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## IN MEMORIAM.

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JAMES MARION SIMS.

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BORN JANUARY 25<sup>TH</sup>, 1813; DIED NOVEMBER 13<sup>TH</sup>, 1883.

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No greater shock could have disturbed the medical world than the news of the unexpected death of J. Marion Sims on November 13th, 1883. It seemed as though a cloud had spread over the medical horizon, and as though each one of us had suffered a personal loss. But a few weeks ago we had seen him, the genial host, receiving his guests in honor of Sir William MacCormac; but little more than a week ago the writer had met him in consultation, and on both occasions had taken the opportunity to congratulate him on his ruddy complexion and apparent perfect health, which showed his complete recovery from the severe illness two years ago. No wonder, then, that the news of his sudden death created surprise, consternation, and universal sorrow. It seemed incredible that the name of Sims, which from the beginning of my medical career had been as a watchword to me, and had crossed my lips almost every day, should belong no more to a living man, but have passed to immortality.

To say who Sims was and to recount what Sims has done, seems unnecessary repetition. Who in the medical profession the world over is ignorant of his fame and the foundations on which it rests? A brief review of his life will therefore suffice.

Born in the Lancaster District, South Carolina, on January 25th, 1813, he graduated in 1832 from the College of South Carolina, and after a course of medicine in Charleston, S. C., went to Philadelphia, where he took his degree as doctor in

medicine at the Jefferson Medical College. Settling in Montgomery, Ala., he devoted himself especially to surgery, and soon acquired a large and, for that section, lucrative practice. An accident revealed to him the method of expanding the vagina by the admission of air in the knee-chest position (on the occasion of replacing a uterus retroverted by a fall from horseback), and his peculiar technical genius soon led to the discovery of the perineal retractor with which his name has since been identified, and to which gynecology may fairly be said to owe its renovation and present elevation. By the aid of this speculum he was enabled to thoroughly expose and accurately unite the edges of vesico-vaginal fistulæ, several cases of which had thus far resisted his efforts. By the further substitution of silver-wire sutures for the silk until then used, he succeeded in achieving success in this formidable and up to that period almost incurable lesion. Feeling that he had made a discovery of incalculable benefit in the treatment, not only of fistula, but of all female diseases, and finding the sphere of Montgomery too narrow for his ambition, Dr. Sims, with a well-established reputation in the South for skill and dexterity, removed to a wider field, and in 1853 came to New York. His one great project was to establish a hospital specially devoted to the diseases of women, and for this purpose he delivered addresses, wrote papers, and enlisted the sympathies of such influential and wealthy citizens as he could meet. It was at first a difficult task; specialism was decried by the profession and mistrusted by the laity, and support came slowly. But his enthusiasm, indomitable will, and evident thorough honesty of purpose and conviction finally triumphed, the Woman's Hospital Association was formed by a number of prominent physicians and laymen, with Dr. Sims at its head as Surgeon-in-Chief, and in 1855 the work of the institution was begun in a private dwelling on Madison avenue. The accommodations soon proved insufficient, and steps were taken to secure a more commodious and permanent establishment. The city offered an eligible site, liberal citizens furnished the sum required, and after much hard labor and many delays, at last in 1866 Dr. Sims saw his efforts crowned by the successful opening of the first pavilion of the present New York Woman's Hospital. He was not present on this occasion, for his political



proclivities led him in 1862 to prefer a residence in Europe, whence he did not return until after the close of the Franco-Prussian war in 1871. In his absence, his efficient assistant, Dr. Thomas Addis Emmet, was chosen Surgeon-in-Chief, and under the energetic and able management of this gentleman, the work begun by Dr. Sims was brought to a successful termination. On the return of Dr. Sims in 1871, a new medical board was organized, consisting of Dr. T. A. Emmet (who during these nine years had been the sole surgeon), J. M. Sims, T. G. Thomas, and E. R. Peaslee. Under the medical management of these gentlemen, the Woman's Hospital acquired a world-wide reputation, and the names of its founder and his followers were in the mouth of every physician interested in gynecology. The wards of the hospital were crowded, and soon additional accommodations were called for. Before these were provided, Dr. Sims terminated his connection with the institution, his feeling of humanity not allowing him to coincide in the decision of the Board of Governors that women afflicted with uterine cancer should not be admitted. In this feeling he certainly was right, no matter what may be the opinion as to the wisdom of his course in thinking this sufficient reason for his retirement. His interest in the hospital never abated, and he lived to see a second pavilion of equal size added to the first, and two cottages built for the sole purpose of performing laparotomy operations and allowing subsequent isolation of the patients. The New York Woman's Hospital stands to-day, and always will stand, a glorious monument to the genius, energy, and humanity of J. Marion Sims.

In it are practised and taught the methods which he had devised and introduced, many of them modified, it is true, but still originally *his* ideas; in it, the majority of the instruments used are known as those of Sims; his speculum, without which many operations would be impossible; his depressor, his wire-twister, his shield, his tenacula, his scissors, etc., etc. And from this fountain-head go out all over the land and beyond the sea the precepts which he originated and promulgated, carried away by hundreds of professional visitors to the numerous operations which are there performed, and spread by the house-staff, as year by year they graduate and begin practice for themselves, and by the assistant surgeons, among

which latter the writer was for several years proud to be enrolled.

During his sojourn in Europe, Dr. Sims had abundant opportunity to demonstrate his peculiar methods of operating, and the successes which he obtained both in those operations which first brought his name prominently before the profession—vesico-vaginal fistula—and in the minor operations for dysmenorrhea and sterility with which his name was long identified, brought him so prominently forward that honors and riches soon poured in upon him. Numerous decorations were conferred on him, and he had but to show himself in a European city to find himself overwhelmed with professional engagements. This was particularly the case after the appearance of his book on “Uterine Surgery,” in 1866, which was soon translated into German and French, and made an unmistakable sensation. This book carried so plainly on every page the impress of originality; the ideas were so fresh, the suggestions so novel and bold, the style so engaging and eloquent, that every one was carried away with it, and all over the world progressive minds began to put its teachings to the test. It may truly be said that this work of Sims made a revolution in modern gynecological practice. The era of what must properly be called “modern” gynecology, that is, *operative* gynecology, dates, so far, at least, as the world outside of the New York Woman’s Hospital is concerned, from the year 1866. Many of Sims’ views have remained uncontested or unchanged, others have been modified, and others again disproved. But the fact must always be admitted that the *impulse of active surgical interference* given by him to the, before him, largely conservative treatment of the diseases of women, has resulted in the enormous advances which gynecology has made in the last fifteen years. And while this statement applies with more force to this country, where new ideas and bold measures are more readily accepted, it is true also to a large extent of Europe, where (chiefly in England and Germany) many able and dexterous surgeons are now vying with each other in widening the path first traced for them by Sims. In this connection it may not be unfitting to mention one man who aided more than any other in introducing Sims’ ideas into Germany by translating his book into that language, namely, the late Herman Beigel, of London,



afterwards of Vienna, himself subsequently the author of an excellent text-book on gynecology, and a monograph on sterility.

Spending his time chiefly between his favorite Paris and London, and constantly adding to his fame, Sims again came prominently before the world in another capacity in 1870, when, as surgeon-in-chief of the Anglo-American Ambulance, he transferred his skill from the gentler to the stronger sex, and after the battle of Sedan contributed largely to the care of the wounded. It was here that the writer, who, as a boy, had repeatedly met Dr. Sims, and who, while assistant to Scanzoni, had eagerly read Sims' book, again heard his name mentioned by men who had just parted from him; for, on the entry of that portion of the German army with which the writer was serving as surgeon into Sedan, by the merest chance he missed meeting Sims, who only the day before had left on his return to Paris. During his sojourn in Europe, Sims was consulted by many ladies of high degree, and one empress and numerous princesses, I am informed, availed themselves of his skill.

Returned to this country in 1871, for three years Sims carried on a large private practice, to which the severance of his connection with the Woman's Hospital in 1874 allowed him to devote all his time. In 1875, he was elected President of the American Medical Association, and delivered one of his characteristic addresses on the prevention and regulation of syphilis in America, which disease he proposed to limit, and gradually eradicate, by the enforcement of strict sanitary inspection of emigrant vessels and houses of ill-repute.

Dr. Sims was one of the founders of the American Gynecological Society, and in 1880 received the well-merited honor of its presidency. A severe, almost fatal, attack of pleuro-pneumonia in the winter of 1880-81 rendered him unable to attend to his labors for nearly a year; indeed, it was feared at one time that he would never recover sufficiently to resume practice. But his wonderful vitality asserted itself a second time (a first apparently fatal illness having prostrated him thirty years previously), and after a sojourn in the South and a summer and winter in Europe he returned to this country almost entirely restored to health.

During the last two years of his life, he made repeated trips abroad, spending the winter partly in Rome and partly in Paris.



He was about to return to Rome again, having engaged his passage for November 17th, when, apparently in robust health, he was seized with dyspnea at 3 o'clock on the morning of November 13th while in bed working on his autobiography, and when his son, Dr. Harry Sims, reached his bedside, he expired without a word. The autopsy revealed atheromatous degeneration of the coronary arteries and a fatty heart.

To properly estimate the position occupied by James Marion Sims in the department of gynecology (with obstetrics his name can scarcely be said to be identified), we must go back thirty years and compare the science, and, above all, the practice of that specialty, as it was then, with the same practice as it now exists. Vaginal injections, cauterizations of the cervix, and applications to the vagina through the imperfect plurivalve and tubular specula then alone used, constituted pretty much all the active therapeutics of gynecology. Through these specula, an operator might be bold enough occasionally to slit the lips of an external os, and a few successful attempts (out of many failures) were made to close a vesico-vaginal fistula. A kindred spirit to the subject of this memoir, it is true, James Y. Simpson, with originality peculiar to himself, and with boldness foreign to his time, dared to go farther, and divide also the internal os. But this example met with few imitators.

But with Sims came the revolution which upset these conservative, do-little methods, and opened wide the field of active, radical, scientific, and rational treatment by surgical means of the diseases and malformations which formerly were merely trifled with, and left unrelieved. As the promulgator of a new system in gynecological therapeutics, Sims may truly, to use the term of the clergyman who delivered his funeral oration, be looked upon as an "apostle." I will not assert that some of his own doctrines and methods, as well as those of his followers, are not erroneous, exaggerated, or unfounded; that, in fact, as the conservative gynecologists of the present day delight in claiming, there is not now too great a tendency to use the knife, and too little reliance on the "powers of nature," and on the "curative influence of time." But I insist that gynecology, as a specialty, exists only since its chief tendency has become a surgical one, that its greatest triumphs (without disparagement to the patient labors of previous gynecologists)

have been achieved with the scissors, knife, and needle, and that this tendency owes its origin chiefly to the genius of Sims.

In this connection, I may say that it has always seemed to me that his greatest achievement was the perfection and popularization of his duckbill speculum and the methods of examination and operation through it. (He cannot really be said to have invented the principle, although he doubtless discovered it independently, because the idea of a perineal retractor had been advocated by Ulrich, of Vienna, and Simon, then of Rostock, before Sims began his investigations.) The use of the silver-wire suture, by which the suture of deep-seated parts was facilitated, and the long retention of the sutures permitted, seems to me but a minor merit, since silk can be, and has been, successfully employed by many gynecologists for these same operations.

The estimate placed by Sims himself on his work is conveyed in a letter received by the writer on October 10th, 1883, acknowledging the receipt of a reprint of an address on "Specialism in Medicine," delivered before the Medical Class of Dartmouth College, August 2d, 1882. In this address, the writer takes occasion to say that "it is only since the invention and popularization of Marion Sims' peculiar methods of examination and operation that gynecology, as a distinct specialty by itself, can be said to exist. Certainly, within the quarter of a century which has elapsed since that discovery of Sims, the specialty of gynecology has made more rapid strides, and attained greater results than during all the preceding ages. . . . Récamier, Simpson, and Sims . . . may properly be called the fathers of modern gynecology. And to the men who, while not forgetting the precepts of the older teachers, have accepted and improved upon the new methods devised by Sims, may the recent great advances and present high position of the specialty be attributed." Dr. Sims writes as follows:

267 MADISON AVE., OCTOBER 10TH, 1883.

Thanks, my dear Dr. Mundé, for copy of your specialism lecture. I had read it in the *Atlantic Medical Journal*.

Your estimate of the value of my labors and of their place in the growth of gynecology will, I am sure, be the verdict of your followers.



It is given to but few men to live to see themselves understood and their labors appreciated.

Again thanking you, believe me,

Yours most truly,

J. MARION SIMS.

Sims was not a voluminous writer, and did not always confine himself to his specialty. His only book was the "Uterine Surgery," which he was engaged in re-writing when ill-health concluded his labor on it, unfortunately, as it proved, forever. It is a great pity this book could not have received the corrections and amendations of an increased experience and a more matured judgment, for doubtless much would have been altered and improved which now still stands as "Sims' practice."

Of his pamphlets, one of the first was on "Silver Sutures in Surgery;" then "Trismus Nascentium;" "The Microscope in the Sterile Condition;" "The Discovery of Anesthesia;" "Septicemia in its Relations to Ovariectomy;" "Intrauterine Fibroids;" and more recently, "The Treatment of Epithelioma of the Cervix Uteri" (*AM. JOURN. OBST.*, July, 1879); and "Treatment of Stenosis of the Cervix Uteri" (*Am. Gyn. Trans.*, vol. iii., 1878); "Chole-cystotomy;" "Treatment of Gunshot Wounds of the Abdomen" (called forth by the discussion on President Garfield's wound), and some other minor papers.

His style of writing, even more than his delivery in speaking, was fluent, eloquent, simple, and incisive, bearing in every sentence the impress of enthusiasm and honest conviction. It was this one characteristic of the man, his evident honesty of purpose, which attracted and convinced many who otherwise would have doubted the wisdom of his bold and original methods.

As an operator, Sims was bold, quick, dexterous, and graceful, and few can surpass him, even now, in the ease and certainty with which he performed the operations for which his peculiar instruments were devised. He performed many capital operations, both ovariectomy, and laparotomy for large fibroid tumors; but he never aspired to the name of a voluminous ovariectomist. But he kept himself fully informed on the modern improvements in these operations, and only three years ago spent some time in Edinburgh studying Keith's method,



an interesting sketch of which he wrote for the *AM. JOUR. OF OBSTET.*, vol. xiii., 1880.

Personally, Dr. Sims was one of the most amiable and lovable of men. A genial, hearty manner, so common to the sons of the "sunny South," a certain sympathetic charm of voice and action, which few could resist, and a frankness and kindness, especially pleasing to the young men who called to ask his counsel; a warm-hearted, impulsive nature, easy to arouse to anger, and ready to melt in tears; forgiving, gentle, playful, even, at times; modest and unassuming; in fact, a nature of which even the faults seemed lovable—these were the characteristics of J. Marion Sims.

That these attributes not only exercised a powerful influence over his professional brethren, but also endeared him to his patients, by whom he was adored, is evident.

He was essentially a family man, cared little for social triumphs, was sparing and frugal in his habits, using neither wine nor tobacco, and devoted what leisure his professional duties gave him to study and literary work. Of late years, his large practice and, at times, failing health, prevented his competing with his contemporaries in the literary contest which is the aim of most of our present gynecologists. I fear many an unfinished article will be found among his papers.

Although not a "society man," Sims delighted in extending the hospitality of his home to all who presented themselves favorably to his notice, and the entertainments which he gave to distinguished visitors were lavish in their profuseness. He was generous to the poor, and his name is missed on but few of the many subscription lists for charitable purposes which circulate continually in New York.

While demanding liberal reward for his services to the wealthy, many a poor woman (often, no doubt, poor only by her own statements) benefited by his kindness of heart, and marvelled at the smallness of his fee. That this kindness was often abused, goes without saying.

Rather above medium height, slender, always cleanly shaven, with thick hair and bushy eyebrows; clad in black broadcloth, and scrupulously neat in his attire; always polite, courteous, and quietly dignified, Sims never failed to attract attention. The portrait accompanying this memoir is from a photograph

taken in England three months before his death, and is an excellent likeness. I am indebted for it to his son, Dr. Harry Marion-Sims, of New York.

It certainly has not been my intention to indulge in a fulsome eulogy of the great man whose loss we all deplore. While knowing him well, although meeting him but occasionally, the writer has not felt compelled by personal obligations to exceed the bounds of respect due the eminence of the man or his memory in preparing this sketch. It is simply a modest tribute paid to one of the most genial men whom the writer has had the fortune to meet, and the greatest gynecologist whom America has produced.

The name and deeds of Sims are immortal!

PAUL F. MUNDE.



