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The True Physician (Taken from "A Surgeon Reflects")

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The true physician is by nature born a scholar. In obedience to the precept of Hippocrates, the Father of Medicine, he must bring to his task a love of labor and perseverance, which, taking root, shall bring forth abundant fruit; with purity and holiness of purpose he must pass his life and practice in the art of healing. So it has been for the past twenty-five centuries.

The true physician leads a life of endless labor, unceasing vigil, and inexhaustible research, working alike among all classes, in the home of the rich and the poor, in plague-ridden villages or in the battlefield. He observes every motion of the sick, analyzes every reaction, unravels mysteries, propounds theories, evolves practices. He studies the past, evaluates the present, plans the future. In the daily course of his practice, he learns many secrets and guards them as though they were his own. He follows the precept of ancient Hebrew philosophy: he does justice, loves mercy, and walks humbly with his patient and with God.

The true physician is often a man of divers talents. Doctor Luke, the Beloved Physician, was one of the four great Evangelists. Copernicus, who practiced medicine conscientiously, giving his service freely to the poor, found time to expound the principles upon which the complicated science of modern astronomy is largely based. Imhotep, the great Egyptian physician, built the first Pyramid. The Arabian physician, Avicenna, who dominates medical history for the five centuries from Galen to Vesalius, was the greatest philosopher and theologian of his time. Linacre, the English humanist; Thomas Campion, the English song writer; Thomas Lodge, the Elizabethan playwright; Sir Thomas Browne, the author of Religio Medici; Peter Roget, the originator of the Thesaurus; David Livingstone, the Scottish missionary; and Robert Bridges, English poet laureate, were all physicians, as are such outstanding authors as Axel Munthe and Alexis Carrel.

Here in America, too, the true physician has been equally versatile. In literature alone, the medical men number among their ranks Oliver Wendell Holmes, Professor of Anatomy at Harvard, but much better known for his witty prose; Silas Weir Mitchell, originator of the American school of thought on neurology—and also the writer of eighteen volumes of literary works; Edward Trudeau, delightful autobiographer, who as a busy physician pioneered in the fight against tuberculosis; Sir William Osler, distinguished essayist, and at the same time one of the greatest physicians of all times; John McCrae, Chief of Medical Service
at Boulogne, 1916-1917, and au-
thor of the well-loved poem “In
Flanders Field”; Harvey Cushing,
eminent neurologist and winner of
the Pulitzer prize in literature for
1925.

The list of American physicians
in other fields besides literature is
equally impressive. It includes
William James, America’s greatest
philosopher; Leonard Wood, Chief
of Staff of the United States
Army; and the five physician-
patriots who signed the Declara-
tion of Independence—Volcott,
Hall, Rush, Thornton, and Bart-
lett.

Whatever the versatility of his
talents, the true physician is above
all, a true gentleman. He con-
forms, in many ways, to Cardinal
Newman’s definition of the word
“one who never inflicts pain.” He
is the type of man who fits easily
into Shakespeare’s great tribute,
His life was gentle, and the
elements
So mix’d in him that Nature
might stand up,
And say to all the world
“This was a man.”

The true physician is Brown-
ing’s man with kindness of heart,
delicacy of feeling, thoughtfulness
for others, unbounded silent char-
ity. He must have the qualities
that John B. Murphy ascribed to
a good surgeon: the eye of an
eagle, the heart of a lion, the touch
of a woman. A down-to-earth
has added—the constitution of a
mule!

The true physician is a mariner
at sea. He is Captain of a craft
that carries a helpless frame from
the mire of disease to the shore
of health. Disease, suffering, and
sorrow, are the troublesome oceans
of his travel. Unmoved, unafraid
of lashing waves, blinding temp-
est, treacherous currents, un-
daunted by the poisoned breath of
pestilence and the ravages of
deadly infection, with a life as
his cargo, he carries on. His in-
struments are aptitude, long prep-
paration, scientific precision, skill-
ful technique, and moral integrity.
His compensations are abiding
faith, fervent prayers, and the re-
turn to health of his patients.
Guided by the inspiration and
heritage of a long line of immortal
health-captains, he directs the
course of his ship to a safe land-
ing.

MODERN MEDICAL METHODS

In other wars the wounded were brought back from the front to
the surgeon. Now the United States is saving hundreds of soldiers’
lives by sending topflight surgeons forward, often to operate within
thirty minutes after the man is wounded.

Among these medical men are specialists in every branch of surgery,
drawn from the theatre’s surgical pool, known as the Auxiliary Sur-
gical Group, and dispatched by the theatre command according to
the day’s needs.