

SKETCHES OF EMINENT LIVING PHYSICIANS.—NO. XX.

2 [Communicated for the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal.]

REYNELL COATES, M.D., OF PHILADELPHIA.

“ Speak, ye, the pure delight, whose favored steps
 The lamp of science through the jealous maze
 Of nature guides, when haply you reveal
 Her secret honors.”—*Akenside*.

ALTHOUGH each profession in itself demands a peculiar order of talent and a distinct combination of the mental faculties for the successful performance of its several duties, yet it is well known that the gown, the toga and the medical mantle, each and all cover a great variety of the genus *homo*. Each, however, performs his rôle in the drama of his art or science, and fills some place in the domain of “ human action.” It is very common for medical teachers and writers to insist on a peculiar order of talent and organization for the medical man. In Cato’s estimation, there is scarcely a species or variety of talent which cannot be usefully employed in our great art or science. The simplest of all arts, the art of observing, the child’s art of noticing such things as are presented to its senses, is of the first importance to medicine. This art is, however, of no avail unless the reasoning powers are applied to sift the chaff from the wheat, truth from error. All men, indeed, may be divided into two great classes, which will include numerous orders, genera and species, viz., the class of *observers*, whose functions, in Cato’s estimation, have been lately entirely overrated—for what are facts without principles? The rough stones of the quarry, without the moulding hand of the statuary or architect! Second, the *reasoners*—or those who seize the thoughts of other men and apply them to their legitimate purposes. The majority of mankind are observers from their childhood up; but nature forms but few true reasoners and logical thinkers. These are the masterpieces of nature; the true prophets, whose deductions are inspirations, whose conclusions are truth—eternal as God. True, an excess of the reflecting faculties will lead to wild and unsubstantial speculations—simply because the premises are either insufficient or unsound; but when properly balanced, we have an Hippocrates, a Galen, a Sydenham or a Rush.

REYNELL COATES, M.D., of Philadelphia, may with great propriety be classed among the thinkers of our profession. His magnificent brow would inform the most careless observer of this fact. He was born in his father’s house in our city on the 10th of December, 1802. His father’s name was Samuel Coates, and he belonged to the society of Quakers. He was a person of fortune and considerable social influence in his day. The Quaker discipline *not permitting a collegiate education*, Reynell was sent to a well-known academy in Philadelphia, and afterwards to a popular boarding-school at West Town, about thirty miles from Philadelphia, where he completed his classical and other studies. He was noted while there, and has been ever since, for his abilities in the higher mathematics. He commenced the study of medicine at an

early period of his life, and entered the Pennsylvania Hospital as resident student, where he pursued his studies with ardor and enthusiasm. He graduated in the University in 1823; having written his thesis on fractures of the lower extremities. Some of his views were different from those of the professor of surgery, but have since been verified by experience.

Six months after this time, receiving the appointment of surgeon to an East Indianman, he went to India and the Isle of France. The Burmese war broke out during his five months' stay in Calcutta. He returned in 1824, and commenced the practice of medicine in his native city.

In 1828, he married Margaretta, daughter of William Abbott, by whom he had two children, both of whom died early. He lost his wife in 1835, and his writings since often give evidence of his abiding affection for her.

In 1829 he left the city to accept the station of Professor of Natural Science in Alleghany College, at Meadville. After remaining there one year, he removed to Bristol, in this State, where he practised for two years. He then returned to Philadelphia, and ceased general practice, resorting to his pen as an occupation. Among the first publications with which he was connected, was the "Encyclopædia of Practical Medicine and Surgery," edited by Dr. Hays. Dr. C. contributed the articles on "Adhesion," "Anthrax" and "Ankle," with some others, entire, and that portion of the article "Arm" which refers to the surgical pathology of the region. About this time he became associated with Drs. B. H. Coates (his brother), W. D. Brinklé, H. Bond, F. D. Condie, Franklin Bache and R. M. Huston, in an institution for medical instruction, under the title of the "Philadelphia Medical Academy." The organization continued fifteen months. The two last-named gentlemen are now professors in Jefferson College.

After the death of his wife, Dr. C. took an active part in the South-Sea Expedition, to which he was appointed comparative anatomist. This expedition, it will be remembered, did not sail, and the subject of our sketch had no connection with the one which was afterwards fitted out and sailed. He then delivered some courses (private) of lectures on operative surgery; but being too independent to *seek* patronage from the schools, he found his classes would not warrant his continuing the lectures. Ideas, however, of Dr. C., which were promulgated in these lectures, may be found in the hand-books and other treatises on surgery published since that time. He commenced and successfully carried out several courses of lectures on physiology, human and comparative; which were delivered in several of the principal cities and towns on the Atlantic border, including Boston.

Dr. C. is a member of many learned Societies. He was Vice President of the (now dead) Medical Society of this city; and is a member of the Academy of Natural Sciences, to whose journal he has contributed many valuable papers, principally on the mollusca. Dr. C. contributed largely to the Philadelphia Medical Journal, formerly called Chapman's Journal, and afterwards edited by Dr. J. D. Godman. He

has long been a valuable contributor to several of our medical journals, as well as one in India. His monographs, one of which on Hereditary Hæmorrhage, and his reviews, abound in facts, and are evidently the result of much thought. His mode of reviewing is like that of the later Edinburgh writers in literature; merely using the work reviewed as a text, on which he engrafts his own views and facts.

For several years past his pen has been chiefly occupied in the composition of matters literary, political, &c., for the general public. He is the editor of several annuals, one or two of which he edited exclusively. We may mention the "Leaflets of Memory," as the most popular of these. He wrote a series of capital articles for the "Friend," called "Reminiscences of a Voyage to India." These are interspersed with many valuable observations on natural philosophy and natural history.

His school-book on Human Physiology is, perhaps, the best in our language, and is used very generally, both in our public and private seminaries.

His "Domestic Medicine" is a large volume, whose first chapters are devoted to anatomy and physiology. The whole work is one of great merit, for the facility with which he has adapted the matter to popular apprehension, and the amount of instruction put together.

We cannot well quote either from Dr. C.'s prose or poetic compositions; yet it is well known that he is one of the most vigorous and captivating writers in our country. The general balance of his mind, with strong reasoning powers, gives him great advantages as a medical or polemic writer. His skill in arraying the facts in any doubtful case is very great, and his ingenuity and power in almost any general argument are well understood in our city.

Personally Dr. C. is rather above the middle height—with broad, Herculean shoulders, and limbs to match; "A front like Jove himself;" and formerly "Hyperion curls," but now time has swept these ornaments from his brow. His voice is rather rough, from some slight catarrhal affection. His manner is quiet and contemplative. It is said that—

"Some place their bliss in action, some in ease;
Those call it pleasure, and contentment these."

Dr. C. is one of the latter, and is perhaps too well charged with the lymphatic temperament to make an active practitioner of medicine. He loves "good living," is a most jovial "good fellow," and can recite poetry from morning till night. We remember well hearing him recite the "Chase," from the "Lady of the Lake," with great beauty and effect.

Long life to him, and a happy immortality in that world about which he knows well how to speculate.

Cato.

MATERNAL INFLUENCE ON THE FŒTUS.

To the Editor of the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal.

SIR,—The following case occurred recently in my practice, and if you think it worthy of publication you are at liberty to insert it in the Journal.