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HORATIO STORER, M.D.

By JAMES J. WALSH, M.D., PH.D.

When, nearly twenty years ago, Horatio Robinson Storer passed away, at the ripe age of ninety-two, he had been for some years Harvard's oldest living graduate, and had enjoyed that distinction to the full. He came of a very distinguished New England family, and was considered to be one of the best-known members of the medical profession in New England, who thoroughly deserved all the honors that came to him.

His story fits in with the interests of the readers of LINACRE. A convert to the Catholic Church in his middle forties, when his judgment was ripest, he considered that to be one of the most important facts of his long life. He was a physician who achieved noteworthy distinction in his professional status—for a time he was vice-president of the American Medical Association, and came to be well known throughout the country for his successful efforts in building up the ethics of that great association. He was almost better known, however, for his collection of coins, medals, and tokens struck off for distinguished men and noteworthy events in the history of medicine and surgery. This collection, of which Dr. Storer made a hobby during his years of retirement, is a fitting memorial to him in the Boston Medical Library.

After taking his medical degree at Harvard in 1853, Dr. Storer

spent, as was then the fashion, some time at the medical schools of Europe. For nearly two years he was assistant to Sir James Y. Simpson of Edinburgh, at that time probably the foremost gynecologist in the world, and a great teacher. This led to his choice of gynecology as his life work, and upon his return to Boston he entered medical practice in this specialty.

It is hard to realize that in the late fifties the whole field of the diseases of women was as yet a closed chapter. The every-day operations that physicians feel perfectly ready to perform nowadays as soon as they are out of medical school were then attempted only with hesitancy, and if the patient died, as was only too often the case in the days before Lister, "murderer" was only one of the politer epithets hurled at the rash operator.

Sir James Simpson believed that in gynecologic and obstetric practice chloroform was a safer, surer anaesthetic than ether, and Dr. Storer brought this view back to America with him. Almost needless to say, any such opinion as this, especially in Boston, the birthplace of the use of ether, was looked upon as medically heretical to the last degree. Dr. Storer was a born fighter, but as his son says, "a fair fighter," and his conviction in this matter probably cost him the Professorship of the Dis-

eases of Women at Harvard. For a few years he was professor of obstetrics and medical jurisprudence at the Berkshire Medical College at Pittsfield, Mass. At that time this was quite an important school, and indeed there was a series of schools in the smaller towns of Massachusetts and New York at about that time that attracted a great deal of attention.

Dr. Storer made determined efforts to establish a Polyclinic, or system of post-graduate medical instruction, such as has since then grown to be such an important element in the medical education offered by our schools. Dr. Storer's Polyclinic, which often had as many as sixty doctors in attendance at one time, was probably the first in America.

His reputation spread rapidly, as is not surprising under the circumstances. Before he was forty he was elected corresponding member of the Obstetrical Societies of Berlin, London, and Edinburgh.

His name came to be particularly well known in connection with the movement to eradicate, as far as possible, the practice of criminal abortions among the physicians of this country. It was a disgrace to civilization to have reputable physicians bringing about what were said to be medical abortions in their patients without proper medical reasons. As a matter of fact, many abortions were brought about merely at the whim of patients who did not want to have the discomfort of carrying a child for nine

months, with all the inconveniences that went with that, and then the bringing of the infant into the world at the end of its normal term.

In one form or another this problem has been before the profession for a hundred years or more, and was never more acute than it is at the present time. Dr. Storer, however, inaugurated a campaign against the practice; he fought it lustily, and many of his writings, which were widely read, exerted a deep influence on medical ethics.

As a teacher Dr. Storer had the rare faculty of imparting his enthusiasm to his students. He was a brilliant and original operator, the first to perform several operations that have since come to be routine, and the inventor of several gynecological instruments now in every-day use. He was years ahead of his time in many phases of surgery. (This was in the days when the best surgeons washed their hands only *after* an operation.) He was the first to use rubber gloves, but he discarded them on the ground that the gloves then made were so thick as to interfere with tactile accuracy of diagnosis. His purpose in using gloves was to safeguard the surgeon rather than the patient. It is the irony of fate that after using them for a time in practice he should have given up the gloves, for it was this abandonment of their use that led to the catastrophe that ruined his professional career.

In the full tide of success, he was unfortunate enough to be infected during the course of an operation. General pyaemia followed, and although after a long fight his life was saved, he was left a permanent cripple, with his constitution so shattered that he was never again able to stand the wear and tear of a surgeon's life.

During a period of four years of rest in Europe, he searched for a suitable hobby to while away his enforced leisure, and found it in numismatics. His interest gradually centered in medical numismatics, and from this hobby, which he pursued for many years, he secured an immense amount of personal satisfaction.

It would seem as though a collection of this sort would be very limited in its scope and appeal. But the thoroughness with which Dr. Storer did this, as he did everything else that he was interested in, soon made his collection a magnificent one. He gathered together some four thousand medals bearing on medicine, which toward the end of his life he presented to the Boston Medical Library in memory of his father.

Almost needless to say, under the circumstances the Storer collection constitutes a very important source of information of the most authentic character with regard to medical men and their works and distinctive accomplishments of all kinds. Dr. Storer made a thoroughgoing catalogue of his collection, and also of more than six thousand other medical

objects which he had succeeded in tracing but did not possess, and thus made available a wealth of information for writers of medical history throughout the world. What began as a collection of medals, expected to be but a few hundred in number, proved eventually to contain thousands of items, and to be a special and valuable addition to the varied exhibits of the Boston Medical Library.

Dr. Storer was happy indeed to escape from the nearly fatal infection which he had contracted, with only a stiff knee, but that remained with him for all the rest of his life. During the long months when he was recuperating from this severe infection, he found the time to look into the claims of the Roman Catholic Church as the representative of the Church founded by Christ on earth. His studies in religion soon led him to become a convert. Like Newman in England, he lived long enough after his conversion to make that event a dividing line in his earthly career, and he continued for the remainder of his long life to be a devout Catholic. Toward the end of his life he was often heard to say that, as he looked back upon the years, he realized how his conversion had been truly the greatest blessing of his life.

When the opportunity presented itself, the Medical School of the new Fordham University conferred on Dr. Storer the degree of LL.D. Through Dr. Maloney he came to be a good friend of the Medical School, another

one of those who, like Doctor Dwight, Professor of Anatomy at Harvard, knew how much need there was for religious and ethical teaching in connection with medical schools, and who proved a great source of support and encouragement to the new school. The opportunity to confer the degree came at the conclusion of a medical fortnight which had for the first time brought to this country a group of distinguished European professors who enabled American physicians to get in touch with some of the new currents of medical thought, particularly along the lines of neurology and psychology, which were at that time so much talked about, but about whose fundamental principles comparatively little was known.

Dr. Storer's collection, and the catalog of it, made him known very well, especially among those interested in the history of medicine, so it was not surprising when it was announced that a gold medal in recognition of his researches in connection with the various awards in medicine had been struck. He was modest enough to deprecate its conferment on himself, saying that he had not deserved the honor; but that was only a part of his un-failing modesty.

During most of his later years he lived in Newport, Rhode Island, where he became one of the most prominent citizens of that centre of social life, and where he exerted a deep influence both as a man

and a physician. He took his civic duties with great seriousness, and was considered by most of the inhabitants as one of the supreme influences for good in the community.

After a long and honored life, well worthy of the title, "Newport's Grand Old Man," as his fellow citizens sometimes affectionately termed him, he welcomed rest at life's close. On his last afternoon, realizing that his end was near, he sent messages to the members of the family who could not be present. He also sent his love to "the dear Harvard men," and gave special directions that his *salve*, or greeting of welcome, be given to Mr. Peabody, his successor as senior alumnus. Then he passed on peacefully.

Taken all in all, few men have made their names more deeply engraved on the history of medicine than Horatio Storer. He was a very worthy member of the medical profession, who helped to carry it through stormy times, particularly in medical ethics, and who added much to the medical and surgical knowledge of the period. And above all, in his profession, his avocation, and his religion, he was never without a thoroughgoing realization of the serious things of life.

That long-continued friendship and personal esteem have not caused me to exaggerate the significance of Dr. Storer's work, will probably be best understood from the fact that there are many others who knew him well and who

lived close to him in secular and medical relations of the most intimate kind who felt they could scarcely say enough in his praise, and especially in recognition of his positive genius of original character. Dr. Henry O. Marcy, a very well-known New England surgeon in that last generation of the nineteenth century, was a pupil of Dr. Storer's, and chronicled that fact with enthusiastic gratitude, for he felt that Dr. Storer had been one of the most stimulating of his teachers.

In an article which appeared in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, which was read in the Section on Obstetrics and Diseases of Women at the Fiftieth Annual Session, held in Atlantic City, June, 1909, Dr. Marcy said:

"Dr. Storer returned to Boston (from his European graduate studies, corresponding to the making of the grand tour) and was appointed an instructor on the diseases of women in the Harvard Medical School. He had a most enthusiastic following when, as an undergraduate, I first met him. He soon became one of the most popular practitioners in the city of Boston and was said to have had the largest income of any member of the profession in New England. He was indefatigable in

his work. He founded the Gynecological Society of Boston, the first special society devoted to the diseases of women in the world; and for seven years he published the *Journal of the Gynecological Society of Boston*. The first successful case on record undertaken for the cure of umbilical hernia was one of his early operations. In September, 1865, he successfully performed hysterectomy; and this was the twenty-fourth case of the operation placed on record and the fourth successful case operated on in America. There was very great prejudice against abdominal operations at that time. In England the medical societies threatened to report the next case of abdominal operation to the coroner.

"There is no doubt that Dr. Storer was the 'best-hated' member of the profession in Massachusetts. A long and dangerous illness removed him from the active arena and years were spent in Europe in quest of health, unfortunately never fully restored. He gave brilliant promise of being the leader of gynecology in America, notwithstanding the vituperative abuse unsparingly showered on him by men who should have known better."

