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THE PLACE OF THE PHYSICIAN IN LITERATURE.

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I ask attention, for a brief space, to a theme which has so reasonable a claim upon our consideration that its introduction was promptly sanctioned by our brethren of the Council. I refer to the place of the physician in literature. That place, as you will observe, is twofold; it is, so to speak, either active or passive. I propose to confine remark to the passive side; in other words, to the physician, not as a *litterateur* himself, in the usual or extra-professional sense; not as one who seeks occasional relief from drudgery in giving graceful and eloquent expression to the thought and feeling and action of his time; not, in short, as the writer, but the one written about; not the author, but the subject. Were it possible, within our limitations, to present comprehensive views of the ministers of the healing art as they are portrayed in fiction, in the drama, in philosophical and critical essays, in the rhythmic measures of imagination, or in the history of actual occurrence, it would be alike pleasing and profitable. But let me remind you that comprehensive treatment of such a subject upon occasions like the present is impracticable. At most, we can only review in a superficial way its more suggestive bearings upon the objects and purposes of this organization.

Gentlemen: you bear an ancient and an honorable name. You have worthily won and you worthily wear a title to distinctive regard. When the Saviour was on earth he did not disdain to be called the Great Physician, or the physician of souls. The Apostle Luke was known among his friends as the "beloved physician." The haughtiest family that ever undertook to "bestride the narrow world like a Colossus," the Medici, of Florence, were not too proud to emblazon in bold relief upon their armorial bearings the pills of their progenitor. Francis Bacon, the author of the *Novum Organon*, who swept with his all-embracing glass the range of the scientific observation of the Elizabethan period, followed its focus along the progress of medical science with greater interest than in any other direction. Napoleon Bonaparte, who rarely had a good word for anybody, who denounced ecclesiastics as hypocrites, lawyers as traitors to justice, and soldiers as cutthroats and robbers, always spoke in terms of warm and kindly commendation of the practitioners of physic and surgery. Augustus Cæsar publicly expressed his gratitude for the cure of a troublesome cutaneous disorder by placing a statue of his physician, Antonius Musa, among the bronze and marble group of the Imperial family, and to-day, in the Vatican, as the symbolization of Æsculapius, it maintains its position among the Cæsars. In Edinburgh, a city that abounds with statues, aside from the memorial to Walter Scott, none commands so large a share of popular homage as the bronze effigy of James Y. Simpson. And of the splendid sculptures on exhibition in the Salon, at Paris, during the present year, none have attracted such curious interest and such earnest admiration as the group of Boucher, representing Laennec applying his ear for the first time to the chest of a consumptive patient, and by that suddenly conceived act giving birth to thoracic acoustics.

More than twenty-seven centuries ago, the immortal Homer, in the XI. Book of the Iliad,

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in describing the consternation which was occasioned, during the siege of Troy, by the wounding of Machaon, the medical director of the Grecian forces, said:—

"The spouse of Helen, dealing darts around,
Had pierced Machaon with a distant wound;
In his right shoulder the broad shaft appeared,
And trembling Greece for her physician feared.
To Nestor, then, Idomeneus begun,
'Glory of Greece, old Neleus' valiant son,
Ascend thy chariot, haste with speed away,
And great Machaon to the ships convey.
A wise physician, skilled our wounds to heal,
Is more than armies to the public weal!'"

In another ancient work, one of the uncanonical books of the Old Testament, written long after the Iliad, we read:—

"Honor a physician with the honor due unto him for the uses which ye may have of him: for the Lord hath created him.

"For of the Most High cometh healing, and he shall receive honor of the king.

"The skill of the physician shall lift up his head, and in the sight of great men he shall be in admiration."

From the date of these early writings down to the genial humor of Dickens and Thackeray, from the days of the Asclepiades to the present transitional period in medicine, the language of compliment has been repeated in multiplied forms in the literature of all civilize dnations. Mere citation would occupy the entire time of our sessions. But as Raynald says in "The Woman's Book," there is a "variable judgment to sustain and abide." There is another side to the portraiture. Turn it to the light and you confront the armament of criticism, you encounter the squibs of irony, you hear the voice of disapproval, the words of censure, the murmur of complaint. In the sacred volume, in which it is said, "The Lord hath created medicines out of the earth, and he that is wise will not abhor them," we are likewise told of the woman with a hemorrhagic diathesis, who "had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse."

Voltaire said, "nothing is more estimable than a physician, who, having studied nature from his youth, knows the properties of the human body, the diseases which assail it, the remedies which will benefit it, exercises his art with caution, and pays equal attention to the rich and the poor." But Voltaire, on another occasion, gave a definition thus:—"Physician—a man who pours drugs, of which he knows little, into a body of which he knows less." Even Lord Bacon, earnest as he was in expressing his gratification at the progress made in his own day in controlling disease, and mitigating pain, and lengthening life, found amusement in repeating insipid and time-worn jocosities. "A gentleman," says he, "fell very sick, and a friend said to him, 'Send for a physician;' but the sick man said, 'It is no matter, for if I die, I will die at leisure.'" And so it goes—praise or dispraise, eulogy or irony, golden opinions or sardonic sneers, just as the views or the feelings are modified, or according to the sway of passing temper. But while many of the best writers revise or reverse their opinions, whether considerately or capriciously, others range themselves invariably on one side, and still others adhere as tenaciously to the opposite side.

While Horace, in his Epistles and Satires, extolled in elegant verse the medical art in general, and his favorite physician in particular, and while Cicero uttered such graceful encomiums as this:—"In no respect do men more nearly approach the gods than in giving health to their fellow-creatures,"—Plato and Pliny, on the other hand, while not objecting to speedy cure of acute disorders, or repair of injuries from accident, had no toleration for the art which—as Macaulay explains their views—resists the slow sap of a chronic disease; which repairs frames enervated by lust, swollen by gluttony, or inflamed by wine; which encourages sensuality by mitigating the natural punishment of the sensualist, and prolongs existence when the intellect has ceased to retain its energy." They hold that a life protracted by medical skill is a long death, and that those who have bad constitutions ought to die, the sooner the better. While Pope and Dryden testify in glowing terms to the skill and courtesy, the learning and patience of their medical advisers, as well as to their confidence in the curative art, Addison insists that we may lay it down as a maxim that when a nation abounds in physicians it grows thin of people. He compares them to an army in Cæsar's time—some of them slay in chariots, and some on foot; if the infantry do less execution than the charioteers, it is because they cannot so soon reach all quarters and dispatch so much business in the same time. Churchill left as one of his legacies, the couplet—

"Most of the evils we poor mortals know
From doctors and imagination flow."

If we accept Chaucer's oft-quoted description of a doctor of physic as a fourteenth century portrait, we must conclude that the medical men of that period were astrologers, that they were in disgraceful collusion with apothecaries, and that they were irreligious and atheistic. This last charge, by the way, need not disturb us if we remember that three centuries later, Sir Thomas Browne, the author of the *Religio Medici*, was accused of infidelity.

Burton, in his "Anatomy of Melancholy," summons witnesses, in his quaint way, from all quarters of the earth, to emphasize the point of an epigram of Urentius, which tickled his fancy, and which is thus translated: "How

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does the surgeon differ from the doctor? In this respect: one kills by drugs, the other by the hand; both only differ from the hangman in this way: they do slowly what he does in an instant."

And in like manner, Montaigne, after sweeping with his drag-net the whole realm of malicious facetiousness, essays to amuse his readers with a rehash of what had long passed into proverbial or epigrammatic form. For example: "One asking a Lacedæmonian what had made him live so long, he made answer, 'The ignorance of physic.' And the Emperor Adrian continually exclaimed, as he was dying, that the crowd of physicians had killed him. An ill wrestler turned physician. 'Courage,' says Diogenes to him, 'thou hast done well, for now thou wilt throw those who have formerly thrown thee.' But they have this advantage, that the sun gives light to their success, and the earth covers their failures," etc., etc., page after page.

But here, it may be asked, what is all this worth? Are we not summoning to the stand incompetent witnesses? Are we not placing jurymen on the judges' bench? Did the poetical or philosophical writers of earlier days know where to draw the line between science and mysticism, between physical cause or agency and superstition? Did they comprehend the untold labor involved in the emancipation of the practical and the material from their supernatural entanglements and their ecclesiastical interminglings? Did the mediæval scholarship that survived the wreck and ruin around it reject the theory of planetary influence in terrestrial affairs, or denounce the claims of magic and sorcery, or expose the pretensions of miracle cures and talismans? Have the essayists and commentators of later times shown ability to discriminate fairly between the results of faithful and conscientious investigation and the delusive assumptions of the more insidious forms of charlatanism? Buckle, in his "History of Civilization in England," says "it has been shown that scientific discoveries do not necessarily weaken superstition, and that it is possible for two hostile principles to flourish side by side, without ever coming into actual collision, or without sensibly impairing each other's vigor." If, then, the old mould still clings to the garments of the magnates of the pen, what is it to us, even though they be enthroned above their fellows, whether they waft benedictions or hurl maledictions? Compliment from them, as from less exalted mortals, may be insincere, it may be exaggerated, it may be unmerited, and Pope tells us that "praise undeserved is satire in disguise." On the other hand, censure may spring from ignorance, or misunderstanding, or prejudice, or perversity. Montaigne explained his antagonistic attitude by declaring that his hatred and contempt of medicine were hereditary, and Pliny furnished a key to his antipathy in the acrimonious delight he exhibited on discovering a tombstone with the inscription "*Turba se medicorum periisse.*"

When compliment and criticism are prompted by questionable motives, we are concerned with neither, as such, beyond the false impressions they leave upon the public mind. What we are most concerned with is the higher and broader significance of that compliment or that criticism whose honesty is beyond question. What we want is not the water from the well, but the truth at the bottom, unless happily the water itself is the truth we seek. When John Dryden sat in his accustomed chair in Wills's Coffee House, and, in his daily talk to the eager listeners around him, expressed his confidence in Dr. Radcliffe, who held his morning consultations at Garraway's, whatever the correctness or incorrectness of his estimate, we know that he was honest in his belief. But while it would be presumptuous for an unprofessional person to pass judgment upon professional questions, as, for example, a therapeutical system, or a pathological system, it requires less intellectual breadth than that of the master minds of literature to weigh and measure the characteristics of the true physician. It requires no extraordinary strength or stretch of vision to see that the true physician is he who manfully grapples with the difficulties and doubts and fallacies and disappointments that environ him; who learns that hardest of lessons—*ahi quanto dura*, as Dante says—to unlearn the erroneous teachings of earlier years; who is not bound so fast to the wheel of tradition as to be blinded by its dust; who is not slave to the *ipse dixit;* who despises the routinist that works by the rules of his craft, asking no questions of the past or the future; who reasons from facts to principles, not from principles to facts; who holds hypotheses upon uncertain tenure, and is ready to relinquish them as fresh-compelling facts flow in; who refuses to degrade a liberal science to the level of a trade or industrial occupation; who conscientiously fulfills his moral and legal responsibilities to his profession, to his patients, and to the public; and who holds himself in readiness for whatever sacrifices may be demanded by unselfish devotion to his duties and obligations, to that

> "art whose glory 'tis to give
> The crowning boon which makes it life to live."

Will it be objected that this is conceding too much in respect to outside appreciation of

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such qualities and qualifications? Will it be urged that even the accomplished literary layman cannot fairly measure professional merit, for the reason that the talents of the physician are exerted in a field so remote from common observation that the materials for judgment are not readily afforded even to those capable of judging? Let us not forget that as the world advances the literary class advances with it, and that that class is more and more disposed to acknowledge the claims and to sound the praises of men who are eminent in the medical profession. Let us thankfully remember how much we owe to the renovating and reformatory influence of the satirical literature and the satirical art of which Molière and Hogarth are the best exponents. If Le Sage, in his delineations of the sanguinary Sangrado, aimed his shafts, as we are told, at the hyperæmic hobby of Helvetius, why should not Helvetius himself have enjoyed the fun to be extracted from the doctrine that it is not "the blood thereof" that is "the life thereof," but hot water and stewed apples? Nay, more, why should he not have profited by seeing himself as the keen-witted humorist saw him? If Benjamin Rush and his bloodthirsty disciples had laughed, as others laughed, to see phlebotomy itself phlebotomized, their biographers would have had a different story to tell. And when Cervantes unmasked another form of depletion in the person of the over-abstemious Rezio, who should laugh more heartily at Sancho Panza's vigorous rejection of the starvation system than its own advocates?

The humorists and satirists of the Molière type, while freely expending their ammunition upon quack artifice in its vulgar forms, devoted their best efforts to its more ambitious phases. It was less accordant with their taste to empty the vials of sarcasm upon the pretenders *out* of the ranks of the profession—as Robert Burns did in his verses "Death and Dr. Hornbook"—than to castigate the empirics *in* the ranks. They preferred to point their quills, as Hogarth pointed his pencil, at quackery in high places; to turn the weapons of ridicule upon the gentlemen with the powdered periwigs, the gold-headed cane, the ruffled shirt, and the stately manner. Unlike the ephemeral caricatures of the present day, clever as they are, Hogarth's "Consultation of Physicians" continues, after the lapse of nearly a century and a half, to point its moral. Molière's Consultation of Physicians, in Act II. of the comedy, *Love is the Best Doctor* (*L'Amour Médecin*), was written more than two centuries ago, yet its delicious satire is as exhilarating as ever. So with frequent hits in the delightful comedies—or screaming farces, as we should call them—*The Physician in Spite of Himself*, *The Imaginary Invalid*, and *The Flying Doctor*, the merriment of which has a perennial sparkle. The wonder is how medical quackery could survive such cuts and thrusts, followed and imitated as they were by Fielding, and Lacy and Bickerstaff. The burlesque ceremony in *Le Malade Imaginaire*, in which, after an examination of a candidate in a macaronic of Latin, dog Latin, Italian, French, and of words belonging to no language, he is admitted to the doctorate with music and dancing, should have closed forever—one would think—the doors of the diploma shops of the huckstering class. But the false pretence of ability or knowledge so delicately satirized belongs to no age, to no country, to no people. Its elements lie in the human mind. "Quackery," as Dr. John Ware once said, "does not principally consist in using medicines of a particular kind, but in using any medicines in a particular way. The quackery is not in the character of the drug, but in that of the man. Quackery may strut with a doctor's diploma, or seat itself in a professor's chair, as well as ensconce itself behind piles of boxes and rows of bottles, and boast of its miraculous cures through the columns of the press."

How well Molière understood this, is shown in the freedom and severity with which he treated the big wigs as well as the pretenders of low degree. One of his early translators, in dedicating an English version of *Le Médecin malgre lui* to Dr. Mead, who was then at the head of the profession in London, felt called upon to apologize for Molière's free and easy deliverances in a lengthy invocation, in the course of which he said: "As 'twas perverted medicine alone, and its quack professors, that were the subjects of Molière's ridicule, Dr. Mead can be no more affected by it than a true prophet by the punishment of imposture, nor be displeased with a satire he could not fear." After explaining that the chastisement was just, he says, by way of contrast: "Your practice was founded on the rock of sound learning, and your success secured by an extensive and well marked experience, by which means you have established the honor of the profession, are become a general blessing to the society you belong to, and have been capable, as a good physician, of doing more service in your generation than all the bad ones have done mischief."

So far as concerns the literature of the more immediate present, it seems to be largely concentred upon the female side of the household of faith. In the recent contributions to American fiction, of "Dr. Breen's Practice," by Mr. Howells, "Dr. Zay," by Miss Phelps, and

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"A Country Doctor," by Miss Jewett, the central figure is heroine, not hero. They are all beautiful; in costume and carriage, they are faultless; in elegance and style, they are of the choicest; in short, in attractions that are distinctly feminine, they all coincide. The only noticeable difference between them is in the motives which actuated them in entering upon a professional career; they are again alike in this, that they "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister."

A brief but significant question remains. What is to be the place of the physician in the literature of the future? Were it possible to forecast the ratio of progress toward the attainment of the objects of the Academy, as set forth in its constitution, the answer would be comparatively easy. For in the proportion that medicine is elevated to the high standard which is the heart's desire and prayer of this organization, and of all who are directly or indirectly in sympathy and co-operation with its aims, will the sting of satire and the censoriousness of criticism fade and disappear. Only a few weeks ago the frantic and terror-stricken populace of Naples stoned the physicians who undertook to rescue the wretches from their peril, just as the misguided Israelites of old stoned the prophets. And so long as the writers of the future find hobby-riders and ultraists wherewith to point an epigram, or transitory fashions and caprices that will sparkle in the guise of comedy, the missiles will continue to fly, and though they be more polished and less angular than those of Naples, they will leave a keener smart.

The pathway to the land of promise is yet long and toilsome; there are illimitable fields still unexplored; there are heights to be scaled and chasms to be bridged; there are errors to be banished and mysteries to be disclosed. True it is that the greater the opportunity the greater will be the result for men of trained sagacity, of ready contrivance, of an adventurous spirit of investigation, and of prompt recognition of larger laws and more comprehensive principles. But whence are the master minds to come in adequate force so long as, under the protection of statute law, the rank and file are recruited from the habitations of illiteracy? We hear much about the machine in politics, but we have a more dangerous machine in the diploma factories which lift an ignorant plowboy out of the furrow, and in two years send him forth into the world to minister as an apostle of science to the greatest exigencies of human life, and to assume responsibilities which demand the highest intellectual and moral culture. Truly, the Molières of the future will have abundant materials for travesty, if machine-made doctors, who have no aspirations beyond the trade aspect, are to be assigned a share in the work of filling the gaps in preventive medicine and sanitary science, of making nearer approaches to infallibility in our etiology, of developing our knowledge of micro-organisms, of probing the depths of heredity and constitutional taint, of strengthening expert testimony in medical jurisprudence, of inquiring into new types of disease occasioned by new forms of manufacturing industry, of introducing improved remedial measures and demonstrating their efficiency, of learning more of climatology and the geographical distribution of disease, of hastening the removal of the *opprobria medicorum*, and so on, to the end of the long, long chapter. If the Academy and they who are in sympathy with its objects pave the way for those who are to follow, and if, in taking up the work where they set it down, their successors see to it that as the good ship proceeds on her voyage the pilots at the wheel are faithful to their trust, in season and out of season, in the tempestuous night as in the tranquil sunshine, there will be no dread of running upon the rocks of animadversion, or the shoals of pasquinade. And among the greetings and benedictions with which patient continuance in well doing will be gladdened, none will be so tender and so touching as "the blessings of them that were ready to perish."

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