

MISCELLANEOUS.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF PHILADELPHIA PHYSICIANS TO GENERAL LITERATURE.

BY ROSS R. BUNTING, M.D. (PARIS).

IT has been said that "of the three learned professions that of medicine is the least learned." There would appear to be some reason for this assertion, at least as regards American physicians, if the following remarks taken from an address delivered by Dr. Traill Green before the Pennsylvania State Medical Society are true: "On the social standing of physicians and surgeons in the United States recently discussed, President Elliott observes that an American physician may be and often is a coarse and uncultivated person devoid of intellectual interest outside of his calling, and quite unable either to speak or write his mother tongue with accuracy. What wonder then, he asks, if the degree of doctor in medicine has not heretofore been universally accepted as a passport to refined society." We would be inclined to infer from these opinions of our profession, that physicians have contributed so little to general literature on account of deficient education. We think there may be other causes to explain why so few of our craft are distinguished in the field of letters. The practice of medicine necessitating the physician's frequent absence from home, and from the fact that so much of his time is broken in upon by professional calls at any time of the day or night, added to these the great responsibilities incident to a profession where the health, eye, and frequently the life, of a fellow creature is at stake, would not naturally be as conducive to studious habits as the professions of law and theology, whose members can always command a certain amount of time from their professional work. Consequently, of the many writers who have followed literature as a profession, quite a number have been originally lawyers or clergymen. Dr. John Brown, in his *Horae Subsecivæ*, speaks regretfully of the days of Sydenham, Arbuthnot, and Gregory "when a physician fed, enlarged, and quickened his entire nature; when he lived in the world of letters as a freeholder and revered the ancients, while at the same time he pushed on among his fellows and lived in the present, believing that his profession and his patients need not suffer though his *horae subsecivæ* were devoted occasionally to miscellaneous thinking and reading." Samuel Warren, in early life a practising physician, the author of that charming novel, "The Diary of a Late London Physician," says in his introduction: "It is somewhat strange that a class of men who can command such interesting, extensive, and instructive materials as the experience of most members of the medical profession teems with, should have hitherto made so few contributions to the stock of polite and popular literature. The Bar, the Church, the Army, the Navy, and the Stage have all of

them spread the volumes of their secret history before the prying gaze of the public; while that of the medical profession has remained hitherto with scarcely an exception a sealed book. And yet there are no members of society whose pursuits lead them to listen more frequently to what has been exquisitely termed 'the still sad music of humanity.' What instances of noble, though unostentatious heroism—of calm and patient fortitude, under the most intolerable anguish that can wring and torture these poor bodies of ours; what appalling combinations of moral and physical wretchedness, laying prostrate the proudest energies of humanity; what diversified manifestations of character; what singular and touching passages of domestic history must have come under the notice of the intelligent practitioner of physic!" According to Dr. B. W. Richardson, there would appear to have been some reason for the few contributions of our profession to polite literature. He remarks, "In England for one century at least, there has been so strong a prejudice against the professional skill of 'learned doctors,' that the physician who has written a clever poem or made a great discovery in science, geography, or aught else, has too often written therewith his last prescription. The shock administered to the public by Charles Bell whenever he announced a new physiological argument was so severe in its reaction upon his practice, that he was obliged to administer *quam primum* a 'practical restorative in the shape of a clinical lecture.'" In recent times this reproach cannot be cast upon our profession, for the popular prejudice against "learned doctors" is fast disappearing. Sir Henry Thompson, the great English surgeon, has written two novels under the *nom de plume* of "Pen Oliver;" Benjamin Ward Richardson is the author of a novel just published. Dr. John Brown's Essays compare favorably with that form of composition in any language. In our country we could name Oliver Wendell Holmes, Weir Mitchell, William A. Hammond, author of several novels, and Dr. John Ordronaux whose Latin hymn entitled "Cardiphonia," would be sufficient to give him a permanent place in the literature of any country. We have attempted in our essay to show that the representatives of our profession in this city by their occasional contributions to light literature, both in prose and verse, have justly earned the title of a scholarly profession. In order to relieve the monotony which would result from a mere list of names with an enumeration of their principal works, we have given extracts from our selected authors, with the hope of giving interest to a subject which at the first blush would appear wanting in attractiveness.

The first to be mentioned in point of time, and the one universally admitted to be among the foremost of American physicians, is Benjamin Rush (1745-1813). This many-sided man, physician, professor, statesman, and philanthropist, as would naturally be supposed, has not failed to contribute something to general literature. We give a list, only a partial one, of his works. "A Volume of Essays, Literary, Moral and Philosophical," collected and published in one volume, 1798, comprising, as the title implies, very various subjects, as "Of the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic," "Observations on the Study of Ancient Languages with Hints of a Plan of Education without them Accommodated to a Republic," "A Defence of the Bible as a School Book," "An Inquiry into the Consistency of Oaths with Reason and Christianity," "Thoughts on Common

Sense." "Observations upon the Influence of Tobacco upon Health, Morals and Property"—and a number of biographical notices. "Sermons to Young Men on Temperance and Health, 1770." "Two Essays on Negro Slavery." "Four Letters to the People of Pennsylvania on the Constitution of 1776;" also his vehement denunciation of the Test Law. Rush's style is natural and easy, fluent and perspicuous, lively and vigorous; his idiom is pure, for he knew enough of both ancient and modern tongues to guard himself against impurities in our polyglot English. In every work of his there is much to praise and little to blame; his beauties are many, of deformities he has not one, as Johnson wrote on Goldsmith's tomb, *nihil quod tetiget non ornavit*, whatever he touched upon he was sure to adorn; hence his works abound in what Lucretius calls the *aurea dicta*, those golden sentences which every reader of Rush will stop to admire and even commit to memory." (2)

Thomas Syng Dorsey (1783-1818), Professor of Materia Medica in the University of Pennsylvania from 1813 to 1818. His literary contributions appear chiefly in the "Portfolio" published in this city under the editorial supervision of Joseph Dennie, and at that time the only literary periodical of any note in the United States. The poem entitled "Reflections on the Incomprehensibility of God," written in 1805, when the author was in the 22d year of his age, embodies uncommon vigor of thought and power of description, and breathes throughout a feeling of piety worthy of Dante and Milton. (3)

John D. Godman (1794-1830.), "Dr. Godman published a number of interesting and eloquent introductory lectures and public addresses delivered on different occasions, which were collected in a volume some time before his death. Among the latest productions of his pen are his essays entitled 'Rambles of a Naturalist,' which were written during the intervals of extreme pain and debility. For strong, lively, and accurate description they have scarcely been surpassed. The volume of his 'Public Addresses' has been greatly admired for the pure and elevated sentiments they contain, as well as for their high wrought eloquence, in which respect they rank among the finest compositions of that class in our language. The fine imagination and deep enthusiasm of Dr. Godman occasionally burst forth in impassioned poetry. He wrote verse and prose with almost equal facility, and had he lived and enjoyed leisure to prune the exuberances of his style and to bestow the last polish upon his labors, he would have ranked as one of the greatest masters of our language, both in regard to the curious felicity and the strength and clearness of his diction." (4)

Nathaniel Chapman (1780-1853) edited "Burke's Speeches," and contributed a number of articles to the literary magazines.

Samuel George Morton (1799-1851). This author's literary contributions consist entirely of poetry of which he wrote enough to fill a small volume, although none of his productions have been published. The longest poems are entitled "The Legend of Cordova" and "The Death of Talma," an Indian story. He also wrote quite a number of minor pieces, all of which are worthy of publication.

The following portion of one of his minor poems is given as an example of

his style. The writer must express his acknowledgments to Dr. Thomas G. Morton, who has kindly loaned him the manuscript volume from which this extract was taken :—

THE MERMAID'S SONG.

Deep beneath the azure wave
Of the boundless Indian sea,
Is the rude sequestered cave
Where I hold my jubilee.

Joyful are those dripping halls,
Where the sun's imprisoned light
Shines upon the coral walls
Like the meteor stars of night.

Robert Montgomery Bird (1803-1854). "His tragedies, *Gladiator*, *Spartacus*, *Oraloosa*, and *The Broker of Bogota* were successful on the stage. Between 1834 and 1839 he published the novels, *Calavar, or the Knight of the Conquest*, a *Romance of Mexico*; *The Infidel, or The Fall of Mexico*; *The Haws of Hawk Hollow*; *Shepperd Lee*; *Nick of the Woods*; and the *Adventures of Robin Day*. He also published *Peter Pilgrim*, a collection of his magazine articles." (5)

(To be continued.)

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ELISHA KENT KANE (1820-1857) is the author of the following works : "The United States Grinnell Expedition in Search of Sir John Franklin during the years 1850-1851." "Arctic Explorations: the Second Grinnell Expedition in search of Sir John Franklin, 1853-'54-'55." Of the latter work Charles Sumner says : "It is a book of rarest interest and instruction, written with simplicity, ease, and directness ; possessing all the attractions of romantic adventure, elevated by scientific discovery, and as we sit at our warm firesides bringing under our eyes a distant portion of the globe, which throughout all time until now has slumbered unknown locked in primeval ice." "In 1500 pages of book matter he never makes a quotation to assist himself in expression except one from Bunyan ; and even that is used for its allegorical effect as much as for its beauty and power. He wrote his own poetry in the higher form of prose." (6)

John Kearsley Mitchell (1798-1858) wrote two quite lengthy poems entitled "Indecision" and "St. Helena ;" also a number of miscellaneous pieces, all of which are of sufficient excellence to give him a permanent position in the poetical literature of this country. "Indecision," his longest poem, "intended," says his friend the late Joseph C. Neal, in a biographical notice in *Graham's Magazine*, "to convey a moral of the most useful character by proving,

"That indecision marks its paths with tears,
That want of candor darkens future years ;
That perfect truth is virtue's safest friend ;
And that to shun the wrong is better than to mend." (7)

Professor Samuel Henry Dickson says of him in an Inaugural Lecture: "His cultivated imagination and practised ear led him to facile versification; and his fine taste gave neatness and the charm of musical diction to his productions in this kind."

Henry Bond (1790-1859) wrote "The Genealogies and History of Watertown," which is almost unrivalled by any similar work ever published in this country. This remarkable book, which attained its present magnitude from a very small beginning, originated in the preparation of the Genealogy of the Bond Family which Dr. Bond had begun as early as 1840. The work was begun and as it advanced the author seemed to appreciate the importance of the researches in which he was engaged, and then the idea occurred to him of making it general in its character, so as to include all the early families of his native town. He believed that "Genealogies," besides gratifying a natural and enlightened curiosity, may exercise a salutary influence, tending to maintain, in their social position, families already elevated, and to elevate the lowly. (8)

Caspar Wistar (1801-1867) was a man of versatile talents, ready wit, and facile pen. A member of the Society of Friends from birth (whose tenets he valued and espoused), his academic education was received in the schools of that sect. Of a precocious mind, fond of reading and acquiring knowledge, the influence of refined parents and particularly of a devoted older sister had much to do in developing a love of literature and a pure taste. It was regretted by Dr. Wistar's friends who knew him best that his literary efforts were only of an irregular and momentary kind. Verses of no mean order formed a place in his social correspondence from time to time, and it is known that he occasionally contributed both prose and poetry to certain secular and religious sheets of the day.

Charles D. Meigs (1792-1869). In regard to this writer it has been well said: "It is not at all wonderful that fellows of colleges in England or industrious Germans who have set apart their lives to fathom all the lore of time should become learned; but that a man upon whom not learning, but a harassing profession had the first claim, should reach such a height of erudition is truly a sight rare to behold. There can be few men in active professions in this country who can show a small part of the learning that was my grandfather's, for he was thoroughly versed in all the great histories of the old and new writers. Livy and Sallust, Thucydides, Guicciardini and Gibbon, he knew them all. The ways of science were not hidden from him. The scant shreds of mystery that have been picked up in Egypt, the dark and nonsensical beginnings of the Greeks, the dreary wilderness of the Arabians, and the copious fields of natural magic that abounded in the middle ages, the great revolution planned by Bacon, the discoveries wrought by Newton, and the further unveiling and prying into the secrets of nature that have gone on in our time, all were open to him, and he saw the worth of each of them." (9)

The only work of a strictly literary character left by Dr. C. D. Meigs is a translation of a novel by Count de Gobineau entitled "L'Abbaye de Typhaines," a tale of the twelfth century. In a letter to the author the translator says of this work: "Your story is a pictograph, a broad and beautiful translation of the

inner life, the sentiments, aspirations, and actions of people of every social rank high and low alike, in Western Europe at the epoch of the Crusades; an epoch most interesting to every reader, not only as to its romance, but by the real influence it excited and continues to exert on the condition of the entire Christian world."

Robley Dunglison (1798-1869). "Dr. Dunglison was no ordinary man, indeed in more than one sense of the term he was an illustrious man; a great scholar, an accomplished teacher, a profound physiologist, an acute thinker, a facile writer, a lucid, erudite, and abundant author. No physician on this Continent has surpassed him in the extent of his erudition, in the variety of his information, or in the magnitude of his labors. Dunglison wrote not only rapidly but well, possessing singular facility of diction and power of utterance. His style was clear and classical, the construction of his sentences harmonious, the arrangement of his matter orderly and systematic. Always perfect master of his subject; and thoroughly versed in the art of composition, it was no labor for him to adapt his language to the comprehension of the dullest intellect. He was one of the founders and editors of the *Virginia Literary Museum and Journal of Belles-Lettres, Arts and Sciences*, a weekly periodical issued at Charlottesville in the interest of the University. Dr. Dunglison furnished many of the leading and more elaborate articles—most of these articles were of a non-professional character and displayed unusual learning and research, as Fashion in Dress in England at the Commencement of the Seventeenth Century; Onomatopoeia; Modern Improved System of Road-making; Certain Ceremonies Connected with the Dead; Anthropology; Blondel and Richard the Lion Heart; English Provincialisms; Penitentiary Discipline; Universities; Legends of the English Lakes; Superstition; Americanisms; Early German Poetry; Etymological History; Sanscrit Language; Ancient and Modern Gymnasia; Cradle of Mankind; English Orthœpy; Canals of the Ancients and Jeffersoniana. Quite a number were of an exhaustive character." (9½)

Samuel Henry Dickson (1798-1872). "Dr. Dickson wrote on literary and current topics, and on several of those subjects which are on the border land between the public domain and the domain of pure science—the following are his chief works: Essays on Life, Sleep and Pain; On Memory; On Pleasure; Essays on Slavery; Orations and Addresses. The *Æsthetics of Suicide*." (10)

Henry Klapp (1819-1873). "In his early manhood Dr. Henry M. Klapp had quite a literary reputation, both his poetical and prose compositions appearing in Philadelphia magazines and newspapers. He was a regular contributor to the "*Dollar Newspaper*," and one of his productions took the first prize offered by the publishers for the best story founded on the American Revolution." (11)

William Mason Turner (1835-1877) is the author of "El Khuds, The Holy," giving an account of his Oriental observations. The following is a list of his principal novels which appeared in *Saturday Night*, *Saturday Journal*, and the *Western World*: "Under Bail;" "Ruby Ring;" "Silver Heels;"

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CASPAR MORRIS (1805-1884.) Of this writer it is said, "He kept himself constantly informed of the best that was going on in the world of science and literature, and was himself no mean poet, though none of his writings in that vein would he ever publish. A small volume of 'Heart Voices and Home Songs,' printed for private circulation, is all that remains." In the Transactions of the College of Physicians, of Philadelphia, 1888, there are four selections en-

titled "Heart's Desires," "The Weeping Willow," "To a Friend in Affliction," and "Dew Drops." In these Transactions will also be found a poem, "Lines to Flying Fish," composed during a voyage to India in 1827. All of these poems are well worthy of publication. (14)

Samuel Drake Gross (1805-1884). The principal literary works of this author are "Lives of Eminent American Physicians and Surgeons of the Nineteenth Century;" "A History of American Medical Literature;" and an "Autobiography with Sketches of his Contemporaries," edited by his sons, and published since his death. He also published numerous biographical sketches of physicians, mostly in the form of lectures to his college classes.

Squier Littell (1803-1886). "Dr. Littell's intellectual activity was not confined to medicine only, he roamed over the whole field of literature; he was a great reader and gifted with such a memory that he could repeat whole pages of poetry, and quote with the greatest ease long passages of famous prose. He was very fond of poetry, and himself possessed an easy facility of versification. Among his papers were many sonnets and odes, and among the lighter compositions were hymns breathing the highest spirit of devotion. Of the "Dies Iræ," the grand old mediæval hymn, there were no less than twelve metrical translations." (15)

W. S. W. Ruschenberger. The following list includes the contributions of this author to general literature: "Three Years on the Pacific, Containing notices of Brazil, Chili, Bolivia, etc., in 1831, 1832, 1834," 2 vols., London, 1835; "Narrative of a Voyage around the World during the Years 1835, '36 and '37; including a Narrative of an Embassy to the Sultan of Muscat and the King of Siam," 2 vols., with fine illustrations; London, 1838; "Notes and Contributions during a Voyage to Brazil and China in the year 1848," (Reprinted from the *Southern Literary Messenger* for 1852-53); Richmond, Va., 1854; a new American from the third revised London edition, with notes and a glossary of "Physical Geography," by Mary Somerville; Philadelphia, 1853; "A Notice of the Origin, Progress and present Condition of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia," 1860; "An Account of the Institution and Progress of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia during a hundred years from January, 1787;" "On the Value of Original Scientific Research," *Penn Monthly Magazine*, Philadelphia, November, 1873. Dr. Ruschenberger has also written a number of biographical notices.

Alfred Stillé. About 1830-36 Dr. Stillé contributed in prose and verse to *Godey's Lady's Book*; and about the same time to the *Zilosophic Magazine*, published by a literary society of the University of Pennsylvania. In 1887, under the pseudonym of Dr. Ellits, he published "Othello and Desdemona. Their Characters and the Manner of Desdemona's Death."

Henry Hartshorne. Dr. Hartshorne has published a volume of poetry entitled "A Bundle of Sonnets and other Poems." Of the poems we would particularly mention "The Countersign," "The Burnished Shield," "The Quaker Meeting House," "Alma Mater," spoken before the Alumni Association of Haverford College, 1858, "A Song of Manhood." Of sonnets "To-Day," "Retrospection," "In Vita Mors," "The Thought of God."

James E. Garretson, under the *nom de plume* of John Darby, has written "Odd Hours of a Physician," "Thinkers and Thinking," "Two Thousand Years After," "Brushland," "Hours with John Darby," "Nineteenth Century Sense," "The Paradox of Spiritualism." Of Brushland a writer remarks: "It is not a treatise on medicine but contains hints to cure many diseases, some not named in doctors' books; nor is it an agricultural work, but if the farmer reads it he may learn to root out more weeds than grow on his farm." The Paradox of Spiritualism was thus criticised in a recent journal: "Cheery, with the geniality of a healthy moral and physical nature. Every chapter of this new volume quickens one's intelligence, and there is something clever on every page. If the author had devoted his life wholly to literature he would have won recognition not as a profound philosopher, but as one of the healthiest and most delightful scholars and humorists."

J. T. Rothrock has written "Vacation Cruising in Chesapeake and Delaware Bays." This book is written in a charming style containing much information for the amateur yachtsman.

Thomas Wistar. This writer is essentially a lyrical poet. His verses exhibit a softness, a rhythm and a tenderness of feeling, naturally adapted to the lyre. We have heard him declare that most of his verses were penned to satisfy an innate longing for music in his soul. Writing occasionally on such everyday topics as have impressed his emotional nature, he has succeeded in throwing a charm over the commonest themes. Whether he pays tribute to a deceased friend or to a faithful dog; whether he sings a "Summer's Requiem" or an "Autumn Song"; whether it be his aim "to point a moral or adorn a tale," his verses all have a pleasing finish and freshness of sentiment which make them edifying without cant, and subjective without a taint of morbidness. Of an affectionate and sympathetic nature, the sentiments of pleasure and sorrow, of love and sympathy have entered largely into his verses. Many of Dr. Wistar's poetical contributions have been published in the *Public Ledger*. His longest poem is entitled "The Dispensary Doctor."

Samuel Weir Mitchell. Dr. Mitchell's literary productions are quite numerous and include three forms of composition—romance, essay, and poetry. The following is a list of his works: "Hephzibah Guinness," "Thee and Thou," "A Draft on the Bank of Spain," "In War Time," "Roland Blake," "Nurse and Patient and Camp Cure," "Doctor and Patient," "Prince, Little Boy, and other Tales out of Fairy Land," "The Hill of Stones and other Poems," "A Masque and other Poems." "'In War Time' is an eminently sane and delicate interpretation of the lives of a group of people each of whom is made admirably real by a succession of minute and carefully studied touches. In the local setting of the story the author blends all the details with a completely harmonious effect. The scene is laid in Germantown and the life depicted is that of a circle calmly conscious of the possession of hereditary opulence and culture and the corresponding sentiments and obligations. The feminine element predominates and receives the sympathetic treatment of a perfect *intimité*. The distinction of repose is not absent from the style or from the movement of the story, which, as

will have been seen, invites a more attentive reading than the ordinary novel is expected to receive." (16)

"Dr. Mitchell tells his story of Roland Blake with a quiet power and a skilful interpretation of characters and motives that will at once win and hold the attention of thoughtful readers. Everywhere are discoverable signs of clear-eyed perception, earnest purpose, and ideal standards of thought and action. Roland Blake is to be commended for all these qualities and for a certain wholesome purity of sentiment not easy to analyze, and which gives to the book a tone and atmosphere entirely its own."

"'The Hill of Stories' is not so bare of beauty as its title, being a pleasantly versified tale of the Tennysonian order. In the 'Camp Fire Lyrics' Dr. Mitchell has given some vivid glimpses of forest scenery, accompanied by a vein of clever, intellectual, rather Heinesque sentiment." (17)

Our list of Philadelphia physicians who have contributed to general literature is by no means an exhaustive one; nor does it imply that because a physician has not written a novel, a literary essay or a verse of poetry, he is therefore to be classed among the ignorant and uneducated; for, we could give the names of scores of distinguished physicians of the past and present of our own city who have written nothing at all on literary subjects, and yet are educated men, with refined tastes, well versed in belles-lettres.

REFERENCES.

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