



FRANCIS WELD PEABODY

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Francis Weld Peabody was born at Cambridge, Massachusetts, November 24, 1881, and died at the same place, October 13, 1927. His ancestors were New England people of high character and distinguished ability. His father was formerly a professor at Harvard University and later Dean of the Harvard Divinity School. He received through inheritance a sound body and a good brain, and from his early environment, which was the best that this country offers, he undoubtedly acquired the "gentleness, and unshaken adherence to judgments deliberately formed; indifference to outward show and compliment, industry and assiduity," that were to distinguish him throughout his life.

He graduated from Harvard College in 1903, and the same year he entered the Harvard Medical School where he showed conspicuous ability. While still an undergraduate, he undertook with his teacher, Dr. J. H. Pratt, the solution of a bacteriological problem relating to typhoid fever, and this was published the month that he graduated, in the Journal of the American Medical Association. Thus he began the practice of investigation and publication, which he continued to the very end of his life. He received the degree of Doctor of Medicine in 1907, and the following year he served as interne in the Massachusetts General Hospital.

Thus far he had followed the beaten path. But now he departed from the course which at that time was almost universal in America. Instead of entering at once on the practice of his profession, he undertook his "Wander Jahre," a custom which, earlier at least, was frowned upon in America, but which in Europe has for centuries been held to offer the greatest rewards to the student in search of an education.

He spent two years in the Johns Hopkins Medical School at Baltimore, first as Assistant Resident Physician under Dr. Thayer, and later as Fellow in Pathology under Dr. Welch. In April of 1910, he went to Berlin and worked in the laboratory of Emil Fischer on organic chemistry. In the autumn, he returned to this country and

became Assistant Resident Physician in the Hospital of the Rockefeller Institute, then newly opened. He remained there for almost two years, leaving in the spring for another trip to Europe, where he visited a number of clinics in Germany, made a short stay in Russia, and worked for six weeks on a physiological problem in the laboratory of Professor Krogh in Copenhagen.

He now returned to Boston after an absence of over four years. He did not return, however, with the idea that his education had been completed, that his student days were over. The Peter Bent Brigham Hospital had just been erected on ground adjacent to the Harvard Medical School, and it was intended that this hospital should be organized as a medical clinic of the school. Dr. Peabody was offered the position of Resident Physician and accepted this proposal for the reason, as he said, that this new institution provided facilities and equipment and teachers that would permit him to continue his studies and investigations under favorable conditions, and also because it gave him an opportunity to aid in the development of a modern medical clinic in which teaching and research should be important functions. At that time new ideas concerning medical education were in the air, and he was one of the small group of young men in this country who recognized the need of developing a scientific atmosphere in the medical clinic if the medical schools were to perform their proper function, and if medicine in this country was to keep abreast of that existing in other parts of the world.

He continued in residence at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital for three years, working in the clinic, developing his ability as a teacher; busy in the wards, widening his experience with the maladies that afflict man, and increasing his sympathetic understanding of those who suffer; active in the laboratory, constantly carrying on investigations with methods of precision, and thus extending his knowledge of the nature of disease and increasing his power as a man of science. During all these years which had passed since graduation, he showed a remarkable spirit of restraint and patience by persisting in the course of training on which he had, years before, voluntarily and independently resolved.

But these years were not merely years of self development and selfish acquisition of knowledge. He had been of great benefit to all the

patients who came under his care, he had been helpful to the students with whom he had been in contact, he had been useful to his university to which he was devoted, and he had been of service to humanity through the contributions he had already made to medical knowledge. But in still other ways he was of service, for in 1914 he was given leave of absence to join a commission of the Rockefeller Foundation which went to China to give advice regarding the new school of medicine which it was proposed to create in Peking. As the medical member of this commission, he undoubtedly had much influence in shaping the future policy of the Peking Union Medical School, and he was later made a member of the China Medical Board of the Rockefeller Foundation.

In 1915 he gave up his residence at The Peter Bent Brigham Hospital but continued as Physician to that institution, and was appointed Associate Professor of Medicine in Harvard University. He now continued for five years to teach, to practice, and to investigate. During these years, however, there were many other professional activities. In 1917 he served as a member of the American Red Cross Commission to Roumania, and later to Russia. On the entry of the United States into the war, he became a member of the Army Medical Corps, and served in hospitals in this country, later going to France as Medical Consultant.

In 1921 he was appointed Professor of Medicine in Harvard University and, at the same time, became Director of the Thorndyke Memorial Laboratory. In Dr. Peabody's words, this laboratory "is a research department of the Boston City Hospital. Its establishment is due to the conviction of the Board of Trustees that the responsibility of the City Hospital is not limited to the treatment and care of individual patients, but includes also medical teaching, preventive medicine, and medical research." This attitude on the part of the authorities of this institution marked a decided departure from the traditional policy of American municipal hospitals, and was of much significance for future medical education in this country. It was very fitting that the Trustees should have turned to Dr. Peabody to undertake the direction of this new department. Brief mention can only be made here of the splendid manner in which he carried out the plans of its organization, arranging that its equipment should permit

the prosecution of fundamental studies concerning disease, and gathering together for its staff a group of well trained young men, eager for research. Here Dr. Peabody continued his teaching and investigation, at the same time stimulating and aiding his co-workers. Within a short time important contributions from the staff began to appear.

Dr. Peabody began his own career as an investigator of disease by undertaking studies concerning typhoid fever, the first of which has already been mentioned. During his residence at the Johns Hopkins Hospital, he began his studies of heart disease. Later, at the Rockefeller Institute, he undertook the investigation of problems relating to poliomyelitis and acute lobar pneumonia. At the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital, he began a long series of investigations concerning metabolism and the function of respiration. While Director of the Thorndyke Laboratory, he undertook the study of pernicious anemia. To all these subjects he made definite contributions. In all of his studies he was obviously interested in the application of the results to practice. For instance, he made studies concerning the function of respiration which have much scientific interest and significance, and he then indicated the application of his results; he showed the importance of a decrease in the vital capacity of the lungs as a factor in the production of dyspnea in heart disease, and demonstrated how the determination of the vital capacity could be made without difficulty in patients. He thus introduced into clinical medicine a new method that has proved to be of distinct value.

It is impossible in this place to attempt to evaluate his contributions to the science of medicine. That will undoubtedly be done elsewhere. It is one of the hardships suffered by workers in medicine that the domain is so vast, and that, if one is to investigate disease as a whole, he must be acquainted with many kinds of technique, for in no disease is there a disturbance of only one function, the entire mechanism of the body is always involved. The science of medicine demands that its votaries shall have some knowledge of all the sciences. That Dr. Peabody could apply himself in succession to various branches of internal medicine, employing different methods in each, and to each one of these subjects adding to knowledge, is the best evidence of his ability and mental capacity. During his years at work in the Thorndyke Laboratory, carrying on his duties as teacher, and, to a more

limited extent, as practitioner, he found time to respond to many demands that were made upon him to give aid and council in projects of importance to medicine. When the Journal of Clinical Investigation was founded in 1924, he was made a member of the Editorial Board. His interest in, and sympathy with, the young men of the medical clinics who were making original contributions to the science of medicine, made him keenly desire that a special organ should be established in which their reports might be published. He was an active and useful member of the Board, and helped in shaping its policies. He served on the Council of the Association of American Physicians, and was also an officer in this organization. In 1926 he was made a member of the Board of Scientific Directors of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research.

His ability and training, his upright character, his academic interests, his success as a teacher and investigator, made him sought after by a number of universities to undertake the reorganization of their departments of medicine along modern lines. He refused, however, to leave his own university, believing that here he could be of the greatest service.

At the age of forty-five, he was at the height of his usefulness. With an ideal training, full of energy and resourcefulness, all those who were interested in medicine and its future looked upon him as one of its most able representatives, and as one upon whom would fall many of the responsibilities associated with shaping the development of medical education and practice in this country during the next decades. When, therefore, in the summer of 1926 his friends heard that, although apparently in the best of health, he was stricken with a serious disease, from which there was little chance of his recovering, they were shocked and dismayed; shocked that they were soon to lose a beloved associate, dismayed that the profession of medicine was to lose one of its most able defenders and promoters. But no consternation or apprehension was evident in Dr. Peabody himself. With at least an outward calmness and tranquility, he faced the inevitable. He decided not to let the knowledge of his fate hinder him from continuing his work or prevent him from leading his accustomed life. Consideration for his family and friends undoubtedly influenced him in coming to this decision. Not with a sad and sorrowful countenance, but with

a bright and unflinching spirit he continued his daily tasks. For over a year he continued his work, a comfort to his patients, an inspiration to his students and associates, a champion of the science of medicine, and an instrument in promoting its progress.

He was not only interested in the development of the science of medicine, however; he understood that "the application of the principles of science to the diagnosis and treatment of disease is only one limited aspect of medical practice." Shortly before his death he wrote an essay on "The Care of the Patient," which not only is a beautiful example of simple, straightforward writing but is an exposition of his own attitude toward his fellow men. The essay closes with the effective lines, "One of the essential qualities of the physician is interest in humanity, for the secret of the care of the patient is in caring for the patient." And this is also one of the secrets of his own engaging personality. This Abou Ben Adhem was devoted to his friends, fond of his associates. He liked people. He had delightful social qualities, and concealed a seriousness of mind and a great earnestness of purpose under a delightful and winning humor. He was always—

"A square-set man and honest; and his eyes,
An out-door sign of all the warmth within,"

and even during his last days—

"Smiled with his lips—a smile beneath a cloud."

Through the death of Dr. Peabody, American medicine has lost one of its most able representatives, the American Society for Clinical Investigation has lost one of its most valuable members, and this JOURNAL has lost one of its most important contributors. But his life and death were precious things which all of us, and especially the young men entering the profession, cannot treasure too highly.