

AN

OBITUARY NOTICE

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OF

THOMAS T. HEWSON, M.D.,

LATE PRESIDENT

OF THE

PHILADELPHIA COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS;

BY

FRANKLIN BACHE, M. D.

READ BEFORE THE COLLEGE, NOVEMBER 6, 1849,

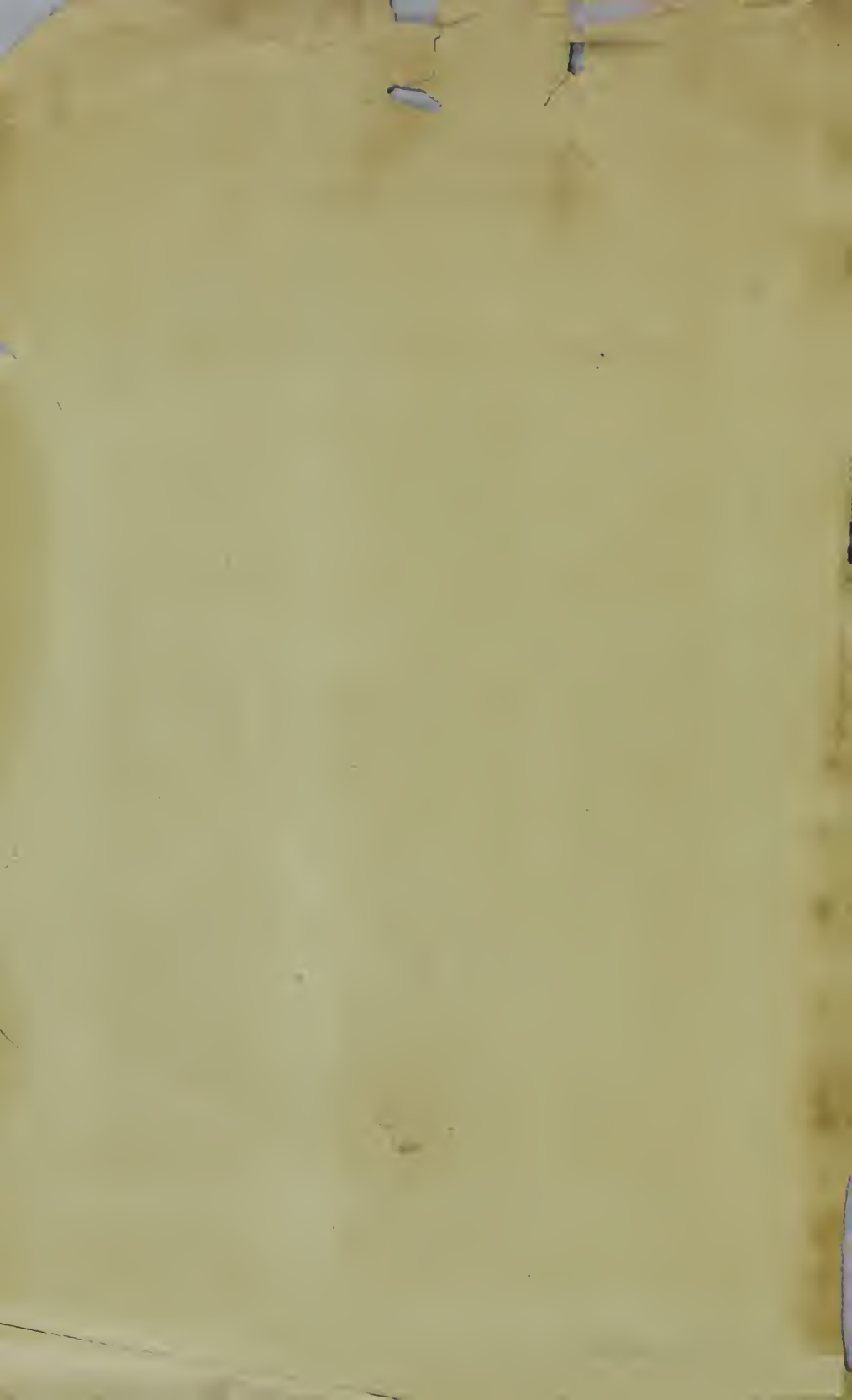
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PHILADELPHIA:

PRINTED BY WILLIAM F. GEDDES,

NO. 112 CHESTNUT ST.

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OBITUARY NOTICE

OF

DR. THOMAS T. HEWSON.

THOMAS TICKELL HEWSON was born in London, on the 9th of April, 1773. He was the second son of William Hewson, the celebrated anatomist and physiologist, who died of fever, occasioned by a wound received in dissection, on the 1st of May, 1774, in the thirty-fifth year of his age, when the subject of this notice was but one year old. His mother was Mary Stevenson, daughter of Mrs. Margaret Stevenson, a widow lady, in whose house Dr. Franklin resided, while in London as agent of the Colony of Pennsylvania. She was a woman of cultivated mind and fine judgment. It was her good fortune to enjoy the friendship of Dr. Franklin to the day of his death; and her published correspondence with him evinces as well the extent of her acquirements, as the elegance of her style.

In March, 1781, at the age of eight years, young Hewson entered the school of William Gilpin, at Cheam, near London, where he received the rudiments of his education, and where he continued to reside until the summer of 1786, with the exception of five months in the winter of 1784-85, which he spent with Dr. Franklin at Passy. He showed much aptitude for learning, and was called

“little inquisitive Tom,” and “all soul and no body.” His mother, writing to a friend in September, 1783, remarks of him that “he bids fair, by the powers of his mind, to do honour to his name; for he outstrips all his competitors in learning.” In the summer of 1786, Mrs. Hewson removed to America with her children, and soon after her arrival, Thomas entered the Junior class of the College of Philadelphia, afterwards the University of Pennsylvania. He was prepared to graduate in 1788, but remained another year, in compliance with the advice of Dr. Ewing, the Provost of the College, who wished him to postpone his graduation on account of his youth. In July, 1789, he took the degree of Bachelor of Arts, speaking at the Commencement with much applause, and immediately afterwards began his medical studies with Dr. John Foulke. After having pursued his studies for nearly five years in Philadelphia, he returned to England in June, 1794, and, in the month of September following, entered St. Bartholomew’s Hospital, as one of the two house surgeons. In November, 1795, he went to Edinburgh, where he remained until July, 1796, when private business compelled him to return to London. In that city he was detained until July, 1800, when he returned to America. During his absence abroad, he had the misfortune to lose his mother, who died on the 14th of October, 1795, at Bristol, Pennsylvania, in the fifty-seventh year of her age.

Thus, after a course of medical and surgical studies, embracing a period of eleven years, he returned to America to enter upon the practice of his profession in this city. In November, 1806, he was appointed physician to the Walnut Street Prison, and served the Institution faithfully until March, 1818, when he resigned. His services in this Institution were signalized by his devoted attentions to the prisoners during the prevalence of a dangerous and malignant typhus, which broke out in December, 1817, and continued until the succeeding March. So highly did the Inspectors of the Prison estimate the services of Dr. Hewson,

that they presented to him a handsome silver vase, bearing the following inscription :

A TRIBUTE TO HUMANITY.
THE INSPECTORS OF THE PRISON
OF THE
CITY AND COUNTY OF PHILADELPHIA
TO
DR. THOMAS T. HEWSON;

Commemorative of his distinguished professional services during the prevalence
of malignant typhus fever in the winter of 1817-18.

The correspondence which passed between the Committee of the Inspectors of the Prison and Dr. Hewson, on the occasion of the presentation of the vase, does equal credit to both parties.

In September, 1811, Dr. Hewson was elected one of the surgeons of the Philadelphia Alms-House, an appointment which he held for many years. In 1815, he published a translation from the French of the valuable work of Swediaur on Syphilis. In December, 1816, he was elected Professor of Comparative Anatomy in the Department of Natural Science of the University of Pennsylvania; but it does not appear that he delivered a course on the subject until the spring of 1818. It is probable, also, that this was the only course he gave under his appointment. Knowledge and zeal are not the only prerequisites of success in teaching a branch of science. The importance of the subject must be appreciated by a sufficient number of votaries, to afford the teacher a class of pupils; for, without recipients of his knowledge, his fitness to impart instruction must be in vain.

In January, 1817, he was appointed physician to the Orphan Asylum, a situation which he held for twenty years; and in No-

ember, 1818, he was chosen one of the surgeons of the Pennsylvania Hospital, in the place of Dr. Dorsey, deceased, and continued to hold the appointment until May, 1835, a period of nearly seventeen years, when he resigned.

Dr. Hewson largely contributed to the formation and revision of our National Pharmacopœia, in fulfilment of various appointments, made chiefly by this College. Although the project of forming our present National Pharmacopœia originated with Dr. Lyman Spalding, who submitted his plan to the New York County Medical Society in 1817; yet it is due to this College to recall to recollection its early though unsuccessful efforts to accomplish the same desirable object. On the 1st of May, 1787, Dr. John Morgan proposed to the College to form a Pharmacopœia for Pennsylvania. This proposition does not appear to have been acted upon until June of the following year, when a Committee was appointed to consider it. In April, 1789, a draught of a letter was reported, to be addressed to the "most respectable practitioners of the United States," in which the importance of a National Pharmacopœia is referred to. This appears to have elicited a communication from Dr. James Tilton, of Delaware, addressed to the College the succeeding year, containing suggestions in relation to the formation of the work. In 1791, Dr. Benjamin Smith Barton was appointed on the Pharmacopœia Committee, and in November, 1792, the Committee made its first report. The subject was allowed to sleep until 1794, when Dr. Parke was added to the Committee. Nothing appears on the minutes respecting the Committee until April, 1797, when it made its second report; and, in the following June, the report being again read, the recommendation of the Committee was adopted, "that an enumeration be made of all medicinal substances and pharmaceutical processes, as shall appear useful and proper to compose the intended Pharmacopœia." Drs. Griffitts, Barton, and James were appointed to make the enumeration; but it does not appear

by the minutes that they ever fulfilled the duties of their appointment.

Nothing further appears on the minutes of the College in relation to a Pharmacopœia until February, 1819, when the College acted on the Circular of the Medical Society of the State of New York, setting forth Dr. Spalding's plan, which, by resolution, was approved of. This plan contemplated the assembling of four district Conventions, severally composed of medical delegates from the Northern, Middle, Southern, and Western States, each charged with the duty of compiling a Pharmacopœia, and of electing one or more delegates to a general Convention, to meet at Washington City on the 1st of January, 1820, to which the district Pharmacopœias were to be referred, with authority to form from them a single national work. In this important enterprise, Dr. Hewson took a leading part. He was appointed by this College one of the delegates to the Convention of the middle district which met in Philadelphia; by the middle district Convention, one of its delegates to the general Convention at Washington; and by the latter body, as a member of the Committee of Publication, which assembled in New York. Thus, in every stage of its preparation, the first edition of our National Pharmacopœia received the benefit of his efficient services.

The National Medical Convention provided for the revision of the Pharmacopœia at the end of ten years. In view of this revision, the College, in April, 1828, appointed a Committee, consisting of Drs. Hewson, Hartshorne, and Wood, to report amendments, corrections, and additions to the work; and at a subsequent period the writer was added to the Committee. This Committee held more than one hundred meetings at Dr. Hewson's house, and, in November, 1829, made its final report, in the form of a draught of a Pharmacopœia, fully written out, and prepared for the press. The writer can bear testimony to the efficient services, rendered by

Dr. Hewson as chairman of this Committee. The College adopted the draught, thus prepared, and directed it to be presented by its delegates to the Washington Convention of 1830, as a contribution towards the revision of the National Pharmacopœia. The draught was adopted by the Convention, with the condition that it be submitted to a Committee of Revision and Publication, consisting of a chairman and two members from each of the eight principal cities of the Union. Dr. Hewson was appointed chairman of this Committee, and was authorized by the College to have a sufficient number of manuscript copies of the draught prepared for transmission to the distant members of the Committee, with a view to obtain their written comments thereon. These having been received, the Committee met in Philadelphia, considered the suggestions they contained, agreed upon the final amendments, and superintended the publication of the work.

Nor did the labours of Dr. Hewson, in connexion with the Pharmacopœia, terminate here. In May, 1838, preparatory to the then approaching decennial revision, Dr. Hewson was again appointed chairman of the Committee for revising the work. The labours of the Committee on this occasion continued through a period of twenty months, and their result was placed before the College in a report, made at a special meeting, held in December, 1839. The report was accompanied by a draught of a revised Pharmacopœia, which, upon being presented to the Convention of 1840, was adopted as the basis of the future work. Dr. Hewson's labours, as chairman of this Committee, form the last official services, rendered by him in connexion with our National Pharmacopœia.

On the 17th of August, 1820, during the epidemic prevalence of yellow fever in this city, Drs. Hewson and Chapman offered their services to the Board of Health, to attend the yellow fever hospital. This offer was accepted; and on the 19th, the Board,

on the representation of the physicians as to the entire inadequacy of the temporary hospital, resolved to open immediately the east wing of the City Hospital, at Bush Hill, for the reception of patients. After the treatment of thirty-one cases, the hospital was closed on the 9th of October following. In a report made by the attending physicians to the Board, they gave it as their opinion that the yellow fever of that season presented more of the character of typhoid malignity than in any preceding year, and recorded their impression that, of the different remedies they had employed, the oil of turpentine had the strongest claims to attention. In the month of December following, the City Councils addressed a number of queries to this College in relation to the proper measures to be taken to secure the city from the invasion of malignant fever. Drs. Hewson, Griffitts, and Emlen were appointed a Committee to answer these queries; and in their report, which was adopted by the College, they strongly recommended, among other measures, the prosecution of the plan, then in contemplation, "for removing the whole of the buildings from the east side of Front street, inclusive, to the river, beginning at Vine and ending at South street, according to the original plan of William Penn, the wise and intelligent founder of the city."

In 1822, Dr. Hewson established a private medical school in Library street, consisting of himself as teacher of Anatomy and the Practice; Dr. Thomas Harris, of Surgery; Dr. Meigs, of Physiology and Midwifery; and the writer, of Chemistry and *Materia Medica*. The school continued with this organization for several years, during which period Dr. Hewson gave an annual course of lectures on Anatomy.

On the 5th of July, 1832, the Board of Health established a "Cholera Medical Board," composed of twelve physicians from the city and districts, and the port physician. On the 10th of July, Dr. Hewson was appointed a member of this Board, and,

at its first meeting, was elected its president. On the organization of the several cholera hospitals and stations, he was appointed physician-in-chief, which situation he filled until the dissolution of the Board and the closing of the hospitals on the 30th of October following. His attention to the responsible duties of his appointment was unremitting. He visited daily the City Hospitals, under the immediate care of his assistants, and was ever ready to render his professional aid to the several hospital physicians, when requested to afford it. His whole intercourse with his colleagues in the Board, and with the physicians of the several hospitals, was marked by dignity and urbanity, which commanded their respect, and at the same time attached them to this person. The discretion with which he exercised his authority, is well described in the following extract from a letter, received by the writer from a friend, who was one of his colleagues during the existence of this epidemic, and well acquainted with his services. He remarks, that "though the duties of his station were sufficiently delicate, and required of him, on more than one occasion, an exercise of authority, and a reversal of the decision of the physicians placed under his superintendence, yet not a single angry feeling was excited; and in no instance was there an appeal from his decisions made to the Board. So judiciously and kindly was his authority exercised, that the self-esteem of his adjuncts was never wounded."

At the close of his services, the Board of Health made him a handsome pecuniary acknowledgment; "not," they remark, "as a compensation for the invaluable services rendered by him to the suffering poor of the city and county during the prevalence of the recent epidemic; but as an expression, in a pecuniary form, of their high estimate of his unremitting attention to the duties of a situation, at once onerous and responsible, which he was induced to accept, at their request, at a season of uncommon alarm and excitement."

Dr. Hewson, during the course of his long life, received scientific honours from several societies and institutions. He was elected a member of the Edinburgh Medical Society in 1796, of the American Philosophical Society, and of this College, in 1801, of the Philadelphia Medical Society in 1804, of the Philadelphia Linnæan Society in 1813, and of the Medical Society of the District of Columbia in 1821. In 1822, the honorary degree of Doctor of Medicine was conferred on him by the Medical Department of Harvard University. He was a contributor to the Philadelphia Dispensary, served the Institution for many years as consulting surgeon, and was one of its managers at the time of his death. For many years he was an active member of the American Philosophical Society, and officiated either as one of its secretaries or curators from 1803 to 1822, inclusive. His services in connexion with this College need not be dwelt upon; as they are known to most of the Fellows. He filled successively the offices of secretary and censor, with the exception of one year, from July, 1802, to April, 1835, when he was chosen vice-president; and in the month of July following, on the death of Dr. James, he was elected president, which office he continued to hold to the time of his death, embracing a period of more than twelve years. It is fresh in the memory of all of us, with what dignity he filled the chair—a chair which had been graced by a Redman, a Shippen, a Kuhn, a Parke, and a James.

Dr. Hewson was not a voluminous writer. He published no formal work; but it is understood that he left a manuscript treatise on the primary forms of the venereal disease, and on strictures of the urethra, which, it is to be hoped, will be prepared for the press by his son, Mr. Addinell Hewson, who has adopted the profession of his father, and is now far advanced in his medical studies. Dr. Hewson's style has the merit of clearness and precision, qualities essential to good medical writing. The follow-

ing list comprises all his papers and communications, so far as they are known to the writer:

Case of Small Pox, supervening on Vaccination. Read before the College, April 6th, 1802. Unpublished.

Case of Unusual Tumefaction, terminating in Extensive Suppuration. Read before the College, May 2d, 1809. Unpublished.

Some Experiments on the Coagulation of the Blood, when out of the Body. Published in the Eclectic Repertory for January, 1811.

Case of Ecthyma Cachecticum, with Observations. Published in the North American Medical and Surgical Journal for January, 1826.

Case of Strangulated Umbilical Hernia, successfully operated upon. Published in the Medical Recorder for January, 1827.

On the Mechanism of Preternatural Joints, and on the Means of Cure. Read before the College, October 2d, 1827, and published in the North American Medical and Surgical Journal for January, 1828.

Remarks on the Eruptive Disease, produced by the Internal Use of Balsamum Copaibæ. Read before the Kappa Lambda Society, and published in the North American Medical and Surgical Journal for January, 1828.

On the Protective Power of Vaccination, and on the late Epidemic Varicella. Read before the College, April 1st, 1828. Unpublished.

History of a Case of Puerperal Convulsions. Read before the College, and published in the North American Medical and Surgical Journal for April, 1830.

On Varicose Veins, with the History of a Case, successfully treated by Pressure and Iodine Ointment. Read before the College, October 29th, 1833. Unpublished.

Case of Martha Thimble. Read before the College, November 22d, 1836. Unpublished.

Communication on the Cerebral Tendency of the Diseases of the Autumn of 1844. Made to the College, November 5th, 1844, and published in the Summary of its Transactions.

Communication on the Cholera Morbus of 1846, and on the Unusual Frequency of Rice-water Discharges in the Disease of that year. Made to the College, September 1st, 1846, and published in the Summary of its Transactions.

In connexion with this list, it may be proper to mention, that the reports, made to the College on Meteorology and Epidemics, were always prepared by Dr. Hewson.

For the last three years of his life, Dr. Hewson suffered from uneasiness about the neck of the bladder, which caused the motion of his carriage to give him considerable pain. From time to time, especially after fatigue or exposure to sudden changes of temperature, his usual symptoms were aggravated, and he suffered painful attacks, attended with hæmaturia. The chief cause of his sufferings was ascertained to be an enlargement of the prostate, which, in connexion with the morbid condition of the bladder, sufficiently explained his symptoms. About two weeks be-

fore his death, he was seized with an attack of his disease, more severe than on any previous occasion. Thirty-six hours before dissolution, he became somewhat comatose; but up to that time his intellect had been perfectly unclouded; and, though fully aware of the approach of death, he manifested the most perfect calmness and resignation. The fatal event took place on the 17th day of February, 1848, in the seventy-fifth year of his age, after an honourable career of professional exertion of nearly fifty years.

On the 5th of November, 1812, Dr. Hewson married Emily, second daughter of the late John Banks, Esq., of Washington City, by whom he had twelve children. Of these, seven sons and three daughters survive him. On the 11th of January, 1837, he met with a severe domestic calamity, in the death of his wife, after a matrimonial union of more than twenty-four years.

Dr. Hewson stood high as a practitioner. His professional education in England and Scotland was shaped with a particular view to surgery; but, upon his return to Philadelphia in 1800, he entered upon the practice of medicine as well as of surgery; following, in this respect, the usage of the country of his adoption. In both branches of his profession, he soon became eminent, enjoying, to the close of his life, a gratifying share of public confidence. In all that related to the ethics of the profession, he was scrupulously correct. His intercourse with his professional brethren was marked by great suavity of manner. When called to consult with junior practitioners, his deportment was such as to place them at once at their ease. There was no assumption of superiority, no attempt at dictation; but, on the contrary, a delicate regard was manifested for their equal professional rights.

Such is an imperfect sketch of the life of our late president.

He has descended to the tomb, and we feel the void occasioned by his absence from amongst us. But he has left us his example of professional excellence and private worth. Let us emulate his virtues, as the best homage we can pay to his cherished memory.

