

Brown (G. W.)

IN MEMORIAM

HERVEY BACKUS WILBUR, M.D.

BY

MRS. C. W. BROWN

BARRE, MASS.

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## IN MEMORIAM.

HERVEY BACKUS WILBUR, M.D.

On the morning of May 1st, Dr. H. B. Wilbur, Superintendent of the New York State Asylum for Idiots, died suddenly at the asylum, of heart disease. This most unexpected death takes from us a philanthropist whose loss will be mourned in two hemispheres. Dr. Wilbur was born in 1820 in Wendell, Mass., where his father resided as a clergyman. Graduating at Amherst in 1838, he studied medicine in Pittsfield and Philadelphia. Whilst practising his profession in Barre, Mass., he became so deeply interested in the accounts of Dr. Edouard Seguin's early attempts to educate idiots, that he decided to devote his talents to that work, opening a private school in Barre in 1848. Save a few magazine articles, there was absolutely no English literature upon the subject, and only one French work; therefore he was thrown almost entirely upon his own resources, in the combined offices of physician, teacher, and gymnastic trainer, proving the power of true genius to lift up the lowliest. His success with his private pupils was so marked, that, invited by the New York Legislature, in 1851 he assumed the charge of an experimental school at Albany, which was in 1855 reorganized as the permanent asylum at Syracuse.

For the work to which he gave his life Dr. Wilbur possessed rare qualifications,—an indomitable will undeterred by the obstacles which ever oppose a novel undertaking, unlimited patience with

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the feeble efforts of his protégés, a genuine pity for the unfortunate, and faith in the divinity that presides over the feeblest humanity. A true scientist, he had no sympathy with the materialistic philosophy which would put out the light of the immortal soul. To the dignity and innate authority quietly controlling all, was added an unfailing fund of humor that often electrified the dulled intellect of a pupil, placing him for the first time *en rapport* with a master-mind. Rich social qualities, making him a welcome guest in every circle, were combined in his household relations with an individual sympathy and courtesy that secured the earnest co-operation of all his officials and subordinates. It would be truth to say that, by the members of his own family and those who came in nearest relations to him, he was wellnigh idolized. The grief of those who are left behind cannot be measured. Liberal to a fault with what was his own, when giving could contribute to the happiness of his friends or aid the needy, he was scrupulously economical in the administration of the finances of the State. The substantial but inexpensive buildings which stand upon the asylum grounds to-day bear testimony to the careful management which secured to his pupils every needed comfort, with the most conscientious frugality. The benevolence which enwrapped one class of unfortunates could not fail to include all classes, prompting him to labor for the good of all. He was for some time President of the National Association for the Protection of the Insane and the Prevention of Insanity, an office which he resigned a few months since. Comprehending the scientific value of the great laws of natural mental development educed in the progress of teaching the mentally deficient, he was ever ready to impart this knowledge in private circles or educational conventions.

A facile and clear writer, his essays, scientific papers, and reports upon idiocy are the most valuable contributions to that class of literature we have, combining, as they do, the results of his long and varied experience, with a wide acquaintance with psychologists and their writings. The only regret is that he did not write more. Deeply interested and helpful in the foundation of the university at Syracuse, he was from the beginning a

lecturer on mental diseases to its students, addressing them for the last time the day before his death.

The resolutions of the Trustees of the asylum over which he had presided satisfactorily more than thirty years, of the Faculty of the university of which he was a member, of the medical society to which he belonged, and of the committee of Plymouth Church, where he worshipped, testify in the strongest terms to their appreciation of the dead as a Christian gentleman, an illustrious benefactor, a magnetic instructor. The Association of Medical Officers of American Institutions for Idiotic and Feeble-Minded Persons, of which he was the acknowledged leader, will sadly miss the inspiration of his presence and the light of his wisdom.

Mrs. C. W. BROWN,  
Barre, Mass.

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