A CENTURY OF MEDICINE IN SAN ANTONIO

NIXON

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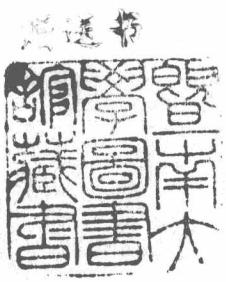
THE STORY OF MEDICINE IN BEXAR COUNTY, TEXAS

BY

PAT IRELAND NIXON, M.D.



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The Good Physician

"Tended the sick, busiest from couch to couch."—Milton.

Storms are remembered when the voyage is o'er,
But not the breeze that wafted us ashore.
If this once busy being were of those
Whom Fame forgets, it mars not his repose;
He never sought, in life's industrious ways,
A large return, or loud or lasting praise;
But to the sacred task which Heaven assigned,
In pain's hushed chamber, gave his strength and mind,
Believing so he served his Maker best,
Trusting the Great Physician for the rest.

We wrote his name on this pretenceless stone,
To point his pillow to his friends alone;
Nor would we vex his spirit to record
How much he did, how little his reward:
Yet all he asked he had; and had he more,
He would have given the whole to bless the poor.

—*Thomas William Parsons*

To

The Wives of San Antonio Doctors

Pioneer and Modern

Who At All Times And In All Places

Have Remained Stedfast

And

To That One In Particular

Who Through The Years Has Been

A Constant Companion And An Unending Inspiration

This Book Is

Affectionately Dedicated

The Father of our Art, Hippocrates,
Invoked Apollo, Aesculapius,
Hygeia, Panacea and the Gods:
By all the greatest names in earth and heaven
He dedicated to his art and ours
The ripening powers of his life and mind.
Alas! is Medicine less good, less great,
Than thrice one thousand years ago she seemed
To one great man, that we, in later days,
Dream not of vows, of holy auspices,
Of Life to one high Purpose dedicate?

Time and the Timeless

PREFACE

MEDICAL HISTORY of San Antonio to be accurate must delve deep into the lives of those physicians who lived and wrought when Texas history was in the making. Some of this history has never been told; much of it is of absorbing interest; all of it is worthy of record. To record the facts, to recapture the grandeur, to rekindle the glamour of these medical pioneers—this is an obligation that devolves on the present generation and it should be done before the last ones of the old generation have gone the way of all the earth and many of the facts with them.

No profession has a more noble heritage than that which we cherish. The discoveries of modern medicine were but dim, uncertain mirages to the intrepid physicians of yesterday. And yet these discoveries have come slowly and out of the labors of those early pioneers who through ingenuity and bitter experience laid the foundation on which our own knowledge rests. Transcendent glory is their due and ours the humble privilege to do these medical pioneers honor and to perpetuate their names.

In all ages, from pioneer to modern times, there have always been doctors who have done their work without ostentation and without any great hope of reward—men who, as Channing Pollock has put it, wrote their stories on the sand in the path of an incoming tide. They were appreciated in their day, they did their part of extra-medical activities, they shared with their neighbors the hazards and hardships that characterized their age. Their reward was found in the satisfaction of having done their work as well as conditions and circumstances would allow. Their name is legion and for the most part their name is lost. With succeeding generations, they come, play their part and then are gone, unknown and unsung. As Thomas à Kempis five hundred years ago well said: " Tell me, where are all those Doctors and Masters, with whom thou wast well

acquainted, whilst they lived and flourished in learning? Others occupy their places and perhaps do scarce ever think of those who went before them. In their lifetime they seemed something, but now they are not spoken of. . . . Today man is here; tomorrow he is gone. And when he is out of sight, quickly also is he out of mind." Suitable tribute has not been paid to the average doctor in the average community rendering average services, the doctor on the periphery of the medical world. Yet who will deny that the world is better and happier for his having lived in it? And after all is there a better test of greatness? San Antonio has had its quota of doctors who have spent their lives on the firing line—privates in the ranks. It is to be regretted that many of their names—to say nothing of their work—are forgotten and it is to be hoped that the records herein compiled will preserve for a better fate the names of the doctors of the present generation.

A soldier fights his fellow man and hastens death; a doctor fights disease and delays death. A soldier fights for the extension of national boundaries; a doctor recognizes no national boundaries. The world long exalts the soldier; it soon forgets the doctor. Caesar is still a celebrity; Celsus is remembered only in medical history. Napoleon is a household word; Larrey, tirelessly amputating the limbs of two hundred maimed French soldiers in a single day, is known to but a few physicians. Hindenburg, Foch and Kitchener, destroyers de luxe, are national heroes; Koch, Pasteur and Osler, scientists and humanitarians, are unrequited. The Alamo had its military heroes and the world rightly acclaims them. But there were doctors also at the Alamo. Travis, Bowie, Crockett and Bonham sacrificed their lives and no one would deny them a full measure of glory. But Pollard, Michison and Thompson also made the supreme sacrifice and their names are seldom heard.

No apology is made for the number and length of quotations used. These quotations, in a particularly happy way, reveal what the authors had to say and how well or how grandiloquently they said it. The language of the Bexar Archives is quaint, precise and much given to ceremony; it would be both difficult and meddlesome to attempt to improve or

change it. And as for the later period, it should be remembered that the early years of the Bexar County Medical Society were coeval with the publication of *Godey's Lady's Book*. Literature in general was at a very low ebb. Sentimentality and grandiloquence were the vogue. Hawthorne in 1855 testified that "America is now wholly given over to a d—d mob of scribbling women. I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash—and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed." And Paul Fatout writing in a recent issue of *The American Scholar* spoke of this period as the low tide in American letters. The ebb had left "malarial flats breathing a miasma poisonous with affectations and sentimentality." So it is not difficult to understand why medical literature of this or a later period should display some of the characteristics of contemporary secular literature.

Robert Fletcher once observed that "medical history is mainly repetition, mostly copying." This perhaps cannot be otherwise because, as Fielding H. Garrison has said, "if we are to have a clear view of the panorama of medical history, we must necessarily stand on the shoulders of our predecessors." Sir William Osler was probably more nearly correct than either of these noted medical historians when he said that "the past is a good nurse, particularly for the weanlings of the fold." Carl Rokitansky had the same thought in mind when he stated that "younger physicians should light their torches at the fires of the Ancients." Both Osler and Rokitansky infer that an opinion is not outworn merely because it is old and that it is not necessarily good because it is new. Rudyard Kipling happily conveys the same idea in his essay on *The Uses of Reading:* "One of the hardest things to realize, specially for a young man, is that our forefathers were living men who really knew something; I would go further and say that they knew a very great deal. Indeed I should not be surprised if they knew quite as much as we do about the things that really concern men. What each generation forgets is that while the words which it uses to describe ideas are always changing, the ideas themselves do not change so quickly, nor are those ideas in any sense new. . . . Therefore,

it is advisable for us in our own interests, quite apart from considerations of personal amusement, to concern ourselves occasionally with a certain amount of our literature drawn from all ages. I say from all ages, because it is only when one reads what men wrote long ago that one realizes how absolutely modern the best of the old things are."

It is appropriate that this century of medical progress in San Antonio be recorded in this centennial year of 1936. In the world's evolution, any hundred years is like the passing of a day. In history, each succeeding century is but a pitiable repetition of strife and war and depression and other like evidences of man's hopeless inadequacy for solving in a rational manner the increasingly confused and complicated problems of the world. As Alexis Carrel in *Man the Unknown* puts it, " despite the immense hopes which humanity has placed in modern civilization, such a civilization has failed in developing men of sufficient intelligence and audacity to guide it along the dangerous road on which it is stumbling." In medicine, this century just passed, notably the latter half, has had crowded into it more of progress and achievement than all previously recorded medical history. In Bexar County this century has experienced the evolution of medicine from a few straw beds on the adobe floor of the Alamo with one doctor to modern, thoroughly equipped hospitals of three hundred beds and a wide-awake medical society of three hundred members.

The work of compiling this book is comparable to assembling a mosaic. Fragments of historical interest and value have been found here and there, some of them in most unexpected places. Some of the fragments are related to those contiguous to them and others are not. The problem of cementing the fragments into a composite readable story has not been easy. Any lack of continuity is explained by a desire not to omit anything worthy of record.

It is obviously impossible and not altogether desirable to dissociate the medical history of Bexar County and the medical history of the State of Texas. With periods of ebb and flow, the two have developed simultaneously and have each exerted a profound influence on the other. However, the desire

has been to limit the story to Bexar County as much as possible, leaving the telling of the larger story for some one more familiar with it.

It has not seemed desirable to cite exact references by use of footnotes. A tiresome array of footnotes might tend to clutter up the pages and might carry with it a specious implication of scholarship, to which no claim is laid. In fact, footnotes could not be adapted to the Bexar Archives which are the chief early source of material. Specific reference will be supplied to any person who is particularly interested.

To Judge Frost Woodhull, a key to whose home made his advice and his excellent library of Texana available at all times; to Albert Steves, Sr., Joseph William Schmitz, S.M., Paul Adams and Pearson Newcomb, for material and suggestions; to Miss Winnie Allen of the University of Texas Library and Miss Julia Grothaus of the San Antonio Public Library, for references and manuscripts that would otherwise have been inaccessible; to my secretary, Mary Johnston, for her patience and fidelity; to Dr. Walter G. Stuck for correcting the manuscript and reading the proof; to Thomas C. Head for valuable aid with the old records of the County Clerk of Bexar County; to Jose Juan Alcedo for translating these records,—to these and all others who in one capacity or another have been of assistance, due gratitude is expressed.

Sincere appreciation is extended to a few generous but modest friends of the medical profession of Bexar County for defraying the cost of publishing this volume. The Bexar County Medical Society has a fine home and library. Any monetary reward that may come from the sale of this book will go to this library. It is the desire of our generous friends that the proceeds from the sale of the book go into a fund to be known as the Century of Medicine Library Fund and that only the interest be spent for purposes designated by the Board of Directors of the Bexar County Medical Library Association.

PAT IRELAND NIXON, M.D.

1022 MEDICAL ARTS BUILDING
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Medicine in San Antonio Before the Alamo

MUCH of the romance, tradition and history of Texas in its development under six flags has centered in and around Bexar County. San Antonio, because of its proximity to the Gulf of Mexico and the Rio Grande and because of its having been a distant outpost of the frontier, has always been the most strategic point of Texas, from both military and commercial standpoints. Here came soldiers and Texas rangers; explorers and soldiers of fortune; merchants and farmers; priests and gamblers; cow men and cow thieves; Frenchmen and Americans; Spaniards, Mexicans, Germans. Here came that polyglot group of men and women who were attracted by the adventures and opportunities of a new country. Here also came doctors.

France by right of the discoveries of Robert de La Salle in 1685, laid claim to Texas and subsequently made several abortive attempts to colonize this area. Her claim, however, was altogether tenuous and was abandoned in 1721 when Spain by virtue of conquest superseded her. For the next hundred years Texas as a part of Mexico was controlled by Spain. In 1821 when Mexico became independent of Spain, Texas was taken over as a province of Mexico where she remained till 1836. In this latter year the Republic of Texas was created and was continued to the year 1845 when Texas was annexed to the United States.

The present site of the City of San Antonio was an Indian village when the first white man visited it. When one visualizes the beauty surrounding the springs of San Pedro and Brackenridge Parks of two hundred and fifty years ago, it is not dif-

ficult to understand why the Indians should have selected this site. In 1689 Don Alonzo de Leon, the Governor of the Province of Coahuila, visited this Indian village and left a small garrison which was the beginning of what afterwards became the Presidio of San Antonio de Bejar. The Alarcon Expedition reached San Antonio in 1718, and in 1731 sixteen families were brought in from the Canary Islands. The Mission of San Jose y San Miguel de Aguayo was founded in 1720 and the Mission of San Antonio de Valero (the Alamo) was moved from the Rio Grande to San Pedro Springs in 1721; in 1732 it was moved to Military Plaza and twelve years later to its present location. The other three missions—Neustra Señora de la Purisima Concepcion de Acuña, San Juan Capistrano and San Francisco de la Espada—were established in Bexar County in 1731. By 1726 the population of San Antonio was two hundred, and fifty years later when the first medical records appear it had increased to about three thousand.

* * * *

Prior to the battle of the Alamo there are scattered records of the activities of medical men in what was later to become Bexar County. Many recent references have been made to Cabeza de Vaca and his medical treatment of the Texas Indians in the 16th century, but there is no proof that he ever came to San Antonio. Anyway, the medical profession can derive little satisfaction in recounting his practices. It is true that he did attempt certain minor surgical procedures, but he was not a physician. He depended for his results on the blind faith inspired in the ignorant Indians. Thus this one quotation stamps him as an early progenitor of our modern-day faith healers: "Our method was to bless the sick, breathing upon them, and recite a Pater-noster and an Ave-Maria, praying with all earnestness to God our Lord that He would give health and influence them to make us some good return. In His Clemency He willed that all those for whom we supplicated should tell the others that they were sound and in health, directly after we made the sign of the blessed cross over them."

There are several references which have to do with epidemics among the Indians of Bejar and Southwest Texas. Chabot quotes a letter to El Caballero de Croix in which reference is made to " the cruel epidemic of 1777 which attacked Bejar." As a result of this same epidemic, Morfi states that " The Ayis, along with the other Indians, were reduced to a few more than twenty families." And the " Tuscana nation suffered greatly in the general epidemic of 1778, so much that the following year, 1779, the number of warriors of the two pueblos was only two hundred and fifty." The nature of these epidemics is unknown. For all we can say, they may have been caused by smallpox, typhus fever, bubonic plague, measles, or influenza. None of the symptoms being mentioned, it is impossible to hazard even a wild guess as to the causative disease. Bubonic plague and typhus fever are definite possibilities since the brown rat had arrived in America in 1775. This quotation is taken by Chabot from the diary of Fray Gaspar Jose de Solis, 1767: " The diseases and ailments from which these Indians, both men and women, frequently suffer are smallpox, measles, fevers, and venereal diseases, and I myself have seen a great number of those who have been horribly disfigured by such maladies. In my opinion, these diseases, as also dysentery from which they commonly suffer, are in great part caused by poisons introduced into the blood from overindulgence in brandy, *tafiat* and wine, and from the use of bear lard, which never thickens and which they drink as if it were water. These impurities in the blood are due also to the fact that they consume in large quantities nuts, which they grind up and keep for future use, medlars, which burn like fire, and other hot foods and beverages." Morfi also mentions " pustules or buboes (*managuates*)."

These references to venereal diseases and buboes cannot but recall the controversy as to the origin of syphilis. It seems first to have appeared in Europe, at least in epidemic and fatal form, at the siege of Naples in 1495 where French soldiers in large numbers contracted the disease from Spanish inhabitants who presumably had been infected by the returning soldiers of Columbus. If the disease was present in America