


## IN MEMORIAM.

  
**JOSEPH PRICE.**

BY  
 W. KENNEDY, M. D.

JOSEPH PRICE was born in Rockingham County, Virginia, January 1, 1853. Received his early schooling at Fort Edward, N. Y; later attended Union College. Obtained his medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1877. Married Miss Louise Troth, of Philadelphia, by whom he had several children.

Dr. Price began his work in the Philadelphia Dispensary in 1877 and early became in charge of the Obstetrical Department and organized the Gynecological Department of this institution. It was his early work in the Philadelphia Dispensary that laid the first stepping-stone toward his magnificent career as a man and surgeon.

His fertile brain and tireless energy were early conspicuous by his ability as teacher and leader. The gynecological and obstetrical departments of the Philadelphia Dispensary, under his leadership, became one of the most conspicuous and largest clinics in the country.

It was during his early association with this institution, that he began his abdominal surgery, most of his work being done in the slums of Philadelphia, in the midst of filth and squalor.

He attained, in this work, at the dawn of aseptic abdominal surgery, an unequaled record of one hundred sections for pelvic suppuration, with one death. Thinking operators cannot dismiss this record. A great master of a simple technic had completely dominated his unsurgical surroundings by the most brilliant results of any age.

Dr. Lewis S. McMurtry, his life long friend and intimate associate, says: "To justly estimate the life-work of Joseph Price and measure his influence upon the development of modern pelvic and abdominal surgery, it is necessary to consider the conditions existing back in the early eighties when he entered the surgical arena.

"At that time the principles of Lister, as evolved from the researches of Pasteur, were accepted unreservedly by only a few, while in a half-hearted way others pretended to apply those principles in practice. The epoch-making work of Lawson Tait, while laying the foundation of modern pelvic and abdominal

surgery, and replacing antiseptics with asepsis, made indescribable confusion in the surgical mind by an apparent rejection of the essential principles of Lister.

“Progress at that time was materially obstructed by an unnecessary conflict between antiseptics and asepsis, when in fact the principles enunciated by Lister as to the relation of micro-organisms to infection were the basis of every successful method of wound treatment.

“During these years the older surgeons, who occupied positions of authority, as teachers and hospital surgeons, either rejected *in toto* the new surgery, or accepted it as an experiment only. The great body of the profession, always disposed to follow established authority, was ready to discredit the claim of the innovation, and for the most part refused to accept the results of the new surgery. Not only was opposition directed against the new methods of operating, but the new pathology, especially as to infections of the Fallopian tubes, ovaries, and peritoneum, ectopic gestation, appendicitis, etc., was denied acceptance and reported cases were discredited. In a word, those established in authority resisted change, and the body of the profession was disposed to adhere to conservative methods in preference to what seemed most radical. A revolution was in progress, and, as in all periods of medical history, it was opposed by the powers in control, while those advocating the new order were maligned and abused. It was so in the days of Harvey and Jenner. When as late as in 1870 Pasteur made a visit to Von Liebig in Vienna, with the hope of demonstrating to him the marvelous results of his labors, Von Liebig, while receiving him courteously, emphatically refused to even discuss the subject with him. So it has always been, and so doubtless it will always be.

“Such were the conditions in the surgical world when Joseph Price entered upon his career. He gave his whole soul to the work. His enthusiasm was beyond control, and he became a militant advocate of the new surgery. With the courage of a Spartan, with matchless skill and judgment as an operator, he forged to the front and made an aggressive figure on every available field to establish the new surgery. It required courage; it made many enemies; but with him it was a fight for science and humanity. During the years from 1885 to 1900 he was an imposing figure in the medical profession of America. He impressed the profession more by the spoken than the written word, and was a constant attendant upon the medical societies.

He addressed county, state, and national societies; and in almost every state of the Union and also in Canada he discussed the surgical problems of the day. But his teaching was most inspiring and forceful at the operating-table. His clinic was thronged for years with young, ambitious, and progressive surgeons from every part of the United States.

"He stripped from surgery all complicated paraphernalia, and made its technic simple and thorough. Every prominent surgeon in this country to-day demonstrates in his methods the impress of this master-surgeon."

From 1887 to 1894 he had charge of the Preston Retreat, during which time there was not a death from sepsis. If his career had ceased here, he already had established an enviable record by his enthusiastic efforts to place obstetrics on an aseptic basis. His magnificent work in the Preston Retreat should not be blotted out by his exceptionally brilliant career as an abdominal surgeon. It is impossible to estimate the great service he did our profession by his early obstetrical teaching. He was founder of the Philadelphia Gynecean Hospital, where his teachings and object lessons are reflected through some of our most conspicuous operators.

In 1891 he opened his private hospital, 241 North Eighteenth Street, Philadelphia, it being the largest private institution in our country for abdominal surgery. His simple technic and masterful work in this institution is world-wide in reputation.

Could any one have had more of the necessary qualities of a surgeon than he—courage of a lion, most dexterous in his manipulations, quiet, cool, and as patient as a child when patience was a necessary virtue. He was a most esthetic and painstaking operator. He had no patience with the man who operated by the clock. He taught constantly by and through his operations, and, although never making any attempt at speed, his manipulations were without a useless move, which gave him the greatest dispatch in his work. He was so definite in his touch that many of his operations were done with the skill of a juggler, and on account of this dexterity, he was often spoken of as "The American Tait." His capacity for work was unlimited, and it is doubtful if any operator has done as much difficult abdominal surgery; he never picked his cases and never refused to give any patient the last chance on account of his own mortality. He was a pioneer in pelvic surgery and probably did more to establish the pathology in the surgical treatment of pelvic suppurations than

any man in America. His finished enucleation of tubal ovarian abscesses was classical and he was the acknowledged master of this work.

His great vigor of constitution permitted him to travel over the entire country, giving object lessons to an eager profession. He was the greatest exponent of the local hospital and no one dedicated more of these institutions throughout the land. It is impossible to estimate the great good he did the profession and laity by his constant labor to establish this local institution and place within its walls competent operators.

In plastic surgery he was an artist and beautiful demonstrator. He was one of Dr. Emmet's most ardent followers. It can be truthfully said of him, he had the combined qualities of an Emmet and a Tait.

To the hour of his death he remained the greatest advocate the country had of the so-called pathological era in abdominal surgery. His earnest pleas for early work, followed by radical toilets and ever removal of the distal infecting source, will stamp his work immortal.

He was always the refined physician and had the greatest distaste for the commercialism which threatens our ranks. The vulgar system of graft, which in recent months is worm-eating the heart out of the American profession, he viewed with great apprehension and profound regret. His ever desire to help the young physician or member in distress, was so typical of the man. His professional charity had no equal. It can be truly said that no public institution in America was more accessible to the poor, irrespective of race, than his private hospital.

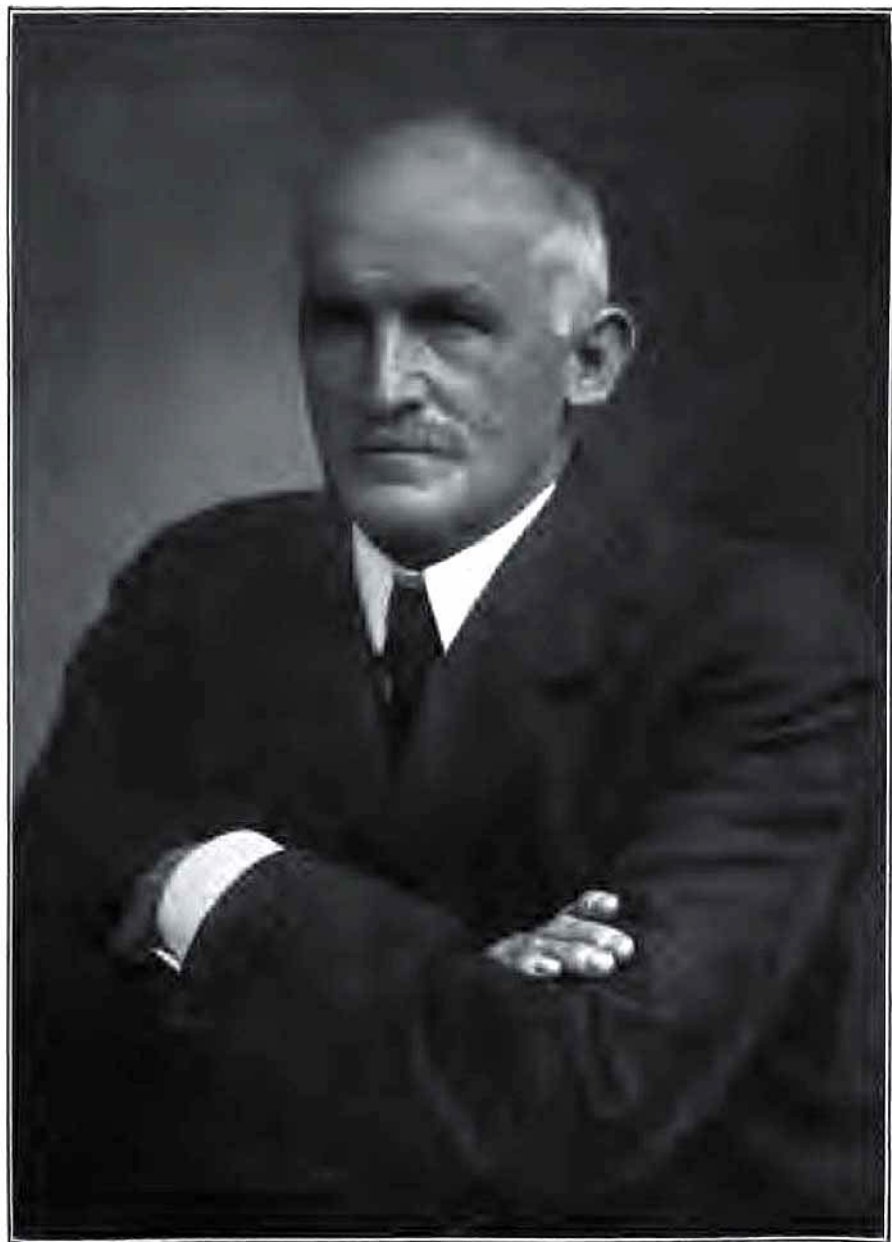
Like all forceful men, he had his enemies. How unprovidential that even they should separate themselves from his benefaction.

He was President of the American Association of Obstetricians and Gynecologists in 1895.

A month prior to his death Dr. Price was given the degree LL. D. by Union College.

He died on the sixth of June, from a retroperitoneal infection, which had existed as a metastatic condition from a prior septicemia.

Exalt his skill as you justly may, but it was Price the sterling man which made him most my beloved master.



**Price, Joseph (1853-1911)**

Joseph Price, one of the foremost figures in the development of American Gynecology in the eighties and nineties of the nineteenth century, found gynecology and abdominal surgery twin babes in swaddling clothes and left them, after a life of extraordinary activity, full grown specialties. He made common and safe the radical operation for the treatment of pelvic suppurations, and taught men in this country how to operate with clamp, *serre noeud*, pins, and external treatment of the stump, and so made hysterectomy for fibroid tumors a safe operation instead of a most dangerous one. Price's personality reached the hearts, while his writings and clinical teachings in some degree moulded the activities of every surgeon in this country and in Canada. To few men has it been given so to impress their personality and their sturdy convictions on their fellows.

Joseph Price was born in Rockingham County, Virginia, January 1, 1853. He received his early schooling at Fort Edward, N. Y., and attended Union College from 1871 to 1872, but left college to join the engineering corps of the New York Central Railroad.

He took his medical degree at the University of Pennsylvania in the class of 1877, and then served as surgeon on a transatlantic passenger steamer between Philadelphia, Antwerp and Liverpool, making three voyages in all.

He began his life's work at the old Philadelphia Dispensary where he found a hearty coadjutor in one of its directors, Dr. Thomas Wistar. The class Price was raised up to examine and treat and become intimate with in their wretched dwellings, was the off-scourings of a corrupt, boss-ridden, badly governed city and it is due to his fidelity to these usually neglected opportunities in a most depressing field that he owed his subsequent rapid advancement to the position of one of the foremost surgeons of America. If the slum poor of the city had been queens, instead of queans, they could not have received better and more faithful care at his hands; often did he, at his own expense, when he was struggling for recognition and for a livelihood, send some sad, worn-out creature to the country for several weeks to convalesce from a severe operation; his warm, Virginia heart was ever peculiarly tender towards the colored women under his care.

"Joe Price," as every one called him, had a racy humor and often found relief from care and gained complete relaxation following his work in relating to chosen spirits the comi-

cal situations and misunderstandings continually arising in the course of his visits to the city's poor. Let it be noted that his jests about the poor and about the quaint old mammies he met were ever tintured with a chivalrous, tender sympathy; it was only when discussing his rivals that his humor became grim and the bolt often carried a festering barb.

Price was a devoted admirer of Marion Sims (q. v.), whose "Uterine Surgery" he knew by heart; he was also a follower and close friend of Sims's peer, Thomas Addis Emmet, and it was for many years his special delight to make up parties of interested Philadelphians and visiting surgeons, to run over to New York to meet Emmet, by special appointment, and see him do a vesico-vaginal fistula, or a perineal, or a cervical operation. The value of these trips was enhanced by the anticipatory graphic and lively picture of what we were to note particularly in the operations; in his zeal Price would grasp his interlocutor's coat or a bit of handy rag, and proceed to demonstrate with a needle and thread, or perhaps he would squeeze and adjust his thumb and fingers so as to demonstrate the principles of some plastic operation under discussion. His admiration for Lawson Tait, whose book, "Diseases of the Ovaries," he knew from cover to cover, drew him to Europe about the year 1887 and brought him into vital contact with England's pioneer surgical genius. Later he made a second visit to Birmingham and the two surgeons corresponded until Tait's death. Price's friends often dubbed him the "Lawson Tait of America." As a brilliant successful surgeon, in a large measure the inaugurator of a new era in this country, the comparison is merited, but on the other hand, although Price had the grave faults of strong bias and impulsive likes and dislikes, he was in every way immeasurably Tait's superior as a man. Joe Price's chief fault was an overmastering jealousy of the nearby successful competitors, and inasmuch as these, too, were but frail and erring mortals, his strictures were naturally often justified; he never knowingly or deliberately falsified.

His surgical technique was of the simplest—with a board for a table top and a little fistful of instruments, he brilliantly executed the most difficult abdominal operations. The secret of his success lay in his fixed purpose in life, his active restless mind, his piercing vision and his long, deft, trained fingers which were at once the envy and the despair of other surgeons. Under Tait's influence and encouraged by his own phenomenal suc-

cess in his abdominal surgery, he rejected and ridiculed antiseptics and the germ theory, but preached "asepsis" as some sort of a different doctrine, and thus practically attained his unparalleled results. Joseph Price easily led abdominal surgery on women in this country for nearly two decades. He naturally fell heir to the abdominal work of his professor in surgery, D. Hayes Agnew (q. v.), who was too old to master the new fields opened up; his obstetrical skill was such that R. A. F. Penrose (q. v.), his professor in obstetrics, constantly relied upon his skill in difficult cases. He asked Price to deliver a brief series of lectures at the university. These were not successful as far as the class was concerned, and were not kept up or followed by any official appointment.

Price never held any regular collegiate teaching position, and yet he taught more men how to do abdominal and pelvic operations, and had more grateful followers than any other man in America.

His kindness to the poor, and a supreme indifference to the bondage of office hours (the despair of his practical brother, Mordecai (q. v.), kept him from accumulating a substantial bank account; the emoluments of a big practice meant but little to him.

He had been engaged for several years to "Lou" Troth, when Professor William Goodell (q. v.) gave up the Preston Retreat (a large endowed obstetric home), and Price's name naturally at once came up for consideration. But the holder of the position must be married! The opportunities offered in the Retreat for obstetric experience were unsurpassed, the salary was large, and with it went a big, comfortable house and grounds, the concession of office hours and an outside practice, provided the institution was duly cared for. Price's candidacy was settled in the happiest manner by immediate marriage; he was elected and filled the post with zeal and success from 1887 to 1894. The issue of the marriage was three daughters and four sons, none of whom studied medicine.

With C. B. Penrose he was the founder of the Philadelphia Gynceean Hospital (incorporated January, 1888), in which he was succeeded by Penrose and J. M. Baldy. Later he abandoned the Gynceean and opened a large private hospital with Dr. J. W. Kennedy.

He was president of the American Association of Obstetricians and Gynecologists in 1895, and one of the staunch supporters of

and a contributor to the proceedings of this honorable body of specialists.

Price's great subjects for operation or for a paper before a society, or for a debate, were "Pus in the Pelvis," "Extra-uterine Pregnancy," "Early Ovariectomy" and "Fibroid tumors;" the vermiform appendix came in, too, for a large share of his attention. When he was known to be in attendance at a meeting, men flocked in and filled the room and crowded the aisles to enjoy his vigorous, spicy discussions. At first somewhat interrupted and hesitant in his speech, he soon warmed up as he felt the sympathy of his audience, until like Stonewall Jackson dashing at the head of his troops, he carried friends and foes alike with him, as he graphically depicted the lessons drawn from his large experience, and caustically flayed his opponents.

His aggressive militancy for what he held to be the best interests of abdominal surgery is well illustrated by the following story, related to me by Dr. Charles H. Mayo, an eyewitness. While Price and his associates in Philadelphia were zealously saving lives by their brilliant operations, a competitor was vaunting his simpler, safer cures of the same conditions by the Apostoli electric treatment. Price soon "camped on his trail," as he would express it, and closely followed his work over a series of months, or mayhap for several years. The electro-therapeutist finally announced a paper on his methods before the College of Physicians of Philadelphia. Price significantly asked Dr. Mayo, then visiting him, to be present, as the meeting "was likely to be interesting." Before the hour a dray drove up to the hall and a great number of jars containing big and little tumors and specimens were unloaded and deposited on a long table in front of the speaker's desk. Then followed Price, who took a little pad out of his pocket and busied himself writing slips and attaching them to the jars. The electro-therapeutist read his paper and cited the numerous patients cured by his conservative methods. Whenever the initials were given, Price put additional notes on the slips on the jars. The denouement came when the subject was thrown open for discussion. Price arose, one by one named the cases cured and then exhibited the morbid specimens he had afterwards removed from the patients; a big fibroid cut open to show the streaks of the intense cauterization, and the fact that the growth was uninfluenced; in another case he demonstrated that the needles had penetrated the uterine wall at a point remote from the

growth; another patient had acquired "a vicious intestinal adhesion," jeopardizing the operation. The tubes of a "cured" pelvic inflammatory mass were picked up and incised and the pus flowed out. The effect was so crushing that the adversary had the pity of the hearers, but the therapeutics were annihilated and electro-therapy received its death blow.

Bitter and unrelenting as a foe, Price was generous to the extreme to friends. He had not the habit of mind for the writing of a scientific or a technical paper, but he saw with prophetic vision the next greater steps to be taken in surgery, he grasped them himself and then turned round to pull the rest of the world up to his standpoint, and before he quitted the scene, everyone had in fact gone his way.

One of the most difficult, nay the impossible task of a biographer is to grasp and depict such a personality and to measure the influence of a man like Joseph Price, and yet as great pioneers such men as he and his brother Mordecai often accomplish more for humanity than many who have poured forth much wisdom from the laboratory. Alas, the aroma of such a life is evanescent and the pen is inadequate to draw the picture. Those who knew him well chuckle or grow pensive and sorrowful as they recall the talks and the walks and the tours and the operations in which they have been associated with him, and one and all are apt to end up with "Dear old Joe, I wish he were here now." Those who came on the scene later can never know him.

Price died of an infection (to which he was ever liable), a universal retro-peritoneal involvement of all the glands in the abdomen, so that in spite of his hurry call to his follower, J. W. Kennedy, to operate, he passed out of the field of his great labors, June 8, 1911. He received the honorary degree of LL. D. from Union College but a month before his death. There is a good portrait in his biography by Dr. Kennedy in the *American Journal of Obstetrics* for January, 1912.

HOWARD A. KELLY.