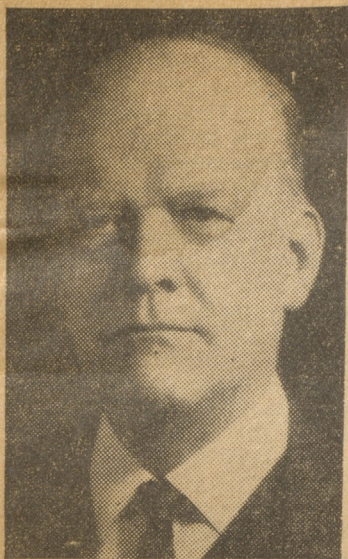


III.

DR. ELISHA NORTH, ONE OF CONNECTICUT'S
MOST EMINENT MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS.

By WALTER R. STEINER, M. D., Hartford, Conn.
*Formerly House Medical Officer, The Johns Hopkins
Hospital.*

Taken by Death



DR. WALTER R. STEINER.

Dr. Steiner Dies, Author Physician

Hartford Courant
Authority in Many Fields,
Long Resident of Hart-
ford Passes After Long
Illness 5.Xi.42, p.1.

Dr. Walter Ralph Steiner, one of Hartford's most noted physicians, former president of the American Medical Library Association and a member of many other national medical bodies, died early Wednesday night, Nov. 4, 1942, at the Hartford Hospital after a long illness. His home was at 646 Asylum Avenue.

Practicing medicine in Hartford since 1900, Dr. Steiner was long a leader in the field of pathology and bacteriology and was nationally known for his articles on internal medicine, pathology and medical history. He served for 39 years as librarian of the Hartford Medical Society, and was secretary to the Congress of American Physicians and Surgeons from 1911 to 1932.

Dr. Steiner was a leading authority on medical libraries and was elected president of the American Medical Library Association in 1934.

Beginning in 1912, he served for many years as consulting pathologist and bacteriologist at Hartford Hospital, and also was consulting physician of the Hartford Orphan Asylum and Bristol, Manchester Memorial, New Britain and Middlesex hospitals.

On State Water

Recognizing his out-
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Hartford 5.Xi.42
Connant Dr. Walter R. Steiner p. 10.

The place occupied by Dr. Walter R. Steiner in the medical profession, not in Hartford and Connecticut alone, but in the nation, is amply attested by the many honors that came to him unsought, each of which seemed only to accentuate his humility. From nothing he ever let drop would one have suspected that he was widely recognized as perhaps our foremost authority in medical history, a subject which early fascinated him and which he pursued with ever increasing zest. But in other fields also he maintained a lively interest. He was a historian of note, particularly as concerned the Civil War period, his native State of Maryland and his adopted State of Connecticut.

With the lives of famous personages he was particularly familiar, and many a delightful paper on them he wrote for the various clubs to which he belonged, papers that revealed how extensive had been his reading. His memory for dates, events and happenings and for quotations, ranging all the way from the masters of verse and prose to limericks that had caught his fancy, was remarkable. Politics, whether past or current, was always a source of interest to him, and he had the scientist's contempt for humbug, hypocrisy and deceit so often exemplified in public affairs. But with all his knowledge of many things, profound and otherwise, his sense of humor always served to keep him in even balance.

Dr. Steiner Was II

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Walter Steiner looked every inch the physician of the old school, kindly, courteous, considerate. But there the resemblance ceased. He was as modern as the most recent graduate of our best medical schools, as might have been expected from his frequent visits to Johns Hopkins Hospital, where early in his career he was House Medical Officer. He kept himself fully abreast of every new discovery in pathology and bacteriology, but he was not one to accept these discoveries before they had been adequately tested and had proved their worth. As a general practitioner he knew the human body as few pretend to know it, and his skill as a diagnostician was held in high esteem.

For forty-two years Dr. Steiner practiced in Hartford, although latterly restricting himself largely to acting as consultant to other members of his profession. His services to the Hartford Hospital, covering a long period, and to various other hospitals in the State betokened only in part his willingness to give his time to their public ministrations. His loyalty to Yale, from which he was graduated with the class of 1892 and which accorded him an A.M. degree three years later, was excelled by no other living alumnus, even though he had to share it with Johns Hopkins University where he completed his post-graduate course and received his M.D. He would have been seventy-two this coming November 18, and he leaves behind him the memory of a life of great usefulness to his fellowmen.

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The funeral will be held Friday at 2 p. m. at the Center Congregational Church. Rev. Russell J. Clinchy will officiate. Burial will be in Frederick, Md.

III.

DR. ELISHA NORTH, ONE OF CONNECTICUT'S
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*Formerly House Medical Officer, The Johns Hopkins
Hospital.*

Nestled amongst the Litchfield hills, in the northwestern [301] portion of Connecticut, lies the little town of Goshen. It had formed a part of the "Western lands," or the sparsely settled territory of the State until May, 1738, when the Assembly passed an act, providing for the sale of the township, "which is hereby named and shall forever hereafter be called and named Goshen." The land of the town was then separated into fifty divisions, to be sold to the highest bidder, and found ready purchasers in the capitalists of that day and the younger sons of large families.¹ Here, six years later, came Joseph North, the grandson of John North, the emigrant, to found a home for his family.² It was this bleak, cold, yet fertile region for which he had exchanged Northington (now Avon), his former residence, but here, at the age of forty-eight, he prospered, and taught his sons how to follow the occupation of their ancestors and become efficient farmers. The eldest, Joseph Jr., was eight years old, at the time of this migration. In 1770 this son married Lucy Cowles, of Farmington, and had by her nine children. Although farming was his chief life work, yet he had a true love for medicine. He is recorded

* Paper read before the Johns Hopkins Historical Club, May 11, 1908.

¹ Hibbard. History of the Town of Goshen, Conn. Hartford, 1897.

² Hibbard. Op. cit., p. 504.

[301] to have spent some time with Dr. Joel Soper, a local doctor, from whom he acquired his knowledge of medicine and surgery. In the setting of broken and dislocated bones he is said to have had great skill, and his practice was quite extensive for many years.³ These tastes were inherited by three of his children, the eldest of whom forms the subject of our sketch.

Dr. Elisha North was born in Goshen on January 8, 1771.⁴ Reared in this chill and drear spot he soon gained a ruggedness of health, which was of great assistance to him in his trying career of a country doctor. At the age of sixteen, he is said to have cared for a broken leg with rare skill and success. Later, he studied medicine with his father, but feeling the limitations in this preparation for his future career, he came to Hartford and studied under Dr. Lemuel Hopkins, one of the celebrated Hartford wits and a physician of prominence in his day. Then, returning to his native town, he practiced medicine until he had gained the necessary sum to more completely equip himself for his profession. In the fall of 1793⁵ (according to Bolton) he entered the University of Pennsylvania as a student, but did not stay to graduate, coming back again to Goshen. How long he remained away we do not know, but in his book entitled "The Science of Life," he refers to Dr. Rush's lectures on animal life⁶ and mentions Dr. Shippen as having shown him, in 1795, in his hasty dissection of the human brain, a little thing called the pineal gland.⁷ Elsewhere he states, "in the year 1794, we visited Philadelphia, on purpose to obtain the information which dissections afford."⁸ In the spring of 1793, we are informed of his election to membership in the Connecticut Medical Society, then but recently organized.⁹ Four years later he mar-

³ Hibbard. *Op. cit.*, p. 339.

⁴ Bolton. *Memoir of Dr. Elisha North*. *Trans. Conn. Med. Soc.* Hartford, 1887, p. 135 and ff.

⁵ Bolton. *Op. cit.*, p. 136.

⁶ North. *Outlines of the Science of Life*. New York, 1829, p. 79.

⁷ North. *Op. cit.*, p. 65.

⁸ North. *Op. cit.*, p. 139.

⁹ Reprint of the *Proceedings of the Conn. Med. Soc.* Hartford, 1884, p. 14.

ried Hannah, the daughter of Frederick Beach, of Goshen, [301] and his lifework as a physician appeared to lie in the land of his birth.

Whilst living in this small country town he earnestly strove to keep abreast with the times and showed an unusual interest in medical progress. Early in his professional career Jenner's book,¹⁰ of 70 pages with four plates, was published, entitled: "An Inquiry into the Causes and Effects of Variolæ [302] Vaccinæ." Its advocacy of vaccination, however, found but few who were convinced of its value. In the spring of 1800 vaccination was introduced into this country by Waterhouse, of Boston and James Smith, of Baltimore, who endeavored to prove in their respective towns the truth of Jenner's assertions in regard to vaccination. North had read and pondered much over this subject, and discerning its importance, made a trip to New Haven—a distance of nearly 50 miles—to obtain "some vaccine fluid warm and fresh from a person there."¹¹ This patient had been vaccinated with material obtained from Dr. Waterhouse, six or seven days before. With this virus North vaccinated three persons, on his return to Goshen, two of whom were children. The adult was not successfully vaccinated, but the children had good "takes," and did not succumb to variolous inoculation. This success North attributed to chance as no one then knew, not even Dr. Waterhouse, the time for taking virus. Generally it was thought, North says, "that the physicians had merely to obtain the virus, use it on a few persons, then put them to the test of variolous inoculation, in order to convince the public of the utility of vaccination and afterwards to propagate the kine-pox at pleasure."¹² That such, however, was not the case, the following

¹⁰ Jenner, Edward. An inquiry into the causes and effects of the variolæ vaccinæ, a disease discovered in some of the western counties of England, particularly Gloucestershire, and known by the name of the cow-pox. IV, 75 pp., 4 pl. 4°. London, S. Low, 1798.

¹¹ North. A Treatise on a Malignant Epidemic, Commonly Called Spotted Fever. New York, 1811, p. 2.

¹² North. Outlines of the Science of Life. New York, 1829. This account is taken from Chap. VIII, entitled "An History of Vaccination", p. 167 and ff.

[302] unfortunate incident proved. Dr. Jessie Carrington, who was also conducting experiments in the "vaccination business," and whom North candidly calls "my rival in business," procured some virus from a traveling person, elsewhere styled a "kine-pox pedler." With it he vaccinated his wife and others, and later, when he supposed his wife was through with the kine-pox, he induced her to have variolous infection put into her arm. "Thus the unfortunate and believing wife, wishing to convince an incredulous public of the utility of the new practice, fell a victim to smallpox and was obliged by law to be taken to the smallpox hospital at Cornwall, about 10 miles distant."

Later, the time for taking the virus, to cause a successful vaccination, was discovered and gradually the genuine "takes" were learned to be distinguished from the spurious ones by both Dr. North and Dr. Carrington. The former information North received from Dr. Waterhouse, who had obtained it shortly before from Dr. Jenner. It was to "take the fluid for vaccination on or before the expiration of the eighth day." North calls this a golden rule, and would add this other, "which is not generally known or attended to; at least the proposed rule is not taught in medical books: Form patients into classes or companies. Such classes may be larger or smaller as may be convenient. Then, when one in a given class is made to have the vaccine pustule, take virus from said pustule, according to the above golden rule, and vaccinate the remainder of said class, with such virus, while warm and fresh from such a pustule."

In May, 1801, a patient came to North complaining of chills, headache and fever. On examination a swelling under his arm was found and a sore on his hand, which proved to be a cow-pox pustule, the patient having contracted it by milking the udder of an infected cow. This was undoubtedly the first example of the vaccine disease or kine-pox being found among the cows of this country. From this patient North successfully vaccinated a little girl and later used the virus from the arm of this girl to vaccinate a man named Hunt, who subsequently went to New York on a business trip. Thus, North declares, the first genuine kine-pox, ever introduced in-

to the city of New York, originated from an American source. [302] Hunt, on his arrival in New York, was sent by North to Dr. Edward Miller, joint editor with Dr. S. L. Mitchell of the Medical Repository, and one of Miller's letters to North is still extant.¹³ It reads as follows:

NEW YORK, 30th April, 1801.

SIR,—I have received by the favor of Mr. Lyman, the letter and enclosures which you have obligingly transmitted to me. Your opinions and practice in respect to cow-pox seem to have been formed in the most judicious and accurate manner; and I cannot but congratulate the district of country which makes up the sphere of your professional labors, on the discernment and ability you display in the introduction and encouragement of such a means (for it scarcely deserves to be called a disease) of preventing and exterminating one of the most terrific distempers, when not mitigated by inoculation, that ever afflicted the human race.

The discovery of cow-pox must undoubtedly be considered by all intelligent and reflecting persons as one of the most interesting discoveries which distinguish the present inquisitive and enlightened period.

Our failure in the propagation of cow-pox in this city was solely owing to the spuriousness of the matter employed—a disappointment which seems often to have happened in different parts of Britain till physicians became experimentally well versed in the peculiar appearances of the genuine disease. Such occurrences, however, will probably become less frequent as soon as the community, and especially medical persons, are thoroughly apprised of the sources of fallacy and of the necessity of giving strict attention to all the circumstances of discrimination. I think your publications very properly adapted to guard against the mistakes incidental to this new practice.

I am greatly obliged to you for the kindness of sending some of the vaccine matter. I shall employ it without delay, and if it should fail to communicate the disease, shall take the liberty of requesting a further supply with view to another trial.

Wishing you every degree of success in your meritorious exertions to extend the usefulness of this discovery, and to improve the condition of the science of medicine, I request you to accept my assurances of the most perfect respect and esteem.

EDWARD MILLER.

DR. ELISHA NORTH, Goshen, Conn.

During these years North claims "we thought it our duty in Goshen to exhibit much demonstrative evidence with re-

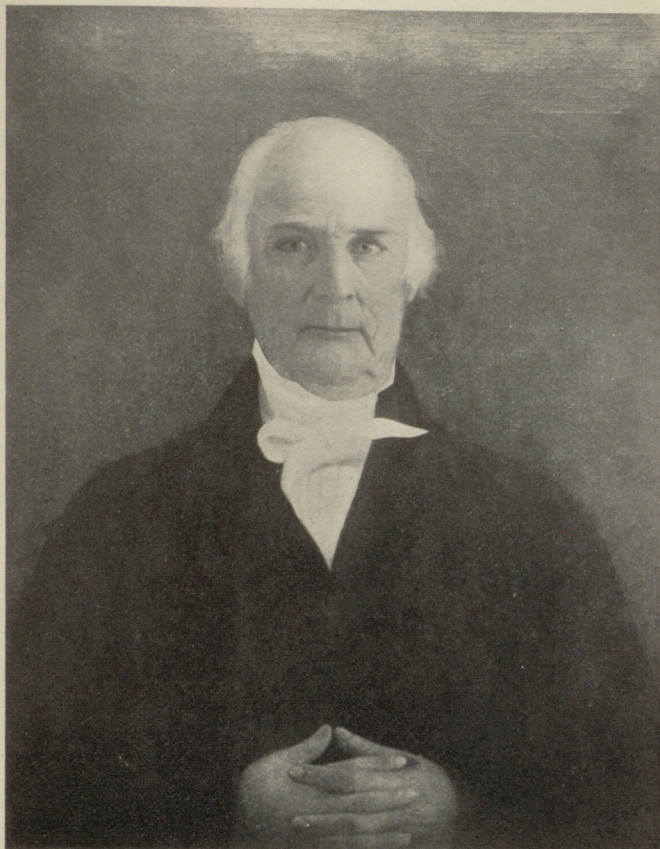
¹³ Bolton. Op. cit., pp. 140-141.

[302] spect to the utility of vaccination, and we regarded the exhibition of such convincing evidence with respect to the utility of vaccination as then being an important part of our business." He blames Dr. Waterhouse for not furnishing suitable and convincing evidence of the benefits of vaccination, other [303] than in his own family. Yet, in spite of North's labors, much opposition to vaccination developed in Goshen. The residents were not convinced of its usefulness, "for there are too many people in common society who know no difference between demonstrative evidence and mischievous reports." North was accused of using, on design, bad smallpox matter. This was based on the fact he used variolous infection as a test upon such of his patients as chose thus to be tried, feeling, he says, "no law of the State was violated, unless I actually communicated the genuine smallpox."

To silence such slander he begged five of his vaccinated patients to visit with him a smallpox hospital at Winchester, eight miles distant, and there be inoculated with warm variolous infection, and likewise see the smallpox for themselves. This was done, as some maintained kine-pox was worse than smallpox. The experiment succeeded and the community was satisfied. Unfortunately, however, "another trouble arose in the progress of this business." "After we had succeeded with much labor and expense in establishing the utility of vaccination, too many thought that they could vaccinate themselves, after they had learned how from us; and such persons doubtless thought it was perfectly a fair game to defraud their teachers of the pitiful fees which were expected." Consequently Dr. North and Dr. Carrington completely failed to make the business of vaccination profitable, notwithstanding their great attention.

It must be stated, though, that North's labors were appreciated by some of his fellow townsmen, for on February 6, 1811, the four selectmen of Goshen state, in an advertisement in the *Connecticut Courant*,¹⁴ that "Dr. North was one among the first who made a vigorous attempt to introduce into this State the use of the cow-pox. Ten years have elapsed since his efforts for this purpose was commenced. The cow-pox,

¹⁴ Bolton. Op. cit., p. 159.



I am Dear Sir respectfully
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like all other new discoveries, met for a considerable length [303] of time with the most determined opposition. The time has, however, at length arrived in which almost every one acknowledges its utility." Then follows this statement of Dr. North's, which refers to his method of vaccination previously mentioned:

The subscriber informs the people in the adjacent towns, that he will with pleasure extend his practice of vaccination to any distance within a convenient day's ride from his usual place of residence. As he always prefers to use fresh infection it becomes necessary to communicate the kine-pox to numbers at the same time. This method of management is also peculiarly calculated to reduce the expense to each individual to a very moderate sum. The subscriber will with promptness and gratitude attend at their own places of abode to all such classes as may apply to him for the purpose of receiving the cow-pox. As vaccination from its very nature can never be an object worthy of the attention of every physician, the subscriber contemplates that those of his medical brethren who may not choose to engage in this practice will not consider this attempt to extend its benefits as an infringement on their medical rights and privileges.

[Signed] ELISHA NORTH.

In 1807 a new and peculiar disease, spotted fever or epidemic cerebro-spinal meningitis, demanded North's attention. It had come upon Goshen "like a flood of mighty waters, bringing along with it the horrors of a most dreadful plague,"¹⁵ its first appearance in the State being at Winchester on April 10, 1807. The malady completely mystified and baffled all the physicians who tried to cope with it; they found difficulty in giving it an adequate name; they were unable to classify it; they were at variance as to its best methods of treatment. The Federalistic physicians proclaimed the virtues of depleting or evacuating the system, in this affection, by calomel and venesections, while the Democratic physicians pinned their faith in the use of stimulating remedies, some of them being most lavish in this particular. For instance, Dr. Bestor, of Simsbury, gave one patient two quarts of brandy and one quart of wine in 24 hours:¹⁶ Dr. Elijah Lyman, of

¹⁵ North. A Treatise on a Malignant Epidemic, Commonly Called Spotted Fever. New York, 1811, p. 2.

¹⁶ North. Op. cit., p. 79.

[303] Torrington, and subsequently of Farmington, gave in seven hours five drachms of the essence of peppermint, half a drachm of gum camphor, two ounces of brandy, and a pint [304] and a half of wine:¹⁷ Dr. Samuel Woodward, of Torrington, gave wine and ardent spirits to produce a degree of intoxication, noting they never appeared to do any injury:¹⁸ Drs. Haskell, Spooner and Holmes, of Petersham, Mass., gave to one patient, 20 years old, one quart of brandy in 12 hours, besides external stimulants,¹⁹ and Dr. Nathan Strong, of Hartford, gave in eight hours one quart of brandy.²⁰ Small wonder then is it that North states "it is not to be denied that the use of stimulants has been abused in the treatment of our epidemic," and this statement comes from one who was a stimulator himself in this disease. However, he declares he does not mean that "in every case patients must take brandy by quarts or wine by gallons, for I believe that it requires as much judgment in using stimulants as it does in reducing the system."²¹

His experience with the malady was very extensive, and his treatment most successful. Eventually most of the physicians employed the stimulating method largely as outlined by North in his letters to President Ebenezer Fitch, of Williams College, in 1808,²² Dr. Elijah Munson of New Haven in 1809 (in this letter he first calls the disease Typhus Petechialis),²³ and in his book, which appeared in 1811. In 1810 Dr. Timothy Hall of East Hartford, in a paper on Spotted Fever, before the Connecticut Medical Society, said that "Dr. North's method of practice coincides more with my own ideas of the proper method of treating this disease than anything I have seen written on the subject."²⁴

During 1808 North treated 65 patients with this disease

¹⁷ North. Op. cit., p. 80.

¹⁸ North. Op. cit., p. 116.

¹⁹ North. Op. cit., p. 79.

²⁰ North. Op. cit., pp. 79-80.

²¹ North. Op. cit., p. 138.

²² North. Op. cit., p. 98.

²³ North. Op. cit., p. 126.

²⁴ Reprint of the Proceedings of the Conn. Med. Soc. Hartford, 1884, p. 314.

and only lost one, while of six others, in Goshen, who died of [304] it, four were under the care of other physicians. Elsewhere he states: "I have myself treated more than two hundred patients with this disease; of these I have lost two."²⁵ His treatment consisted in giving an emetic, generally ipecac, at the commencement of the complaint, if there were no symptoms immediately alarming. This was followed by a cathartic of senna, rhubarb or some other mild purge, which was done, as a "preliminary treatment to prepare the stomach and bowels the better to receive medicines." "While this is doing," he applies a blister to the nape of the neck, as he has found it will frequently remove the headache, and then he gives elix. paregoric or tinct. opii, in sufficient doses to ease pain and remove distress. Also gum camphor is prescribed as well as elix. vitriol, native acids and a half-pint to a pint of wine daily. He, likewise, frequently adds a tea of Virginia snake root and Peruvian bark. He keeps the patients' feet warm with sinapisms or bottles of warm water, and applies blisters occasionally. He gives the patient as much food as his stomach will best bear. Now and then he varies his medicines and orders tinct. Huxh., tinct. castor com., ess. menth. pep., spts. lavend. com. and other drugs. For a common drink he uses warm teas of sage, pennyroyal, hemlock or rob. of elder. If, however, he is called to see a patient in the sinking state of fever, he immediately sets to work with stimulants externally and internally. He puts the patient to bed, having first bathed his feet in warm water; applies blisters to the nape of his neck and gives tinct. opii., hot brandy slings, heated wine and warm teas. He, also, applies hot brands from the fire quenched in water and wrapt in clothes near the patient in bed. In some cases essence of peppermint, tinct. castor com., camphor and other remedies are prescribed, taking care not to crowd the stomach to excite vomiting. By this treatment he finds the patient generally is "relieved as soon as he grows warm: not always, however, until he sweats." He adds: "I do not suppose the cure depends upon the mere flowing of the sweat, but upon the effects of the stimuli used

²⁵ North. Op. cit., p. 67.

[304] for exciting the sweat. Still I consider the sweating is useful, it being a kind of medical thermometer, to enable us to know when the degree of stimuli has been carried sufficiently far in bad cases."²⁶

With commendable care North sought to acquaint the public with this new and dread affection by giving in book form not only his own views upon it but also those of Danielson and Mann, who first saw the disease in this country, and the views of Lyman of Torrington and Farmington, Woodward of Torrington, Bestor of Simsbury, Fiske of Worcester, Williamson of Baltimore, and others who had wide experience with it. In the appendix, he gives the detailed history of eight patients, two of whom had had the disease twice, and, also, inserts a translation of the first description of the disease as it appeared in Geneva, during the winter and spring of 1805. The book was published four years after the malady was first observed in this country, and is indeed a little classic, which is now hard to procure. In it North considers the disorder a form of typhoid and gives the pathognomonic symptoms as pain in the head, soreness of the throat, white tongue, weak pulse and great prostration of strength. He does not consider an increase of temperature of the body and an increased frequency of the pulse as prominent symptoms.²⁷ He, also, gives most of the symptoms that have been noted in connection with the disease, including the joint affections.²⁸ The eruption was commonly seen during the first year of the epidemic, but later was more rarely observed. We very much regret he never published the second edition of this book, which he planned to print some thirty years later, along with Dr. Nathan Strong's Dissertation on Spotted Fever, Dr. Thomas Miner's pamphlet on that subject, Dr. Samuel B. Woodward's essay and two others by Hon. Benjamin Vaughn, Esq., of Maine, and Dr. Henry Fish.²⁹

[305] In 1812, when North was 42 years of age, he was invited

²⁶ North. Op. cit., pp. 132-137 (inc.).

²⁷ North. Op. cit., pp. 17-18.

²⁸ North. Op. cit., p. 15.

²⁹ Bolton. Op. cit., p. 146 and North: Outlines of the Science of Life. New York, 1829, p. 203.

to remove to the city of New London. The offer was one he [305] could not refuse so we find him on July 1, 1812, offering his services to the citizens of New London, as a practitioner in physic and surgery, in an advertisement in their journal, the *Connecticut Gazette*. He, also, there states that, "having lately been informed it was understood he did not intend to practice midwifery, he now takes this opportunity to inform the public that he will as readily attend on calls of that description as any other; also, that he has been much experienced in that part of his profession for twenty years past."³⁰

Seven years later he advertises again in the same journal, appealing to physicians, clergymen, selectmen and others, whose duty it is to take the lead in society where sickness is concerned, and four New London physicians endorse the publication as one which will probably benefit society. In the advertisement North mentions his new method for performing lithotomy for stone in the bladder, and his catheter for cases of retention of urine, "by the use of which no person in the future need necessarily die from that cause alone." He proclaims he has "acquired experimental knowledge in the treatment of permanent urethral strictures by the caustic bougie and can give correct advice and furnish the most improved trusses for ruptured persons." Finally he adds: "I have had the pleasure to prevent total blindness and restore sight to twelve or thirteen persons during the last three years. These would now probably be moping about in total darkness, and be a burden to society and to themselves, had it not been for my individual exertions."³¹

His skill and interest in this last specialty, ophthalmology, had caused him to open an eye infirmary in New London in 1817, which was the first institution of its kind in this country. Elsewhere he writes: "We had attended to eye patients before that time, but it occurred to us then, that we might multiply our number of cases of that description, and thereby increase our knowledge, by advertising the public in regard to an eye institution. This was done, and we succeeded; although not to our wishes in a pecuniary view of the case. Our

³⁰ Bolton. Op. cit., p. 160.

³¹ Bolton. Op. cit., p. 160.

[305] success or exertions probably hastened in this country the establishment of larger and better eye infirmaries (*i. e.*, for larger cities)."³² North appears to have been especially proud of his work in this line, for on the title page of one of his books we find under his own name the words "conductor of an eye infirmary."³³ The following anecdote well illustrates the need of such an institution in New London. It is related that a patient came to North with an inflamed eye. The doctor discovered the cause of the inflammation was due to some foreign substance and successfully removed it, prescribing the application of some soothing lotion, before the patient's departure. As he left, North asked him what he had been doing for his eye. The man replied that he had been to Dr. Blank. "Ah," said North, "and what did he do for you?" "He gave me thirteen doses of calomel," the man begrudgingly replied. And when we remember that the usual dose in those days was from 5 to 15 grains, we have a fellow-feeling for this patient, on account of the venom he displayed against his former doctor.³⁴

North's life in New London was indeed a busy one. His work as an oculist, as a surgeon and as a general practitioner gave him little time for leisure, yet he remained a student to the end of his days, and seemed to realize with Plato that education was a life-long business. Consequently, he strove "to gain encouragement in his day's work and a betterment of mind and method" by joining and taking an active part in the New London County Medical Society, which he served as clerk in 1815 and as chairman in 1823 and 1831.³⁵ He was, also, active in the work of the State Medical Society, which conferred upon him the degree of M. D. in 1813.³⁶ He was, frequently, a delegate to its annual meetings and served on some of its committees. In 1824, probably desiring to gain more rest and recreation, he removed to a farm at East Lyme,

³² North. *Op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.

³³ North. *Outlines of the Science of Life*. New York, 1829.

³⁴ Bolton. *Op. cit.*, pp. 150-151.

³⁵ Bolton. *Op. cit.*, p. 149.

³⁶ Reprint of the Proceedings of the Conn. Med. Soc. Hartford, 1884, p. 179.

driving in each day to New London to see his patients. It [305] was while he was on this farm that he found some peat, which caused him to have large ideas about its use as a fuel. These he exploited in an article in the *American Journal of Science*.³⁷ After a few years he returned again to New London and lived there until his death at the age of 73, on December 29, 1843. His family consisted of a wife and six children; two daughters and four sons. Three of the sons were named Harvey, Erasmus Darwin and William Heberden,³⁸ showing their father's love and reverence for some of the illustrious names in his profession.

In practice he is said to have "exhibited a remarkable degree of caution, deliberation and careful reflection. When concerned with the health and comfort, and we may add the moral welfare of his patients or friends, he exercised a conscientious care and thoughtfulness that preserved him from unsafe enthusiasm or dangerous and extreme views. As a counseling physician he enjoyed the confidence and friendship of his brethren, and was much valued for his philosophical habits of mind in cases of difficulty and uncertainty."³⁹

His quaint, dry humor is still preserved in a few surviving anecdotes. This is, also, well illustrated in his writings. Some of the stories, still extant, record his absent-mindedness. It will suffice to quote a few instances.

On one occasion a young girl came into his office on account of some trouble in one of her feet. As she hesitated to bare her foot and show it to him, he became much incensed at her false modesty and finally blurted out: "Madam, if your foot is clean, let me see it." Her scruples are said to have immediately vanished.⁴⁰

On another occasion, one of his children, when quite young, swallowed a pin and came in great distress to her father, ex- [306] claiming: "I've swallowed a pin." Dr. North, barely looking up from his book, quietly said: "Well, does it hurt you?"

³⁷ On Fuel. *The Am. J. of Science and Arts*, 1826, XI, pp. 66-78.

³⁸ Bolton. *Op. cit.*, p. 154.

³⁹ Bolton. *Op. cit.*, p. 148.

⁴⁰ Bolton. *Op. cit.*, p. 155.

[306] "No, father," said the child. "Then don't be so careless again," was the laconic reply.⁴¹

Resembling many others in his profession, he was a bad bill collector. After his death the following was found in his ledger:

"Mr. Blank, to doctoring you till you died \$17.50."⁴²

At another time when his house was on fire, a neighbor called out to him, "Doctor, your house is on fire." He is said to have made no reply but to have quietly walked into his house. Seeing him so cool, a bystander asked his neighbor and intimate friend, Judge Lyman: "What do you suppose the Doctor is going to do?" "Doubtless," answered the Judge, "he will consult Count Rumford's works to ascertain the best means for extinguishing fire."⁴³

I quote the following illustrations from his writings:

Referring to the appetites he states: "The stomach, like a wife, has more power at home than any other organ in the whole family of organs and parts; and it should be so for the whole animal mass is very dependent on this very important part."⁴⁴

In mentioning the functions the different organs perform, he declares: "the stomach and digestive apparatus has the most perpetual and needful power, but the human brain, like an husband, has immense power over other animals and things, as well as at home."⁴⁵

Speaking of the social principle of an individual which may be moulded by education or through habit and fashion, he writes: "Among mankind the men pretend in private life to govern the women and the children; but both the latter often rule the former and often to the injury of society."⁴⁶

Elsewhere we read: "The body can be altered and sometimes be improved, by physical power, as well as the mind, by

⁴¹ Bolton. Op. cit., p. 155.

⁴² Bolton. Op. cit., p. 155.

⁴³ Bolton. Op. cit., p. 156.

⁴⁴ North. Outlines of the Science of Life. New York, 1829, pp. 152-153.

⁴⁵ North. Op. cit., p. 59.

⁴⁶ North. Op. cit., p. 61.

education, or by moral causes. When an infant's club-foot is [306] made by the surgeon to grow naturally, or to assume a proper shape, every one will agree that an improvement is made; so, when the human beard is shaved off, many think a person improved, or made to look better in the eyes of others. The human head can be made in infancy, to grow square or long, according to the fashion which prevails in some places. A woman's foot can be made to be small as it is done in China; and the body of a lady can be made to resemble, in shape, that unpleasant insect, the wasp, as is now very unfortunately the unwholesome fashion even in this highly-civilized country. We hope to be excused by the ladies, for we mean them no harm."⁴⁷

In another of his publications we learn that "mankind is full of wonderfulness; it is not, however, always necessary to have a big head to command attention, as some writers ably teach; not that I myself have a small head."⁴⁸

By his contributions to medical science North has left a reputation behind, which the succeeding years cannot blight. Although not a man of the genius of Nathan Smith of New Haven, yet he was, in truth, of large mould. His books and articles are all well worth reading. In Bolton's bibliography of his writings we find 12 titles. Nine of them represent papers in the different daily and medical or scientific journals of that day. In one of them he describes his operation for lithotomy by the posterior method, with the patient placed upon his abdomen, and when we remember that there were no anæsthetics in those days, the position appears to have been a judicious one, for "the patient had the power of closely embracing a solid substance (the operating table) and could be firmly secured upon it, if necessary."⁴⁹ Another paper is of interest as an epidemic of typhoid fever in Goshen, during

⁴⁷ North. Op. cit., pp. 74-75.

⁴⁸ North. *The Pilgrims Progress in Phrenology*. New London, 1836, p. 68.

⁴⁹ North. An attempt to demonstrate that the bladder may be opened for the extraction of stone, by a posterior method of operating, more conveniently to the surgeon, and with much greater to the patient, than by any other method hitherto discovered. *N. E. J. of Med. and Surg.*, 1822, XI, p. 113.

[306] 1807, is there detailed.⁵⁰ In it we find North was opposed to the use of stimulants, in the early days of the disease. The remaining subjects in Bolton's list include Hydrocele Capitis Infantum, Cyanche Trachealis, two letters on epidemic cerebro-spinal meningitis, fuel, the rights of anatomists vindicated and phrenology. North's other literary remains consist of three books, one of which on spotted fever has been already discussed. The other two were entitled, *Outlines of the Science of Life* and *the Pilgrims' Progress in Phrenology*. The first volume, also, contained six essays, which had been previously printed. The one on the history of vaccination as practiced in Goshen has been already considered.

North wrote the *Science of Life*, as a philosophical farmer on the one hand and a practical physician on the other, to prove that the phenomena of vitality or sentient spirit, which is found in animals and plants, is formed by caloric either from the blood of animals or sap of plants, and that every sort of life as well as every function of life is dependent upon such a spirit. Consequently, no unknown spirit or immaterial non-entity need be presupposed to explain the phenomena of vitality. He realized that a very few only of such beings, even among those that are rational, can be expected to learn this doctrine, and some must be expected to oppose it, as they did phrenology, without understanding it. He claims, however, the merit to have shown that the halitus of the blood is the hidden principle of vitality, instead of its originating, as a gaseous or spirituous principle, directly from the brain, as Darwin contended. Thus he reasons, the circulating blood is the seat of the main principle of life, and maintains that further experiments and observations, to support this, are un-

[307] necessary. Although his ideas appear materialistic, yet he claims he is also a mentalist and does not deny the power of God to make the human soul immortal, agreeably to the Christians' faith and hope.

The book is extremely discursive, abounds in quotations from Pope and contains a quaint collection of pithy epigram-

⁵⁰ North. *Account of the Typhus Fever and its Treatment*. Phila. Med. Museum, 1808, IV, p. 16.

matic sayings, yet it becomes, occasionally, monotonous, for, [307] as he truly confesses, to make an impression we may have been sometimes faulty in a repetition of ideas, at least, in the opinion of some. He begins his book with an epitome of vitality which is followed by a preface, a table of contents, an introduction, an address in vindication of the book, and a chapter on the State of Physiology and Metaphysics during the last half century. Finally, after this digression, he begins his subject on the forty-sixth page, and continues it for about 62 pages. He shows an extensive knowledge of the state of physiology in his day, and evidently must have been an omnivorous reader, as he quotes Darwin, Servetus, Abernethy, Rush, Bichat, Gall and Spurzheim, Le Gallois, Broussais, Bostock, Good, John Hunter, Thomas and John Brown, and others. In a foot-note, he shows he is familiar with Beaumont's experiments on Alexis St. Martin.⁵¹ North thought the book would give "most pleasure to the aged, yet it is to be hoped that the work will be read by the young." "Little emolument, however, was expected from it, though the writing of it had increased his power as a practical physician, but whether it would benefit readers time must decide." A small edition as published, as he "wished to make his nucleus of physiology or science of life useful to medical men if not to politicians" and, although the market was so glutted with foreign physiological books, he hoped for a small share of domestic patronage, at least for an original work. Ten respectable physicians had examined his manuscript of this book, and nine had written certificates in favor of its publication.

His essays on the Rights of Anatomists Vindicated are reprinted here and were written to show the great mischief the public law of 1824 would cause in Connecticut, which made the procuring of dead bodies for purposes of dissection very difficult. They are written in North's inimitably quaint style and strive to prove the necessity of dissection to maintain the superiority of modern surgery over the ancient. The business, however, should be done privately. "By this means the surgeons acquire dexterity in operations, and, consequently,

⁵¹ North. Op. cit., p. 53.

[307] the living are not liable to be injured by ignorant and unskilled surgeons and the dead the surgeons cannot injure." It is the living and not the dead who require, on their own account, protection. Those who dissect the human body have a claim upon the protection of the law as well as other citizens, provided they conduct their business with decorum and propriety. But, on account of the above law, it will be impossible for the surgeons to qualify themselves for their specialty, as malpractice suits may be their lot, on the one hand, if they are unskilled, or a criminal's sojourn in Newgate prison, on the other, if they take the means to become acquainted with the different operations upon the dead body, which they might subsequently have to perform upon the living. "Are there not enough of those," North asks, "who have been useless, and worse than useless while living, that can be made useful when dead?" Besides there is nothing in the Bible against disinterment or dissection.

In fact, he happened to "know of several persons who were as innocent of the real crime of real felony as a child unborn, who had been caught in the meshes of the cruel laws of this country, in relation to anatomy. The last of these, after lying in the county jail many cold winter nights was, by the powerful aid of highly respectable friends, with much difficulty and expense at last saved from suffering the penalties of the State prison for 10 years as the case might have been. This person, consequently, wisely concluded, if such were some of the evils of the mysterious or secret art of surgery, to quit the business; and the next we heard of him he was calculating to become a seafaring man."⁵²

North suggests that dead bodies be purchased directly from certain well-disposed relatives or their substitutes, previous to or after inhumation, and admits that he once procured an anatomical subject in such a way, and without price, from a very respectable and pious person. He, also, proposes the advisability of buying an uncertain privilege of a person who should agree to remain ignorant of what the surgeon might do, in relation to a particular dead body, and thus painful feelings might be diminished. Again, surgeons might ask

⁵² North. Opp. cit., p. 158.

the favor of a living friend, the privilege of performing a [307] single surgical operation or partial dissection for their own improvement, and admits having sometimes done so himself, even before inhumation. But, if the body is dissected before inhumation, great care should be taken to ascertain that the person is completely dead! In fact, to be absolutely sure, it is better to obtain dead bodies by inhumation and so avoid the possibility of dissecting a living person. Finally, he wishes it understood that, on account of his advanced age, he has no personal interest in inhumation or dissection.

I have been unable to get more than a fleeting glance at North's book or pamphlet on Phrenology. He was long interested in this subject and probably heard Spurzheim lecture upon it, at New Haven, during his American visit, in 1832. The book seeks to give instructions in this science, in the mode of a pleasant conversation, in a mixed company of gentlemen and ladies.

Besides being known as a writer and man of mark, North is also distinguished for having invented four forgotten surgical instruments—an improved trephine, an eye speculum, a trocar and a new form of catheter. The first two were exhibited before the State medical society in 1821, and the last two had the endorsement of four New London physicians.

The life and writings of Elisha North were well portrayed by his grandson, Dr. H. Carrington Bolton, in 1887, but as this pamphlet is now quite scarce, I have been induced to bring him again before the public as a physician unworthy of the present ignorance concerning his life and works.

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