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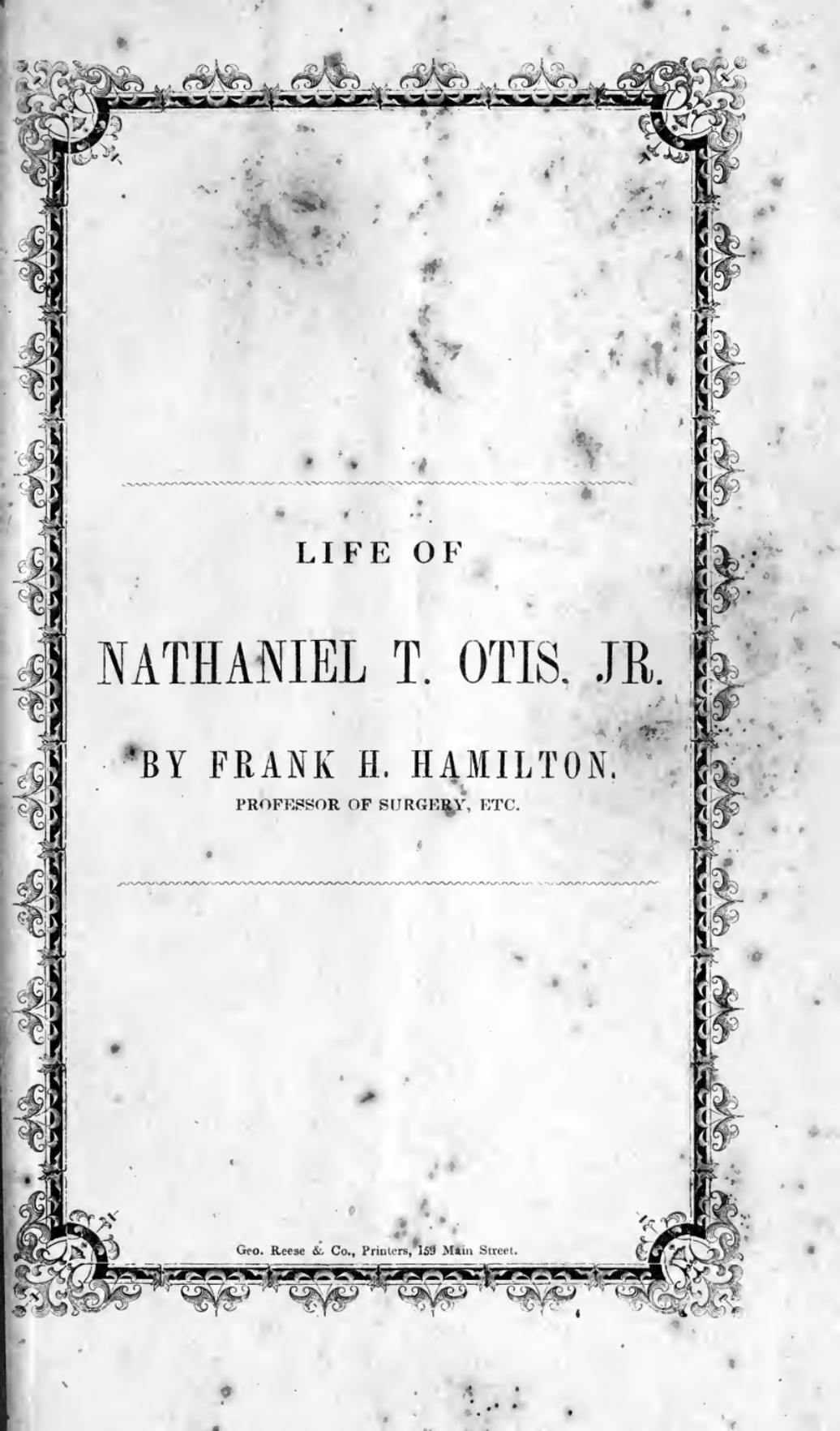
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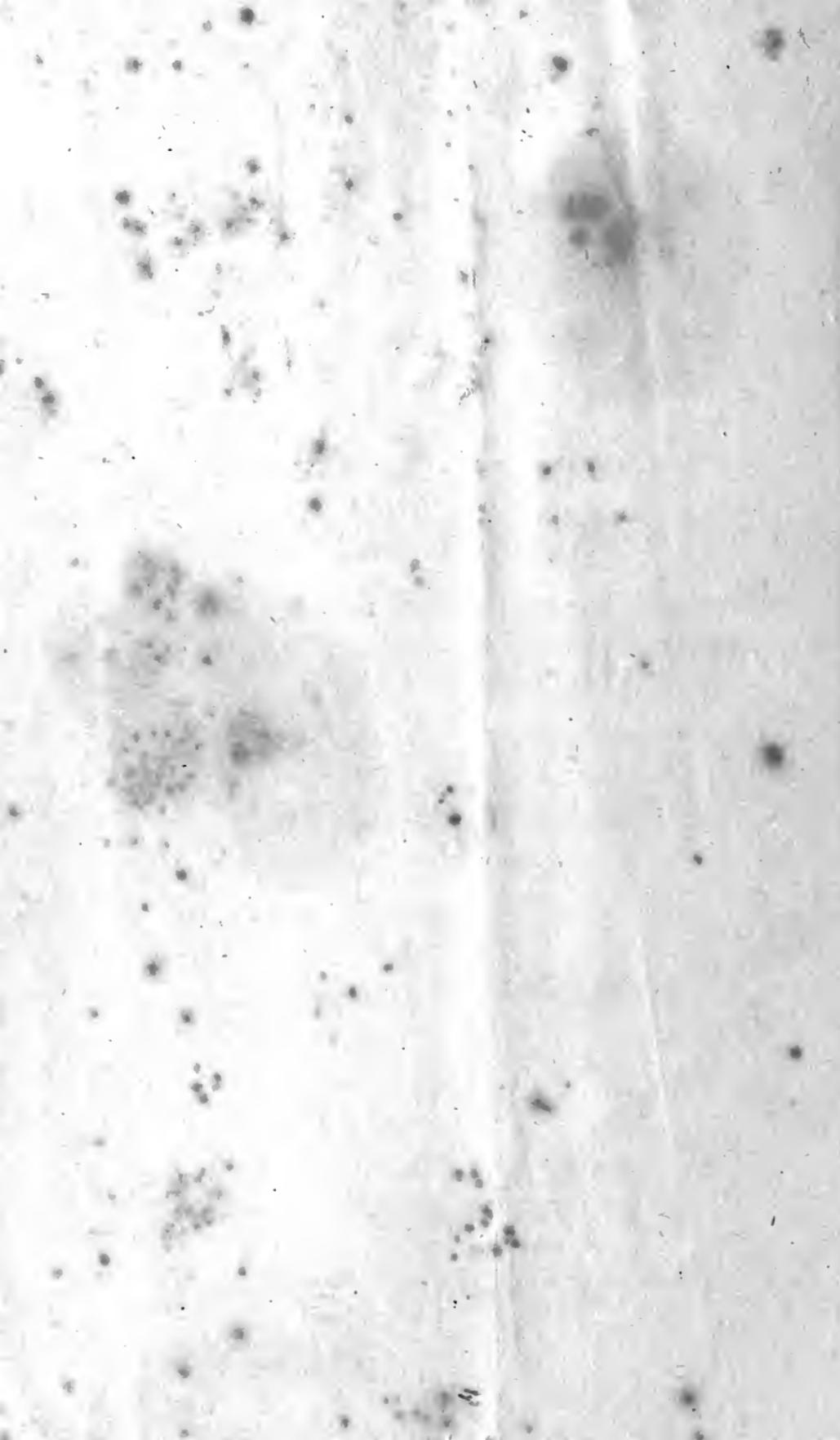




LIFE OF
NATHANIEL T. OTIS, JR.

BY FRANK H. HAMILTON,

PROFESSOR OF SURGERY, ETC.



LIFE OF
NATHANIEL T. OTIS, JR.

WHO DIED AUGUST 14, 1849:

AGED 19 YEARS.

BEING PART OF AN

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE MEDICAL CLASS OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF BUFFALO, AT THE OPENING
OF THE SESSION OF 1849—'50.

BY FRANK H. HAMILTON,

PROFESSOR OF SURGERY, ETC.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

BUFFALO:
GEO. REESE & CO., PRINTERS,

159 Main Street.

1850.

LIFE OF
NATHANIEL T. OTIS, JR.

GENTLEMEN,—Having thus briefly reviewed the history of our art, and noticed the lives of such men as have marked its several eras, I cannot forbear seizing what remains of the present occasion, to remind you of your fellow student, *Nathaniel T. Otis, Jr.*, who has died since the close of the session of 1848 and 9. And I am the more pleased to allude to him at this moment, because, although he did not live long enough to secure for himself a record among those who have illustrated and adorned our science, yet did he live sufficiently long to lay broad and deep the foundations of future greatness, and by demonstrating how much may be accomplished in a brief life, he may serve as a bright and useful example to you all.

Otis was born on the 22d of February, 1830, in the city of New York, and came with his parents to reside in this city in the fall of 1836. During his childhood,

he was distinguished especially for filial obedience and intellectual precocity. He was generally in advance of his mates, acquiring all the branches of elementary education with a facility, and applying himself with a zeal which generally secured for him the first rewards and the warmest attachment of his preceptors.

Even at this early age he discovered a special inclination to the natural sciences. When only ten years old he procured a human skull, and without any aid except what he obtained from pictures and books, he separated and re-adjusted its several bones.

During his academic course, while pursuing the classics and the higher branches of English education, he continued to distinguish himself. He ranked always with the best scholars, and if he had several rivals, it is probable he had not a peer in our schools.

Meanwhile, he did not cease to devote most of his leisure time to the prosecution of his studies in the natural sciences. He explored the fields and the forests, the streams and the lake, occasionally accompanied with his gun, or with his hook and line; appropriating his game, however, oftener to the enriching of his cabinet than to the gratification of his palate. A bone, a stone, a plant, a fish, a bird, an insect, all contributed alike to his entertainment; and he seldom returned without having impressed into service some one of these. He examined with equal delight the

wings of a butterfly, or the petals of a flower ; and he dissected with equal care the anatomy of man, a brute, or a bird. To observe more closely the habits of certain animals, he preserved them alive, feeding them himself, and watching them daily, and noting down their peculiarities. In short, there was no object in nature so humble or simple as to be beneath his notice, and no subject so obscure or complicated that he did not aim to comprehend it. Accordingly, we have found his chamber, which for the sake of privacy, had been appropriated to him in the attic, well filled with neatly arranged and labelled specimens of quadrupeds, birds, fishes, insects, minerals, plants, and flowers. Here, also, we found his galvanic battery, his files and chisels, his chemical apparatus, his retorts and crucibles ; for this room served him, as occasion might require, for the purposes of a museum, laboratory, workshop, and study.

The inclination of his genius was too manifest and decided to allow of hesitation in the choice of his profession ; and glowing with enthusiasm, and filled with anticipations of the future, he commenced, in the fall of 1847, the study of medicine.

His progress in this science was such as his friends had anticipated. In every department he was thorough and systematic. In his note book he carefully recorded every case of interest which came under his obser-

vation ; and for nothing was he more grateful to his preceptor than for an opportunity to examine a rare disease, even at the sacrifice of his meals or his sleep.

In the intervals of his regular study hours, he now devoted himself to the acquisition of the most polished modern languages—French, German, Spanish, and Italian ; and only occasionally, at the solicitation of his friends, did he recreate himself with his favorite instrument, the guitar. In the French and German he was already able to converse tolerably. And in the Italian and Spanish he had made respectable attainments. When he sought relaxation from his severer studies, in society, he usually preferred the company of intelligent foreigners, from whom he might derive geographical or political instruction, while at the same time he perfected himself in colloquial exercises.

If surprise is felt at the variety and complexity of his pursuits, and a doubt is suggested as to the ability of any youth to carry on successfully so many studies at the same time, (for none of these various labors were suspended even while attending five lectures per day,) we shall find an explanation and a solution of our doubts in his complete system and untiring industry. He arose often long before day-break, and through the day every hour had its duty pre-assigned. And this was done without ostentation. Even his in-

imate friends knew but little of what he was accomplishing. We are indebted to his parents and to the daily record of his acts in his private diary, for the knowledge of these facts. One incident will serve to corroborate our statements. Some months before his death he persuaded his mother to purchase for him the necessary books to study Spanish, but with the strictest injunction of secrecy. Not even his father or sister were to be made privy to the fact. He wished to surprise them suddenly by his attainments in the language. He immediately commenced his new labor, and although he had made several translations, the secret was never disclosed until the morning after his death. "Now," said his agonised mother, "I can tell the secret which he has charged me so long to keep." On one occasion, when walking alone with his mother, and conversing upon his plans for the future, he exclaimed, "Life is too short for me to accomplish all I wish to." With such sentiments, can we longer feel surprise at his having in so few years accomplished so much?

Soon after his return from a visit to his relatives in Boston, he went to the County Alms House, by request of the Physician, to supply the place of the house student, who was then sick. It was during the prevalence of the cholera, and many of the inmates were suffering from the prevailing epidemic. His du-

ties proved too severe, and on the third day he returned home very much fatigued and unwell.

On the 24th of June, being then quite recovered, he accepted the place of *interne* in the "Hospital of the Sisters of Charity," a place here, also, having been made vacant by the sickness of one of the house students. Of this event he thus speaks in his diary :

"Thursday, 24th, 10 o'clock, P. M.

Another eventful day has passed—a day of uncommon interest and pleasure, on account of the changes which have occurred. This morning I was appointed *interne* to the Hospital of the Sisters of Charity. The Sisters, I hope and believe, are well satisfied with my appointment; and my abilities, poor although they be, shall be devoted in efforts to please both them and the medical gentlemen whose instructions I shall follow. My situation here is only temporary. I supply the place of the absent *interne*, Mr. J. Root, to whom I must not forget to write. My situation here is both more pleasant and comfortable than it was in the Alms House, and my appointment has pleased me very much, much more than I wish any one to know, and I hope sincerely that I may be able to perform the incumbent duties well and faithfully."

But he was not permitted long to enjoy his happy fortune. He had scarcely been in the Hospital one week, when he again fell sick with symptoms of cho-

lera, and he was again, for the last time, taken home to his parents. The disease seemed at first to yield to the means which were employed, and on the fifth day he seemed to be convalescing. The next day, however, his symptoms became more grave, and it was soon apparent that he could not recover; and after having received from his clergyman the last services of the church, and having bid us all an affectionate farewell, he calmly resigned himself to death.

“As sinks the day star in his ocean bed,”

so sank from our sight his gentle spirit, early in the morning of the 14th of August, as if to remind us that he had died when the morning of his life was yet fresh and fragrant about him.

The resident students of this College paid their last tribute to his memory in a series of resolutions, which were published in the several city papers, and by accompanying in a body his remains to their resting place. A graceful monument, carved with appropriate inscriptions, will soon mark his tomb, but a more touching memorial of his virtues than this, you will find in the tears and inconsolable anguish of his parents, and in the common sorrow of his many friends.

I shall be pardoned, gentlemen, for detaining you some moments longer, to read a few detached paragraphs from his private diary. The events of the day

are generally detailed with great minuteness, and I shall only select a few portions, such as indicate his striking traits.

Monday, Feb. 26th. He, among other things, was wiring together the skeleton of a dog. "After tea, I worked on that skeleton until near the time for my French teacher to come. I have confounded hard work with the carpus. I am afraid that I shall have to dissect another before I shall be able to finish it. At 9 o'clock my teacher came, and I recited. *Bon soir a la monde.*"

Feb. 28th. "I worked on my skeleton after tea, and I am thankful to say it is nearly done."

Afternoon of March 3d. "Read French and the romance "Count Monte Christo." I have done very little, much to my shame. I will never have occasion to record the like again. I am firmly resolved to read no more such novels."

Sunday, March 4th. "Heard an excellent sermon from Rev. Mr. Schuyler; played two or three games of draughts at the house of a friend." At the close, he says, "I have done one thing to-day which I will never do again on Sunday, viz., play draughts."

March 5th. "I said several idle words to mother to-day, while I was reciting my French lesson; a thing which I will never do again, if I can only think in time."

March 6th. He resolved upon several amendments, and concludes, "May the divine aid be near at hand."

March 16th. He experiments upon a dog, which he had procured for that purpose. "I administered chloroform, and then severed the cerebro-spinal axis. This evening I dissected on the dog, played a little on the guitar, &c."

March 20th. Discovers a new muscle in the dog. "I have called it retrahens epiglottis. It arises by two fleshy slips from the body of the os hyoides, just beneath the origin of the two slips of the lingualis, and winding around there, it is inserted into the epiglottis at upper part of the inferior 1-3; use, evidently to draw the epiglottis backwards and from the glottis after the act of deglutition."

July 21. "This evening my honored and most beloved mother made me a present of the U. S. Dispensary; a book which I have long wished to possess."

In thus recording the elevated sentiments, and the professional enthusiasm, of one who was lately a pupil in this School, we feel a just and honorable pride. By the character of such young men alone is its future reputation to be built up and sustained. In the death of Otis, this College has suffered a loss. But to you, with those who have registered, and who may still continue to register upon our album, we look with confidence, as the men who are to become the strong

and polished pillars of our rising edifice. Your names and our names, are hereafter to be associated—your reputation and ours are to sink or soar wing-and-wing. Your weal and our own now become closely and indissolubly linked.

I solemnly conjure you, therefore, in the name of those absent friends who sustain you, and tremblingly watch your progress—of the public, of whose lives you are to become the guardians,—of this College, whose infant reputation you are to bear up—of yourselves, the artificers of whose fame and fortune you alone can be—in the name of humanity—of all on earth you value, or in heaven you cherish—in the name of all that can prompt a motive, or inspire an upward aspiration—I earnestly conjure you to great and noble achievements in this your chosen profession. Wherever you are—here or elsewhere—whether under our guidance, or the guidance of others—in whatever circumstances of time, or place, or condition—let your eye be constantly, steadily fixed on the star of your ambition. Oh that I had the language of a seraph, that with rapt inspiration I might kindle and light up in your souls a fire of enthusiasm which should never be quenched! Like that which conducted the youthful Otis to an early and enviable distinction. Like that which, through poverty, and sickness, and every obstruction, led the young Godman to im-

mortality. And like that which whilom glowed in the bosoms of many blessed martyrs in our profession, when alone and unawed they trod the scorched and deserted streets of the city of the plague, and from the very lips of death himself drew in the pestilential vapor.

I shall not be charged with partiality, when I assert for you the pre-eminent claims of this profession. Its eulogium is written in the character and genius of the men by whose lives and works it has been illustrated, and in the universal sentiment of favour by which it is recognized by the public.

It is appointed unto all men once to die; and this final catastrophe and winding up of the drama, is as certain as that the grass shall perish, or the green herb become dry. And yet see how tenaciously man clings to the brief threescore years and ten in mercy allotted to him. It is hard to feel the pangs of disease—but it is harder still to witness the agony of the flesh of those we love. It is hard to die; but it is harder still to bury forever from our sight those with whom we have long lived and sympathized, who have clung to us, and grown about us, until they have become grafted into our very selves. When these parasitic tendrils are torn from us, there is a pang greater than the pang of death—it is the bursting asunder of the thongs of the heart.

To us, gentlemen, oh how fervently, the mother prays to save her child; it is a plant whose loss no garden of choicest exotics, can ever supply. To us the orphan child looks up to save its only parent; it is a tree whose fall no forest of ancient lindens can ever replace. Toward us gleams out the last lingering ray of hope from the pallet of straw; and upon our skill silently wait, in hushed expectation, the chambers of luxury, to be hung in empurpled mourning, or to wake with the song of festivity.

Be thus reminded, that in declaring your intention to pursue the study and practice of our art, you have become the champions of your race against disease, and pain, and death. Go then, and, while you often recall the burning zeal of your beloved companion whose loss we deplore to-day, and to whom three score years and ten seemed too brief a time to accomplish all he saw before him, prepare, also, to do with honor the perilous, but noble work, which you have assigned yourselves.

RESOLUTIONS,

Adopted at a meeting of the resident Students of the Medical Class,
August 16, 1849.

At a meeting of the resident students of the Medical College of the University of Buffalo, assembled August 16th, 1849, A. B. Root was called to the Chair, and A. J. MEYER was appointed Secretary.

On motion, it was

Resolved, That a committee of three be appointed, to prepare resolutions expressive of our sentiments upon the decease of NATHANIEL T. OTIS, JR.

Whereupon, James S. Hawley, H. B. Vandeventer, and Albert J. Meyer, were appointed such committee. Adjourned.

At a meeting held, pursuant to adjournment, August 17th, 1849, the following resolutions were reported and unanimously adopted:

Resolved, That we deeply regret the untimely death of our late fellow student, NATHANIEL T. OTIS, JR., by which he has been taken from the study of a profession, which he pursued with ardor, and promised to adorn.

Resolved, That in his death, we have suffered the loss of a companion whose moral, intellectual and social character, has ever commanded our respect and admiration.

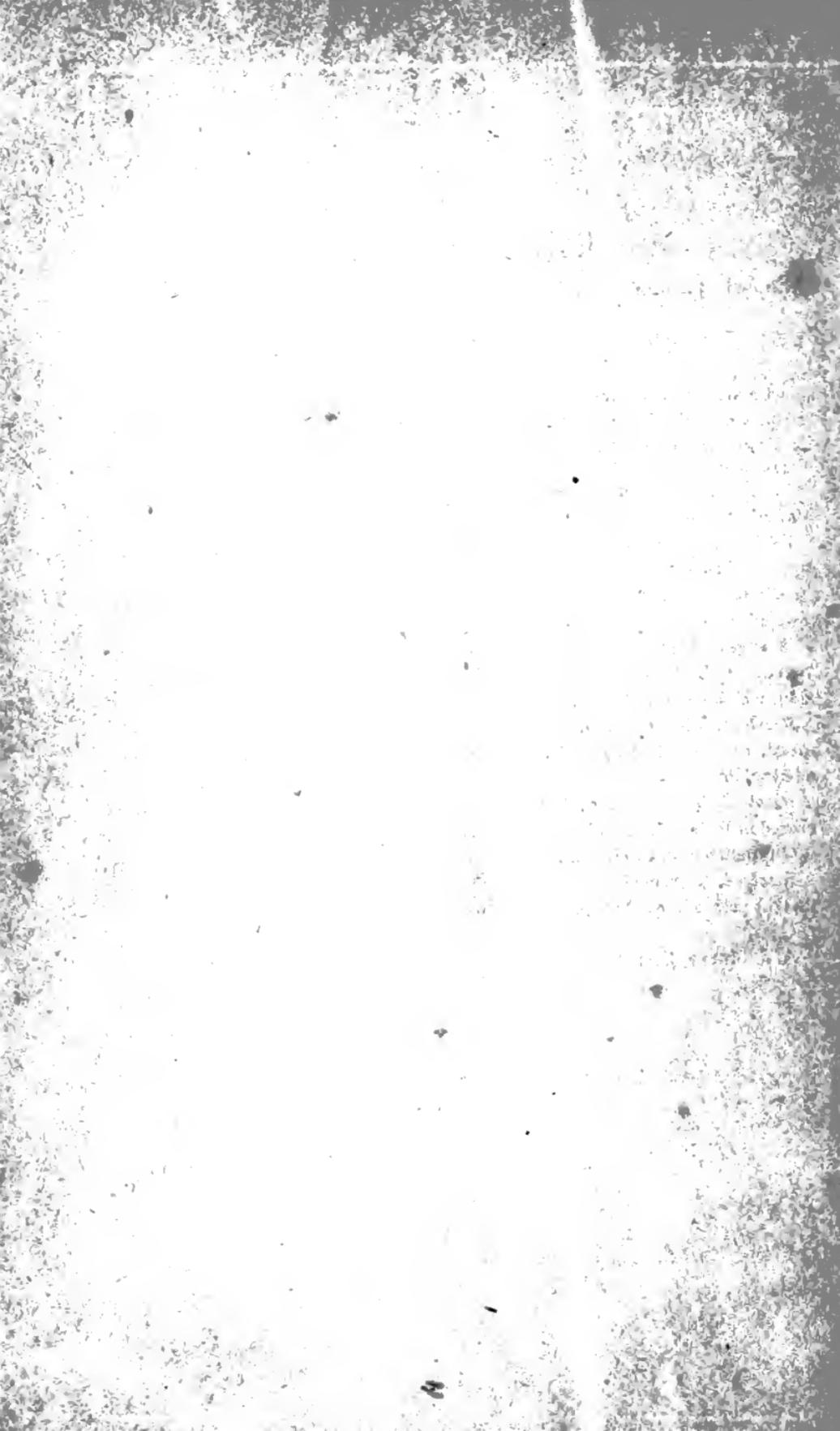
Resolved, That we sincerely sympathize with the parents and friends of the deceased in their sudden and painful bereavement.

On motion of J. S. HAWLEY, it was

Resolved, That the Secretary transmit a copy of the above to the parents, and that the proceedings of these meetings be published in the city papers.

HUGH B. VANDEVENTER, Ch'n.

A. J. MEYER, Secretary.





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