

COMPELLING COMMENTS

Diaries of James Clarke White

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James Clarke White, born in 1833 of Scotch-Irish descent, was a true pioneer for the specialty of dermatology. Growing up in Maine, his innate sense of curiosity drove him to pursue many scholastic endeavors. His early thirst for knowledge was genuine and without intention; he studied for the knowledge itself. He learned botany and ornithology, and often shot and stuffed birds for the Harvard Natural History Society as an undergraduate.¹ In his senior year of college, he chose medicine, writing in his diary: "There came to me this afternoon in church the sudden conviction that I would choose medicine as my life work."²

White earned his M.D. from Harvard Medical School. In 1855, he served as medical house pupil at Massachusetts General Hospital, and later traveled to Vienna to continue his medical studies.² In Vienna, White became interested in skin pathology. There, he focused on dermatology without any plan of making it his sole focus. Much of his passion for dermatology can be attributed to Ferdinand Von Hebra, chief of the German school of dermatology, who captivated White with his teaching methods and detailed clinical illustrations.²

Upon return to Massachusetts, White worked as a professor and developed the resolution to specialize specifically in dermatology, a rare decision in the medical landscape at that

time. He was appointed as the first chair of dermatology at Harvard, a position specifically designed for him. White went on to become a founding member and first president of the American Dermatological Association.¹ Additionally, White contributed to medical literature by publishing his own book entitled *Dermatitis Venenata*.² In 1914, White privately published *Sketches of My Life*, a diary of personal reflections from his times at Harvard.¹ Dr. White was a figurehead of dermatology and served a critical role in its development as a unique medical specialty.



Figure 1. Photograph of James Clarke White.

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