

ward-tenders, students and the patient were ready—but not Dr. Morton. Dr. Warren, who was to operate; waited a half-hour; he then remarked, sarcastically, “Dr. Morton has not come, perhaps he has another engagement.” Then followed sneering remarks by the students, and sneering looks by the surgeons, for no one had faith in the experiment, and the students enjoyed the fun of the anticipated failure, myself with the rest.

As Dr. Warren was about to begin the operation, Dr. Morton came in, out of breath, and red in the face from hurry. He immediately commenced to give the ether from the glass inhaler then used. In three or four minutes he turned to Dr. Warren, and said, “Your patient is ready”; whereupon the operation was done without a sign of pain that I could see. Dr. Warren then stood facing the class, and said, “Gentlemen, *this is no humbug.*” We were *thunderstruck*. Dr. Warren was a tall, straight man, dignified and rather solemn in manner, with supreme self-control, laconic in speech, using the fewest words possible and never repeating them (resembling the Duke of Wellington); yet there were tears glistening on his face when he uttered those words.

Now for the explanation of Dr. Morton’s tardiness. On the previous day (October 15th) Dr. Gould, a friend of Dr. Morton, suggested that valves be put in the inhaler to aid the elimination of the expired air. At midnight he (Morton) had thought out the way to do it; he then went to the house of Mr. Drake, philosophical-instrument maker, rang him out of bed, hurried him to his shop, and induced him to make the required alterations. This took him well into the next forenoon; hence Dr. Morton’s delay.

In order to fully satisfy the minds of all that the Lethæon was a *complete* destroyer of pain, it was proposed to make the severest test, namely, that of the actual cautery. It was applied, accordingly, to the back of a man suffering from caries of the spine. The iron, heated to a white heat, was passed up one side of the spine and twice upon the other side, a distance of two feet, and then zigzag between the spinous processes for the same distance. The room was filled with the odor of burning flesh and smoke, but the man did not wince. Dr. Warren said that this was the severest test possible, and proved the complete success of ether as a destroyer of pain.

A young woman named Alice Mohan was brought into a surgical ward suffering from disease of the knee, for which amputation had been advised but declined from dread of the operation, she preferring death. Dr. Hayward told her that he could give her something that would put her to sleep and make the operation painless, when she readily consented to have it done. This was the first amputation under ether. It was done by Dr. Hayward, November 7, 1846.

Dr. Warren substituted chloric ether for sulphuric and seemed to prefer it.

The first recorded case of extraction of teeth under ether was on the 30th of September, 1846, by Dr. Morton. He began his experiments by pouring the ether on cloths; that not being satisfactory, an inhaler of some kind was thought necessary. Many different kinds were tried, but none were without faults. In the early part of April, 1847, Dr. Morton abandoned them all for the cone-shaped sponge. No important knowledge has been gained connected with the administration of ether since that date.

It appears that ether was used, by inhalation, for asthma and phthisis as far back as 1818; and, singularly enough, the greatest care was used not to carry it to unconsciousness for fear of fatal results, several cases of death having been recorded from that cause.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF THE INTRODUCTION OF ANESTHESIA.¹

BY C. V. BENIS, M.D., MEDFORD, MASS.

IN replying to the request of your committee that as a witness of the first operation under ether, at the Massachusetts General Hospital, I would relate some of the incidents of that occasion, the first thought is that little remains to be said; that the events of that day have long ago become historical.

The picture of the theatre at that time is distinctly before me.

In the old days, the private pupils of the late Dr. John C. Warren, of whom I was one, were accustomed to assist in his operations at the hospital; and after graduation, I continued to make very frequent visits there, especially on the regular days for operations. On one of these days, the famous first operation under ether was performed.

I think nearly all of the Surgical Staff were present. I remember that Dr. Peirson, of the Board of Consultation, was there. The theatre was quite well filled with students and the younger professional men; among whom I remember Dr. George H. Gay, Dr. H. G. Clark, Dr. W. W. Wellington, Dr. Daniel D. Slade.

All waited impatiently for the arrival of Dr. Morton, who had been detained, and was late in keeping his appointment with Dr. Warren.

Immediately on Dr. Morton’s hurried arrival, he began the administration of ether to the patient, already on the operating-table, through a tube connected with a glass globe which contained it; and the operation was completed quietly and without special incident.

AN INCIDENT IN THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE INTRODUCTION OF SULPHURIC ETHER AS AN ANESTHETIC.¹

BY W. G. WHEELER, M.D., CHULSEA, MASS.

IN the early part of the year 1846, a New England travelling man from Boston, on his way to the West, arrived at Little Falls, N. Y., then a village, now a city in the valley of the Mohawk. He announced himself in a circular as the agent for and interested in a wonderful discovery which he wished to exhibit; also that he would sell to dentists, physicians and surgeons the right to use the new and powerful agent which would render the extraction of teeth and all surgical operations painless. He also, by written notes to the physicians and a few of the leading citizens of the town, invited them to visit his rooms the next afternoon, to witness the effect of this oblivious drug and to see the extraction of a tooth, without pain, while the patient was under its influence.

This was a great announcement; and it required considerable faith on our part to accept the Boston

¹ Read at the Clinical Meeting of the Staff of the Massachusetts General Hospital, December 1, 1896.

man's notion and all that he promised. However, at the specified hour, some half-a-dozen physicians and one dentist called upon him. In his room we found an ordinary operating-chair. On a small table near by was an old-fashioned "wine decanter" half-filled with a bright-red liquid; two glass tubes (one longer than the other) passed down through the large cork, and attached to the affair was some small rubber tubing, three feet in length, with a felt cone on the end, moulded so as to cover the mouth and the nose.

Soon an elderly man, dressed like a farmer, entered; with fear and agitation he seated himself in the operating-chair, and the mouth-piece was readily adjusted. He was told to breathe in, long and deep down. During the first few inhalations he was excited, and resisted; but soon his respirations became slow and stertorous, the muscular system relaxed, the lower jaw dropped and the eyelids closed. The dentist then applied his forceps to one of the patient's molars, and out it came. In fifteen to twenty minutes, consciousness returned, and the victim's face was the expression of wonderment and surprise, as he beheld the offending member within the grip of the dentist's forceps. The patient was questioned as to his sensations, of which he could only say that he knew nothing, was glad it was out, and that he felt no pain.

The physicians asked the agent a few questions as to the *modus operandi* of this Letheon, as to how long the anesthetic effects lasted, and if it had to be repeated. It was then he seemed quite oblivious and could tell us little or nothing, but said it was safe, and that no accident had happened as far as he knew. But we found that he could tell us the exact price, or the royalty per month to be paid for the right to use the article in our surgical operations. And let me say that none of us present ventured to purchase a royalty. But we left his room somewhat surprised, and somewhat doubtful as to what we had seen of the "Boston notion," or the "newly discovered Letheon."

The question of consciousness, or rather the amount of pain that the patient was sensible of? This was the unknown quantity in the problem before us. Some of the doctors seemed sceptical, and said that there were manifestations of pain; one concluded that there had been collusion between the operator and his patient. And then, to add to our perplexity, the name signified nothing as to its chemical elements; the bright color was suggestive of danger ahead. We all readily smelt the pungent fumes of sulphuric ether, and were quite certain that this was an important constituent of the oblivious compound.

Such was the humble advent of "surgical anesthesia," this mighty boon of the nineteenth century, on its mission of mercy to relieve suffering humanity.

The discovery of ether (or rather the anesthetic property of sulphuric ether) this was the beneficent gift of painless surgery, vouchsafed to our profession for all time.

The city of Boston was its home and its birth-place. The Massachusetts General Hospital was its public sponsor at its baptism and will be the fitting custodian of its memory to the "Coming Ages."

LISTER SUCCEEDS ERICHSSEN.—Sir Joseph Lister has accepted the appointment of consulting surgeon to the City of London Hospital for Diseases of the Chest at Victoria Park, succeeding the late Sir John Erichsen, F.R.S., in this office.

THE SURGICAL RECORDS OF THE MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL HOSPITAL BEFORE 1846.¹

BY H. H. A. BEACH, M.D., BOSTON.

A GLANCE at the earliest events connected with the development of the hospital, reveals the interest of Dr. John C. Warren its first surgeon, and of his father, Dr. John Warren (brother of General Warren), in its organization. In a letter sent home from London, July 9, 1800, he writes: "I have heard nothing of the hospital which was to be established in Boston. Does it progress? And have you, sir, a prospect of getting appointed to it?"²

We are told by the historian of the hospital,³ that a circular letter to the citizens of Boston, signed by Drs. James Jackson and John C. Warren, "may be regarded as the corner-stone of our institution." That strong appeal for financial aid, met with a liberal recognition; and as a result the charter was obtained in 1811. It entitled the holders to real and personal estate to the yearly value of \$30,000. A board of trustees was elected in 1813.

On April 6, 1817, a consulting staff was chosen, and the positions of attending physician and surgeon were filled for the first time by the appointment of Dr. James Jackson and Dr. John C. Warren.

Land for the hospital was purchased October 6, 1817, and the Bulfinch plan was adopted by the trustees, February 1, 1818.

The corner-stone was laid on July 4th, under which was placed a tablet engraved with the following inscription:

"The corner-stone of this edifice, designed as a general hospital, founded by the munificence of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, was laid at the request of the Trustees of the Massachusetts General Hospital by the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, Francis J. Oliver, Grand Master; His Excellency John Brooks, Governor; His Honor William Phillips, Lieutenant-Governor, President of said corporation, and a most munificent donor, the municipal and military officers of Boston, assisting at the ceremonies.

"The fourth day of July, MDCCCXVIII, and of the Independence of the United States XLIII. Anno Luce 5818."

"The accommodations of the hospital were intended to give to a few, in a superior style, everything which their comfort or well-doing demanded. The poor patient was sure of receiving all the care and attention and of having everything which would promote his cure, equally with the rich. The man of property might find all the accommodations of his own house, in addition to those remedial measures, such as baths, apparatus, and nurses of superior order, which he could not obtain at home. There was nothing left undone which care, medical skill, cleanliness, pure air, perfect ventilation and strict discipline could accomplish, nothing was wanting that could contribute to the ultimate success of an operation or the cure of a disease.⁴ . . .

"The origin, arrangement and in a great degree, control, of this institution in its earlier years belonged to Drs. Jackson and Warren. The trustees acted by their advice as the persons most interested in its welfare and best qualified by their profession to superintend it."

The first patient was admitted to the surgical wards for treatment on September 20, 1821, beginning the long and eminent services of Dr. Warren to the hospital, which only ended with his retirement in 1852.

¹ Read at the Clinical Meeting of the Staff of the Massachusetts General Hospital, December 1, 1896.

² Life of John C. Warren, p. 206.

³ Bowditch.

⁴ Edward Warren: Life of John C. Warren.