THE BOSTON MEDICAL AND SURGICAL JOURNAL.

VOL. XXXVIII. WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8, 1848.

No. 6.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF SILAS FULLER, M.D.

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[Read before the "Hartford Medical Society," and published in the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal by request of the Members.]

WHEN such men as the subject of this brief memoir are permitted to adorn any age, it is a duty incumbent upon their cotemporaries to profit by their example, and by their wisdom and influence to become wiser and better men; and when, by the unerring law of nature, they are removed, another duty presents itself—to record *their* virtues, and *our* knowledge of the fruits of their labors, and transmit them to those who will soon occupy our places. In doing this, our high regard for their memory and our personal friendship should not lead us into any undeserved eulogium.

A full expression of my own feelings respecting the character of our deceased friend, one of the founders of this Society, would, to those not acquainted with him, be considered exaggeration; and having been requested by your vote, to give a sketch of his history, it is my intention to avoid extravagance.

Dr. SILAS FULLER was the son of Abiel Fuller, of Lebanon, Conn., a man of strong mind, particularly distinguished as a mathematician, and much esteemed as a citizen. His mother also possessed uncommon mental energy. He was the sixth lineal descendant from Dr. Samuel Fuller, one of that noble company who landed at Plymouth, Dec. 22, 1620. He was born Sept. 22, 1774. His early opportunities for acquiring an education were such as his native village afforded; and they were, for a country town, of a superior order, being under the superintendence of the venerable Trumbulls and Williamses, who exerted a controlling influence in that ancient and honorable town. His early days were spent with his father, in agricultural pursuits, during a part of the year, while other portions of it were devoted to teaching the youth of his village. Possessing a vigorous and inquiring mind, and a thirst for knowledge, he early resolved to devote himself to the study and practice of medicine; and in May, 1795, he commenced a course of study with Dr. Thaddeus Clark,* of Lebanon, one of the most talented and highly respectable members of the profession in Connecticut.

* He is now living near Pittsburg, Pa., enjoying a vigorous old age.

In 1798, by the advice of his friend and instructor, he settled in the north parish of Lebanon, which in May, 1804, was incorporated as a town.

Dr. Clark possessed the confidence of his young pupil in an eminent degree; and the confidence, which was mutual, ripened into a strong friendship, continuing uninterrupted while Dr. Clark remained in Connecticut. Dr. Scott, of Bozrah, was also an estimable and discriminating physician. These gentlemen were the consulting physicians of Dr. Fuller during the early part of his professional career, and he remarked to the writer, during the sickness which terminated his valuable life, "that to their fidelity and friendship he attributed his success in his professional pursuits." In 1798 he married Miss Alinda Clark, a young lady of more than ordinary intellect. He entered upon active life at one of those periods, prominent in the history of our country, when political excitement assumed a high character; and although he was not then, or at any subsequent period of his life, considered a politician, he entertained the views of the dominant party in Connecticut at that time. This fact, combined with the prejudice which might naturally arise from his having selected a parish in his native town as his field of labor, created an opposition rarely encountered by a young man, which, however, by the exhibition of pre-eminent professional ability, he very soon surmounted. It was but a short time before he secured the confidence, esteem and patronage of almost every individual by whom he had been opposed, and during the succeeding fourteen years he gained an enviable reputation as a physician and surgeon.

In the last war with Great Britain he received a surgeon's commission in the 23d Regiment of United States' Infantry. His competitor for the office was an ardent and devoted politician, and an advocate of the measures of the party by which the war was declared. He also possessed some reputation as a surgeon, and in years was his senior; but notwithstanding these facts, Dr. Fuller's professional character gave him an advantage over his competitor, which political qualifications could not confer. His commission was dated July 6, 1812, and Drs. John Gale and Henry White were associated with him as surgeon's mates. This valiant regiment was commanded by Maj. McFarland, aided by Maj. George M. Brooks, and belonged to the brigade commanded by that intrepid officer Gen. Winfield Scott. Gen. Wm. J. Worth and Major Henry Whiting were lieutenants in the regiment to which Dr. Fuller was attached. With such officers distributed through the 23d regiment, it was well qualified to act the noble part which it performed in the battles of Chippewa and Bridgewater. These, and others in the army, were men of cultivated talents, were highly esteemed by Dr. Fuller, and they duly appreciated his worth.

John McCall, M.D., an eminent physician in Utica, and President of the Medical Society of the State of New York, was an associate of Dr. Fuller, and was surgeon in the 13th Regiment of the U. S. Infantry. He says, "Dr. Fuller sustained a high character and excellent

reputation throughout the army, as a man and as a surgeon. No medical officer stood higher in the army, or was more respected and esteemed."

This period of his life afforded opportunities for perfecting himself in surgery, the favorite department of his profession; and although he entered the army well qualified to perform the responsible duties of the station, he returned from it with a reputation which secured to him the confidence of the community where he resided, and a large share of the consulting business in all the adjoining towns, and in the neighboring counties.

It will be recollected that during the war, a very fatal epidemic prevailed, not only in the army, but very extensively through the country. Respecting the treatment of this disease, it will also be recollected that there was a diversity of opinion, a portion of the medical profession considering it strictly and uniformly a *typhoid pneumonia*, requiring stimulants, and stimulants only; while another portion of the faculty could see nothing but an *entonic* character in its development, and employed the *lancet* and antiphlogistic remedies for its removal. The results of these extreme modes of practice need not be mentioned. During this epidemic, and while in the army, Dr. Fuller wrote a very valuable essay upon its pathology and treatment, which was published in some of the journals of the day, and subsequently in a work entitled "Medical Sketches," written by James Mann, M.D., one of the surgeons of the army.

In 1823, by the recommendation of the Connecticut Medical Society, the Faculty of Yale College conferred upon Dr. Fuller the honorary degree of Doctor of Medicine. In 1826 he was elected by the Medical Convention of the State of Connecticut, one of the "committee of examination at the Medical Institution of Yale College." To this duty he always promptly attended, and entered with so much interest and fidelity into the examinations, that with the exception of 1842, when he was a member of the committee to nominate professors in the Medical Institution of Yale College, he was either *ex officio*, or by appointment, a member of the committee of examination until the session of 1846, when the state of his health prevented.

As I have before remarked, Dr. Fuller was not a partizan, nor was he ever practically a politician, although thoroughly acquainted with the political views of the different parties, and the leading doctrines relating to our national interests. Possessing such qualifications, and the entire confidence of the citizens of his native town, he was repeatedly elected to represent them in the Legislature. He was also a member of the convention which formed the present constitution of Connecticut.

For many years after retiring from the army to the field of his former labor, he was particularly interested in the investigation of the causes and treatment of the diseases of the mind. On this subject his knowledge and experience were such that insane patients were placed under his care from all the surrounding country, and his success in the treatment of the insane was so satisfactory, and the confidence of the community in him was so great, that he had a *private hospital* almost constantly under his supervision. He was thus prepared to manage a more

public institution ; and after the death of Dr. Eli Todd, the distinguished Superintendent of the "Retreat for the Insane," Dr. Fuller was selected by the Directors of that Institution as his successor. In July, 1834, he entered upon the duties of the station, which place he occupied until he resigned the office in February, 1840 ; and those gentlemen who have been associated with me as "visiting physicians of the Retreat," will agree with me that at no time since the opening of that institution has the medical department been better managed than while under his care. After leaving the Retreat he opened an office in this city, and while his health remained unimpaired, he performed a large amount of professional labor in Hartford, in all the adjoining towns, and even beyond the limits of the State, greatly esteemed by his employers, and highly respected and beloved by his brethren.

In 1834 he was elected Vice President of the Medical Society of Connecticut, which office he held until May, 1837, when he was chosen President of the Society, and re-elected on the two succeeding years. After having filled the office, and impartially discharged its duties, with credit to himself, and to the entire satisfaction of the Society, during three successive years, he tendered his resignation, accompanied with a very pertinent and appropriate address, which is contained in the printed proceedings of the Society over which he presided. In his intercourse with his medical brethren he exhibited those excellent qualities, both of his head and his heart, for which he was so highly distinguished—he was influenced by a high regard for integrity, and those rules by which all honorable and upright men are governed in their professional intercourse. On this subject he was an example for those who wish to be both useful and respected. Upon the younger members of this Society I would urge the importance of looking to such men as the subject of this memoir, as examples for habits of investigation, zeal in the discharge of professional duties, scrupulous regard for the reputation both of the profession and its worthy members, and an honest desire to accord to all that degree of merit to which they are entitled—and while he was regardful of the reputation of the meritorious members of the profession, he held in utter detestation that want of magnanimity of character which will induce a professional man to detract from the reputation of a brother for his own personal benefit.

Dr. Fuller was a "self-made man." Unaided by influential friends, or wealth, he was early thrown upon his own resources ; and nature having endowed him with talents of an eminent order, he rose, by his own merits, in early life to a very enviable position. During his pupilage he defrayed a part of the expense of his education by teaching. No adventitious circumstances aided him in the commencement of his useful life. As he was limited in opportunities for gaining an elementary education, so was he in his professional course. Medical schools, with the talented professors, which now adorn almost every part of our country, had no share in qualifying him for the great amount of professional labor which he performed. A mind uncommonly capacious and contemplative, capable of comprehending all those sciences connected with the course

of study which he selected, constantly in the pursuit of that important object, enabled him to overcome all obstacles. He never boasted of his success in business, or of his extensive practice, nor did he ever sound his own fame, or make any pretension to extraordinary qualifications; but by the application of the powers of his strong mind, and a careful pathological investigation of medical science, he early established a professional character which many, under the most favorable circumstances, have failed to secure.

In him were combined *all* those faculties which are necessary to constitute a practical man, but a memory uncommonly retentive was one of the most prominent. His mind was a vast and well-regulated storehouse, in which was arranged material, from study and observation, which peculiarly qualified him for every emergency. This not only enhanced his professional skill, but rendered him, on all occasions, remarkably interesting and attractive as a companion and friend. He never adopted any but the most honorable means for securing business; and I am inclined to believe that pecuniary considerations did not actuate him in the pursuit of his profession, as he was regardless of this motive to a fault. Inexcusable neglect in this matter during a part of his life was to some extent the cause of embarrassment; and if, while laboriously engaged in the discharge of his professional duties, he had been careful to require those for whom his valuable services were rendered, to pay him more liberally, and more promptly, he would, perhaps, have been more just to himself, to his employers, and to the younger members of the profession who are compelled to conform in some measure to the customs of their predecessors. He attended with great fidelity upon those who were unable to make any remuneration; and I have heard him express in strong terms the pleasure it afforded him to attend upon such, as he could do it without any suspicion of laboring for pecuniary compensation.

In his powers of discrimination, in diagnosis and pathology, he excelled. His pastor, the Rev. Dr. Bushnell, who knew him well, says, "He seemed to me, whether in virtue of his long experience, or of some native insight, I do not know, to excel, in a remarkable degree, in reading the symptoms of disease; and I should say, that the secret of his success lay in the decisiveness and certainty of his pathology." Dr. Fuller examined cases with great care, and expressed his views of their nature with equal frankness; and I think the members of this Society, and the large number of physicians who have been frequently in consultation with him, will agree with me in the opinion that he did not allow any theoretical views to interfere with facts and plain indications in the treatment of disease. He adapted his treatment to the peculiarities of the case, whatever they might be, without regard to the dogmas of schools or individuals.

The opinion, sometimes expressed by those not possessing the most favorable opportunities for judging, that he was ultra in his views respecting antiphlogistic practice, appears to me not well founded. Although he employed the *lancet*, and other *antiphlogistic* agents, in cases demand-

ing their use, his practice was marked in this, as in every other respect, by his peculiar discrimination. An intimate professional acquaintance with him for the last twenty-five years has afforded me ample opportunity for forming an opinion on this subject. I have, in numerous instances, been with him at the bed-side of those who were affected with various diseases, and with different forms and in different stages of the same disease, and I am happy to bear testimony to the fact that in all his investigations, his sole object was, to analyze the case with such precision as to enable him to adapt his treatment to the real condition of the patient; and without passing an undeserved encomium upon his judgment, I should add that on this point he was peculiarly successful.

He was untiring in his efforts to derive instruction from the labors of others, and it is greatly to be regretted that his habits were such that he always preferred storing in his own capacious mind the experience of others, to the very commendable course of recording the practical observations derived from an extensive and successful business. While his associates have had ample opportunities for deriving benefit from his experience, others will lose much which might have been made a matter of record. His library was large and well selected; he read, with careful attention, the principal publications of the day, both professional and miscellaneous, and instructed a large number of young men in the principles of medicine and surgery.

His personal appearance was commanding, yet he studied less to please by his address, than to be useful to his patients; and by those who appreciated his talents and skill, his visits were always anticipated with pleasure, and his society enjoyed with profit.

In delineating the character of our venerated and lamented friend, we would "nothing extenuate or set down aught in malice." While we honor his memory and reverence his virtues, truth demands the acknowledgment that he was "subject to like passions" with others. Yet while we admit that "to err is human," we do not allow that he possessed a weak trait which would permit him to perform a dishonorable act—he possessed a nobleness of character incompatible with anything savoring of meanness.

Dr. F. commenced life at a period when the members of our profession were daily tempted by the mistaken hospitalities of their employers, yet he avoided that broad and deep current which has carried away many from the sacred desk, the bar, and the medical profession. He not only escaped this evil, but was an ardent friend of the cause of temperance, and an advocate of its principles.

A mind so well furnished as was that of our friend, a mind ever grasping after truth on every subject it investigated, and which carefully examined all those sciences which are directly or even collaterally connected with his profession, cannot be supposed to have superficially examined the most important of all subjects, that with which our future existence and happiness are so intimately connected. With the *historical* part of the Bible he was better acquainted than many of the professed teachers of its truths; and with the *doctrinal* parts of that sacred volume he had

made himself so familiar, that he was well qualified, both to edify and instruct those who had long been familiar with the great truths of the Christian religion, the principles of which evidently governed him in the discharge of his moral and social duties. For reasons which I am not now able to present, he neglected the important duty of making a public profession of his faith in the christian religion till September, 1842, when he became a member of the North Congregational Church in Hartford, under the pastoral charge of the Rev. Dr. Bushnell. Dr. Fuller was a firm believer in a superintending Providence; and in proof, both of his *belief*, and the *exercise* of a special Providential care, he related the following incident. While stationed in the vicinity of Plattsburgh, during the last war with Great Britain, he was sitting in the temporary hospital which was provided for his patients, when one of the officers came to invite him to his tent. Notwithstanding he possessed social feelings in an eminent degree, and was remarkably fond of embracing every opportunity for conversation, he felt a reluctance on this occasion which compelled him to decline. The invitation was repeated, with the inquiry whether any business prevented, and he reluctantly consented to accompany him. While seated with his friend, and no more exposed than in any other situation on the field, Dr. F. was so strongly impressed with a sense of impending danger that he invited the officer to a walk among the barracks. After leaving the tent, and when within a few rods of it, the table by which they had been sitting was struck by a shell from the enemy's quarters, and, with everything around it, was torn to fragments.

Dr. Fuller was deeply afflicted by repeated deaths in his own family. Of nine children, only one survives him. Several died in early childhood, and one or more during his absence while connected with the army. In 1825 his eldest son, then a member of Yale College, died of tubercular consumption, which disease also terminated, successively, the lives of his wife, two sons who were highly respectable physicians, and his only daughter, the wife of Dr. Geo. B. Hawley, of Hartford.

The disease which closed the life of Dr. Fuller, and from which he had suffered repeated attacks, for many years, was internal rheumatism from metastasis. He died on the 22d of October, 1847, the day following the death of his daughter. In the closing hours of life, when I last saw him, he was not in a state of mind to manifest anything in relation to the change which immediately awaited him; but in the course of his last sickness, which continued about two weeks, he confidently expressed the hope of meeting his departed christian friends "in a world of happiness."

DR. BEDFORD'S LECTURE.

To the Editor of the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal.

SIR,—I have this moment read in the number of your Journal, bearing date 23d of February, the following editorial remarks, together with an