

SAMUEL POWEL GRIFFITTS*

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Men like ourselves know how hard it is to live up to the best standards of medical duty; know, also, what temptations, intellectual and moral, positive and negative, assail us all, and can understand the value and beauty of certain characters, which, like surely guided ships, have left no permanent trace behind them on life's great seas, of their direct and absolute devotion to duty. . . . Of this precious type was Samuel Powel Griffitts.

THUS spoke S. Weir Mitchell of the subject of this sketch in his "Commemorative Address upon the Centennial Anniversary of the Institution of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia."

Such a characterization at the hands of so acute and astute an observer of human nature captivates the interest and imagination. Certain qualities in Griffitts contributed to his composite strength. Reared in the Quaker faith he adhered strictly to its tenets in deed as well as in form. Plain in dress and simple in manner his social contacts were superficially austere but intimately warm. Devoid of personal affectation he possessed unusual poise and quiet social grace. In his judgment punctuality was a cardinal virtue in the physician and he practiced his preaching. His professional appointments were scrupulously kept. Unostentatious, he assiduously shunned public attention; and when his good services in the public weal became the object of unsought but deserved notice, he unobtrusively with-

drew. Yet the mark of his efforts remains in a number of institutions in his native city and his private and professional life might well serve as a model to our troubled and restless generation in medicine.

Born to William and Abigail Powel Griffitts in Philadelphia on July 21, 1759, Samuel Powel Griffitts was their third and last child. Upon the passing of his father his early training devolved on his mother. His piety and close adherence to the Quaker faith unquestionably reflected this influence, but to the mother may also be attributed his linguistic facility and knowledge of the classics. Young Griffitts' academic course began in the College of Philadelphia in 1776 and was marked only by a recognition of his superior grasp of the ancient and modern languages. Political turmoil had invaded the halls of the College and the interloping University of the State of Pennsylvania eventually granted him the degree of bachelor of arts in 1780 after a year's delay.

Meanwhile Griffitts' interest in medicine as a profession had apparently arisen from his services during the Battle of Germantown. Religious scruples had naturally precluded the enlistment of many Quakers in the Continental Army; but with a sanguinary battle almost within their midst and with friends as well as foes among the wounded, sympathy prevailed and

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much of the succor afforded the troops about Philadelphia came from these traditional opponents of force. Among the voluntary first aid workers at Germantown were Caspar Wistar and Samuel Powel Griffitts; and in both, this experience weighed heavily in the choice of a profession. Adam Kuhn, a student and friend of Linnaeus, became Griffitts' preceptor and the intimacy between the two grew with the years.

In the *Eclectic Repertory* for 1818 there appeared a "Biographic Notice of Doctor Adam Kuhn by One of His Pupils." Its authorship is generally attributed to Griffitts and by reason of the obvious transfer of personal characteristics two passages are cited. The first of these reflects the reticence of both preceptor and pupil:

This is not the only instance, in which a dislike to appear before the public, has deprived us of the experience of those, who were best qualified, by their talents and observations, to communicate instruction. . . . The account of men who have been uncommonly useful, although they may have passed through life without much *éclat*, is nevertheless of great importance, when they can be held up as profitable examples to survivors.

The second quotation gives some insight into the zealous adherence of Kuhn to the high position of punctuality among the human virtues, in which the pupil Griffitts heartily concurred.

But a most prominent feature in his character, was a strict punctuality, and observance of all his engagements. This inestimable virtue can never be too highly inculcated to a physician. The want of it is a deviation from truth, and the consequence of such deficiency is replete with endless inconvenience. It would be difficult, justly to charge him with a voluntary departure from this correct course, in the

long period of nearly fifty years' practice. And whilst we admire and applaud the propriety of his conduct, an occasion like



FIG. 1. SILHOUETTE OF SAMUEL POWEL GRIFFITTS. (IN POSSESSION OF COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS OF PHILADELPHIA.)

the present should not be lost to endeavour to produce a change in the prevailing manner of our country, with respect to the fulfilment of engagements, by holding up to public view, the practice of an inestimable fellow citizen, who always acted like one that regarded punctuality as a sacred duty.

At some time during this period of preceptorship under Adam Kuhn, Griffitts served as an apprentice in the Philadelphia Almshouse. In 1781 he was granted the degree of bachelor of medicine by the University of the State of Pennsylvania and thereafter sought the broadening influence of foreign study. The turbulent times temporarily closed the centers of his choice, Edinburgh and London, to him. So in 1781 he turned to the Continent for his training. In Paris he attended the medical lectures and clinical exercises in the

Paris Sept. 19. 1782.

Dear and honored Sir,

It gave me a good deal of Pain
to read in my Mother's Letters Letter that you
thought me my Legend. Rather than believe in
it, and a Hypothesis, I will throw myself
on your Mercy & Indulgence, and prefer being
dull, to being thought ingrateful.

Now, to write you any thing in
the Way of Pains of any Sort, I should talk of
Nothing, but of Gallies. The Heads of the
best Physicians were filled with the Idea of
that Place, which they have received by Tradition
since the Arrival of Monseigneur the
Count d'Artois & the Duke of Bourbon, that
that they have forgot even to talk of Paris, which
was some Months ago the fashionable Place
of Conversation.

The Physic (is it a due, Medicine) is
not so as respectable a Faculty here as a medi-
cal Philosopher would wish, yet some of the
most necessary Branches, particularly Chemis-
try are very much cultivated. I attended

the Spring Term: Maygari Count the Baron de Puff
and was much pleas'd to find the old Gallicanists them
Chymistry is so greatly indebted yet in good Health
and busy in his Laboratory.

As they would let us go to England & Scotland,
I have, by the Advice of Mrs. de Riv whom I believe you
know, & several others, determin'd to pass the Winter at
Montpellier, for which Place I set out in a few Days -
You will greatly add to the Obligations already
confer'd on me by favouring me with a Letter, as I should
be very happy to be inform'd of your own & Family's Health
& to know what is the State of Medicine as to Lectures
as with us at present - Perillious Countryman
Dr. Franklin, being a sort of flying) or rather misplac'd
Guest of this of the good
Guest of Paris which he suffers considerably.

Wishing you, my dear Sir, with Mrs. Puff's
Family all the Happiness that a State of being good can
bestow, I remain, with Reverence,

Your most obliged humble Servant

J. P. Griffin.

Doctor B. R. R.

hospitals. (Fig. 2.) Montpellier was enjoying a short season of revived popularity largely through the efforts of Barthez. This theorist had succeeded Bordeu and advanced the vital principle in the explanation for physiologic phenomena. To this medical center Griffitts came in the autumn of 1782 and expressed sincere admiration for the medical philosophy of Barthez. After a tour of southern France he returned to Paris late in the following Spring and thence to London in June, 1783. Finally his journeyings brought him to Edinburgh, the mecca of all young American medical students of that period. For a session, 1783-4, he was privileged to sit before a faculty that included Cullen, Monro secundus, Gregory, Black and Hamilton. Griffitts returned to London in the Spring of 1784 and embarked from Portsmouth for Philadelphia in the early Fall.

A letter from John R. B. Rodgers to Benjamin Rush dated London, July 7, 1784 states that Griffitts "returns to Philadelphia with a high idea of our University; he will be able to tell you, what he has often told me, that he has received more satisfaction and improvement from his medical masters in Philadelphia than anywhere else."

In his native city Griffitts gathered the loose strands of his social and professional contacts. The first city directory of November, 1785 listed only forty-six physicians and two dentists. His office was located in Union above Second Street. His quick sympathy and benevolence greatly abetted his rounded training in assuring success in general practice. It became evident to the laity as well as to the medical profession that here was a man whose primary interest was service to humanity. Lofty as were his ideals, his practice lacked none of the cool practicality of his religious sect.

Sound clinical judgment rather than brilliancy marked his daily work. Yet, widely read in the medical literature, he was not averse to the trial of new procedures that promised reasonable success. Griffitts early earned his spurs as a consultant and as a physicians' doctor, the highest tribute to a medical man. In these relations his conduct was ethical and doubtless much of his success depended upon his admitted erudition, clinical insight and measured decisiveness. It is significant that with Mease, Dorsey, Physick and James Rush, Griffitts attended Benjamin Rush in his last illness.

Conspicuous among Griffitts' services to his fellow Philadelphians were his repeated labors in combating the recurring epidemics of yellow fever. Thoughtless of self and personal advantage he remained at his post of duty throughout the pestilences of 1793, 1795, 1797, 1798, 1799, 1802 and 1805. With a small group of fellow practitioners he kept the faith that raises our profession above the trades. When the ranks of practitioners were reduced to six by sickness, death and desertion during the awful summer and autumn of 1793, the city was districted among those remaining and to Griffitts fell the populous central section. Measuring his resources carefully, he met every demand upon his time and energy until he contracted the fever. He was bled seven times in five days by Benjamin Rush and with great reluctance left the city upon recovery. (Fig. 3.) His biographer Coates remarked that "passage through such a fiery ordeal contributed much to temper and anneal that remarkable character for regularity and unfailing punctuality, for which he was so conspicuous in after life."

A remarkable day-book of the epidemic of yellow fever of 1798 from

Griffitts' hand is preserved in the Library of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia through the generosity of fever of 93-97. By early bleeding—mercury to affect the mouth he was quite recovered on the 25. His store was on wharf

*I could not leave town without a parting
Adieu to my kind friend & sincere prayers for
his preservation.*

*I am sorry to find that the use of
the Lancel is still so much dreaded by too
many of the Physicians - & while lamenting the
death of a valuable friend, Benj^r. Smith, was
this morning told he was bled but once. Dur-
ing his disorder - Now if my poor frame reduced
by previous sickness, great anxiety & fatigue, and
a very low diet - could bear seven bleedings in
five days, besides purging - & no diet but toast
& water - what shall we say to Physicians who
bled but once -*

*I am so indifferent about leaving town that
were it not for my family's sake, hardly know
I should act - tho' I am useless here - & hope the disease
is on the decline -*

*Would it not be right to give the Infidel,
a stroke in the paper now - then - I arrived my
friend - We are soon to set off.*

I am &c. P. Griffiths.

Oct. 19.

FIG. 3. NOTE OF GRIFFITTS TO BENJAMIN RUSH, OCTOBER 19, 1793.
(YEAR DEFINITELY FIXED BY THE INVESTIGATION OF DAVID C. KNOBLAUCH.)

S. Weir Mitchell. It is a document of surpassing human interest aside from its wealth of medical information. Random clinical notes are scattered over its cover and the title page contains a list of dates with remarks upon the conditions of the weather. The first note reads,

July—

On the 20 day of 7 mo. 1798 I saw a patient Thos. Wharton, who had all the symptoms of the malignant contagious

near which lay . . . which had arrived from Jeremie . . . on the . . . with a number of passengers—those places having been suddenly evacuated. About this time I had a number of Dysenteries—two cases of nervous fever—and several remittents.

The hiatuses in the foregoing quotation are passed without comment. Since Griffitts at no time spared the rod of responsibility, it may reasonably be assumed that he had hoped to supply the

gaps with the specific data omitted at the time of the notation. On August 1st he made the following entry:

Alexr. Phillips had had one of the crew of the Ship *Deborah* sick in his house. This ship was a transport in the West Indies—arrived on the 18th—lost 5 persons by sickness on the passage—and sent 4 sick to the hospital at the Fort. She afterwards went to Kensington, where the disease soon spread—Dr. Proudfit attended the Carpenter who worked aboard her and soon after died of the disease—Another person who worked on board her got the disease and communicated to several in Mifflin's Alley—Geo. Hunter my authority—I saw three of them.

The ship *Deborah* was under Griffitts' constant suspicion as the probable source of the epidemic and in the entry of August 20th he took pains to underline this vessel's name.

This day visited Wm. Savery's wife and girl in Cable lane & Stephen Macfield's wife. Wm. Savery's wife informs me that two weeks ago—a young man had been ill of fever in her house and that Eli Shoemaker died in ye same. This man had been on board the *Deborah*. Cable lane is highly infected—few houses free—& *Dr. Sayre* informs me that from thence to the river it is much the same.

The day-book is replete with the references to the occurrence of new cases of the fever within limited and usually crowded districts. Thus on August 21st he noted,

The miseries of the poor are great. In Elmslie's Alley one house only free from disease or death. A woman with a very young baby went from thence to the hospital—8 new cases today. Last night died Rebecca Griscom at the Alms house. She sent for me after 3 days illness—when the fever had nearly subsided.

Griffitts could not escape the convic-

tion of the contagious nature of yellow fever, as witnesses this note:

Another man—same house—corner Dock st. (and Walnut)—died 19—medicines not well given—no attention to nursing or cleanliness. Found on visiting him that another man had been lying in the next room ill of the fever for several days—this one went to the hospital and died—Saw another man in Chestnut St.—who got ill next door but one to the last house—recovered.

The suffering of the poor appalled him.

Five new cases. So much distressed on account of the situation of the poor that I have represented their cases to many persons. Something must be done shortly for them. Litters for removing the sick to the hospital is another concern which I cannot get rid of. Hope that both these matters will shortly be remedied.

From the medical and human standpoints several further comments are worthy of preservation.

Visited Dr. Dan [de?] Benneville at Kensington with the fever—he had incautiously set [*sic*] for time in the Evening near the *Deborah*—his case violent—recovered by bleeding, mercury in a few days—taken as ye 5. On the eighth his wife & servant woman taken—both recovered by the sixth day. The woman eat [*sic*] a large quantity of apples—relapsed & died.

Saw Henry Hill's man Augustus Simon taken in the night—removed next day to the hospital & died—said he had been only in dock Street—but the servants said he had been out all night.

On September 17th Griffitts made this significantly common yet fallow observation: "Six new cases—very hot calm weather. Musketoos tormenting." Completely adhering to the theory of the foreign origin of the yellow fever, he noted its appearance in New York and Boston with the comment. "No

Aug 7 -
 P.M. 1. Saw Jas. Clements boy - who was taken ill three days before - saw Jas. Phillips in water below Walnut St., and Ben. Morgan's son, in consultation who was taken the day before - in getting those on flanges - who of these three died on the fourth of the month - next year - which, as usual, was unaccounted - on its first appearance -

Dr. Writer & myself now agreed to get a meeting of the Colley on the 28th inst - when 17 members met - and agreed to inform the Manager of the Maine & City hospital - that a malignant contagion prevailed in water between Walnut & Spruce Streets - and to recommend that three posts should be erected - & the shipping men then removed to a further distance from the City.

1. Saw - 1/2 gal & bottle chiefly employed on Walnut below Walnut - at C. Paris - was delirious with pink pulse - did not say - could give no satisfactory acct: of his case.

3. Attempted to go out - failed with my son at field head - set & found to return home - I have for ten new cases - In an almost hopeless case of last night - a soft pulse, yellow skin & great prostration & constant vomiting - in which purges had been administered - in that affected, brawled back heat, & purges to the feet, and warm chamomile tea for constant drink - this furnished some purification - & purged 17 times in all - the patient gradually recovered.

Dr. Rush called on me this morning. Dr. Rush called on me with medical observations to be learned by such sick persons as cannot procure regular medical attendance in the present awful disease - with a request that I add my name to his, in recommending them to public attention - After a careful examination & necessary alteration I felt willing to comply with his request - recollecting that most of the physicians are prejudiced & prejudiced us to enthrone - yet it is always our duty to do good - & may it please the all-wise Dispenser of human life - Gain to bless the humble means -

FIG. 4. PAGES FROM GRIFFITH'S DIARY.

wonder—St. Domingo Vessels go to all ports, especially the eastern ones.” He approved of the invitation of the Board of Health to those remaining in the city to move to prepared camping sites west of the Schuylkill River but remarked, “How much better would it have been to have kept the enemy out—than to have deserted the city to get out of his reach.”

Never a constitutional satellite, Griffitts apparently subscribed to the “ten and ten” formula of Benjamin Rush during the epidemic of 1793 but modified this therapeutic practice on the basis of his personal experience. This circumstance probably explains his reserve in lending support to a circular for public instruction in 1798. (Fig. 4.) After a study of the same he joined forces with Rush. His personal practice is thus outlined:

I use the following plan—As soon as called bleed largely—give pills 4 grs. Calomel every 2 hours 'till they purge—if too much give a little opium—keep the windows open day and night—have the hands and head washed repeatedly with cold water—repeat the bleeding p.r.n. Continue this course for 3 first days, then purge with foli [?] Tart.—or senna & Rhubarb constantly and largely. Apply blisters to the wrists after 3rd day in case of nausea, weakness or fever—& to the stomach if any appearance of vomiting coming on.

In spite of the efforts of the faithful band of physicians remaining in the stricken city death stalked on every hand. To Griffitts, “The general terror appears greater this year than ever.” Then, too, the fever fell in greater severity than in any previous epidemic. At one time twenty-nine medical students and two practitioners were ill with the fever and the effective ranks of regular physicians were reduced to five by October 4th. Under the terrific

strain of maintained effort, even Griffitts’ splendid fortitude began to waver. Like Moses he cried:

A day of Trouble. Buried a beloved servant who died last night. Much unwell today. Too much so to visit my patients. Thus it is & thus they suffer from unavoidable neglect—I *feel indeed alone*.

The note of August 30th gives some idea of his burden:

I am told while I went into the country from half past eleven to 5—to see my sick child upwards of fifty knocks at the door—and yet thro’ all this favored with calmness—how great a blessing. My lot seems to be cast amongst misery & death.

Great fatigue possessed him from time to time but he was given strength to complete his task. “The two encampments on Schuylkill and the Germantown road,” were in his judgment, “a happy resource for the poor—If they can keep clear of fall fevers.” The latter observation is remarkably acute, for typhoid fever remained a serious threat to the health of any concentration of people under unhygienic conditions for over a century to follow. No record of such an outbreak at that time has been encountered. On October 29th Griffitts recorded the occurrence of a frost and on October 31st it snowed. On November 1st the Board of Health invited the citizens to leave their encampments and return to the city. The epidemic of 1798 had passed into history.

Meanwhile the College of Physicians of Philadelphia which had been founded in 1787, was exerting an increasing influence upon American medicine. Samuel Powel Griffitts’ name is included among the original junior fellows of this august organization. His letter to Benjamin Rush from London regarding the latter’s “idea of an American College of Physicians” has been so

London, August 10. 1783

Dear Sir,

I need not tell you that yours of last April gave me great Pleasure. Even the flattery Manner in which you are pleased to speak of me was very agreeable, as being a good Proof of your indubitable Friendships, which I value highly though I am very sensible 'tis not merit that brings you thence.

From what I have seen of the Hospitals here I am entirely of your Opinion that London must be the Metropolis of the whole World for practical Medicine. The Wards are however far inferior to the French, in point of Cleanliness, and Nursing. I have met with several Physicians of your Acquaintance, who had a great many Quinians to ask about you; particularly Dr. P. Saunders of Guy's; and Dr. Sargent of the Trinitarian Hospital. Your Idea of an American College of Physicians is what has several times occurred to me. I have

often been asked, what it is that gives a License to practice Physic with us; I have answered by saying, it is but ought to; but to say substantially does, would make Physic appear rather in a less State in America. Your Plan would effectually remedy this Evil.

I see Dr. Hall often. He is very opinionative in his Attendance at St. Thomas. Dr. Ferriaroli will set off in a few Days for Rhinocopia. When I find an Opportunity of writing to you, I hope to be able to give you something more acceptable, for at present I am writing such a "The Critick of Letters" that not to be absolutely dull is all I can say for I will not however finish without begging a Line when convenient. Please to present my best Compliments to Mrs. Black; and to ever assure her for of the grateful good Wishes, &c.

Your obliged Servant

Samuel Ford Griffiths.

regularly quoted without attention to its context and implications that it is herein reproduced to correct a persistent misinterpretation. (Fig. 5.) Clearly Rush's plan contemplated a much more comprehensive organization than the College of Physicians of Philadelphia. From Griffiths' comment a prevision of the present National Board of Medical Examiners may be gathered as arising in the fertile brain of the great Rush. Be that as it may, Griffiths' interest and energy in behalf of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia never lagged. He was one of three (Rush, Duffield and Griffiths) named as a committee to prepare the certificate of membership and the seal of the College which were published in the *Pennsylvania Packet and Daily Advertiser*, February 1, 1787. In many capacities his services were conscripted by the College. Apparently his aptitude for detail resulted in his appointment to all early committees on publication. He was also a member of the first library committee. Griffiths was likewise called to serve the public welfare in the recurrent appeals to the College for advice in matters relating to communicable diseases. His name appears upon committees appointed to investigate the nature and sources of these epidemics with suggestions as to their control successively in 1797, 1798, 1799, 1805, 1811 and 1820. The early reports of the College supported the theory of the foreign origin of the yellow fever and its spread by contagion. Although Griffiths subscribed fully to this position, he remained a close friend of its strongest opponent, Benjamin Rush, who resigned from the College in protest to this action. The Committee of the College in 1820 (Hewson, Emlen and Griffiths) indicated its attitude in the matter of the communicability of yellow fever by recommending

"the prosecution of the plan now in contemplation for removing the whole of the buildings (on Water Street) from the east side of Front Street, according to the original plan of William Penn, the wise and intelligent founder of our city." Griffiths succeeded James Hutchinson as secretary of the College in 1788 and continued in this exacting post until 1796. He served as censor from 1805 to 1808 and was elected vice president July 7, 1818. He held this position until his death in 1826.

On June 3, 1788 President John Redman appointed a committee "to form a pharmacopoeia for the use of the College." Its members included such distinguished names as John Redman, John Jones, Adam Kuhn, William Shippen, Jr., Benjamin Rush, Samuel Powel Griffiths, Caspar Wistar and James Hutchinson. The evolution of the first American pharmacopoeia is inseparably linked with the humblest, if not the least, of these, Griffiths. William Brown had profitably spent some of the period of enforced inactivity at Valley Forge in preparing a formulary for the Army. The circular letter of the Committee on the pharmacopoeia which was to be sent "to the most respectable medical characters in the United States" bore the signatures of John Redman as President and Samuel Powel Griffiths as Secretary. It pointed out the pressing need for such a standardization and solicited cooperation. The responses to this communication were limited but favorable. The committee made several reports to the College. June 6, 1797 Griffiths, Barton and James were constituted a committee to bring before the College all proper materials for a pharmacopoeia. The first compilation of this order, however, was the "Pharmacopoeia of the Massachusetts

Medical Society," published in Boston in 1808.

Ten years later (November 21, 1818) a group of physicians in New York, including David Hosack and Lyman Spalding among others, suggested a convention to consider the formation of a national pharmacopeia. The College of Physicians of Philadelphia heartily accepted this proposal and appointed as their delegates to the convention, Parke, Griffiths, Hewson, Jones, Stewart, Atlee and Parrish. Upon the invitation of the College the first Convention of the Middle States Delegates was held in the Chamber of the College of Physicians from June 1 to 4, 1819. The general convention of the four districts was called in Washington January 1, 1820 and the first "National Pharmacopoeia" was born from its labors. A committee (Griffitts, James and Hewson) was appointed by the College of Physicians of Philadelphia to review the work and on September 4, 1821 reported certain alterations that might be suggested upon the revision of the first edition.

Samuel Powel Griffiths was elected to the American Philosophical Society in 1787, the same year of his election to the College, but his interest in the latter far overshadowed the former. A careful search of the *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* reveals no record of a single scientific contribution on his part. On January 7, 1791 he was made a councilman for three years along with Adam Kuhn, Reverend Nicholas Collin and Jared Ingersoll, Esq. His name is not listed among the members of the Society who on March 1, 1791 marched in a body to the German Lutheran Church in Fourth Street to listen to the eulogy of their illustrious patron, Benjamin Franklin, by Dr. William Smith. Griffiths attended the stated meeting on March 4, 1791 and

on January 3, 1794, although absent, he was made a counsellor. Clearly his interests were elsewhere.

The legislative enactment of September, 1791 creating the University of Pennsylvania from the College of Philadelphia and the University of the State of Pennsylvania effectively stabilized the medical situation in Philadelphia. The new Medical Faculty was completely organized on January 23, 1792 as follows,

William Shippen, Jr.—anatomy, surgery and midwifery
 Caspar Wistar—adjunct in above
 Adam Kuhn—practice of physic
 Benjamin Rush—institutes of medicine and clinical medicine
 James Hutchinson—chemistry
 Samuel Powel Griffiths—materia medica and pharmacy
 Benjamin Smith Barton—botany and natural history.

Griffitts' success as a teacher was assured from the outset. He conscientiously applied himself to the elucidation of the abstract subjects, materia medica and pharmacy, to which he was assigned and won the approbation of the students by his accurate and orderly presentations. After serving the Medical School in this capacity for six terms Griffiths resigned in 1796. Carson offers the following explanation for this singular abnegation:

But the situation of a public lecturer was not altogether congenial to his feelings, which were most gratified by an active discharge of the less conspicuous duties of life. Perhaps, too, the disinclination which he always manifested to hold any place of emolument may have exercised some influence in producing his resignation of a chair which was every year becoming more profitable, and even at that period conferred one of the highest honors within the reach of the profession.

A letter from Benjamin Rush to John Redman Coxe (December 8, 1795) ascribed a more plausible explanation for this action. "Dr. Griffiths has declined lecturing, owing to sickness & distress from the loss of his favorite child. It is expected he will resume the duties of his chair next year." This was not the case and Benjamin Smith Barton succeeded to the chair of *materia medica* and pharmacy.

As has been gathered from Griffiths' biographic sketch of Adam Kuhn, the master had laid the ground for a remarkable reticence not only in public expression but also in medical publications. Singularly, however, one of Griffiths' infrequent contributions took the form of the editorship of a treatise on home medicine. The title is self-explanatory, "Domestic Medicine: or a Treatise on the Prevention and Cure of Disease by Regimen and Simple Medicines with an Appendix, containing a Dispensatory for the Use of Private Practitioners by Wm. Buchan, M.D., Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh. Revised and Adopted to the Diseases and Climate of the United States of America, Samuel Powel Griffiths, M.D., late professor of *Materia Medica*, University of Pennsylvania." The preface is largely an apology for the subject matter and approach. In such a vein he remarks "As to medical reputation, I am well aware this is not the way to obtain it; but if I have succeeded in making this valuable and popular work more intelligible, and consequently more useful to my fellow-citizens; I shall be sufficiently rewarded." Of its reception and the immediate reaction of the profession we know nothing; but of this much posterity can be assured, neither "Domestic Medicine" nor any of its modern coun-

terparts has ever added a cubit to the intellectual stature of its mental parents.

Only a few isolated clinical notes remain by which to measure the literary worth of Griffiths. These communications are published in the *Eclectic Repository*, of which he was editor for several years. They demonstrate an ease and brevity of style that contrast strangely with the mellifluousness of "Domestic Medicine." His descriptions are clear and devoid of unnecessary verbiage. One communication relates his experience in the preservation and use of vaccination crusts. In another note he recommended the use of blisters to prevent and arrest mortification. From his wide experience with yellow fever over a period of seven years he concluded that second attacks of the disease did not occur. He expressed his firm belief in the contagious nature of yellow fever and urged isolation and quarantine in its control. With characteristic candor he reported the erroneous diagnosis of an aneurysm of the right carotid artery in the hope that his mistake might protect his fellow practitioners.

The benevolence of Samuel Powel Griffiths was a by-word in a day when charity was a natural virtue not paraded for public display. It will be recalled that the acts of violence in Santo Domingo succeeding the granting of the full privileges of French citizenship to the free colored inhabitants and mulattoes in 1791 had led to the hegira of the white population in 1793. To this movement may be directly traced the epidemic of yellow fever that wreaked such havoc in the same year in Philadelphia. Yet this city of refuge set itself to raising funds to succor the French émigrés. A sum exceeding twelve thousand dollars was quickly subscribed. In the task of raising and disbursing this fund none was more active than Samuel

Powel Griffitts whose knowledge of the French language and people was of inestimable value in such a pass. Characteristic of the man were his efforts in supplying fresh inoculation materials to the Negroes of Haiti at the same time he was assisting their exiled former masters in Philadelphia. As Mitchell states: "With one hand it may be said he distributed the bounty which his fellow-citizens entrusted to his care, to the refugees from St. Domingo, while with the other he was busy sending vaccine virus to their revolted slaves."

Griffitts' civic consciousness might well be adjudged the dominant trait of his character. This quality found expression in many directions; and wherever his name is associated with a public work or philanthropic effort, he appears as a worker and contributor. As an early proponent of vaccination in Philadelphia he was an original member of the Vaccine Society founded in 1809. His zealous personal efforts carried this prophylactic measure against small pox to the underprivileged population of outlying Southwark and the Northern Liberties. The Philadelphia Dispensary is his most lasting memorial. With commendable modesty he attributed its beginning to the suggestion of Dr. Henry Moyes to Samuel Powel and himself in 1785. In all probability the idea arose with Dr. Moyes, but its fruition in the first dispensary for the medical care of the poor in the United States was largely the result of Griffitts' devotion and indefatigable energy. On February 10, 1786 a meeting of interested individuals was called to discuss ways and means for developing the plan. Doctors Rush, Hall and Morris actively collaborated and it was decided to ask for public subscriptions. To this end a public notice was published in *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, February 8, 1786 (Addendum

A) outlining the proposal and soliciting the support of interested parties. Dr. Moyes' connection with the institution of the Philadelphia Dispensary is emphasized by the following supplemental note to the formal appeal:

We are happy to inform the public, that Dr. Moyes has kindly offered to deliver two lectures in the Hall of the University, upon the most interesting and useful parts of chemistry and natural philosophy, after he has finished his present course, at half a dollar a ticket for each lecture for the benefit of this new charity.

An advertisement in the same issue of *The Pennsylvania Gazette* reads,

The dispensary will be opened in Strawberry Alley, on Wednesday, the twelfth of April. Those among the poor, who wish to have their children inoculated for the small pox, under the care of the dispensary, are desired to make speedy application to some one of the contributors.

The response to the public appeal for support of the new charity was spontaneous. Within two weeks 320 subscriptions had been received and the early success of the Dispensary assured not only by the monetary returns but also by the wholehearted support of the medical profession. The original list of its attending physicians included Samuel Powel Griffitts, James Hall, William Clarkson, John Morris, John Carson and Caspar Wistar and its consultants, John Jones, William Shippen, Jr., Adam Kuhn and Benjamin Rush.

From its opening on April 12, 1786 to December 12, 1786, 719 patients were attended by the Philadelphia Dispensary. The house in Strawberry Alley engaged from Christopher Marshall, Jr., March 10, 1786, was outgrown and August 23, 1787 a house in Chestnut Street was rented from John Guest. December 15, 1800 a lot in Fifth Street

between Walnut and Chestnut Streets was purchased for the Dispensary. The plans for a new building were viewed February 11, 1801, and the contract let June 15, 1801. On December 14th of the same year the Managers of the Philadelphia Dispensary met for the first time in the new building. This development was in part made possible by a loan of £1000 from the Pennsylvania Hospital.

The charity prospered and all indebtedness was soon discharged. In 1816 it was deemed wise to establish a separate dispensary in each of the two outlying districts, Southwark and Northern Liberties. The parent institution was then designated to care for the sick poor within the old boundaries of the city, from Vine Street to South Street and from the Delaware River to the Schuylkill River. The Southern Dispensary began its duties of mercy August 17, 1816, and was chartered March 24, 1817. Samuel Powel Griffitts was president of its first Board of Managers. This offspring of the Philadelphia Dispensary was first located in Shippen above Third Street. While Griffitts lent his moral support to this new development he continued his active duties at the Philadelphia Dispensary. Indeed, for more than forty years, or from its foundation until his death, he daily attended the unfortunate sick in this his favorite philanthropy. In 1922 it was removed from its quarters in 127 South Fifth Street to the Pennsylvania Hospital, where it maintains its corporate identity as the Outpatient Department of that venerable institution. The spirit of Samuel Powel Griffitts marches on.

The inhuman care of the insane was crying for reform at this period. Pinel in France had sounded the advance that forward-looking Friends in England

had not been slow to follow. Rush had long been preaching the illogic of the then accepted methods of treating the mentally disturbed patient; but his innovations, such as the tranquillizer, served to obscure the basic soundness of his precepts to all except profound students of this field of medicine. From his very nature Samuel Powel Griffitts' interest in the welfare of the insane was foreordained. Upon his motion The Society of Friends in Philadelphia investigated the situation in 1811. Following the pattern of The Retreat founded in 1792 at York, England by the Friends, this sect laid its plans for a similar institution in Pennsylvania. They termed themselves "The Contributors to the Asylum for the Relief of Persons Deprived of the Use of their Reason." Griffitts again gave of his substance and energy in the evolution of the plan. A farm was bought near Frankford, a suburb of Philadelphia, at the cost of \$6,760. The cost of the original hospital building together with alterations in other buildings was \$43,000. The Friends' Asylum, the first institution of its kind in the United States, was opened for the reception of patients in 1817 and its meritorious services have been continuous to the present time.

Nor were Griffitts' civic and charitable interests limited to the field of medicine. In November, 1791 he was made an overseer of the Friends' public schools in the town and county of Philadelphia. His sound judgment was exerted in this direction until his resignation in May, 1815. He was an active member of "The Humane Society for the resuscitation of drowned persons" from 1786. The atrocious state of the prisons and the cruel treatment of prisoners were objects of his sympathetic interest. With the help of influ-

ential citizens a "Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons" was formed in 1790. Bishop White was its first presiding officer and Samuel Powel Griffitts served as its secretary from the foundation until his death. Through the efforts of this organization certain reforms were effected in the penal code of Pennsylvania. In 1824 Joseph Parrish brought the case of John Zimmerman before the College of Physicians of Philadelphia. Zimmerman, an insane man, had been charged with the murder of his daughter, convicted and sentenced to be hung. A committee of the College (Griffitts, James, Otto and Parrish) investigated the situation and upon their recommendation the College petitioned Governor John Anthony Shultz who commuted the death sentence.

Griffitts' interest in the question of slavery was early aroused and continued throughout his life. In 1790 he joined the "Pennsylvania Society for promoting the abolition of slavery, the relief of free negroes unlawfully held in bondage, and improving the condition of the African race." "Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows"; and there are few more incongruous correspondents than the contained, mild-mannered Griffitts and the violent Henri Gregoire, bishop of Blois. Their mutual interest in the emancipation of the Negro race led to a long exchange of letters of which no trace is found.

In person Samuel Powel Griffitts was of medium stature and wiry constitution. Never robust, he nevertheless was equal to physical exactions far beyond average endurance. By custom and choice he made all of his calls on foot. He persisted in this plan until his death. His habits were severely abstemious. An early riser he began the day by

the reading of a passage of the New Testament in Greek or Latin. At some time each day he interrupted his professional calls to pay his respects to such children and grandchildren as resided within the city. He was rarely absent from the monthly meetings of the Friends.

In 1787 Griffitts married Mary Fishbourne, the daughter of a merchant of Philadelphia. Their home life was very congenial and he was an affectionate husband and indulgent father. For over thirty years he had never escaped a yearly recurrence of the intermittent fever. During the latter years of his life he suffered from vague digestive symptoms. His health seemed to fail somewhat in the last two years and for the last few days of his life he was more debilitated than usual. Accordingly he limited the number of his professional calls. Early on the morning of May 12, 1826 Griffitts experienced an uncomfortable sensation in the thorax and expressed the belief that venesection might relieve it. Whereupon he arose and began to dress. Mrs. Griffitts became alarmed at his condition and sent for his friend, Joseph Parrish; but when he arrived, Griffitts had returned to his bed and was dead. Apparently the end had come as the result of an acute coronary occlusion. He was survived by his wife and six children. By his own request he was buried outside of the city, since he feared "the injurious consequences of interments within large cities." (Addendum B)

Samuel Powel Griffitts' epitaph might well be written in the words of S. Weir Mitchell:

But wherever he went and in whatever he did peace and gentleness were around about him, so that in every relation of life men and women eagerly trusted this sim-

ple, straight-forward, intelligent, unambitious man.

Material assistance in the preparation of this biographic sketch has been afforded by W. B. McDaniel, 2nd, of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, David C. Knoblauch of the Library Company of Philadelphia and Florence M. Greim of The Pennsylvania Hospital, to whom grateful acknowledgment is made.

ADDENDUM A

From *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, February 8, 1786:

In all large cities there are many poor persons afflicted by disease, whose former circumstances and habits of independence will not permit them to expose themselves as patients in a public hospital. There are also many diseases and accidents of so acute and dangerous a nature that the removal of patients afflicted by them is attended with many obvious inconveniences. And there are some diseases of such a nature that the air of a hospital, crowded with patients, is injurious to them. A number of gentlemen, having taken these things into consideration, have proposed to establish a public dispensary in the city of Philadelphia for the medical relief of the poor.

The peculiar advantages of this institution will be as follows:

First—The sick may be attended and relieved in their own houses without the pain and inconvenience of being separated from their families. A father may still continue to provide for his children and children may enjoy in sickness the benefits of a mother's kindness and attention.

Second—The sick may be relieved at a much less expense to the public than in a hospital, where provisions, bedding, firewood and nurses must be provided for their accommodation.

Third—The sick may be relieved in a manner perfectly consistent with those noble feelings of the human heart which are inseparable from virtuous poverty, and in a manner also strictly agreeable to those refined precepts of Christianity which inculcate secrecy in acts of charity and benevolence.

For the promotion of this plan the following rules are proposed:

First—That each lady or gentleman who

pays annually into the hands of the treasurer, one guinea, shall be entitled to the privilege of having two patients at one time, under the care of the dispensary. Those who pay annually two guineas shall have four, and so on in the same proportion; and those who subscribe ten guineas at once, shall be entitled, during life, to the privilege of having two patients attended at one time by the physician at the dispensary.

Second—That a board, consisting of twelve managers, be annually elected, on the first Monday in January, by a majority of the contributors. Votes may be given at all elections either in person or by proxy. Five managers shall constitute a quorum. Their business shall be to provide medicines for the sick and to regulate all affairs relative to the institution.

Third—That six attending and four consulting physicians and surgeons, an apothecary and a treasurer of the dispensary be annually elected by the managers of the institution.

Fourth—That the physicians and surgeons in ordinary shall regularly attend at the dispensary on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, from twelve till one o'clock and that such patients as are unable to go abroad on dispensary days shall be regularly visited at their respective places of abode.

Fifth—That every case shall be duly attended whether acute, chronic, surgical or obstetrical, if recommended by a contributor in a written note addressed to the attending physician, agreeably to the first rule. The mitigation of the evils and danger of the small pox by inoculation, shall likewise be the object of the charity of this institution. The attending physicians and surgeons shall have a right to apply for advice and assistance to the consulting physicians and surgeons, when they think proper, in all difficult and extraordinary cases.

Sixth—That the apothecary shall reside at the dispensary; that his business shall be to compound and deliver medicines; to keep an exact account of the names, places of abode, diseases, times of admission, discharge, etc., of the patients.

For the purpose of receiving contributions and beginning the business of this institution, the following gentlemen have agreed to act in the respective offices assigned to them until the first Monday in January, 1787;

when a meeting of the contributors will be called by an advertisement, for the purpose of electing managers from among themselves, who shall, agreeably to the third rule, elect as speedily as possible afterwards, all the other officers of the institution.

Managers—Rev. Dr. Wm. White, Thomas Clifford, Samuel Powel Griffitts, Rev. Geo. Duffield, Henry Hill, Samuel Vaughan, John Baker, Thomas Fitzsimons, Samuel Miles, Lawrence Seckel, Samuel Pleasants, Thomas Franklin.

Attending Physicians and Surgeons—Dr. Samuel P. Griffitts, Dr. James Hall, Dr. William Clarkson, Dr. John Morris, Dr. John Carson, Dr. Caspar Wistar.

Consulting Physicians and Surgeons—Dr. John Jones, Dr. Will Shippen, Jr., Dr. Adam Kuhn, Dr. Benjamin Rush.

Treasurer—John Clifford.

ADDENDUM B

Poulson's *American Daily Advertiser* for Saturday morning, May 13, 1826 contained the following notice:

Obituary

Died, on the 12th instant, Dr. Samuel Powel Griffitts, in the sixty-seventh year of his age, highly respected as a Practitioner, and highly esteemed as a Man; he has suddenly descended to the tomb amidst the sincere regrets of his fellow citizens.

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