

# BOWDITCH (H. I.)

FOR THE

## MEDICAL PROFESSION,

AS A MEANS OF DEVELOPING

THE WHOLE NATURE OF MAN.

A VALEDICTORY ADDRESS TO THE GRADUATING MEDICAL CLASS OF  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY, MARCH 11, 1863.

WITH ADDITIONAL REMARKS ON A

TOPIC OF IMPORTANCE AT THE PRESENT HOUR.

BY

HENRY I. BOWDITCH, M. D.,

PROFESSOR OF CLINICAL MEDICINE IN HARVARD COLLEGE.

Alphabet  
Box

BOSTON:

TICKNOR AND FIELDS.

1863.





AN APOLOGY  
FOR THE  
MEDICAL PROFESSION,

AS A MEANS OF DEVELOPING

THE WHOLE NATURE OF MAN.

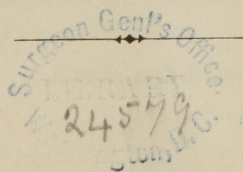
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MEDICAL PROFESSION

From Henry I. Bowditch, —  
Dear Sir: — The Committee of the Graduating Class of 1868 respectfully  
request a copy of your Valuable Address for publication

Sincerely your friends,  
William J. HAYDEN,  
John Brown GARVIE,  
D. HARRISON HAYDEN,  
Darius M. PERRY,  
J. G. PERRY.

“The value and rank of every art is in proportion to the mental labor or the mental  
pleasure produced by it.

“As this principle is observed or neglected, our profession becomes either a liberal  
art or a mechanical trade.”—SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS'S LECTURES.

Wash. D. C. 1863  
Dear Wm. J. Hayden, J. B. Garvie, D. H. Hayden, D. M. P.  
J. G. Perry —  
Gentlemen: — It has seemed to me a matter of some value to you  
to publish an address, which was written and spoken to you,  
I should have talked with you at my own office upon the ex-  
tents of my life. Such a communication seems rather like a confession  
and is scarcely fit for the public eye. Nevertheless, as you ask for it, I  
give it into your control exactly as written.  
I remain, very sincerely your friend,  
Henry I. Bowditch.

BOSTON  
TICKNOR AND FIELDS  
No. 25 CORNHILL



PROF. HENRY I. BOWDITCH, —

*Dear Sir:* — The gentlemen of the Graduating Class of 1863 respectfully solicit a copy of your Valedictory Address for publication.

Sincerely your friends,

WILLIAM J. RADFORD,	} <i>Committee.</i>
JOHN BROWN GARVIE,	
D. HYSLOP HAYDEN,	
DANIEL MCPHEE,	
J. G. PERRY,	

COLLEGE LIBRARY, *March 11, 1863.*

*March 13, 1863.*

DRS. WM. J. RADFORD, J. B. GARVIE, D. H. HAYDEN. D. MCPHEE,  
J. G. PERRY, —

*Gentlemen:* — It has seemed to me a matter of doubt whether it would be proper to publish an address, which was written and spoken to you, much as I should have talked with you, at my own office, upon the experiences of my life. Such a communication seems rather like a confession, and is scarcely fit for the public eye. Nevertheless, as you ask for it, I give it into your control exactly as written.

I remain, very sincerely your friend,

HENRY I. BOWDITCH.

# ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN OF THE GRADUATING CLASS:

By these ceremonies, you have been duly admitted into our ancient and honorable profession of medicine. In a few days you will part, perhaps forever, from us and from most of your associates in these pleasant studies; and it devolves upon me, as the representative of the Medical Faculty, to give you a cordial God-speed on your future careers of hoped-for usefulness or fame.

Were I to follow my own impulses, I would adopt the laconic but admirable speech once made by a learned Greek Professor of Harvard to a class of students about to leave Alma Mater, as you are about to leave us: "You have done well; I wish you well." But such brevity is not allowed me. In truth, it would indeed be strange if we, who have been so long intimately connected in the study of our art, which in old Greek phrase is "of all arts the most noble," could not spend a few moments in pleasant conversation. Nor does it seem inappropriate that one who, by long experience, knows the fate that befalls most of the periods of professional life, should, at a time like this, utter some words of cheery hope, or perhaps of



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warning, to his juniors, just starting on their various pilgrimages.

Allow me, then, to present to you one or more faintly-traced pen-and-ink-sketches, so to speak, of a few of the more salient points of a subject I deem most interesting in itself, and not unsuitable to this occasion, when so many of you are about to make your first step forward in the practice of medicine, and when, if ever, it is most important to move under the guidance of the highest principle. I propose, therefore — The Medical Profession ; its noblest aspirations ; the fair opportunities it offers for the development of the whole nature of man ; its highest duties, as connected with such opportunities.

What should each one of you hold up before himself as the Highest Ideal of Professional Life ?

As I understand the riddle of existence, it is not to gain *Riches* merely, although, certainly, you may ask, in the words of Agur's prayer, to have neither poverty nor riches, in the future of your profession.

Is it, then, *Honor* that you should seek after as the acme of your professional hope ? What the world calls "honor," can never be gained by physicians. Confidence, respect, esteem, perfect love, if you please, on the part of grateful patients ; but that is not "honor," as the world uses that term.

Is it, then *Power* that you may hope to attain ? You will be too often powerless before disease and death, to allow a fond love of power to seize upon you ; nor could you gain it, even if you wished it.

Is it, finally, perfect *Professional Success* ? Should



you take this as your highest choice, that you should be beloved and respected in life, and mourned for by thousands at your death? Surely, you will say that this is worthy of your highest effort. Ought you not, therefore, throw your life into this seemingly great thought, so soothing to you while living, and promising to throw lustre on your memories when dead?

Each and all of these, and other similar objects that might be named, though absolutely good, seem to me to fall far short of the highest ideal of human life. I have seen a physician rich, full of credit with the multitude, great in his power of controlling human beings committed to his charge, and surfeited with professional success, and yet he was mean in his very nature, a total failure, in fact, in the prime object of existence.

What, then, is this nobler aim, and for lack of knowing and striving after which, so many make either partial or total failures in life, and become mere breathing machines — living, but soulless bodies?

Life is not given to us *chiefly* that we may become wonder-working mechanics, keen men of business, brilliant wits, deep scholars, wise philosophers, orthodox theologians, able jurists, or even learned and skilful doctors. The gaining of these ends, are only means, so to speak, of life — means, forsooth, and only means toward a far higher and far holier end, viz: the harmonious development of every manly quality of one's nature — qualities implanted in him during the mysteries of conception, and receiving as much the impress of Almighty Power at the moment of birth, as when, in the beginning of our race, the same

Supreme Being breathed into the first man's nostrils the breath of life, and that imperfect creature became a living soul.

But where shall we find this ideal manhood, this type of all the grand qualities of human nature? Can any man find it within his own grasp? Has any man ever found it in another? Imperfect as we all are, we seek in vain. Shall we, for that reason, cease to keep that ideal in our view? I think not. Better have an aim too lofty ever to be reached in this world, than to drag on through life merely, as it were, sucking out a miserable existence from every hour, as it rapidly passes by us.

Every profession and trade tends, if we did but know it, and shape our lives in that belief, to bring each one of us up toward this standard; but I love and respect our beautiful profession, because it tends, I think, more than any other to lead us, at least, to an appreciation of it.

Let me endeavor to illustrate this part of our subject, and show you, by a few practical examples, the grand opportunities offered by our profession, in aid of any endeavors we may feel disposed to make toward this standard. If to some captious spirits I seem to pass too minutely into the facts of personal experience, or to deviate from the strict path most appropriate for an occasion like the present, I am quite sure that you, my friends, who have just received your diplomas, and for whose benefit alone I speak, will pardon the improprieties, for the sake of the intended good to you.

If you question the deepest recesses of man's nature, you will find that every human being desires —



*First.* The enjoyment of the outward world of experience, and a perfectly healthful physical existence.

*Second.* He tends to friendship and love, and to the exercise of all those kindly emotions that cluster around the human heart.

*Third.* He longs for the culture, growth, and free employment of his intellect.

*Fourth.* Man tends, whether he will it or not, as truly as the needle to the magnetic pole, at some period of his earthly career — it may be only during the last few moments of it — toward faith or a religious life.

A few words on each one of these divisions of the subject.

No man, however great a scoffer he may be against the profession, in reference to its influence on *public* hygiene, can deny that the study and practice of our art, by giving to physicians a knowledge of physiological laws, and an insight into the first encroachments of disease, tend to the preservation in robust health of physicians themselves. A vast majority of bodily ailments are caused by sins against the simplest laws of life and of health. These sins, though ignorantly committed by the laity, carry in their train punishments both swift and sure, and oftentimes long and distressing. The physician may, if he choose, avoid almost all of these. I would, therefore, commend to you our art and its practice, in that it will influence well your future bodily health, — the *corpus sanum* of the poet, upon which so much of your future morality, intellectual activity, and, it may be, your very piety

will depend. Is there any other profession in life that can justly claim as much ?

If we now turn to the region of the emotions, in their widest signification, all-powerful as they are in their tendencies to improve, repress, or modify man's development, we shall find that the practice of our profession acts in a manner most admirable upon those engaged in it. How can it be otherwise ? If the influence of noble example be of any avail in this world ; if the benign presence of self-sacrificing friendship ever touch the human soul ; if the sight of a lofty philosophic serenity or childlike faith at the approach of death, ever appeal to all that is divine in man, then enter with confidence the portals of our profession, for you will thereby have the most golden opportunities of seeing, by the bedside of the sick and of the dying, all the finest traits of human character, illustrated by the purest examples the world can produce.

I would that I could give you even the faintest idea of what I feel that I have gained by my profession, in that it has given me numerous opportunities of studying closely the kindly influence of suffering and disease upon the sick, and upon all who minister to them.

In order to illustrate my meaning, permit me to try to sketch one or two scenes, that have recently occurred within my own experience.

About five weeks after the hard-fought and glorious battle of Antietam, I was called to visit the headquarters of the Army of the Potomac, then at Pleasant Valley, only a short distance from the battle-ground. During my stay, I spent nearly two days at a camp



hospital, at which were collected about two hundred of our wounded. While my companions, who were not of the profession, spent their time in roaming at will over the ten miles' circuit of that sanguinary field, I remained at the hospital, helping, *as any physician would have done*, the surgeons in charge in their care of the wounded. I was amazed at the quiet, uncomplaining fortitude displayed by our suffering soldiers. It was a most interesting psychological phenomenon, and it was all but universal. It raised my estimate of human nature, and thereby raised me, my own individual nature, to a higher grade of existence. The memory of those sufferings, so nobly borne, will ever be a stimulus to me to bear serenely the greatest ills of civil life.

But there were two comrades that especially charmed me, and I would that I could, in fitting language, so tell their touching story that the memory of its beauty might forever remain upon your hearts, and often, in future, rise up before you, as it now comes up before me, arousing within me the tenderest and most lofty emotion. Listen to the tale of the young Zouaves. They were members of Burnside's corps, and belonged to that noble and fearless band, which made the famous charges over the narrow bridge, thence up over an open hill, in face of an intrenched foe, finally gaining the height, but with a fearful loss of life. Among the bravest of the brave, on that bloody day, were these two. One was slowly but surely dying of a ghastly wound in the thigh. He had been lying nearly motionless for about five weeks. He was the elder of the two, and had a peculiarly fine, intellectual countenance, pallid

with the approach of death. His tall, well-knit form had the rounded muscular development of a right manly youth. His skin was of the purest white and finest texture, and of almost girlish softness; his deportment eminently quiet and dignified. I never saw him smile but once, and that when the surgeon in charge remarked that the "Zouaves are always brave." He looked, in fact, like a young Christian warrior who felt that he had fought bravely his last fight in a noble cause, and now was quietly preparing for the coming doom, serenely waiting for death as the greatest boon, that could be vouchsafed to him in the intensity of his suffering. From the frightful nature of his wound those sufferings must have been torture, but he made no complaint. Nay, he rather blamed his own want of fortitude, for allowing even a few low moans to escape his lips. "Do we cause you too much suffering?" I enquired of him, on one occasion, when we were moving him, and he uttered a word indicating great anguish. "Oh, no," he replied, "I am only regretting that I cannot restrain these moans." In his presence I seemed before one of a superior nature, physically, intellectually, and morally. There was a silent natural language about him that spoke thus much to every understanding heart. A certain nameless, almost divine influence appeared to emanate from the simple pallet of straw, and the dying young patriot silently poured into the hearts of all around him a portion, at least, of his own serene and holy thought. I saw him often, and he had always that same noble deportment. I could not forbear entering his tent whenever I passed by. Every moment spent in ministering to him even



by a word, was a blessing vastly greater to myself than it could be to the sufferer. On my departure, I offered to visit his family, which he quietly declined, on the ground that it would take me far from my route home. He was however glad to have me write to his parents, which I subsequently did. I told them of his totally hopeless situation. I spoke of my admiration for his gallantry in the fight, and his serenity at the prospects of death, &c.

Permit me to give you one or two brief extracts from a letter received a short time afterwards from his broken-hearted mother. It seems to me merely the complement of the story I have related of the youth, and illustrates and explains what I myself saw. It is couched in simple language, and shows little of literary culture, but the richest spiritual experiences of life. I give the words exactly as written:—

“DEAR SIR: . . . It is a comfort to a bereaved mother to think that a young soldier in camp can live prepared to die. He have suffered much; was wounded before at Camden, though not yet twenty years of age. I thank God that he was a soldier of Christ, as well as soldier of his country. He was one of the first to stand in defence of his country. He is a year and seven months in the army. But his last battle is fought; he have gained the prize; his trials and sufferings are over. I must content myself with the hope that I shall go to him. He cannot return to me.” . . . . .

Now what was it, my friends, that brought me thus intimately within the sacred precincts of the death-scene of a stranger, or still more into that holiest of

holies, a bereaved mother's heart? It was solely because I was a member of our noble profession.

But I have not told you all that I saw and gained at the death-bed of the young Zouave. Whenever I visited him I saw by his side, and tenderly watching him, a youth dressed in the jaunty costume of the corps, with his long silk tassel dropping gracefully from his cap, over a brow of a more youthful aspect than that of the wounded sufferer. He was acting as nurse to his comrade, and having escaped unharmed from the terrible charge upon the enemy, was full of ruddy life and buoyant hope. He was evidently a year or two younger, but their bearing towards one another was more like that of two lovers, than that usually noticed between man and man. A sort of Nysus and Euryalus friendship it really was, and as richly worthy of immortality from poet's heart and pen as that which the Mantuan bard has so sweetly sung. The contrast between the death-like aspect of the sufferer and the robust health of the other, was most striking and beautiful. The young nurse was forever near the bed of his dying companion, and springing to his aid at the slightest intimation. On one occasion, in an especial manner, did this devotion show itself. I certainly shall never forget it. We were dressing the wound, and necessarily caused much pain, so that groans were wrung from the patient. His comrade seemed almost frantic with his eager sympathy. He flitted constantly around in aid of the surgeon, ever and anon leaning over and murmuring into the ear of the sufferer soft words of consolation and of hope, until finally, just at the moment of extremest



suffering, a sudden, stolen kiss was pressed upon the pale forehead of his dying comrade !

Why do I detail to you these things ? Some, I fear, may deem them all ill-timed. What have they to do with a valedictory address to a graduating class of medical students ? Two reasons I have for bringing them before you. Similar events, modified of course by circumstances of time and place, you will constantly meet with in your future professional career, and by relating, even imperfectly, these two beautiful and unique scenes, I would lead you to open not only your eyes but your whole natures to all similar purifying influences. We are made better men by being allowed to see them.

My second object is less germane to this day's object. But for this very reason, if I had no other, I would relate this story at the present hour. As Anacreon claims that, while wishing to sing of heroes, his harp responds only with notes of love, so I find, in these earnest days, that this sacred war in which the nation is engaged, always comes up before me, when I would speak even of the gentlest and most peaceful influences of our profession. I confess therefore that my second reason is that I may thus, somewhat publicly, bear testimony to the grand Christian fortitude evinced by almost all of our soldiers on this and similar occasions. I have likewise wished to describe, even in the faintest language, the superb serenity of soul evinced by that dying warrior, and the warm, self-sacrificing friendship of the other of these two most youthful soldiers. Would to God that any words of mine could make immortal in man's memory these high traits of the two patriot

youths, noble fighters in this good fight for human liberty and national life.

But you will not need the sorrows of the battle-field, for many such opportunities. Wherever the medical art exists as an honorable profession and not as a mere trade, there will similar, though perhaps not such striking scenes be exhibited, at every quiet fireside of civil life.

I turn now to the influence of our profession upon the intellect of man. I can of course do no more than simply touch upon this great subject.

I have always thought that the fact that the profession has had amongst its noted men some of the finest intellects the world has ever seen, and acknowledged as such not only by the communities in which they lived, but also by posterity, is a strong proof of the capability of our profession to satisfy the intellectual cravings of the highest class of minds. A profession that ranks among its votaries a Morgagni or a John Hunter, surely should not suffer, when compared with any other, as a means of intellectual advancement.

Again: Look around you in the various communities in which you live, and observe the relative rank of the physician, as a man of intellectual power, in all the every-day doings of the circle in which he moves. Generally, you will find that he holds either the very first, or nearly the first rank; and he holds this position, usually, by the divine right of a higher mental culture than his neighbors generally possess.

Yet, further, let me appeal to the individual consciousness of each one of you. Young as you are in



medical study, and all unused as you are to medical practice, I nevertheless feel certain that there is not one among you, who will not bear witness to the sharpening of the wits, to the increased clearness of thought, and the really hard intellectual work you have had, — while endeavoring to thoroughly grapple with any obscure case of disease, placed before you, even during this brief curriculum, that has just elapsed.

Indeed, there is nothing that requires greater care in observation, more acuteness of perception of the intimate relations of things and events, or clearer, more judicial powers of weighing evidence than the thorough, comprehensive elucidation of many of the cases constantly occurring to physicians. “Who is more profound, more judicious, more penetrating than Lina-cre?” writes Erasmus, about three and a half centuries ago, when alluding to the learned physician to the King, and family doctor to the aristocracy of London.\* Indeed, Gentlemen, neither a fool nor a lazy man can ever be a great and good physician. May I not, therefore, say, in one word, our profession, pursued with manly aims, while it more than satisfies the human heart, affords, too, everything necessary to satisfy the cravings of intellect for a stalwart growth.

Let me, in connection with this topic of your proper intellectual culture, make a few hints on reading. You will all agree, that, at the present day, it will not do for any man to consider his student life as ended with the reception of his diploma. It has but just commenced. It ends only with his life. Hitherto,

\* Butler's Life's of Erasmus. London, 1848.

you have read to learn your profession ; hereafter you must read for the practice of it, unless you intend to settle down as the meanest and most pitiful of routinists. Of course, every man, if he read at all, will endeavor to keep up with the current medical science of the day. I would earnestly advise you, however, not to limit yourselves to this phase of literature. A wise and liberal culture enjoins upon you a wider circle. Shakspeare will teach you human nature in a manner that no other writer can. Dickens, and others of similar stamp, will warm your hearts toward the miserable and poor, with whom you will be thrown in contact, especially during your earlier years of practice. Let broad farce, too, and keen humor have their places. I think a fine comedy helps digestion, and it will enable you to laugh off some of the whims of nervous patients. What grander appeals to independence and manliness of character, — what more touching warnings than can be found in Burns ! Who does not walk more erect after reading Tennyson's grand dirge of the nation at the death of Wellington, the warrior, the statesman, the man of power ? The mild and genial philosophy of the *Excursion*, showing, as it does, how much there is of real beauty in some of the commonest acts of daily life, has been of infinite service to me ; and it is my firm belief that I am now a better practising physician, because Wordsworth has lived, and has sung out his rich human notes from his poet's nook in Cumberland.

Read, then, not only medical, but, as far as possible, good works in all departments of literature and science ; and permit me to add, that now is the appointed



hour, the golden season of your lives, Accept, then, with joy this God-given privilege of leisure, and sow broadly the seeds of your future growth. Ere many years, you will find cases accumulating, and the much-coveted business encroaching upon time. Then the scanty moment for reading will have to be snatched from toiling, almost drudging life, or in the midst, perhaps, of the whirl of professional success, only at the dead of night. Lose not, I beg you, these few precious years, now opening before you, during which, perhaps, you will have few patients, and many weary hours, unless, with strength of will, and intelligently, you wring from them the means for your own nobler development for all future time.

I pass now to the last and most difficult, but the most important part of our subject.

What influence ought the profession, you have chosen, to have upon your religious character, and what are your most important duties connected therewith? Of course, I can merely glance at a few of the considerations, naturally connected with these topics. As I have already hinted, when commencing this address, I believe as firmly as I believe anything, that every human being, whether wise or simple, good, bad, or indifferent, tends as certainly toward faith, or some religious belief, as he does toward death. No man, unless he be demented, can approach that final point of mortal life, without being compelled to think of that Divine and Supreme Ruler, under whose laws he first drew the breath of life, and in submission, or opposition, to whose laws he has, like a wise man or a fool, lived. At that hour, if at no other, all the shams

of his previous career show their utter nothingness, and he bows in religious faith or fear to meet the impending fate. But thrice blessed is our profession, because the practice of it, if pursued in a truly loyal manner, tends to raise the physician, early in his career, to the broad, really catholic, belief that there is a wise and humane Father, who governs all things rightly, though often darkly to our most limited powers of perception.

This view, I know, is very different from that oft-repeated libel, made usually by bigots, that medicine tends to Materialism, Infidelity, and Atheism. What monstrous absurdity! Can any man dissect the human neck, or examine minutely the marvellous workings of the human hand; can he watch the mysterious wandering of the microscopic germs, seeing, and yet really *not* seeing, their real processes of growth; can he watch, hour after hour, the wonderful revolutions of those apparently mere masses of granules, and observe how life and muscular action are mysteriously and inexplicably evolved during this simple motion; can he do and see all these things, and be, at the same time, an Atheist? Out upon such arrant nonsense!

How marvellous and full of spiritual meaning are these realms of human physiology! Study man as deeply as you may, yet who ever has unravelled, or ever will be able to unravel, the real seminal principles that have lain for centuries, and I doubt not will forever lie hidden, in that threefold mystery of man's nature, conception and birth, life and growth, decay and death. "Gentlemen," often exclaimed to his class one of the greatest clinical teachers the world



has ever seen, “gentlemen, there is always something in man and his diseases that escapes our senses.” In each one of these three mysterious phases of human life, appears, forever mocking our weak understanding, — that same great, mysterious, wonder-working power. Hence, I contend that our profession tends strongly to raise any reflecting mind to God, as ever present in His mighty and inexplicable laws. Impressed by a sense of awe before these grand energies, the mind tends easily and naturally toward reverence, and, at times, most naturally toward prayer, which, in its essence, is only an expression, silent it may be, of that reverential awe. Hence, I can readily believe to be true the story, that is told of one of the greatest English surgeons of the last century, and which runs somewhat in this wise: It was noticed that, previously to any important operation, he always retired to a room adjacent to the amphitheatre, and remained there for a short time in total silence. Innumerable were the quiet jokes passed around among those professional jokers, the medical students, as to the reasons for this withdrawal of their great leader. On one occasion, the door of the mysterious apartment was accidentally left ajar, and one more roguish and of a bolder type than his comrades, crept, amid much merriment on the part of the others, to the open door-way; and there he espied the great surgeon, whom they had looked upon as capable of coping with any case, and apparently needing nothing but his own bold heart and steady hand to carry him through any operation, however fearful; this man of intellect and power — on his knees at prayer, — prayer for that help which,

doubtless, had never failed him in the hour of trial, and which he was sure then of obtaining!

It is now many years since, while engaged in midwifery, and when I felt that the lives of two beings seemed to rest in my hands, that I experienced, for the first time in my life, the Divine inspiration that flows from above into any human heart, that humbly asks for aid. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, I passed from the agony of extreme mental uncertainty, — nay, actual physical tremor, — to a perfectly clear, unclouded intellect, a reasonable judgment of the case, a fixed purpose, and gained a hand as firm as steel. For that inestimable boon, the richest and most wonderful experience of my whole life, let me ever give thanks to the medical profession and to God!

In connection with this branch of my subject, permit me to allude briefly and cautiously to a topic which trenches, some may think, too much upon the domains of the sister profession of theology, “Oh, for a great, new thought,” cries the great German scholar, during his last illness, “to penetrate my soul, and I shall be well again!” If at any time in a man’s life he needs firmest support, and warmest sympathy, it is at that hour, when death is near at hand. A kindly word of good cheer, of bright hope, or of high-toned thought, will meet with a warm response, or, at least, with eager gratitude. Each one of you may be occasionally placed in a position in which you will have to say that word, or it will not be said. Once in my life I have been so situated, and I dared not fail to meet the requisitions of the moment. Beware of suggesting at that solemn moment anything of



mere dogma, that can tend to increase the mental anguish of the sufferer. But let all your words be those of loftiest cheer, or of quiet resignation. Suggest, if need be, the mercies, rather than the judgments of Jehovah. Some of you think it impossible you should ever be called upon to say a word at such a time. Be it so. Wait and see what the hour may bring forth. Meanwhile, let me, by these few remarks, lead you to a thought upon the subject, and suggest a caution. Do not substitute a theological formula for what is really wanted by your patient, viz: warm, living, human sympathy with him in his suffering, and the expression of a belief in the existence of a merciful Father, rather than a stern, unyielding Judge. Be, if you can, a real minister of God, to aid a, perhaps, fainting soul. Otherwise, stand aside, in reverent silence, before the August Presence of All-powerful Death!

Gentlemen, in these few hints, given in this part of my subject, you have the sum and substance of my "Religio Medici." Whether I have said too much or too little to satisfy the judgments of all, it mattereth but little, provided that your young hearts, full as they must be as yet, of all generous hope and of earnest aspiration, only understand my motives in thus speaking.

All hail! then, I say, to our profession for its influence on the whole nature of man! And you, I trust, will cordially say "Amen."

And now, having thus hastily shown you, first, the true objects we should aspire to in our professional career, and second, having briefly sketched the influ-

ence of our profession upon the physical health, the heart, the intellect, and the soul of man, I might close with a warm farewell, and with the assurance that it will always be a source of pleasure to my colleagues and myself to hear of your success in life. I am unwilling, however, to close without some reference to the present condition of our beloved country and the probable relations, that some of you may eventually hold towards some of the patriot men, who are fighting the battles of this, our second revolution.

I cannot conceive of any reasonable man doubting that this is the great historic era of our nation, and before which, as the future historian shall look back upon it, all the glories of that of '76 will pale. I see in it the workings of Divine justice, and in the same way that the revolution of 1688 in England, and that of 1792 in France, swept off, as with the power of a tornado, all the criminal despotisms of those days, setting at naught all the prerogatives of power, and moulding like wax political constitutions, so, in these our latter days, that same Almighty justice is bringing upon this nation the proper reward for its crimes against liberty, during the two past centuries; crimes that culminated, a few years since, in that impious and Babel-like declaration, "We know, on this question, no higher law than the American Constitution."

See the marvellous change already wrought upon us. A few years since, political demagoguism and a peacock-like strutting pride fairly possessed the nation, and we foolishly talked of eternity as the certain future of our *immaculate* political status. Where now is all that overweening confidence? Gone, and I trust forever;



and in its place even scoffers look aloft, and admit that God alone can ride safely upon *this* whirlwind, and direct *this* storm. Out of this, our country's "thunderstorm of battle," if we be but true to our highest principles, he will safely bear our people, and the nation shall become thereby purer, nobler, and more truly free.

Under these circumstances, any man is a coward and recreant to the noblest sentiments of his nature, who does not think it the choicest blessing of his life to be allowed to have mere existence, at the present time, with permission to watch and wait, and serve, even in the slightest degree, in helping forward the great events that hourly press upon us.

But to some of you who have surgical tastes and abilities, how much is opening?

Gentlemen, I would have you not only esteem highly the profession you have chosen, but likewise, like true patriots, ever raise aloft the sacred banner of our country, made more sacred now that it has inscribed upon its ample folds, in letters of living light, "Freedom to every slave." Honor all who fight to sustain it; and deal gently, as with a brother's hand and heart, the brave and dear ones, who fall wounded in its defence. Do not, I beg of you, regard them merely as interesting cases for your professional skill, but bring the fact home to your hearts that they have, in reality, been fighting for you, and for the nation's life, and, whether they have thought so or not, fighting for human freedom. Therefore, you owe them an immense debt of gratitude. While commanding their respect, let them be compelled to give you their love for your

kindness as well as skill. I know of no nobler field than that now offered to a young and enthusiastic surgeon in the volunteer army of the United States, *provided* he duly appreciates the grandeur of the contest now going on, and honors, as he should be honored, every wounded son of the Union. Oh, friends, young brothers, think of these things when afar off, whether on the Western Prairies or in the Sunny South, you have dealings with the suffering soldier. Bear ever with your steady, manly, surgeon's hand a tenderness, worthy to be remembered with that shown by the youthful Zouave for his dying comrade. Thus acting you will do honor to yourselves, to us, and *alma mater*. Above all, while doing your duty to God and to man, you will raise in the eyes of all beholders our "Most Noble Art of Medicine."

Gentlemen, farewell.



**ADDITIONAL REMARKS;**

OR,

**A BRIEF PLEA FOR AN AMBULANCE SYSTEM**

FOR THE

**ARMY OF THE UNITED STATES,**

AS DRAWN FROM THE EXTRA SUFFERINGS OF THE LATE LIEUT. BOWDITCH AND

A WOUNDED COMRADE.





## ADDITIONAL REMARKS

*Or a brief Plea for an Ambulance System for the Army of the United States, as drawn from the extra sufferings of the late Lieut. Bowditch and a wounded comrade.*

The foregoing address is printed, as will be seen by the annexed correspondence, in accordance with the wishes of the Graduating Medical Class of Harvard College, as expressed in its vote of March 11, 1863. The publication has been delayed, in consequence of my journey to the camp of the First Massachusetts Cavalry, to bring home the dead body of my eldest son, who had fallen, while leading a charge in this war for free institutions, and for liberty.

I little thought that, in less than one week from the hour at which I, in a few words, at the conclusion of my address, begged of the earnest youths, then before me, to do everything they could to alleviate the sufferings of the sick and wounded soldiers, I should have presented to me the terrible thought that my own son would, perhaps, need the care of stranger surgeons and soldiers for his own relief in his dying hour.

Since his death, I think that I stand in different, and, may I not say? somewhat wider relations, than

those I enjoyed from the teacher's chair. Resting as I now do under the solemn cloud-shadow of a great but benignant sorrow, I hope that some words I may now write, will reach beyond the confines of my profession, and touch other human intellects and hearts, — intellects and hearts of men and women, who will have influence upon those in power, and who will, with me, endeavor to *persuade our leaders to do simple justice toward every wounded soldier in the armies of the United States.*

May I not believe that now I can, of myself, exert a greater moral influence upon those in power, and that I can *now* do something — as all my previous efforts seem to have been vain — toward persuading the authorities to take *some* measures, that will secure to our wounded soldiers the *Nation's* fostering care, from the *first* moment of their fall upon the bloody field, until they arrive in our well supplied and most excellent hospitals.

This is not the case at present; for, under the want of all proper arrangements by the Government, a wounded soldier is liable to be left to suffer, and *die, it may be*, on the battle-ground, *without the least attention*, save what *common humanity* would lead one soldier to bestow upon a comrade.

This happens, first, because Congress steadily refuses to establish any definite and efficient Ambulance Corps in the armies of the Republic; second, because the War Department declines to do anything in the premises.

As an illustration of, and in addition to what has been already published by others, as well as by my-



self,\* I beg leave to state that Lieut. Bowditch, having been mortally wounded, in the first charge made after leaving Kelly's Ford, lay helpless on the ground, for some time, by the side of his dead horse. Two surgeons saw him, but they evidently had no means for carrying off the wounded officer, and it is believed *no one connected with an Ambulance Corps ever approached him there.*†

A stranger horseman, — probably from the Rhode Island forces, — finally assisted him to get into a saddle; and he rode off, leaning over the neck of the animal, — a terrible mode of proceeding, considering his severe wound in the abdomen. All this happened *when he was in the rear of our victorious army*, or, in other words, at just the place and time, at which a thorough Ambulance Corps should have been busily at work, *seeking out*, and relieving, with every means *a great Government should have had at its disposal*, the wretched and, perhaps, dying sufferers. But what, in reality, does the Government do to meet such an emergency? It provides a carriage, which a perfectly healthy man would find exceedingly uncomfortable to drive in, even for a few miles, and one driver, sometimes not the most humane. There are, also, I doubt not, various articles of surgical dressings, etc., for the wounded; but these articles are generally far in the

\* Appendix A.

† Three days after the fight, I heard several staff officers, — one of whom, certainly, was a surgeon, — talk, not as if they approved of the fact, but as if it were a matter of course, — saying that they “thought” a flag of truce ought to be sent over the river, to see to our wounded, many of whom were then, as they believed, still lying on the field!

rear of the army. The United States Government did not then, and never does, provide *any men*, whose duty it is to hasten to meet and to relieve these hours of poignant suffering. After Lieut. Bowditch arrived at the ambulance carriage, there was no water to be found in the casks, connected with it, although, by law, there should have been. The driver was wholly ignorant of the names of those whom he was carrying. He actually, and in answer to a direct question from Col. Curtis, denied that Lieut. Bowditch was one of them. He did not get any water for the Lieutenant and his still more suffering comrade, although both *longed and asked for it!* *A wretched and dying Sergeant begged much for it, and in vain!* Had it not been for the kindness of Col. Curtis, who, after *much difficulty*, found out where my son was, no water would probably have been procured for either of the parched sufferers. As it was, it arrived at last, *too late* for the Sergeant, who was so much exhausted as to be unable to avail himself of the cup, finally proffered him by his wounded comrade.

I mention these shortcomings, as I deem them, of the Administration and of Congress, with great reluctance, and without a trace of any feeling, save of sorrow. A few months ago, when treating of this same subject, I felt, and may have, at times, expressed, indignation, — not an unrighteous one, however, I hope, — at such neglect. Now, with the solemn memories of the past few weeks resting on me, I am sure that all will believe that sadness, not anger, must be uppermost in my mind. But I would fain plead, with all the earnestness a stricken father might be supposed to have,



when in sight of the mangled dead body of a darling, first-born son, that *such enormities, as are now liable to happen, under the present want of any proper ambulance system in the United States army, shall not be permitted hereafter.*

So far as the ensuing summer campaign is to be considered, it is already too late to do anything. The Senate of the United States, under the leadership of the Chairman of its Military Committee — an honorable Senator from Massachusetts — refused, a few days before the late Congress adjourned, to concur in the passage of a bill, previously passed, unanimously, by the House of Representatives. I am not an advocate of any *particular bill* or *special plan*. I only ask for *some system*. The Senate considered the plan proposed “impracticable,” and therefore declined doing *anything!*\* If all things were managed by mortals, according to such a mode of reasoning, very little progress would be made, very little humanity be practised, in this world. *The Senate and Government of this free people, decline to do for its citizen volunteer soldiery, what every despot of Europe carefully looks after, with reference to his conscripts or his hirelings!*

Some have asked, “But does not the Government do all it can? What do you want?” My reply is, a corps of detailed soldiers, or, what may be deemed better, a corps of honest, brave, and humane men, enlisted for this special duty, is needed. Such a corps exists in every army in Europe. I have now before me a pamphlet devoted solely to giving an account of the French and English ambulance systems. From it I will quote the following table :





Blankets (baled, in packages of ten).....	200	10	180	9	160	8	140	7	120	6	100	5	6	3
“ “ for the sick.....	30	2	28	1½	24	11	20	1	16	1	12	1	9	..
“ “ for wrappers.....	30	1	18	1	16	1	14	1	12	..	16	..	9	..
Tents, holding 16 men each, and apparatus..	30	15	28	14	22	11	16	8	10	5	6	3	4	2
Bags for stakes and poles.....	8	4	6	3	6	3	4	2	4	2	2	2	1	1½
<i>Transportation for the Sick.</i>														
Transportation } Mule Litters (pairs).....	24	24	18	18	14	14	10	10	8	8	4	4	2	2
} Mule Litters (pairs).....	250	250	200	200	150	150	110	110	80	80	50	50	30	30
} Cushioned panniers (prs),	6	6	6	6	6	6	4	4	4	4	2	2	1	1
} Mules.....														
Total.....	364		297		235									

For expeditions operating at a distance in the South, the number of cases of supplies must be increased sufficiently to receive a third more linen for wounds and a double supply of nutritious food. The number of cushioned panniers should be increased in the proportion of one-fifth, and the number of mules also in the same proportion.

AMOUNTS SUBSTITUTED FOR THE ABOVE, FOR AMBULANCES OF TROOPS ACTING IN THE SOUTH.

Cases of supplies for the Health Service...	26	13	20	16	16	8	21	6	8	4	4	5	5	2½
“ “ Excc. “	40	20	36	18	28	14	24	12	14	7	7	10	5	6
Cushioned panniers for mules' backs.....	300	300	250	200	200	200	150	150	120	120	90	90	70	70
Report of the number of mules attached to other parts of the Ambulance Apparatus.	...	333	...	278	...	222	...	168	...	...	...	97½	...	75½
Total of mules for the Southern columns,	...	94	...	80	...	71	...	57	...	...	...	27½	...	10½
	...	427	...	358	...	295	...	225	...	...	...	125	...	92

Remembering that there were about 2,000 Union men in the fight at Kelly's Ford, the reader will be easily able to judge how many men would have been actually detailed as an ambulance corps, and how much of "apparatus," &c., for the same object would have accompanied the expedition, if our Government had the views of the French Government on the necessity and humanity of taking care of our wounded. One would think that *self-interest* would lead any Government to try, as much as possible, to save a wounded soldier for future use, even if common humanity were left out of sight.

The pamphlet from which this table is taken is one of 70 pages octavo, and is written by Mons. Boudin, Chief Physician of the Military Hospital at Boule, Paris.\*

From the table, the reader will see the number of officers and men and apparatus, connected with the ambulance service of the French army.

That service, it appears, is capable of being divided so that a certain portion of its effective force and supplies can be readily selected, at a short notice, for any number of regiments or brigades, &c.

The United States, doubtless, provides freely of supplies, but it steadily refuses to have any drilled corps to administer these supplies, in the most humane and most efficient manner. All is left, in a great measure, to chance!

A chance man carried Lieut. Bowditch from the field. Nothing scarcely was known until Col. Curtis sought for and found him, in the last carriage. The driver knew not whom he was carrying, though both of the wounded men were fully able to report their names and regiments. He had shamefully neglected to have water in his vehicle, or to get it for the sufferers, when one of them earnestly asked for it.

It may appear an absurdity to a military man, that a civilian should pretend to have any opinion upon the subject. But it seems to me that our immense armies need a corps of men for these special duties, of looking

\* *Système des Ambulances des Armées Française et Anglaise; Instructions qui règlent cette branche du service administratif et medical, par M. Boudin, Officier de la Legion d' Honneur, Medicin en chef de l' Hospital Militaire du Boule. Avec trois planches. Paris: J. B. Bailliere. 1855.*



after the wounded soldier, as much as we need a special surgical corps, special paymasters, a special engineer corps, special men for cavalry, infantry, artillery service, &c. Certainly, the object is sufficiently great and humane. When thousands of men are inevitably to be wounded, it would seem to be perfectly suicidal in the Government, even in a selfish point of view, not to have a corps enlisted or detailed, to save as many as can be saved. As it is now, if a soldier be once put even temporarily, *hors du combat*, it would seem as if the Government were wholly indifferent whether he lived or died.

Again, by having such a corps, the number of combatants would not be so rapidly lessened, as it is now, by several men taking one wounded from the field.\*

Such an ambulance corps should consist of able-bodied, brave men, — men not afraid to go to the front to save a fallen fellow-man. They should have a distinctive uniform. Arrangements might be concluded whereby the ambulance corps, in both armies, should be considered as the laws of war usually regard pickets, that is, as not to be molested in their specific duties, save perhaps, under extraordinary circumstances. Doubtless, many of such a body would fall, but it would be from random shots, and not from the voluntary barbarism of either army. It would be a brave, and noble, Christian death. Such a corps should take its place near the battle-field. It should be well trained to march, immediately to raise and carry off the wounded

\* One surgeon told me he saw eight men carrying off one wounded soldier! Four were bearers — and four were intended for “relief” — and were walking by the hill, doing nothing. Few if any of these men returned to their posts.

with the least suffering possible. It could attend to minor points of surgery, and act as nurses, or cooks on the field, in tent, and in hospital, &c. Is it too much to hope that, at some future day, similar corps, from any two belligerent armies, will, under certain restrictions, be allowed to mingle together, upon the field, more immediately after the termination of a battle, than is now allowed? If, by mutual agreement between two contending parties, this object could be gained, a *vast* amount of *extra* suffering would be prevented, and, doubtless, many lives saved. There are hundreds of details, that might be named, in which such a corps would be invaluable. Every great European nation has such, in its armies, thoroughly trained. Why cannot we have such?

There *is* no *valid* reason. On the contrary, I have good reason for believing that it is the arbitrary will of one mind, and to which even Senators bow, that has prevented all action. Many persons have vainly appealed to the President. The Medical Societies of some of the large States have appealed to him, and to the War Department. Committees, and private citizens of New York and Boston have earnestly asked of Congress, of General Halleck, and of Mr. Stanton, to do *something*. All efforts, thus far, have been fruitless.

I now make one more appeal, but this time not to any one man, or to Congress, but to our Imperial "Cæsar," the People! The People must take this matter into its own hands, and *compel* the Government to look fairly at the whole subject.

The people are willing their sons should dedicate their young, heroic lives to this Holy War, this Blossom-



ing-out of Centuries. We have, even in our bereavement at their death, a certain triumphant joy, if they, as instruments of High Heaven, be accounted worthy to be martyrs in so sacred a cause. But we have a right to demand that they shall not be *needlessly tortured*, or thrown aside, like their own wounded steeds, to die perhaps by the wayside, for want of proper care from our Government. If any government under Heaven ought to be *paternal*, the United States authority, deriving, as it does, all its powers from the people, should surely be such, and should dispense that power, in full streams of benignant mercy upon its soldiers, when wounded in its defence.

I look forward, with dismay, at the *extra* suffering that may fall on thousands of the splendid youths, now in our army, during the ensuing summer campaign. Fortunately for the Army of the Potomac, as long ago as August last, General McClellan established a certain ambulance system of detailed soldiers, and under the enlightened suggestions of Dr. Letterman, Medical Director of the same army, I learn that much good was accomplished by it after the Fredericksburg fight. But the facts of my son's case have proved that the arrangements of the Army of the Potomac are still imperfect, and there are other armies, in which not even this imperfect system exists. I am authorized to state as the deliberate opinion of General McClellan himself, that the arrangements in vogue in the Army of the Potomac, while he was in command, might still be improved, he does not consider that by any means as complete.\* It

\* Appendix C. See letter from General McClellan.

was evidently introduced to meet a want, not radically to supply the deficiency. I rejoice however, to think that, under the present enlightened chieftain of the brave army, thus alluded to, Major-General Hooker, aided by members of his professional staff, an immense amount of suffering will be prevented. But this statement only brings out into bolder relief the utter chaos, that exists almost everywhere else along our lines; a chaos only relieved by the fact that man's sufferings, the world over, always appeal to man. The wounded soldier *will* be taken some care of, *even when forsaken by his government!*

Let me not be misunderstood, I claim to be *intensely* loyal to this Administration. It is the government of my choice, I have been striving to get such a government, for over twenty years. I will ever do what I can to sustain it. But it will never do for me, with my views of honorable loyalty to a government, to keep out of sight such plain shortcomings on the part of those in power. More especially, do I feel called upon to speak and write plainly on this subject, because I believe that all that is really wanted is an enlightened public sentiment upon the matter. When that comes the Government will, of course, be compelled to attend to it. Let me not therefore be considered disloyal, when, while endeavoring to enlighten the people, I would also strive to make the Government, truly noble, generous, and humane, in this department of its administration. Those individuals are the really disloyal, who would check such endeavors.

I care, however, very little what interpretation may be put upon my conduct at the present time and in the



past, but I wish it fairly understood that I *cannot* do otherwise, and be true to the instincts, implanted in me as I believe, by God, for my guidance. Such being the fact, I shall always, on all proper and perhaps, on what, some may deem, improper occasions, continue to urge upon the public and upon the Government attention to this matter.

In conclusion, let me, therefore, earnestly appeal to every man and woman in this country, to do his or her share toward bringing about a better state of things. Let the hapless sufferings and bleeding forms of thousands of our noblest youth, wounded or slain in this holy war for the Republic's Life, and for human liberty, plead for this cause. Let every one, who has a friend now in the army, remember what that loved one may be called upon to endure, in consequence of this culpable neglect of those now in power. Every one of you has some influence. Let that influence, however great or trivial it may seem to yourself, be brought to bear, either by letter or by personal conversation, upon every member of the Government, the President and his Cabinet, and Senators and Representatives. Let the press be made to speak. The blessings of "him who is ready to perish," will fall like Heaven's own dew upon your hearts, if ye steadily and faithfully pursue this subject, and do your share toward its perfect accomplishment.

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Even at this very hour, while these pages are passing through the press, the moans of thousands of our dying youth have been rising from the battle-fields of

Fredericksburg, begging each one of you to do your duty to them ; and demand of our Senators that they shall no longer decline to do *anything* toward establishing *some* ambulance system in the armies of the Republic. Do not, I beg of you, believe that Massachusetts has done all her duty in this particular. On the contrary, she stands convicted of the fact that one Senator reported against a bill, and the other stood by at the time, and said not one word to prevent the atrocious neglect of a most plain duty on the part of Government. Our present State Executive has urged this subject, *again and again*, upon the President and those in power, but all in vain. Both Senators from Massachusetts are either dumb, or in open opposition to all action in the premises.

I am well aware that, when the cause itself rises, by its magnitude, far above all special individual relations, any *personal* remarks are usually to be avoided. There are times, however, when justice and humanity demand them, as in the prophetic days of old. I come as no prophet, but simply as a *man*, and while thus singling out the Massachusetts Senators, I do so from no other motive than to bring, more forcibly, to the minds and hearts of the loyal North, the gross dereliction of duty, evinced by *every* Senator from the Free States.

HENRY I. BOWDITCH.

Boylston Street, May 22, 1863.



## A P P E N D I X .

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### A

The following are Reports of Drs. Stedman and Bowditch, who went with an ambulance train to the battle-field at Centreville. They are taken from Dr. Gay's Report to the War Committee of Ward IV. In introducing them, Dr. Gay says :

“The statements in reference to the ambulance drivers demand universal action to instantly correct this brutal custom.”

DR. GEORGE H. GAY : —

Dear Sir, — I beg to submit the following as a report of my experience during my late visit to the battle-field near Fairfax Court House, Va.

At 10 o'clock, Sept. 5, 1862, a message came to “Willard's,” in Washington, from Surgeon-General Hammond, that two surgeons were much needed at a spot between Fairfax Court House and Centreville, where many soldiers lay wounded and starving. Dr. Bowditch and myself immediately volunteered our services, and at 11 P. M., we started in a train of fifty ambulances for the scene of suffering. The distance to be travelled was about twenty-two miles. The halts on the way were numerous, and some were prolonged most unnecessarily, as it seemed to us. The horses were stout, the weather cool till after sunrise, and then warm, but the heat not exhausting. At the end of the journey we were to find men dying from starvation and neglect of surgical attendance; and yet the horses must be allowed to walk a great portion of the way, and be watered every few miles, while the freight of each wagon was light. Beyond all example, the driver of the ambulance, in which it was my lot to ride, was the most vulgar, ignorant, and profane man I ever

came in contact with. But in contrast with him, the driver of the ambulance in which I returned, was one of the most humane men. He had been a soldier in the regular army for nine years — had been wounded in one of our earliest battles — and since his recovery had been employed as Government teamster. On the wagon-master's command to him to drive faster, and keep up with the ambulances ahead of ours, he remonstrated, saying the men in his wagon were suffering intolerably already, and he did not intend to make them suffer more if he could prevent it. His expressions of sympathy were frequent, and doubtless afforded some consolation to the wounded. One or two other drivers, who came under my notice, behaved themselves with becoming humanity and gentleness in their assistance of the sufferers; though, as a body, these drivers were such as would disgrace, it may be, any menials ever sent out to the aid of the sick and wounded. The wagon-masters themselves, of whom we expected better things, were not overborne, apparently, by any deep sentiments of compassion for the sufferers. I noticed that in going to the battle-field they took no pains to hasten on the train. On the contrary, as before said, the halts were too frequent and prolonged. But in returning, though admonished by the groans of the soldiers, which were continuous from one end of the train to the other, they often urged the teamsters to drive faster.

On arriving at our place of destination, *lying about on the grass or in an old house and its out houses*, we found about one hundred and fifty soldiers, suffering from gunshot wounds of every description, inflicted five or six days before. Two had been shot through the lungs; one through both thighs and scrotum; some through the abdomen. In short, no part of the body had escaped. Four surgeons of the army were in attendance; but from want of food and sleep they were nearly exhausted; and being unable to perform but little duty, they requested me to remove some limbs, which operations were necessary to the more favorable transportation of the wounded to Washing-



ton. These were an amputation of the thigh, for a wound of the knee-joint and compound fracture of the former; and an amputation of an arm, for compound fracture and extensive laceration at elbow-joint.

And here let me notice the kind and assiduous attention to his wounded, of Dr. Joseph W. Hastings, Assistant-Surgeon, 21st Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteers, who was indefatigable in his service to all under his care. It was evident that his readiness, gentleness, and quiet cheerfulness, as well as skill and capacity, had won the gratitude of his regiment. I would not depreciate the merits of the other surgeons at this station. I speak thus of Dr. Hastings only because of my more frequent opportunities of witnessing his conduct.

On the following morning, after dressing many wounds, I accompanied Dr. H. to the rebel hospital, about four miles farther, on the Warrenton road, for the purpose of removing Capt. Kelton, of the 21st Regiment, whose thigh had been amputated by Dr. Miller, the rebel surgeon. We found four of our soldiers there, and about seventy-five wounded rebels, lying on the hay in a very comfortable stone barn. I observed that the medicines and surgical appliances used there had Philadelphia labels. Had they been captured, stolen, or smuggled? Our men expressed themselves gratified with the attention they had received from the rebel doctor; for which I could do no less than thank him. We then placed Capt. K. in the ambulance, and returned to our hospital.

In the afternoon we loaded the ambulances with the wounded, and at 4½ o'clock started for Washington, which, after a night of horror, made such by the cries and groans of the sufferers, the drunkenness, profanity, and inhumanity of the drivers, we reached about four o'clock the next morning. The men were deposited in the various hospitals in the city, and at noon I found some of them, those two especially upon whom I had operated, contented and cheerful as possible under the circumstances.

I shall never forget the anxiety with which I watched for the

safety of those two men. But one ligature had been required in securing the artery in the thigh. Suppose from the constant jolting of the wagon, or from any other cause, that ligature should have come off; or that such should have been the case with the man whose arm had been lost, how could life have been saved? No one ambulance would have been allowed to stop, as the whole train would have then been compelled to wait, and the sufferings of all the other wounded would have been increased or prolonged. Thank Heaven no such accident occurred, and I hope no one was permanently afflicted by this sad journey.

It will appear from this narration that our expedition to Virginia was not unattended with good results to those whose distresses we were called on to succor. For my own part, I feel that should the sad opportunity again offer itself, the experience I have thus gained would avail for a more satisfactory service than any before rendered.

Respectfully, your friend and servant,

C. H. STEDMAN.

At a meeting of the Boston Society for Medical Improvement, held Sept. 22, 1862, Dr. Bowditch remarked as follows :

“ I desire to bring before the Society a subject of great importance to the future welfare of our wounded soldiers ; although, at first sight, it may not seem exactly appropriate for a meeting of this Society.

“ During my recent visit to Washington with other physicians, summoned there by the Secretary of War, I was brought immediately in contact with the abominable system, or rather no system, of ambulances now in use in our army. The atrocities I saw committed, are, I think, a sufficient reason for bringing the subject before you, in order that, either by the individual effort of the members, or by the united action of the Society, public opinion may be made so strong as to force the Government to devise some plan more in accordance with common humanity, and more truly military in its discipline.



“ On the evening of Friday, Sept. 5, at the request of the surgeon-general, I joined an ambulance train that was just starting to go to the relief of our starving and wounded men, near Centreville. There was a train of fifty carriages. I subsequently learned that three of the drivers, afraid of entering the enemy's lines, escaped with their ambulance wagons before we reached Long Bridge. This was easily accomplished, as there was no escort; and, as it subsequently appeared, no power to prevent such an event. It is true that an army-surgeon accompanied and gave general directions to the train, but he was in the first wagon, and could not know what was doing towards the end of the long train. I soon perceived that the drivers were men of the lowest character, evidently taken from the vilest purlieus of Washington, merely as common drivers, and for no other qualification. Their oaths were flaunted forth without the least regard to the presence of superiors, and with a profusion that was really remarkable, even in the vicinity of Washington. The driver of my ambulance became sleepy as the night wore on, and as his zigzag course over a Virginia road was rather perilous, and as he informed me that he had been overturned a few weeks previously, I thought it more prudent to drive myself, rather than to allow him to do so. While the moon was up, this was comparatively easy. He accordingly slept inside of the carriage until 3 or 4 A. M.; he then reluctantly again took the reins, because I was unwilling, owing to the darkness, to drive further. His whole deportment during the night showed a disregard for everything save his own comfort.

“ Early in the forenoon, however, appeared on the part of the drivers of nearly one half the train, a total want of discipline, and a forgetfulness of the object and character of our mission, that seemed to me atrocious. Suddenly, I perceived one half of the train was stopping, and all the drivers leaving their carriages, rushed into an adjacent field, and there spent some minutes in stoning and shaking the trees in an apple and

peach orchard; and all this in the presence of part of the family of a Virginia planter! These individuals made no resistance. They apparently thought it would be of no use; for over all this road had the two armies swept again and again. In vain I pleaded that we were breaking the sacredness of the flag of truce, — that we richly deserved death for plundering private property. In vain I urged the inhumanity of leaving our suffering, starving soldiers, in order to fill their own greedy stomachs. I appealed to one of the three leaders who rode on horseback, and pretended to be the leaders of the train. He only smiled a smile of ineffable contempt, and munched his stolen apple with perfect *nonchalance*. Meanwhile the flag of truce was lost afar off in the distance, and our party was obliged to drive, for some time, with great rapidity in order to overtake it. Just as my carriage started, a heavy stone struck it not very far from my head. It had evidently been hurled, and *justly* hurled, at us for our infamous conduct. I remarked that hereafter I should know why our ambulances were fired upon by the enemy. The only answer I obtained was an oath.

“About mid-day we arrived, and found our men in a most piteous condition, lying everywhere, inside and outside of every building connected with a small farm-house. The negro-quarters was a palace, — the manure-heap was a soft bed. The fairest place was under a wide-spreading tree. I found the drivers did not feel it to be their duty to help the sufferers, but sulked, or swore, or laughed, as it pleased each. On the following morning, it is true, I did persuade my own driver to bring to me water, as I was dressing the wounds of the soldiers; but it was difficult even to get that, and he aided me because I asked him to do so, and not because he had any heart in the work.

“On Saturday, P. M., we started for Washington, — all the sick having been arranged in different ambulances, under charge of various surgeons. That night I shall never forget. I had taken one of those most severely wounded under my own



special charge. The ball had passed into his chest, and caused intense difficulty of breathing. He was a German, and one of the most uncomplaining of sufferers; and his broken words of gratitude for the slightest token of kindness, were most touching. None but a brute could have failed to be kind to him. He could lie only on one side, and consequently his head was placed directly behind my driver. During the first part of the way, I did not think that the driver paid the least attention to the road with reference to the comfort of the patient. In early night, his tongue ran glibly on in loud, indifferent talk, or the vilest profanity, — thus preventing all sleep. As the night progressed, I was distressed to find that the whiskey, with which he probably had supplied himself, was having its usual soporific effect, and he fell back upon the panting form of my patient. I lifted him up, and told him I could not allow such treatment of the sick man. The only response I got was a muttered oath of “men complaining,” &c. But it was all in vain. Again and again did he fall back, until at last I took the reins, and drove most of the night with one hand, while with the other I supported this snoring drunkard!

“Of course, I repeated all these facts in a letter to the Surgeon-General. He assured me that I could not tell him anything new — that he had, months since, foretold to the Secretary of War the horrors, that would occur with such a set of wretches as usually were found in a body of ambulance drivers — that he had vainly endeavored to obtain *some system*, but there was none now. The whole of the ambulances are under the Quartermaster’s department. He (the Surgeon-General,) had not the control of a single carriage. All his efforts had been in vain.”

“I want now,” continued Dr. Bowditch, “through this Society, to create a public sentiment that will compel the Government to attend to this matter, and to have a real ambulance corps. Dr. Hammond (the Surgeon-General) is not wedded to any plan; but he has suggested the appointment of six am-

balances to each regiment, and three men to each ambulance, viz: one driver and two assistants. The latter would take the wounded, in a careful, methodical manner, from the field. This would prevent, in some measure, the soldiers from leaving their ranks, and would likewise be more humane for the wounded. All the corps would be under strict military discipline. But I repeat, all that is desired is, that some plan be adopted. Now all is chaos. I make no motion on this matter, but leave these facts before the Society, hoping that they will, in some way, tend to relieve our suffering soldiers."

Dr. J. Mason Warren moved that Dr. Bowditch be requested to reduce his remarks to writing, and that the facts be laid before the public in the journals of the day.

Dr. H. W. Williams moved that Dr. Bowditch be a Committee to report some plan of address to the Secretary of War, to be sent by the physicians of Massachusetts, in furtherance of some plan for the establishment of a United States Ambulance Corps.

S. L. ABBOTT, *Chairman of Meeting.*

FRANCIS MINOT, *Secretary.*



## B

MR. WILSON, OF MASSACHUSETTS :

“THE Committee on Military Affairs and the Militia, to whom was referred the bill (A. R. No. 719,) in relation to Military Hospitals and to organize an ambulance corps, have instructed me to report it back with a recommendation that it do not pass. I will not make the motion for its indefinite postponement, but let it go on the table.

“I will simply say that this bill has passed the House of Representatives, and the Committee on Military Affairs have considered it with a great deal of care. There is great interest in the country in regard to it, but we think it an impracticable measure to organize such a corps at this time.”

[In the Senate, February 24, 1863.]

*From Washington Globe.*

## C

NEW YORK, February 21, 1863.

HENRY I. BOWDITCH, M. D., Boston.

MY DEAR SIR: I owe you an apology for my long delay in replying to your letter of the 2d, but it was mislaid, and I could not conveniently reply without the letter before me.

You ask me —

“1st. Is there at present any uniform ambulance system in the army of the United States?”

There is not, unless quite recently introduced.

“2d. Do you deem *any system* necessary?”

Clearly so. I think that any general officer who has served with troops in the field will declare such a system as essential, not only in regard to the comfort of sick and wounded, but to secure efficiency.

3d. Should the men in the ambulance corps be detailed soldiers, taken from time to time from the ranks; or should they be men enlisted for the purpose and taught their especial duties?

There are many self-evident objections to the system of taking men temporarily from the ranks for this duty; they need instructions in their peculiar functions, as well as the ordinary discipline, and should have a distinctive uniform. I am of the opinion that men should be enlisted especially for duty in the ambulance corps.

4th. Do you think the establishment of such a corps would increase the number of non-combatants?

I think it would *decrease* the number of non-combatants especially during battles.

In conclusion, I would beg to repeat what I have previously said to you in substance, that is, that I regard the formation of a well organized ambulance corps as one of the great desiderata for our armies.

Again, expressing my regret that I have so long delayed replying to your letter,

I am dear sir, very truly yours,

GEORGE B. McCLELLAN,

*Major-General U. S. A.*





