BOOK
ON
THE PHYSICIAN HIMSELF
AND THINGS THAT CONCERN
His Reputation and Success.

CHAPTER I.

"These are my thoughts; I might have spun them out into a greater length; but I think a little plot of ground thick sown is better than a great field which, for the most part of it, lies fallow."

To fight the battles of life successfully, it is as necessary for even the most skillful physician to possess a certain amount of professional tact and business sagacity as it is for a ship to have a rudder. There are gentlemen in the ranks of our profession who are perfectly acquainted with the scientific aspects of medicine, and can tell you what to do for almost every ailment that afflicts humanity, yet, nevertheless, after earnest trial, have failed to achieve reputation or acquire practice simply because they lack the *professional tact and business sagacity* that would make their other qualities successful; and there is nothing more pitiful than to see a worthy physician deficient in these respects, waiting year after year for practice, and a consequent sphere of professional usefulness, that never come.

Were any such graduate to ask me: "How can I conduct myself in the profession, and what honorable and legitimate means shall I add to my scientific knowledge and book-learning, in order to make my success in the great professional struggle more certain, more rapid, and more complete?" I should offer him the following suggestions:—

First, last, and in the midst of all, you should, as a man

and as a physician, found your expectations of success on your personal and scientific qualifications, and keep whatever is honest, whatever is true, whatever is just, and whatever is pure, foremost in your mind, and be governed by it. If you do not you will not deserve to succeed in the honorable profession of medicine, and no honest man can wish you success.

Whether, after graduation, you commence to practice without any intermediate course, or wisely strive to further prepare and refine and broaden yourself for your life's work by a limited term of service as resident physician or assistant in some hospital, or by taking a systematic course in diagnosing, prescribing, and manipulations at some post-graduate school in one of our own great cities, or endeavor to obtain a complete scientific knowledge of the profession by making a journey to the hospitals and clinics of London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, or Leipzig, that your eyes may see the work, and that your ears may drink in the thoughts of their great teachers, is a matter of taste, money, time, and opportunity; but, whenever and wherever you commence your private practice, you should, above all else, be seriously in earnest and strive to start right, and, by the aid of hope, tireless industry, and determination, to enter promptly on the road to success; for, unless you gain popular favor by a worthy display of ability, acquire some reputation, and build up a fair practice in your first six or eight years, the probabilities are that you never will. In the battle of life it is not simply the events of school days and college hours, but the after-performances, that prove the physician.

"Life is a sheet of paper, white,
Whereon each man of us may write
His word or two, and then comes night."

Beware of entangling alliances. It is, as a rule, better not to enter into partnership with other physicians. Partners are usually not equally matched in industry, capacity for work, tact, temperament, and other qualities indispensable to an intimate and congenial fellowship, and are not equally cared for by

the public. Hence such professional alliances do not generally prove as beneficial or as satisfactory as expected, and consequently partnerships rarely continue long. Above all else, never ally yourself with any other physician as assistant or junior partner, to do the drudgery, or on any other terms than as an equal. The sooner you learn to depend wholly on yourself, the better. Julius Cæsar said: "I had rather be the first man in a village than the second man in a great city."

"The fame that a man wins himself is best;
That, he may call his own."

Unless you have the locality and your place of residence already selected, you may find it the most difficult problem of your life, with the whole boundless continent before you, to accurately balance and weigh the difficulties and advantages of this, that, or the other nook, corner, or opening. Whether to locate in your own town, among the generation you have grown up with, and where everybody knows all about you and your pedigree from the cradle up, or elsewhere, among strangers; in a populous city or moderate-sized town, or in a village or a rural district; in the East or the West, the North or the South of our wide-spread land, is truly a puzzling puzzle, and may be the turning-point in your life.

Many big blunders are made at the outset by locating in the wrong place; therefore, give the subject your very best thought, and decide with great care, and only after duly considering your own qualities and qualifications, as well as the locations, —whether you are self-reliant and pushing, or quiet and unobtrusive; whether you have abilities that will enable you to compete with the wisest and the best, and compel people in a populous centre to employ you in preference to your neighbors; or whether, being less fully armed, you had better be satisfied with mediocrity, and become a modest country doctor in a less thickly settled location, where there is less competition and less talent to encounter, or go to the new States and grow with the growth of the settlements, or rise with the villages, or spread

with the cities that are springing up. I may remind you, however, that

"Where there is nothing great to be done, a great man is impossible."

Medicine, like everything else, thrives best in good ground. By all means seek to locate in a community to which you are suited; that will be congenial as a place to live in, and in which you are likely to get business and be useful to your fellow-beings, and also to earn a living for yourself. Bear in mind that unpopular opinions in politics or religion injure, and that, all else equal, you will be more likely to succeed and be contented in a section where your views, habits, and tastes are naturally in harmony with the bulk of the people, morally, socially, and politically.

No matter where you start, if, alas!

"You wear the bloom of youth upon your cheek,"

you will hear the adjective "young" oftener than is pleasant, and encounter up-hill difficulties that older physicians do not. "He looks too young;" "He lacks experience;" "He don't know anything;" "He has no practice, therefore is no good;" "He shouldn't doctor me," and "I'd send him off and get an older physician," are among the often-heard expressions. Face them all bravely. Never doubt, but show the world, by good management and good habits, that you deserve to succeed, and success will surely come. Strict attention to the opportunities that will present themselves for winning confidence in cases that are incidentally thrown into your hands, and a diligent cultivation of your talents, with promptness, civility, courtesy, and unobjectionable conduct to all, rich and poor, and pleasant manners, but no time to gossip, will bring it. Even a single event, or an accident, may fortunately give you an introduction to extensive business.

If you are young and youthful-looking, unless you have some special reason to the contrary, let your beard grow, if it will; and remember that our Saviour and Alexander each lived

but thirty-three years, and Napoleon commanded the army of Italy at twenty-seven.

If you begin practice in a city or town, the location and appearance of your office will, more or less, affect your progress, and you will do well to select one, easy of access, in a genteel neighborhood, upon or very near one or more of the main thoroughfares, and convenient to either a densely populated old section, or a rapidly growing new one. The nearer to busy centres of mechanics and laborers, the better. If you were to locate on a back or unfrequented street or other out-of-the-way place, or in the country, where the land is unproductive and the population sparse, simply because there is but little or no competition, it would naturally suggest to the public that you had poor judgment or were made of timorous, negative material, or lacked the spirit of enterprise and enthusiasm, or were waiting for practice to come naturally, and for success to be handed to you on a silver platter, or else had defective ambition and distrust of your own acquirements.

"He that does not show himself is overlooked."

Remember, in making your selection, that a physician cannot rely on his near neighbors for patronage; people in your immediate neighborhood may never employ you, while some farther away will have no one else.

If your first location disappoints you, remove to another; but avoid frequent removals, and do not shift or change from one place to another unless it is clearly to better yourself. Select a place suited to your abilities and taste, and then be tenacious. Reputation is a thing that grows slowly, and every distant removal imperils one's practice, necessitates new labor, and sometimes even compels a commencing of life over again. A physician's frequent removals may also create a bad impression, and look like natural instability or dissatisfaction from lack of success.

Branch offices are, as a rule, not desirable, for, in addition to the loss of time, and wear and tear in going to and fro, and

double trouble in general, they are apt to create an uncertainty in the minds of those who may be in want of the physician, as to where and when he is most likely to be found. On estimating all the advantages and disadvantages, it will probably be found that, as a rule, a plurality of offices increases greatly neither one's practice, one's popularity, nor one's income, but does add greatly to the labor, and hence may be regarded as likely to prove more annoying than profitable.

It has been said that

> "A physician never gets bread
> Till he has no teeth to eat it."

Be this as it may, it is risky for you, if a beginner, with no influence and but little money, to locate in a section already overstocked with popular, energetic physicians, as their superior advantages, established reputations, and warm competition may keep you limited and crippled for too long a time before a chance or a change comes. Also, guard against going too close to large, free hospitals and dispensaries. Your first necessity is to possess knowledge and skill as a physician, your second is to find a field in which to exercise and display them; but, no matter where you locate, if you expect business immediately to follow your annunciation of being ready to receive it, you will, except under very extraordinary circumstances, be rudely disappointed.

A corner house is naturally preferable to one in the middle of a row, since it is convenient for persons coming from all directions, and not only has facilities for constructing an office entrance on the side street, leaving the front door free for other callers, but also insures to the consulting-room a good light for examinations, operations, and study.

Regarding offices: Try to have a good, comfortable waiting-room, with a recessed front door; also, a good, light, airy, and accessible consulting-room of moderate dimensions, with, if at all convenient, two doors,—one for the entrance and the other for the exit of patients,—for many of those who consult you will

prefer to be let out through a passage or private door, and thus escape the gaze and possibly the comments of others in waiting.

Exercise special care in their arrangement; give them a pleasing exterior and make them look fresh, neat, and clean outside; and inside, give them a snug, bright, and cosy medical tone, and let their essential features show that their occupant is possessed of good taste and gentility, as well as learning and skill; and that they are not a lawyer's consulting-rooms, nor a clergyman's sanctum, nor an instrument-maker's shop, nor a smoking-club's head-quarters, nor a sportsman's rest, nor a loafing room for the gay, the idle, the dissipated, and the unemployed; nor a family parlor, nor a social meeting-place of any kind; but the offices of an earnest, working, scientific physician, who has a library, takes the journals, and makes full use of the instruments and methods that science has devised for him, and regards his office as the twin sister to the sick-room.

Take particular care, however, to avoid making a quackish display of instruments and tools, and keep from sight such inappropriate and repulsive objects as catheters, syringes, stomach-pumps, obstetric forceps, splints, trusses, amputating knives, skeletons, grinning skulls, jars of amputated extremities, tumors, manikins, the unripe fruit of the uterus, etc. Also, avoid such chilling or coarse habits as keeping vaginal specula or human bones on your desk for paper-weights.

But while you should make no undue exhibition of books, surgical instruments, etc., it is not unprofessional to have about you—not for display, but for ready and actual use—your outfit: microscope, stethoscope, laryngoscope, ophthalmoscope, spirit-lamp, test-tubes, reagents for testing urine, and the various other aids to precision in diagnosis, and the numerous instruments you make use of in treatment; also, to ornament your office with diplomas, certificates of society membership, potted or cut flowers or growing plants or vines, fine etchings, pictures of eminent professional friends or teachers, or of medical celebrities,—Hippocrates, Galen, Harvey, Gross, or whomever else