THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN MEDICAL WOMEN

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The "Medical Woman's Journal" is presenting, for the first time in concrete shape, a history of the pioneer medical women of America. This history was prepared for and presented in part at the Convention of the International Medical Association, held in Geneva, Switzerland, September 4-7, 1922, by Dr. Eliza M. Mosher, of Brooklyn, N. Y., whose history we present first. We do this because of her recognized position as the Dean of American Medical Women; having spent fifty years of her life in the practice of her profession and in service to humanity; because it was from her fertile brain that the first suggestion of an International Association emanated; because during her long career as a practicing physician she has always been imbued with a high ideal for the women members of the medical profession. Dr. Mosher is the Senior Editor of the "Medical Woman's Journal," her connection in that capacity having begun in January, 1909.—[Mgr. Editor.]

ELIZA M. MOSHER began medical study in 1869 at the New England Hospital for Women and Children, and in the office of Dr. Lucy E. Sewall, attending physician at the same hospital.

In 1871 she entered the medical department of the University of Michigan. While a two-year course was sufficient to obtain a diploma at that time, she elected a three-year course. At the beginning of the second year she was asked to serve as assistant demonstrator of anatomy and quiz master for the women's class. In order to do this she elected a four-year course and devoted her second year mainly to anatomy under Professors Ford and Frothingham.

Desiring better clinical advantages than the University afforded at this time, she spent the third year of her course in New York City, matriculating at the Woman's College of the New York Infirmary, but spent much of her time attending clinics at Bellevue Hospital, DeMilt Dispensary, and elsewhere. She returned to the University of Michigan for her last year of study.

In the autumn of 1877 the Massachusetts State Reformatory Prison for Women at Sherborn was completed, and Dr. Mosher was called to become its resident physician. The organization of a hospital of sixty beds from its very inception required executive ability as well as medical skill and training.

In 1879 Dr. Mosher resigned her position in favor of her assistant, Dr. Lucy Hall, and went abroad for a year of medical study. In London she saw laparotomies performed for the first time. Carbolic acid was sprayed continuously across the opened abdominal wound during these operations. She studied the diseases of children at the Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital, attended the clinics of Sir Andrew Clark on the chest, and Sir Morell Mackenzie at the London Throat Hospital. In Paris she studied diseases of the eye under M. Panas. She joined a class of foreign physicians in practical surgery under M. Fort, and spent much time at Hotel Dien following clinical professors of the medical school.

On returning to America in 1881 to resume the private practice of medicine, Dr. Mosher received letters and telegrams calling her immediately to Boston. The superintendent of the Reformatory Prison had been removed, and Governor Long urged Dr. Mosher to accept the position left vacant, saying, "You are the only woman I am willing to appoint; and to put a man at the head of the prison, as I must if you refuse, will set back the work of women in Massachusetts twenty years."

Dr. Mosher at once introduced a "grading and marking system" to stimulate the inmates of the prison to greater effort at self-control. She adopted a plan of cumulative punishments for misdemeanors that greatly reduced the infraction of prison rules. She added a probation department whereby each new prisoner was separated from the others for a definite period, during which she was brought under the personal influence of the officers and the chaplain. After two and one-half years she resigned the position, and with Dr. Lucy Hall, who had succeeded her as physician of the prison, located in Brooklyn, N. Y., to enter upon the private practice of medicine.

Before two months had passed the position of resident physician at Vassar College became vacant, and Dr. Mosher was asked to take it. She refused unless the president and trustees would permit her to serve on half time in alternation with her associate, Dr. Lucy Hall, and this only until Brooklyn practice should demand the full time of both doctors. Her conditions were accepted, and the autumn of 1883 found her at the college making a careful physical examination of the freshmen girls and recording the same with their family history. This was the first time in the history of women's colleges in this country that such a record had been made by a college physician.

Together with the gymnasium teacher Dr. Mosher replaced the old calesthenic drill with its cumbersome skirt for the Sargent system of physical training with its painstaking measurements and its more suitable divided skirt.

In 1896 an urgent call came to Dr. Mosher from the University of Michigan to inaugurate the work of a dean of women, and to establish a system of physical education for women students in the Barbour gymnasium just being completed. With these a full professorship in hygiene was offered in the Department of Literature, Science, and the Arts. Reluctantly again she laid aside the practice of medicine, and, although it involved a large pecuniary loss, she turned heart and soul into work for her Alma Mater.

In accepting the position at the University, Dr. Mosher explicitly stated to President Angell that she would remain until the work to which she was called was fully organized—probably no longer, as her chosen field was the practice of medicine. At the end of six years this work was accomplished, and she tendered her resignation, so that she might return to her office in Brooklyn, where work awaited her coming, and in which she has been actively engaged since that time.

During the twelve years which have elapsed, Dr. Mosher has been a lecturer on hygiene at Adelphi College for Women; on anatomy, physiology, and hygiene in the Union Missionary Training Institute, located in Brooklyn; and has lectured at Mt. Holyoke College to the Freshman classes.

Dr. Mosher was associate founder of the "American Posture League," New York City, and has been chairman of one of its most important committees since its inception. She has been an active member of the War Committee of the "Medical Woman's National Association," of which she is honorary president. The work of this committee, under the name "American Woman's Hospitals," still continues because of the great need for medical women in the devastated regions of Serbia, Turkey, Asia Minor and Russia. Upwards of one million dollars have been raised and expended, and medical women with able corps of nurses have rendered a very great service to the sick and suffering of those countries.

Dr. Mosher spent four years in intensive study on the relation of habitual postures to the health and symmetry of the body during the early part of her work in the School of Physical Education at Chantauqua. This study has made her an authority on this subject in America.

During the last ten years Dr. Mosher has been making a careful clinical study of the abdomen and its contents with special reference to enteroptosis, its prevention and correction, and her papers have added materially to the knowledge of this important subject.

Dr. Mosher is a member of the A. M. A., the New York State Medical Society, the Medical Association of Greater New York, the Medical Society of the County of Kings, the Brooklyn Pathological Society, the American Medical Milk Commission, etc.

She has written a book, "Health and Happiness, a Message to Girls," Funk & Wagnalls Co., publishers, and a very large number of papers all of which embody original observation and work.

DR. ELIZABETH BLACKWELL

Count me o'er life's chosen heroes;
They were souls that stood alone—
Stood serene, and down the future
Saw the golden beam incline
To the side of perfect justice, mastered
By their faith divine."—[Lowell.

SIXTY-SEVEN years ago in an American city a lady suffering from a serious pelvic disease said to a finely educated young teacher, Elizabeth Blackwell by name: "You are fond of study, have health and leisure; why not study medicine? If I could have been treated by a woman physician, my worst sufferings would have been spared me."

This little seed fell upon good ground. Although Elizabeth Blackwell at once repudiated the suggestion, because of the deep-seated contempt she had always felt for disease and physical defects, the suggestion sank deeply into her subconscious mind, and as in the case of Kipling's Explorer,

"A voice worse than conscience,
Rang its everlasting changes,"

on "Why not study medicine?"

Finally, to still the insistent voice, she wrote to several physicians, friends of her family, asking if it would be possible for a woman to obtain a medical education. Their replies were almost identical—"The idea is a good one, but impossible of accomplishment." This verdict became an incentive rather than a check, for she felt there must be some way of realizing an idea of real value. so she determined to push forward.

Just at this time a noted abortionist was

flourishing in New York City, and was advertised throughout the country as a *"female physician."* The gross perversion and destruction of motherhood by this abortionist filled Elizabeth Blackwell with indignation and awakened in her an active antagonism "that the honorable term *female physician* should be exclusively applied to women who carried on this shocking trade seemed a horror to her," and her decision to study medicine at once took root.

In order to accumulate the needed funds for medical study Elizabeth Blackwell accepted a teaching position in a distant State. An experience she had on the night of her arrival at her destination shows conclusively that she was called of God to be the great leader of medical women she afterwards became. Of it she writes in her book, "Pioneer Work in Opening the Medical Profession to Women": "Doubt and dread of what might be before me gathered in my mind. I was overwhelmed with sudden terror of what I was undertaking. In an agony of mental despair I cried out, 'O God, help me! support me! Lord Jesus, guide, enlighten me!' My very being went out in this yearning cry for Divine help. Suddenly, overwhelmingly, an answer came. A glorious Presence as of a brilliant light flooded my soul. A spiritual influence so joyful, gentle, but powerful, surrounded me that the despair which had overwhelmed me vanished. All doubt as to the future, all hesitation as to the rightfulness of my purpose left me," she writes, "never in after life to return."

"I *knew* that however insignificant my individual effort might be it was in a right direction and in accordance with the providential ordering of our race's progress."

Many a woman since that day, the writer among the number, has made the momentous decision to undertake the responsibilities, and make the sacrifices which a medical life entails under the same internal promptings and with the same promise of help. Time will permit but a short outline of the subsequent career of Elizabeth Blackwell. With great difficulty she found a medical college willing to receive a woman student, but she found herself engulfed in prejudice of faculty and students and of the town's people as well. It is good to know that by her scholarliness, her innate womanliness and modesty she won the respect of all these, and an honorable place at graduation, which occurred on January 23, 1849.

Not satisfied with the limited instruction given in our American colleges at that time, she determined to go to London. She was admitted to clinics at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, where she came in contact with the best British physicians. She had letters of introduction also which gave her admittance to the drawing rooms of distinguished English women, where again she met celebrated men and women of that day.

In August, 1851, she returned to America and opened a modest office. As a hint to medical women starting in practice, an early experience of hers is worth noting: She spent the time waiting for practice to begin in writing a series of lectures on the Physical Education of Girls, which she delivered in a Sunday School basement room. She writes, "These lectures, owing to the social and professional connections which resulted therefrom, gave me my first start in practical medicine." In 1853 she opened a small dispensary in order to make it possible for poor women to be attended by one of their own sex. Enlarged again and again, as the years have passed, this dispensary, still presided over by medical women, daily cares for large numbers of women and children.

In 1856 her sister Emily, who had graduated in medicine from a college in Cleveland, O., and had spent two years in study in London, Edinburgh and Paris, joined her. In 1857 they, with the help of friends, established a small hospital which they named the New York Infirmary for Women and Children. This also stands today after years of creditable work a monument to the memory of these two remarkable women.

In 1865 a college for women was incorporated under the name "Women's College of the New York Infirmary." In view of the still existing doubt in the minds of the men of the medical profession regarding the ability of women to study and practice medicine, an examining board made up of professors from the New York medical schools was early formed to examine the students who were to receive diplomas. In this way a high standard of scholarship was established in this school.

The Doctors Blackwell believed that "the first and constant aim of the family physician should be to diffuse knowledge which would enable parents to bring up healthy children." To prepare medical women for this important phase of their work a class of hygiene was added to the regular curriculum of the college, and the first teaching upon this subject in any college in New York City was given by Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, who occupied that chair in the New York Medical College for Women.

With a dispensary, infirmary and college equipped, and under the management of her distinguished sister, Dr. Emily Blackwell, and able associates, Dr. Elizabeth

Blackwell felt that her pioneer work for medical women in America was done. At this time pioneer work in England was beginning, and she hoped that her ten years of experience in America might hasten the medical education of women and their recognition by the profession in England.

In 1859, ten years after her graduation at Geneva, N. Y., Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell returned to the land of her birth, having been the first woman to receive a license to practice medicine in London. With her ten years' experience in America, she hoped she might, by public lectures and personal influence, hasten the establishment there of a college and hospital for women under the direction of able medical women.

Her work as a pioneer in England, I must leave to be told by our English historian at this meeting.

The writer cannot close this sketch of the life of our wonderful American pioneer without an acknowledgment of her personal indebtedness to Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell. With a medical friend she had the great privilege of spending Christmas week of 1879 as a guest of Dr. Blackwell at her residence, Rock House, Hastings. The hours of delightful conversation before her open fire can never be forgotten—the inspiration and stimulus were sufficient to endure for a lifetime.

Sweetly and peacefully from this world life passed the wonderful woman who lighted the medical torch in America. From hand to hand it has progressed until today we meet here from all parts of the world to celebrate the noble fellowship, which it has created.

EMILY BLACKWELL

The life and work of Emily Blackwell was closely linked with that of her sister Elizabeth. She also saw that in the field of medicine there was need of whole-souled women ready to brave prejudice and meet with courage the hardships that under the best circumstances attend the life of a physician.

Determining to study medicine, she gained admission to the Rush Medical College in Chicago, where she spent her first year. At its close, however, the *State Medical Society demanded that the school should be closed to women students.* It was the same State Medical Society, be it remembered, sixteen years later sent the *first woman delegate* to the annaal meeting of the American Medical Society.

The organizers of the Western Reserve College of Cleveland, O., were broad-minded

DR. EMILY BLACKWELL

men, who admitted women to that medical school from its beginning. It was from this school that Emily Blackwell in 1852 received her medical degree. She at once went to England for further study, and had the great good fortune to become a private student of the celebrated Sir James Simpson, of Edinburgh, Scotland. She remained with him upwards of a year, and when she left he warmly testified to her fitness for the work she had undertaken.

Space will allow but one excerpt from the letter he put into her hand at parting. It reads: "I have rarely met with a young physician better acquainted with the ancient and modern languages or more learned in the literature, science and practical details of our profession. Permit me to add that in your relation to patients and in your kindly care and treatment of them I ever found you a most womanly woman."

Similar testimonials were received by Dr. Emily Blackwell from distinguished physicians in London and Paris in whose hospital wards she had faithfully studied.

On her return to New York Dr. Emily Blackwell joined her sister in the practice of medicine, and assisted by Dr. Zakrzewska, who also had graduated in Cleveland, they organized the hospital which was incorporated under the name "New York Infirmary for Women and Children." This hospital today stands as their great memorial. The story had already been told of the founding

of the college in which Dr. Emily occupied the chair of diseases of women during the entire life of the school. She was a teacher remarkable for the clearness and precision with which she presented her subject. Her words were well chosen and her clinical teaching most valuable.

When the Woman's College of the New York Infirmary was merged with the co-educational medical school of Cornell University. Dr. Blackwell retired from active medical work and passed the remaining days of her life in well-earned rest with her sister, Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell. She placed the newly lighted medical torch in the hands of able young women, who in turn are passing it on to a continually growing army of medical women all over the world.

DR. MARIE ZAKRZEWSKA

Ninety-three years ago in the city of Berlin a girl was born who was destined to exert a powerful influence upon the medical education of women in America—Marie Elizabeth Zakrzewska. The Polish family of which her grandfather was a direct descendant was one of the most ancient in Europe. The great grandmother for whom Marie was named was a gypsy queen of the ancient Lombardi family. Her grandfather was a surgeon attached to the army of Frederick the Great during the "Seven Years War." Her father was a government official; at one time he gave expression to revolutionary tendencies, and for this was retired from the army on a pension too small for the support of his large family, of which Marie was the eldest.

In this emergency her mother, in order to help care for the family, entered the government school of midwives. In early childhood marked traits and strong inherited tendencies, fostered and developed by family circumstances and environment, manifested themselves in Marie. Her influence over others seems to have been as well marked then as later in life.

Because of eye trouble Marie was allowed to be much with her mother while she was at work in the hospital. The regular attending physicians often took her with them through the wards, and she was given the name, "Little Blind Doctor." As her eyes grew stronger she read with great interest books on surgery and the "History of Midwifery." Later she frequently accompanied her mother on visits to patients, thereby learning valuable lessons never to be forgotten. The experience of caring for two aunts, one suffering from cancer, became a determining influence in her life. She now knew that she would devote herself to the study of medicine and work for humanity.

The only door open to her in Berlin was the school of midwifery. To this school she was admitted. Her work was so superior to that of the ordinary student that she gained the highest praise and the true friendship of Dr. Joseph Hermans Schmidt, professor in the school and chief director of the Hospital Charite of Berlin.

Because of her fitness and unusual ability and his own failing health, Professor Schmidt desired to have her appointed to the position of Chief Acconcheuse in the hospital and to fill his place in the school. There was much opposition—"No woman had ever filled these positions," etc.; but at last, on May 15, 1852, when she was only 22 years of age, Marie E. Zakrzewska received the appointment, the highest that could be given to a woman in Germany. She proved equal to the work and filled both positions in a satisfactory manner. When Dr. Schmidt died Marie's thoughts turned to America, and with a younger sister she sailed for New York, March, 1853, bringing with her "credentials from the highest authorities in Prussia as a scientific experienced acconcheuse of unusual talent and skill." To her sorrow the letter given her in Germany to physicians in New York gave her no recognition, and she learned

that in this "Land of Liberty and Equality" the women physicians were not recognized, but on the contrary held a place inferior to that of nurses.

Disheartened, though not discouraged, she hung out her sign, but no patients came. A year later she met Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, who became interested in the life story of the young German girl. From this time forward the path to her chosen work was open. In two years she graduated at the Cleveland Medical School, and returned to New York. She assisted Doctors Elizabeth and Emily Blackwell to open the New York Infirmary for Women and Children, in which she was made resident physician. Twice she was sent to Boston to collect funds for the little hospital. She found there a group of noble men and women who were deeply impressed "by her genuineness, her splendid courage, her certainty of success, and, more than all, having the noblest aims."

Later, when the weak little New England Female College in Boston needed help, Dr. Zakrzewska was invited to fill the chair of obstetrics. She accepted the position provided a hospital for clinical work should be opened in connection with it. During the time she held her professorship in this college she attracted to it a number of intelligent young women who in later years also became important pioneers in the field of medicine.

Finding that neither college nor hospital could be brought up to her ideal standard, at the end of three years she resigned her professorship, and with able friends opened a hospital of ten beds, which later became the New England Hospital for Women and Children. This hospital, so modestly begun, has become a great foundation. During the fifty-five years which have passed hundreds of young women, graduates in medicine, have received their bedside training there, and a large number of trained nurses have been sent forth, many to become superintendents of large general hospitals.

As soon as the hospital was established Dr. Zakrzewska began private practice, in which she rapidly gained a large clientele. She proved by doing almost continuous night work and by walking long distances in rain and snow the ability of women to endure equally with men the arduous requirements of a medical practice.

From this time till her death in 1902 Dr. Zakrzewska's life was filled with service for others. Those of whom had the good fortune to come under her clinical teaching at the New England Hospital have never lost the influence of her life and character.

She seldom praised, and was critical and outspoken when work was carelessly done, yet her warm heart was always felt beneath it, and her desire to make her students worthy of their high calling as physicians was apparent. Her interest in the great reform movements of her time could always be counted upon. She was a radical anti-slavery advocate, and in the movement for the enfranchisement of women she was an honored comrade with the veterans in that struggle. She spoke often before clubs, schools and various organizations, and wrote valuable papers which have been preserved and will be included in the full history of her life soon to be published.

It was the dream of her girlhood to build a hospital in which women might receive the same practical training as men, and she lived to make this dream come true.

The New England Hospital for Women and Children, doing its noble educational and charitable work, stands today as a testimonial to the power of a woman to accomplish that which in her soul she felt called upon to do, and it is a living monument to the memory of its founder, Dr. Marie Elizabeth Zakrzewska.

To you from falling hands we throw
The TORCH—be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die,
We shall not sleep.—[McRae.

CHILD WELFARE

"Fifty Permanent Mother and Baby Health Centers in Michigan Before July 1. 1923," is the slogan adopted at the first meeting of representatives of women's organizations called by the director of the bureaus of child hygiene and public-health nursing, to present plans for the work made possible by the Sheppard-Towner Act.

The Seventh Annual Better Babies' Conference was one of the chief attractions of the State Fair, held September 16th-23d, in Illinois. The conference was under the direction of Dr. Jesse D. Rawlings, Director of Public Health.

School Dietitian for Baltimore.—The commissioner of health, Baltimore, has been authorized to appoint a woman dietitian to the public-school health work staff, to enable the department to look after children who are undernourished. The chief work of the new official will be to instruct the 100 school nurses in dietetics in order that they may carry information into the homes of the children.