

## THE PHYSICIAN AS FATHER-CONFESSOR

*Sacred Relationship of Patient and Physician. Doing the Right Thing. Love Powders. The Wooing and Winning of Kyriss. Physician's Duty and Privilege.*

### SACRED RELATIONSHIP OF PATIENT AND PHYSICIAN

There is an almost sacred relationship between patient and physician that is akin to the relationship of communicant and clergy. The law and the decisions of the courts uphold the principle of the sacredness of privileged communications between patient and physician. The physician is the good genius at birth, ministers to the suffering during life and tenderly cares for the dying. His relation to the family is closer than any other, barring blood relationship.

It was therefore fitting that less than a generation ago, the physician should have been called upon to draw the wills of persons about to depart for the great unknown, as mentioned elsewhere in this book. It is not to be wondered at that he should be consulted on matters of policy, domestic, political and economic. Wife or husband may consult him about intimate domestic difficulties real or imaginary. The erring swain and the unfortunate girl who loved and trusted "not wisely but too well" go to him for help out of their difficulties. It is in these situations that the physician can show his generalship, his moral stamina and his sense of justice.

A young man approaches a doctor for something to help his trusting, girl lover "come around." The physician at once knows what is wanted. If the physician is true to his profession, as nearly all are, he will quietly talk the matter over with the young

### THE PHYSICIAN AS FATHER-CONFESSOR

man or young woman and suggest that a marriage be arranged, as that will make it as nearly right as it can be made. In most cases the advice will be followed, shortly. Instances like the following, none of which refers to persons now living, are common enough.

#### DOING THE RIGHT THING

A young man came with the story that he and a young woman whom he expected to marry were in trouble. They were not in a financial position to marry, although they expected to be married as soon as he could afford it. He seemed a sensible, quiet young man of honest intentions. Talking the matter over from several angles, I advised him to go to the young woman's father and lay the case before him, telling him he was willing and anxious to do the right thing, but had no immediate prospects of being able to support a family. He took my advice "laid his cards on the table," the marriage took place and the father helped them to farming equipment and they got along very nicely.

A girl of German parentage, boisterous and somewhat spoiled by her many brothers, a girl whom I knew very well and whose family was close to me professionally came with a story of having missed several periods. Questioned she admitted that a lover had taken advantage of her, but stressed a story that she had been forced. I told her that was an unlikely story and that she could have protected herself but she pleaded that she fought until overcome, which I also told her was unlikely. I suggested that abortion was impossible to consider, that she must have the young man marry her, that she needed a husband and her prospective child a father. She blurted out that she did not want him, would not

#### THE PHYSICIAN AS FATHER-CONFESSOR

marry him. I again insisted that the child needed a father and she a husband, that she was in no position to choose—an attitude she had, apparently, assumed. I offered to talk to the young man if she wished me to do so. This she declined, but she promised me she would see him and report to me later. She returned with the report that the young man had said he would marry her if she would talk to her father and make him "come down handsomely." To this astounding proposition she told him to "Go to h-ll," she would do nothing of the kind. Eventually, however, they were married and her father outfitted them on a farm.

A young woman came to me to find out if she were pregnant. Examination revealed a pregnancy of probably five months. She said a marriage had been planned but postponed on account of financial conditions. Feeling a fatherly interest I ventured to suggest that a wedding take place very shortly, quietly, without waiting for a special trousseau and suggested that by the time the baby came the community would think nothing of it. A full month later there was a church wedding.

A fond mother brought her beautiful daughter to consult me because of missed catamenia. Placing her on the examining-table a prominence of the abdomen in the mid-line was at once noticeable. I then asked her if she had been true to herself to which she replied in the affirmative. I then more insistently asked her whether her lover had taken advantage of her, which she denied with an insulted air. I then said we would make an internal examination to find whether she had a tumor. To this she demurred. Her mother came to my assistance by asking the girl some pointed questions. Finally the girl burst

#### THE PHYSICIAN AS FATHER-CONFESSOR

out weeping and said "Let's go home." A wedding followed, shortly.

A girl from a neighboring community worked in a cafe and came under my care on account of painful flooding. Questioned, she readily admitted indiscretions with a lover who had departed. I had her moved to the home of her parents who were unsuspecting Germans, told them she had had an internal hemorrhage and needed surgical attention, and with the assistance of another physician, who administered an anaesthetic, I cleaned out the debris with a dull curette.

A teacher came to me with the story of indiscretions with her lover in a moment of forgetfulness for which she blamed herself as much as she did the lover, and wondered if she might be pregnant. She thought there had been no penetration. I encouraged her to think nothing serious had happened—and events proved my statement correct. They later married and raised a fine family.

#### LOVE POWDERS

Perhaps the poorest couple it was my pioneer privilege to know was Jimmy and his wife, young people barely of age, renters, who occasionally came to town on their rickety lumber wagon pulled by two skinny ponies. Jimmy and his wife did not live altogether agreeably it appears, for one day he came into my office and asked me whether I could give him some "love powders" for his wife. He explained that she did not seem to care for him anymore and he had heard that there was such a thing as love powders. I had to explain to him that there was no such medicine and ventured the suggestions that perhaps

#### THE PHYSICIAN AS FATHER-CONFESSOR

if he made quite an effort to be agreeable, it might affect the home life of both.

#### THE WOOING AND WINNING OF KYRISS

Kyriss was a German bachelor who lived on his own farm and wanted a wife. He was stolid, about forty and unsophisticated. He was told he might be able to induce a certain young woman whom we will call Henrietta to marry him. He called on her several times but she repelled him for he was too slow to suit her disposition. Henrietta had other admirers more to her fancy. In the course of time Henrietta discovered herself with prospects of motherhood and without anyone willing to assume paternal responsibility. A family council was held and it occurred to someone in the group that simple minded Kyriss might be won over. Father interviewed Kyriss with the story that Henrietta wanted to see him; that she was very sorry for having repelled his previous advances—would he come over to their home? Kyriss would. A prompt wedding was arranged.

In ten weeks I was called to a confinement. A normal child of eight pounds was born. "A seven month's child," the grandmother exclaimed, "Don't you see the blueness of the finger nails?" I did not. A neighbor lady came in and ventured the suggestion that seven-months children never lived more than a few weeks. This disturbed Kyriss and he promptly came to see me about the matter. I told him not to worry that the child was fully developed and quite all right. I had not realized his stupidity nor her duplicity. He said that if it was a full term child, it wasn't his; that it could not be more than a three month child, if it was his. At this I sensed

#### THE PHYSICIAN AS FATHER-CONFESSOR

the situation and changed my story, telling him that he must not for a minute let such thoughts trouble him, that it was a fine child and no matter whether it was seven months or three months it was physically perfect and he must not allow himself to think of anything else but that it was his child. This seemed to satisfy him and the matter quieted down.

#### PHYSICIAN'S DUTY AND PRIVILEGE

This may not pass as high class literature but it is a true representation of one phase of life seen by all physicians, during the passing years. It may prove a worth while object lesson to the young physician just beginning practice. The physician's opportunity to do good social service in such cases is undeniably great and he should consider it a duty as well as a privilege to use his influence for the good of such misguided and unfortunate persons.