

EXTRACT

FROM

AN EULOGIUM

ON

WILLIAM SHIPPEN, M. D.

1736 - 1808

DELIVERED BY

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IN THE

MEDICAL COLLEGE.

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EULOGIUM, &c.

GENTLEMEN,

TO commemorate the virtues, to celebrate the achievements, and thus perpetuate the fame of the illustrious dead, has been the business of the poet, the painter, the sculptor, and the orator, in every country and in every age. Neither the rigours of a polar, nor the fervours of a tropical sky ; neither the rude insensibility of barbarism, nor the busy dissipation of polished life, can deter the mind from this pious employment.

The motives by which mankind are induced to engage in it, are confessedly liberal and elevated in their nature—in their result they are eminently pleasing and important. In point of universality and force, they are, perhaps, next to those which lead the mind to the worship of a God. In either case, an intermingled sentiment of gratitude and piety constitutes a leading principle of action—in either case there is manifested a grateful and praiseworthy recollection of benefits received.

With sentiments and recollections not dissimilar to these, are we now assembled to mingle our sorrows over the ashes of a mortal—with praises such as may become the occasion, and such as truth may not disavow, are we called on to honour the memory of a benefactor.

Previously to my attempting to portray the character, and to unfold to you a view of the labours and achievements of our distinguished countryman, suffer me to premise a single reflection. If many youths have been fired with enthusiasm and urged to deeds of greatness and glory, by a recital of the lives of the destroyers of nations; how much more does it become you to catch the spark of a generous emulation from the story of him who was one of the benefactors of the human race?

Dr. SHIPPEN was descended, on his mother's side, from a family of wealth and distinction, which had been attached to the person and had followed the fortunes of the illustrious founder of the state of Pennsylvania. By his father he was connected with those pious and intrepid pilgrims, who, flying from fanaticism and persecution in their native country, had sought an asylum for liberty of conscience and the rights of devotion, in the wilds of New England.

He was born in October, 1733, in the city of Philadelphia; of which, Joseph Shippen, his grandfather, having emigrated from Massachusetts, on a special invitation from William Penn, had been the first mayor.

Of the first years of the life of young Shippen, nothing particular is at present recollected. Nor is this circumstance to be regarded as a circumstance of regret. The history of childhood is but rarely instructive. It is seldom that the infant gives any well-founded presage of the future character of the individual. As the acorn holds buried in its bosom the embryo-oak, destined to be the future pride of the forest, and a still smaller seed encloses the more gigantic *adansonia*, so in the early morning of life, the rudiments of human greatness are generally concealed beneath the sportive habits of the child. Our first acquaintance with our young philosopher, commences at the West-Nottingham

grammar school, then under the direction of the Rev. Dr. Finley. That eminent and pious divine, no less distinguished for his talents and learning, than for his facility and excellence in the instruction of youth, and in rendering them enamoured of academic studies, was afterwards president of Princeton College. Under a teacher so able and enlightened, genius could neither lie dormant nor pass unnoticed. Accordingly, the talents of our young student, which if not of the *first*, were unquestionably of an order bordering on the first, rapidly unfolding themselves under such auspicious circumstances, soon raised their possessor to honourable distinction among the most favoured pupils of the institution. Nor did his conspicuous standing with the preceptor excite the jealousy, or deprive him of the affections of his fellow-students. So open was his heart, so frank his disposition, so mild his temper, and so fascinating his manners, that, whatever sentiments of emulation he might awaken in the bosoms of his companions, he could never become the object of their envy or dislike.

Having passed with unusual rapidity and the most flattering marks of applause, through his preparatory studies, our pupil was removed from the Nottingham grammar school to the College of New Jersey, which was at that time established in the village of Newark.

Here he was again fortunate, in being placed under the tuition of a very able and accomplished teacher—an enthusiast in learning, whose example was no less adapted to fire the youthful mind with the love of letters, than his instructions were calculated to enrich it with knowledge. This teacher was the Rev. Aaron Burr, father to him of the same name, who has made so distinguished a figure in the annals of our country. On the emulous disposition and aspiring genius of the youthful Shippen, opportunities so congenial

and excellent, could not fail of producing the most happy and brilliant effects. It was, accordingly, while pursuing his studies in this institution, that the rapid development of his talents, marked with unusual lustre for his years, began to attract the notice of the public, and pointed him out to the discerning eye, as a youth born to no common destinies.

Though distinguished in every branch of academical attainment to which he turned his attention, it was not his lot to acquire in each of them the same degree of eminence. His taste and the native bent of his genius, led him more particularly to the cultivation of classical learning, polite literature, and the graces of oratory. In these departments, such was, in a short time his acknowledged pre-eminence, that, when prizes and honours were proposed as the rewards of excellence in them, he was more than once suffered to bear them off without competition.—The better to impart to you some idea of the character and effect of his juvenile elocution, let me solicit your attention to the following anecdote, the truth of which rests on indubitable testimony.—When about to be admitted to the degree of Bachelor of Arts, in the College of New Jersey, he had conferred on him the honour of preparing and delivering a public oration, in the Latin tongue. On the day of commencement, the audience was extensive, respectable and enlightened. But a small part of them, however, had received the advantages of a liberal education. In this select number was the celebrated Dr. Whitfield, one of the most accomplished orators of modern times. Nor were his taste and judgment inferior to his excellence in practical eloquence. When Mr. Shippen appeared on the stage, the beauty of his countenance, which has rarely been surpassed, the elegance of his person, the ease and gracefulness of his whole deportment, attracted the eye of every

beholder, and excited a lively interest in his favour. But he had not proceeded many minutes in his address, when his personal accomplishments were lost in the superior charms of his eloquence. While he continued to speak, a power of fascination seemed to issue from his tongue, exerting over the audience an unlimited control. Not an idle whisper escaped from the lips, nor an inattentive glance from the eye of the assembled multitude. Though the language of the speaker was strange and unintelligible to most who heard him, his manner was so perfectly in unison with nature, that it soon found its way to the bosom of every one. Seldom has eloquence made a more impressive display of its power over the softer passions of the mind. Notwithstanding the disadvantage under which the orator laboured, from speaking in an unknown tongue, yet such was the pathos which marked his delivery, that he retired from the stage, with his audience in tears. Dr. Whitfield, in particular, set no bounds to the terms in which he expressed his admiration and delight. He even declared in the enthusiasm of the moment, that such a specimen of oratory would not have done dishonour to the Roman rostrum in the proud days of Hortensius and Cicero. Though an encomium so exalted, is not to be considered as correct criticism, it could have been extorted only by uncommon excellence. The occasion afforded a very happy presage of the success and celebrity which awaited the orator, in the professorship to which he was afterwards called.

Having finished his academical studies, a profession for life was now to be chosen. Nor did he hesitate or balance in making a choice. His inclination led him, by a strong predilection, to that of medicine: and he accordingly commenced his studies under the direction of his father, who was an eminent practitioner in the city of Philadelphia.

Here a new, rich and delightful field of knowledge opened to the view of our young philosopher. Having been hitherto conversant chiefly with the productions of men, he was now introduced to an acquaintance with the more august and diversified works of nature. In these he found a never-failing source of pleasure and instruction; for they were in unison with his taste, and peculiarly suited the texture of his mind.

Having already availed himself of every source of medical information to which he could have access in his native land, young Shippen embarked for Europe, where opportunities of instruction awaited him, better suited to his genius and ambition. Arrived in a country which had long been considered as the paradise of science, he put himself successively under the direction of some of the most distinguished medical teachers and practitioners of the age. Among these are to be reckoned, in particular, Hunter, Monro, Fothergill, and Boerhaave; characters whose fame will survive, and whose works will be consulted and admired, as long as medicine shall be practised as an art, or cultivated as a science. Nor did these luminaries in science, regard their young American as a common pupil. Finding his moral worth as unexceptionable, and his social virtues as engaging, as his intellect was enlightened and his manners refined, they soon took him to their bosoms, some of them even with parental tenderness, and opened to him the resources of their private friendship. This was more especially the case with Dr. William Hunter,* of London, in whose family he resided for several years, and whose paternal cares and luminous instructions

* About this period he married, and took with him to Edinburgh, Miss LEE, daughter of Governor Lee, of Virginia, by whom he had nine children.

he never ceased to remember with the gratitude of a son, and to dwell on with sensations of peculiar delight.

Although from the quickness of his perceptions, the liveliness of his imagination, and the whole texture and character of his mind, young Shippen had a peculiar fitness for speculative disquisitions, yet from his early years he was much more attached to demonstration, than to theory. This truth was clearly illustrated throughout the course of his professional studies. Hence though possessed of an ample stock of knowledge, in every department of medical science, he was more particularly devoted to the demonstrative branches of anatomy and surgery. It was, accordingly, in these branches, that his labours were most indefatigable, and his attainments most conspicuous, during his attendance on the medical schools and hospitals of Europe.

While thus engaged in the pursuit of science abroad, he was neither unmindful nor regardless of the prosperity and elevation of his native country. The rising greatness of the (then) colonies of North America, imparted to him a pleasure, and inspired him with a high-minded and laudable pride, which none but the philanthropist and patriot can feel. He dwelt with enthusiasm on the time when the land of his nativity should become the seat of those sciences which had hitherto flourished only in the old world. Nor did his ardour and enterprize suffer him to remain a mere passive expectant of events which as yet lay buried in the bosom of futurity. They combined with a laudable ambition and a sense of duty, in urging him to take an active and distinguished part in calling those important events into existence. He, accordingly, while only a medical student in the *old world*, conceived the design, and, in part, digested and matured the plan of establishing a school of medicine in the *new*. Nor did this idea, exalted in itself,

and pregnant with incalculable advantages to his beloved country, lie inoperative in a mind so aspiring and bent on schemes of public utility. Having imparted his views to a young medical friend, who, like himself, had visited London, in pursuit of professional knowledge, and procured from that gentleman a promise of co-operation, he continued to labour with increased assiduity, the better to qualify himself for his proposed undertaking. It is thus, that with minds rich in expedients and formed for perseverance, the conception of a favourite enterprise ensures, for the most part, the means of execution. Having spent several years in the lap of the sciences abroad, and graduated, with great reputation, in the University of Edinburgh, Dr. Shippen returned to America in the summer of the year 1762. On his arrival in Philadelphia, which was destined to be the theatre of his future eminence, he met with a reception the most grateful and flattering. His eulogy, while abroad, having been frequently pronounced by travellers from Europe, his fellow-citizens had been anxious to hail, with a distinguished welcome, the return of one who had done signal honour to his native country. A reception so strongly marked by affection and respect, was regarded by Dr. Shippen as a pledge of patronage and success in the walks of his profession. Nor did his anticipations exceed what his experience realized. He had been but a very short time in business, when he attained a very elevated rank of practical eminence. This was more particularly the case in the practice of surgery, a branch of his profession which he still continued most zealously to cultivate. Hence in the very morning of his professional career, he had the honour of being consulted in difficult cases by the oldest and ablest of his surgical brethren. But it did not belong to the aspiring mind, nor did it comport with the comprehen-

sive and patriotic views of Shippen, to rest satisfied with the *mere practice* of the healing art. His aim was more exalted, and his object more honourable to himself, and more extensively useful to his country. It has been already stated to you, that the establishment of a medical school in Philadelphia, had long been with him a favourite project. He now felt himself on the eve of attempting its accomplishment, aided by the ripened preparations of several years. Still, however, there were difficulties to be encountered. The enterprize, arduous in itself, was rendered abundantly more so, in consideration of its novelty: for as yet the voice of a public lecturer in medicine had never been heard in the western world. In order, therefore, to test the practicability of the measure, and to pave the way for a more regular and extensive establishment, he determined to embark in the undertaking himself, by delivering in a private capacity, a course of lectures on anatomy and surgery. This he did in the winter of 1762-3, being the first winter after his return from his studies and travels in Europe.

Experiencing something of the fate of most new adventurers in science, Dr. Shippen lectured, during the first winter, to a very limited class. But during his second, the case was different. The richness and perspicuity of his instructions, the elegance of his delivery, and the consequent increase of his reputation, had drawn together such a number of pupils, that he had some difficulty in procuring an apartment sufficiently large for their accommodation.

An experiment thus made by a solitary individual, proving successful beyond expectation, convinced the trustees of the University of Pennsylvania, that the establishing a school of medicine was a practicable enterprize. Arrangements for this purpose were accordingly made, and on the 17th of September, 1765, Dr. Shippen was unanimously

elected Professor of anatomy and surgery. With what fidelity and effect he devoted himself to the duties of his new appointment, the unexampled growth of the school, and the rapid diffusion of medical knowledge throughout the new world, will amply testify.

Having beheld Dr. Shippen, seated in a professor's chair, it will not be uninteresting to you to dwell for a moment on his rich and rare assemblage of qualifications for doing justice to that elevated and important station. Possessed of a lofty stature, and an open, animated, and manly countenance, his personal appearance was dignified and commanding. Nor did this constitute the whole amount of the advantages of his exterior. In addition to an imposing figure, and a graceful deportment, he was deservedly ranked among the handsomest of men. To a strong, clear and melodious voice, he added a distinct articulation, and an utterance capable of great modulation. In the qualifications of his mind, nature had been no less bounteous to him than in those of his person. His perception was quick, his memory retentive, his understanding vigorous, and his imagination fruitful and inventive. Nor had culture been wanting in the improvement of those powers which nature had bestowed with so liberal a hand.

His powers and accomplishments as a public speaker, were peculiarly eminent. Those, who from their attendance on the medical schools of Europe, were qualified to decide, pronounced him the most eloquent lecturer of the age. In its stile and character his eloquence was original. It did not breathe the fervour of the pulpit; it had not the point and argumentative keenness of the forum; nor did it rise to the commanding declamation, calculated to rouse yet govern a popular assembly. It might have been emphatically denominated *the eloquence of science*. Its object

was the understanding, rather than the passions ; its aim demonstration, rather than persuasion. It was calm, dignified and luminous ; flowing with the majesty of a spacious stream, sweeping unbroken through a level country ; not hurrying along with the irregular force and wild impetuosity of a mountain torrent. It consisted in a rich and perspicuous arrangement of facts, accompanied by fair and forcible inductions, clothed in choice and appropriate language, and delivered in a manner the most graceful and impressive.

As a public teacher, Dr. Shippen was conscientiously scrupulous with regard to his doctrines. He inculcated nothing which he did not firmly believe ; and his belief was generally founded on the basis of facts. Though not hostile to rational theories in medicine, he never indulged himself from his chair, in visionary speculations. Preferring ignorance itself to error, and deeming candour more honourable than a false pretension to knowledge, he withheld his sanction from doubtful opinions, and in no instance attempted to answer or silence the enquiries of others, with what he did not himself completely understand. Hence, his doctrines, though apparently less *ingenious*, and perhaps less amusing to his pupils than they might have been rendered by the wild vagaries of sportive imagination, were generally solid, and never dangerously seductive of the minds of youth. They were, for the most part, such as were capable of an immediate application to practice.

So rare an assemblage of talents and acquirements, directed in their application by wisdom and industry, added daily to the reputation, as well of their possessor, as of the school of medicine in which they were displayed. But while this school was yet in its infancy, an event occurred, of a character so portentous, and an aspect so formidable,

as to shake to their centre, and for a time, even to threaten to annihilate all the establishments of our country, whether civil or literary. This event was the American revolution, which commenced in the year 1774. During a struggle so eventful and glorious, it was not to be expected that the talents of Shippen would remain unemployed. Nor was it long before they were called into action. No sooner had the nation appealed to the sword, and taken the field in defence of liberty, than great individual sufferings, as well as great losses to the public service, were sustained, from the want of arrangement and economy in the public hospitals. The disorder which prevailed in the management of those institutions, was found to be more destructive than the arms of the enemy. To remedy this great and threatening evil, it became necessary to place these abodes of wretchedness under the superintendence of a medical character competent to the trust—a character in whose talents, integrity, patriotism and humanity, a confidence unlimited might safely be reposed. Such a character was immediately found in the professor of anatomy and surgery, and Dr. Shippen was accordingly appointed Director General of the military Hospitals of the United States. This appointment, arduous in itself, even under the most favourable circumstances, was rendered trebly so by the novelty of the establishment, and the alarming want of resources necessarily incidental to an infant country. Unintimidated, however, by the difficulties which presented themselves, the professor entered on the duties of his appointment, with a promptitude and zeal corresponding to the exigency of the times, and the magnitude of the undertaking. The ability and faithfulness with which he acquitted himself in this distinguished trust, are best attested by the reformation of abuses, and the amelioration of the general state of the hospitals, which soon suc-

ceeded the commencement of his directorship. If some evils still remained in this department—if some inconvenience and distress were still experienced by the sick and wounded, they were attributable to the faults of subordinate officers, and to the insurmountable difficulties of the times, rather than to neglect or want of abilities in the director general.

He continued in office till our struggle for independence had terminated in victory. On the achievement of that glorious event, he surrendered up his commission, into the hands by which it had been conferred, receiving for his services, the thanks of Congress, and a letter expressive of his approbation from the commander in chief of the American army. As an evidence of the sincerity and continuance of his approbation, it is worthy of remark, that when General Washington afterwards resided in Philadelphia, as President of the United States, Dr. Shippen was employed as physician to his family.

The sanguinary operations of war, having at length given place to the mild and restorative influence of peace, the professor returned with promptitude and joy to his long deserted station in the University of Pennsylvania.—We now behold him in the very zenith of his fame.—The distinguished reputation which had been recently acquired by the Director General of the military Hospitals, added now a fresh lustre to the character and labours of the public teacher. Under these circumstances, his lectures could not fail to become more interesting, instructive and popular. Aided by the talents and zeal of his professional colleagues, he soon succeeded in rendering the Medical School of Pennsylvania, an institution of high and just celebrity. The accomplishment of this event was to him a source of peculiar gratification. From motives of patriotism, he rejoiced

that his country had become doubly independent. Independent as a political community, and independent as a nursery of medical science. No longer forced, in pursuit of instruction, to brave the dangers of the ocean, and the still greater dangers of European *luxury and vice*; he now saw the youth of the United States, amply disciplined in the knowledge of the healing art, without a separation from their native soil.

Having traced the professor's footsteps through the sprightly morning and the bright meridian of life, it remains that we accompany him through its sober evening. For we have now arrived at that period, when, by a decree of nature, the orb of genius begins to descend. Seldom, however, has this orb been shorn, in its descent, of fewer of its beams, than it was in the case of the venerable deceased.

When the professor began to feel, with increasing force, the daily encroachments of that inaptitude for action which is the inevitable lot of advanced age, he became anxious that its inconveniences should be exclusively his own. In particular, he determined that these inconveniences should neither mar the fortunes, nor affect the character of the Medical School, which had so long been the object of his paternal care and solicitude. To carry into effect this liberal purpose, he requested of the trustees of the institution, the appointment of an adjunct professor of anatomy and surgery, who might share with him in the labours and honours of the chair. The adoption of this measure afforded a grateful and welcome relief to his declining faculties. Still, however, it did not serve him as a pretext for suddenly abandoning to his colleague the duties of his professorship.

For many years he not only sanctioned, by his constant presence, the lectures upon anatomy and surgery, but still

continued to deliver a principal part of them himself. Nor did he ever entirely abandon the theatre of his usefulness and his fame. It was but a few months before his death, that in the presence of a numerous and admiring class, he made an impressive display of that evergreen eloquence which flourished in freshness amid the winter of age.*

Several years previous to this period, Dr. Shippen finding himself after the decease of his father, in affluent circumstances, had determined to relinquish entirely the practice of a profession which had become too laborious for his growing infirmities. He had, accordingly, provided for himself a retreat in the country, where, amid the elegant leisure of the philosopher, he passed his summers in retirement. Here, abstracted from the noise and bustle of the world, he devoted much of his time to the study of the scriptures. It was while retired within the bosom of this tranquil retreat, and earnestly engaged in this holy employment, that he received his last dread summons from above: To this summons, (after having long sustained with patience and fortitude the ravages of a lingering disease,) he yielded, with all the calmness which resignation can bestow, a willing obedience, on the 11th of July, 1808. Thus expired, in the seventy-fifth year of his age, one of the most distinguished medical teachers of the age, and the father of scholastic medicine in the United States.

But if Shippen was distinguished in his professional and public character, he was no less amiable and accomplished

* This lecture was the first delivered in that new Medical College, whose architectural beauties do such honour to the genius of Mr. Latrobe. In retiring from it he made this observation to his family; I am so much delighted with the prosperity of the institution, that, with the reverence due to the sacredness of the quotation, I might almost say with the venerable Simeon, "Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, since mine eyes have seen" the completion of all my labours for the benefit of the Medical School.

in private life. Nor can it be either unpleasing or uninteresting, to pause for a moment, and take a last view of him in that less splendid, but more endearing relation. To personal honour and unspotted integrity, he added the softer virtues of benevolence and humanity.* Possessed of a warm and susceptible heart, connected with sincerity and stability of character, his attachments were strong, his friendships were durable. As a companion, the warmth of his heart, the frankness of his disposition, the mildness of his temper, and the polished and conciliating style of his manners, secured the affections of all who approached him. Nor is it unworthy of the present occasion to remark, that when seated at the festive board, and amidst that hospitality for which his house was always distinguished, the sprightliness of his wit, and the graces of his conversation, gave a zest to the enjoyments of the convivial circle.

Such were the talents and such the acquirements, such the life and such the death of him, whose character I have endeavoured to commemorate. A character how varied, how rich, and elevated ! An attempt to portray it how feeble and ineffectual ! Could I have availed myself of the descriptive eloquence of the deceased ; could I have caught but a remnant of his mantle as he ascended the heavens, then would I have delineated him in the colours of truth, then would I have presented you with a living likeness of my great original. But, however unsuccessful has been the present humble effort, the case is still within the limits of hope. Some future attempt, commenced under happier auspices, and conducted by abilities more competent to the undertaking, will yet do justice to the memory of our medical father:

* In life and in death he was a benefactor to the poor, whom he attended when sick, without fee or reward ; and left many valuable bequests to the poor and unfortunate.