

# Editorials

## The Rural Practitioner

The practitioner in the country today, has little to complain of in comparison to his neighbour of the early nineteenth century. John Browne of "Rab and his Friends" abstracted from the Edinburgh Annual Register of 1817, some Hudibrastic lines addressed to the country surgeon—

Luckless is he, whom hard fates urge on  
To practice as a country surgeon  
To ride regardless of all weather,  
Through frost, and snow, and hail together—  
To smile and bow when sick and tired  
Consider'd as a servant hired

. . . . .

And oft at two points diametric  
Called to a business obstetric.

Towards the end of the century the beloved Clement Gunn of Peebles wrote in his diary—"All yesterday I was tired and overwrought suffering from nervous exhaustion due to pressure of work. 'Physician heal thyself', is no text for the country doctor; he has no time to fulfil it. To make matters worse, at 2 a.m. I was urgently summoned to attend a woman with whom fried eggs had disagreed ! Later a maternity case hailed me forth again at 4.30 a.m."

The history of the country practitioner has yet to be written. When it is, the great names of the past will be duly honoured, but homage must also be paid to the multitude whose works, hardships, long-sufferings, patience, readiness always to do, when called, the work which was nearest and whose only memorials are to be found on tombstones and brasses in country churchyards—it is to them that we must pay homage.

Sir Walter Scott in his story of the surgeon's daughter described Gideon Gray as a member of the class of men "under whose rough coat and blunt exterior you find professional skill and enthusiasm, intelligence, humanity, courage and science." Rural practitioners have always had these qualities; but often they have been credited more with enthusiasm, intelligence, humanity and courage than they have with professional skill or scientific knowledge. Among the foundation members of the College will be found many rural practitioners who have become accustomed to working in isolation; several of our members live in the Outer Hebrides, others in far-away places over-seas. It is surely their desire to retain and increase their professional skill in the medical sciences which has made them so enthusiastic to further the aims of the College: To them the

College owes an especial duty. Their problems in many ways, are different from those of their brethren in the towns. They cannot readily meet together; they do not often get opportunities to discuss cases; in times of epidemics they are not in an easy position to compare with others the clinical observations that they make. If they require information on any subject they find it difficult to lay their hands on the necessary medical literature.

The College can help these practitioners in many ways. By the formation of regional faculties, it has become possible to hold post-graduate courses in the small towns, bringing to the country doctors information which previously was not readily obtained. The research committee of the College is always willing to help practitioners to seek out relevant literature concerning any of their problems, and to assist them in the writing and publication of medical papers. Through the College also, can be provided professional bibliographical help in the search for references and the preparation of papers, at extremely moderate fees.

Practitioners requiring assistance of this kind should contact the secretary of the research committee, Dr. D. K. Crombie, 52 Oakham Road, Birmingham, 17.

#### REFERENCES

- Leaves from the Life of a Country Doctor.* Ed.: Rutherford Crockett. New Edition. 1947. p. 122.  
Brown, John: *Horae Subsecavae.* Edn. 1882. 1st Series, p. 223.

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### **Health Education in General Practice**

It has been recognised for a long time that the family doctor is in an ideal position to instruct the public in the maintenance of health. The Cohen Report of the British Medical Association on *General Practice and the Training of the General Practitioner*, 1950, contained this paragraph:—"The responsibility for prevention of disease and health education forms an increasingly important aspect of the general practitioner's functions and emphasizes his obligation to patients who are well in addition to those who are ill. No one else is in so advantageous a position to give advice on the maintenance of health, the principles of healthy living and the prevention of disease." Every experienced general practitioner in the course of his work is constantly giving instruction in the maintenance of health: he does this automatically, often unconsciously.

When, in the nineteenth century, the need for preventive medicine was first forced upon the notice of the profession by the scandalous overcrowding, slums, inadequate water supply and non-existent drainage, with the consequent high infant mortality rate, high tuberculosis incidence and, above all, periodic visitations of cholera, the logical and proper answer lay in the formation of