

ABOUT A COUNTRY DOCTOR.

Address Before Trinity Medical Society.

BY DR. POWELL OF TORONTO.

A Charming Chat About the Medical Profession.

Hint and Anecdotes About Young Medicos. Quaint and Pleasant Pictures of a Doctor's Doings.

Dr. N. A. Powell of this city, recently delivered the following address on "The Country Doctor," before the Trinity Medical College Literary and Scientific Society:

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.—Possibly it was a kindly regard for my health that prompted the officers of your society to extend to me an invitation to address you to-night. Returned to you after eleven years of outpost duty, they have called upon me to present a report, perhaps thinking with the western poet, that

When a person has a story that he thinks he ought to tell, If he doesn't get to tell it, why of course he don't feel well.

The theme upon which I am to speak is one that might well inspire to eloquence even a member of the silent profession, but, conscious of its greatness and my own limitations, I ask in advance your indulgent consideration, recalling the words of that old professor of



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rhetoric, who to a student before trial said: "Sir, your time is five minutes, your subject the immortality of the soul."

It is not my own story that I shall tell, but that of my brothers and comrades: men whose lives I have been watching, for these many years. History is of value only for the lessons it can teach us. My experience might teach you less than that of others. I had the good fortune to succeed to an established practice, and so missed the uphill fight that many have to wage.

A country doctor is a sublimed and glorified medical student. Now you know just what a medical student is—at least you think you do, from your standpoint perhaps you do. From the point of view of your teachers he is a big, rough, warm-hearted, generous, brainy fellow, with energies to be directed, and with boundless possibilities for future usefulness. From the standpoint of a Grand Opera House manager, he is a Nihilist. While from that of the "little girl out



THIS POINT OF VIEW OF YOUR TEACHER.

home" he is—well, you gentlemen know what he is to her. On two points regarding him all will agree. He quickly sees through sham and pretence, and (outside the class room) he is never at a loss for a timely answer.

Illustrating a Point.

Let me illustrate a point. In an earlier history of our college there were students here who, being the sons of ministers, felt it their duty to be a little wild, in order to restore the balance. It is told of one of these gentlemen that once when his "jag was heavy upon him," he dropped to sleep in a barber's chair. When the knight of the razor said to him, "If you don't hold up your head I can't shave you," the reply came quickly, "Then cut my hair." And you remember when that church down street took fire and the students all turned out to see it, one of them stated the whole case in the two words, "Holy smoke!" From such raw material as this the country doctor in our day and generation is evolved. Like the millers, we manufacture some for home consumption and "grind" the rest in bond for export. Probably the first physician, surgeon and accoucheur who ever engaged in country practice was the father of our race, Adam Primus. A photograph, the negative of which has unfortunately been lost, represents him giving catnip tea to little Able, while his wife Eve, suffering from a sick headache, binds up her throbbing temples with a fig leaf handkerchief. Ever since the fall the three most constant and universal demands of humanity have been water, bread, a doctor. Now, all who are graduated from our colleges cannot be surgeons and live in cities. It takes 10,000 people to support a surgeon, while with 1,000 a physician can live and save money. Besides, to get a living practice in a city takes about eight years, in a town four and in a village one or two only.

And so it comes about that the certain rises on our graduate as he hangs out his shingle at the cross-roads and hires a front and a bedroom for himself and a stall for his horse. While he is waiting for calls we will consider his environment and his preparation for the life he is to lead. Around him stretches the country, as God made it and as man is trying to improve it. The roads he will soon learn to know in

the dark as yet know nothing about the improvements suggested by the late Mr. Maclean. They curve and wander in search of the easiest grades, and at times they end in squirrel tracks that run up the trees. The forest primal borders the clearing on each farm lot, and the houses are of frame or log. Scattered here and there are little villages like the one in which he has located, "houses clustering like chicks around the motherly church roof," as Lowell happily puts it. He may have a dozen of such hamlets within what is to be his "ride." His college text books are his library, a hand-matched is ample for all his instruments, while a shelf or two contains his slender stock of drugs. The



FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE GRAND OPERA HOUSE MANAGER.

money saved from school teaching, was just enough to get him through the council, so from his father's farm a horse is spared, or one is bought on a slow note with paternal backing. This steed is not apt to be one that will get up an epidemic paralysis among those who watch him travel. At first a saddle is bought, then a buckboard and a cutter, have to be procured. A buggy only puts in its appearance, when some of the rocks are off the roads, and another kind begin to pile up in the doctor's pocket.

Two Years Later.

(Scene: Second—two years later.)

The first novelty of caring for folk has worn off, and our doctor is winning his way to the confidence of the community, but of late into his life a new and strange unrest has come.

His first diagnosis of his own disease is, "A subacute nostalgia." Very soon the symptoms point in quite another direction. It is not his old home he is longing for, but the new one he is to build. The lights that gleam across the snow, from happy firesides, make him



"I WILL FOLLOW YOU MY HUSBAND."

feel more and more his own isolation. His boarding house loses its attractiveness, and about this time he begins to make certain calls that do not go down in his visiting list. At first he seeks excuse for these, but later he is somehow expected, and he is too thoroughly a gentleman to disappoint a lady. Before very long someone goes driving with him, and sits tucked up in the cutter, while he makes his visits. The most widely spread of all maladies is upon him. You gentlemen, who study vital statistics, are well aware that more fall in love than in war. But the doctor does not fall in love. He walks right in with his eyes open, guided by that instrument of precision, his heart. Right here his professional advantages show to good account. Lawyers see the worst side of humanity, ministers the best side, while physicians see it just as it is. With his special knowledge of all the



FROM COUNTRY MUD IN SPRING AND FALL, "GOOD LORD DELIVER US ALL."

girls in the country, and his common sense, it would require positive genius to make a blunder. He makes no mistake, and the very best of them all is the one who has by this time agreed to call him "George" instead of "doctor." With womanly intuition she reads him through and through, and knowing full well that it is a terrible endorsement of a man to marry him, when he speaks she answers as Minnehaha did, "I will follow you, my husband." To the physician, overtaken in mind and body, struggling for his daily bread and weighed down very often with the awful responsibilities of his calling, a gentle, loving wife is the greatest of all good gifts. Besides this, to all fair things he lends a fairer charm, and from the home she will help him to create will come the purity, hope and courage with which from this time on his share the battle

Ten Years Later.

Scene Third—ten years later.

And now, our doctor is an established and prosperous man. Long ago his new house was built, and if not the best, it is apt to be the most tasteful in the village. You see he consulted his wife when it was planned. Sancho Panza said, "Women don't know anything, but that man is a fool who don't take their advice." He owns a farm on the fourth concession, is chairman of the School Board, reeve of the township and an elder in the church. His political convictions are strong, and his influence widely felt. The Hon. Oliver Macdonald or Sir John Mowat—I forget which—has his allegiance, and the party has no better or cleaner adherent. He is known and loved and trusted and overworked, and pitied by all. Perhaps he has a few enemies, just enough to enable him to escape the Biblical warning, "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you." His reputation has outrun the limits of an ordinary practice, many have urged him to move into the county town and he has long thought of doing so. But still he stays, waiting till he can meet with someone into whose keeping he can commit the care of his people, those to whom he has given the best years and the best energies of his life. Before we leave him let us look at the manner of man he is growing to be. Granting that the personal equation is the chief factor in the result, it is still true that the silent forces of his calling, those that ride with him over all the roads, that sit with him at all bedside, that are with him in his downy and his uprising—all these work upon mind and heart and body, making him day by day a better man or a worse one. He is worth our study, for in scattered settlements over all this greater half of the continent you will find his counterpart, and to some of you gentlemen it will soon be given to live a life like his and work out a similar destiny. What of that life, its mirth and its misery, its hopes and its aspirations, its disappointments and its rewards?

First, before all, it is a life of unconscious bravery, of devotion to duty and of the sacrifice of self for the good of others. On what higher plane can any life be lived? "It is only," wrote Goethe, "with self-renun-



"IS IT A CASE OF SCIATICA?"

ciation that we begin to live." He may not preach the truth, but he lives it, and that is a thousand times better. Dying for a truth or a principle is far, less difficult than living up to one.

Two o'clock in the Morning Courage.

The bravery his calling develops is that rare quality which Napoleon called "Two o'clock in the morning courage." It is an easy thing to be brave before a crowd of witnesses, but not so easy when the fight is a losing one and God alone is watching the struggle. Fire broke out one night in a city tenement, and in an upper window a child was seen. Quickly the ladders were run up and a fireman mounted to save her, but before he reached the top the flames and smoke were upon him. He hesitated and began to drop back. Then one in the crowd cried, "Cheer him," and from the multitude went up a shout that told of sympathy with him and the life to be saved or lost. Once more he dashed at the flame, went through it and came back with the little one safe in his arms. No such encouragement comes to the physician, when in some lonely tenement at night he receives his baptism of fire; but from that trial he comes forth in stronger, purer manhood, and never after doubts but that he is divinely ordained to be a minister of help, of comfort and of consolation unto those who are appointed to suffer. It will be his to "scatter the charities that soothe and bless and save." The devotion to duty that guides him now is the self same principle that moved the ten thousand at Marathon, and the three hundred at Thermopylae, that inspired

of lovers, makes up their quarrels and secures their happiness. He brings husband and wife together again, when differences have separated them. He is father confessor to half the country, and keeps his trust with knightly honor. His sympathy is deep and genuine, and is not worn on his coat sleeve. No one more than himself feels contempt for a "gusher," in or out of the profession. In every calling you find them. After a consultation, an old Quaker lady once said: "These will do me the favor not to bring that man again; they know I don't like my feelings pruned." Legal persons use sympathy only to sway juries. Clergymen sometimes over-use it. An evangelist at one time got into the habit of calling his audiences "dear souls." Laboring in Ireland he used to say with effect—"Dear Belfast souls," "Dear Dublin souls." But when he said, "Dear Cork souls" it did not seem quite appropriate. The sympathy of the physician is expressed, not in weeping with those that weep, but in devising relief for they who suffer in heart, mind or body. Far from being blunted by long contact with pain, his sympathy grows keener with each year of added experience. As anatomists, you know how close to the fountains of tears are to be found the ripples of laughter that run around the eyes. If the good Lord had not meant that we should be mirthful he would never let so many funny things happen. Father Faber has said: "There is no greater help to a religious life than a keen sense of the ludicrous."

Such a Divine gift has saved many a man from suicide, and it certainly softens the asperities and lessens the annoyances of practice. There is a vast difference between having people laugh with you and having them laugh at you. Into every sick room the physician should carry the inspiration of a cheery, hopeful presence. There is lots and lots of the kindest humor, even in that world of pain and sickness in which a country doctor dwells. A messenger calls when you are out and says, "I got some medicine from the doctor, and I want to insult him about it." A mother tells you that "Bobby has never been sick; he had a rash on his head once, and I got some of that there caricature soap and he soon got all right." You ask how did Ann Jane sleep? and are told "Doctor, dear, she was delirious all night." Is it a case of sciatica? The old man tells you "that a ball of hot wind keeps running from his hinch to his hock." And the Irish woman, who wishes to save your feelings and cannot report improvement, says, "Doctor, I have given little Patsy all your medicine and he is no worse, thin."

Unpleasant Experiences.

Night calls and bad roads, these two are chief factors in a country doctor's misery. When worn out and half sick, a call at bedtime or later comes with a sense of personal affront, and its bearer its looked upon as one far gone from original righteousness. We know, but others do not, that the really necessary calls which a physician receives would hardly suffice to keep up his horses. Besides that, it is the dead-beats that are most imperative and most untimely in their calls, and that take care to know nothing of the symptoms, lest medicine be sent and the visit be deferred until the morning. You are wanted "just as quick as you can get thar," and when you do get there the "black dipthery" is a follicular tonsillitis, or the "erysipelas" is a nettle rash. There was a man in the land of Uz who sat patient and self-poised as the messengers with evil tidings came to him thick and fast. Either we are not his lineal descendants, or this old patriarch failed to transmit to us the secret of his calm philosophy. When such calls come we don't always appear to good advantage before our families, and perhaps we start on the road resolved that the prescription shall be, zinci sulphatis grs. xx. But long before the patient's house is reached, the ruffled temper is smooth again.

Starlight and a good cigar are capital sociatives, and nothing worse than sweet nitre may be given. If the litany could be lengthened to read:

From country mud in spring and fall, Good Lord deliver us all.

Physicians might attend church more regularly, and would join with fervor in this part of the service, if in no other. Oh, the mud, the unutterable, bottomless, clinging mud, the—the—but I cannot speak of this subject with composure. Its memories are too painful, and overcome me. Better far the drifts of winter, that can only be climbed on snow-shoes before being shovelled out and broken for teams than the axle-deep and glue-like mud that sticks to my memory in dreams as it used to stick to the feet of my horses. More than any other the country doctor is a man who does his own thinking. In this world, said the greatest of German writers, "there are few voices and many echoes." City-bred physicians lean on each other and quote precedents and authorities as glibly as lawyers do. Few men really think, many think they are thinking, and all have opinions. You had them early in life. Your first opinion probably was that you were sorry that you had come here, next you held, perhaps vaguely, the opinion that if dinner wasn't ready it ought to be. I have met city physicians who reasoned about as profoundly as you did then but who have been getting along fairly well in practice. In the country they would have failed miserably.

Country Doctors Not Unlearned.

Ignorance like crime naturally hides in cities. Country practice offers no asylum ignorantum. The doctor there goes right to the front, to be known and read of all men. The people among whom he dwells belong to the great middle class, intelligent people, capable of forming correct judgments. Before such judges he stands, and he can shirk no responsibilities since sharp eyes follow him everywhere observing and discerning what manner of man he is.

Trained by the life he leads, he gains self-reliance, presence of mind, fertility of resource and sagacity, and thus becomes a self-contained man, capable, skilful and safe. To him a consultation is always something like a confession of failure and a downfall of pride. To this class have belonged such men as Jenner and Sims, McDowell and Robert Koch, with countless others whose good deeds will only be known when the secrets of all hearts are opened. He is charged with being at times "a routinist," and a one-idea man. If he has but one idea, it is his own, and he is that much ahead of quite a few other people. You do not find him, for example, claiming that all there is of modern gynecology is carried under one Birmingham hat. Such the work, now what of its rewards? In ten years of hard work a very large sum can be accumulated—on one's ledger. What shall it profit a man if he has accounts against every one in the country and cannot collect a cent. For your encouragement let me tell you that from 75 to 90 per cent. of money earned in the country is good, or will be some day. But there are rewards not to be expressed with the dollar sign before

them. It may be yours to feel the happiness of the patriarchs of old. "The blessing of Him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy." Better still, your ample reward may be the benediction of the great Physician, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these ye have done it unto me."

As to the final reward, let us ask of those who have attained the prize. List while they speak:—

In life's uneven road Our willing hands have eased our mother's load; One forehead smoothed, one pang of torture less, One painful hour a sufferer's couch to bless, The smile brought back to favor's parading lips, The light restored to reason in eclipse, Life's treasure rescued like a burning brand, Snatched from the dread destroyer's wasteful hand— Such were our simple records, day by day, For such like these we won our lives away. In toll-song paths our daily bread we sought, But bread from heaven attending angels brought. Pain was our teacher, speaking to the heart, Mother of pity, nurse of pitying art; Our lesson learned, we reached the peaceful shore Where the pale suferer asks our aid no more. These grateful words our wooms, our reward. Ye served your brothers, ye have served your Lord.