

OCTERLONY (J.A.)

With Compliments of the Author

EULOGY

ON

THE LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF

Gunsford Pitts Vandell

BY

JOHN A. OCTERLONY, A. M., M. D.,

PROF. OF OBSTETRICS AND DISEASES OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN, UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE.



"Vita Enim Mortuorum Memoria Vivorum Posita."

LOUISVILLE, KY.

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LUNSFORD PITTS YANDELL was born on the 6th day of June, 1837, on his father's plantation, "Craggy Bluff," in Rutherford County, Tennessee.

He came of a family for generations distinguished in the annals of American medicine. His father was the late Prof. L. P. Yandell, celebrated for great learning and eloquence, and not only a skillful physician, but also a renowned chemist and geologist. His mother was Susan Juliet, daughter of David Wendel, Esq., of Murfreesboro, Tenn. In her were combined all nature's choicest gifts. With uncommon beauty of form and features were united rare intellectual endowments; graceful and gracious, of refined manners and sprightly conversation, yet profoundly reverent and devout, she won the love of all who knew her.

To her son she must have been the ideal of womanly perfection. He loved her with more than ordinary filial affection, and during her last illness his unwearied tenderness and ceaseless, gentle cares sweetened her failing life, and commanded the reverent admiration of all who witnessed these touching scenes.

The son of such parents could not fail to be a gifted being. This was proved at every step of his career. The family having moved to Louisville, young LUNSFORD became the pupil of the late Prof. Noble Butler, who was one of the most noted educators of his time.

From him he received the training suited to his years, but we may readily conceive that his illustrious and learned father had the chief share in molding his tastes and developing his intellectual powers. Their companionship was close and constant, and their relations through life continued most beautiful. What lessons of mind and heart were imparted in those happy hours of unrestrained intercourse between them! How the father must have poured forth in rich abundance the vast treasures of his learning! How the son must have received with rapt attention and pondered in his heart the wise parental teachings!

The love of natural history for which LUNSFORD became conspicuous in after life was early discerned by his father and sedulously fostered by him. While yet a boy he displayed unusual fondness and aptitude for the study of medicine. His father was one of the founders of the University of Louisville, in which at this time and for many years he held a leading professorship. Profs. Austin Flint and S. D. Gross were also members of the Faculty. It was in this great school that young LUNSFORD became a student. Under the tuition of such men his medical education necessarily became both comprehensive and thorough. He pursued his clinical studies under the guidance of his elder brother, Prof. D. W. Yandell, in the wards of the Louisville City Hospital, and in Stokes's Dispensary, then under the direction of this eminent surgeon. With such ardor and success were these studies prosecuted that the "Doctorate in Medicine" was conferred upon him in 1857, when he was hardly twenty years of age.

Shortly after his graduation the young physician removed to Memphis, Tenn. Here he soon established a lucrative practice, and rose so rapidly in professional esteem that he was elected, in 1859, to the Professorship of Materia Medica and Therapeutics in the Memphis Medical College. This place he filled with great honor to himself and increasing advantage to the school.

But soon the civil war broke out and interrupted his scientific labors. One so keenly alive to all that was going on around him, the "*quicquid agunt homines,*" could not help taking a deep interest in the great questions which then agitated the country and roused the

passions of the people. With all the enthusiasm of youth and of an ardent temperament he plunged into the war, and enlisted as a private soldier in the Confederate army, and, with all the loyalty of a noble nature, he adhered to the Southern cause. He fought in the first battle of the Southwest, at "Belmont." Gen. Polk, who commanded the Confederate forces, having been informed that Dr. YANDELL was serving as a private in the ranks, called him to his headquarters. When the young soldier came he said: "YANDELL, we need men to carry muskets, but we need surgeons too; and one of your name naturally belongs to the medical department of the service. Please, therefore, report to the Medical Director of the army, who will assign you to duty in his department." He passed the required examination and was commissioned a surgeon. Later on he was under the terrific fire at Island No. 10, and was one of the few who were fortunate enough to escape from the island and reach the Confederate lines. He took part in the sanguinary battle of Shiloh, and was complimented in general orders for gallantry on the field. It was here he came under the immediate notice of Gen. Hardee, at whose request he was assigned to duty as staff-surgeon and medical inspector of the corps. These posts he filled with signal distinction until the final surrender in 1865. He participated in nearly all the hard-fought battles of the Southwest, and after each received honorable mention in general orders, not only for his admirable care of the sick and wounded, but for gallantry on the field of battle.

His amiable and cheerful disposition, his ability and faithfulness in the discharge of duty, his kindness and sympathy for the sick and wounded, won for him both respect and affection. He was the life and soul of the mess and around the blazing camp-fire. On the eve of battle, on the dreary march, or amid the horrors of defeat, his genial presence infused new cheer and mitigated the hardships of war. Of all the Confederate soldiers who served with him none was known ever to speak of him but with kindness and respect.

At the close of the war he returned to Louisville and engaged in the practice of his profession. Old friends and acquaintances gladly welcomed him, and he quickly made new friends. My first recollection of LUNSFORD YANDELL dates from this time, and is most vivid and

pleasing. The occasion was a fancy dress ball at the residence of Mr. Charles Cobb, of this city. LUNSFORD personated a knight of the sixteenth century. His costume of black and gold was most becoming, and admirably served to set off his splendid figure. He appeared to me to be the handsomest man I had ever seen—perfectly unconscious of his great attractions, and happy in the possession of youth and health and the good will of all around him.

His practice rapidly increased, and before long his *clientele* consisted not only of the best people in the city, but of important cases sent him from remote parts. Professional journeys to distant places became frequent. But few hours were left for recreation and rest, yet he had always time to give to the poor. How ceaseless were his ministrations to them was not known save by a few, but from his confidential letters we glean words and incidents which reveal in part his generous expenditure of time and labor, where no remuneration could be expected and none was ever asked.

In the latter part of 1866 he married Miss Louisa Elliston, of Nashville, Tenn. It was a most happy union. When he brought into his home his lovely bride, he also brought in her his good genius—

“A guardian angel, o’er his life presiding,
Doubling his pleasures and his cares dividing.”

Four charming children were born to them, the youngest of which is a son, who bears his father’s name and beautifully resembles him in features. Shortly after his marriage he sailed for Europe, accompanied by his wife. They remained abroad for a year. During this time he visited the great centers of medical learning in the Old World, and made the personal acquaintance of all the leading men in the profession. Wherever he went he made a most favorable impression and received unusual attention and courtesy.

His studies were pursued in earnestness, but in his own original way. No blind worshiper of authorities, he observed men and their teachings with rare discrimination. While gathering information from innumerable sources, he never lost his intellectual independence or merged his own individuality into that of the great masters, whom he carefully studied yet as freely criticised.

On returning to Louisville in 1867 he was elected Professor of *Materia Medica* and Therapeutics and Clinical Medicine in the University of Louisville. This was the beginning of his real life-work, and the best part of his scientific work was inspired and effected by his connection with this great institution. LUNSFORD YANDELL took great pleasure in teaching, not only because he loved the work for its own sake, and was admirably fitted for it by nature and training, but also because of his great desire to be useful in the highest and widest sense. The University was to him an object of intense and passionate devotion. His illustrious father was one of the founders of her medical department. His elder brother had graduated there, and, by his great powers as a teacher and wide-spread fame as a bold and skillful surgeon, he had still more closely connected the name of Vandell with her greatness and her glory.

LUNSFORD himself had studied within her walls. She was his "*alma mater*," and now he became one of the Faculty of this University. With characteristic energy he strove; ceaseless were his labors; the ardor of his devotion never cooled. Where the interests of the University were in question he knew neither friend nor foe, and thought but of her good.

To the great work of educating young men for the medical profession he brought many splendid qualifications rarely combined in one person. In the lecture-room his noble countenance was ever "a pleasing sight and a delectable presence." His commanding figure and dignified deportment inspired interest and respect even before he had begun to speak, and his rich and melodious voice enthralled attention. His language was simple and his style was forcible and clear. He had great powers of generalization, and positive and profound convictions; yet he was thoroughly progressive, and with the great John Hunter he could say, "These are my opinions to-day; I know not what they will be to-morrow."

Year after year the following passage was copied in his day-book, that his eyes might often fall upon it:

"I am not at all embarrassed because the opinions I held at one time are opposed to those which I hold at another. I am not incapable of being mistaken."

In the class-room he always preferred demonstration to mere description, and original observation and deduction rather than repetitions of other men's opinions. His lectures were

—“With wisdom fraught;
Not such as books, but such as practice taught.”

The influence he exerted upon the students was always for good. Nothing unclean ever soiled his lips, whether in conversation with them, in clinic or in didactic lecture. In all his teaching there was an undertone of deep religious feeling and great reverence for woman, which imparted a dignity and impressiveness entirely distinct from the eloquence of his style, the music of his voice or the nobleness of his presence.

A taste and talent for literary labors was to be expected in the sons of the elder Yandell, who wielded so pointed and so vigorous a pen. For half a century he exerted an influence in medical literature so wide and deep that its effects have even yet not passed away. Young LUNSFORD at an early period of his career became a contributor to various medical journals. His correspondence from Europe on medical men and matters was read with avidity, and elicited unusual comment and admiration. They deserve a place by the side of those masterly medical letters of Prof. David W. Yandell which won such great applause at the time of their appearance.

In 1877 LUNSFORD YANDELL became the co-editor of the Louisville Medical News with the lamented Cowling, and continued this arduous work until compelled by ill health to retire. But with regained health came also a return of energy and a desire for more extended usefulness. Again he took editorial charge of the Medical News, and continued to be its chief editor during the remainder of his life.

Few persons realize what a Sisyphus rock a weekly medical journal is to its editor. No sooner has he completed one number ere the next must be prepared—there is no rest. Yet, worn with professional duties and the ceaseless exactions of an onerous practice, LUNSFORD YANDELL ever returned to his editorial work with fresh zeal and unabated vigor. The Louisville Medical News is a monument to his tireless energy and literary powers. The publications which gave him

widest reputation, and in which his peculiar merits as a writer most conspicuously appear, are his clinical lectures on dermatology. A simple style, clearness and conciseness of description, great grasp, and a keen appreciation of essentials, made these lectures deservedly popular, and impressed the profession with the learning and practical skill of their author.

But it was especially as an epistolary writer that he excelled. Here he displayed genius. It has been said that letter-writing is a "gift," and also that it is now one of the lost arts. LUNSFORD YANDELL's pen gave brilliant evidence that it remained a living art in the year of grace, 1884, no less than in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when Madame de Sevigné and Lord Chesterfield wrote and charmed their readers with their celebrated letters. LUNSFORD YANDELL's correspondence was copious and varied, but every where one is enchanted by an unstudied grace and an unrestrained naturalness in thought and expression; an artless eloquence and simple pathos command the reader's admiration while they invoke reflection. His letters evince a wonderful power of adaptation. To a friend he writes in the mild light of calm philosophy; his children are addressed in a style so inimitable that Hans Christian Andersen could not have excelled it. Others again so sweet, so pure, so sacred, they may not even be named. In all he writes as a sincere lover of God and of his fellow men. Their beauty and their pathos make the elegant and petty gossip of De Sevigné and the polish and diplomacy of Chesterfield seem very trivial and cold and artificial.

The elder Yandell, himself one of the most distinguished naturalists of his day in this country, inculcated a love of natural history in all his children. LUNSFORD became very proficient in geology. He enriched and completed the magnificent cabinet his father had collected, and displayed wonderful skill in restoring imperfect fossil formations, so that in many a specimen it was not easy to decide which was the work of art and which of nature. He remained all his life an ardent lover of nature in all her moods and aspects; in her small and hidden ways as well as in her grander and more striking revelations. His letters, lectures, and conversation teemed with apt and beautiful illustrations drawn from his rich stores of natural science.

Indeed, I can not help the thought that but for his warm and deep sympathy for his kind, and never-flagging desire to relieve suffering wherever found, he would have become a naturalist instead of a physician. It adds new beauty to his life to know that throughout his course he sacrificed his own preference in order to serve the better his fellow men.

As a physician he was learned and skillful, conscientious, faithful, painstaking and sympathetic. With great respect for himself and for his office, he inspired his patients with the same feelings. He had confidence in himself and in his powers, and great faith in the power of the healing art. To him medicine was not so much a profession (and still less a trade) as it was a priesthood, and the practice of it a sacred function—the physician a priest—the altar humanity—the sacrifice himself. He was most reluctant to decline any call to visit the sick, no matter how inconvenient to himself, especially if the patient happened to be poor. In the summer of 1883, while far from strong himself, he wrote: “And now I must finish this letter, for I have to go a long way to see a sick child; no pay, but I may do it much good, and thereby give its parents much happiness.” Such acts as this made luminous his days and blessed his sleep with dreams of paradise.

One of the articles of his medical creed was that a physician should always first ascertain the mode of action and effects of medicines by experiment upon himself before prescribing them to his patients. He practiced what-he preached, and it is safe to say that he had tested upon his own person the powers of all the important drugs he made use of in his practice. Medicine was to him emphatically “the healing art.” The great aim before him was to cure, to relieve. Other branches of medical science had less charms for him, who e'er

“Intent on somewhat that may ease
Unhealthy mortals, and with curious search
Examines all the properties of herbs.”

In science we have a part of an eternal writing unrolled, the rest is unrevealed. We can not read the context. We see a part of the great chart or map of truth, in which we can follow only certain

tracks or paths. A section of a diagram is before us, the complement of which we do not know. But his broad generalizations enabled LUNSFORD VANDELL to occupy higher ground and to take larger views and penetrate more deeply than is possible to those who merely crawl among the mists and mazes of bewildering and conflicting details.

He was a loyal champion of the great principles in which he believed. With dauntless courage he defended them against all assaults, no matter in what shape or from what quarter they might come. Fidelity to what one believes to be true, moral courage in adhering to one's convictions before the world, is the greatest lack of our time. The age lacks sincerity, and what men most lack is the feeling that they should be true to the right; and that to be manly is to be ready to follow the truth, under whatever guise it may come, to whatever it may lead. It was just the possession of this rare quality that made LUNSFORD VANDELL so conspicuous, and caused men to admire even while they opposed him.

He was a man of varied powers and of a many-sided character. Like a perfect gem, emitting light in all prismatic colors, and from a hundred brilliant facets his rich and complex nature presented a new yet ever beautiful aspect from whatever side it might be viewed. Thoroughly original in thought and independent in action, he could not be a man of routine, and never did the same thing twice in exactly the same way.

In the midst of absorbing duties, of steady hard work, the current of his life flowed swiftly on. But his usefulness received many a check. Attacks of illness time and again interrupted his labors, but he returned to them with unwavering determination and in a spirit of hope and cheer and trust. Shortly after his forty-sixth birthday he wrote:

"I have grown much older in the last four years, at the rate of about four years to the twelve months. As I take stock of life at forty-six, I rather believe I can see some progress during the past year. My health, on the whole, enables me to work better than formerly, and I have done some writing and studying and lecturing. Honest work is never lost, and I have idled little in any way."

The various attacks of illness that came upon him were as the distant but ominous sounds which often precede an earthquake. All of a sudden it came. The glorious edifice of his life crumbled into instant ruin, and only the blessed memories of what he had been remained. On awakening in the morning of the 12th of March, 1884, he complained of a violent indisposition, and suffered much all day. Toward night he appeared more at ease and asked for food. A few minutes later he was seized with a sudden angina, and then—the silence and sleep of death settled upon him.

“There was no cold gradation of decay ;
 Death broke at once the vital chain
 And freed his soul the nearest way.”

“Then fell upon the house a sudden gloom,
 A shadow on those features fair and thin,
 And softly from the hushed and darkened room
 Two angels issued, where but one went in.”

He was gone!—His calm and silvery voice will be heard no more. Never again will be seen on earth this perfect type of manly beauty—noble in aspect, pure in heart, kind and affable in conversation, faithful in friendship, vigorous and persevering in all good works!

The news of his death spread with lightning speed, and created a profound and sorrowful impression—a whole people mourned; all classes united in one common grief. Hearts aching with sorrow throbbed in many a lordly mansion. Among the poor a wail of anguish went up, for they had lost their friend. Even in the purlieus of vice, in dens of sin and shame, eyes unused to tears wept, for the good physician was gone. He who had only words of kindness for them in their misery and degradation, whose voice was ever soft and gentle, whose mild and noble features ever expressed the divine sympathy that directed his ministrations even to the most abandoned of mankind. His deeds of mercy strewn along his path and shining as stars in the firmament do follow him.

At the grave the poor, the friendless, the fatherless, the widow wept in sorrow for their loss, and with voices broken with sobs invoked God's blessing on the dear ones he had left.

The medical profession of the city and of the whole State was profoundly moved with grief at his death. Their public and private expressions of sorrow and sympathy were re-echoed from every part of this vast continent; and messages of affection and regret came even from distant hemispheres across the sea.

Thus died LUNSFORD VANDELL in his forty-seventh year. It was a short life measured by years, but of unusual compass when one reflects on all that he accomplished. He crowded within its brief space more noble thoughts, more earnest endeavor, more varied labors, more stirring activity, more brilliant achievements than go to make the sum of fifty ordinary lives.

I have sketched his public course. Will you pause a little while I draw the veil that shrouds his inner life as I have learned to know it?

Gifted with extraordinary abilities, and amid opportunities well fitted to stimulate ambition, yet he was signally free from the sway of this passion. During the last year of his life he gave much of his leisure to the reading of Carlyle, in one of whose letters the following passage occurs, which seems to have made a deep impression on LUNSFORD and coincided with his own feelings, for he marked it and surrounded it with lines as if he wished to have his eye directed to it whenever looking at the page:

“As to fame, and all that, I see it already to be nothing better than a will-o’-the-wisp which leads one on through quagmires and pitfalls to catch an object which, when we have caught it, turns out to be nothing.”

In a letter of his own, he writes:

“I do not care to have my name live, save for my children’s sake, but I wish to sow the seeds of good in this life, which may fructify both this and coming generations; which may bring forth good fruit that shall feed men and form them for God’s work.”

He was endowed with extraordinary energy and perseverance in the pursuit of any objects he thought worthy and wise; never dismayed by difficulties, never deterred by obstacles. To him difficulties were things simply to be overcome; obstacles merely things to be removed. He never failed in any thing he undertook. Men

marveled at his success, but few understood the secret by which he succeeded.

“What was my art?” said Richelieu. “Genius, some say; some fortune; witchcraft some. Not so; my art was *justice!*” LUNSFORD YANDELL loved justice, and feared naught so much as to be unjust to any one. After having achieved a great success he wrote to the trusted sharer of his joys and sorrows:

“But, after all, our great strength consisted in taking the just, which is always the strong because it is the right side.”

To say that he was free from envy would be but scant justice, for he was remarkably free from this low but common fault and possessed in an unusual degree the opposite virtue. Magnanimity was a distinguishing feature of his character. In the controversies which official position or a sense of duty compelled him to engage in, he was the sturdy champion of principles, and waged relentless war in behalf of them. But he harbored no ill-will toward his opponents. No one ever forgave personal injuries more quickly and completely than he did. Some time after a certain personal disagreement he was heard to ask of a friend: “Did I not have a quarrel once with Dr. ——? What was it all about? Do you remember?” So completely had he forgiven. With him the remedy for injuries was to forget them.

“Some grave their wrongs in stone; but he, magnanimous and serene, wrote his wrongs in dust; he trod them under foot, blotted them out, and grieved only that they could not escape the eye of the Almighty.”

He was lenient toward the weaknesses of men, found extenuating circumstances for their faults, and always tried to think the best of all. He was a man of deep and tender sympathies, and as he advanced in life—as the depth of its meaning became more and more clear to him, as he came to feel the gentle pressure and guidance of an “Unseen Hand”—his sympathy for the suffering and sorrowing, the weary and heavy laden, became also more broad and tender, until it enfolded in a sweet embrace all God’s creatures.

Whatever of human weakness and imperfection might attach to him, he certainly made no effort to appear other than he was. No one had less hypocrisy in his composition; no one could be more

genuine. Though with charming candor he avowed his faults, yet with the delicacy of a sensitive nature he shrank from revealing those priceless treasures of mind and heart of which he was possessed, and which, when once discerned, inspired love and admiration. Could I but interpret to the world one half of the noble thoughts and lofty sentiments which lie buried in his grave, I should bestow a greater benefit upon the world than I can ever hope to accomplish.

No one ever set a higher value on true friendship; no one had more friends than he; no one loved his friends more than he; no one was ever more loved by his friends than he:

"His sweetness won a more regard unto his place
Than all the boist'rous moods
That ignorant greatness practiceth."

It was his delight to gather his friends around him in his beautiful home. He was a charming host, and never appeared to greater advantage than on those bright occasions when, in the midst of his chosen guests, he dispensed a refined and genial hospitality.

His highest happiness was centered in his home. A loving and devoted husband, "his wife was the ocean to the rivers of his thoughts."

The paternal instinct was never more strongly displayed in any man—it had developed into a principle of his being—an ever-present motive, moulding his utterances, guiding his actions toward the one end—the welfare and happiness of his children.

His was a cheerful and a happy life. Among friends and pupils, in his home and abroad, by precept and example, he taught the duty of cheerfulness.

"Cultivate a habit of cheerfulness," he would say; and again, "A wide-spreading, hopeful disposition is your only true umbrella in this vale of tears." In one of his letters he wrote: "Learn to be happy; happiness is chiefly self-contained."

No one better knew than he the depressing effect of sickness, and how easily an over-worked brain engenders fretfulness and irritability. "Bad health" (he said with Carlyle) "does indeed undermine me more than all other calamities put together." Yet, while pressed by

the exacting duties of his professorship and editorial position, worn by an arduous practice and by bodily pain, he was ever cheerful, and could feel and write :

“It would be very wicked and ungrateful in me ever to be sad a single moment, for God is so good to me.”

It was this faith in the goodness of God which built for him a bridge across the gulf of death and landed his thoughts peacefully on the farther side.

“And now he rests, his greatness and his sweetness
No more shall seem at strife,
And death has rounded into calm completeness
The statue of his life.”

One by one I have taken up the many threads of his beautiful life, and with unskillful, but with loving hands, have tried to weave them into one connected whole. You who knew LUNSFORD VANDELL and loved him will feel with me how imperfect, how very far beneath his merits my work has been. Yet there is but one thing more for me to say, one more tribute to offer to his beloved memory—the laurel wreath upon his monument, the sum of all he was, and all he did—

“HE ADDED LUSTRE TO ANCESTRAL GLORY.”



