

HISTORY
OF THE
MEDICAL PROFESSION
OF KINGS COUNTY,

1644—1822.

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OF BROOKLYN.

THE TERRIBLE INDIAN WAR of 1643-44, which devastated and very nearly extinguished the rising settlements of the New Netherlands, under Kieft's ill-starred management, was virtually ended, in July, 1644, by the arrival of the ship "Blue Cock" from Curacao. The 130 soldiers which she brought—and which Petrus Stuyvesant, then governor of that island, had been glad to get rid of, as having no use for them, and fearing a threatened famine—added strength and confidence to the sorely pressed colonists. And, availing themselves of the breathing spell thus afforded them, attempts were made to establish a permanent peace with their savage neighbors.

In this vessel, also, probably, came a surgeon, PAULUS VAN DER BEECK, of Bremen, who had served in the West India Company's ships, and at its station at Curacao. He was, probably, the second medical man in the colony, Hans Kierstede, also one of the W. I. Co.'s surgeons, having settled in New Amsterdam as early as 1638. A pushing man, shrewd and "with an eye to the main chance," was the ex-ship-surgeon; for, in October of the same year, some three months from the date of his arrival, he married Mary Thomas or Baddie, who had already been the wife, successively, of Willem Arianse Bennett and of Jacob Verden. Her first husband, Bennett, was one of the first settlers in the present limits of the City of Brooklyn, having, with Jacques Bentyn, in 1636, purchased (Stiles' Brooklyn, i. 52) a large tract of land which he had cultivated, and on which he built (about at the intersection of the present Third avenue and Twenty-eighth street) a home. He was killed by the Indians at the beginning of hostilities, his buildings burned, and his stock stolen or destroyed. In 1644, however, peace being made with the Indians, the settlers gradually returned to their ruined farms. The widow and her new husband soon returned again to Long Island, and Bennett's deserted farm was cultivated, and buildings erected

upon it by Surgeon Van Der Beeck, who took up his residence there, probably, before 1653; for in that year he, with others, was chosen by the neighbors to represent them in a convention and as a delegate to Director Stuyvesant. This convention framed a petition, strongly worded, insisting with sturdy Dutch determination on their rights, as citizens, to have a voice in the government of the province.

In a sparsely populated colony, among settlers who, from the necessity of the case, must be rugged with health, but little call existed for medical skill. Every man became not alone his own doctor, but each was virtually a "jack of all trades;" no one pursued one avocation to the exclusion of others. So with Paulus Van Der Beeck; we read of him as "Mr. Paulis, surgeon and farmer." Danger seemed to have no terror for him, for he lived far from the protecting walls of the fort. Like a shrewd man, he cast his eye upon the public crib, and for many years fed at it. In 1656 he was collector or farmer of the revenues; 1661-'62 finds him farming out the Excise and Tenths on Long Island; at the same time he was ferry-master. He prospered and grew rich. In 1675 he was assessed on £133 10s., and there were only nine citizens with higher rates. In 1676, he is rated £140, an acre of land passing at £1 wampum values; and, in a previous year—1657—the church having fallen behind in the dominie's salary, Van Der Beeck is rated as "in easy circumstances and well off," and taxed ten florins. But one break did occur in a life seemingly so full of success. In 1663, his step-sons, the children of Bennet, petitioned for a re-possession of their patrimony; and, by the order of the Director-General and Council, Sheriff Hegeman put them in control of part of the land.

Surgeon Paulus Van Der Beeck died previous to 1679; for in that year the much bereaved Mary was once more a widow, and as such conveying lands.

GERARDUS WILLEMS BEEKMAN, a physician and

politician, is recorded as the next doctor in Kings County. His father, Wilhelmus Beekman, emigrated from Hessel in 1647, and held many public offices in New Amsterdam. Gerardus settled in Flatbush, and in November, 1678, was chosen one of the deacons of the Reformed Dutch Church of that place. Of his medical labor nothing is recorded. As others followed some calling besides their trade or profession, Beekman embraced politics and remained an office-holder till the time of his death. In 1687 he took the oath of allegiance as a native, while two years earlier he was appointed a colonel in the militia and justice of the peace. It was his destiny to be in active life during the ill-fated Leisler controversy, and he was a firm adherent to Leisler's cause. When the justices in New Amsterdam refused to administer the oath of allegiance to William and Mary, 1689, Jacob Leisler sent to Long Island for Captain G. Beekman, Justice of the Peace, to perform that duty. A year later Dr. Beekman was one of Leisler's Counsel of Ten. Ere another year passed, however, a change in the administration occurred. In October, 1691, Beekman was placed under arrest, but released under a bond of £500 not to depart the province and for good behavior. But he was too strong a partisan to be quiet, and issued a spirited defence of Leisler's actions. Brought to trial with five more of Leisler's staunch supporters, he was found guilty and sentenced to death. Now it was that his sterling character became apparent; Governor Slaughter offered him a free pardon if he would but apologize for his adherence to Leisler; and his friends importuned him to accept the proffered clemency, pointing out that Leisler and Milborne had already been executed; and that, owing to delay of communication with the home government, Slaughter was practically in absolute control; and, that whatever the result of after investigation into his actions might be, Beckman's life could not be restored. Perhaps, finding him still obdurate, they suggested that the apology would only be a form, and that as soon as advices could be received from England, Slaughter would be recalled. He declined alike their advice and suggestions, and firmly facing the result, refused to ask the proffered pardon, because he believed the cause of Leisler a just cause, and his own conduct in the matter, right. He, with his comrades under sentence, were at length pardoned by order of the King. For several years after this we hear but little of Beckman in public life. Not till 1705-'6 did he again hold office; then he appears as a member of Lord Cornbury's council, and in the latter year as a commissioner for the Mohegans in their claim against Connecticut for certain tracts of lands. In 1709, 1711 and 1715 he was a member of Governor Hunter's council; and he was acting governor of the province from 1709 to 1710. He died in November, 1724, at the age of 71 years.

An amusing incident relating to Beckman has been

preserved to us, by a letter of one H. Filkins. A controversy had arisen between the congregation of the Breuckelen church and their dominie, Mr. Freeman; hot words, followed by hotter actions, disturbed the quiet of the community, and at last the law was invoked by the clergyman. Justice Beekman rendered the decision that Mr. Freeman should preach. A few days later Colonel Beekman and H. Filkins met on the ferry, coming to Breuckelen, and, on landing, stopped at the ferry-tavern to drink a glass of wine. One glass followed another till both gentlemen were well fuddled; then the subject of Rev. Freeman's preaching came under discussion. Mr. Filkins was also a justice of the peace, and bitterly opposed to Dominie Freeman. The controversy grew more irritating, till Beekman finally asserted that service should be continued as heretofore. To this Filkins retorted that he was also a justice, and Beekman's peer. Then Col. Beckman's wrath blazed out; and, as Filkin's states in his letter, he "gave me the lie, calling me a pitiful fellow, dog, rascall, &c." Such language poured upon a temper already inflamed by the infusion of "Dutch courage," naturally caused an outbreak, and Filkins goes on to state "which caused me, being overcome with passion, to tell him I had a good mind to knock him off his horse, we being both at that time getting upon our horses to goe home, but that I would not goe; I would fight him at any time with a sword." "I could wish," he adds "that these last words had been kept in, and I am troubled that I was soe overcome with passion and inflamed with wine. The work of these Dutch ministers is the occasion of all our quarrells."

Ere Beckman's death, a Dr. JOHN NERBURY was residing at the Brooklyn ferry. Little can be learned of him. In 1710 a Palatine child was indentured to him. In 1732 he presented a bill against the county, amounting to £6, 4s, for taking care of a poor man at Mr. Stryker's, of Flatbush; later he deeded a wood-lot in Flatbush to Johanna Dewitt, and still later, in 1746, evidence exists that he was living on Staten Island.

HENRY, or HENDRICK VAN BEUREN is the next practitioner of whom any record can be found. In 1754 he presented a bill to the county, for setting the shoulder of Mary Ann Smith, and for after attendance, valuing his services at £1, 12s. Another bill of his for "doctoring" the "French neutrals," for 14s., bears date of 1765. These "French neutrals" were some of the two thousand unhappy Acadians whom England had deported from their homes in 1755, and scattered in the New England provinces, and as far south as Pennsylvania. Another bill against the county, in 1770, and one in 1772, attest that he was engaged in active practice. Busy as he was, however, he found time to protest against the doings of the numerous "irregulars" in his vicinity. In the *New York Gazette, or Weekly Postboy*, for May 20, 1754, he appears in this letter:

"*Vita brevis, ars vero longa : see occasio momentosa magni momenti ; empirica periclitato periculosi iudicium difficile.* HIPPOCRAT. APHORIS.—The daily and innumerable Abuses that are committed on the Bodies of our Fellow-creatures, in the Practice of Physic and Surgery, by the unskilful Pretenders to both ; and the deplorable instances of the Havock and Devastation, occasioned by such intestine Enemies (destructive to any State, as a raging Pestilence), is obvious to all Men of Judgment and Observation. How solicitous ought every Monarchy, and Commonwealth, to be, about the health and Preservation of every Individual? The ancient Romans were very singular in this way. Any one who had the good Fortune to save the Life of any Roman citizen, was dignified with an Oaken Garland. Even the diminutive Republic of St. Marino, in Italy, in our days, is very remarkable for the judicious Choice in a Physician, under whose Hands the Commonwealth thrives. A proper Regulation in this Respect, so necessary in this Province, will be likely never to take place, without the attention and concurrence of the Legislature.

"Every pitiful Fellow, now-a-Days (more dexterous at murdering or maiming his Patients, than at terms of Art), assumes to himself, with no small Arrogance, the Appellation of *Doctor* ; far from being due to *Quacks* and *Medicators*, and only so to the Gentlemen of the Faculty, the undoubted sons of *Æsculapius*. So venerable a Distinction is become rather a Term of Reproach to those to whom it peculiarly belongs, who have taken the highest Degree in that Art, or Science, in some University ; or, at least, ought to be qualified for so doing.

"Well may a Gentleman of the Faculty, in the City of New York, particularly distinguished for his uncommon merit, disdain the appellation, when he must share it with *numbers* who can have no Pretension to it at all ; and even with Apothecary apprentices, before they have finished their elaborate studies and application of *Three long years.*"

It may not be amiss to notice these impostors, who, at this time, so irritated Dr. Van Beuren and others, as to call forth frequent protests in public prints. The demand for medication was evidently on the increase, and the emoluments of the profession becoming more valuable. The immunity from climatic change that the settlers had at first enjoyed, had given place to an outbreak of intermittent fever and of dysentery in the summer, and to lung and throat affections in the winter. Already small-pox had appeared among the colonies, and swept through the province more than once. Yellow fever had also been introduced and added to the death rate. These maladies were widespread, and doubtless carried great alarm to the worried colonists. The modesty of charlatans has never been conspicuous, and such an opportunity to prey upon human fear and credulity was no more neglected two centuries ago, than it is to-day. Legislation did not interfere with their action, and their pretensions, however absurd, were believed by a people not too well educated. Any one might set up as a practitioner of medicine, and succeed. That many did so, we may judge from the indignant protests of the few educated physicians who had cast their lot here. A writer in the "*N. Y. Independent Reflector*," 1753, says : "That place (N. Y.) boasts the honor of above forty gentlemen of the faculty, and

far the greatest part of them are mere pretenders to a profession of which they are entirely ignorant." Another, in a New England colony, writes, in 1757 : "Few physicians amongst us are eminent for their skill. Quacks abound like the locusts in Egypt, and too many have recommended themselves to a full and profitable practice and subsistence. This is the less to be wondered at, as the profession is under no kind of legislation. Loud as the call is, to our shame be it remembered, we have no law to protect the lives of the King's subjects from the malpractice of pretenders. Any man, at his pleasure, sets up for physician, apothecary and chirurgeon. No candidates are either examined or licensed, or even sworn to fair practice." In the light of these statements, Dr. Van Beuren's strong letter seems fully justified, and affords us, also, a glimpse of the writer's character. He was an educated physician, conscientious in his life's work, and detesting, with an honest man's contempt, the claims of impostors.

After the battle of Long Island, most of the Kings County people hastened to renew their allegiance to the crown ; among them was Henry Van Beuren. In *Rivington's Gazette*, June 30, 1781, "James Rankin, chairman of the Board of Refugees, requests the Loyal Refugees of Kings County to appear at the home of Dr. Van Beuren, Flatbush, on Wednesday next at noon, to consult on matters of importance."

Contemporary with Van Beuren is found the name of DR. JOHN LODEWICK. His record is extremely slight ; for, with the exception of two bills against the county, nothing can be learned of his existence. The first bill, bearing date of 1759, is for tending a sick woman at Peter Lott's, in Flatbush ; the next, in 1767, is for tending a sick man from December 19, 1766, to April, 1767, and for medicines, and amounts to £9, 5s. 6d.

Another contemporary of that time, and the last pre-revolutionary physician of whom I find record, is DR. HARRY VAN DE WATER. One of his bills against the county bears date 1766, and is for medicine and attending on a sick vagrant person at Justice Theodorus Polhemus' (of Bushwick), £2, 10s. Another, date 1769, is for medicine and attendance on a vagrant person for two weeks. His death occurred from disease contracted on board one of the prison-ships. A history is in these last few words. Long Island was in complete control of the British, and the cause of the colonists was at its lowest ebb. Van De Water's neighbors, and some, at least, of his professional comrades, were staunch royalists ; to be patriotic at such a time, implied the loss of property, social ostracism, perhaps imprisonment and death. He accepted the issue for what he believed to be right.

The War for Independence brought many army surgeons into Kings County. At the date of the battle of Long Island, the medical officers of the Eastern division, supposed to have been present, were Drs. Wm.

Shippen, of Pennsylvania, chief physician of the "flying camp;" Department Director General Isaac Foster; Physician General of hospital Ammi R. Cutler, of Mass.; Surgeon General of hospitals Philip Turner; and Physician and Surgeon General of the army Wm. Burnett.

At the close of that disastrous August day, the following American surgeons were prisoners in the British lines: John and Joseph Davies of the First Penn. Battalion; Dr. Holmes of Huntington's regiment, and Dr. Young of Atlee's regiment. After the battle, Boerum's bolt-house, the house on the Heights known as the Livingston or Joralemon house, and the Remsen house, then occupying the site of Grace church, were used as Brooklyn military hospitals; while in New Utrecht and Flatbush, the churches were used both as hospitals and prisons. Sad was the fate of the wounded prisoners at first. In Flatbush, they were neglected and unattended, wallowing in their own filth, and breathing infected air. After ten days of this misery, Dr. Richard Bailey of the Staten Island hospital was appointed to care for them; and he, assisted by Dr. Silas Holmes of Norwich, Conn., a prisoner of war, did all in their power to alleviate the suffering. Under their charge the wounded were daily visited; a sack-bed, sheet and blanket was obtained for every prisoner, and the overcrowded church was relieved by distributing the captives into the neighboring barns.

During the progress of the war, *Rivington's Gazette* was largely used for advertising lost or stolen property; among the advertisements is that of a reward of two guineas, by Surgeon A. Bainbridge of the New Jersey Volunteers, for a runaway slave; and one of Dr. Allemand, for the recovery of a lost mouse-colored horse. In the mortality list on the British side, stand the names of Wm. Poole, chief physician of the Naval hospital in Brooklyn, who died in 1778, and Surgeon John Howe, who died in 1782.

War has ever been a great incentive to the medical profession. Its necessities call for more recruits, its agonies and deaths for increased skill, to alleviate the suffering caused by its wounds, and combat the diseases incident upon camp life. Our war for independence was no exception to the rule; and, at its close, we need feel no wonder at the increased number of practitioners of medicine. At least three army surgeons took up their residence in Kings County at the close of the war; one in Flatbush, whose name is given as Dr. BECK, and JOHN J. BARBARIN and JOHN DUFFIELD, in Brooklyn.

Of Dr. BECK so little is known authentically that even the correctness of his name is in dispute. That an English army surgeon settled in Flatbush at the close of the war is, however, beyond dispute. He was a man of ability and obtained a successful practice, to which he attended, till an accident or illness prevented active labor. After this he seems to have become dissipated

and poor, and for some time before his death to have been dependent on charity. His end was tragic; his body was found in an old well, and it is unknown whether he fell in by accident or committed suicide. Either contemporary with this physician, or succeeding him by but a short time, were the brothers JAMES J. and JOHN H. VAN BUREN. James lived in the old Duryea house, now owned by the Brooklyn City R. R. Co.; John was a bachelor, and lived with another brother, who kept a hotel near the old jail. In the Supervisors' proceedings for 1787, is a resolution that Dr. Van Buren attend upon a sick person in the county jail at Flatbush, and that £4 be allowed him; and a strong probability exists that at this time Dr. Van Buren was the keeper of and occupied the county courthouse and jail. James Van Buren died in 1802, followed by his brother nine years later.

At this time Flatbush was the principal town and county seat of the county. In Brooklyn, we have already seen that Drs. Duffield and Barbarin cast their lot at the end of the war. Of the former, little can be learned, save that he died in 1798, and that a street was named after him. JOHN JOEL BARBARIN was in the British service during the Revolution; before its close he married a daughter of Lodowyck Bamber of Brooklyn, and shortly after resigned from the service and settled here in practice. In Nov., 1784, he petitioned the Assembly to grant him the right of citizenship. A MS. record of accouchment cases attended by him, from 1791 to 1796, was kept by the doctor in the French language, and is reported to be still in existence. Barbarin was one of the first trustees of the incorporated village of Brooklyn. A street, now Lawrence street, was originally named after him. From his portrait, he seems to have been a man of fine physique, with dark complexion and black eyes; his dress was plain, but rich, and garnished at the wrists with lace.

During the first decade of the present century the profession in Flatbush was augmented by the coming of Dr. WM. D. CREED. He was born in Jamaica, L. I., became a licentiate in 1809, and began active practice in the county towns. He was elected to the office of sheriff for one term. At the close of his term of service, he moved to New Utrecht, where he again practiced his profession. In the epidemic of Asiatic cholera in 1832, he was a member of the Board of Health of Flatbush, with Drs. Zabriskie and Vanderveer of that village, and Dr. Robert Edmond of East New York.

In Brooklyn, at the period between 1800 and 1822, are found the names of GEORGE A. CLUSSMAN, J. G. T. HUNT, MATTHEW WENDELL, CHAS. BALL, BENJAMIN LOWE, SAMUEL OSBORNE and JOHN CARPENTER. The first mention found of Dr. CLUSSMAN is in a bill against the county, in 1779, for £5, 4s. In one of the copies of the *Long Island Weekly Intelligencer*, for 1806, William Vander Veer, apothecary, advertises that he is regularly educated in his business, having studied in

Amsterdam, and that his store is in the house of Dr. Geo. A. Clussman, who, with Dr. Samuel Osborne, will guarantee his ability and drugs. Dr. Clussman further seems to have been deeply interested in educational matters.

JOSEPH GEDNEY TARTLTON HUNT was born in Westchester, N. Y., in 1783. He studied medicine with Drs. Whitehead, Hicks and Bard, was licensed in 1804, and appointed Asst. Surgeon in the navy. In a short time he was promoted to be full surgeon. He served in the Algerian war, under Decatur; was on board the Chesapeake when she was captured by the Leopard. At length he was stationed at the Brooklyn Navy Yard; here he not only attended to his official duty, but acquired a considerable private practice. In 1820, he resigned from the service, and made his home on the corner of Concord and Fulton streets. He was one of the earliest members of the Kings County Medical Society, of which he was President from 1825 to 1830, inclusive. In 1824, he was appointed the first Health Officer of Brooklyn, with a salary of \$200 a year, and was re-appointed, without intermission, till the time of his death, in August, 1830. Dr. Hunt was small in stature, with a brusque manner, but he redeemed this approach to curtness by many agreeable social qualities.

SAMUEL OSBORNE (previously mentioned as vouching for apothecary Vander Veer), son of John Osborne, M.D., of Middletown, Conn., studied medicine, settled in Brooklyn, and became a physician of some repute. A bitter newspaper controversy was maintained between him and Drs. Wendell and Ball, during the yellow fever epidemic of 1809; a controversy ending in the indulgence of outrageous personalities between the disputants. Shortly after this, Osborne removed to New York city.

From about 1790 to 1805, Dr. PETER, or Peters, was living at New Utrecht, and built on the high ground, midway between Fort Hamilton and the village of New Utrecht, a large edifice for an academy. Here he kept a school in addition to his practice. This building, later known as "the De Karsy House," was torn down in 1872. His practice covered the town of Gravesend. It is said that it was his custom to go to the hotel, upon his arrival in town, and to ring a large dinner-bell, to notify those needing his services that he was in readiness for consultation. In 1805, Dr. FRANCIS HENRY DUBOIS, who became a licentiate in 1802, settled at New Utrecht, and acquired a large practice, which he retained till his death, in 1834.

Kings County Medical Society established.—We have at length reached the period at which the

desultory and disconnected detail of sometime practitioners ceases; and the medical men of Kings county formed an organized society for their own protection against impostors, and for the benefit of the people in their mutual reports and discussions of diseases, and in their closer acquaintance and fraternity with each other. In 1806, the Legislature of New York enacted a law allowing the incorporation of a state and of county medical societies. Under this act, the State Medical Society was organized at once. The medical men of this county did not act in the matter, however, for several years, and it was not till 1822 that organization was attempted. On Monday, February 22, 1822 Drs. Chas. Ball, Matthew Wendell, John Carpenter, Wm. D. Creed, Francis H. Dubois and Adrian Vanderveer, practicing physicians in this county, met in the village of Flatbush to discuss the propriety of forming a county society. After informal discussion they adjourned to meet in Brooklyn on March 2. At the March meeting it was decided to organize a society, and the following officers were elected: Cornelius Low, *President*; Matthew Wendell, *Vice-President*; Adrian Vanderveer, *Secretary*; John Carpenter, *Treasurer*. At the same meeting, By-Laws for the government of the society were adopted. On April 2, 1822, the following physicians, with the officers already named, founded the society: Francis H. Dubois, J. G. T. Hunt, Chas. Ball, William D. Creed, Thomas Wilson Henry. From the organization of the society till the present time, the following gentlemen have been its *Presidents*:

Cornelius Low, 1822 to '25; J. G. T. Hunt, 1825 till his death, in 1830; Thos. W. Henry, 1831 to '33; Chas. Ball, 1833 to '35; Isaac I. Rapelye, 1835; Matthew Wendell, 1836; Adrian Vanderveer, 1837 to '39; John B. Zabriskie, 1839; Purcell Cooke, 1840 to '42; Theodore L. Mason, 1842 to '44; Bradley Parker, 1844; Purcell Cooke, 1845; J. Sullivan Thorne, 1846; Lucius Hyde, 1847; Chauncey L. Mitchell, 1848; Henry J. Cullen, 1849; James H. Henry, 1850; Samuel J. Osborne, 1851; George Marvin, 1852; Andrew Otterson, 1853 to '55; Geo. I. Bennet, 1855; T. Anderson Wade, 1856; Samuel Boyd, 1857; Chauncey L. Mitchell, 1858 to '60; Daniel Brooks, 1860; C. R. McClellan, 1861; Samuel Hart, 1862; Dewitt C. Enos, 1863; Joseph C. Hutchison, 1864; John T. Conkling, 1865; Andrew Otterson, 1866; Wm. W. Reese, 1867; R. Cresson Stiles, 1868-'70; J. H. Hobart Burge, 1870-'72; Wm. Henry Thayer, 1872-'74; A. J. C. Skene, 1874-'76; A. Hutchins, 1876-'79; J. S. Prout, 1879; Charles Jewett, 1880, '83; G. G. Hopkins, 1883.