

## THOMAS C. JAMES, M.D.

BY HUGH L. HODGE, M.D.

DR. THOMAS CHALKLEY JAMES was born in Philadelphia, August 31st, 1766. He was well educated after the manner of Friends, especially at their school under the superintendence of Robert Proud, the historian of Pennsylvania. No doubt can exist that his love of literature, and of books in general, must have been at this period manifested, as his proficiency was early evinced, and a superiority over his cotemporaries in this respect existed, which could not otherwise be explained. He commenced and prosecuted the study of medicine under the direction of that eminent practitioner, Dr. Adam Kuhn, a disciple of Linnæus, whose opinion always carried weight among his medical brethren, and who had the honor of educating some of the first physicians of our country. In 1787, at the age of twenty-one, he received the certificate of Bachelor of Medicine, from the University of Pennsylvania, of which his preceptor, Dr. Kuhn, was a distinguished professor. It was about this period that his father's affairs became deranged, and the desire of the son to have a complete medical education, then not to be procured in America, seemed to be thwarted. He did not despair, but, through the influence of friends, procured, in the fall of 1788, the situation of a surgeon in the *Samson*, a mercantile vessel, to the Cape of Good Hope and Canton; and, by the results of this tedious voyage, was enabled to carry his anxious wishes into complete execution. He returned home early in the summer of 1790, and soon afterwards completed his long-contemplated preparations for finishing his medical education in Europe. After receiving advice and instructions from his experienced friends and preceptors, Dr. Adam Kuhn and Dr. Wistar, he sailed for London in the fall of the year, a short time before the death of his beloved and respected father,—the intelligence of this melancholy event reaching him not very long after his arrival.

In London he found his countryman and fellow-student, Dr. P. S. Physick, a pupil and an assistant of the celebrated Mr. John Hunter, pursuing his studies in St. George's Hospital. By Physick's advice, Dr. James entered (May 30th, 1791) as a house-pupil of the Story Street Lying-in Hospital, under the care of Drs. Osborne and John Clarke, the two leading obstetric practitioners and teachers in London. In this institution he had soon the pleasure of receiving, as a companion, his friend Dr. J. Cathrall, who was also with him at Canton. The winter of 1791-2 was spent in London, chiefly in attending lectures, and also as an attendant at St. George's Hospital.

After much deliberation respecting the relative advantages of spending a winter in Edinburgh or Paris, and after consulting by letter his friends on this side of the Atlantic, he finally followed the example of Dr. Physick and Cathrall, and went to Edinburgh, in the spring of 1792. Here he remained and attended the lectures during the succeeding winter, in company with Dr. Hosack, of New York, and Dr. Ruan, one of our fellow-members, whose acquaintance with Dr. James commenced at Edinburgh.

It does not appear that Dr. James graduated at Edinburgh, in imitation of his friends, Drs. Wistar and Physick, being content with the honors of his own University, in Philadelphia, then in its infancy. In the month of June, 1793, Dr. James, accompanied by Dr. Ruan, arrived at Wiscasset, in the then District of Maine. They reached Philadelphia a short time only before the terrible and then unknown epidemic, the yellow fever, visited this city. Dr. James had hardly time to receive the congratulations of his anxious friends, when the fatal scourge appeared, bringing dismay and terror, even to the boldest spirits. Before time was afforded him for exerting his talents and acquired knowledge for the benefit of others, he himself became a sufferer, and for some time was disabled. He probably had but a slight attack, for in a letter dated Philadelphia, September 20th, 1793, to his mother, he makes no mention of his own health, while he alludes to the dismal scenes which his family and professional duties had made too familiar.

The winter dissipated the epidemic, and of course the fears, although not the sorrows of the inhabitants of Philadelphia. Dr. James undertook the more regular business of his profession, but

did not yet feel himself settled ; for the ensuing year we find him acting surgeon to the "Macpherson Blues, on the Western Expedition."

On his return from this military expedition, he opened his office, and became a candidate for professional business and reputation in this city, under the most favorable prospects of success. The yellow fever had greatly thinned the ranks of the profession. Dr. Way and Dr. Carson had lately died. Dr. Dunlap, who was extensively and almost exclusively devoted to obstetrics, was advancing in years, and depended much, says Dr. Ruan, on Dr. James, whilst his competitors, although numerous, were about his own age, and perhaps none of them possessed the advantages which Dr. James enjoyed. He married Miss Hannah Morris, a lady connected with one of the first families in Pennsylvania, eminently adapted, by her mild but decided character, her judicious yet cheerful disposition, to meet the peculiarities of Dr. James's character. His success became certain, business rapidly increased, and his time became fully occupied with patients and pupils, all of whom admired and loved him.

In 1802, November 17th, Dr. James, in conjunction with the late Dr. Church, commenced his first regular course of lectures on obstetrics. To render his teaching useful, Dr. James, assisted by Dr. Church, not only employed the usual modes of illustration, but zealously endeavored to instruct practically, as well as theoretically. For this purpose, his influence and exertions prevailed in having a "lying-in ward" (the first in this city), established at the Almshouse, over which he presided as attending accoucheur. To each case of labor was admitted not only the resident pupils of the house, but three of those attending the lectures, so that in succession all were furnished with cases, the peculiarities of which were duly explained.

The first course of lectures terminated on the 2d March, 1803 ; the second commenced May 10th, of the same year. So that two courses were delivered every year for three years. On the death of Dr. Church, which occurred about this period, Dr. James associated Dr. Chapman with himself, lecturing with him during the winter of 1807-8, and subsequently as a private and public teacher.

In 1808, Dr. Shippen died, and Dr. Wistar was appointed his successor, as Professor of Anatomy and of Midwifery. Dr. Wistar immediately perceived that these two departments of medical science ought to constitute two distinct professorships. On the 3d of January, 1809, he communicated these sentiments to the Board of Trustees; but it was not until the 11th of April, 1810, that the Board took action on this important proposal of Dr. Wistar, and declared by resolution that there should be a separate Professorship of Midwifery in the University of Pennsylvania.

Of course, the canvassing among the friends of the candidates was spirited; each party felt confident of success, for each had a superior man to support, although the natural modesty and diffidence of Dr. James not a little interfered in the advancement of his claims. The election by the Trustees was made June 29th, 1810, and terminated in the elevation of Dr. T. C. James as Professor of Midwifery in the University of Pennsylvania, with the understanding that he should be assisted by Dr. Chapman. This was a most important epoch, not only in the life of Dr. James, but in the history of Medical Science, particularly of obstetrics, in the United States.

The first course of lectures in the University was commenced by the new Professor in November, 1810, and although supported, not by any positive regulations on the part of the Trustees, but merely by the indirect influence of the school, and by the personal character of the teachers, was attended by a large proportion of the medical students then assembled in Philadelphia. Succeeding years witnessed increased attention to obstetrics; the importance of the science and its great practical utility were more obvious, and its complete triumph over ignorance and prejudice was at hand.

In May, 1813, the medical profession lost one of its brightest ornaments, Dr. Benjamin Rush, the Professor of the Theory and Practice of Medicine, whose life and opinions have become identified with the history of medicine in our country. He was succeeded by Dr. Benjamin Smith Barton in the practical chair, on the 14th July, 1813; while the chair of Therapeutics and *Materia Medica*, vacated by the resignation of Dr. Barton, was assigned to Dr. Chapman, on the 13th August, 1813, and Dr. James was left the Professor of Obstetrics, without an assistant. On this interesting

event, the following resolution was unanimously passed by the Board of Trustees, in October, 1813: "Resolved, that hereafter the Professor of Midwifery shall be a member of the Medical Faculty, and shall have all the power, authority, and privileges belonging to a professorship in the said Faculty, and that no person shall be admitted hereafter as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Medicine in this University, unless he shall have regularly attended the lectures of the said Professor for two years, provided," &c.

This triumph of truth and humanity over ignorance and prejudice may be considered as complete. Obstetrics was confessedly equal to the other practical branches of medical science; and its practitioners and teachers were authoritatively pronounced on a par with those of Surgery and the Practice of Medicine. The battle had been fairly fought and won, and Dr. James, who, we have seen, contributed so much to this happy issue, received now the reward so eminently due to modest worth, superior talents and attainments, united with persevering industry.

Some fifty years had passed over his head. Age had made an undue impression, owing perhaps partly to original temperament, but more to mental and corporeal exertion, to anxiety, to loss of sleep and necessary exposure. He was partially bald, his hair whitened, and his form originally so perfect, was now somewhat bent, but his ruddy and healthful aspect, his fine countenance, his diffident yet refined manners, his affability, his condescension to medical students, his great intellectual and moral worth, excited feelings of affection and veneration in the minds and hearts of all.

Dr. James continued to lecture without assistance, to the increasing classes of the University, until 1821, when, with the desire of relieving himself of a portion of his duties, but especially with the wish of rendering the course more valuable, he requested the assistance of the then adjunct professor of anatomy, Dr. Horner, in demonstrating the anatomical portions of the lectures, and in exemplifying to the sub-classes, the mode of performing obstetric operations. Soon, however, the lamentable fact began to be apparent to Dr. James, as well as to the pupils, that his physical powers were failing. A nervous tremor was occasionally observed in the fingers of the right hand; gradually but very slowly, it extended

to the muscles of the right arm ; and in a few years involved all his nervous and muscular system, exciting the symptoms of a premature old age, and indirectly becoming the cause of his death. Soon after, his voice began to fail, so that great attention was requisite to hear him during the lecture. He applied to the Trustees for an assistant to his chair. In consequence of this suggestion, the following resolution was passed on the 18th of October, 1825.

“That an Adjunct Professor of Midwifery be appointed, who shall hold his appointment so long as Dr. James continues to be Professor of Midwifery: provided that the expenses of the student shall be in no manner increased by such appointment, and that such an Adjunct Professor shall have no vote in the Faculty of Medicine, except in the absence of the Professor of Midwifery, to whom he is adjunct.”

On the 15th of November, 1825, Dr. William P. Dewees was unanimously elected Adjunct Professor under the foregoing resolution, and immediately entered on the duties of his new situation.

Dr. James in justice alike to his own character, to Dr. Dewees, and the University, resigned in the month of June, 1834, his professorship, of which he in a great measure, may be considered the founder, and the reputation of which he sustained for the long period of twenty-four years.

During his professional career, he became engaged also with many private and public institutions as physician in ordinary, or as consulting physician ; among others, with the Welsh Society, St. George's Society ; also with the Philadelphia Dispensary, where for many years he was consulted by the attending physicians, many of whom, with much gratitude, bear testimony to the value of his assistance, and to the readiness and cheerfulness with which it was at all times rendered. As formerly remarked, he might be regarded as the founder of the “Lying-in Department” of the Philadelphia Almshouse Infirmary, over which he presided until about the year 1807, endeavoring to render it practically important for students of medicine. In 1807 (Jan. 26th), he was appointed Physician to the Pennsylvania Hospital, as successor of Dr. J. Redman Coxe, and on the 25th of June, 1810, was translated at his own request to the station of Obstetric Physician. The duties of this appointment he continued to discharge with scrupulous attention and punctuality, until the 26th of November, 1832.

In the Philadelphia Medical Society, Dr. James was an honorary member, but the exciting character of its debates never seemed to suit the quiet tenor of his feelings, and he rarely, at least of late years, attended its meetings. To the College of Physicians he was much attached. Its quiet and dignified course well suited the peculiarities of his character. Within its precincts, he was sure to meet with his cotemporaries and personal friends, or with those who were gratified in numbering themselves among his pupils and admirers; and he there never anticipated that rude collision of sentiment, which, although it may occasionally elicit the spark of genius, too frequently generates the fires of envy and passion. He was elected Fellow of the College on the 6th of October, 1795, and in July, 1796, he succeeded Dr. Samuel P. Griffitts as secretary. The duties of that office he discharged for six years. In 1809, he was made treasurer, and continued as such for seventeen years; at the expiration of this period in 1826, he became Vice-President, and finally, in March, 1835, he was unanimously elected President, as the successor of Dr. Parke. We all remember the interest which he took in the affairs of the College, the pleasure with which he attended its meetings, and the suavity and dignity with which he presided over its deliberations. Great, however, as was his confidence in his associates, and anxious as he was for the improvement of medical science, he was unwilling to present his sentiments in written communications to the society. With perhaps one exception, the papers he read were rather the history of facts than the detail of opinions. On the 9th of April, 1804, he presented the history of a case of hydatids. On the 4th of September, 1810, he gave the details of a case of premature labor, artificially induced by himself, in the case of a contracted pelvis, after the expiration of the seventh month, with the gratifying result of safety to mother and child. This is the first record, we believe, in this country, of the scientific performance of this operation, for which much credit is due to Dr. James, especially as in America and Europe generally, it is still viewed with suspicious eyes, although in Britain, it is regarded as an established operation in certain defined cases.

Connected with his efforts to favor the beneficial influence of the College, and the progress of medical science in our country, was the establishment and support of a most valuable periodical work,

termed, as evincive of its character, "The Eclectic Repertory," commenced in the year 1811, and carried on for eleven years with great advantage to students and practitioners of medicine. Although chiefly eclectic from foreign books and journals, many valued domestic and original monographs and cases were admitted, which enhanced the interest and importance of the publication. The names of the editors whose disinterested labors and judicious efforts were for a long time lent to this undertaking have not been published, but were known to most of the members of the College. They were Drs. Hewson, Parrish, Otto, James. The latter is well known to have spent much time in selecting and preparing suitable materials, although he did not frequently contribute original matter to its pages.

Such are the most important and interesting facts which we have been able to procure respecting the public and professional duties of our late President. There is another series of facts which might be brought into view as exceedingly interesting, but which have only an indirect bearing on his character before the world. We allude to his private, his domestic history; but this is and ought to be a sacred subject, to be touched by no foreign hand. Suffice it to observe that, what Dr. James was abroad, he was at home, excepting that, when in company with friends and relations, reserve would be banished, and his warm, full heart, would overflow, in confidential and familiar intercourse, with his family and friends.

Thus blessed in his domestic relations, in his social circle, and in the confidence of the public as a practitioner and teacher of medicine, the moderate expectations of Dr. James were abundantly gratified; he had all that this world could bestow to render life happy and useful. He, however, felt and acknowledged that more was requisite to satisfy the wants of man, and he early found that religion alone can give zest to temporal enjoyments, and dissipate the dread of a future state of existence so natural to the human soul. In this state of mind, looking forward to an eternity of increasing knowledge, holiness, and happiness, he died, July 5th, 1835; leaving us, his surviving friends, and the medical profession, a bright example of the accomplished physician and the Christian gentleman, who always preferred the useful to the brilliant; and who, however others may have surpassed him in originality of



thought and boldness of execution, was inferior to none in that pure morality, that unsophisticated integrity, that sound, discriminating judgment, so essential for the practitioner of medicine; which exalt and dignify the professor, and render him a blessing to the community.

THE LIVES  
OF  
EMINENT PHILADELPHIANS,

NOW DECEASED.

COLLECTED

FROM ORIGINAL AND AUTHENTIC SOURCES,

BY

HENRY SIMPSON,

MEMBER OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA.

"Though fame is smoke,  
Its fumes are frankincense to human thought."  
BYRON.

ILLUSTRATED WITH FORTY-FOUR FINE ENGRAVINGS.

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PHILADELPHIA:  
WILLIAM BROTHERHEAD,  
NO. 213 SOUTH EIGHTH STREET.  
1859.