ORATION

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

Medical and Chirurgical Faculty

OF

MARYLAND,

At their Annual Meeting in Baltimore,

JUNE 3, 1858,

BY

SAMUEL CHEW, M. D.,

Professor of the Principles and Practice of Medicine, and of Clinical Medicine,

IN THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND.

Omnibus bonis in rebus conatus in laude, effectus in casu est: et sicut ad pœnam sufficit meditari punienda, sic et ad laudem satis est conari prædicanda.—APULEIUS. *Florida*, 20.

BALTIMORE:
PRINTED BY HEDIAN & PIET,
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BALTIMORE, JUNE 5, 1858.

Dear Sir:

The undersigned have been appointed a Committee by the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of Maryland, to tender to you the thanks of the Faculty for the very eloquent and able address delivered before them on the occasion of their late anniversary session, and to request a copy of the same for publication.

Very truly, yours, &c.,

J. GILMAN, M. D.,
H. M. WILSON, M. D.,
W. H. DIFFENDERFFER, M. D.,
Committee.

PROF. SAMUEL CHEW, M. D.

BALTIMORE, JUNE 6, 1858.

Gentlemen:

I have just received your obliging communication of June the 5th. The address to which you so kindly refer, was prepared hastily and with no view to publication. Such, however, as it is, I submit it, of course, to the disposal of the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty.

With great respect for the Society which you represent, and for yourselves personally, I am, gentlemen,

Very truly, your obedient servant,

SAMUEL CHEW.

J. GILMAN, M. D., H. M. WILSON, M. D., W. H. DIFFENDERFFER, M. D.,

Committee.

ORATION.

Mr. President and Gentlemen :—The present annual meeting of our Society is an occasion of more than ordinary interest. The building in which we assemble to-day for the first time, is one which has recently become the property of our Association. We have heretofore had no fixed and regular place of convocation. To-day we inaugurate a wiser and better arrangement of our polity. From to-day we are prepared, as a body, to experience the happiness ascribed by the wandering hero of the Roman Epic to those who possess a local habitation, "*Fortunati quorum jam mœnia surgunt.*" The hall in which we are now gathered together will probably be the usual, or perhaps the constant, place of all our future meetings. May its use be auspicious to the best interests of our fraternity! Happy for us all if its name be hence-forward associated in our minds with recollections of the knowledge, the good sense, the urbanity of deportment, and the friendly and cordial feelings which should subsist among the members of a scientific, liberal, and honorable profession.

Of our common possessions, this building, with our library and its other contents, is the least important—the one which we might lose with least regret. And, indeed, if, instead of this plain and humble hall, we possessed a lyceum equal to the most beautiful and stately of those palaces erected by the genius of Vitruvius or Palladio; if, instead of our useful but limited collection of books, we owned a library of Alexandrian or Bodleian amplitude; even such possessions would be of but trivial value in comparison with others which we hold in common as members of the medical profession. We hold in common other possessions of higher account than any material property. We hold in common the reputation of our profession, and the reputation, the well-being, and the future prospects of our professional science. These things have come down to us as an inheritance from our predecessors,—as a sacred trust consigned to our keeping, to be transmitted, unimpaired and unsullied, to those who shall succeed us. The nature of such an inheritance, of such a trust, it behooves every physician to understand; and it may therefore, on an occasion like the present when we are met to consult for the welfare and honor of our Faculty, be not inappropriate or unseasonable to turn our attention to this subject. To

those who are engaged with proper feelings in the study and practice of medicine, the reputation of the medical profession and the condition of medical science can never be an argument destitute of interest.

By the reputation of our profession, I mean that character and credit which physicians have held among their contemporaries, not for professional ability alone, but also for general learning, for integrity, probity, benevolence, beneficence, or for any other qualities, good or bad, by which they are distinguished as a class from other classes of men, or from men engaged in other pursuits.

The members of our profession possess, and must always have possessed, a certain common or general character. Those who are long engaged in the same occupation become necessarily, after a time, more or less assimilated to each other in both physical and mental habits. *Abeunt studia in mores.* We witness this effect in many of the other walks of life. We observe it in the case of divines, of lawyers, of soldiers, of artists, of merchants. Each of these classes is found to be more or less distinguished from all others by peculiar traits of character;—traits which, whether good or evil, are evidently produced by the influence of their professional pursuits. Of each class it is true that their turn of mind and modes of thinking and acting are affected and modified by the nature of their habitual occupation.

The professional character of physicians has long been distinctly marked and generally recognized. It is one for which we have no cause to blush. It is one which, in its predominant features, may be contemplated with just and rational satisfaction. It is not my business or purpose to extol that character. What we have been made by our speculative studies and practical pursuits, is a subject which may be more appropriately treated by any other speaker than a physician. When Matthew Prior, the English poet, was viewing the apartments at Versailles, with the victories of Louis the 14th painted on the walls, he was asked if the palace of the King of England, the heroic William the 3d, had any such decorations. "The monuments of my master's actions," he replied, "are to be seen every where except in his own house." In the same spirit, we may prefer to have the praises of our professional character proclaimed any where rather than among ourselves, and by any tongue rather than by our own. And we may the more readily forego this subject when we recollect that some of the wisest and most illustrious members of the other learned professions,—some of those best qualified to judge what physicians ought to be and what they are,—have been the most emphatic of our eulogists. We may safely be silent when we have such advocates as Johnson, Temple, and Parr to speak in our behalf and celebrate our merits.

Waving therefore the consideration of this topic, we may find in the character of that department of philosophy which we study and practice, a subject of a less exceptionable nature, one which we may speak of with less reserve, and one which equally comes home to our business and bosoms. Let me then solicit your attention to a few desultory remarks on the present condition and future prospects of medical science.

On the very threshold of this inquiry we are met by a statement which has of late been so often repeated, that it begins by some to be considered as fully proved and established,—as a truth which can be called in question only by those who are either heedless observers or deficient in candor. We are gravely told, that the general confidence once reposed by mankind in the science of medicine, as professed and practiced by physicians, has, within the last few years, been disturbed and shaken, and is now greatly impaired; that there is at present a very general distrust of the efficacy and utility of that science; that there are many who consider it dangerous and injurious; and that there is a large and increasing number of persons who believe that there are other methods of treating diseases, differing essentially from those employed by physicians, which are more safe, more rational, and more successful.

These assertions are so contrary to my own observations, and to the experience and judgment of the ablest of those with whom I have conversed, that I should be inclined to regard them with indifference and contempt. Yet, as they are frequently heard, and as their truth has been recently admitted by one of the most distinguished American writers on medicine, it would, perhaps, be scarcely proper to pass them by without notice. An examination of them would appear also to belong properly to our present inquiry, since the condition of our science must be judged of by reference not only to what it is, but also to what it is supposed to be.

Is it true, then, that the community have less faith at present than they had formerly in the utility and value of medical science?

If such be the case, the change appears to be not so considerable as to be plain and manifest to common observation. Some assert it. Some deny it. The facts alleged by some as proving it, are considered by others to prove no such thing, but to be such facts as have existed in former times, and perhaps in all times. It would appear difficult to decide the question by reference to observation and experience. The only other means of solving it, is to inquire whether any cause can be assigned for the supposed revolution in the judgment of the public. If no sufficient cause can be discovered, we may infer with probability that no change has in reality taken place.

The reasons commonly stated for the alleged decline in the reputation of medical science, are either that the science has not been making progress proportionably to the other departments of knowledge, but has remained stationary, or has been moving in a retrograde direction; or that the physicians of the present day are, from defective education or inferior natural endowments, less qualified than their predecessors to inspire the community with respect and confidence; or that better methods have been devised for the treatment of diseases than those employed by the regular physicians; or, finally, that the more general diffusion of knowledge among the people has enabled them to form a more correct and less favorable estimate of our claims, and to detect and understand the imperfections of our science, and the inefficiency or mischievous and fatal errors of our art.

Now, do these causes, all or any of them, exist in such a degree as to account sufficiently for the effect which they are said to have produced?

In the first place, is it to be admitted that medical science has not of late been advancing? Is it true, that while in other branches of knowledge improvements have been taking place either rapidly and brilliantly, or slowly and surely, medicine alone has remained inactive, torpid and hibernating? Is it true that while other speculative and practical pursuits have been more or less constantly increasing their contributions to the service of mankind, medicine alone, effete and incapable of useful exertion, has wrapped her talent in a napkin, and hid it in the earth?

It can hardly be necessary before an audience of well-informed men, and least of all before an audience of medical men, to bestow much attention on this inquiry.

The relative conditions of a science at different periods of its history, can be ascertained only by collating and comparing together the books in which the existing condition of the science in those several periods is recorded and embodied. In the present question, what do we learn by such a comparison? How does the condition of medical science in our age, compare with its condition in former ages?

The reply is obvious. The superiority of the science of the present day is unquestionable. It is unquestionable, whether our retrospect extend all the way across the vast abyss of more than twenty-two hundred years which separates us from the Coan Sage, or whether we revert to a period of but little more than half a century from our own.

It would be difficult, I suppose, to find in the present day any one so blinded by the dust of antiquity, as to avow the opinion that all that is now known in medicine is contained in the tomes of Hippocrates and Galen, or of Sydenham and Boerhaave. It is proper to speak with respect and reverence of those illustrious philosophers. But we must not forget respect and reverence for truth. Some of the early writers on medicine, some, indeed, of the earliest of those whose works have descended to the present time, were men of extraordinary sagacity and vigor of intellect. Their contributions to science constitute noble and imperishable monuments of the power of the human mind to struggle against difficulties, and to make honorable progress in knowledge under the most unfavorable circumstances. But nature cannot be conquered in a single campaign. There are difficulties and obstacles in the pursuit of science harder to be surmounted than those which beset the retreat from Moscow or the storming of the Malakoff. It is no impeachment of the merits of the ancient physicians, to assert that their modern successors have far surpassed them in knowledge, and in the most glorious attribute of knowledge, the power to do good; surpassed them, however, less perhaps by superior abilities than by superior advantages of time and position. "The dwarf,"—to use the apposite illustration of Didacus Stella,—"The dwarf standing on the shoulders of a giant may see farther than the giant himself." The progress of medical science, more perhaps than that of any other kind of knowledge, evinces the justice of Bacon's aphor-

ism, that "*Antiquitas seculi est juventus mundi;* and that these present times are the ancient times when the world is ancient, and not those which we account ancient, *ordine retrogrado*, by a computation backward from ourselves."* Knowledge, like wealth, is accumulated more easily and more rapidly in proportion to the amount already acquired. The genius and industry of the ancients have aided the moderns to excel them in science.

All who are acquainted with the history of medicine know how zealously and ably its recent cultivators have availed themselves of the advantages afforded by the enlarged experience of the profession, and by the improvements of the cognate and collateral branches of knowledge. It is remarked by Bacon, that "Medicine is a science which hath been more professed than labored, and yet more labored than advanced; the labor having been rather in circle than in progression, and with much iteration but small addition."† But this censure, harsh even when first uttered, was pronounced by the great Chancellor more than two hundred years ago; and two hundred years have not passed over our profession, as over the head of the wandering Hebrew, without bringing changes and improvements. The single discovery of the circulation of the blood, announced by Harvey in the reign of Charles the 1st, is of more importance and value—of more scientific interest and more practical utility—than any thing, or than every thing, that had ever before been known in Anatomy or Physiology.

Upon the whole, there seems no ground for doubting that medicine, with all the imperfections and short-comings that it still presents, has, since the days of Bacon, made advances fully equal to the best that have occurred in any other department of knowledge. It can be easily proved that in no other field of research, in no other science, in no other useful art, have the discoveries made in recent times been more important, or the improvements more beneficial to mankind. And it is equally certain that at no other period have these discoveries and improvements been more numerous, more conspicuous, or more valuable than during the last half century.

If, then, the reputation of medical science has been waning during this period, its decline must be referred to some other cause than any impairment of its ability to be useful. We must seek elsewhere for a cause sufficiently potent to produce the change in question, and to produce it notwithstanding the most conspicuous and unquestionable increase in the beneficent power of the science.

Such a cause, it is sometimes said, may be found in the character and qualifications of the physicians of the present day,—their inferior natural abilities and deficient education.

This agreeable and flattering explanation is commonly propounded by persons who have but small claim to be considered judges of mental capacity and culture. It is probably not very often credited even by those who suggest it, and it is certainly wholly unsupported by evidence.

In a profession so crowded as ours, there must always have existed much

* *Advancement of Learning, B.* 1. † *Advancement of Learning, B.* 2.

variety and diversity in the character of its members. Among them there have doubtless been at all times, as there are at present, persons eminent for virtue, learning, wisdom and skill. Associated with these there have also perhaps at all times been others of a different and opposite character. But that the proportion of the worthy to the unworthy members is smaller at present than it was in former periods, cannot be proved. There is no reason for believing that such is the case. There is no reason for believing that among the physicians of the present day, there is less of moral and intellectual excellence than existed among their predecessors. On the contrary, it is probable from various considerations, that the standard of morals and intellect was never at any time higher in our profession than it is at present.

With regard to the power of newly-devised empirical methods of treating diseases to eclipse and degrade the reputation of scientific medicine, it is an old story which physicians have heard so often and so long that it can scarcely at present be expected to make any very violent and painful impressions on their sensibilities.

The only true and rational system of medicine must be founded on knowledge of Anatomy, Physiology and Pathology, and on extensive and accurate observation of the effects of remedial agents. A system resting upon this basis, however imperfect and defective it may be, is yet founded on a rock, and must possess over all systems destitute of such support, infinite and unquestionable advantages. Such a system can have but little to apprehend from the competition of the Natural Bonesetters, the Thomsonians, the Homœopaths, the Hydropaths, the Spiritualists, or the shallow advocates of the other ephemeral follies that are successively springing up to amuse and delude for a time the adult infants of the community, and then pass away and be forgotten.

> "The earth hath bubbles, as the water has,
> And these are of them."

Of each form of charlatanry that in its turn has fluttered above the medical horizon, its prophetic admirers and followers have proclaimed that it would inevitably overthrow and destroy the regular school of medicine. Such predictions have not yet been fulfilled;

> —— "non usque adeo permiscuit imis
> Longus summa dies." ——

Our science has experienced the fortune of Dryden's hind,—"Oft doom'd to death, but fated not to die." It has encountered, without fear and without detriment, stronger and more perilous opponents than any whom it now beholds; and, in spite of all that its present adversaries can do, it will doubtless long continue its onward course, conquering and to conquer, wise with the accumulated experience of many centuries, ardent with the aspirations and energies of perpetual youth, still increasing its power to do good, and still adding to its claims upon the gratitude of mankind.

When I think of the systems of ignorance, empiricism and chicanery that attempt to raise themselves into rivalry with Medical Science, I am reminded of Jotham's aspiring bramble that was willing to be king over the trees, but which will never again be invited to such illustrious eminence. When I contemplate medical science,—what it has so long been, and what it is,—I sometimes liken it to the oak of Marius, celebrated in the lost poem and in the imperishable prose of Tully, as growing stronger as well as more venerable under the weight of years, *canescens sæclis innumerabilibus;* or, sometimes,—if the thought may be allowed,—I image it as presenting some faint but perceptible resemblance to that more sacred tree which grows by the pure river of life, and whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.

In every community there will persons be found who harbor unreasonable and absurd opinions respecting medicine, as respecting other important subjects. This is what a very moderate acquaintance with human nature might prepare us to expect. But such erroneous judgments appear to be neither more common, nor more injurious to the interest and reputation of our profession, at present than in former days. The silly and crotchety notions of ignorance and presumption are dangerous principally to those who entertain them. There was lately a gentleman residing in this city who through the whole of a long life obstinately refused to be vaccinated, alleging as his reason that vaccination is an artifice of fraud and knavery, wholly destitute of protective power, and contrived by physicians merely for their own emolument. This poor gentleman died some two or three months ago of confluent smallpox. The sad effect upon himself of the cardinal article of his creed was sufficiently manifest, but I have not heard that it has as yet destroyed the credit of Jenner's discovery, or put an end to its use.

The study of Jurisprudence is not abandoned because persons are occasionally met with who take advice in matters of law from pretenders and interlopers whose names are unknown to the learned faculty of the Bar. The study of Theology is still cultivated, though there are some who choose to seek counsel in cases of ethics and religion from Muggletonian prophets and Mormon elders. And so, likewise, the science of Medicine is not to be considered in a hopeless condition because there are certain wise people who doubt the abilities of regularly educated physicians, but have full faith in the leechcraft of men whose whole literary and scientific training has been in the art and mystery of coachmen, coblers and tailors.

We shall augur favorably of the prospects of our profession when we consider who are its advocates and who its opponents. It has been remarked of Tillotson, that whoever reads over the names of his friends and of his enemies, will be inclined to rank among the best and most fortunate of mankind the person who was loved by such friends and hated by such enemies. A similar two-fold felicity has fallen to the lot of Medical Science. If we think highly of that science when we reflect on the illustrious men by whom it was founded and advanced, and on the good and wise men in other walks of life who have given it their esteem and confidence, our respect for it will

be still further exalted, when we recollect the character and endowments of those by whom it has been condemned and reviled.

That the general diffusion of knowledge by which the present age holds itself to be so honorably distinguished from all others, has diminished the *prestige* and reputation of medical science, is an opinion often expressed, and one which we hear sometimes from those who are hostile, sometimes from those who are friendly to our profession.

We are told by some that the public have at length become sufficiently enlightened to detect the vanity of our science, and the dangerous nature of our art; that claims and assumptions, which were generally admitted in times of ignorance, are now scrutinized with philosophic skepticism, and rejected with contempt; and that physicians are consequently beginning to experience the fate of their predecessors in deception, the astrologers and alchymists.

Others who regard our profession with more friendly eyes, assure us that the present low estimate of our science is not from the increased intelligence of the age, but rather from the presumption and arrogance that always attend superficial and imperfect knowledge—not because there are more philosophers, but because there are more sciolists in the community.

This latter explanation is the one which we should be most willing to accept. If the credit of medical science have really declined, every physician would prefer to ascribe the change to the *unwisdom* rather than to the wisdom of the age. We should all think it better to be condemned by folly and ignorance than by good sense and sagacity. The meaner the tribunal, the less should we regard the sentence.

In the present case, the supposed unfavorable verdict appears to have been rendered by judges not wholly above exception. This is made probable by the fact that the persons most hostile to the claims of medical science are in general the most strenuous and noisy supporters of empirics and charlatans. The sages, who are too acute, wary and philosophic to trust the wisdom, skill and honesty of men like Andral, Louis, Watson and Latham, are yet found to listen with credulity to illiterate and ignorant imposters; to consult table-rappers with awe and reverence; to swallow infinitesimal globules of charcoal and sugar of milk, and to send locks of their hair to be examined by Mademoiselle Julie, to enable that ingenious young lady, by such exploration of physical signs, to discover that her male patients are suffering from cancer of the uterus, and her female from enlargement of the prostate gland.

It requires but small experience in life to discover that skepticism in relation to medicine, as in relation to other subjects of even higher importance, is not at all more apt to spring from knowledge, sagacity and reflection than from ignorance and imbecility. The fool is fully as prone to be a skeptic as the philosopher—and infinitely more prone in cases where skepticism is erroneous and irrational.*

* L'ignorance a deux filles, l'incredulité et la foi aveugle.—Gibbon, *Essai sur l'etude de la literature.*

In all ages there have been among mankind enough of wisdom and enough of folly to afford a copious theme to those who, according to their respective dispositions, are inclined to admire their contemporaries, or to deride and stigmatize them. How much wiser is the present age than the ages that have gone before it? Who can decide? Our own opinion that we are superior to all former generations, is no absolute proof of that superiority. The same impartial and amiable verdict in its own favor has been rendered by each one of all preceding ages. Æschines, the eloquent rival of Demosthenes, declares that human life in his time had risen above the common lot of mortality, and that he and his contemporaries were born to one end alone,—that posterity, through all the coming centuries, might discourse of their wonderful exploits. Posterity have found other subjects for their admiration and applause.

The generation of the present day certainly understand steamships, railroads, electric telegraphs, the physical arts in general, very much better than their forefathers. But such knowledge is compatible with a very abundant measure of ignorance and absurdity in relation to more important matters. Wisdom is not the only attribute of our time. There are errors still prevalent respecting subjects of the highest moment, that are fully as gross and pernicious as any that obtained in the darkest years of that period, which, as contrasted with the present enlightened era of Mesmerism, of table-moving, of spirit-rapping, of Mormonism, and of Homœopathy, we are accustomed to call the Dark Ages.

In regard to medicine and physicians, the mistakes of mankind appear to have been very much the same in all ages, as in all ages they have arisen from similar weaknesses, prejudices, and perversions of intellect. It has been justly remarked, that "He who wadeth thoroughly in learning or contemplation will find the conviction printed in his heart, that *there is nothing new upon the earth —Nil novi super terram.*"* It is now as difficult perhaps to be original in blunders and follies as in wisdom and wit. Most of the errors of judgment and of conduct in relation to our profession that prevail at present, are "clean past their youth," and have not only "some smack of age in them, some relish of the saltness of time," but are indeed of venerable antiquity. Of this truth, familiar to every one who is conversant with the history of popular opinions, it would be easy to adduce numerous illustrations.

One of the most common complaints made by physicians of the present day against their contemporaries is in relation to the countenance and patronage given to ignorant and dishonest pretenders to medical knowledge, and the neglect of just discrimination between those who have devoted time and labor to the study of medicine and others who have made no such preparation, and whose medical ability, such as it is, has come, like Dogberry's reading and writing, by nature alone. But this is no new grievance. It was familiarly known, lamented and denounced, by our predecessors before the days of steamers and railroads. It has always been the fashion with a part of mankind, —sometimes with persons from whom better judgment might be expected,—to

* Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, *B.* 1.

conclude that the more ignorant and untrained the candidate for medical business, the better necessarily must be his fitness for the treatment of diseases. It was not reserved for the wisdom of the 19th century to be the first to exercise in matters of medicine a faith akin to that of Tertullian and Sir Thomas Browne, and to believe in the skill of charlatans and imposters all the more confidently because it is manifestly impossible that it can exist. It requires but slight acquaintance with the records of the past to show that this heroic creed is no dogma of recent discovery.

In an act of Parliament passed in 1511, the third year of Henry the 8th's reign, we find it commemorated, that "The science and cunning of physic and surgery (to the perfect knowledge whereof be requisite both great learning and ripe experience) are daily within this realm of England exercised by a great multitude of ignorant persons, of whom the greater part have no manner of insight in the same, nor in any other kind of learning; some also ken no letter on the book; so far forth that common artificers, as smiths, weavers, coachmen, and women, boldly and accustomably take upon them great cures and things of great difficulty, in which they partly use sorcery and witchcraft, partly apply such medicines unto the disease as be very noious, and nothing meet therefor; to the high displeasure of God, great infamy to the Faculty, and the grievous hurt, damage, and destruction of many of the king's liege people, most especially of those that cannot discern the cunning from the uncunning."*

Let those who are indignant at the follies of the present age cast their eyes on the picture here presented, and cease to applaud the superior wisdom of antiquity. Let them observe how many absurdities of our day had their exact and perfect types in the days of old. We see the same artificers busy in medicine then as now; the same smiths, weavers, and coachmen; the same women, graduates perhaps, or not graduates, of Female Medical Colleges; the same illiteracy or unacquaintance with letters on the book; the same witchcraft, sorcery, and necromancy; the same reckless boldness to undertake great and difficult cases; and the same consequent hurt, damage, and destruction of human life. The only difference to be observed is, that there is no mention of infinitesimal pills; and that it is hardly possible, at the present time and in our country, to conceive of a legislative body that could venture to speak of charlatans and their craft with such irreverent freedom. How much the world has gained by such improvement in pills, and such refinements and amenities in legislation, is a question for the wise and learned.

If medical science is to be put down and abolished only by the universal prevalence of light and knowledge, it certainly appears to be at this time in no very extreme and immediate danger. Yet while the present generation are not perhaps so immeasurably superior as they may think themselves to all who have gone before them; while there are many still, as there were in the days of the immaculate Defender of the Faith, not exactly qualified to form a correct judgment respecting the claims of the various aspirants after the honors

* *Stat.* 3, Hen. 8, c. 11.

and profits of Medicine, and to "discern the cunning from the uncunning;" and while much of the vaunted knowledge of our time is of that innutritive quality which puffeth up without conferring wisdom and discretion; it must, notwithstanding, be admitted, I think, by all candid observers, that of mental activity, useful information, and real intelligence there is perhaps among several nations of the present age a rather more general diffusion than existed in any former time. And this characteristic of our day we can have no desire to question or dispute, since it must necessarily be propitious to the interests of our profession. It gives us the best reason to believe that the claims of medical science will be justly and favorably estimated. The appeal of that science is not to the ignorant. It is addressed to the cultivated, the intelligent, the thoughtful,—to those who are capable of understanding the inherent difficulties that obstruct the progress of medical knowledge,—to those who, while they know how much remains to be done by physicians, know also how much physicians have already done for the benefit of mankind. It is by this class of men, not by ignorant pretenders to knowledge, not by "the great vulgar or the small," that the merits of our science are to be adjudicated, and its position to be fixed and decided. And by this class,—a class relatively larger and more influential in our age than it ever was in any preceding period,—a decision appears to have been made of which we have no cause to complain. At no other time have the claims of the scientific physician been by the intelligent class of the community more promptly admitted, or his services more gratefully acknowledged, or his science and art more valued and respected.

The judgment of the public in regard to the merits of medical science appears to be in the main sufficiently favorable. How far is that judgment warranted and sustained by the present condition of the science as respects its fitness and power to accomplish the great ends for which it is cultivated?

In considering this question, we shall find much cause for regret, much also for satisfaction, and much for encouragement and hope.

Medicine, both as a science and as an art, is still imperfect and defective. It is a study which must have received attention from the earliest period of human society. It has long been prosecuted with diligence and zeal. It has at all times numbered among its votaries men of distinguished learning and genius. And, notwithstanding this, it must be confessed that its progress, through the greater part of its long career, has been slow and irregular; that its condition is still far inferior to what might be desired; that it is still, as a science, incapable of explaining many things belonging to its province which philosophy would desire to understand; and that it is still, as an art, incapable of doing many things belonging to its province which humanity would desire to see accomplished.

For such tardiness of progress, and such imperfection of result, it is not difficult to account.

It must be remembered, in the first place, as a general consideration, that of useful knowledge of every kind the little that mankind have ever acquired has been acquired slowly and with difficulty. The more valuable the object at

which we aim, the slower and more difficult in general is its acquisition. The sciences of jurisprudence and of government are scarcely less important to the world than the science of medicine. Their importance has been felt and acknowledged in all ages, in all countries, and by all mankind. Yet they have advanced as slowly and irregularly as medicine, and are still fully as remote as medicine from the ideal standard of perfection.

It requires but little reflection to discover that the science of medicine, from its nature and object, is necessarily a study of great and especial difficulty:

——"Pater ipse medendi
Haud facilem esse viam voluit."——

The object of the science is to prevent, to cure, or to mitigate diseases. To accomplish these ends in the best possible manner, requires the possession of varied and extensive knowledge, and the exercise of great and uncommon powers of intellect. The physician must understand the structure and functions of the human body, the most complex as it is the most admirable of all the visible works of the Divine Creator. He must recognize the diversity of constitution and temperament imparted to individuals by nature, or impressed on them by accident or habit. He must be acquainted with all the multitudinous causes, mental and physical, that are capable of throwing the system into disease by changing the texture or deranging the action of its organs. He must be familiar with the nature of those morbid changes and derangements, and be able to detect their existence, and to note their progress and variations. He must know the virtuous powers and uses of that vast array of agents which experience has shown to be capable of exerting remedial influences on the suffering organism. And he must have a mind capacious, acute, provident, logical, not to be agitated by passion, not to be misled by prejudice, not to be deceived by appearances.

Such is the knowledge, such the capacity, requisite for the thorough comprehension and effectual advancement of medical science. Where are such knowledge and such capacity to be found? When we consider the extent and difficulty of the subject of inquiry, and the limited faculties of the human mind, we cease to wonder that medicine has advanced so slowly and is still so imperfect. We are tempted, on the contrary, to forget its deficiencies and failures in admiration of its glorious achievements.

It has been alleged that the modern improvements in our science consist rather in an increased knowledge of the nature and character of diseases than of the art of treating them; and that Therapeutics, if it have advanced at all, has certainly not advanced in proportion to Pathology.

This opinion is often expressed in the spirit either of reproach or of regret; and its truth has been sometimes admitted, without sufficient thought, by physicians themselves. Yet a little consideration will show that it is not only erroneous but absurd.

To the proposition that the advance of Therapeutics has not been proportionate to that of Pathology, we might reply by inquiring, what is the due proportion

that should subsist between those two departments of knowledge. Who can define to us the exact measure of improvement in the method of treating a disease that ought to result from a given amount of increase in our knowledge of its nature? Before we are condemned for not improving our therapeutic skill as successfully as our pathological knowledge, let it be decided how the disparity between the two is to be measured, and how and where the desired point of equality is to be fixed.

But if the statement be made in a looser sense, as expressing the opinion that while Pathology has been much improved by recent researches, Therapeutics has been improved but little, or not at all, or far less than might have been reasonably expected,—and this, I suppose, is what is commonly meant,—the proposition assumes a more intelligible form, but is still erroneous, and must be met by a denial of its correctness and truth.

Therapeutics is the art not merely of *curing* diseases. It is the art of *treating* diseases. In cases where it cannot arrest and remove a disease, it can yet almost always, by proper application of its resources, allay and diminish the pain and distress which the disease is occasioning, and defer the fatal termination to which it is tending. With this correct understanding of its objects, we may justly assert that Therapeutics has been improved—necessarily and signally improved—by the improvements made in Pathology. In almost every instance increased knowledge of the character of a disease has led to some improvement, more or less important, in the method of treating it. Such must of necessity be the case. The pilot is better fitted for his post at the helm by knowing the situation of the rocks and shoals that lie in the course of his ship. The leader of an army is better prepared to hold the truncheon of command by being properly informed respecting the position, arrangement, and strength of his enemies' forces. And, in like manner, the physician cannot be acquainted with the disease which he is called to treat,—its causes, its seat, its nature, its symptoms, its ordinary course and tendencies,—without being, by consequence, the better qualified to treat it properly and skillfully. As we learn more accurately the natural history of diseases, we necessarily understand better what we should do for their relief, and,—what is often fully as important,—what we should forbear to do.

The physician whose science enables him to discover that his patient has a tuberculous cavity in the lungs, or an obstruction at the mouth of the aorta, or a morbid patency of the mitral or tricuspid orifice of the heart, is as unable to accomplish the removal of these lesions and effect the restoration of health, as the ignorant blunderer who finds in the pulmonary disease mere nervousness, and in the cardiac affection mere catarrh. The cure may be equally impossible to both. But how different will be the treatment! How much relief may be afforded by knowledge! How much misery may be inflicted by ignorance! Knowledge may soothe the patient's sufferings, prolong his life, and render life tolerable and even comfortable. Ignorance may condemn him unnecessarily to painful, dangerous and destructive methods of treatment; may expose him unnecessarily to the brunt of lancets, cups, leeches, blisters, and cauteries;

may subject him unnecessarily to the penalties of mercurial salivation; or may bind him to the muzzle of some other of the heavy artillery of the Materia Medica, —a situation sometimes scarcely less terrible than that to which British humanity has consigned her Hindoo captives,—and may thus cause him to suffer more severely and perish more speedily by the pretended remedy than he would have done by the disease.

The recent improvements in practical Medicine have resulted principally from increased knowledge of Physiology and of Morbid Anatomy, and have been manifested partly in the better treatment and partly in the more successful prevention of diseases.

To recount these improvements in detail would be a long and tedious task, and on this occasion, and before the present audience, it is wholly unnecessary. The subject is familiar to all physicians, and a brief and cursory glance at it will be sufficient.—Only a few particulars need be enumerated.

We all know that the frightful devastations of Small Pox have been in a great measure arrested, and that Scurvy, long the terror and scourge of navigation, has been so subjected to the control of art that its occurrence may now be prevented with almost absolute certainty. These invaluable improvements were made somewhat more than half a century ago. If we descend to a more recent period, and observe the progress of our science during the last fifty years, we shall be struck by other important changes. We shall find that during this period the natural history of diseases has been studied with a degree of industry and success never before equaled, and that Diagnosis has consequently attained a precision and accuracy formerly unknown. We shall find that the process of inflammation is better understood, and inflammatory diseases more successfully treated; that the nature and structural lesions of continued fever have been more satisfactorily investigated, and its varieties more accurately determined; that the treatment of malarious fevers has been signally improved by the early and active employment of anti-periodic remedies, especially the Salts of Quinia; that mental insanity is treated more humanely, more judiciously, and more successfully; that chemistry and the microscope have thrown new light upon the character and treatment of several important diseases; that the frequent occurrence of granular disease of the kidneys has been discovered, the nature of the disease to a considerable extent explained, and the methods of detecting its existence established; that new and valuable remedies have been added to the Materia Medica, conspicuous among which are the anæsthetic agents; that the properties of the really efficient remedies have been more exactly ascertained; that the active principles of many of the vegetable remedies have been isolated, and employed with greater convenience and advantage in their pure state; and,—what is perhaps the most important of all—that the admirable invention of Medical Auscultation has enabled the physicians of the present day to detect the existence and character, and to mark the changes, of diseases of the sanguiferous and respiratory organs, which were formerly often undiscovered, and indeed often undiscoverable, until their fatal

termination, or their advance to a stage in which medical treatment was necessarily useless.

Of the value of Auscultation in clinical medicine, every one is aware. Its utility and importance are most conspicuously manifested by comparing our present knowledge of thoracic diseases with that possessed by the most enlightened physicians before the introduction of this mode of examination.

Of Cardiac diseases, the medical writers and the medical profession before the present century were almost wholly ignorant. In relation to these affections, they appear to have entertained the despondent sentiments of Cowley—

"The heart of man what art can e'er reveal?
A wall impervious between,
Divides the very parts within,
And doth the heart of man e'en from itself conceal."*

On this subject scarcely any information can be derived from their writings, —none that even the most zealous admirers of medical antiquity can profess to consider valuable. They had acquired by dissection some knowledge of the morbid changes in the structure of the heart; but they were unable to connect these changes with the symptoms which occurred during life; and they were consequently unprepared to detect with certainty the existence of disease during its early stage, or to ascertain its true character, or to propose any satisfactory or rational method of treatment.

The only diseases of the heart referred to by Boerhaave are aneurism and weakness.† Cullen notices none but palpitation and syncope.‡ Riverius declares that the diseases of this organ are so speedily fatal that they allow no time for the application of remedies, and that an acquaintance with them is of no clinical value, except in the case of syncope, palpitation, and debility.§ And at a later period, Dr. Mason Good,—who, though a recent writer, may justly claim to be, in relation to this subject, a competent representative of the ignorance of the ancients,—in his ponderous work on the study of medicine, confines his account of cardiac maladies to a very brief chapter on carditis, of which he knows nothing, and pronounces that there are no signs by which inflammation of the pericardium can be distinguished from that of the substance of the heart.‖

On the subject of diseases of the respiratory organs, the state of knowledge, or rather of ignorance, was almost equally unsatisfactory. The existence of some of the most important and most common of these affections was often doubtful, was often unsuspected, while they were making fatal changes in the affected organs; and in regard to their diagnosis, prognosis and treatment, every thing was involved in confusion and obscurity;

"Quale per incertam lunam, sub luce maligna,
Est iter in silvis."

* *Ode upon Dr. Harvey.* † *Aphorisms*, 176, 661. ‡ *First Lines.*
§ *Praxeos Medicæ, Lib.* 8. *Genevæ*, 1737.
‖ *Study of Medicine, edition of* 1825, *published during the author's life.*

The embarrassments and perplexities connected with these cases are admitted and lamented by many of the ablest physicians of former ages. "O how difficult is it," says Baglivi, "to treat diseases of the lungs! O how much more difficult to detect their existence, and to prognosticate their results! They deceive the most experienced; they baffle the very princes of medicine. Do you, my pupils, be cautious and prudent in treating them, and never promise an easy cure, as the mountebanks do who have not read Hippocrates."*

How widely different is the present condition of science in regard to diseases of the chest, is universally known. The change has been from darkness, doubt, and uncertainty, to a light comparatively clear and satisfactory; and it must be ascribed almost exclusively to Laennec's invaluable invention, which has supplied physicians with a new instrument,—literally a *novum organum*,—for detecting and investigating so many of the most common and most destructive diseases to which the human body is liable.

In referring to the modern improvements in Medicine, it would be improper to omit mention of the tendency which has been gradually increasing among the members of our profession to abandon the use of what is known by the name, at one time too attractive, of *heroic practice*. Physicians are disposed at present to employ, in general, a mode of treating diseases that is less ostentatious, less perturbating, less hazardous,—a mode that is milder, more cautious, more regardful of the patient's safety, more considerate of the curative power of nature, and more ready to confide in that power. Not that the wisdom of this course has been discovered only of late, or was ever wholly unknown to our profession. It has in all times been recognized and justly appreciated by many able and eminent physicians. Hippocrates cautions his disciples to beware of injuring their patients while attempting to help them. Sydenham warns us to remember that we are merely the ministers and interpreters of nature, and that our function is to follow her guidance and assist her efforts. But it is only of late that this method has been gaining ground among the bulk of the medical profession. It is only of late that physicians, as a body, have been led by increased knowledge of Pathology and Physiology,—by increased acquaintance with the natural history of diseases, and with the marvellous recuperative powers of the human system,—to understand that it is often safe, and often advisable, to dispense with active and violent remedies, and to depend upon gentler means. Happy the change that has taught us just reverence for the wisdom and humanity embodied in Chomel's aphorism: that while to do good to our patients is only the second law of Therapeutics, the first and great law is to do them no hurt.

When we contemplate the history of medicine, the present condition of the science, and its great and rapid advances in recent times, what are we to expect of its future career and its ultimate destiny?

* O quantum difficile est curare morbos pulmonum! O quanto difficilius eosdem cognoscere, et de iis certum dare præsagium. Fallunt vel peritissimos, ac ipsos medicinæ principes. Tyrones mei, cauti estote et prudentes in iis curandis, nec facilem promittite curationem, ut nebulones faciunt qui Hippocratem non legunt.—G. Baglivi, *Opera Medico-Practica*, p. 34, *Lugduni*, 1710.

If we attempt to look forward into the dark and boundless regions of futurity, we should guard our minds against the opposite errors of distrust and despondency on the one hand, and of ignorant and unreasonable enthusiasm on the other. We should not conclude with Lucretius that science and art have already attained the utmost degree of perfection of which they are capable; nor yet believe with Bishop Wilkins that philosophers will some day succeed in accomplishing, by means of flying chariots, a safe and easy communication between the earth and the moon. Calm and rational reflection will teach us to expect further improvements in medical science, greater, more useful, more wonderful than any ever yet revealed to mankind; but at the same time it will moderate and chasten our expectations by pointing out the numerous difficulties that must for ever retard and limit the progress of all human knowledge.

The circumstances which favor the hope that medicine will continue to advance, and to bestow new benefits and blessings on mankind, are partly the condition which it has already attained, and partly the judicious methods of research now used by those who are endeavoring to further its improvement.

The present condition of the science is eminently favorable to progress. Its cultivators are no longer, as to their means of advancing it, in the position of needy and destitute adventurers. They possess what in mercantile language is called an abundant stock in trade. The ample amount of knowledge now in the hands of the profession, if used with proper skill, must necessarily lead to farther acquisitions. It is written, that "*To him that hath much shall more be given, and he shall have abundance.*" Every new fact that is ascertained, every new principle that is established, must tend, in a greater or less degree, to facilitate farther discoveries. "As we justly expect," says Bacon, "a greater knowledge of things, and a juster judgment, from a man of years than from a youth, on account of the greater experience, and the greater variety and number of things, seen, heard, and thought of by the person in years; so may much greater matters be justly expected from the present age than from former times; as this is the more advanced age of the world, and now enriched and furnished with infinite experiments and observations."*

A circumstance of the present age strongly conducive to the advancement of medical knowledge, and of all kinds of knowledge, is the increased intercourse among all parts of the world by means of the recent marvellous improvements in the facility and rapidity of locomotion. The present is the fated period in which "many run to and fro," and in which "knowledge is increased." All the nations of the earth are now brought, so to speak, into the immediate neighborhood of each other. All persons engaged in the prosecution of a common study, no matter how widely asunder their abodes, are now assembled, as it were, in one great university, where all labor together, and where each one receives assistance from all the rest. The scientific discovery made to-day in a hospital of London or Paris will in a week or two be read of, discussed, criticised, confirmed, or confuted by physicians at the foot of the Himalayas and of the Andes; on the banks of the Euphrates, the Ganges, the La Plata, and

* *Causes of Errors in Philosophers*, Part 1, Sec. 5, Aphorism 84.

the Columbia; at the cataracts of the Nile, and at the falls of the Mississippi; in the ancient and holy cities of Jerusalem and Benares, and in the new and profane villages of Kansas and Australia. Never before did knowledge and genius appear in so noble a threatre, and address themselves so directly to so vast an audience. "The world is all before them," to listen to their teaching, to adopt their suggestions, to applaud their success, to excite them to new achievements, and more glorious triumphs.

The other reason for expecting our science to improve is found in the better and wiser method of investigation employed by its present cultivators.

The progress of medicine was for many ages retarded and interrupted by the habit, which long prevailed among eminent medical writers, of forming premature theories or general doctrines, without sufficiently patient, exact, and extensive investigation of facts. The attention of the whole profession was long fixed upon such fabrics of the imagination, and diverted from the study of nature. The important and obvious truth was long overlooked, that medical knowledge must in all cases derive its origin from one source alone, the accurate observation of facts,—facts that occur spontaneously, or that are called into existence by properly devised experiments. This vital and essential principle is at present recognized and admitted by all medical inquirers. All are now aware that the only just mode of investigation is the one introduced by Hippocrates, whose admirable sagacity enabled him to anticipate the Baconian method, and, two thousand years before the time of Bacon, to teach the inestimable lesson,—too soon and too long neglected and forgotten by his professed followers,—that the only means to arrive at the knowledge of general laws is by careful observation of particular facts. The only theory that can now command the attention of physicians is one that consists of a mere summary and exposition of the known facts belonging to the science; a theory, in short, which, to use the expression of Heraclitus, is drawn from the great world of nature and not from the little world of man's brain. It is observed by Sir John Pringle, that from the Greeks down to his time there had been in medicine a vast amount of reasoning upon a very small number of facts; but that, on the contrary, it would be better to have in future very little reasoning or a large number of facts. This sentiment expresses the judgment of the physicians of the present day; and from its general acceptance among them we may justly infer that the interests of science are not likely ever again to suffer from the prevalence of hypothetical systems. It is not probable that theories, unsupported by facts and proofs, however plausible and ingenious they may be, will ever again exert any extensive and lasting control over the minds of physicians, or succeed in calling off their attention from observation and experiment.

To turn to the best account the advantages afforded by the present position of our science, and by the present method of pursuing its study, so as to increase as far as possible the utility of the art of medicine, is an important and manifest obligation incumbent upon every member of the medical profession. It is the duty of every physician to exert himself, according to his ability, to improve his profession, to adorn our common Sparta—*ornare illam Spartam*

quam nacti sumus,—and to do so by making his art as useful as possible to the community in which he lives, and by laboring to transmit it to his successors amplified and illustrated by his studies, and advanced to a condition of higher and more salutary power than that in which he received it from those who went before him.

To accomplish these objects, requires long, diligent and earnest labor—labor in clinical observation, labor in reflection and meditation, labor in studying the recorded experience of other observers. But there is nothing ungrateful, irksome or repulsive in this labor to those who enter on the task under the influence of the great cardinal principle by which all human actions should be directed and governed—*the love of God and of mankind.* To those who come thus prepared, no other pursuit, as it appears to me, can be more delightful. Our profession holds out to us the most attractive of all sciences to engage our attention at home, and the most useful and beneficent of all arts to exercise our energies abroad. Nothing, surely, in the whole range of natural science can be more interesting to an intelligent mind than the investigation of the wonderful mechanism of the human body, in all its various conditions of health and disease. Nothing can be better adapted than that study to exalt our conceptions of the Divine Wisdom. Nor can it be a pursuit unattended with delight to learn with what ingenuity the resources of art have been applied for the removal or relief of diseases. In all the vast extent of literature,—whether we look to the writings of statesmen, philosophers, historians, orators or poets,—no where else shall we find more striking manifestations of the power, sagacity and wisdom of the human mind than are presented in the records of practical medicine.

I cannot, gentlemen, conclude my remarks without congratulating you, and all other true physicians, upon your happy selection of a walk in life. There are other paths which lead more certainly to distinctions, honors, and affluence. There are other professions which may be more exempt from cares and disappointments. But where shall we find a pursuit more favorable than ours to the development and improvement of the best faculties of our intellectual and moral nature? Where shall we find an occupation for the few and fleeting years of life, more conducive to progress in wisdom and virtue? To grow old engaged in the acquisition of knowledge—γηρασκειν διδασκομενος—was the wish of the wisest of the ancients. The sentiment is purified and elevated by referring it to a just and adequate motive. To grow old in the study of science for the purpose of doing good to mankind, is a desire worthy not only of the wisest but of the best and holiest of men. It is the daily business of the physician "to seek the bright countenance of truth in the pure air of delightful studies," and to apply the knowledge thus acquired in affording relief to human misery, in carrying comfort to the afflicted, help to the oppressed, deliverance and safety to those that are ready to perish. I can desire nothing better for you, gentlemen, for our professional brethren, and for myself, than that we may feel and appreciate the happiness of such a life, and be thankful to God for having placed it within our reach.