

Childs (H-H.)

EULOGY

ON THE DEATH OF

JOHN DOANE WELLS, M. D. ✓

LATE PROFESSOR IN THE

BERKSHIRE MEDICAL INSTITUTION,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

FACULTY AND MEDICAL CLASS,

SEPTEMBER, 1830.

BY HENRY H. CHILDS, M. D. ✓

PROFESSOR OF THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF MEDICINE.

[PUBLISHED BY REQUEST



PITTSFIELD :

PRINTED BY PHINEHAS ALLEN AND SON.

EULOGY.

GENTLEMEN,

THE opening of the annual lecture term of the Berkshire Medical Institution is again announced. For eight successive years have students resorted to this Institution, for the purpose of instruction in the science of Medicine, and the average number has not been much less than one hundred. In the patronage enjoyed, and in the success which has attended, the friends of the Institution would recognize, with grateful hearts, the smiles of a superintending Providence. Neither the period which has elapsed, nor the prosperity which has followed, have in any degree abated the zeal of its patrons to render it worthy of the confidence and favor of the public.

Originally designed to increase the opportunity and advantages for Medical education, on the principle of a liberal policy, rather than a source of pecuniary emolument to the Professor, the same motives will continue to govern, and the same objects will be kept steadily and prominently in view.

In a retrospective glance of the events which have transpired within the period of the last eight short years, how much do we find to encourage the philanthropist, to animate the philosopher, and to interest all. I do not purpose to call your attention to the great moral and political changes, which have evolved in rapid succession, or the improvements which have been made in the arts and sciences, and their practical application to the useful concerns of life, contributing to our convenience, interest, and happiness—still less will it be expected that I should notice the improved systems

of education, or the various schemes of benevolence in successful operation for the melioration of the condition of man.

More appropriate is this occasion to call your attention to those subjects which have an immediate relation to the science of Medicine—to its advancement, if it has advanced—and to its changes, for no science experiences greater changes. I might advert to the theories which have been espoused, and the theories which have been abandoned—the *practice* which has been praised, and the practice which has been blamed—the improvements in the collateral branches of the science of Medicine, and their application to the profession; these are subjects coming properly under consideration in a medical school, and deserving the attention of the medical student.

But to the consideration of one event, and one of a recent melancholy occurrence, our minds are called, in the performance of a painful duty, at this first interview—the lamented death of JOHN DOANE WELLS, late Professor in this Institution. This is an event of a most solemn and deeply affecting character. How mysterious are the Providences of God—what a lesson of humility does this event teach—how frail a thing is man—how uncertain is the tenure of his existence here. Youth, activity, friends, station, all avail nothing, when the dread messenger arrives; hard indeed it is to realize that he is no more, who so recently stood within these walls, full of life and activity—his countenance beaming with vivacity, illuminated by a mind strong and brilliant—he moves, he speaks, we listen to catch the melodious strains—but ah! all is silent as the grave! we may dream, we may imagine, for we shall neither see nor hear him any more forever.

If genius, if talents, if usefulness could stay the stroke of death, we should not now be called to mourn his untimely departure. For these he was eminently distinguished—for these he was deservedly exalted in the esteem and confidence

of the public—a blessing to the public, the public mourn his loss.

He died too at an early age—at an age when few attain to great distinction—for him how much celebrity might have been anticipated—how much greatness might he have achieved—how great a blessing might he have proved.

A very brief sketch of the life of Dr. WELLS, together with some notice of the striking features and prominent traits of character, which he exhibited in his rapid progress and elevation to distinguished eminence in his profession, may profitably occupy our attention at this time—animated by his example, and inspired by his success, may a zeal and emulation be enkindled in your breasts, which shall burn brighter and brighter till the lamp of life shall be extinguished.

For the pre-eminent distinction which Dr. WELLS attained, even before the meridian of life, he owes nothing to the influence of birth or fortune; though of highly respectable parentage, he claimed no alliance to the aristocracy of wealth or power, adventitiously bestowed. From his youth his mind was imbued with sound principles; early convinced of the value of time, he rightly estimated the importance of diligently improving the opportunities and advantages of education, with which he was favoured; accordingly we find him early distinguished by his habits of industry and close application to study, and by the purity of his moral conduct.

In his classical studies, holding a rank with the foremost, always respected and beloved by his associates; having finished his collegiate course, he graduated in 1817, and immediately commenced the study of medicine, pursuing it with the same zeal and perseverance, for which he was already distinguished. Anatomy was his favorite study; his interest in this fundamental branch of the profession amounted almost to *enthusiasm*. He *promptly* availed himself of all the means and advantages which opportunity presented for improvement; his labors in the dissecting room—his demonstrations to his fellow-students, and his entire devotedness to the study of his profession, exhibit an example honou-

ble to himself and worthy of your imitation. How well he succeeded in the acquisition of anatomical knowledge, and the consequent superiority he enjoyed, is distinctly told by the bright prospects which soon opened before him.

In the year 1820, he received the degree of Doctor of Medicine from Harvard University, and soon after the appointment of assistant to the distinguished Professor, Dr. Nathan Smith, then attached to the Medical School recently established in the State of Maine. So well qualified was he for the duties which were required, and with so much ability were they discharged, that soon after he was appointed Professor of Anatomy in the Brunswick School. Incited by a laudable ambition to excel, he visited Europe under the most favourable circumstances. He was Professor of Anatomy in a new and flourishing Institution—he was already well grounded in the science—he had begun lecturing—he knew precisely what was wanting to qualify him for more extensive usefulness, and he possessed the zeal and interest requisite for the accomplishment of his purpose. In Paris, he spent most of his time while absent ; for there he found the advantages superior to those of any other country. There he perfected his knowledge of Anatomy.— Properly appreciating his opportunities, he applied himself unremittingly to the study of his profession. There too, besides the acquisition of medical science, he obtained a style of lecturing not surpassed by any individual in any school in the United States. In manner graceful ; in language pure ; in eloquence unrivalled.

While in Europe, he purchased, for the Maine Medical School, a Library, and a Cabinet of Anatomy, which, with the addition since made under his direction, constitute one of the most valuable collections of books and preparations any where found in this country.

On his return, laden with the fruits of industry, he engages with untiring zeal in the discharge of his professional duties. To his Professorship of Anatomy is added that of Surgery. He enters upon the duties of his office. His

success is complete ! The high expectations of his friends are more than realized. Principally by his labours and by his talents, the Brunswick School becomes deservedly popular, and stands conspicuous among the Medical Institutions of our country.

In 1826, Dr. WELLS is appointed Professor of Anatomy and Physiology in the Berkshire Medical Institution. To many of you I need not say how well he succeeded—all were satisfied—nay more—all were delighted. None could fail of being greatly benefited who attended the clear and able demonstrations which he made—who listened to his eloquence, and followed the lucid argument and the consistent reasoning to their inevitable conclusions. His fame was now no longer bounded by Geographical limits—within the last year he received an appointment in the Maryland University. But with the increase of his fame, a decline in his health was too visible. He had tasked his constitution too severely—and while the powers of his body were weakened, his spirits were unbroken, his zeal was unabated. He repaired to Baltimore, and gave his introductory lecture to an audience of more than fifteen hundred. It was received with the highest applause. He delivered his course of lectures to a large and attentive class—Trustees, Faculty and Students listened with astonishment and delight to the torrent of eloquence with which he accompanied his valuable instructions. But the spirit, which had sustained, and animated, and carried him triumphantly on, had exhausted the powers of the body, requiring greater sacrifices than his constitution could bear ; his health failed ; disease and death occasioned by too frequent and too great exhaustion, terminated the short but brilliant life of one whose memory will long be cherished, and whose character his friends will long delight to contemplate.

The zeal and interest which had urged him forward in his professional studies did not cease to influence him in his professional labours ; but with the *ability* with which he was prepared for their discharge, he both *deserved* and *command-*

ed success. His lectures on Anatomy and Physiology were clear and comprehensive ; minute yet full ; judiciously discriminating, he gave to each subject belonging to those sciences the attention which the importance of each justly merited. In the science of Anatomy, which has occupied the lives of such men as Bell and Hunter, Beclard and Meckel, he knew all that was known. To whatever part of the science he directed our attention, he at once excited our interest. On the subject of Physiology, a science of less certainty and less demonstration, he wisely abstained from all visionary speculations.

To attempt to unfold the laws of the animal economy farther than the phenomena of animal life are concerned, or to explain the principle of vital action farther than a full delineation of the phenomena which are the result, has generally been to appeal to the imagination for the support of a favorite hypothesis. Futile have been all the efforts of ingenuity to subject the ethereal agent of life to the rigid principles of Mechanical or Chemical Philosophy. Theory has followed theory, in varying succession, from the time of Hippocrates to the present ; and even now, many of the most ancient notions on this subject are deservedly the most popular ; while all the ingenious and prominent physiological theories are exhibited to the student, his attention is called to examine the subject in the light of reason and sound philosophy.

With a full and clear anatomical description of the different organs of the animal system, he delineated their functions, enumerated the phenomena of life, recounting the experiments which go to establish principles and assign laws for the government of actions connected with life. Thus while his course enlightened and enlarged the understanding, the minds of his hearers were guarded against any prejudice or bias, which would hinder future investigation.

The subject matter of discourse is stated ; the important points candidly discussed ; the whole subject clearly presented, and in such a manner as not only to excite present

attention, but to invite future reflection and investigation.

In the practice of Medicine, Dr. WELLS possessed the requisite qualifications for eminent distinction and usefulness—and in the intervals between his lecture terms he was assiduously employed. Besides holding the office of Dispensary Physician, he was also engaged in very considerable private practice.

With the same zeal and perseverance which belonged to his character as Professor, he applied himself to the practice of Medicine ; attentive to his patients ; affable and agreeable in his manners ; generally beloved, and rapidly acquiring the confidence of the public, and an extensive practice.

The value of decision of character, as well as perseverance, was duly appreciated by Dr. WELLS. He saw and experienced the powerful agency of this principle, producing a concentration of effort and energy of action, which with irresistible force bears down all obstacles, and triumphs over all opposition. Its vast power and influence on the character is observed in all those who are distinguished masters in the arts and sciences, and in the liberal professions, as well as in the enterprizes of philanthropy and benevolence.

In our own favored country, where all are equal—where the road of preferment is open to all—and where merit is the criterion to settle the reward, he best succeeds who best improves his time.

Would you, Gentlemen, properly appreciate the traits of character which constitute a great and good man, follow the example of him whose praise is in the mouths of all who knew him. In his youth and in his studies ; in his manhood and in his practice ; industry, decision and perseverance characterize his every stage of life. Unaided by affluence, or the patronage of influential friends, he was early thrown on his own resources, and his efforts corresponded with the importance of the achievements he was destined to make.

Trust not, young Gentlemen, to patrimonial bounty to supply the defects which negligence creates—improve the favours of Providence to facilitate your progress in the high and honorable course of professional study—but never suffer them to induce sloth, or serve as an apology for indolence, and thus pervert to your ruin the blessings of Heaven.

The dignity of your nature forbids that ignorance and wealth should usurp the place of knowledge and reputation ; however captivating the smiles of wealth, pecuniary independence bears no comparison in value to true independence of mind ; the law of the animal economy which unites effort to improvement, and strength to exercise, cannot be violated with impunity. What conquests have been achieved by individuals when thrown entirely on their own resources ; and how many have been destroyed by parental indulgence and pecuniary bounty ? How often has a patrimony, or the expectancy of one, quenched the spirit of enterprize, and allured to the path of inglorious ease, blasting the hopes of the too fond and indulgent parent. While on the other hand, how numerous the instances where even poverty has fired the soul with an all conquering resolution, stimulated the mind to energetic action, and crowned with success the noble daring of the heirs of her fortune.

Be not too much elated by riches, or the prospect of a rich inheritance, nor blinded by its dazzling brilliancy ; and never suffer poverty to depress or discourage you ; or the anticipation of it to produce despair. But while you study the laws of the animal economy, regulate your conduct by those principles which govern the developement, progress and perfection of the corporeal and mental powers ; and if at any time distrust or despondency come over you, call to your relief the many striking examples of the truth and soundness of the doctrine ; especially recollect the untiring exertions of him whose death we now mourn, and on whose virtues memory will long delight to dwell—who, without the aid of wealth, or the influence of friends, by his own efforts rose,

and by his talents gained an eminence in the profession, and that too, at an early age, standing unrivalled. We have to lament that in the attainment of so distinguished excellence, by labor so unremitting, the powers of his constitution were tasked beyond their ability to support.

In the preparation and delivery of his lectures nothing was omitted which would contribute to aid in producing the most powerful effect on his audience. His uniform practice of devoting the hour preceding his lecture exclusively to the particular subject, is proof of his industry and faithfulness, and gave him a familiarity and ease in the performance admired by all.

Highly distinguished as was Dr. WELLS in his professional qualifications, their attainment costing him much time and labour, we would not withhold from him the *tribute* which literature and general science so cheerfully award and so liberally bestow on his character.

A thorough classical education, with a mind well disciplined, formed a solid foundation for the erection of a rich and splendid superstructure; his varied and copious learning; the expanded powers of his intellect present conclusive evidence of his industry and perseverance, and justly entitle him to the reputation of a good *general scholar*.

But it was his *moral qualities*, added to his intellectual powers, which gave a beauty and interest to his character, and threw around it a fascination, endearing him to his friends, and captivating all who fell within the circle of his acquaintance. Governed by a delicate sense of honor—in his feelings actuated by a spirit of liberality—open and frank in his disposition—above envy—he disdained all hypocrisy—and in an unparalleled course of prosperity, he maintained a dignity and modesty of demeanor, which proved his *moral worth* of the highest order. No false philosophy darkened the clearness of his perceptions, or disturbed the purity of his sentiments; none contaminated the professional instructions flowing from his lips. While un-

folding the complicated and wonderful structure of the human system, he omitted no opportunity of impressing on the minds of his hearers the evidence of the divine agency and wisdom, displayed in the formation of man, and of the power and benevolence of God constantly exerted for his preservation and continuance. In all the different relations he was called to sustain in life, he not only acquitted himself with honor, but by his *example bequeathed* to his friends and the public an invaluable legacy. We have seen him in prosperity almost unexampled; we have seen him admired and honored above most others of his age, and we have not witnessed a corrupting and destroying influence either on the mind or conscience. The field of his brilliant prospects is opening wider and wider; his sphere of usefulness is continually enlarging; his professional reputation high and immovably established; his numerous friends sharing with him a well deserved and wide extending fame. In the possession of all that earth can proffer to her most favoured sons, suddenly and unexpectedly a sad and mournful change occurs; he is stopped in his career of prosperity, and compelled to exchange all the delights of social and active life for the torture of pain and the confinement of disease; here his trials begin, and now is to be tested the value of his character for true wisdom. With fortitude and patience he endures the most excruciating sufferings of body, while his mind reposes with tranquil confidence in the dispensations of an overruling Providence, acquiescing in humble submission, influenced by the truths of the christian religion, which he publicly professed, his soul rises above all earthly objects and holds converse with the skies.

In prosperity he was not corrupted, and now in adversity he does not despair. In the nearer approach of death he was calm and resigned, while the bosoms of his friends were torn with grief and sorrow. We sympathize with those friends in this most afflictive dispensation, and we mourn the early departure of one whose promise of long continued usefulness seemed so sure, and whose life was so

great a blessing ; but we would bow submissively to the inscrutable Providence of the all-wise Ruler of the Universe. And now, though dead, he yet speaks in the most impressive language, that of his own bright example, worthy the aim and ambition of the most devoted student, and not less worthy the imitation of the most distinguished Professor.

No language or advice, young Gentlemen, can be more useful or comprehensive than this, that you make JOHN DOANE WELLS your standard of excellence ; that you follow the path, he marked out, luminous with his effulgence ; it leads with certainty *direct* to a temple consecrated to fame and to honor, to usefulness and to happiness.

Study, then, to attain a true independence of mind ; for this he was distinguished ; and none can be truly great who are destitute of its ennobling influence ; not that independence which originates in selfishness and ignorance, supported by pride and vanity, ungoverned by reason, contemptuous, and actuated by no higher principle than supreme self-love. But *cultivate* that independence which is based on truth and rectitude, and which, in disregard of consequences, steadily and perseveringly prompts to the discharge of *every* duty ; fearlessly approving of what is *right*, and discountenancing what is wrong ; giving an elevated direction to efforts for the promotion of individual and public happiness. Intimately allied to this independence of mind is decision of character ; and by this is also implied energy of action. For this our friend was particularly distinguished ; and to this trait in his character was he indebted, principally, for the greatness he attained—VENIT, VIDET, VINCIT.—Inspired by this principle, plans were well formed and promptly executed—judicious enterprizes undertaken and rapidly accomplished. Devotion to the profession, and a zeal for improvement, gave him, at an early age, the distinction and the honors which ought to satisfy even long life. In disposition amiable ; in sentiment generous ; frank

and open in his conduct ; sincere and ardent in his friendships ; no man had fewer enemies. On a proper occasion he once said, “ if there is any one thing I detest, it is hypocrisy.”

YOUNG GENTLEMEN, with this bright example of unparalleled success and splendid reputation in the profession you have chosen, be excited to great diligence and perseverance ; cherish those virtues which raised him so high in the estimation of the wise and good, and so strongly endeared him to all who knew him ; and fondly may we hope, that after a longer life than was permitted him, your end may be like his, whose memory is blessed.

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