

meigs (J. Jr.)

---

M E M O I R

OF

J. FORSYTH MEIGS, M.D.

[Extracted from the Transactions of the College of Physicians of  
Philadelphia, 3d Series, Vol. VII.]

---





# MEMOIR

OF

## J. FORSYTH MEIGS, M.D.

Read before the College of Physicians of Philadelphia,  
March 5, 1884.

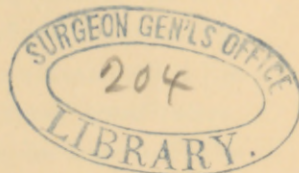
BY

ARTHUR V. MEIGS, M.D.

---

[Extracted from the Transactions, 3d Series, Vol. VII.]

---



PHILADELPHIA:

1884.

COLLINS PRINTING HOUSE,  
705 Jayne Street.

## MEMOIR.

---

ONLY eleven years ago my father, Dr. J. Forsyth Meigs, of whose life I am to give you a history, read in this same hall an account of the life of his father. He opened his sketch by telling of the diffidence he felt lest his filial love should tempt him to exaggerate his father's merits, but said further that no one else could have known him as he did. I might well quote the first page of his essay, for it is I believe as applicable this evening as it was eleven years ago, when my grandfather was the subject. The life, however, that I am to picture was a very different one from that which he described.

My grandfather's life was full of excitement and bustle, stirring incident and romantic event. Born on the beautiful and semi-tropical Island of Bermuda, and passing his boyhood in Georgia, a place then upon the confines of civilization, he imbibed many romantic ideas, and the untrammelled life he led strengthened his naturally robust constitution. When less than twenty-one years of age, he came to Philadelphia, having borrowed money to study medicine at its famous medical school. Here he made an early marriage,

and after living south only a year or two, returned to fight his way to success, surmounting all obstacles, although entirely unaided by any influence, relying alone upon his own strong will, and natural capabilities and assiduity. He did attain the highest possible success then to be reached in his profession. A man of influence in the city, a popular and highly esteemed teacher in one of the most famous medical schools of the day, his name was in every man's mouth, and he long lived an active life, finally to retire, full of years and honors, to a place in the country that he dearly loved, to enjoy there, in the society of his wife, the rest for which he had so long and so arduously labored.

The life I am to chronicle was very different. Few men who attain such enviable distinction as my father, live so quietly, and are so thoroughly out of what is commonly called the world. In his earlier days he was filled, as are physicians of ambition, with the desire to be a teacher, but after my mother's death, which occurred when he was only thirty-eight years of age, a time when most men are only beginning to reach their best success, he withdrew himself from almost everything but the mere practice of his profession. Even his pleasures were set aside, and he practised medicine; first to earn a livelihood for himself and his seven children, and second to find distraction; for his grief at the loss which had befallen him was deep, and he never recovered from it. Naturally a rather sober-minded man, and disposed to look at life from the most serious side, his great loss, which came to him in middle life, made him still more so. As time, however, went by, he found more and more, that what he at first sought as a distraction, and because he considered it his duty, began to give him pleasure, and almost the only

pleasure life at that melancholy time offered. He took the greatest interest in the welfare of his patients, and always gave his best skill and most patient care in every way to advance their interests, and thus tend to gain his end—their cure. He always said a physician should be much more than a mere writer of prescriptions. He was a family practitioner in its noblest and highest sense. His first consideration was always his patient, and after that and far off, came the desire for the other things men strive for—wealth, ease, social position, the esteem of his fellow-men, and that most seductive of all the ends of ambition—fame. Whatever of the latter he attained, was simply the necessary sequence of his conscientious striving after the former. His book was successful and much read, because men came slowly to find that it was the best upon the subject, and he had a large practice, because the community learned that there was no other physician in whose hands they could, with more safety, place the care of their health.

My father was born October 3, 1818, at the corner of Eighth Street and Apple Alley, which is above Race, being the third of ten children. His father was of a New England family, and was in the seventh generation from Vincent Meigs, who was the first of his name to come to America; he settled at East Guilford, Connecticut, about the year 1647. His mother was Mary Montgomery, and she was descended from the old family of the Montgomerys of Scotland. Of his early childhood and boyhood, I have not been able to learn much, for it was a subject upon which he never dilated a great deal to us, his children, and I have not been able to learn from his brothers or sisters of any very striking incidents connected therewith.

From earliest childhood he always wished to be a physician, and from this determination he never swerved, so that in the family there was no question as to what should be his calling. He was a quiet and rather soberly-inclined boy, very fond of reading, and not much given to rough or boisterous play. Without being sick, or positively unable to do all that his brothers could, he was always looked upon as comparatively delicate. His first experience in learning was at a dame's school in Cherry Street. Later he made a very serious step in life, when he went to the Classical Academy of Mr. Samuel Crawford. Many a Philadelphia boy of that day remembers Mr. Crawford, and many remember him with no pleasure. He must have been a harsh and cruel man, for he used his rattan most unmercifully, and few boys passed through his hands without learning the strength of his rod. I think it most characteristic of my father, that, although cruelty was a thing he always hated and despised, yet in his judgment of men he was so mild, and disliked so much to think harshly of any one, that he never admitted Mr. Crawford had been cruel. He always said the terror of the rod he saw so freely applied to almost all the other boys, but of which he himself never experienced the lightest touch, was good for him, and drove him to study hard, harder than he would have done had he not ever had the fear of the rattan hanging over him. "It was seldom used," he would say, "unless in some way deserved."

When not sixteen years of age he was taken from school, and began the study of his profession, attending the lectures upon two of the elementary branches at the University of Pennsylvania, and at the same time studying music, and having a tutor who gave him some further instruction. He studied four years at the University, and graduated in



1838, when not twenty years of age. At about this time he went to Georgia to pay a visit to Mr. John Forsyth, who had married his aunt, and after whom he was named. The journey was at that time a much more difficult undertaking than it is now, for railways had not yet superseded the old way of travelling by stage.

While still at college he was elected to the position of resident physician in the Pennsylvania Hospital, and went there almost immediately after his graduation on the first of April, 1838. Here he had for his colleague and room-mate, during the first year of his residence, Dr. Henry H. Smith, since Professor of Surgery in the University of Pennsylvania. His colleague during the second year (the term of service was at that time two years) was Dr. Alfred Stillé, now Professor of the Theory and Practice of Medicine in the University. When he entered the hospital he was less than twenty years old, and he has often told me, in later years, when I have myself been in difficulty, how he felt and feared his responsibilities at that time, how on more than one occasion, when summoned to attend an injured person, just admitted to the ward, he would, after the nurse was out of earshot, cry out in despair, "I cannot, I cannot;" but calming himself externally would discharge his duties, no one ever suspecting how much it cost him. He also told me that, upon one occasion, he became enraged at a patient, and losing all control of himself, danced about the ward, and swore at the man furiously. For this he was reported by some one to the managers of the hospital, and was summoned to appear before the two attending managers, two solemn members of the persuasion of Friends, in broad-brimmed hats, and was given a severe reprimand for his unseemly conduct. When he finished this story he always

laughed, and said the rebuke did him good. Much is said nowadays of the cruelty of officers and officials of institutions to the inmates, but the great provocation that has constantly to be endured with the class of people who form a large portion of the inmates of charitable institutions is seldom remembered. When so gentle and habitually considerate and kind a man as my father could so completely lose his temper, it is hardly to be wondered at that most men are occasionally cruel.

I cannot better picture my father as he was at this time, and earlier, during his student life, than by quoting from a letter kindly written me by Dr. Stillé. He says, "When I saw him on the benches of the lecture-room at the University . . . . I did not at first know his name, but I wondered at such an immature boy, as his appearance showed him to be, being engaged in a study that demanded all possible preparation by mental maturity and cultivation. And this deficiency, if he did not realize in itself, he certainly did feel after I had the pleasure of being his associate in the Pennsylvania Hospital. In the interval of three years, however, he had become a man, physically and mentally, although the development did not efface in him that certain feminine delicacy, in both respects, which was no doubt natural to him. I never knew a more modest man, one who, without being squeamish or puritanical in the least, was more delicate in his language and conduct. I think that no one else could have the same right to speak of this as I who shared the same room with him for a whole year, and who for many years afterwards saw more of him than perhaps any other medical friend. . . . I had myself gone abroad imbued with the enthusiasm of Gerhard and Penock, who first brought to Philadelphia the methods of

study of the Parisian school, and I, in my turn, excited the ambition of Dr. Meigs to become acquainted with them. I remember the deep interest he manifested in my exposition of the methods of examining patients, of recording cases, and of numerical analysis. And although I cannot now remember that he carried it into practice while with me in the hospital, I know that he did so afterwards. I think I can see him now sitting cross-legged upon his bed as naturally as if he had been a born Oriental, and conversing with me upon these and similar topics, always grave but never solemn; always earnest but never enthusiastic, having a single eye to learn the truth, whatever it might be. Like other young men so thrown together, we fell into many discussions of topics in no way related to medicine, and canvassed them diligently, but never with acrimony even when our notions disagreed; and I confess that I had often to wonder at the simplicity, naïveté, yes, innocence of his character. . . . I hardly remember a happier year of my life than the one spent as the colleague of Dr. Meigs, and that he too found it agreeable seems to be shown by the fact that our friendly relations continued as long as he lived. I lamented the termination of his hospital term of duty (at that time it was for two years), but our intercourse was maintained by letter during his residence abroad, and I know very well that his correspondence was always entertaining. I have to regret that of all his letters to me the only one that has been preserved I have placed in your hands, but I distinctly remember that they had very little relation to medical affairs, because the fact surprised me at the time. His foreign tour, however, did much for maturing his character, and ridding it of that provincialism for which untravelled Americans are notorious. On his return he, of course, found

a comparatively straight and easy road to professional success before him. His father's name was a tower of strength, and from it he went forth to do battle with disease among the infants and children of his father's families. More than once, in later years and before he reached middle life, he has lamented to me that he was too much hemmed in by pædiatry. Yet in this he laid the strong foundations of his professional success. All the while he was collecting the material for the work upon which his reputation must chiefly rest. Every case was recorded, and by degrees a mass of material accumulated that formed a mine out of which at last was built up his work upon diseases of children. From time to time he conversed with me about these papers, read them to me for criticism, and finally, taking Rilliet and Barthez as his model, he produced the best and most original work upon the subject in the English language."

I have quoted Dr. Stillé's letter thus at length, because it shows better than any words of my own, how my father appeared, during the earlier portion of his medical career, to that one of his contemporaries who, from their intimacy, was best able to judge him. Almost immediately after finishing his term of service at the hospital, he went to Europe, sailing in April, 1840. While abroad he spent some six or seven months in Paris, where he further pursued the study of medicine. He never said very much about his life in Paris, but did tell me once, that at that time his studies were rather in the direction of surgery, as his father and he had concluded he was to be a surgeon. He listened while in Paris to the teachings of Velpeau, Louis, and other eminent French physicians of that day. While abroad he visited Italy, Switzerland, France, Belgium, and parts of

England, going east as far as Warsaw and Vienna, and south as far as Naples. This was before the days of railroads, and almost all his travelling was by diligence.

In August, 1841, he returned home, coming back as he went, in a sailing vessel, and then his life opened in earnest, as he began the practice of his profession, in his father's house in Chestnut Street above Tenth. His father's name and influence secured for him an introduction, and from the very beginning he had more or less practice.

In the spring of 1843 he began his career as a teacher, delivering an introductory lecture to his course upon Obstetrics on April 6th, at the Philadelphia Association for Medical Instruction. The lecture delivered upon this occasion, which was his first appearance before an audience of any sort, was very characteristic of the man, and of his wonderful love of truth. He begins, "To-day for the first time in my life I appear before an audience in the character of lecturer. It is to me, as you will readily believe, a moment of deep and intense interest. My position at this moment is like that of some adventurous traveller in distant lands, who, standing upon the confines of a new and unknown region, into the hidden recesses of which he is about to plunge, will naturally pause," etc. etc. How few men, when beginning their career as speakers, open by announcing to their audience that they are new to their position! The Medical Association was intended to give instruction to the students during the spring and autumn, supplementary to the regular courses of lectures, at the different medical colleges in the city. In this institution my father was associated with the late Drs. Joshua M. Wallace, F. G. Smith, John McClellan, and Robert Bridges, and Drs. Alfred Stillé, Keating, and various others. He delivered courses of lectures at different times upon

Obstetrics, Diseases of Children, and Practice of Medicine, and the association must have continued in existence until 1854 or afterwards, a period of eleven years at least. During this time my father was most assiduous and active, if one may judge by the number of written lectures and notes found among his papers which were prepared for this institution. He was a most conscientious worker, and in his lectures speaks constantly of his efforts to do well. An examination of these lectures shows that even at that early day, his mind had already become impressed with many ideas which in after years became even more firmly fixed. For instance, he devotes almost the whole of his general introductory to the course of 1850, to a consideration of "Habit and its Effects," enjoining the formation of good ones, and the avoidance of bad, and impressing upon his hearers how wonderful is the effect of habit upon man, and how impossible it is to escape from its effects if once established. In a lecture upon typhoid fever he says, "Diet is exceedingly important, nothing more so." He gives an analysis of cases treated in private practice, and in a series of sixty-nine reports five deaths, and records that in five instances more than one case occurred in the same house. A much less mortality than the ordinarily quoted hospital statistics would lead us to expect. He mentions the occurrence of relapses in the disease, and that the fever attacks very young children, facts which have only come to be generally acknowledged very lately, although he made his observations and taught them more than thirty years ago.

On October 17, 1844, he was married to Ann Wilcocks Ingersoll, who died a little more than twelve years afterwards, December 30, 1856. They had eight children, the oldest and youngest of whom died young.

In the spring of 1845, my grandfather went to Europe for his health, leaving my father to take charge of the greater part of his patients. From this time, although only twenty-six years of age, he had a large practice.

In 1848 was published the first edition of his book upon Diseases of Children ; it appeared as one of the " Medical Practitioner's and Student's Library." This work soon established for itself a reputation, although of course it elicited some share of adverse criticism. My father often quoted one critic, who said, " Dr. Meigs has rushed in shirtless haste before the public," and the recollection of this mistaken estimate of his work always amused him. A second and third edition were soon exhausted and the book was allowed to go out of print. In 1869, finding himself so much occupied that there seemed no prospect of his being able, unaided to prepare a fourth edition, he associated with himself Dr. William Pepper, giving him a full half ownership in the book and changing the title to Meigs and Pepper on Diseases of Children. One of the most marked traits of my father's character was shown in his thus placing upon equal terms with himself, who had written a book with an already established fame, so young a man, at that time just entering upon the practice of medicine, although he has since taken so high a position in the profession, and whom he conjoined with himself that he might have some one to do the laborious parts of the work which he was himself unable, from his excessive occupation, to accomplish. In 1870 the fourth edition appeared under the new title. Further editions of the book were from time to time called for, and the seventh and last appeared in 1882, less than a year before his death. During all this period of thirty-four years the book maintained the position which it took almost

from the beginning, as the best work upon the subject in the English language.

As a writer, he perhaps never did himself full justice, for after the publication of his book, which was the great literary labor of his life, he undertook no work of magnitude, being incessantly occupied with practice. He wrote only when he felt absolutely driven to give to the world something which burned within him, and which he thought of such importance that he at all costs seized the time to commit it to paper. The literary instinct was strong within him, and his mind and memory were stored with conclusions and observations the result of his great experience. Nothing but his excessive occupation prevented his being a voluminous writer, for he wrote with great ease and rapidity, and was very fond of literary work, never seeming more happy than when seated at his table with paper before him, and surrounded with books.

That he was capable of other literary productions than the mere detail of medical observations, to which he usually confined himself, is shown by his memoir of his father, Dr. Charles D. Meigs, which is a very graceful tribute of a son to a father, and is besides a very charming and just piece of biographical writing. During his life he contributed a number of articles to various medical journals, some of them being of great importance and originality, as for instance, "Remarks on Atelectasis Pulmonum, or Imperfect Expansion of the Lungs, and Collapse of the Lungs in Children;" "Heart-clot as a cause of Diphtheria;" and "On the Morphological changes in the Blood in Malarial Fever, with Remarks on Treatment." He also wrote the "Address on the Opening of the New Lecture and Operating Room of the Pennsylvania Hospital;" "Memoir of Charles D. Meigs,



M.D.;" and "A History of the First Quarter of the Second Century of the Pennsylvania Hospital."

My father was, however, so incessantly occupied with the cares of practice that he took but little time, either for literary work, which was always a great pleasure to him, or for leisure. This is well shown by a letter he wrote to Dr. Stillé, then abroad for his health, in 1851. He begins: "I am quite afraid to say how long since it was that I received your letter dated at Vienna, for I am perfectly aware of how abominable it has been in me not to have answered it long ago. My excuses, not my excuse, must be, that I have been incessantly, and necessarily occupied. In fact, I have never been so busy in my life as I have been during this whole winter and spring. My business has been very urgent, for I have been paying from eighteen to twenty-six and twenty-seven visits daily the whole winter, and during my father's absence of four weeks at the South, I was literally overwhelmed and half murdered. My lectures, too, in your old position, have been constantly digging me in the side—screaming at me with the voice of a locomotive whistle, work, work, rest not—so that you must really believe that my not answering your welcome and agreeable letter before this has been the consequence of a pressure of matters that must have the precedence of all others. . . . ."

"You have heard, no doubt, of the death of poor—— He died of meningeal apoplexy, and was found to have been laboring under enlargement with softening of the heart, and to have his right lung greatly reduced in size from the pleurisy he had had some two years before his death. So that the poor fellow had been practising hard, writing on scientific subjects, and discussing unity of races with Bachman, for two years with but one lung. If he had rested

himself, as he ought to have done, and as he would have done had he been anything but a doctor, he might have been living still in very tolerable health. But doctors must work and toil, when all other professions would rest from labor, and so he lost his life. . . .

“How do you feel about returning home to toil and strive? Does not your heart sometimes sink at the thought of submitting again to the fatigues and thousand annoyances of medical business? Upon my word, I often think that if I had but some two or three thousand dollars a year, I would spend the coming fifteen or twenty years of my life at Geneva, or in Florence, reading language and educating my children—but then comes the thought, educating my children—for what? To come home to this hard-working, bustling, driving nation. How little fitted would they be to fill their stations in life did they see me lounging listless and inactive through my life! No, I must work even to set them an example, as well as to obtain for them food, raiment, and lodging.” This shows the life he led at that time, and the effect it had on his mind and spirits.

In December, 1854, he had a severe attack of pleurisy or pneumonia, which threatened his life. After a short holiday, however, he went to work again as hard as ever.

In December, 1856, my mother died, and he then plunged himself, if possible, deeper than ever in the vortex of labor, seeking distraction.

In 1859 he was elected one of the physicians to the Pennsylvania Hospital. The duties connected with this position were a constant pleasure to him, so long as he continued to hold it, which he did for nearly twenty-three years, and he took an interest in the hospital, not as physician alone, but in its welfare and prosperity in every way. He was the

means of getting large sums of money donated at different times, and this fact, as well as his long and faithful services as physician, is mentioned in a series of resolutions passed by the board of managers, when he resigned his position in November, 1881. He wrote, "A History of the First Quarter of the Second Century of the Pennsylvania Hospital," which was read before the board of managers at their stated meeting, held 9th mo. 25th, 1876. His term of service as physician was in the summer and autumn, when he was least occupied with practice, and he took the keenest interest, both in his work in the wards, and his lectures to the class, which were, during all the earlier portion of the time he was connected with the hospital, continued throughout the whole summer, two lectures being given each week. He had a wonderfully quick and incisive way of examining patients, and would often by one or two questions rapidly put, elicit facts that his clinical clerk and resident physician had failed to learn after long and laborious cross-questioning. The rapidity and precision with which he would make a diagnosis were thus often a cause of astonishment to those following him in the course of his duties in the wards. He never seemed to pass by or to neglect any patient under his care, no matter how chronic or disagreeable the nature of the complaint might be, giving to each one the due and necessary amount of time and attention. He was uniformly kind to all his patients, and ever kept before him, as his first object, the cure or alleviation, so far as might be possible, of their various maladies, never losing sight of this object in the pursuit of any scientific investigation in which he might be engaged, and during his whole time of service as a hospital physician, he was much occupied in scientific investigation,

constantly striving to add to the stock of our exact knowledge.

When the great civil war broke out in 1861, it found him and all his family, by inheritance, members of the Democratic party. His father had lived in Georgia, and naturally he and all his sons were Democrats. My father was the first of the family to turn to the other party. I have often heard him say that before the election of Mr. Lincoln, he had thought and read much, trying to learn what would be right for him to do, and even the day before the election was still uncertain. That evening he went to consult Mr. Horace Binney, who was one of his warmest friends, upon some of the law and historical points connected with the matter, and after hearing Mr. Binney's answers to his questions, went home determined to vote for Mr. Lincoln, which the next day he did.

It was in my father's office that the scheme for the establishment of the Union League of Philadelphia was matured. This important organization, which was political in its purposes, was the first of its kind to be instituted in the country, those of New York and other cities being established afterwards, and in imitation of that of Philadelphia. It grew out of the Union Club which was organized in November, 1862. The following extract from a book entitled "Proceedings of a Meeting of the Union Club of Philadelphia, held at the League House, December 27, 1870," Phila., J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1871, page 25, will show this: "The seventh meeting of the Union Club was a memorable one. It was held at the house of Dr. John F. Meigs, on the twenty-seventh day of December, 1862. At this meeting the scheme for the establishment of the League was matured, and the articles of association for that purpose were first

read, and they were afterwards generally signed by the large company present. During the first year of the existence of the club, Dr. Meigs' professional engagements compelled him, to the regret of all, to resign his membership, and therefore his name appears nowhere upon the roll of the Union Club which was subsequently printed. He was not the less one of our earliest and most active members." Throughout the war he continued to be most earnest in his support of the government, and looked forward to the possibility of a disruption of the country as almost certain ruin. So unnecessarily anxious, as the event proved, was he lest the government should fail to quell the rebellion for want of funds, that he at one time seriously contemplated having all his family silver melted into money to be given to the government, and I remember the silver being all brought home from the bank and weighed preparatory to the execution of this purpose, which, however, was never carried into effect.

In December, 1863, he had a second attack of pneumonia with hemorrhage from the lung, but within a very short time he recovered and returned to his practice.

In 1864, my father applied for the then vacant professorship of the Theory and Practice of Medicine in the University of Pennsylvania, but he made no canvass for the place, and was only half-hearted in his desire to be elected. He received, however, several votes, although Dr. Stillé was elected.

Dr. Meigs was a man endowed by nature with a rare and seemingly contradictory combination of qualities. He could be bold to temerity, although usually he seemed a timid man; he was gentle as a woman, and yet could be almost fierce, and absolutely unbending, if roused concerning

things he thought important. He made few friendships except such as came to him through his professional relations; to ties thus formed, he was ever most loyal. It was in this manner that his friendship began with the late Mr. Horace Binney. They were firm and fast friends for many years, and it was only Mr. Binney's death that severed the tie.

A deep and lasting effect was produced upon him when a boy, by seeing his mother at the head of the family of a struggling and rising physician. The family was a large one, for his parents had ten children, and the mother's life was one of constant occupation with little leisure. The sight of this, together with the effect produced upon my father's then impressionable nature, by the stern discipline that was maintained at Mr. Crawford's school, where he was obliged to study almost unceasingly, lest he too should be whipped, must have been large factors in forming the bent of his mind. Throughout life he was always deeply impressed with the wonderful and lasting effects of habit, once formed and firmly established. He himself formed, very early in life, the habit of unceasing labor, and although the original motives were gone, the fear of Mr. Crawford's rod, and the desire to do all he could to spare his overtasked mother, yet the habit was firmly fixed upon him, and he never escaped from it. This turn of mind made him sometimes impatient in his judgment of innocent pleasure; it was not that he thought pleasure itself wrong, but he had ever before him the fear lest it should lead astray from the paths of good conduct, and this fear pursued him like an ugly shadow, and interfered with his enjoyment of his own hard-earned moments of leisure, which were ever darkened by the dread that he was unduly prolonging them when he should be back again in his tread-mill.

In his use of medicines he habitually gave small doses, and appeared ever fearful of producing ill effects, but on occasion, when prompt action seemed necessary, he would give drugs, and doses of them that other men dared not. He always seemed to me singularly skilful and happy in his treatment, concluding to do, by what seemed an inspiration, exactly the thing needful at the moment. He was strongly impressed by, and thoroughly knew when to apply the rule, which he used to attribute to the late Dr. Parrish, "when you know not what to do in medicine, do nothing," appreciating fully that there are times when we must stand helplessly by and wait, trusting for the while to the *vis medicatrix naturæ*. He well understood that most diseases tend spontaneously toward recovery, and knew when to apply this knowledge.

With his patients he was ever gentle, giving much attention to their account of themselves and their condition, and in his diagnosis and prognosis giving generally the first place to a consideration of what Stokes has well called the "vital phenomena," and afterwards and secondarily considering the physical signs. Of all things he hated a quarrel, whether it resulted in words or blows, and I do not remember his ever being engaged in one. Although this was true, he seemed incapable of fear, either physical or moral, assuming his responsibilities as they met him, or going out to face them with a calm and immovable front, whatever his inward sufferings may have been, and they must have been great, for after all he was naturally a timid man, and it was only his wonderful moral courage that enabled him to triumph over his disposition.

I well remember in my early student days going to the Pennsylvania Hospital to follow him in his rounds

through the wards. Arriving there one morning, I found a great excitement within the usually quiet old walls. Around one of the basement windows, which was barred, I saw a crowd of men and women, and heard a voice occasionally crying out inarticulately. Approaching, I saw a man in one of the cells careering wildly around its narrow limits, beating the sides with a heavy brass instrument. Saliva ran from his mouth in streams, so that it lay in pools upon the floor, and the walls were bespattered with it. I shall never forget the terror-stricken faces of those around the window, and how they stood far away and looked. They told me the man had hydrophobia. The resident physician and nurses were terrified, and no one dared go in, to quiet the raving man. Presently my father came, and learning the situation, quietly directed that a mattress be brought to him, and then, finding one of the nurses who was willing to accompany him, opened the door, and holding the mattress so as to protect himself from any blow, he and the nurse entered, and forced the raving man to lie on his bed. While effecting this the man spat full in his face and eyes; nothing disturbed by knowing that this quantity of one of the most dreaded poisons was upon him, my father quietly finished what he had to do before washing his face. I remember my terror when I learned what had happened, but he did not seem in the least disturbed, and I never heard him mention it afterwards, although most men would have been long haunted by a fear of hydrophobia. He never seemed to have the slightest fear of any contagious disease, and would frequently inveigh against the modern terror of scarlet fever, and belief in its virulent contagiousness. He always maintained that it was very slightly contagious, much less so certainly than measles, and that the present



custom of ostracizing any family where there might be a case, was cruel and barbarous, besides being cowardly and useless.

With all his gentleness and hesitation ever to think harshly of others, he was sometimes very severe in his judgment of things he disapproved of, or could not sympathize with, although they might be harmless in themselves. He had no hobby, and his life was a much less pleasant one for the want of it. Although fond of books and a great reader, and having a great love for boats and the water, and seeming to have a taste for zoology, besides taking a more than passing interest in many other things, he never let any one of them take a strong hold upon him, but devoted himself with real assiduity to his profession only, taking in a little of the other things from time to time as they came in his way. It was for this reason partially that he never made any serious preparation to retire from his professional labors, although he had talked of it for many years, and always looked forward to the time when he would live a life of leisure. At times he would become excessively weary of his life of constant labor, and yet when he contemplated the prospect of having no perfunctory work, he feared lest the time might hang heavily upon his hands. He had a great love for literary work, and at times pictured himself as retired from active practice, and occupied in writing of his past medical experiences, which were very extensive.

During the last four or five years of his life he allowed himself a little more leisure, taking each summer six or eight weeks, during which he travelled off to some out-of-the-way place where he thought he would be unlikely to be troubled by calls upon his professional skill, for he never could refuse

*Surgeon Gen - respectfully requests to turn his  
eye to this passage, when meditating points  
for stopping closed bay - on account of contagion.  
or non contagion -*

a request for advice; but when at home he worked as hard as ever, denying no one, and going at all times and in all seasons to any one who asked him.

On December 9, 1882, he paid his last professional visit. For two or three days the weather had been very cold and bleak, and he had been constantly chilly, and then had pain in the chest, which on the afternoon of the ninth was very severe, but still he insisted upon going out. About six in the evening he came home, and the pain was so intense that he was obliged to go to bed. In a day or two he had a fully developed pneumonia, and after suffering absolute anguish from diaphragmatic pleurisy with which it was accompanied, he died on the afternoon of December 16, an hour or two less than a week from the time when he paid his last professional visit.

How he was beloved and mourned is evidenced by a notice of his death which was written by an old friend and patient, and which expresses better than any words of mine could, the sentiment of the community at his loss. "The announcement of the death of Dr. John Forsyth Meigs, upon Saturday evening, cast a deep shadow of gloom over a very large circle of Philadelphia society. Born, bred, and living his life of active usefulness in this city, Dr. Meigs had gained so strong a hold upon patients, friends, and the public at large, that the sudden news of his loss falls as a sharp and heavy blow. Of the thousand families among whom his work of professional beneficence has been done, there is hardly a member who has not learned to love and to revere him. Untiring in effort, prodigal of his time and strength, and bringing to the treatment of every case the highest skill, the most minute attention to details, the most earnest resolves to succeed, Dr. Meigs could not fail to

impress himself strongly upon all affections and judgments. He was one of those faithful physicians for whose coming the waiters in the sick-room ever eagerly watched. The careful notation of the most apparently trivial symptoms, his honest statement of opinion, his genuine expression of sympathy, all inspired the strong confidence that what was being done was the best that human skill could accomplish.

“A patient and correct thinker, not only upon the professional subjects which so largely occupied his attention, but also upon subjects of wider or more general interest, an accurate writer upon several branches of medical science, an actively good and patriotic citizen, Dr. Meigs' domain was the sick chamber, his sphere was the contest with the enemy ever springing for his prey, which the follies, the ignorance, and the misfortunes of humanity keep in unceasing activity. In this field he was ever battling, mostly successful, sometimes baffled and disappointed, but always retiring with the consciousness of having fought the good fight, and of having struggled manfully for victory. He has been taken from life whilst actively engaged in the exercise of his noble calling, and his last earthly thoughts, his last wandering fancies reverted to those to whom he had always given good measure, pressed down and running over. Long, very long will it be before the medical profession will produce a more perfect model than this gallant, modest, unselfish, blameless, civic hero.”









