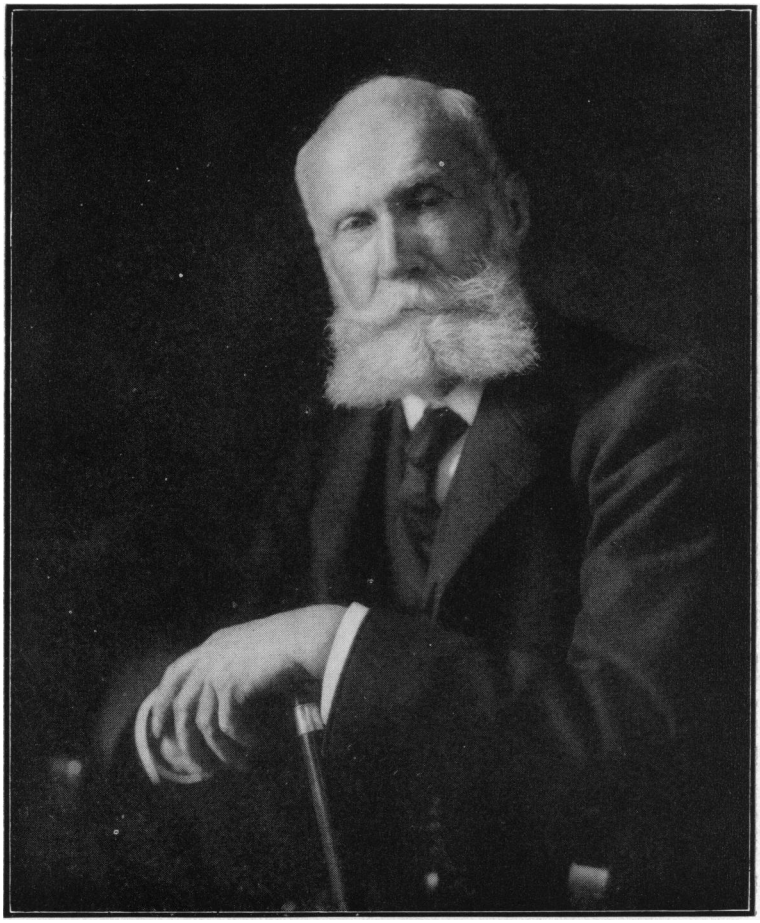

FRANCIS PELEG SPRAGUE, M.D.

NECROLOGY

FRANCIS PELEG SPRAGUE, M.D.

MYLES STANDISH, M.D.
Boston, Mass.

Dr. Francis Peleg Sprague was unique in American ophthalmology in that he carried a heavy service as an ophthalmic surgeon in the Massachusetts Charitable Eye and Ear Infirmary for twenty-five years, yet never entered private practice. Possessed of an ample income, he did this great work from the overflowing kindness of his heart and the desire to be of service to his fellow-men. No other member of the staff did his duty more faithfully or found less occasion to ask others to take his place in his absence. He was an original member of the American Ophthalmological Society.

Dr. Sprague was born in Washington, D. C., February 17, 1834, while his father was United States Senator from the State of Maine.

After the usual preliminary education he entered the Harvard Medical School, and received the degree of Doctor of Medicine in 1857. He spent a year or more as interne in a Boston hospital, then studied ophthalmology in Vienna. Returning to America during the civil war, he was appointed Acting Assistant Surgeon, U. S. A., and served from February, 1862, to February, 1864, at Washington, in the Judiciary Square Hospital and the Desmarres Eye and Ear Hospital.

He was appointed Ophthalmic Surgeon at the Massachusetts Charitable Eye and Ear Infirmary in 1864 and served until 1890. It was a faithful, persistent, benign, and

kindly service, liberally interspersed with secret generosity to the poor and helpless among his patients.

As he had no private practice to urge him to hurry through his clinics, they were often long. Each individual case received careful study and kindly encouragement. Sometimes his young and impatient house officers were inclined to complain about the length of the clinics, but in after-years they remembered with gratitude the careful discussions of important cases, the kindly, respectful attention he gave to their crude ideas, and his calm, serious comment thereon. If the case under consideration had been unusual, he perhaps would appear in the House Officers' dormitory at the end of the day with several books from his library, each with bookmarks carefully inserted to direct attention to articles upon the subject which had been discussed in the morning clinic.

He was a persistent operator in complicated and nearly hopeless cases, deeming that even a small amount of vision was a great source of happiness to persons practically blind.

He was always a safe, sane, careful, level-headed medical adviser, and the patients who came in his service were indeed fortunate.

Dr. Sprague had positive opinions, but his gentle serenity was never disturbed. No one ever knew him to utter a harsh word or even to criticize an absent person unkindly.

His wit and humor were unfailing, delicate but irresistibly amusing, and a source of delight to all who knew him.

He was actively interested in the parks and streets of the city of Boston, and the four lines of trees on Commonwealth Avenue are there largely on account of his insistence.

He married, October 5, 1868, Elizabeth Rebecca Lowell; she died seventeen years before her husband. They had no children.

Dr. Sprague died October 6, 1921. His death was like his life, gentle and serene; he had just spoken and was in apparent health.