

Obituary notice of Dr. Albert H. Smith, by Dr. Harrison Allen.

(Read before the American Philosophical Society, Dec. 3, 1886.)

Albert Holmes Smith was born in Philadelphia, July 19th, 1835. He was the seventh child of Dr. Moses B. and Rachel D. Smith. His ancestors emigrated from England about 1685, soon after the grant by Charles II to William Penn. Dr. Moses B. Smith was a noted practitioner of medicine at Bustleton, Pa., from 1814 to 1829. From the date last named to that of his death he was well known in Philadelphia as a practicing physician. He died in 1855 in the sixty-eighth year of his age. He was a man who stood high in the estimation of his fellow-citizens. He was an associate of Physick, the elder Hartshorne, J. K. Mitchell, and other eminent medical men. He was one of the founders of the American Medical Association.

The education of Albert H. Smith was conducted in accordance with the views of the Society of Friends. After passing through the Academy at Westtown and the private schools of James Lippincott and Henry D. Gregory, he entered the Collegiate Department of the University of Pennsylvania, whence he graduated with honor in 1853. Immediately after graduation he matriculated in the Medical Department of the same institution, and obtained his diploma in 1856. He was fortunate in receiving the position of resident physician at the Friends' Asylum for the Insane at Frankford, and subsequently the more important office of resident physician to the Pennsylvania Hospital. He was thus in every way thoroughly prepared for the duties of practice which soon devolved upon him. At an early period of his career he became identified with the Nurses' Home and Lying-in Charity. He served as one of its physicians and lecturers for the long period of twenty years. This unassuming charity is a centre from which has always emanated authoritative teaching on the subject of obstetrics. Hundreds of physicians scattered over the face of our wide country have received their instruction in this all-important branch of medical art from Dr. Smith. The Nurses' Home was the scene of much of Dr. Smith's professional labors. He here laid the foundation of that career which in many respects was remarkable.

For a short time Dr. Smith was one of the obstetricians to the Philadelphia Hospital, and in 1868 he became one of the consulting physicians to the Woman's Hospital. Dr. Smith was twice elected president of the Philadelphia Obstetrical Society, and of the Philadelphia County Medical Society. He presided over the American Gynecological Association at its eighth annual meeting. He visited Europe in 1880, when he was received with distinction by the leading physicians both in England and on the continent. In 1885 he was elected an honorary member of the Gynecological Society of Great Britain.

Dr. Smith enjoyed robust health until the fall of 1883, when the symptoms of an incurable malady announced themselves. With but slight abatement the disease advanced until it compelled its victim to seek abso-

lute repose. After a prolonged illness, accompanied with great suffering, he died, December 14th, 1885.

Dr. Smith married Miss Emily Kaighn, daughter of Charles Kaighn, of Kaighn's Point, N. J. He was the father of seven children, five of whom survive him.

To attain to a commanding position in a difficult art, to become a popular practitioner in a city where professional competition is keen, demands qualities of unusual order. By steady, untiring persistence Dr. Smith conquered a position of eminence among his brethren and a place in the hearts of hosts of patients. In the last mentioned relation his rank among the physicians of Philadelphia was, perhaps, unique.

Dr. Smith was *facile princeps* the leading obstetrician of his time in America. He developed a skill in the management of cases requiring instrumental aid which in the opinion of his colleagues has probably never been exceeded. In the language of an associate: "He held advanced positions both as a practitioner and a teacher of obstetrics. He used the forceps with unsurpassed skill."

The excessive toil which is inseparable from the life of an obstetrician in full practice—the irregular hours, the exacting vigils—demand an iron constitution and a determined will. Dr. Smith possessed these qualifications. In common with many men of exceptional endowment, he enjoyed the faculty of sleeping at times which did not interfere with the exactments of long-continued toil. Forty-eight hours have been passed without sleep on his part and yet without impairment either of physical or mental vigor. Nothing ever came to him as an interruption. The demands of the most unreasonable patient never annoyed him. When at his prime he was indifferent to fatigue and hardship. I recall on one occasion meeting him at the house of a patient when the cold was extreme, and the streets were all but impassable from the accumulations of ice and snow, congratulating myself that I was free from the labor which was before him that day. Yet he failed to comprehend that anything unusual existed, and did not appear to regard in the slightest degree conditions which are generally held to be distasteful and simply to be endured.

It has been frequently observed that men of the cast of mind of Dr. Smith are rarely literary in their inclinations. The lives of intense responsibility lead by them; the fatigue to which they are habitually committed; the weariness and disposition to repose which is so well known to follow upon long periods of exposure to the open air, no doubt suffice to explain this disinclination. It is a noteworthy circumstance that in spite of this disinclination Dr. Smith was a literary worker. Soon after leaving the Pennsylvania Hospital he is found editing "Ellis' Formulary," a work requiring great patience and care. He contributed a number of papers—eighteen in all—to the medical journals. As an evidence of the cast of Dr. Smith's mind it may be noted that of this

number ten were on practical subjects. In the main they were in illustration of improvements of instruments and of apparatus. An important modification by himself of a uterine pessary is favorably known over the entire medical world. He was the first to introduce into practice the intra-uterine applications of hot water in arresting hemorrhage. At a time when his practice was at the largest he undertook the study of the German language, and at a later period he enjoyed an easy command of the medical literature of Germany. As a writer Dr. Smith was clear and forcible. In a sketch of Dr. Emeline H. Cleveland he attained a truly eloquent strain. This fact is worthy of mention since he was always self-depreciatory of his literary abilities and disclaimed every intention to authorship. He was often heard to regret that with him the act of composition was difficult.

These are the chief facts, as the world esteems facts, in the life of Albert H. Smith. Much remains to be said, much that at my hands I keenly feel must remain imperfectly said. The elements of character which made Dr. Smith while he was among us an honored object, remain now that he is dead an undying memory.

Dr. Smith was a man of chivalrous type, and his life was consecrated in the best sense of the term to the service of the Highest. It was more to him to right a wrong and to defend the weak than to make scientific discoveries. The impression made upon his mind from being brought in contact with disease was the suffering that appealed to him for relief rather than the nature or the results of morbid processes. As a consequence he is found less active in the investigation of the anatomy and the pathology of those diseases with the study of which he was identified than with the means of assuaging the pain and distress attending their presence in the economy. He was not heard to express any exalted conception of the duties of the physician; he made no pretension to any special consecration to good works; he was, indeed, too busy a man to systematically attend to the rites of a society so simple in organization as is that of the Friends. The attitude assumed by him toward the suffering was not that of one who from generous impulse was occasionally induced to offer relief, but as one impelled by an incentive which was constantly present. It actuated the performance of the smallest duty as well as the greatest, and was the same in the dwellings of the rich as in those of the poor.

Many instances are told in which Dr. Smith undertook the task of seeking out the helpless and rescuing the fallen. Dr. Christopher Cleborne, of the U. S. Navy, is my authority for the following incident: Dr. Smith, while a resident at the Pennsylvania Hospital, had in some way learned that a poor country girl had been enticed from her home into a brothel. She was sick, in debt, and unable in consequence to escape from her surroundings. Finding that she was penitent, he opened a correspondence with her friends, paid her indebtedness, enabled her to get away from the den in which she was lodged, and to be restored to her parents. On another occasion Dr. Smith was called upon by an agent for a be-

nevolent society who informed him that an abandoned woman was about to be tried for the murder of her child. The poor creature had taken the life of the infant soon after its birth. She had been arrested and at the time that Dr. Smith was notified she was on trial for the crime. It appears that the mother had applied to the Nurses' Home for assistance, but in vain. Dr. Smith needed but a simple narration of the facts to have his sympathies aroused. He relinquished all his engagements and repairing to the court-room undertook to defend the woman. He endeavored to show by statements made on the witness-stand by himself and his medical friends, whom he had summoned, that a homicidal tendency is not infrequently developed in the mother while in the parturient state, that the woman had sought relief and protection at the Nurses' Home, which, had it been granted, would have shielded her from her own maniacal disposition, and that no premeditation to the murder could be proved. The plea was successful and the woman was acquitted.

The zeal which always characterized Dr. Smith's efforts to save and defend women doubtless accounted for the line of practice he accepted. While a resident at the Pennsylvania Hospital he was noted for the delicacy with which he treated the women patients. In his practice he gave evidence of a thorough acquaintance with the peculiar organization of women. He studied not only her physical but her psychical nature. Women returned this appreciation with an esteem and affection that was unbounded.

A lady whose knowledge of Dr. Smith was gained almost entirely in the course of his professional visits to herself, has recorded some of the impressions which she derived from him. His influence, she thought, was due in great part to his sympathy. It had no limits. He took the trials and griefs of others to himself. He was never known to be impatient even when he was weary and sad at heart. As his health failed he disguised his sufferings and listened with interest to the most trifling ailments. "I saw him," said she, "on the very day that he finally gave up work, yet he was so bright and cheerful that I felt completely reassured that he was restored to health."

Dr. Smith had a high conception of womanhood. He accepted woman as man's help-mate in the most exalted sense. He held her to be man's guide and controller. In his judgment, while her moral instincts were truer than his, her mental powers were equal, and that on the encouragement given her depended the moral regeneration of the world. He was as urgent in calling her to a true sense of the immense importance of her mission as he was strenuous in his endeavors that society at large should acknowledge her claims. "Woman," said he on the occasion of a memorial meeting held in honor of Professor Cleveland, "must expect to exalt herself to her true position in which she can perform the proper function in the intellectual and social economy."*

* Papers read at the Memorial Hour in Commemoration of the late Professor Emeline H. Cleveland, M.D., Phila., 1879, p. 28.

From the foregoing it can be easily understood that Dr. Smith became an early and consistent advocate of the medical education of women. He urged upon the profession and the community the justice of admitting women to the practice of medicine, and to all the privileges of membership in the representative medical bodies. To use the words of an eulogist,* "he bent his broad shoulders to shield professional women from roughness and unjust depreciation, and to remove from their path the stumbling block of scornful indifference." He was undaunted by opposition and unwavering in his adherence to his convictions. That ostracism followed such a course mattered not; that he was openly assailed as a man who was defiant of public opinion did not move him. Defeats of women candidates to election to membership in the Philadelphia County Medical Society did not deter him from repeatedly renewing the attempt.

At a meeting of the Pennsylvania State Medical Society, held in Pittsburgh, in May, 1878, Dr. Hiram Corson presented a resolution to the effect that every Hospital for the Insane in the State be administered by two medical attendants, one a man and the other a woman. The resolution met with great opposition, and at the ensuing meeting at Chester it was actively discussed. In the course of the debate Dr. Smith spoke stoutly in favor of the resolution, and throughout the struggle which agitated the society defended the position taken by Dr. Corson. The resolution was lost by a close vote of 40 to 35.

Dr. Smith lived to see the opposition to the medical advancement of women in great part overcome and to enjoy the gratitude of those whose cause he had so valiantly espoused. When the warning of failing health compelled him to relinquish his practice and to seek relief abroad, he was the recipient of the most touching expressions of regard from the physicians and the students of the Woman's Hospital. On the occasion of his death a meeting of the Alumni of the Woman's Medical College was called and largely responded to. Messages of sympathy were received from graduates from distant cities. In commemoration of his self-appointed service in their behalf and the interests which they represented, a portrait in oil was ordered to be painted and presented to the Hospital. In pursuance of this intent a portrait now adorns the parlor of this institution.

The prolonged illness of Dr. Smith called out as much sympathy from his friends and patients as he had extended to others. It may be here related that when it was found desirable to remove him from his city residence to his cottage at Beach Haven, the equipment of the city ambulance service became available and the interest taken by the mayor of the city, by the police surgeon, Dr. Morris Stroud French, and by the police corps in seeing that the beloved physician was painlessly and expeditely taken from his sick-room to the cars—the streets being cleared for the purpose—made the occasion in a degree a public one.

His attitude to children was all but reverential. It was beautiful to see

* Public Ledger, Dec. 15, 1886.

his countenance lighten up even in midst of pain to hear of the welfare of some little friend. Tokens of affection showered themselves upon him during his illness. A lady narrates the incident that a fortnight before he died she took her little niece, of whom he was extremely fond, to see him. He gave her some flowers, and, though suffering greatly at the time, insisted upon carefully fastening them to her dress himself.

Such is the brief chronicle of an important life. Not that much has been left in literature or science in evidence of what he accomplished. In the best sense of the term his career was imperfectly developed. He was at the point of attaining a position in life where many converging lines were meeting. A fairly lengthened span would doubtless have given opportunity for complete application of his powers. It is well known that he was on the threshold of a preferment which would have greatly increased his influence and widened and strengthened his position, when the last summons came with no uncertain sound. The spear fell from his nerveless grasp and the fight was over.

Stated Meeting, December 3, 1886.

Present, 13 members.

President, Mr. FRALEY, in the Chair.

Professor F. A. Genth, Jr., a lately elected member, was presented to the Chair and took his seat.

Correspondence was submitted as follows, viz: A letter of envoy with request for exchange from R. Istituto di Studi Superiori pratici e di perfezionamento in Firenze, Italy; a letter of envoy from the Foreign Office at the Hague; a letter announcing change of address from Dr. F. L. Otto Roehrig, Los Angeles, Cal.

On motion, the R. Istituto di Studi Superiori was placed on the Society's exchange list, to receive from No. 121.

College of Physicians (Philadelphia) requested the loan of portraits belonging to the Society, of such persons as were founders or fellows, to be shown at its approaching Centennial exhibition, December 28, 1886-January 6, 1887. The application was on motion referred to Curators with instructions to report thereon at the next meeting of the Society.

Accessions to the Library were received from the Depart-



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