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# REPLY

TO

DR. LEWIS A. SAYRE'S REVIEW OF DR. RUPPNER'S CASE

OF

## LARYNGO-TRACHEOTOMY,

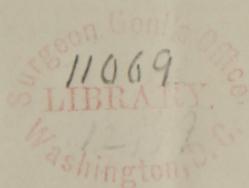
TO WHICH IS ADDED A FULL ACCOUNT OF

*THE GREAT POISONING CASE BY PARTRIDGES  
AT THE FIFTH AVENUE HOTEL.*

BY

A. RUPPNER, M. D.,

PHYSICIAN TO THE NEW YORK DISPENSARY FOR DISEASES OF THE THROAT AND  
CHEST, MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION, ETC.



NEW YORK:

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# REPLY

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DR. LEWIS A. SAYRE'S REVIEW OF DR. RUPPNER'S  
CASE OF LARYNGO-TRACHEOTOMY.

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FIFTH AVENUE HOTEL, NEW YORK, }  
March 20, 1870. }

E. S. DUNSTER, M. D.,

*Editor of the New York Medical Journal.*

DEAR SIR: A letter addressed to you by Dr. Lewis A. Sayre, of this city, having been published as a supplement to the NEW YORK MEDICAL JOURNAL for February, I forward to you a reply to that communication, trusting that your sense of justice will induce you to give my reply the same publicity that was accorded to Dr. Sayre's letter.

I remain, very respectfully,

A. RUPPNER, M. D.

FIFTH AVENUE HOTEL, NEW YORK, }  
March 20, 1870. }

L. A. SAYRE, M. D., New York City.

SIR: A printed letter, emanating from your pen, addressed to the editor of the NEW YORK MEDICAL JOURNAL, February 10, 1870, and purporting to be a Review of my case of

Laryngo-Tracheotomy, reported in the January number of the *NEW YORK MEDICAL JOURNAL* as Case III. in the paper entitled: "Contributions to Practical Laryngoscopy," has been extensively circulated by you both among the profession and the public.

It is hardly possible you presumed for a moment that this letter, referred to above, could escape my notice. As there is a difference as to facts between us, or rather, the manner in which these facts were reported, the question will reduce itself simply to this: Were you intentionally injured in my report; have I tried to correct my error, if such has been committed, according to the rules customary among professional gentlemen, and, finally, are your statements correct, and therefore worthy of confidence?

In analyzing the contents of your letter, I shall first deal with the facts as you present them; then I will give at least one example, and that an indisputable one, of your love for truth and justice in your professional dealings with me. After that I shall leave it to the profession, whose sympathy you have invoked, to render their verdict.

On page 1, line 8, of your published letter, you say:

"One of the above cases is most inaccurately reported, and, as it is a case in which I have a personal interest, it becomes my duty to give it a passing notice, in order to correct the doctor's errors.

"The case is that of Captain Bigelow, of New Braintree, Mass. Dr. R. requested me to see Captain B., in consultation with him, some time in June or July, 1869. He had a tumor in the larynx, which the doctor has very accurately described, and which he was trying to remove by local application of various escharotics. On hearing the history of the case, and becoming satisfied that the tumor was increasing more rapidly than escharotics could destroy it, I advised its immediate removal by external incision, if he (Dr. R.) was satisfied that it was not malignant.

"Dr. Rupperer assured me that he had repeatedly examined, by the microscope, pieces that he had pulled off with the forceps, and could find no trace of cancer, and, although it bled very freely, he could find no evidence of the tumor being malignant. In his published statement he says: 'Pieces the size of a pin's-head were removed with the forceps,' etc. . . . 'Examined under the microscope, these lobules were found to consist of cancer-cells, varying in type,' etc. I leave it to the doctor to explain this discrepancy between his statement to me, in the presence of Captain Bigelow, and in his published report.

“Presuming on the doctor’s knowledge of the microscope, and on the accuracy of his statements, I again urged the immediate removal of the tumor by external incision, as the captain was in danger of impending suffocation. This advice I certainly would not have given if I had not been assured that the growth was *not* cancerous, but would have advised *tracheotomy* simply as a means of prolonging life, and making the patient as comfortable as possible under the circumstances.”

Let us pause here and consider your statements.

On the 8th of July, 1869, Captain B. having been for some days very desponding, I invited you to meet me to see him. I had previously spoken to you of the case. You expressed great desire to see it as a matter of scientific interest. I had repeatedly urged upon the captain the importance of a removal of the growth by external incision, for this reason, that, even if the growth was doubtful in its character, by a timely operation its progress might at least be temporarily retarded, if not its return prevented, and comfort at least obtained for some time to come.

Your advice, then, to remove the tumor was not original with you. You were asked to state your objections to it, if such existed, at the time.

Was the growth malignant or not? Your assertion that I assured you repeatedly that the growth was not malignant, has its foundation only in your imagination. But you say it was made in the presence of Captain B. Now, if I ever stated to Captain B. that there was nothing dangerous about the growth, that its nature was perfectly benign, why did he press me constantly for an expression of the result of the microscopic examination, which I withheld from him for fear of the depressing influence such intelligence would have upon his mind? Some two weeks after the captain had returned home, after the operation, he wrote me, urging me to tell him the nature of the growth, as I always had refused to express my opinion to him. Why this pressure for an answer repeated before and after the operation, if I made, as you assert, the positive statement, in his presence and yours at the same time, that the growth was not malignant? Then again, sir, have you never seen any morbid growth of doubtful character? Are you always positive in your assertions? This, then, is a

question of veracity between yourself and me. Until you produce stronger proof that your statement is correct, than you have done, it is certainly not entitled to more credence than mine. On the contrary, I have, I trust, produced pretty strong evidence against you by bringing the captain's own actions to bear upon the case. Nor have I ever spoken to my professional friends who saw the case before the operation in any other way, except with the greatest solicitude as to the nature of the growth. You continue in your letter, page 2: "I heard nothing more of this case until the 15th of August, about eleven o'clock at night, when I received, at Long Branch, the following telegram:

*"The captain is dying. Come immediately; he must be operated upon at once.*  
A. RUPPNER."

I have taken the trouble to look up the original dispatch at the office of the Western Union Telegraph at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, and give here a copy of the same:

NEW YORK, August 15, 1869.

"Dr. L. A. Sayre, Mansion-House, Long Branch. Come immediately, Bigelow must be operated upon at once.

A. RUPPNER."<sup>1</sup>

To which dispatch you coolly prefix: "The captain is dying." Is *this* a question of veracity too, between you and me?

Heard nothing more of this case till you received the telegram at Long Branch!

Now, sir, from the time you saw Captain B. first, to the time of the operation, we had several conversations about the case. We had occasion to meet repeatedly in a case of yours, and I kept you informed of Captain B.'s progress. I also informed you, some time before the operation, of the great opposition to any operation, by the captain's friends and relatives. I told you that, on account of the determined opposition of these parties, I informed Captain B., and particularly also his wife, that I should not do the cutting, but would be present to direct what should be done. Thus being disembarassed of

<sup>1</sup> "The above is a correct copy of a telegram forwarded by Dr. Ruppner, August 15, 1869, and on file at my office.

"T. W. BURNHAM, Superintendent of Telegraph Office, Fifth Avenue Hotel."

some of the duties attending the operation, I should be more fully prepared to devote my attention to the growth proper when exposed more fully to view, and be ready for such emergencies as might arise. Opposition was even made to you from some quarters. Other surgeons were suggested. I overruled these proposals, as I had had a previous understanding with you about the operation. The morning of the day of the operation I distinctly stated to Mrs. Bigelow what arrangements I had made with you. I saw the captain and told him. His friends knew it. I expressed my determination plainly, that nothing but my deep interest in the patient and his family kept me connected with the case at all, after I became aware of the determined opposition to the operation by the captain's friends and relatives. But for that opposition I would never have permitted you to handle the knife in my place in this case.

How, then, in the face of these facts, could, according to your statement, the captain feel "indignant at the deception?" Where was the deception, but for your attempt to make it appear so?

I shall pass over your quiet poetical description of your meeting with Dr. Vance; your walk down the avenue, and your details of all that passed in the room. But mark, now, the sequel.

You and I retired to the anteroom for consultation. There were arranged the instruments on one table and not upon two. The room was too small to contain two tables with the additional furniture in it. These instruments were kept there, because the captain had, as a particular favor, requested of me not to bring an instrument into the room before he was completely anæsthetized, nor to admit any spectators. What passed then and there in that little room, between you and myself, is known, besides "Him who knows and hears all things," to no living being except you and me. You state: "He then" (meaning me) "for the first time requested me to perform the operation, stating that he was tired and nervous from want of sleep, having watched all night with the captain."

*My most emphatic reply to you is, that I never made such*

*a statement*; that you were aware, as I have shown above, that you were expected to perform the operation. The rest of your assertion, as to the want of sleep, watching all night with the captain, etc., *never came from my lips*, for the very good reason that I had never watched with the captain. This, then, again, is a question of veracity between us. Let me produce first all my evidence before deciding whose regard for truth is the greatest.

Permit me, however, to recall to your mind what did pass between us in that little room. You asked me distinctly what I proposed to do, as you would operate according to my directions. I then stated to you the plan I had determined upon, to which you assented, remarking at the same time: "Just let me know, as we progress with the operation, what you wish done, and I will do it." This was the whole conversation we had on the subject. That you ever remarked to me that "this was rather a short notice for an operation of such magnitude, and that you preferred your own instruments and assistants," I deny. This also is, then, a question of veracity between you and me.

Allow me to ask you, however, *what operation of such magnitude was this that you would have the profession to believe you performed*, of the credit of which you state I deprived you, that therefore you must appeal to the profession as an injured man? What was the nature of this operation of such magnitude, I ask again? Are not the principles involved in the execution of tracheotomy so plain, so simple, so absolutely divested of all dangerous complications, that the merest *tyro* in surgery who runs can read? Evidently, in your estimation, the magnitude of the operation was in *the price* you attached to it a week later, when I told you that the captain had paid me two hundred and fifty dollars for you, which I sent to your address, and got a receipt.

But to return to your narrative. You say, page 3, line 21: "He replied in a hurried manner" (meaning, of course, myself), "Every thing is all right. I have every instrument all prepared, and Dr. Zolnowski was a pupil of Türk and Trölsch, etc., and is the best assistant you could have."

Every thing *was* all right evidently, except yourself. The

magnitude of the operation, to use your own language, clearly threatened to overcome you. As to my introducing Dr. Zolnowski to you as the best assistant you could have, since he was a pupil of Türk and Tröltsch, there is no truth about it. I myself was your principal assistant, as far as the cutting was concerned, as you well knew, as I stood from the beginning to the end of the operation opposite you, sponged and dilated the parts, and made my observations and suggestions as we progressed. My position was also the left, on the direct side of the tumor. Dr. Dudley was, at my request, your second assistant, and stood near you.

Now, Dr. Zolnowski was introduced to you by me, at my parlor, on the same day, at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, as a pupil of Prof. Bilioth. For your information I would state that Bilioth is one of the most prominent teachers and operators in surgery in Europe. He occupied the chair of Surgery at the University of Zurich, and has latterly been called to fill the same chair at the great Medical School in Vienna. Dr. Zolnowski was Bilioth's assistant, hence fully competent to judge of the operation we were to perform; though it is not probable that I could have fallen into the error of introducing a gentleman to you as first assistant who was not at all conversant with the English, since at that time he had been only a few months in the country. I beg to refer you below to a letter he has addressed me in reference to the operation. Now to the operation itself. You state, page 4, line 1:

“I passed the knife through the tumor, which was very vascular, and intended to insert the tube immediately on the withdrawal of the knife, but the captain gave a deep, full, whistling inspiration, completely invaginating and closing the external wound, and of course inhaling a large quantity of blood, and *almost instantly* he apparently expired. As there was but one tenaculum used, and no other retractor present, I had to take out my pocket-case, open it (which of course took some time) and get a tenaculum, which, on being used, proved too delicate to hold the wound open. Dr. Dudley seized the scissors out of my pocket-case, which happened to have a hook on one of the handles, and, using that hook as a tenaculum, gaped open the wound and inserted the tube. But the captain still remained apparently dead, and without respiration. Pulling off a feather from a fan some one was using, I ran it suddenly down into the trachea,

and removed some clots of blood. This was done several times, while other gentlemen present were trying to keep up artificial respiration. At last, in a paroxysm of coughing, he forcibly expelled several clots of blood, when his respiration became normal, and his life was saved."

Now, sir, that two tenaculums were on hand, Dr. Dudley affirms, but one was too weak. Still, that circumstance was of too little importance, I think, as every one acquainted with such matters will admit, to waste so much paper about it as you have.

The hæmorrhage was the *natural, unavoidable result of an incision into a tumor which was very vascular*. As I have always acknowledged, that circumstance was overlooked by me in the following manner in my report: It was an error in copying my first draft of the report for the press. In my first manuscript I wrote as follows: "*No untoward event happened when the incision was made and the canula introduced, except some hæmorrhage, the unavoidable result of the vascularity of the tumor.*" I did not, by some unfortunate mishap, copy into the manuscript handed to the printer the latter half of the sentence, viz.: "except some hæmorrhage, the unavoidable result of the vascularity of the tumor." Nor was the omission discovered until it was too late to correct it.

When the trachea was opened, respiration apparently ceased for an instant. No sooner had I given the patient a good drink of strong brandy (a circumstance you seem to have overlooked), and Dr. Zolnowski, standing at the foot of the table, practised pressure upon the abdominal cavity, than the captain revived. This all took but an instant. It is true some clotted blood which had passed into the trachea was expelled from the opening by coughing. But is that a phenomenon so rare in tracheotomy as to have such stress laid upon it? If, sir, any of your friends who were present wish to make the profession believe that the patient was dead several minutes, and but for you would have remained so, they are welcome to their opinion. I, at least, am not willing to lend my name to such a purpose, to appear thus before the profession. I shall prefer to be found fault with rather than to be pushed into an assertion of facts which I honestly believe did not take place.

To show that it is not uncommon in operations of tracheotomy and laryngo-tracheotomy for the respiration of the patient to cease altogether for minutes without grave results necessarily following therefrom, I refer my readers, and you, sir, especially, to a report of a case of tracheotomy by J. Davis Thomson, M. D., as reported in the March (1870) number of the *Baltimore Medical Journal*, where, in the case of a Confederate soldier, respiration was suspended for several minutes after the trachea had been opened with an ordinary abscess-lancet, and where for several minutes there were not the slightest signs of life. Artificial respiration was then practised, but for several minutes without avail, when presently, with a gasp and a slight shudder, the patient inhaled feebly through the artificial opening. A little mucus and blood were next expelled, and the functions of life were reëstablished—(page 147).

Allow me to pass by for a moment that part of your review in which you refer to the letter I sent you. I shall recur to it presently. You continue, page 5, line 8 (from below), to quote from my report as follows: "Nothing has been elicited from the captain since the above date, till, a short time since, I came in possession of a statement of his case." This is indeed copied from a letter of Captain B. to you.

But how did you, sir, come to correspond with my patient? Shortly after the operation, I became aware that you were working up my case. I concluded to take measures to forestall your actions, and to publish my case myself. You happened about that time to be under my professional care for a chronic throat-disease, for which I had treated you before successfully. At my office, during one of your visits to me, I asked you, "Doctor, have you lately heard from the captain?" You hesitated at first, then replied: "Oh, yes, I got a long letter from him the other day." "I would like to see it," I rejoined. "By all means;" and you began to search in your pockets, and, not finding the desired document, you said: "I will send you the letter down to-night." No letter came. I waited. Asked again for it. Waited again, and sent to your house for it. It had been mislaid, was the reply. Finally (for I was determined to have the letter anyhow), I found, one

morning, under my door, an envelope, enclosing eight or ten pages of foolscap, without date or remarks, beginning and ending with the quotation-marks given in my report. No signature was attached to the paper.

As a reason for your strange action, you assert now, page 5, second line from below :

“This letter I did not like to give the doctor, as it contained some statements not very flattering to his veracity, and I did not like to hurt his feelings. In fact, the captain charged him with having deceived him, by telling him that ‘it was the most difficult and dangerous operation he (Ruppaner) ever performed in his life.’ And the captain, having learned from Dr. Swan and Mr. Hobert that Dr. Ruppaner had not performed the operation, felt indignant at the deception.

“I therefore,” (you continue) “had copied and sent to him the professional part of the letter, in order to prove to him the correctness of my first suspicions, that the tumor was malignant.”

*Generous indeed, sir! Did not want to hurt my feelings!* But allow me to tell you that Captain Bigelow never charged me with what you have put into his mouth! I never told Captain B. what you assert I did, nor shall I believe that he ever committed himself to you, unless you produce his letter in full. Nor does the being live that dares to make the assertion to my face that I told him that it was the most difficult and dangerous operation I ever performed in my life! Pardon me, sir, if I am so bold as to assert that I should judge you rather considered the operation the most dangerous and difficult you ever performed in your life.

Further, I am in possession of a letter from Captain B., of later date than the one to which you refer, and he makes no such accusation. What I have often said unreservedly is this, that this was the most remarkable, important, and difficult case I had seen yet of that nature. Moreover, instead of complaints of deception, etc., I have proof to the contrary from the captain. He expressed his thanks to me fully and earnestly—had no fault to find, but, with tears in his eyes, expressed his gratitude to me when we parted. I shall not insult the character of Captain B. for a moment by believing him so treacherous to one who, like myself, has spent hours and hours over his case for months in order to stave off the

fatal catastrophe. Nor will the captain assert that what I did, I did only for a money consideration. The fees I received will never begin to repay me for the time spent in the study and treatment of this case.

It remains now for me to consider that part of my report, in the January number of the *NEW YORK MEDICAL JOURNAL*, which refers personally to you, and which is the chief burden of your letter of February 10, 1870.

Now, I acknowledge, and I have done so at all times since the paper was published, that the expressions I used are not as clearly worded as might have been done. Nay, I am satisfied that, by a simple change in its punctuation, the error, if any, or if so grave as you would have the profession believe it to be, could have been, if not entirely obviated, yet ambiguity avoided.

Upon reading, however, that, rather, I should think, complimentary than disparaging sentence, your injured sense of justice is aroused, you swear vengeance, and *presto*, you addressed questions in writing to the gentlemen who were my guests, not yours, at the operation.

No sooner was your letter received by one of them, than I was informed of the fact, and, when questioned whether and how it ought to be answered, I insisted by all means justice should be done, and the letter answered unreservedly. This my friend did, though you did evidently not entirely relish his answer, as your comments thereupon prove.

Instead, then, of addressing yourself personally to me, whom you knew well, you preferred to take the course you have. You, however, assert that it is in the interest of science, and a duty you owed to the profession, to expose these errors! But pray what great scientific errors are those involved in this complaint? Can any sane man tell me? I trust, for your sake, that the sequel will show that your declarations are true and unselfish; that to the interests of science alone you make this sacrifice.

No sooner had I been informed of your action, than, in order to make the *amende honorable*, if you claimed it to be due you, I addressed you without delay the subjoined note, only a few days after the *JOURNAL* was out. This note was

sent to you by special messenger, and delivered. The following is a true copy :

"FIFTH AVENUE HOTEL, NEW YORK, }  
"December 31, 1869, 11 A. M. }

"MY DEAR DOCTOR:

"I regret to learn, from a mutual friend of ours, that you feel yourself aggrieved, inasmuch as that I had not done you justice in my report of Captain Bigelow's case.

"Allow me here, therefore, to state that, when I wrote the report of my case, I had not the *remotest intention* to claim for myself what credit, in my case, really belongs to you. I trust you have known me long enough to know that I am not willing to compromise the good opinion and fame of a professional friend in a few printed lines. I disavow any sinister motives *in toto*.

"If there is any doubt as to who performed the operation, I shall be happy to clear up that doubt in a supplementary note to the JOURNAL, as well as in reference to the hæmorrhage, which fact, I acknowledge, I overlooked in my report.

"I am not willing that the old year should pass away, and the new one come in, without my addressing you, in the sincere hope of a satisfactory solution of the difference.

"With the compliments of the season, I remain,

"Very truly yours,

"A. RUPPNER, M. D.

"Dr. L. A. SAYRE, Fifth Avenue."

This letter, written in a most kindly spirit, for an honest purpose, you never condescended to answer.

But please compare, let the profession compare, the mutilated form of my letter you publish on page 5, where you say, beginning with page 4, last line: "I regret to appear before the profession in this manner, and presumed from the following letter that I should have been spared the trouble:"

[COPY.]

"FIFTH AVENUE HOTEL, }  
"December 31, 1869. }

MY DEAR DOCTOR:

When I wrote the report of my case I had not the remotest intention to claim for myself any credit in my case that rightly belongs to you. If there is any doubt as to who performed the operation, I will clear up that

doubt in a supplementary note to the JOURNAL, as well as in reference to the hæmorrhage, which latter fact, I acknowledge, I overlooked in my report.

“Very respectfully, your friend and servant,

“A. RUPPNER, M. D.

“Dr. L. A. SAYRE, Fifth Avenue.”

You continue: “As the February number of the JOURNAL is out without the promised explanation, I have, in compliance with the wishes of many friends, and in obedience to the duty I owe the profession, made these facts public.” Now, sir, read my letter again, and then look at what you publish to the profession as such letter. You snatch two sentences from the body of my letter, which suit your purpose, and ignore the rest!

Is this done in compliance with the wishes of many friends of yours, and in obedience to the duty you owe the profession? I regret, too, that I must thus appear before the profession, but I shall leave it to every honest, truth-loving being to say, what I could do more than to offer the explanation which you scorned?

I annex here a letter received from Dr. Zolnowski, dated March 10, 1870, in reference to the operation.

[COPY.]

DR. A. RUPPNER, Fifth Avenue Hotel, New York.

HONORED COLLEAGUE: In answer to your letter of the 4th of March, 1870, I have the honor to reply, that the operation of laryngo-tracheotomy performed at your suggestion on Captain Bigelow, August 16, 1869, and at which I was present as your assistant, is still fresh in my memory.

When I entered the room I found the patient under the influence of chloroform, and about fifteen minutes passed before the operation commenced.

After the trachea was opened, inconsiderable arterial hæmorrhage followed, and a little blood passed into the trachea. As this hæmorrhage into the trachea was small, the patient could have easily expelled the same by coughing through the opening in the trachea, had he not been very much exhausted from the prolonged inhalation of chloroform, which great exhaustion must of course have increased the risk for the safe termination of the operation. In consequence, a feather was introduced to stimulate the trachea, a proceeding very common when operating upon children, and after which the patient almost instantly respired again.

That any thing extraordinary happened during the operation, as is asserted, I am not aware of. If my opinion should be considered wrong, I may be permitted to state that I assisted at about fifty such operations at the clinic of Prof. Bilroth, of Zurich, in the space of a year and a half. No operation of this kind ever lasted longer than from three to five minutes, and I myself have performed the same in the space of from five to ten minutes. I remain very truly your friend and colleague,

D. V. ZOLNOWSKI, M. D.

Here, sir, I might take leave of you, were it not that *I, too* (to quote your own words), "owe to science and the profession a duty which I can no longer overlook." Nor is the following statement made, because two wrongs make a right, if there should be still any doubt, in the minds of the profession, that you are an injured individual, after perusing my statements thus far.

But you must be aware, sir, that there is no rule which does not work both ways. If I now apply the same measure to you which you have dealt out to me, please do not complain if the fit is a little tight.

I accordingly beg leave to bring back to your mind, sir, and also introduce the profession, to the case of two gentlemen who were poisoned at the St. James Hotel, by eating partridges in February, 1868, and who afterward were brought to their quarters at the Fifth Avenue Hotel. You too, sir, had an interest in that case, as will be seen from the following evidence:

From the NEW YORK SUNDAY NEWS, March 1, 1868.

*Saved from Death—A Nearly Fatal Catastrophe—Dr. Lewis Sayre the Rescuer—Strange Recital of Facts—A New Means of absorbing Poison—Two Gentlemen attacked by Symptoms of Poisoning by Prussic Acid.*

The other evening, while the distinguished surgeon, Dr. Lewis A. Sayre, was taking his dinner at his residence, corner of Thirtieth Street and Fifth Avenue, a violent ring was heard at his private door-bell, and a messenger, in breathless anxiety, announced that two well-known gentlemen had been taken suddenly and mysteriously ill at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, and that the doctor's presence was immediately required. Dr. Sayre instantly left his unfinished dinner, and prepared to follow the excited messenger; but, before he had his overcoat buttoned, another messenger arrived,

and announced that, unless the doctor hastened, the gentlemen would be dead, as they were in great pain and unable to stand on their feet, and both were prostrate in the reading-room. From the description the excited messengers were able to give of the peculiar symptoms exhibited by the invalids, the doctor concluded it was a case of bourbon whiskey or old rye, and not of cholera, and that a little emetic would put every thing right with the patients. However, he hurriedly followed the messengers, and in the reading-room of the hotel he found the two gentlemen, whom he instantly recognized as well-known whiskey-brokers, attended by a friend, surrounded by a gaping crowd of spectators, some of whom were convulsed with laughter, while others seemed to be seriously impressed with the spectacle. One of the gentlemen was completely prostrate on the marble floor, spasmodically gasping for breath, while the other was making frantic efforts to regain his feet, over which he seemed to have no more control than the unfortunate Timothy Toodles, after he had fallen, in his vain effort to recover his dropped glove.

The doctor approached this gentleman, and endeavored to assist him to stand, but so completely powerless were his pedals that he instantly sank to the floor. Finding this procedure useless, he ordered a room on the same floor to be prepared, and caused the gentlemen to be carried to it. He then questioned the conscious one, and was surprised to find that he was perfectly clear in his mind, and that there was not the slightest evidence of intoxication apparent. He then examined the other, who still remained in a perfectly quiescent state, and he was startled on discovering that his face was livid, the features rigid, skin clammy, and pulse scarcely perceptible.

He inquired of their friend where they had been, and what they had been drinking, as he believed that they had, in all probability, imbibed some of the terrible whiskey that is now so freely retailed, and which is adulterated with various poisonous drugs, particularly with that subtle poison, strychnine, from which, when it once puts its victim to sleep, there is no awaking.

The friend informed the doctor that he had been with them all day, and solemnly assured him that neither of them had taken any whiskey whatever.

Dr. Sayre, for a moment, seemed nonplussed, and inquired where they had been, then; for the affair was looking serious, and he believed that they had taken some kind of poison; or had been inhaling some poisonous atmosphere, or gas. His informant stated that two hours before they all three were in as perfect health as they had ever been in their lives, attending to business, assiduously, in disposing of whiskey—one of them having an extensive consignment of that article to dispose of—that arriving at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, where they intended to dine, before the dining hour, and having exceedingly sharp appetites, they had gone to the St. James Hotel, where they had dinner.

In answer to the doctor's inquiry as to what they had eaten, he said

they had taken some raw oysters and brandy, and that he had eaten a beefsteak and some mushrooms, and his friends, being more fastidious, had dined on a couple of broiled partridges, and that during the course of the dinner they drank a bottle of a new brand of champagne. After dinner, they went into the bar-room to get cigars and some brandy, when one of the sick gentlemen suddenly said he felt very ill, and that he was so dizzy he could not stand, and commenced to reel and stagger about like a drunken man, and in a few moments the other was similarly affected. That, believing the wine had intoxicated them, he instantly called for a carriage, and with great difficulty succeeded in getting them in it, and one of them was seized with violent vomiting. On reaching the Fifth Avenue Hotel, they had entirely lost the use of their limbs, and had to be helped into the reading-room, where they lost all power of locomotion, and dropped helplessly to the floor, and, becoming alarmed, he had sent for the doctor.

Doctor Sayre now turned his attention to the patients, and found them both almost completely paralyzed. Their limbs were perfectly dead, their eyes dilated, faces blanched, features rigid, circulation almost suspended, breathing difficult, and pulse but slightly perceptible, and one of them was rapidly approaching an entire state of syncope.

This was both strange and startling to the doctor, particularly as the friend who narrated the facts was perfectly well. However, Dr. Sayre is a gentleman who never delays for questioning, particularly where there is a doubt in the case, and he accordingly acted with his noted promptness. He had resolved one thing, and that was, that the gentlemen had been poisoned; but how, and with what? It was poison, that was certain. They had all drunk the same liquors, and eaten oysters, and yet but two were affected. One had eaten a *fillet* and mushrooms, and the others of broiled partridges, and these two were the sufferers. Yes, it was poison, and the symptoms all pointed to the effects of that most terrible and fatal of all poisons, prussic acid.

The moment Dr. Sayre concluded this diagnosis, he rushed to Caswell & Mack's drug-store, under the hotel, and prepared a large dose of a certain antidote for this dreaded life-destroying agent, which he speedily administered to the patients, and applied the usual other remedies of mustard and warm water, and in a little while he had the gratification of seeing them reviving under the mysterious influence of his medicine, and they were soon out of danger, being rescued, as it were, almost from the very jaws of death, by the science of this not only distinguished physician and surgeon, but master of *materia medica*. Dr. Sayre, from the symptoms, was confirmed in his opinion of the presence of prussic acid, but how was it absorbed in the system and blood of these gentlemen? Was it contained in the champagne, or brandy, or oysters? No! for all had drunk alike, and taken oysters. The partridges? That was the secret. He knew that the winter had been unusually severe, and that where these birds abound large quantities of snow had covered the ground and deprived them of their natural food, and, unless they approach farms and feed from the

stacks of grain, they resort to the laurel-tree, and eat from it the red laurel-berries, which contain large quantities of prussic acid, but whether the result is serious to the bird or not he does not undertake to say. Sufficient to know that the flesh of this delicious game-bird becomes thoroughly impregnated with the poison, which the analysis of a portion from one of the gentlemen's stomachs demonstrated.

Dr. Sayre, being deeply interested in the subject, thoroughly examined it, and finds but one similar case reported in the medical books, and that occurred some eight years ago in Massachusetts, where a gentleman was poisoned under like circumstances, having eaten partridge-flesh during a severe winter, and which proved fatal before medical aid reached him, and which would have been the result in this instance but for Dr. Sayre's foresight and timely attention.

This case should operate as a warning to all epicures who insist on eating game-birds during seasons of heavy snows, when they are deprived of their natural food; and particularly of partridges that have not the moral courage to attack the farmer's grain-stacks, but prefer to indulge in red laurel-berries.

Again, March 14, 1868, there appeared in the *New York Citizen* the following communication, *over your own signature*:

From the NEW YORK CITIZEN, March 14, 1868.

NEW YORK, March 10, 1868.

*To the Editor of the New York Citizen.*

DEAR SIR: On the 15th of February last, I was called in great haste to the Fifth Avenue Hotel, about half-past six, P. M., to see two gentlemen, whom the servant informed me were very sick, and he "thought that they were very drunk," but that they wanted me to come immediately.

Before I could get my hat and coat, another messenger came in breathless haste to hurry me.

When I got there I found two of my personal friends lying on a bed, very cold, pulseless at the feet, very weak pulse at the wrist, immensely-dilated pupils (in fact, the iris was almost obliterated), unable to stand, and when placed on their feet the pulse ceased at the wrist, and they fell (or rather sank down on the floor as though stricken with paralysis). They both complained of great faintness, and said they felt as if they were dying.

On laying them on the bed again the pulse returned at the wrist, and, on asking them to lift the hand, it could be done with some effort, but was held quite unsteadily, and would then fall suddenly, like a case of paralysis.

They were perfectly conscious of every thing, and the intellect perfectly clear, showing that the muscular system was the only part that was drunk, and the brain as yet was perfectly unaffected. This to me was a very un-

usual case, as I had never seen any thing like it before, and, after examining them very carefully, I informed them that I did not think they were drunk, but that I believed that they were poisoned.

On further inquiry, I found that the two gentlemen had dined at the St. James Hotel, with a third friend, who was then present, and perfectly well and sober, and that they had all drunk of the same whiskey, and about the same amount before dinner.

On questioning about the dinner, I found that the two gentlemen whom I had been called to see had ate of partridge, which the other gentleman had not done; that they were helped twice, about alike, and, a fine portion being left, one of them asked the other to be helped again, but, as he declined, ate it himself. He was much more seriously affected than was his companion. The character of the disease being exactly similar in the two cases, only differing in degree, I was therefore inclined to attribute it to the partridge. And knowing that the partridge has no means of sustenance—when the snow is deep—except the cherry-laurel, and as all the symptoms were like those of poisoning by prussic acid, which exists in great abundance in the laurel-berry, I naturally came to the conclusion, and made the diagnosis of poisoning by prussic acid. I immediately administered muriate of ammonia and sesquichloride of iron—applied warmth to the body—and an occasional hot toddy, and in twenty-four hours they were out of all danger, and in forty-eight hours were out again as well as ever.

The symptoms came on in both gentlemen almost at the same time, about one hour and a half after dinner, just sufficient time for digestion to take place, commencing with slight nausea, giddiness in the head, and great faintness, so that both of them asked for some brandy almost at the same time; but before the servant could get it, they felt so much worse that they left the table, and went out into the street; not being able to walk, they got into a carriage and drove to the Fifth Avenue Hotel. On the way one of them vomited very freely and fell down in the carriage.

They got out of the carriage with great difficulty, on the Twenty-third Street side of the hotel, and succeeded in walking as far as the reading-room, when their legs gave way and they fell, or rather sat down on the floor, and their heads fell in almost any direction, like a rag-man.

They were perfectly unable to stand, and were carried into an adjoining room, when I saw them in about twenty minutes, with the symptoms I have described above.

I have never seen a case of this kind before; but I have just been informed, by Colonel Lewis G. Morris, of Fordham, that the late Robert Schuyler, and his brother George Schuyler, were poisoned in the same manner some fifteen years ago, from eating partridge, in a season of deep snow, and came very near dying from its effects.

LEWIS A. SAYRE, M. D., 285 Fifth Avenue.

Once more, in October, 1868, you ascended the rostrum at Bellevue Hospital Medical College, where you delivered the introductory lecture to the course of 1868-'69, and then and there in the presence of members of the Board of Trustees, the faculty of said college, numerous visiting physicians, some three hundred students, and the public assembled, you made use of the following language (*vide* page 12, line 6, of your published lecture):

*From the Introductory Lecture of 1868-'69, at Bellevue Hospital Medical College.* By LEWIS A. SAYRE, M. D., Professor of Orthopedic Surgery.

(Page 12, line 6.) As with a knowledge of anatomy, so too, with a knowledge of chemistry and materia medica; they must be equally minute. The effects of poisons upon the system, the influence of various remedies upon the different secretions, must be minutely investigated, to be thoroughly understood. To obtain this knowledge requires the most careful and devoted study, and constant labor in the chemical laboratory. So too, in regard to the actions and effects of the various drugs and medicines upon the human frame. Your knowledge of them all must be equally minute, and can only be obtained by a careful study of the materia medica, and, to comprehend it, a knowledge of botany is also necessary. As an instance of the necessity of this knowledge and its importance, allow me to refer to a case which recently occurred. Summoned in haste to a fashionable hotel, to see two gentlemen who were supposed to be dangerously intoxicated, I found them with feeble pulse, and the greatest muscular prostration, with dilated pupils, and partial loss of vision—in a recumbent posture, apparently perfectly well, with the exception of the feeble circulation and want of muscular power before mentioned; with the intellect unclouded, and exhibiting no signs of intoxication. In an erect posture, the heart almost ceased to beat, and they fell almost lifeless to the ground, exhibiting, in fact, all the symptoms of poisoning with prussic acid. Both were affected in a similar manner, but the one more seriously than the other, the symptoms being of the same character, only differing in degree. The question now was, How had the prussic acid been administered—whether by accident or design? A friend present, who was perfectly sober, stated that he had dined with them, and that previous to the dinner they were in perfect health; that they had all drunk of the same wine, in apparently nearly equal proportion; and, as he was entirely unaffected, that what they had drunk could not have been the cause of their present condition. He stated that these two gentlemen who were sick had dined upon partridge, while he had partaken of a different dish, and that the one whose symptoms were the worst had eaten more of the partridge than the other;

and the symptoms began to develop themselves in both gentlemen very nearly at the same time, about forty minutes after the commencement of their dinner.

Finding no source of poison in any thing else that had been partaken of by them, I naturally inferred that it was obtained from the partridge. How did it get there? Happening to be a long winter, when there had been seven weeks of continuous snow, and the ground constantly covered, these birds had been prevented from obtaining their ordinary food, and had been compelled to feed upon the berries of the laurel; therefore their flesh had become charged with the potent poison of prussic acid, which in a minute quantity is found in the berry of the laurel. Then looking at the characteristic symptoms presented, paralysis of the heart, dilated pupil, peculiar weak faintness, and the clear intellect, indicative of prussic acid, cause and effect were rightly understood; and, by administering the antidote of prussic acid, both gentlemen were speedily restored to perfect health.

Thus stands your published record. Please, sir, permit me to tell my story now, for your benefit, for the sake of the duty I owe the profession, and to science.

February 15, 1868, between four and five o'clock, I was hastily summoned from my office to room "H," on the same floor of the hotel as my own, where I found two gentlemen, lying each on a bed, surrounded by a few gentlemen, friends of the patients—one the father-in-law of one of the sufferers—and also a number of servants. I was told that these patients had just dined at the St. James Hotel, on partridges, and had drunk also champagne and whiskey.

I examined first Mr. S. He lay on his bed perfectly indifferent as to what was going on; spoke clearly, but did not care to converse, and, when he did so, it was with some effort and feeble voice; aspect pale and ghastly; skin of bluish hue, cold and clammy to the touch, indifferent to being pinched or pricked with a pin. When I lifted an arm or leg of his, it dropped as if the man was under chloroform or ether; general insensibility; great dizziness; pupils dilated to the utmost; respiration difficult; pulse very weak, and increased to such a height per minute as impossible to be counted. The breath did not indicate an excess of drink. I was satisfied that it was useless to lose time in the experiment to make him stand up. He could not do it.

Mr. G.'s (the second patient) symptoms were even worse than those of Mr. S., for he had occasional spasms.

Satisfied that no time was to be lost—my diagnosis being, poisoning by *hydrocyanic acid*—I ordered the bystanders to apply friction, with speed and force, so as to keep up the circulation, and to produce warmth. Ordered hot fomentations to the bowels; sent a servant for mustard and warm water, and, in the mean while, rushed to Caswell & Mack's drug-store, where, not having time to prescribe, I had handed to me, with the utmost dispatch, some muriate of ammonia and sesquichloride of iron, rushed back, prepared and administered the antidote in the presence of the bystanders. Immediately after, I prepared myself the emetic of mustard and warm water, administered it in large quantities, got powerful action therefrom soon; kept this action well up by additional doses of the same emetic. Later I gave an active purgative, which acted promptly and powerfully, and thus, after some three hours of hard, very hard work—thanks to the kind and humane assistance of the friends present—I had, under Providence, the great satisfaction to see my two patients out of danger. These were indeed three hours of intense suspense, of the result of which any medical man might justly feel proud.

While attending to these duties, I conversed with a third gentleman, who had also been one of the party, but who had eaten lobster-salad instead of partridges. He therefore escaped. I was satisfied, from the very first, that the meat of these birds was the cause of the mischief, since it is an old and well-known story that partridges live in winter, when snow covers the ground, upon *laurel-berries*, which berries are known to contain prussic acid. This fact, then, is no new or rare discovery. In Europe, laws make it a penal offence to shoot these birds during the winter months.

After over three hours of friction, vomiting, purging, taking of antidotes, hot applications, and any amount of anxiety all around, the patients were quite comfortable, warm, pulse lower and fuller, and an inclination on their part to converse, manifest.

At this stage of the case, Mr. S. said to me: "Doctor, what ails me, anyhow?" "You were poisoned, by eating

those partridges," I replied. "Oh, no; I know it was that vile whiskey we were drinking that did the work," rejoined Mr. S. "Sorry for your whiskey, then," was my reply.

Mr. S., still continuing to doubt, asked me: "Do you know Dr. Sayre?" I replied affirmatively. "Have you any objection to my sending for him, to see whether he thinks as you do, for he has attended me before when I was sick?" "Not at all," was my answer; "I shall be glad to have Dr. Sayre see you."

A messenger was immediately dispatched. During his absence, I was called to see another patient up-stairs. When I returned to the room where my patients were, I was told that you (Dr. Sayre) had been there, and gone into the apothecary-store. Following you there, I met you. We returned to the sick-room. You now questioned the patients in my presence; went through the routine usual in such cases. You approved of all I had done. Then we left the room together. Parting, you said you would call again to-morrow. Of those occasional hot toddies I never heard or saw a thing. They must have been taken outside. Nor did I have occasion to verify the result of your mysterious decoction you prepared at Caswell's, called commonly an antidote. If prepared at all, it was never administered.

All of my prescriptions can be found entered at Caswell's, in their books, corresponding to the dates, number of room, and patients in question. But I have taken the trouble carefully to look for your prescriptions, particularly the antidote, but there is not one of yours to be found in the prescription-book of that period! Very singular, indeed! Perhaps you sent out for the medicines, as more handy than to get them right in the house! Is this, too, a question of veracity between you and me?

Now, that there may not be the slightest doubt as to *who attended, prescribed for, and saved these patients from death*, I beg to bring to your notice, and to the notice of the profession, whose sympathy you have invoked, the following correspondence and declarations, four in number, one each from Messrs. Suit and Grimes, the gentlemen who were the victims of this affair, who swallowed the poison; another from A. F.

Willmarth, Esq., President of the Home Insurance Company, father-in-law of Mr. Suit; and finally one from L. T. Guthrie, Esq., both of whom stayed with the patients from the beginning to the end of this dangerous catastrophe.

Satisfied that you, to say the least, were entirely in error in regard to this poisoning case, as to whom belonged the credit of saving these men, I addressed the subjoined note to each of the four gentlemen, and give their replies:

[COPY.]

“NEW YORK, *February 4, 1870.*”

“MESSRS. S. T. SUIT, P. G. GRIMES, L. T. GUTHRIE,  
A. F. WILLMARTH, ESQS.

“GENTLEMEN: Will you allow me to ask you the simple question, whether or not I was your attending physician when you were poisoned some time ago, and whether or not I prescribed for you and had charge of your case till you had recovered? Please answer, and oblige,

“Yours, very respectfully,

“A. RUPPNER, M. D.”

REPLY—1.

“FIFTH AVENUE HOTEL, }  
“*February 4, 1870.* }

“In reply to the above, I will say that Dr. Ruppner was the first physician that reached me at the time we were poisoned, and I must say, in justice to that gentleman, that I am of the opinion it was through his skill my life was saved.

“S. T. SUIT.”

2.

“SILVER HILL, PRINCE GEORGE COUNTY, MD., }  
“*February 10, 1870.* }

“DR. A. RUPPNER—

“DEAR SIR: It gives me pleasure to indorse Mr. S. T. Suit's letter to you in regard to the poisoning case in New York, of which he and I were the victims. I have ever been, and am still, under the conviction that it was owing to your skill as a physician that to-day I live to write this.

“Very respectfully your friend,

“P. G. GRIMES.”

3.

“GRAND HOTEL, }  
“NEW YORK, *February 27, 1870.* }

“DR. A. RUPPNER—

“DEAR SIR: I was present and assisted in carrying Mr. S. T. Suit and Mr. Grimes into a room in the Fifth Avenue Hotel, when poisoned, and remained with them for several hours.

"You were immediately called in, and stated they were poisoned. You immediately prescribed and administered an antidote long before the arrival of any other physician, which I believed then, and believe now, saved their lives. They were able to converse readily and pleasantly, and seemed entirely out of danger before another physician arrived.

"Very truly,

"L. T. GUTHRIE."

4. "HOME INSURANCE COMPANY, OFFICE, NO. 135 BROADWAY, }  
"NEW YORK, March 7, 1870. }

"DR. A. RUPPNER, FIFTH AVENUE HOTEL, NEW YORK—

"MY DEAR SIR: I am in receipt of your note of this date referring to the sudden illness of Messrs. S. T. Suit and P. G. Grimes, from the effects of poison at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, in February, 1868, and, in reply, take great pleasure in saying that you alone attended upon, and prescribed for, these gentlemen until they were regarded as entirely out of danger, and, but for your very prompt and efficient action, I am well satisfied that both would have died; and further, that no other physician was called until after they were convalescent and the danger passed.

"Very respectfully yours, etc.,

"A. F. WILLMARTH."

Is comment necessary, sir, upon the above declarations? Is this any longer, too, a question of veracity between you and myself?

It may be replied that the brilliant article in the *Sunday News* was inserted without your consent. But pray, sir, where did the reporter get all the minutiae of the case? How did he know all about the great master in surgery and materia medica, and that wonderful decoction that mysteriously kills poison? Then there is your letter over your own signature in the *New York Citizen*. In that letter you boldly publish that you attended and prescribed for the two gentlemen who were poisoned. Nay, you state what the antidote was which you administered. It has been shown, however, that you neither prescribed nor administered the antidote in question.

And what shall be said of your introductory lecture before the trustees, professors, and students of Bellevue Hospital Medical College in October, 1868, wherein you refer to this poisoning case? Behold a professor of one of our medical colleges boasting in public of a cure he never performed! The case was just suited to the occasion, and took admirably. You

did not, sir, remember me as the principal agent in this case, but you did remember me with a printed copy of your lecture, sent to me with your compliments, undoubtedly for my-special edification. Is this, too, a question of veracity between you and me?

At the last meeting of the American Medical Association you delivered a speech, in which you embellished your subject after the manner of Holy Writ :

“May my hand be paralyzed if I make any attempt to profit by advertising knowledge I have attained in my profession.”<sup>1</sup>

Pardon me, sir, if I am so bold as to ask you (if the above are really your tenets) how did you come to advertise yourself over your own signature in the *New York Citizen*?

And then, sir, what does the code of ethics adopted by the American Medical Association say about reporting cases in newspapers, etc.? Every physician knows that it is strictly forbidden, under penalty of discipline. You, sir, are chairman of the Committee of the American Medical Society on *Medical Ethics*, to revise the code of ethics, to report in Washington, May 3, 1870. Is there not an amendment needed to our code of ethics to afford protection against the repetition of the offence stated above?

We are members of a liberal profession. The scenes of human suffering we witness ought to teach us particularly charity and forbearance. We are all liable to err. I yield to no member of the profession in readiness to acknowledge that I am liable to err, and therefore am ever ready to correct my errors. So are you, sir, liable to err. Two years ago you snatched from me the case mentioned above, and claimed as one of your great achievements what did not rightfully belong to you. You entirely ignored my existence. And yet, the case

<sup>1</sup>A correspondent of the *Western Journal of Medicine*, October, 1869, thus comments upon this speech of yours, page 605: “This case of paralysis reminds me so much of the many eloquent *bores* who are constantly jumping from their seats to explain something. We meet them in every walk of life—in the most insignificant township caucus of the rural district, as well as in the legislative halls of our country; in our country medical societies, as well as in the American Medical Association. Our desire is, that *their tongues, instead of their hands, may be paralyzed.*”

was of such great importance, that I shall be proud of my success in the result as long as my heart beats within me.

You will grant, sir, it does not fall often to one man's lot to be the instrument of saving two valuable lives at the same time from imminent death!

When, therefore, you thought that you had cause for complaint (a complaint which none but the most ultra-fastidious of the profession would have thought of raising), I had a right to expect more liberal treatment than you have accorded me. My letter to you was all that could be asked for by any reasonably-disposed man.

I shall now leave my case in the hands of the profession, whose verdict you have invoked. I think I have proved, beyond peradventure—

1. That, in my original report of Captain Bigelow's case, I had not the remotest intention to deprive you of what credit is due to you in the case.

2. That the operation which you claim to have been one of such magnitude was one of simple tracheotomy only, which operation I am ready to perform any day, and which any surgeon, who has common-sense, can perform.

3. That I offered you in my letter to make any additional explanation that might be necessary, and that you paid no attention to the same.

4. That you, to put it mildly, misprinted a telegraphic dispatch of mine to you.

5. That you have presented my letter addressed to you in a *mutilated form*, retaining what was in your favor and expunged the rest, leaving it to be inferred that that was the whole.

6. That you have put language into Captain Bigelow's mouth which, I think, he never uttered.

7. That you allowed to be circulated, without contradiction, in the *New York Sunday News*, March 1, 1868, a long and detailed account of a poisoning case, said to have happened at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, in which report it is pretended that you saved the lives of two gentlemen by a mysterious decoction, etc., which decoction you never administered, and which gentlemen you never saw until, in my opinion, they were out of danger.

8. That you have published in the *New York Citizen* of March 14, 1868, a letter over your own signature, in reference to the same case, in which letter you substantially reiterate the same facts, and publish, moreover, what the antidote was you prescribed and administered.

9. That you, in an introductory lecture, delivered in October, 1868, at Bellevue Hospital Medical College, before members of the trustees, the faculty and students, referred to this case, as having been diagnosed and treated by you, without reference to myself, and had the same lecture published.

I regret exceedingly that you should have forced upon me the necessity of appearing before the profession in this manner, but hope you will spare me the trouble of further disclosures.

I remain, sir, your servant,

A. RUPPNER, M. D.

