

THE DISCOVERY OF ETHER ANÆSTHESIA.

"Palman qui meruit ferat."

BY JOSEPH JACOBS.

To any fair-minded investigator it will seem strange that there should be writers who would award priority of discovery of the use of ether in surgery to anyone but Dr. Crawford W. Long, of Georgia. Yet in January *Scientific Monthly*, Dr. C. A. H. Smith devotes more than six pages to statements and arguments attempting to show that the honor should be bestowed upon Dr. W. T. G. Morton, of Boston, Mass.

That article—outside of its introduction dealing with the history of anæsthesia in general, its detailed biography of Morton, its disclosures of Morton's labored efforts to use the discovery of another for his personal gains, and its expression of regret that all the enumerated unethical acts of Morton should have brought him the contempt of his associates (but ignoring the condemnation of the American Medical Association and former resolutions of repudiation)—beclouds the truth of Dr. Crawford W. Long's priority. Much is said about the connection between Morton and Dr. Horace Wells, his dentist associate and classmate, and Wells' experiments in denistry with nitrous oxide, and it is admitted that Morton conceded that Dr. Charles T. Jackson, his old preceptor, "had prior knowledge of the work" and was besought by Morton to allow his name to be used in his joint application for a patent. But the fact is not emphasized that this patent was not for the use of pure ether, but for a compound in which ether was disguised with aromatic oil, under the name of "Letheon." Is it a wonder, then, that Dr. Charles T. Jackson who was the brains of the partnership in "Letheon," the one who had conceived the idea of the use of ether, in 1846, and disclosed it to Morton, who, otherwise would never have dreamed of its use, should have felt outraged when Morton attempted to palm off the discovery as his own to the surgeons of the Massachusetts General Hospital? Dr. Jackson must have conceived that he was dealing with an imposter, for he promptly took steps to assert his own priority. This he did in a letter to the French Academy of Sciences.

The whole conduct of Morton tended to show, and it was probably the fact, that his motive in applying to the surgeons of the General Hospital, was not to disseminate "knowledge of the discovery," but was done to gain glory at the expense of Jackson's discomfiture, and in retaliation for Jackson's attempt to assert his own priority in the letter to the French Academy. It is little wonder that Morton's conduct in this connection, and in his attempt to sell his Letheon to charitable hospitals, brought discredit to his name, and subjected him to the adverse criticisms of his contemporaries. If there be any credit in the conduct of those who acted with Morton, it should go to the surgeons of the Massachusetts General Hospital who promptly made known the results of their experiments.

But it must be remembered that more than four years before 1846 (not two, as stated by Dr. Smith) Dr. Crawford W. Long's discovery was known by the physicians of Northeastern Georgia, and Dr. Long was continuing its use, openly, during these transactions in Massachusetts.

Dr. Long was a gentleman of retiring disposition throughout his life; he never sought to glorify his own achievements. His only thought was that he should be remembered as a benefactor of mankind in this connection.

It seems very strange that there should be writers who still advocate the claims of Morton to priority, when Morton himself confessed Jackson's priority, and when affidavits in abundance were filed that he, time after time, admitted that priority. And this being true, the claims of Dr. Long should be beyond controversy, when Dr. Jackson after full investigation in Dr. Long's office at Athens, Georgia, in 1854, admitted Dr. Long's priority to himself by more than four years, and returned to Boston to publish the acknowledgment in the *Boston Medical Journal*, in 1861.

Dr. Charles T. Jackson was one of the most distinguished chemists of his day, and while asserting his own claims of discovery as against Morton for any originality in the use of ether as an anæsthetic, appealed to the courts about their patent interests. Those who wish legal proof that Morton disclaimed any originality in the matter for himself, will find many affidavits to this effect in Vol. 17, of *Littell's Living Age*, page 560. So, why should any doubt remain that Dr. Long was the true and original first discoverer of Ether-Anæsthesia in surgery when Dr. Jackson admitted his claim, and when such an abundance of sworn testimonies is in the hands of his daughter, Mrs. Frances Long Taylor, of Athens, Georgia, to verify all the particulars of the employment of ether in a surgical operation, by her father, at Jefferson, Jackson County, Georgia, March 30, 1842, four and one half years before either Morton or Jackson ever essayed its surgical use.

Anyone who desires to see all of the original affidavits and the original day-book accounts may find them in the hands of Mrs. Taylor, showing the extirpation of a tumor from the back of the neck of James Venable, at Jefferson, March 30, 1842. Some of them may be briefly summarized as follows:

First—The affidavit of Mr. Venable that the operation was performed by Dr. Long March 30, 1842, under ether and that it was painless.

Second—The original entry in Dr. Long's account book, as follows:

JAMES VENABLE TO DR. C. W. LONG, DR.

1842		
January 28	Sulphuric Ether	.25
March 30	Ether and Extracting Tumour	2.00
May 13	Sulphuric Ether	.25
June 6	Extracting Tumour	2.00

The above and all the following can be found in photographic copy form in Dr. Allen J. Smith's paper in *Old Penn*, October 2, 1915, entitled "Documentary Evidence bearing upon Dr. Crawford W. Long, Discoverer of Ether-Anæsthesia."

Third—Affidavit of Dr. Edmund S. Rawls of Rome, Georgia, who, in 1842, was present at the operation on Venable and who testified, positively, to the facts.

Fourth—Affidavit of William H. Thurmond, who was also present at the above operation and swears that he saw it painlessly performed by Dr. Long while the patient was unconscious under ether.

Fifth—Affidavit of James E. Hayes, who swears he witnessed a second such operation on Venable by Dr. Long on June 6, 1842.

Sixth—Sworn statement of Sabry Hemphill that Dr. Long operated on a negro boy belonging to her, cutting off a toe, while the patient was under ether, July 3, 1842, and that he suffered no pain.

Seventh—Mary Vinson of Jackson County, Georgia swears that Dr. Long cut out three wens from her head in the summer of 1843. One operation under ether gave no pain, but she suffered severely while the other two operations without ether were performed. This is also certified by Mrs. Vinson's husband, William Vinson, who was present.

Eighth—Mrs. Emma H. Carlton swears that Dr. Long, December 1844, advised her husband, Dr. Joseph B. Carlton, to use ether in his practice, and while she was that year on a visit to Jefferson with her husband, he extracted the tooth of a negro boy in Dr. Long's office, under ether, without pain, and that the fact of Dr. Long's using ether in surgery was frequently spoken of in the County Jackson at that time, and was quite notorious.

Ninth—G. L. Thompson testified that he was present and saw Dr. Long cut off the finger of a negro boy, then the property of Ralph Bailey, Sr., under ether, without pain, in the year 1845.

Tenth—Affidavit of Mary E. Ware of Floyd County, Georgia, that he extracted one of her teeth, while under ether, painlessly in 1846.

There are many other testimonials of such a character.

Those who may be interested to investigate further the authenticity of Dr. Long's claim may refer to the writings of the following authors who have made exhaustive studies in this controversy and have written in Dr. Long's favor, to wit:

Dr. Marion Sims, New York City.

Dr. L. B. Grandy, Surgeon, U. S. A., of Atlanta, Ga.

Dr. Marcus Taylor, Mississippi.

Dr. J. McF. Gaston, Atlanta, Ga.

Dr. Hansell Crenshaw, Atlanta, Ga.

Dr. Isham Goss, Athens, Ga.

Dr. George Foy, Dublin, Ireland.

Dr. Dudley Buxton, London.

Dr. Hugh H. Young, Baltimore, Md.

Dr. E. M. Magruder, Charlottesville, Va.

Dr. Allen J. Smith, University of Pennsylvania.

Dr. Charles Johnson, Champlain, Ill.

Dr. J. Wesley Long, Greensboro, N. C.

Dr. Paluel Flaggs, New York City.

Mrs. Frances Long Taylor, Athens, Ga.

Dr. Joseph Jacobs, Atlanta, Ga.

Will any fair investigator wish further proof of Dr. Long's priority, in view of the above, and when it is remembered that Alexander Hamilton Stephens suggested his name, in 1879, as one of Georgia's representatives in the National Hall of Fame; that the General Assembly of Georgia selected Dr. Long's name with that of Mr. Stephens for this honor, and that after twenty years' notice to the world by a Public Act, the state dedicated a statue of Dr. Long in that Hall without protest, and it was accepted by the formal unanimous vote of the United States Senate on the 30th of March 1926? This installation was made by authority of a former resolution of the Senate in which Senators from New York, Pennsylvania and Georgia discussed the various claims. If the champions of Morton had a case, then was the time for its presentation. As no issue was then made, should they not "forever after hold their peace?"