

Pepper (Wm)

*with Complements  
of William Pepper*

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OBITUARY

OF

EDWARD RHOADS, M.D.

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*Trans. Acad. of Phys., of Phila.,  
(1863-74) n. s. IV, 403-411*



# OBITUARY

OF

*life*

## EDWARD RHOADS, M.D.

READ BEFORE THE COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS OF PHILADELPHIA,  
FEBRUARY 5, 1872; AND EXTRACTED FROM ITS  
TRANSACTIONS.

BY

WILLIAM PEPPER, M.D.,

FELLOW OF THE COLLEGE.



"Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,  
Nor in the glistening foil  
Set off to the world, nor in broad rumour lies:  
But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes,  
And perfect witness of all-judging Jove;  
As he pronounces lastly on each deed,  
Of so much fame in heaven expect thy meed."

PHILADELPHIA:  
COLLINS, PRINTER, 705 JAYNE STREET.  
1872.



## OBITUARY OF EDWARD RHOADS, M.D.

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It is a pleasing custom of this College which provides that whenever death has removed one of its Fellows, an evening sacred to his memory should be set apart, on which we strive feebly, as by the power of words and thoughts we may, to recall him, and place him once more in our midst.

The wheels of human life and action revolve ceaselessly, and place a rapidly increasing distance between us and any past event. Each day's cares and activity throng the mind, and dim the images of the past that memory seeks to cherish, until the joy or sorrow that for the time filled the whole of life, seems in but a few months only the shadowy phantom of some far-distant experience.

It is true, that in a life so full and overfull of thought and action as that of the present day, there is but little leisure left to devote to the contemplation of the future, and far less to spend in reflection on the past. Whatever the past has made us, we are; whatever it has given to us, we hold and strive to make the means of securing more and more; but of what it has taken from us, we rarely think, but turn impatiently from the sorrowful reminiscences which sometimes stir in the depths of our being, muttering, "Let the dead Past bury its dead." To a great extent this is needful, if we are to advance in our work actively and hopefully. But do we not often carry this too far, and in struggling manfully against the depression and despondency which follow a great grief, often end in not only throwing off these, but also in forgetting and losing much of the sweetness and usefulness which might always remain with us?

I have chosen this particular evening for the presentation of this brief memoir, since it is within a few days of the first anniversary of the death of him who is its subject.

Edward Rhoads was born in Philadelphia, on the 29th of September, 1841. There is but little to be recorded of his early years, which were passed at his parents' home. He displayed, however, even during his boyhood and youth, many of the characteristics which subsequently distinguished him. His disposition was impulsive and resolute, yet tender, affectionate, and remarkably sympathizing. His fondness for natural

objects was strong, and the natural sciences were the favorite subjects of his early studies. His education was conducted at his parents' home until the winter of 1853, when he entered the school of the Brothers Smiley, in order to prepare for his collegiate course at Haverford, where he was admitted in 1855. He pursued his studies here with great success, and graduated with the first honors, in 1859, at the early age of eighteen.

Passionately fond of nature, and gifted with a keen power of observation and a most retentive memory, he acquired a considerable knowledge of several branches of physical science, especially of botany. His love of literary pursuits was strong, and he applied himself with pleasure and easy success to the study of languages and belles-lettres. The range of his reading was really extensive, but the unusual strength of his memory and the happy gift which he possessed of arranging and utilizing his information, always gave a strong impression of the extent and variety of his literary acquirements. His literary taste was singularly pure and elevated—he rarely indulged himself in the reading of fiction, but found his favorite authors among the great poets or writers upon moral or metaphysical subjects. I have had the opportunity of reading a number of the essays which he wrote at Haverford College. They were, without exception, upon subjects of grave and serious character, and his mode of treating them showed an appreciation of their scope and importance, and a depth of thought very unusual at such an early age. One of the most marked features of them is the strong expressions they contain of admiration for, and sympathy with, heroes of a lofty type; and in many instances the characters of such men as Daniel, Paul, Cato, Cæsar, etc., have been chosen as the theme. Among the most elaborate and thoughtful of these early productions of his pen, were essays on "The Trial and Condemnation of Socrates" (which gained the Alumni Prize), and "The Office of the Greek Drama," which formed the subject of his Oration at the Senior Commencement.

The grave tone of his mind was, however, wholly untinged with gloom. He possessed as keen an appreciation of genuine humor as any one I have ever known, and his laugh was ready, hearty, and most infectious. This taste never was lost, and in later years, when serious thought and the continued sight of suffering became oppressive, he would seek relief in some of the humorous works of Holmes or Lowell, both of whom were great favorites with him.

The traits of character which throughout life distinguished him also developed themselves at a very early age. I quote from a letter of one of his favorite teachers at College, who, after speaking of the general success with which he pursued his studies, adds: "What was most striking in him, however, was the maturity and even balance of his mind, his clearness of intellect, and his soundness of judgment. Add to these a

dignity and stability of *character* which almost amounted to a special gift or talent by itself." His disposition was frank and open; his impulses were quick and generous, and his affections strong, tender, and deep. These qualities early endeared him to a wide circle of friends, and I much doubt whether even one of them was ever parted from him, so singular was the truth and constancy of his own affections, and so uniform the thoughtfulness and consideration which marked his personal relations with others, while the power of his attractions and the beauty of his character deepened the love and increased the esteem of his friends the longer and more intimately they knew him.

I should indeed do violence to my own feelings (and, I think I may also say, to the feelings of many who will read this sketch), if I restrained or weakened my language in alluding to his character as a friend. What words indeed can fully describe the charm, the sweetness, and the strength of true friendship? the most nearly divine feeling our hearts entertain—the sweetest, surest solace in life—the strong cord which knits men together closer than brethren. It were difficult to realize more fully the perfect form of such friendship than was to be found in the relation between Edward Rhoads and some few of his chosen associates. Few can have inspired more deep and lasting affection than they gave him; none can ever have repaid it with a more rich return.

It will easily be comprehended that such qualities would secure a high degree of control over his companions—and, in fact, I have heard several of his school-fellows and college-mates recall, after a lapse of many years, the powerful influence which he exerted. It was not merely the warm affection he inspired, the purity and elevated tone of his own character, and the consistency of his conduct, which produced this effect; it was in large amount due to his fearless and unhesitating championship of truth and right, and denunciation of all that was false or wicked. No false sense of shame or fear of ridicule would prevent him from avowing his own adhesion to the right, and encouraging others in the same course. Yet, in his intercourse with his friends, he was ever careful to avoid the slightest expression that could have been construed as unfavorable criticism of their character or actions. Always severe in his judgment of himself, and disposed with true humility to depreciate his own merits or attainments, he was as constantly lenient towards others, and willing to praise them cordially and sincerely. The silent influence of such a character is of untold and incalculable force, and it diffuses around it an atmosphere of purity which is fatal to evil and corruption. I have spoken of the great purity of his character and mind, and this quality was presented to a singular degree by his language, which was not only free from the grosser blemishes, and the use of exaggerated and extravagant expressions, but was characterized by great simplicity and clearness of diction.

Undoubtedly his early maturity of mind and gravity of character were further developed by the results of a severe attack of articular rheumatism from which he suffered while at college. He recovered from this illness after a desperate struggle, but unfortunately it had been complicated with endocarditis, and there remained a considerable degree of mitral disease. It is possible that, had he been persuaded to enter upon some occupation involving little excitement or physical exertion, his life might have been longer preserved. But such a course was entirely hostile to his nature. Gifted with high ability, he felt himself called upon to exert it to the utmost in the cause of humanity, and therefore selected as the occupation of his life, to which he deliberately determined to consecrate his every power, that profession, "than which," as he himself said, "there is but one higher and holier." He was certainly rarely adapted for this pursuit, and he instantly threw himself into its study with the utmost enthusiasm. In fact, even in the early days of his professional life, it was evident that no consideration of his personal comfort, or even of the care and moderation enjoined upon him by the condition of his health, was ever to deter him from the accomplishment of his professional duties in the most thorough and successful manner. He matriculated at the University of Pennsylvania in the autumn of 1860, and graduated with eminent distinction in March, 1863. Immediately after graduation he gained, by competitive examination, the position of Resident Physician in the Philadelphia Hospital, and on leaving there, in April, 1864, was elected to the corresponding post in the Pennsylvania Hospital, where he passed eighteen months. During this prolonged term of Hospital residence, his assiduous devotion to the care of his patients was no less remarkable than his earnest investigation of pathology. The deep impression made by his unremitting attentions upon the sick under his charge, may be inferred from a little incident that occurred after his death. A poor young woman who had undergone amputation of the thigh in the hospital, and had been in his ward, came to the house where his remains were robed for burial, begging with sobs to be allowed to look once more on him who had been so kind to her in her affliction, and had watched night after night by her bedside.

While holding these positions he won, as might be expected from what has been said, a high reputation for zeal and ability, and made many friends among the older members of the profession, all of whom remained warmly interested in him during the rest of his life. A short time before the expiration of his term of service at the Pennsylvania Hospital, he was again attacked with articular rheumatism, and was desperately ill for many weeks. He convalesced slowly, and so soon as his strength permitted, went abroad in November, 1865. He spent about eight months travelling in Great Britain and on the continent, though most of his time was passed in England, where he was welcomed by the numerous



friends of his father to that charming circle of English home-life into which strangers so rarely penetrate.

His letters written at this time are striking evidences of the deep and comprehensive interest which he felt in the great social and political questions of the day, and they also show forcibly the powerful impression made upon his mind by the innumerable relics of a past fraught with such historic interest for every American. He naturally felt a lively pleasure as a devoted and sincere member of the Society of Friends, in visiting the birthplace of that religious body, and in studying its vigorous growth and present prosperous condition; and yet his truly catholic spirit reveals itself by the impartial tone in which he frequently alludes to the beautiful ritual of the English Church, and to the eloquence and wisdom of her eminent divines. He also availed himself of the opportunities afforded in London of following the teaching of some of the most distinguished British physicians, and of studying the modes of construction and arrangement of their public charitable institutions. He returned to Philadelphia very much improved in health, though still showing unmistakable evidences of serious organic disease of the heart. His own medical knowledge, and the accurate opinions which had been expressed, at his own urgent solicitation, by several eminent diagnosticians whom he had consulted, convinced him of his true condition, and warned him of the probable results of a life of unceasing activity and excitement. He was not of a nature which could tolerate self-deception, or veil by any specious arguments, based only on hopes and fears, the probable consequences of any course of action. He knew also full well that the sole chance, though even this was but a slim one, of prolonging his life, lay in the choice of some quiet, inactive pursuit. Yet he never hesitated for a moment, but having chosen his calling, and consecrated all his powers to it, he immediately resumed the pursuit of his profession with the utmost devotion and energy. He soon began to receive gratifying marks of the confidence with which his ability and character were regarded. In the summer of 1866, he was elected, almost without solicitation on his part, one of the visiting physicians to the Philadelphia Hospital. He entered upon the duties of this position with the utmost zeal and enthusiasm, and throughout his connection with the hospital devoted a large amount of time, and a larger amount of exertion than he could well afford, to the care of his patients and to the various measures undertaken for the improvement of the organization of the institution. Among other reforms which were introduced during the time of his connection with the hospital, the most important, and the one in which he took the deepest interest and the most active part, was in reference to a change in the mode of attendance on the part of the visiting staff, so as to secure constant service from each member of it. This plan of hospital service, although imposing additional labor upon the visiting staff, is so manifestly desirable,

both for the interests of the patient and for the purposes of thorough scientific study, as to immediately commend itself, and it is, as is well known, almost universally adopted in hospitals abroad. In America, however, the Philadelphia Hospital has the credit of being the first to institute it, and put it into successful operation; and among those who were active in bringing about this admirable reform no one was more influential than Dr. Rhoads.

He also took part in the clinical teaching of the hospital, and delivered weekly lectures during six months of each year; while, at the same time, he formed private classes for more thorough clinical instruction in the wards. His kindness and attention to the patients were extreme, and he was to many of the unfortunates who crowd the wards of that great hospital, not only a skilful physician, but a kind and sympathetic friend. His fondness for hospital work and the original investigations which can only be carried on in connection with such institutions, made him attach the deepest importance to his position on the staff of the Philadelphia Hospital. He retained this appointment until a few weeks before his death, when, becoming convinced of the impossibility of ever re-entering upon duty in its wards, he tendered his resignation. Before it became apparent that this step would be necessary, the interest and enthusiasm with which he had looked forward to a life devoted to investigating and teaching medical science, revealed themselves frequently and strongly in his conversation.

Gifted with unusually accurate and keen powers of observation, Dr. Rhoads was led to devote special attention to the study of Physical Diagnosis, designing to devote himself more particularly to the treatment of diseases of the chest, and in the spring of 1870 he was chosen by the Faculty of the University of Pennsylvania to fill the newly-created position of Lecturer on Physical Diagnosis. He prepared an extended course of Lectures upon this subject, but his rapidly increasing infirmity prevented him from delivering more than a small portion of them. The manuscript notes of his lectures which he left, show in what a comprehensive and thorough manner he had proposed to treat this important branch of medical science. He possessed qualities which eminently fitted him for success as a teacher both of didactic and clinical medicine. His diction was fluent and clear, his choice of language elegant and exact, and his manner in speaking earnest and impressive, though at times it lacked vivacity and variety. His evident sincerity and perfect truthfulness made his statements carry great weight, and aided the happy charm which he possessed of awakening in his audience an enthusiasm for truth and knowledge. I have never known any one whose love for exact truth in all matters exceeded his; and this naturally directed his thoughts strongly to the study of physical science, and to the experimental investigation of pathological questions. I allude prominently to this trait of his mind,

not so much on account of any noteworthy results of his own work in that direction, as because it has come to be so generally believed that devotion to the study of the natural sciences, a high degree of confidence in the conclusions drawn from them, and a large faith in the solution of many now-baffling problems through their aid, are, if not actually incompatible, at least very rarely associated, with strong personal religion, deep reverence, and faith.

But here at least were found these two faiths coexistent, yet not in conflict. He had an ardent love for scientific investigation and a firm belief in the ultimate supreme development and acquisition of scientific truth, and yet never for an instant hesitated to accept the well-established facts of physical science, lest they might be found to conflict with the authority of Scripture. A profound belief in the absolute supremacy of Divine Truth underlaid his whole nature, and he, therefore, felt that the highest attainment of human knowledge would be only a less and less imperfect expression of the Divine Idea, and that eventually all discoveries of science will be found to harmonize with and to be subordinate to God's eternal laws. It would have been a happy thing for the world, if those who have occupied the position of defenders of religious truth had all possessed this spirit of wise toleration. There would not have been presented, what has too often been seen, and is even now far from being extinguished, that artificial and fictitious antagonism between the teachers of revealed religion and those of science, which has driven one party to doggedly support indefensible positions, and has often irritated the other into accepting the imputation of a hostility which has no real existence.

For several years before his death his private practice increased rapidly, and his public positions began to bring him forward, also, as a consultant. His rapid success and the strong attachments which his patients formed for him were the result not only of his clear judgment and practical skill, but as well of the constant, unwearying attention and tender thoughtfulness which he devoted to them. His entire self-forgetfulness and self-sacrifice showed themselves most forcibly in his relations with his patients, and although many times his own infirmities called loudly for care and repose, the call was unheeded, and he was ever glad "to spend himself and be spent" in relieving the sufferings of others.

He was elected a member of many of the learned and medical societies in this city, among which may be mentioned the Pathological Society (December, 1864), the College of Physicians (January, 1867), the American Philosophical Society (April, 1868), and the Academy of Natural Sciences (May, 1868). He participated actively in the proceedings of these bodies, and was a frequent contributor to the two medical societies. He also held office in these latter, being Recording Secretary of the College of Physicians, and Treasurer of the Pathological Society. It will readily be understood that with the numerous and onerous duties devolv-

ing upon him in connection with his practice and the public positions which he held, there was but little time to devote to literary labor. In addition, however, to the short papers furnished to the proceedings of the College of Physicians, and the Pathological Society, he aided Dr. J. Forsyth Meigs in the preparation of an elaborate memoir on "The Morphological Changes of the Blood in Malarial Fever," which was published in the *Pennsylvania Hospital Reports*, vol. i., 1868. He also published (id. op.), in conjunction with the writer of this memoir, the results of an experimental investigation into the Fluorescence of the tissues of the body, considered especially in connection with malarial diseases and the action of quinia. He also wrote many able reviews, which appeared in the *American Journal of the Medical Sciences*. His deep interest in religious subjects, as well as in all important social questions, was evinced by the preparation of a number of memoirs or addresses on such topics, which display much thoughtful study and a wide comprehensive grasp of mind. None of these articles have been published.

His style as a writer was clear, concise, and elegant; his diction was remarkably pure and displayed great familiarity with the structure and resources of the language. It is to be regretted that he left behind him no original work at all worthy of his powers as an observer and author. That he contemplated the preparation of extensive clinical treatises, is evident from the valuable records which he left of observations made at the Philadelphia Hospital.

But one other literary performance, or rather engagement, calls for mention. When, in the spring of 1870, it was determined to establish a semi-monthly medical journal in Philadelphia, Dr. Rhoads was unanimously requested to assume its editorial management. After much hesitation he accepted the position, with a determination to devote himself to the development of a journal which should aid in elevating the tone of medical literature, and should be a consistent and fearless supporter of the true interests of medical education and medical science. He was, however, only enabled to make the preliminary arrangements for the publication of *The Philadelphia Medical Times*, when his rapidly failing health compelled him to relinquish into other hands the management of an enterprise which he could himself have conducted with consummate judgment and skill. His place has fortunately been most successfully filled by the present accomplished and talented editor; but the extent of the loss which the journal, while still in embryo, sustained from the death of Dr. Rhoads, can be fully appreciated only by those who were intimately acquainted with the rare excellence of the qualities which he possessed for editorial labors.

This was the latest professional work which he was destined to undertake. The organic disease of the heart from which he had suffered for nearly ten years, had insidiously progressed. He had frequently pre-

sented, during this period, from the effects of unusual exertion or fatigue, alarming symptoms of disturbance of the circulation; but these admonitions were rarely heeded by him, and the call of duty usually summoned him back to active work ere he was sufficiently refreshed and recruited by repose. The sacrifices of comfort which were thus made, the actual suffering which was daily endured, were never made known by any word or sign. He advanced steadily and uncomplainingly on his chosen path of duty, though he well knew it must soon conduct him to his own grave. I well know how displeasing it would have been to him to have any commendation bestowed upon his course, and probably we are all but little apt to recognize the heroic courage which lies concealed rather than is displayed, in the quiet unobtrusive life of many a faithful toiler in the cause of humanity. Yet surely there is no more real heroism than that which impels and sustains an ardent nature, bowed down by the burden of physical infirmity and suffering, in a course of continued self-sacrifice and painful endurance, which can end only when the life is finally laid down for the good of others. The spring of 1870 was to Dr. Rhoads a season of incessant toil and anxiety. Philadelphia was visited by a grave epidemic of relapsing fever, and the wards of the Philadelphia Hospital were crowded with hundreds of cases of the most severe form of the disease. After exposure for two months to the concentrated contagion, he contracted a mild attack of the fever in the early part of May, and, soon after convalescing from this, was attacked for the third time with articular rheumatism, which was followed by a recurrence of endo-pericarditis. For several weeks his life was almost despaired of, but the violence of the attack finally subsided, and during August he so far improved as to be able to bear the journey to West Chester. This improvement was, however, delusive and temporary. He never became able to use any exertion, and was never free from harassing and wearying dyspnoea. In October, the vigor of the heart failed rapidly, and symptoms of great circulatory embarrassment soon showed themselves. From that time until January 15, 1871, the date of his death, his strength gradually failed, and œdema steadily increased, towards the close becoming associated with intense pulmonary and gastric congestion. His sufferings were protracted and extreme, and yet were borne with perfect resignation and silence. The sympathy of his many devoted friends was always gratefully received, but he rather seemed, through the strength of his endurance, able to extend comfort and reassurance to them, than to need any human help to bear his affliction. In the hours most free from physical suffering, he showed that his active interest in the welfare of his friends was unabated, and to the very last, even when speech was well-nigh impossible, he asked solicitously about every case of suffering or sickness which reached his ears. His intellect remained clear and active until a short time before his death: and after the power of conversing

was lost, he passed several hours every day in listening to reading. A life which drew its inspiration and strength from above, had prepared him for receiving the most severe ordeal of physical suffering with willing submission, and with utter reliance that the hand which gave the blow was guided by Love.

Some of the lines which he wrote after the power of utterance was almost lost, contained the expression of an humble hope that his strength might be sufficient to bear this latest, most terrible trial of his faith and endurance. "The hand of God has indeed swept across my life, and all is changed. In the great shock I have waited, not altogether in vain, to realize that it is also the hand of Love. Why should anything make us sad but that which draws us away from our dear Saviour; and why should not everything which brings us nearer to Him make us rejoice? Oh, for His strength—His indwelling Spirit of strength and patience—that all the tempests and dark days of physical suffering may be endured, lived through, with something of real life, and finally triumphed over in Him, the conqueror of all evil—death, hell, and the grave." Death finally came, gradually and peacefully at the last, and closed his sufferings on the 15th of January.

His funeral was held in the Twelfth Street Meeting House, on the 18th, and was attended by a very large number who availed themselves of this last opportunity to express their love and respect for the friend they had lost. The various addresses and prayers which were offered, breathed the deep sorrow which was shared by all present, and showed, in no uncertain way, the rare position which Dr. Rhoads had held in the affection and esteem of many sections of our community.

His remains were laid to rest in the Friends' Southwestern Burial Ground, while scattering snow-flakes, fit emblems of this pure young life, fell into the open grave.

Thus early closed the life of one so rich in gifts, both of mind and character, that a career of rare usefulness and success seemed certainly to await him. Measured by the standard of those achievements which win the world's applause, his life may well seem imperfect; measured by the standard of those acquirements which increase and advance human knowledge, it may well seem to fall short; but when we measure it by a far higher standard, that of a consistent conformity to the highest law of our nature, and of uniform devotion to the noblest purposes, it cannot fail to elicit our admiration. The fame awarded by the world is mostly given only as the prize of great achievements, and hence it must always follow that comparatively few of the really great men can ever receive full recognition. Where one is afforded ample opportunities for exerting his full powers, and a long life in which to bring his work to completion, many are either never offered the suitable occasion, or, saddest of all, are stricken down in the midst of their successful efforts too early to have

accomplished aught worthy of their powers. The opportunity of judging rightly of such lives, where capacities, not deeds, are to guide the judgment, must always be limited to the comparatively small circle of each one's intimate friends. But to these the true fame and eminence of the man are clear and established; they feel the deep truth of the words—

“ The greatest gift the hero leaves his race  
Is to have been a hero,”

and ever treasure the memory of that apparently fruitless and imperfect life as a proof of the lofty capacities of our nature, and as an undying type of true greatness.

It is thus that we may well preserve green and unfading the memory of Edward Rhoads; as of one whose life was cut short before he had realized any of the lofty aspirations which he possessed, but who yet lived long enough to show us the beauty and power of a nature, ardent and intense, yet in rare subjection to the divine law, and of high talents and varied graces of character, all blended and devoted, in entire self-forgetfulness, to the relief of suffering and to the happiness and good of others.

However we may mourn the early death which curtailed the influence and usefulness of such a life, and prevented the development and fulfilment of his life's work, yet can we recognize the completeness of the nature, the lofty endowment of mind and heart, which stood superior to the accidents of time or circumstance, and placed the stamp of true greatness on this man. *Integer vitæ, scelerisque purus* we might well engrave deeply and imperishably as his fitting motto on his tomb—but still more deeply and ineffaceably in our hearts.













