

Peters (J. C.)

Goldsmith (M.)



IN MEMORIAM.

MIDDLETON GOLDSMITH, M.D., LL.D.

**DUE TWO WEEKS FROM LAST DATE**

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In Memoriam.



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A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE LATE  
MIDDLETON GOLDSMITH, M.D., LL.D.

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BY JOHN C. PETERS, M.D.

DR. GOLDSMITH only lived in New York from 1837 to 1845, but during that time he became one of the founders of this Society. Most of the rest of his life was spent in Vermont. Few of our members had ever seen him, and still fewer have any clear conception of the man. Yet his life was a very picturesque one, crowded with good works, and crowned with great successes. His professional renown commenced very early, for he was a good anatomist and almost a great surgeon while yet in his teens. He commenced to dissect when some of his boyish companions were still whittling sticks. His father, Dr. Alban Goldsmith, was Professor of Surgery in the Louisville, Ky., Medical School, and Middleton had served as his prosector and clinical and surgical assistant, and performed at least one amputation of the thigh before he was eighteen years old. He always seemed to have anatomy and surgery at his fingers' ends.

In 1837, when he was nineteen years old, his father was appointed Lecturer on Surgery in the New York College of Physicians and Surgeons, then in Crosby Street, and Middleton, of course, continued to assist him. This college was then the only medical school in New York, and in 1837, when I first sat upon its benches, it had less than seventy medical students. Philadelphia then had four times as many medical colleges, and more than ten times as many matriculants. Now the disparity is not so great. Middleton graduated from the College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1840, aged twenty-two, and almost immediately sailed to India and China, as a ship's surgeon.

On his return he established, with the aid of Drs. Mar-  
koe, Sayre, La Conte, and others, the first Alumni Association of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and contributed largely to the first volume of its Transactions.

The Goldsmiths, father and son, were great naturalists, and very fond of rare and handsome birds; hence Middleton was soon found assisting the great Audubon in

the dissection and classification of some of "the Birds of America." They had many artistic and æsthetic tastes, and their beautiful rooms in Park Place were filled with handsome illustrated books, fine engravings and paintings, splendid cameos and musical instruments, besides being loaded down with brilliant surgical apparatus. There were then no stores in Park Place, or on Broadway, near by. These wide streets were filled with stylish private residences, and the great Park on the east, and the lovely Columbia College grounds on the west, made the whole neighborhood delightful.

But the Goldsmiths came, on one side, from "a race half aristocratic and half bucolic; as simple as shepherds and as proud as kings;" hence Middleton was often found at Bull's Head in search of tape-worms, hydatids, liver flukes, and other curious pests of animals. He also made many minute dissections of the eyes of men and animals for a prominent oculist, and even taught him how to operate. He was a great favorite with the genial but eccentric Dr. John W. Francis, some of whose peculiarities he may have imbibed. Dr. Francis always spoke of him as the last lineal descendant of the great Oliver, and as a poor medical orphan, who had no uncles in the New York or Bellevue Hospitals to help him on. In return Middleton poked great fun at the triplex and complex pills, and the big and little worms, gall-stones, and bilious disorders which Dr. Francis believed they cured.

He visited the dead-house in the Park every day to make autopsies for the coroner, and, when there were no other subjects, he and I cut up the bodies of the paupers, which were merely sent there for burial in Potter's Field, which used to be in Washington Square. I well remember his long and swift, but skilful, way of cutting; the quick hari-kari-like, or "happy-dispatch" way with which he went through a cadaver, without any rough mangling or jumbling of things. All was orderly and rather artistic.

At this time he was a remarkably tall man, considerably over six feet high, muscular, but not gross, and exceedingly well-proportioned. He was quick, but easy and even graceful in most of his gestures and movements. He had reddish hair, a fair complexion, a handsome and pleasant face, and was very neat and even showy in his dress. He was a reasonably good Greek and Latin scholar, but especially a perfect master of the English language, which he always spoke and wrote with great purity and conciseness. He was very fond of Burns and Shakespeare, and that grand old pagan, Hesiod, whose "Works and Days" and "Theogony; or, Creation of the World and Gods," he delighted in all the days of his life. He sometimes made verses, which he called poetry; always

sang a good song, and sometimes a better psalm tune; he could play on the guitar and banjo; was a good talker, a capital story-teller, and quick at repartee. He soon became a great favorite in medical, social, and religious circles, and often shone in the best assemblages of the brightest men and nicest women. He was looked upon as a sort of modern Apollo and Admirable Crichton, and the most rising young surgeon in New York. But he blazed in his greatest glory when he paraded as Brigade Surgeon on Major General Sandford's showy militia staff. He was always gallantly mounted, for he was born in Maryland, reared in Virginia, and trained in Kentucky, and knew what a good horse was. Dr. Sayre and I often gazed at him with admiring, but also envious, eyes. How different was his composed and stately bearing from the grotesque performances of Regimental Surgeon Paine, who always appeared on "Training Day," crowned with an old revolutionary cocked hat, with a big red feather in it; armed with an ancient cutlass buckled over his every-day frock-coat; and mounted on a vicious little Vermont pony, which pranced, and kicked, and buck-jumped in such outrageous fashion that Martyn sometimes seemed seated on his horse's ears and sometimes nearer the ground.

Middleton occasionally mounted a metaphysical high horse, and used involved language, so tumid as to be scarcely intelligible, but which immensely tickled Dr. Sayre, and would have greatly pleased a High Dutch Professor of Transcendental Philosophy. He also always had a great deal of what Hughlings Jackson calls "mental diplopia," *i. e.*, he could look equally earnestly and impartially on both sides of a question, and could not only defend each view with the greatest ingenuity, but with the most perfect good faith and honesty.

In those times French pathology was in the ascendant, and the Goldsmiths and many other New York physicians were worthy disciples of Cruveilhier, Andral, Louis, Civiale, etc. I had been educated, in part, in Germany, and was filled with enthusiasm for Rokitansky and the Vienna school of pathology. Dr. Goldsmith and I often talked over pathological matters in the dead-house and elsewhere. He wished me to send to Vienna for barrells of specimens, and to found a pathological society, of which none then existed in the world. Dr. Sayre also wanted to establish a pathological society, and soon I was invited to attend a preliminary meeting for this purpose at Dr. Sayre's office, and am said to have made my appearance with two pailfuls of specimens, collected by Dr. Goldsmith and myself. Middleton preferred the plan of the Boston Society for Medical Improvement, which was partly clinical and partly pathological. Dr. Sayre had a

plan for a purely pathological society, and he and Dr. Goldsmith persuaded those ripe pathologists, Dr. John A. Swett, John A. Forry, Thomas M. Markoe, Gustavus A. Sabine, Robert Watts, William C. Roberts, and others to join them; and soon Willard Parker, Alonzo Clark, John T. Metcalfe, William H. Van Beuren, and others of like stamp were added to the number and quickly overshadowed the three original suggestors and founders of this society, which undoubtedly were Drs. Goldsmith, Sayre, and J. C. Peters.

The first meeting took place on June 14, 1844, and in less than six months Dr. Goldsmith was called to the Chair of Surgery in the Castleton, (Vt.) Medical College. He never returned permanently to New York, but never forgot the New York Pathological Society, which he regarded as a bantling of his own, and finally made a generous bequest to it to increase its honor and usefulness.

In Castleton Dr. Goldsmith lectured and operated for ten years, making a great reputation and gaining many friends, most of whom clung to him during the rest of his life. Dr. Sayre won a prosectorship, and fell heir to the Brigade Surgeoncy and to the magnificent uniform, which he had to let out over the chest and elsewhere; for although he was not too large for his own trousers, he was for Goldsmith's.

In 1851 Middleton was chosen President of the Vermont Medical Society, after only six years' residence in the State, and made a capital report to it on fractures.

In 1856 he was called to Louisville, Ky., to the chair of surgery which his father had filled before him, and soon became Dean of the Faculty. He was summoned occasionally to New Orleans, St. Louis, and other distant places in consultation and to operate. Sometimes he got a barrellful or less of rare old whiskey, as well as thousand dollar or smaller fees from G. P.'s, or grateful patients; but he always preferred hard cash to hard liquor. He often had to treat what Shakespeare called "the rotten diseases of the south, such as gripes, ruptures, fistulas, gravel in the back, stone in the bladder, big livers, and aching bones;" but he was specially noted for his skill in operating on the eye, and for successfully crushing stones in the bladder.

When the civil war broke out he promptly offered his services to the Union, and commenced as Brigade Surgeon in the Army of the Cumberland in 1861. Soon he was Medical Director in General Buell's army at Shiloh; next, Inspector of Hospitals in General Grant's army at Corinth; and, finally, Surgeon-in-Chief of all the military hospitals in Kentucky and the Army of the Ohio. It is hard to overestimate the good work which he did in



these honorable and important positions. In addition, he discovered the virtues of bromine in hospital gangrene and kindred diseases. He must be regarded as one of the great pioneers of disinfection, as Lister did not commence his experiments till 1866, and little was known about carbolic acid before 1870. When his sick and wounded were dying for want of warm clothing, he disinfected condemned blankets and overcoats, which had been used by small-pox patients, with bromine, and succeeded so well that he not only used these clothes himself, but permitted his whole family to do so also.

He now broke down completely under a severe and prolonged attack of camp diarrhœa, but persisted enthusiastically in working up his views on bromine. His attractive daughters had many suitors, whom he quickly pressed into the dreary task of copying papers on gangrene, pyæmia, etc. As none of them were medical men they naturally thought they had fallen on hard lines indeed.

At the close of the war he endeavored to resume his practice in Louisville, but his outspoken Union sentiments rendered him so unpopular that he was forced to return to Vermont, where he remained, in Rutland, for the last twenty-five years of his life. He did not again enter into general practice, but played a large rôle in surgery, as a consulting physician in obscure and difficult cases, and as an expert witness in medico-legal trials. He soon again became a power in Vermont. He established the Rutland Free Dispensary, and was ever ready with his purse and services. There is no part of his history which is more clear and creditable to him than his devotion to the poor. He not only treated those who came to him, but sought out many who could not easily get other medical or surgical aid; and generally also paid their board bills. He was often crusty and abrupt to the rich, and is said never to have yielded to the whims of his patients unless they were very poor, or very old, or in some way peculiarly unfortunate. On alternate Sundays he would drive far out to the marble quarries and prescribe for all the women and children of the Irish laborers. On other Sabbaths he would go to the wood-choppers' camp for the same purpose. He never exacted fees for these services unless the men were careless or brutal to their families. Then he not only charged high, but made an effective use of language. Some of the laborers would slip their silver dollars into the big pockets of his huge shooting-jacket, where they would often be found long afterward, mixed up with cartridges, prize potatoes, and packages of fish-hooks. He had as much influence with this class of people as their priests and clergymen; and was a great friend and chum of good Catholic priests, kindly Congregationalists,

jolly, shouting Methodists, quaint hard-shell Baptists, and gentlemanly low church Episcopalians; but he looked askew at canters and ranters and bitter Calvinists, and had rather a disrespect for his Satanic Majesty, and for his brimstone and the place where he is said to burn it. As the New England Sabbath always ended on Sunday afternoon, he generally had a gun and fishing-rod quietly stowed away in his wagon.

He delighted in assisting young doctors by good counsel, by speaking a kind word for them where it would tell, by helping them in their operations, and by lending them medical books and surgical instruments, many of which he never got back again. Still, he always had the largest medical library in Vermont, and the greatest collection of surgical instruments, besides several big galvanic batteries and unusually fine microscopes; all of which he knew how to use.

Although very fond of his professional work, he steadily began to delight more and more in out-door pursuits and pleasures, in fine horses, cattle, sheep, dogs, guns, farming and gardening, or as the old geographies put it, in "hunting, fishing, and war." He became a sportsman and naturalist in the best sense of those terms, for there was not a plant or flower, or seed or grain, or bird or fish or animal that he did not know all about.

He always had great respect for

That germ, but faintly understood,  
Whose growth is hid in motherhood,

and hence engaged in breeding fine horses, cattle, sheep, dogs and even fish, and helped to make Vermont a great cattle and sheep-raising State. Next he had model farms and raised choice grain, fruit, flowers, and potatoes. He even tried hard to make Vermont cider as attractive as sour Rhine wine. In short there was scarcely any branch of useful domestic knowledge with which he was not familiar. He never failed to master any subject in a comparatively short time, and whatever he studied soon yielded good practical results to some one. He required ready outflows for his surplus energy and always selected agreeable or beneficent ones. His surgical work was like second nature to him, as he had been operating largely for thirty years or more. In short he had long reached that highest and best development of his faculties when they had become, as Schiller says, almost automatic without ceasing to be either accurate or earnest. As his bucolic side predominated more and more over his aristocratic tendencies, so did he shed his conventional and professional clothes and dress more and more like a prosperous farmer and woodsman. He could not and said he would not always look like a first-

class undertaker or immaculate head waiter. His broad-brimmed stiff hat, which was both sunshade and umbrella, could be seen from far off, and there was no other in Vermont like it; his boots were apt to be high and waterproof, for he never knew when he would wade for trout, or plod for partridges, and his coats were often like large shooting jackets, or a collection of game bags. On week days he often had a long bamboo fishing-pole sticking out behind his wagon, but he drove fleet horses and was rarely dusted on the road.

He was generally provided with a medicine chest and case of surgical instruments, was always ready for any emergency, and came into the sick room like a wholesome and cheery breeze of wind on a sultry day. He had no favorite operations, but was always called upon when unusual skill was required, and is credited with the usual prodigious number of big tumors, aneurisms, amputations, and of operating on all sorts of strangely visited people, the despair of other surgeons. It is even said that he would not even leave a mole, or mother's mark, or hare lip, or ugly scar to disfigure fair women, or pleasant children.

As an expert witness he was without a rival; a terror to opposing lawyers, whose cross-examinations he always turned against themselves, and is said never to have been defeated. His commanding presence was so impressive and his testimony was so clear, concise, and positive that the jury always believed that only they and he understood the case rightly, and if necessary would have over-ruled the judge and the laws; but he always obtained the approbation of Chief Justices Peck and Shaw, Judges Phelps and Barrett, Governor Stewart and other great and honest lawyers.

As a philanthropist and hygienist, he was a great thorn in the sides of ignorant or lazy health officers. He found the Vermont State Asylum crowded with over five-hundred inmates when there was only room for one-hundred and fifty. Besides, the State was only allowing \$1.40 a week for board which cost nearly \$3, and was not even paying that poor pittance, as it was \$30,000 in arrears. We can easily imagine him saying to the Governor and Legislators: "If your excellencies will not merely put your venerated noses in these overcrowded rooms at midnight, but will endeavor to sleep the rest of the night in them, you will find out all about foul air, and what we doctors call lack of ventilation. If you will ask your thrifty wives to feed and clothe these poor patients on the scanty State allowance they will soon give you lessons in domestic economy that you will never forget, or else I have strangely underrated the generosity and justice of Vermont women."

He drew up the game laws of Vermont, which have been the models for those of several other states, making sportsmen and hunters the wise and generous protectors of game in the breeding season. Then poachers and pot-hunters had no rights which any decent man was bound to respect. When fish and birds and wild animals were mature, swift, cunning and strong, he could whip a stream, snare birds, and shoot beasts with the best of them; then he almost rivalled the poachers, especially when he wanted delicate food for poor patients. His game laws were of course attacked, but it is shrewdly suspected that the most astute and bitter criticisms came from his own pen anonymously, and that he greatly enjoyed his own apparent discomfiture.

Need we be surprised that when such a man died there was a great outburst of overwhelming sorrow from his neighbors, and that his distant friends were almost astounded at the tremendous praise which was heaped upon his memory. But when we find that even his mother-in-law, and his brothers-in-law, and sons-in-law, joined heartily in this praise, we must believe it well bestowed.

We can never forget him. Several years ago he gave this society a large sum of money to found a lectureship; for many months he had been endeavoring to give us his large and valuable medical library, estimated to contain 6,000 volumes. Then his dear wife, whom he did not expect to outlive, was suddenly carried away to a better world, and he was stricken down with deadly grief, helpless and unconscious from which he only aroused sufficiently to complete his generous gifts to us and to the Academy of Medicine.

Oliver Goldsmith wrote: "Innocently to amuse the imagination in this dream of life, is wisdom." Middleton Goldsmith acted as if he might have said: "To usefully and generously train our brains and our hands and our hearts in this royal game of life is still greater wisdom."







