

WILLIAM HEATH BYFORD, A. M., M. D.

The death of Dr. William H. Byford, which occurred at Chicago on May 21, 1890, was not only a profound affliction to his family and his circle of immediate friends, but also a positive loss to the cause of medical education; while at the same time marking the removal from active practice of an eminent surgeon and the termination of one of the most successful courses in scientific surgery that has illustrated the present era of progress.

Dr. Byford was born at Eaton, Ohio, March 20, 1817. His ancestors came to America from Suffolk, England, and the only patrimony which he inherited consisted of the physical vigor and the tenacity of purpose characteristic of the race from which he sprang. Not long after his birth his parents removed to New Albany, and later to the little village of Hindostan, Indiana. There William H. attended a district school, but the death of his father, before he had reached the age of nine years, compelled him to devote his time and energies entirely to manual labor, in order that from his scanty earnings he might contribute to the maintenance of his widowed mother and her destitute family. Four years after his father's death he and his mother went to live upon her father's farm in Crawford county, Indiana, but here, too, the boy found labor a necessity. At the age of fourteen he formed the purpose of learning the blacksmith's trade, but could find no master of that craft willing to accept him as an apprentice. Baffled in this direction, he turned to the tailors, with whom he was more successful. One whom Dr. Byford himself described as "a kind-hearted Christian gentleman by the name of Davis" took him into his shop. There the boy remained two years, completing his apprenticeship at Vincennes, where he served four years longer.

Young Byford, however, was conscious of a capability for something higher and better than he could attain through this humble handicraft. While serving as an apprentice he borrowed books and devoted every leisure moment after his daily toil to study. Such were his zeal, industry and unremitting energy that he thus acquired an excellent knowledge of English, besides making some progress in the rudiments of Latin, Greek and French. Chemistry, Physiology and Natural History later engrossed his mental efforts, and it was probably the fascination which these branches of study possessed for him that first made him feel his God-prompted vocation for the medical profession. He resolved to become a physician, and Dr. Joseph Maddox, of Vincennes, received him into his office as a student. So keen was his intellect, so quick was his comprehension, and so assiduous his application, that in less than two years, after passing an examination before a State Board of Commissioners he was found qualified to engage in the practice of medicine and surgery, under the then existing law. He first established himself professionally at



Owensville, Indiana, in August, 1838. Two years later he removed to Mount Vernon, where he became associated with Dr. Hezekiah Holland, whose daughter, Miss Mary Ann, he married in 1840.

After his ten years' residence at Mount Vernon, Dr. Byford attended a course of lectures at the Ohio Medical College, and was graduated from that institution in 1845. In 1847 he performed two Cæsarean operations, and, while it does not appear that either of them was absolutely successful, yet the excellent account of them which he published, and which was followed by other contributions to medical journals, at once attracted the general attention of the profession and gained for him an enviable reputation. In October, 1850, he was chosen to the Professorship of Anatomy at the Evansville (Indiana) Medical College, and accordingly removed to that city. Two years later he was transferred to the Chair of Theory and Practice of Medicine, which he filled until the college became extinct, in 1854, during a portion of the time aiding in editing a medical journal published at Evansville, known as the *Indiana Medical Journal*. In 1854 he became a member of the American Medical Association and was made a special committee on Scrofula. On this subject he prepared an elaborate and valuable report, which commanded widespread attention and greatly added to his constantly growing reputation. In May, 1857, he was Vice-President of the association. In the autumn of that year he accepted the Professorship of Obstetrics and Diseases of Women and Children at Rush Medical College, Chicago, and removed with his family to that city. For two years he discharged the duties of this position with distinguished ability, but resigned in 1859 to accept the same chair in the Chicago Medical College, of which institution—then in its infancy—he was one of the founders. His motives in taking this step were of a character which reflected high honor on his professional zeal and foresight, and wholly unselfish. He was anxious for the establishment of a medical college which should insist upon enlarged annual courses, afford a more systematic and better graded curriculum, and which should require better preliminary preparation on the part of matriculants. For twenty years he filled his chair at the Chicago Medical College, witnessing not only its growth but also seeing the gradual adoption of the principles which he had so earnestly and so ably advocated. In 1879 he was recalled to Rush Medical College, to occupy the Chair of Gynecology, which had been especially created for him.

As an instructor—alike in the lectures and class rooms—Dr. Byford was at once perspicuous yet profound, going down into the very depths of scientific research, yet always simple in his enunciation of the most recondite truths. His clinics were always crowded with students and practitioners, and the utmost attention was always paid to his slightest word. In the medical education of women he was one of the pioneers of the West. He was one of the

founders of the Woman's Medical College of Chicago, aiding its formation by giving freely of his time, his influence and his wealth. The institution was organized in 1870 and Dr. Byford became president of the Faculty, as well as of the Board of Trustees, both of which positions he held until his death. Indeed, it may be questioned whether the success of that institution was not dearer to him than that of any other undertaking of his life. The success of the Woman's Hospital is also largely attributed to his tireless and unflagging zeal. Himself one of the eminent gynecologists of the century, he was anxious that the knowledge of this important specialty in medical practice should spread among his professional brethren. In 1876 he was one of the founders of the American Obstetrical and Gynecological Society. He was at one time its Vice-President and later its President, continuing in active membership until he died. He was also a prime mover in the organization of the Chicago Gynecological Society and a life member of the British Gynecological Society. There are many measures in practice with which his name is intimately connected; for example, the use of ergot in fibroid tumors of the uterus; drainage per rectum abscesses that have previously discharged into that viscus; abdominal section for ruptured extra-uterine pregnancy, proposed before the days of Tait; and the systematic use of the slippery elm tent. He was the first in this country to advocate stitching the open sac to the abdominal wound after enucleation of cysts of the broad ligament.

As a practitioner Dr. Byford was singularly successful. He was in general practice for twenty-two years before he made gynecology his specialty. He possessed in an eminent degree that subtle faculty sometimes called personal magnetism, which was never more clearly manifested than by the readiness with which children responded to his constant and always friendly notice. As a consultant he was unflinching in courtesy and scrupulously honorable toward his confreres. As a companion he was genial, yet never unmindful of proper limitations. As a friend he was sympathetic, generous and true. His domestic life was one of ideal happiness. Reference has been already made to his marriage to the daughter of his professional partner at Mount Vernon—Miss Mary Ann Holland. Mrs. Byford, who died in 1865, was noted alike for her earnest Christian character and her many domestic virtues. Dr. and Mrs. Byford had the following named children: W. H. Byford, Jr., M. D., deceased; Dr. Henry T. Byford, an eminent gynecologist of Chicago; Mrs. Anna Byford Leonard; Mrs. Mary B. Schuyler; and Mrs. Maud B. VanSchaack. In 1873 the Doctor married Miss Lina W. Flershem, of Buffalo. The only child of the second union died in infancy.

Dr. Byford was a devout Christian, alike in professed faith and in daily life. His death was not preceded by any lingering, painful illness. Although for three years he had been conscious of symptoms of heart disease, he contin-

ued in active practice, and not until the last hours of his life was there any impairment of his mental faculties. Four days before his death he performed abdominal section for the removal of the appendages on account of fibroid tumor of the uterus, and on the day preceding his death he attended to his customary professional duties. His demise was sudden. Early on the morning of May 21, 1890, he succumbed to an attack of angina pectoris. An anodyne was administered by a neighboring physician, and Dr. Henry T. Byford was hastily summoned. Before the son could reach his father's bedside, however, the latter was unconscious, and at 2 A. M. he entered into eternal rest.

Dr. N. S. Davis, Sr., paid the following eulogy to this distinguished member of the profession: "The late William Heath Byford of Chicago is the best example of a literally self-educated man, who attained a deservedly high reputation as a medical practitioner, teacher and writer, as well as a man of honor, integrity and of humanity, with whom I have been acquainted. He spent nearly all the years usually allotted to school education in diligent labor to aid in supporting a widowed mother and family. From his ninth to his twenty-first year of age he was thus employed. Yet through it all he managed to obtain the necessary books, and perseveringly devoted his evenings, odd hours, and rainy days to their study. Thereby he came to legal age with a better practical education, including both Greek and Latin, than is possessed by many of the graduates of our High Schools. Then he studied medicine, and entering upon practice he advanced step by step until he reached an honorable position among the most highly honored of his profession. He was a persevering supporter of whatever tended to the elevation of medical education and the practical usefulness of the profession. The prominent traits of his character were simplicity and kindness, clearness of perception and practical application, with an unyielding perseverance in the pursuit of whatever he deemed attainable and right."

Comparatively little has been said, in the preceding paragraphs, in reference to Dr. Byford as an author. His principal editorial work was done as associate editor of the *Chicago Medical Journal* (with Dr. N. S. Davis) and as editor-in-chief of the *Chicago Medical Journal and Examiner*, which was a combination of the *Journal* and the *Examiner*, and was published under the auspices of the Chicago Medical Press Association. For a time he also edited the *Northwestern Medical and Surgical Journal*. His contributions to current medical literature were frequent (his favorite subject being Gynecology) and were always well received. He was a prolific writer, yet he never lapsed into weakness, nor did he ever become uninteresting or tautological. Indeed, with a mind like his—at once analytic and synthetic—his works could not fail to command attention. A list of Dr. William H. Byford's articles and works is appended:

"Cæsarean Section," 1847; "Treatment of Continued or Typhoid Fever," *American Journal of Medical Science*, 1851; "Milk Sickness"; Report Committee on Scrofula, Transactions, American Medical Association, 1855; "Physiology, Pathology and Therapeutics of Muscular Exercise," Chicago, J. Barnet, 1858; "A case of Pelvic Abscess," Transactions, Illinois State Medical Society, 1859; "Successful Ovariectomy," *Chicago Medical Examiner*, 1860; "Ovarian Tumors. Is Ovariectomy a Justifiable Operation?" *Ibid.*, 1861; "Two Successful Cases of Ovariectomy," *Ibid.*, 1863; "Removal of Multilocular Tumor Weighing Thirty Pounds," *Ibid.*, 1863; "A Treatise on the Chronic Inflammation and Displacements of the Unimpregnate Uterus," Philadelphia, Lindsay & Blakiston, 1864; "The Practice of Medicine and Surgery Applied to the Diseases and Accidents Incident to Women," Philadelphia, Lindsay & Blakiston, 1865; "The Philosophy of Domestic Life," Boston, Lee & Shepard, 1869; "A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Obstetrics," New York, William Wood & Co., 1870; "An Address Introductory to the Course of Instruction in the Woman's Hospital Medical College, Session of 1870-71," Chicago, R. Fergus' Sons; "The Address in Obstetrics and Diseases of Women and Children," Transactions, American Medical Association, 1875; "Treatment of Uterine Fibroids by Ergot," *Ibid.*, 1875; "The Causes and Treatment of Non-puerperal Hemorrhages of the Womb," Transactions, International Medical Congress, Philadelphia, 1876; "The Spontaneous and Artificial Destruction and Expulsion of Fibrous Tumors of the Uterus," Transactions, American Gynecological Society, 1876; "The Second Decade of Life," annual address before the Tri-State Medical Society, 1877; "Dermoid Ovarian Tumors," Transactions, American Gynecological Society, 1879; "A Case of Double Operation of Ovariectomy and Hysterectomy, with Remarks," *American Journal of Obstetrics*, 1879; "On Puerperal Vaginitis and Laceration as Causes of Vesico-vaginal Fistula," *Chicago Medical Journal and Examiner*, 1879; "Ergot in the Treatment of Fibroid Tumors of the Uterus," *Ibid.*, 1879; "Chronic Inversion of the Uterus," Transactions, American Gynecological Society, 1879; "Fibrous Tumors of the Uterus," American Clinical Lecture, New York, 1879; "Displacement of the Ovaries," *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, 1880; "On the Diagnosis of Ovarian Tumor," *Ibid.*, 1880; "The Successful Extirpation of an Encephaloid Kidney," Transactions, American Gynecological Society, 1880; "Pelvic Abscess," *Peoria Medical Monthly*, 1880-81; "The History of Gynecology in Chicago," *Chicago Medical Journal and Examiner*, 1881; "Annual Address of the President," Transactions, American Gynecological Society, 1881; "Remarks on Chronic Abscess of the Pelvis," *Ibid.*, 1883; "Remarks on Intrapelvic Inflammation in the Chronic Form," *Journal American Medical Association*, Chicago, 1883; "Doctorate Address, delivered at the Commencement of

the Woman's Medical College," *Chicago Medical Journal and Examiner*, 1884; "Remarks on the Surgical Treatment of the Malignant Diseases of the Uterus," *Journal American Medical Association*, 1884; "A Case of Mural Pregnancy," *American Journal Obstetrics*, 1885; "Extra Uterine Pregnancy," Reference Handbook of Medical Sciences, 1885; "Carcinoma or Cancer of the Uterus," Pepper's System of Practical Medicine, Philadelphia, 1886; "Fibrous Tumors of the Uterus," *Ibid.*; "Fatty Tumor of the Suprarenal Capsule," *Obstetric Gazette*, Cincinnati, 1889; "Cysto-fibro-myoma of the Uterus," *Ibid.*, 1889; "Ovarian Pregnancy," *Ibid.*, 1889; "Inflammation of the Ovaries," *Virginia Medical Monthly*, Richmond, 1889-90.