

HUTCHISON (Jos. C.)

ANNUAL ADDRESS
BEFORE THE
MEDICAL SOCIETY
OF THE
STATE OF NEW YORK,
FEBRUARY 6th, 1867.

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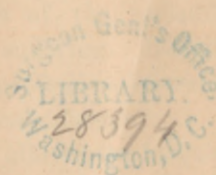
OF THE

STATE OF NEW YORK,

FEBRUARY 6TH, 1867.

BY JOSEPH C. HUTCHISON, M. D.,

OF BROOKLYN, PRESIDENT.



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ANNUAL ADDRESS.

Mr. Vice-President, Gentlemen of the Society, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The subject of the address which the by-laws of the Society makes it my duty to deliver on this occasion is, The Moral Power of the Profession, instead of Legal Enactments, the best Agency in effecting Medical Reform.

It is a common opinion, in view of the important services rendered by the physicians to the community at large, that it is the duty of the Legislature to enact laws for the promotion of medical education and the protection of the legitimate members of the Profession, as well as the public, from the encroachments of ignorant pretenders, and to discountenance and suppress quackery of every class and description. A well instructed body of physicians is indeed a necessity in every State, not merely to minister to such of its citizens as may suffer from disease or accidental violence, but by their professional knowledge and skill to aid the Legislature in the enactment of laws having for their object the protection of the health, and the promotion of the vigor, comfort and general well-being of the entire community: to assist the officers of justice in the detection of guilt and the protection of the innocent; and to render efficient the efforts of the philanthropist to diminish crime, pauperism and human suffering. But do we need the aid of Government to elevate the profession—to secure to the community a competent corps of medical advisers?

The political system of this country allows the largest freedom in everything pertaining to medicine, medical schools and physicians. In Europe, medicine, in common with other departments of science, is under the supervision of Government, and the medical profession is regulated by codes more or less elaborate. The provisions of these codes, it cannot be denied, are not without benefit to society. They protect it against the evils incident to irregular and empirical practice; and a body of well instructed medical practitioners, adapted to the wants of the community, are provided, skilled in every department for the treatment of the

various maladies and necessities that render medical services essential to human welfare. Ample provision is also made for the cultivation of the science, and to aid its progressive advancement.

It is not objected to European medical legislation, that it is defective or without positive value, or unnecessary. In their circumstances, and with their system of government, it is indispensable. But we contend that all its advantages may be attained under our free institutions, and without the interference of government legislation. Those who look to legislative action for the redress of professional grievances, and point to other countries for examples of what they would have introduced among us, do not consider that between this country and Europe there is no point of resemblance, and that all arguments drawn from a supposed analogy between their condition and ours, are false and delusive. The spirit that governs the Legislation and policy of Europe, though meliorated by the influence of the Christian religion, and softened by the cultivation of letters, arts and science, have yet the taint of their origin. The masses are not an integral part of the Government. They sustain it by the fruits of their industry, by their courage and by their blood; but they have no participation in its legislation, in its privileges, its emoluments or its honors. They are deemed incapable of regulating the most common of their social measures, or providing for the ordinary wants of society. Every social regulation emanates from and is in charge of Government; nothing is entrusted to the people. They are kept in perpetual wardship and pupilage—governed not for themselves and by themselves, but for others and by others. It is made a plea for the deprivation of every legislative function, that the people would, from ignorance, want of prudence and forecast, damage themselves and prove their own worst enemies.

It would be as idle to attempt the suppression of medical quackery by regulations enacted by government, or to introduce the European system of education here, with our ideas of civil and religious liberty, as it would be to attempt to force upon them, in their present circumstances, an adoption of our free institutions as a substitute from their system of Church and State.

A people perfectly free, accustomed to rely on themselves for self-protection in the affairs of life, have their intelligence awakened and invigorated, and their wits sharpened to a quick sense of their self-interest. Let them be instructed in the truth, and understand what is best for their interest, and they decide correctly. It is

the limited information—I may go further and say, the almost entire ignorance that pervades all classes—the highest as well as the lowest—of the general principles of science—that is the bane of society; it is the pregnant source of most of the social ills, and leaves the community to be deceived and preyed upon by charlatans and quacks of every kind, political, financial, religious and others, more numerous even than those that swarm in the medical domain. May we not hope that these evils will disappear, as general education and the cultivation of the masses advance?

The medical profession in this country neither ask for nor expect any exclusive privileges; but they ought to have under their supervision and regulation the medical interests of society. No others can understand them so well, and, consequently, manage them in a manner to obtain the greatest advantages they can yield. The medical community is to the medical interests of society what the religious community is to its religious interests. This is maintained in a sound condition by the organization of the various religious sects that compose the Christian church. The church lives and prospers here independent of State patronage. To no sect is granted any exclusive privileges. The Mormon, the Jew and the Christian, are alike protected in the enjoyment of their respective religious tenets and modes of worship. Our Government has wisely refused to prescribe a curriculum of study for those who desire to become religious teachers, or to declare what their moral requirements shall be. This matter is left to be determined by the parties interested. And yet, notwithstanding we have no laws prohibitory or protective, our people are as thoroughly imbued with the principles of religion, and our clergy, as a body, are as intelligent and learned as those of any other country. Indeed, the absence of such laws acts as an incentive for intellectual and moral culture to such as desire to command the respect and confidence of the public. Why shall not we, with equal propriety and with the hope of results quite as satisfactory, leave all that pertains to the regulation of the medical profession in this country to the voluntary action of the profession itself? Let us seek no aid from church of State, but become a law unto ourselves, or, rather, act above all law save the Divine, since it is certain that we alone must protect the honor of the medical profession. I do not believe that it would be possible in this country at the present day even if it were desirable, to secure the enactment and the faithful execution of laws designed to protect the community

against the evils of empiricism, or to foster a well educated corps of medical men. Indeed, through the earnest efforts of physicians, such laws have been passed in almost every State in the Union; but they have been imperfectly administered or evaded, so as to become dead letters upon the statute book, or have been repealed at the request of those who procured their enactment, and in some instances they have been so amended or modified as really to make the charlatan the legal equal of the man of learning and position.

The history of the legislation touching the practice of physic and surgery in our own State, affords a melancholy illustration of the truth of these statements.

The statute enacted in 1806 by the Legislature of this State "to incorporate medical societies and to regulate the practice of physic and surgery" was among the first efforts made in this country to give the medical profession an honorable station in the community. In speaking of this law, Dr. Romeyn remarked in his anniversary address, delivered in this place in 1809: "That it marked a new era in the progress of science in this State." "The Legislature," he continues, "has evinced a confidence in the medical profession that the powers with which it is invested will be exercised with moderation and justice, and that new efforts will be made to promote the knowledge of the healing art, and to extend its usefulness." The act of 1806 made a wide distinction between the educated physician and the empiric, by placing the latter under serious disabilities. It recited: "that any person who should commence practice after the first day of September then next without being duly licensed, (by one of the medical societies) should forever thereafter be disqualified from collecting any debt or debts incurred by such practice; and it further made the unauthorized practice of physic and surgery a misdemeanor, punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both." Such was the estimation in which the medical profession was held by our Legislature only sixty years ago, and such the means deemed necessary to protect the medical interests of society. By this act, those who were properly qualified by education to discharge the duties of the physician were made known, and distinguished from the host of pretenders and imposters who assume the title and make pretensions to the character of physicians.

But the times have sadly changed. That profession whose origin is Divine, (for "Of the Most High cometh healing,") shall enjoy no exclusive privileges, and the public must look out for itself. Why

should the State concern itself with one who has not the wit to take care of himself? If he choose to risk his life and health in the lottery of quackery it is his own look out. Should the chances go against him the State loses a citizen, albeit not gifted with knowledge or wisdom; and it is not the people the Republic need, but wise and intelligent citizens. It is true that lotteries are prohibited, and the vender of lottery tickets is punished. The risking of money in gambling is interdicted, and gamblers are denounced. But in what respect do the lottery and gambling of quackery, in which health, life and human suffering are the stake, differ from games of chance, where the stake is money alone?

In 1830; the Thompsonians raised a hue and cry against these restrictive laws, and the law of 1806 was so modified by the Legislature as to make the unauthorized practice of medicine a penal instead of a criminal offence. Quackery then not only ceased to be a crime, but it was no longer even a penal offence when practiced by a class of empirics known as botanical doctors or Thompsonians, provided they prescribe only vegetable remedies indigenous in the United States. But even these concessions did not keep this empirical set from a merited oblivion, and they have become almost extinct. It was further modified from time to time by enactments, repeals and amendments, all tending to break down the restraints upon medical imposters; and in 1844 all restrictive laws were abrogated, the tide of quackery was let loose, and the quack, whom Swift correctly described as a vampire, that lives on human blood, was hereafter to have the fullest liberty to puff himself into practice, as a man possessing skill and knowledge, with the express sanction of an act of the Legislature.

But even this was not enough to illustrate the democracy of medicine. Two other so-called systems of medical practice presented their pretentious claims to legal recognition, and our Legislature, desirous of allowing the largest freedom in everything pertaining to the healing art, incorporated the Homœopathic Medical Society of the State of New York in 1862, and the Eclectic Medical Society in 1865, making them subject: "to all the liabilities, and entitled to all the powers and privileges of the Medical Society of the State of New York." And to-day the enlightened and skillful votary of legitimate medicine occupies in our State the same legal standing as he who sacrifices his common sense and his conscience in the fraudulent practice of the most odious quackery!

But why should we complain that our legal powers and privileges are not more enlarged? Is it not rather a subject for congratulation that they are so limited, since we have to enjoy them in common with the unscrupulous pretender? After all, it is the public rather than the medical profession who are the sufferers and who require legislative protection against the evils incident to empirical practice. The profession can take care of itself, and it is their duty to protect the public, who intend well, as far as possible. Men would not knowingly jeopardize their health and lives by a dangerous practice. When quackery is preferred it is from a belief that it offers more certainty and safety than regular medicine, or it may be employed as the result of accident. Every city, every street, and every poor-house presents to our view the unfortunate dupes of the cruelty and cupidity of *legalized* quackery, with their shattered frames, their hopes and future happiness blasted, and life itself a burden! Or, perchance, a poor man, with his axe or his chisel, accidentally wounds an artery and sends for, or has sent to him one who proves to be an empiric, who is befogged and bewildered by the flow of blood; and after the lapse of a few hours, the father of an infant family, depending on him for support, is in his coffin, and the grave quickly receives one of the thousands of victims of "*legalized quackery.*"

The public, on the subject of medicine, intend well, but on everything connected with it they are lamentably ignorant. Few, indeed, have the slightest idea of medicine as a science. The opinions generally entertained, even by the best educated, are vulgar errors. Can we be surprised, then, that our legislators should be deluded into the endorsement of fantastic systems and modes of treatment, by the plausible assertions of cunning impostors, by partial and deceptive statements, the truth of which they have not the requisite knowledge to determine, and are compelled to take on trust? There is no empiricism but what is short-lived. A false doctrine is adopted by and receives the clamorous plaudits of the deceived and credulous crowd; but the fallacious promises held out are soon belied by experience, and neglect and oblivion follow. But another and another succeeds to meet the same fate; and this course continues and will be perpetuated, until the public mind is enlightened on the true character of medical science, and understands the limits within which it is restricted. Public opinion, enlightened by correct knowledge, is the best legislation.

The preceding considerations lead us to the conclusion, that the spirit which governs the legislative policy of this country is opposed to granting to the medical profession the protection of law, or restricting the citizen from placing his life and health at the mercy of the charlatan—that the efforts to elevate the profession, and to suppress quackery by legal enactments, have not only signally failed, but have operated prejudicially; and the sooner we rid ourselves of the idea of legislative protection, the better for us and the community.

The medical profession of this country may protect itself and the public, to a certain extent, against the evils of empiricism, regulate the practice of legitimate medicine, and furnish standards for candidates for the doctorate, by the exercise of a *moral power*, which cannot be disregarded or resisted if we are true to ourselves, and which will be far more efficient than any act of legislation.

Let us inquire how the inherent power of the profession can be made efficient in securing to the community a body of educated and well disciplined physicians? It was a saying of Socrates that he did not pretend to give new ideas to his disciples, but to enable them to recognize their own ideas, and to teach them to think for themselves, rather than to think for them. Your own consciousness will, I think, attest the truthfulness of what I have to say on this subject. It will be but a repetition, for the most part, of the lessons of the past. But this should be an encouragement, for it indicates that the suggestions must be good which have been so often repeated.

I. *Medical instruction, both by the private preceptor and the medical schools, must be correctly conducted.* It is a common thing for the private practitioner to declaim against the imperfections of the schools, and to charge them with the responsibility of supplying a body of properly educated physicians. He sees the mote but is unconscious of the beam. There is a joint responsibility here. The first barrier against the intrusion of ignorance into the profession, must be at the door of the private office. There should be a faithful sentinel here, who would not allow any one to pass the threshold that is not fitted by a proper preliminary education and other qualifications to enter upon the study of a liberal profession. The beginning of the student's career is the most important period of his pupilage. Unless he start properly, be judiciously directed and thoroughly instructed

at first, his subsequent course will be eminently unsatisfactory. Instead of being allowed to pursue his studies at random and with but little profit, as is too often the case now, he should be put upon a systematic course of reading, accompanied by examinations. The greatest defect in our system of medical education is the careless and inadequate manner in which we discharge our duties to office pupils. Office instruction is often a mere sham. If the profession and the schools will co-operate, each holding the other to a strict accountability, the physicians of this country will reach a much higher standard of attainments.

Through the influence mainly, I believe of the united voice of the profession, as expressed through the American Medical Association, the instruction in the medical schools has already greatly improved, and is every year becoming more complete, demonstrative and practical. The annual lecture term in many of the colleges has been lengthened, the number of professorships and of subjects taught has been increased, and clinical instruction in the hospital is a more prominent feature.

The *theoretical* instruction of students in our Medical Colleges is perhaps well enough. Most of them successfully undergo a rigorous examination on the branches taught, and indeed know at the conclusion of the collegiate courses more of these subjects than the best practitioners of the country. Indeed, a large part of what is learned at the schools is lost in the course of years, because the study necessary to maintain it, is at least for *all* these branches, impossible to the busy practitioner of medicine. That he knows a great deal more at the outset than his professional necessities compel him to retain, demonstrates satisfactorily to my mind, that his book or lecture-knowledge is at least sufficient. But suppose that a student were taken to a hospital, and directed to diagnose and treat a variety of cases, would he not feel to want, and that wofully, of the kind of education which from the nature of the case could not be obtained at college and hospital clinics, as ordinarily conducted? These are well enough, but you might as well expect to make mere musicians by hearing music, or affirm that those must be astronomers who daily behold the sun, moon and stars, as to expect men to become surgeons by seeing operations; or physicians by witnessing the common calamities of sickness and death. Hence, daily clinical instruction in the wards of a hospital, thus bringing the student into actual contact with the patient, has been demanded by the profession through

the American Medical Association, and many of our schools have already adopted it. Since the government cannot interpose its power for the protection of the public from the deceptions and fatal practices of charlatans, it is the duty of the profession, as it is the interest of the community, to sustain such schools as exact the highest grade of acquirements, practical as well as theoretical, for the possession of its honors; thus giving a guarantee that the possessor of its diploma is worthy of confidence.

II. Another important means of effecting medical reform, and of increasing our legitimate influence with the public, is: *The thorough organization of the profession into county or district, as well as State and National Associations.* It is the duty of every one to join these associations. In this way, those physicians who have gone through with regular courses of instruction, and have been recognized as belonging to the profession, can be made known and distinguished from the host of pretenders, imposters and empirics, who assume the title and make pretensions to the character of physicians. The register of the county medical society should contain, as was originally designed by the law of this State, the names of every regular practitioner in good standing in the county, and the list should be published at least once in each year, as is done in Kings county, in one or more newspapers. The act to regulate county medical societies, passed at the last session of the Legislature, gives them: "full power and authority to enforce discipline among their members, and obedience to their rules and regulations, with power to expel or otherwise discipline as they may deem most advisable for the best interests of said society." This law enables the county society to expel or exclude from membership, such as have by their moral delinquencies forfeited their privileges and standing, and lost the confidence and respect of the profession, as well as those who have been guilty of notorious irregularities in practice. So that membership in a county medical society offers, or should offer to the public the surest guide in the selection of their medical advisers. In many of the counties of this state, the county medical societies are not in active operation. This is a serious error and should be corrected at once.

The thorough organization of the medical profession, and its representation in County, State and National associations, while it will build up a medical public opinion that the profession will feel itself bound to look to and be governed by, will also give a

direction to the general public opinion that will do more to discountenance ridiculous doctrines, to repress empiricism and to destroy quackery, than could be effected by the most stringent laws.

III. *It is important that we keep our skirts clear of everything pertaining to irregular medical practices of whatever kind or description.* We should not only avoid all complicity with them, but even the suspicion of a *quasi* recognition of them. Let us remember that a corrupt tree bringeth forth only evil fruit—let us avoid the very appearance of evil. Especially should we deprecate the introduction of medical heresies into the army and navy and into our civil hospitals. The power of the profession has already been successfully exerted in both these directions against the absurdities of Hahnemanism; but we must look out for the future. I cannot persuade myself that this popular imposture is worth the ammunition of reason, and sarcasm and denunciation that has been expended upon its flimsy structure. Those who are foolish enough to embrace it will not be driven from the delightful task of fostering the delusion, by any arguments we can adduce. They will ascribe our opposition to selfish motives, and are vain enough to cling to the illusion all the more strongly the greater the effort which is made to detach them from their hold. The discussion of the subject, with the public, gives it an importance it might otherwise never obtain. As a system it must soon become *effete*, and it will be better to let it “severely alone” than to warm it into life by the fire of controversy. Every citizen has the right to select whatever kind of medical practice he pleases. But in the *hospitals* and in the *army* and *navy* the case is different. There the patient has his physician selected for him by those in authority, and it is our duty as physicians, as good citizens, as Christian philanthropists, to resist every effort to force upon him, without his consent, any system of irregular practice.

The first attempt in our State to introduce an empirical practice in hospitals occurred in 1849, when a petition was sent to the board of health of the city of New York, “requesting the establishment of a cholera hospital, in which patients might be treated on the homœopathic plan.” This petition was referred to the medical council, which consisted of three eminent physicians, whom the Sanitary Committee of the Board of Health associated

with them for advice and consultation. They made the following report:

NEW YORK, *June* 19, 1849.

"A resolution having been offered to the Board of Health, that a hospital for the reception of cholera patients be established in this city, in which the practice of Homœopathic physicians shall be pursued, and the same having been referred by the Sanitary Committee to the medical council, the undersigned state that should the above resolution be adopted, they see no satisfactory reason why the same courtesy should not be extended to the Hydropathists—the Thompsonians—the Chromo-thermalists, and indeed all others claiming to have specific modes of treating the cholera."

"By intelligent and well-educated physicians generally, homœopathy is looked upon as a species of empiricism. It is neither practiced by them nor countenanced by them. Concurring entirely with their professional brethren on this subject, the undersigned conceive that the public authorities of our city would not consult either their own dignity or the public good, by lending the sanction of their name or influence to homœopathy or any other irregular practice."

Signed,

JOHN B. BECK, M. D.,

JOSEPH M. SMITH, M. D.,

SAMUEL W. MOORE, M. D.,

Medical Council.

SETH GEER, M. D., *Resident Physician,*

RICHARD L. MORRIS, M. D., *Health Commissioner.*

The report was adopted by the Sanitary Committee.

The noble men who made that report have been gathered to their fathers, and if they had done nothing else to entitle them to our grateful remembrance, this, alone, which was the means of saving the profession from an indignity, and the sick poor from the ruthless hand of medical charlatanism, would be sufficient to embalm their memories in the hearts of every votary of legitimate medicine.

In the year 1857, we find the partisans of homœopathy, with a pompous self-complacency, again demanding recognition in the public hospitals, by a resolution introduced into the Board of Governors of the Alms House Department, New York, providing:

"That one-half of Bellevue hospital should be set apart for the practice of homœopathy." The subject was referred to a committee, and the chairman, the late Hon. Washington Smith, presented an able report adverse to the merits of the system, and its introduction into hospital practice, which led to the defeat of the resolution. A large portion of the report is taken up with a collection of the results of trials of this pretentious system in various European hospitals, which must convince the most skeptical honest mind of its utter worthlessness.

Referring to the claims of homœopathy to recognition in the hospital on the ground of its popularity, the committee express the following opinion:

"That this system is wide-spread, and that it has adherents among the intelligent portion of the community, is an argument that applies with equal force to every system of medical empiricism. The opinion of a man of simply general intelligence has properly no weight in regard to any new theory, and its application to practice in any department of the arts or sciences. We should naturally look for a reliable opinion of the merits of such theory to the scientific cultivators of the art in which its application is proposed. Thus tested, the homœopathic system must utterly fail to receive our sanction. We appeal in vain to its adherents to point to a single medical man among its advocates in this city, whose scientific attainments in his own profession would entitle his opinion to our confidence. In no department of science is there more activity in the investigation of the principles upon which it is based, more acuteness in observation, or better logic in the deduction of practical precepts from such principles and observations, than in medicine. And yet the records of science show that all those who truly advance the several departments of medicine, all, without exception, both in this and foreign countries, belong to the ranks of the so-called regular system."

In reply to the suggestion that the board should grant the prayer of the petitioners because they were a numerous body of highly respected citizens, the committee remark:

"But whence do these petitions emanate? Do they come to us from the inmates of the hospital who are to be the subjects of the experiment? Do the sick who crowd the wards complain of the incompetency of the medical officers, and of the inefficiency of their treatment, and petition us to change their medical attendants and introduce a new system of practice? Do these petitions

even emanate from the honest laboring classes of our city, whom the vicissitudes of life and the misfortunes of poverty may at any moment remove to the wards of Bellevue for relief to their bodily ills? These are questions which this Board would do well to ponder before it acts."

In view of the facts contained in this report, the Governors refused to assume the grave responsibility of forcing an empirical practice upon the poor confided to their care.

In the years 1861-2, the homœopathists appealed to Congress with petitions, backed by 35,000 names, asking it to recognize homœopathy in the army and to introduce it into the military hospitals. The medical profession throughout the land, believing that such a measure would be detrimental to the life of the sick soldier, and that it would degrade and destroy the efficiency of the medical staff of the army, indignantly protested through their medical societies, medical journals and individually, against the enactment of such a law. Nowhere did the profession second the efforts of the late Surgeon General Finley, to prevent homœopathists obtaining an official recognition in the army, more vigorously and efficiently than in our own State. The volume of our Transactions for 1862 contains a memorial from the Oneida County Medical Society, and a communication from the New York Academy of Medicine, urging the State Medical Society to express to our members of Congress their emphatic disapprobation of the efforts that were being made to legalize the appointment of homœopathists as army surgeons, because, says the academy of medicine:

"It is no more worthy of such introduction than other kindred methods of practice as closely allied to quackery;" and because "such appointments would dissatisfy and dishearten the medical staff of the army, who understand the true character of homœopathy, and who have entered the service of their country with confidence that the government would strive to elevate the standard and promote the efficiency of the medical staff—results surely to be defeated by the appointment of homœopaths."

These communications were referred to a committee of this Society for consideration, and through their report, which was unanimously adopted, we resolved "to present a determined front in opposition not only to homœopathy, but to all other irregularities in the medical practice of the army."

The appearance of cholera in the city of New York last summer afforded another occasion for the homœopathists to present their claims for recognition before the public. Petitions numerously signed were presented to the Metropolitan Board of Health, asking that a cholera hospital and district be placed under homœopathic management. The subject was referred to the Sanitary Committee of the Board, who made the following report:

“Your Committee think favorably of the request made by the homœopathic physicians to be assigned to hospitals, and recommend that Dr. Smith make a selection from such practitioners as shall offer their services, and that one-half of the hospital at the Five Points, and that one-fourth of the hospital at the Battery, be put under the medical care of these physicians.”

It should be noted that the Board of Health took no action upon this report, so that the entire responsibility of the matter is with its medical members who compose the Sanitary Committee. At the meeting of the Board, held May 11th, 1866, the Chairman of the Sanitary Committee, is reported in the New York Tribune, May 12th, to have said, that he was willing to permit homœopathists to practice in the hospitals under the surveillance of allopathists, but that he had no confidence in them and would not on his own responsibility trust them with a patient. He merely as a legislator permitted the public prejudice to take the precedence of his private convictions.

The medical members of the Board of Health were selected as such, because of their professional knowledge, and were appointed a Sanitary Committee by the Board for the same reason. It was supposed that their official duties required them to do only what in their judgment was best for the public good. Did any members of that committee believe that they would “consult either their own dignity or the public good, by lending the sanction of their name or influence to homœopathy or any other irregular mode of practice?” Can we admit the monstrous doctrine that a public servant in the discharge of his public duties must ignore his private convictions? Are not men selected for public trusts on account of the private opinions they are known or supposed to hold? Suppose the illustrious Grant, when he was placed in supreme command of our armies, instead of relying on his professional knowledge and skill—on his “private judgment”—in the management of his forces, had yielded to the “prejudices of the

public" as expressed through the political generals of the newspaper offices, think you that he would either have discharged his duty to his country, or saved the republic from disaster?

Did the sanitary committee believe that the admission of this *evil* into the hospitals, in the manner proposed, would expose its entire inefficiency, and *good* would result from the experiment? Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Surely, if it is necessary to fight this battle over again, after the thorough exposure of the results of homœopathic practice in hospitals, contained in the report of the Hon. Washington Smith, already referred to, the public will not believe, even "though one rose from the dead." Moreover, does the end here justify the means? Why, we might as well steal money to support our missionaries.

Were the committee influenced by the popularity of homœopathy, and the respectability of its petitioners? If this was a motive for their action, is there any "satisfactory reason why the same courtesy should not be extended to all others claiming to have specific modes of treating cholera?" Why should the homœopaths be allowed to set themselves up as the exclusive objects of our respect, and insult common sense no less than outrage common decency, by calling upon us to discard the accumulated lessons of wisdom and experience?

These petitions to the Metropolitan Board of Health did not "emanate from the honest laboring classes of our cities, whom the vicissitudes of life and the misfortunes of poverty may at any moment remove to the wards of "a cholera hospital for relief to their bodily ills." It is notorious that our poorer classes are generally correct in their notions of medical practice. This is shown by the comparatively small number who seek relief at the homœopathic dispensaries, while the other dispensaries are crowded. Did not the sanitary committee incur a fearful responsibility in consenting that a portion of the sick poor of our cities should be compelled to submit to an experiment with a system of medical practice, in which neither the committee nor the patients had the slightest confidence?

The action of the sanitary committee must be considered also in its relations to medical ethics. "By intelligent and well educated physicians generally, homœopathy is looked upon as a species of empiricism." The excellent code of ethics adopted by the American Medical Association, to which we have all subscribed, makes it culpable for us to countenance any species of empiricism. And

the responsibility is increased tenfold when we not only countenance, but actually recommend that the inmates of our hospitals shall be subjected to the treatment of ruthless charlatans. Section 4 of the 3d chapter of the code of ethics declares "It is the duty of physicians, who are frequent witnesses of the *enormities committed by quackery*, and the injury to health and even the destruction of life caused by the use of quack medicines, to enlighten the public on these subjects, to expose the injuries sustained by the unwary from the devices and pretensions of artful empirics and impostors."

The Metropolitan Board of Health may be said to be the creation of the physicians of the metropolitan district. The proposition for the enactment of a suitable health law originated in the New York Academy of Medicine in 1857. Year after year since that time, the medical men of the district have been in their societies, in public and in private, in the Legislature and in the lobby, the persistent and uncompromising advocates of the metropolitan health bill (and the State Society has always given the measure its cordial support). Defeated again and again, but not discouraged, ever conscious of the benefits it would confer upon the public, they pursued the subject with an enthusiasm seldom equalled, and succeeded finally in securing the co-operation of some influential non-professional citizens, and after nine years systematic and determined effort, triumphed over the moneyed influence which had so long corrupted the Legislature, and the metropolitan health bill became a law.

Is it surprising therefore, under the circumstances, that the members of an honorable profession should feel indignant at the attempt to give homœopathy an importance it had never before attained, by placing its followers upon the same platform with themselves?

It is with feelings of sincere regret that I have felt called upon by a stern sense of duty and a respect for my professional views, to utter an earnest protest in my official capacity against the action of the sanitary committee of the board of health, relating to homœopathy. It would have been far more agreeable to me, personally as well as officially, to have commended all their acts. No one who knows the gentlemen who compose that committee, will doubt for a moment that they acted conscientiously and from the best motives; but the interests of the public and the profession are too sacred to allow us to overlook for *this* reason an error of

judgment which might have led to such disastrous results, and the tendency of which was to degrade the profession.

I have thus hinted at some of the prominent land marks that may guide us in our efforts to elevate the character of the medical profession. They are

1st. That we be independent in character and cease to cling to the delusive phantom of legislative reform, and disdain an unmanly truckling to the ignorant and prejudiced in power and out of power.

2d. That the great body of the profession insist upon a more complete system of medical education; that they discourage the admission to pupilage of illiterate and incompetent persons, and encourage the schools to a strict fulfillment of their duty in conferring the doctorate on those alone whose competency has been fully tested.

3d. That there be a systematic organization of the profession throughout the country, "as well for the cultivation of a community of interest, as for the collection into a common fund, available to all, the personal experience and observations of each practitioner."

4th. That the lines of demarcation between true science and the false systems of medicine shall be so broad and deep, that even among the non-professional community, he who runs may read.

It must be obvious to any intelligent and unprejudiced observer, that the last fifteen years have witnessed a marked improvement in medical education, and a stricter observance of the code of ethics. And to-day, in no other country in the world is the profession of medicine as widely respected, and as intrinsically respectable, as in these United States. Here only is the physician esteemed the equal of men who occupy the highest social rank, and here only is he the leader in all Associations for the promotion of learning—and in every humane and benevolent Society. The humblest physician, may by a zealous application of his time and talents to his profession, and by an upright and dignified course of conduct, inspire those out of the profession with respect for his character and opinions, and rise in the confidence and good opinion of the intelligent, the judicious and the wise.

I had here proposed to close, but the notice of a bill in the Legislature to prevent vivisections for scientific purposes, or in other words to obstruct the study and improvement of the healing art, calls for a brief notice. The Medical Society of the State of New York, to-day, through a memorial and resolutions which were

unanimously passed, expressed their disapprobation of the proposed law. An examination of this subject by an enlightened Legislature, will satisfy them that every physiological discovery of importance is due to experiments on living animals, and that the future advancement of physiology, as well as practical medicine and surgery, must be due to the same source of information. I cannot be persuaded that the proposition will be seriously entertained—that our law-makers will for a moment think of deforming the statute book by such an improper, not to say inhuman enactment.



