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Plain Home Talk 1882

Female Doctors.

There is a great deal of debate nowadays as to the fitness of women for the profession of medicine. Is the serious consideration of this question intended to dignify and inflate the hordes of masculine boobies who throng our medical universities, or, to utterly disparage the intelligence of women? Which? For all who gravely entertain it I would make the following infallible prescription :—

℞ Common Sense, gr. j.
Justice, ℥ j
Mind your business, q. s.
Mix.

Make this compound into ten pills, and take one every five minutes when the question disturbs your conservative mind, until relieved. The disease is strictly a mental one, proceeding in men, from excessive vanity, and in women, from a servile zeal in flattering a sex already bloated with arrogance.

It seems really difficult to write a word seriously under this head, for the reason that when the question is presented to any impartial mind, it would appear that if there is any one avocation to which woman is better suited by nature than to another, it is the care of the sick. Look for a moment at the qualities requisite to make a good physician. They are: keen perception—intuition—sympathy—patience—gentleness—love. No one, who has ever been stretched upon a bed of sickness, will omit from the category one of these qualities as unnecessary. Only two qualifications remain to be added, viz.: an enthusiasm to undertake the duties of the profession, and a thorough education. No one will dispute that the first qualities named, are generally possessed to a greater degree by women than by men. Of the qualifications last mentioned, there is as little danger of women becoming doctors without a natural taste for the labors of the profession, as there is of men doing so; and if any are disposed to assert that they are mentally incapable of acquiring an accomplished medical education when proper facilities are afforded, I suppose that person must be answered, although I blush at the indignity offered to women, while undertaking the task. How do we generally find it in schools? Is it indeed the case that boys learn more rapidly than girls? *Reverse* the question, and teachers will respond "Yes." Some claim that girls cannot attain proficiency in mathematics. This has never been established by any satisfactory evidence; and if it were, what need has a physician of a complete mathematical education? Others have said that she is not inventive. It is true that she has not flooded the patent office with caveats and applications for patents; possibly because husbands and fathers have usurped for their personal benefit nearly every thing which the female mind may have suggested. But an objection of this kind may be effectually met by the facts that Madame Ducoudray invented the manikin, and Madame Boivin some of the most useful obstetrical instruments in use. The lady last mentioned is the author of several medical works, which are regarded as authorities by many eminent medical men in Europe and America. Professor Meigs, of Philadelphia, in

alluding to the valuable services this eminent woman has rendered to the medical profession, remarks that: "Her writings prove her to have been a most learned physician, and as she enjoyed a very large practice, her science and her great clinical experience, as well as her personal knowledge, are more to be relied on than that of all male physicians together." In England, a person must pass a rigid examination to become a druggist, and a Miss Garrett passed "a five years' apprenticeship; a preliminary examination in arts, and two professional examinations, each comprising five subjects." Miss Garrett was reported to have acquitted herself brilliantly, and the chairman of the apothecaries, after complimenting her ability, expressed a wish "that all men in the profession were as well prepared."

The time is rapidly approaching, however, when the success of women in the practice of medicine will be so well established that no one will have the effrontery to question her capacity in this pursuit. Since Elizabeth Blackwell graduated from the medical school at Geneva, New York, twenty years ago, various medical colleges and hospitals have been established for the benefit of women.

There are medical institutions for the instruction of women in this city, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and perhaps other cities of the United States. There are about three hundred female physicians in this country, who graduated regularly from chartered institutions. Some of these have incomes of ten or twenty thousand dollars per year from their practice.

In England, France, Germany, and Austria, women have been admitted to practice. At this rate it will not take many years to convince the most knotty conservative mind that women will practice medicine, and that, too, with credit to themselves and satisfaction to their patients.

There is one point wherein those favorable to women as practitioners of medicine fail to appreciate the benefit which may accrue when female practitioners become available in every part of the country. The presentation of it at this time will sound as ridiculous as the claim of women to study medicine did twenty years ago; but I trust that another score of years will not pass before it is recognized. It is this: *male invalids should have female physicians, and female invalids should have male physicians.*

One great argument used at this time for the admission of women

to the practice of medicine is, that they may attend to the diseases peculiar to their own sex: but if the truth were fully known, the secret of the opposition of women to their own sex aspiring to fame in the medical profession, springs out of repugnance, in a measure, to any such arrangement. Women do not want female doctors to attend them. There are, of course, some actual and many seeming exceptions to this rule; but if there were as many eminent women in practice at this moment as there are men, the majority of women would at heart prefer that the latter attend them; and so soon as women become famous as doctors, men will not hesitate to exhibit a preference for female skill. This secret crops out even now, and may be perceived by any observer. The sick man who has a skillful female nurse in his room is charmed with her attentions, and takes her advice and the little dainties she prepares, without hesitation. The visit of his physician is accepted as an evil that cannot be dispensed with, and when he has departed, the patient sagely questions the *rationalité* of his counsels and prescriptions. On the other hand, the sick woman, if her preferences in the selection of a physician have not been wantonly disregarded, dotes on the call of her doctor, and feels better when he is present. She takes his doses about as submissively as the sick man swallows the pleasant things the nurse prepares. The philosophy of all this may be discovered in the essay on "Sexual Starvation," commencing on page 164. I have taken some pains to ascertain the sentiments of intelligent patients of both sexes on this point, and although they at first appeared startled at the novelty of the idea, having never thought of such a thing before, they almost without exception, on reflection, agreed that such an arrangement would best accord with their individual preferences, if skill were equally divided between doctors of each sex. As things now are, the most steadfast friends of the family doctor are women. Every woman who has a really good physician, recommends him to everybody, and is impatient because she cannot induce her next-door neighbor to employ him. To her imagination, he is about the nicest man, and the most skillful doctor the world has ever produced. Men never get so enthusiastic over their medical adviser, although they may express gratitude when relieved of pain by him. In the latter case, the relief is obtained mainly through the effects of medicaments administered; but with the woman, the benefit is about equally derived from the medicines and the magnetism of the doctor. He presses

his hand on her brow, feels of her pulse, sits for awhile beside her, and chats as only a person of one sex can talk with one of the other. The conversation becomes flippant and cheerful; the spirits rise like mercury in the thermometer when held in a warm hand; the effect is magical; and when he departs, she looks forward with pleasure to the next call, while taking his prescriptions with confidence and alacrity during the interval. This, understand me, when she has the physician of her choice. Woe to the doctor if she does not like him personally! She hesitates to send for him when her friends think it necessary. She never did take such nasty stuff before! She knows it can do her no good! "Oh, dear! how can my husband have any confidence in that fellow?"

Now, reader, here is a new crotchet for you to mentally digest. Bring the results of your observation, your personal experience, physiological and magnetic law, to bear upon its consideration. Dismiss all idea of any impropriety in employing a female doctor if a man, or a masculine doctor if a woman. Indeed, the latter have had very little medical care from any other source than that of their opposite sex; but scarcely anybody seems to have discovered any impropriety in the custom which sanctions it. I speak now as a man's-rights-man! I demand for our sex the medical education of women in order that we may, when sick, have their sympathy, advice, and medical care. Who can consistently oppose the proposition? Certainly not those women who have objected to the medical education of women because they are satisfied to have only male doctors; this would be selfish. Nor yet men who think the latter may be with propriety employed to attend their wives and daughters in all cases however delicate. "What is sauce for the goose, is sauce for the gander!" It is, then, left for those only who are in favor of female medical schools and practitioners, to urge an objection. Nothing can consistently come from this quarter; for when female physicians become numerous, it may, in sparsely-settled regions, be quite as difficult to employ a male practitioner as it is now to find a female physician. The latter may take the place of many of the former entirely in some localities; so it will be perceived that "things will become mixed," unavoidably, unless we have some definite idea of the distinct functions of male and female practitioners, and act upon it. If it be decided that we must have female doctors for men, and male physicians for women, it will encourage

the settlement of those of each sex in every neighborhood, large or small; and then, when any one has an affection of a very delicate character, peculiar to his or her sex, there will be an opportunity to "change base," and present the case to a physician of the same sex as the patient.