The Wright Story

Part Four

'Harlem Hospital'

By Dr. Montague A. Cobb

In Journal of the National Medical Association

Dr. Wright rendered three decades of service in Harlem Hospital. The first two, 1919-1939, prior to his three-year illness from pulmonary tuberculosis, were hectic and tempestuous.

The last, 1942-1952, was, by comparison, calm, and marked by productive research at an ever increasing tempo.

During this last period, Dr. Wright worked under stringent physical limitations. The climbing of any considerable flight of stairs was taboo.

His operative work was limited because the anaesthetic vapor was harmful. He was not permitted to fly.

Daily rest periods had to be observed. An army cot in his office was his bed for these last 10 years.

Yet his intellectual energy seemed limitless. With his major battles behind him, the field was at last a little bit cleared for work that was wholly creative and he worked to produce the maximum in such time as might be left.

But perhaps a word about the Harlem battles might be illuminating.

Dr. Wright opened offices in New York in April, 1919 at 2311 Seventh ave. His first official position was as an assistant physician in the Health Department veneral disease clinic at Pleasant ave. and 118th st. at $40 a month.

He next applied for a position at Harlem Hospital, which was short-handed. The superintendent gave him an appointment in the lowest grade, clinical assistant visiting surgeon, and was promptly transferred for so doing.

Through the intervention of Dr. Wright's politically influential friend, Commissioner Ferdinand Q. Morton, Mayor Hylan ordered an investigation of the city's hospital system, particularly as it related to Harlem Hospital.

The first result was agreement by the Medical Board of Harlem Hospital and the Mayor to reorganize the hospital

TESTIMONIAL DINNER — Dr. Robert H. Kennedy, Mrs. Corinne Wright and Dr. Wright at a dinner in his honor at the Hotel Statler, April 30, 1952.

and to admit colored physicians as adjuncts in the respective specialties and accept colored internes who passed the entrance examination.

First named were Dr. Wright and Dr. Douglass B. Johnson as adjunct visiting surgeons, and Dr. Lucien M. Brown and Dr. J. T. W. Granady as adjunct visiting physicians.

The eventual result was a reorganization of the city hospital system, carried out in 1929 under Mayor James Walker.

The city hospitals, instead of being under separate boards of trustees, with the board of Bellevue and Allied Hospitals as the largest and policy determining body, were all placed under a new Department of Hospitals, with each having its own medical board.

Colored physicians now had their foot in the door of Harlem Hospital, with Dr. Wright spearheading the advance.

Further progress was marked by many clashes, but the most important development germane to our story was the close relationship which developed between Dr. Wright and Dr. John F. Connors, director of the Hospital's Department of Surgery and president of its Medical Board.

Their coming-together was turbulent. Again we have the story first hand. Dr. Wright's version follows:

At the end of the year there came up a question in the Medical Board of a promotion of a colored man who had rendered good service in the field of gynecology, Dr. Peter Marshall Murray.

The whites had a candidate that they wanted. Dr. Murray was admittedly competent.

The Medical Board did not give the job to Dr. Murray but they gave it to a less competent white doctor.

Dr. Wylie Wilson, who was president of the Medical Society, and Dr. Murray, came to me and the Medical Society sent telegrams to George Givany who was leader of Tammany Hall, to the Mayor of the City of New York and to all the members of the Board of Bellevue and Allied Hospitals and to the directors of the staff of Harlem Hospital.

These telegrams were timed so that they would arrive at 2 o'clock in the morning and get all the respective gentlemen out of bed.

When I arrived at the hospital the next morning Dr. John F. Connors, the director of surgery, said, "Look at this. I was awakened at two in the morning. What about it?"

I said, "Well, it seems that the Medical Board of Harlem Hospital went back on a gentlemen's agreement and when people are not gentlemen, that's bad.

"Men were to be promoted according to merit and a gentlemen's agreement has been violated. Therefore, the Medical Board is not to be respected."

He said, "Do you think I am going to take orders from the colored doctors up here?"

"I said, "I don't know what you're going to do. All I know is that when you are right, we'll hold your hands up and when you're wrong we'll give you hell, and you no longer have the right to be called gentlemen."

He berated me for one hour. The next day he called a meeting of the Medical Board which reversed their decision and promoted Dr. Murray and three days later he got on a boat and went to Europe and I did not see him for three months.

I expected that when he did get back he would give me the works. When he arrived he had his whole staff in front of him, numbering about 30 surgeons, internes and others.

I stood on the edge of the crowd. He pushed his way through the crowd and said, "Wright, I am god damn glad to see you." From that day on we were friends until his death. He was a kind hearted and a courageous man.

After his death I headed a committee which collected sufficient funds to put a plaque in the Women's Pavilion in Harlem Hospital for him.

I also established a memorial lecture in his honor, the John Fox Conners Lecture, and organized the Conners Society which is an alumni society for the surgical society.

John Connors was a brilliant surgeon, but above all he was honest and a man of great integrity and courage. In short, he was fearless if he thought he was right.

It may be difficult for some of us today to realize the hostility which greeted the advent of colored professional personnel into Harlem Hospital.

In 1923 when a nurse training school was established to provide training opportunities for colored nurses, one of the surgical chiefs, a Dr. William H. Luckett, pulled off his gloves in the operating room, stating that he would not operate in front of a "n---r nurse."

He resigned from the hospital and subsequently died of alcoholic miasma.

It used to be one of the insulting practices of white internes whenever a colored nurse took sick, to make a vaginal smear to make sure that she did not have gonorrhea.

This was stopped by Dr. Conners who made personally whatever examinations were required or had Dr. Wright make them.

This greatly improved the morale of the nursing staff whose medical care has since been provided by senior staff with proper privacy, a consideration for which Dr. Wright stated, the young women have repeatedly shown their gratitude.

About The Author

The Wright story was first published in the March 1952 issue of the National Medical Association Journal.

Dr. W. Montague Cobb, the biographer, is professor and head of the department of anatomy at the Howard University School of Medicine.

She's In Love--

A WOMAN IS IN LOVE IF SHE:

1. Suddenly becomes interested in things domestic, indulges in light cookery, tries to knit or embroider, and buys home magazines as never before.

2. Becomes demonstrative and affectionate towards her mother and considerate in the home. She will also become polite to strangers and kind to old people in busses.

3. Finds that she admires physical and moral strength in men and weakness in women, whereas, a few weeks ago, she would have declared that the sexes were equal in all things.

4. Feels a tiny sick sensation every time the telephone rings.

5. Keeps changing her appearance. Face powder, lipstick, perfume, all are changed weekly, and never is she satisfied with her appearance.

6. Becomes very feminine in her clothes, running to fluffy necklines, dainty gloves and shoes, and sheer stockings that she is most particular to keep straight as to back seams.

7. Turns to the sporting pages of the newspapers and occasionally tries to grasp front page political situations so that she can discuss them afterwards.

8. On meeting the object of her love is either struck dumb and leaves him to do the talking, or else is rather rude and makes stinging, impertinent remarks which she regrets terribly.

9. Wants to interfere with the bachelor arrangements of the beloved's apartment or home by introducing flowers, scented soap, fancy curtains etc.

10. At the beginning of a love affair accepts all invitations to meet the young man immediately, then hastily brings out several vague excuses as to why she may not be able to meet him. If she is not in love, the excuses come first and the acceptance last.

IF:

11. The m... more she act... ner, voice, e... ferent on eve... done to pique... what type of ... that she will ... women instea...

12. Loses ... taste in the art... by the opinion ...

13. Turns to ... even hums dan... whether she d...

14. Becom... over his mon... at the theater, ... is probably s... theatre, home ... hairdos herself ...

15. Keeps h... Will put up w... of prestige as ... er. When awa... mand more a ...

16. Will br... promise, or n... just to drink a... ed one. This i... en and they d... themseves to ... h other.

17. Cries ... quickly and ... more beautiful ...

18. Says th... kinder than y... it is a grand ... morning at the ... a terrible tem...

19. Becomes ... always arran... the initiative, ... him just casu...

20. Is not in... simply do not ...

e deeply she loves, the ... superficial things. Man... essions—all will be dif... occasion. Everything is ... he male curiosity as to ... man she is. She believes ... lease him by being all ... of just one woman.

interest in food and all ... being temporarily swayed ... the man.

usic when she is alone and ... tunes during office hours, ... es or not.

extremely economical ... Suggests cheaper seats ... uses instead of taxis. She ... ding twice as much on ... oked meals, clothes and ... but that is different.

temper as never before. ... any discomfort or lack ... g as she is with her lov... from him, she will de... ntion than usual.

k any engagement, any ... lect anything or anyone ... p of coffee with her lov... understood between wom... ot even trouble to excuse ...

re easily, laughs more ... ps less heavily. Looks ...

people are really much ... think they are and that ... fe—even on a Monday ... ffice when the boss is in ...

ssy over telephone calls, ... g that the man takes ... reas previously she rang ... as she did others.

ested in other men—they ... st for the time being.

Mrs. M. Jackson Philadelphia, Pa. | Mrs. Bessie Barrow Baltimore, Md. | Mrs. M. H. Cox Washington, D.C. | Mrs. W. R. Strassner Raleigh, N.C. | Mrs. J. S. Kilgore New York City | Mrs. Charles Dinkins Nashville, Tenn. | Mrs. Clara Banks Baltimore, Md. | Mrs. S. W. Broome Cleveland, Ohio

Ministers' Wives Meet In Baltimore June 30

Mrs. Elizabeth Bouey, president Ministers' Wives' auxiliary and 1950 AFRO Ideal Mother.

Mrs. C. E. Jordan Los Angeles, Calif.

Mrs. P. R. Evans Richmond, Va.

Mrs. S. G. Dobson Baltimore, Md.

Mrs. Adolphus Hobbs Germantown, Pa.

Mrs. R. M. Stanford Atlantic City, N.J.

Mrs. Vashti Stokes Baltimore, Md.

Mrs. Daisy King Baltimore, Md.

Mrs. Clara Harris Mrs. R. Brooks

Mrs. J. J. Cook Augusta, Ga.

Mrs. R. Brooks Baltimore, Md.

Dr. M. O. Ross Detroit, Mich.

Mrs. Esther Johnson Toledo, Ohio

Mrs. E. A. Peacock Jasper, Texas

Mrs. S. M. Thompson Richmond, Va.

Mrs. L. W. Jaxon Chester, Pa.

Mrs. Marion Merritt Detroit, Mich.

Mrs. V. Jackson Baltimore, Md.

Mrs. Flossie Smith Baltimore, Md.

Mrs. J. C. Hairston Pittsburgh, Pa.

In 1939, as the women gathered for their Christian Conference at Virginia State, Elizabeth Bouey found herself again a member of the faculty and again trying to help in the solving of problems.

One day as she sat alone thinking it all over, there came this thought:

"Other ministers' wives are meeting with similar experiences, wouldn't it be a fine thing if there could be a conference just for ministers' wives, where they could come and discuss ways of handling such problems?

The next day the five or six ministers' wives who were in attendance at the Conference were approached by Mrs. Bouey and the idea of a conference of ministers' wives was put before them.

The summer of 1940 found many of the same faces again on the campus of Virginia State college enjoying the wonderful fellowship of the Christian Conference.

Elizabeth Bouey was present as before. Again the few ministers' wives in attendance were called together and listened to Mrs. Bouey tell of the plan of bringing together ministers' wives and for what purpose.

The fall of 1940 found a committee of Mrs. W. L. Jennings, Mrs. W. L. Ransome, Mrs. W. W. Blackwell, Mrs. Annie Jackson, Mrs. S. M. Thompson, Mrs. Ora Brown Stokes, and Mrs. Bouey planning for the first conference.

More and more ministers' wives of Richmond joined the group. April 8, 1941, the first conference was held at the Second Baptist church, Richmond, Virginia.

There was an attendance of 170 people—ministers' wives, ministers, and well wishwishers. A one-day meeting was held. The meeting was such a grand success the ministers' wives were determined to redouble their efforts.

At this first conference two states and the District of Columbia were represented. Today there are members in thirty states, in the West Indies and in Liberia, West Africa.

The National Association of Ministers' Wives has an Educational Department headed by Dr. Mary M. Q. Ross of Detroit, Mich. who is ably supported by Dr. Uvee Mdodana Arbouin, of Long Island, N.Y., Mrs. Mamie L. Aiken of Detroit, Mich., Mrs. Noah W. Moore of Philadelphia, Mrs. J. S. Kilgore of NYC, and Mrs. Georgia Gayden f Greenwood, Miss.

The life-membership department's head is Mrs. S. W. Broome of Cleveland, Ohio. Mrs. S. M. Thompson of Richmond, Va., and Dr. Arbouin of Long Island, N.Y. are the secretaries. Mrs. Mayme L. Copeland of Hopkinsville, Ky. is treasurer.

Mrs. N. W. Moore of Philadelphia, Pa. is chairman of the building fund department and hopes in the near future to secure a building for our national headquarters and home for needy ministers' widows.

Mrs. Essie M. Strozier of Toledo, Ohio, heads the business and professional department.

Mrs. W. L. Ransome of Richmond, Va. is editor of the official organ, The Ministers' Wives Herald.

The annual conference for ministers' wives will meet June 30-July 2 at the Bethel AME and Union Baptist churches in Baltimore, Md.

Colored Teacher At A White School

George Albert Freeman had been at Ames a year when he was invited to take an appointment as an instructor. How he happened to be offered the instructorship and an opportunity to follow in the footsteps of Dr. Carver was told last fall by Dr. Ray Wakeley, veteran professor of sociology at Ames.

"It came in the spring of 1950," he said. "We were growing aware that George Freeman was an outstanding student and specialist in research on sociological matters.

"Little by little, the various men in the department began to invite him to meet their classes, to serve as a 'guest' lecturer. It worked out very well. The students received Freeman with genuine interest. They liked his manner and material.

No Fanfare

"Having been thoroughly tested, Freeman was invited to take an appointment to the instructor staff. He promptly agreed. That was all. There was no fanfare, no special preparation for his students.

"George just walked in, introduced himself and began to teach. The young folk, perhaps a little surprised at first, found he was able and likeable. He has continued to do a fine job."

An indication of Freeman's full acceptance on the campus was his election as the 1951-52 president of Alpha Kappa Delta professional fraternity for sociology seniors, graduate students and faculty members.

Freeman met his sixty-seven students six times weekly, prepared lectures, tests and discussions in between, and at the same time worked on his doctor's dissertation in rural sociology.

Amazed At Reaction

Freeman said last fall that he was "amazed" at the reaction of his classes when he first walked before them. "Iowa youth, especially the group that comes here from the rural areas," he said, "has no awareness of any racial differences these days.

"It sees no 'problem' and has neither bias nor prejudice on the subject. Great progress has been made in this field of relationships. We have had lively discussion of races and religions in class, of course, but they have been objective ones, with no over-emphasis.

"But our course of study is not all racial. It covers the rise of culture, from tribal clans to today's society. It even goes into city planning, a wide variety of topics."

Freeman, the first colored person on the Iowa State faculty since 1895, was a member of the Collegiate Methodist church in Ames, Phi Delta Kappa, national educational fraternity; the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, and the Iowa State college sociology club.

Freeman had been an instructor in the economics-sociology department of Iowa State since the fall of 1950, a year after he went there to study for his doctor's degree in sociology. He would have received his Ph.D. at the June commencement this year.

Two Years Overseas

Death was due to hypertension and complications. His illness was related to his Army service during World War II in Africa Europe and the Pacific theater. He was a first sergeant from 1943 to 1946. He spent the last two years overseas.

Freeman finished the Summer High school in Kansas City, Kansas, entered South Carolina State college where he received his bachelor's degree in agriculture in 1935.

In both high school and college, Freeman was active in sports, winning letters as an all-end tackle in football, in basketball, and in track as a high jumper and 440-yard dash man.

He taught for a few years in rural South Carolina and later became principal of a consolidated school in that state. For three years before entering the Army he was employed in the Farm Security Administration and the National Youth Administration.

After his discharge from the Army, Freeman entered Kansas State college where he received his master's degree in 1949. From there he went to Ames to work on his doctorate.

The Iowa instructor became ill March 21 and spent a week in the Mary Greeley hospital in Ames before he was transferred to the veterans' hospital here March 28.

Died In May

He died Friday morning, May 8.

His widow, Mrs. Catherine Freeman, was employed in the Ames ublic library. Before her marriage in November 30, 1939, she was Miss Catherine Claughton of Lexington, Kentucky.

As a memorial to Mr. Freeman the sociology faculty of Iowa State plans to establish a George Albert Freeman shelf in the library. His friends and admirers will contribute books on sociology and inter-group relations to the shelf, in his memory.

Given Military Funeral

DES MOINES, Iowa (NNPA) — George Albert Freeman, 40, the first colored person to serve on the faculty of Iowa State college at Ames, Iowa, since Dr. George Washington Carver taught botany there fifty-seven years ago, died at the Veterans' Hospital here Friday morning, May 8.

Funeral services were held Tuesday, May 12, in Kansas City, Kansas, where Freeman was born and reared. Burial was in the military cemetery at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.