

## *Dr. Physick and His House*

PHILIP SYNG PHYSICK was born in his parents' house on Mulberry (now Arch) Street near Third on July 7, 1768.\* His father Edmund Physick (the name is a corruption of Fishwick,<sup>1</sup> a place in Lancashire and has no medical significance) had for many years been an agent for the Penn family, and not long after Philip's birth the Physicks moved to Governor John Penn's Lansdowne plantation. Lansdowne House, then brand new, stood on the site in West Fairmount Park later covered by Horticultural Hall. There the Physicks lived near the mansion in a small house called "The Hat." Mrs. Physick, the former Abigail Syng, was the eldest of the twenty-three children of the famous silversmith Philip Syng, Jr., who had been born in Ireland in 1703 and had come with his parents to Philadelphia in 1714.<sup>2</sup>

Edmund and Abigail Physick had four children.<sup>3</sup> The youngest, Philip, was nine when Washington spent the winter at Valley Forge. His father went to visit the encampment and reported that the cannon were frozen solid in the mud so that if Lord Howe had attacked they could not have been worked. During the Revolution John Penn's farm became the property of the state, but Edmund Physick appears to have stayed on to run it. He and his family did not seem to suffer financially.

Philip was sent to town to the Friends' Academy. During the week he boarded with Mrs. John Todd in Third Street and on weekends he walked home. His schoolmaster used to praise the way

\* This paper was read by Mr. Roberts in St. Peter's Church, Third and Pine Streets, at the Annual Meeting of the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks on May 24, 1967, preceding the dedication of Dr. Physick's restored house.

<sup>1</sup> *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, V (1881), 360.

<sup>2</sup> For genealogical data, see Mary Bunting Wolff, "Syng Family," manuscript at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and John W. Jordan, *Colonial Families of Philadelphia* (New York, 1911), I, 850-871.

<sup>3</sup> Henry White Physick (1758-1821), married Adriana Haynes; Elizabeth Physick (1760-?), married Leonard Dorsey; Abigail Physick (1763-1854), died unmarried; Philip Syng Physick (1768-1837).

he arrived on time on Monday mornings after a five-mile walk, when other boys who lived nearby were late.<sup>4</sup>

Philip wanted to work with his hands and would have liked to be a silversmith like his maternal grandfather, but his father insisted that he become a doctor. Accordingly, Philip was sent to the University of Pennsylvania for an A.B. and to study with Dr. Adam Kuhn, later famous as an opponent of Dr. Benjamin Rush.

In 1788, Edmund Physick took Philip, then twenty years of age, to London to study surgery under Mr. Hunter. Before leaving Hunter's office the father asked if he should buy any books for his son. The celebrated surgeon led the Physicks into his laboratory and pointed to the cadavers. "These are the best books," he said, "other books are fit for very little."

Two years later, Hunter procured for the young man a post as House Surgeon at St. George's Hospital, London. The other interns did not like having an American in their midst, but when he had shown his skill by reducing single-handed a dislocated shoulder (a maneuver usually requiring two strong men) he was accepted by them.<sup>5</sup> After a year, he received a diploma from the Royal College of Surgeons and was sent by his father to finish his education at the school of medicine in Edinburgh, then considered the best in the world. There his peculiar name resulted in some teasing, and one of his fellow-students produced the following verse:

Sing Physic, Sing Physic, for Philip Syng Physick  
Is dubbed Doctor Phil for his wonderful skill;  
Each sick phiz he'll physic, he'll cure every phthisic  
Their lips fill with Physic, with potion and pill.

The rhymes continued through thirteen quatrains, ringing every change on the puns inspired by his name. A newspaper clipping of the complete poem is pasted into the manuscript copy of the Syng genealogy in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.<sup>6</sup>

Physick received his M.D. in 1792 and was offered a good practice in Edinburgh, but, hating its rainy climate, he preferred to return

<sup>4</sup> Biographical data on Physick is based on W. E. Horner, *Necrological Notice of Dr. Philip Syng Physick* (Philadelphia, 1838), and Jacob Randolph, *A Memoir on the Life and Character of Philip Syng Physick, M. D.* (Philadelphia, 1839).

<sup>5</sup> Randolph, 24-25.

<sup>6</sup> Wolff, 11.

to Philadelphia, where his father generously set him up in an office at 45 Arch Street (probably the house where he had been born). At first the young man found little to do, but a year later the great yellow fever epidemic ravaged Philadelphia and the Board of Health built a hospital at Bush Hill (near 23rd and Hamilton Streets) for poor sufferers from the disease. Philip volunteered his services as resident physician of the hospital, but resigned a few months later



when a Frenchman, Dr. Devèze, was appointed. Contracting a light case of the fever, the young doctor concluded that the malady was not contagious, though he never suspected its being carried by mosquitoes. It was during this time that he met Dr. Rush and became his admiring friend.

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his services were recognized (like those of Dr. Rush) by "elegant pieces of silver plate" costing upwards of a thousand dollars, a very large sum in those days. In his will the doctor left one of these pieces, a tea tray, to his elder son Philip, and another one of them, a tea urn, to his younger son Emlen.

After the epidemic Dr. Rush was attacked by Dr. Kuhn and others for using too drastic blood-letting and purges in the treatment of yellow fever cases. Dr. Physick came to Rush's defense with a printed testimonial in the *United States Gazette*:

With a view of inspiring confidence in bloodletting in the cure of yellow fever, I take this method of informing my fellow citizens that I lost during my last attack of that fever a hundred and seventy-six ounces of blood by twenty-two bleedings in ten days. The efficacy of this invaluable remedy was aided by frequent and copious evacuations from my bowels, and a moderate salivation.<sup>7</sup>

His work during the epidemic made him well known in Philadelphia, and his marriage in 1800 to Elizabeth,<sup>8</sup> daughter of Samuel Emlen, a wealthy Quaker, brought him a large dowry and, in the course of time, seven children, of whom only four lived to grow up. His eldest child, Sarah Emlen (called Sally), born in 1801, became the wife of Dr. Jacob Randolph. Susan, born in 1803, was to marry a distinguished naval officer, Commodore David Conner. Two boys, Edmund and Samuel, born in 1804 and 1805, died as infants. Then in 1807 came Philip, Jr., who was to take up the practice of law and die in 1848. Philip's wife, Caroline Eliza Jackson, lived until 1877, surviving a son and daughter who died young. The doctor's sixth child, Elizabeth, died in infancy, and his last child, Emlen Physick, was born in 1812. Emlen was never properly married. In 1851 he paid the expenses of the divorce suit which Frances Mary Parmentier won against her husband, George L. Sawtell, whom she charged with cruel and barbarous treatment. For a year or so she lived in a house in Juniper Street which forty-year-old Emlen rented for her, then she moved into his house on Spruce Street, east of Sixth. They had three children: Susan, who died young; Emlen, Jr. (who was legit-

<sup>7</sup> Winthrop and Frances Neilson, *Verdict for the Doctor, the Case of Benjamin Rush* (New York, 1958), 131.

<sup>8</sup> A portrait of Mrs. Physick by Thomas Sully, said to have been commissioned by Susan Conner and copied from a miniature, is in the possession of Mrs. William Henry Noble, Jr.

imatized by Act of Assembly); and Ellen Elizabeth, born on a trip to Europe. In his will, probated in 1859, Emlen acknowledged Ellen as his child and left Frances a trust income of \$2,000 per annum, "as long as she shall remain unmarried." Subsequently she brought suit against the estate for a widow's portion, and for a share of old Samuel Emlen's trust.<sup>9</sup> Luckily, Dr. Physick did not live to witness Emlen's matrimonial entanglements; he had more than enough of his own.

Soon after his marriage Dr. Physick was made Surgeon to the Philadelphia Alms House. In 1802 he was elected to the American Philosophical Society, and in 1805 he was appointed to the Chair of Surgery at the University of Pennsylvania. Honors and posts of distinction were to come his way throughout his life.

Having read of the experiments being made in England by Schweppe in carbonating water, Physick made some himself in 1807, with the aid of Townsend Speakman, and tried it on his patients. While this idea did not prove useful medically, Speakman, by adding fruit and other flavors to the concoction, was one of the originators of the soft drink business in America.<sup>10</sup>

In 1812 the doctor invented the stomach pump. His was a pewter syringe with a flexible tube. With its first use he saved the lives of two Negro twins suffering from an overdose of laudanum. The stomach pump was only one of Physick's practical and useful inventions, most of which were in the realm of special instruments for use in surgery.<sup>11</sup>

Among those who have left recollections of Dr. Physick was Dr. W. E. Horner of Philadelphia, who observed him in 1813 at Dr. Rush's funeral:

He was then in the vigour of manhood and of reputation, the universally acknowledged centre and head of the surgery of this country. An indescribable interval separated him from everybody else, and yet attracted everyone to him. I remember . . . his quick and thoughtful step; his inclination of the head . . . highly powdered; his hair overhanging his ears in a thick

<sup>9</sup> *Estate of Emlen Physick Deceased, and Trust Estate of Emlen Physick, under the Will of Samuel Emlen, Dec'd. Auditors Report, and Exceptions; Estate of Samuel Emlen, Deceased. Appeal of Frances Mary Physick. Opinion of the Court; Physick's Appeal. Emlen's Estate.*

<sup>10</sup> "Aerated Waters," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Fourteenth Edition, I, 124.

<sup>11</sup> Randolph, 76.

long brush on each side, where it was clipped straight below. The head, face, and neck exhibiting the most finished and statue-like appearance; and his costume being a paragon of neatness, and of appropriateness, without any undue effort at effect.

The word "statue-like" suggests that Dr. Horner may have seen the terra-cotta head of the doctor exhibited that same year at the annual show of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts by the sculptor William Rush, and still on exhibition in its galleries. Horner went on to describe Dr. Physick in the operating room: "He had a correct, sharp, discriminating eye; a hand delicate in its touch and movement, and which never trembled or faltered . . . He had a forethought of all possible contingencies and demands during a great operation."<sup>12</sup>

Dr. Randolph, his son-in-law, recorded that he seldom smiled, was of middle stature with large flat feet, and that after his recovery late in 1813 from typhus he remained very thin, never really regaining his health. He wore his hair brushed back and tied in a queue and continued to powder it long after this fashion had become outmoded. The queue he never did abandon. Usually he wore a blue coat with metal buttons, a light waistcoat and gray or fawn-colored "pantaloon." He was noted for his dignity and courtesy.<sup>13</sup>

Like all doctors of his time he believed fully in the value of bleeding, and in those days preceding the discovery of anaesthetics one of his uses of bleeding had real value. If a dislocation proved impossible to reduce, he would bleed the patient till he fainted; the resulting relaxation usually made it possible to restore the bone to its place.

Dr. Physick hated garrulous patients and would brook no interference from them in the conduct of a case. Dr. William Furness, the Unitarian minister (father of the Shakespearian Dr. Horace Furness) recalled in a newspaper article: "Dr. Physick practised with 'no post at his back'. He leaned upon no crutches of authority. He took the life of the patient in hand, and required implicit obedience. His personal appearance, gray hair, dark eyebrows—every line of his fine last-century countenance [were] expressive of decision."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Horner, 17, 20.

<sup>13</sup> Randolph, 31-32.

<sup>14</sup> Wolff, 11.

The doctor was faced with a grave decision in 1815, for in that year he separated from his wife. The deed of separation was signed on September 7, appointing John Hart, druggist, and William Howell, merchant, to administer certain properties for the benefit of Elizabeth Physick. These included the two lots which were her dowry, one at the northwest corner of Fifth and Pine Streets, 198' x 150' 'n size on which stood eleven houses, and one on the east side of Second Street between Race and Vine, together with certain properties that she had received under the will of her father. The rent from this real estate—\$1,445 and 544 Spanish milled dollars—would be enough for her to live on, although it was only a tenth of the doctor's income.

The deed of separation provided that:

The said Philip Syng Physick doth covenant and agree to and with the said trustees acting on behalf of the said Elizabeth Physick that he will permit and suffer her to live separate and apart from him during her natural life in the free and uninterrupted enjoyment of the income hereby provided for her separate maintenance and in the enjoyment of the personal property which by his permission she may take with her in which is to be included eight hundred dollars in cash and Household furniture and kitchen furniture of the value of fifteen hundred dollars . . .<sup>15</sup>

There is nothing in the deed about the reason for the separation. Family tradition suggests that she was attracted by Dr. John Syng Dorsey, her husband's nephew who, judging by his portrait,<sup>16</sup> was a very handsome man but much younger than his aunt-in-law. Physick, who outlived his nephew, remembered the Dorsey children in his will, so that there seems to have been no ill feeling.

In 1815, the year of his separation from his wife, the doctor's old-maid sister Abigail bought the house now known as 321 South Fourth Street, and deeded it to her brother. Perhaps this odd procedure was due to legal complications arising from the separation. Elizabeth Physick, who died in 1820, probably did not move into the new house. Whether Abigail, who lived until 1854, did or not is not known.

<sup>15</sup> Deed of separation between Elizabeth Emlen and Philip Syng Physick, Sept. 7, 1815, in possession of Mrs. William Henry Noble, Jr.

<sup>16</sup> A copy of this portrait by Sully is at the Medical School of the University of Pennsylvania.



Henry Hill, who had built the house on part of the site of the former Alms House, was one of the nine children of Dr. Richard Hill of Hill's point near Annapolis. In 1739 his father and mother had fled to Madeira to escape creditors, leaving him to the care of his married sister in Philadelphia. By 1744 his father had paid off his debts and established a flourishing wine business. Henry, now nineteen years old, went to Funchal to assist his father and continued to live there until shortly before the Revolution, when he returned to Philadelphia. He was a member of the Committee of Safety in 1775, of the Constitutional Convention of 1776, and an original member of the First City Troop. His affluence is indicated by the £ 5,000 he subscribed to the newly organized Pennsylvania Bank in 1780 and by his directorship in the Bank of North America from 1781 to 1792. Hill owned two countryseats—Wilton, in the neck, and a place in Germantown, Carlton, which he rebuilt in 1780. It was in 1786 that he built the house at the corner of Fourth and what is now called Cypress Street.

An undated letter from his sister, Mary Lamar, who was in London, begins as follows: "I have the pleasure to acknowledge my dear brother's favour of the 19th of May. I am happy to hear that the fanlight and wire work are safe arrived, and that they meet your approbation." After some discussion of the price of glasses (mirrors) she continues: "I have some thoughts of sending only one large handsome glass for the best room, if that is the best room in the front; there being but two windows, one large glass will do with handsome girandoles or something more fashionable." The present front rooms have only one window each so that it is probable the house was then very different. Mrs. Lamar goes on to comment on furniture and "As to chimney-piece and slab, a handsome white marble, which is the fashion for a best room and looks beautifully, cannot be got under £ 40 or £50."<sup>17</sup>

Hill must have depended much on his sister in furnishing the house for he was a widower, his wife Ann Meredith having died before he began to build it. Though a member of the "City Dancing Assembly" and though "Hill's Madeira" was reputed the best in Philadelphia, he did not drink any wine or spirits. In 1798 he died in

<sup>17</sup> John Jay Smith, *Letters of Doctor Richard Hill and His Children; or the History of a Family as Told by Themselves* (Philadelphia, 1854), 197-198.

his town house of the yellow fever, leaving no children, and for some years it had a variety of occupants. Evidently, it was substantially smaller than it is today, perhaps twenty feet wide on Fourth Street with two windows in the front parlor. The house extended back along Cypress Street much further than it does now, perhaps a hundred feet in all.

Dr. Physick, on acquiring the property in 1815, seems to have made great changes. The house was rebuilt with a fifty foot front on Fourth Street and part of the rear wing was demolished, leaving a gap of twenty-five feet between the house and the end of the wing which was made into a stable, and making the main block almost a fifty foot square, as it now is. The old stair became the present back stair. A new dining room, drawing room, and entrance hall with bedrooms over them, and a new front stair were built. It is this house which the 1966 restoration has tried to recreate.

Fortunately the building was surveyed for fire insurance by the Philadelphia Contributionship in 1815. Although it does not say so, the survey must have been made because of the recent alterations. The first floor is described as consisting of four rooms: a kitchen and three parlors with marble mantels. The parlors had surbases, cased windows and inside shutters, stucco cornices, and "five mahogany doors." The entry had a marble flag floor, which still remains. The mantelpieces now in these rooms were found on the second and third floors to which they must have been moved when the house was modernized in the 1850's. All their woodwork was removed in a series of modernizations and has had to be replaced with reproductions. One bedroom door was found with its original panels concealed under a full-length mirror, and this was used as a model for restoring the five mahogany doors on the first floor and the large doors on the second floor.

A most unusual feature is the mantel of Valley Forge marble in the dining room. It was found in the best bedroom and I have never seen another like it. The mantel is inlaid with panels of looking glass which had been smashed by vandals. When the broken glass was removed, it was found to be backed with pieces of paper, one of them a handbill advertising Rickett's Circus, the performances of which took place in the Pantheon Circus and Amphitheatre erected in 1795 at the southwest corner of Sixth and Chestnut Streets. A

crude cut shows John Bill Rickett's horse "Cornplanter" jumping through three hoops. On another piece of paper, probably from the *Lancaster Journal*, is printed an almanac for the last week of July, 1795, advertisements offering rewards for stolen horses, and an interesting account of an engagement between the British and French fleets off l'Orient, signed by Lord Bridport, First Lord of the Admiralty.

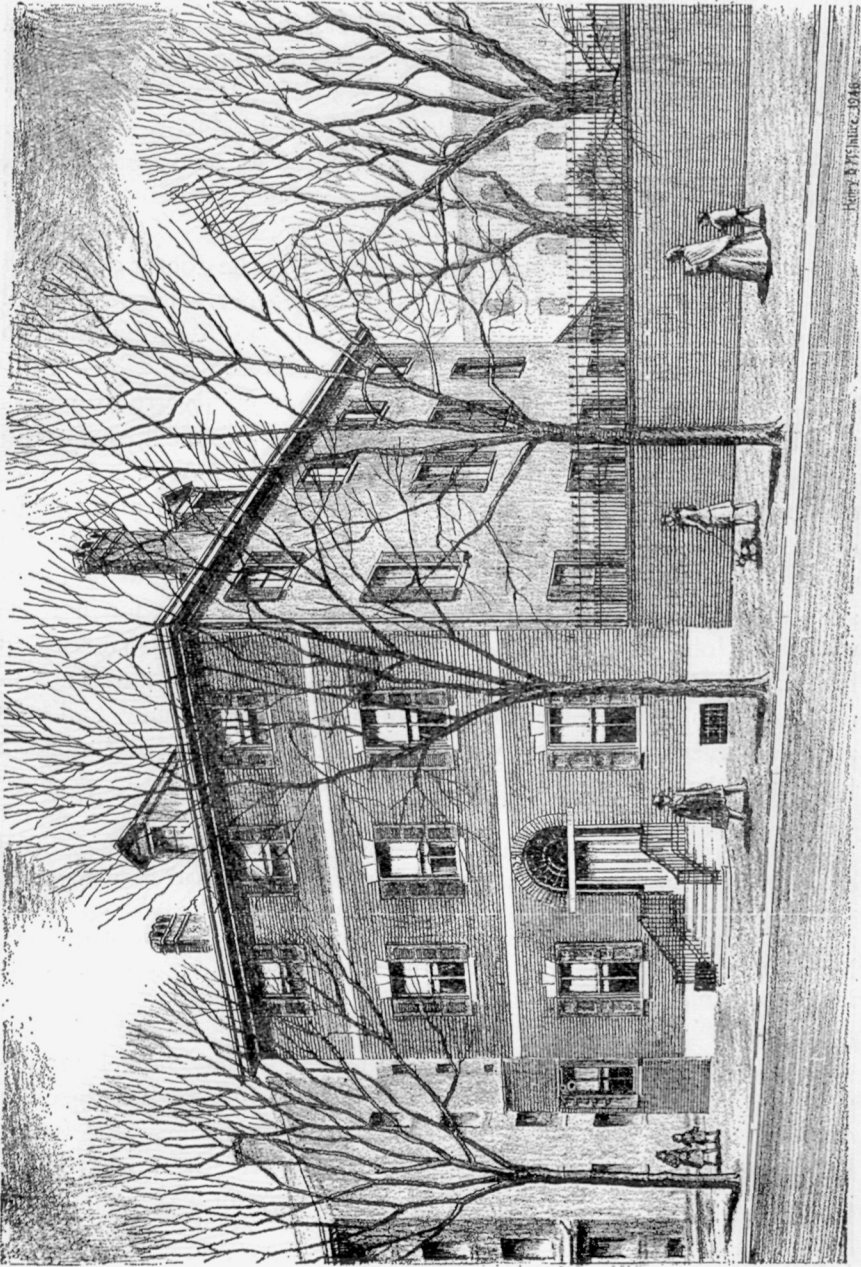
Another unusual feature is the springhouse. This extends out from the cellar to the north under the Cypress Street sidewalk. The spring has dried up, but the slate basins for the milk cans are still there. Across the passage from the springhouse is Henry Hill's old wine cellar. Its window with wooden bars looking into the passage has given rise to absurd accounts of its being used to imprison "refractory seamen." Another little iron-barred window looks into the part of the cellar under the addition. The bars must have been put there to prevent entry from the outside before the addition was made.

When he moved into his new house Dr. Physick was a very rich man. He had four horses in the stable, as attested by the four stalls and the list of the horses in his will. His income averaged about \$20,000 a year, despite his reputation for very modest fees. On one occasion he sent a servant after a patient who had given him two \$100 bills. Physick, who had taken them without looking at them, wanted to ask the patient if he had not intended them to be tens, which would have been quite sufficient. On the subject of his charges Dr. Furness has written:<sup>18</sup>

I have a grateful remembrance . . . of his great kindness to me and mine. When friends of mine from the eastward came to consult him, clergymen or others, he always asked of their circumstances and he would not ask compensation if their means were limited. He never accepted any return from clergymen or officers of the army or navy, and Commodore [John] Barron presented him with a silver vase on which was engraved this distich:

The offering of feeling,  
To the surgeon who feels  
As much pleasure in healing  
As he whom he heals.

<sup>18</sup> Wolff, 11.



A silver pitcher, another present from the Commodore, was left in the doctor's will to Commodore Conner, his son-in-law. It was marked with an eye and a bee (I B) a pun on the donor's initials.

Five years after the doctor had left his wife and moved into the new house, his eldest child, Sally, married Dr. Jacob Randolph. Susan, the other daughter, continued to live at home until 1828, when she married Commodore Conner, holder of two congressional medals for gallantry in the War of 1812.

Besides the Irish coachman and a colored boy the doctor employed a housekeeper, Anna Maria Shields, and another servant, Rhoda Poynter. They are described in his will (July, 1836) as having "so long lived in the utmost kindness and harmony." Just when Anna Maria became his mistress is not known, but family tradition has it that when the doctor returned from a hard day's work she would comb his hair as he lay on the sofa in the parlor. We can be sure that there was a blazing fire on the hearth, for according to Dr. Horner he liked to keep his room between 75° and 80°. Not much of a reader, Physick often went to bed at nine so as to be up at half past six for his hospital visits. His schedule was very heavy, for in 1819, when Dr. John Syng Dorsey died suddenly after the first lecture of his course, Dr. Physick took over, finished the course and was appointed to the Chair of Anatomy which his young nephew had held at the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. S. Collins of Baltimore, a former student in this course recalled that

At the close of his lectures he often expressed his views on the surgical diseases of the parts in the demonstration of which he had been engaged, and then he was eloquent. The kindling of the eye and the fixedness of the features showed he was treating a subject which called forth his powers. No part of his lectures made half the impression on his class as these incidental remarks on surgery.<sup>19</sup>

After his appointment to the Chair of Anatomy he reluctantly gave up the Chair of Surgery, but in 1821 was appointed Surgeon to the Institute for the Blind. The practice of his profession left him little time for dining out, to which, in any case, he preferred the occasional company of a friend. His housekeeping was frugal; after

<sup>19</sup> Newspaper clipping, G. \*625, at Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

his typhus attack he had but a poor appetite and in contrast to others in that period ate very little. A biographer quotes him as saying:

"Ah, these French cooks; I'll tell you how one of them served me some years ago. I gave an order to him for a dinner to a company; among his nasty dishes, he served me up a Turkey with one wing off, and in such a state that it was difficult to tell what it was; when I give dinners now I take good care not to employ them; and the dishes are dressed in such a way that you know what you eat."<sup>20</sup>

In view of his supposed prejudice against the French, it seems strange that there is a persistent tradition among his descendants that Dr. Physick gave a ball for Lafayette on his visit to Philadelphia in 1824. Physick was by then a very prominent citizen, recently elected President of the Philadelphia Medical Society, and a party at his house would have been news, but a careful perusal of the newspaper accounts of the Marquis' visit reveals no mention of such a party either in 1824 or on Lafayette's return visit in 1825.

It may be that the doctor was not even in town on the occasion of Lafayette's second visit. In 1821 his older brother Henry had died in Wilmington, Delaware, and from his estate he had bought the house where Henry and his wife Adriana Haynes had spent their summers at Octoraro, Maryland, overlooking the Susquehanna. From then on, he used to spend part of every summer at that farm. He had been fond of the place ever since he had gone there to recover from his second attack of yellow fever in 1797.

In 1831, Dr. Physick felt overworked and in need of retirement although he was only sixty-three. He had prided himself on his dexterity as a surgeon (he was particularly successful with cataracts) and wanted to save his strength. Accordingly, he resigned his post as Professor of Anatomy at the University.

Yet it was in the same year that he performed his most famous operation: he cut Chief Justice Marshall for the stone. Since his patient was seventy-six and anaesthesia was still unknown, it was a difficult problem. But the Justice was an excellent patient, remaining completely unruffled as he ate what he described as probably his last breakfast, but a very good one.<sup>21</sup> For the operation Dr. Physick

<sup>20</sup> Horner, 25.

<sup>21</sup> Randolph, 98.

charged no fee, but the Justice gave him a handsome silver vase which the doctor left in his will to Caroline Eliza (Jackson), his son Philip's wife, to be given by her to her son Philip Syng Physick III. The vase or wine cooler, which is now in the Pennsylvania Hospital, is inscribed on one side: "This tribute of gratitude for restored health offered by J. Marshall. Philadelphia, November 19th, 1831." And on the other: "FRUITUR FAMA." Though some said the Justice had never fully recovered, it was through no fault of Dr. Physick that he died four years later of an ulcerated liver. In tolling for his funeral the Liberty Bell was cracked.

In 1836 the doctor was pleased to be made an honorary Fellow of the Royal Medical Society of London. He was also flattered that his former students employed Henry Inman to paint a portrait<sup>22</sup> of him for the Anatomical Lecture Room, but he was in ever poorer health. Once, seeing Dr. Horner in the street, he called to his coachman to stop so that he could shake his hand. "I shall not see you again," he said, and this proved to be true.<sup>23</sup>

Dr Horner, a fellow member of the Philosophical Society, was entrusted by the Society with the preparation of a minute on the doctor's death which he called a "Necrological Notice." This provoked the publication of an anonymous *Brief Review* making fun of the pompous title and defending the doctor's memory from alleged slanders by Dr. Horner, whose remarks today would seem to be prompted only by an affectionate frankness. One passage in the *Review* gives a vivid picture of the doctor at home and refutes the charge that he was biased against the French:

We very distinctly remember that, having occasion to visit Dr. Physick upon business important to him, though unconnected with his profession, when ushered into his parlour, we found him surrounded by French medical periodicals; and such was the degree of interest which they seemed to have excited in him, that we found it almost impossible to lead his attention from them to the object of our visit. He repeatedly took them up and read passages aloud; and certainly, as much from the ease with which he read them as from his expressions of sentiment, we received the impression that he was in the habit of reading French medical literature and enjoyed it.

<sup>22</sup> This portrait hangs at the Medical School building at 36th Street and Hamilton Walk, Philadelphia.

<sup>23</sup> Horner, 15.

The doctor had been a member of the Royal Academy of Medicine of France since 1825. "I have often heard him say," continued the anonymous author, "'Death, what can it be; with all our inquiry it is at last a fearful step in the dark.'"<sup>24</sup>

"As he advanced in years," wrote Dr. Furness, "Dr. Physick turned with deep interest to the subject of religion. His noble profession had absorbed him. His religious views were in hopeless confusion. He swung to and fro between the extremest orthodoxy and the rankest skepticism. He told me he obtained some satisfaction from the writings of Dr. Channing."<sup>25</sup>

But neither the writings of the great Unitarian nor the "highly important and consolatory attentions"<sup>26</sup> of the Rev. W. H. De Lancey, rector of St. Peter's, could reconcile him to the problem of why God allowed His creation to suffer as he had seen so many men do. The doctor's death came on December 15, 1837. Its cause was diagnosed as "hydrothorax" (perhaps emphysema?). For days the patient had not been able to breathe when lying down, and had had to be held upright. The respect in which he had been held was well expressed by the Philadelphia diarist Sidney George Fisher: "Doctor Physic died yesterday. He had been for many years at the head of his profession in this country, and ranked as probably the best surgeon in the world."<sup>27</sup>

Strangely enough, the doctor provided in his will that his funeral be delayed for fear of burial alive and stipulated that there be no autopsy. According to Philadelphia custom, the funeral was held in the house. Shortly after 9 A.M. the coffin was taken up Fourth Street to Christ Church Burial Ground at Fifth and Arch. Following it walked the trustees, faculty, and students of the University and of Jefferson College, the members of the American Philosophical Society and the Philadelphia Medical Society, the members of the Convention who were meeting in Philadelphia to draw up a new State Constitution (they adjourned their meeting to attend), and a host

<sup>24</sup> Anon., *A Brief Review of Dr. Horner's "Necrological Notice" of Philip Syng Physick, M. D.* (Philadelphia, 1838), 13, 15.

<sup>25</sup> Wolff, 11.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted from the Fifth Codicil of Dr. Physick's Will. The original will is missing, but a copy of it is in Will Book 12, page 683, City Hall Annex.

<sup>27</sup> Nicholas B. Wainwright, ed., *A Philadelphia Perspective; The Diary of Sidney George Fisher* (Philadelphia, 1967), 38; Randolph, 107.



of friends and patients, so that the coffin had nearly arrived at the Burial Ground before the last person had left the house. Jacob Randolph selected as his epitaph:

He gave his honours to the world again  
His blessed part to Heaven and slept in peace.

In his will, besides legacies previously mentioned, the doctor left his small silver coffee urn to his brother-in-law Samuel Emlen and his medical books and surgical instruments to his son-in-law Dr. Randolph. (The instruments left by Dr. Randolph to the Pennsylvania Hospital were for many years exhibited as belonging to Dr. Physick, but it has recently been pointed out that they were made in France in 1836, five years after Dr. Physick had performed his last operation.) Dr. Randolph and Commodore David Conner were left \$5,000 apiece, and many other relatives were named for smaller bequests.

To the coachman, John Finnegan, he left \$1,000 in trust for life (if he worked for other members of the family they were not to take this income into account but pay him the usual wage), and his colored boy John Black was to get \$100 to invest on his twenty-first birthday. His son Philip was to have the furniture and the stock of the Octoraro farm, the House of Refuge \$1,000, the Magdalen Society cash and stock valued at \$4,000, St. Peter's Church, where he had occupied pew No. 82, a \$500 bond, with a hundred dollar "piece of plate" for Dr. DeLancey. The two carriage horses, the mare, and "my faithful horse Charley" are to "be sent to one of my farms in Maryland."

The most interesting item in the will is the provision for Anna Maria Shields and Rhoda Poynter. The executors, Philip S. Physick, Jr., and Charles Chauncey, were directed to purchase a suitable house for \$2,500 in the city or suburbs. This was to be Anna Maria's for life and she was expected to provide a chamber in it for Rhoda. The executors were to set up a trust fund of \$3,500 for Anna and \$2,000 for Rhoda. Subsequent codicils increased the total to \$10,000, the ratio between the two trusts remaining the same. Besides giving them \$200 for moving and setting up housekeeping Philip was entrusted with a "Memorandum" probated as the eighth and last codicil as follows:

The following articles I wish my executors to deliver to Anna Maria Shields for her own use to wit:

Ten mahogany chairs, Tea table and sofa in the front parlour. A dining table in the Breakfast Room.

The painted chairs, eight or ten in number, the Rocking Chair, washstand with marble top, the Looking glass over the Mantel piece and Candle Stand in my Chamber.

One pair of Low and one pair of high Candlesticks both plated.

One Bureau and two of the Mahogany tables in my back chamber.

The bedstead and Mattress and Bedding in the small corner room usually occupied by Mr. Samuel Emlen when in the city.

The little Bedstead and Bed and Mattress in the dressing room.

The Carpet on [*sic*] the front and back bedrooms, one of my tenplate stoves, six kitchen chairs and such articles of kitchen furniture as she may reasonably want. One set of new tea china to be purchased for her not exceeding in price Twenty Dollars.

Six silver Table spoons, eight silver Tea spoons, all my blue dinner China, Kitchen Carpet, all my towels and napkins, one pair of brass Andirons, shovel and tongs, one dozen plain tumblers, one pair of decanters, and one dozen plain wine glasses.

And the following articles I wish my Executors to deliver to Rhoda Poynter for her own use to wit: the Bed she now sleeps on with Mattress and bedstead, the square looking glass, two table and four tea spoons of silver. One Bureau in Back parlour (fellow to that given to Anna Maria Shields), Tea China, with the Brittainia [*sic*] Metal Tea pots which I have in daily use.

It is interesting to note that in spite of the separation from his wife the doctor's brother-in-law should have been on such terms of intimacy with him that he had a room (the second floor northwest corner) of his own in the house and the gift of a coffee urn in the will.

The residue of the estate was to be then divided into four equal shares, the daughters getting chiefly real estate and the sons other property. Accordingly, after the doctor's death, the Octoraro house became the property of Susan Conner and her husband, from whom it descended to the doctor's great-great-great-granddaughter Elsa Noble. Philip, Jr., with his share of the inheritance, began to build a house at 1901 Walnut Street, a large white marble and stucco mansion known as "Physick's Folly." It had a circular hall and a marble portico, and proved too much for him to cope with. In 1846, two years before his death, he sold it to Algernon Sidney Roberts from whom it finally passed to Graham Roberts, who sold it in 1925 to the builders of the Rittenhouse Plaza which stands on its site.

As previously mentioned, Sally Physick married Dr. Jacob Randolph (1795-1848) son of Edward Fitz Randolph, who had had a distinguished career in the Revolution. Dr. Randolph was twenty-five and his wife twenty when they were married. At the urging of Dr. Physick, he gave up general practice in favor of surgery. Dr. George W. Norris described Randolph as "straightforward, courteous and considerate," and of a "gay and amiable disposition."<sup>28</sup>

The Randolphs moved into 321 South Fourth Street and immediately added a one-story wing along its north side. This provided room for a pantry and a scullery or summer kitchen, so that the old kitchen could be used as a servants' dining room. Whether what the doctor called the "breakfast room" was enlarged then or later is uncertain. It was a logical thing to do, for the old "front parlour," used at parties as a dining room, was the southwest room, as far as possible from the kitchen on the northeast corner. The breakfast room, which now became the dining room, was lengthened to the north by eight feet which made the front of the house unsymmetrical. To support the chimney, which now came above the center of the ceiling, a cast-iron box-beam was installed, but it was inadequate, the ceiling leaked and cracked and all this had to be removed when the restoration was made.

An agreeable description of a supper party at the Randolphs (at nine in the evening of January 2, 1840) is found in Sidney George Fisher's diary:

Very handsome and pleasant. Some of the most agreeable people in town there. Mrs. [Charles?] Willing, the two Mrs. Butlers [Mrs. John and Mrs. Pierce], Mrs. J.F.F. [his first cousin Joshua Francis Fisher's wife], Mrs. [George] Harrison, Fenimore Cooper [author of the *Leatherstocking Tales*], Sally Waln, etc. Had some talk with Mrs. Pierce Butler and Mrs. J.F.F. Took Sally Waln in to supper. Cooper was next to us, his manner is bad, stiff and ungracious but he converses well . . . [Charles] Kean, the actor was also there, vulgar I thought in manners and appearance . . . Home at 12, after a pleasant evening.<sup>29</sup>

Dr. and Mrs. Randolph had three children: Elizabeth Emlen Physick Randolph who married Louis Wister; Philip Syng Physick Randolph; and Samuel Emlen Randolph. In 1848 the popular

<sup>28</sup> George W. Norris, *Biographical Memoir of Jacob Randolph, M. D.* (Philadelphia, 1848), 12.

<sup>29</sup> Wainwright, 94.

doctor died suddenly after a brief and unspecified illness, leaving Sally a widow who, by the time of her death in 1873, was to survive all her children. It was probably she who moved the old mantels upstairs and replaced them with Victorian ones, and who modernized the plaster cornices and woodwork. About this time the room over the front door, called by Dr. Physick "the dressing room," was made into a bathroom. Other baths were built into the back halls when the back stair was removed.

Sally Randolph's youngest son Emlen married Anna Lewis and his son Philip Syng Physick Randolph, a child of seven, inherited the house on Sally's death. In 1888 Philip married Maie Fetherston and had six children.<sup>30</sup> The house must have been too much for him, for in 1895 he sold it to his cousin "Elsie" Keith, a great-granddaughter of Dr. Physick and the daughter of Philip's aunt Elizabeth Randolph Wister. In 1883 "Elsie" had married Charles Penrose Keith. Mr. and Mrs. Keith, who never had any children, died, respectively, in 1939 and in 1941 after spending the last years of their lives at their summer place in Germantown. It is said that she never addressed her husband as anything but "Mr. Keith" in public, but in private she called him "Daddles."

During their forty years in the house, the Keiths did much remodeling. Mrs. Keith had a phobia against dust and had practically all the baseboards removed, replacing them with glazed tiles, mostly white, so that the floors could be mopped. Upstairs all the backbands were removed from the trim so that there would be no mouldings to catch the dust. The mouldings were removed from all the door panels, and the panels covered with thin sheets of wood to make a flush surface. All the inside shutters were ripped out, and the paneled recesses between the window sills and the floor were plastered over and made flush with the surface of the walls. Since the windows were too high to wash easily, the frames were ripped out and their heads lowered by a foot or more. Stone lintels were introduced on

<sup>30</sup> The children were: Dorothy, married (1) John Fell, issue Philip S. P. Fell and Dorothy Fell, and (2) Ogden Mills; Philip S. P. Randolph, married Madeline Cochran, issue Philip S. P. Randolph; Hannah, married Robert Hudson, issue Robert Hudson, Jr.; Emilie, married Philip Stevenson, issue Emilie, Margaret, and Phyllis Stevenson; Samuel Emlen Randolph; L. Wister Randolph, married Mary Dobson Norris, issue Richard Norris Randolph and Dorothy Randolph.

the outside where the brickwork had to be lowered. The "fancy mahogany banisters," described in the Contributionship's survey of 1868, were banished as dust-catchers, and smooth oak banisters, rather like baseball bats, were installed.

Mrs. Keith became rather lame in the twenties and in her last years used a wheel chair. She built a tower on the south side of the house and installed an elevator to take her from the southwest room to her bedroom above. Outside the drawing room windows she built a brick terrace with a long narrow ramp of very shallow steps, and in the garden she had an oval concrete walk built so that she could be pushed round and round in her chair. She also had part of the garden wall demolished so that the neighbors could look in. The two cannons which stand in it were once planted in the Fourth Street curb at the corners of De Lancey and Cypress Streets, but no one knows where they came from. Perhaps Commodore Conner brought them back from Vera Cruz in 1848.

At the death of Mrs. Keith, the house was left to the Pennsylvania Hospital with the proviso that it not be demolished. During the war it was used as a hospitality center for service men, then as a dancing school. For several years George Fairfax Kearney, a former editor of the *Public Ledger* lived in it, and for a number of years it was empty. Now, through the generosity of the Walter H. Annenbergs and the good offices of the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks, it has become a worthy memorial to the "Father of American Surgery."

*Philadelphia, Pa.*

GEORGE B. ROBERTS