

Notice of the life and professional services of William R. Grant, M.D : a discourse, at the opening of the lectures in the Medical Department of Pennsylvania College, for the session of 1852-'53 / by Henry S. Patterson.

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NOTICE
OF THE
LIFE AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICES
OF
WILLIAM R. GRANT, M. D.

A Discourse,
AT THE OPENING OF THE LECTURES
IN THE MEDICAL DEPARTMENT OF PENNSYLVANIA COLLEGE,
FOR THE SESSION OF 1852-'53.

✓
BY HENRY S. PATTERSON, M. D.

PROFESSOR OF MATERIA MEDICA AND THERAPEUTICS.

Published by Order of the Faculty.

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1852.

Extract from the Minutes of the Medical Faculty of Pennsylvania College.

March 29th, 1852. The following preamble and resolutions were unanimously adopted:—

Whereas, It has pleased the Supreme Disposer of events to remove from our midst our beloved friend and colleague, DR. WILLIAM R. GRANT, Professor of Anatomy in this school since 1843 : therefore

Resolved, That this Faculty is deeply sensible of the loss it has sustained in the decease of one so long endeared to its members by his purity of heart, his amiability of character, his uniform tenderness and courtesy, his professional zeal and ability, and his devotion to the duties of the chair of which he was the incumbent.

Resolved, That, in token of respect to the memory of Professor Grant, the Faculty will attend his funeral in a body; and that Professor Patterson be appointed to prepare a biographical sketch of the deceased, to be delivered as an introductory lecture to the session of 1852--53.

October 16th, 1852. On motion, it was

Resolved, That the thanks of the Faculty be presented to Professor Patterson, for his faithful and eloquent tribute to the memory of the late Professor Grant, and that a copy of the same be asked for publication.

D. GILBERT, M. D.,

REGISTRAR.

DISCOURSE.

GENTLEMEN:

It has been my pleasant duty, on many previous occasions, to receive again the Medical Class of Pennsylvania College, after its summer recess, with a heartfelt greeting, full of joy and hope. Pleasant indeed it has been to press again the hands of the pupils from whom we had been temporarily separated, as well as to receive with cordial welcome those who for the first time placed themselves under our care. The same feelings exist and seek their due expression now, but they are saddened by the memory of an event unforeseen by all of us at our parting. Over our hitherto bright sky rests a sombre cloud, and we all feel its influence. We are no longer the unbroken band that met you in former years. The spoiler has been in our midst, and has stricken down, in the flower of his age, one who was endeared to all our hearts by many virtues. Scarcely had we parted with you before the inexorable fiat went forth, and one of our number was taken from us to meet us here no more forever. Even at the moment when some of you were reaching your distant homes, with all their happy associations, this Faculty were following to his last resting-place him who for nine years had filled the chair of Anatomy in their body. Such is the event whose gloom rests upon us now, and we doubt not that you feel it as we do. We should be false to our own feelings as well as to our sense of duty, if this first hour of our re-union were devoted to any other topic than the expression of our respect for his memory and our regret for his loss.

Let me then occupy your attention on this occasion with a tribute of regard to our departed friend. In so doing, I fondly trust that I may not only be enabled to do justice to his merits, but also to render a service to you. Blessed is the memory of the just. It is a sweet savour before the Almighty, and it doubly blesses them that cherish it. My object will be accomplished if, in directing your attention to the history of the just man, now made perfect, I can awake in your hearts a determination to follow in his footsteps and cultivate the principles which filled his last hours with a peace that passeth all human understanding.

WILLIAM ROBERTSON GRANT, was born at East River in the neighbouring British province of Nova Scotia, on the 22nd of December 1811. His paternal grandfather was a native of Inverness, in Scotland, who came early to the province and took up the original grant of a large tract of land in the neighborhood of Pictou. His mother, whose maiden name was Robertson, was a native of Scotland. By his parents, who were pious and consistent members of the Presbyterian church of Scotland, he was educated in the strictest principles of that rigid denomination. Early destined for the church by their anxious care, he received the best education the province afforded. His religious principles necessarily excluded him from King's College, the only degree-conferring institution in the province, and in which only members of the church of England could consistently graduate. But the unwearying attention to education, which has always characterized the Scottish people, as well in their emigrations as at home, was displayed here also. In the Pictou Academy, the Presbyterians of Nova Scotia provided for their children all the substantial advantages of a classical and collegiate education, if they could not legally obtain for them the Baccalaureate. Here it was that young Grant received his early education, on the completion of which he entered, in accordance with the wishes of his parents, the divinity class of the same institution.

It was at this period that his attention was first directed to the study of medicine. With the circumstances that produced

this important change in his career I am unacquainted. It certainly was not from any loss of faith in the tenets of his church or any weakening of his attachment to its principles. To his last hour, it numbered him among its most consistent and devoted members and office-bearers.

Perhaps his peculiarly sensitive and diffident nature shrunk from the high responsibilities of a station which seemed to him so sacred and awful, or, more probably, he had the rare discernment to perceive the calling to which his powers and disposition more peculiarly adapted him. Be this as it may, his resolution was taken, and, in the autumn of 1834, he relinquished the study of theology, and entered, as a medical student, the office of Dr. Alexander Macdonald, a highly respectable practitioner of Antigonish. This gentleman has since testified his regard for and confidence in Dr. Grant by sending his son here to study under the paternal care of his former pupil and to receive a degree from this institution. After studying two years under the care of Dr. Macdonald, our friend resolved to complete his medical education at Philadelphia, as the medical metropolis of our continent. He sailed in a vessel from Pictou to New York, and, on the 17th of December 1836, he first entered this city which was to be his home and the scene of his labors and distinction. Immediately on arriving, he matriculated as a pupil of Jefferson Medical College and devoted himself to his studies with the whole energy of his nature. Notwithstanding that his age was already more advanced than that of most of his fellow-pupils, he took three full courses of lectures, applying himself particularly to the cultivation of anatomy, which had for him peculiar charms. In the autumn of 1838, although still an undergraduate, he received from the late Professor Pattison, the flattering appointment of Assistant Demonstrator of Anatomy. Between Grant and his distinguished teacher and principal, there thus arose a close intimacy and sincere friendship, which were never interrupted.

In the spring of 1839, he received the degree of Doctor of Medicine, having submitted a thesis upon *Topical Applications*,

and was almost immediately appointed Demonstrator of Anatomy and Curator of the Museum in Jefferson College. These situations he filled with credit to himself and advantage to his Alma Mater for three years. In the summer of 1842 he resigned them and opened private anatomical rooms in College Avenue;—that location which, first made illustrious by the eloquence and zeal of Godman, has since been regarded as an eminently anatomical quarter, and seems to have become a school of the prophets in that line, furnishing our colleges with able, accomplished and experienced teachers of that difficult science.

Here it was that my personal acquaintance with Dr. Grant and his connection with the members of this Faculty commenced. He was then well established in our city in all his relations. Recognized as an able and promising physician, he was laying the foundation of an extensive practice. Reviving his connection with the branch of the Church of his fathers in our city, he had already (in 1840) been elevated by the congregation of the First Associate Presbyterian Church to the office of a Ruling Elder, a trust seldom reposed in one so young. A citizen of our country, by naturalization, he had still further identified himself with Philadelphia, by a matrimonial alliance with the family of one of our most respectable and influential citizens, Mr. John M'Allister. These circumstances, together with his undisputed reputation, as a learned and successful teacher of anatomy, recommended him to the consideration of a body of medical gentlemen, who were then seeking to establish a summer-school of medicine. Into their association he entered, and they commenced their lectures in the spring of 1843. The first results of this enterprize were not encouraging. Several changes occurred in the association, and in the fall of the same year, Drs. Grant, Darrach, Wiltbank and myself composed its members.

At this time occurred the dissolution of the original Faculty of Pennsylvania College, erected by the withdrawing members of the old Faculty of Jefferson College, with the addition of the late lamented and world-renowned Dr. Samuel George Morton and others. Into the causes of this dissolution it would

now be both painful and irrelevant to inquire. Suffice it to say that the disruption seemed final and the school in danger of perishing. Under these circumstances, the association just referred to made overtures, both to the Trustees and the late Faculty for the re-organization of the school. Some technical difficulty existing as to the right of appointment to the vacant chairs, the new incumbents entered upon possession in virtue of an appointment by the Trustees, confirmed by an instrument signed by a majority of the former Faculty, relinquishing to them and their associates all right and title whatever to the school, its honors and emoluments.

Thus it was that Dr. Grant assumed the responsibilities of Professor of Anatomy in this college, then trembling apparently on the brink of ruin. The documents legalizing the appointment of himself and colleagues were not received until the "introductory week" had commenced. The students who came to the city to attend the lectures of the college, were scattered abroad. Most had gone to other institutions, many of them to other cities. Several graduated the succeeding spring in New York and Baltimore. Desperate as the undertaking seemed to most, it was attempted, and a Faculty of four members carried through the course of lectures with a class of twenty-three pupils. During the session Dr. Grant labored with untiring zeal and energy, delivering six lectures weekly upon Anatomy, and three upon Operative Surgery, while he attended assiduously to the duties of the dissecting room. Before the close of the session, his health, already somewhat impaired, began to fail him, but he persevered to the end. On the 9th of March 1844, the Faculty completed their labors by holding a public commencement in their own lecture room in Filbert street, and before a very limited audience, at which the degree of Doctor of Medicine was conferred upon seven pupils. Shortly afterwards, their number was filled by the appointment of Dr. Gilbert, as Professor of Surgery, and Dr. Atlee, as Professor of Chemistry. The prospect now began to brighten, and the erection of this building, with a class at the last session of one hundred and thirty pupils, displays the result of the arduous labors thus

inauspiciously begun. In these labors, Dr. Grant always bore his full share. Devoted to the interests of the college, he strove earnestly for its establishment and rejoiced in its prosperity.

During all this time, he suffered occasionally from a pulmonary affection, left as the sequela of a previous severe attack of pleuro-pneumonia. He seldom passed through the labors of a session, without suffering one or more of his attacks, which were latterly complicated with evidences of cardiac hypertrophy. He was plainly suffering under serious organic disease, resisted by the powers of a naturally vigorous and sound constitution, as well as by carefully regular and abstemious habit. Both in his practice and in his teaching, he underwent a great amount of fatiguing labor. Of an ardent and enthusiastic temperament, he entered upon the work in hand with his whole might, and prosecuted it with eagerness. During the past session his friends flattered themselves that his health was better than usual. Toward spring he manifested signs of exhaustion and debility, but nothing to prepare us for the change so speedily to occur. As so often happens in long continued chronic illness, the end came upon us suddenly and unexpectedly. Indeed, our friend may be said to have died, like a faithful sentinel of humanity, at his post and with his armour on his back. It was in the discharge of professional duty that his illness was contracted. On the afternoon of Tuesday, March 23d, he was summoned in haste to the aid of a woman who had committed suicide by hanging in the cellar of her own house. He went with speed, entered the damp and chilling atmosphere of the place, while heated with the labor and excitement, and, the people around recoiling from the loathsome object, he raised the heavy body with one arm, while he detached the rope from the neck with the other. Hoping that life might still be restored, he labored long and assiduously in the same cold cellar, before he resigned the unfortunate creature to her irrevocable fate. The evening of the same day he spent at my house, where he seemed much excited and nervously agitated by the horrors of the scene he had just witnessed. His largely sympathetic heart was painfully wrung, and his tender feeling of

humanity shocked by the wretched spectacle of crime and misery he had come through, and whose terrible consequences he had so earnestly but vainly striven to avert. In the course of the night he was seized with chill, and, the next day, was prostrated by a pulmonary attack of unusual violence. The history of his case it is not my place to give, as it will doubtless be made public by one more fully conversant with all its details. No apprehensions of a fatal issue were at first entertained, but it soon became apparent that the remedies used were failing of the desired effect. Drs. Atlee and Darrach were unremitting in their care, and their devotion was appreciated with expressions of grateful thanks by their beloved patient. On Saturday, the 27th, it was believed that a favorable change had taken place in his condition, but, on Sunday, it became manifest that all human aid was vain, and that the end was near. His mind was entirely clear, composed, and tranquil. Perfectly aware of his rapidly approaching dissolution, not one feeling of terror or dismay seemed to disturb the calm serenity of his spirit. Death was a topic on which he had reflected long and prayerfully, and he could approach the dark portal of the grave without one tremulous shudder, without one murmur of regret, leaning on the arm of Him that is mighty to save. The religious trust he had learned on his mother's knee, and which he never for a moment lost his hold upon through life, was with him to the last, and shed its joy and light upon his dying pillow. To him death had no sting, and over him the grave could have no victory. Though his heart yearned to the dear ones around him, he could bid them a last farewell with a heavenly smile upon his countenance, for he believed, with a full and perfect earnestness of faith, that he should meet them again in an abiding city, to part no more forever. And so, on that Sabbath afternoon, while the friends he loved were raising, in the house of prayer, the song of thanksgiving in which he had so often joined, his spirit gently took its departure from its earthly habitation, and there remained to us of our friend only his lifeless form.

It is needless to say that the intelligence of this sad event

made a most painful and profound impression upon many. No man was more beloved in the circle of his acquaintance than Dr. Grant. This was made manifest on the occasion of his interment, when so many persons, representing so many professions, interests, opinions, and social grades, assembled to pay the last honors to his mortal remains. In that train also were seen the Professors, Alumni, and Students of this college, anxious to testify by every means in their power their respect to the memory of departed worth.

The character of Grant presents several points whose contemplation may afford interest and instruction, and to these I now propose to direct your attention. I do not appear here, be it understood, either as a critic or an eulogist. My object is not to apply the moral scalpel to our subject, nor, on the other hand, to indulge in his indiscriminate praise. My aim is more genial than the one, and more honest than the other. It is to trace the lineaments of our deceased friend, precisely such as they appeared to his brethren of the Faculty, and according to the best of my poor ability. If, in so doing, my feelings lend a bias to my pen, it is unconsciously to myself. To weigh the spirit of a man in an even balance belongs, I know, to a purer discernment than man can attain, but I hope to accomplish my task in sincerity, appealing to those around me, who knew him even better than I did, for the truthfulness of the portraiture.

Every man who has reflected carefully upon the elements which should go to compose the *good physician*, has formed to himself an ideal of that perfect character;—one, perhaps, so perfect that none of his associates or contemporaries can fulfil its necessities, or seem to deserve the name. It is hard to try poor human nature by such a standard, and such I would not apply now. No man would have shrunk more instinctively from the application of such a touchstone than Grant, diffident as he was of his powers, and ever anxiously fearful of falling short in the duties of his profession. Yet I can safely aver that few men have been better fitted by nature and education for those duties than he. His heart was tender and sympathetic as a woman's. His ear was never deaf to the cry of suffering.

Ever ready to fly to the relief of pain and disease, he labored in the work of healing for the work's sake. To him the prospect of remuneration was always a secondary object, perhaps kept too subordinate for his own pecuniary interest in this mercenary world. He could weep with those that wept, and felt himself repaid when, through his ministrations, suffering was relieved, and the warm hues of health were brought back to the cheek paled by lingering disease. Yet with all this tenderness there was in him a resolute firmness of character, due alike to his Scottish blood, and his rigid Scottish training. He never shrank from the infliction of pain, when that infliction was indispensable to the accomplishment of an ulterior good result. His hand never shook as it urged the knife through the quivering flesh of a fellow being in a life-saving operation, even though his heart at the moment yearned over that patient with all the deep sympathy of a brother's love. It is this union of tenderness with firmness that qualifies a man eminently for the office of a surgeon, and this our friend fully possessed.

In the study of the literature of his profession, as well as in its practice, he was industrious and laborious. He was well read upon every branch of our science. While anatomy was his chosen department, he never neglected any other, and his opinions upon all medical topics were therefore valuable and instructive. His conversation was sought alike by students and physicians. From the stores of his extensive reading and observation, he could bring something to throw light upon every topic that was suggested and every case that presented itself for treatment. Possessing an extensive and well-selected library, he spent much time in study. He was not one of those who believe that their professional education is completed when the diploma is obtained. He felt deeply that *his* education could never be completed, while the stores of medical learning were still unexhausted by him, or even while nature displayed new fields of research and discovery. This sentiment arose mainly from his conscientiousness in all professional matters. The high-toned regard for truth and honor which characterized all his relations in life, was particularly conspicuous in his in-

tercourse with his patients and his medical brethren. In assuming the charge of a case of disease he felt that he took in his hands the awful responsibility of a human life, and his tender conscience would give him no rest if he knew that the means of cure failed in his hands from the want of some one fact or process which a larger reading or profounder reflection might have supplied. Hence he was fully convinced that his duty to God and humanity required him to omit no opportunity of instruction, but to persevere in his study with the same ardent thirst for knowledge as when he first entered upon its pursuit. The same consideration made him a particularly cautious physician. When the subject in hand was the life of a fellow-being, he dared not be rash or precipitate. He spent much time with his patients, watched them long and anxiously, and never entered upon any course of practice without a firm conviction of its propriety.

In his relations to his medical brethren, he was kind, courteous, and honorable. The ethical rules which regulate our professional intercourse he observed with scrupulous care. Never forward nor obtrusive, he applied to his conduct among his brethren the scriptural injunction: In honor preferring one another. His position in regard to them was therefore always of the most pleasant character. No man ever had fewer enemies, and no man was ever more sincerely mourned by those whom a contrary course might so readily have converted into business rivals and personal foes. His professional standing was evidenced by his early reception into the College of Physicians. He was a member of the County Medical Society, and, a short time before his decease, was chosen by that body a delegate to represent it at the annual meeting of the State Medical Society. His name also appears upon the roll of permanent members of the National Medical Association, in which he had represented the Faculty of this college.

As a teacher of anatomy, Dr. Grant was remarkable more for clearness and systematic accuracy of detail, than for any powers of elocution. He made no pretension to oratorical display, which indeed he felt to be out of place in a purely demon-

strative chair. His style of language was therefore plain, but full and perspicuous. His object being to teach, he sought chiefly to be intelligible to all, and to carry his class with him by familiar explanation and copious illustration. A happy natural tact and mechanical ingenuity rendered him peculiarly felicitous in the choice and arrangement of demonstrative illustration, as many of you doubtless remember. That he was a successful teacher is admitted on all hands. For proofs of this can I do better than appeal to you, who were members of the last class, and to the Alumni of the school, now before me, who enjoyed the benefits of his instruction?

In all his personal relations Dr. Grant was characterized by great amiability of temper, courteous deportment, and the strictest integrity. Kindly and affable to all, he was ever a welcome guest at the social fireside, as well as in the chamber of disease and death. His gentle manners and sympathizing conversation endeared him much to the hearts of his patients. Rigidly honorable and upright, he endeavoured to regulate all his conduct by a sense of duty. He never deviated from the principles of morality instilled into his mind in early youth. Thrown here into this sinful city, a stranger youth among strangers, he carried in his breast a sure talisman against all its allurements and temptations, and, by the uniform correctness of his walk and conversation, soon gained the confidence and esteem of his teachers, his fellow-pupils and the society into which he was introduced. Happy the medical student who, like him, can pass through the slippery path of his city probation, and keep the white garments of his youthful innocence "unspotted from the world!"

Any attempt to delineate the character of Dr. Grant must be incomplete, however, without a reference to his religious position and course. On this point, allow me to read an extract from an obituary notice, by his beloved pastor, the Rev. J. B. Dales, in the Christian Instructor of May last, and which is appropriately headed, *A good man fallen!*

"In his religious character Dr. Grant was exemplary and useful. On the 2d of May 1838, he joined the First Associate

Reformed Church in this city, on a certificate from the church in his native place; and about two years afterwards (Nov. 19, 1840) he was ordained to the office of a Ruling Elder. Thenceforth, in Session, in Presbytery, and in the Synod—in the chambers of the sick and the houses of the poor—in the loneliness of the stranger, the sorrows of the afflicted, and the wants of the needy, he was uniformly regarded as the wise counsellor, the true friend, the sincere Christian. In his death a Pastor mourns an Aaron or a Hur, who was ever ready to hold up the hands that would tremble under the toil and weight of ministerial duty. A Session mourns a brother who was zealous for the purity of God's house, the spiritual welfare of his people, and the advancement of the cause of righteousness and truth. And a Church mourns a fellow-member, who loved the gates of Zion, and was ever ready to weep with them that wept, and rejoice with them that rejoiced."

The consolations he had so often ministered to others he was privileged to test himself, gloriously and triumphantly. The faith that guided his steps through life, shed a halo of celestial light over his dying bed. In the near prospect of dissolution, his pale lips could murmur: *All is well!* and as he felt earth receding, and his spirit losing its hold upon its tenement of clay, his face beamed with the fullness of joy and peace, as he said faintly: *I am almost home!* The last words the anxious watchers heard from his lips were "*exceeding and eternal weight of glory,*" and, almost at that moment, the last dread change passed over his countenance, and his immortal spirit had gone to God who gave it. In the view of that closing scene, where death was deprived of all its terrors, who would not exclaim: LET ME DIE THE DEATH OF THE RIGHTEOUS, AND LET MY LAST END BE LIKE HIS!

Believe me, gentlemen, that in these remarks I am actuated by no desire of sermonizing. I merely desire to point out to you that happy Christian death-bed scene, to ask you to contemplate it thoughtfully and to let its luminous teachings work their way in your inmost hearts. Neither am I influenced by any sectarian sympathy or desire to magnify the tenets so faithfully and

trustfully held by our deceased friend. The circles of our religious conviction touched in but few points, but in the points where they did coincide, thank God, lay the great central facts of all spiritual truth. Happy for us it is that the sphere of that truth lies beyond that of intellectual speculation, and there may those of the most opposite convictions meet in unity of spirit and in the bonds of faith. In my early studentship my reverence was divided between two of the lights of our profession, now extinguished. The one, Dr. Otto, had been the beloved physician of my family, our revered helper in all times of trouble and distress. The other was my distinguished preceptor, Dr. Parrish. Between these two good men existed a most intimate friendship and daily intercourse, one of the bonds of which was a common admiration of the Imitation of Christ of Thomas à Kempis. Never shall fade from my mind the beautiful spectacle of those venerable forms,—the placid and peaceful Quaker and the rigidly devout Presbyterian,—bending together over the glowing pages of the heavenly-minded Catholic. Never shall I unlearn the lesson of a true and holy Catholicity of spirit, which was thus taught me, and which I have always believed to be one of the best badges of our profession. It is under the influence of this sentiment that I address you now, and entreat you to ponder carefully the teachings of that hour that proclaims, in tones more thrillingly convincing than the voice of an archangel, that “blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.” “Yea, saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.” May the Master of life grant you that spirit in full measure, filling all your earthly journey with pleasantness, and crowning your last hour with a glory like to that of him whose loss we mourn, though we know it was great gain to him. So may he, whose life was devoted to your service, be made a blessing to you even in his death, and the companion of your joy in the great resurrection!

And now, Gentlemen, I have performed—how inadequately I feel as deeply as any of you can do,—the task assigned me by our Faculty. As a labor of love, receive and regard it and visit it with no severer criticism. If I shall have stirred up

the pure minds of any of you to a resolute determination to walk in the footsteps of the friend I have displayed as an example to you, my highest wish will be abundantly gratified.

The services of this hour have been devoted to a work of duty and the expression of a feeling we could not and would not disregard. My part has been thus to plant the cypress over a grave we would not have forgotten. When next we meet, my colleagues will introduce you to the more immediate business of our union. I have detained you to-day in the place of tombs, and amid the memorials of the dead, where the feelings that arise are enough to occupy our minds for the present. Under their sombre shadow we separate for the night, but

“To-morrow, to fresh fields and pastures new!”