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PHARMACY AND MEDICINE OF GEORGE ELIOT.\*

BY A. W. LINTON.

Relatively few Twentieth Century Americans find time to read the stories of English provincial life written in the middle of the last century by Marian Evans, better known to the world as George Eliot. The reader of George Eliot must indeed be blessed with patience, for in most of her tales the plot develops very slowly, and the most trifling details in the lives of the numerous characters do not escape attention. But George Eliot's works will be read long after most of the "best sellers" of to-day have passed into oblivion.

Many of the characters of George Eliot's stories are patterned closely after persons in real life; friends and acquaintances of her own girlhood days. Most of the others, while not actually copied from life, are true portraits, since they live and think and act just as real persons in their respective stations in life and living in the England of George Eliot's time would have done. While other novelists may portray a character by describing his dress, mannerisms and actions, George Eliot allows the reader to look into the very soul of the persons in her stories. To the reader they become living, breathing, characters, each with weaknesses and sins; creatures in a measure of heredity, of association, and environment, but fighting more or less successfully against the difficulties which beset them.

Adam Bede, the village carpenter and cabinet-maker in the story of the same name, was so true a representative of the rural English mechanic of his day that a cabinet-maker who happened to secure from a relative in Blackwood's, George Eliot's publisher, the privilege of reading the manuscript of the book, could not believe that the author, at that time supposed by the world to be a man, was not a cabinet-maker by trade. This George Eliot regarded as a tribute of the highest order. No matter what the subject dealt with in her novels she spared herself no pains or labor in perfecting every detail. This is just as true in references to medical matters as in any other. George Eliot did not count a physician among her intimate acquaintances, but in creating the character of Doctor Lydgate in *Middlemarch* she spent an enormous amount of time in reading medical literature and histories of medicine.

In *Felix Holt, Radical* we find but little reference to medical men and regular practice, but Holt's Cathartic Pills play an important part in the story. The father and mother of Felix Holt have for years gained an humble livelihood by making and vending these and other sovereign remedies. The worthy Mrs. Holt relates her share in the manufacture of the Pills and Panacea in characteristic language. "And when everybody gets his due, and people's doings are spoke of on the housetops, as the Bible says they will be, it'll be known what I've gone through with those medicines—the pounding, the pouring and the letting stand, and the weighing—up early and down late, there's nobody knows yet but One

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\* The pseudonym "George Eliot" was adopted by Mary Ann (or Marian) Evans for most of her writings. She was born November 22, 1819. The centenary year, fast coming to a close, prompts the inclusion in this number of the Journal A. Ph. A., of the article on "Pharmacy and Medicine of George Eliot" by A. W. Linton, read before Section on Historical Pharmacy, New York meeting, A. Ph. A., 1919.

that's worthy to know, and the pasting o' the printed labels right side upwards. There's few women would have gone through with it, and its reasonable to suppose it will be made up to me."

The son, Felix, had been apprenticed to a country apothecary, and it had been the hope and expectation of his parents that he would continue the medicine business established by his father. But Felix developed an acute conscience, and distressed his mother by a most inconvenient habit of thinking for himself about all sorts of matters, political and religious as well as pharmaceutical. "My father was ignorant," said Felix bluntly. "He knew neither the complication of the human system nor the way in which drugs counteract each other. Ignorance is not as damnable as humbug, but when it prescribes pills may do more harm. I know something about these things. I was 'prentice for five miserable years to a stupid brute of a country apothecary, my poor father left money for that, he thought nothing could be finer for me. No matter. I know that the Cathartic Pills are a drastic compound that may be as bad as poison to half the people who swallow them; that the Elixir is an absurd farrago of a dozen incompatible things, and that the Cancer Cure might as well be bottled ditch water."

The philosophy of Felix is not a comfortable one, and it brings him into conflict with all sorts of accepted beliefs and institutions. He finds that "truth vendors and medicine vendors usually recommend swallowing. When a man sees his livelihood in a pill or a proposition he likes to have orders for the dose and not inquiries." Mrs. Holt in combating this iconoclastic attitude of Felix, if not entirely sound in her therapeutics, displays a knowledge of the keeping qualities of plaster mustard. "His father believed it was gospel truth, and it's presumptuous to say it wasn't. For as for curing, how can anybody know? There's no physic'll cure without a blessing, and with a blessing I know I've seen a mustard plaster work when there was no more smell nor strength in the mustard than so much flour. And reason good—for the mustard had laid in paper nobody knows how long—so I'll leave you to guess."

*Romola* is unique among the novels of George Eliot, for in it the author turns aside from the English towns and villages which she knew so well and lays the scene of her story in another land and another age, namely in Florence at the close of the 15th century. In *Romola* we are shown the Florence of the Renaissance, the Florence of Lorenzo de Medici, the Florence of the days of the invasion of Charles VIII, the Florence of Savonarola. George Eliot did not essay to write *Romola* until after many months of the closest study of Florentine history of the period involved. Every authority, no matter how lengthy, was carefully read, and in Florence itself she spent more than a month in observation and research. Some critics have adjudged *Romola* to be the greatest historical novel ever written, others have considered that the author made a mistake in leaving the rural England, whose life she could interpret so accurately, for an unfamiliar field.

However, we cannot hope to do justice to the literary values of *Romola*, but must be content with one or two references to things medical. Evidently in the Florence of the 15th century, as in America of the 20th, the barber shop was a place where one might hear a discussion of everything of interest in the community. The loquacious barber Nello is made to comment on the apothecary's shop as follows: "But what sort of inspiration can be got from the scent of

nauseous vegetable decoctions? To say nothing of the fact that you no sooner pass the threshold than you see a doctor of physic like a gigantic spider disguised in fur and scarlet waiting for his prey, or even see him blocking up the doorway inspecting saliva—besides your druggist who herborizes and decocts is a man of prejudices, he has poisoned people according to a system and is obliged to stand up for his system to justify the consequences.”

The bitter rivalry which existed between physicians and surgeons in that period is illustrated by the retort made on a certain occasion by the doctor to Nello the barber. “Is it your Florentine fashion to put the masters of the science of medicine on a level with men who do carpentry on broken limbs and sew up wounds like tailors, and carve away excrescences as a butcher trims meat? Via! A manual art such as any artificer might learn and which has been practiced by simple barbers like yourself on a level with the noble science of Hippocrates, Galen and Avicenna, which penetrates into the occult influences of the stars and plants and gems—a science locked up from the vulgar.”

The learned doctor, it will have been noted, made reference to the use of gems or precious stones in the treatment of disease. This is referred to at length in Chapter VI in which Romola speaks to Bardo, an eminent citizen of Florence, in regard to the belief which her father has in the use of rings as a defence against pains in the joints. Bardo replies, “Bartolammeo has overmuch confidence in the efficacy of gems—a confidence wider than is sanctioned by Pliny, who clearly shows that he regards many beliefs of that sort as idle superstitions, though not to the utter denial of medicinal virtues in gems. Wherefore I myself, as you observe, wear certain rings which the discreet Camillo Leonardi prescribed to me by letter when two years ago I had a certain infirmity of sudden numbness.”

George Eliot's *Middlemarch* gives in great detail the doings of the people of a typical English provincial town of the middle of the last century. There are really two sets of characters and two stories, more or less interwoven. One of the prominent characters is Lydgate, a young physician, who having obtained his medical education in Paris and Edinburgh comes to Middlemarch to begin his career. There are few instances in fiction in which the hopes and aspirations, the trials and temptations of a physician have been more vividly painted than in the character of Lydgate created by George Eliot. Here again she spared no pains to secure accuracy in every reference to professional matters.

Lydgate comes to Middlemarch brimful of youthful fire for the uplift of medical practice, and enthusiastic in regard to proposed research which he believes will make him famous. Although he longs for fame, he is sincere in his desire to use his profession for the benefit of humanity. He glories in his calling and believes it to be the noblest. “If I had not taken that turn when I was a lad,” he thought, “I might have got into some stupid draught horse work or other, and lived always in blinkers. I should never have been happy in any profession that did not call forth the highest intellectual strain, and yet keep me in good warm contact with my neighbors. There is nothing like the medical profession for that, one can have the exclusive scientific life that touches the distance, and befriend the old fogies in the parish too!”

Early in his practice Lydgate was fortunate in effecting some rather unusual cures, and soon found himself becoming a man of prominence in Middlemarch.

"There was a general impression that Lydgate was not altogether a common country doctor, and in Middlemarch at that time such an impression was significant of great things being expected of him." He develops plans for a new fever hospital which he thinks "might be the nucleus of a medical school here, when once we get our medical reforms, and what could do more for medical education than the spread of such schools over the country." Some of the substantial citizens are interested in Lydgate's plans for a hospital, and arrangements are made to build it and put it under his direction. He believes that he sees placed within his hands an instrument that will enable him to render splendid service to the people of Middlemarch, and at the same time give opportunity for the investigation he loves.

But alas for Lydgate's dreams of research and of medical reforms. He falls in love with the beautiful but selfish and shallow daughter of a substantial Middlemarch merchant. Rosamond saw in Lydgate, as she thought, a young physician of unusual promise, who bade fair to win in not too long a time high social standing and ample income. Lydgate soon found it impossible to keep up his practice and hospital work and at the same time satisfy Rosamond's demands for social engagements. The research was more and more neglected. His difficulties were increased by the fact that he was not politic enough to carry favor with the various factions of the social and economic life of Middlemarch, and his sincerity made him many enemies. He was thoughtless enough to argue that the office of coroner should be filled by a medical man, stating that "the coroner ought not to be a man who will believe that strychnine will destroy the coats of the stomach if an ignorant practitioner happens to tell him so." This made for Lydgate a bitter enemy of Mr. Chicely, a lawyer who held the office in question.

Lydgate lost some of his adherents also because he refused to dispense medicine, which it was customary at that time for all but physicians of the highest standing to do. He tried to explain to his patients that it could only be an injury to them if his only mode of getting paid was by making out long bills for draughts, boluses and mixtures. But Mrs. Mawmsey could not accept Dr. Lydgate's viewpoint. "Does this Mr. Lydgate mean to say there is no use in taking medicine?" said Mrs. Mawmsey, "I should like him to tell me how I could bear up at Fair time, if I didn't take strengthening medicine for a month beforehand."

Still further criticism Lydgate brought upon himself by his zeal for science. Mrs. Goby having died of a disease not clearly expressed by symptoms, he asked of her relatives permission to conduct a post-mortem. This proposition caused a widespread scandal. "Mrs. Dollop became more and more convinced by her own assertion that Doctor Lydgate meant to let the people die in the hospital, if not to poison them, for the sake of cutting them up without saying by your leave; for it was a known 'fac' that he had wanted to cut up Mrs. Goby, as respectable a woman as any in Parley Street, who had money in trust before her marriage; a poor tale for a doctor who if he was good for anything should know what was the matter with you before you died and not want to cut into your inside after you were gone."

Poor Lydgate under these difficult conditions received no support from his wife. For Rosamond had been disillusioned since her marriage, and found that

a young physician might be very busy and still have an income quite inadequate to supply her with all the beautiful things she desired. Lydgate tried to arouse in his wife an interest in his investigations, and a willingness to wait with him for the fame and fortune that would come. "I am thinking," he told her, "of a great fellow who was about as old as I am, three hundred years ago and had already begun a new era in anatomy. His name was Vesalius. And the only way that he could get to know anatomy was by going to snatch bodies at night from graveyards and places of execution. No wonder the medical fogies in Middlemarch are jealous when some of the greatest doctors living were fierce upon Vesalius because they had believed in Galen and he showed them that Galen was wrong!" At another time when Rosamond remonstrated because Lydgate spent so much time poring over his microscope he replied: "Haven't you ambition enough to wish that your husband should be something better than a Middlemarch doctor? What I want Rosy, is to do worthy the writing and to write out myself what I have done. A man must work to do that, my pet." But this appeal failed to fire Rosamond with an interest in the things which meant so much to Lydgate.

Lydgate now passed through dark days. "He certainly had good reason to reflect on the service his practice did him in counteracting his personal cares. He had no longer free energy enough for a spontaneous research and speculative thinking, but by the bedside of patients through direct external calls upon his judgment and sympathies brought the added impulse necessary to draw him out of himself. It was not simply that beneficial harness of routine which enables silly men to live respectably and unhappy men to live calmly, it was a perpetual claim on the immediate fresh application of thought, and of the consideration of another's need and trial. Many of us looking back through life would say that the kindest man we have ever known has been a medical man. . . . Some of that twice blessed mercy was always with Lydgate in his work at the Hospital or in private houses, serving better than any opiate to quiet and sustain him under his anxieties and his sense of mental degradation."

Harassed by debt, annoyed by scurrilous attacks from jealous medical men, tortured by the knowledge that the wife whom he still loved dearly gave him no love in return, and sick at heart at the failure of all his plans for investigations, Lydgate was subject to every temptation that can come to a man and a physician. Like many another medical man he tried opium as a palliative for his mental anguish, but had strength sufficient to prevent his becoming a slave. He drank heavily at times but carried his wine well and did not become a drunkard. He even tried gambling.

The story of Lydgate's life and practice is too long to give even an outline. His griefs and disappointments were bitter. His troubles were due in part to influences over which he had no control, in part to his own weaknesses. George Eliot was too honest an author to depict a character as free from faults. In time Lydgate gained an excellent practice and a substantial income. By the world he was regarded as a successful man but he considered his life a failure because the dreams of his early life were never realized.

Sir James Paget, one of the most eminent British surgeons of the last century, after reading *Middlemarch* declared that the insight displayed by the author into

medical life is so deep and accurate that he could hardly believe that there was no biographical foundation for the character.

Every careful reader of *Middlemarch* will agree that George Eliot has sensed as few writers of fiction have done the peculiar difficulties which confront the medical man who seeks to be true to himself and his profession. Although the practice of medicine has undergone many changes since the time in which George Eliot wrote, human nature is much the same now as then, and many of the problems which confront the young physician of to-day are similar to those of Lydgate.

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#### THE REMEDY.

#### A NATURAL AND REASONABLE PRESCRIPTION PROMISING RELIEF FROM UNJUST AND VEXATIOUS TAXATION.

BY SEWARD W. WILLIAMS.

The pharmacist, as a professional man, is always interested in remedies designed to prevent, relieve or cure the ills of the community. The druggist, as a business man, should be no less favorably disposed toward a remedy promising him relief from annoying and unjust taxation.

The world's leading sanitarian, Surgeon General W. C. Gorgas (retired), says.<sup>1</sup>

"I feel confident that the most sanitary measure that any community could adopt would be a taxation on land values." (Note "land values" not land.)

Dr. S. S. Cohen, of Philadelphia, one of the best friends Pharmacy ever had in the medical profession, and well known to members of the A. Ph. A. as one of America's foremost physicians and deepest thinkers, says:<sup>2</sup>

\* \* \* "Tax vacant land equally with adjoining land put to wise use, and remove taxes from the improvements made by the farmer, the manufacturer, miner, etc., and you will revolutionize not only industry but health. Rents will fall, and profits of the farmer, the manufacturer and the merchant, the wages of the workman, will alike increase. In other words, labor, whether mental or physical, will receive its due reward; and legal ground-blackmail—which is what the holding of land out of use amounts to—will cease."

Now the pharmacist, as an analyst, will recognize that the remedy alluded to is the "Singletax" advocated by that great philosopher, Henry George. But we must not allow the mere name of a valuable remedy to prejudice our minds against the medicine itself. The expert in prescriptions realizes the importance of dosage and writes it on the label. He would laugh at anyone who refused the prescription because the whole bottle couldn't be comfortably taken at once.

Thus, with the remedy under consideration, he may prefer the title "singletax

<sup>1</sup> *Jour. Am. Pharm. Ass'n*, March 1916, p. 284.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 285.