

PHYSICIANS AS CONTRIBUTORS TO BRITISH AND AMERICAN LITERATURE.

(Concluded.)

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American Literature.

Pioneer hardships are not apt to produce song and story. Add to this condition stern Puritanism and you will understand the scarcity of literature in this country during the first century of her colonial history. Writers there were, but their theme was religion—the thunders of the law, and justice, not always tempered by mercy, were expounded from the pulpit and by the quill of the New Englander; trading, and a desire to live and let live, occupied the Dutch of New Amsterdam in the early days of their history; while Virginia and the rest of the South were busy establishing plantations, and fostering (as best they could) family traditions of good society and breeding. It behooved the physician of this time to hold himself in readiness at all hours of the night and day to attend to the quieting of historical conditions and other maladies of the people. During the first one hundred years of this country, none suffered more hardship than he who oftentimes risked his own life in an effort to save others. What wonder is it then, in the face of all this, search where we may, we find in the literature of that time not a line that can be ascribed to the pen of a physician?

The latter part of the eighteenth century, with its war-cry and struggle for liberty, was a time when the writers of history became rich in good material for their work. Even then, the influence of Theology was felt as in Channing's "Student's History," each chapter having a scriptural reference as a heading.

After the historians followed a period of oratory which was unprecedented in this country, and the equal of which has not since been known. Then, and not until then, was America in condition for the development of general literature. Hand in hand with oratory, came the renaissance of New England, which developed writers in all the walks of life wherein a knowledge of letters might be found.

The first to reward our research for an American novelist or poet among medical men is *Lemuel Hopkins* (1750-1801), of Hartford, Conn., one of the so-called "Hartford wits" of the latter

part of the eighteenth century. This old-time physician was a satirist with a ready pen for those who differed from him on religion or politics. He was the associate of Trumbull, Humphries and Barlow. His contributions to the press were eagerly sought for by the editors of his time. Ethan Allen got into disfavor on account of his infidelity in the day of this writer, who characterized the General in rather harsh terms in a lengthy poem, beginning with these lines:

“Behold him now, ye staunch divines,
His tall head bustling above the pines.
All front he seems like wall of brass,
And brays tremendous as an ass.
One hand is clenched to batter noses,
While t’other scrawls ’gainst Paul and Moses.”

A sad ending to a brilliant career was the death of *Dr. Joseph Brown Ladd*; in an affair of honor he received his death wound, and the world of letters lost a born poet, who at the age of ten years wrote a poem far superior to those of his contemporaries of twice his years. His poem was followed from time to time by verse of great merit, but the young physician and poet met his unnecessary death at the early age of twenty-six.

Dr. Samuel Latham Mitchell (1764-1831), born in North Hempstead, L. I., was the promoter and founder of the first Agricultural Society in America. His books are on the sciences allied to medicine and a number of short poems were written by him. He became noted for an oration delivered in a Presbyterian Church in Wall Street, to the Tammany Society.

Dr. Benjamin Church (173?-1776?) is said to have given contributions to literature in the early days under the pen name of “A Son of Liberty.”

Dr. James McClurg (1746-1823), of Virginia, was a great writer of scientific books other than medical, and produced a number of love songs having for their theme the beauty of the Virginia maidens, one of whom became Mistress McClurg.

The well-remembered *Dr. David Ramsay* (1749-1815) was the son of Irish emigrants living in Pennsylvania, where David was born. This great man wielded the sword as well as the lancet, and after the war was over took up his pen as well as his practice of medicine; a book of revolutionary data, although true in historical detail, was not allowed to be sold in England. Upon this incident Dr. Ramsay wrote a spirited poem in which he says:

"Their chastisement is only begun.

Thirteen are the States and the story is of one.

When the twelve yet remaining their stories have told,

The King will run mad and the book will be sold."

Four hours' sleep was all this man allowed himself; twenty hours daily for many years were devoted to medicine and literature. He was a man of prepossessing appearance and of a kindly disposition toward all men except the rulers of England.

Dr. Frederic Bland (uncle of John Randolph) was born in 1742, in Virginia, was educated at Edinburgh, began the practice of medicine in 1764, and composed songs which were sung to martial tread during the struggle for liberty. In later life he produced a number of poems.

Dr. Benjamin Rush (1745-1813), a close friend of Franklin, wrote much that was educational and scientific, and also a history of the early settlers of this country. To this may be added several stirring poems, having freedom for their theme.

Dr. Charles Caldwell (1772-1853), of Philadelphia, contributed much to journalism in the early days of American independence. His *Port Folio*, a small magazine, was devoted to the criticism, in a kindly way, of the newspaper editorials of his time. He also wrote the lives of American military and naval officers and other public and distinguished men.

Dr. Martin Johnson, first of East Hampton, L. I., later of the City of New York, wrote some beautiful verse which saved his reputation in after years, when by the flattering offers of a printer he was tempted to translate an infidel book then in vogue, written by Boulanger. In extenuation of this rash act, he said: "Poverty and persuasion induced me to translate this work," which put an end to his literary career, and very nearly robbed him of his practice.

And now, in the year 1792, let us introduce to you *Dr. Elisha H. Smith* (1771-1798), our first Yale graduate, who appears as doctor, physician, poet and playwright, and an all-round good fellow. He wrote several plays which were produced at the old John Street Theatre with success; also a number of sonnets, which were well received; also an operatic version of a ballad, entitled "Edwin and Angelina." In 1793, he edited the first collection ever made of American poetry.

Dr. Josiah Gilbert Holland (1819-1881), of Philadelphia, became a strong influence as an editorial writer in the early his-

tory of journalism in this country. After three years of the practice of medicine he received such flattering offers from a leading newspaper that he gave up his chosen profession and made literature his career for the remainder of his active life. His "Life of Abraham Lincoln" was published when the author was near his 70th year. His novels were well received, and are to-day to be found on the shelves of many private libraries. His last two books, "The Mistress of the Manse" and the "History of the Life of Abraham Lincoln," are fresh in the minds of the people.

In the year 1795 there was born a writer of verse—a bright star destined to shine for a short period in the firmament of current literature. This young physician was *Joseph Rodman Drake* (1795-1820), the associate and bosom friend of Fitz-Greene Halleck and J. Fenimore Cooper. Dr. Drake was a born poet. Read his "Culprit Fay," with its delicacy of light and shade and its descriptive strength. You will see the witching fairies dance along on the waters of his beloved Hudson, whence came the inspiration of this great poem. He and Halleck wrote many contributions to the *New York Post*, during the time it was edited by a Mr. Coleman. Drake signed his poems "Croaker" and Halleck signed his "Croaker, Jr." As these articles contained a roasting for many men in high places, the identity of the authors was kept well-concealed from the public. Dr. William Langstaff, a friend and partner of Dr. Drake, was engaged to copy them, thus keeping the handwriting from even the editor, who saw the circulation of his paper increase ten-fold through printing the verses of these two "Croakers."

About this time, a Connecticut man, *Dr. Percival* (1795-1856), published a number of small volumes of good poetry, which are highly recommended by his biographer, the Rev. J. H. Ward; and *Dr. Robert M. Bird* (1805-1854), of Delaware, began about that time to be felt as a playwright of no mean ability. The "Gladiator," "Spartacus," "Oralloosa," and "The Broker of Bogata," are plays which were well received. Some of us would like to see the "Gladiator" once more, if played as the late John McCullough used to play it. Dr. Bird's best remembered book is "Nick of the Woods," a boy's story.

Dr. Christopher C. Cox (1816-1882) was a contributor to many periodicals. He wrote mostly verses, and one long poem entitled "One Year Ago" brought the author quite into the front

ranks of his compeers. This was prior to the publication of his book entitled "Old New Yorkers," which was the first of its kind, and which probably has been lost sight of in the flood of more recent books on that subject.

Dr. Isaac Hays (1796-1879) accompanied Dr. Kane on his first Grinnell expedition. Upon his return he wrote, in story form, a beautiful account of his experiences, to which he gave the title "An Arctic Boat Journey." Then the Civil War broke out, and this young explorer went to the front and served his country until the victory was won. Taking up his pen again, although still occupied with the practice of medicine, he added four more books to the list of those written by American medical authors.

Dr. Simeon Tucker Clark (1836-1893), a New England physician, wrote a book of poems in which there is much to be admired. These poems were well received by lovers of nature.

Dr. William Henry Winslow is a present day writer, or we should say, a writer of recent years. His "Sea Letter" is a book filled with romance, having for its scenes Martha's Vineyard and the coast of Maine. This book has gained for the author many favorable criticisms by the book reviewers of the present time. The novel is indeed very interesting, being neither melodramatic nor overdrawn, but a good story, well told. We hope more of its kind may follow.

Dr. E. C. Pickett, a University of Pennsylvania man, gave many contributions to literature in the early seventies. His "Life of General Pickett" sets forth President Lincoln's warm friendship for the General and his wife, whose tribute to her soldier husband is a monument of greater worth than Dr. Pickett's book, although his is no mean review, and shows great painstaking.

"A Doctor's Wonder Days," written in 1900, by *G. Frank Lydston*, is a book of much merit, and is beautifully illustrated with the author's original photographs. Dr. Lydston is a contributor to many current magazines.

Dr. William Hammond, one time Surgeon-General of the United States Army, wrote many scientific works which are closely allied to medicine. Aside from these he gave to the reading world six novels. One, entitled "A Strong Minded Woman," was very popular, as was also, "On the Susquehanna." The others were well received but were of minor importance.

Dr. Worthington Hooker, a New England man, produced many good books which might be classed as educational; they are principally along the lines of natural history. Hooker, however, wrote one that is a revival of the earlier style of writers, entitled "The Scriptural Idea of Man."

Dr. Charles G. Halpine came to this country after graduating in medicine in Dublin. He began to practice in New York, but his native taste for battle led him to enlist as a soldier. He went out with the Sixteenth Regulars during the Civil War. After serving his time he returned to New York, and under the pen name of "Miles O'Reilly" he is a well remembered writer to this day.

Dr. Arthur Donalson Smith, of the University of Pennsylvania, contributed much to literature when he published accounts of his expedition between Lake Rudolph and the Nile, in his "Through Unknown Africa." This bright young man had bestowed upon him, as a reward for his discoveries, the Elisha Kent Kane Medal—the first time it was awarded.

Unlike those who contribute from time to time to the current numbers of magazines or journals, is *Dr. S. Weir Mitchell*, of Philadelphia, one of our present day novelists, and a poet. This writer is so well known that it would be wasting time to try to review his works in this essay. To discuss him later will be more interesting, for we are inclined to think of him as the greatest American author in the medical fraternity of the past or present.

While we've tried to bring out the fact that, during the period of renaissance in America, a number of physicians wrote many good novels, plays and poems, we have withheld from the list the name of *Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes*, physician, anatomist, lecturer, satirist, poet and novelist. All this combined to make of him such a brilliant star in the firmament of literature as to throw the lesser literary lights among his brethren into the gloom of oblivion. Unless the hands of research be allowed to lift the veil to part the curtains of time, and to step into the atmosphere which surrounded the great man, the "Autocrat of the Breakfast Table," who electrified the patriotism of his countrymen when he wrote "Old Ironsides," we will leave him where he deserves to be—in the forefront of his competitors, who were members of the same honored profession.

One there was in those days, however, who deserves a place near the shrine of Dr. Holmes.

Let us penetrate the halo spread about the head that is crowned with New England gems, and we will find one over here in the city of Newark, New Jersey, who wrote almost as many novels as did Dr. Holmes, and whose talent as a dramatist is well remembered. More than twenty of his plays were produced in New York City, and throughout the country. There was not an uninteresting novel in the five written by him. His volume of "American Ballads" is charming, as also is his "Boys' Book of Battle Lyrics," published in 1885. I wonder how many of the present day readers remember this bard as the writer of the song made famous by Du Maurier who, in one of his books, makes Trilby sing "Ben Bolt," and thus revived the memory of its author?

Dr. Thomas Dunn English was the versatile composer who, when asked by the editor of the *New York Mirror*, for a sailor's song, and given but one day in which to write it, wrote and sent this ballad to the office of the *Mirror* in less than the time specified by the editor, and with it the statement that if he had had more time he could have done better. Little did he dream how very well he had written. A story is told about this ballad to this effect: that at the time when it appeared in the *Mirror*, a manager of one of the New York theatres used it to scare a young lad who had been applying again and again to him for an opportunity to demonstrate his ability as a singer. It was fashionable at that time to have songs sung between the acts. "Take this ballad," said he, "have it set to music in time for tonight's performance, and you may sing it." The youth hastened away in hope and fear. He went through his songs for music that might prove to be of some help, and success came to him in one of Kneasel's compositions which, with but few minor changes, admirably fitted "Ben Bolt." The young man captivated his audience, and sang his song in New York for three consecutive seasons.

Among the many doctors of medicine who have contributed to literature, we have named but a few; a sufficient number, however, to prove that, for men of the medical profession, only application is necessary in order that they may write books which will compare favorably with those written by professional authors.