Affair With Professor Pattison

Granville Sharp Pattison, a native of Scotland, was born in either 1791 or 1792. His career was, in some ways, a strange one. That he was able in his chosen line as an anatomist was never denied; and while at certain times his character was colored by various scandalous hues of notoriety he was always able to rise above them so that when he died, in 1851, he was at the height of his fame.¹

At the age of eighteen he was chosen assistant to Allan Burns, a well-known Scottish anatomist, and later succeeded him in the chair of anatomy, physiology and surgery in the Andersonian Institution at Glasgow. There he had a reputation as an interesting lecturer and successful teacher. In hopes of obtaining a professorship in the medical department of the University of Pennsylvania he came to this country in 1819, only to find that the position had already been filled. He contented himself by giving a series of private lectures on anatomy in Philadelphia and published, in 1820, a work entitled Experimental Observations on the Operation of Lithotomy. This treatise brought him a certain fame because it was so vigorously attacked by his professional brothers.

In 1820 Pattison accepted the chair of anatomy, physiology and surgery at the University of Maryland in Baltimore. Six years later he resigned and returned to England, where he was appointed professor of anatomy at the University of London. He was dismissed from this position in 1831 because of a student rebellion. The next year he was invited to the professorship of anatomy at the Jefferson Medical College, in Philadelphia. There he built up a great reputation as a teacher and brought prestige to the new school.

Such in brief are some of the main events of the life of Granville Sharp Pattison. This was the man who, in his very first year in this country, attempted to bring on a duel with Dr. Nathaniel Chapman, and who, in his fourth year, actually fought one with Chapman’s brother-in-law, General Thomas Cadwalader.²

¹ These and the following facts about Pattison were taken from the Dictionary of American Biography, XIV. 311.

² Chapman and Cadwalader had married sisters, Rebecca and Mary, the daughters of Colonel Clement Biddle.
It is somewhat astonishing that a professor should have become involved in such enterprises. It is even more astonishing when one considers the characters of his antagonists. Dr. Chapman, the favorite physician of a large portion of the wealthier classes in Philadelphia, was one of the most popular men in the city. Famous for his social graces as well as for his medical skill he was universally esteemed and known as a kindly, tactful man. During his lifetime he filled many useful and honorable positions. He was connected with the medical department of the University of Pennsylvania from 1813 until his death in 1853.  

General Thomas Cadwalader was one of the recognized leaders of the city. The only son of General John Cadwalader he had risen by his own efforts to a position of great importance. Recognized for his capable service in the War of 1812, a Major General of Pennsylvania Militia, agent for the Penn family, confidential agent for the Bank of the United States and later its chief director, a leading literary light of Philadelphia, General Cadwalader was not a man of rash or hasty action. But he was a man of character, one who would stand by his principles and his personal ideals of the proprieties, as his father had done before him.

When Pattison first came to Philadelphia he was taken up and sponsored by Dr. Chapman and Dr. Physick. While he had missed his chance for an appointment to the University he was in hopes that he might yet obtain one through the agency of these two men. To his disappointment the opportunity did not materialize, as Dr. W. Gibson received the next appointment. From then on his relations with Dr. Chapman became mutually disagreeable. Pattison blamed Chapman for his lack of preferment and complained that he was running down his character. Chapman on the other hand spoke freely concerning his embarrassment in having helped introduce Pattison to Philadelphia. He said that all Pattison's credentials were written before he became dishonorably involved in a notorious divorce case in Glasgow; he inferred that Pattison had been practically forced to leave Scotland and freely painted his character as not being that of a gentleman. He also,

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as well as Dr. Gibson, criticized Pattison's claims to a brilliant discovery in anatomy, concerning lithotomy, which they branded as a literary piracy containing incorrect statements which could not come from a man of professional reputation.

Pattison finally, in October, 1820, attempted to come to an "explanation" with Dr. Chapman and named his "friend." Chapman refused to reply to Pattison but did write the friend that he would never receive any communication of any sort from Pattison. The latter retaliated by posting broadsides in Philadelphia in an effort to call him out:

To The Public
Whereas Nathaniel Chapman, M. D. Professor of the Theory and Practice of Medicine in the University of Pennsylvania, etc., etc. has propagated scandalous and unfounded reports against my character; and Whereas when properly applied to, he has refused to give any explanation of his conduct, or the satisfaction which every gentleman has a right to demand, and which no one having any claim to that character, can refuse, I am therefore compelled to the only step left me, and Post the said Dr. Nathaniel Chapman, as a Liar, a Coward and a Scoundrel.

GRANVILLE SHARP PATTISON

As a result of this action Pattison was arrested on an application made to the public prosecutor by Dr. Chapman's brother-in-law. Dr. Chapman denied all agency in the arrest and was generally believed innocent of it. This unfortunate occurrence took place about midway in the course of a pamphlet war entered into by Pattison, Gibson and Chapman.

Many of these pamphlets are to be found in the collections of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Among them is one called Strictures on "Mr. Pattison's Reply to Certain Oral and Written Criticisms" by Dr. W. Gibson, published in Philadelphia in 1820. This is

4 The brother-in-law in question could have been either General Cadwalader or Thomas Dunlop who had married a third daughter of Colonel Biddle.
5 All the above information is derived from the pamphlets listed below.
mainly a rehash of the arguments tending to disprove the alleged medical discovery of Pattison. It deals harshly with the Professor's character and motives and is well written. Shortly following this there was published in Baltimore in the same year a pamphlet entitled, *An Answer to a Pamphlet Entitled “Strictures on Mr. Pattison’s reply to certain Oral and Written Criticisms, by W. Gibson”* written by Professor Pattison. Here we have an account of the character of Dr. Gibson which does him little credit, and a refutation of the charges that Pattison had been the aggressor in the quarrels, guilty of a literary piracy, guilty of making incorrect statements and wanting in professional reputation.

Dr. Chapman was meanwhile busying himself by publishing two editions of the *Correspondence Between Mr. Granville Sharpe Pattison and Dr. Nathaniel Chapman*. This was an illuminating account of the true nature of the Scottish professor and the trouble he had caused since his arrival in Philadelphia. As a sample of pamphlet warfare it was not up to the high standards of the other two authors. This was responded to in another pamphlet by Pattison, called *A Refutation of Certain Calumnies Published in a Pamphlet, Entitled, “Correspondence between Mr. Granville Sharp Pattison and Dr. Nathaniel Chapman,”* in which he dissected Dr. Chapman’s literary struggles and entered a general denial of the latter’s statements. This was indeed an admirable effort and conceived with just the right controversial tone.

The best that Chapman could do now was to rake up an early scandal concerning his opponent. He accordingly published a pamphlet incorporating *The Whole of the Proceedings, Duly Authenticated, in the Case of Divorce of Andrew Ure, M. D. v. Catharine Ure, for Adultery with Granville Sharpe Pattison*. This was a rather expressive and telling blow. It was answered by *A Final Reply to the Numerous Slanders, Circulated by Nathaniel Chapman, M. D.*, by Pattison, who now sought to explain the divorce case and whitewash his own character.

The general feeling that the reader is apt to entertain upon perusing this material inclines his sympathies against Pattison, who seems to have been a little too plausible. He was a much abler man with the pen than the Philadelphia doctors, but that in the end weighed against
to write a confere on a delicate but important matter. Being a Manager was no new position for the General; he had served before and knew what was expected of him. Both he and Dr. Chapman had been Managers as early as 1804. The correspondence which follows speaks for itself.

No. 1 Copy

[Philadelphia] 23, March, 1823

My dear Sir,

In consequence of what has passed between you & Mr. Jacobs, of which you informed me last evening, I state to you that communications between the Managers of the Assembly being strictly confidential the right of other persons to investigate them cannot be acknowledged. Had my note to you been shewn to any person besides the Managers I should very cheerfully consent to have it shewn to Mr. Jacobs. The object of the note was to prevent any individual Manager from giving a ticket for the Assembly to Mr. P. I was desirous that the application, if made, should be made to me as I was and am willing to assume all the responsibility of preventing Mr. P. from appearing at the Assembly, if practicable.

Had any gentleman made the application to me in behalf of Mr. P. I had marked out the course to be pursued. I should have stated to him that after the quarrel between Dr. Chapman & Mr. P. and all the circumstances attending it, it would be unpleasant to a large number of Dr. C's friends & to myself especially, to meet Mr. P. in society.

This representation as I presumed wd. have occasioned the application to be withdrawn. If still however insisted upon, I shd then have convened the board of Managers, and stated my objections, taking a vote on the question. I need hardly say that I should myself have voted in the negative.

You are at liberty to read this letter to Mr. Jacobs, and, if he pleases, he may take a copy of it, in order to have an opportunity of giving full consideration to the subject.

Your's most affectionately

T. Cadwalader

John M. Read, Esq.

No. 2

Baltimore March 26th, 1823

Sir,

Whilst in Philadelphia last week, I was informed, that you had written a Note to the Managers of the Philadelphia Assemblies, directing them, if applied to for a ticket for me, to refuse it, you being "willing to assume all the responsibility" for preventing me from appearing at the Ball. I now address you for the purpose of demanding, either an explanation or satisfaction, for so daring an attempt to insult me. I have requested my friend to enclose you this letter, and to adopt such measures, as he may judge expedient for bringing this affair to an honorable termination.

As I had some business of importance to transact in Philadelphia, I delayed addressing you on the subject until after my return to Baltimore, being fearful from the arrest which took place in the affair of your brother-in-law, Dr. Chapman, that had I, whilst there, demanded satisfaction, such measures might have been pursued, as would have prevented me from accomplishing the object of my visit.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obt. st.

Granville Sharp Pattison

To General Cadwalader

No. 3

Baltimore S. Pauls Lane

26 March 1823

Sir,

I have the honor to enclose you a letter from my friend Professor Pattison, and beg leave to observe, that if you feel unwilling to offer an explanation, perfectly satisfactory to his honor, I am ready to correspond with any gentleman whom you may name as your friend, and make arrangements to bring the business to a speedy conclusion.

I have the honor to be,

Sir, your most obedient servant,

A. Hope Pattison

For General Cadwalader

7 Captain A. Hope Pattison, a brother of the professor.
Sir,

About half an hour ago, I was favored with your letter of the 26th instant (postmarked 27th) enclosing one from Professor Pattison, and nearly at the same time received Duplicates by a private hand. The latter precaution was unnecessary, considering the certainty of the mail.

Having no explanation to give in regard to the matter complained of by Professor Pattison, I have only to say, that if he challenges me I will meet him, it being understood that the affair is to be considered as finally settled with its termination on the ground, whatever that termination may be, that the whole proceedings be conducted with caution and secrecy, and that any notice of the affair in the papers, hereafter, be avoided.

It will be better to have the meeting on the border of Delaware & Maryland, as the reappearance of Mr. P. in this city or my visiting Baltimore might attract attention.

I have the honor to be,

Sir, ob. servt.

T. Cadwalader

A. Hope Pattison Esq.

No. 5

Baltimore 30th March-23
S. Pauls Lane

Sir,

I have this moment received your polite communication of the 28th inst and have the honor to enclose you a letter from my friend Professor Pattison.

In regard to your stipulation about the affair being kept out of the newspapers, I would beg leave to observe that I consider it altogether unnecessary. Professor Pattison can certainly have no object in giving further publicity to this affair, than that which is essentially required to purify his proceedings to his immediate friends.

On account of the very inclement state of the weather here today, I cannot calculate on your receiving this communication before the
morning of Tuesday, and therefore may not receive your answer before Thursday next. If it meet you and your friend's views, I would propose that we meet at Frenchtown on the morning of Friday the 4th April, and make the necessary arrangements for settling this affair on the forenoon of that day.

I have the honor to remain,

Sir,

Your very obedient servant

A. Hope Pattison

To General Cadwalader

No. 6

Baltimore 30th March-23

Sir,

Since my letter went to the post office I observe on a reperusal of yours of the 28th inst to me that I have neglected to notice one of the conditions which you have stipulated viz. "That this affair is to be considered as finally settled with its termination on the Ground whatever that termination may be." I beg leave to inform you that this condition will be complied with on our part it being at the same time distinctly understood to be equally binding on yours.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your very obedient servant

A. Hope Pattison

To General Cadwalader

No. 7

Baltimore March 30th 1823

Sir,

From the attempt you made to insult me whilst I was in Philadelphia, I request the satisfaction due from one gentleman to another.

My friend who encloses this communication, is fully authorized to make the necessary arrangements.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obt servant,

Granville Sharp Pattison

To General Cadwalader
him. Pattison appears to have been fighting and quarreling all his life. Upon his dismissal from the University of London he wrote a Statement of the Facts which explained everything. He encountered too much trouble to be always innocent—a divorce case in Scotland, then troubles in Philadelphia, and finally difficulties in London.

So there the business ended with Pattison teaching in Baltimore and Chapman continuing his work in Philadelphia. But it had not been a fortunate affair; Pattison had in fact called the former out and had been refused in his challenge. Chapman argued that he had a large dependent family, that Pattison was not a gentleman, that it was not in keeping with his position to fight duels, and that he did not care to open a new lecture series by presenting his students with the spectacle of their professor involved in a so-called affair of honor. Pattison for his part pointed out what he considered fallacies in each of these reasons. One feels that the popular imagination of the times favored the challenger. Although many Philadelphians stood by Chapman the affair remained a questionable one in which the rights and wrongs were far from settled.

Several years passed before Philadelphia was again alarmed by the conduct of Professor Pattison. Then another incident occurred— itself growing out of the earlier quarrel with Dr. Chapman—which led to more violent results. While the whole story was not common knowledge, every one knew that Pattison had challenged General Cadwalader and that a duel had followed in which the latter was wounded. At the time this extraordinary event caused great excitement, but as the years rolled by and generation succeeded generation the duel was all but forgotten.

Recently there has been discovered among the papers of General Cadwalader a small bundle of letters numbered from one to twelve and inclosed in a cover on which is noted in the General's hand "Affair with Professor Pattison." For well over a hundred years the documentary evidence has been thus sealed, but it is now possible to print these contemporary papers that make this "affair of honor" very real to us today.

It was in March of the year 1823 that the General sat down in his capacity as a Manager of the time-honored Philadelphia Assemblies,
No. 8

Baltimore 31st March-23

Sir,

I have the honour to inform you that the adjustment of the affair between Professor Pattison and yourself has been on his part committed to the charge of Mr. Meredith who will by this days mail communicate with you on the subject.

I have the honor to be

Sir,

Your obedient servant

A. Hope Pattison

For General Cadwalader

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No. 9

Baltimore March 31st 1823

Monday 10 ’clock P. M.

Sir:

I have the honor to inform you that at the request of Professor Pattison, I have consented to act, in the place of his brother Capt. Pattison, as his friend, in the adjustment of the unfortunate difference existing between you & him. Of this change you will also be apprized by a communication from Capt. Pattison.

It may be proper to state, that I hold myself bound by the acquiescence already given to the conditions contained in your letter of the 28th inst. As however the adjustment of preliminaries, may require more time than was anticipated by Capt. Pattison when he wrote to you yesterday, I have now to propose, that a previous meeting for this purpose, shall take place between your friend & myself, either on Friday or Saturday next, at Frenchtown or Newcastle, as may be most convenient to him. I shall wait your answer, which in the course of the Mail I may expect to receive on Thursday morning, so as to enable me to leave this if necessary, in that evening’s steam boat.

I have the honour to be

with great respect

Your ob. servt

J. Meredith

For General Cadwalader, Phila.
Sir,
I this morning received letters of the 30th March from Captain Pattison & Professor Pattison. The latter contained a challenge wh I accept.

These letters, but for the state of the roads, would have reached me last evening. The Captain’s letter fixed the meeting for Friday morning, and I had prepared an answer accordingly.

By the mail of this afternoon I have received your letter of yesterday, with one of that date from Capt. P., and am happy to find that you have undertaken to act in the business. Observing you now propose a preliminary meeting, at Frenchtown or New Castle, on Friday or Saturday, between yourself and the Gentleman who is engaged for me, I beg leave to refer you to the accompanying communication from my Friend Captain Dallas of the navy, to whose management I commit the matter on my part.

I have the honor to be, most respectfully,
Sir, your ob. servt.

T. CADWALADER

J. Meredith, Esq.

Sir,
The enclosed letter from Genl. Cadwalader will shew you that I am authorized to act for him in the affair with Professor Pattison. In compliance with your letter, I will be at New Castle, at the Steam Boat Inn, on Friday evy, in the expectation of seeing you early on Saturday morng by which time you will have arrived there, leaving Baltimore on the boat of Friday. G. C. will accompany me, & will remain at a convenient point in the neighborhood. It is expected that Mr. P. will be with you. The time is fixed to prevent inconvenience in case of the mail being late in arriving at Balt. on Thursday. The preliminaries can require but a few minutes to adjust and, within a few miles of New Castle a convenient place of meeting can be fixed upon, so as to afford easy access to either Pennsylvania or Maryland, after the affair is over.

The following to be the arrangement on the ground.
1st. Pistols to be loaded by the seconds in the presence of each other.
2nd. Parties at ten paces distant & to remain in limb & body with as little motion as possible.
3rd. Word to be given. Gentlemen are you ready. Fire.
4th. Pistols pointed downwards, & not to be raised until the word fire is uttered after which the parties may fire when they please.
5th. No rest to be taken of any kind.
6th. The affair to be considered as wholly terminated by the meeting, whatever the result may be.

I beg you to bring with you a transcript of the foregoing arrangements, signed by you. The same shall be done on my part, so that we may exchange them.

Very Resp.
Yr. ob. serv.

A. J. D.

Jonathan Meredith. Balt.

No. 12

The following arrangements, on the ground, are agreed upon between Capt. Dallas on the part of General Cadwalader, & Mr. Meredith on the part of Granville S. Pattison Esquire.

1st. Pistols to be loaded by the seconds, in the presence of each other.
2d. Parties at ten paces distant, & to remain in limb & body with as little motion as possible.
3d. Word to be given, "Gentlemen are you ready? Fire."
4th. Pistols pointed downwards, & not to be raised until the word Fire is uttered, after which the parties may fire when they please.
5th. No rest to be taken of any kind.
6th. The affair to be considered as wholly terminated by the meeting, whatever the result may be.

J. Meredith

April 5th 1823.

The duel must have been fought on April 5, 1823, because of the evidence of the date on the above letter. Further evidence of its having been fought on that day was that by the following day it was known to have occurred as far away as Washington. As we find nothing to the

8 “A vague rumour has reached this place, that you have received a wound, in a duel with Mr. Pattison of Baltimore. . . .” To General Cadwalader from Capt. W. B. Finck, Washington April 6, 1823. Cadwalader Collection.
contrary we may suppose that it was fought near New Castle according to the original plan.

There is no description of the duel itself. All we know is that Pattison’s shot lodged in Cadwalader’s right arm and that the latter’s shot, just wide of the mark, pierced the skirt of his opponent’s coat about the level of his waist. Captain Dallas, perhaps in an effort to allay fears for his principal’s safety, stated that the wound was “but a scratch, on the outer part of the arm.” That this underestimated the seriousness of the wound is easily apparent. Had it been only a scratch he would not have remained so long away from home, especially as he knew how anxious his family was to receive him back. His last entry in his letter book before the duel was of April 2, 1823, and the first sure evidence of his return was that on April 19, 1823, he dictated a business letter enclosing a draft which he signed with his left hand. It has been said that the General never recovered the full use of his right arm and that the wound eventually caused the gradual breakdown of his health which preceded his death in 1841.

The consensus of contemporary opinion regarding duels is interestingly reflected by several letters the General received shortly after the unfortunate affair. Captain James Biddle writing from on board his ship, the frigate Congress at Norfolk, exclaimed, “I have been much worried and annoyed at the idea of your suffering. I have cursed the Scotch villain more than a thousand times, and as often wished that he had a bullet in him. There is one advantage however in fighting it carries off a good deal of ill will and resentment, and you can therefore now feel less incensed at the fellow than before. We must not think or say anything more of him.”

General Winfield Scott, who had been a close friend of Cadwalader’s since the War of 1812, wrote as follows:

9 T. W. Morris to General Cadwalader at Newport, Delaware, April 8, 1823. Cadwalader Collection.
11 An article on General Thomas Cadwalader compiled by his grandson, Dr. Charles E. Cadwalader, informs the reader that the General’s health began to decline after 1833, “He had received a severe wound, in a duel, from a pistol-ball that lodged in the elbow-joint, and which from its position could not be removed. The irritation from its presence gradually undermined his constitution.” Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Biography of Pennsylvania (New York, 1893), III. 299. See also Dictionary of American Biography, XIV. 311, article on Professor Pattison.
12 Later Commodore, a brother of Nicholas Biddle, the financier.
13 April 20, 1823. Cadwalader Collection.
Richmond, April 15th, 1823

My Dear General:

It was not till the moment the steamboat was pushing off from Market Street wharf, that I received an intimation that you had gone down to Delaware to meet Pattison. My first impulse was to land & hasten to the spot; but reflecting, that if necessary, I might go to you from some point on the Baltimore route, I made a confidant of Mr. Calvert, my fellow-passenger, in order that I might have some one to whom to give vent to my extreme solicitude, & proceeded. At New Castle we were happy not to find the enemy as it multiplied chances in our favour. We also on reaching Frenchtown eagerly looked around & for a moment saw no one of that party, but presently we learnt that they were stowed away in the forward cabin. A Baltimorean who knew my anxiety went to enquire of Meredith who presently came to me, & assured me there was no danger, neither bone nor artery touched. I determined then to proceed.

I am extremely happy to learn by a letter from John received this moment that you are doing well. We had yesterday a report that gave us much uneasiness. I say us for there are hundreds here, besides my wife & our friend Nicholas, who had begun to feel much solicitude for your safety. God grant that I may soon hear, that you are perfectly well.

Several persons in my hearing have remarked on an apparent inconsistency on your part. But to me your conduct was just what I should have expected. When it was a question of admitting a doubtful character to an assembly of ladies you were naturally scrupulous—but when the affair took the other turn, the soldier predominated. Your conduct was perfectly natural; but I am one of those who believe P. not a gentleman. Present me most respectfully to Mrs. C. & my young friend John, from whom I hope to hear again soon.

Sincerely your friend

W. Scott

Nicholas B. Wainwright

14 John Cadwalader (1805-1879), eldest son of the General, later Judge of the United States District Court.

15 John Cadwalader answered this letter four days later, on the nineteenth. For several weeks he answered all the General's mail of this nature.

16 Cadwalader Collection.