

**EULOGY ON THE  
LATE JOHN W.  
FRANCIS, M.D., LL.D.**

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Eulogy on the late John W. Francis, M.D., LL.D. by Valentine Mott

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**VALENTINE MOTT**

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## DISCOURSE.

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*Κριτεροιο τοταρπιμεσθα γοοιο.*

HOMER.

GENTLEMEN OF THE ACADEMY:—

WHEN, in the Iliad, Achilles is visited by the ghost of Patroclus, whose funeral ceremonies have just been celebrated with extraordinary pomp and solemnity, the living hero, in the presence of his departed friend, is melted with tenderness, and laments that it is not in his power to throw his arms around the chilly shade that they may in mutual embrace enjoy the delight of grief.

In peaceful sorrow there is a kind of joy. The human heart bereaved finds gratification in mourning over its loss. Its anguish is assuaged by indulging in gentle melancholy. "Strike the harp in my hall," exclaims the mighty Fingal to the bard, "Strike the harp in my hall, and let Fingal hear the song. Pleasant is the joy of grief. It is like the shower of spring when it softens the branch of the oak, and the young leaf lifts its head."

Among all civilized nations, and at all periods of history, it has been a custom to assemble at stated times, to celebrate the virtues and perpetuate the memory of the illustrious dead. In accordance with

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this ancient and universal rite, we are met here to-night to mourn the death of our late associate, Dr. John Wakefield Francis, to pay tribute to his many virtues, to deplore our own great loss, and to do what we may to perpetuate the memory of his long and distinguished life.

Providence has seen fit to order, that I, who more than fifty years ago saw him rise from the position of a devoted and industrious student to that of a popular teacher of medical science, and then successively become an eminent physician, an illustrious professor, a leading savant, and a controlling spirit in the ranks of our divine profession;—that I should also have remained to behold the close of his career, and to pronounce this night his Eulogy. It has been mine to see the dawn of his professional life; to see his sun rise in the purple chambers of the East, rejoicing like a strong man to run a race; to witness the meridian of his glory; to experience the milder radiance of his afternoon splendor; and to be present at his beautiful and tinted sunset—tinted we may say, for during his last hours the light of his brilliant intellect fell upon us, not clear and cold, and dazzling, and blinding, as it sometimes did in the earlier rationalistic period of his life; but mellowed and subdued, and split into a thousand crimson streams, by a living faith in our holy Redeemer, whose blessed name was present on his dying lips.

The lives of Dr. Francis and myself, as is well known, have run parallel, and over the same ground for more than the period usually allotted to man,

and our mutual friendship has been life-long and close! as tender, I believe, during the last years, as when more than a quarter of a century ago he called his son by the name of his friend. Together, O companion of my youth! we saw this city pass from its former simplicity to its present grandeur—together we saw the white winged sailing vessels in the bay superseded by steamers that walked upon the water, pillars of cloud by day, and of fire by night—together we saw these steamers succeeded by locomotives, compared to the speed of whose flight “the tempest itself lagged behind;” and together we saw those iron chargers succeeded by a telegraph, whose etherial messengers outstrip the very arrows of light. Together we had journeyed up the hill of life—together we had enjoyed the prospect from the summit, and together we had commenced to descend.

“ But where the path we walked began  
To slant to its autumnal slope,  
As we descended, following Hope,  
There sat the shadow feared of man

Who broke our fair companionship  
And spread his mantle dark and cold,  
And wrapped thee formless in its fold  
And dulled the murmur on thy lip;

And bore thee where I could not see  
Nor follow, though I walk in haste  
And think, that somewhere in the waste  
That shadow sits and waits for me.”\*

We of the Academy as yet can scarcely think

\* Tennyson—In Memoriam.

him dead. It is so lately that our halls reverberated with the tones of his spirit-stirring eloquence, that the echoes seem hardly to have ceased. But our venerable friend will never return. He has passed through those gates which open not backwards; they have closed upon him, and he has trod the path beyond—the path which leads to an unknown shore. The rays of a vernal sun are already falling upon his tomb; they will call forth to renewed life the flowers that the hand of affection has planted there, but they can never re-animate his lifeless form. The amaranth will grow above him, and mingle its regal flowers with the deep green leaves of the gnaphalium! Mosses and lichens, emblems of immortality, will find root there, clothing the mound in ever-living green—

“When spring with dewy fingers cold  
Returns to dress the sacred mould,  
She there will find a sweeter sod  
Than Fancy's foot hath ever trod.”\*

And yet he who during life was always so quick to appreciate the attentions of his friends, will ever sleep on in senseless apathy beneath. The footfalls of the living will be frequent above his head, but they will not disturb his slumber. The birds of spring will warble—the winds will sigh—the waves of the bay will break upon the shore with heavy beat, and slow rain drops will patter upon leaves, and all the rural sounds to which he once delighted to listen, will go on as ever in the world above, but all will be silence in his world below. His noble

\* Montgomery.



heart, which was always moved in sympathy by the woes of others, is for ever at rest. The eye, out of which his genial spirit so brightly shone, has receded far within its socket, and is ever-more veiled within a leaden lid. The hand that dispensed so many charities is palsied for ever. He has gone to inhabit with kings and counsellors of the earth, with the chieftains of the mighty dead. Of what avail to him now are any earthly considerations?

“Can storied urn or animated bust  
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?  
Can honor's voice provoke the silent dust,  
Or flattery soothe the dull cold ear of death?”\*

But though he has passed beyond the reach of either our praise or censure—though to him it matters not what is said of him here to-night, yet it is a pleasure to us who remain to recall the events of his life—to recount his noble deeds, and in the words of our motto, to “enjoy together our mutual grief.” It seems also eminently proper, that this body of which he was one of the early Presidents, should, in this official way, pay its tribute to his memory. A sense of justice impels us to acknowledge, in a public manner, his high professional merits, while the love we bore him as a man and an associate, incites us to enumerate his many amiable personal characteristics.

JOHN WAKEFIELD FRANCIS was born in this city, in Warren street, November 17th, 1789. He was the eldest son of a German grocer, who died of yellow fever in 1795, while the son was yet a mere lad.

\* Gray's Elegy.

Other members of the family also suffered with the same disease on that occasion, among whom was the subject of this discourse, whose recovery, he tells us, was at one time deemed so improbable, that his coffin was brought into the room where he lay, and prepared for his reception.

His mother, in whose sole charge he was left, appears to have been a woman of more than ordinary good judgment and energy of character. She was formerly of Philadelphia, and of Swiss descent. From her he inherited a taste for literature and a love of books, which she had the good sense to encourage, and which the industry of his father had left her the means to a considerable extent to gratify.

When sufficiently grown to begin to anticipate the duties of life, the same taste led him to select the trade of a printer, and he was allowed to apprentice himself to Mr. George Long, a noted publisher of that day. But he soon found the mechanical duties of the press-room a matter quite different from the *belle lettre* he had anticipated. The longing for books and study still possessed him, and at noon, instead of going to his dinner as an apprentice boy should, he contented himself with an apple, and crept away under the press to enjoy his Latin grammar.

But apprentices whose attention is so much abstracted, and whose diet is so unsubstantial, are not apt to be of much profit to the master. The duties were evidently uncongenial to the boy. Mr. Long was a man of good judgment, and so a way was found to cancel the indentures, and John W. Fran-

cis was saved to the medical, and probably in a great measure to the literary world. However, he was always fond of recurring to this period of his life, in which he said he had followed the example of the illustrious Franklin, to whom also his friends averred and he believed he bore some personal resemblance. He was always intimate with printers, and, through life, very generally attended the annual re-unions of the typographical fraternity, and frequently graced them with one of his peculiar after-dinner speeches.

Leaving Long's, he directed his attention exclusively to a literary and professional life. He attended for a while the Grammar School of Rev. George Strabeck, and afterwards prepared for College under Rev. John Conroy, a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin. He entered Columbia College two years in advance. The amount of intellectual labor he was capable of performing at this time seems scarcely to have had a limit, for during the time he was an under-graduate we find him pursuing the study of medicine in the office of the late Dr. Hosack, and drilling the doctor's students; attending medical lectures and writing them out into abstracts; conducting, in conjunction with his preceptor, a medical periodical; and in addition to all this, composing, as the event proves, his celebrated inaugural thesis on the use of mercury. The more we study the early history of his life, the more we are assured that his success was then, as much as in after years, due to his *ceaseless, tireless industry*.

It was during this period of his life I made my first visit to Europe. On my return I gave a short