

Did W. write this?

JAMES BOVELL, M.D.

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This well-known Canadian physician died on the 16th of January, in the island of Nevis, West Indies, where he had been residing for several years. He was born in 1817, in Barbadoes, in which island his family had long been resident. When in his 17th year, he went to England, and entered his name as a student at Cambridge, but shortly after was taken ill, and on his recovery began the study of medicine at Guy's Hospital, where he enjoyed the friendship of the Coopers, of Bright, and of Addison. Through life he remained a Guy's man, and was never weary in talking of his old teachers, among whom Bright and Addison appear to have been his ideals. After taking the license of the College of Physicians, he proceeded to Edinburgh, and studied Morbid Anatomy for several months under Dr. Craigie. From thence he went to Glasgow, and worked at the Pathology of Fever with Dr. Buchanan, taking his degree at the University in 1838. Attracted by the fame of Stokes and Graves, and having friends and relatives in Dublin, he proceeded to that city, and studied under those great masters for several years. While there he formed a lasting friendship with the late Dr. R. L. Macdonnell, of Montreal. During the latter part of his stay in Ireland he had typhus fever, and on recovering determined to return to Barbadoes, though strongly dissuaded from this step by his Dublin friends. There can be no doubt that in this he made a great mistake. Intimate with both Stokes and Graves, possessed of ample means, and with intense enthusiasm for his profession, the way to success was clear. He entered ~~himself~~ into practice at Bridgetown, Barbadoes, and rapidly gained the public confidence. About 1848, and subsequently, a considerable number of West Indians came to Canada, and among them was the subject of the present notice. He settled in this city, and at once took a prominent position in the profession. In 1850 he took part with Drs. Hodder, Bethune, and Melville in the establishment of the Medical Faculty of Trinity College, in which he held the positions of Professor of the Institutes of Medicine and Dean of the Faculty, during its short but successful career of four years. In addition to the posts already mentioned, he was Physician to the Gerneal and Burnside Lying-in Hospitals, and gave clinical instruction in both institutions. He also held the chair of Natural Theology in the University of Trinity College. In conjunction with the above-named gentlemen and Drs. King and O'Brien, he assisted in the publication of the "Upper Canada Medical Journal," 1851, the first issued in this Province. After the disruption of the Medical Faculty of Trinity College, he joined the Toronto School of Medicine, and continued to lecture on Physiology and Pathology until 1870, when he returned to the West Indies, to the island of Nevis, where he had an estate. Shortly after he was ordained a clergyman of the Church of England, and took charge of a parish in the island, where, with the exception of two visits to Toronto, he remained until his death. His contributions to medical and scientific literature were numerous, and are to be found in the "British American Medical Journal," the "Upper Canada Medical Journal," and the "Canadian Journal." Among the most important are the series of papers on the "Barbadoes Leg," in the "British American Journal" for 1849; "On the Transfusion of Milk in Cholera," "Canadian Journal," 1854; and papers on the Anatomy of the Bear and on the Medicinal Leech, in the same journal. He published also an extensive pamphlet urging the Government to take up the question of Inebriate Asylums. His published works are chiefly of a theological and devotional character: "Outlines of Natural Theology" and "Passing Thoughts on Man's Reaction to God," both of which were very favourably received; also "The Advent," and a Manual for the Holy Communion.

A consideration of the life and character of Dr. Bovell presents certain difficulties, for in many respects he was an exceptional man, and cannot be judged of by ordinary standards. Prominent among his characteristics was a moral nature of unusual delicacy and fineness; vice naturally avoided him, virtue was drawn towards him, and the good side of a man instinctively showed itself in his presence. This, with a frank, kindly disposition, made him exceedingly loveable to his friends and deeply respected in the community. Mentally he had been richly endowed; a strong memory - except in matters of professional business - keen perceptive faculties, a quick wit,

and considerable fluency of expression. But with all these there was something lacking, and it is this which makes the retrospect of his life in some respects a sad one. There was a want of that dogged persistency of purpose without which a great work can scarcely be accomplished. The contrast between actualities and possibilities in his case was painful; and the work done - though excellent - seemed almost feeble in comparison with what might have been achieved. Much of this arose from attempting too many things. It may be well for a physician to have pursuits outside his own profession, but it is dangerous to let them become too absorbing. To Dr. Bovell the fields of Science, Philosophy, and Theology were especially attractive, and were cultivated equally with the field of Medicine, in which it was his chief duty to work. With equal readiness he would discuss the Origin of Species, the theories of Kant, Hamilton, and Comte, or the doctrine of the Real Presence; and what he said was well worthy of attention, for his powers of criticism and analysis were good. But his versatility was an element of weakness, as he himself knew. His reputation depended chiefly upon his professional skill as a physician, and this was proportionate to his talents and advantages. The training which he had received under Bright, Addison, Stokes, and Graves made him at once a valuable addition to the medical men of any community, and in Barbadoes and Toronto he quickly commanded a consultation practice. But here a circumstance must be mentioned which was adverse to material success. As a young man he was possessed of fair means, and never felt the "frosty but kindly" influence of RES ANGSTA DOMI, which, repressive and injurious in certain cases, has on the whole a beneficial effect, particularly in the formation of business habits. These and the scientific habit of mind are rarely found conjoined, and in many respects Dr. Bovell was a typical example of a class. The exacting details of practice were irksome to him, and too often appointments were neglected and patients forgotten in the absorbing pursuit of a microscopic research, or the seductive pages of Hamilton or Spencer. There are numerous stories told of his absent-mindedness - some of them true, many more apocryphal. As a physician his power of diagnosis was especially good, more particularly in diseases of the heart and lungs; and such was the confidence the profession and public placed in him, that had he been alive to his own interests he might have made a large fortune. As a professor, his personal character made him a great favourite with the students; but he was a brilliant lecturer rather than a good teacher; his own intuitive grasp of ideas was so rapid and clear that he failed to make allowance for the slower perceptions of less gifted minds!*

To his professional brethren he pursued a course of unvarying kindness, living on terms of good-fellowship with every medical man in the city.

After taking orders he devoted himself almost exclusively to ministerial work, though during his visits to Toronto his old patients sought him out in numbers.

For many years he suffered from an ulceration of the back, which had latterly grown much worse. On December 9th he had a paralytic stroke, and ten days later a second, which he survived only a few weeks.

The influence for good which a life like that of Dr. Bovell exercises in the profession and in society at large is in many ways incalculable. Enthusiasm, high moral principle, and devotion at a shrine other than that of material prosperity, are not the qualities that build a princely fortune, but they tell not only on a man's own generation, but upon the minds and hearts of those who are growing up around him, so that his own high purpose and unselfish life find living echoes when he himself has long passed away.

* From an unrequited obituary notice in the Canadian Journal of Med.??
 1880 v p. 114 Jubalyville Guelphian Coln. Cont. v. p.