

The way they lived then

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At the time of which I write, medical men throughout the land were as predatory as the medical men of Barsestshire. Whenever they appeared, new patients were pounced upon and fleeced. The fate of the two Conservative candidates during the Percycross election is illustrative of this. Mr Griffenbottom, a victim of gout, was suffering almost the pains of hell, and Sir Thomas Underwood had a fractured humerus, having been struck by a huge stone at the hustings whilst inveighing against bribery. Griffenbottom was in bed in one room at the Percy Standard and Underwood in the next. The three Conservative doctors, moving from one chamber to another, watching each other closely, and hardly leaving the hotel, had a good time of it. Sir Thomas was kept an entire week and a day before the three doctors and the innkeeper between them would allow him to return to London. "A broken arm is a great misfortune," said his daughter when she came to visit him, and to this he replied, "Well;—Yes. One can't deny that. And the three Percycross doctors are three more misfortunes."¹

Such captive patients were rare. It was hard to find patients who were well-to-do in the world; and when promising patients were found they did not always fulfil their promise—as Dr Pottinger discovered with Miss Mackenzie. She had come to Littlebath for a change of air and for the waters, and she carried a letter of introduction to Dr Pottinger. He was, perhaps, a little disappointed when he saw that she showed every sign of good health; but he bore it like a man and a Christian, remembering, no doubt, that let a lady's health be ever so good, she likes to see a doctor sometimes, especially if she be alone in the world. He offered her, therefore, every assistance in his power, and he and the wife of his bosom did their best to see her well settled. But their efforts were unrewarded and their hopes unfulfilled. Miss Mackenzie was soon to be absorbed in the amatorial attentions of the Reverend Jeremiah Maguire and did not once ask for the doctor's services throughout her stay in Littlebath.²

Riding after the hounds in order to be ready for broken bones and minor accidents was levelled against Dr Nupper,³ but it was unfair to single him out. There was just as strong evidence that Mr Sawyer, the skilful young surgeon from Brotherton, hunted with his mind more on cornering a human quarry; and there were others. Indeed, someone who investigated the matter claimed that there was always a doctor in the field—sent there by some benignity of Providence, he hinted—who always rode forward enough to be near to accidents, but never so forward as to be in front of them.⁴

Constant competition

Most patients were acquired by waiting, poised at the ready, for a rival to produce dissatisfaction and to be discharged. It was a triumph to gain a single patient from the enemy, but the greatest glory was obtained on taking over the doctoring at the manor house. There was always a stir when a manor house changed its doctor, and those readers familiar with the affairs of Barsestshire will not have forgotten the dismissals of Dr Thorne and Dr Fillgrave from Greshamsbury House. It was only a few years later, and in the very next county, that another remarkable

deposition occurred: young Dr Crofts became doctor for Guestwick Manor instead of Dr Gruffen who had attended for thirty years. Most people were pleased about this, and none more than the young Galen himself. For several years he had wanted to marry Isabella Dale—and doctors should be married men it was thought, by the ladies at any rate—but his total annual income was only £200, and, at this time, young wives did not go out to work. Dr Gruffen had poked fun at Lord De Guest and that was the end of him at Guestwick Manor. He had already put himself slightly out of favour when, on being asked to dinner at the manor, he had come in coloured trousers. "Just a bachelor's chop," the Earl had said, "for there's nobody at home but myself." Even so, he should have been more careful. Few people were sad for him. He had made a fortune at Guestwick and, with his sandy haired assistant, he still treated most of the ailments of the town.⁵ But I, for one, have a little sympathy for him losing the choicest jewel in his practice over a moment's raillery.

The awareness that rivals were constantly waiting for such a slip was apt to provoke anxiety among the successful doctors, although some were less affected than others. Dr Malachi Finn of Killaloe, in county Clare, seems to have remained unruffled by his neighbour, Dr Duggin, a learned physician, who spent a fruitless life endeavouring to make head against him. His most valuable patient, the Earl of Tulla, continued to confide in his gouty feet, and the weak nerves of the old countess, and the stomachs of all the domestics, to the care of Dr Finn; and he took everything else in his stride. For twelve months he talked of giving up midwifery, but his son, Phineas, had incurred £300 expenses while studying for the Bar, so the doctor paid up and buckled to work again. It was to the great disgust of Dr Duggin, who at that time said very ill-natured things about young Phineas.⁶ On the other hand, Dr Colligan, of Dunmore, in county Mayo, did not bear this constant competition so lightly. Though for many years he had courted the public in vain, at last the inhabitants of three parishes trusted their corporeal ailments to his care, with comfort to themselves and profit to him. Nevertheless, despite his hard-won reputation, he was always dreading the appearance at Dunmore of one of those young rivals, who had lately established themselves at Tuan on one side, and Hollymount on the other; and, to prevent so fatal a circumstance, was continually trying to be civil and obliging to his customers. He would not put on a blister, or order a black dose, without consulting with the lady of the house, and asking permission of the patient, and consequently had always an air of doubt and indecision.⁷

This air of doubt and indecision could have lost patients for him. Those familiar with Barsestshire will recall that it was Dr Fillgrave's indecisive air which lost him Lady Arabella for good to Dr Thorne. More than that, Dr Colligan was excessively dirty in his person and practice: he carried a considerable territory beneath his nails; smelt equally strongly of the laboratory and the stable; would wipe his hands on the patient's sheets; and wherever he went left horrid marks of his whereabouts. Perhaps his rivals were equally uncouth. This might also explain why Dr Macnuthrie of Callender did not lose the Kennedys for he too had off-putting habits. Lady Laura Kennedy hated him. She adamantly refused to see him when her husband said he would send for him because of her headache. But he insisted. Said Lady Laura: "And now I shall have that horrid man from the little town pawing me and covering everything with snuff, and bidding me take Scotch physic."⁸ Like Dr Colligan, his reputation stood high, but both of them were taking risks when there were eager rivals about.

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"I will send for Dr Macnuthrie at once."

It was not only to local rivals that business was lost; there was also the London élite to worry about. When anyone who was anyone became ill, a telegraph message was dispatched to Savile Row—for it was there that the London specialists were to be found. It seems as if their charges were high and the results of their prescriptions and ordinances poor. Sir William Brodrick went down to Hertfordshire for two days to see Mr Scarborough and took back in his pocket £300. The next time the patient had a sharp bout of pain the local apothecary did as much good and charged only 10/-.⁸ Sir Omicron Pie, the great physician, also had to see a patient in Hertfordshire and charged £20. The patient said he could encounter death like a man but why should he be robbed in his last moments?⁹ There is, unfortunately, no record of the charges of Sir Trite Turbery, the eminent mad doctor,¹⁰ nor of those of Sir James Thorax, who treated the Prime Minister's hoarseness.¹¹ Sir Jacob of Savile Row was certainly dear, for Judge Staveley decided he would not be needed for Felix Graham after he had made inquiries.¹²

In some cases the Angel of Death had already knocked and they could not have been expected to stave off the inexorable coming of the grim visitor, but in less severe cases they did not improve upon the local Galens' opinions. Katie Woodward's London physician was as much in the dark about the cause of her debility as was her Hampton doctor, and it was her mother who divined that she was pining for Charley Tudor.¹³ Dr Spicer knew more about the cause of the Marquis of Kingsbury's depression than Sir James from London, for he knew the quality of the Marchioness's tongue.¹⁴ Finally, if the Marquis of Brotherton is to be believed, they were conceited. "Your London doctors," he told his brother, "are such conceited asses that you can't speak to them. Because they can make more money than their brethren in other countries they think they know everything, and nobody else knows anything." The Marquis, it must be said, was suffering from an accident neurosis. He could not get a London doctor to say that he was very ill, and Sir James Bolton had even ordered him to get up and walk in the park for an hour.⁴ But perhaps the provincial sons of Æsculapius would not have entirely disagreed with his utterance.

Other doctors are mentioned in these records, but there is nothing to alter the impression that it is better for us *the way we live now*.

References

- ¹ Trollope A. *Ralph the Heir*. 1871.
- ² Trollope A. *Miss Mackenzie*. 1865.
- ³ Trollope A. *The American Senator*. 1877.
- ⁴ Trollope A. *Is he Popenjoy?* 1878.
- ⁵ Trollope A. *The Small House at Allington*. 1864.
- ⁶ Trollope A. *Phineas Finn*. 1869.
- ⁷ Trollope A. *The Kellys and the O'Kellys*. 1848.
- ⁸ Trollope A. *Mr Scarborough's Family*. 1883.
- ⁹ Trollope A. *The Bertrams*. 1859.
- ¹⁰ Trollope A. *He Knew he was Right*. 1869.
- ¹¹ Trollope A. *The Prime Minister*. 1876.
- ¹² Trollope A. *Orley Farm*. 1862.
- ¹³ Trollope A. *The Three Clerks*. 1858.
- ¹⁴ Trollope A. *Marion Fay*. 1882.



Two children's heads from Charles Bell's *Essays on the Anatomy of the Expression in Painting*, 1806. The left head is by Fiammingo, the right by Bell to illustrate the faults in Fiammingo's drawing: "the absence of due preponderance" over the back of the head, "the eye is too deep set," and "there is a protuberance marked on the lower part of the forehead which is quite peculiar to a more advanced age."