

MEREDITH (W^m)

A comprehensive minute,
commemorative
of

Philip Syng Physick

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1838.



A



COMPREHENSIVE MINUTE,

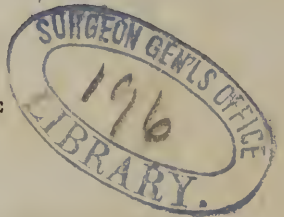
COMMEMORATIVE

OF

PHILIP SYNG PHYSICK, M. D.,

EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF ANATOMY AND SURGERY,

IN THE



UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA.

PHILADELPHIA:

1838.

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA,

Saturday, December 16, 1837.

At a Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees, held this day, the following Resolutions were adopted unanimously:

“Resolved, That the Trustees will attend the funeral obsequies of the late Professor, DR. PHYSICK, in company with the Professors of both Faculties, and the Alumni and Students of the University.

“Resolved, That a Committee be appointed to prepare and present, at the next meeting of this Board, a Comprehensive Minute—to state the long connexion of the deceased with this University—and to express the respect entertained for his able and faithful services as a teacher—for his eminence as a practitioner of medicine—and for the virtues which adorned his private character.”

The Committee appointed, are—Mr. Meredith, Judge Hopkinson, Dr. Mayer, and Mr. Gibson.

Certified from the Minutes.

JAMES BIDDLE, Secretary.

TO WILLIAM MEREDITH ESQ.,
Chairman, &c.

N. CHAPMAN, M. D.,

Professor, &c.

DEAR DR. CHAPMAN,

TURNING from the honoured dead to the living, I inscribe this MINUTE to you. Not that I think it is going to enlarge your fame much, but because the relation which you had to the deceased, as a pupil, and your confidential intimacy with him since—personal and professional—enable you best to appreciate his worth.

There is another reason, not less operative; it is, to have an occasion for saying, that the friendship and esteem of more than thirty years' standing, are yet warm in the heart of

Your's, faithfully and

affectionately,

W. M.

COMPREHENSIVE MINUTE.

PHILIP SYNG PHYSICK was born in this city, on the 7th of July, 1768.

His boyhood passed away in the schools of Mr. John Tod and Mr. Robert Proud, Masters of "Friends' Academy."

In due time he entered the Collegiate Department of the University, where he profited in classical studies by the instruction of Mr. James Davidson, one of the best scholars in *humanity* of his time. In he graduated A. B.

Moral correctness, diligence, and filial piety, were presages of his future usefulness and celebrity. They who think, "that best men are moulded out of faults, and become much more the better by being a little bad," find no authority in his example.

The *profession of medicine* was his early choice. He commenced the study with the excellent and learned Dr. Kuhn, who had been the "Professor of Materia Medica and Botany" since the first establishment of our medical school.

In 1788, he accompanied his father to London, and was placed under the care of Dr. John Hunter, THE surgeon and anatomist of the day.

While he was yet at *the feet* of this great master, he so won his favour and confidence that, by his influence he was preferred to the office of "*House Sur-*

geon to *St. George's Hospital*," over many competitors with powerful patronage.

In 1791, having received his Diploma from the "*College of Surgeons in London*," he visited the school of Edinburgh, and graduated M. D.

Thus qualified by study and instruction, and with some experience (especially in surgery,) he returned to his native city, in 1792, and opened his office as a *practitioner*.

Surgery was at first and perhaps continued to be a favourite branch.

His quick and penetrating eye, firm nerve, and manual tact and power, peculiarly fitted him to excel in practical surgery. Upon these, the master had relied much when he predicted the future eminence of the pupil. He was happy, too, in the improvement and invention of many useful surgical instruments to assist the operator and diminish suffering.

The mortal epidemic of 1793, brought him into general notice and respect. With faithful brethren,*

* It were impossible to look back to that dark hour of death and dismay, and not recall DR. BENJAMIN RUSH, the *great actor* in the tragic scene. His heroic fortitude and disinterested benevolence were above all measure and all return. They are a monument which should be imperishable.

To his inflexible perseverance in maintaining the theory of the *domestic origin* of yellow fever, we owe many and great blessings. The earlier introduction of pure water—more care of personal cleanliness—increased attention to whatever concerns the wholesomeness of the air and the general salubrity—for these we are mainly indebted to Dr. Rush. They who knew Philadelphia as she was before 1793, understand *their* value.

STEPHEN GIRARD, one of the most efficient and useful of the Committee of Citizens, (he was volunteer NURSE at the Hospital,) enter-

“he stood between the dead and the living,” and was appointed to the *forlorn hope*, to be “Resident Physician of the Yellow Fever Hospital at Bush-Hill.”

To his professional cares was added much of the regulation and control of the domestic economy, and his authority in this behalf was strengthened by the civil commission of the peace, conferred by Governor Mifflin.*

He continued there while it was necessary to keep the Hospital open, and honourable and valuable testimonials of his humane and skilful services followed him in retirement.

In 1794, he was elected “*Surgeon to the Pennsylvania Hospital*,” and continued to perform the active duties of that station twenty-two years. His practice increased with no ordinary rapidity, and in the same year he again met preferment as “*Prescribing Physician of the Philadelphia Dispensary*.”

He was long time *Surgeon to the Alms House In-*

tained Dr. Rush’s opinion of the origin of the fever, and there was intimate communication between them. It is not unlikely that this and their entire concurrence in the necessity of removing local causes of disease, may have led Mr. G. to think of the appropriation of his wealth to public purposes, especially the widening of Water Street, and the improvement of the eastern city front, and its police and embellishment.

Although it may not be perfectly apposite to the purpose of this note, we will not deny ourselves the pleasure of naming Mr. M. Carey, as a colleague of Mr. G. in the Committee of Citizens. He carried into the performance of its duties, the same contempt of danger—the same warm and generous heart—which have animated him through a long life, and placed him with the foremost in benevolent works and designs.

* Dr. Rush says, “this house was regulated and governed with the order and cleanliness of an old established hospital.”

firmary—Surgeon to the Institution for the Blind—and President of the Medical Society.

The *American Philosophical Society* elected him a member in July, 1802.

Nor was our Professor without honour *abroad*. The “Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society of London,” transmitted the Honorary Diploma to him in 1836.

All these distinctions were solid benefits to our school. They were, too, “*clear honour, won by merit of the wearer.*”

Dr. Physick’s direct connexion with our Medical Department began in June, 1805, when he succeeded Dr. William Shippen and the lamented *Wistar** in the Chair of Surgery, then separated from Anatomy and Midwifery.†

* We shall be excused for *stepping out of the text*, to speak with affectionate respect of this gentleman. *Great* and *good* are the epithets which belong to his name. He was eminently great as a philosopher, a physician, and a teacher; and it were vain to seek a *better* in the social and domestic relations. To this day Philadelphia owes one of the happiest associations of her society to his name and hospitable example. He died in January, 1818, having filled different stations in our school since 1789.

† These again were divided, and to the latter Dr. Thomas C. James was elected in June 1810. Ill health caused him to resign in 1834, and he did not long survive—a strong constitution was broken down by incessant toil of mind and body. Nature had bountifully bestowed upon him the essential qualities of the gentleman, and they were successfully cultivated. His self-government and courtesy were beautiful traits. He was a scholar, and he might have been a *poet*, but he practised self-denial. In the sphere to which he mainly confined his attention, he had hardly a rival in general esteem and

It may be remarked, here, that the style of his lectures was strictly didactic—his manner grave and imposing. He did not affect the rhetorician, nor by any means stir the imagination—his own or his hearers.

In July, 1819, he was elected to the Chair of Anatomy, vacant by the death of Dorsey, whose praise was neither “MEASURED NOR CONFINED.” He remained there until 1831. Then it was, that by reason of declining health, he felt himself constrained to withdraw from its duties, and to tender his resignation.

Upon the happening of this deplored event, having filled these Chairs with the highest reputation more than thirty years—he was unanimously chosen to be “Emeritus Professor of Surgery and Anatomy”—a compliment (the first of its kind here,) for the bestowing of which *policy* might have sufficed, for his *name* was a *pillar of strength*.

But the main design was to render a *signal* honour, and so it was received.

It will not be expected to find in this place a notice of peculiar opinions, if he had any, in the theory or practice of his art. But it is designed to relate, briefly and without overcharging, some of the elements of his personal and professional worth. The

confidence. And foreign travel, much reading, and manly associations, commended him as a companion to highest respect. If he had a defect it must have been more of *diffidence* in himself and of *deference* to others, than an impartial comparison of merits would justify. But he was a pattern of the pure man—the amiable friend—and the Christian philosopher and philanthropist.

same are doubtless to be seen in the histories of eminent medical men, dead and living, but "*the ELEMENTS were so MIXED in him,*" as to produce in rare perfection, with universal assent, a MODEL of the ADMIRABLE PHYSICIAN.

If, as has been said elsewhere, "the science of medicine has relation to every thing;" and if, as is believed, there is no virtue but finds its proper place in the *perfect physician*, this may be thought high eulogy; but it is not the less just.

We have remarked that the *healing art* was Dr. Physick's EARLY choice. It was first and LAST in his aspiration and his ambition. To this, other objects were held in secondary estimation;—in other studies he did not court distinction. For this, the fascinating lures of pleasure were shunned, and the faculties of mind and body kept, by exercise and temperance, in constant training.

Abhorring EMPIRICISM, he was yet bold and decided in *practice*. Doubt and uncertainty were dispelled by anxious inquiry and meditation in the closet and on the pillow:—there they were left.

In common intercourse his GRAVITY might have been mistaken for coldness—perhaps AUSTERITY. But in the chamber of the sick, his face was effulgent of kindness and sympathy, lighting to love and hope! It is hard to say, "*utrum eum amici magis venerentur an amarent.*"

Whatever might assuage pain or administer to ease and comfort—even the manner of adjusting the patient's couch, or the concoction of his diet,—nothing was beneath his attention.

The families in which he was professionally intimate, confessed his faithfulness and skill, with grati-

tude; and they often felt too, more deeply, that they had found a FRIEND in the PHYSICIAN.

Jealous of professional honour, he was sensitively delicate on the subject of professional reward, lest any might impute an undue mixture of the alloy of cupidity with the liberal motives to duty. But he never "*turned disease into commodity.*" There was a constant negation of mercenary feelings in numberless, unstinted and unrequited services;* for he was always prompt at the call of the poor. Humanity this so often, in varying degrees, associated with professional rank, that it is adverted to less for individual encomium than to pay a just tribute to a numerous class.

TRUTH was in his regard a *prime* virtue, so that we may again apply what has been said of Atticus, "*mendacium neque dicebat neque pati poterat.*" His undeviating regard for truth raised PUNCTUALITY above the rank of MINOR MORALS.

His *practice*, like his *fame*, had become national. Physicians and patients, far away and near, asked his advice; and many from remote cities and States sought here in person relief by his consummate skill. His success in healing was indeed remarkable. Upon whom shall his mantle fall? Doubtless there is a fit successor to be found among those who best know to value his teaching and example.

He was no religionist.—Reverence for religion was deeply seated in his mind and his affections: nor was

* In regard to the exalted estimation in which Dr. Physick was held by our friends of South Carolina—his moderation in charges—and the frequency of his benevolence, we have a note from Mr. John Vaughan which we are almost tempted to insert verbatim. But to prove works of unbounded charity in the one it is enough to call the other to the stand as a witness, and to know they were co-labourers.

he indifferent to her outward rites. It is not known that he was ever betrayed into an expression which could disquiet the *believer* or give boldness to the *sceptic*. And so ardently did he pant for her promises, that he fain would have attained assurances more than are revealed by *Faith*.

Behold this imperfect portraiture of the man whom this University delighted to honour! How richly have her honours been repaid by the wider expansion of her own fame,—by the enlarged reputation of her school—and by the advancement of medical science!

After protracted suffering, our Friend and revered Professor expired on the morning of the 15th day of December, 1837.

The *often* conqueror is himself vanquished! The grave is closed and holds fast HIS victim!

Yet say, can that *emaciated Body* be *all* that remains of this *Mind* and these *Virtues*!



