

## OBITUARY.

### PROF. BENJAMIN PEIRCE.

Benjamin Peirce, Professor of Astronomy and Mathematics in Harvard College, died in Boston yesterday, at the age of 71 years. No name has shed a more brilliant lustre over the academic department of Harvard College than that of Prof. Peirce. Tutor Henry Flynt, of the Class of 1693, is the only person ever connected with the college for a longer period. Born at Salem, April 4, 1809, Prof. Peirce was graduated in 1829, became tutor in 1831, University Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy in 1833, and Perkins Professor of Astronomy and Mathematics in 1842. He has, therefore, been a Professor for nearly half a century, and has held his present chair nearly 40 years. Between 1836 and 1846 he published a series of text-books on geometry, trigonometry, algebra, and "curves, functions, and forces." These have had a permanent influence on mathematical teaching in this country, and what were at first novelties in them have since become commonplace matters in all text-books. In 1842, with Prof. Lovering, he published a "Cambridge Miscellany of Mathematics and Physics," in which he gave his celebrated analytical solution of the motion of a spinning top, a criticism of Espy's "Theory of Storms," &c. His Boston lectures on the "Comet of 1843" aroused an interest which led to the foundation of the Observatory at Cambridge. His investigations relating to the discovery of Neptune, in 1846, attracted the attention of astronomers and mathematicians in Europe and this country, and proved him to be a thinker of extraordinary powers. He showed that the discovery of the planet by Galle in the position previously pointed out by Leverrier, was a happy accident, rather than the necessary result of the latter astronomer's computations. Not that Leverrier's calculations had been erroneous, but because there were two very different solutions of the perturbations of Uranus possible. Leverrier had correctly calculated one, but the actual planet in the sky solved the other, and the actual planet and Leverrier's ideal one lay in the same direction from the earth only in 1846, the year of discovery. From 1851 to 1855 Prof. Peirce published the remarkable results of his labors on Saturn's rings. In 1849 he was appointed consulting astronomer to the "American Ephemeris and Nautical Almanac," for which he prepared a volume of lunar tables in 1852. He also assisted Prof. Bache in the coast survey, and rendered valuable services to this great national work for many years before he became Superintendent. He received this appointment in 1867, and held the office till 1874. His "Treatise on Analytical Mechanics" appeared in 1857, and in 1870 was published an edition of 100 lithographed copies of "Linear Associative Algebra," a work remarkable for the power and boldness of its reasoning. His latest productions are a course of Lowell lectures on "Ideality in Science," delivered about a year ago, and a series of communications to the National Academy. In the former he gave his views on philosophy and religion, and in the latter, he discussed with his wonted power questions of cosmical physics and theories concerning the source and supply of the sun's heat. All his writings are characterized by singular directness and conciseness, and particularly by a happy choice of notation—a point of great importance to the mathematician, lessening not only his mechanical labor in writing, but also his intellectual labor in grasping and handling the difficult conceptions of his science. Many monographs, bearing the marks of Peirce's individuality and peculiar power, have been read by him before various academies, societies, and institutions; but only the results of most of them have ever been furnished for publication. Among these may be mentioned an investigation of the forms of stable equilibrium for a fluid in an extensible sack floating in another fluid, being an *a priori* embryology. Also, the motions of a billiard-ball, an instance in nature of discontinuity, when the ball leaves its curve, and goes on a tangent; another, the motion of a sling, curious from the immense variety of forms comprised under exceedingly simple uniform conditions. While Prof. Peirce had the tenacity of grasp, and power of endurance, which enabled him to make the most intricate and tedious numerical computations, he was still more distinguished by intensity and fervor of action in every part of his nature, an enthusiasm for whatever is noble and beautiful in the world or in art, in fiction or real life; an exalted moral strength and purity; a glowing imagination which soared into the seventh heavens; an insight and a keenness of external observation which made the atom as grand to him as a planet; a depth of reverence which exalted him while he abased himself.

### SAMUEL VERPLANCK HOFFMAN.

Mr. Samuel Verplanck Hoffman, a wealthy retired lawyer, and a descendant of one of the old Knickerbocker families, died suddenly of heart disease, at his residence, No. 210 Fifth-avenue, yesterday morning. Mr. Hoffman was apparently in the best of health up to a few hours before his death. He was born in Columbia County, in this State, in 1802. He practiced law in his native place from 1825 until 1840, when he retired. About that time he took up his residence in this City. He had lived in the handsome brown-stone building where his death occurred, for the past 25 years, and spent the Summer with his family at New-Brunswick, N. J., where he owned a country seat. He was special partner for a number of years in the well-known dry goods house of C. & F. Waldo, and was a Director in the Republic and the Hoffman Fire Insurance Companies. Mr. Hoffman was a member of the Union League Club, but never took an active part in politics. He was a devout Episcopalian, and was eminently charitable. He held the offices of Vestryman in Trinity Church, in this City, and Warden in Christ Church, New-Brunswick. He was a regular attendant at the latter place of worship during the Summer months, and attended services at Trinity Chapel when residing in this City. He was also a member of the Board of Trustees of the Deaf and Dumb Asylum for many years. Mr. Hoffman married a daughter of the late Garrett Storms, who survives him, and by whom he had two sons, one of whom is the Rev. Eugene A. Hoffman, Dean of the General Theological Seminary and a delegate to the Protestant Episcopal Convention now in session in this City. The other is the Rev. Charles F. Hoffman, Rector of the Church of All Angels, in West Eighty-first-street. Mr. Hoffman was tall in stature, of commanding presence, and possessed a genial and hospitable disposition. His funeral will take place from Trinity Chapel next Saturday, the hour not having as yet been determined upon.