

Address.

JAMES THACHER, M.D., OF PLYMOUTH, MASS.¹

BY JAMES B. BREWSTER, M.D., OF PLYMOUTH, MASS. Colonies

MR. PRESIDENT AND FELLOWS OF THE MASSACHUSETTS MEDICAL SOCIETY:—From the settlement of the colonies until the end of the first quarter of the eighteenth century, medicine in this country can hardly be said to have existed as a distinct profession.² Almost the only medical practitioners were the clergy, many of whom combined with their pastoral duties the healing of the sick. They ministered to both body and soul in a manner alike heroic. Among the medical authors of that time appears the name of Rev. Thomas Thacher, the author of the first medical publication in America, issued in 1677, entitled, "A Brief Rule to Guide the Common People of New England how to order themselves and theirs in the Small Pocks and Measles";³ also of Cotton Mather, Jared Eliot, and other clergymen, contributors to the scanty literature of medicine. Scattered throughout the colonies there were a few regularly educated physicians, but their number was small, and their influence limited. At first they were graduates of the different European schools: later, some of the graduates of American colleges sought in Europe opportunities for professional instruction not attainable in America.⁴ Two of the early presidents of Harvard College, Charles Chauncey and Leonard Hoar, were graduated in medicine at Cambridge, England.⁵ John Clark, an English physician, practised in Boston from 1638 to 1664.⁶ William Douglas, M.D., a Scotchman, educated at Leyden and Paris, who is remembered as Boylston's unscrupulous opponent in the practice of inoculation, was a practitioner in Boston, of great repute, from 1716 to 1750. Dr. Thomas Boylston, the father of the introducer of inoculation, was a graduate of the University of Oxford, and settled in Brookline in 1635. Later, we recall the names of Isaac Rand, William Aspinwall, John Cutter, Thomas Bulfinch, Benjamin Gale, John and Joseph Warren, and others who might be mentioned, as eminent and skilful physicians of the time. Yet, notwithstanding these most illustrious exceptions, we must remember that the great mass of practitioners of medicine previous to the Revolution were ignorant pretenders, without a medical degree, or any warranty save that they had served an apprenticeship with some local dispenser of herbs and the more disgusting remedies then in vogue.

It is difficult to appreciate how low the standard of medicine then was; Dr. Beck says in his "Historical Sketch,"⁷ that "in point of respectability, medicine undoubtedly stood lower than either the legal or theological professions. The religious difficulties in England had filled the ranks of the latter with men of learning, talent and piety, while the offices of honor and emolument under the Crown offered allurements sufficiently powerful to induce many who were distinguished in law to emigrate to the western world. With medicine it was far otherwise; accordingly, for a long time, with

some few exceptions, only those who had failed to attain respectability or employment at home, would venture on so precarious an experiment. Nor were the young native physicians, for a long time, calculated to remedy the evil. There were neither lectures, schools, nor hospitals, which could be resorted to, and the expense of a foreign education was an insurmountable obstacle."

Even so late as 1753, we are told by the *Independent Reflector*, a paper published in New York, that that city with ten thousand inhabitants could boast of more than forty gentlemen of the faculty, the greater part of whom were mere pretenders to a profession of which they were entirely ignorant, and convincing proofs of their incapacity were exemplified in their iniquitous practices. The advertisements they published proved them ignorant of the very names of their drugs.⁸

It is estimated by Dr. Toner, in the "Annals of Medical Progress," that at the time of the Revolution the colonies contained about three millions of inhabitants, and from three thousand to thirty-five hundred physicians, of which number not more than four hundred had received a medical degree. The first course of anatomical lectures with demonstrations delivered in New England was given by Dr. John Warren, then surgeon of a military hospital in Boston, during the year 1780.⁹

Previous to the middle of the eighteenth century, obstetrics was not considered as belonging to the medical profession; all births were attended by females. Dr. James Lloyd, returning from Europe in the year 1753, where he had been a pupil of the celebrated Smellie, first introduced the custom of attendance by male practitioners,¹⁰ which afterwards became general.

Thus, without attempting to follow more fully the history of medicine in this country during the eighteenth century, we see that the only opportunity for a young man of moderate means to enter the medical profession was by associating himself with a local practitioner. This association was generally by apprenticeship for a term of years, usually five or six. The apprentice was taken at an age much younger than we should now think a lad ready to commence the study of a profession. Dr. John Bard,¹¹ when fourteen years of age, was apprenticed to Mr. Kearsley, an English surgeon at Philadelphia, who treated him with great rigor, and subjected him to the most menial employments. Dr. Benjamin Rush was apprenticed at the age of fifteen; Dr. James Lloyd, at seventeen, for a period of five years; also Dr. Daniel Drake, while in his sixteenth year. The apprentice was expected to perform the disagreeable duties about the barn and farm, as well as those more professional—such as the preparation of drugs, medicaments, and plasters—with occasional opportunities to assist at minor operations, and was dependent more upon his own observations than upon instruction received, for acquiring a knowledge of his profession. Of books there were but few, and these chiefly of the older writers,—Hippocrates, Galen, and Sydenham, with possibly some of the more recent works of Van Sweeten, Huxham, Haller, Pott, Smellie, and Hunter; but not often were more than three or four of these found in the possession of any one individual.

¹ Being the Annual Discourse delivered before the Massachusetts Medical Society, at the One-hundred and Tenth Annual Meeting, June 10, 1891.

² John B. Beck, M.D.: Historical Sketch of State of Medicine in America.

³ Contributions to Annals of Medical Progress, p. 20.

⁴ Joseph M. Toner, M.D.: Annals of Medical Progress, p. 13.

⁵ Loc. cit., p. 13.

⁶ Loc. cit., p. 22.

⁷ J. B. Beck, M.D.: Historical Sketch of State of Medicine in America, p. 6.

⁸ Davis on Medical Education, p. 16.

⁹ Loc. cit., p. 46.

¹⁰ Josiah Bartlett, M.D.: Progress of Medical Science.

¹¹ Thacher as Medical Biographies, p. 96.

With this short prelude as to the status of medicine and the medical profession in the eighteenth century, I ask your attention to the subject of my paper, — JAMES THACHER, M.D., of Plymouth, Massachusetts.

Dr. Thacher was descended from Anthony Thacher, who came to this country from England in the year 1635. He was born at Barnstable, February 14, 1754. His father was John Thacher, his mother was daughter of Samuel Norton, Esq., of Chilmark, Martha's Vineyard, and grand-daughter of Governor Coddington, of Rhode Island. With only such preparation as could be acquired while living upon one of the sandy farms of Cape Cod, he was, at the age of sixteen, apprenticed to Dr. Abner Hersey, of Barnstable. That his preceptor was an eccentric and austere man, with less of the science than the art of medicine, appears from his student's interesting and somewhat amusing account of him. Dr. Hersey's advantages of education were greatly deficient, he having labored with his father in husbandry during early life. He commenced the study of medicine under his brother James, of Barnstable, a physician of reputation and extensive practice. After a pupillage of about one year, his brother's death proffered him at the age of nineteen, the benefit of that brother's name and the field of his professional labors. At a youthful period of life, perhaps unexampled in the annals of medicine, and under the disadvantages of a penurious education, young Hersey began his career, and ever after pursued it with fidelity and zeal. He at once embraced the whole circle of practice which his brother had enjoyed, and it was not long before he acquired the confidence and respect of the people. For many years he commanded without a rival the whole practice upon Cape Cod — a distance of more than forty miles, containing a population of seven or eight thousand — controlling at pleasure his practice and his fees. As a surgeon he was considered judicious and skilful, though he never performed a capital operation.

Dr. Hersey was subject to an hypochondriacal affection, and in his domestic character was eccentric in the extreme, — a compound of caprice and whims. Domestic happiness and social intercourse were strangers in his family. He oftener chastened by his frown, than cheered by an expression of approbation. He adopted a very abstemious mode of living, rejecting animal food, ardent spirits and wine, confining himself chiefly to a diet of vegetables and milk. But in nothing was his singularity more conspicuous than in his manner of dress. His garments were of a fashion peculiar to himself, remarkably large and loose, and lined throughout with baize. Such was his whimsical fancy, that he had a great-coat made of tanned leather. Seven calf skins were cut and formed into an outer garment as a defence against the rain. He was by nature churlish in his temper, and abrupt in his manners; and when in his peevish moods, it was common for him to express himself in such language as this: "I had rather be chained to a galley oar, than suffer such vexation."

A curious instance of this kind occurred when the widow of his brother contemplated making him a visit. She informed him by letter of her intentions. The doctor, knowing that she would appear in a style rather different from that to which he had been accustomed, was greatly agitated, and immediately answered the letter as follows: "Madam, I cannot have you. I have neither hay nor corn for your horses, nor have

no servants in my family, and I had rather be chained to a galley oar than wait upon you myself."

He died in the sixty-sixth year of his age, leaving no children. By his will he bequeathed to Harvard College five hundred pounds, as an additional endowment of the professorship to which his brother, Ezekiel Hersey, of Hingham, had previously given a larger sum.

Dr. Thacher completed his five year' apprenticeship in the twenty-first year of his age, at a most eventful period in the history of our country. The battle of Bunker Hill had just been fought. All New England had become the theatre of civil war, and every member of the community was stirred with the deepest anxiety and patriotic enthusiasm. Our young doctor says of himself: "Participating in the glorious spirit of the times, and contemplating improvement in my professional pursuits, motives of patriotism and private interest prompted me to hazard my future in the conflict for independence."¹²

In taking this step, he met with no encouragement, either from his own family or from his late preceptor. All urged in opposition his youth, and the manifest hopelessness of the cause. However, his youthful ardor found in Joseph Otis, Esq., more sympathetic counsel. That gentleman not only commended his purpose, but furnished him with a letter of introduction to his (Otis's) brother-in-law, James Warren, Esq., President of the Provincial Congress. Through James Warren's influence his name was added to the list of candidates for examination; and he awaited the appointed day with anxiety and suspense, lest his stock of medical knowledge should be deemed inadequate, and his hope be blasted. That the examination was reasonably close and severe, covering the topics of anatomy, physiology, surgery and medicine, is apparent, since, of the sixteen examined, six were privately rejected as unqualified.¹³ Having successfully passed this test, he was appointed surgeon's mate in the provincial hospital at Cambridge, Dr. John Warren being the senior surgeon. July 15, 1775, he assumed his duties. Dr. Josiah Bartlett was associated with him in a similar capacity. This hospital consisted of several private but commodious houses appropriated for the purpose, and contained a number of soldiers wounded at Breed's Hill, as well as many sick of various diseases.

The following February upon the appointment of Dr. John Morgan as Director-General of Hospitals, our young surgeon was subjected to another examination by that gentleman, and appointed mate to Surgeon David Townsend, and assigned to Colonel Asa Whitcomb's regiment, stationed upon Prospect Hill. This regiment was one of the few which were permitted to enter the town of Boston, after it was evacuated by the British. At this time, small-pox prevailing, he was inoculated by his friend, Dr. John Homans, and passed successfully through the disease, not being ill in bed a single day. He accompanied his regiment upon the expedition to Ticonderoga, and participated in that disastrous retreat, which afterwards proved to have been one of the factors in bringing about the ruin of Burgoyne's army by drawing that general into the interior. The term of service of Whitcomb's regiment having expired, Dr. Thacher was appointed to the general hospital. While in this hospital at Albany, he enjoyed fine opportunities for

professional improvement, large numbers of officers and soldiers of both armies being assembled there; among these was General Benedict Arnold, suffering from a fracture of the leg, whom the doctor found an exacting and unreasonable patient.

The following November, 1778, Dr. Thacher was appointed surgeon of the First Virginia Regiment, with which he remained until the next June, when, upon the invitation of Dr. Townsend, he exchanged into the First Massachusetts, commanded by Colonel Henry Jackson. His relations with the Virginia officers had been most pleasant, but he believed it to be more advantageous to serve in a regiment with officers from his native State. While with Colonel Jackson's regiment he participated in various minor engagements and skirmishes, and was present at the execution of Major John André.¹⁴ Of that melancholy sacrifice of a brave and chivalrous young officer to the stern and relentless rules of war, he has given us in his "Military Journal" one of the best accounts extant.

In July, 1781, Colonel Alexander Scammel, formerly adjutant-general of the army, formed a select corps of light infantry, chosen from the most active and efficient of the New England soldiers. The honor of an appointment as surgeon to the troop was offered to Dr. Thacher, and accepted by him. This troop was intended for active and hazardous duty in advance of the main army. They were present at the siege of Yorktown, which terminated in the surrender of Lord Cornwallis. This incident of the war afforded Dr. Thacher the greatest satisfaction. He speaks of it as among the blessed privileges and richest incidents of his life, that he assisted at the siege and capture of a British army.

January 1, 1783, in accordance with a resolution of Congress reducing the army in view of the near approach of peace, Dr. Thacher resigned his commission, and left the military service with honorable testimonials as to the faithful discharge of the various duties which had devolved upon him. We have followed thus minutely his military career, as it was the school which liberally educated him. He entered the army an obscure lad of twenty-one years, poorly equipped with professional knowledge, and entirely deficient in worldly wisdom; he emerged after seven and a half years spent in the enjoyment of unusual facilities for advancement in his profession, an accomplished physician and surgeon. He had acquired also those social qualities which were not less important to his future success, by association as guest and friend with the most distinguished and cultured officers of the Revolutionary army.

He retired from the army July 1, 1783, and in the following March established himself at Plymouth, Mass., as a practitioner of medicine and surgery. The prestige which he brought with him speedily obtained for him a large and lucrative practice. His fame soon spread, and he was frequently called to the neighboring towns for consultation, especially in cases of surgery. While pursuing an arduous and extensive practice, he was also engaged in teaching. Usually, as members of his family were six or eight students whom he instructed by recitations and demonstrations. It has been related to me by an old lady¹⁵ who remembered the doctor very well, that quite a serious local sensation was created by the suspicion that some of

the dissecting material for his demonstrations was obtained from a neighboring churchyard. A curiously deformed individual was believed to have been resurrected by the students, and a mob collecting threatened the doctor's house, and interrupted for a time his course of instruction.

(To be continued.)

Original Articles.

PULMONARY SYPHILIS IN THE ADULT.¹

BY THOMAS E. BATTERTHWAITE, M.D., NEW YORK CITY.

MY excuse for bringing this vexed question before the profession at this time is that I have some personal experience to present that will, I think, contribute something towards its solution.

And I may say at the outset, that the importance of syphilitic lung affections has been very much underestimated by physicians; and I do not much blame them, because the subject has always occupied an obscure corner in our text-books, or has been altogether omitted.

These statements of mine lead us to the inference that there is both a negative and an affirmative position, and I could prove it satisfactorily to-day by an appeal to you who are here. For some of you would tell me plainly that you do not believe in the existence of pulmonary syphilis: others of you would state positively that you have both seen it and treated it successfully. Perhaps some of the former may be among my syphilitic friends, who, like Bauemler, have written much on the disease in some of its special types; and yet with him they may feel compelled to state that they are not sure of ever having seen a genuine case.² Indeed, I am willing to concede that such a position is within the range of possibility, though not of probability. At any rate the majority of general practitioners throughout this country to-day would, I am quite confident, affirm that they have never seen lung syphilis.

In my clinics at the Post-graduate Medical School, during my experience of eight years, I was repeatedly told by medical men that syphilis did not occur *at all* in their practice, being quite unknown to them. And yet syphilis is really a comparatively common disease; and when any one has once learned to recognize it under its protean forms, he feels astonished at having failed in making the diagnosis. And I am quite willing to join with such a one and cry, *Peccavi*.

But both in our own country and in all civilized lands there are to be found numbers of prominent practitioners who are ready to affirm the existence of pulmonary syphilis, and as the result of their deliberate opinion derived from personal knowledge; and yet I will willingly admit that there have been good grounds for holding conservative views, especially among those whose practice has not brought them into contact with pulmonary diseases. These grounds are briefly as follows:

In the first place, some syphilologists have said nothing on the subject, denied its existence, or even have spoken with harsh criticism of those on the affirmative side; and all this, we may presume, in per-

¹ Read before the New York Academy of Medicine, Section of General Medicine, May 19, 1891.

² Ziemssen's Cyclopedia, vol. iii, p. 211.

¹⁴ Military Journal, p. 272.

¹⁵ Mrs. Mary W. Russell.

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His labors as a teacher were no inconsiderable part of the good work which he performed for the advancement of his profession. Indeed, so remarkable habits of industry and application had he, that he even was able among his other duties to take up medical authorship, and in this field he accomplished a work, which for its extent and value must challenge our respect and admiration.

His first publication was entitled "The New Dispensatory, compiled from the most approved authors, both European and American," and was published in 1810. This volume he most courteously dedicated to his former preceptor, John Warren, M.D., Professor of Anatomy and Surgery in the University of Cambridge, and President of the Massachusetts Medical Society. Before publishing the work, he loyally submitted it to the Massachusetts Medical Society for its approbation. A committee consisting of Drs. John Warren, Aaron Dexter, and Josiah Bartlett, after examination, commended it in the following terms: "As it appears to have been a principal object of Dr. Thacher to adapt the work to American practice, and as he has adopted for the basis of his work the American Pharmacopœia of Massachusetts, lately published by the Medical Society, and recommended for general use, they are of the opinion that it will co-operate with the views of the Society in that publication, especially as its nomenclature and order of arrangement seem to be strictly observed in the manuscript. They therefore conclude that it will be for the interest of medical science in this country to encourage the work; and it may be the means of exciting a more general attention to the medical virtues of American productions, many of which might be introduced into the materia medica, and advantageously as well as economically supply the places of foreign articles."¹⁰ That these gentlemen did not err in their estimate of the book, or the need of the profession for such a work, is assured by the fact that it rapidly passed through four editions. The profession of the State showed an appreciation of it which must have been gratifying to its author.

Two years later he issued an octavo volume, entitled "Observations upon Hydrophobia." The style is that of a series of letters addressed to a friend, containing a very full description of the disease, the various theories and methods of cure existing at that time, and an inquiry as to the specific remedies which had been suggested, — most of them secret remedies, acquiring great fame as infallible cures. Among these last were the common red chick-weed, tree box and skull-cap, — each celebrated. The most curious of all was known as "Crouse's remedy," which was purchased from John M. Crouse, its inventor, by the New York Legislature, in the year 1806.¹⁷ The recipe, as filed in the comptroller's office of the State of New York, is as follows: "First. Take one ounce of the jaw-bone of a dog burned and pulverized, or powdered to a fine dust.

Second. Take the false tongue of a newly foaled colt, let that be also dried and powdered. Third. Take one scruple of the verdigris which is raised on the surface of old copper by lying in moist earth. The coppers of George I or II are the purest and best. Mix these ingredients together, and if the patient be an adult let him take the common teaspoonful a day, and so in proportion for a child, according to its age. If these should fail, the patient should immediately apply to a physician, who will administer three drachms of verdigris and one ounce of calomel at one dose, and he need not be alarmed on account of the size of the dose."

After enumerating and pronouncing futile all the so-called remedies and plans of treatment which had then been suggested, Dr. Thacher, in his final chapter, expresses great hope in results to be obtained by properly conducted experiments upon animals in some suitable institution, and concluding, says: "You may smile at my project; but however chimerical and visionary it may appear, I would rejoice to be the Jenner of the proposed institution." This language, in the light of the researches and discoveries of Pasteur, seems now to have been almost prophetic.

In 1817 he published a work on the theory and practice of medicine, entitled "American Modern Practice; or, a simple method of prevention and cure of disease, according to the latest improvements and discoveries; comprising a practical system adapted to the use of medical practitioners of the United States; to which is added an Appendix containing an account of many domestic remedies recently introduced into practice, and some approved formulæ applicable to the diseases of our climate." In his preface he says, "It is confessedly a matter of regret that a country, in which literature and science have been so honorably and successfully cultivated, should so long remain destitute of a systematic work on practical medicine." The author most ably supplied this need, a second edition having been required a few years later.

In the chapter upon the character, qualifications and duties of a physician, the standard which he offers might well serve for the emulation of any generation. The entire literature of medicine furnishes no more complete or concise statement of the rules which should govern the conscientious physician who desires to do his full duty toward his clients and his fellow-practitioners. He says:

"The man who maintains this important station in society should possess the strictest integrity of character; disinterested benevolence and philanthropy should be interwoven in the constitution of his nature. He should possess that modesty and humanity which melts at every distress, extending the hand of relief and comfort to the afflicted, especially to the widow, to the fatherless and to him that hath none to help him. He should be actuated by the dictates of tenderness and sympathy, which have their origin in the best feelings of the heart. To these meritorious qualities should be added an acute, penetrating genius, a retentive memory, intuitive discernment, and an intrepid and decided disposition of mind. To excel in the profession of medicine requires indefatigable industry and a vast variety of liberal accomplishments, as well as an understanding improved by experience. The physician, on the commencement of his functions, should not allow his mind to be enslaved by systems, nor to imbibe a bigoted attachment to great names, — as there is no absolute perfection in systems, nor infalli-

¹ Being the Annual Discourse delivered before the Massachusetts Medical Society, at the One-hundred and Tenth Annual Meeting, June 10, 1891.

¹⁰ Preface to New Dispensatory.

¹⁷ Observations on Hydrophobia, p. 208.

bility in the wisdom of men. He is not to be implicitly guided by the doctrines, nor the practice, of others, however eminent, but to establish a course of practice, the result of knowledge, founded upon experience and observation. He will avoid all appearance of vanity and ostentation, exhibiting, however, a modest confidence in his own merits that may command the confidence of others. In his prescriptions he will endeavor to combine simplicity with elegance, rejecting the absurd idea that a combination of many simples in one prescription may retain and exert the separate virtues of each. He will confide in a few selected articles judiciously adapted, that the indications may be answered by as few medicines as possible. A superficial or cursory view of the patient and a slight examination of the symptoms will never satisfy the inquisitive and intelligent physician, nor inspire confidence in his judgment and skill. The young practitioner will derive much benefit from a methodical record of all important cases that occur in his practice, describing with accuracy the disease, with the attendant symptoms and mode of treatment, whether successful or otherwise. Such record will furnish a document of much utility in facilitating his own improvement. It is to be recommended among the objects of peculiar importance to medical practitioners, to possess themselves of a well-chosen library. If the pecuniary resources of individuals are insufficient to procure a competent collection of books, let district associations be formed to accomplish this purpose. A social medical library would prove a bond of union among physicians, besides rendering the acquisition of knowledge cheap and easy to its members. Those who voluntarily preclude themselves from the refined pleasure and satisfaction derivable from professional study, and who practise only by rote, and drudge on in the same beaten track, although they may boast many years' experience, are but novices in many essential points, and utterly incompetent to discharge their calling with satisfaction to themselves or justice to their patients."¹⁸

No one can read even these brief extracts from Dr. Thacher's very full and complete article upon this subject without feeling that he was far in advance of his time in the exalted professional standard which he maintained, and in the high ideal which he urged, — an ideal which should stimulate the physician, not only to elevate himself, but also to contribute something to the general advancement of the noble calling to which he belongs. Who can doubt that, entertaining such sentiments, he was the good physician, honored and beloved for his good works? Dr. Thacher was at this time sixty-three years of age, and he was essentially a physician. The great work which he had accomplished as a practitioner, teacher and writer was confined to the field of medicine; but an imperfection of hearing, which he had had from youth, increasing with advancing years, compelled him to relinquish attendance upon his patients, and to find employment for his active mind in other pursuits.

A distinguished member of this Society, in his annual address,¹⁹ quotes the remark, "Successful men may have gained much to retire upon, but nothing to retire to, if literature, social ties and philanthropic interests have been lost sight of during the rush and struggle of their thirty years of active life"; but Dr. Thacher, never having been engrossed in his profes-

sion to the exclusion of all other subjects, now found occupation and enjoyment in literature, in agriculture, and especially in horticulture. He contributed much to the development of this branch, stimulating it both by his example and his pen, as he not only planted and trained orchards himself, introducing new varieties of fruit, but he wrote several papers upon the subject, and also a work entitled, "The American Orchardist," which passed through two editions.

In 1823, he published his "Military Journal, during the American Revolutionary War," which he dedicated, with sentiments of profound veneration for that patriotic warrior and statesman, to his Excellency John Brooks, Governor of Massachusetts. In this work we have one of the most graphic descriptions of the stirring scenes of the Revolution, faithfully portraying the hardships and struggles endured by those renowned patriots and heroes who risked life and fortune — everything but honor — in the cause of liberty. Thacher's Journal is a continuous narrative of events of which the author was an eye-witness, extending through the whole struggle for national independence, a period of seven and one-half years, written in a style easy and attractive, with that added charm which always attends the narration of personal experiences. Of all Dr. Thacher's works this is unquestionably the one which posterity has found the most valuable. Notwithstanding that it has passed through several editions, but few copies are now obtainable, and these are eagerly sought as rare prizes, by those acquainted with their value.

The next year after publishing his Military Journal, — being then (1824) seventy-two years of age — he issued in two volumes of more than seven hundred pages, "The American Medical Biography; or Memoirs of Eminent Physicians who have flourished in America," which he dedicated to Edward Augustus Holyoke, M.D., who was at that time in the one-hundredth year of his age, being the oldest physician in the United States, and who had been the first President of the Massachusetts Medical Society. In the preface of this work he makes acknowledgment for valuable assistance received in its preparation from a number of his professional brethren, — the only one of whom now living is the venerable Dr. George C. Shattuck. This work will never lose its value as a book of reference for all who may wish to learn of the distinguished men, who, from the time of the settlement of the country up to the date of issue, have advanced our profession. It contains a full and complete sketch of the lives of more than one hundred and sixty American physicians, most delightfully written, and honestly appreciative of the merits of each. A goodly number of portraits embellish the work, and help us to form an idea of those old worthies whom it commemorates.

An essay on "Ghosts, Demonology and Apparitions," and a "Practical Treatise upon the Management of Bees" followed soon after.

In 1832 he had become much interested in antiquarian research, and wrote the first history of the town of Plymouth. The first edition is said to have been burned while in the hands of the printer, and Dr. Dean, of Cambridge, believed that he possessed the only copy of this edition extant. In this volume he has collected the early records of the Pilgrims, and all events of interest from the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers down to the time of publication, very faithfully. It was the first town history published in this

¹⁸ Thacher: Modern Practice, chap. x.

¹⁹ R. M. Hodges, M.D., before the Massachusetts Medical Society.

State, and is valuable for reference even now. It is probable that Dr. Thacher was led to undertake the task from an interest inspired by his antiquarian researches in connection with the Pilgrim Society, of which he was one of the earliest members, and for many years librarian, and custodian of its collection, — a position filled by him at the time of his death. The records of the trustees of the Pilgrim Society contain the following resolve :

“Resolved, That the members of this Society entertain a grateful sense of the eminent services of their late librarian, Dr. James Thacher, recently deceased, who, by his zeal and perseverance in promoting the objects of the Society, has well deserved that his memory be cherished with respect by all who feel an interest in its success.²⁰

He was one of the earliest members of the Massachusetts Medical Society, for many years serving as councillor. Its objects and interests were ever dear to him, and he always expressed the greatest confidence in its continued success. He was also honorary member of Medical Societies of Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Hampshire and Georgia. He was elected a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, of the New York Historical Society, and the Historical Society of New Hampshire, and foreign member of the Society of Statistics of Paris. He received the honorary degree of Doctor of Medicine from Harvard University, and also from Dartmouth College; also the degree of Master of Arts from Harvard University. He was one of the original members of the Society of Cincinnati.

As a physician, Dr. Thacher was versed in the science of medicine. He delighted in books, and made great use of them, but he did not draw his information from these alone. He had a very extensive acquaintance among eminent men in many branches of science, and maintained with them a correspondence most unusual in those days. In the practice of medicine he was not hampered by traditions and dogmas, but was ever progressive, constantly seeking new suggestions, and ever ready to try legitimately new plans of treatment. Sometimes his zeal for improvement in therapeutics caused his rivals unjustly to charge him with credulity, and too great haste in the adoption of new ideas.

Piety was a marked trait in his character; in all his writings he expresses the most profound respect for religion. He strictly and religiously regarded the Sabbath, refraining from all unnecessary professional labor upon that day, and was constant in his attendance at public worship. All social reforms found an earnest advocate in him. Intemperance he especially denounced; and the smoking and chewing of tobacco he declared to be nauseous and disgusting habits.

Indicating his antislavery views, we may quote from his *Military Journal*, an entry made in October, 1781, while he was a young man, acting as surgeon of the Revolutionary Army:

“The labor on the Virginia plantations is performed altogether by a species of the human race, who have been cruelly wrested from their native country and doomed to perpetual bondage, while their masters are manfully contending for freedom and the natural rights of man. Such is the inconsistency of human nature. Should Providence ordain that America should be emancipated from thralldom, it should in gratitude be our prayer, that the African slave may

be permitted to participate in the blessings of freedom.”²¹ This opinion he entertained and recorded, at a time when the right to hold human beings as slaves was unquestioned by even the most progressive and philanthropic.

As an author Dr. Thacher is justly entitled to an honorable position. The number and variety of his subjects is astonishing. He was an indefatigable worker, — thus he was able to accomplish so much literary work in addition to his strictly professional labors. His style was conspicuous for completeness of research and clearness of description, with an ease and flexibility which rendered it attractive. The more we reflect, the greater will be our surprise, that without the early advantages of a liberal education, and accomplishing his work at a distance from the few medical centres and libraries then existing, and unassisted by the interchange of opinion furnished by medical journals and the stimulating association with those engaged in like pursuits, and removed from every kind of assistance in which city life is so rich and country life so poor, — privations which every physician engaged in country practice must have often felt interfere with the fulfilment of his desires and aspirations, — that, notwithstanding all these disadvantages, his labors in the field of literature were eminently successful and the crowning glory of his life; for his last work was published when he was over eighty-one years of age.

His was a life of great activity and industry, — the venerable toiler not resting from his labors even at an age when repose from the cares and toils of life would seem to be imperatively demanded. His usefulness continued even to the end.

At ninety years of age he died, as the town record tells us, of old age, after a brief illness, upon May 23, 1844.

It is with great local pride that I have imperfectly traced the career of Dr. James Thacher, who resided for more than sixty years at Plymouth, believing that the name of this zealous patriot, good physician, faithful teacher and able author, deserves an honorable position upon the roll of eminent members which is the glory and honor of this Society.

Original Articles.

THE PATHOLOGY AND TREATMENT OF CHRONIC OVARITIS.

BY ALEX J. C. SKENE, M.D.

THE study of the pathology of ovaritis derives a special interest from the fact that the ovary differs from all other organs of the body, in that its function is performed at the expense of a portion of its structure which is never restored to its original condition. The rupture of each Graafian vesicle in ovulation, causes the destruction of the vesicle. Rudimentary vesicles mature and repeat the function of their predecessors, and are in turn destroyed. Finally the supply ceases, and the ovary, worn out in structure, becomes functionally incompetent long before the general organization has reached the end of its life and activity. In all other organs of the body, function is effected through cellular disintegration and restoration.

²⁰ Records of Trustees, Pilgrim Society, May 27, 1844.

²¹ *Military Journal*, p. 334.