

CHAPTER II.

"He who does the best his circumstance allows,
Does well, acts nobly, angels could do no more."

THERE has been of late years a large, annual addition to our already overcrowded profession, and the doctor-making colleges of the United States, with their tempting inducements to students,—small fees, condensed lectures, quizzes, "loading up" at the heel of the session from "compendis," "epitomes," "vade mecums," and "multum in parvo" guide-books, and evenings at grinding clubs; with the two short courses of lectures required for *astonishing the professors* in the green-room, by accurately repeating the majority of their own sapient sayings, and thereby obtaining the M.D.,—are now manufacturing annually more than four thousand graduates, besides the medical immigrants representing all nations who reach our shores from abroad, already dubbed M.D., and prepared to enter at once upon practice. The result is that, if it requires a population of 1800 to support each physician, and if every physician must have a paying clientage of 1000 or 1200 persons to enable him to live and thrive, there are now in every American community more than twice as many physicians as are required by the professional work.

Yea, every city, town, hamlet, and village, every cross-roads, every nook and every corner, everywhere in our land, can now boast a physician or two. Canada has but one for every 1193 inhabitants, Austria one for every 2500, Germany one for every 3000, Great Britain one for every 1652, France one for every 1814, Italy one for every 3500, while we of the United States, blessed (?) in physicians as in everything else, have, counting both regulars and irregulars, one for every 600, and druggists in proportion. If there were only a few more than needed to fill vacancies caused by death and increase of population it

might be wholesome, and would allow the public a choice, but with such an overproduction as this there is not professional work enough to employ all, and many worthy aspirants must necessarily languish, and those who do flourish must do so by great skill, great tact, or great industry. Another result of issuing diplomas so freely is that diplomas are now far down in public estimation, and are not received as evidence of their owners' competency either by army or naval examining boards, or even by State licensing boards.

The doors to the Æsculapian temple are open,—too open to every variety of individual,—and all kinds are rushing in, and you will be unusually lucky if you encounter none who are maliciously antagonistic. You will not only meet Professor Loveall, Dr. Fair, Dr. Ettykett, Dr. Warmgrasp, and Dr. Dove, but Professor Crank, Dr. Oblique, Dr. Sneerer, Dr. Crusty, Dr. Quackit, Dr. Squabler, Dr. Frigid, and Dr. Spitfire are also about, and may be encountered in unfriendly collision.

Bear this fact in mind, and avoid all manifestations, and, if possible, all feelings of petty jealousy, and let your conduct be affable and frank, fair and square to everybody on all occasions, and strive, in your daily life, to build a reputation for professional probity that will excite the respect of all, whether friend or foe, and convince them that you are incapable of any dishonorable act.

Avoid all quarrels, bickerings, and disputes with your medical brethren, and be ever ready to yield a point, where it involves no principle, rather than engage in controversy and contention; and if ever a question arises between you and a brother physician that you cannot settle yourselves or by the code of ethics, submit it to the decision of mutual friends, but never begin to retaliate or make reprisals, and avoid all innuendoes and sarcastic remarks to the laity about opponents who have offended you. Exhibit a total absence of professional tricks, and resolve, once for all, that you will remain and act as a gentleman, even under provocation, whether others do so or not. Fail not to

practice the golden rule, and "do unto others as you would have them do unto you," and trust the balance to time. Medicine is an honorable calling; resolve that it shall be no less so by your adopting it.

Remember, too, that honor and duty require you to do right not only because it is good policy, but because it is right. Do not, however, be so trusting as to "look for wings on a wolf," or expect exact justice from rivals and personal enemies in return; for, were you as chaste as Diana and as pure as the falling snow, you could not escape misrepresentation by evil eyes, wicked hearts, and deceitful tongues.

Like every other physician, you will have your friends to extol you and your enemies to condemn and decry you, and although you can neither stop the latters' tongues nor prevent all unfavorable public criticism, yet you must take care that nothing be permitted to blast your reputation for upright, honorable conduct. Charges against your skill, unless very gross and damaging, had better be left unnoticed, or passed over with indifference; even though it reaches your ears that some Littlewit, or Grundy, or Glibtongue has said he has a total lack of faith in you, and would not call you to attend his ailing cat or dog, such sarcasm need not disturb your equanimity, nor be taken as personal; remember that such remarks are simply individual expressions of lack of faith in you professionally. Such things are said about every physician in the world, and, although they grate harshly when they reach the ear of him to whom they apply, they are quite different from personal libels, or such as bring your morals or integrity into question,—charges of being a swindler, or a drunkard, or an adulterer, or a seducer, or a murderer, or an abortionist, for example.

Never boast of the number of cases you have; of your remedies, operations, and wonderful cures; or of the surprisingly large amounts of your collections. All such things are apt to create envy, jealousy, disbelief, adverse criticism (Professor Pufhimself or Dr. Hornblower), and other hurtful results.

Also avoid talking about yourself, or telling from house to house how terribly busy you are, and of your numerous bad cases, and claiming to save the lives of all who do not die. Indeed, it is better to say but little in regard to your own merits, either in the way of exaggeration or depreciation, and to relate nothing at all to laymen about any case but the one before you; phthoothern bragging will not enhance your merits with sensible people, and if you really have extra cases and extra skill, or are a great anatomist or eminent surgeon, people will be sure to find it out in other ways. Also keep your business affairs and your money matters to yourself, and avoid the habit of talking to people about your collections, bills, etc., unless it be to a person about his own bill, or you will soon get the reputation of thinking and talking more about money matters than anything else.

As a physician, you will require a good address and varied talents, for you must come in contact with all kinds of people. An intelligent readiness in adapting yourself to all classes sufficiently for the requirements of your profession is an invaluable faculty, and one in which most physicians are sadly deficient.

In addition to professional knowledge, you should make yourself fairly conversant with general scientific subjects that tend to exercise the reason rather than the memory, and also with general and polite literature, that you may acquire ideas, a nice discrimination of words, and improved power and facility of expression, and so put yourself on a conversational level with the cultured classes with whom you are likely to be brought into contact. In fact, among intellectual and educated people, good conversational powers and broad culture often actually produce a higher opinion of a physician's professional ability than is really possessed. Besides,

"Wisdom is the sunlight of the soul,"

and there is a perpetual delight in the possession of knowledge. Therefore, keep your dictionaries and encyclopædias at your elbow; patronize them freely, and, when your reading or musing excites your curiosity on any subject, turn to them and be

informed. They are very convenient and useful in looking up facts and opinions when you have but a few moments to devote to an inquiry.

"We live in thoughts, not breaths.
He most lives who thinks most."

One who can neither conjugate *amo* nor decline *penna* may reduce a dislocation, adjust a fracture, tie an artery, or prescribe a drug as skillfully as the Latinist can; yet a good (classical) education, and the mental images, ideas and discipline that follow, although not indispensably necessary to the acquirement of skill, experience, and success as a physician, are powerful elements in the professional struggle. Therefore, if you have begun late in life, and are defective in early training, be not cast down; but, to rid yourself of the charge of illiteracy and misapplication of words, make up the deficiency by dint of study and self-education, as fully as possible; otherwise, it will make you ashamed of your want of knowledge, and either keep you hid among the nonentities of the profession or perpetually debar you from obtaining more than a limited elevation in it.

Indeed, without educational and other qualifications you can no more enjoy social or professional rank, or reach true eminence, than a pigeon can fly upward with but one wing. The true secret is to be qualified for advancement; besides, without a fair education you will be continually exposed to ridicule for your ignorance or vulgarity by persons who are, perhaps, very much your inferiors in those peculiar gifts of heaven,—genius and sound common sense. But while a physician cannot know too much, I strongly doubt the wisdom of frittering away, after practice is begun, a disproportionate amount of time on educational frivolities and school-boy subjects, or giving them more time than recreative attention allows. Nor is it wise to give special attention to higher mathematics, the fine arts, the great classics, zoölogy, comparative anatomy, mineralogy, botany, Egyptology, geology, conchology, or other collateral studies, while yet imperfect in the practical and essen-

tial principles of medicine, because simultaneous attention to multifarious subjects prevents concentration of thoughts, and naturally divides and distracts one's mind, and prevents one from pursuing the strictly needful studies with his full strength. Do not attempt to grasp more than you can hold, but pursue whatever you do undertake with manly determination and continuity of effort.

The plan of forcing themselves tenaciously to pursue aims of a practical character constitutes the peculiarity of most men who rise much above the ordinary level and succeed in an eminent degree. This is not only true in medicine, but in any calling. I once knew a person who by accident lost his leg at the middle of the thigh; previous to this he was but an ordinary swimmer, but afterward the fact of his having only one leg attracted special attention to his swimming. Seeing himself thus observed stimulated him continually to do his best, which made him more and more expert, until eventually he became the best swimmer I ever saw, because the most ambitious.

A knowledge of Latin to even a limited extent is of inestimable value. If you are not a scholar, and have not had the advantage of embracing it in your early education, you should not fail to employ some Latin scholar to teach you at least as much as you need in your practice; you can get one at small cost by advertising anonymously in any daily paper. He can, with the aid of a Latin grammar (Gildersleve's Latin primer is excellent) and a dictionary, teach you in a short time sufficient of the outlines of the Latin language to enable you to understand the etymological import and pronunciation of words, phrases, and technical terms, and to write prescriptions, etc., correctly, and thereby lift you above a feeling of abashment at your deficiency in this obviously important particular, give a constant sense of security, and afford perpetual satisfaction. No matter where you get your Latin, so you get it somewhere. Ability to write prescriptions in correct Latin, also, naturally assists in creating respect, or, rather, in preventing unfriendly criticism

and disrespect, in the minds of your fellow-physicians, the druggists, and others. Besides, all laymen suppose that every physician understands some Latin, and if they find him ignorant of this they naturally think him equally so in everything else.

Many people really believe we write prescriptions in Latin in order to mask their ingredients. The true intent, however, is to give every article (and every quantity) a concise and specific title, and to point it out in such a manner that when we call for it in a prescription we may get *it*, and nothing else, thus making mistakes of meaning between the prescriber and the compounder impossible; besides, the Latin names of drugs are the same in America, Europe, and elsewhere, and can be read by the scholars of all nations, while the common names, sugar of lead, laudanum, black wash, etc., are liable to differ with each nation and locality. Thus, aqua is water in Baltimore, and is the same in Paris, in Calcutta, and in St. Petersburg. Latin is a dead language, belonging to no modern nation, and therefore fixed, and not subject to mutations. It is not only perfectly accurate, but, by long usage, is in high repute.

A rudimentary knowledge of Greek is also useful, as from it have been formed three-fourths of the compound terms employed in the medical and other sciences. Indeed, Latin and Greek have furnished the materials for building up the language of the various sciences for more than two thousand years. The meaning of the terms semi-lunar and dys-uria are as plain and descriptive to those who understand Latin and Greek as the words milk-pail and steam-boat are to those who understand English.

In using the Latin names of medicines, diseases, muscles, etc., be consistent. Adopt either the broad English or the (Roman) Continental pronunciation, but, whichever you adopt, be careful to use it invariably and correctly. You may acquire a correct pronunciation of the various medical terms by frequently consulting a dictionary, of which there is none better than Dunglison's latest edition.

German is another of the world's great languages, and an acquaintance with it is not only pleasurable and a means of intellectual improvement that costs but little money, but it will assist you greatly with the industrious, faithful, and thrifty Germans, among whom you will find many of your most honest and grateful patients. Determine to get at least a smattering of it early in your career. If you speak German, it is well to mention the fact on your cards.

Remember that no one can learn to speak the German or any other language unless conversation enters largely into his teaching; he must learn it through his ears, as well as through his eyes.

You will find that many foreigners prefer an American physician who can speak their language to one who has come here from their own country, and have more confidence in him, because, being a native, they know he has spent his whole lifetime here, and they reason that, although the great principles of medicine may be taught and learned anywhere, he is by experience more familiar with the diseases that exist in our climate, the peculiarities of the vicinity, and the modifying influences of our seasons, diet, and modes of living.

A German, Frenchman, Spaniard, Italian, or Bohemian will often be delighted to find a physician in an English-speaking community with whom he can converse in his own tongue. Foreigners often pay much more liberally than natives, and usually treat the physician with much greater respect.

A physician is at perfect liberty to state on his cards and signs that he speaks French, Italian, Spanish, Bohemian, German, or any other foreign language; and such a statement should, if made, be in the language of the people for whom it is intended.

Accustom yourself to use current and correct orthography, and to write, not with a scrawling hand, in a zigzag or the worm-fence style, but in a good, neat, distinct, school-day hand. Write every prescription as though critics were to judge you