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In Memoriam: Archelaus G. Field

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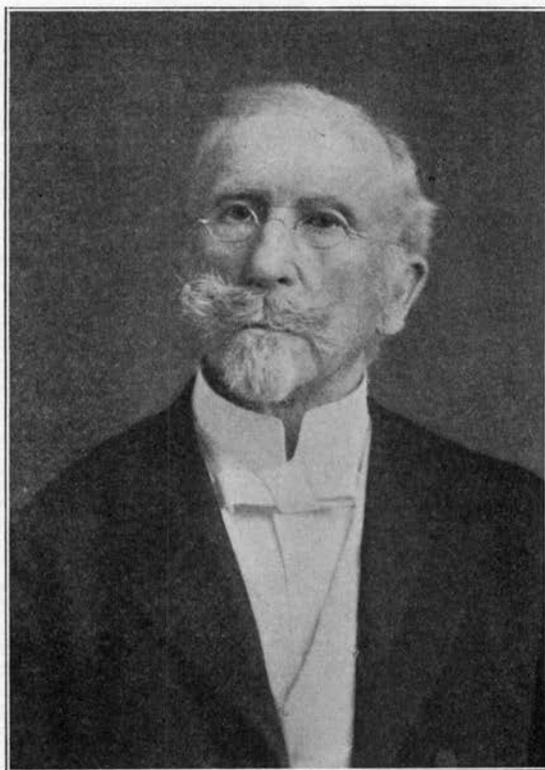
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DR. ARCHELAUS G. FIELD

IN MEMORIAM

DR. ARCHELAUS G. FIELD

Soon after coming to this state in the spring of 1889 it was the pleasure of one of us (L.H.P.) to have met Dr. Field in connection with an investigation made during that summer concerning the dying of fish in the Iowa river at Marshalltown owing to the pollution of the stream with the refuse of the glucose factory and the growing of *Beggiatoa alba*.

Since that time we met Dr. Field on several different occasions. He always appeared to be interested in scientific things. It was an inspiration to him to discuss modern science and especially that part of the science that related itself to the subject of medicine. This personal instance is mentioned merely to show the diversified interest of Dr. Field.

Evidently Dr. Field had been a careful reader of many topics outside of his profession. In looking over the very fine biographical sketch written by Dr. D. S. Fairchild of Clinton¹ one is impressed with the manifold interests and great achievements of the man, his influence in the community and his work in connection with medical science — a progressive in every sense of the word. He was a man who had wide experience as a medical practitioner, who had received a wide medical education and used his best knowledge for the best interests of the medical profession and the community.

It is quite appropriate, therefore, that the Iowa Academy of Science should prepare a brief sketch of his life, since he was a charter member of the first Iowa Academy of Science which held its first annual meeting in his office on January 25, 1876. He attended the early meetings of the Academy regularly and was active in its deliberations and certainly lent his aid in furthering scientific work in the state of Iowa. He was never affiliated with the present Iowa Academy, which is a lineal descendant of the old Iowa Academy. However, this should not deter us from appropriately recognizing his influence in the work of the Academy.

¹ Journal of Iowa State Medical Society, Volume 12, 103.

Dr. Archelaus Field was born at Gorham, Ontario County, New York, on November 15, 1829, and died in Des Moines on May 31, 1924. His father, Abel Wakeler Field, was a physician. The mother was Zilpha Witter. At an early age, in 1839, the Fields moved from Ontario County, New York, to Madison County, Ohio. Dr. Field attended the Academy at West Jefferson, London and Worthington, boarding himself, and started to teach at the age of 15 when he secured a certificate for teaching the English branches, and in October, 1849, the certificate received at Chillicothe, Ohio, stated that in addition to the common branches he was prepared to teach algebra, natural philosophy, chemistry, and astronomy. In the year 1850, with some other emigrants, he moved to Appanoose County, Iowa, being domiciled at Centerville where he started the practice of medicine. In 1851 he was appointed deputy sheriff of Appanoose County. He made a pilgrimage to Wayne County to what is now Corydon, and then to Fairfield. He returned to Centerville where he entered a partnership with Dr. N. Udell.

About this time, August, 1851, his father died, so Dr. Field returned to Ohio the following spring and took up the practice of medicine. Since he thought he did not have education enough, in 1853 he entered the office of Prof. John Dawson of Columbus, Ohio, who was his preceptor, graduated from the Starling Medical College, Columbus, in 1854, and received the degree of M. D. After graduation he again taught school in Franklin County, Ohio. In the spring of 1854 he located in Hillsboro, Highland County, Ohio, and in June, 1856, formed a partnership with Dr. Buchanan of Faircastle, Brown County. In the autumn of 1856 he went to Cincinnati and from Cincinnati took a boat to Eastport, Miss. The town of Eastport was about two miles from the steamboat landing. He intended to locate at Gacinto, about thirty miles from Eastport. At Eastport landing he introduced himself to a druggist and in this way was able to do a little practice and receive a small fee of five dollars.

He established himself at Gacinto where he succeeded admirably in his practice. His practice increased beyond all expectations but owing to the differences between the north and south on the negro question Dr. Field felt it best to return north and in 1859 returned to Corydon where he soon established a good practice and was also elected President of the Wayne County Agricultural Society and in this way became a member of the Iowa State Board of Agriculture which met in Des Moines in 1861.

He was very well pleased with Des Moines and therefore decided to make this his future home. He moved to the city in July, 1863, and soon left for the east to take further professional work. He wanted to take advantage of the work given in the Bellevue faculty by Dr. Austin Flint, James R. Wood, and Frank Hamilton, who were well known medical men of their times, as was Valentine Mott in the University of New York. He took advantage of the work of Alonzo Clark, Thomas H. Marcoe and Willard Parker who were connected with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University. To make the best use of his opportunity the doctor matriculated in all three of these medical colleges. He was graduated from Columbia University in 1864. It may be stated in passing that he was also a student in the Bronson School of Elocution.

He returned to Des Moines in May, 1864, and opened up an office at the Savery Hotel, now the Kirkwood. He soon changed his location. He identified himself with the Presbyterian church and later joined the Congregational church. This is interestingly told by Dr. Fairchild. He became city physician in 1865 and in 1866 physician for Polk County. In 1866 he was appointed U. S. Examining Surgeon for pensioners and served for eight years, and was then appointed upon the Board of Review in the Pension Department in Washington, where he lived in 1882. In 1877 he was married to Hattie Weatherby of Cordington, Ohio. Soon afterwards he moved to Keokuk where he became connected with the Keokuk College of Physicians and Surgeons. Here he held the chair of Physiology and Pathology. He was secretary of the Iowa State Medical Society in 1869-71 and was elected president in 1872. He was a delegate of the Iowa State Medical Society to the International Medical Congress in Philadelphia, was mayor of North Des Moines, coroner of Polk County in 1868, and his interest in the scientific work is shown from the fact that he was a member of the American Society of Microscopists, American Association for the Advancement of Science, a charter member of the Iowa Academy of Science and member of the American Medical Association. Dr. Fairchild states also that he was a member of the Iowa State Bar Association, having taken a course in the law department of Simpson Centenary College, receiving his degree of LL.B. in 1879. His interest in scientific work is shown by a paper that he read at the Columbus meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, on the subject "Bright Light in School Rooms a Cause for Myopia." He recom-

mended that certain improvements be made in the lighting of public school buildings.

He began experiments in photo-micrography in 1883 and photographed many microscopic objects of natural history. In 1884 he was instrumental in organizing the Des Moines School of Technology.

After removing his home and family to Des Moines, he at length, by good business management and shrewd real estate investments when land values were rapidly increasing in an energetic little capital city, he at length acquired a competency. With the latter his laboratories, library, apparatus, and facilities for conducting scientific research grew apace. For the last thirty years of his life he was virtually retired from the practice of medicine.

Although Doctor Field was a practicing physician of large clientele he appeared to find abundant of time for his scientific pursuits, which often took the bent seemingly of pure delight at being able to extend his knowledge in little known or entirely unknown directions. Seldom putting his observations on paper in finished form he was nevertheless widely known for his accomplishments in histology and microscopical technique, and he devised adaptations of the camera to the microscope. He was indeed an expert along microphotographic lines when others were just beginning to realize the extent to which such performances could be carried. His microscope and its accessories were long the best and most complete in the state and perhaps in the country.

Doctor Field gained publicity chiefly through demonstration; but those who were fortunate enough to attend his lectures, carried on the torch there lighted and got the accounts into print, thereby aiding in spreading widely the Fieldian methods. His records of successful medical treatments were more methodical and his descriptions of them readily found their way into the medical journals, to be widely adopted by the profession. Doctor Field's principal writings therefore were confined mainly to the realm of medicine.

Field was a man of many parts. He was a naturalist of the old school, intensely interested in all nature about him, her moods and her mysteries. The plants, the beasts, the fowls and the fish, the rocks and the minerals all came in for due attention. Those who were privileged to know him as a friend not only respected and admired the compass of his learning and his virile personality but felt for him an affectionate regard.

His mind was ever active and it remained clear to his very

last hour. Up to the day of his death he took lively interest in all the affairs of the moment. During the last few years of his busy life, after he had attained the age of ninety years, he devoted much of his time to the study of geology, not only in the books, but in the field.

Doctor Field had a keen sense of humor and great personal charm, which endeared him to a host of friends. He was one of the most kindly, modest and upright of men, courteous with that courtesy which we now call old fashioned. Although busiest of men he was always at the disposal of his friends. To visit him on an evening in his own spacious home, in his marvel of a "den," when he was settling down to the work that he loved so well and lived so long for, was a lesson in largeness of heart and a stimulus to research that did not speedily pass away. With his strong character he was bound to be a leader in any society of which he was a member. With his recent passing from amongst us it seems as if the last link with the Heroic Age of science were severed.

He was a public spirited citizen, was interested in the improvements of the city. In the additions that were laid out by him he tried to preserve the fine trees and Dr. Fairchild, from whom we have taken some of the facts, concludes his biographical sketch as follows:

"Retrospectively, Dr. Field can say that if he could live his life over again the chances are that on the whole he would not be likely to do better. While he is conscious of having prolonged some useful lives, he is conscious also of many shortcomings, in which he did not do his best, and in which he might have been more kind and considerate to his friends and to those near and dear to him; and he is not unmindful of the scores of noble and faithful horses that in seventy years of active life have been helpers and in hundreds of instances his only companions."

CHARLES KEYES AND L. H. PAMMEL