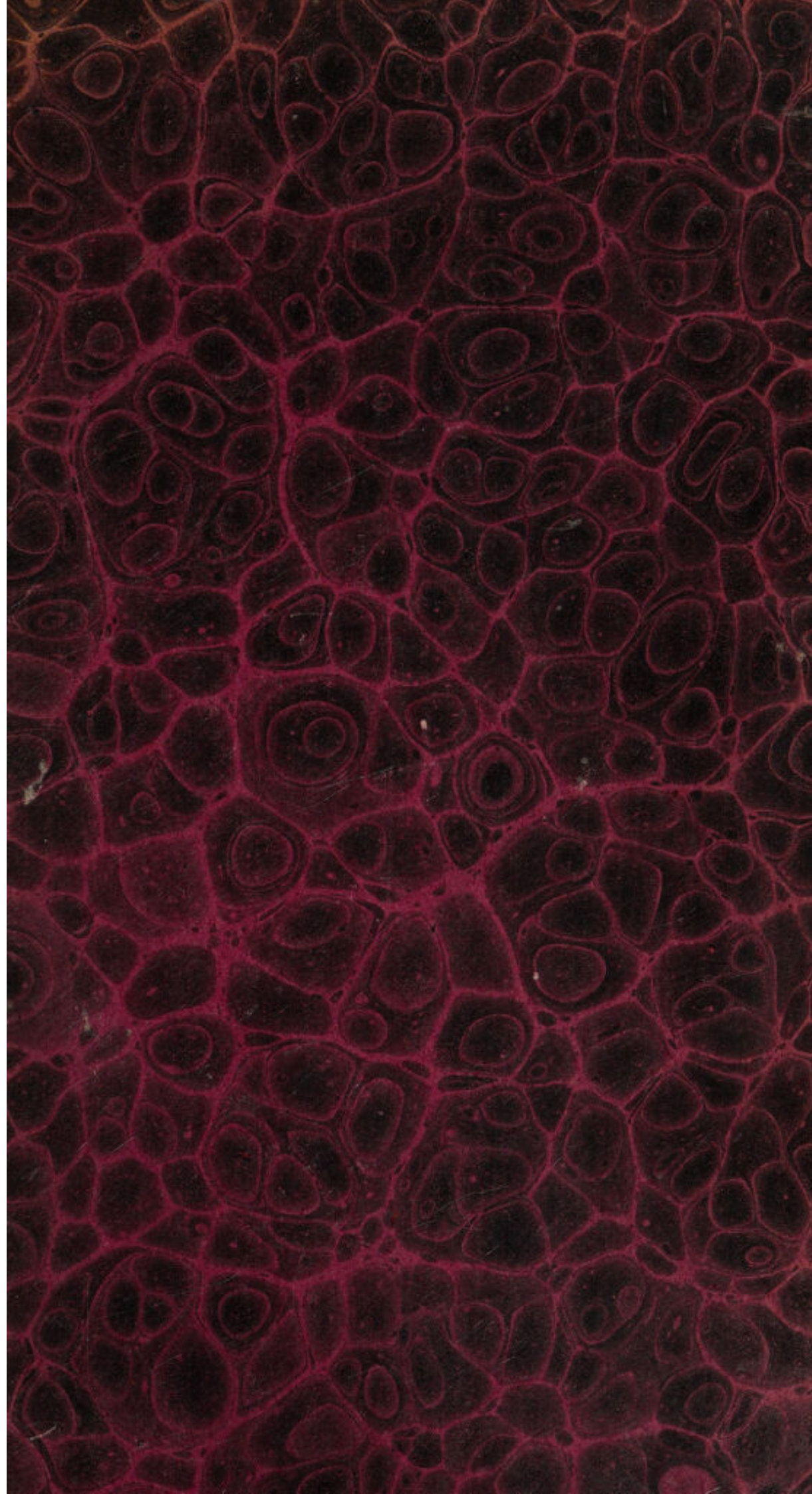
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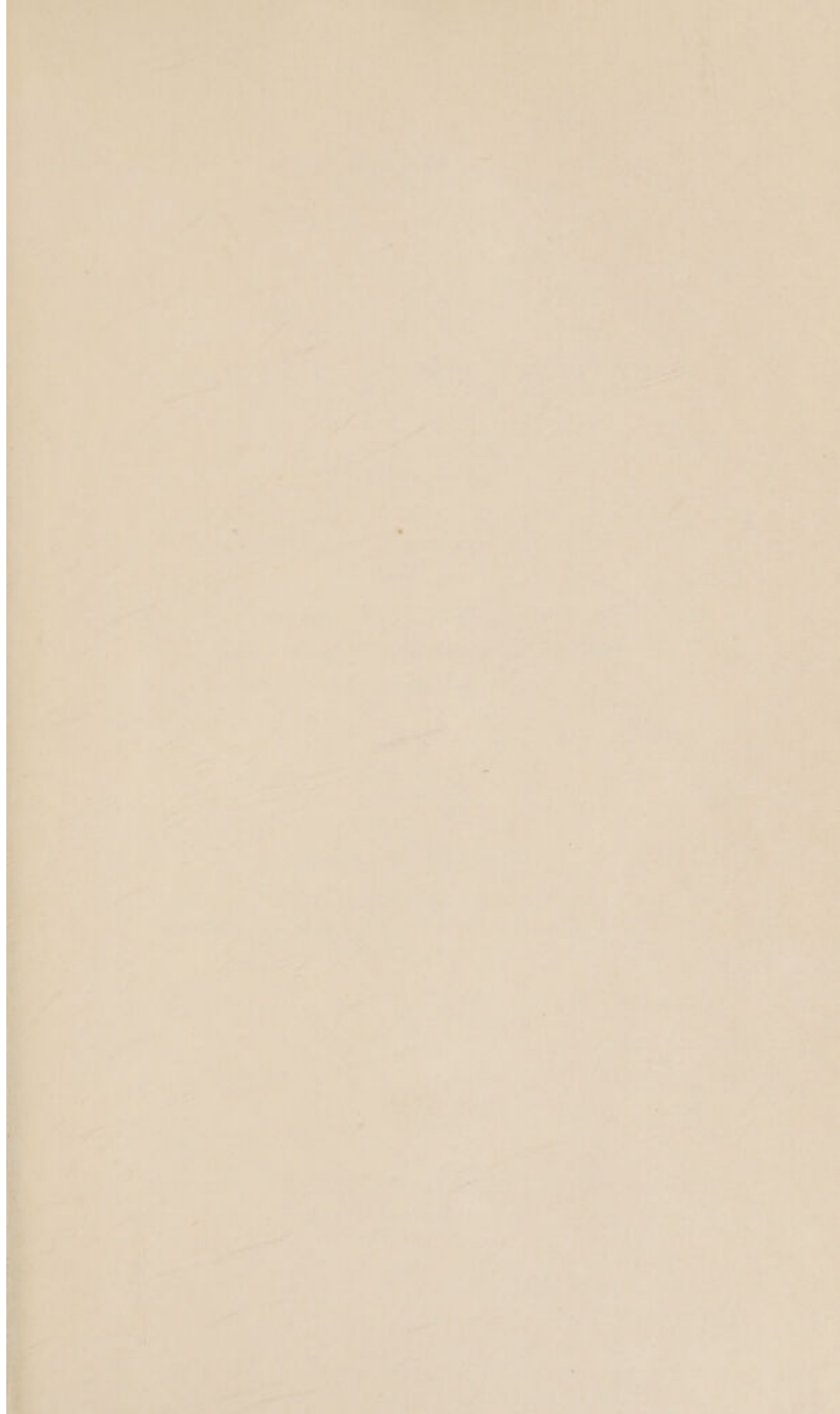
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LETTER

ON

FEBRILE CONTAGION:

ADDRESSED TO

DAVID HOSACK, M. D. F. R. S. F. L. S.

PROFESSOR OF THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF PHYSIC, AND OF MIDWIFERY AND
THE DISEASES OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN, IN THE UNIVERSITY
OF THE STATE OF NEW-YORK, &c.

BY JOHN W. FRANCIS, M. D.

Professor of the Institutes of Medicine in the University of the State of New-York, Member
of the Medical and Chirurgical Society of London, of the Literary and
Philosophical Society of New-York, &c.

NEW-YORK :

PRINTED BY CLAYTON AND FANSHAW,

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1816.

LETTER

THEIR COAT OF ARMS

OF THE

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NOTICE.

During the Writer's late residence in Great Britain, finding the question, Whether the human constitution is susceptible of a second attack of Yellow Fever? occupying a large share of the attention of the medical profession, it occurred to him, that the ample experience enjoyed by the physicians of the United States, would go far in settling this controversy. With the view of calling the attention of American Practitioners to this subject, and of obtaining the results of their Observations, the following Letter is published.

NEW-YORK, Dec. 1816.

LETTER.



LONDON, *June* 16, 1816.

DEAR SIR,

Within a few days I set out for Bristol, and in all probability this is the last letter you will receive from me dated London. The present communication might be devoted to many interesting subjects medical and philosophical; but I am induced from several considerations to restrict my attention particularly to one. You have long been acquainted with the important controversies that have existed on that grand subject of medical disputation, contagion; with the various and contradictory opinions that have been promulgated as to its nature and effects; and with the manner in which those controversies have been conducted, especially by American physicians. The question of contagion and infection has also occupied, as you well know, a large share of the attention of the medical writers of Great Britain, especially within the last few years. Much less diversity of sentiment, however, exists in this country than in our own, and in the discussion

much less of asperity has been manifested. A single exception occurs in the case of Dr. Bancroft in his late "Essay on the Disease called Yellow Fever:" a work intended by the author to prove that this form of fever is occasioned by the operation of marsh miasmata, and is non-contagious; and of which performance it is due to the talents of the author to admit that he has displayed great learning and research. As one practically acquainted with the disease during its visitations in America for a period of more than twenty years, your own ample experience will have enabled you at once to perceive the fallacy of such speculations. Indeed, the volume of Dr. Bancroft has most materially aided in the establishment of the very doctrines which it was his object to overturn. Few writers seem to have entered the field of controversy with stronger prejudices, and, perhaps, none have communicated their thoughts with less deference to authority and in more illiberal language. It would appear to be the opinion of Dr. Bancroft, judging from his conduct, that gross invective and personal abuse may supply the place of well authenticated fact and legitimate deduction.

The revival in England of the controversy relative to the specific form and contagious nature of yellow fever has been the means of giving birth to several works of great practical value, and in my

opinion, of deciding the great question; if indeed any thing had been wanting after the laborious investigations of yourself and of other American physicians. The volumes of Sir James Fellowes and Dr. Pym have just made their appearance here, and may not yet have reached you. The former author has published the results of his practice under the title of *Reports of the Pestilential Disorder of Andalusia, which appeared at Cadiz in the years 1800, 1804, 1810 and 1813; with a detailed account of that fatal Epidemic as it prevailed at Gibraltar during the autumnal months of 1804, &c.*: the latter under the name of *Observations upon the Bulam Fever which has of late years prevailed in the West-Indies, on the coast of America, at Gibraltar, Cadiz, and other parts of Spain: with a collection of facts proving it to be a highly Contagious Disease.* As officers of high trust in the medical Department of the Army, they have enjoyed opportunities of unwonted observation: the manner in which they have drawn up the respective accounts of their labours is highly satisfactory, and the accuracy of each work is fully confirmed by official documents. Sir James Fellowes, as long ago as 1795, had numerous opportunities of witnessing the pestilential fever which committed such ravages among the British soldiery of St. Domingo, and he describes the Peninsular fever as appearing

under a similar form of malignity and showing, many of the strongly marked characters of the St. Domingo fever. His history of the origin and progress of the disease clearly points out that there is a real foundation for the distinction between fevers arising directly from the miasmata of marshes and decomposed vegetable matter, and those that are the offspring of human effluvia or specific contagion. The account furnished by Dr. Bancroft under this head is clearly proved to be erroneous, and his statements, deficient as they are in the most essential requisites, will have little weight when compared with the judicious relation of the Spanish Professor Arejula. In his observations on the disorder called the Walcheren fever, which prevailed so fatally among the troops of Zealand in 1809, and after their return to Great Britain, and which disease, notwithstanding the volume of Pringle,* has most absurdly been pronounced by some writers to be the yellow fever, Sir James maintains that it possessed no contagious property, at least no evidence existed that the complaint ever had been propagated or communicated to those in attendance upon the sick. "This fact," says he, "was confirmed by my own experience, and by the testi-

* Diseases of the Army.

mony of all the medical officers of the army." "On the other hand," adds Sir James, "the numerous facts which have been recorded of the contagious nature of the pestilential fever of Spain are incontrovertible; they are detailed with simplicity and truth, and they must speak for themselves."*

Dr. Pym, in his Observations, has attempted to prove that the fever of Gibraltar was the same as the Bulam fever, so happily described by the learned and distinguished Chisholm; that it is a disease totally distinct from the bilious remittent fever of warm climates; that it has no connection with or relation to marsh miasmata; that it appears in the West-Indies only under peculiar circumstances; that it is contagious, and under a certain degree of temperature may be propagated from one country to another; that it attacks, in a comparatively mild form, natives of a warm climate, or Europeans whose constitutions have been assimilated to a warm climate; and that it differs from all other fevers, in having its contagious powers increased by heat, and destroyed by cold, or even by a free circulation of moderately *cool* air. According to Dr. Pym, under the name yellow fever, have been confounded three fevers, which

* Introduction, p. xxii.

he considers as totally distinct. The agency of marsh effluvia, I have already observed, he wholly rejects as a cause of the Bulam, Gibraltar, or real yellow fever. This you will perceive is striking at the root of that most pernicious error that has been so zealously and so widely propagated, notwithstanding the evidence of facts to the contrary, and the happy nosological distinctions made long since by such authors as Blane, Chisholm, Jackson, Lempriere, Clark of Dominica, Stewart, Bard, and numerous other practical observers of undoubted veracity. For I believe you will agree with me that from the want of a due discrimination on the part of many writers who have professed to describe the fevers of the United States, as they have prevailed in our sea-port towns and in different inland places of our country, have proceeded most of the dissensions that have existed on this subject. This want of discrimination too may justly be considered adequate to the production of many of the histories of the diseases of America that have appeared, and in which we find confounded fevers arising from dissimilar causes, characterised by a different train of symptoms, and varying most essentially in the methods of treatment they require.* Dr. Pym's is no feeble

* This language, I feel assured, will not be deemed too strong by those who impartially compare the different accounts of the

attempt to counteract the influence which the unwarrantable opinions of Dr. Bancroft may have had in relation to this point.

But I have to solicit your attention to a much more important circumstance made known in the volumes of Dr. Pym and Sir James Fellowes, and to communicate which this letter has been written. Dr. Pym, who had the advantage of seeing the disease not only in Europe but in the West-Indies, contends, that the Bulam fever attacks the *human frame but once*; and supports this position with the strongest proof. I will not do injustice to his statements by attempting to abridge them. Irrefragible evidence is advanced by Dr. Pym, that the Gibraltar, West-India or Bulam fever, (the malignant pestilential fever of Chisholm) are the same disease. In a subsequent essay, Dr Pym has enlarged on the subject of the disease affecting the human body but once. I must be indulged in one or two extracts.

“At Gibraltar, during the prevalence of the

fevers which prevail in the interior of our country, and more especially those that have made their appearance in the vicinity of lakes with the histories that have been given of the pestilence as it has exhibited itself in New-York, Philadelphia, Boston, and other sea-ports and places within the United States. To consider the several kinds of fevers as *grades* only of one and the same disease, is a retrograde movement in medical philosophy.

disease in the years 1810, 1813, 1814, there was no well authenticated instance of a second attack: every person escaped it, who had had it at any former period: and this fact is now so well established there, that among the quarantine regulations against the introduction of the disease this year, (1815,) *all the troops who have not passed it are encamped, while those who have passed it are doing the duty of the town.* At Cadiz, Carthagea, and Malaga, the fact of persons not being liable to a second attack of this disease, is considered to be as firmly established as it is in the small-pox."

"Two more proofs of the Bulam fever not attacking a second time, were in the 70th and 55th regiments. The first suffered severely from the disease in the West-Indies, in the year 1794, and returned to that climate from Europe in the year 1800, filled up with new officers, with the exception of six, viz. Col. Dunbar, Major Elliot, Captains Johnstone, Lawrence, Hutchinson, and Boat, who had had the fever at a former period in the West Indies, and who now escaped it, although the corps buried ten of the newly appointed officers in a very short time."

"Upon a moderate computation, there were *one hundred and fifty* officers (civil and military,) at Gibraltar, who had not had the disease before, and twenty-five who had passed it in the West

Indies ; and making an allowance for one or two doubtful cases, where the disease was so mild as not to confine the patient to the bed, one hundred and forty-five at least out of the one hundred and fifty were attacked by it, while every individual of the twenty-five who had it before escaped it." *Appendix to Dr. Pym's Observations.*

This same peculiarity marked the pestilential fever of Spain. According to Sir James Fellowes, it never has been known to attack the same person a second time in that country. "This fact," says Sir James, "which was first observed by the native practitioners, has now been confirmed by the experience of several years, and by the concurrent testimony of all the surviving inhabitants of those places, where the disorder had most prevailed." *Introduction, p. xxiii.*

I have dwelt so long on the performances of Sir James Fellowes and Dr. Pym, as almost to be deterred from referring to any other authority ; yet I cannot forbear making a short extract from an account of the epidemic fever which occurred at Gibraltar, and for which the public are indebted principally to Dr. Gilpen, one of the inspectors of the hospitals. The paper throughout is of singular merit, and eminently calculated to do away the doubts of the sceptical, and strengthen the faith of the wavering. It is gratifying to the

philanthropist to read the answer given by Dr. Gilpen to the eighteenth query, addressed him by the Medical Board of the army.

“In private houses, in most cases,” replies Dr. G. “the attendants were attacked. There were undoubtedly many exceptions in the hospitals; but it was to be accounted for, as, generally speaking, the attendants were persons who had had the disease previously either in the West Indies, or in Spain, or here, in 1804. At the commencement of the disease last year, it was calculated that there was about five thousand persons within the walls who had previously passed through it; and, after careful inquiry, there does not appear to be one well authenticated case of a person’s having received the infection a second time. I heard, indeed, of three or four; but as the nature of the *previous* fever could not be exactly known, these exceptions have but little weight in so momentous a question. The exemption from a second attack, I am credibly informed, is firmly believed in Spain. At Cadiz, last year, though the fever put on the very worst symptoms, and destroyed the patient frequently in forty-eight hours, the deaths did not exceed, in a population of upwards of seventy thousand, fifty a day; and these were chiefly strangers. The Spaniards are so fully convinced they cannot receive the infection

a second time, that having passed the disease is matter of great rejoicing among them: and a medical certificate of the fact, is a sufficient passport into an infected town, which they enter without the smallest apprehension." Consult the Transactions of that active and distinguished association, the Medical and Chirurgical Society of London, vol. 5, for more ample details.

The immunity of the constitution from a second attack of yellow fever, is a peculiarity so strikingly characteristic of most disorders of an acknowledged specific nature, and of such great practical interest both in a social and political point of view, that it is extraordinary it should have met with so little notice before Professor Arejula made mention of it in the year 1806. "The yellow fever of Andalusia," says Arejula, (I avail myself of the translation of his account in *Sir James Fellowes' Reports*, p. 67.) "attacks persons but once in their lives, and it is of great importance to the physician to know this, in order to form his prognosis and his plan of cure, as well as for the individual who may have passed through this disorder, that both of them being assured of this fact, may step forward without fear to the relief of their fellow creatures who may hereafter be afflicted with so dreadful a malady." Dr. Pym, however, enjoys the reputation of being

the first English physician who promulgated this principle. I have not the sources of information at hand to enable me to determine how many of the writers on the malignant fever, as it has prevailed in our country, have entertained this opinion, though I well recollect Dr. Lining to have been one; as may be seen in his account of the fever of Charleston, published more than sixty years ago in the *Edinburgh Physical and Literary Essays*, volume second. In the interesting correspondence on the yellow fever which was maintained a short time anterior to this period by Dr. John Mitchell, of Virginia, and Lieutenant Governor Colden, of New-York, nothing is alluded to from which we might infer their knowledge of this law of the disorder. See the *American Medical and Philosophical Register*, vol. 1st. and 4th. In the *Facts and Observations of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia*, on the nature and origin of the pestilential fever, after establishing the identity of the yellow fever which existed in that city in 1793, 1797 and 1798, with the West India pestilence, the College state, that it is a circumstance that deserves particular attention, that "very few, if any, of the Creole French in this city, [Philadelphia,] suffered from the contagious malignant fever which prevailed here in 1793, 1797, and 1798, though the disease was introduced into

their families ; and children born in this country of Creole parents, died with it last autumn, while the parents and the children born in the West Indies were entirely exempt from it." We look in vain, if my memory serves me, for any thing of the same sort in the Additional Facts and Observations, a subsequent publication of the College of Philadelphia.

In the Sketch of the Malignant Contagious Fever as it appeared in the same city in 1793, Dr. Cathrall observes, "it does not appear to affect the same person twice. Although careful enquiry" adds he, "has been made by several of my medical friends and myself, it only appears that some of the patients had a slight relapse of fever, but without any of the distinguishing symptoms of the disease, and very soon recovered." It is much to be regretted that the several histories of this disease published by that able medical annalist, the late Dr. Rush, should have been so confused and unsatisfactory on so momentous a matter. In his account of the bilious yellow fever of 1793, you will, nevertheless, find that the refugees from the French West Indies "universally escaped the disorder," though this was not the case with the natives of France who had been settled in the city. On the other hand, Dr. Currie of Philadelphia, in his treatise on the Synochus Ictericus, states, that several instances occurred of the

disease affecting the same individual a second time, and under circumstances so unequivocal that it could not be *fairly* ascribed to a relapse. This assertion, you will see, is not strongly made, and may be deemed rather matter of opinion than matter of fact.

Dr. Currie also tells us that the French West Indians, particularly those from St. Domingo, almost to a man escaped the disorder, though they made use of no precaution for the purpose, “while those from France were as liable to it as the Philadelphians.” Nothing in relation to the security from a second attack of the disease is advanced by the late Professor Bayley, in his excellent volume on the Epidemic Fever of New-York in 1795, though in the Collection of Papers published by Mr. Webster, a writer on the epidemic of New-York, of the same year, alleges that he knew not a decided instance of an individual labouring under a second seizure.—But at present I am not duly prepared to enlarge on this point, by reference to other American authorities.

Dr. Pym has referred me to a passage in Sauvages on this disease, in which it is asserted that it operates upon the constitution but once. *Typhus icterodes* contagiosus est. Albos tantum, maxime peregrinos ex regionibus frigidis advenas, Indos, Hybridos, mulatros omnes, exceptis infantibus, una tantum vice afficit: nigri vero ab eo mor-

bo nonquam afficiuntur.” See *Nosologia Methodica*, tom. 1. p. 316, of the quarto edition of 1768. Does your own extensive experience in the malignant epidemic of New-York, agree with the opinion that the human constitution is invulnerable to a second attack of yellow fever, and corresponding in this respect with small pox, and other specific disorders? In answer to this question, which has been frequently put to me by practitioners of medicine in England, I have uniformly ventured to assert that it holds good as a general fact. Those who have once had the disease are certainly *less susceptible* of its influence a second time.

Permit me now to make known to you the important results of the recent deliberations of two of the most distinguished medical associations of this kingdom. The decisions of the Royal College of Physicians of London, and of the Army Medical Board are at length brought to a close. These two learned bodies, alike distinguished for scientific attainment and practical knowledge, have been for a considerable time past devoted to a consideration of all the facts connected with the nature and character of the yellow fever, particularly as it has of late years appeared in Spain. The Royal College have pronounced that the yellow fever is a highly contagious disease, which decision they have reported to the Lords of the

Privy Council. With respect to its attacking the human frame but once, they say they think it *extremely probable*, but that upon a point of such importance they cannot venture to give a decided opinion. The Army Medical Board, at the head of which presides Sir James M-Gregor, have also given it as their opinion, that the yellow fever is in its nature contagious; and they further add their conviction, that the fever of Spain is not only strictly contagious, but that like other disorders of a specific character, it affects the human frame but once. I have been kindly favoured with an abstract of these proceedings, and I herewith enclose an extract from the official report upon Dr. Pym's publication, by the Army Medical Board. The operation of climate, soil, and other local causes, in adding virulence to febrile contagion, may be considered almost an axiom in physics; and the necessity of a strict adherence to your improved system of quarantine laws, and all municipal regulations for the purpose of domestic cleanliness, cannot be too strongly enforced. On this subject the Royal College and the Army Medical Board are united in opinion.

(COPY.)

EXTRACT FROM THE REPORT UPON DR. PYM'S PUBLICATION BY
THE ARMY MEDICAL BOARD.

Army Medical Board Office, 6th May, 1816.

"It is due to Dr. Pym to state, that we consider him to have been the first English medical

man who promulgated the opinion, that the disease in question (the Bulam fever,) is capable of attacking the human frame but once; and if that opinion be correct, which we believe it to be, it is certainly an important fact, and led Dr. Pym to employ those persons as attendants on the sick, who had undergone the disease, and therefore were not likely to be affected by the contagion of it, and thus probably saved many lives. Under these impressions, we beg leave to recommend the industry and research displayed by Dr. Pym in his book, to Lord Palmerstone's favourable consideration.

“Signed,

“J. M'GREGOR,

“W. FRANKLIN,

“W. SOMERVILLE.”

The advocates for the unity of disease will, I believe, find it insuperably difficult to reconcile with their theory, the facts which I have thus hastily communicated to you; while the fundamental principle, that there is a radical difference between remitting fever and yellow fever, between fevers depending upon marsh miasms as their source, and those that take their rise from human contagion; in short, that yellow fever is a distinct idiopathic disease, acquires additional support. It may not therefore be of disservice to make known

the purport of this letter. The doctrine maintaining that different fevers are of one common origin, is in reality so unfounded in fact and so pernicious in its consequences, that the sooner it is discarded, the better will it be for the interests of humanity.

Before I conclude, permit me to add a few lines on a subject not wholly foreign to the nature of this letter, the *plague*. The account of the origin and progress of the plague in the island of Malta, in the year 1813, drawn up by Dr. Calvert, physician to the forces, and printed in the 6th volume of the Transactions of the Medical and Chirurgical Society of London, is a document of great value. The reasoning of the author, deduced from the evidence which a faithful narrative affords, seems to be very satisfactory. Contact, he maintains, is the most certain mode of communicating the disease, but he is inclined to deny that it is essential to the propagation of the contagion.

“It appears to me, says Dr. Calvert, that this contagion or principle of plague is diffusible in the atmosphere to a distance greater or less from an infected body, according to the climate and season of the year, and possibly to other peculiar states of the atmosphere, with which we are unacquainted; that in the spring or summer season a single infected person is sufficient to contaminate the air of a whole city; and that those who hap-

pen to be then exposed to febrile causes or otherwise predisposed are the first to become its victims. That these newly infected persons generate a fresh supply of poison, increasing its strength and influence, till at length it becomes so powerful, that nothing but the winter season will entirely put a stop to it."

The various reports that have been so industriously circulated concerning the contagiousness and non-contagiousness of the plague, especially as it prevailed in the army of the East, and the contradictory statements that have been made relative to Baron Desgenettes, induced me, while in Paris in the spring of 1816, to seek an interview with that gentleman, in order to ascertain the truth on this interesting subject. Dr. Delile, the companion of Dr. Desgenettes as a member of the Institute of Egypt, accompanied me. What practical advantage may arise from inoculation for the plague we are not yet able to state; that the experiment is not without great danger is sufficiently well ascertained. The Baron distinctly declared that it had ever been his settled opinion that the plague was a contagious disorder; that his extensive experience as an officer of the medical staff, had only served to confirm him in that opinion; and further expressed much surprise, that any account should have been made public representing his views in a different light. The Baron inoculated

himself with the matter of plague, though he felt persuaded that the disease was of a specific character, and had almost hourly evidence of its contagious effects: but more fortunate than the incredulous Whyte, he did not fall a victim to the experiment.

I am aware how confidently the case of Dr. Whyte has been denied. So far however from any doubt being entertained by the medical philosophers here, as to the accuracy of the statement of his inoculating himself with the matter of plague, it is well known that his preconceived notions of the nature of that pestilence, were the cause of his rashness and premature death. Of this I have been assured by personal communication with Sir Gilbert Blane and Sir James M'Gregor.

When I took pen in hand, I did not expect to produce so long and tedious a letter. My apology must be the nature of the subject, interesting, beyond all others, to an American physician.

With due respect I remain, dear Sir,

Your friend,

JOHN W. FRANCIS.

DR. DAVID HOSACK,

New-York.

Boards

JOHN W. FRANCIS, M.D.

PROFESSIONAL life, especially in young republican America, is often diversified ; but the physician's is, perhaps, less frequently so than that of any of the members of the three liberal pursuits to which academic honors are awarded. Medical men, from the very nature of their studies, and the active cares in which they are involved in the subsequent discharge of their responsible trusts, necessarily pass their existence rather within the secluded chambers of the sick and afflicted, than before the gaze and immediate observation of the multitude. But, in defiance of this restriction, the cultivators of the venerable art of healing have been justly accounted among that class of individuals whose daily vocations lead to a substantial acquaintance with human nature, and the principles of human action ; while their peculiar energies are ever directed to investigations, embracing a multitudinous variety of circumstances by which sound science is increased, and the lasting interests of society better secured. Knowledge, therefore, in the medical profession, serves not only to dignify its rank, but in the exercise of its powers becomes the agent of innumerable blessings to society ; and is elevated equally by the importance of its ultimate object, and by those qualifying attainments which render their possessor the efficient instrument of its philanthropic designs.

There is, besides, in the history of physic, abundant evidence to show how much the advancement of man has been furthered by the professors of the healing art ; how greatly the interests of humanity have been promoted by their efforts ; how largely the charities of life, an elevated literature and exalted science have been aided by the broad foundations of public institutions, in which physicians have borne a prominent part. The annals of Continental and of British medicine demonstrate this truth ; nor are examples wanting in our own country of similar establishments, generously cherished by this order of men. Hence, though the transactions of one day in the physician's career

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seldom differ from those of another, the lives of eminent professors in the medical faculty become worthy of notice ; they are the guardians of the public health, and they deserve to rank among public characters ; and he, who possesses a deep and enthusiastic veneration for the art, and while, in the daily exercise of its salutary precepts fosters, the cause of learning and the general welfare of his species, merits, at our hands, some recorded testimonial of his actions.

Among the many living examples in the United States of those in that profession, who by their acquisitions adorn the science of physic ; who, by the faithful and conscientious performance of its arduous duties, have conferred benefits of acknowledged importance upon humanity ; and by the publication of the results of experience have added to the medical literature of their country, the respectable individual, whose name is at the head of this biographical sketch, occupies a conspicuous place.

JOHN W. FRANCIS, M. D. was born in the city of New-York on the 17th of November, 1789. His father, Melchior Francis, who came to this country shortly after the peace of 1783, was a German from Nuremberg, well known in New-York as an enterprising, upright grocer, of an enthusiastic temperament, and of a liberal and charitable spirit, whose career of usefulness was suddenly arrested by death from yellow fever in 1795, in the 35th year of his age. His mother was a native of Pennsylvania ; her family, of the name of Somer, were originally from Bern, in Switzerland from whom there are numerous descendants in this country, now residing in the above-named State. Her children were mere infants when her husband died ; but she was left in circumstances sufficiently easy to give them a good education. JOHN, the eldest, after receiving the common early instruction, was sent to a school of no little reputation under the charge of the Reverend George Strebeck, with whom he commenced the study of mathematics and the Latin language, and afterward continued his classical pursuits under the direction of the Reverend John Conroy, a profound scholar, and a distinguished graduate of Trinity College, Dublin. By the aid of this excellent teacher he was enabled to enter an advanced class in Columbia College, where, in 1809, he received the degree of Bachelor, and in 1812 that of Master of Arts.

While an under-graduate, the subject of this memoir, having resolved to adopt the medical profession, devoted a portion of his time to its studies ; he was enabled to accomplish this by a strong natural capacity, and by an ardor and perseverance which have marked his whole course of life ; he had not only mental energy, but a vigorous con-

JOHN W. FRANCIS.

stitution, which sustained his intense application in the acquisition of knowledge.

In 1807, then still an under-graduate as above-mentioned, he commenced his professional studies with the late Dr. David Hosack, the able and eloquent teacher, at that time professor of *Materia Medica* and Botany in Columbia College, and among those most extensively engaged in the practice of physic in New-York. Under this eminent preceptor MR. FRANCIS had ample opportunities of witnessing the principles of the art illustrated by their practical application. During the period of his professional studies for four collegiate years, he never absented himself from a single lecture, nor attended one without making notes or abstracts on the subject taught by the lecturer. His clinical knowledge was also much increased by a constant attendance at the New-York Hospital, then enjoying the rich experience of Drs. Post, Kissam, Stringham, and others; and at the City Almshouse, an extensive charity, the medical department of which was under the management of Drs. Hosack and Macneven, the clinical instructors.

Several laws for the greater improvement of medical science were enacted about this period by the Legislature of the State of New-York. County Medical Societies had been formed the year before, and promised much advantage to the cause of professional learning. The College of Physicians and Surgeons, under the authority of the Regents of the University, was organized in 1807. From this institution, in 1811, MR. FRANCIS received the degree of M. D. This was at the first commencement of that school under the Presidency of Dr. Samuel Bard, and the subject of this memoir was the first graduate who recorded his name in the College Album. DR. FRANCIS's inaugural thesis was a dissertation on mercury, embracing its medical history, curative action, and abuse in disease. His researches were extensive, while many of his views were novel and profound, and have since been confirmed by the philosophical inquiries of British and other foreign practitioners. This production acquired for him great credit at once among his fellow graduates and the faculty generally; it has been repeatedly noticed by different writers in various languages, and maintains its reputation at the present day.

DR. FRANCIS had been in practice a few months only, when his late preceptor proposed to him a co-partnership in business. This proposition, from the high standing of Dr. Hosack, was too flattering to be declined. This connection lasted till 1820, since which time DR. FRANCIS has continued in practice by himself.

From the first organization of the College of Physicians and Sur-

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geons, the professorial chairs were filled by men of acknowledged learning and ability most of whom were much distinguished as teachers.

In the spring of 1813 DR. FRANCIS received from the trustees of the institution the appointment of lecturer on the Institutes of Medicine and Materia Medica. Shortly after this period, an union being effected between the rival institutions, the medical faculty of Columbia College and the College of Physicians and Surgeons, he received from the regents the professorship of Materia Medica. He delivered his first public course of instruction to a class of one hundred and twenty students, declining all compensation for his services, that the consolidation of two schools of medicine, which had brought together so numerous a body of professors, might not too much enhance the price of education to those who wished to attend a full course of lectures. About this time he published a historical account of the College, with a syllabus or outline of the several courses of lectures. The students of this new school, upon its chartered establishment, had formed themselves into a medical society, similar to that at the University of Edinburgh, to improve their minds by weekly discussions on medical and surgical subjects. The President of the Society, which was termed the Medico-Chirurgical Society, was chosen from the professors of the College; and for many years DR. FRANCIS was elected to preside over it, succeeding in this appointment the learned Dr. Mitchill.

Strongly impressed with the conviction that the city of New-York possessed all the requisites for a great medical school, alive to the importance of an extended system of medical education, and cheered by the rising prospects of the institution to which he was attached, DR. FRANCIS resolved to visit Europe, having in view, as well to profit by the lessons of instruction afforded by the old world, as to transfer, as far as lay within his power, what was valuable and practicable to the new. While in London he became a pupil of the illustrious Abernethy, and witnessed the practice of St. Bartholomew's hospital; attended the lectures of Brande at the Royal Institution, those of Pearson at St. George's hospital, &c. Between Abernethy and FRANCIS there sprung up so strong an attachment, that the former offered the latter a share of his business, which at that time was oppressively extensive.

According to a memoir to which this biographical sketch is much indebted,* besides England, DR. FRANCIS visited Scotland, Ireland, Holland, and France.

With eager curiosity he examined most that was rare and promi-

* New England Magazine, vol. 7th.

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nent in these countries. His letters gave him access to scholars and men of science wherever he travelled. In Edinburgh he shared the hospitality of the great professors, and visited their schools so renowned for practical wisdom. Here he listened to the eloquent and classical lectures on medicine of Dr. James Gregory, and the able expositions of Professor Jamieson on the Wernerian formations; and witnessed the early experiments of the philosophic Brewster, in his private study, on the polarization of light. In Dublin he was received with true Irish cordiality; and found in the anatomical preparations of McCartney, specimens which rival even those of John Hunter. Regarding his professional object as the most important one of his mission, he was obliged to resist the strong impulse which prompted him to pass beyond the Rhine; and most reluctantly turned his back upon the country, toward which, as the land of his fathers, he felt the dutiful yearnings of a son; and for which, as the birth-place of Herder, Schiller, and Goethe, he entertained the reverence of a scholar. In Holland, the anatomical theatre where Ruysch once taught, and the garden where Boerhaave once displayed the harmonies of the vegetable kingdom, awakened to recollection the glories which have long since departed. In France, with Denon, he viewed in his cabinet, and in those institutions under his care, all that was magnificent in the arts. Gall displayed to him the rich materials of his collections, on which he founded his system of craniology; while the "Jardin des Plantes," under the direction of M. Thouin, gave him new ardor for a knowledge of the wonders of creation. With Cuvier he examined the objects more intimately connected with his own profession.

We are not wanting in proofs of the enthusiasm and success with which the subject of this article prosecuted his European tour. It was such as to excite the notice of many of his most enlightened foreign acquaintances. One thus speaks: "I feel much gratified by the opportunity you afforded me of making the acquaintance of DR. FRANCIS. A mind more ardent in the pursuit of useful knowledge perhaps never existed; and I have no doubt he will, in a few years, stand at the head of his profession. I introduced him to my son-in-law, Dr. Yeates, who is an able and learned physician; he entertains a high opinion of your friend's talents, and I am sure will at all times be happy in the opportunity of being useful to him."* DR. FRANCIS is warm in his admiration of those lights of knowledge he everywhere encountered in his travels; but though enamoured with the learned

* Letter of the late Patrick Colquhoun, author of the *Police of London*, &c. *Life of Eddy*, by S. L. Knapp.

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men he met in different countries, his political affections were wedded to his own ; and in the midst of his European attachments, he was still a republican in his principles.

On his return to New-York he found that some changes had been made in the disposition of the professorships in the College ; the duties of the chair of *Materia Medica* had been added to that of Chemistry. He was at once appointed by the Regents of the University professor of the Institutes of Medicine. On the death of Dr. Stringham, in 1817, the department of Medical Jurisprudence, heretofore taught with applause by that gentleman, was assigned to DR. FRANCIS. Another change took place in 1819, by resignation, by which DR. FRANCIS became Professor of Obstetrics and Medical Jurisprudence. This appointment he held until 1826, when he resigned, at the same time with his colleagues, Drs. Hosack, Mott, Mcneven, and Mitchill ; Dr. Post had given up the professorship of Anatomy a short time previously. The board of regents accepted the resignation of the faculty, and presented them their thanks "for the faithful and able manner in which they had filled their respective chairs as instructors and lecturers in said College."

During the same year in which the resignation of the professors of the College of Physicians and Surgeons occurred, a majority of them founded and organized a new institution at their individual expense, under the name of Rutgers' Medical College. In the place of Professor Post, Anatomy and Physiology was assigned to the late distinguished Dr. Godman, who, at the instance of Professor FRANCIS, left Philadelphia for a larger sphere of usefulness and profit. The success of this new school for four terms was triumphant, at the end of which period the legislative wisdom of the State thought proper to close the doors of the College. It is believed that every friend and patron of sound practical medicine now admits that the interests of medical learning sustained a severe loss by this measure.

In the Rutgers' Medical College DR. FRANCIS was chosen Professor of Obstetrics and Forensic Medicine. In the number of pupils, his classes were second only to those of Anatomy, which are always most fully attended in every well-arranged medical institution. The close relationship between many parts of the physiological portion of a course of instruction on Obstetrics, with numerous topics discussed in legal medicine, justified, on the part of the professor, repeated disquisitions of the most interesting nature ; and these, by an ample museum, were made the more clear and satisfactory. In his third edition of the work of Dr. Denman, a large amount of medico-legal facts and opi-

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nions is introduced ; and in the same volume is embraced his history of the Obstetric art, from the time of the ancients to that of the latest writers on the subject, which has received the approbation both of the erudite and the practical. The number of students under his care while he was connected with the institutions above-named, was probably greater than that of any other professor in the city. He devoted from four to six hours a day to public and private instruction in the several departments of the science ; other portions of time were devoted to the labor of practice. With the termination of all collegiate duties, he resolved to confine his attention to the practice of physic exclusively. In his parting address to his public class, he stated the causes which would thereafter dissolve the relationship of pupil and preceptor, paid the tribute of grateful respect to the magnanimous patrons by whom the College had been countenanced, and held up to admiration and example that guardian genius of all establishments for the diffusion of useful knowledge,—Dewitt Clinton.

DR. FRANCIS'S early introduction to practice and teaching, however laborious and anxious the task, led not to the neglect of those intervals of leisure which occur in the lives of all. Convinced that the charms of medical reading, and the diffusion of medical and scientific knowledge, would both be promoted by the establishment of a new periodical journal in New-York, he, while a student, united with his preceptor, Dr. Hosack, and issued, in 1810, a prospectus for the American Medical and Philosophical Register. This work was published quarterly, and continued for four years. It was filled almost entirely with original materials. After the completion of the fourth volume, the editors assumed the responsibility of the work, and announced their names. In conjunction with the late Dr. Dyckman and Dr. Beck, he was for some time editor of the New-York Medical and Physical Journal, which was projected in 1822. He continued as one of the editors until the termination of the third volume. This work contains a number of his medical observations and records.

DR. FRANCIS has written papers, in many different medical and scientific journals in the United States, on subjects connected with his profession : among the most prominent of these, and of a practical nature, are his observations on the use of vitriolic emetics in croup, with details of cases in which this remedy was effective after the formation of the adventitious membrane lining the trachea. This novel method of cure has since often proved successful in other hands in this country, and has recently been adopted abroad : remarks on the goitre as it prevails in the western parts of New-York and Canada :

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cases of ovarian disease ; on the medicinal properties of the *sanguinaria Canadensis* : history of a remarkable case of a diverticulum of the ilium : cases in morbid anatomy : facts and inferences in medical jurisprudence : on phlegmasia dolens occurring in the male subject ; on caries of the lower jaw in children : on elaterium and croton oil : cases of ichthyosis : observations on the mineral waters of Avon in Livingston County, New-York, deduced from chemical experiments and medicinal trials. His letter on febrile contagion, dated in London, 1816, and addressed to Dr. Hosack, contains an exposition of certain British writers, on the insusceptibility of the human constitution to a second attack of the yellow fever. This curious fact concerning the nature of this disease in certain latitudes, which was strongly maintained by various authors of Great Britain and the West Indies, received additional support, in many striking cases, from the observations which this letter brought to light, that had been made by many American physicians upon the pestilence in different seaports of the United States. Other papers might be referred to containing his clinical opinions ; his reflections upon the nature and treatment of scarlet fever and other disorders may be found in the improved edition of Good's Study of Medicine edited by Dr. Doane.

State medicine, or that division of science which comprehends the principles of evidence afforded by the different branches of medicine, in elucidating and determining questions in courts of law, had been long and advantageously taught in German and other continental universities, when, in 1807, the chair of Medical Jurisprudence was founded at the University of Edinburgh, and Dr. Duncan, Jun., appointed Professor. The following year Dr. Stringham, who had graduated at that school, gave a course of lectures, the first delivered in the United States, on the same subject, in the college at New-York. As his successor, DR. FRANCIS was among the earliest teachers in the United States of this important and now generally cultivated department of knowledge. But it was not merely as a teacher that he exhibited the extent of his inquiries and practical researches in forensic medicine, and enlisted the enthusiasm of the student. During the greater part of his professional career, in almost every case of criminal prosecution in our judicial courts, his opinions have been solicited, and have seldom or ever been the subject of doubt or controversy. DR. FRANCIS invariably availed himself of the deductions which anatomy and pathology afford.

Nor have either his studies or his writings been confined to subjects strictly professional. Several of his biographical notices are valuable

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contributions to the stock of elegant and general literature : these sketches are drawn with a free and manly hand, with faithfulness and discrimination. Among the most valuable of them may be mentioned his account of Cadwallader Colden, one of the earliest practitioners of physic in New-York ; those of Edward Miller, Benjamin Rush, Archibald Bruce ; James S. Stringham, Thomas Eddy. His record of Samuel L. Mitchill, in the first volume of the National Portrait Gallery, is an honorable testimony to the memory of that remarkable man, whose genius and character will be more highly valued the longer his merits are contemplated. The occasional addresses of DR. FRANCIS are written with taste and spirit united with candor and good feeling. His address to the New-York Horticultural Society, in elegant language, portrays the beauties of nature adorned by art. The oration before the literary societies of Columbia College, in May, 1831, exhibits an important outline of the life and services of that distinguished patriot, the late Chancellor Livingston. The venerable President Madison transmitted a letter of approbation to the author, for the service he had rendered to American Biography, by his interesting account of the revolutionary patriot.* His discourse at the opening of the new hall of the Lyceum of Natural History, as yet but partially in print, is perhaps his most extensive production. It was delivered in December, 1836 : its object is to recommend the cultivation of the natural sciences, and to bring together the most striking and important facts yet made known, concerning the natural history and physical resources of the new world.

The humane physician is perhaps more exposed than any other member of society to taxes on his time and benevolence : in seasons of pestilence and calamity, the claims of charity are not to be slighted or avoided. The later visitations of the yellow fever, and of the malignant cholera, bear witness to his sensibility to the cause of humanity, and to his intrepid discharge of his duties. His clinical views of the new Asiatic plague, as it prevailed in New-York in 1832, in which city it entombed upwards of four thousand inhabitants, are published in a letter to Dr. Reed of Savannah. This letter was so favorably received at that anxious period, that more than one hundred thousand copies, in various forms, were circulated in different sections of the Union. In France it excited the attention of professional men ; and the authorities at Havanna, when the cholera appeared there, had the pamphlet translated into the Spanish language, and widely diffused through the island of Cuba.

* This biography is re-published in the 3d volume of this work.

