Obituary

THE CAREER AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE LATE DR. WILLIAM J. MORTON

Dr. William J. Morton practiced medicine in the City of New York for over thirty years. He was at one time editor of the JOURNAL OF NERVOUS AND MENTAL DISEASE. For about five years he was professor of nervous and mental disease in the medical department of the University of Vermont, and for fifteen years or more he was professor of nervous and mental disease and medical electricity in the New York Post Graduate School. Dr. Morton made some important contributions to X ray and radium therapy, to ionization methods, and to electrotherapeutics. He was a member of the American Neurological Association and was a member and at one time president of the New York Neurological Society. He was neurologist to the Metropolitan Throat Hospital, to Randall's Island Hospital, and to the New York Infant Asylum.

Dr. Morton was born in New York in 1846. He graduated from Harvard College in 1867 and graduated in medicine from the Harvard Medical School in 1872. He studied medicine in Vienna and Paris in the following years. He practiced in the Diamond Fields of South Africa in 1874 and 1875. He later traveled in Europe and finally settled in practice in New York in the year 1878, taking up definitely the specialty of Neurology and Electrotherapeutics.

I met Dr. Morton first in the early 80's. He had then a beautiful home on West 56th St., a well-equipped office, and was full of ambition for a neurological career. He had an inventive and mechanical turn of mind and was busy when I first knew him in patenting a new type of water motor which was to revolutionize dynamics.

He was in Washington with me at the time of Guiteau's trial and execution. This was about the time of the appearance of Moritz Benedict's book on the Brains of Criminals and we jointly made a description of the brain of Guiteau from the criminologist's standpoint. It appeared in the Medical Record, July 5, 1882, and I can aver that it was a good, objective piece of work as neither of us knew enough about criminology or insanity to establish a bias.

After this I did not meet Dr. Morton very much. He was always cordial and agreeable in his manner but seemed a little shy and shut in or shut off, having generally some interesting scheme which he was about to realize, or was realizing.

Dr. Morton had an inventive turn of mind and his interests went towards physics and chemistry in relation to therapeutics rather than to pathology and clinical medicine.

A list of his published articles showed that he was a pioneer and an original worker and discoverer in certain lines.

In 1895 and 1898 he published articles on cataphoresis. He was among the first to contribute to a therapeutic method which is now accepted under the name of ionization, as a useful procedure. "Local anaesthesia by cataphoresis and by mechanical pressure," 1905, and "Cataphoresis or Electrical Medicamentous Diffusion as applied in Medicine, Surgery and Dentistry," 1898, are the titles of his papers.

He was one of the first workers in X ray and radium therapy for cancer, lupus, and various skin diseases. "Radio-therapy," 1902, "X ray therapy and radium," 1903, "Radio-therapy and surgery with a plea for preoperative radiations," 1905, "Radium for the treatment of cancer and lupus," 1907, Artificial fluorescence of living tissues in relation to disease, 1904, "Some cases treated by the X ray—acne, cancer, carbuncle, keloid," 1903.

Dr. Morton was one of the early users of the large static battery, and he evolved from it what is still called the "Morton Current." He described it in 1891 under the title "Franklinic Interrupted Current," or "my new system of administration of static electricity."

This current was a rapidly interrupted Leyden jar discharge passed through the patient. It is really a current of the same character as what is now called the general high frequency. Jones, in his work on Medical Electricity, describes and upholds the utility and originality of Morton's invention. Jones also gives credit to Morton for his contributions to ionization.

It appears then that the history of radium and X ray therapy and of ionization and electro-therapeutics can not be written without giving credit to Morton's inventiveness and originality.

Dr. Morton was a man of pleasing personality, handsome, courteous, kindly, and unaggressive. He had something of the adventurous in his character. He practiced in South Africa and he traveled extensively in Europe and visited Mexico. It was this spirit I think that led to his misfortunes, for he was a man blameless in his social life and one never heard unkind things said of him in his professional relations, except perhaps that he saw things very optimistically. His last years must have been sad ones, but I think he should be remembered as a genuine contributor to therapeutics, and one who helped and solaced many and incurred the enmity of none.

A full list of his contributions is given in the *Who's Who of New York Physicians*.

CHARLES L. DANA