

WOMAN AND HER INTERESTS

The First Woman Physician

WOMEN physicians are now well known in Canada, in the chief centres at least, where some members of the profession have done especially notable and admirable work. In the United States there are thousands of women practising as physicians.

England, Germany, and other European countries have recognized the place of women in the medical profession. But half a century ago the lady doctor, as she was called, was looked upon as a curiosity, and she met with opposition on every hand. The death recently of Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman to take an M.D. degree, recalls her early and long struggle for recognition of a woman's right to study and practise the science of healing.

Elizabeth Blackwell was an English girl, one of the elder children in a large family emigrated to the United States. Her father's death, when she was seventeen, left her mother in straitened circumstances, and Elizabeth went to work to help by teaching school. She cherished the idea of some day studying medicine, feeling that women physicians were needed in the social scheme. With this end in view, she studied all her spare time after school hours.

Then she endeavored to obtain admission to the medical schools of Philadelphia, but without success. Finding the schools closed against her, she studied privately with two physicians of Philadelphia. But she felt that this mode of study could not give her the thorough grounding she wanted; and, moreover, it was her aim to lead the way in opening the right road to a medical career for women desirous to qualify themselves to discharge its duties worthily. She realized that her admission to a regular medical college and the acquisition of the medical diploma, as a sanction for her own course and a precedent for other women, were essential to the carrying out of her plans. She therefore procured a comprehensive list

of the medical colleges in the United States, and proceeded to address in succession an application for an admission to each of them.

Her application was refused by twelve colleges. The future M.D. found the barriers of "precedent" raised against her in one direction after another, but at last began to appear a way out.

Among the applications she had made throughout the length and breadth of the country, one had been addressed to the medical college of the University of Geneva, N.Y. The faculty of that institution gave her request a fair consideration, and agreed that they saw no reason why a woman who wanted to study medicine, and who had possessed herself of the required preparatory knowledge, should not be permitted to take the college course. Finally the matter was referred to the whole student body, who hailed it as a good joke. Whether from a spirit of gallantry, the incentive to make an innovation, or an aroused love of fair play, the students decided unanimously in favor of the new applicant. A resolution was drawn up, not only inviting her to enter the college, but also pledging themselves "individually and collectively, that no word or act of theirs should ever cause her to regret the step." To their credit be it said, they kept their word.

Miss Blackwell entered the college when she was twenty-six years old. It may be imagined that she applied herself to study with an ardor proportioned to the difficulties she had had to overcome. Her position, the only woman in a large body of students of medicine and anatomy, was not without its embarrassments, but she was prepared to endure them for the sake of the knowledge she could gain in no other way. She sought by her own manner to make her presence in college regarded by those around her, not as that of a woman among men, but of one student among five hundred, confronted in the lectures and demonstrations only with the truth and dignity of natural law. Through her own dignity, sense, and right-

mindedness, she won the respectful and yet kindly regard of her fellow-students.

But though the "lady student" had thus made good her position within the college, the suspicions and hostile curiosity with which she was regarded in the little town, were long in subsiding. As she went through the streets, on her way to and from the college, audible whispers of "Here she comes!" or rude invitations from one street urchin to another to "Come and have a good look at the lady doctor!" would greet her ears. Even well-dressed men and women would draw up on the pavement to see her go by. But the quiet, dignified bearing of the little woman, dressed simply, and going on steadily about her business, made it apparent that there was nothing strange or outlandish about her personally, and gradually the unwelcome attentions fell off.

Dr. Blackwell graduated in 1849, and received her M.D. degree. The convocation building was crowded, a great many ladies being present, some of them coming miles to witness the conferring of a medical diploma on a woman for the first time.

The president, in his address, alluded to the presence of a lady student as "an innovation that had been in every way a fortunate one," and said that "her presence had exercised a beneficial influence upon her fellow-students in all respects."

Her subsequent career justified her course. She studied at the Maternity Hospital in Paris, and "walked" one of the London hospitals. Afterwards she returned to New York, worked up a successful practice, and established an Infirmary for Women and Children. Ten years after her graduation, she registered as a physician in England, and later practised in London. She founded the National Health Society in London, and assisted in founding the London School of Medicine for Women. She also disseminated medical knowledge by her published works, among these being one on "Physical Education of Girls," "Religion of Health," "Council to Parents on Moral Education."



A Group of Bridesmaids

Attendants at the wedding of Viscount Maidstone and Margaretta Armstrong Drexel, the first of three International marriages in London, in June. The bridesmaids wore white satin gowns, with tulle veils instead of hats, and their bouquets were of lilies and marguerites, the bride's name flower.