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INAUGURAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE MEDICAL SOCIETY

OF

THE COUNTY OF NEW-YORK,

ON THE

12TH DAY OF JULY, 1824.

BY DAVID HOSACK, M. D. LL. D.

⁷¹
PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY.

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1829

OFFICERS

OF THE

Medical Society of the County of New-York,

ELECTED JULY 6, 1824.

DAVID HOSACK, M. D. *President.*

JOHN WATTS, JR. M. D. *Vice-President.*

FELIX PASCALIS, M. D. *Corresponding Secretary.*

NICOLL H. DERING, M. D. *Secretary.*

DR. DAVID ROGERS, *Treasurer.*

SAMUEL W. MOORE, M. D.

JOHN C. CHEESMAN, M. D.

JOHN B. BECK, M. D.

DR. PETER C. TAPPEN,

JOHN STEARNS, M. D.

} *Censors.*

Delegate to the State Society.

JAMES R. MANLEY, M. D.

Lecturers.

JOHN B. BECK, M. D.

DR. ELBRIDGE G. DUNNEL.

JOHN W. FRANCIS, M. D.

SAMUEL W. MOORE, M. D.

JOHN STEARNS, M. D.

MEDICAL SOCIETY OF THE COUNTY OF NEW-YORK.

At an adjourned Anniversary Meeting of the Society,
held at the hall of the College of Physicians and Surgeons,
July 12, 1824, it was

“ Unanimously resolved,

*“ That the Comitia Minora be directed to publish
forthwith the Address delivered this day by the President.*

“ NICOLL H. DERING,

“ Secretary.”

INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN,

Members of the Medical Society of the County of New-York.

BEFORE I take my seat as the presiding officer of this Institution, it is becoming me to tender to you my grateful acknowledgments for the unexpected honour you have conferred upon me, by placing me in the station which, by your suffrages, I am now to occupy.

It is matter of common remark that, for some time past, a very extraordinary attendance has been rendered by the members of this Society, and particularly at the last meeting, which was devoted to the annual election of its officers. The more than ordinary zeal which has been thus displayed is certainly to be considered as an evidence of a desire on your part of advancing the interest of this Institution, of promoting the progress of medical

knowledge, and thereby of elevating the general character of the Society: to ascribe it to any other views would be unworthy of those whom I have now the honour to address. Impressed with these feelings, I gratefully accept the place assigned me; and, hailing the spirit by which you have been actuated, I beg leave to assure you that I shall most cordially unite with you in all those measures which may be calculated to advance our common interests, to add to that harmony which now exists, and to give dignity to an elevated and liberal profession. Permit me, furthermore, to add, that in the performance of my official duties, while it shall be my study to observe the respect that is due to every member of this body, I shall endeavour to discharge those functions with independence and impartiality. While I endeavour to carry into operation the laws of the state relative to our profession, and the code of by-laws appertaining more immediately to the government of this society, allow me to solicit your friendly co-operation and support; and if at any time party feuds or feelings have existed in this Institution, let us upon this occasion resolve to know them no more, but banish them from our remembrance.

and unite our hearts and hands for the great but common interest of the whole.

Coalitions, except where they are directed to mutual improvement, or to the benefit of the community at large, we should remember are inconsistent with, and, indeed, are a violation of the solemn obligations the physician enters into when he receives the doctorate of medicine, or is admitted as a licentiate, and should be discountenanced by all. Let us then cherish the hope that hereafter the unworthy jealousies and hostile feelings which have been too often chargeable upon the medical character of our city, will find no place in this association; but be lost in that fellowship and good feeling which it is our interest to cultivate, and which I shall do all in my power to promote.

Although a very short time has been allowed me, since the election, to reflect upon the subjects which ought to receive our consideration, or may be deemed most useful to advance the great objects for which we are associated, your attention will be called to a few of the more prominent objects which appear to me to have a claim upon the notice of this Society.

In the first place, I remark, that we enjoy numerous and peculiar privileges from our local situation. We occupy the most enviable city in the United States—a city distinguished for its large and rapidly increasing population—for the intelligence and enterprise of its inhabitants—its numerous literary and benevolent institutions—its immediate and unceasing intercourse with the most enlightened parts of the world: add to these, its unrivalled commercial advantages, more especially since the accession recently made to its resources by the great western canal. As members of one of the most learned faculties, these advantages impose upon us the duty to avail ourselves of those blessings, with which we are so highly favoured, and of rendering them tributary to the best interests of our profession, and thereby of the community in which our lot is happily cast.

As this, too, is the parent society, from which the other institutions of a similar character throughout the state have emanated, we should also bear in mind the debt that is due to ourselves, and the responsibility that devolves upon us to redeem the pledges which were given when we first received

from the legislature the act of our incorporation in 1806.

In this Institution, too, is to be found the germ of that establishment, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, which has reflected so much honour upon the University of which it is a part, and has been the means of diffusing medical instruction throughout our state and country. These considerations, arising from the importance of our Institution, the situation and circumstances in which we are placed, call loudly upon us for exertions corresponding with the advantages we enjoy.

It is expected, and justly too, that the physicians of the metropolis should be the most learned and able of the profession in any part of the state, for the reason that, *cæteris paribus*, they enjoy more ample means of information, both theoretical and practical, than are afforded in less favoured situations. Seeing, then, that they possess more than ordinary opportunities for observation and improvement, the inference is unavoidable, that from them more will be required, and is justly demanded.

This leads me then to inquire, first, what are the great objects for which such professional inter-

course and solemn associations have been established in the state ? and secondly, what are the means by which the benefits contemplated are to be secured ?

The objects referred to divide themselves under two heads : firstly, to regulate ; and, secondly, to improve the practice of physic and surgery.

For the attainment of the first of these objects, this Society has been very laudably and successfully engaged in framing a code of ethics which has received the approbation of the faculty, both at home and abroad.

The State Medical Society has given its imprimatur to that code, and has recognised it in every thing essential ; not only to place the practice of the healing art upon an honourable and liberal basis, but to regulate the intercourse between the members of the medical faculty in such manner, and upon such principles, that their observance cannot fail to preserve that elevation and respectability to which the profession has attained in the most cultivated ranks of society. A foreign journalist,* noticing our code of police regulations as recently

* See Johnson, *Med. Chir. Review*, for March 1824.

published, expresses himself in terms of high approbation, and recommends them as meriting peculiar regard, and as reflecting the highest credit upon those who had performed the arduous task of propounding and constituting such code of regulations.

I pass on to notice the means of effecting the latter object, that of improving the healing art, and of extending the benefits to be derived from this Association.

That we may preserve the honour and respectability of the profession, none should be permitted to practise it who have not been legally received, either as Doctors of Medicine or as Licentiates, agreeably to the provisions of the act of the state legislature. From many facts which have come to my knowledge, there is good reason to believe, that in this city and in its vicinity, many ignorant pretenders, who commenced their career as acknowledged venders of quack medicines, are now prescribing for the sick, and are in the daily violation of the laws of the state. Connected with this subject, is the unwarrantable practice which has obtained among some of our apothecaries, and those of them too the least qualified, of prescrib-

ing for the sick who may apply at their shops for the purchase of drugs ; and in some instances they have had even the arrogance to suppress the prescriptions of the physician, and to substitute their own combinations.

It therefore becomes the duty of this Society, agreeably to the act passed in 1813, to interpose, and to arrest these impositions upon the community, and which are to be considered as among the greatest evils that can befall society. I therefore propose that a special committee be appointed, or that it be made the duty of the Censors, or of the Comitia Minora, to obtain and to report to this Society, a census of all the physicians and surgeons and legally admitted practitioners of medicine in the city of New-York, classing them under the following heads :

1st. Those who were established in practice prior to the act of incorporation passed in the year 1813.

2d. Those who are graduates of this University, or of the Colleges or Universities of other states.

3d. Those who have been licensed in New-York, or have been admitted to practise by producing licenses from other states.

4th. Those who are practising under licenses or degrees obtained from foreign Universities and governments.

Such census also becomes necessary, as it leads us to a knowledge of such persons as may be in practice, who, though well qualified, may have neglected to exhibit the evidence of their education and qualifications, as directed by the act of the legislature and the by-laws of this Society.

By these measures we shall be enabled to carry into operation the provisions of the law for restraining those who may be illegally engaged in practice; and by so doing perform a duty imperatively enjoined upon the County Societies, an act of justice to the profession, and especially to the public, who are not always competent to discriminate between the impostor and the well-educated physician.

The existing laws of this state, regulating the practice of physic and surgery, the statutes of our University, and the code of by-laws of this Society, I believe contain provisions, which, if properly regarded, will in a great degree lead to the suppression of every species of quackery and imposition in our profession. In all ages our calling has

been disgraced by the arts of the selfish and designing; and it is mortifying to observe in our own city continued and most flagrant evidences of the successful career of charlatanery. I earnestly hope you will omit no effort within the legitimate reach of your authority, to discountenance and suppress the whole tribe of *nostrum* venders and *specific* mongers; and if, upon experience, you shall find that the present system of regulations is inadequate, that it will be deemed meet to supersede it by obtaining from our legislature a code of greater efficiency and vigour.

Many years since, the Medical Faculty of London expelled from their communion even the distinguished and learned Dr. James, who, disregarding the obligations due to his profession and to society, became the vender of a secret febrifuge powder. In like manner, the most learned Society of Europe erased from their lists the name of the celebrated Lower, who had been convicted of venal practices. And within a few months, as we are informed by Dr. Johnson,* the name of Dr. Thornton, once highly respectable, has been in a similar

* See Medico-Chirurgical Review for December 1823.

manner disgraced, by being struck from the list of the Royal College of Physicians, because of his association with an itinerant quack, or vender of American herbs in London. The spirited journalist goes on to remark, that, in his opinion, "Dr. Thornton's conduct, in aiding the Whitlow imposition on public credulity, richly deserved this mark of disapprobation;" and adds his hope, "that immoral as well as unprofessional conduct shall be often served in this way in future." A similar course of decisive and vigorous conduct on our part would probably be productive of similar beneficial results, in preserving the respectability of the healing art in the United States.

Indeed, gentlemen, I cannot withhold the expression of the mortification I feel when I see the members of our profession, some, too, enjoying the most distinguished seats in our Universities, descending from their high estate, and lending the sanction of professorial authority to any new syrup or panacea that cupidity and the arts of the impostor can combine to fill the purses of the venders.

I also suggest, for your consideration, the following additional measures, as, in my opinion, calcu-

lated to advance the general interests of this Society, and of the profession.

1st. That the Society hold its meetings monthly. As connected with the most efficient means of enhancing the intellectual discipline of the members of this Institution, it may deserve our consideration, whether a portion of the time of each of our meetings may not be advantageously appropriated to the reading of communications on the different departments of our science, and how far such communications may from time to time be offered to the public, either in a special journal to be established by this Society, or through the medium of one of the periodical works already established and printed in this city.

2d. That a committee be appointed to keep a regular series of meteorological observations—noticing the temperature of the air, the quantity of rain, progress of vegetation, and all those circumstances connected with the weather and climate, that have an influence upon the character of our diseases; and that, for this purpose, the necessary apparatus, which can be purchased at a very inconsiderable expense, be obtained without delay.

3d. That a committee be appointed to prepare a monthly report of the prevailing diseases. This leads me to observe,

4th. That another duty devolves upon this Society, that of investigating the nature and causes of the epidemic diseases which may make their appearance, and of recording the means which may be found most successful in their prevention or cure. Committees for this purpose should be appointed, whenever the Society may receive information on subjects of this nature, and which are especially committed to the vigilance of our Corresponding Secretary.

5th. That an addition be made to the number of lecturers, so that a paper on some subject of medical science, an interesting case of disease, or other communication, may be presented at each meeting of the Society.

6th. With a view to afford the most ample means of information to the members whose individual circumstances may not enable them to have access to the necessary sources of such knowledge, that a library devoted to medicine and chirurgical science and its auxiliary branches, and commensurate with the existing funds of this Institution.

be commenced agreeably to the plan contemplated by the act of 1813, which authorizes "each of the Medical County Societies to cause to be raised and collected from each of the members of such Society, a sum not exceeding three dollars in any one year, for the purpose of procuring a medical library and apparatus, and for the encouragement of useful discoveries in chemistry, botany, and such other improvements as the majority of the Society shall think proper."

The present age is abundantly prolific in books of great merit in our profession. The soundest learning and the most extensive experience are manifest in many of the writings of the present authors of Great Britain and of the European continent; and, in our own country, the productions of physicians are daily becoming of more value and importance. While we obtain from abroad what is deemed most useful, it is, also, our especial duty to preserve these efforts of our countrymen, so that the younger members of the profession may learn to emulate those who have preceded them, and that posterity may know to whom they are indebted for being wiser than those who went before them.

The funds of this Society are small, but they are adequate to all its immediate wants. In commencing the library, it will be most prudent, in the first instance, to direct the purchase of the most valuable periodical journals of the day, both foreign and domestic, by which the members may obtain a knowledge of the most recent improvements, which may have taken place in the different practical branches of the profession, as well as in those departments of science which are immediately associated with the healing art. Many gentlemen, doubtless, will have it in their power, and will feel the disposition to contribute to such collection some of the more permanent standard professional works, both ancient and modern. I shall not be backward to manifest my feelings to promote this great and laudable measure. With these sources of information and improvement, the habitual exercises of the members, conducted in the manner recommended, and a record of the interesting facts which, I may say, daily present themselves to the attentive observer, this Society, especially if the exertions of its members be concentrated to this object, would be enabled to give to the world an annual and valuable volume of

communications reflecting upon it the highest honour, and no less creditable to our city and country.

Another subject, that with few exceptions has been altogether omitted by this Society, is the biography of its departed members.

In the institutions of Europe, it is at once the privilege and the duty of the survivors to make known the merits of those of their associates, whose career of usefulness is finished. In this respect we have been remiss, and have permitted many of the most meritorious members of our profession to descend to the tomb, without that testimony of our affection and respect that their services and virtues had deserved. It cannot be owing to ingratitude that their memory is permitted to sleep; for every tongue is ready to confess their praise, and acknowledge their merit; and among them are many, who, by their learning, abilities, and moral worth, would have reflected honour upon any association, and whose example, portrayed with fidelity, would have excited the emulation of their youthful successors. It gives me pain to observe, that we do not possess a page recording the merits and services of the first Pre-

sident of this Society under its new act of incorporation. You will all anticipate me, when I refer to the late Dr. Nicholas Romaine, to whom we are signally indebted for much of the present prosperity of our profession in this state.

In like manner, the professional services of many other eminent physicians have been passed over with similar neglect. I still however indulge the hope that it is not too late to render that justice to their memory which has hitherto been withheld, and that something may yet be done to rescue from oblivion the names of those who have been most distinguished as practitioners in our city and state, or have been the benefactors to their profession and country, by the exertions they have displayed in fostering the first beginnings of our medical schools.

The names of Clossy, Jones, Middleton, the Bards, Smith, Tennent, Cochran, Charlton, Bayley, M^c Knight, William Pitt Smith, Nicoll, Treat, Tillary, Anthon, the Kissams, and the written memorials of the late Dr. Edward Miller, Dr. Elihu Smith, Dr. James Stringham, Dr. Archibald Bruce, Dr. Benjamin De Witt, Dr. John C. Osborne, Dr. Jacob Dyckman, and of Dr. William Moore.

some of which have been recently committed to the manuscript files of this Society, should find a place in the first volumes of our Transactions that may be committed to the press, and will doubtless prove an example worthy of being perpetuated by this Society, and constitute a legacy that will be appreciated by a grateful posterity.

Persuaded, gentlemen, that you all have at heart the interests and honour of the profession, I have felt it my duty thus far to detain you by the reflections I have recommended for your consideration, not doubting that I shall be supported by your zeal, and aided by your active exertions.

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