

THE DOCTRASSES OF MEDICINE.¹

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DR. MELANIE LIPINSKA, whose portrait appears herewith, is the authoress of "*Histoire des femmes medecins*;" and, as her work is very interesting from a medico-historical standpoint, we venture the publication of a few extracts.

The number of female physicians is increasing. During the year 1899-1900 the Paris school alone counted twenty-nine French women inscribed, and also one hundred female medical students from other portions of the globe. Is this right? Is it a misfortune? Let some more competent judge decide the question.

Feminism in these militant days is not a new condition. It is as old as our planet. There were female physicians in the time of Hippocrates, and the mother of Socrates was a sort of doctress, according to the words of her son that have been transmitted to us by Plato. The mother of Socrates said: "*Always deliver a woman who has difficult labors and facilitate abortion when the mother of the infant so decides.*" We need not be astonished at this. The ancients had altogether different ideas of abortion from ours. A contemporary of Augustus Hyginus, the grammarian, tells us that even antique Greece saw difficulties arise between the physicians of the two sexes. He reports the legend of Agnodice, the first female physician of Athens. The recital of Hyginus may be considered as fabulous, yet it is possible, for the legend is ever the truth concentrated or transfigured; and it is very probable that in a few centuries hence the history of the first female physician of the nineteenth century, Madame Madeline Bres, will enter in future narrations as a mere legend, too.

The adventures of Agnodice are a gracious symbol. Before her day the Athenian law interdicted slaves and women from the practice of medicine. It likewise happened that many women whose modesty prevented them from ever consulting male physicians died from lack of medical attention. Then a beautiful young girl, Agnodice, resolved to aid her own sex. So she cut off her fair locks, assumed the costume and airs of a man, and followed the medical teachings of Hierophilus. Her education being finished, whenever she heard that a woman was attacked by a malady of the fair sex she went promptly to the aid of the sufferer, and if the patient took her for a man, she made herself known as a woman. This plan attracted a great practice, and the Greek doctors, getting wind of the affair, accused Agnodice; and she was brought before the areopagus, or magistrate, on the charge of corruption. The magistrate was on the point of sentencing her, when Agnodice openly declared her sex. Did she do this in the same manner as the lovely Phryne? We do not know, but hope, for the sake of modern doctresses, she did not. Yet her jealous

¹ Translated from the French.

male adversaries cried out that the law had been violated. But the Athenian women had influence then, just as woman ever has had, and intervened in favor of Agnodice, for had she not saved their lives? So wise Grecian legislators revised the law that barred women from practicing medicine, at least, and the field was open to the fair sex.

As we said at the beginning, a doctress, Miss Melanie Lipinska, has written a large volume on the history of female physicians from days of antiquity to the present time. She fully shows by strong documentary evidence that the woman doctor has existed in all times and in every land. Indeed, she proves that it has only been in later days that women have been restricted in their rights to practice the healing art. It is true then that it was only in the middle of the nineteenth century that women reconquered and resecured what was their ancient right.

The first French woman to secure a diploma, that of surgeon, used



MELANIE LIPINSKA.

the same subterfuge as that of the fair Athenian, Agnodice: by simulating masculinity. Besides, the authenticated adventures of this French doctress are much more romantic than those of the Grecian lady.

Henrietta Faber was the widow of a French officer killed at Wagram. Like many women of her day, she was occupied with surgery and the care of wounded soldiers. Widowed, she assumed man's costume and passed for a male, under the name of Henry Faber; thus she underwent her military examination in medicine. She remained as an acting surgeon in the "*grande armee*" up to the time of the war with Spain, when she was made prisoner. She remained in Spain until peace was declared and then departed for the Island of Cuba in 1818 as an official Spanish surgeon. One day she heard a man say as she passed, "That's a woman!" Greatly disturbed, and fearing to lose her means of making a living, she proposed to her maid to wed her for a recompense. This servant, who knew the surgeon's true sex, agreed to the unique proposal, but soon after betrayed

the secret in her idle chatter. Henrietta Faber was arrested, tried, and condemned for *sacrilege*; the sentence being ten years' confinement. In 1825 she was sent to Florida; there she resumed the practice of surgery again, made a fortune and finally died as a sister of charity at Vera Cruz.

If among primitive peoples female curers abounded, there were also many female physicians in Rome. Recent archæological discoveries have permitted moderns to rewrite the lives of these *medicæ*. But we need not follow Miss Lipinska through all this interesting historical matter bearing on women doctors. We leave to some gentle American *confrere* the task of a fuller translation of this very charming subject.

Let us remark in passing, however, that modern feminism recruits the greater number of its adepts among peoples of Anglo-Saxon and Germanic origin. We know that France furnishes but very few doctresses. The militants of international feminism gloat over the lukewarmness of their more modest French sisters. Our faculties count a minimum of French ladies, if compared with foreign female medical students. Now, the character of races changes but little. Germanic antiquity was ever feminist. We may even state that during a larger part of the "middle ages" the German women were far better educated than the men. Even at the present day, in the United States, the women are mostly superior in point of cultivation to the men. Yet France, during the "middle ages," had some very magnificent women when it came to intellectuality.

In the "middle ages" universities were rare in Europe; men acquired medical education by following some talented master, and, after some years of such experience, were admitted to the ranks of *master surgeons*. The archives of Marseilles reveal the case of one of these master surgeons who turned out to be a woman. We read that Sarah Gilles took, on August 28, 1326, one Signor Salret as a student. She contracted to lodge, feed and teach him medicine and physic for the space of seven months, on condition that the student, if he left her during that time, must repay his mistress for the benefits he had already received. When the "*faculty of medicine*" came into power it declared war against all female physicians. In 1220, an edict was promulgated that forbade any one practicing medicine who did not belong to the regular faculty, and, following the usual rules and customs under such circumstances, *only men were admitted to practice*. But this edict remained a dead letter, for public documents frequently refer to women physicians who practiced in France—at perfect liberty, too. In the year 1292 there were eight female physicians in Paris, whose names and address have been transmitted to posterity. In proportion to population then there were more doctresses in Paris than there are at the present day; for the register of 1900 shows eighty-seven women duly authorized to practice medicine in Paris. During the "middle age" there were female surgeons in France, which fact is proven by documentary evidence, an edict issued in 1311 forbidding female surgeons

from practicing in the city of Paris, unless they had passed an examination before a competent jury.

In the sixteenth century the medical faculties manœvered so well that no women were found practicing medicine in France. But at that same time women physicians were reaping a rich harvest in Italy and in Spain, where the brilliant Oliva Sabneo wrote so well. The seventeenth century represents the complete decadence of feminine instruction in France. That was an anti-feminist age. It was the genial and yet satirical Moliere who wrote and expressed the unanimous male opinion at that epoch, when he demanded:

*“Ine la capacite de sou esprit se hausse,
A connoitre un pourpoint d’avec un haut de chausse.”*

At the end of this century some medical works written by women appeared, but it was only the eighteenth century that developed such great female writers as Miss Biheron and Madams Arconville and Necker; but these women were savants rather than medical practitioners. Under the Revolution, that saw the rise of so many absurdities, Madam Tallier demanded from the “convention” that all young girls should submit to an obligatory term of service in hospitals, “there to nurse and treat by the sweetest cares and consolations the sick poor,” as the beautiful Theresa puts it, in all the pathos of the times.

It was the French Revolution that fully inaugurated the feminist movement of to-day, putting it in full activity. It burned fiercely throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, and the second half of the same century witnessed the full realization of advanced feminism. It will probably die out again by the twenty-first century; for history ever repeats itself.

The first woman to honestly acquire the degree of doctor of medicine was an American, Elizabeth Blackwell. In 1844 she demanded admission as a medical student of the Philadelphia faculty. Repulsed, she asked admission from every faculty in the United States. The demand was rejected by almost every faculty, but finally the faculty of Geneva Medical College, State of New York, decided to submit the question to their medical students. Now, your male American student is the most chivalric type the world over, whether in New York, Paris or London. These American medical students seriously examined the proposition, put the question to a vote, carried it by a majority, and their proceedings were duly ratified by the Geneva faculty. It was thus the real first female medical student of our age made her *debut*. Young America set the example for old Europe. Meantime, human nature was excited by Elizabeth Blackwell. Her title as student led her to undergo a thousand and one discomforts in the city of her residence. Hotel-keepers for a long time refused to receive her as a guest, under the pretext that her presence would injure their wholesale boarding-house business. When she passed along

the streets the shop-keepers would run to their front doors to see the "she" medical student. When Elizabeth Blackwell obtained her diploma she went to Paris, where she experienced the greatest difficulty in securing admission to the lectures. Then the physician-in-chief to one of the great Berlin hospitals wrote her to come to him; that his hospital would open its doors for the fair American. Meantime, a new stroke of diplomacy had been driven by American women; for, on December 12, 1850, the Philadelphia College for Women Physicians opened its doors. This college must not be confounded with the numerous pseudo-colleges that abound in the United States, and grant cheap, ready-made diplomas in all manner of *pathies* to aspiring female medical students. An American woman coming from the Philadelphia school may be regarded as competent; those from other schools are always failures—women with medical aspirations and no brains. So Philadelphia became, not without numerous struggles, the center of the world's feminine medicine. Then came many distinguished women who won diplomas by hard and earnest work—such female physicians (may their tribe increase!) as Amandibai Toshee and Garubai Karmanki, from India; Kei-o-Kami, from Japan; Sabat M. Isleboaly, from Syria; Hu King Eng, from China, and other distinguished Oriental female physicians. In 1900 there were more than three thousand female physicians in the United States; probably fifty per cent. out of these were incompetents from the average low-grade medical schools that are as thick as the leaves in Vallambrosa in that free, exceedingly free and easy, republic.

In Europe it was the Russian woman that overran the medical schools. Russian girls of the nihilist class love to dabble in medicine. So Russia had an intense attack of feminism. In fact, when Russian women passed rapidly from the condition of serfdom to a free state, and had a chance for education, they were intoxicated by the spirit of liberty. It was difficult even for the autocratic government to restrain their violence. In 1868, the Medico-Surgical Academy of Saint Petersburg conferred the diploma of doctor on Madam Rondnava, who had been admitted to finish her studies on account of a Cossack scholarship. This corps of Cossacks professed to be Mahometan of a certain tribe, and demanded a female physician to treat their women.

But this exception confirmed the general rule that in Russia closed the door of medical schools to women. About this time a young Russian girl arrived in Switzerland, it was in 1864, where she demanded from the University of Zurich the right to study medicine. There were very long discussions on the subject. It ended by granting the demand, and in a few years Zurich became the hot-bed of Russian female medical students. So much politics entered the study of medicine by female Russians, that in 1873 a ukase was issued by the Czar of all the Russias, enjoining all female Russian medical students to leave Zurich at once. No sooner had they departed than a crowd of English women took their places.

Meantime the example of Zurich had had an immediate imitation, for women were admitted to the study of medicine at Paris. Dean Wurtz, of the Paris faculty, never hesitated: for when, in 1866, Madam Bres, of Nismes, demanded the rules and regulations, they were sent her. In 1868 she presented herself for the degree, but she had been preceded for several months by three strangers: an American, Miss Putnam, probably the brightest woman that ever took up the profession; an English woman, Miss Garrett, and a Russian lady, a Miss Goutcharoff. This was the first feminine year of the Paris school. The appetite for medicine among women developed. Women now wished to join the *externat*; they succeeded in this in 1882. Then, of course, they had to conquer the position of *internat*; this they did in 1884. Finally, they started out to capture the clinical positions; they failed in this in 1886; but it is well to remember that woman is very persevering in all she undertakes. Afterward women aspired to medical teaching. Thus we see Madam Blanche Edward Pilliet replace her dead husband in the chair of physiology at Lariboisiere, while Madam Robineau was named prosector to the school of medicine at Rouen; and Madam Helena Gaborian added the title of doctor of pharmacy to that of doctor of medicine. She was the first woman who ever accomplished what few men have been able to do.

When European and American women start out to study medicine, they think they will succeed in their natal lands—but soon find the terrors of competition at the very outset of their careers. Woman can never tolerate competition from her own sex—that is her very weak point. So it happens that many women who have failed in medicine in Christian lands have found immense success in Mahometan countries. The Mahometan religion will not tolerate a male physician for women. So the woman doctor is ever a success in all the lands where Mahometan ideas prevail. This is why the Arabic physicians know so little as regards gynecology and obstetrics. Such writers as Avicenna, for instance, knew nothing about Arab women or her maladies. In 1887, the Dupuy ministry studied the question of women physicians for countries subject to Islamism, where women live in harems and are not permitted to receive medical treatment from male doctors—in fact, no man, save the eunuch is permitted to visit the harem.

In olden times this question was treated in yet another form by a legislator, a contemporary and agent of Philip the Fair. In a memoir, addressed to Edward III., King of England, in 1300, this legislator, one Pierre de Bois, claims that the crusades have for their purpose the moral conquest of the Orient. What better propaganda than women? He insisted that women must be taught Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, in order to convince their future clients. Since these same women must also be physicians and surgeons, they must be so highly educated that they would reach the intelligence of Mussulman women—and thus expand and expound, as they expanded, the beauties of Christianity.

This project of Pierre de Bois came to be put into practice within four hundred years. Read the life of Madam Halpin, who, in the eighteenth century, cared for Mahometan women—one should read all this romantic story in Madam Lepinska's work.

To-day Russian and Anglo-Saxon female physicians overrun Asia, many in the guise of missionaries. France even has sent a few doctresses to its African Mahometan territory, and Madam Chellier has had most remarkable success in Algeria.

The feminine oddity is strangely regarded in Paris. Some Parisian doctresses will insist on wearing masculine clothing. Not long since at one of the President's receptions, Madam Carnot set the example of taking a gentleman's arm on going to the lunch table. A young Parisian, a little under the influence of wine, found no one left in the saløn but a person he supposed to be another young man. To this young person he gave a sharp slap on the shoulder and exclaimed good-naturedly:

"Eh bien, maintenant, si nous allons pisser."

He did not know he was speaking to a doctress in masculine clothing. But the doctress was up to Parisian snuff and quietly replied, "*Allons!*" Is there too much Gallic salt in this? If so, do not touch the article.