

Memorials to Dr. Thomas Dwight / by J. Collins Warren, John Bapst Blake and David Cheever.

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Warren, John Collins, 1842-1927.
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Publication/Creation

Boston : W.M. Leonard, 1912.

Persistent URL

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BY

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*Reprinted from the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal,
Vol. clxvi, No. 1, pp. 7-11, Jan. 4, 1912*

BOSTON
W. M. LEONARD
101 TREMONT STREET
1912







MEMORIALS TO DR. THOMAS DWIGHT.*

I.

BY J. COLLINS WARREN, M.D., BOSTON.

MY recollection of Thomas Dwight, who was a near relative of mine, extends back to a very youthful period of his life. He never seemed to be a robust child, but although frail physically, he was always eager and ready to do his share in boys' play. Athletic sports had not yet become a part of a child's life, and there was no great physical demand upon one's strength which separated the stronger from the weaker in those days. He held his place amongst his playmates more by virtue of an intellectual force, which at that time manifested itself by marked precociousness. As an instance of how he was able to overcome any defect may be mentioned the peculiar childish lisp of speech, for which he was put in the hands of his teacher when he first went to Mr. Tower's School for Boys on Park Street. By persistent effort and attention to the drill of his teacher, a marked change in his accent was developed, characterized by a sonorous roll which was so distinguishing a feature of his speech in after life.

At an early age he accompanied his parents to

* Read at the meeting of the Boston Society for Medical Improvement on Nov. 27, 1911.

Europe, and after a long residence in Paris (where he served as a scholar in the boys' *pension* of the day) acquired an easy familiarity with the French language. His childish recitations of some of the French classics, including Corneille and Molière, with which he showed great familiarity, often delivered in an appropriate costume and characterized by a marked individuality of pronunciation, were a great delight to the older members of the family. His cousin, Mary Warren, a pupil at the Sacré Cœur, often took a part with him in these performances, and both threw themselves into their respective parts with great enthusiasm and considerable theatrical talent. Dwight could not have been more than eight years old at that time.

As the child was precocious, so the boy developed into an "old-fashioned" type of character which remained more or less with him throughout life. As I have said, although physically much less developed than his comrades, and of a highly-wrought nervous temperament, he nevertheless possessed great moral courage, so that when the occasion required he was quite ready to play his part in a fight, or any test of physical strength. It was really owing to some such sense of duty that he was placed in a position which prevented his graduating with his class in college, of which he was a very popular member.

Although quick to learn, and of an intellectual caliber that made learning easy for him, he had not yet developed any strong taste for study.

His shortened undergraduate term enabled him to begin his professional studies a year or two earlier than he would otherwise have done, and his capacity for hard work and serious endeavor quickly developed.

This anticipation of medical study brought him into the class next below me in the Medical School. I recall an instance of dissecting-room life at this period which serves to illustrate a characteristic trait. Dr. Cheever was at that time demonstrator of anatomy; the class in dissecting was often held in the evening in the little one-story dissecting room at the foot of the western wall of the building on North Grove Street. In the daytime it was lighted by a skylight. The character of this wing was well known to the hoodlum element of the neighborhood, and at night, when work was going on there, the light always shone brightly through the roof. One evening while we were absorbed in class work, a brickbat crashed through the glass. Dr. Cheever's equanimity did not forsake him, but calmly looking upwards and then down at us he said, "Up, guards, and at them!" We needed no further urging and sallied forth *en masse* to drive off the intruders. Dashing through one or two unoccupied lots of land surrounded by a high board fence, I suddenly found myself face to face with a pugnacious opponent. And while we were squaring off to settle matters, then and there I suddenly discovered my opponent was none other than Dwight himself, who, in the darkness, had mistaken me

for a foe, and although I was much the larger, he had not hesitated to rush upon me with all the force of his outraged dignity.

Dr. Dwight could not come in contact with any of his teachers without attracting their attention to his striking qualities. "Who was that who said 'bone'?" asked Professor Holmes as soon as Dwight became a member of the recitation class. It was Dr. Holmes' introduction to his successor in the chair of anatomy.

Dr. Dwight followed me to Europe a year after my departure from home. We were together in Vienna during my second year of European study, and the following winter I passed in Paris while he pursued his studies in Munich, so that we were not brought together again for any length of time until the time came for us to go home.

On his returning at the end of two years of study we met at London in the spring of 1869, and it was there that we first heard of the work of Lister, who was then in Glasgow. Of course there was no end of gossip among professional men as to the value of the new ideas which were being advanced, and much fun was made about the mode of treatment which was making it possible for wounds to heal without suppuration. Dwight and I were not only keenly interested in medical matters, but we were also quite alive to the social opportunities offered by London at the height of the season. There were many agreeable compatriots there at that time, and we had just formed a plan for a delightful trip across the south of

England on a four-in-hand with Mr. and Mrs. Charles H. Joy. This was an opportunity for seeing English country scenery that could not be obtained in any other way. The posting days had long gone by, and the four-in-hand represented at that time the poetry of travel. But we both realized the importance of seeing Lister and some of his work, and although our days in Europe were numbered, we did not hesitate to cut out a large portion of this delightful trip, and so broke away at Bristol and ran up to Glasgow with letters of introduction which we had obtained in London.

Lister received us in the most hospitable and courteous manner, and gave us the opportunity to see his hospital service and afterwards to dine pleasantly with him at his home and hear from his own lips an interesting statement of the various steps which finally led to his great discoveries.

Although alive to all that was new and interesting, Dwight then returned home keen to begin his chosen career. It was quite evident that although he felt it his duty to practice in his profession, his heart was really more in the scientific study of medicine, with a strong bias towards anatomy, which at that time formed a large part of what was then classed as laboratory work. It was not long before a college president, coming from Maine to hunt for a professor of anatomy, found in him one to his liking and one fully prepared to take on all the responsibility pertaining to professor's work.

And so the professor's career began early and soon blossomed out and became the plant of vigorous and sterling growth with which you are all familiar. For a time a sense of duty kept him in the ranks of the practitioners, but this was not a rôle for which he was fitted either by inclination or temperament, and when at length in the fullness of time he rounded out and took his place among the world's anatomists, the "doctor" became merged into the "professor," a title which a whole generation of pupils and hosts of friends loved to remember him by, as it seemed an appropriate symbol of what is typical of one devoted to science, to a search for truth, to high moral standards, to pure living and devotion to the cause which he was gallantly serving.

II.

BY JOHN BAPST BLAKE, M.D., BOSTON.

A PRESENT-DAY poet has written a verse to the noble dead, among whom he counts his friend; he pictures the dead as guests of the Almighty, in whose house they dwell. He says:

"And oftentimes cometh our wise Lord God, Master of every
trade,
And tells them tales of his daily toil, of Edens newly made;
And they rise to their feet as he passes by, gentlemen
unafraid."

This picture of the dead is not novel, but the expression of the poet is very happy; it suggests a great deal; "gentlemen unafraid" in the presence of the Lord, — it seems peculiarly applicable to Dr. Dwight.

He was, of course, a gentleman in every possible sense, by birth, inheritance, instinct and habit; in the technical, the general and the widest meaning of the word. A gentleman at the head of his large family, and one who did not think parental authority and thorough discipline inconsistent with fatherly love and tenderness; a gentleman in whom refinement had not dulled the edge of force, nor gentility dissipated the drive of action; in short, a gentleman who realized the highest significance of the name, and who lived up to its ideals.

Dr. Dwight possessed certain overpowering characteristics which dominate the picture that we hold of him; like a towering mountain which shows to the observer from every point the same rugged outlines.

Perhaps the most prominent of these qualities were his *faith* and his *courage*. His faith was the keynote of his life, and if we do not understand this, we fail to understand the man. Next to this, his courage pervaded his every action, whether as a Catholic or a scientist, a teacher or a writer. He was not in the accurate sense of the word a convert to the faith: he was baptized at the age of twelve, and from that time on he never doubted or faltered. His faith was active, searching, practical, unwavering, unafraid. In many public ways it was manifested, but through how many silent and hidden channels it flowed, to the refreshment of the poor and lowly, not even his closest friends can know. His charity was ever

colored with the warm flush and enthusiasm of religion, never practiced (as O'Reilly has said) "in the name of a careful, statistical Christ." He was neither a dreamer nor a theorizer, but always an active worker, a director, a partaker, who with full hands, and in his own person, visited the sick and comforted the afflicted; and these things he did as a gentleman should do them, quietly, thoroughly, earnestly, persistently.

As a teacher this quality of courage was equally manifest. Decision stamped his statements and directness dominated his lectures; he taught what he had learned from his own study and observation, and if this did not square with the authorities, so much the worse for them. His students of twenty years ago, among whom the writer counts himself, will well remember one of his characteristic sayings: "The books tell you that the condition is so and so, but in point of fact, gentlemen, it is no such thing"! Authority was subject to study with him, and if it did not bear analysis, it could not carry weight. As a teacher, therefore, and particularly as a teacher in the first and second school years, he was positive, convincing and admirable. He had organized his department in the manner which he knew was best and most efficient, though it was a departure from previous conditions, and he stamped himself and the facts he taught firmly upon the minds and memories of his students.

Incidentally it may be said that his faith did not interfere with his scientific work any more

than did the faith of Pasteur or Mendel, Müller or Schwann, Claude Bernard or Lamark, Lord Kelvin or Clerk Maxwell.

His courage extended equally well to his personal as to his public life. The writer well remembers meeting him at the inauguration of President Lowell. He wore the rich hood of the honorary Georgetown degree, and stood in the enclosure near Holden Chapel, surrounded by countless dignitaries, resplendent in gorgeous colors. He looked very well, and not having seen him during the summer months, assuming him to be in his former good health, the greeting was naturally, "I am very glad to see you, Dr. Dwight; how are you?" The utterly unexpected answer, coming in his deep resonant voice and reaching the ears of scores of men in the vicinity, was, "Ah, doctor, I am fully as well as a man suffering from an incurable disease could expect to be!" All who heard him turned to gaze in undisguised concern and astonishment, to look at the man who so courageously told the whole truth about his own condition, and who found in that unfortunate disease nothing which he should conceal or evade. He felt that he knew his future a little more accurately than those about him, — that was all. He confessed, and did not deny.

His courage extended into the practical workings of his faith. If he found what he considered mistakes creeping into the human side of his church, he fought them just as vigorously as he

did outside matters. Neither position nor influence deterred him. In his function as public library trustee he stood unfailingly for what he felt was right and just, particularly in relation to Catholic books and beliefs. Though friends and colleagues might differ from him, he held his convictions without compromise, his views without wavering. Logical argument alone would sway him from his maturely formed judgment, and he was willing to listen to argument, even if not lightly moved by it.

Death is the common lot of all and it has been apostrophized by many, but by few more feelingly than Henley, as he saw it come to others and faced it himself in the old Glasgow Infirmary in 1873.

“Inevitable, — silent, — unseen,
Everywhere always, —
Shadow by night, and a light in the day,
Signs she at last to her chosen;
And, as she waves them forth,
Sorrow and Joy
Lay by their looks and their voices,
Set down their hopes, and are made
One in the dim Forever.

Into the Winter's gray delight,
Into the Summer's golden dream,
Holy and high and impartial,
Death, the Mother of Life,
Mingles all men forever.”

High and impartial, it is true, but bitter to accept and hard to understand by those who mourn. Here was one whose physique, habits and heritage gave promise of fifteen fruitful years to come, yet he was called e'er he could

reach three score and ten. Why some are taken who seem so deeply needed, why some remain, we cannot know. His death was a loss alike to family and faith, to friends and to faculty, to profession and to students; but both life and death were examples which he left behind for encouragement and imitation to those who admired the gentleman unafraid.

A modern writer has recently deplored the effect on the world of the fear of death. There is no fear of death in the strong who are about to die, but only in the weak who linger. Surely, there was none in Dr. Dwight. For nearly two years from the time when he heard and accepted the verdict, and up to the last few months, he lived his usual life, did his work, delivered his lectures, wrote his book. The courage which upheld him in the face of monotonous daily suffering without chance of ultimate recovery, and the cheerfulness which was its constant sidelight, were naturally the admiration alike of relatives and physicians. It was the highest type of courage, for it accompanied individual hopeless struggle, inability for effective resistance, and lacked the sustaining inspiration of action and the dramatic help of battle or great disaster. Yet Death comes to the brave in gentle fashion, in the garb of a helper, and it came to him, not as a thief in the night, but as an expected guest, sending heralds to announce his approach.

For many years a German woodcut which he loved much hung over Dr. Dwight's desk: the

friends who remember his study will recall the picture. It is the work of Alfred Rethel and is entitled, "Der Tod als Freund," a virile, powerful print, showing a little room just below the belfry in an old church tower: through the tall open window is seen a smiling valley, mountains in the distance, and a quiet village nestling in the sunset. Sitting in a rude arm chair, his limp hands dropped in his lap, is the body of the old bell ringer, who through the long years of a life of faithful service had rung for Mass and Vespers, angelus and burial. To him, toiling to the last, Death has come as a kindly friend, bringing well-earned rest as a gift, — and, standing before him in a monk's cowl, with bowed head, has taken the rope from his lifeless fingers, and (after the fashion of a friend) is tolling the bell, finishing the task. So he came to the doctor, who, we may well believe, recognized in his own experience the realization of the allegory in the picture that he knew so well.

Thomas Dwight was a great admirer and a deep student of his name-Saint, the religious philosopher, Thomas Aquinas. But there is another who seems to have been in even greater measure a pattern for the man. It is Paul the Apostle, courageous fighter and defender of the church. After his work was done to the point of utter physical incapacity, after his book was finished, accepting with calmness the end which was at hand, Thomas Dwight might well have written at the close of the chapter, as did Paul to Timothy:

"I am even now ready to be sacrificed, and the time of my dissolution is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the Faith"! and we who have gathered to honor his memory may surely add — Amen.

III.

BY DAVID CHEEVER, M.D., BOSTON.

DR. DWIGHT was one of those fortunate men who possess a marked individuality all their own. His face and figure, his almost patriarchal beard through which he ran his fingers meditatively, his abrupt decisive speech, often gruff but varied with curious rising inflections, his hearty but quiet laugh, his many eccentricities of manner, served to mark him clearly in one's memory. Of late years he was the first teacher with whom the student came in contact on entering the medical school, and probably each of us younger men can recall vividly the moment when, already deeply impressed with a sense of approaching a mysterious and somewhat awesome field of knowledge, we listened to Dr. Dwight's cautions as to the discretion and respect with which we must exercise the privilege of scientific study and dissection of the human body. He made us feel that we were admitted to a company who pledged themselves to the proper exercise of this privilege, for the benefit of humanity, and very rarely thereafter was it abused.

It is unnecessary to speak at length of Dr. Dwight's actual accomplishments in the field of

anatomy. They are already a matter of record. He was an enthusiastic and zealous student of gross systematic anatomy. He returned well-equipped from his studies in Europe for the pursuit of microscopic anatomy and embryology, but his inclination and perhaps his early interest in clinical work led him more and more definitely along the line of gross anatomy. Here, even in the early days of his teaching, the opportunity for original work was limited and further narrowed year by year, and it was natural that after mastering normal anatomy his attention was drawn to the study of variations, especially of the bony skeleton. Here he made himself a master, unrivaled in this country and perhaps elsewhere. In connection with these and other investigations he enriched the Warren Museum with valuable collections made by his own hands, which will endure as a worthy monument of his industry. He was an indefatigable worker. There are probably eighty publications from his pen, varying from a brief monograph to the important contribution which he made to Piersol's "Anatomy."

It is undoubtedly as a teacher that he deserves to be held in the highest esteem. He entered his career when the didactic lecture to a large class had reached and passed its zenith, and his active life witnessed the development of personal and sectional teaching to small groups of students. With him, however, the didactic lecture retained its title to recognition. He dearly loved to lecture.

He did not trust to the inspiration of the moment, but prepared himself with great care, and built up year by year an efficient educational machine which was steadily improved with ripening experience. He spoke without notes. He was not a brilliant speaker, as history states his predecessor was, but he was clear, convincing, interesting and satisfying. He well knew the value of graphic accessories to vivify and help the student visualize the spoken word. From abroad he brought familiarity with the frozen sections of Rüdinger, made many series himself, and used them constantly in his teaching. He caused to be constructed under minute personal supervision many large models, especially of bones and of the viscera, unrivaled aids to teaching. With little genius as a draughtsman, he trained himself to make instructive drawings and diagrams on the blackboard. He invariably, when practical, used the cadaver to demonstrate the subject matter of the lecture. He even turned clay modeler! Most of us remember with interest and amusement his lecture on the spinal cord. With clothing imperfectly protected by an old rubber apron hung awry from his neck, he plunged into two great masses of moist clay, variously colored, and after prodigious kneading and rolling and scraping he produced a doubtful looking cylindrical mass, which on section with a wire showed to the expectant class a really graphic cross section of the spinal cord. The class always laughed and applauded, no more at the success of the demon-

stration than in appreciation and sympathy at his evident delight and self-satisfaction, as he stood surveying his work, clay smeared upon his hands and cuffs and even in his beard, and his face wreathed in smiles. Dr. Dwight may be said to have been an able anatomist, an authority in certain special fields, and a teacher of the first rank.

He was the personification of honesty; nothing would lead him to soften the asperities of the truth. He delighted to bestow the honor of making the dissections for his lectures upon students whom he knew, especially on sons of old friends in the profession, but he was governed solely by their abilities, and would regretfully but irrevocably cease consideration of one whose attainments did not warrant it. His praise was rare and terse, his blame swift, certain and usually just. It was always a moment of extreme anxiety to them when the prosectors exhibited their work before the lecture. "Do you call that a dissection?" was his comment on a piece of work which it had taken two weary men a whole night to complete. Its only fault was its artificiality. But how sweet it was to listen on some other occasion at the swing doors of the amphitheatre, and hear him say, "Now let us look at this very handsome dissection." There was a tradition among us that he still had leanings toward the surgeon's art. Certainly he loved to destroy our handiwork with a few ruthless slashes to show some deeper structure. He was conscientious to a

degree in the performance of his work; he never delegated it. He considered it the right of every student to have his examination book read by him. He read and reread the border-line books, and sometimes sought the aid of others to aid his decision.

A human trait was his interest in medico-legal cases. His researches into methods of determination of sex and of estimation of height and general physique from fragments of human anatomy caused him to be called occasionally in important cases. He gave much time and conscientious study to this work. Gruesome relics were brought to him in these cases whose notorious details might have justified but never brought out an indelicate word.

I have spoken of his honesty. He was rigidly, inflexibly, uncompromisingly honest. The course of expediency, did it only imply the suppression of his own views, was unknown to him. His opinions were strongly held, strongly defended and rarely changed by argument. I do not personally recall an instance where he was persuaded from his view. It would be disloyal to the memory of a man of such temperamental qualities to remain silent about their inevitable results. Dr. Dwight would be the first to protest against any such misrepresentation by omission. He was a jealous guardian of the prestige and rights which inhered in the science which he taught and in his own position. If his predecessor was the Autocrat of the Breakfast Table, certainly Dr. Dwight was

the Autocrat of the Department of Anatomy. He could not admit that the relative preponderance of anatomy in the curriculum must necessarily diminish with the development of the practically new medical sciences of the past twenty-five years, unless the time consumed in the course of study were to be greatly increased. He resented bitterly the lessening of the time devoted to anatomy and its concentration to a short period of study. He was certainly justified to the extent that it took from him the opportunity to give the instruction which he regarded most highly, the course in topographical anatomy in the second year. He rarely missed an opportunity to press his views, whether or not the subject were germane to the occasion. He was not tactful in debate, and not always able to weigh without prejudice the views of others, and by these qualities he sometimes created opposition which might have been avoided, especially among those who did not know him well. His conception of the importance of his science made him arbitrary at times in his dealings with his colleagues. He hesitated to allow his science to correlate in the curriculum with the clinical branches, fearful that its prestige might suffer thereby. Yet on the personal side he was the kindest, most considerate and approachable of men. No undergraduate or graduate came to him for help without obtaining all that was in his power to give. These are the qualities of a man of strong individuality and opinions lacking a certain breadth

of view. They led to the upbuilding of a strong, well-organized and well-taught department, complete and sufficient unto itself.

During the last two years of his life his splendid qualities came out in bold relief. Facing the certainty of speedy death, and the probability of invalidism and suffering, and burdened with a distressing and ever-present physical infirmity, he never wavered in his devotion to his duties in the medical school. During these two years he gave practically the whole of his usual course of lectures to the first-year students. He studied the bones of the carpus and tarsus in every dissected subject, first with the radiograph and then in the macerated specimen, and was rewarded by finding and describing some unique examples of variations and anomalies. Until the end of the last term, he continued his important work in classifying and arranging the anatomical specimens in the museum. Outside his profession, he completed his book, "Thoughts of a Catholic Anatomist," which may be regarded as his Apologia.

Throughout his illness he scorned to deceive or even remain silent about the character of his complaint to those who inquired. He faced death, as he had faced life, with the courage and confidence bred of his character and of his faith.





