

Grove J. H.

WITH COMPLIMENTS

— OF —

ROBERT NEBINGER.

BIOGRAPHY

— OF —

ANDREW NEBINGER, M. D.

Box 325

1880



Biography
of
Andrew Nebinger, M. D.
by
J. H. Grove, M. D.

Read before the Philadelphia County
Medical Society, May 11, 1887.

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Biography.

In obedience to the request of the Philadelphia County Medical Society to furnish it with a biographical notice of our late honored associate, Dr. Andrew Nebinger, that the same may become a matter of record in its archives, I have the honor to submit the following sketch :—

Dr. Andrew Nebinger was born in the old district of Southwark, Philadelphia, December 12, 1819. His father was Andrew Nebinger, of York County, Pennsylvania, a descendant from German and English parents, and a soldier in the war of 1812. In the battle of Yorktown he received a wound, the scar from which he carried to his grave. A sister of Dr. Nebinger's father was married to Dr. Webster Lewis, a brother of Judge Ellis Lewis.

His mother was Honora St. Leger, a native of Dublin, Ireland, his filial love for whose memory was the predominant feeling of his heart, ever bursting forth when her name or the place of her birth was mentioned. Who that was present can forget his impassioned words at the

reception of General Corcoran, in 1862: "Oh! Erin, green isle of the ocean, I love and adore you, not alone because of your martyrs, heroes, statesmen, poets and matchless orators, but I love you because of her from whose loins I sprang."

Dr. Nebinger pursued his studies in the private schools of the day, and laid the foundation for a practical and scientific education, which he afterwards perfected in the Medical Department of the University of Pennsylvania, graduating with the highest honors, April 6, 1850. The subject of his graduating essay was, "Cholera Infantum," in the preparation of which he gave evidence of a matured judgment, not often to be met with in an essay from the pen of a young physician.

He studied medicine with Drs. John Neill and J. J. Reese, of Philadelphia; but for ten years prior to his entering into full practice as a physician, he was engaged in the apothecary business in the vicinity of his late residence on South Second street.

The drug business, an important and essential factor in the training of a young physician, was relinquished after Dr. Nebinger had completed his medical studies at the University of Pennsylvania, in 1850.

The Doctor began the practice of medicine in the locality of his birth, and remained there steadfastly devoted to his profession, and assiduously applying

himself to his work. He was wedded to his profession, and was careful, in pursuing its practice, to do everything in his power to elevate it, and render it useful in relieving the ills of poor suffering humanity.

His obstetrical practice was remarkably large, and his success as an obstetrician soon placed him in the foremost ranks of the accoucheurs of the day. He built up a large and lucrative practice, at the same time paying close attention to the affairs of medical societies. Though always actively engaged as the medical adviser of wealthy patients, he never allowed the poor to suffer, and many are the unfortunate families who are indebted to Dr. Nebinger for kindly attentions.

A bachelor, with no personal family cares, he always found time, apart from his regular duties, to aid the poor and lowly, finding recreation in the noble work of a humanitarian.

Dr. Nebinger was one of the incorporators of the County Medical Society of Philadelphia, and was made one of the Directors of the Association immediately after its incorporation in 1877. The Doctor, at various times, prepared and read a number of original and instructive papers before the County Medical Society. These papers always received marked attention from his auditors, and at the close of his reading he would receive the cordial congratulations of the members upon his pleasing and instructive efforts.

Among the numerous papers thus presented to the County Medical Society, of which he was the author, we may mention, *The Pathology of Cholera Infantum, Scarlatina, Diphtheria, Variola* (presented as part of the transactions of the American Medical Association, 1865). The latter paper, in consequence of the very positive and original treatment recommended by Doctor Nebinger, and the highly satisfactory and decided results obtained by him in carrying out his "Compensative Nutritive Treatment," attracted no small degree of attention elsewhere as well as here.

The Doctor was a true follower of Hippocrates, believing "that medicine was an aggregation of facts, discovered or made manifest by experiment, observation and experience, confirmed by repeated tests and trials, and that the only true and safe practice was that which was based upon such aggregation of facts; or, in other words, upon 'rational experience.'"

Hence, when he was able to state, in his argument in defense of his system of treatment of Variola, that his statistics exhibited a mortality of but four in seventy-nine cases, about five per cent., or one in nineteen and seventy-five one-hundredths, during the epidemic of small-pox in 1861 and 1862, he was giving evidence that the teaching of Hippocrates was a living principle for his guidance. Listen for a moment to the Doctor's words, when discussing this subject:—

“The necessities of the system are great, and can only be met by the introduction of the highest order of aliment, and that in large quantities. He had heard but recently of a case of confluent small-pox; the patient was an adult male, who was restricted to three glasses of milk-punch per day, the doctor in attendance declaring that a greater quantity would be injurious.

“For one moment reflect upon that. Three glasses of milk-punch in twenty-four hours, for a man covered from head to foot with pustules, the whole surface of his body being destroyed, and the necessity existing for its reproduction; and yet those pustules were to be perfected and the whole surface of the body to be reproduced out of three glasses of milk-punch per diem!

“Need he say that sloughing of the skin and cellular tissue took place, and that the patient died? No, he need not. You must know that under such treatment no other result could follow. ‘Three glasses of milk-punch, and three only; more would be damaging.’ Why, if a well man was permitted to take, as his only food, but three glasses of milk-punch every twenty-four hours, he would, in a short time, starve to death on it. Yet, gentlemen, this is the treatment given to confluent small-pox patients. Is it wonderful that the great majority die?”

In 1870 Dr. Nebinger, as the retiring president, read a paper before the Philadelphia County Medical Society

upon the subject of "Criminal Abortion: Its Extent and Prevention." It is not necessary to say to you who were then members of the Society that the masterly presentation of this subject, as made by Dr. Nebinger, excited discussion and animadversion in circles outside of the ranks of our profession.

The Doctor was a brave man, and he struck with no uncertain hand at a crime that still remains a blot upon our civilization. Would that there were more men of his stamp among us, ready to brave everything for the truth, then might we hope for the consummation looked forward to by Dr. Nebinger, when the prevention and cure of this terrible moral evil, with all its entailment of physical suffering, shall be fully accomplished!

In 1867 Dr. Nebinger prepared a sketch of the life of Dr. William Darrach, and read the same before the County Medical Society, January 23d of that year. We quote from it the Doctor's tribute to the excellence of American teachers and colleges in our day:—

"The era has rolled by when the necessity existed for the American student of medicine to quit this country for foreign climes, to there perfect himself in, or to give an elegant finish to his studies. Our colleges and teachers, public and private, are now so numerous and so well qualified to impart medical knowledge; our hospitals so extensive, the mass of disease, medical and surgical, so

vast, and the clinical instruction so thorough, that after the student shall have learned all that may be here acquired, there will be but little else, perhaps, worthy of the expenditure of time, labor and means, for him to acquire abroad."

Yet with this high opinion of our schools and their teaching, he was not content that they should remain stationary, but was ever urging them forward in the line of higher requirements on the part of matriculates, and a longer term of study, and was partly instrumental in accomplishing changes in both these directions, in the curriculum of his Alma Mater. As evidence of his strong feeling on these subjects, we quote from his address as President, delivered before the Medical Society of the State of Pennsylvania, at Altoona, May, 1880:—

"The advance in the art of medicine, the great increase in the sum of medical knowledge, the vast increase in the number of the instrumentalities, for the cure and relief of disease, whether medical, surgical, gynecological, ophthalmological, etc., etc., are such that the amount of time which was devoted by our fathers to the learning and teaching of medicine, is now ridiculously inadequate to meet the requirements of the day. The advance in medicine demands a longer period of pupilage, certainly not less than *four years*, more extended and thorough teaching, and a better quality, or higher preliminary education, before matriculation."

The Doctor wrote a biography of William Mayburry, M. D., which appeared in the transactions of the American Medical Society of the State of Pennsylvania for 1875. This biography, as well as that of Dr. Darrach, gives evidence of the fine literary ability of the author, and causes us to regret that he did not more frequently place his thoughts before the public.

To those who have never heard the Doctor deliver an address, it may be proper to state that to the attractive and instructive subject matter of his essays, he added the grace and ability of a finished elocutionist. No one who has ever listened to him when warmed with an important theme, can ever forget the fire and flow of his eloquence. The Doctor's eloquent words, in memory of William Mayburry, M. D., and in honor of the medical profession, apply with equal force to him who penned them :—

“Having finished his academical studies, he felt that it was important that he should determine upon some profession or business to which he should devote the years of his manhood, for the double purpose of his own happiness and the public weal. Feeling, doubtless, that he, who, in the great hive of human industry, is a drone, consuming the honey, the products of the skill, labor and enterprise of others, without producing himself all that he may be able to produce, and thus contributing

his *pro quantum* to the common stock of human happiness and human utilitarianism, is unworthy of the existence which has been given to him.

“His choice fell upon the profession of medicine, a profession as old as it is honorable, as useful and humane as it is honorable and old. A profession which the gods might deem it an honor and a privilege to worthily pursue, inasmuch as its chief aims are to make the maimed whole, to deprive pain of its agony, to raise up and restore to health those struck prostrate with disease, to cause the deaf to hear, the blind to see, and to give women in travail a safe deliverance of a living offspring. Upon such a profession his choice fell, and wisely, as the deep interest which he took in his profession, and his positive ability and great usefulness as a member of it, at the bedside, over and over again demonstrated.”

The Doctor, besides his connection with the Philadelphia County Medical Society in which he held, in turn, all the leading offices, was a member of the State Medical Society, of which he was, at different times, President and Vice-President, a member of the College of Physicians, of the American Medical Association of the United States, a life-member of the Academy of Natural Sciences, the Franklin Institute and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

As Medical Director of St. Mary's Hospital he brought to bear in its direction all his rare executive ability, great

intelligence and consummate medical skill. To this labor of love he devoted the latest energies of his life, and followed its fortunes in the future by the bestowal upon it of a large share of his estate by will. The new St. Agnes' Hospital will ever remain an enduring monument to the memory of its benefactor.

During the late Rebellion Dr. Nebinger was surgeon-in-charge of the Cooper-Shop Volunteer Hospital, in which position he was ably assisted by his brother, George W. Nebinger, M. D., and also by his brother, Robert Nebinger, who compounded the medicines for the hospital and dispensary.

The kind and skilful attentions received by our soldiers on their march to the front, and by those of them who were fortunate enough to reach there on their return, attentions given by night as well as by day, can never be forgotten, and the memory of those days and nights is enshrined in the hearts of thousands of our veterans.

The Doctor was a great student and very fond of books. He surrounded himself with a large library containing numerous rare and valuable books, all of which were for use, none for show. He made notes of his reading, and a retentive memory enabled him to command stores of information upon even abstruse subjects, not apparently in his line of thought. A close and logical reasoner, and ready in debate, he was seldom

overmatched, and seldomer still found wanting if a reason were demanded for the opinions that he held.

Doctor Nebinger was an active and zealous member of the Church of the Sacred Heart. A Catholic in every sense of the word, he was not a bigot; he was of those who never did his good works that they might be seen of men.

In educational matters the Doctor took a lively interest. He was a member of the Board of Public Education from 1868 to the time of his death. During his connection with the Board of Public Education he took quite an active part in promoting the educational interests of the pupils of the schools of Philadelphia, and made many useful and intelligent suggestions for improving and maintaining our public school system.

Doctor Nebinger retired from the active duties of his profession about 1870, and devoted himself to his duties as a member of the Board of Public Education, and to the management of various charitable institutions, in which he always exhibited the greatest interest. During the early part of February, 1886, he was not at all well, and in March he was seized with nervous prostration accompanied with heart failure, and after several weeks of painful illness he passed from time to eternity, in the hope of a blessed immortality, April 12, 1886, in the sixty-seventh year of his age.

In the words of his favorite author, "Take him for all in all, we shall not soon see his like again."

At a meeting of the Philadelphia County Medical Society, held May 11, 1887, a memoir of the late Dr. Andrew Nebinger was read by Dr. J. H. Grove, the member appointed for that purpose; and upon the conclusion of the reading, the following minute was unanimously adopted:—

Dr. Andrew Nebinger was one of the incorporators of this Society, and among its most honored and active members. He occupied, with honor to himself and benefit to the Society, its principal offices, including that of President. He was ever zealous in its service, wise and influential in its counsels. As its representative he made it respected and powerful in the American Medical Association, and in the Medical Society of the State of Pennsylvania, and of the latter body was made President, and guided the deliberations of an important convention.

His voice was ever raised, and his efforts exerted in behalf of all that would dignify and elevate the profession, which he practised with distinction; gaining therein, that greatest meed of success, the gratitude and affectionate devotion of the patients, to whom he was physician, friend, counsellor, and often benefactor. In scientific, religious and charitable organizations he was active and prominent. To the close of his career, so full of work and honor, he was engaged in the service of the community, and his unflagging efforts in the cause of public education will not soon be forgotten by his fellow-citizens, whose gratitude and respect they earned for him.

It is particularly fitting that this Society should formally testify to its appreciation of such valuable services, and pay a tribute of respect to the memory of its honored member, the kind physician, the ardent patriot, the true citizen, the faithful friend, the good man ; and it is ordered that the foregoing minute be entered upon our records, and a copy thereof, duly attested, be forwarded to the brother of our lamented associate.

From the minutes of the Philadelphia County Medical Society.

J. SOLIS COHEN,
President.

Attest :

S. SOLIS COHEN,
Recording Secretary.

May 12, 1887.

