

A MEDICAL TYRO OF THE EARLY EIGHTIES

Partnership With Preceptor. My First Confinement. I Treat Convulsions. The Irishman and His "Ager." I Receive Twenty-Five Dollars. Partnership Dissolved.

PARTNERSHIP WITH PRECEPTOR

Although I had earned the right to affix that magical "M. D." to my name, I had a deep-rooted feeling of my own inadequacy and was convinced that I did not have sufficient knowledge to practice medicine on my own responsibility. This feeling of fundamental inferiority probably saved me from making an utter failure, for it spurred me on to continuous endeavor to compensate for my deficiencies. At any rate I was very glad to accept the offer of a limited partnership with my old preceptor at Moulton, Iowa.

Our suite of offices was far from inviting. A large store room on the principal business street was partitioned into three rooms. I equipped the rear room with a bed for my sleeping quarters. The office was my home. I paid the then large sum of three dollars and a half a week for board at a near-by restaurant. I was happy as could be for was I not a practicing physician at last?

And then my experiences began. Five days after I arrived, my preceptor left me in charge of the office and his patients while he went away on a business trip for a week. The time had come to "Root, hog, or die." Fortunately for me, the wife of my partner was a brilliant and sensible woman, who had been one of my high school teachers. She helped me through these first days with good advice, and even instilled some principles of diplomacy into my blundering brain.

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FIRST CONFINEMENT

The first confinement call came promptly. The patient was the wife of the section foreman. As soon as I entered the bedchamber the husband said, "Doc, have you had any experience in handling such cases?" I had schooled myself for just such a question and unhesitatingly, but shamefully, replied "Oh, yes!" (My total college experience was with a manikin, you remember). Luckily for me, the child was born about ten minutes after my arrival, else I might have fallen into grave disrepute.

I TREAT CONVULSIONS

A woman, whose husband died while on a spree in Burlington, went into convulsions. I was called to treat her. Something told me to give her bromide and chloral, nerve quieting remedies; the preceptor's wife helped me to make a diagnosis of hysterical convulsions. I assumed a very sober and severe attitude, ordered the members of the household about and gave her every attention within my mental horizon. People thought her alarmingly ill. Within a few days she began to recover and my star was in the ascendant. I was told by my friends that people were speaking well of the "young doctor."

A very special friend of my partner developed a severe inflammation of the bladder and I was called to take care of him. To relieve the pain of the strangury, I prescribed an opiate together with neutralizing agents. He became delirious and the family became alarmed. The preceptor-partner returned at this critical moment and explained to the satisfaction of the family and friends that the opiate produced the mental confusion.

All my life I have been somewhat diffident; from

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adolescence on I was extremely bashful. As I grew older, and attained my medical degree, I did not completely overcome that inferiority complex, as the psychologists of today would call it. It spurred me on to a bit of assumed courage. I determined to overcome this lack of training and experience, which I felt so keenly, by faithful study. I made it my practice to read and re-read in my books every case I had to treat, so as to familiarize myself with all the symptoms and varying phases and complications of disease. No matter how frequently I had cases of the same general type under my care, I carried out this practice for many years. This proved a wonderful help to me in later years. I recommend it to others.

THE IRISHMAN AND HIS "AGER"

At the time of which I write, Iowa had prohibition of distilled alcoholic liquors, and local option for beer 3% and wines 15% alcohol. Alcohol liquors might be prescribed by physicians for the use of patients. This privilege was much abused, both by the laity and by some physicians. Requests for prescriptions for alcohol came as soon as it was known I was in practice. I declined all. But the variety of excuses offered were a source of amusement to me. One man whom I had known well for some years told me he had a mule with a sore hoof and he wanted alcohol to put on the hoof!

Malarial fever was common in Southern Iowa in those days and many persons called for whiskey or alcohol to take with quinine. An Irishman with a whiskey nose came to me for a "dost o' quinine for ager." When I moved to get it for him he came close and whispered he wanted "to take it in whos-

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key, doctor, just a little quinine and lots of whoskey." On a later occasion at the drug store my partner fixed this ardent customer on a like request, by adding tincture of capsicum to the quinine and whiskey. The Irishman gulped it, strangled, struggled to catch his breath, and exclaimed "Jasus Carist, that would kill a hor-rse; that would kill the divil!"

PARTNERSHIP DISSOLVED—I RECEIVE TWENTY-FIVE DOLLARS

I soon learned that my preceptor had acquired some bad habits during the years I had been at medical school. He was drinking and I suspected he was using morphine, a suspicion later events confirmed. And so I decided to go elsewhere. I had spent three and a half very eventful, and professionally very profitable months, from March third to mid-June of 1882 in this partnership. There had been little illness after March. By the time I left we had earned over \$1,000—which was probably an average for that day. Under our agreement, I was to have one fourth, but when we settled, I was awarded exactly \$25.00.

The later history of my preceptor was rather startling. In a dispute over a bill he shot and mortally wounded a butcher—in self defense he claimed—and was sentenced to ten years in the penitentiary at Ft. Madison. After two years imprisonment, he was pardoned and located in Ft. Madison as a surgeon where some years later, he died.

Such was my beginning in the practice of medicine!