

Bond (Henry)

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE

OF THE LATE

JOHN RUAN, M. D.;

READ (BY APPOINTMENT) BEFORE THE COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS

OF PHILADELPHIA,

By HENRY BOND, M. D.,

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THERE are many individuals whose lives have been marked by no achievements of extraordinary brilliancy, and no incidents to fill the world's mouth; but which, nevertheless, present most wholesome examples for imitation, and the recollections of which are among the most precious treasures of their friends. Such are they who listen to the still small voice of conscience, and think it

“Greatly wise to talk with their past hours,  
And ask them what report they bore to heaven;  
And how they might have borne more welcome news;”

Rather than to the loud claims of ambition—that insatiable thirsting for power and distinction, governed only by the dictates of worldly expediency, without scruples as to the means adopted in the pursuit and attainment of its objects; but

“Whose yesterdays look backward,  
And, like the Parthian, wound him as he flies.”

These thoughts are elicited by the contemplation of the character of him, a notice of whose life it has been made my duty, as it is my pleasure, briefly to present to this Society.

DR. JOHN RUAN was the second son of John Ruan, a respectable gentleman planter in the island of St. Croix, in the West Indies, where he was born, June 19th, 1771. His father died in 1782, and his mother being previously deceased, he and his elder brother were sent by their guardians to this country to complete their education, and were placed under the care of Mr. Isaac Barnes, of the City of Trenton, New Jersey. Young Ruan studied four years in the Academy of that place, of which the Rev. James Armstrong, D. D., was at that time the Principal. In 1788, he entered the Junior Class of Princeton College, of which our late Vice President, Dr. OTTO, was a member; and took his first degree in 1790, and afterwards that of Master of Arts. In the following winter he attended a course of medical lectures in Philadelphia. In the spring of 1791, he went to Edinburgh, then the most renowned medical school in Great Britain, if not in the world. There he remained prosecuting his medical studies, until 1793, when he in company with our late President Dr. Thomas C. James, his fellow student, returned to the United States, and landed at Wiscasset in Maine. It appears, by the catalogue of his *Alma Mater*, that he obtained the degree of M. D., but at what time, or in what institution, I have not learned.

Soon after his return from Europe, he commenced the practice of Medicine in the borough of Frankford, near Philadelphia, where he remained fifteen years; at the termination of which period he removed to a farm, which he had purchased a few miles from that borough. There he remained three years, still devoted to the duties of his profession, which, in 1811, he relinquished, and retired to a plantation

in Maryland, where he resided ten years. He spent the winter of 1821 in his native island, on a visit to his two brothers, who were planters there. On his return he found it necessary, on account of pecuniary losses, to resume the practice of his profession; and in the spring of 1822, he settled in Newportville, in Bucks county, Pa. But he soon found a country practice too fatiguing for one at his time of life, being then fifty-one years old; and in the autumn of that year, he removed to Philadelphia, being encouraged thereto by some of his old professional friends—particularly by Drs. Otto and Dewees, and by his warm friend and fellow student, Dr. James. He soon acquired business, and in a very few years had a larger obstetrical practice than any other physician in this City. Two or three physicians in the Incorporated Districts have sometimes made larger annual reports of births to the Board of Health; but, during the twenty-two years of his professional life in Philadelphia, his obstetrical practice amounted to 400 cases more than that of any other practitioner in the City. He attended 2922 cases; and from 1830 to 1840, from his sixtieth to his seventieth year, his cases, annually, varied from 161 to 214. To be able, at that time of life, to undergo all the watching and fatigue necessarily connected with such a practice, shows that he was blessed with a constitution of great vigor, and capable of great endurance.

In the spring of 1843, he had a severe attack of pneumonia, by which he was greatly reduced and prostrated. He recovered so far as to enjoy comfortable health and to resume his professional labors. But his constitution had received so severe a shock, that the fatigue and watching necessarily

connected with his business, rapidly hastened on the infirmities of age, and in the summer of 1844, he was compelled to withdraw entirely from practice; and late in the autumn of that year, he removed to a small estate which he owned in Bucks county,—where he died, July the 2d, 1845, in the seventy-fifth year of his age, greatly respected and deeply lamented.

In his manners, Dr. RUAN evinced the simplicity and courteousness of the real gentleman, and the sincerity and benignity of the true Christian. He well understood and practised the rules of intercourse observed in the best bred society, and was punctillious in conforming to the strictest rules of professional etiquette.

He was no vaunter of his own success, nor had he trumpeters at hotels and on the corners of the streets to spread his fame, and gain adherents. His uncommon success in his profession was the result of kindness, courteousness, and fidelity—of his unwearied attention and unmeasured benevolence. The poor never called on him in vain, and no labour was ever spared when he could minister to their relief. He was always cheerful, but never frivolous; prompt in the discharge of duty, but not officious; gentle, but decided; dignified, but free from austerity. He seldom failed to inspire his patients with the highest confidence in his ability and friendship. His liberal, tolerant spirit, and the benevolence of his heart were evinced in every action, and imparted to his conversation a peculiar charm. His extensive and various reading gave him a fund of information, which made his conversation instructive as well as agreeable.

In all the domestic relations he was a most excellent model

for imitation. He was very little disposed to mingle in a throng or to frequent the crowded festive hall; his pleasures and his affections centred in the domestic circle. There he might almost always be found, except when called away by the duties of his profession, or by those of religion. In former years, he frequently attended the meetings of the College, but a laborious practice, added to the burden of years, rendered his attendance of late unfrequent. He however, continued to feel a lively interest in the prosperity and honour of our Society.

I cannot learn that Dr. RUAN ever wrote any thing for the press; but he has left, in manuscript, some notes of cases which he either attended or witnessed. It seems, at first view, somewhat remarkable that one of so cultivated a mind, and such extensive observation, should have added nothing to the stock of recorded medical facts and observations. During that part of his life, in which men usually write, if ever, he was either engaged in a laborious country practice, or was in retirement from the profession; and after his resumption of its active duties, and his settlement in this City, the nature and extent of his professional engagements, would seem to furnish a sufficient reason why, at his time of life, he did not turn author. And, moreover, one of his prominent characteristics was a dislike, we might almost say, a morbid repugnance, to the semblance of seeking notoriety.

In February, 1805, when he resided in Frankford, he was elected an Honorary Member of the Philadelphia Medical Society; and in April, 1823, a few months after his settlement in this City, he was elected a Fellow of this College.

He was naturalized in 1798, at the earliest period after

his settlement in the country, which the laws of the United States admitted of; and he always evinced a warm attachment to the interests and institutions of his adopted country.

Dr. RUAN was married three times, and in each instance he drew a high prize in the matrimonial lottery. In 1793, he married Elizabeth, a daughter of Richard Gibbs, an English gentleman of fortune, by whom he had two children. In 1805, he married Rachel, a daughter of Dr. William McIlvain, of Burlington, N. J., by whom he had several children, all of whom died in childhood. In 1822, he married Susan, a daughter of the Hon. William Rodman, of Bensalem, Bucks county, Pa., by whom he had six children; three of these, together with their mother, have survived him to mourn his departure.

He was many years a communicant in the Protestant Episcopal Church, in which he had been baptized in infancy; and in his protracted sufferings and infirmities, he was remarkably sustained by the hopes and consolations of religion. Of his religious character, it is perhaps sufficient to say, for it is saying much, that his life was so exemplary, so conformable to what he professed, that he never gave the enemies of religion occasion to speak reproachfully of it on his account.

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