

Utica Vanticia (Claflin) (Kelley) Brooker

Born between 1841 and 1843, Homer, Ohio.¹

Died 9 July 1873, New York, New York.²

Buried 1873 in Green-Wood Cemetery, Brooklyn, New York.³

VICTORIA, UTICA, AND TENNESSEE.

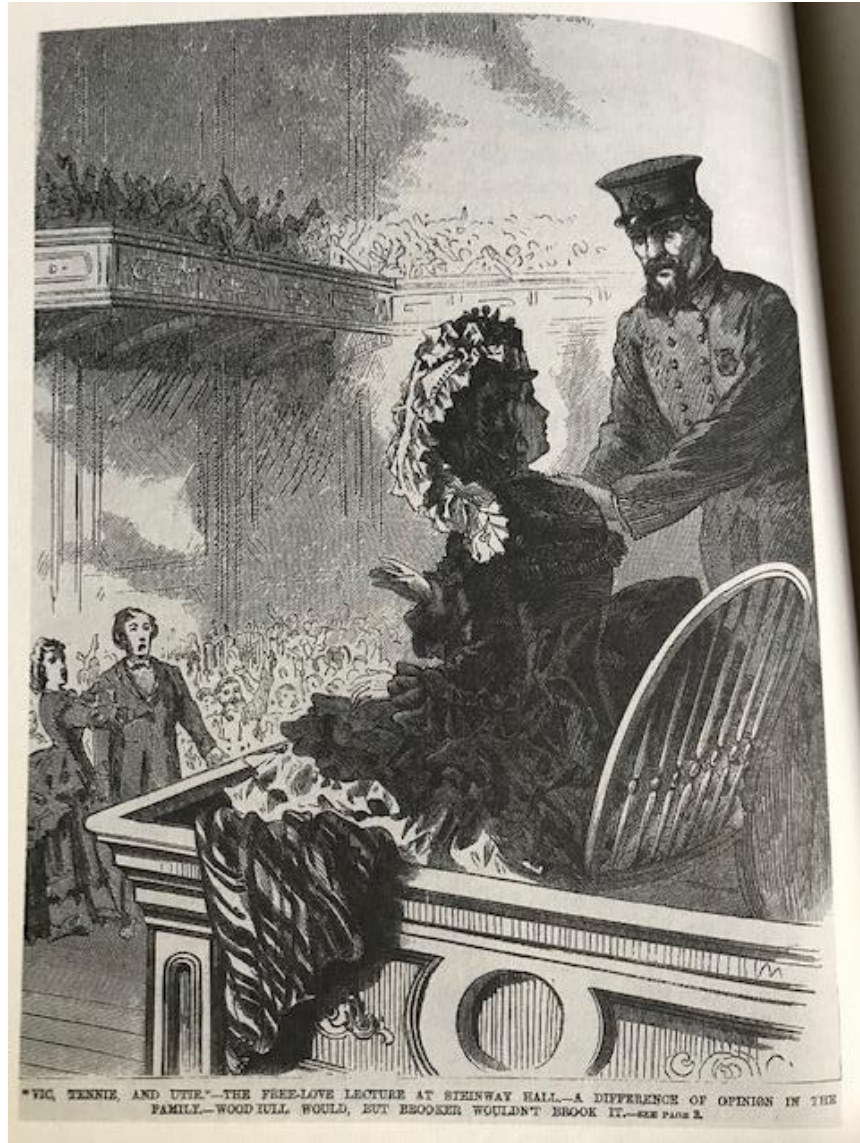
Three sisters fair, of worth and weight,
 A queen, a city, and a State—
 At least from such each takes her name—
 And all were largely known to fame.
 Two of them took an early start
 To practice in the healing art,
 The other traveled far and near,
 And visited each hemisphere.
 All were geniuses most rare,
 Of form genteel and features fair.
 By as great space they were separate
 As Buckeye from the Golden State.⁴

¹ Wight, in his *Genealogy of the Claflins* (1903), says she was born in 1843 (p. 123). Her biographical timeline suggests a date closer to 1841. “In Memoriam,” *Woodhull & Claflin’s Weekly [W&CW]*, v. 6, no. 8, 26 July 1873 says she was three years younger than Victoria (1845); the 1860 census gives her age as 17 (1843). Utica was supposed to have been on stage in San Francisco at age 15 and that she remained on the stage for five years. She was in Cincinnati in 1860 and from that point forward there is no interval long enough to account for a period of time in California, so she must have been in California in the 1850s. If she was born in 1841 she easily could have been in California in 1856 as a fifteen-year-old, especially if she accompanied her older sister Victoria who was there in the same period.

² “Death of a Claflin,” *The New York Times*, 11 July 1873.

³ Victoria Woodhull Martin Papers, Southern Illinois University, burial record from Green-wood cemetery, for payment for plot at lot 21:493, Box 3, folder 20.

⁴ Jesse Root Grant, “Jesse R. Grant as a Literary Man,” *Chicago Tribune*, 6 July 1873, p. 5. The father of Ulysses S. Grant was hard of hearing in his old age. He lived in Covington, Kentucky, and sought Tennessee’s services while she was living in Cincinnati. For the rest of his life, Grant remained friendly with the sisters and often visited them in New York.



From Day's Doings, 9 December 1871, illustrated in Amanda Frisken's *Victoria Woodhull's Sexual Revolution, Political Theater and the Popular Press in Nineteenth-Century America*, p. 62. This is the only known illustration of Utica Claflin Kelley Brooker. Note the horrified figures of her sister, Victoria, and Theodore Tilton in the lower left.

Utica, or "Utie" was most often described as a quiet woman.⁵ She was also considered the most beautiful of all the Claflin daughters and, by some, an intellectual equal to both Victoria and Tennessee, if not their superior. There is no reliable record of Utica's birth. She was supposed to have been three years younger than Victoria, so born about 1841, but other accounts and records give her date of birth as late as 1843. The timeline of her life agrees with a date of birth closer to 1841.

Utica was a troubled woman. She had cognitive problems that denied her the center stage she strongly desired and which eventually led her to her destruction when

⁵ "The Princess Editha," *The Evening Telegraph* (Philadelphia), 18 June 1870, p. 8.

she sought solace in alcohol and morphine. Victoria later wrote of her in language suggestive of a learning disability:

But there were causes for all this made effectual by the possibilities of her organization. Though possessed of all the attributes and capacities that make the greatest men and women—perfection itself in form and almost in feature, in intellect a giantess, in moral sense a heroine, and in affection a very Venus—indeed a very queen among women, she yet lacked the one thing that could reduce all these talents to practical use—she had no application, no concentration, no continuity. As a child at school study, even, was impossible and this characteristic gained in strength as she grew in years, until it was the controlling element in her nature, yet she realized all her possessions, and feeling them as none but a queenly soul could feel, she involuntarily and constantly rebelled against the power that thus held her captive to its sway, yet lacked the capacity to conquer it. This one weakness turned the whole current of her life from the smoothness and grandeur of the mighty river, to the terrific rushing of the mountain torrents as they are let loose from the winter's snows by the drenching rains of spring.⁶

At the age of 15, Utica was supposed to have been on the stage in San Francisco, perhaps under the name of Utie Clifford.⁷ Because Victoria and Canning Woodhull were in San Francisco at about the same time, and Victoria also was on stage there, Utica may have accompanied the couple to California, perhaps to care for the couple's invalid son, Byron. If Victoria had to earn the living for the family, given her husband's tendency towards dissipation, they would have needed a babysitter. California records are simply too sparse between 1850 and 1860, so any reconstruction of events must rely on later comments.

By 1860, Utica was living with her parents and siblings in Cincinnati, Ohio.⁸ Her sister, Tennessee, was the breadwinner of the family, touted as "The Wonderful Child," a natural-born clairvoyant who could heal and find lost objects. Chasing money and new clients, the family soon left Cincinnati and traveled in Indiana and Pennsylvania. The income came to a halt when the four members of the Claflin family, including Utica, were arrested for "humbuggery" in Pittsburg in March 1861.⁹ After their release, Buck seems to have gone in one direction while the mother, Anna, took her two daughters in another. The three women were known to have been in Lewiston, Pennsylvania, in the spring and summer of 1861,¹⁰ but until Utica appears in Quincy, Illinois, in 1864, there is no other record of her. Her sister Tennessee ran off from the family and went to

⁶ "In Memoriam," *W&CW*, op cit.

⁷ An Awful Case," *Lawrence (KS) Daily Journal*, 15 July 1873, p. 2. "Deceased was in her youth a very handsome woman, and we believe was on the stage at one time, under the name of Utie Clifford."

⁸ It should be noted that Utica's brother, Malden, was also living in Cincinnati in 1860. As a railroad conductor, he frequently travelled, but his wife, Corintha, seems to have remained in Cincinnati. After the elder Claflins left for Illinois in 1863, Utica may have lived with her sister-in-law. She would not be expected to be discovered in the City Directories. She was not in Ottawa, La Salle County, Illinois, in 1864 when Tennessee was practicing under the auspices of her father and mother in that town.

⁹ A "Natural Clairvoyant" in Trouble, *Baltimore Sun*, 20 March 1861.

¹⁰ The last record of the women in Pennsylvania is a list of letters for each being held at the post office in Lewistown, PA, in July 1861. *Lewistown Gazette*, 3 July 1861, p. 2.

Sycamore, Illinois, where she met her sister Victoria,¹¹ and briefly married before going first to Chicago, then to Quincy where she joined Utica in the home of their elder brother Hebern. Like Tennessee, the Utica's missing years are possibly explained by her first marriage, but her lack of notoriety makes her difficult to trace.

All that is known of Utica's first husband is that, on the occasion of her second marriage in 1866, she was called "Mrs. Utie Kelley."¹² She was single in 1861¹³ remarried in 1866, so the marriage was a brief one. A veiled reference in Woodhull's 1873 memorial of her sister suggests the marriage was not a happy one: "While either of those to whom she was married would have made any ordinary woman happy. . . to her they were restraints that at the same time both curbed and nettled her proved spirit and kept her constantly on fire."¹⁴

Hebern had become both wealthy and famous through his enterprising self-promotion and a purported ability to heal cancer. He built a fine Italianate home that served as his clinic; there was plenty of room for his sisters and the circumstances were decidedly better than what they had experienced for the past few years.¹⁵ Utica and Tennessee were with him by mid-summer 1864, and they were the two adult females in the household for the Illinois State Census in 1865.¹⁶ The siblings told the town's inhabitants their parents were dead – not surprising given Hebern's dislike of his father and the experiences the girls had endured with their parents.¹⁷ Tennessee left a marked impression of herself in the minds of the town's inhabitants that lasted for years. She was remembered as a brilliant and witty conversationalist, a clairvoyant, and a blonde beauty. In contrast, Utica was held up as the model of perfect womanhood who remained so quietly out of the public eye that the residents years later could not recall her name. The Quincy townsfolk, however, did recall the name of the man whom she married: her womanly perfection won the attentions of Thomas H. B. Brooker, a well-known local attorney. The couple married in Chicago on 28 November 1866.¹⁸ The marriage was a short one, caught in the surreal furnace of the Claflin family. Ironically, some residents of Quincy remembered her like this: "she became the wife of Thomas Brooker who was at the time city attorney of Quincy. She is recalled as a woman who possessed attributes of gentleness and modesty and held aloof from the fads that made her sisters famous. She has dropped from the public recollection, as she preferred."¹⁹ The Quincy townsfolk clearly did not know that Utica was already drinking heavily.

The last two weeks of May and first two weeks of June 1871 put the entire Claflin family in the spotlight. Utica did not take part in her mother's infamous lawsuit against Colonel Blood in May of that year, but it was to her home that Anna ran after her supposed kidnapping immediately following the closure of the trial. The Brookers then

¹¹ *True Republican* (Sycamore, Illinois), 24 May 1871 and "The Notorious and Wonderful Sisters," *True Republican* (Sycamore, Illinois), 20 April 1887.

¹² "Married," *Chicago Tribune*, p. 4, col. 5.

¹³ List of Letters remaining unclaimed," *Lewistown (PA) Gazette*, 3 July 1861.

¹⁴ "In Memoriam," *W&CW*, op cit.

¹⁵ The home still stands in Quincy and is known as the "Hebern Claflin House."

¹⁶ They are not enumerated by name in the census, which shows two females of Tennessee and Utica's age in the home.

¹⁷ "A Former Quincy Lady," *Quincy Daily Journal*, 27 October 1909, p. 9, col. 3.

¹⁸ "Married," *Chicago Tribune*, op cit.

¹⁹ *Quincy Daily Journal*, 27 October 1909, p. 9, col. 3.

figured in the inquest held into her brother-in-law's mysterious death in the weeks following the trial and Anna's disappearance. While Utica consoled the widow, Tom Brooker handled the inquisition, identification and disposition of the remains, including paying for the burial because the widow couldn't afford to.²⁰ At the time, uncharacteristically for the family, the Brookers had their own home in Brooklyn, separated from the Claflin chaos. For a short time, Tom worked as an editor for *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly*, and because of that it must be assumed his political and social views differed from his wife. Utica unfailingly took the side of her mother and sister Mary against Victoria and Tennie, especially on the issues of "free love" and "the marriage question." "Those people who prate of affinities and make free-loveism their doctrine are sure to come to evil," she told a reporter in 1871.²¹ Yet her husband wrote for and edited the paper that was most synonymous with the movement.

It was not long until Utica put herself into the spotlight by dramatically interrupting one of her Victoria's lectures as a heckler. The lecture, given in November 1871 at Steinway Hall was called "The Principle of Social Freedom, Involving Free Love, Marriage, Divorce &c" had drawn a large audience. In a rare public outburst, Utica stood and interrupted her sister with a vehement denunciation of the principles advocated by Woodhull. The audience encouraged her, and the lecture was stalled for a full ten minutes until a policeman encouraged Utica to resume her seat.

The famous nursery song—
 "Inty minty utie corn,
 Wire briar limber lock,
 Three geese in a flock,
 One, two, three, out goes she

Was practically illustrated at Steinway hall in New York city on Monday night. Three geese in a flock were Mrs. Woodhull, who lectured, Theodore Tilton who presided, and Utie not corn but Claflin, who rushed upon the stage and interrupted her celebrated sister in the ventilation of some of her peculiar theories regarding love and marriage. Before Utie could count "one, two, three, out went she" under the escort of a policeman. It would hardly be truthful to characterize the affair as both amusing and instructive, but it was certainly original.²²

The following March, with her father handling the gate receipts, Utica gave her own lecture at the Cooper Institute called "What I Know About Free Love." In it, she said it was respect and affection for her aged parents that compelled her to interrupt her sister the previous November and the same sentiments motivated her appearance that night. Her sister had been drawn into "a ring of vile free lovers headed by 'His Imperial Littleness the long-haired Messiah of the golden age,'" or Theodore Tilton. Utica then launched into a tirade against Tilton, "a milk and water philosopher" who was bent on corrupting

²⁰ "Was There Foul Play?" *Buffalo Commercial*, 16 June 1871, p. 2. For the trial and Anna Claflin's disappearance see "Female Financiers' Feuds," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 8 May 1871 and "The Female Brokers and Their Blood Relations," *The New York Times*, 16 May 1871. For Anna's disappearance see "Mrs. Claflin Missing," *The Sun* (New York) 25 May 1871, p. 1.

²¹ *New York Star*, 10 June 1871, quoted in the *Daily Alta California* and *San Francisco Times*, 21 June 1871.

²² *The Cairo Bulletin* (Illinois), 25 November 1871, p. 2.

society and who had ruined her family. She denounced the doctrines of the free love “religion” for tearing down the stronghold of marriage and womanly purity and the men who advocated it as too dissolute to love the marriage state and too miserly to pay the price of licentiousness.²³ It is apparent from her invective that Utica believed that Tilton and Victoria were having an affair, indulging in the worst aspect of “free love,” namely adulterous promiscuity. Matters were not helped by Tilton’s apparent scorn as he shortly after described Utica as a “worthless, heartless, frivolous creature.”²⁴

By this time Utica’s own marriage seems to have been irreparable. In 1870, Tom was enumerated with his brother, Orlando, in Quincy, Illinois.²⁵ Utica, though not found in that census, was not with her extended family in Manhattan, nor was she in Quincy. Quincy residents who recalled the couple described the marriage as troubled, and Brooker had certainly left by 1873 when he was practicing law in Chicago at the time of her death.

Victoria’s first husband, Dr. Canning Woodhull, died in April 1872, bringing another explosive rift in the family to public view. This time, Utica played a prominent and telling role. Dr. Woodhull, a long time alcoholic and morphine addict, had contracted pneumonia. For the first few days, he self-prescribed, but as he grew worse, the family called in diplomate physicians²⁶ – who immediately stopped his morphine. He did not long survive the withdrawal. While she was probably correct, Utica’s insistence that the physicians “give him opium, give him thirty grains, and if no effect, give him thirty more” was ignored. Her sister Margaret commented, “She takes it herself—as much as 30 grains a day.”²⁷ In a rebuttal, Utica denied any current use of morphine, and went on to say, despite overwhelming testimony and data showing otherwise, that Dr. Woodhull was not intemperate that she “had never seen him in the smallest degree inebriated and knew him to be perfectly abstemious.”²⁸

At her death, it was reported that she had been drinking heavily for 10 or 12 years. In the weeks before she died her behavior had become as aggressive and erratic as her self-medication was impressive.

Yesterday morning Mrs. Utica Boker [*sic*], a sister of Victoria Woodhull, was taken to the Jefferson Market Police Court on a charge of being drunk and disorderly. On the Twenty-fourth Precinct return sheet the name of Margaret Myer [*sic, Miles*] appeared as complainant, but when the case was called no one appeared to prosecute, and Mrs. Boker was discharged. Late in the afternoon she returned to court and made complaint before Justice Cox, against Col. Blood and Victoria Woodhull. She charged that Mrs. Woodhull and the Colonel had beaten her cruelly, and had her arrested without cause. A summons was issued, returnable at 11 o’clock this morning, for the parties complained against.²⁹

²³ “Utie on Vic,” *New York Herald*, 8 March 1872, p. 10; “Denouncing Free Love,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, 8 March 1872, p. 3; “Anti-Free Love Lecture,” *Chicago Tribune*, 8 March 1872, p. 1; and “Another Claflin, She Doesn’t Like T. Tilton,” *The Cairo Bulletin* (Illinois), 12 March 1872, p. 2.

²⁴ *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 13 April 1872, p. 2.

²⁵ 1870 US Federal Census, Quincy, IL.

²⁶ Those who actually went through, and graduated from, medical schools.

²⁷ “The Death of Dr. Woodhull,” *The Sun*, 9 April 1872, p. 1.

²⁸ “Dr. Woodhull’s Death,” *The Sun*, 10 April 1872, p. 2.

²⁹ *The New York Times*, 1 July 1873.

Her complaint was quickly answered:

A Charming Family

To the Editor of *The New-York Times*:

The statements of yesterday that Col. Blood and myself had committed an assault upon Utica Brooker are unqualifiedly false. Mrs. Brooker, in a drunken or insane rage, attacked Mrs. Miles—her sister—with a heavy chair, for which and her subsequent acts Mrs. Miles had her arrested for disorderly conduct. It was, however, at my special solicitation that Mrs. Miles did not appear against Mrs. Brooker. It was expressly understood that she should not return to the house further to molest us; but no sooner was she released than she did return, and at once began her insane and disorderly conduct.

Her complaint is purely malicious, and by her own avowal was made to affect the public against me.

Respectfully, Victoria C. Woodhull

No. 48 Broad Street, New York, July 1, 1873.³⁰

Utica was dead seven days later.

Death in the Claflin Family³¹

Mrs. Utica V. Brooker, a sister of Victoria Woodhull and Tennie C. Claflin, died at 11:30 o'clock on Wednesday night, at the residence of her sisters, No. 6 East Thirty-fourth street. Mrs. Brooker was but thirty-one years of age, and her husband is at present in Chicago. She had been confined to her bed by illness for about twelve days, and was attended by several physicians, who disagreed so widely as to the cause of her illness and death that neither of the medical men would give a certificate, and her sisters yesterday afternoon sent information to the Coroners' Office and requested that an inquest should be held. Coroner Herrman, accompanied by Dr. Joseph Cushman, proceeded to the Woodhull-Claflin mansion, and instituted an investigation. He was informed by different members of the family that the deceased had for ten or twelve years past been of very intemperate habits, indulging to an inordinate extent in brandy, gin, whisky, beer, &c., and on several occasions had been known to drink bay rum³² when no other liquor was accessible. She had also been known to take 1,000 grains of bromide of potassium in a week, and 300 grains of the drug in a day.³³ As a consequence, she was frequently attacked with delirium tremens, and during the paroxysms would jump out of bed and chase the members of the family threatening to kill them, &c. Mesdames Woodhull and Claflin asked that a post mortem examination be made on the remains of their dead sister, and Tennie desired to be present during the autopsy, but to this Coroner Herrman would not consent. In the presence of several physicians Dr. Cushman made the autopsy, and the examination of the internal organs showed conclusively that death had resulted from Bright's disease of the kidneys, caused by excessive intemperance. An inquest was at once held and a verdict in accordance with the above facts rendered.

³⁰ *The New York Times*, 3 July 1873.

³¹ *The New York Times*, 11 July 1873.

³² A concoction of bay leaves and rum used at the time as an aftershave and deodorant.

³³ Its medical use was to control seizures.

When Canning Woodhull died, Tennessee had purchased a plot in Green-Lawn Cemetery, the most fashionable in the city. Utica was buried with Canning after a funeral that included no mourning dress, no crepe, no clergyman, and no quotes from the Bible. She was buried in a plain wooden casket, with a plate on the lid that read "Mrs. Utica V. Claflin Brooker, died July 9, 1873, aged 31 years." The refrain throughout the service was "Cut off at thirty-one—by marriage." Though the family in attendance all had tears in their eyes, Buck broke down, and at the grave side service, Victoria and Buck were inconsolable.³⁴

Victoria wrote *In Memoriam* to her sister; it was published on the 26th of July 1873 in the *Weekly*. "A life which might have shed happiness and peace and heavenly content all around was wasted, blasted, blighted by conditions which the world saw fit to make her carry, and to which, poor child as she was, she had not the interior strength to become superior." She was also brutally honest about Utica's addictions:

the heartrending scenes of her life that first led her to the habitual use of narcotics, and when almost too late warned to break from them, to stimulants to down the griefs and disappointments, and to blunt her susceptibilities and ceaseless longings for something better, rose afresh to the memory of all of us who had stood by to aid her through her fiery trials. These habits of life induced kidney disease, and as this increased it added a new source of suffering to her cup, already running over, the demand for stimulants being at times almost a necessity; and this, again, reacted to hasten the progress of the disease. . . her friends seldom thought her suffering. The pallid face and the lusterless eye nevertheless often told the tale of her bodily as well of the mental pain.

Thomas Brooker survived his wife six years, dying in 1879. The couple had no children.³⁵

³⁴ "A Peculiar Funeral," *The Sun*, 14 July 1873, p. 1.

³⁵ *Quincy Daily Herald*, 5 October 1879, p. 3. DEATH OF THOMAS H. BROOKER.

This sad event occurred yesterday afternoon at the residence of his brother O.W. Brooker, on Hampshire street.

Thomas H. Brooker was in the fortieth year of his age, having been born in Steubenville, Ohio, in the year 1839. In 1856, in company with his father Robert Brooker, he came to this city, which, with but a few years exception, had been his home until the time of his death. In early life he worked for a time at the trade of "carriage maker," but afterwards, under the advice of the late Col. Grimshaw, he adopted the law as a profession, entered the office of Williams, Grimshaw & Williams as a student, under whom he completed his studies, and was admitted to the bar, and entered upon the practice of his profession with George Stahl. It was but a short time until the civil war broke out and the call for troops was made. He at once enlisted, being the first volunteer enrolled from Quincy, and served in Capt. B.M. Prentiss' company of 100 day men.

After the war he accepted a position in the Department of the Interior at Washington, under Secretary Browning. Afterwards he went to New York City, where he was engaged in business for two or three years, and then returned to Quincy. In the Illinois Constitutional Convention of 1870 Mr. Brooker was the Secretary of the Judiciary Committee, of which the late Judge Skinner was Chairman. He also served one term as Clerk of a State Senate Committee. At the municipal election of 1876 Mr. Brooker was elected to the office of City Attorney of Quincy, an re-elected to the same position the following year, which position he filled with great satisfaction to the people. Mr. Brooker was well known to the people of this city, and was for many years prior to his death a prominent character in local politics, having been an active member of the Democratic party, he always took a conspicuous part in the political campaigns of the city and county.

Thomas H. Brooker was a man of warm heart, lively and genial disposition, full of wit and a fund of entertaining story, he was always the leading character of any company into which he might chance to be thrown, and possessed natural capacities which, with closer habits of application would have given him a higher rank in his profession. Among the people of this city he had a great number of friends, who will be saddened to learn of his death, but who will kindly remember the many pleasantries and good deeds of his life.