

Examination for License to
Practice Sixty Years
Ago.

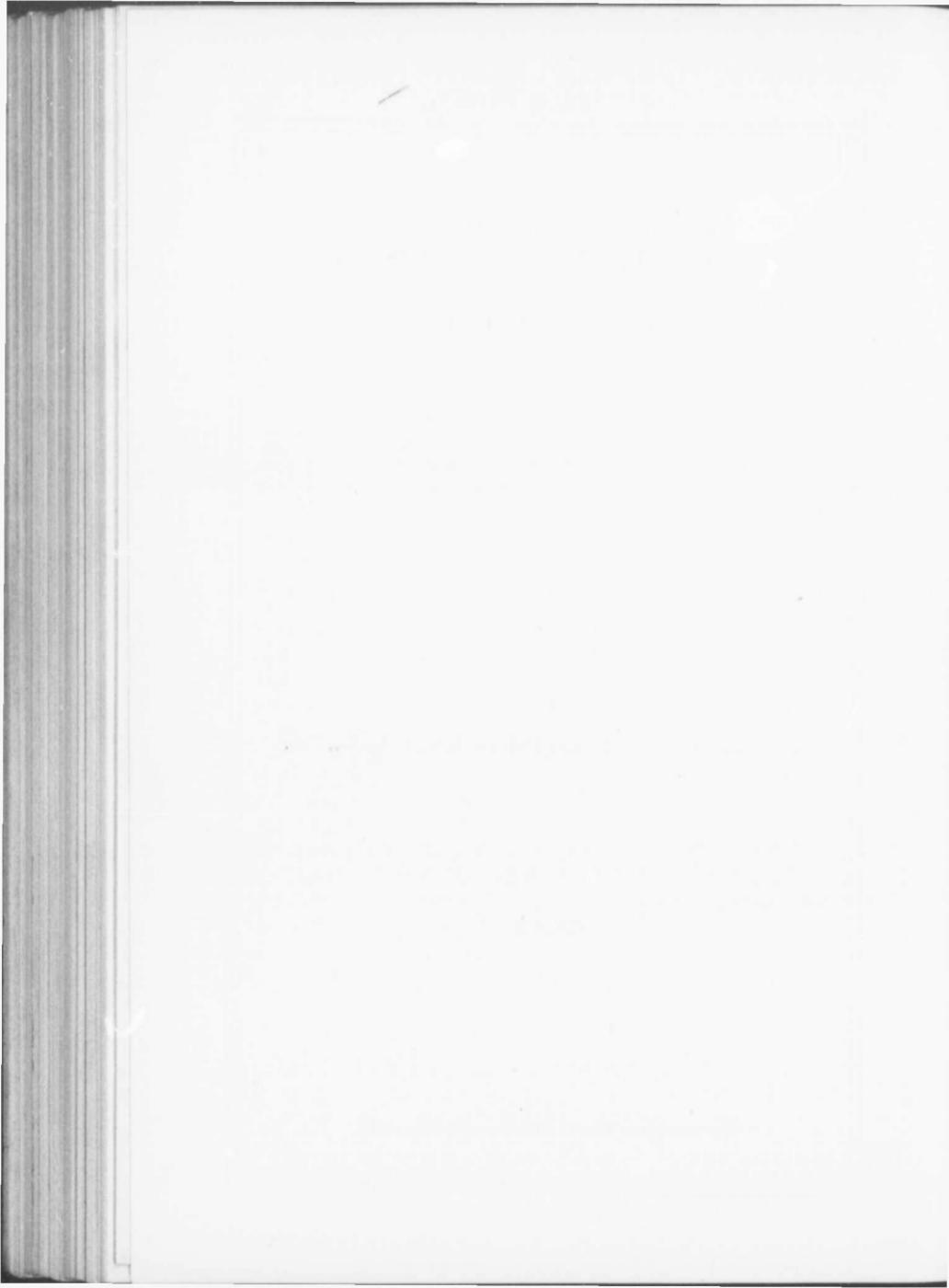


By

The Honourable Mr. Justice Riddell, L.H.D., LL.D., Etc.



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EXAMINATION FOR LICENCE TO PRACTISE SIXTY YEARS AGO.

BY THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE RIDDELL, L.H.D., LL.D., ETC.

THE "*Anglo-American Magazine*" was published in Toronto by Thomas Maclear beginning July, 1852, and continuing for a few years. Running through the whole series was a department called The Editor's Shanty, not wholly unlike the *Noctes Ambrosianae* and *me judice* not wholly unworthy to be compared with Wilson's famous work. The author must have been a Scot—the dialect is unexceptionable—and a medical man, or have had the assistance of a Scotsman and a doctor. The characters who take part in the dialogue are the Major, the Laird, the Doctor and the Squireen, assisted sometimes by Mrs. Grundy. They have usually a generous supply of Davis' "Port Hope," and of redolent Havannah with T. D. cutties.

In the number of the Magazine for May, 1853, the Doctor gives an account of an examination for licence to practise Physic, Surgery, etc., which he had attended during the previous month. This contains considerable burlesque, but must have been not wholly without verisimilitude.

The examination was held in the General Hospital "in the best room of this worst of buildings" which the Doctor does not hesitate to call an "old pest-house." The General Hospital then with its grounds, occupied nearly all the block bounded by King, Adelaide, John and Peter streets, the main building was 107 feet long by 66 feet wide and two stories high, and there were two smaller buildings for fever cases—the average number of patients was about 100. Toronto considered herself no mean city, having a population of 31,000 and an assessment of \$12,000,000—the whole province had a population of about 1,000,000.

A visiting physician, Dr. "Cuticle," had in the March number described the hospital as a large square brick building set down *crookedly* in a vacant lot of land—which he thought was a very judicious arrangement as strangers could not possibly mistake it—he was informed, however, that it had, to please some fanciful gentleman,* been placed with the front facing due south, so that the corners might represent the cardinal points of the compass. He found that the attending physicians did not attend at regular hours, the surgery (dispensary) was a badly lighted room having a partition across the centre with shelves of musty-

*Said (by Dr. Scadding) to have been Dr. Grant Powell, the well-known son of Chief Justice William Dummer Powell.

looking old Lottles covered with dust and cobwebs. There was no proper operating theatre but only a dark close room, and the hospital was one of the worst arranged and managed and "a sort of Calcutta Black-hole." Such was the building the scene of the examination; a new building was, however, put up a few years later.

The law at that time required a practitioner of medicine to obtain a license which (with the exception of those holding a license or diploma from a British university of the R.C.P., Lond., or R.C.S., Lond., or a commission as physician or surgeon in the army or navy), must be obtained after an examination before a board appointed by the Governor. There were no less than three medical schools in Toronto at that time, the Toronto School of Medicine (Dr. Rolph's school which was in 1855 to become the Medical Faculty of Victoria University), the Upper Canada School of Medicine (Dr. Hodder's school, then become the Medical Faculty of Trinity University), and the University of Toronto Medical Faculty (this last being abolished at the end of the year by the Act of 16 Vic., C. 89). Clinical lectures were also given during the winter sessions at the General Hospital.

The Medical Board was composed of Drs. Widmer (President), Gwynne, Beaumont, Hornby, Herrick, Telfer, Nicol, Durie, King and Clarke (Secretary).

Dr. Widmer was the father of surgery in Upper Canada: a F.R.C. S. he served through the Peninsular Campaign; coming to "Muddy Little York" in 1815 he soon had an immense practice; he became a member of the Legislative Council and filled many other offices, surviving till 1858.

Dr. William Charles Gwynne was an Irishman, M.B., T.C.D., and a post graduate student at Edinburgh. He came to Upper Canada in 1832, served in the Rebellion of 1837, and was a professor in King's College Medical Department. He died in 1875.

William Rawlins Beaumont, M.D., F.R.C.S., came to Canada from England in 1841, and became professor in King's College. A man of great mechanical skill, he invented several surgical instruments—he was a sound surgeon and an admired lecturer. He died in 1875.

Robert Hornby, M.D. (Edin.), L.R.C.S., Lond., an Englishman, practised for a time in Cleveland, Ohio, and came to Toronto in 1835. He died in 1869.

George Herrick, A.B., T.C.D., M.D. (Edin.), M.R.C.S., (Lond.), after practising in Cork in his native land came to Upper Canada in 1838, and not long after he became Professor of Midwifery in King's College. He had a large private practice and was deservedly popular with patients and students.

Dr. Walter Telfer, L.R.C.S. (Edin.), a Scotchman, came to Toronto from Niagara in 1835. He was for some time superintendent of the Lunatic Asylum, but was removed in 1847, it is said at the instance of Dr. Rolph, but this is disputed. He was one of the attending physicians at the General Hospital, and a member of the Board from 1838 till his death in 1857.

Dr. William Nicol, born in England, passed the Upper Canada Board in 1836, practised in Bowmanville and in Toronto, became Professor of Materia Medica in King's College, and graduated as M.D. of the university. He had a very large practice until his death in 1866. George Nicol, the well-known clerk of Assize, Toronto, is a son.

Dr. William Durie, born in Scotland, entered the Royal Artillery as assistant surgeon in 1797, subsequently became full surgeon, came to Canada in 1836 and joined the Medical Board in 1838. He practiced in Toronto and Thornhill, dying in 1871.

John King, M.D., (Edin.), L.R.C.S. (Edin.) an Irishman, came to Canada in 1830, and became a member of the Board in 1832. He was in 1843 appointed Professor of the Theory and Practice of Medicine in King's College, and for a long time was on the staff of the General Hospital. He died in 1857.

Dr. Edward Clarke, M.R.C.S. (Edin.), was house surgeon of the Hospital, and succeeded to the secretaryship of the Board in 1848 on the removal from Toronto of Mr. Edwin Henwood, resident apothecary and subsequent house surgeon of the hospital, the former secretary. Henwood while apothecary had studied medicine, passed his examination in 1845, was immediately appointed house surgeon and in 1848 went to Hamilton to practise his profession.

The "Doctor" who in "The Editor's Shanty," describes the examination, says: "In the middle of this Doctors' Commons stands a walnut table, such as was used by the denizens of Old York when its streets were muddy—at its eastern end is placed a painted elbow chair for the aged President, and around the thirsty crumblers board are six other body-rests for the reception of the corpses of the Examiners. The to-be-examined unfortunate wretch is perched off at one corner at some distance, to prevent the possibility of his getting any information from "the understandings" of the table. At a small settable by the window sits the Secretary with all the insignia of office, consisting of blank licenses, old pens, wafers, etc., etc." Dr. Widmer was at this time 73, which was considered "aged" sixty years ago.

The candidate is called in, Mr. Seth Obed Bramble, "a ponderous nondescript sort of being, by his dress . . . seeming to implore mercy and by his sleek plausible physiognomy suggesting caution to the

Faculty who were to weigh his merits." He is turned over by the president to "Dr. Labermahn" to test his acquirements in Latin and materia medica.

It may seem anomalous to begin a professional examination with an inquiry into the knowledge of Latin possessed by the candidate; but it must be borne in mind that in those days everyone of education had some knowledge of Latin—and an ignorance of that language indicated if it did not absolutely prove a lack of general culture. Accordingly from the first, candidates were from time to time rejected on account of their want of knowledge of Latin. In October, 1824, two are rejected because "deficient in classical education"; July, 1830, one as "ignorant as a classical scholar"; April, 1832, another "deficient in classical knowledge"; October, 1832, two for the same reason. In April, 1834, one unfortunate who "had tickets from Fairfield* of two courses of lectures and a doctor's degree in medicine after four years' study and without any knowledge of the classicks, presented himself." This was enough to reject him, "he was not examined further." In July, 1834, one candidate from the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh, "could not construe a prescription written by Dr. King," and was not examined further—two years after, one gentleman "from the United States educated at the University of Maryland and Pennsylvania, exhibited a total ignorance of the Latin language" and was rejected.

The practice seems to have been to examine in Latin first—a sort of matriculation examination—and to proceed with the professional subjects only if the candidate exhibited some familiarity with that language. We find the Board writing the sister Boards in Montreal and Quebec in April, 1847:—

"The course this Board pursues in the examination of candidates is as follows: 1st, Some acquaintance with the Latin language is required. With this view if the candidate cannot construe some paragraphs of Gregory's *Conspectus*, a portion of the *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis* or a Latin written prescription is substituted; in the event of

*Fairfield Medical College began in 1809 as an unincorporated institution, known as the Academy of Medicine of Fairfield, at a small village, Fairfield, not far from Little Falls, N.Y. In 1812 it was granted a charter by the State Legislature, under the style "College of Physicians and Surgeons of the Western District of the State of New York," known as Fairfield Medical College. This, it is said, was the sixth medical college organized in the United States. From 1813 to 1839 lectures were given at Fairfield, Frank Hamilton delivering his first course of surgical lectures at its last session. Geneva Medical College, of Geneva, N.Y., had been chartered in 1834, and its first course of lectures was given in 1835. When Fairfield Medical College closed its doors (which it did after the session of 1839-1840) some of its Faculty, including Hamilton, joined the staff at Geneva. This college continued until 1872, when it removed to Syracuse, N.Y., becoming the Medical Faculty (College of Medicine) of the Syracuse University. This is still in active operation, with an attendance of about 150 students.

a total failure in these, the professional examination is not proceeded in. If the Latin examination is satisfactory, then follow:

“2nd. *Materia Medica* and *Pharmaceutic Chemistry*.

3rd. *Anatomy and Physiology*.

4th. *The Theory and Practice of Medicine*.

5th. *Practical Surgery*.

6th. *Midwifery and the Diseases of Children*.”

“Dr. Labermahn” was I think, Dr. Nicol, who was certainly a “labor man” (for that and not “lebermann,” is probably the meaning). Nicol was not only Professor of *Materia Medica* in the University, but also a member of the Senate and Dean of the Faculty and Secretary of the *Chirurgical Society*. He also had a very large practice in Toronto. Moreover, the kindness of Dr. Labermahn to the unfortunate candidate and his protect against an unfavorable decision accord with Dr. Nicol’s well-known kindly disposition.

The examiner says: “Mr. Bramble, will you be kind enough to translate this prescription:

℞ *Baccarum Juniperi contusarum, uncias duas*
Aquae ferventis octarium.
Digerantur vaso claudo in loco calido;
colatur et colaturae adjice
Potassae acetatis drachmas duas,
Aecti Colehici drachmas tres
Syrupi Zingib. unciam. Misc.
Sumatur uncia tertiis quartisve horis.”

The student makes rather a hash of the Latin—“*Recipe*” is “receive,” “*Baccarum Juniperi*,” “of the juniper of Baccus,” “*Aquae ferventis*” “fervent water,” while “*octarium*” quite floors him. But the kindly examiner excuses his “naturally slight forgetfulness,” and helps him over the difficulty. He also forgives a false quantity in the verb, and expresses himself satisfied, notwithstanding the protest of “Dr. Rex”—who is of course Dr. King.

Professor Rex then takes the candidate in hand and examines on toxicology, the symptoms and antidote of arsenical poisoning. The knowledge displayed by Mr. Bramble on this subject is not immense, especially as he thought an alkaloid was an alcoholic mixture. Prof. Rex was not satisfied—but Prof. Hayrick (Herrick) took over the examinee. His department was practice of medicine, and his only question the treatment of “a child—a little thing you know—that had the—hang it, you know what—comes on in the infernal hot weather—” the student suggests “the summer complaint,” and Prof. Hayrick says “Exactly now.” The answer is satisfactory to the professor, who jerks

his thumb over his shoulder to Dr. Belmont. This was a characteristic gesture of Herrick's, as will be seen by a reference to Canniff's Medical Profession in Upper Canada, p. 427.

Dr. Belmont (Dr. Beaumont) then examines, but his questions are plainly travestied and we may pass them over—one characteristic question may however, be mentioned—the student is asked the name of the inventor of a certain instrument. Dr. Beaumont was himself such an inventor.

Dr. Stowell* then examined on physiology, asking his questions on the liver, "slowly as if calling to his mind the experiments of Bernard and the appearance of Kiernan's liver under the microscope." I have no doubt we have here a side hit at an incident which did much to make Dr. Gwynne famous. A young man attempting to climb a lamp post one night fell down, suffering a fatal internal injury. The medical men called in were puzzled, but Dr. Gwynne alone said the liver was ruptured, which the post mortem proved to be the fact. (Claude Bernard's investigations upon the glycogenic functions of the liver are of course classical). As Dr. Gwynne was Professor of Physiology in the University, the identification of Dr. Stowell with him seems very probable; but I do not know any reason for dubbing him "Stowell." Dr. Stowell asks, "State to the Board the physiology of the organ and particularly with reference to the formation of sugar." The student answered, "Sugar! Never heard tell of such a thing, you know, Sir! Some of them English and French know a mighty deal more nor we Can-nucks." His ignorance of the results of the then very recent experiments and investigations was not to be wondered at and was certainly shared by a very large proportion of the profession everywhere. The rest of his answers showed him a perfect master of his subject so "that the assemblage, principally students, could not forbear applauding him." After the examination had covered the liver, etc., it went on to the making of gruels, broths, etc., for the sick and ended by an inquiry into the proper formulæ for "drinks." The student's prescription for a gin cocktail I copy as indicating what was considered a "drink" sixty years ago:

℞ Simpl. Syrup	ʒ ss
Sto-ton Bitter	ʒj
Genev.	ʒjss a ʒij
Aq.	quant. suf.
Misce per swizzle—stick. †	

*I had thought that this might be Dr. James Bovell, who was professor of the Institute of Medicine in Hodder's School (Trinity University), but Dr. Bovell does not seem to have been a member of the Medical Board.

To be followed by 7 grs. jalap and one of eal. every eighth hour—donec alvus bene soluta sit." Celsus himself could not give better Latin and perhaps not a better "drink."

Mr. Bramble was finally passed, over Prof. Rex's strong dissent and protest.

Some others of the students are said to have "passed highly brilliant examinations, examinations, I can assure you, which would have reflected credit on any Royal College of Surgeons or Physicians in the world."

A curious feature of the examination is that not only were the other students present but also by virtue of a by-law then recently passed, any member of the profession who chose. After the Doctor had given his narrative in *The Editor's Shanty*, a good deal of discussion took place as to the proper method of examination—the conclusion apparently being that there should first be a written examination and then a *viva voce* examination on the answers.

‡This word puzzles the President, and much to the amusement of his colleagues, he asks to have it translated. It is at length explained with the assistance of a diagram and a split quill inserted in the inkstand and whirled rapidly around. The President said, "Hang me, I must get one."