

**Sketch of the life and character of Samuel George Morton, M.D. : lecture introductory to a course on anatomy and physiology in the Medical Department of Pennsylvania College delivered October 13, 1851 / by William R. Grant.**

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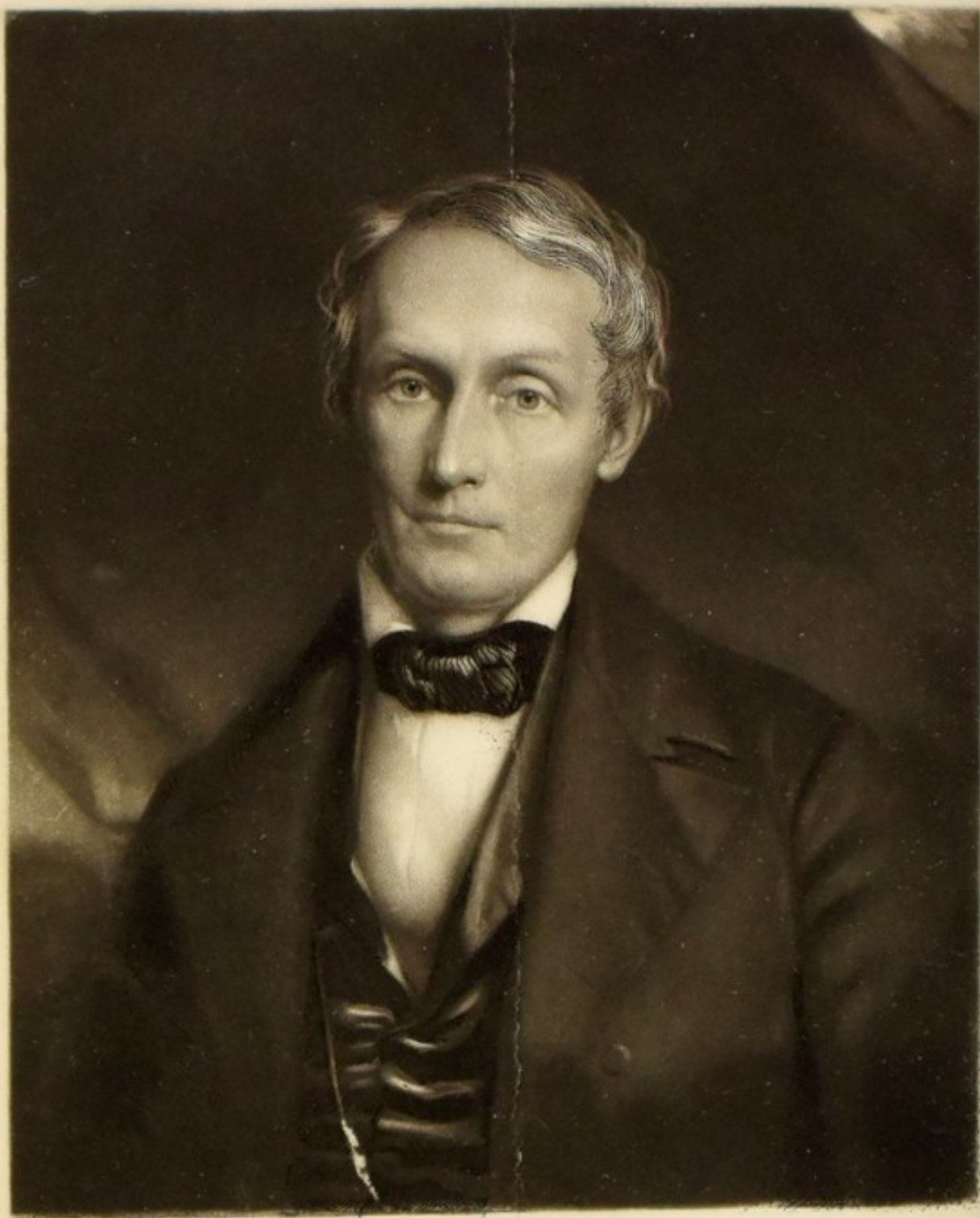
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Samuel George Morton

**Sketch of the Life and Character of Samuel George Morton, M. D.**

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# LECTURE

INTRODUCTORY TO A COURSE

ON

# ANATOMY AND PHYSIOLOGY

IN THE

## MEDICAL DEPARTMENT

OF

PENNSYLVANIA COLLEGE.

DELIVERED, OCTOBER 13, 1851.

BY WILLIAM R. GRANT, M. D.

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PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE CLASS.

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PHILADELPHIA,

JOHN ROYER, PRINTER,

1852.



## CORRESPONDENCE.

Philadelphia, October 31st, 1851.

Prof. W. R. GRANT,

Dear Sir:

At a meeting of the Class of the Medical Department of Pennsylvania College, (B. Lippincott, of Pennsylvania being Chairman, and W. H. McFadden, of Pennsylvania, Secretary,) the undersigned were constituted a Committee to solicit, for publication, a copy of your most valuable, instructive and eloquent introductory Address.

Hoping you will comply with our request, we remain

Yours truly,

P. S. LEISENRING, Pennsylvania,  
GEO. A. BROWN, New Brunswick, B. A.  
WM. R. L. SHARP, New Jersey,  
ALFRED WYNKOOP, Louisiana,  
BARTOW DARRACH, New York,  
J. T. BINKLEY, Tennessee,  
C. S. BARNITZ, Ohio,  
H. M. SINGLETARY, S. Carolina,  
DANIEL G. FISHER, Delaware,  
A. McL. PADDOCK, Maine.

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West Penn Square, November 10, 1851.

GENTLEMEN,

Your communication of the 31st ult. was duly received and considered.

I am the more willing to comply with your solicitation from a belief, that even this brief *sketch* of the life and character of an eminent man, may do good to those who have chosen his profession, and who, we hope, are about to walk in his steps.

With the kindest regards,

I am gentlemen, yours &c.

W. R. GRANT.

To Messrs. P. S. LEISENRING,  
G. A. BROWN,  
W. R. L. SHARP,  
ALFRED WYNKOOP,  
B. DARRACH,  
&c. &c. Committee.

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## INTRODUCTORY LECTURE.

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*Philadelphia, October 13th, 1851.*

GENTLEMEN,

I see before me this morning many whom we recognize as familiar friends, who having left us for a season to recruit their health and renew their strength, or to visit kindred and friends, and enjoy for a time the endearments of home, have returned—we hope invigorated and refreshed,—ready again to buckle their armor on. Gentlemen, allow me in the name of the Faculty, on this the first day of the session to extend to you individually and collectively a *cordial welcome*; assuring you that we feel encouraged by this token of your continued confidence and good will.

There are others among my auditors whose acquaintance we have yet to make, but whose names we would be happy to have also enrolled among our patrons and friends—whether you hail from among the chivalrous and warm hearted sons of the sunny south; or the staid and ruddy youth of the bracing north; from the enterprising pioneers of the great west; or the calculating citizens of the commercial east—from whatever section within the bounds of this vast Republic, or within the limits of the neighboring Provinces of the British Dominions, from whatever quarter you may have come, all hail, we welcome you all, this day, to this Hall and to this city in which we dwell.

To this city of colleges and learning; of churches and piety; of industry and plenty; of order and sobriety; of temperance and brotherly kindness; of hospitals and charities, but alas! a city also containing places of dissipation and of ruin; of fashion, frivolities and follies.



To this city renowned for its straight and spacious streets, but having also crooked and dubious paths, distinguished by its cleanliness and comforts, but disfigured by some things that are defiling and wretched, abounding with light and knowledge, chequered however with darkness and ignorance.

Coming to our school and to our city, at this time, and under these circumstances, you will stand in need of counsellors and guides, amidst such a variety of attractions and distractions, and so many interests which conflict.

Be assured gentlemen, it will be our pleasure, as it is certainly our duty, as far as in *us* lies, to aid you in attaining the *good* and avoiding the *evil*, in cleaving to the *one* and refusing the *other*.

On this occasion you might reasonably expect to hear a lecture, having a special reference to that branch of Medical Science which it is my province to teach in this institution; but by the mysterious doings of a Sovereign and over-ruling Providence, since we last met within these walls, a theme has been provided, both solemn and instructive, which is considered appropriate, and I would feign hope may not be unblessed to him who now addresses you, or to you my young friends who hear me.

On Thursday the 15th day of May last, many hearts were made sad and many cheeks were bedewed with tears at the announcement, that Dr. Samuel G. Morton, had expired at his residence in Arch street, after an illness of only three or four days duration. So unexpected and unwelcome was the news that many at first were inclined to question its reality, and every one hoped it was not so—But alas! it was too true. He who was but a few days before in the discharge of his ordinary professional duties and in his usual though feeble health, up to the very day of his fatal illness, was now numbered among the dead; it was only then that many who knew him well were made conscious that a *great* and a *good* man had been taken from among us, and that a light had been suddenly extinguished, which had shed its lustre for years on this country, and indeed on the world. On the day after this announcement the faculty of



this college held a special meeting, and unanimously passed the following resolutions;

*Resolved*, That the faculty has heard with deep regret of the death of Samuel George Morton, M. D. formerly Professor of Anatomy and Physiology in this institution.

*Resolved*, That in the opinion of this faculty, Dr. Morton, by his integrity, urbanity, varied and profound learning, by his tender, affectionate and faithful ministrations to the sick and his honorable professional conduct, has endeared himself in a peculiar manner to his professional brethren and to the community.

*Resolved*, That in testimony of our regard for the deceased, the faculty in a body will attend his funeral.

*Resolved*, That a copy of these resolutions, with the condolence of the faculty, be conveyed to the family of Dr. Morton.

*Resolved*, That Professor Grant be requested to prepare and deliver at the opening of the next session of the college, a memoir of the *life and character* of Dr. Morton.

In conformity with one of these resolutions, the faculty formed a part of a long and solemn procession, which followed his remains to their resting place in Laurel Hill Cemetery, on the romantic banks of the Schuylkill. There they were deposited beside those of a beloved son, whose loss at the interesting age of nineteen, one year previous, our lamented friend had been called upon to mourn. The bereaved father had on that event composed a few lines, which as they furnish us with a touching description of the scene and circumstances of that sore trial, and a beautiful exhibition of the tenderness and affection of a heart that could both feel and love, as well as a specimen of Dr. Morton's poetical talents I shall repeat on this occasion.

#### A FATHER'S LAMENT FOR HIS SON.

GEORGE MORTON.

*Born December 21st 1832—Died May 15th, 1850.*

Stretched on the couch of anguish lay

A youth of manly form and graceful brow:

But lo! the strength of yesterday

Gives place to weakness now.



A day of agony—an hour of rest—  
 Then came the pulseless hand and heaving breast,  
 And all was over. O that sacred spell  
 Wherein we prayed, and wept and bade farewell !  
 That hurried warning of eternity—  
 That gush of wild emotions, O my child !  
 Yet thou alone wert calm and reconciled,—  
 Death brought no fears to thee.  
 And art thou gone for ever ! Thou who seemed  
 An angel in my house and heart :  
 So young, so pure, so bright,—I had not dreamed  
 That thus untimely we were doomed to part,  
 Or I should live to see the wild-flowers bloom  
 Around thy early tomb.  
 Thy joyous step no more  
 Is heard by those who welcomed it before;  
 The sounding viol and the cheerful flute,  
 By thee no longer touched, are hushed and mute;  
 And all is lone and sad where thou hast been,  
 Thy voice unheard—thyself unseen.  
 Yet in our hearts thy memory shall live  
 Embalmed and beautiful till life is o'er;  
 And then the Promise of our Faith shall give  
 Thy spirit back to us, to part no more  
 In that mysterious clime,  
 Where takes the soul no note of toil or time.  
 Thy tranquil grave is by the river's side,  
 And there our dust shall mingle with thy own:  
 And we will pray to die as thou hast died,  
 And go where thou art gone.

S. G. M.

It is not my intention even if you had the time to hear it, and I was possessed of the means, or furnished with data, to present you with a biography or to attempt an adequate eulogium of our lamented friend. This duty I am happy to know has been assigned by the college of physicians of this city, to their able and erudite President, Professor Wood of the University of Pennsylvania, and by the Academy of the Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, to the clear head and ready hand of Professor Meigs, of the Jefferson College. Either of these distinguished writers will in due time, I have no doubt furnish the profession with such a memoir as will be worthy of a name and a place among the biographies of men who have made themselves illustrious by their contributions to the cause of science. My humble effort and aim at this time will be to portray a few of the more prominent traits of Dr. Morton's life, character and disposition, and advert to those labours and productions



which have long since made him well known to many in this community, but which may not have been so familiar to some of my auditors.

Philadelphia is honored as the place of his nativity. We learn that he was brought up in connexion with the society of Friends, to whose members our profession and its kindred sciences, in this city and elsewhere, are indebted for many of their most distinguished ornaments. Having early in life adopted medicine as the profession of his choice, he pursued his office studies under the propitious auspices of the late Dr. Joseph Parrish, from whom it is but reasonable to infer that he may have imbibed a portion of that milk of human kindness, which eminently characterized, both preceptor and pupil, through life.

Having completed his curriculum of study and received the honors of the doctorate in the year 1820 from the University of Pennsylvania, he went to Europe.

During his sojourn in Edinburgh, where he passed the greater part of his time while abroad, he *first* distinguished himself and was highly esteemed for his literary abilities, as well as his professional attainments, writing and ably defending his Thesis in the Latin language as was the requirement of the school in those days. He received before he left, a second degree of M. D. from the venerable university of that city of literary and medical renown, which distinction not only reflected credit on the giver, and honored the receiver, but was also shared by his worthy and aspiring *American Alma Mater*.

His principal associates and companions at Edinburgh, were Thomas Hodgkin, the popular and public spirited Quaker doctor of Bedford Square, London, and Alexander Hannay, long a beloved physician of Glasgow. To these gentlemen Dr. Morton gave letters to my colleague Professor Patterson, when about to visit Europe last spring, (to whom I am indebted for these facts.) That to Dr. Hannay was particularly warm, filled with playful references to early days, and their youthful enjoyments and recreations, regretting their interrupted intimacy, and ending with the expres-



sion of the hope that "ere long they would meet again." On arriving at Glasgow Dr. Patterson learned the sad intelligence of the decease of Dr. Hannay. At London he was received with the kindest attention by Dr. Hodgkin, and while at his hospitable table, when Morton was the subject of an animated conversation at the time, a cloud was thrown over the spirits of all present by the entrance of Elliott Cresson, Esq. of this city, bringing a Philadelphia paper with the news of his unexpected death. May we not hope and believe that his wish was realized, and that *he* and the *friend* of his youth *have* met, even in that happy clime where faith and hope are exchanged for eternal fruition, and where friends *do* meet to part no more.

Ardent and enthusiastic young Morton made the tour of Europe, which in those days was more highly appreciated than now, because, perhaps more rare and difficult to accomplish. In the course of his travels he visited his attached friends and relatives in warm hearted Ireland, the land of his ancestors and the home of his kindred.

Strong temptations and inducements were there and then presented to the young doctor to remain and settle among them. But his more ardent love for his country and for this his native city, with their peculiar and greater attractions prevailed.

He returned, bouyant in spirit, ardent in hope and persevering in effort, here to commence *a career* which it appears even at that early period in his professional history he had marked out for himself, and to establish a name and a fame in the scientific world, not likely soon to be forgotten or easily surpassed.

Dr. Morton immediately commenced practice in this city, which soon became extensive and lucrative, and to the day of his death he enjoyed a popularity second to none among the practitioners of Philadelphia.

It is presumed that during a long period, *none* could claim a larger and at the same time a more select practice, *few* one that was of equal amount.

As a private teacher of medicine he was for years success-



fully engaged; associated at different times with many of our gifted physicians, who *have* occupied and *do still* occupy distinguished positions, in, as well as out of the schools in this and other cities; and to large and respectable classes in the Philadelphia Hospital and elsewhere, he delivered several courses of Clinical instruction.

Professor Morton was associated with the immortal M'Clellan in laying the foundation, and in rearing the superstructure of the medical department of this college. The persevering personal exertions of these eminent men, and the untiring energies of their gifted minds, were devoted to sowing the *first* seeds, and in training and sustaining the *first* shoots.

Morton was the *first* professor who filled in this institution the chair, which he who now addresses you has the honor at this time to occupy.

After the death of Professor Calhoun the dean of the faculty, he was invested with the duties and responsibilities of that office, which he continued ably and faithfully to perform until the unexpected change took place, which invested the present incumbents with the management of this department, transferred to us in consequence of the voluntary resignation of himself and colleagues, in the autumn of 1843.

It is but justice to his memory to state that in the transfer alluded to, he was the principal and efficient agent, and that it was by his prompt and generous conduct that the course of instruction in the college was neither interrupted nor seriously retarded.

Although his official and professional connection with the school, thus suddenly, and may I not add unfortunately ceased, he ever took a warm interest in its welfare, repeatedly attending our introductory and valedictory lectures, and often expressing his gratification and delight in the brightening prospects of its continued usefulness and ultimate success.

As some token of his regard we may mention that to his kind liberality, the present faculty is indebted for a number of specimens which enrich our museum, particularly for a set of rare and valuable casts, taken from a series of skulls



in his immense and unrivalled collection, in the Academy of Natural Sciences.

It might reasonably be supposed that engrossed with the duties and responsibilities of his extensive practice, and all the addition of these laborious collaterals occupying his time, he could find but little leisure for other pursuits, and could indulge only a faint hope of ever acquiring fame in any other path; but along with an assiduous and unfaltering devotion to strictly professional avocation, Dr. Morton combined an enthusiastic and earnest love for natural science. His life is an illustration of what can be done, even under adverse circumstances, by those, who are patient, who are resolute, who are industrious, who are wise and who are true to themselves.

He was for thirty years an assiduous and valuable member of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, and during a portion of that time its honoured President. He was also a member of the college of Physicians, of Philadelphia; of the Philosophical Society of this city, as well as a member of other scientific associations in Europe and in America.

Ever calm, but ever active, always prepared for the exigencies of his business duties, and ever ready to devote to profitable use the scanty intervals of leisure which those duties allowed him, he found time for continual participation in scientific affairs. Perhaps the most prominent and peculiar of his varied and extensive contributions to science, were those great works, the *Crania Americana* and *Crania Egyptiaca*, which immediately placed their distinguished author in the front rank of archæologists and ethnographers throughout the world. The appearance of the first named of these volumes established an era; it opened up a new department of research. The materials which were afterwards embodied in this remarkable folio, published in 1839, and the first ever produced, the author had begun to collect twenty years before. Few scientific labours ever caused a stronger or more durable impression on the philosophic mind, or had a more powerful effect in directing the course of future investigations. Its full effect is yet to be ascertained; at present it



stands almost isolated, and its real value can be developed only, when other races of men are studied and tabulated, on a similar plan, and when a comparison of the averages given would enable us to determine the characteristic differences among the races. This unique production also is a work of great merit.

His *Crania Egyptiaca* was published in 1844, five years after. Notwithstanding all the riches of European Museums and the facility of intercourse with Egypt, it was after all left for a citizen of more distant America to *elucidate* what had always been considered a most intricate subject and to change the prevalent opinion upon it.

The ethnological position of the Egyptian as a portion of the Hamitic branch of the great Caucasian race (so called) was fully established, and he also proved conclusively that the *earlier* civilization had existed on the Lower Nile, and had passed upward *only* at a later period.

To crown the triumph, Dr. Prichard and other authorities in Ethnology, retracted their previously expressed opinions, on the receipt of Morton's work, and acknowledged themselves convinced by his facts and arguments.

The title of this book, gentlemen, *reminds* us that but a few days preceeding his death, the subject of our memoir sat on one of the front benches which some of you now occupy, in his usual health, listening most attentively to one of my colleagues while eloquently discoursing on *Egyptian Mummification*. "Sic transit vita."

In 1833, an original and elaborate volume on the pathology and treatment of consumption, issued from the press, bearing on its exterior the authors *name* and on its pages the lineaments of a most accurate observer and judicious medical discerner.

Next appeared (in 1835) an American Edition of McIntosh's Practice of Physic, which has since passed through several editions under Dr. Morton's continued care and supervision. This book I believe is still in high repute as authority in this and many others of our Medical Schools.



In 1849, two years ago appeared his last elaborate and valuable work on Human Anatomy—in one volume, Royal octavo—compiled with much care and labour.

To the publishers, Messrs. Grigg and Elliot, much praise is due for the superior character of its artistical and mechanical qualities, so desirable in a work of that kind. We would here take occasion to recommend it as an excellent guide to the student on the subject of which it treats.

At an interview with the author while this work was in process of publication, a proposition was made, which as it illustrates a prominent trait in Dr. Morton's character, viz. *child like humility*, I have been tempted to relate, even at the risk of being charged with its opposite

He asked your speaker the privilege of taking his seat with the class, whenever his time and professional engagements would permit, that he might become more familiar with the subject which he was preparing for the press. Although so reasonable and flattering a request could not be refused, be assured Gentlemen, in all sincerity, I felt that the proposition should have been reversed—that he should be the Gamaliel and not I

Corroborating our desultory remarks on the life and character of this scientific physician, we will repeat in full, the following short and modest eulogium, written by his mourning and attached Pastor and friend,—and published at the time in one of the religious papers of Philadelphia.

“A SUDDEN AND SEVERE LOSS.”

“Seldom has our city been more deeply moved in its literary and professional ranks, by the ravages of death than during the past week, in the comparatively sudden and unexpected decease of Dr. Samuel George Morton. After a short sickness of about four days, disease had done its perfect work. Little did we think, as we saw him in God's house on the Sunday previous to the fatal attack, that he was never to tread those courts again; that we were delivering to one immortal being at least, the last public ministrations of grace that would ever fall upon his



ear. The manly form, the gentle mein, the thoughtful manner, the apparent vigor, gave hope and promise for future years of toil and usefulness. But, alas! the decree had gone forth; dust must return to dust, and neither skill nor kindness, prayers or effort, could reverse the fiat. Dr. Morton's published works have given him a name and a fame in Europe equal at least to any of his competitors in the race of scientific investigation. The simplicity of his character, his child-like disposition and extreme unobtrusiveness, coupled with his extensive acquirements in the various branches of natural science, gave him prominence and influence in the literary circle of our city. His winning gentleness, deep feeling, and absorbing sympathy for suffering patients, endeared him to the many households where he was called to exercise the "healing art." We have witnessed time and again the workings of a describeless mental agitation when the fell power of disease seemed to baffle the appliances of medical skill; and his own lips have told us, of midnight hours and entire nights rendered restless and sleepless, by a burning desire to repel the insidious foe and save the life of a suffering patient committed to his care. Personally we owe him a debt of gratitude which if we cannot repay, we may at least acknowledge. As the generous preceptor of two of our sons who received from him what more resembled the kindness of a father, than the service of an instructor; as the faithful attendant of our household in seasons of sickness through a series of years; as the friend of humanity proffering to us the privilege of calling in his aid, without fee or reward, in behalf of any of the poor of our parish, we feel that it is due to his memory, and the profession of which he was so distinguished a member, to advert to these facts as illustrative of what we believe to be a very general characteristic of the entire body."

Called from life in the prime of mental vigor and usefulness, and summoned by his Divine Lord & Master, to render an account of his stewardship at an age considerably within the limits of three score *years* and ten—in the midst of absorbing scientific and professional labours—having ac-



accomplished much—but much also remaining to be completed—at this momentous crisis when the eyes of the scientific community were particularly fixed upon *him*, and the cry understood if not expressed was, give! give! At that moment, the angel of death receives his commission and with unfeeling and resistless hand lays the body low in the dust and calls the spirit back to God who gave it.

While reflecting on this subject, we were forcibly impressed with the appropriate application to the circumstances of his devoted life and too early death, of the words of the Latin Sage as you may see them engraved in microscopic characters in the *design* on the face of the Anatomical Ticket of this school—"Ars longa, vita brevis est."

Yes Gentlemen, true! true! are we not reminded almost daily and hourly, that life is short, frail, and uncertain? that it is a vapour which appeareth for a little and vanisheth away, that it is as the morning cloud and early dew—that it is as the flower of grass which soon withers and dies. Yes, our profession reminds us, our consciences assure us of the fact, and Providence and revelation alike iterate and confirm the important and solemn truth.

Dr. Morton's life, although comparatively short, equalled that of many, and exceeded the average life of man. How many of us my young friends will see two and fifty years? a question which any may ask, but none can answer.

In our anxiety to excel in the arts and sciences of this world's teachings, to receive its honors and enjoy its rewards, which are unsatisfactory and evanescent, and which perish with the using, let me counsel you early to seek that wisdom which is from above, and make choice of that better part which shall not be taken away—to be diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.

If ye consecrate your time and your talents to the service of Him in whom we live, and move and have our being, be assured that whether your days be few or



many, when your earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, ye shall have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, having promise of the life that now is and of that *which is to come*.  
*Then can ye say with the Poet,*

"O happy is the man who hears,  
 Religion's warning voice,  
 And who celestial wisdom makes,  
 His early only choice."

Thus, gentlemen, we have seen, that there has been taken from among us within a few short months, by the mysterious Providence of Almighty God, one of the most respected and beloved of citizens, who for thirty years has walked our streets, and gone in and out before this community, an honor and an ornament to our profession, who has endeared himself by his meek and amiable deportment, to all classes and conditions of his fellow men, high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, who by his talents and persevering research, has within the limits of a comparatively short life, acquired a reputation (at home and abroad) coextensive with the *scientific*, may I not add with the *civilized* world, who has distinguished himself as the laborious and successful pioneer in science, as a popular and accomplished teacher of medicine and its kindred branches, a successful and unrivalled author.

In the words of a friend who knew him well and prized him much: "he was estimable in all his relations, respectable in all he thought and did, a man of pure heart and blameless life, a faithful physician, a kind friend, a loving husband and father, a gentle companion, and exemplary citizen, a man gifted without ostentation," and may we not hope that with all his talents and his fame, he was a christian devout though inobtrusive.

Gentlemen, have we not in the very hasty and imperfect outline of our lamented friend, presented to you a character worthy of your imitation, a model, a personification of untiring industry and perseverance, of unalloyed modesty, urbanity and sterling worth, of professional proficiency, (we had almost said perfection,) and of remarkable scientific attainments.



He was probably by nature not more gifted than many of *you*, and perhaps not *equal* to *some* of you. *His* race is run—ye are yet on the track, will ye not walk in his steps? will ye not *strive* that ye may excel. The science which he loved is yet unfinished, incomplete. The profession of his choice is to be yours—a noble prize is to be won—a bright example has gone before you—as the time is short and the journey long and difficult, improve the one and persevere in the other, and God will surely bless you.

Gentlemen, it seldom falls to the lot of mortal and fallible man to pass through *life*, with a character so irreproachable, a name so honored and untarnished and a fame so extensive and merited, or, at *death* to be so sincerely mourned and regretted by all classes of society, from the humblest citizen to the most learned in science, each striving to excel in paying respect to the memory of departed *worth*.

May we not in conclusion, gentlemen, with propriety transfer to his tomb the following Epitaph by Pope, written after the death of his beloved Fenton, esteemed an elegant poet, and one of the worthiest and most modest men that ever adorned the court of Apollo:—

"This modest stone, what few vain marbles can  
May truly say, Here lies an *honest* man :  
A poet bless'd beyond a poet's fate,  
Whom *Heaven* kept SACRED from the *proud* and great :  
*Foe* to loud praise, and *friend* to learned ease,  
*Content* with science in the vale of peace,  
Calmly he looked on *either* life, and *here*  
Saw nothing to regret, or *there* to fear :  
From *Nature's* temperate feast rose satisfied,  
Thanked heav'n that he had *liv'd* and that he *died*."