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NEW YORK ACADEMY OF MEDICINE,

1881.

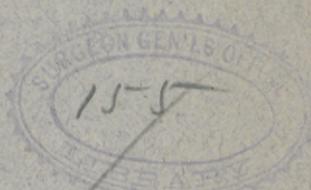
SECOND

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

BY

FORDYCE BARKER, M.D., LL.D.

*President of the Academy.*







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# NEW YORK ACADEMY OF MEDICINE,

INSTITUTED, 1847. INCORPORATED, 1851.

12 West Thirty-first Street.

Regular Meetings, First and Third Thursday Evenings in the Month.

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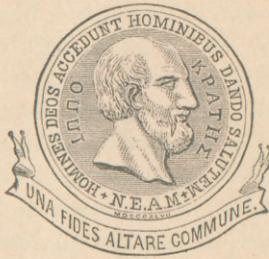
INAUGURAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE NEW YORK ACADEMY OF  
MEDICINE, FEBRUARY 3, 1881.

BY

FORDYCE BARKER, M.D., LL.D.,

PRESIDENT OF THE ACADEMY.



NEW YORK:  
PRINTED FOR THE ACADEMY,  
12 WEST THIRTY-FIRST STREET.  
1881.



## SECOND

# INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

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### FELLOWS OF THE NEW YORK ACADEMY OF MEDICINE:

COMMENCING a new term of office, it is both my duty and my pleasure to express my warm appreciation of the honor which I have received at your hands with such unanimity. At the same time, I beg leave to say that I do not flatter myself that it is a tribute to professional ability and acquirement, but that it simply means an expression of confidence that the functions of the office will be performed with impartiality, zeal, and conscientious fidelity—and with that purpose I accept the duties. I regret to say that a kind of moral *vis inertiae*, which grows, unless resisted, with each year of our life, made me very reluctant to again assume the responsibilities of the office, but the present condition of the Academy and the especially happy epoch in which it has been my good fortune to be elected to the position seemed to make it an imperative duty that for one term more I should do my best to prove that I am not ungrateful for your partiality. As those of my predecessors in office now living are present, I am sure that they will all concur with me in the statement that no one before me has been so lucky in the time of their service, a time when circumstances have combined to make what reputation the position gives easily won. The fruit of the years of the zealous labors of my predecessors and other untiring, honest workers for the Academy of Medicine was ripe and ready for harvest. Thirty-four years ago all of the best men in the profession united in the organization of this Academy, for the purpose of the culti-

vation of the science of medicine, the advancement of the character and honor of the profession, the elevation of the standard of medical education, and the promotion of public health.

While in fulfilment of this design, we can justly claim that it accomplished very much more than many who have not made themselves acquainted with the direct result of the work incited by the Academy are aware of, yet for many years it struggled under the disadvantage of having no home of its own where common affections could centre, and where it could accumulate the treasures of the literature of the past and present. But at last, through the persevering zeal and untiring efforts in an ungrateful and thankless work of solicitation by some of our number, who deserve the gratitude of the profession of the present and coming ages, sufficient funds were secured to warrant the purchase of the building now owned by the Academy. At this time the Academy had no library worth speaking of, as all together, its books did not constitute a tithe of the worth of many private medical libraries in this city. Next in the order of events came the presentation to the Academy, by its then President, Dr. S. S. Purple, a library which could not now be purchased anywhere for \$10,000, and indeed some of its volumes could not be again found. It is in some respects unique. This munificent donation demonstrated the necessity of a new library hall, as it constituted a nucleus about which the growth of a large library, such as the profession of this city absolutely demands, must be inevitable, and is rapidly securing.

It will now be seen that no one of my predecessors was ever so lucky in his epoch, for on the evening of my inauguration it was announced by my predecessor that he was authorized "by a very worthy and distinguished member of the profession, who has called upon me, and has manifested his appreciation of your liberal efforts to advance the social interests of the profession, by a pledge of \$5,000 of the amount required to build the extension and make the necessary alterations of this building according to the plans which were submitted to you by your Committee on Ways and Means in 1875.

The only condition of this noble benefaction is that this Academy shall raise the remaining \$2,000."

I must confess that I was both surprised and pained by the little evidence of enthusiasm with which this announcement was received, not, it was apparent, from doubt as to the genuineness of the offer, but from an incredulity and an indifference as to the possibility of raising from members of the Academy the additional sum required. Indeed, I noted the fact that I heard a sufficient number of those belonging to the profession express their disbelief in the accomplishment of this end, who could have raised this sum by their own contributions without doing injustice to their families or largely exceeding the debt which they themselves owe to the profession.

But thanks to the efficient labors of a Subscription Committee, who performed the thankless duties assigned to them with untiring zeal, unremitting work, and pertinacious courtesy, and thanks also to the excellent spirit of a large number of the Fellows of the Academy, who subscribed as largely as their means would warrant, the sum of \$3,000 was raised, which not only secured the pledge of \$5,000, but our wise and generous benefactor added \$3,000 on condition that the \$3,000 subscribed should be given to the permanent Library Fund. Thus it is that we now have our agreeable, convenient, well-lighted, and perfectly ventilated hall.

But the interest of our generous benefactor did not cease with the completion of the hall, for he has largely contributed to our library. The niche over my head was filled by him, and his orders still remain to add to their number such of the new medical works as are not supplied by the generosity and wisdom of their authors.

This Library Hall is a monument more enduring than brass or marble to keep the name of Abram DuBois fresh in the memory of coming generations of the profession, and a legacy of a stamp of nobility for his descendants. To paraphrase a sentence from Marmontel, "Such a legacy is a letter of credit which will be accepted on the security of their ancestor, with a full confidence that it will be redeemed with honor."

I regret to say in regard to my immediate predecessor, who by his noble gifts of books made a library hall for the Academy of Medicine an imperative necessity, that unless he make haste to redeem the time by matrimony, his stamp of nobility is not likely to be perpetuated by descendants in a direct line.

I have thus briefly and hastily sketched the auspicious conditions on which I entered upon the duties of my office, when I first received your suffrages. The history of the past two years of the Academy has been that of rapid and uninterrupted progress in every direction. The most notable of events has been our marriage with the Journal Association, which added largely to our library, and also to our moral and intellectual power. Unnatural jealousies, unfounded distrusts, rivalry quite distinct from honorable competition, have in a great measure been buried, and I think we have every indication for the belief that we have now *una fides altare commune*, and that we shall work together most harmoniously and most efficiently. It is said that at the signing of our Declaration of Independence one of the members remarked, after writing his name, "we must now hang all together." "Yes," replied John Hancock, "or we shall all hang separately." The moral of this anecdote is so obvious, that I need but quote the wise law of Jack Bunsby that "the bearing of a remark lies in the application on't."

Our library now contains over 17,000 volumes, exclusive of pamphlets, and is, I may say, with almost literal truth, daily increasing. By the will of our late lamented and distinguished fellow, Freeman J. Bumstead, we received his medical library, the most complete and valuable collection of works and writings on syphilography, as is said by those competent to express an opinion on the subject, to be found in any public medical library in the world. In the future we are destined to receive many more such contributions. I can speak with absolute certainty of one, which will eventually find a place in this hall, which its owner is seeking to make as complete as possible in the English and French bibliography of obstetrics and gynecology.

By a munificent gift from Mrs. John Jacob Astor of \$500 to be appropriated to the Circulating and Journal Department of our library, I am informed by the Chairman of the Library Committee, that the facilities for loaning journals and certain classes of books will be speedily made all that can be expected or desired. It was greatly regretted that the financial condition of the Academy would not permit the accomplishment of so important an object at an earlier period.

The scientific work of the Academy has for the past two years been most satisfactory. Papers of unusual merit and importance have been read on various subjects pertaining to pathology, general medicine and surgery, therapeutics, and the various special subjects of obstetrics, gynecology, dermatology, laryngology, otology and ophthalmology, and the reading of these papers has been followed by able discussions, which have attracted notice and been largely reprinted in both American and European journals. These discussions have been very valuable, because they have called out our best and ablest men, known to be experts in the special subject of the paper read, and they have given the results of their careful study and large experience. We have rarely been compelled to listen to platitudes or crude statements of facts already well known to every intelligent and educated man. We have seldom been tortured by the flippant loquacity of garrulous pretension and assumptions, but we have had new reasoning, new statement of facts, new therapeutical suggestions, worthy of consideration and trial. During the past two years I have not been absent from a single meeting of the Academy, except when I have been out of the city, and I can honestly assert that there has not been a single meeting from which I have not learned some new facts, and new suggestions which I should not have otherwise acquired. This I say without any disparagement of the very excellent reports by our Associate Fellow Dr. Wesley M. Carpenter, published in the *Medical Record*, or the more condensed reports in the *Gazette* and *New York Medical Journal*, but because I think it generally true that what we learn through the ear is more emphasized and more

clearly absorbed in the mind than what we acquire through the eye by reading. In a letter, which I received a few days since, from a very distinguished surgeon of the Southwest, he writes: "When I receive the *Medical Record* I look first for the report of the meeting of the Academy of Medicine, for in this I am always sure to find something which I did not before know. What surprises me most is the great number of able and cultivated men you must have in New York, for, unlike the proceedings of most medical societies, I do not see the same names as speakers at every meeting, but each meeting brings out some new names which I have never heard of before, who speak to the subject so ably that I am sure that in your city they must be or soon will be great men in our profession, or at least in some branches of it." Remarks of a similar tenor have often been made to me by physicians from other parts of the country when visiting the city.

I take this opportunity to refer to the necessity of having the papers read before the Academy and a report in full of the discussion of these papers, published by ourselves at short intervals. Now our papers appear in some one of the medical journals, while only brief abstracts appear in the other journals, both of the papers and the discussions. In the interest of science and the progress of medicine, it is most important that these all may be found complete in one publication, and equally in the interest of the Academy for the purpose of keeping up our exchange with other learned societies in this country and in Europe. At a recent meeting of the Council of the Academy, Dr. John G. Adams proposed a most feasible scheme for the accomplishment of this purpose, until the Academy acquires a sufficient income from its funds to do this without recourse to the personal liberality of our Fellows, an event not far distant. I venture the assertion that the publication of our Transactions at short intervals will soon commence. This will not in any way interfere with the work or privileges of our medical journals, which the Academy should always be most anxious to encourage and sustain. In this connection I beg to refer to a topic which Dr. Jacobi brought before the Academy at a recent

meeting, but unfortunately it was just before the adjournment when a portion of our audience had left. I refer to the continuance of the publication of the *Index Medicus*, a monthly classified record of the current medical literature of the world, unique in its conception and design, invaluable for every man who wishes to investigate what is known and being done in every department of medical science and practice. It would be a national disgrace to the profession of this country to permit this enterprise to fail from want of pecuniary support. For two years Mr. F. Leopoldt has published this with a very considerable loss. He does not ask a return for what he has already sunk, but only a support for the future. It seems to me that every Fellow of this Academy who can afford to pay the annual subscription, and who has the least conception of what is due to the profession, is bound in honor to give this most important work his aid.

One of the avowed objects of the Academy is the promotion of the public health. What it has already done in this direction has been put more forcibly by our Senior Ex-President, Dr. Willard Parker, and published by a reporter in a recent number of the *New York Herald*, than I have ever before seen it. Dr. Parker claimed, and who shall say that the claim is not well-founded, for the New York Academy of Medicine "the right to recognition as the fountain-head of whatever excellence New York may boast as to sanitary regulations, the right to style itself the bulwark between disease and the public weal; and thus it has been worth to this city, by its services, millions of dollars. For to the Academy, New York is indebted for the existence of its protecting Board of Health, a board that has warded off disease that might have involved the loss of thousands of lives and millions upon millions of property. The Academy set in motion the efficient Board of Health that did that great work of stamping out cholera which saved untold lives to the State. This offspring of the Academy has inspired most of the legislation upon hygiene ever since, reforming our buildings, giving us improved sewage, checking the adulteration of food, and especially of punishing those

who have destroyed unnumbered children with adulterated milk." He gives many other illustrations of the invaluable work which has thus been effected in this direction, which lack of time will not permit me to quote in full.

If the public of this great commercial society could only be made to appreciate the great pecuniary loss which is due to the violation of sanitary laws, it would be roused to most efficient action for its protection. Notwithstanding the fact that New York is more favorably situated than any other large city in the North or in Europe for the best sanitary conditions, its rate of mortality is in excess of others. A large part of this excess of our death-rate is undoubtedly due to causes which could, and ought to be controlled by municipal regulations, and thus the lives of 6,000 persons might annually be saved. The pecuniary loss to this city from these causes can be with difficulty estimated, but it is safe to state that it amounts to many millions of dollars annually. The loss to Philadelphia from the ravages of small-pox in 1871-72 have been estimated by competent statisticians as nearly twenty millions of dollars. The pecuniary loss to this city the present year from diphtheria, scarlet-fever, typhoid fever, pneumonia, and other diseases generated by preventible causes, such as defective plumbing, bad sewage, filthy streets, and a poisoned atmosphere, beyond all question would pay our city debt and reduce our taxation if it could have been saved and applied to this purpose.

A few weeks since I had the pleasure of perusing a paper entitled "What the State owes the people, Public Health is Public Wealth," which was read before the American Public Health Association, at its meeting in New Orleans, in December last, by the Hon. Erastus Brooks. It struck me that it would be wise to borrow the plan of religious propagandists, publish the paper as a tract, and circulate it by colporteurs among all the reading public of this city. It ought to be followed by another tract, by an equally competent writer, entitled, "What shall we do to be saved."

If the public were once made alive to the importance of this subject, no political charlatans would ever be permitted the

expensive economy of cutting down the necessary expenditures of a health board in its health-saving, money-saving, life-preserving work. We live in an epoch when public opinion is a moral force greater than the power of armies or the influence of political parties. All that is needed is the awakening of the intelligence and convictions of the public. I have found the error very prevalent among our citizens that the dangers which arise from the public neglect of sanitary laws are chiefly confined to the poorer classes and those living in crowded tenements. All, however, agree that it is a burning reproach to the civilization of the age, and a still greater stigma upon our governing authorities, that the avarice of a few hundreds should be permitted to make miserable, unhappy, and, as I absolutely know, in some cases, positively ill, hundreds of thousands of our population by establishing manufactures in our suburbs which fill our atmosphere with noisome, offensive, and unhealthy effluvia.

The truth is that in some respects the peril to those who are able to live in the most comfortable and even luxurious circumstances is greater than to those of the poorer classes. The danger to which all of us are exposed, despite such precautions as most take, is infinitely greater than that from assassins and desperate burglars, for we have no protection in the use of revolvers or other weapons of defence. Our assailant is a stealthy insidious poisoner. Within a comparatively recent period I have seen three young men of character, promise, and position stricken down and die from this poison. If my conferees now present could give their experience I am sure the number of such deaths would cause an alarming surprise to many who now do not give a thought to the subject. To how many in the city might not the words of the poet be applied as an epitaph :

“He ate, drank, laughed, loved, lived, and liked life well,  
Then came—who knows—some gust of jungle wind,  
A stumble on the path; a taint i' the tank;  
A snake's nip; half a span of angry steel;  
A chill; a fish bone; or a falling tile—  
And life is over; and the man is dead.”

Medical men who have a good professional reputation are not usually regarded by the public as strong either as business men or as politicians, whether they act as individuals or as organized bodies. But they do have great power in moulding public opinion on all subjects on which they are known to be better informed than others. On all these matters, which I have just been discussing, they ought to be able to influence legislation, and no doubt they can, when they make zealous efforts.

I therefore believe that I am warranted in asserting that the Fellows of the Academy of Medicine are in hearty sympathy with the purposes of the New York Sanitary Reform Society, and are most anxious to give it all the aid in their power. I am sure that every one of us feels the importance of an improvement in tenement-houses, as regards an adequate supply of air and light, and the prevention of defective and dangerous plumbing, the abating of nuisances which affect the public health, such as those at Hunter's Point, and to secure the supervision of the Board of Health over the plumbing of all buildings hereafter erected in this city. Bills designed to attain these various ends are now before the Legislature, and intelligent, zealous action on the part of the profession in instructing those whom they know of its honorable members may contribute essentially to secure their passage. This Society, it seems to me, has evinced great wisdom in devising only practical and feasible schemes, which must receive the approval of every sensible thinking man.

It remains for me to add a few words in regard to the Academy. Within the past eighteen months over eighteen thousand dollars have been subscribed and paid by members of the Academy for building its hall and the improvement of its library. At present it is impossible to ask those of the profession who have proved their readiness to do all in their power, to do more now; although in the future, as in the past, their efforts in this direction will be continued with unabated zeal.

The value of the property now belonging to the Academy, as represented by its hall, its equipments, and its library, was appraised last year at \$81,430. On this is a mortgage of

\$10,000, which constitutes the whole debt of the Academy. Its income from annual dues of its members and admission fees from new members is sufficient for its current expenses, but the interest on the mortgage allows but a small surplus for keeping up the library in the purchase of books, for appropriations for binding the journals, and, except for the generous donation of Mrs. Astor for this year, for adding what is most desirable and even necessary, subscriptions for duplicate journals and books which can be taken out.

The profession of this city have never asked aid from the public in their efforts to secure for its members the highest culture and erudition, to keep them abreast with the rapid progress of science and improvements in practice, and to make them positive contributors to its advancement. In Europe the profession are stimulated and assisted greatly by contributions from private individuals and appropriations from the state.

Every intelligent man must appreciate the importance of a medical profession of the highest character for such a city as this, not only as most necessary for suggesting and promoting every measure to preserve the city from epidemic diseases and devastating pestilence, but for the protection of himself and family. Hardly a month passes that some new discovery is not made, either in science or in practice, which may be a means of saving life under conditions which may occur to any one, and so the vital utility of having such knowledge diffused among the profession may become of the greatest importance to every one.

It has been thought that at least one hundred men may be found in this city who so perfectly understand this, and who so appreciate its importance for themselves and their families, that they will esteem it both a pleasure and a privilege to place the Academy of Medicine in such a position as will enable it effectively to accomplish its high aims by the contribution of \$100. A pressure of other engagements has not allowed me the time to present the matter to a large majority of such of my friends as I think will respond favorably to the call, but I have great pleasure in saying that I have not yet met with a

single refusal, and have already deposited in bank several hundred dollars which have been given to me for the object. The Academy will also have great satisfaction in learning that, through the hands of Dr. Abram DuBois, Dr. William H. Van Buren, and Dr. Henry D. Noyes I have received from their friends one check of \$200, and others of \$100. The names of the donors will, in due time, be published.

The late distinguished Dr. John Ware, of Boston, in one of his addresses published some thirty-five years ago, expressed the opinion that the public no longer believed in the profession as a body, but that there only remained such personal confidence as individual members might secure. However true this may have been at that time, I think that we must all say that it is very much less true at the present day. This result is chiefly due to our medical societies, which have led to the cultivation of social intercourse and the intimacy of personal relations that break down prejudice, prevent depreciation, and develop the feeling of common brotherhood no less important than their influence in stimulating their members to greater mental activity, to higher culture, and to the literature of the profession. On the one hand, we, in the profession, have had some grounds for feeling that the public have unjustly charged us with being opposed to progress and rejecting everything new as untrue. Our mistake has not been in opposing errors, but in our methods of opposing them. As the late Bishop Wilberforce, a man as remarkable for his wisdom as his wit, said in the last address that he ever made, "All errors that have spread and become formidable, rested upon some truth. If not, they could not for a moment survive the light of day and the light of discussion. So the history of error is always the same. First, the outcoming of truth; then the exaggeration of that truth; lastly, the distortion of the truth. If there were no truth in it, no earnest man could be misled by it."

There is something in human nature, when developed by moral and intellectual training, which revolts against every thing that has the appearance of injustice. When the public see men whose honesty, whose education and scientific attain-

ments they regard as unquestionable, denounced as dishonest, as quacks, or as knaves, excluded by those whom they consider as belonging to the same guild, not merely from professional but also from social intercourse, is it surprising that their sympathy and even support should be given to what we believe and even know to be false in science and futile in practice? I ask if it be not true, that at the present day, most of us see that by this mistake in judgment on the part of our predecessors as a body, a school in medicine has been created and perpetuated for nearly a half century, and supported by a respectable and cultivated minority of society, in all parts of the world? Is there any one who believes that if the meagre truths which this pseudo-school has unquestionably developed had been frankly accepted, its errors kindly exposed, and its individual supporters treated with that wise charity due from a liberal profession, that it would now have any existence in the estimation of the public as an antagonistic school?

There has been a great change in the profession within the past thirty years, not only in this regard, but also in many other particulars, which I will not detain you by enumerating. There is also a corresponding change in the relations which the profession holds to the public, as has already been indicated in my former remarks. I doubt whether, in any former age, the medical profession has been held in so high estimation, and whether in any other city in the world it has held so high a position socially, or is on the whole better remunerated for its professional work. Many of our more wealthy people do not content themselves with paying the bills sent to them by their medical attendants, but often add a most generous honorarium. Thus I am informed on the best authority that one received at the commencement of the year a check for \$10,000, and another of our number a check for \$5,000. There are many of us who are remembered at the Christmas holidays, by grateful patients, who send presents of silver and bronze, works of art, and luxuries of an æsthetic character, as an expression of a grateful appreciation for professional kindness and skill. We should not expect or look for such generous appreciative liber

ality, but we should aim to deserve it from all who confide the health of themselves and their families to our hands. We can see very clearly how largely the community is indebted to the profession. Let us be careful not to forget what we owe to the community. But I have no intention or right to improve the occasion by a sermon, as I read on the faces of some before me a prompt readiness to do honor to the beautiful sentiment, selected by a lady who has proved one of our most generous benefactors and is engraved on our Loving-cup, "May peace and love be multiplied unto us."



