

GIBSON, W. M. B., M.D. The subject of this biographical sketch scarcely requires any mention of ancestral connections, for he stood out alone, an isolated being, from any other Gibson alive or dead—an unique and eccentric character. As far as consanguineous inheritance goes, his sum of qualities—which distinguish one person from another—might as well have been of spontaneous growth. Yet to follow the conventional paths of biographical writers, some trace of his ancestry should be given.

His great-grandfather, on the paternal side, was one Hugh Gibson, who lived in Franklin county, Pennsylvania, previous to the Revolutionary War, and whose two sons, John and Levi, pioneers of Indiana county, were captured by the Indians and delivered into the hands of the British. Their release came only with the termination of the struggle, and thereat John Gibson resumed his residence in the county last mentioned. Will-

iam Gibson, the son of John, located in Clarion county (then Armstrong) in 1803, the year in which Louisiana was purchased of France. James, the son of William, was the father of the person of whom we write.

The great-grandfather on the maternal side was of Hibernian stock, who bore the characteristic appellation of McFadden, while his spouse was of German extraction, whose name was Jack. Owen Meredith, the grandfather, was a native of Chester county, from whence he emigrated to Centre, and thence to Clarion. The Merediths were of English and Welsh lineage.

William Meredith Bruce Gibson was born on the 10th day of January, 1843, five miles from Clarion town, in Monroe township. The exact spot of his nativity was half way between two iron furnaces, three-fourths of a mile on either side; and in this fact there is an illustration of the "eternal fitness of things," inasmuch as our Gibson was "between two fires" all his days. And this fiery circumstance wielded another influence, and a more potent one, over the life which was then in the matrix that shaped the years of manhood. A continuous warfare was rife between the youths of the furnaces, in which the boys of the country adjacent took sides; and, too, the forces of the furnaces often coalesced and did battle against their heterogeneous enemy, the rural striplings. Many a trouncing, in these sanguinary affrays, did our hero both give and receive; and as his young ideas were here first taught to shoot at educational targets, so were the seeds of pugnacity sown, which grew into a bountiful crop, especially in hostilities of an intellectual character. When Right and Justice were on his side, he was as aggressive as the flux of the invincible ocean, and as immovable as the eternal hills.

At the age of fourteen the precocious lad entered upon the career of school teaching, alternating his time between that avocation and attending the Dayton Union Academy, of Armstrong county. Between his fourteenth and nineteenth years he taught nine terms, and in his fifteenth the study of medicine was commenced. At the age of seventeen he was accorded, by an unanimous voice of the County Institute of Armstrong, over which Superintendent Calhoun presided, a professional certificate; and with this credential of educational efficiency, he went forth into other States to disseminate knowledge. In 1860 he was the principal of the academy of Bullitt county, Kentucky, a few miles south of Louisville; but in consequence of an attack of ague he returned to Pennsylvania, and taught a couple of terms of school at Goheenville, in Armstrong county, and in the winter succeeding presided over the graded school of East Brady.

In the years of 1862 and 1863 a course of medical lectures were taken at Ann Arbor, which famous institution was his professional *alma mater*; but the most profound, penetrating, and practical information was gleaned from Dr. James Stewart, at Greenville, Clarion county, whose mind was both analytical and synthetical, and whose erudition encompassed about all the learning and experience of medicine in his day.

Dr. Gibson first became a practitioner in Troy, Jefferson county, where he was associated with Dr. R. B. Brown; but in 1864 he entered upon the duties of his profession in an independent career by locating at Reynoldsville, a villiage at that time of the most unpretentious character. His impressive personality challenged the attention of the community, and his successes as a healer were the confirming truths of the book of which his physiognomy and conversation were the title page. And not only as a doctor did he achieve popularity in these initial years of a long, permanent residence, but his social qualities gained for him a status that was liken unto a star around which the

satellites of society revolved; and this position gave him a force in directing and shaping the minds of his associates, and of the youths whose ambition was yet in an embryonic state, that redounded to the greatest good. This is a fact which the writer appreciates, inasmuch as he, himself, was one of those youths.

On Independence Day, 1867, Dr. Gibson enacted that beautiful drama of the heart, Love and Marriage, the woman of his choice—the object of his perpetual friendship—the faithful helpmate and companion of twenty years, having been Miss Anna, daughter of Joseph McCreight.

In his professional career he acted as one of the surgeons of the Low Grade Railroad, a position given him when the surgeons were first appointed, and in which his thorough competency gained for him the utmost confidence of the management. In the years of 1875 and 1876 Dr. M. A. Masson was associated with him in the practice of medicine. Masson was a man of brilliant ideas, and a thorough and bold practitioner. He was a brother-in-law of the famous Dr. R. O. Cowling, late of Louisville, Kentucky. Both of these talented men have been called hence.

Dr. Gibson belonged to the allopathic school of medicine, and he kept abreast of progress in medicinal discovery. With a keen perception of causes as he saw effects, and with his great knowledge of curatives, backed by the best of reasoning faculties, he rarely erred in prognosis, although his diagnosis was always encouraging to the patient and friends, even if, in his latent breast, he knew there was no hope. For this peculiarity he has often been censured, but, believing in the potency of *will power*—of the superiority and influence of mind over matter—he held on by even this frail thread until the last breath of the patient was gone, and this tenacity was a part of the character of the man. Wherever he took a hold, he maintained until One greater than he wrested the object from his grasp.

Dr. Gibson's distinguished mental superiority did not qualify him for any one special pursuit, but rather for many. His power of invention, as shown in his literary work—the formation of nice and new combinations of ideas, and imagery—stamped him as a genius of a very high order. This is particularly true of his poetic efforts, many of which are lofty in thought, and beautiful and strange, and always unique, in phraseology. In romance his invention was marvelous, and one of his novels, published under a *nom de plume*, attained a world-wide popularity, and in true worth almost approached the classic, for although the work appeared almost a quarter of a century ago, it is yet read on both sides of the Atlantic. Had he devoted his time to literature, there can be no doubt but that his name would to-day be emblazoned in *ardentia verba* wherever the shrine of letters stands; but with his death ended all the grand possibilities his mind was capable of.

His physiological make-up was a most happy one, nicely balancing the various functions and sensibilities. His Teutonic blood gave him solidity and logic; his Scotch and Welsh, sternness and tenacity; the Irish, affability and loquacity; and these were well blended and tempered, the effect of which was an almost perfect man. If there was a preponderance of any one part, it was a tender sensibility for all who suffered; and this was of a degree that often impoverished his own worldly welfare. Yet, laboring between the fires of ambition on one side, and mendicancy on the other, he yet accumulated a comfortable living, and his conscience was not goaded by the remembrance of dishonest acts.

His tenacity of purpose was of a degree that would seem to make the stronger term

*stubbornness* a more fitting definition of that trait of his character—especially when his convictions were fixed upon the solid foundation of truth, as understood by a mind whose logic was clear and far-reaching. This peculiarity was manifested early in life, at the age of seventeen, when principal of the academy before spoken of. Young Gibson was sojourning in the town, and his social disposition soon found him many friends, and his educational bent, intellectual ones. The school was without a head, and its directors discovered in our hero both the mental and physical qualifications requisite to the man who could successfully preside over an institution whose patrons were as refractory in manners as they were advanced in learning. If they carried a cyclopedia in their heads they also carried a dagger in their belts, and former principals had invariably proven inadequate to the maintenance of such discipline as a respectable educational establishment should possess. Young Gibson had not known of the contumacious character of the school until after his acceptance of the position; but, nothing daunted, he immediately purchased a stiletto of much longer blade than those he had seen in the community, and, retiring to the academy, made himself as proficient as a boomerang thrower in hurling the knife at a pillar. When the students assembled on the opening day, the spirit of anarchy was rampant, and as an initial intimation of the iron rule with which this new absolute monarch was going to control his subjects, he took a position from which he was accustomed to throw the stiletto, and, with a herculean effort, plunged the glistening blade deep into the pillar, where it momentarily whizzed and quivered. The effect was magical, and each perverse being saw in his tutor a “foeman worthy of his steel,” and the steel was ever after kept within its scabbard. Not alone, however, by this acrobatic feat did the new principal subdue the unruly element of his school, for by a little oratorical diplomacy, in which he showed the pleasure and advantage of a cognate feeling in teacher and pupil for the genius and welfare of the institution, he won to him the hearts of every fiery breast. This adventure reads more like the product of a romancer’s brain than that of an honest biographer’s, and for boldness and impudence is only equaled by Cæsar’s experience with the pirates near the island of Pharmacusa.

As to the religious convictions of Dr. Gibson, we may quote what he, himself, said of his life-long friend, Thomas Reynolds, sr. The sentiment seems as much a confession of his own, as an observation on another. Here it is:

“But the most conspicuous traits of his nature were a sense of honor, incapable of a stain—a probity which was stubborn in its inflexibility—and an abiding, deeply rooted, uncompromising detestation, even *horror*, of all shams and hypocrisy, whether religious, political, or of any other kind. It is easily seen how such a man, in this day and generation, however deep a reverence he might have for the Author of his being as the great and good God—the Father, Preserver, and Protector of all the common brotherhood of man—would rather retire those sentiments and feelings, and keep them sacred within the innermost recesses of his soul, than to make a parade of them before the world.”

Friendship with Dr. Gibson was not a plant of hasty growth, but, set in the soil of his esteem, and nourished by kind and intellectual intercourse, it attained a perfection not often seen in social life. He had resources within himself so that he could have lived alone, but those very resources made him eminently companionable and appreciative. Out of such material, the most pleasing and lasting friendships are wrought. In

conversation he spoke well, easily, justly and seasonably; humor was more than wit, and easiness than knowledge.

On the 20th day of August, 1887, this great soul took its flight—the familiar form of Dr. Gibson, the magnanimous, was wrapped in the vestments of eternity.

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