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THE
RECIPROCAL RELATIONS
OF
PHYSICIANS AND CLERGYMEN:
A Speech,

DELIVERED AT THE ANNIVERSARY DINNER OF THE

"New-York Society for the Relief of Widows & Orphans of Medical Men,"

On Wednesday, Nov. 17th, 1847.

BY THE REV. JOHN M. KREBS, D.D.

NEW-YORK:
PRINTED BY HENRY LUDWIG, 70 VESEY-STREET.

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ADDRESS.

The following sentiment having been offered,

"7. The kindred professions, Divinity, Law, and Physic, alike founded for the protection and advancement of human welfare; may they never be diverted from their true and holy calling."

DR. KREBS arose and said,

MR. PRESIDENT, AND GENTLEMEN :

In rising to respond to the generous sentiment to which you have just given expression, I find myself in a position which may be best defined by one half of a familiar anecdote. Charles II. one day inquired of Dr. South, how it happened that he who preached so much elsewhere, *without notes*, always *read* his sermons before the Court? The reply was to the effect that he felt embarrassed by the presence of such an august assembly, and therefore needed the help of his manuscript. I need not recite the counterpart of the story.

In the midst of such an intelligent assembly of professional men as this, I will not attempt to speak entirely *impromptu*, especially if I should enter upon the graver themes suggested by your toast, on which the Committee have requested me to say something. Not that I am conscious of any mere, ordinary, post-prandial restraints upon the "liberty of speech:" for notwithstanding the abundant provocations to appetite, furnished by your hospitable board, there is to me a greater attraction still, in this opportunity, if I may use a hackneyed quotation, of "the feast of reason and the flow of soul." *Apropos* to which, however, I may observe, Mr. President, that the present practical illustration of the comprehensiveness of your *dietetics*, and of the range and resources of the *materia medica*, is much more palatable than your prescriptions commonly prove. Indeed, laymen, in which class I must include myself in relation to your profession, on being first initiated into this department of the *mysteries* of the *ars medicandi*, and instructed in these *esoterics* of the *penetralia*, might almost suspect that that proverb is true, "Physicians are shy of taking their own medicines." And we might farther apprehend that, as the acquisition of knowledge is often attended with penalties, so our mingling with you to-night, upon *your* invitation, may, in turn, be followed to-

morrow, by the very unpleasant necessity of inviting you to return our visit, in a considerably less attractive capacity than that in which you now appear.

But to return to my purpose. Shielding myself, for the first time in my life, under the authority of a "*Churchman*;"—lest I should be in the predicament of that unlucky scholar, who, in losing his library, lost all his learning,—I shall take the liberty, awkward as it may seem, to refer, as far as I may have need, to some notes of deliberate opinions which I have jotted down, in anticipation of this occasion.

MR. PRESIDENT: It becomes me hardly more to acknowledge, on behalf of the profession to which I belong, the tribute you have rendered, than to recognise, as to your own honor, your just appreciation of the kinsmanship of these professions, and of the position we occupy, in the relations we sustain to medical men. You are professors of the healing art. We also are physicians, graduates of a high school. *Yours*, prominently, is the aim and duty of relieving the pains and sicknesses of the body. *Ours*, prominently, is the aim and duty of healing the maladies of the soul, applying a salutary balm to the wounded conscience, binding up the broken-hearted, and comforting all that mourn. With remedies prescribed and furnished by the Great Physician, we dare to undertake even such desperate cases as the physician, in *Macbeth*, confessed were immedicable by him,—

"——— to minister to minds diseased;

Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow;

Rase out the written troubles of the brain;

And, with some sweet oblivious antidote,

Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff,

Which weighs upon the heart."

Yea, in that inevitable hour which comes to all, when a higher Wisdom and Omnipotence baffles all the wisdom and the skill of man, it is ours still, to stand by the bier and the tomb, and to check the premature boasting of death and the grave, by suggesting and cherishing the hope that, even

"Those ruins shall be built again,
And all that dust shall rise."

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality, and then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, *Death is swallowed up in victory!* Sir, that is a noble illustration and magnificent triumph of this higher medicine, that as sin brought death into the world, so there is a remedy for death itself and a victory even over the devouring grave!

In these kindred pursuits, we are often associated with you, as it is meet, in the chambers of sickness and the house of mourning. And, it is appropriate to meet you here, amid festivities which relate to that most important part of pure and undefiled religion, which is to visit the fatherless children and widows in their affliction. We are related to you also, as members respectively of professions, which are bound in mutual sympathy, by the ties of that liberal education and those comprehensive studies, which so indispensably subserve the highest purposes of both.

And here now, perhaps, I ought to stop. And I will stop, unless it shall be perfectly agreeable to you, that I should claim your attention for a little longer than has sufficed for the mere exchange of courtesies, and the acknowledgment of a complimentary toast, while I would offer some remarks at which I hinted, growing out of the relations of the professions to each other, and which are suggested by the expressive sentiment to which I have risen to respond.

And now, sir, since you so cordially consent to my holding you by the button, our salutations being exchanged, I propose that the physicians and the clergymen shall hold a little free and friendly conversation together. And it is pertinent to the relation in which we stand to each other, and to our association with you to-night, to refer to the *distinctiveness* of our respective spheres, and to notice some points, in which we are equally in danger of intruding or trenching upon the province of the other.

Let me allude, in the first place, and with all candor and respect, to this liability on the part of the physicians.

It has sometimes occurred, for example, that from gentlemen of the medical profession, (as indeed of other pursuits,) there has emanated an influence—not always designed, indeed, but possibly the contrary—an influence which has tended to undermine the authority, and to undervalue the importance, of divine revealed truths. I do not refer to the insidious attacks which have sometimes been made, in scientific works, upon the divine authority of the Holy Scriptures; nor yet to the alleged tendency of your studies to materialism and infidelity. Sir, if it be true that “an undevout astronomer is mad,” it is equally true, that an undevout physician is mad also. And, however it may be with some, who would gladly shield their infidelity by pleading the character or sentiments of the medical profession, as such, I deem such an allegation to be a slander upon your body. I will not, I cannot believe that this is a necessary characteristic of the pursuits of the men of your profession. There is no such right tendency in your researches into nature, but the contrary. How can it be that, in exploring the construction of this frame, so “fearfully and wonderfully made,” any man should not find in it the handiwork of that God whom His word reveals as its Creator, and even in the total cessation of all the life and functions of that curious machinery, which the knife reveals in the exanimate form, the irresistible proof that it must once have been instinct with a spiritual soul? There are too many, both among dead and living physicians, who have both submitted themselves fully to the authority of the Divine word, and contributed to illustrate it by direct labors, and by the cordial and constant recognition of it in all their investigations, and too many of kindred spirit here this night, I trust, to allow the calumnious allegation to live. We, sir, feel our indebtedness to the researches of men of scientific pursuits, not only for the materials they have furnished us, for the illustration of divine truth, but for the direct aid they have given us, when they rallied by our side, in repelling, avowedly and successfully, “the oppositions of science, falsely so-called.” Sir, can we ever forget such names as Cuvier, and Davy, and John Mason Good? And we freely acknowledge and hail, as we profoundly ap-

preciate, the minute researches and the testimonies which have been unfolded for *our* appreciation and employment too, by the distinguished philosopher* whom I see before me, whose interesting lectures are now instructing our citizens—whom we were glad to welcome to our shores, when we expected him but as a visitor, and whom, now announcing his intention to become a denizen of our country, we the more cordially welcome, not only as reflecting honor upon his native land, and conferring honor upon this land of his adoption, but as belonging to the world and to mankind.

I have rather intended, in my thoughts, to refer to those occasional instances, even in accomplished authorship, of the semi-professional utterances of sentiments that tended to the disparagement of the supremacy and sufficiency of the Divine word, and to the practical undervaluing otherwise, of the great and solemn truths which are its peculiar theme. That injustice has sometimes been done, in making free with great names, is less serious than the injustice to great truths with which those names are identified. Now, sir, your opinions have deserved influence. How important is it, in such a day as this, of the wild vagaries of sciolism, the cunning artifices of imposture, the charlatan impudence of empiricism in all the departments and professions of human life, and the fanaticism of obstinate error and of rampant infidelity, that your influence should all be on the side of sound doctrine and saving knowledge. I by no means object against men, of other professions, investigating even the most sacred truths of that word, with whose dispensation and exposition *we* are specially intrusted; nor examining into the principles, nature, and power of its precepts. We invite inquiry. We dread far more men's indifference than their keenest inspection, and, least of all, the discoveries of true science. Whatever she discloses we hail, and, fearing nothing, appropriate it all. We claim no monopoly; we assert no arrogant pretensions; we would assume no *ex cathedra* airs; we would cherish no superstition that shuns the light; we approve of no blind submission of mental indolence and apathy; and we repudiate all imputations of bigotry, while we would stand unflinching by the standard of Eternal Truth, and hold fast, as with the grasp of death, to that which has been tried and found good, and established on impregnable foundations; and would warn all men to beware, with what intent they touch our holy things, that they may lay no profane hand upon the ark of God.

Is this bigotry? Is it indolent hatred of the light? Is it hostility to active thought and free inquiry? And is a certain jealous exclusiveness, with respect to the forms and agencies of error, nothing but a fit theme for the thread-bare sneer, that "orthodoxy is my doxy and heterodoxy is other men's doxy?" Sir, there is such a thing as orthodoxy, as there ought to be, elsewhere than in the pulpit; and it is upheld and guarded by a conservatism as jealous as any you see at church. Mr. President, I appeal to you and to the honorable members of the medical profession. *You will not acknowledge empiricism;*

* Professor Agassiz.

you will not surrender the truths which have been established by the experience of ages of trial, and are strengthened and defended by the monuments which every generation of skill in medical practice has reared around them, to the first summons of rash innovation, and to the clamors of insolent adventure and hazardous pretence; notwithstanding, though you need not this vindication from me, you welcome all true discoveries of true science, and all the accumulating results of patient experiment, and daily pursue that experiment yourselves, and adopt them into your systems of well-proved rules of practice. You will not countenance quackery, in any form, not even by condescending to hold consultations with its practitioners. Why, then, should *we* be deemed guilty, if we are equally firm in our adherence to a system of truths, which have relation to the highest destinies of men; which are not the result of human excogitations, the elaborations and developments of slow, and oft uncertain, inquiry in the dissecting-room, the laboratory, or the mine; but which sprung forth, complete and sure, from the radiant throne of the Eternal Light, all fitted to become the guide of our footsteps, and the lamp to illumine our path, by the appointment of the God of Heaven himself!

And, as for intellectual sluggishness, for lethargic, credulous submission to stereotyped opinions and worn-out creeds, and for hostility to free and active thought, we appeal to the books we have written, and to the constant activity and mental efforts of unremitting public instructions, and to the "midnight lamp," which symbolizes *our* vigils too, parallel with your frequent discomfort, in being interrupted of sleep and called untimely from your slumbers, by the sudden but irresistible appeal of them that suffer on the bed of disease. And what themes are those which stimulate us to intellectual industry, and serve us in stimulating the minds of our hearers to the same healthful activity—which require of us to ransack all nature, and to appropriate all science for their illustration—which involve the most amazing interests—and that, in their own intrinsic dignity, justify, as they claim and receive, the lofty meditations of the angels of God, who "desire to look into these things?" No, sir! the sublime theology and anthropology of the Bible makes *thinkers* of the men who grapple with it, and meditate upon its awful mysteries. And it is this which has dispersed the darkness, and taken off the chain that restrained the human mind. If there is intellectual or civil freedom in the world, it is the *Truth* which has made men free.

I would but advert again to the tendency to undervalue the great interests with which we are charged, which I find in a rule of medical ethics adopted by some physicians, whereby ministers are excluded or restrained in our intercourse with the sick. They would not have us to discharge our office fully, just when it becomes most pressingly important, lest, implying the actual danger, we should produce injurious excitement, and retard or utterly prevent the possible recovery of the patient. And they will not themselves disclose the certainty of impending death, nor allow us to do so. Is this right? is it honest? is it kind? And are we cruel, if we would tell the truth to the dying man, when it may be, that that truth involves his only hope of dying in peace? I know the importance of sustaining the sick with the influence of

that hope which, though it may be but as a spider's web, may be cherished while there is life : but something must be left to our prudence, and something, too, accorded to our experience. We have seen the sick and the dying soothed, and the work of the medical man helped, by the introduction into the sick room, of the themes of the gospel, in religious conversations and prayers, and the enlivening influences of that hope which maketh not ashamed. And doubly useful and doubly happy is that physician who, like some that I have known, can do the work of a minister in the chambers of disease ; and often, in circumstances where ministers could not gain access at all. *This is no intrusion* into our sphere.

But now, sir, though I fear I have trespassed too long already, allow me to turn, on the other hand, to some of the instances in which the clergyman may trench upon the sphere of the physician. I select but two for a few more minutes' animadversion. One is where the clergyman undertakes to play the physician's part. We are benevolent and wish to do good. A kindly nature sympathizes with the suffering ; and everybody has a propensity, as strong as original sin, to prescribe for the sick. It is a hazardous business, even when suggesting "old women's remedies." It is the physician's business to prescribe ; and he is often needed, if it be but to tell us that we do not need him—a piece of advice as worthy of a fee, as when we "pay the doctor for a nauseous draught." And when he is in attendance, our unwise zeal to do good may lead us to the violation of all etiquette, I ought rather to say all decency, like thrusting our opinion into a consultation to which we were not invited, by injurious interference, by disparaging suggestions and criticisms ; and I have even heard of clergymen *proposing a substitute for the family physician!* And even if this length be not reached, it is quite possible to do much harm, by a bare ominous shake of the head, which, like Lord Burleigh's, often means a great deal, and in performing which, the clergyman looks almost as sagacious as the doctor, when he shakes *his* head, or sniffs the perfume of his gold-headed cane, and looks wise. When my physician is called in to me, or to mine, we are in his hands. I allow no interference of nurse or visitor. And, as I would not detract from the confidence with which I employ him, so should no man, whether layman or clergyman, do aught that may hinder the practice, or weaken the confidence of a patient or his friends in an attending physician, especially when, perhaps, for aught we know, life and death are trembling on their most critical poise.

The other point is akin to that just noticed. I refer to the ready endorsement, by clergymen, of puffed specifics, panaceas, and legions of various inventions, surpassing all the marvels of that most marvellous *inventor*, Ferdinand Mendez Pinto. Truly, if we are to believe all that is certified to us every day, the doctors may shut up shop, the undertakers will soon be bankrupt, and the world will have no occasion to deplore the failure of that romantic expedition of Ponce de Leon to Florida, in search of the "Fountain of Youth ;" nor the fruitless search of the alchemists for the "Philosopher's Stone," and the "Elixir of Immortal Life." I have seen a string of ministers' names appended to recommendations and certificates, in newspapers and pam-

phlets, thrust in at your doors, of all sorts of healing inventions, of which they *could* know little or nothing, but from some superficial observation, some isolated case, some report of others, or some mere intuition of credulity. Perhaps somebody, unable to pen a decent advertisement, has sent a box of patent pills, or a bottle of some harmless-looking syrup, compounded of we know not what, nor in what proportions, nor by whom, or what his qualifications are; but it is tried—the *dernier ressort*; and, *presto*—it worked like a charm! The disease is gone!—and forthwith comes forth an endorsement of—what not? “But,” some one will say, “have we not read the pamphlet? and did we not see the cure? and must we not trust the evidence of our own eyes?”—No; not always. Sometimes the liberal gullet will take in not only one little “powder, pill, or potion,” but with equal facility, will swallow a *whole system*! Any new thing, though it would seem the veriest charlatantry, and its *caveat*, “Beware of Counterfeits,” is too often a warning advertisement of its own imposture, while, at best, it is sustained by too few and distant cures to give it claim to confidence, and the scores of injuries and failures which belong to its unwritten history, are kept out of view, or hid in the grave,—no matter what it is, or whence it is, may come up, and you will find some good man or good minister to endorse it. Now I object to this, and protest against it: not because I would here pronounce for or against rival pills or rival systems, but simply because the questions of life and health are too important to be tampered with, on the mere recommendations of those whose studies have not embraced these things, and demand the highest prudence and caution, even of those who have been bred up to these delicate decisions. Once, our Master gave the gift of healing to his ministers: but they have not got it now. And primitive antiquity is no more to be plead here, than it is in some other things which belong to no permanent arrangement, and are left to occasions and emergencies.

Sir, the people confide in our prudence and intelligence. We have great influence. Our very choice of a physician will sometimes guide their choice. Hence there is need of the greatest caution how we recommend anything, or man, or book, or system of medicine, of which we are so likely to be the most incompetent judges in the world. We can, all of us, be easily imposed on by cunning, or by impudent professional seeming, and by our own honest intentions, and by the impulses of a mercurial temperament, and perhaps, by the vanity of affecting to know a little of everything. I have often thought it very desirable, that among the excellent provisions for instruction in our seminaries, there were in each of them—the Law School, the Medical College, and the Divinity Hall—a special endowment of a professorship of Common Sense. We, of all men, need to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

Mr. President, bear with me, while in conclusion I introduce a little story I have somewhere read. There was once a parish notoriously addicted to sleeping in church. They might have sat for Hogarth's picture. We ministers are sometimes afflicted in this way; but we are in good company; for I once saw a juror with his head thrown back and sound asleep, under the eloquent argument, and full in the

eye, of one of the most accomplished lawyers, statesmen and orators of our country. It almost seemed to me as if I could see him snore. All the physicians will admit, and I have had your high authority for it, not an hour ago, sir, and have often had that of my friend, over there, Dr. Griscom, who, you know, is great on the whole subject,*—that this infirmity of congregations is often induced by many causes independent of any soporific influence from the pulpit. I will not say, however, that *we* may not be occasionally chargeable with administering, in our discourses, a homœopathic dose or two of morphine. But to my story. There was a half-witted man in the parish, who had often observed the indecorous and unseasonable slumbers of the congregation. Accordingly, one drowsy summer afternoon, he posted himself in the gallery, opposite the pulpit, armed with a hatful of apples, none too sound, and therefore not likely to hurt anybody, at least, on being administered externally. The preacher looking up, for a moment, beheld him nicely poising one of the missiles, and just ready to let it drop into the open mouth of a sleeper just below. Not approving this novel and ingenious method of assisting the “awakening” power of his sermon, notwithstanding the auxiliary might be justified by the pantomime of classical times, who stood upon the stage and performed the appropriate gesticulation to the words of the speaker, the preacher interrupted his discourse, calling the people to beware of this new *appellant* for their attention, and sharply rebuked the man for his unseemly behaviour. The delinquent, at once, bracing himself up, looked full in the preacher’s face, and thus vented his indignation:—“Sir, mind you your preaching, and let me alone to keep these sleepy dogs awake!” Mr. President, I do think, I am verily persuaded, that the intelligent and respectable members of the medical profession, might justly say to some of ours, “Gentlemen, please to mind your preaching, and do not meddle with our work of healing the sick.”

Sir, at the commencement of these remarks, I said something about the “feast of reason and the flow of soul.” I have to apologize for this *overflow* of mine, while I thank you for the patience with which you have endured it. And I can only express the hope that you may not have too much “reason” to complain of it, as “one, weak, washy, everlasting flood.”

Allow me to offer this sentiment:—

“*The medical profession*—which has attained its high eminence by diligent devotion to science; and which, by rejecting no genuine improvement, but taking the lead in patient experiment and intelligent research, at the same time stands firm to the principles which long experience has proved; in the hour of sickness, we turn to that tried integrity and skill, which, under God, invite our fullest and safest confidence.”

* The Doctor’s valuable suggestions, and his zeal upon the subject of ventilation, have exposed him, in some quarters, to the charge of monomania on that point. If he is “mad,” I wish, with all my heart, he would “bite” some of our ecclesiastical architects.





