

WILLIAM PHILLIPS GRAVES  
1870-1933

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WILLIAM PHILLIPS GRAVES was born on January 29, 1870, at Andover, Massachusetts. His father was William Blair Graves, at that time the head of the department of science at Phillips Academy, and a descendant of John Graves, one of the early settlers in New Hampshire. His mother, Lauranah Hodges Copeland Graves, is still alive and is a descendant of Elijah Copeland who traced his ancestry to John Alden.

Dr. Graves received his preliminary education at Phillips Academy where he won several prizes in Latin and Greek as well as taking a leading part in the athletic and social activities of the school. In 1887 he entered Yale University, receiving mention in the catalogue as passing the second best entrance examination in Greek. At college he stood high in his classes, progressed from editor to editor-in-chief of the *Yale Record*, and became a versatile athlete. Although he was on many teams his fondest memory was that he played half-back on the famous Yale football team of 1888 which had the unique record of scoring six hundred and ninety-eight points to opponents' nothing.

Teaching was his decision for a career so he became an instructor at the famous Hill School in the fall of 1891. While there he was the general athletic director and taught penmanship, Latin, history, English composition, and drawing. The drill that he received in some of those subjects was reflected in his perfect chirography, the excellent grammar and clarity of expression in his writings and the beautiful illustrations he drew throughout his life. Except for a year of postgraduate study at Harvard in 1893-94, the next four years were spent at Hill School.

In a memorandum which Dr. Graves left he stated that he then decided to study medicine and become a surgeon, but he did not give the reason for such a radical break in his life to attain that definite objective. He was offered the position of vice-principal of Hill School but refused it and entered Harvard University Medical School in 1895. He worked his way through by tutoring and winning a scholarship, showing his ability and energy by graduating at the head of his class with a Summa Cum Laude degree in 1899. As a second-year student

he cut his finger while doing an autopsy on a scarlet fever victim and nearly died from the hemorrhagic type of that disease.

After a year as interne at the Massachusetts General Hospital he married and went to Europe for study, principally in pathology under Störek at Vienna.

In 1902 a place was offered him at the Free Hospital for Women in Boston where he established the Pathological Laboratory and then went to Baltimore and other cities for six months' study and observation. At Johns Hopkins he received inspiration from Kelly and Cullen as well as learning the technic of medical illustration from the famous Max Brödel.

His progress from there on was steady and brilliant. He became Surgeon-in-Chief to the Free Hospital for women on the retirement of Dr. William H. Baker in 1908. Under his administration the hospital grew from one of forty to one of one hundred and ten beds with all the best facilities for the treatment of surgical patients. He built it into a teaching institution which had achieved a world-wide reputation when he reached the age limit and retired on January 1, 1933. Dr. Graves was appointed Professor of Gynecology in the Harvard University Medical School in 1911. Dr. Baker left a fund establishing a professorship in Gynecology to be known by his name to which Dr. Graves was appointed in 1926. He resigned that post in 1932, becoming Professor Emeritus.

Dr. Graves made many contributions to medical literature but his crowning achievement was the well planned, clearly written textbook on *Gynecology* which first appeared in 1916. Its value may be gauged by the fact that it has been translated into other languages and that he was preparing the fifth edition at the time of his death.

He belonged to many medical societies, local, national and foreign, being President of the American Gynecological Society in 1931. Boston University honored him with the degree of Doctor of Science in June, 1932, and in December, 1932, he went to England to receive an Honorary Fellowship in the British College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

Soon after his return from England he contracted an acute infection of the influenza type but with his characteristic sense of duty, insisted on getting up to operate on a patient already scheduled. That was evidently too great an exertion and after two weeks of acute illness he died on January 25, 1933. He is survived by his widow and three children, one of whom, Sidney C. Graves, had just started to practice medicine in association with his father.

Dr. Graves' outstanding characteristics to his associates were his ceaseless energy founded on his magnificent physique; his capacity for study and writing; his versatility; his tenacity in adhering to his own judgment; and his conscientious care of his patients.

We cannot remember him as ever doing anything at less than full pressure; not hastily, but to the limit of his ability. He studied constantly, setting apart definite times for it, and when he was writing his textbook or difficult articles he not only gave up his charity work, but also his private practice for a time in order to concentrate. The result of this undivided attention is expressed in the clarity of his exposition and an accurate choice of words which gave his writings a more flowing, pleasing style than is usually found in medical literature.

As a surgeon his diagnosis and judgment were sound because of his complete mastery of his specialty, and also he possessed that elusive sense, surgical intuition, which is so essential to success. Technically he had no superior, for his operations were well planned and quickly performed in a neat, gentle manner. Roughness in handling tissue and unnecessary speed were never displayed yet, because of his routine methods and assured handling of instruments, he was a rapid operator.

Dr. Graves once told me that if he had not become a surgeon he would have been a second-rate artist. All who are familiar with his books realize that he was an artist and that if he had devoted his life to that vocation he would have been a first-class one. Not everybody realizes that he was an excellent painter in water colors and oils and also a good modeler. He had a keen appreciation for painting and sculpture which was acknowledged by the presentation to him of works of art by many grateful patients.

Dr. Graves was a man of broad culture. He benefited more than most by his education in the classics and kept up an interest in the fundamental sciences, such as economics, philosophy, and physics. His Presidential address to the American Gynecological Society is a fine example of this learning for which he was admired. This resulted in his being a thoughtful man whose ideas on the topics of the day, medical, political, and social, were founded on clear reasoning. He did not often express his opinions on such topics except to his intimates, but when he did, they were considered with respect. As a man he was intensely ambitious and industrious. This concentration on whatever he was doing combined with a degree of shyness in his earlier years made him very sensitive to adverse criticism. As he grew older and his position was assured, he became a friendly, genial and very attractive man. His patients thought the world of him with good right, for nobody could have been more conscientious in caring for them. His subordinates had the greatest respect for his attainments. When he had confidence in them, he gave them every chance to do difficult work and helped them with a friendly word when they made mistakes in judgment or technic. He was always ready to give

advice when it was requested, but rarely volunteered it apparently feeling that each person had a good right to his own ideas.

This memorial can best be concluded by a quotation from one written by Dr. Robert B. Osgood: "Strength, courage and ability were his endowments; industriousness, concentration and force were his characteristics; knowledge, skill and accomplishment were his acquirements."

FRANK A. PEMBERTON.

## Obituary.

WILLIAM P. GRAVES.

*Professor of Gynaecology in Harvard University; Surgeon-in-chief to the Free Hospital for Women, Boston, U.S.A.*

THE death of Dr. William P. Graves, which occurred on January 25th, 1933, came as a great shock to the vast majority of his friends and patients, and left a void in the community which cannot be filled, and which time will only emphasize rather than obliterate. Only a few of his most intimate friends realized that his health had been failing for some time, and if his life was to be prolonged this could only be brought to pass by, at least, a temporary curtailment of the various activities which to him constituted living. Whether he himself fully realized the actual danger, although he had been warned of it by his medical adviser, is a question, but in any case he preferred to die in harness, carrying on his life's work to the end, rather than to stop and to rust out gradually, as was otherwise inevitable, and even to his close friends a sign that any cloud was hanging over him was not apparent.

William Phillips Graves was born at Andover, Massachusetts, on January 29th, 1870, the son of William B. and Luranah H. (Copeland) Graves. He prepared for college at Phillips Andover Academy and graduated from Yale with the class of 1891, leaving behind him an enviable reputation both as a student and as an athlete. After leaving college, he taught for a brief period at the Hill School, Pottstown, Pennsylvania, following which he entered the Harvard Medical School from which he graduated with the highest honours in 1899. During the next sixteen months he served as surgical "house pupil" at the Massachusetts General Hospital.

In 1900 following his graduation from the Hospital, he married Miss Alice M. Chase, of Boston, and went to Vienna where he spent several months in graduate study. On his return he entered practice in Boston and, within a short time, was appointed to the staff of the Free Hospital for Women, in Brookline, as pathologist. In 1907 he was appointed surgeon-in-chief to the hospital, a position which he held with marked distinction until September, 1932, when he retired from the active control of the hospital, as Surgeon Emeritus.

## OBITUARY

In 1911 he was appointed to the professorship of Gynaecology at the Harvard Medical School, and in 1927, when the William H. Bager Professorship of Gynaecology was established, he became the holder of the Chair, becoming Professor Emeritus at the beginning of the current year. His retirement from hospital work and teaching, however, brought no respite from his activities as a practitioner, and he continued his arduous life until his health completely broke down, some two weeks before his death.

As a teacher Dr. Graves' work was of a high degree of excellence, and he was a prolific and convincing writer on gynaecological subjects, illustrating his various writings with original drawings which showed a high degree of artistic skill. His two principal works were a textbook on gynaecology, which ran through several editions, and is everywhere accepted as a standard work, and a volume on "Female Sex Hormonology," published in 1931.

Dr. Graves received many honours at the hands of his associates. In 1931 he served as president of the American Gynaecological Society, and only a few weeks before his death was created an Honorary Fellow of the British College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, being the first American to be so honoured. In 1932 he received the honorary degree of Doctor of Science from Boston University, and his students also registered their approval of him, both as a teacher and as a man, by electing him to honorary membership in the various undergraduate societies which stand for intellectual attainment.

It is to be deeply regretted that a life of such manifold accomplishment should be cut short at such an unnecessarily early age, but Dr. Graves was a man who lived too intensely in the present to spare himself even if he realized the cost of continued overwork, and always has been of such sturdy physique that it is doubtful if he fully appreciated the warnings of his medical adviser. Although his patients and colleagues appreciate part of what he accomplished in his life work, the full evaluation of his career will be evident only when we see the continued influence of his work in the teaching of students by the men he trained, and in the continued high standard of the work of the hospital which he did so much to develop.

He is survived by his wife and three children, the eldest of whom is already on the staff of the Free Hospital for Women. His mother and a brother, Henry S. Graves, Professor of Forestry at Yale University, also survive.

Franklin S. Newell.

The sudden death of Professor William Phillips Graves came as a shock to the gynaecological world, and as a severe personal loss to his local colleagues and friends. There is no need to recount here the details of Dr. Graves's brilliant professional career for they are well known to readers of this journal. He possessed, in exceptional degree, the three qualities of a leader in medicine—great clinical skill, the ability to impart his knowledge to others, and an interest in productive research, which in his case expressed itself in stimulating and directing the investigative work of his younger associates. To Graves, and to the organization built around him is due much of the credit for establishing gynaecology in Boston and New England as a speciality independent of general surgery.

The son of a schoolmaster, Graves started with a cultural background which remained in evidence all his life. He received academic honours in Latin and Greek, edited the *Yale Record*, and, after graduation from college, taught and studied for four years in order to earn the money for a medical education. Later his interests turned to philosophy, psychology and eugenics. To these subjects Graves devoted the same intensive energy that he put into his professional work, for it was his habit to do all things well. In purity of diction and charm of style his writings reflect the man's broad humanitarian knowledge. Nor were his non-professional attainments limited to the academic field. He was a talented artist and modeller, preparing beautiful illustrations for most of his own writings. Having been in his college days a versatile athlete and famous football player, he always maintained an interest in sports; in later years he took up golf, on which he became an amateur authority.

It is pleasant now to recall that within the past year there came to Dr. Graves three distinguished honours—the Presidency of the American Gynaecological Society, the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Science, from Boston University, and the Honorary Fellowship of the British College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. This last was particularly gratifying to him. The life of William Phillips Graves is finished, but his life-work goes on, for he has left a precious heritage of his wisdom.

Samuel R. Meaker.

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Dr. William P. Graves, to adopt the American method of address, was merely a name except to those who had met him in the United States, until he visited this country in 1926, but a name made well known to British Gynaecologists by his splendid textbook. The impression he then produced on his colleagues here was, as I judged it, singularly uniform; and I was an interested spectator, having known him since 1921. His modesty and reserve, allied to frankness in debate and sociability in season, won for him the reputation of being a broad-minded surgeon of balanced judgment conservative by instinct, but progressive by reason—and an interesting and interested companion. I was privileged, however, by reason of a mutual attraction, to know him far better than was possible for the ordinary acquaintances. We had so many interests in common, apart from our work, that it was a rest to be together. Graves' love of fine literature and history was most stimulating; and he longed to obtain an environment compatible with this. After spending a few days in the country with me, he said he would not be happy until he, too, had a small place himself to which he could go for mental refreshment. On the very day he received an invitation to accept the Honorary Fellowship of our College, he bought an old colonial estate which had belonged to the Prescotts—the historian's family. Alas! his dream came true, but too late.

Graves had been a great athlete. He was a member of the Yale football team of 1888 probably the greatest football side there has ever been in America. He was also a fine boxer and racquets player in his day. He told me that the cardiac impairment from which he suffered had been caused by weight-lifting, for which he had been noted.

It was a curious coincidence, we thought, that his father should have been Professor William Blair Graves.

In his own country, Graves, I quickly realized, occupied the same standing in Gynaecology as that of Whitridge Williams in Obstetrics. People admire in others the qualities they most desire themselves. Williams and Graves were essentially reliable, sound and stable. They were institutions. They were not showy, but they were trustworthy. Such examples of integrity and wisdom, of composure and solidity, were of immense value to a country in which strenuous efforts were, and are, being made by the College of Surgeons and other powerful bodies to raise the ideals and standard of practice.

Graves' craftsmanship as an artist was judged chiefly by his



medical drawings, which were of high quality; but he was far more than a mere draughtsman: he had an inspired vision of beautiful things, and of beauty in ordinary things which pass unseen or unnoticed by the man in the street.

Although Graves was a skilful technician, an astute clinician and most attractive and inspiring teacher, it was the greatness of his character, the beauty of his thoughts and the gentleness of his nature which sustained him in the rarefied atmosphere of the upper regions. But he was no gospel-monger; he forced his ideals on none. He was very tolerant in his views on religion and morals; they were very much those of a healthy man with a well-adjusted outlook on the necessity for, but difficulty of living *ὄβλιος ἀπίστο*.

I have written of Graves' modesty. It was almost embarrassing to hear him laughingly protest when he was here in December last that it was more than he could endure to hear himself described in so flattering a manner, for he had, he said, no idea that anyone considered him "out of the ordinary"; and he meant this quite seriously.

The thoughtfulness of Graves' nature, his love of fair-play, and his adherence to the principle of the right and proper, ensured his being a great gentleman. He never in his life, I should think, hurt the feelings of anyone.

I had two charming letters from him after he returned home, and I little thought that when, after some delay, I wrote to him in reply and sent the photographs and cuttings he desired to have, that he would never receive them or my letter telling him how greatly we all had enjoyed his visit to us, and how much affection he had won by his unassuming, gracious, and charming personality.

William Blair-Bell.



**WILLIAM P. GRAVES.**

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