

**HISTORY OF AMERICAN
MEDICAL
LITERATURE FROM 1776
TO THE PRESENT TIME**

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History of American Medical Literature from 1776 to the Present Time by S. D. Gross

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OF

AMERICAN MEDICAL LITERATURE,

FROM 1776 TO THE PRESENT TIME.

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S. D. GROSS, M.D., LL.D., D.C.L. OXON.,
PROFESSOR OF SURGERY IN THE JEFFERSON MEDICAL COLLEGE.

"The chief glory of every people arises from its authors."—DR. JOHNSON.

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PREFACE.

THE matter comprised in the following pages was read as an Introductory Address to the Fifty-first Course of Lectures in the Jefferson Medical College, October 4th, 1875, and published at the request of the Class. It is now issued in a separate form for distribution among my professional brethren, and such persons as may feel a desire to peruse it. The composition cost me much labor, but it was a labor of love, designed to show our people how much earnest work we have done during the century now about to close of our existence as an independent power in the interests of medical science, and in upholding the national honor. Like Rousseau's Ode to Posterity, the booklet may never reach its destination; but if it should be so fortunate, it may, perchance, serve as a connecting link between the glorious Past and what a hundred years hence will undoubtedly be a grand and brilliant Present.

PHILADELPHIA,
Nov. 4th, 1875.

HISTORY OF AMERICAN MEDICAL LITERATURE.

1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

IN opening the fifty-first course of lectures in this school, I desire to spend the hour allotted to me for this purpose in the discussion of a subject which, it seems to me, is eminently appropriate to the occasion. Half a century has passed since this school came into existence, and we are on the eve of the anniversary of our national independence. In a few months more the clock of Time will strike the hour of twelve, and usher in the birth of a new century for forty millions of freemen, living in peace and happiness, literally their own governors and their own legislators. We, a portion of this immense hive of human beings, representing almost every nationality on the habitable globe, are assembled here this evening to see what the century, now rapidly passing away, has done for our great profession, and what, in turn, the incoming one has a right to expect from you. Of your speaker, and of others like him, little more is to be expected; they are but links between the past and the present; and any light which they may have emitted will soon be obscured, if not lost, in the dim future. What magic horoscope shall pierce its womb?

The theme which I have selected for my discourse is, "The Progress of American Medical Literature during the last Century;" a theme which, while it may, I think, incite your ambition, will afford us an opportunity of discharging a debt of gratitude to our predecessors and contemporaries; men who have advanced the interests of the profession and surrounded it with a halo of glory. I have undertaken this task, difficult as it is, the more willingly because my entrance into the profession fifty years ago was coeval with the birth of our medi-

cal literature. I may add that of some of the authors of whom it will be my province to speak, I was a pupil, that upwards of a score have been my colleagues in medical schools, that many of them have been my personal friends, and that some have been educated under my own teaching.

The first question which naturally presents itself is, Have we a medical literature; and, if so, is it worthy of us as a great profession, and worthy of your acceptance as a guide to the study and practice of the healing art? It is within the recollection of men still living that a writer in the *Edinburgh Review*, generally supposed to have been Sydney Smith, sneeringly asked, "Who reads an American book?" and, although the remark was not designed to apply especially to professional works, it was not without its significance even here. If the reverend critic, who owed this country a bitter grudge on account of his losses as a Pennsylvania bondholder, could rise from his grave, and stroll through the vast bookstores which would everywhere meet his eye, it is evident that he would change his mind: for it may safely be affirmed that no nation on the globe has made greater or more brilliant progress in general, and even in professional literature, than ours since the utterance of those sarcastic words. It has been well observed by Dr. Johnson, that the chief glory of every people arises from its authors.

When the tocsin of war was sounded on this continent in 1775, by the rebels in arms against the mother country, the physician might have looked around in vain for a native medical book. The whole stock in trade was comprised in a few pamphlets on smallpox, measles, and scarlatina. Our literary and professional works, like our tea and coffee, sugar, and finer fabrics, came from Europe, especially England. Our dependence was absolute. In all the country there was but one medical school; and even this was soon suspended, the lecture-room having been exchanged for the hospital, and the lancet for the sword. There was work to be done. Three millions of human beings, groaning under the yoke of tyranny and oppression, were to be freed; the bond stipulated for blood; the professor's gown was replaced by the epaulette; and for seven long years, alternately marked by hope and despond-

ency, silence reigned supreme in the halls of literature and science. Nor was there any improvement in this respect for a number of years after the struggle had ended. Men could not at once return to their accustomed habits and occupations. The country was impoverished, and heavily in debt. Men had to provide bread for their families. One man alone, of towering intellect and of untiring industry, stood forth during all this period in the midst of his fellow-citizens, like the morning star, gilding the horizon with the effulgence of his genius. Tract after tract fell in rapid succession from his prolific pen, inaugurating thus a new era, and setting in motion a ball destined to roll onward and upward through all the ages on this mighty continent. Benjamin Rush, a farmer's son, born within thirty miles of Philadelphia, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and at first physician, and then surgeon of the continental army, is the father not only of American Medicine, but of American Medical Literature, the type of a great man, many-sided, far-seeing, full of intellect and genius; abused and vilified, as man hardly ever was before, by his contemporaries, professional and non-professional; misunderstood by his immediate successors, and unappreciated by the present generation, few of whom know anything of his real character. In awarding to this great and good man this high honor, I am but rendering a bare act of justice to his memory. Rush inspired his pupils with ambition, and taught them how to think, for he was facile princeps, "head and shoulder" above all his compeers as a medical philosopher.

These tracts were at length, namely, in 1788-9, collected and published in book form, under the title of "Medical Inquiries and Observations," in four volumes. The treatise upon "Diseases of the Mind," incorporated long ago into the medical literature of Europe, was issued in 1812, and is an enduring monument of his experience, genius, and erudition. The last edition, the fifth, was printed in 1885. The next work was his essays, literary, moral, and philosophical, published contemporaneously with the Medical Inquiries. Rush died in this city in 1813, at the age of sixty-eight. The slanders which were heaped upon him were a disgrace to his age and country. To such an extent were these slanders carried by Cobbett, the

editor of a scurrilous paper called the Porcupine, that Rush, at the earnest solicitations of his friends, instituted against him a suit for libel, the jury awarding him \$5000 damages, every cent of which he distributed among the poor of Philadelphia. Cobbett, driven into bankruptcy, and treated with contempt by his fellow-citizens, soon after went to New York, where for a short time he edited a new paper, named the "Rushlight," in which he continued his abuse of the illustrious physician. The latter days of Rush were spent in comparative tranquillity in the retirement of his study, in the love and esteem of a large circle of friends, in the contemplation of religion and philosophy, and in the supervision of American editions of the works of Sydenham, Oglehorn, Pringle, and Hillary.

In connection with these splendid literary achievements of Rush, it is proper that I should pay a passing tribute of respect to a deserving man, a contemporary of the great physician, of whom the present generation of medical men is as ignorant as if he had never existed. I allude to Dr. John Jones, author of "Plain Remarks on Wounds and Fractures," the first edition of which was issued in 1775, and the last, namely, the third, considerably enlarged, in 1795, under the supervision of Dr. James Mease. The work comprises an interesting chapter on the construction of military hospitals, and an account of a case of hydrocele containing two gallons of fluid, one of the most extraordinary of the kind upon record.

Jones was a native of Jamaica, Long Island, of Welsh extraction, and a member of the religious Society of Friends. After having been for some time Professor of Surgery in New York, he removed to this city in 1780, where he became physician to Washington and Franklin, physician to the Pennsylvania Hospital, and vice-president of the Philadelphia College of Physicians. Much of his education was acquired under Pott and John Hunter. He is said to have been a very dexterous operator. His death occurred in the sixty-third year of his age.

Rush, as we have seen, died in 1813; and only two years before that event appeared Wistar's Anatomy, the first native systematic treatise on that subject ever published on this continent. In 1813 appeared Dorsey's celebrated Elements of Sur-

gery, and soon after Chapman's *Materia Medica and Therapeutics*, all pioneer works, the result of the labors of professors in the University of Pennsylvania, then the foremost medical school in America. In order to carry out the plan I have proposed to myself, and to do full justice to the subject, it will be necessary to speak of the literature of each of the subdivisions of medicine, beginning with anatomy. Before doing so, however, I must be permitted to offer a few remarks respecting the text-books in use in this country during the latter part of the last and the early part of the present century. It is proper to observe that during this period only three schools existed on this continent, the University of Pennsylvania, the New York College, and Harvard University. The text-books up to the close of the century must have been imported from England, which was itself but poorly supplied with medical works. The *First Lines of the Practice of Physic*, by the great Dr. William Cullen of Edinburgh, was published in 1776, and was the first scientific production of the kind in the English language. This celebrated treatise was reproduced in the latter part of the last century in the United States, and for a long time held its place as a text-book both in Great Britain and on this side of the Atlantic. An edition of it, with notes and observations, from the pen of the late Professor Charles Caldwell, appeared in this city in 1816. Of the character and value of these additions, the editor evidently had a most exalted opinion; for he declares, in pompous phrase, that the work without his notes is dangerous in its effects on the inexperienced cultivators of science, imbecile in its practice, and marked, in many cases, by unqualified error, "a fault that must necessarily have proved, in innumerable instances, signally mischievous in its influence on society." Alas! poor Yorick, if he could have risen from the dead, and found himself thus criticized, and that too by a man who never had a hundred patients in his life, what mental torture would he not have experienced! The whole secret of this denunciation was simply to promote the sale of Caldwell's Cullen, as it was called.

Another book, also unmercifully criticized by Caldwell, was *The Modern Practice of Physic*, by Dr. Robert Thomas, of Salisbury, England, issued in 1801. This he pronounced to be