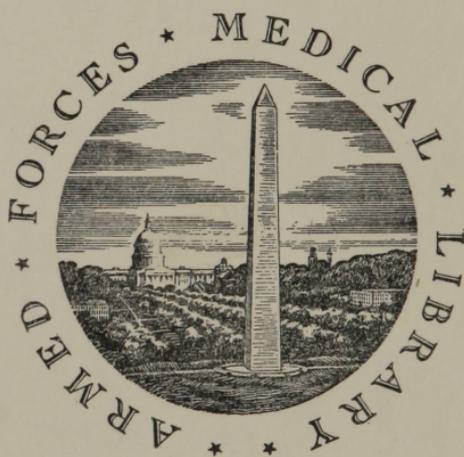




UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



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WASHINGTON, D.C.





AN

INTRODUCTORY DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE MEDICO-CHIRURGICAL SOCIETY

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW-YORK.

November 5th, 1816.

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BY JOHN B. BECK, A. M.

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1816.



*At a meeting of the Medico-Chirurgical Society of the University of the State of New-York, held at the College Hall, November 9th, 1816, "On motion, Resolved, that the thanks of this Society be presented to Mr. Beck, for his Introductory Discourse, and that Doctors John W. Francis and Benjamin P. Aydelott, be a committee to request a copy for publication."*

Extract from the minutes,

**HENRY W. DUCACHET,**

*Secretary.*

TO

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

*Professor of the Theory and Practice of Physic, and of Obstetrics, and the Diseases of  
Women and Children, in the University of the State of New-York, &c. &c.*

SIR,

As the following Discourse owes its appearance principally to your solicitation, permit me to dedicate it to you, as a slight testimonial of respect for your character, and gratitude for your instructions.

Your friend and pupil,

THE AUTHOR.

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AN

INTRODUCTORY DISCOURSE, &c.

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GENTLEMEN,

THE study of medicine may, without presumption, be considered as one of the noblest and most interesting pursuits which can occupy the attention of the human mind. What, indeed, can be more *interesting* than to contemplate the wonders of creating power which are displayed in the human frame, and to mark the various changes it undergoes from peculiarities of place and circumstance! What more *noble*, than to aim at the alleviation of human misery, and to render Nature herself, with her exhaustless stores, tributary to the comfort and happiness of man! Such is the province of the healing art. It is her's to relieve the pains of suffering humanity—to restore the bloom to the cheek of faded beauty—to dispel the gloom of disordered intellect—or, if she fails in accomplishing these benign objects, to assuage the agonies of expiring nature, and to strew with flowers the path to the grave. Such benefits are too important, not to have received the highest tribute of gratitude. Accordingly, in all ages and countries, whether savage or civilized, the *medical art* has been held in the greatest veneration, and those who practised it, have ever been esteemed as the benefactors of mankind. Monuments have been reared to their memory, and their names have become the subject of the poet's song. Thus did the ancient Greeks embalm, with the choicest honours, their

Æsculapius and Hippocrates; and thus, also, in modern times, Boerhaave and Sydenham stand almost unrivalled in their fame.

Such being the elevated aims of this profession, and so magnificent the honours which it confers, it might naturally be supposed that the best efforts of human intellect would have been directed to its cultivation, and that it would fall little short of perfection in the present day. The reverse, however, is the case. The ancients can boast of some great names, but they were so ignorant of the structure of the body, and so fatally attached to speculation, that, in many respects, their writings are little more than splendid romances. During the dark ages, medicine, although practiced by the priests and empirics, in common with the other sciences, was but little improved. It is to the three last centuries that we are indebted for a greater number of important discoveries, and for the introduction of more just reasoning on medical subjects, than to the whole of the fifteen which preceded.

But even now, notwithstanding the high improvement which the profession has certainly attained, and the elevated rank it occupies, and although the first talents and the profoundest erudition have embarked in its service, its advancement has, by no means, been equal to its importance, or to the sanguine expectations of its admirers.

To point out a few of the causes which have retarded the progress of medical knowledge, and to notice some of the circumstances which have tended to counteract their effects, are the subjects to which your attention is requested on this occasion.

The causes, doubtless, are numerous; but I shall confine myself to the consideration of *three*, which appear to have had the most powerful and extensive influence.

The first, and most apparent, is the peculiar difficulties attending medical investigation. These arise from the

extent and variety of the knowledge which it embraces, and the abstruse nature of the subject.

In the medical profession, a wider range of knowledge is necessary than is found requisite in any other. Beside a perfect acquaintance with those sciences which are more immediately connected with medicine,\* the physician should be conversant with the dead languages, with the French and German, Natural and Moral Philosophy, and Mathematics.

It is not to be expected that any person, however laborious, can acquire a perfect familiarity with all these auxiliary branches of knowledge; nor would it be necessary, however useful it might be, if he could. But the medical philosopher, whose ambition aims at something beyond bare subsistence, must be acquainted with the *general principles*, at least, of every science calculated to throw light upon medicine; and, considered in this view, what department of knowledge is there which may not be enlisted in his service? In the writings of the ancient *Greeks and Romans*, he will not merely find specimens of every kind of excellence in composition, but, without the aid of the languages in which they are transmitted to us, he will not be able to obtain a knowledge of the very phraseology of his profession. Besides, very many valuable works on medicine are only to be found embodied in those languages.

A knowledge of the *French and German* languages, is also absolutely necessary to whoever wishes to keep pace with the important additions which the most distinguished physicians of the European continent are daily making to the science of medicine.

The physician should, likewise, understand *Natural Phi-*

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\* The subjects embraced in the medical instruction of this university are taught in the following professorships, viz. Anatomy—Theory and Practice of Physic—Midwifery—Surgery—Chemistry and *Materia Medica*—Clinical Practice of Medicine—Institutes of Medicine—Medical Jurisprudence—Natural History.

*losophy*, in order to apply its principles to climate, the phenomena of vision and hearing, and other subjects of physiological inquiry. *Moral Philosophy* makes him acquainted with the nature and operations of the human mind, and thus enables him to minister more successfully to its diseases.

The science of mind is a subject which is certainly too much neglected by physicians. The *body* appears to be the sole object of their consideration. But, if we for a moment recollect the unbounded influence which the mind exercises over the body in the preservation of health and the production of disease, it must be granted, that this view of their functions is much too partial and contracted. Indeed, there is no reason to be assigned why a physician should not be as intimately acquainted with the *mind* as with the *body*. The diseases of the former, though not so frequent, are infinitely more dreadful than those of the latter, and *that* is mere quackery which would attempt to relieve them without a previous knowledge of its operations. If the science of mind was more attended to by the profession, might we not hope for a more successful treatment of those afflicting diseases, *melancholy* and *madness*. The happy results which have already attended, what is called the *moral management* of persons labouring under these disorders, certainly justify the expectation.\*

*Mathematics* accustoms the mind to habits of just observation and nice discrimination, and disciplines it to the

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\* Vide Mr. Tuke's interesting account of the *Retreat* near York, in England, where this mode of treatment has been adopted, and followed by the most beneficial consequences. In the language of the Edinburgh Reviewers, it is the "best managed asylum for the insane that has ever yet been established." The example has been imitated in other places, and it must be gratifying to know that measures are maturing for a similar establishment in the vicinity of this city. On the patriotic and benevolent labours of Mr. Thomas Eddy, in the promotion of this laudable object, too much praise cannot be bestowed.

principles of the most rigid ratiocination. To the neglect of this branch of knowledge, as one of the causes, may be attributed many of those crude and unmeaning speculations which, in every age, have deluged medicine.

Not to extend these remarks any farther, there is scarcely a single department of knowledge which may not be brought to bear upon the healing art. Even poetry and history are not without their uses to the philosophical physician: from the former he may learn the influence of the passions, while the latter teaches him how moral and physical causes have operated in elevating or degrading the character of individuals and nations.

Such being the requisites of the physician who aims at honourable distinction, it is no wonder that they should interpose a stumbling block in the way of the majority of those who enter the profession, and that the very motives which should excite their ardour, and call into exercise all their energies, should have the contrary effect of chilling their enterprise and paralyzing their efforts. To subdue all the obstacles that oppose the attainment of these requisites demands, indeed, a rare combination of talent, persevering industry, and expansion of view. But the voice of history proclaims aloud, that medicine is indebted, for her most brilliant improvements, only to such men who have been successful in overcoming these obstacles. The names of Hoffman, Boerhaave, and Haller, men no less distinguished for the extent of their general erudition than for the strength of their intellect, add their sanction to the truth of the position.

It has been a subject of much discussion, whether the division of the medical profession into several departments has been beneficial or injurious. The arguments urged in favour of its utility have the appearance of plausibility, but are destitute of any real force. In the mechanical arts, the division of labour certainly adds economy and despatch to

greater excellence. But, in the application of this principle to intellectual operations, it has been wofully perverted. "It is only by the study of general principles that the able physician, as well as the man of science, is to be formed; attention to a particular part makes the artist, whose prospect is limited by his own narrow sphere; and, in the same manner, it makes the mere operating surgeon and the empirick, whose experience is confined to some individual portion of the system."\* The latter may perfect the particular branches to which their whole attention is directed, but it is only from the former that we are to expect those luminous conceptions, and those grand discoveries, which constitute the real advancement of the science.

If we investigate the effect of this principle, when applied to medicine, we shall find it productive of the greatest disadvantages. It augments the number of hands employed, without diminishing the expense; nay, it even forces the physician to increase his charge, from the limit which it prescribes to the sphere of his employment. Whatever tendency it may have to improve the mechanical operations of the art, it in the same proportion narrows the views. It multiplies inert and useless remedies; and, from the great variety of contradictory interests to which such a state of things gives rise, it prevents those useful reforms which the progressive improvement of society naturally demand in such a science.

These are not the uncertain conclusions of abstract reasoning on this subject; all of these effects are strikingly exemplified in the medical practice of Great Britain, and the inconvenience of them is not only felt, but acknowledged. The superiority of the medical establishment of

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\* Vide an *Essay on the Medical Economy of Great Britain*.

the United States, where this principle is rejected, over that of other countries, is unquestionable; experience has proved it to be more advantageous, both to the practitioner and to the patient. It has introduced a bolder, and, may I not add, a more successful practice, while it has augmented the influence and general respectability of the profession.

But another difficulty, more insurmountable than the magnitude of his acquisitions, attends the medical inquirer; and this arises from the acknowledged intricacy of the subject. The endless disputes and contradictions which are found in medical writings are sufficient to convince him that doubt still prevails, where nothing short of absolute certainty should reign. A thick veil hides from his view the secret operations of nature, which not all the expenditure of ingenuity and learning has been able to penetrate. The reason is obvious—"Medicine is founded on a knowledge of the laws which regulate the phenomena of organized or living bodies." Now, these phenomena differ from those of inorganic matter, not only most materially in their nature, but it is not possible to subject them to the same test of palpable evidence. Besides, so many are the hidden causes which modify the state of organized bodies, as to render it wholly impossible to calculate upon results, with any thing more than probability. Hence it is that the laws of life, and the proximate cause of disease, are so partially understood, even by the first medical philosophers.

Something has been done, indeed, and, considering the intricacy of the subjects, it may be said that much has been done to elucidate them. But, nevertheless, "clouds and darkness still continue to rest upon them."

To these subjects, the language of Seneca is justly applicable, "*Multum egerunt qui ante nos fuerunt, sed non peregerunt.—Multum adhuc restat operis, multumque res-*

tabit, nec ulli nato post mille sæcula præcludetur occasio aliquid adhuc adjiciendi.”\*

The *second cause*, which I shall notice as having retarded the progress of medical discovery, is the influence of *false theory*. By a *theory* is meant the principles of any science or art. It may, then, be either *true* or *false*; the former is legitimately deduced from facts, the latter is built on presumption. It is proper that we should bear in mind this distinction, as it is too common to confound every kind of theory as equally false and visionary. To frame a theory, which shall have the support of truth, is certainly one of the proudest efforts of the human mind, and forms an era in the history of science. While, on the other hand, false theory is the offspring of a disordered imagination, or of indolent genius, disdainng the drudgery of consulting nature, and comparing facts. Their fate is equally different with their origin: the one shall endure while truth exists: the other blazes with an ephemeral splendor, which may attract a crowd of ignorant admirers, but which soon expires, leaving its devotees in darkness and in error.

The dangers of theory are the more to be apprehended, because there is an almost irresistible propensity in the mind, to favour and admire it. There is a simplicity and a grandeur generally thrown around it, which, while it gratifies indolence, by rendering laborious investigations useless, flatters intellectual vanity, by pretending to solve the intricacies of a whole science by a few general principles.

It need not, therefore, be wondered at, that so many theories have appeared, and that some of the finest geniuses have lavished their talents on dreams which have vanished

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\* Senec. Epist. lxiv.

before the sober realities of truth, like the mountain mists before the morning sun.

If we consider the influence which theory once exercised, we shall find matter for the deepest regret, that it has been the cause of the degradation of the human mind, and the wanton betrayal of truth by those who should have been its guardians. It taught men to despise facts, or, if they were permitted to consult them, it was only for the purpose of discolouring and perverting them. It introduced the base spirit of party into science, and gave rise to that intemperate zeal, and those fierce contentions, which disgrace the pages of literary history; while it led mankind farther astray from the simplicity of nature, and bewildered them more deeply in the mazes of error.

Such was the spirit that prevailed previous to the time of Lord Bacon; every science suffered from its fatal effects, and it was not until this false propensity was subdued, that any real advances in knowledge were made.

The science of medicine, perhaps more than any other, experienced its baneful effects. From the mystery which envelopes it, it has, at all times, afforded an extensive field for conjecture and hypothesis. Hence it is, that even "the most eminent physicians in every part of the world, impatient of observing and delineating, have been eager to explain and to systematize."\* Such being the characteristics of the profession, it need not cause any degree of wonder, that no greater progress was made in medicine, and that, after the experience of so many ages, it was reserved for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to give birth to the absurdities of the chemical and mechanical doctrines. Indeed, medicine moved in a circle until the commencement of the 17th century, when it was reserved

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\* Medical and Physical Journal, vol. 24. p. 2.

for the comprehensive mind of a Bacon to propose, and the genius of a Newton to carry into execution, a plan, which should not only give the death blow to the delusions of the reigning philosophy, but which should establish those principles by which truth might be investigated in any science. This plan was the *inductive method of reasoning*, which was no less admirable for its simplicity than for its adaptation to the elicitation of truth. It put to flight at once the "artificial forms" and the syllogisms of the ancient philosophy. By the application of the principles of this system, natural philosophy was cleared of the rubbish of ancient systems, and on their ruins was erected that beautiful fabrick which time has only served to strengthen.

In medicine it was far more difficult to effect a similar revolution, but it was partially accomplished; and, if the new philosophy did not altogether paralyze the spirit of theory, it at least introduced more of rationality into medical reasoning. From this epoch, medicine began gradually to improve. The wild conjecture, and the visionary hypothesis, which had disgraced the science, were now in a measure discarded, and in their room were substituted *principles* and *conclusions* drawn from the pure sources of observation and experiment. It is one of the highest commendations of the present age, that abstract speculation in medicine receives so little support. After the toil of ages men seem now thoroughly convinced, that *truth* is more valuable than a fine-spun theory, and that the only way of arriving at the discovery of it, is to consult nature, and faithfully to record her operations.

The *last cause* to be noticed, as having proved detrimental to the progress of medicine, is the *prevalence of empiricism*. It is the misfortune of every profession and art to be burdened and disgraced by ignorant pretenders, but in none is imposition more common, or more difficult of de-

tection, than in medicine. Why this should be the case is by no means difficult of solution. The art is, in a great measure, so occult, and lies so entirely beyond the cognizance of all who have not made it the subject of particular study, that it offers not only the greatest facilities, but even impunity to those who are disposed to take advantage of the ignorance and weakness of their fellow men. Hence it is, that from the very first dawnings of the medical art down to the present hour, *quacks* have flourished and fattened on the spoils of the human race. In Greece and Rome they prevailed to so alarming an extent, as to bring almost the whole profession into disrepute: accordingly, we find it not unfrequently the subject of ridicule in their satirical compositions. In modern times, too, it has afforded a fertile theme for the satire of a Cervantes, a Le Sage, and a Sterne. If mankind generally were gifted with the powers of just discrimination, all the strokes of wit aimed at it would fall harmless to the ground. But, unfortunately, either through weakness or malice, they are too apt to confound the good with the bad, and to consider every imposter, however ignorant or selfish, as a just representative of the whole profession. From this source flow those illiberal assertions which are sometimes urged against physicians. Their motives are impeached—their conduct is censured; they are accused of ignorance—of cruelty—of sacrificing the health of their patient to gain a sordid recompense. It would be worse than a waste of time—it would be an insult to common sense, to attempt to disprove such accusations, when levelled against the whole profession. But when directed against empirics, we must not only admit their justice, but confess that they fall short of the truth. To establish this, need I describe their character? This would be unnecessary. We have them in multitudes around us in this very city, so lost to honour as not to refrain from *publishing* their infamy to the

world. The misery of which they are the agents it would be impossible to calculate; their breath is *poison*—their touch, the *blasting mildew*. Wherever there are human beings to suffer, these vultures are found rioting in destruction. Their wide-spread depredations are limited by no space, and terminate only in death.

They thus not only cast disgrace on the profession, by the ruin which they inflict on those who are deluded by their high-sounding pretensions, but by their base traffick they rob the honest and well-informed practitioner of the means of support, and prevent many, who might become its ornaments, from entering the profession. Men of generous minds, and high ambition, despise the unworthy competition, and seek for honours in a nobler career.

To remedy the evil, which thus exists, is no easy task; nothing but the strong arm of legislative authority seems capable of suppressing it, and not a single reason can be offered why quacks should not be ranked with the highway robber, or the secret assassin, and punished accordingly.\*

I have thus endeavoured to lay before you a few of the causes which have had a tendency to retard medical improvement. Some of them are inherent in the very nature of the science, while others are extraneous, and have been, in a great degree, corrected by the just views which distinguish the present age, and their fatal influence, is,

\* This city appears to have been infested with quacks from the earliest times. Smith, in his history, speaking of it, says, "quacks abound like locusts in Egypt." His language is literally applicable to the present day.

The author is happy to state that the County Medical Society of New-York, justly alarmed at the progress of quackery in this city, have resolved to petition the legislature on the subject, in order that some efficient measures may be adopted for its suppression. For a series of excellent remarks on the subject of quackery, vide the *American Medical and Philosophical Register*, vol. 3. p. 80.

therefore, not so sensibly felt as in former times. Two of the causes which have contributed most essentially to produce this result are, the *successful application of the inductive method of reasoning to medicine*, and the establishment of *scientific associations*.

On the former of these, it is unnecessary to dilate; but some remarks illustrating the history and the benefits of the latter will convince us of their singular utility, not only to medicine, but to the sciences generally. And it should not be forgotten, that as all the sciences mutually depend upon, and elucidate, each other, so the same causes operate in the improvement of all.

Societies for the promotion of knowledge owe their origin to modern times. The Greeks, indeed, had their *Lycæum* and their *Academy*, in which their philosophers discoursed and speculated; they could boast of their *games*, where genius was applauded, and the spirit of emulation roused to the highest pitch of excitement. Yet these institutions were widely different, both in their construction and design, from the societies of the present day. The two first were devoted to the education of youth, and, at the latter, although poems and histories were sometimes recited to the populace, the principal object was improvement in athletic sports and exercises.

The first establishment approaching to a literary society, of which history gives us any information, was formed by the Emperor Charlemagne, in the eighth century. Notwithstanding the ignorance and barbarism of the age in which he reigned, this illustrious monarch contracted the most ardent attachment to science, and displayed the most honourable zeal for its promotion. From among the learned men, whom his munificence had attracted from other countries, he formed *an academy* in his own palace. His plan, indeed, was limited and defective; but still, when

contrasted with the grossness of the times, and from the novelty of the design, it reflected the highest honour on the sagacity of the founder. The attention of this academy appears to have been chiefly directed to the languages, although rhetoric, poetry, history, antiquities, astronomy, and mathematics, were likewise cultivated.\*

From this period, down to the sixteenth century, we find no trace of any scientific associations. The unbounded influence exercised during the reign of Charlemagne in matters pertaining to science, appears to have wholly expired with him. The temporary excitement, produced by his labours and example, communicated no impulse to the succeeding age, and the thick darkness which overspread Europe extinguished the glimmer of light which was just beginning to dawn upon the intellectual world.

At the commencement of the 16th century occurred that splendid reformation which for ever released the human mind from the absurdities of superstition and idolatry, and restored it to that freedom of which it had been so long deprived. Its influence was no less astonishing upon literature than upon morals. The human mind awoke from the lethargy of ages, and commenced a career of unparalleled discovery and improvement. Truth arose from her servitude, and shook the pillars of error to their base. Science reared her majestic head, and darted her rays into the recesses of ignorance and prejudice. The stores of ancient knowledge were brought to light, and men were ~~more~~ *made* familiar with the concentrated wisdom of ages; the study of classical learning was revived; new inducements were developed for the exertion of intellect, and new objects multiplied on which to employ its energies.

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\* Card's History of Charlemagne.

Among the fruits of this moral renovation, the establishment of literary societies is certainly not to be esteemed the least important. Naples claims the honour of giving birth to the first. It was formed in 1560, under the name of "Academia Secretorum Naturæ," and ranked among its members the celebrated Galileo. As might be expected, it partook largely of the imperfections attending all new institutions. It was, however, extremely serviceable in setting an example which was speedily imitated, not only in other parts of Italy, but throughout Europe. The most distinguished societies which arose during the 17th century were those of London and Paris.

The first idea of a literary association at Paris was suggested in the beginning of the century, by the celebrated Mersenne, who, together with Gassendi, Des Cartes, Hobbes, Roberval, Pascal, Blondell, and others, held private weekly conferences, at which they read their own productions, and criticised those of others. These private meetings were afterwards succeeded by public ones, under the auspices of M. Montmort and M. Thevenot. This combination of genius excited considerable interest, and laid the foundation for the establishment of the Royal Academy of Sciences, which was incorporated in 1666, by Louis XIV. Its members were distributed in four classes, viz. 1. That of Natural Philosophy. 2. Of Mathematics. 3. Of History. 4. Of Belles Lettres. Its transactions are contained in 139 quarto volumes.

In 1793 the *Convention of France* abolished the academy of sciences, and erected on its ruins the *National Institute*,\* which has far exceeded every other learned society, in the

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\* The Institute was divided into four distinct classes: 1. That of the Physical and Mathematical Sciences. 2. That of the Literature of France. 3. That of History and of Ancient Literature. 4. That of the Fine Arts.

magnitude of its projects, and the brilliancy of its reputation. The present generation has witnessed the overthrow of this magnificent monument of national intelligence and munificence, by that spirit of vindictive revenge which would extinguish all art and science, to obliterate every vestige of the splendid reign of Napoleon; a reign not more signalized by the military wonders which it achieved, than by the constant protection it afforded to learning and the liberal arts.\*

The origin of the Royal Society of London was somewhat similar to that of the Academy of Sciences. It took its rise from the accidental association of a few scientific characters who met in London, in 1645, for the cultivation of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy. In 1648 it was transferred to Oxford, and in 1659 it again returned to London, and held its meetings at Gresham College.

The civil commotions which occurred at this period caused a temporary suspension of their labours; but on the restoration of Charles II. the association was re-organized, and its numbers greatly augmented by the addition of persons of rank and talent. In 1662 it received the Royal Charter.

Though less extensive in its plans than the Academy of Sciences, or the National Institute, this society has been no less successful than its rivals, in the cultivation of Natural Philosophy, and the collateral sciences.

Such is a concise notice of these noble institutions; to say any thing concerning their wide-spread utility, would

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\* It is a fact worthy of record, that the late emperor was no sooner informed of the death of those ornaments of the medical profession, Dessaut and Bichat, than he immediately, and without solicitation, ordered monuments to be erected to their memory, at his own expense. Vide Life of Bichat, in the New London Medical and Physical Journal.

be vain. They reflect the brightest lustre on the countries that have cherished them, while, by the publication of their transactions, they have erected, to their honour, immortal monuments of genius and learning.

The celebrity which attended these societies speedily attracted the attention of the learned in other countries; and under the protection of enlightened sovereigns, similar institutions were established in every part of Europe. It would be useless to give you even a recital of their names: they are all founded on the same principles, and with very little, if any, difference of design.

From this slight sketch we find that scientific associations have been co-existent with the highest elevation, and the greatest refinement of the human mind. To become convinced that they have had a most material agency in producing this elevation and refinement, it is only necessary to contemplate the effects flowing from them.

They concentrate the literary efforts of a nation—they extend the boundaries of knowledge—they patronize genius—and, what is of still more importance, they cherish the spirit of emulation. Notwithstanding all that may be urged to the contrary, it is this spirit which is the soul of intellectual activity; it is the master spring of human action, and has produced all that man can boast of as great or noble. Rob the human breast of ambition, and enterprise is paralyzed—genius itself languishes, and science lies an uncultivated waste. It is no objection whatever to urge against it that it has been the cause of incalculable evil. That it has been so, cannot be denied. It is in the very nature of all powerful agents to produce mischief, if improperly directed, exactly in the same proportion that they would have conferred blessings, had they taken a contrary direction; and the evils attributed to ambition are

not owing to the passion itself, but to the improper application of it. If *ambition* prompted an Alexander and a Cæsar to deluge the world with blood, and to elevate themselves on the prostrate liberties of their country—it was the same principle which fired the dauntless soul of *Luther*, to arouse to moral life and liberty the slumbering nations of Europe—supported *Howard* in his miraculous exertions in the cause of suffering humanity—encouraged *Columbus*, in his immortal discovery of this western world.

On men of letters this passion operates with peculiar force. The thought of *immortality* fires the imagination of the poet—directs the pen of the historian—pours light into the soul of the philosopher—and imparts its magic inspiration to the orator. If those ethereal spirits who produced the *Iliad*, the *Æneid*, and the *Paradise Lost*, could have been exposed to our view, we should have seen this passion enthroned in all its grandeur and omnipotence. Under its influence, *Horace* enthusiastically exclaims,

Exegi Monumentum ære perennius  
 Regalique situ pyramidum altius :  
 Quod non imber edax, non Aquilo impotens  
 Possit diruere, aut innumerabilis  
 Annorum series, et fuga temporum.  
 Non omnis moriar; Multaque pars mei  
 Vitabit Libitinam.      Lib. III. Od. 30.

Such being the extended operation of this passion, it is evident that every thing which is calculated to call it into exercise, or to modify its application, must be of the greatest importance. Literary societies cherish this passion in an eminent degree, by the honors and rewards which they confer, and by directing it to objects

of confessed utility; they exert an influence on learning and society at large, at once the most diffused and beneficial.

*Medicine*, in common with the other sciences, has experienced the most salutary effects from these institutions. Indeed, it is only through them that those splendid developments are to be made which must take place before this science shall attain to that perfection to which it aspires. The world has sometimes been favoured with intellectual prodigies, who have brought about the most astonishing revolutions, and, by their discoveries, have stamped immortal renown on their names. These prodigies, however, have appeared but seldom, and should not be taken into consideration in a general estimate of human powers. From the nature of medicine, being founded on observation and experiments, from the extensive range of its investigations, and from the multiplicity of facts which it embraces, we might despair of its advancement if surrendered to the unassisted talent and feeble labours of individuals. In associations of genius and industry alone are to be found agents capable of promoting, in a proper manner, this grand design. Already have they accumulated and diffused facts which have given the profession that undoubted superiority which it now possesses; and let it be recorded to the honour of the members of the medical profession, that they have always been among the most zealous patrons of science; they have been the authors and supporters of most of the literary and philosophical societies which now exist; and if we inspect their transactions we shall find them principally occupied by the productions of physicians.

In this country the progress of scientific establishments has kept pace with our unparalleled improvement in other respects; and we have in our possession ocular demon-

stration of their singular importance. They have cherished a national literary spirit ; they have made us acquainted with our intellectual resources, while they have afforded both the incitement and occasion for the exertion of talent. Almost all that has been done towards collecting materials for the history of this country has been accomplished by them ; and their transactions exhibit the most honourable specimens of native talent and industry.

The American Philosophical Society, the first literary association of which this country could boast, was formed in 1769, chiefly through the spirited exertions of Dr. Franklin.\*

Since that period, others have arisen in various parts of our country. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences of Boston, the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Historical Society of Massachusetts, the Historical Society of New-York, the Literary and Philosophical Society of New-York, and the Literary and Philosophical Society of Charleston, not only demonstrate the vast utility of such establishments, but are so many proud proofs of our increasing ardour in the cause of science.

*Gentlemen of the Medico-Chirurgical Society.*

It is our ambition to unite our feeble exertions in the cause of that profession in whose honours we expect one day to participate. It is a cause worthy of our noblest efforts. It is a cause devoted to the public good, and consecrated by the genius of its members. The names of Hippocrates, Harvey, Boerhaave, Haller, Sydenham, Rush, and a host of others, have stamped a moral grandeur on the

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\* Vide Mr. Clinton's Introductory Discourse before the Literary and Philosophical Society of New-York, for the original proposal of Dr. Franklin for the formation of this society.

profession, which neither time nor circumstance can efface. They stand like pillars of fire, whose blaze has illumined the world.

But, Gentlemen, you are all fully conscious of the importance, as well as the dignity, of the profession to which you are devoted. It is of more consequence to notice the encouragements offered to the labourer in the medical harvest. Notwithstanding all that has been accomplished, and it is certainly very great, the healing art is still, in many respects, in its infancy, and therefore it displays a noble field for the exercise of genius, fertile with pleasure and honour. Here are regions yet to be traversed, which have never felt the footsteps of intellectual man; here are discoveries yet to be made, which shall raise their author to an equality with a Harvey and a Hunter. In short, not a single branch of medicine has yet attained to perfection, while some are still enveloped in almost total mystery. In this country, there is every thing to be done; our botany, zoology, and mineralogy, are all to be explored, and, from their intimate connexion with medicine, they must be cultivated by medical men, or not at all. And yet how little is done in comparison with what ought and might be done. A fatal apathy, with regard to science, appears to have seized upon us. And whilst the Humboldts and the Michauxs of Europe, are hurrying hither to gather imperishable laurels, American philosophers, with a few illustrious exceptions, are reclining in slothful indifference, apparently insensible alike to ambition and to shame.

Let not their example be your model; on the contrary, you are bound by the strongest obligations to exert your best efforts in the cause of science. You are bound to it by the regard which you cherish for the honour of your country. You are bound to it by the devotion which you owe the profession to which you belong. You are bound

to it by that love of reputation, which is the surest pledge of future greatness.

You have the most powerful inducements thus to act. You live in a country where talent takes the precedence of title, and where well directed industry always meets its reward.

Notwithstanding our sluggishness, we may even now perceive the glimmerings of that blaze of literary glory which is painted to the vision of hope as the portion of this happy country. Republics have always been the nurseries of intellectual greatness, and it is not vain to anticipate that this republic will ere long become the seat of science and the arts. It will not be considered as an evidence of national vanity, to predict, that a country on which nature has lavished her most splendid gifts; a country, and the only one too, which heaven has blessed with a free constitution; a country, whose naval and military exploits have already filled the world with acclamations of applause, shall become one day still more illustrious by the intellectual achievements of her sons.

And, oh! if a second night of moral darkness should ever overspread the eastern world, here may the fire of genius continue to burn with undiminished brilliancy; here may science flourish with luxuriant growth, under the fostering patronage of a free people; and from hence may burst forth those radiations of intellectual and moral light, which we are taught to believe will, at one period, illuminate and bless every portion of our globe.

