

In memoriam : Dr. George Tupman Fincham / by George Cowell.

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From the Writer

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In Memoriam.

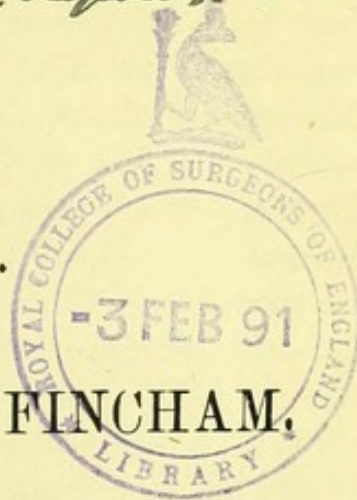
DR. GEORGE TUPMAN FINCHAM,

By GEORGE COWELL.

OUR volume of Reports unfortunately again opens with a record of a much-regretted loss sustained by our staff—a loss which is tempered, however, by many cheering and enduring memories. The latest of our Consulting Physicians has gone to his rest, and it is our duty, whilst expressing the sorrow universally felt by colleagues and pupils alike, to endeavour, however imperfectly, to express in words some account of that life which is gone from us, and of that life's work and character which will live in the hearts of all who knew him.

Dr. Fincham, like Dr. Radcliffe, died somewhat suddenly. It had been noticed, however, that he had been failing in health for some months, and, as he suffered from aortic insufficiency, his friends were not free from anxiety about him. He had retired from practice some twelve months before, but he used still to show himself at the College of Physicians, and often attended the meetings of the House Committee of the Westminster Hospital, in the affairs of both of which institutions he continued to take the warmest interest. The immediate cause of death was probably the giving way of a small cerebral vessel, for he was found insensible and died a few hours afterwards, on May 26th, 1890, in his 73rd year.

George Tupman Fincham was born on January 28th, 1818, at a house in Spring Gardens. He was the son of a medical man,



Mr. George Fincham, in general practice at that place. He was sent to Westminster School in 1827, and later, in 1831, was transferred to King's College School, then under the Head Mastership of the Rev. Dr. Major, who was a connection by marriage of his mother. In 1834 we find him in the Higher Department of the School at work at Latin and Greek. In 1836 he matriculated at St. John's College at Oxford, whither he went up to reside in October of that year. Here he entered with zest into that study of scholarship and Greek and Latin literature, happily held to be essential to the cultured Physician of those days. In due course he graduated in Arts, and, having chosen his father's profession, he returned to London and entered at St. George's Hospital in October, 1839, where he studied Chemistry under Mr. Faraday and Mr. Brand. A year later he went to Paris, and studied medicine during the winter, under Professor Chomel, and established a friendship with Dr. Noel Gueneau de Mussy, who was at that time Dr. Chomel's *Chef de Clinique*. He then returned to St. George's, where he worked steadily and very successfully until the summer of 1842, when he went to Dublin and became a resident pupil at the Rotunda. In that city he also attended the practice of that scholarly Physician, Dr. Graves. After another winter at St. George's he passed the examination for the M.B. Degree at Oxford in 1843, and in the following year became a Member—or, as it was then called, Licentiate—of the Royal College of Physicians.

Dr. Fincham's first spheres of public practice were the Public Dispensary in Bishop's Court, afterwards in Carey Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, and the Western Dispensary, at both of which institutions his work speedily showed the painstaking and conscientious character of the man. The M.D. degree at Oxford was taken in 1847, in which year also he married Miss Heygate, the daughter of James Heygate, Esq., of Southend, Essex.

His first connection with Westminster Hospital was as Lecturer on Forensic Medicine in the Medical School, to which Chair he was appointed in 1850, and which he held until 1865. On January 22nd, 1853, he was elected, at the age of thirty-five, coadjutor to Dr. Woodfall, the first Assistant Physician appointed to the Hospital, by whose resignation, however, in May of the same year, followed by Dr. Kingston's retirement two years later, he rapidly became in succession Senior Assistant Physician and

full Physician, to which latter post he was appointed on April 21st, 1855. Dr. Fincham was elected a Fellow of the College of Physicians in the same year. Here also he was held in high honour, and was appointed Censor in 1872-4 and in 1877-8, Councillor in 1876, 1883, and 1885, Examiner in 1881-2, Senior Censor in 1883-4, and in 1884 the senior of the two first Vice-Presidents that were appointed.

Dr. Fincham had been twenty years full Physician at the Hospital before he became in any way connected with the Chair of Systematic Medicine. This Chair was held for many years by the late Dr. Basham, and when he resigned it in 1871 Dr. Fincham, with his usual unselfish conscientiousness, persuaded himself that it was to the advantage of the Medical School that Dr. Anstie should succeed to it, and himself declined the post. However, on the death of Anstie in 1875, it was thought important to the School that he should step into the breach, and he most kindly undertook to share the Chair with Dr. Sturges, and continued to deliver half the Lectures on Medicine for eight years, until 1883, when by an inexorable rule he had to retire from the post of Physician of the Hospital and was elected Consulting Physician, and Westminster regretfully lost his valuable services. He however retained his seat on the House Committee, the deliberations of which he continued to attend until within a few days of his death. He twice delivered the Introductory Lecture at the opening of the Winter Session—in 1856 and 1866. From 1853 to 1889 he was Physician to the Scottish Provincial Life Assurance Company, and for some years he was Physician to the Westminster School. He leaves a widow, two sons, and two daughters.

Dr. Fincham was one of that good old type of scholarly Physicians, the disappearance of which from amongst us is a great misfortune to our profession. Trained himself at Oxford by the study of scholarship, and refined by acquaintance with the best literature of Rome and Greece, a taste which he always maintained, there was hardly any subject that pained him more than the neglect of the classics, as the foundation of mental training and development. He always held that the training of the mind was something apart from mere teaching, and was strongly convinced that the study of Latin and Greek afforded the best means to this end. Science was ill-adapted, even if of any real

service, to be a means of training, whilst it was certain that a knowledge of it could be far more easily acquired after the mind had been properly developed by scholarship or mathematics. How completely opposed to Dr. Fincham's opinion have been the recent ill-considered pronouncements in favour of abolishing altogether Latin and Greek as a preliminary training for medical men.

On a foundation, then, of sound learning and much literary culture, Dr. Fincham had built a good practical knowledge of medicine. In applying this knowledge at the bedside, he was ever most cautious, conscientious, and painstaking, sparing neither time nor patience in his endeavour in obscure cases to arrive at a correct diagnosis. Any striving after effect was entirely absent from his thoughts, and in fact opposed to his nature; there was only an honest endeavour to obtain a correct view of the case before him, stimulated by an eager interest innate in the true physician. But it must not be thought from what has been said that Dr. Fincham was slow in forming his opinion of a case. With his habitual care and caution, he possessed, perhaps without knowing it, for he never himself relied upon it, a true sagacity and clinical penetration which could not fail to impress his pupils and those whom he met in consultation. Still he endeavoured to confirm and verify the suggestions of his sagacity, and did not assert that of which he was not himself convinced. Dr. Fincham combined with this conscientious care a remarkable tenderness for and sympathy with his patients, which often gained their affection as well as the confidence of hospital and private patients alike. That this tenderness and sympathy were born of a recognition that he had not merely to treat a disease but a sick person, was shown in the thoughtful kindness with which his opinion was conveyed, in the judicious selection of the treatment prescribed, and in the delicacy of feeling, and yet firmness, which always characterised the advice and warnings that he had to give. Doctors are not agreed as to the duty of warning a patient of his approaching end, but Dr. Fincham held most strongly that this duty was paramount.

Dr. Fincham was too cautious and not sufficiently dogmatic to be considered a brilliant teacher, but yet in reality he was one of the best of teachers. It is said that the art of taking pains is the

secret of success. How many of Dr. Fincham's pupils must thank him for the acquisition of this art. It will be an evil day for medical training when all teachers are dogmatic, or when all teachers follow the same methods. Dogmatic teaching is of great service to the student who is preparing for examination, but it is in itself not sufficient to make him a successful practitioner. Students must learn to think and reason for themselves, and Dr. Fincham's method was well calculated to this end. And the lessons that were learnt from him, how to observe disease, how to interrogate patients, how to interpret and appreciate symptoms—in short, the methods by which an accurate diagnosis may be obtained—will not easily be forgotten by those who had the good fortune to be his pupils. His kindness of manner, and the devotion and conscientiousness with which he ever performed his hospital duties, will live, too, in the recollection of all.

Dr. Fincham was not often seen at the medical societies, and his published writings were very few. Of the latter, I believe that the following is a complete list:—

'A Lecture on Clinical Teaching and Clinical Study,' *Medical Times and Gazette*, 1862.

'A Clinical Lecture on a case of Aortic Aneurism,' *Medical Times and Gazette*, 1864.

'Observations on Diarrhœa and Cholera,' *British Medical Journal*, 1871.

'Pallor of the Skin in some of its Clinical Aspects' (the substance of two Clinical Lectures), *Westminster Hospital Reports*, vol. i., 1885.

Thus far I have confined myself to the professional history and character of Dr. Fincham, and one hesitates to go beyond it. And yet how miserably imperfect would be this notice if it failed to give one glimpse of his private life and character, and of the tastes and feelings that influenced and harmonised his professional and domestic life. He was a man of strong affections, and thoroughly understood the full meaning of the word *Home*. It therefore goes without saying that he was, in the best sense, a good husband and father. He made warm friendships, too, with such of those with whom he was brought much in contact, who succeeded in gaining his respect; and his high moral tone, his nobility of character, his unswerving integrity, his unassuming modesty of bearing, and his charm of manner, never

failed to attract and influence those who were capable of appreciating them.

The principle that may perhaps be said to have influenced his whole life was his respect and veneration for authority. It was this that made him ever loyal to his profession, his college, and his hospital. It was this that explained his reticence. His devotion to the discharge of duty excluded all selfishness and self-seeking, and he wrote not to push himself forward, but only when he had something that ought to be said. It was this that made him a Conservative in politics, and rendered it impossible for him to have any sympathy with the modern methods of political controversy, and the vain theories propounded for so-called socialist reforms. It was this, too, that led him in 1855 to seek admission into the Roman Catholic Church, as he failed to satisfy himself that the English Church possessed the necessary authority.

Dr. Fincham did not go much into society, and most of his extensive reading was done aloud at his own fireside and to the members of his own family. The many pleasant conversations on these books prevented the subjects of them from being forgotten, and many happy memories of these are still cherished by those who participated in them.

It has been wisely said that no man can thoroughly enjoy and appreciate a holiday, who, first, is not accustomed to throw himself heart and soul into his work, and, secondly, does not possess some favourite study or adopt some attractive pursuit outside his ordinary work. Such means of cultivation and relaxation Dr. Fincham found in the fascinating study of Architecture, and especially in its ecclesiastical examples. Amongst his books were many on this subject, and for years it determined the direction of his holidays both at home and on the Continent. He never tired of wandering about those cities and towns, whether in England or abroad, which possessed noble churches, those poems in stone which demonstrated the faith and aspirations of the builders, and whose beauty and proportions spoke to him with no uncertain voice. And when he returned to home and work he still would delight in describing what he had seen, and the minsters that had entranced him, warming the listener to the desire of visiting the same marvellous structures and elevating him to a like admiration of them with himself.

It was a happy thought, when, on Dr. Fincham's retirement from the post of Physician at the Hospital, and when he was feeling the wrench of being deposed from the happiest work of his life, the spontaneous desire to give expression to their feeling of regret and loss, led the subscribers to include in the presentation some etchings of exquisite architectural examples. It was this perhaps more than anything else that showed the genuineness and sincerity of the feelings so unanimously expressed, and which overwhelmed him with emotion. It is rarely that a man retires from his life's work amid such widespread regret or so universally beloved.

REQUIESCAT IN PACE.

