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In Memory

OF

GEORGE PEPPER, M.D.

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AN OBITUARY

Read before the Obstetrical Society of Philadelphia

BY

WILLIAM GOODELL, M.D., PRESIDENT.

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READ BEFORE THE OBSTETRICAL SOCIETY OF PHILADELPHIA,

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PRESIDENT, WILLIAM GOODELL, M.D.

From the Annual Address delivered January 2d, 1872.

THE other associate whose death we mourn was the beloved Dr. George Pepper. He was born in Philadelphia on the 1st of April, 1841, and in the same city was wholly educated. Entering the Collegiate Department of the University of Pennsylvania in September, 1858, he graduated in July, 1862. He at once began the study of medicine in the office of his father, the late Prof. William Pepper, M.D., of the University of Pennsylvania, one of the most distinguished physicians of his day; but, like many of our patriotic youth, he abandoned it to enter the army. On the 15th of the following September he enlisted as a private in the Sixth Pennsylvania Cavalry, better known as Rush's Lancers. His abilities, however, being soon recognized, he was shortly afterward promoted to a lieutenantcy. He passed through many of the hardships and dangers of war, and was under fire at the terrible battle of Fredericksburg. In spite of the suffering and privation incident to that campaign, the out-door life proved of great benefit to him. His health, previously shattered by a sharp attack

of pleurisy, and by a desperate illness from acute nephritis, became so robust that it was his purpose to serve his country until the rebellion was quelled. But in the following spring, while on a scouting party, his left clavicle was badly dislocated by a fall with his horse on the ice. This accident disabled him from active service, and on the 22d May, 1863, he received an honorable discharge.

Upon his return home, he at once resumed the study of his profession; entered the Medical Department of the University of Pennsylvania in October, 1863; received his diploma in March, 1865, and, on the 29th of the same month, married a daughter of the late George M. Wharton, Esq., a leading member of the Philadelphia bar. Soon after this, he obtained a district from the Philadelphia Dispensary, and, during his term of service, faithfully discharged its onerous duties. Taking a great interest in the higher studies of his profession, he early became a member of the Pathological Society; for some time held the office of its treasurer, and contributed numerous short papers to its proceedings. While yet a mere youth, he gained an election to the College of Physicians and to the Academy of Natural Sciences. Apart from a membership in these active societies, he was made a corresponding member of the Gynæcological Society of Boston, and was honored by several official positions.

For several years he was the sole physician to the Magdalen Home. As one of the assistant physicians to the Nurses' Home, he gained great experience as well as reputation in obstetric manipulations. At this institution he gave clinical instruction on the diseases of women

to large private classes. He also delivered a course of didactic lectures on the same subject at the Jayne Street Medical Institute. In addition, as the assistant of Dr. J. Forsyth Meigs, at the Pennsylvania Hospital, he took elaborate notes of every interesting case, and contributed to the Hospital Reports for 1868 an admirable paper upon a case of retroversion of the womb, complicated by a large fibroid. A few months before his health began to fail, he won, after an exciting contest, an election to the Philadelphia Hospital as one of its accoucheurs. Those of us who knew him well, will recall the joy he expressed in gaining so coveted a position on the staff of this magnificent hospital. What diagrams were drawn by his skilful pencil, what elaborate lectures he had written out, and what earnest plans he had laid for imparting clinical instruction to the students who throng its wards! Little did he or we think that this was not to be.

His life, spent in obtaining and in imparting knowledge, was a busy one; but it had its reward. Few physicians have ever acquired so remunerative a practice in so short a time. By common consent he was conceded to be the rising obstetrician of this city; and deservedly, for no one had prepared himself so thoroughly in that branch of the healing art. No one in this city had collected so complete a set of obstetrical instruments and of those for the surgical diseases of women.

In the spring of 1871, he was laid low by a lingering attack of typhoid fever. From this he convalesced so slowly that he was sent to spend the summer at the family country-seat in Chestnut Hill. Thanks to the unre-

mitting care of his brother, Dr. William Pepper, to whom he was warmly attached, he was so far restored to health as to resume his practice in the autumn. Three months later, on the 12th of November, he was seized with an extremely severe influenza, followed in a few days by an inflammation of the left lung. His sickness was lingering and marked by many alternations of condition. Early in May, he was again moved to Chestnut Hill, where, after an illness of ten months, he died on the 14th of September, 1872. Thus, in the first flush of manhood, at the early age of 31, passed away our greatly beloved friend and associate leaving a wife and two children to mourn his loss. He was buried in Laurel Hill Cemetery, and at his funeral this society was largely represented.

In an annual address, more can scarcely be given than a mere sketch of the life of a departed member; but Dr. George Pepper was so identified with the history of this society, and withal so highly esteemed, that I need not ask your indulgence for a little more than the customary obituary notice.

Early attaching himself to obstetrics and to the diseases of women, he sought in every way to perfect himself in those branches. His name appears on the honorable roll of the founders of this society; but he was more than that—he was one of its prime originators. As such his memory should be cherished by us. Upon the night of its organization he was chosen to be its first secretary. To this office he was annually reelected until his protracted illness compelled him to resign. How rarely absent he was from his post; how pleasantly and

efficiently he performed its duties; how lively an interest he took in the welfare of this society, and how often and how ably he participated in its debates, all are still fresh in your memory. To our Transactions he contributed two valuable papers—the one “Adipose Deposits in the Omentum and Abdominal Walls as a Source of Error in Diagnosis,” the other on “The Mechanical Treatment of Uterine Displacements.” His numerous remarks and observations there recorded bear witness to the wide range of his information, and the keen interest he took in this chosen branch of his profession. By his death we have lost our most active member and our staunchest supporter.

His great artistic talent, his mechanical ingenuity, his singularly retentive memory, his industry and enthusiasm in the pursuit of knowledge, gave promise of the highest attainments. No young physician had a more certain future before him. His practice was rapidly growing; his reputation as a teacher increasing; his skill and counsel were beginning to be sought after by his professional brethren, when an inscrutable Providence cut short this brilliant career.

While greatly admiring the intellectual qualities which he possessed in so high a degree, I love still more to think of the qualities of his heart. The charming simplicity and guilelessness of his character, his genial hospitality, his warm affections and abiding friendships, endeared him to a very large circle of friends. During his last illness, the love with which he was regarded sought expression in numberless gifts and constantly repeated delicate attentions. No sick-chamber was ever so lavishly decked

with flowers; no bedside so surrounded by every device that art could contrive or money purchase, for the comfort and cheer of an invalid. It was in a meeting of the College of Physicians that I first met George Pepper. His tall figure, handsome face, highly intellectual countenance, and gentlemanly bearing immediately attracted my attention, and I at once sought an introduction. But it was in this hall that I first learned to know him and to love him. A common interest in the welfare of this society, the transaction of its business, like pursuits and congenial tastes threw us much together, and this acquaintance, despite the disparity of our ages, soon ripened into a warm friendship.

His death I feel keenly; we all shall sadly miss him—very sadly indeed. But this grief is not ours alone; there are others to whom his death brings far more bitter pangs. It is not for us to violate the sanctity of home-griefs; but I may say that no husband was more devoted, no father more kind, no son more affectionate, no brother more beloved than our departed friend. Few men loved his kindred so warmly and so unselfishly; no one was in return more loved.

It was my privilege to see much of him during the long and weary days of his illness, and many a time did he ask after the welfare of this society, and after its members by name. His sufferings were great, his frame reduced to a most pitiable condition of emaciation and weakness. When it was day, he longed for the night, and when it was night, he longed for the day; but words of impatience, words of complaint, I never heard pass from his lips. When it was but too evident that the last

enemy was approaching, he calmly arranged his affairs gathered up his strength for a last farewell, and died in the abiding faith of a Christian, and in the hope of a glorious resurrection.

O vita, stulto longa, sapienti brevis !

