

Memoirs of the Life and Writings of William P. Dewees, M. D. By HUGH L. HODGE, M. D., Professor of Obstetrics in the University of Pennsylvania.*

DR. WILLIAM POTTS DEWEES, the late Professor of Midwifery in the University of Pennsylvania, was one of the most distinguished individuals that has ever graced the annals of our profession in this country; his name is indissolubly associated with the history of our science; he found it struggling in the weakness of infancy, and left it fully established in the strength and privileges of manhood.

Of the parentage and early life of our departed professor, little is known. His great-grandfather, and probably his grandfather, were among the immigrants from Sweden, the original settlers of Delaware bay and river, and maintained, for a series of years, a respectable and influential character. His grandmother belonged to the family of Farmer, which appears to have been of Irish descent, their ancestors enjoying much wealth, part of which was invested in the purchase of immense tracts of land in this country. His mother was the daughter of Thomas Potts, a highly respectable English gentleman, whose family first settled and gave name to Pottsgrove (or Pottstown) on the river Schuylkill.

Dr. Dewees was born on the 5th of May, 1768, at Pottsgrove, and being early left fatherless, and with very little property, he had not the advantage of a collegiate education. It is difficult, however—not to say impossible—to restrain genius, even by the chains of poverty and neglect. Young Dewees improved all the means at his command, and must have made some proficiency in the languages, as his knowledge of Latin and French in after life was sufficient for all necessary purposes. He is represented by those best calculated to judge, as docile, industrious, very affectionate, and amiable.

He early determined to study medicine, and was, for this purpose, placed by his father in the establishment of a Dr. Phyle, a practising apothecary, as was very customary at that period, when the proper distinction between the business of the apothecary and of the physician had not been generally made.

Under the superintendence, for two or three years, of Dr. Phyle, he appears to have acquired his knowledge of pharmacy, and its collateral sciences—afterwards he placed himself in the office of Dr. William Smith, to prosecute more especially his professional studies. During his connection with Dr. Smith, and his residence in Philadelphia, in the years 1787, '8, and '9, he attended lectures in the University of Pennsylvania.

* This Memoir was read before the Medical Class of the University of Pennsylvania, November 5th, 1842. Being anxious to lay it before our readers without delay, and having but little space for the purpose, we have been compelled to slightly abridge it.

During the infancy of medical instruction in this country, the degree of Doctor in Medicine was seldom sought after, and in accordance, therefore, with the almost universal custom of the day, Dr. Dewees commenced the practice of his profession without receiving a regular diploma from his preceptors, in the summer of 1789. He was then twenty-one years of age, about the medium height, well proportioned, of a florid complexion, brown hair, rather slender make, and remarkably youthful in his appearance, so that great objections were frequently made to employing a physician apparently so very young.

He commenced the arduous duties of our profession about fourteen miles north of Philadelphia, at the village of Abington, where he soon engrossed all the valuable practice, notwithstanding the objections made to his youth and inexperience, and to the deficiencies of his education. His talents, united with great industry and perseverance, his affectionate and amiable disposition, secured the attachment, and very soon the confidence, of his patients. In this comparatively retired spot, thrown at an early age upon his own resources, with no patronage but his own character and attainments, with no pecuniary assistance, Dr. Dewees, by sedulous attention to business, by careful observation of physiological and pathological phenomena, laid the foundation of his future usefulness and celebrity. He would often, in after life, allude to observations made, or to treatment pursued by him while a youth at Abington, confirmatory of his future theoretical and practical views. He was soon called to a more extensive field of usefulness.

The desolations of a terrible epidemic (the yellow fever), during the summer and autumn of the memorable year 1793, had extended to the practitioners of medicine in this city, as well as to the public generally. Almost universally they remained at the post of danger; and many fell victims to their humane, self-denying, and disinterested devotion to the suffering community. The ranks of the profession in our city being thus diminished, and there being few instructed physicians in the country, a fine opening occurred for those whose education and experience gave promise that their services would be useful. On this occasion a Physick and a James appeared on the scene of action, candidates for a practice and a reputation which were subsequently enjoyed in rich abundance. The opportunity was too promising to be neglected by Dr. Dewees. It immediately drew him from his comparative retirement among the healthy regions and the delightful scenery of Abington. He felt the internal promptings of a spirit that burned for distinction—the stimulus which a consciousness of power excites in the bosom—and without hesitation he forsook his present prosperous career, to embark on a more troubled sea, whose waves had been deeply agitated by the physical causes to which we have alluded, and also by the perhaps still more distressing contentions which existed among the surviving members of the profession, and arose from contrariety of opinions and practice during the recent epidemic. Under these circumstances, Dr. Dewees took up his residence in Philadelphia, in December, 1793, as a candidate, with others, for professional business and reputation.

At this important epoch in the medical history of our city, and of the country, he found the confidence of the public was resting upon a Kuhn, a Shippen, a Rush, a Wistar, and a Griffiths. Dr. Rush soon ascertained the talents and abilities of Dewees, and threw his commanding influence in his favour. An intimacy also took place between Physick and Dewees, and as their course was different, the former preferring surgery and the

latter obstetrics, they assisted each other in prosecuting their respective plans for professional advancement.

Independently of any collateral assistance which Dr. Dewees might have received from the friendship of Dr. Rush, he enjoyed one of the finest opportunities that could possibly be presented for a medical man to rise to wealth and fame. At that period the science of obstetrics was hardly known in America. The physicians who occasionally engaged in its practice, had received no instruction, with the exception of a few, who, having visited Europe, brought home a general knowledge of the subject, but who, from the prejudices existing against the employment of male practitioners, had few opportunities and fewer inducements to perfect their knowledge. Hence, midwifery existed almost universally as an art: the aged and imbecile nurse was almost universally preferred to the physician. Women were generally the practitioners of midwifery, as few imagined any particular instruction necessary for an attendance on labour; at least any beyond that derivable from prolonged experience. Our science, however, is too essentially connected with the lives and happiness of individuals and families, to remain, for a long time, in such obscurity, when knowledge and science on other subjects were elevating the character and developing the resources of the community. As the arts and luxuries of life increased, the dangers and difficulties of the parturient process increased also. Experience lamentably demonstrated that the attentions of the nurse, however experienced, were unavailing; yea, that the officious interference of ignorant practitioners in a process so wonderful and so abstruse as that of parturition, was too often productive of the most fatal consequences to the child and its mother, thus destroying the comfort and happiness of families. In such extremities, all notions of false delicacy are thrown to the winds; the cry for help, arising from the emergencies of the case, is imperative; but, alas, who was prepared to respond to the cry? Who to render the necessary assistance? The physician, who, on such emergencies was called, was unprepared to afford relief; his former studies had been imperfect; his experience in midwifery trifling; his observation of severe cases very limited; and you may imagine the embarrassing and horrible condition in which such a practitioner must be placed, when a human being, and that a female, in agony supplicated for relief—when to him every eye was turned—when on him rested every hope of a despairing husband or a broken-hearted mother, and he felt conscious that he ought to be able, but still could not afford the proper assistance. Such was the condition of our community some fifty years ago—such, we are sorry to affirm, is the state of many communities, in various portions of our country, at the present day—where often, very often, the cry for help bursts from the agonized bosom, and there is no suitable response from the instructed obstetrician.

What greater incitement could be offered to a young medical man, conscious of power, but sensible of his deficiencies, than such a state of things? What more extensive field of usefulness could be presented to a conscientious and philanthropic youth, burning with desire to benefit his race, than to labour for the preservation of mothers and their children during the eventful and agonizing moments of parturition?

The opportunity, thus Providentially occurring, was embraced by the subject of our address. He felt and realized his own deficiencies, but was determined to overcome them. To attain the victory—to prepare himself for the elevated station to which he aspired—could only be effected by rendering

himself equal to the emergency. He reviewed his observations, made during four years at Abington, at the bedside of his patients,—he compared these results with the experience of others: he went still further; he commenced again an examination of the foundations of his science, the fundamental principles of obstetrics; and on these he built his stable superstructure, which has, and will last, to his own credit, and to the reputation of our school, our city, and our country. He made himself familiar with the then modern authorities—the Osbornes and Denmans of England, the Lévretts and Baudelocques of France; and hence derived accurate notions of the science and practice of midwifery.

His investigations, when compared with the results of his own experience, excited a partiality for French in preference to English obstetrics. He chose Baudelocque for his teacher; and often declared that he was indebted to this most distinguished French obstetrician, for all that he himself knew of midwifery. The disciple was worthy of his master.

Thus armed for the conflict, with the ignorance and prejudices of the community—with the irregular, the uneducated, or the imperfectly educated practitioners of the art, he was ready for the emergencies that might occur. Such emergencies were not unfrequent; for, unfortunately, difficult cases of delivery were at that period the result, not only of natural causes, but very frequently of the bad and officious practice of ignorant pretenders to the art, who made that labour difficult or laborious, which, without their interference, would have been natural and comparatively easy. On such occasions Dewees was often consulted; and a large portion of operative midwifery fell into his hands. For him, this was in every way advantageous; his theoretical knowledge became practical—his dexterity in operating, as well as his tact in the difficult art of diagnosis, was perfected; his reputation was diffused through the community, and his practice, of course, became more extensive and profitable. In a short period, therefore, after his establishment in Philadelphia, under the conjoint influences of the causes mentioned, but especially by his own real worth and decision of character, his success was complete, and he felt that he might safely enlarge his responsibilities and assume new duties, while he added to his comforts and happiness.

About this period he married Miss Martha Rogers, daughter of Doctor Rogers, of New England. Not many years after, this lady, still in all the bloom of youth and beauty, became the sudden victim of an acute disease, to the destruction, for a time at least, of that domestic comfort and support to which her husband had aspired, and which is so needful for all, especially for a physician, whose mind and heart are so constantly engrossed with the sufferings of his fellow beings, and whose periods of relaxation are so rare and so imperfect.

Dr. Dewees, soon after this period, conceived the idea of rendering himself useful, not only as a practitioner, but also as a teacher of midwifery; the science and practice of obstetrics, being little understood in our country, for very few and imperfect attempts had been made to impart even a general knowledge of this most important subject. Dr. William Shippen, one of the founders of the University, has the enviable reputation of being the first teacher of anatomy, of surgery, and also of midwifery, in this country; his professorship embracing these various subjects. So extensive were the duties incumbent on this professor, so fundamentally important was the subject of anatomy, and so urgent were the calls for instruction

in the elements of surgery, that midwifery was necessarily almost wholly neglected in his course of instruction. A few general directions for the guidance of the practitioner, constituted nearly all the information imparted to the student at the close of the professor's lectures.

As no one could realize more fully than Dr. Dewees the want of more extensive and efficient instruction on the subject of practical midwifery, we find that he has the high honour of first attempting a full course of lectures on obstetrics, in America. In a small office, he collected a few pupils, and in a familiar manner, indoctrinated them with the principles of our science; toiling year after year in opposition to the prejudices, not only of the community, but even of the profession, who could not perceive that so much effort was necessary for the facilitating the natural process of parturition.

Thus favourably introduced to the citizens of Philadelphia as a practitioner, and to the professional public as a teacher of the science of obstetrics, his practice became extensive, and his income greatly enlarged.

He again determined to seek the advantages and pleasures of domestic life, and in the year 1802 became united to his second wife, Miss Mary Lorrain, daughter of John Lorrain, a respectable merchant in Philadelphia. In this connection, he was greatly blessed: Mrs. Dewees was preserved in health and strength as the partner of his prosperity and adversity, enjoying with him the innumerable favours which Providence in the course of a long life had abundantly bestowed, and sharing with him those painful reverses that occurred in the latter periods of his life. By this marriage, Dr. Dewees became the father of eight children—three daughters and five sons—most of whom survive him.

Thus successful in his public exertions, blessed in his domestic relations, the object of attention to a large circle of friends, with whom he reciprocated those social attentions to which the natural warmth of his feelings and the sincerity of his friendships constantly inclined him, Dr. Dewees pursued the steady course to a still more extensive reputation and usefulness.

The practice and the science of midwifery were daily gaining importance in the judgment of an enlightened community. Their immense value in preserving life, in ameliorating suffering, in preventing continued and destructive disease, were more and more recognised. The necessity, positive and imperious, of employing as practitioners only those who were suitably indoctrinated, became acknowledged. The practice of allowing females to officiate was constantly diminishing; and the public attention became more steadily fixed on a Dewees, and a James, as the proper representatives of obstetric science, as those best calculated to give it practical efficiency. It soon became evident that midwifery would be regarded in a more important light by the Trustees and Professors of the University of Pennsylvania; that the time could not be far distant when it would be detached from its inefficient and subordinate connection with the anatomical chair,* and be separately taught in this model school of American medicine.

To be prepared for this event in every respect was now no easy task. Competition had already existed for years with many distinguished indi-

* Surgery had already been severed from Anatomy during the lifetime of Shippen; and was rendered a distinct and coequal Professorship under the direction of the father of American Surgery, Dr. Physick, June 5th, 1805.

viduals, especially with Dr. Thos. C. James, his cotemporary, and who, in addition to the possession of fine talents, an excellent education, great personal attractions and influence, was also a lecturer on the science of obstetrics, having commenced his course of instruction with the late Dr. Church in 1801. New competitors were also appearing; and one, although young in the profession, a graduate of 1801, who had just returned from Europe, yet by the brilliancy of his talents, his popular address, and the influence of his former friends in Virginia, and his social connections in this city, obtained an influence as a practitioner, and soon as a teacher in obstetrics, which threatened to distance all his rivals. I allude to Dr. Chapman, the present distinguished Professor of the Practice of Medicine in this University, who, on the death of Dr. Church, became associated with Dr. James, in 1805, as a lecturer on obstetrics.

Dr. Dewees immediately determined to strengthen his position in public estimation, by attending to the forms, as he had done to the essentials of the profession. He applied, in the spring of 1806, to his Alma Mater for a diploma, that he might be fully entitled to the appellation of Doctor in Medicine, as he had for years been engrossed with the duties and responsibilities of the profession. On this occasion he wrote an elaborate *Thesis*, on the means of moderating or relieving pain during the process of parturition, in which he assumed the broad ground, that pain was an accidental or morbid symptom of labour,—the result of artificial modes of living and treatment, to be moderated or destroyed by medical means. Whatever opinion may be entertained as to this general proposition, there is little discrepancy of sentiment as to the efficacy of the remedy chiefly relied upon by Dr. Dewees, *i. e.* copious blood-letting; nor as to the fact, that to him, the profession, and through it, females universally, are under the highest obligations for the introduction of this measure into efficient practice. 'The Professor of Anatomy, Dr. Shippen, declared that "it marked an era in the history of Medicine," and exclaimed "how much misery might I have prevented had I known it forty years ago!"

The anticipated crisis respecting the establishment of midwifery as a distinct professorship, did not occur until the year 1810; so slow is the progress of truth, so difficult to illuminate the minds of men as to their true interests.

For this elevation of obstetrics to its legitimate station, we are much indebted to the late Professor of Anatomy, Dr. Caspar Wistar, who, in January, 1809, soon after he succeeded Dr. Shippen as Professor of Anatomy and Midwifery, urged, in a written communication, the Trustees of the University to have obstetrics separately taught in the school. Another year was suffered to elapse; and it was not until the 11th of April, 1810, that the resolution passed the board constituting midwifery a distinct Professorship; even then, with the miserable proviso, that an attendance on its lectures should not be essential for graduation.

The struggle for the new chair in the University was very warm, and the claims of opposing candidates, and the influence of their respective friends, rendered the event doubtful. The strong claims of Dr. Dewees, his talents, his industry, his attainments, his dexterity, boldness, decision and judgment as a practitioner, his great success in the practice of his art, and as a teacher of its principles, his popularity, supported by the strongest testimonials from many of the distinguished men in the profession, including Rush and Physick, were met by analogous claims of opposing candidates, Dr. James, and Dr. Chapman.

On the 29th June, 1810, the decision was made by the election of Dr. Thomas C. James to the new Professorship, the first in this country. This disappointment to the long cherished hopes and expectations of Dr. Dewees was certainly great, but involved no loss of character, as the most ample testimony was borne as to his qualifications and character, and the public confidence in his skill was entirely unabated. It could only be said that his influence with the Board of Trustees proved to be weaker than that of his rivals.

Dr. Dewees, turning his attention from the teaching to the practice of obstetrics, devoted himself, with renewed energy and success, to the active duties of his profession, occasionally allowing himself some relaxation in the pleasures arising from social intercourse, and also from indulging a natural taste for painting and music. For these arts he early manifested a decided inclination; and, although he never allowed himself time to study them in detail, yet for both he entertained the feelings and enthusiasm of an amateur, and was often refreshed by their agency amidst the anxieties of his self-denying and engrossing profession.

So devoted, however, was he to business, that his health, although it had been generally excellent, could not withstand the baneful influences arising from loss of sleep, irregular hours, laborious occupation, and continued mental and moral excitement, to which every practitioner of medicine, especially an obstetrician, is constantly exposed. His breast became delicate, and on several occasions he was threatened with hemorrhage from his lungs.

This dangerous indication of pulmonary affection, conjoined with a tempting pecuniary investment, induced Dr. Dewees, in the year 1812, to resign his profession, with all its honours and tempting prospects, and to remove to Phillipsburgh, where he invested the proceeds of a life of toil and self-denial. Disappointment followed this speculation, and a few years sufficed to destroy the property Dr. Dewees had been years in accumulating. His health, however, improved, and all fears of pulmonary disease having vanished, he returned in the fall of the year 1817 to the scene of his former prosperity; again a poor man, as regarded pecuniary matters, with a large family dependent on him entirely for support, but rich, in reputation for talents, industry, and success in his profession.

His immediate wants being supplied by the kindness of professional friends, he resumed his private course of instruction to medical students on midwifery, and the practice of his profession. He soon became connected with Drs. Chapman and Horner in the Medical Institute of Philadelphia, founded originally by Dr. Chapman, about the year 1817, and to its success Dr. Dewees greatly contributed, from the period mentioned until 1832, when age, and other pressing circumstances, induced him to resign.

As a practitioner his success was again complete; his former patients welcomed his return; and his increased reputation, supported now by the observations and experience of a long course of active professional duty, soon enabled him to discharge his pecuniary obligations, and to furnish him with the comforts and luxuries of life.

He now resolved to record, for his own reputation, and for the great benefit of the public, the results of his experience and observations on the nature and treatment of diseases, and especially, as regarded his favourite science of obstetrics. Thus obeying the good old-fashioned and common sense rule, first to study; then to practise; and finally, to teach and write;

in opposition to the practice of very many who undertake to publish books long before they have an opportunity of verifying their opinions by their practice.

The first publication was a second edition of his inaugural essay. The subsequent experience of practitioners has abundantly corroborated the advice of Dr. Dewees urged in this essay, as to the advantages of free bleedings in cases of rigidity—advantages not only of a positive character, in favouring relaxation, lessening pain, and hastening the process of parturition, but, also of a negative character, perhaps still more valuable, in preventing a vast amount of suffering, mental agitation, disease, and also of death. Would that his precepts were still more extensively studied, and more frequently acted on. Would that many, eminent in the profession, would sit at the feet of this Gamaliel, this teacher in medicine, and imbibe some fundamental notions of the importance of medical, and the dangers of surgical measures in cases of tension and rigidity of the soft parts during the process of labour. We should then, no doubt, hear less of some of the terrible cases in midwifery than at present.

After this Dr. Dewees collected his scattered essays, which, for a series of years, had been occasionally presented in the medical periodicals, and republished them in a distinct volume. This was in 1823. The character of these essays is generally practical; indeed, all have a bearing on the opinions and duties of a practitioner, although some are of a theoretical and controversial character. In all of them, we find displayed the great good sense, clearness and precision of their author, who seems to improve every subject he touches, and to carry forward the principles and practice of his predecessors to a still greater degree of perfection. These observations are made, not with any design of endorsing all the opinions of Dr. Dewees—for this cannot be done, as no doubt many of them are untenable, especially those which are merely speculative, and those which are connected with the very imperfect physiology of the day—but, with the important object of characterizing the writings of an individual who has accomplished more for obstetrics than any man of our country, and who has elevated himself, by the character of his publications, to a station of high authority in the profession. He is our representative to other nations on the science of obstetrics, and as such is continually quoted by European authorities, as if he constituted one of their own number.* This is high distinction, and the more worthy of admiration as attained by mere force of character—by talent, industry, and sedulous attention to business, without any assistance from education, wealth, and other accidental influences.

* Dr. John Ramabotham, of London, dedicated the second part of his "Practical Observations on Midwifery," to Dr. Dewees, in connection with Sir C. Mansfield Clark.

Dr. Edward Rigby, of London, an author of a most excellent work on Obstetrics, which has lately been republished in this country, writes to Dr. Dewees in August, 1834, in the following manner:—"I trust you will pardon the liberty I have taken in writing to you, as well as the motives which have induced me to do so. I have been accustomed, for some years, to hold such frequent intercourse with you in reading your admirable system of Midwifery, and work on children, that I cannot refrain from requesting a more direct intercourse between us," &c. &c.

The July number of the British and Foreign Medical Review, for 1839, contains the following handsome compliment:—"The Philadelphia school of Midwifery has for many years been looked upon with great respect by the obstetricians on this side of the Atlantic. The high name and professional standing of Dr. Dewees, his great experience, and, above all, his inestimable, compendious system of Midwifery and other valuable publications, have mainly contributed to this result."

By his essays, Dr. Dewees has done much in ameliorating suffering and prolonging life, by inculcating good principles, and insisting on a better practice. For example, in one paper he ably sustains the important idea that labour, in the human species, and especially in the upper walks of life, ought not to be so exceedingly painful as it is usually observed; and that, by proper attentions, even under all the disadvantageous influences of civilized life, suffering may be materially lessened.

He also ably and successfully notices Dr. Denman's celebrated aphorisms for the use of the forceps, demonstrating their inconsistency and their dangerous tendencies, especially by restricting too much the use of these invaluable instruments.

He has introduced advantageously into practice, the more extensive and precise use of the ammoniated tincture of guaiacum, in the treatment of some of the varieties of dysmenorrhœa and amenorrhœa. His observations on puerperal convulsions, and particularly, on the essential importance, in these horrible cases, of the free use of the lancet, are invaluable. To him we are indebted for the full establishment of a decided practice in such cases—a practice so efficient, that puerperal convulsions are no longer one of the *opprobria medicorum*; a death now being almost as rare an event as a recovery was formerly.

The views taken of uterine hemorrhage, of retroversion and inversion of the uterus, and the criticisms upon the directions given by some high authorities in obstetrics, are almost equally important, and would alone constitute a most powerful claim to the gratitude of all those interested in the health and lives of females.

After the publication of these essays, Dr. Dewees commenced the preparation of a series of systematic works, upon which after all, his reputation must eventually depend. The reputation acquired by any one as a practitioner of medicine, as a successful teacher or lecturer, is after all ephemeral. It lives at the utmost, only during the lives of the recipients of favours thus conferred. The wave of another generation carries the name thus acquired, to a silent oblivion. He who would live in the memories and hearts of men,—or rather,—he who would be useful after his body has been decomposed in the grave, must record the results of a life of observation and labour.

The first systematic work of Dr. Dewees, is probably his best—upon which he bestowed most thought and labour,—viz: His "*System of Midwifery for the use of students and practitioners.*" We have already alluded to the state of ignorance which universally existed throughout our country, on the science of obstetrics, towards the close of the last century, and of the light which beamed forth when a James, and a Dewees, became practitioners, and afterwards teachers of midwifery. Few or no publications had been made on this subject in America, and few of the foreign works circulated to any extent. Dr. Dewees was among the first to diminish this evil, by republishing in 1807, Heath's translation of Baudelocque; Dr. Chapman, in 1810, published an edition of Mr. Burns' (of Glasgow) principles of Midwifery; and Dr. Bard, of New York, the President of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, about the same time issued a compendium of the theory and practice of Midwifery,—designed rather to diffuse among ignorant midwives and practitioners, a knowledge of the rules for practice, as laid down by the best European authorities—rather than to make any attempt to enlarge the boundaries of the science. At

this juncture, Dr. Dewees's book opportunely appeared—the first regular systematic work of which our country could boast—although to Dr. Bard the credit belongs, of being the first one to instruct upon a large scale the physicians of our country in the art of midwifery.

To an American, therefore, the appearance of Dewees's work on Midwifery, is an important epoch in the history of our science, as being the first regular attempt to think for ourselves on tokology, and to contribute to the onward progress of this important division of medical science. It is the more important from the intrinsic value of the book, which, with all its deficiencies, probably constitutes now, at the expiration of twenty years from its original publication, the best practical book in our profession,—a book, gentlemen, which every one of you, as obstetricians, and especially as American obstetricians, should undoubtedly obtain and carefully study. It is founded on the French system of obstetrics, especially on that of Baudelocque. It takes a stand decidedly in advance of Denman, Osborne, Burns, and other English authorities in general use in our country at that period, and even of Baudelocque himself, in throwing aside from his excellent system much that was useless, and, it may be said, imaginative. On the mechanism of labour, on the details of natural and preternatural deliveries, and on the scientific rules for the safe conduct of labour, founded on a knowledge of the process of delivery, the system of midwifery by Dr. Dewees is exceedingly valuable as far as it goes: and it advances farther than any work of the day. That it should, on these points, be in the rear of the present state of the science, is the necessary result of the onward march of the human intellect. In what may be termed the medical portion of his system, Dr. Dewees may still be considered as one of the first authorities of the day. He is, on all occasions, eminently practical. His directions are clear and decided—his practice, founded on scientific research, and directed by great prudence and judgment, is always efficient—yet never rash. He affords to the suffering female all the relief which science and experience can impart, yet never endangers her life or her welfare, or that of her unborn offspring, by interfering improperly in the complicated and wonderful process of delivery. He studied nature: at the bedside, he became conversant with the details of natural delivery; he discovered what could be accomplished by the efforts of nature, and what could not: he learnt when the instructed practitioner should quietly wait for the development of the physiological actions of the female system, in silent admiration at the wonderful arrangements of a merciful Creator, and where, also, the resources of science were demanded in facilitating these actions, or in actually interfering for the safety of the mother or her infant. He was not to be numbered among those, on the one hand, who are the advocates of a "meddlesome midwifery," continually doing mischief through their ignorance and rashness; nor, on the other hand, will you ever find Dr. Dewees among those inefficient practitioners, who will never do good through fear of doing evil; who are so afraid of the abuse of artificial resources, they will never use them; who will allow, with the utmost indifference, the agonies of parturition to continue hour after hour, day after day, endangering the safety of the tissues, functions, and life of a delicate female, involving the welfare of her infant also, for fear of assuming responsibility; for fear he should be regarded by the timid or jealous ones as fond of interfering with nature's processes, as anxious to employ medical or surgical measures upon all occasions. Read his system of midwifery, and you will discover how

prudence and judgment are united with boldness and decision; how the practitioner is represented as the servant of nature, ready, at the instant, to facilitate all her efforts for a safe and rapid termination of inexpressible sufferings; always on the alert to detect any deviation from the proper course of delivery—on the alert to afford the required assistance, whether by medical or surgical measures. You will find him estimating rightly the value of human life, whether infantile or maternal, sympathising with human suffering, and anxious, on all occasions, to alleviate, shorten, or destroy the pains and anxieties, mental as well as corporeal, of the process of parturition.

That the work is not perfect, is to say that it is a human production; that it is not embellished by fine writing, and that occasionally it is diffuse, indefinite, and illogical, is the misfortune not the fault of the author. On the contrary, these very defects show the obstacles he had to overcome, and contribute to indicate more fully the native talent, the good sense, the great industry, and the practical efficiency of our *American Baudelocque*, whose name is inscribed upon the roll of fame, as one of the first of obstetric authorities—our representative in the general republic of science, on the subject of obstetrics. Nine editions of the system of midwifery have appeared, and no doubt a long period will elapse before subsequent authorities will be preferred to one, now so eminent at home and abroad.

Having contributed so much for the welfare of mothers, by his work on midwifery, he has contributed greatly to the suitable management of infants by his next systematic work, "*A Treatise on the Physical and Medical Treatment of Children*," published in 1825, and which has now passed through seven editions.

As its predecessor, this work is in advance of the doctrines and practices of the day; and for all practical purposes, irrespective of certain pathological views and scientific details, may still be regarded as unrivalled, notwithstanding the numerous publications on the management of infants and children with which the press has been loaded.

Dr. Dewees investigates the influence of the mother on her child, especially during pregnancy and lactation; he displays the importance of the physical management of infants, during the first weeks and months of life, as well as subsequently, and enters his decided protest against the prejudices and malpractices of ignorant and unskillful attendants, and points out, with his usual minuteness and discrimination, the modes of preserving health and life, of preventing and of curing the diseases of this helpless, but suffering portion of the community. To him we are greatly indebted, simply for fixing attention on the physical management of children, independently of the high value of his directions; for, prior to this period, the profession in this country left the details almost exclusively in the hands of nurses and midwives, with all their tormenting ignorance and officiousness.

In 1826, only one year after the publication of the work on children, appeared an elaborate volume, "*A Treatise on the Diseases of Females*," another standard work in our medical literature. Such a publication was much wanted, and was readily received by the community, as well as by the profession, as high authority. It circulated, as well as its predecessor, very rapidly in every part of our land; and it became, what it still is, the book for reference in all questions of practice, on the important, delicate, and difficult subjects which it embraces.

We cannot particularise, but would remark, in passing, that it bears the general character of the works of the author, as being dictated by great

decision and judgment, the result of much reading, but especially of careful and minute clinical observation. Hence, as a necessary consequence, from such an observer and practitioner, it adds materially to our knowledge of complaints exceedingly difficult to investigate, gives a precision and an efficiency to practical rules which were every how desirable, and has thus greatly ameliorated the sufferings of females, and procured much health and happiness to this afflicted, but too much neglected portion of the community. On the subject of prolapsus and retroversion of the uterus, it may, in addition, be remarked, that to no one individual are females so much indebted, in our country, as to Dr. Dewees, for fixing professional attention on the prevalence of these complaints, their importance, their distressing character, their proper treatment by means of pessaries, and especially for his improvement in the form of these instruments, and in the material of which they are composed; recommending the glass or metallic instruments in preference to the perishing materials previously employed, and which, from this cause chiefly, were the source of so much irritation, as to bring these invaluable assistants into great disrepute.

The last of the systematic works issued by our professor was on the practice of medicine, in the year 1830. Encouraged by the success of his former appeals to public, as well as professional attention, and anxious that those individuals who were remote from medical advice on the frontiers of our country, should have some means at command to assist in the management of their complaints, Dr. Dewees was induced to prepare a digest of his experience on the various diseases of the human system, with a view to popular as well as professional patronage. He in part succeeded, as no one can deny the excellency of the practice usually inculcated by Dr. Dewees. Still, the book has no pretensions to a scientific arrangement or treatment of diseases; and being prepared hastily, and with reference to popular use, does not partake largely of the confidence of the profession.

While thus much engaged, during a period of more than seven years, in making large and valuable additions to our medical literature, the attention of Dr. Dewees was in no degree diverted from his practice. How he accomplished so much is wonderful; how a man, engaged night and day in the general practice of his profession, and especially in the harassing duties of obstetrics, could so rapidly and efficiently labour with his pen, can only be explained by allowing him a happy combination of physical, as well as mental powers; as rare as it is desirable. His mind, indeed, never seemed to be fatigued; always on the alert, it would, even after great physical exertion, after the loss of rest and sleep, revert from one subject of thought and anxiety to another, and, at any moment, be directed from the anxious contemplation of a dangerous case of disease or of labour, to the quiet, but engrossing business of an author, with its memory, acuteness, judgment, and every other faculty, ready for active exercise.

Another explanation is, that Dr. Dewees well knew the value of moments of time, and could well improve them. He never suffered them to be lost, and could, as he has often affirmed to the speaker, carry on a train of thought, or an argument, for a few moments, and then, after hours of interruption, resume the current of his thoughts, and immediately prosecute his writing.

During this portion of the life of Dr. Dewees, various changes by death and otherwise, had occurred in the University of Pennsylvania, to which we need not allude at the present time, excepting to state, that the health

of Dr. Thomas C. James, the Professor of Midwifery, had visibly declined, so that he stood in need of assistance in carrying on the course of lectures. This had been partially rendered, as regarded the anatomical portion of the lectures, for some years, by Dr. Horner; but in 1825, it was resolved by the trustees, at the request of Dr. James, that an adjunct should be appointed to the chair, and on the 15th of November, 1825, Dr. Dewees was unanimously elected to this station, during the existence of the then incumbent.

Dr. Dewees, on his entrance into the University, was fifty-seven years of age, in full possession of his mental and corporeal faculties. His figure had spread considerably—so that he could be termed portly—while he maintained a comparatively youthful appearance, from his florid complexion and brown hair, still without the silvery gloss of age. The duties of the professorship gradually devolved more and more upon him as Dr. James declined in health, and were discharged in a manner very acceptable to the students. Of course, there was no great display of eloquence or erudition in his lectures, but he was always clear, decided, precise, and minute in his directions, speaking in rather a conversational style, with the promptitude and confidence of a man who had formed his own opinions by his own observations, and illustrating all that he taught by a rich fund of cases and anecdotes, drawn, in a great measure, from what he had himself witnessed. Such a teacher could not be otherwise than interesting, and, from the whole character of his mind, with its endowments, natural and acquired, you may readily conclude he must have been exceedingly valuable. His popularity was great, and his usefulness became thus greatly extended; his pupils distributing his fame, as well as his valuable instructions, through the extent of our country.

For several successive years Dr. Dewees reaped, in every way, the harvest resulting from his long and persevering efforts in the cause of medical and obstetric science. His income from his practice, his books, and his professorship, was ample for his present and prospective wants; he was admired, beloved, and trusted in the community in which he moved; he enjoyed an enviable reputation in America and Europe, and was continually receiving testimonials, in various ways, of the estimation in which his character and works were held. He had been, for a long series of years, a member of the American Philosophical Society, and was continually receiving certificates or diplomas from medical and other scientific bodies in the United States, in the Canadas, and in Europe, with the gratifying intelligence, that they considered themselves honoured by adding his name to the list of their members; while private letters from distinguished physicians confirmed, and rendered still more gratifying, these public manifestations of regard and confidence. In the domestic and social circles, his prosperity was equally great, and his warm heart was continually engaged, as far as more important business would permit, in reciprocating convivial enjoyments with his friends and fellow-labourers, within and without the profession; while, notwithstanding the lapse of years, his health and strength continued vigorous and active.

These blessings were continued, without interruption, until February, 1834, when a comparatively trivial accident, a sprain of his ankle, became the turning-point of his prosperity—the commencement of a series of trials which continued to the close of life. Owing, probably, to the confinement to the house, in consequence of his accident, his system became gradually plethoric, and he suffered from the want of his accustomed enjoyment of air

and exercise. In the month of April he suddenly became apoplectic, but owing to the timely assistance of his friends, Drs. Hays and Chapman, the dangerous symptoms were arrested, but his corporeal faculties were decidedly impaired. Cessation from business, travelling, and recreation, were so far successful, that in the fall of 1834 he was able to return to his practice, and received from the trustees of the university the unanimous appointment of Professor of Midwifery, Dr. James, from his great infirmities, having resigned this office, which he had the honour to occupy for twenty-four years.

With some of his former vivacity, Dr. Dewees was enabled to discharge the duties of his professorship during the ensuing winter. The exertion was, however, too great. In the spring his health was more impaired, and, notwithstanding every attention from his medical friends, and the influence of a change of air and travel, the autumn of 1835 found him weakened in mind and body. He made an attempt to deliver the winter's course of lectures, but it was apparent to himself, as well as to others, it was altogether futile, and on the 10th of November he resigned his professorship in the University of Pennsylvania.

This mournful event, to his colleagues, to the students assembled to receive the results of his long tried observations, to the university, and to the public, was not suffered to pass unnoticed. Flattering resolutions, expressive at the same time of their sympathy and regrets, were passed respectively by the board of trustees, by the medical faculty, and by the assembled students. The latter were characterised by the warmth of feeling so interesting in young men; by the expression of their high respect and confidence in his talents and attainments, in his honour and rectitude of purpose; of their gratitude for the favours received at his hands, and especially for the invaluable services he had rendered them and the medical public by his lectures and his works, his oral and written instructions. Anxious to honour their afflicted teacher, to bear testimony to the sincerity of their declarations, and, at the same time, to evince to posterity the gratitude and affection which his talents, industry, and virtue had excited in his pupils, they resolved to present to the retiring professor a magnificent silver vase, with the following inscription:

PRESENTED TO

WILLIAM P. DEWEES, M. D.

Late Professor in the

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA,

By the

MEDICAL CLASS OF THAT INSTITUTION,

As a testimonial of their respect for his exalted worth and talents.

PHILADELPHIA, NOVEMBER, 1835.

"Semper honos, nomenque tuum, laudesque manebunt."

Thursday, the 25th November, 1835, was the day appointed to make the presentation. The scene was most interesting, and could never be forgotten by those who were witnesses and actors on the mournful occasion. To behold this room, the arena of his former efforts to instruct and edify, crowded to excess by physicians and students, anxious to pay their

last respects to one so respected and beloved—to behold the venerable professor, famous, in both worlds, for his contributions for the alleviation of human misery, himself the sufferer, unable to sustain himself without assistance, seated in the centre of that beloved circle of students, to whom he was anxious to impart instruction, but to whom he was about to bid a long, a last farewell—to witness the great man, the bold, decided, energetic practitioner, bowed down under the influence of physical feeling, and the overpowering moral sentiments by which his bosom was agitated—to hear the chosen representative of affectionate pupils proclaim his talents, his virtues, his attainments, and to testify, by words and actions, their gratitude and affection—to discover that the deserved recipient of all these attentions was so overwhelmed by conflicting feelings, by the remembrance of the past, the solemnities of the present, and the prospects of the future, that words failed him to express his gratitude,—that another individual, his long tried friend and colleague, Dr. Chapman, had to pour forth the acknowledgments of his grateful heart, for such sincere and lasting testimonials from his beloved disciples, all constituted a scene so impressive, that the voice of eloquence alone could do it justice. It was a scene for the painter, or for the poet. It was one of those delightful manifestations of the best feelings of the human soul, rarely, it is true, to be witnessed, but the more impressive from its rarity in this world, where selfish feeling too generally predominates, and stifles the warm aspirations of a generous and noble nature.

This hour may be considered the last of the professional life of Dr. Wm. P. Dewees. He retired from the scene of his labours to embark for Havana, in the Island of Cuba, in search of health and strength. The experiment was not wholly in vain. He recovered sufficiently to attend to some of the lighter duties of a practitioner in medicine, which he discharged chiefly at Mobile, in Alabama, where he spent most of his time for more than four years, receiving marks of confidence and attention from his professional brethren of the south—most of them his former pupils.

In 1840, he left Mobile for Philadelphia, where he arrived, after spending some months in New Orleans, on the 22d day of May, 1840, but he was an altered man; his physical frame had dwindled away under the influence of disease, and, although his mind retained much of its original acuteness, he appeared as the representative of the past, rather than a member of the present generation.

Our cold weather proved unfavourable to his strength and health, causing congestions of his vital organs, and producing so much distress and suffering, that he was anxious to be released from a world in which he felt that he had finished his work. Such, however, was the strength of his constitution, that this solemn event did not occur until the 20th of May, 1841, when his anxious spirit was released from its earthly and suffering tabernacle.

On the news of his death, a special meeting was called by the Philadelphia Medical Society, and resolutions passed expressive of their deep regret at the decease of their fellow member and late Vice President—of their high sense of the beneficial influences exerted by his talents, attainments and professional character—and of their desire that I should prepare a memoir of their late admired professor.

His funeral was attended on the 22d of May, exactly one year after his return to Philadelphia, by his former colleagues, the professors in the

University, by the members of the Medical Society, by the physicians and students then resident in the city, as well as by many of his former friends and patients, who were anxious to pay their respects to the memory of their friend and physician.

"Sic transit gloria mundi."

Such, gentlemen, is a cursory notice of the life and labours of our departed professor. On review, we must all be impressed with the belief, that nothing but a powerful intellect could have raised him from his state of ignorance and poverty in the year 1786, to the station he occupied in 1834, as the first obstetric teacher and writer in these United States. As already remarked, the character of his mind was that of strength, rather than of brilliancy, or even originality; his judgment was unrivalled, and his memory most retentive. He laid hold, with a giant's grasp, of the information within his reach, made it his own, and almost invariably, by careful experiment and observation, rendered this information more complete, and carried the opinions and practice of others nearer to perfection. He was truly a man of genius; and thus, as we have seen, contributed greatly to elevate his favourite science to its proper grade in public estimation. He was a man of strong and decided opinions on all those subjects, to which his attention was turned. Here he spoke positively, and acted with boldness and decision. He never failed in an object for want of nerve or decision of purpose. Fortunately, his judgment was so correct, that on practical subjects he was comparatively seldom mistaken; and hence his boldness and energy were productive of great good, rather than evil. Those who were his contemporaries, and had the best opportunity of judging, universally bear testimony to his excellency as a practitioner, whatever may have been their estimate of his theoretical opinions. Indeed, it was almost impossible, that he could have attained to great superiority in the theoretical department of our profession, which demands, even for the purpose of making short progress, a fund of scientific information, and of literary and classical cultivation, with which few are favoured.

In the practice of obstetrics, the boldness and decision of Dr. Dewees was of vast importance. There was no rashness in his efforts, because he took the essential precaution of studying the science of midwifery, before he ventured on the difficult points of practice. He imbibed the best principles from the best teacher—Baudelocque of France,—and thus furnished, he had no want of confidence in himself, or his art, in any emergency. He never drew back and allowed his fellow beings to perish, when the means of relief were at command, for fear of danger or responsibility. All that could be done was done, and well done; and I have the authority of my now venerable colleague, Dr. Chapman, the fellow labourer of his friend, Dr. Dewees, for declaring, that no man was a better or more successful obstetric operator than Dr. Dewees, especially in the use of the forceps. The consequence has been, that not only did our predecessor accomplish a vast amount of good himself by means of operative midwifery, but he has, by his example and his instructions, vindicated this branch of the profession from the reproaches of the timid or ignorant practitioners, who were so terrified by the horrible consequences of mismanaged labours, as to dread the employment of artificial measures, even in cases of acknowledged difficulty. The daughters of America, in this

respect owe, and will always owe, an immense debt of gratitude to their true friend—Dr. William P. Dewees.

But something more than mere talent and force of character is demanded to insure success as practitioners of medicine, particularly for those whose attention is devoted to the sufferings and diseases of the more delicate portion of the human family. The qualities of the heart must be superadded to talent and wisdom. In this respect, Dr. Dewees was not deficient; although not remarkable for polish of manner or refinement of character, he had warm affections, became deeply interested in his patients, sympathized with their sufferings, and, by the kindness of his manner and the earnestness of his attentions, impressed them with the belief, that all the energies of his character, and all the resources of his profession were devoted to their relief. He was peculiarly happy in his conversation with his patients: having a cheerful, pleasant disposition, and an abundant supply of pleasant information, he beguiled the hours of suffering, and rendered his presence acceptable as a consoling friend, as well as an efficient physician. He was, therefore, greatly beloved by those who depended on him for relief. Following him, as I have done, in his practice in this city, it has been a gratifying circumstance to listen to the praises of one who, while he occupied the elevated position which we have described, would bend to the voice of suffering humanity, and pour consolation and peace into the hearts of those who were looking to him for deliverance from corporeal sufferings. He was an amiable man, although endowed with strong feelings and a quick disposition, which would occasionally be manifested, like the lightning's flash, he never bore enmity, and soon returned to the enjoyment of the kindlier feelings of his nature.

He was a man of taste as well as of genius. As already remarked, he was an amateur, but not a proficient, in music and painting. The walls of his house were covered by the productions of the masters of the art of painting, which cost him large pecuniary sacrifices: while to music, he devoted much of his leisure, and was refreshed by its agency amid the severe duties of his profession. He was among the founders of the Musical Fund Society, and its first president, which office he resigned in May, 1838, after his removal from Philadelphia.

As a friend and companion, he was always acceptable. Fond of the pleasures derived from social intercourse, he partook of them frequently, considering his pressing avocations, and always contributed greatly to the gratification of his associates by his cheerfulness, his vivacity, his fund of anecdote, and by the strength of his thoughts and expressions.

In all his intercourse with society, he was candid, honourable, and high-minded. In all the domestic relations of life, the warm affections of his spirit were continually manifested; he contributed much of his substance to the support of helpless or unfortunate relatives; he was hospitable, and with an open hand ready to relieve the wants of his friends. As a husband, he was considerate, devoted, and affectionate; as a father, most indulgent: as a brother and friend, kind and attentive. Amidst all the reverses of life, (and few individuals have passed more rapidly and more frequently from one extreme to another,) he always maintained the amiableness of his character, and his active devotion to business, and laboured, even to his last hours, through pain, weakness, and great infirmities, to supply the wants of a dependent family.