R. M. T.

Emmet

REMINISCENSES OF DR. THOMAS ADDIS EMMET.

with
the compliments
of
Thos. Addis Emmet.

FROM
THE MEDICAL NEWS
NEW YORK
NOVEMBER 18, 1905

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[Reprinted from THE MEDICAL NEWS, Nov. 18, 1905.]

REMINISCENSES OF DR. THOMAS ADDIS EMMET.*

BEFORE entering upon my autobiographical narrative, which, it has been suggested, would be an appropriate and interesting form of response to your toast, I wish to express my fullest appreciation of the honor you have done me. I can say no more to give greater expression to the depth of my feelings than I thank you all, and with all my heart.

This occasion I feel may prove a vindication of my work as well as the most important event of my life. I naturally asked for the names of those who were the prime movers in tendering me this dinner, and my surprise was great to learn that I had not been honored by my friends alone. There are a number among you who I will not say have been inimical, but who certainly lacked appreciation of my methods and who have long held that I was a teacher of false doctrine. Now possibly the pendulum has begun to swing the other way, as I have hoped and prayed for years it would, but, be this as it may, you are friendly *now* or you would not be here, and my heart warms equally to one and all of you. I have long finished my life's work, and the desire now with me is peace and good will to all. It has been a surprise to me with advancing years how quickly have been forgotten the disagreeable incidents

* This sketch was prepared by Dr. Emmet, to be read at the dinner, May 29, 1905, in a whole or in part, as might seem appropriate. Dr. Emmet, however, was called on at so late an hour that he made but a few extemporaneous remarks having little reference to what he had intended to say. The subjects treated in this sketch have been considered of especial interest in connection with some of the remarks made by the different speakers who were ignorant of what Dr. Emmet had prepared. After deciding to print this narrative, new material entering more into detail was added by him for the purpose of elucidating the subjects briefly referred to in common, but otherwise the manuscript has remained unchanged.

which I now realize must attend the professional course of all men with decided opinions as I have held, and who stood, as I have always, ready to defend them.

I was born at the University of Virginia, near Charlottesville, where my father was one of the original professors appointed by Mr. Jefferson to fill the chair of Natural History and afterward of chemistry. An effort to recall the incidents of my early life has nearly overpowered me with the vivid recollection of persons and events which had passed from my mind for so many years.

Above all, stands out the recollection of my father, Dr. John Patten Emmet, a remarkable man both in character and attainments. For years previous to his death he had been my constant companion. It is my belief few fathers ever made a more lasting impression upon the moral development and after-life of a son than he made upon mine. From my earliest age he seemed seldom to have spoken to me without attempting to teach me something which I readily understood, and of which I seemed to have retained the recollection. He taught me to think and to think of the rights of others; to be careful in money matters; to obey the laws of God and man from principle, and to realize to a full degree my duty to both. He taught me to be a close observer, and to seek the causes of things. Thus was laid the foundation of my success in after life as a pioneer in the development of the theory and practice of gynecology. On one occasion he taught me a very practical lesson. He overheard me finding fault, in an arrogant manner, with the negro whose business it was to clean my shoes. With a twinkle in his eye, which I well remember, and in a kindly manner as if conferring a privilege, he said: "My boy, from this time forth, so long as you are under my roof, you shall clean your own shoes, and this

will give you the satisfaction of always being able to have your shoes exactly in the condition you wish." This taught me to be self-reliant and to this day I am reluctant to call upon anyone to do for me what I can do for myself. I have gone through life with an increasing ambition to be worthy of his good name, and my first thought has been the gratification he would have experienced in the flesh, on every occasion where I have attained success or have been the recipient of some honor.

My father, at his death, left me, at the age of fourteen, little more than his example and good name. From that time I have had to think for myself and practically to have paid my own way. A relative advanced me the money so long as I needed it, but all of this I repaid with interest as soon as possible. In return for his kindness it is one of the most gratifying incidents of my life to have had the privilege and ability years after, to lighten his burden, when a reverse of fortune came upon him in his old age.

After my father's death, I entered the University as a student, but the fact of my residence as the son of a professor, my youth and a very rapid physical development militated against any steady mental application. My gun, my dog and my horse, the fields and the woods on the neighboring mountains saw more of me than my professors, until finally, falling hopelessly behind in my classes, it was requested by the faculty that I should withdraw from the college.

Dr. Robley Dunglison, of the Jefferson Medical School, Philadelphia, had been appointed a professor in the University of Virginia by Mr. Jefferson at the same time with my father, and they had been warm personal friends. Dr. Dunglison assisted at my birth, but had left the University before my recollection. I have always possessed the faculty of being able to decide quickly for myself in any emergency. Being

thus suddenly stranded I wrote to Dr. Dunglison as to a stranger, telling him the circumstances and asking his advice as to the advisability of trying to study medicine. I received a prompt and generous response. The Doctor fully understood my difficulty and his advice was to make no effort to study, but to attend the medical lectures regularly and try to remember what I could. The first medical lecture I ever heard was delivered by Dr. J. K. Mitchell, the professor of the theory and practice of medicine in the Jefferson, and from that hour I felt that my life's work was laid out for me.

My course of study was an uneventful one with the exception of an attack of smallpox and one of pneumonia, for which I was immediately bled, got a dose of calomel, and convalesced promptly. I led a frugal life, attended strictly to my work and kept my living expenses and extravagances within three hundred dollars a year. At the ending of four years, and after the delay of a year to pass my twenty-first birthday, I graduated.

In response to the action of the American Medical Association, which had been but recently organized, the examinations for graduation in medicine were said to have been particularly strict in 1849-50. I certainly passed a creditable examination, but without having dissected more than the sartorious muscle, without having written a prescription, or having attended an obstetrical case. I make this statement in no disparagement of the Jefferson medical faculty, as with advancing experience I have been impressed with the fact that these professors formed a remarkable body of men. Each was a host in himself, and I doubt if their equal as a whole were ever gotten together in any other medical school, at home or abroad. The system of teaching was defective in this respect then as it is to-day, and only those who were fortu-

nate enough to obtain hospital appointments just after graduation were able to correct the defect by gaining the necessary practical experience. Otherwise the greater part of a lifetime must be spent in private practice to obtain what was necessary at the beginning. I knew thoroughly the theory of medicine, and by means of plates my knowledge of anatomy was perfect, nor can I recall having had the slightest difficulty in answering any important question.

Among the medical men and their assistants with whom I was brought in contact at that time there was a great deal of common sense and appreciation of the practical value of what should be taught, and yet there was no lack in estimation as to the value of detail and accurate knowledge where it was applicable. I attended each year the summer course in Philadelphia, which was a repetition of the winter one given in the college. The lectures were delivered by younger men who were well trained, and all of those who lived became prominent later in life. On one occasion a Dr. Wallace, who already had a large surgical practice, was to lecture on hernia one hot July afternoon, when it was hot only as it can be sometimes in Philadelphia. The Doctor weighed about three hundred pounds, and after divesting himself of all the clothing he could spare, came in with the trunk of a subject to make his demonstration. But the heat was too much for him and, mopping himself between each word, he began: "When you come to operate for hernia you will find little you have been taught to expect, and I cannot now enter into a fuller explanation, but it is in a nutshell, cut until you come to the gut, and you will be a damn fool if you cut it; good day." When the weather got cooler the Doctor did the subject full justice in his usual affable manner, but to this hot day I am indebted for an important practical lesson being forcibly impressed upon

me. Many times in after-life, when I had lost my way in the abdominal cavity, where everything had become matted together by frequent attacks of peritonitis and where often in the tissues there seemed but the thickness and consistency of damp tissue paper as the only barrier to some accident which might cause the death of the patient, I have felt a wave of demoralization pass through me down to my knees. I would suddenly think of the lecture on hernia, with the full details which I have not given, and with a smile not in keeping with the situation, I have had my faculties sharpened so that with care and time I have soon worked out into a clearing, with no further difficulty before me.

I do not cite this incident of the lecture on hernia as a reflection upon Dr. Wallace, but in appreciation of the terse and practical lesson the doctor wished to convey. Notwithstanding the accidental inelegant mode of expression, it impressed everyone who heard his few words with the necessity of self-reliance under every circumstance, and, above all, that the difficulties of the operation were exaggerated by the usual mode of teaching. Dr. Wallace had already gained a reputation as a careful and successful surgeon before his death.

On the day of graduation, after a long ceremony, I received my diploma and reached my lodgings late for dinner, but before I had finished I was summoned by a communication from the dean of the faculty to call upon him without delay. My first thought was that some mistake had been made about my diploma, and I answered the summons with a heavy heart. I was informed that through an agent of the Chilian government the faculty had been requested to select from the graduating class some one fitted to take charge, as surgeon, of an expedition, and that I had received the appointment. The expedition was about to sail from New York under

St. George Campbell, the engineer, who was to build the first railroad in Chili, for Meiggs, who afterward became known as the railroad king. I was to receive three thousand dollars a year in gold and all my living and traveling expenses paid upon binding myself to remain until the completion of the road. This seemed a fabulous sum to one in my circumstances, and in relative value would be about equal to twelve thousand dollars at the present time. Without delay I called on the merchant in New York who had the fitting out of the expedition and was very cordially received as a person of some importance. I was explicitly informed by him that no expense should be spared in fitting out my department, or in consulting anyone as an expert who could aid me. I learned that about eight hundred men, women and children were going, and as we would likely be about three years up among the Andes Mountains, unable to supply any deficiency, it was necessary that no mistake of omission should be made in supplying everything which would be necessary in addition to medicines and surgical outfit. To make a beginning I was requested then and there to write out a requisition for medicines, to which I could make additions afterward. I had no difficulty in writing out the names of a number of medicines, but soon I began to perspire freely on realizing for the first time the responsibility I was about to assume. After chewing for a short time upon the end of my quill pen, to aid my thoughts as to what I should do, I took up my hat, went out to the merchant and told him I could not conscientiously accept the position. He looked at me as if he thought I was a fool, and I passed out without comment. I afterward learned that a young graduate, who probably had not had my advatages; accepted the position; but I was never able to ascertain how he " made out."

I have never had my sense of duty so severely

taxed as on this occasion, where I had to put aside so completely every consideration of self interest, and it seemed at the time as if my decision was the wiping out of all future prospects.

Within a short distance of the counting house I met Dr. MacNeven, the only person I knew in the city outside of my family circle. He asked me what I was doing in New York, and I asked him what he was doing downtown at that hour. It was just after the frightful famine in Ireland when several hundred thousand immigrants had landed during the year in New York, and were dying in the streets of typhus, or ship fever, as it was called. Commissioners of Emigration were appointed, and they were erecting temporary buildings on Ward's Island for hospital purposes. A medical board of fifteen visiting physicians had been appointed, and Dr. MacNeven was one of the number. He was on his way to the place of meeting to examine applicants for the position of Resident physician, and I accompanied him. I was the first victim, and after an examination of four hours, during which each member of the Board took a turn, I was judged competent and reported for duty on the following day. I had never seen a case of ship fever, yet a building containing one hundred male cases was assigned to me, together with one hundred and fifty beds in addition for sick children and women, all of whom I had to visit regularly twice a day and as often as necessary to see any special case. I was also instructed to "go through" once a day a ward near my quarters containing about one hundred aged women. I was somewhat staggered at the responsibility put upon me, but I accepted the situation with a light heart as the only means by which I could gain experience in the practice of my profession.

At an early hour next morning I began my work with the old women, feeling fully satisfied that I would accomplish what was expected of

me if it could be done by my own efforts. I supposed all occupying beds in a hospital ward were sick, but when I was through, taking each woman in rotation, I had not a very clear idea of my morning's work, beyond having apparently cheered up greatly the spirits of the old women by my attentions. In my effort to do justice to the complaints of each and to use to their advantage the account of family or traditional ailments, which were communicated by each in confidence, I had written pages of prescriptions, having attempted to treat symptoms, singly and in groups.

I was seen coming out of the building, weary and in want of food and was accosted by one of the staff with the salutation: "In the name of Heaven, Doctor, what have you been doing in there all day with those old women? Don't you know that is part of the Refuge and all they need is a little tea and tobacco?"

Fortunately for the sick in my service that day when I was wanted and could not be found, another physician had been assigned to them and I was assisted each day thereafter. But further comment is unnecessary, in addition to what I have already expressed on our faulty method of teaching practice. At the end of some ten days I developed an attack of ship fever and escaped death by a very narrow margin, but I was back again at work within a month after the fever left me, although a leave of absence was generally granted for three months to recuperate. Contrary to rule, I had a second attack thirteen months later, which was so virulent in character that to save my life it was necessary to move me from the hospital atmosphere, with my nurses, to the house of an uncle in the city, which he and his family vacated on a few hours' notice, and it took me two months to regain my strength sufficiently to resume my work.

I served as a resident physician for three

years, having had in that time under my charge about eleven thousand miscellaneous cases, including all the eruptive fevers among adults and children, with over nineteen hundred cases of adult males suffering from ship fever. I got also some surgical experience and served my time in the Obstetrical Department, where from five to ten women a day were delivered. The interne was in full charge of the practice for about twenty-two hours out of each day, and whenever the visiting physician was not on duty. I frequently volunteered in the Pharmacy, and after my regular work was finished I served many hours at night in helping put up prescriptions. This experience was of great advantage when I began private practice, as a large number of physicians then still furnished their office patients with medicines, and I continued the custom for a number of years. A revival of the custom would be an offset to the prescribing druggists, and, from a pecuniary point, be of great advantage to the profession by stopping the repeating by druggists of old prescriptions for former patients and for all their friends on one office fee. In addition, as part of my volunteer work, I made fully one thousand post-mortem examinations. I thus familiarized myself with every pathological condition, with the exception of true yellow fever, of which I saw very few cases, but we had a number known as Chagres fever. At that time the Panama Railroad was being built, and at the beginning it was part of the duty of our staff to select with the greatest care the laborers, who were nearly all young Irishmen, and a finer set of men were never selected for any service. Making allowances for all exaggeration, the mortality was frightful and few returned but those who were brought back sick to Ward's Island. It was said at the time that with an allowance of eighteen inches for each body, laid side by side, the railroad track could

have been covered with the dead from ocean to ocean.

During my service in the hospital I took no holiday, and, with the exception of about three months and a half, while I was sick with ship fever, I was on continuous duty for three years in a service from which a number died and and many were obliged to resign in consequence of imperfect health. Yet I had a great deal of recreation, pleasure and time for reading. During my first winter I built after my own design a sailboat about nineteen feet long, beginning with the centerboard box and building out from that to the stern and bow. I was said to have disregarded all rules applicable to boat building, and yet I turned out a so-called nondescript which I used for two years. She was so active in her movements that I christened her "Senna and Salts," a combination probably known to few of you in practice to-day, but one which was speedy in movement and decided in action. I should state that I have a natural turn for mechanics, and at one time I possessed a collection of tools selected from almost every trade. I could carve in wood, and there was scarcely anything I wanted in wood or iron which I could not reproduce by some method of my own, unless the skill of an expert was needed. I will have to refer again to how much a knowledge of mechanics aided me in the development of my work in plastic surgery.

About two weeks before the expiration of my service as one of the Resident Physicians my Visiting Physician resigned. To my astonishment and satisfaction I received in a few days an official communication from the Board of Commissioners of Emigration notifying me I had been appointed a member of the Visiting Board of Physicians, and I was informed that the election had rested on my record of service. I was twenty years the junior of Dr. J. M. Carnochan,

who had been the youngest member of the board, and at the first meeting I became the secretary. My salary as Visiting Physician was four dollars a day, on which I soon married. With the prospect of building up a practice, I was fully contented, when I was so fortunate as to receive twenty-five cents cash for a visit among the tenement houses, then situated along the East River below Fourteenth Street. I received about fifty dollars for my first year's work in private practice, but after that time I advanced rapidly.

Some six months after my appointment and during the winter of 1853, I nearly lost my life in the discharge of my duty. There was a blizzard, with a fall of snow I have never seen equaled, and for two days there was scarcely an attempt made to travel on foot or by vehicle. I lived in Fourth Avenue near Twelfth Street, and in front of my door was the Harlem & New Haven Railroad, which had its depot then near the corner of Canal Street and in Broadway. Early in the morning of the third day a car passed with a steam snow plough to open the way. I decided it was my duty, as the youngest man of the Medical Board, to make an attempt to reach the hospital on Ward's Island, where I knew no Visiting Physician had been able to report for service for four days. I was two hours on this train reaching One Hundred and tenth Street, and where the railroad crossed the Harlem flats there was an open waste covered with snow three or four feet deep, and frequently I found it in drifts over my head. It was several hours before I was able to reach the ferry house on the Harlem River, and, notwithstanding the thermometer was at zero, I was in a profuse perspiration, in consequence of the great exertion I had made. The river had been frozen over, as well as the greater part of Hell Gate, but it was flood tide, and when I reached

there the river was filled with large cakes of ice piling up on each other from the force of the current. I could induce no one among the ferry men to accompany me in my effort to cross the river; but this did not discourage me as I was strong, self-reliant and foolhardy. I took a light flat-bottom skiff with each oar secured in a grummet, crossed the river by dragging the boat from one piece of ice to another, and several times fell in, getting wet above the waist. I finally succeeded in landing on the island with my clothing frozen on me and in quite an exhausted condition. I got a drink of brandy and visited my own patients, together with a number in the other services, wherever my advice was needed. I recrossed the river in the same manner, but with less exertion, as there were a number of open spaces where I was able to row. It was just growing dark when I reached the little railroad station on the viaduct, which I found empty, without a fire and with the prospect of freezing to death before morning if no train passed. I should have remained at the hospital, but it was before the days of local telegraph or telephone, and I was unwilling to subject my family to so many additional hours of uncertainty. A train come up fortunately soon after and stopped on my signal, so that I reached home after twelve hours' exposure, with my strength greatly overtaxed and weak from fasting all day, as I had neither time nor thought at the hospital to take any food.

I have detailed these circumstances as my experience was an interesting one from a medical standpoint. To my surprise I took no cold and next day suffered only from fatigue, but after some days I developed rheumatic fever and lay for six weeks on cotton, during which time I believe not a joint in my body, except in my spine, escaped the inflammatory action. After I began to sit up I suffered for a few days from

sudden attacks of palpitation and from syncope. Later on I twice dropped out of my chair unconscious for a moment in consequence of a draft of cold air caused by a window being opened suddenly behind me. But I convalesced rapidly and from that time I have never been conscious of any heart disturbance beyond an occasional intermitting pulse not due to organic disease. I can at my age ascend a stairway, so far as my broken leg will allow me, with as little disturbance of my respiration as at any time in my life.

My last service as Visiting Physician at the Emigrant Refuge Hospital was rendered in the early summer of 1854. The physician who had been on duty for the shortest time took charge, according to rule, of any emergency ward which had to be opened, and did so in addition to his regular work. I thus became responsible for a cholera ward where, during my six weeks' service, eight hundred cholera cases were admitted, generally in a state of collapse, as the greater portion were picked up in the slums of the city. I had a number of assistants, but the responsibility of my position was a fearful one. I spent about four hours a day going from one bed to another, aiding the attending physician, and was present at nearly all the post-mortem examinations. On two occasions, when a larger number of bad cases than usual had been admitted, I found next morning all the patients and the nurses had died since my last visit. Yet very few cases died in the hospital proper among the nurses or patients where they received proper and prompt treatment at the beginning. The nurses employed in the cholera wards were well paid for extra work, so that they were overworked and they relied too much on stimulants to keep up their strength. Many priests died, and I believe no record was kept of the number who lost their lives at Ward's Island. My strength was greatly taxed, and I became so sat-

urated with the poison that I was seldom free from some of the premonitory symptoms, but these were readily kept in check. My rest was greatly disturbed, as I would be often seized in my sleep with cramps in my fingers, toes and in the calves of my legs. The physician who relieved me was very apprehensive for his safety and died in a week. He was the only physician who lost his life in this service. That I did not die during my service in the Emigrant Refuge Hospital made me think afterward that God probably preserved my life for some other work.

After I became associated with the Woman's Hospital I gradually realized that the chief work of my life was to be done there. What was required of me became evident. With a new field of study before me, and with a mass of material at my disposal, greater than anyone else had ever controlled, it was made evident that my mission was to teach.

It would be but repetition should I attempt to give here any detail of my experience connected with that service. I have already done this in an address by me on "Reminiscences of the Founders of the Woman's Hospital Association," published in the *New York Journal of Gynecology*, May, 1893; and afterward with some additions reprinted in the *American Gynecological and Obstetrical Journal*, April, 1899. To a greater extent I have treated of the subject in a paper, "Personal Reminiscences Associated with the Progress of Gynecology," read before the American Gynecological Society at the meeting in May, 1900, and published in the transactions of the Society for that year, and which was also printed in the *American Gynecological and Obstetrical Journal* for May, 1900.

In these papers I have also attempted to express my great obligation to my old friend Dr. J. Marion Sims, with whom, during our joint service of five years and a half at the Woman's

Hospital my relations were as close as that of a son. If he had not given us his speculum, which opened the way for investigation, a knowledge of the use of silver wire and his perfect technic, I would never have been known to the world in connection with gynecology. Beyond the stated limit as to time, our work, however, lay on different lines and was viewed from different standpoints without the slightest connection one with the other.

It is now necessary for me again to refer to my experience at the University of Virginia to make clearer some of the difficulties which I managed to overcome to some extent in after life, and to show that even my limited tuition there proved of the greatest benefit. Mathematics was the especial stumbling block in my course at the University, and yet I can now realize what advantage I would have gained from the aid of a tutor as is furnished to-day at our universities. I certainly am not totally deficient in the mathematical instinct, although I have never learned the multiplication table, at least not having acquired it in early life, I have made no effort to accomplish it in later years, as by some mental process of my own I am able to get at what I need. After I had been some years in practice and a married man with children, I managed to find time to go over a college course with private teachers. Mathematics did not interest me as a whole, but I found the study of geometry very fascinating. That I learned to cipher is shown by the series of statistical tables which I prepared for my work on "The Theory and Practice of Gynecology," on which special work I spent nearly two years and made every calculation myself. These details go to show, I think, that defective teaching at the beginning is generally the cause of failure even with the most stupid child.

The course of lectures on Natural Philos-

ophy, as delivered by Prof. Wm. B. Rogers, was the only one which interested me. Consequently this line of study occupied much of my attention when years after I went over the college course. I thus learned to test every operation in plastic surgery by some principle of mechanics and was frequently able to judge of the value of any procedure devised by myself or another, without having actually to perform the operation. In my experience no plastic operation has ever been perfected to be of any practical value until it could stand a mechanical test. I will state, in addition, my conviction that no one in plastic surgery has ever been a successful operator, nor able to repeat to advantage the successful work of others, without possessing a mechanical instinct. This statement will doubtless be criticized, but by no one able to recognize the difference after a surgical procedure between a successful result and a failure.

I received my first professional recognition by being made a member of the Berlin Obstetrical Society, after publishing my work on "Vesicovaginal Fistula from Parturition and Other Causes," in 1868, and shortly after I was elected a member of the Medical Society of Norway.

My work on "The Principles and Practice of Gynecology" was published in 1879 and went through three editions in this country within fifteen months. All three editions were reproduced in London and translations into German and French were printed in Leipzig and in Paris. I have been informed that one was also made into Spanish, but the manuscript was lost by some accident. Whatever may have been the value of the work it was essentially original from cover to cover and it embodied the experience of the best part of my professional life. It was published unfortunately just before the full development or adoption of the aseptic treat-

ment as applied to abdominal surgery. In this respect the work was considered by some not full enough in detail, and yet I am still of the opinion that I taught the essentials. Others judged me not to be sufficiently advanced in my teaching, as I did not fully endorse all the surgical procedures of the period, but time has certainly sustained my judgment. A fourth edition of this work was never called for and fortunately, as I might have laid myself open to the charge of plagiarism. For everything I taught of special importance has gradually become absorbed into the practice of the profession during the past twenty-five years, and incorporated into every new book as common property, so that the origin of much has been lost.

I sometimes greatly enjoy a joke in a quiet way. It has not been more than six months since a physician from the West visited New York "to perfect himself," as he expressed it, and who, happening to hear of me somewhere, called to see me as one of the sights. As we had nothing in common I turned the conversation on his practice. He was, of course, a specialist in gynecology and for half an hour entertained me with an acount of the advantage to be derived from hot water vaginal douches, dwelling on the importance of the dorsal position. I showed so much interest that he left with a gratified expression in consequence of having taught a New York doctor something new.

For writing "The Theory and Practice of Gynecology" I received the degree of Doctor of Laws from the Jefferson Medical University, the trustees of the Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia, being the Governing Board. The Academical Department of this University, situated in Pennsylvania, has been in active operation for over a hundred years. This institution has conferred this degree, I have been informed, but five times, and I believe only on graduates

from the medical department. This honor I share with Dr. Marion Sims, who graduated in 1836.

In 1898 I issued "The Emmet Family, with Some Incidents Relating to Irish History, etc." The work also contained an extended memoir of my father. For writing this book I had the honor of receiving the Laetare medal from the University of Notre Dame, Indiana. In 1903 I published an extended work, "Ireland under English Rule, etc.," a labor of years and on the merits of which the public has yet to render a verdict. I have written a number of articles on professional subjects, which have been published in the medical journals at home and abroad, and with which most of you are familiar. I have written various papers and addresses relating to American and Irish historical subjects, of which I have no record.

It seems fitting on this occasion, probably the last with which I shall have any professional relation, that I should bring into more prominence certain points which I have omitted in the past from a feeling of delicacy, or the advisability of referring to which has since become more evident.

I can claim that my earliest important contribution to surgery was in teaching the great necessity for cleanliness, with regard to both patient and instruments, and this I taught to a degree for which none of my professional friends appreciated the need. With the aid of dear old Margaret Brennan, the nurse, I gained results in plastic surgery, thirty-five years ago, which in later years I found impossible with any trained nurse. She could give a glow of immaculate cleanliness to a vagina, in preparation for an operation, I have never seen equaled. She served God every moment of her life in her vocation as a nurse. All present who have ever served in the Woman's Hospital can recall her placid face;

as she stood hour after hour holding the speculum immovable. I have sometimes seen a slight movement of her lips and I have said to her, in an undertone, "Margaret, who are you praying for now?" Her answer was: "For you and everybody," which was literally true, as her whole thought was for everybody but herself. For faithful and untiring service; skilful nursing; close observation and observance of detail, the world owes Margaret Brennan an unrecognized debt of gratitude, to an extent which can never be appreciated, for all she contributed toward the development of gynecology.

My work on Gynecology gives full evidence of many remarkable results obtained in abdominal surgery with her assistance and at a time when we had nothing but the skilful use of ordinary turpentine soap and hot water for preparing the patient, or the instruments. Those of you who are familiar with my early teaching at the Woman's Hospital have heard me reiterate in my clinics as an aphorism: "The death warrant of many a patient is carried under the finger nails of the operator." Before I ever heard of the existance of Lister, I taught this, and yet no man has ever appreciated more than I have the value of the former's work in educating the world as to the importance of asepsis. When the first Woman's Hospital building, at Forty-ninth Street and Park Avenue, New York, was opened under my charge, in 1868, as Surgeon-in-Chief, I had a steam or Russian bath in operation for the purpose of cleansing and where every case was prepared by several baths for a laparatomy and with the free use of turpentine soap. In 1871, when a medical board was formed to take charge of the service, none if my colleagues appreciated the necessity for any such preparation and all voted against me when it was decided to tear out this bath to make a reception room for the patients of the outdoor clinic.

Much good was accomplished by demonstrating the existence of lacerated cervix and the close relation of the injury to epitheloma, if it be not the actual cause. The operation for repair filled an important place, but a still greater advance was made on showing the greater necessity for amputation, when it was discovered by me that in many cases the character of the lesion had become changed owing to the use of asceptic midwifery. Yet, it is difficult to determine if the good which has been obtained under all favorable circumstances, counterbalances the evil from the great abuse which has existed from operating unnecessarily, as well as from neglect on the other hand where an operative procedure should have been employed. The discovery of this injury and operation gave me a world-wide reputation and yet I have never been satisfied. From some unexplainable cause the profession at large has never mastered the subject in detail sufficiently to enable the good derived to compensate for the amount of injury resulting from ignorance or want of dexterity.

My success from operating to cure the injury and finally from having been the means of preventing the occurrence of vesico vaginal fistula, has given me far more gratification than I have ever had in connection with laceration of the cervix, and yet the extent of my work in relation to the former is comparatively but little known.

Dr. Sims made it possible by his teaching to close every fistula of any extent by means of silver wire wherever it was possible to bring the edges together free from tension. I developed the plastic methods by which nearly every case of greater injury could be cured in time, as I demonstrated in my book on this injury, published in 1868. Dr. Sims, after going abroad at the beginning of the Civil War, never had the opportunity to advance beyond the work which he described in his remarkable paper read before the

New York Academy of Medicine previous to his departure. I gained good results where others had failed, or, in other words, I cured the supposed incurable cases sent me, but found it difficult to transmit my experience. This would have been a lamentable result but for the fortunate circumstance that I was able to demonstrate the cause of fistula and by the removal of this cause, the injury has become of rare occurrence, or simple in character. I read a paper at the meeting of the American Gynecological Society, in 1878, at Philadelphia, and published in the transactions for that year, by which I showed the lesion was always the result of delay in delivery and not from "meddlesome midwifery," as was then the accepted belief; and I showed that where ergot had been used, which was the common practice, the injury was much greater. I then promulgated the important point that an attendant would be most culpable of neglect if delivery were not accomplished without delay in every case when the head ceased to recede after a pain. Unless impaction has taken place the head will recede after every pain except just at the moment after it has passed from the uterus, but it is then so high that no injury could result in a normal pelvis. This paper revolutionized the then accepted obstetrical practice throughout the world, and ergot itself has ceased to be used. Fifty years or more ago this frightful injury was so common that the Woman's Hospital was established for its cure, and to-day it may be said that it should never occur, unless such a degree of deformity exists that delivery cannot be accomplished, or an abdominal section is impossible.

I introduced the use of scissors into the surgical work of gynecology as a substitute for the knife and devised nearly all the different forms now in use, although others have gone over the same ground since. Without the aid of these in-

struments there would have been but little advance made in plastic surgery.

There will be a reaction and a return to the proper use and administration of hot water vaginal douches; and also in the use of pessaries, which never fail, in the absence of active inflammatory action, to be of benefit when employed to restore the pelvic circulation rather than the version, and when fitted with a mechanical instinct, to give the needed support.

Since the last edition of my work on Gynecology was published I have made two contributions which are worthy of note. First, the introduction of a method for establishing a permanent opening above the pubes, for otherwise unreliable cases of vesicovaginal fistula, a procedure now fortunately seldom needed, but one which could be utilized for the relief of certain conditions existing in the male bladder. A paper treating of this subject was read by me before the New York Obstetrical Society: "Incurable Vesicovaginal Fistula," etc., and was published in the *Am. Journal of Obstetrics* for May, 1895.

The other subject was more important: "Inclined Decubitus," etc., to be used for the restoration of the normal circulation in the female pelvis and for the cure of pelvic inflammatory condition. During the last fifteen or twenty years of my professional work I owed a greater degree of my success to this agent than I gained by any other means. It is a remarkable circumstance that so simple a procedure, and one which must appeal to the good judgment of every one on investigation, should be unappreciated by the profession. I hope some one may yet give this subject due thought and be able to popularize so important an aid in the treatment of the diseases of women. In 1892 I contributed an article on this subject to the February number of the *New York Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics,* which is well worth the attention of some en-

terprising medical journal to reprint, as it has been forgotten.

There are other points which, in justice to myself, should be properly presented, and much which may hereafter be placed to the credit of American surgery, but I have said enough to indicate the course for further information.

This dinner has already given me a new lease of life and I feel as young as I did at the age of forty, but, unfortunately, my injured leg brings me down to close bearing and to the gait of a very old man. I, however, am enjoying life and every hour of it. I have been fortunate in having always had some hobby in active operation. I urge all of you to cultivate such an accomplishment as an investment for your old age, which will never cease to bear interest, and to try to get all the fun you can out of it. My present hobby is the study of the Irish language, which I began after my seventy-fifth year, and it has not only afforded me steady occupation, but intense enjoyment.

In saying farewell to you, one and all, it is my sincere prayer that as you advance in years it may be your good fortune to have your life pass on to the end with as smooth and restful a current as has been mine so far. I bid you farewell, and to many from different and distant sections of the country, it must, I fear, be for the last time.

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