

THE  
MYSTERIES OF MONTREAL;

BEING  
RECOLLECTIONS  
OF A  
FEMALE PHYSICIAN.

BY CH. FÜHRER.

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“Truth is Stranger than Fiction.”

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1831.

Now, however, came the question: How are we to live? for my husband had no settled profession, and his parents, though wealthy, could not deprive their more obedient children of their rights to benefit the perverse Gustav. They gave him sufficient to start him in business, with the understanding that he would emigrate to America, their idea being that a German gentleman with a little capital could not fail to make a fortune among the comparatively illiterate Columbians. To New York accordingly we came, and Gustav labored assiduously to establish a business as importer of German manufactures; he soon found, however, that men who did not know Horace from Euripides could drive closer bargains, and make quicker sales than he could, and, as he was too proud to compound with his correspondents in the old country, and insisted on conscientiously paying a hundred cents for a dollar, we found ourselves in less than three years, with diminished capital in specie, and an increased one as regards future candidates for the Presidency, on our way back to our common Fatherland. Through the influence of his friends, Gustav procured a good situation in a merchant's office, but he was altogether unsuited both by temperament and education for such a position, and I soon made up my mind that I must either prepare to enter the world's great battlefield in person, or live in helpless dependence on my husband's relations.

I had often while in America wondered why the ladies

of that Republic (so advanced and enlightened in everything else) should submit to a practice so revolting, so contrary to all ideas of morality and refinement as is the system of man-midwifery so widely practiced in the United States. No German lady would think of permitting the attendance of a man at her bedside on such an occasion, and though custom in England seems generally to sanction the absurd practice, yet Her Majesty Queen Victoria never allows her medical advisers to be in attendance in any other capacity than that of *consulting* physicians. I had discussed the matter frequently with married ladies in New York, and they were generally agreed, that, could only competent ladies be found in the United States, man-midwifery would soon cease to be practiced in that Republic. I accordingly resolved to devote all my energies to the study of that particular branch of the medical profession, and my efforts were crowned with success. In two years I obtained a diploma from the Hamburg University, and soon after prepared to return to America. \*

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\* Dr. Playfair, President of the Obstetrical Society of London, in his address delivered in February, 1879, said:— "I confess that it is with a feeling of regret, something akin to shame, when I reflect that I am supposed to teach a class of young men the entire subject of midwifery, and the diseases of women and children, in a short summer course of something under forty lectures. The thing is a manifest and ridiculous absurdity, hence we have, of necessity, to omit, year by year, at least half of midwifery proper."

About this time a friend of my husband's informed us that the climate of Canada was very much superior to that of the Eastern States, and much more like that of Germany, and that in Montreal I would be likely to find, not only a pleasant city, but a people more European in style and custom, also a capital field for the exercise of my profession. For Montreal then we sailed with hearts full of hope, and, being fifty-four days at sea, I was summoned by the Captain to attend a lady on board (which I did with the success which has since invariably attended my efforts), and this was my debut as a professional accoucheur.

On our arrival at Montreal we presented letters of introduction to the German Consul, and the leading members of the German Society, and I soon became fully occupied in the exercise of my profession. Dr. X . . . . . (now one of our most distinguished physicians) not only tolerated my vocation, but, with a magnanimity worthy of his genius and ability, gave me counsel and advice, and recommend-

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The Principal of Calcutta Medical College writes Dr. Playfair thus :—"To what a hideous extent is the practice of midwifery carried on in England by *utterly unqualified men*, whom the unhappy women and their friends believe to be qualified, and the system in your hospitals sadly favors this."

Yet there are some women who will smother every feeling of modesty and morality, and trust their lives to one of these licentiates rather than commit themselves to the care of a thoroughly trained midwife of their own sex. Surely nothing can be more absurd and irrational.

ed me as highly as possible to his confrères and the public. Some few resident doctors threw cold water on my enterprise, but, to their credit be it spoken, the profession at large treated me invariably with the greatest kindness and courtesy, shewing thereby a liberality and largeness of heart which is ever the outcome of real ability.

I was not long installed in my new home when, as we were sitting cosily round the fire, the door bell was rung furiously, and on my going down to receive my visitor, I was astonished to find a gentleman with a newborn baby wrapped in the tail of his broadcloth coat. He said he was its father, and that the mother had taken suddenly ill before any provision could be made for its reception, and he implored me to take it, as he would otherwise feel impelled to throw it in the river. I thought my heart would break to see the poor infant so ruthlessly treated, so I took it from him, promising to see it safely to some charitable institution. He told me his name was Ferguson, that he was in business in Montreal, and that if I would deposit the child in some charitable institution and call and see its mother during her recovery, he would pay all necessary expenses. It was too late that night to go out with the child, so I prepared some food for its nourishment and kept it till the next day, resolved to go after dusk and see the Lady Superior at one of the nunneries, but to my chagrin I discovered that the nunnery was closed, and I was obliged to return home with the babe, which, by-the-

by, continued to roar lustily all the way, and so attracted public attention to me (its presumptive mother) that I wept as bitterly as the child itself, and was heartily sorry that I had undertaken any such mission.

Next day I set out again in good time, but now a new difficulty awaited me. The good Sister who received me informed me that only those who were baptized and received into the Catholic Faith were eligible for admission. On hearing this I burst into tears; I told her my story, that the child was not mine, but that I was commissioned by its father to deliver it to her, and I besought her so earnestly to take it from me that she very considerably did so, and on my handing her the necessary fee, she undertook to have it regularly baptized and admitted.

In the evening I called to see the mother; she was lying on a miserable couch in a low lodging-house in the Quebec suburbs, yet she had about her the air of a lady, and on her finger glittered a ring set with brilliants. She wept when I told her how her child was disposed of, but said that she had no other alternative, as if her father, who was a lawyer of eminence, had any idea of her predicament, he would cast her off in shame; that when she first discovered her condition she persuaded her paramour to make a formal proposal for her hand, but her father was enraged beyond measure, and threatened her so terribly that she, for a time at least, put away all thoughts of Ferguson from her mind, and had not quite decided how to act, when the

occurrence took place which led to the visit aforementioned, and caused the necessity for my attendance. Miss L—— had barely time to call in a carriage at Ferguson's office, and apprise him of her condition, when she was taken ill, and obliged to procure a lodging with all speed. Ferguson selected the wretched hovel alluded to, as being away from all chance of discovery by his or her friends, and after my visit, empowered me to engage a nurse, and make what other arrangements I could for Miss L——'s comfort. She managed to get a confidential friend to telegraph her father from Quebec that she had arrived in that city, and then sent on a letter and had it mailed there, stating that she had gone on the steamboat the previous evening to see some friends off, and, remaining too long on board, was taken away eastward, but would return on receiving the passage money from Montreal.

With this story she managed to deceive her otherwise astute father, and in four days she actually got up and went to her own home in a carriage; insisting on retiring immediately to her room in consequence of the nervous excitement and fatigue she had undergone. The nurse I had engaged to attend her, she on some pretence or another smuggled into the house as a domestic servant, and so not only managed to have an attendant, but to keep up a clandestine communication with Ferguson and the outer world.

In the frantic hope of acquiring a rapid fortune, Ferguson

migrated to New Orleans, but just then the American war broke out, and he was pressed into the service. Whether he was killed or not Miss L—— never found out; his letters became gradually less frequent, till finally she lost all trace of him whatever, and she eventually married a wholesale merchant of this city, who is to this day probably unaware of this little episode in his wife's former career. Sometimes I see her in her carriage driving with liveried servants along St. James street, and I cannot refrain from thinking of the innocent babe as it lay in poor Ferguson's coat-tail.