

EARBY LONG AGO

SEVENTY YEARS IN MEDICAL SERVICE

Days When Township Had No Resident Doctor

Of those who have rendered distinguished service to the communal life of our village, the medical profession is worthy of the highest commendation and recognition. We are accustomed to taking these services for granted, as a matter of course, that we did not rightly estimate their value and significance. How different must have been the conditions about seventy years ago, before there was a resident doctor, and for medical services the district was dependant on visits from medical practitioners from Colne, Barnoldswick and Skipton.

The clergymen at Thornton and Kelbrook (the Rev. Canon Morris and the Rev. Owen Owen) were noted for giving valuable advice in times of sickness, and Mr. Owen was virtually the village doctor at Kelbrook. Nor must the services of good - hearted, neighbourly women be overlooked, for such were in constant demand in times of sickness and misfortune. There was a lady living in Aspen Lane, who always kept a store of clean linen ready for emergencies, and if there were accidents in the mill, on the roads or in the quarries, people knew who to turn to for suitable dressings.

There were, too, occasional outbreaks of typhoid fever and smallpox, dread scourges which sometimes held whole families in their death grip. There are instances of real heroism of brave women ministering to the sick and dying, and who struggled to overcome the ravages of foul disease. It is told of two ladies, at the "top of the town," of how they took their dolly tubs into the street, filled them with boiling water, and, adding sweet soap and chloride of lime, fetched out of the affected houses all the bedclothes and linen, and made recovery possible by their sacrificial labours.

FIRST RESIDENT PRACTITIONER

A retired army doctor settled in Earby in 1870, and he appears to have been the first resident practitioner on the village. He had a commodious house built in School Lane, near to the Old Grammar School, which he named "The Grove." It is stated that the house was so designated because there was a grove of trees in the field across the lane, and the doctor was very grieved when the trees were cut down some time after he had settled there.

Dr. Theakstone was advanced in years when he took up residence in Earby, and he was always affectionately termed "th'old doctor." He had a fine reputation, which was maintained to the end of his career ; he had several difficult and unusual cases, which he treated very successfully ; and he was especially noted for his kindness to the poor and for his reasonable charges for the villagers. He left Earby for Newton-le-Willows, near Bedale, his native place, to spend the declining days of his life, and he passed away after a full and serviceable life of 80 years. Before he left Earby an attempt was made to organise a public testimonial, but it was abandoned owing to the doctor's strong objections to such a course. There are many still alive who vividly remember the "good old doctor," including those who visited his house to sing festival hymns at the Earby Feast Walking Day.

I may add a personal note relative to the old doctor's ministrations. When a boy of about eight years I was sent to fetch some "wick" lime in a bucket. Unfortunately, it was nearly full, and very heavy, and I stumbled over a stone in the road, and the lime was splashed into my face. I was taken into a shop nearby (the old "Co-op.") and my head pushed onto a bread mug

full of water.

For several; days I was practically blind, and I have a distinct recollection of being led by the hand by my mother to Dr. Theakstone's surgery at "The Grove." The old doctor was exceedingly kind, and with a squirt he cleared away all traces of the lime from my eyes. It was a painful process, but he kindly assured me it would soon be over, and I should have my eyesight thoroughly restored. The memory of his kindness, both in word and deed, is a very happy one.

SERVED FROM BARNOLDSWICK

For a few years after the departure of the "old Doctor" the Earby district was principally served by Barnoldswick doctors.

Dr. Roberts was a frequent visitor to Earby, as he was the "Parish Doctor" and the Factory Certifying Surgeon. His place of call, as the "Parish Doctor," was a grocers shop in Water Street, kept by William Wilkinson, who was generally known as "Bill o' Joa o' Dick's." Dr. Roberts was a cripple, being bereft of one leg, and he always had two crutches to assist him in his locomotion. He went about the district in a dog-cart, and was always accompanied by his faithful manservant.

Dr. Roberts had a long term of service as the factory surgeon, and hundreds of Earby lads and lasses appeared before him when the half-time system was in operation. It was always an event of special interest when "the doctor came to pass the children," and many Earby people have pleasant recollections of appearing before the grand old man. He had a fine physique, notwithstanding his infirmity, and he "looked the part" well with his handsome countenance, adorned with side whiskers. He was indeed one of the outstanding figures of the period in which he practised his profession, and was held in the highest regard by all who knew him. Dr. Nightingale, who belonged to an esteemed Thornton family, became Dr. Robert's assistant, and he resided at Mr. John Wilkinson's, in Water Street, Earby. During a brief stay in the district he won golden opinions by the gracious and sympathetic manner in which he discharged his medical duties.

The writer had an experience of the kindness of Dr. Nightingale which will never be forgotten. It was on a fine summer morning, in August, 1887. My father and brother had gone to work about 5-45, when my mother was taken suddenly and seriously ill, and was unable to rise as usual. Shortly after six o'clock I ran down Aspen Lane to Water Street, and aroused Dr. Nightingale. Having explained the position to him he promised to be up at Green End in a few minutes. On his arrival he made his way into the sick room, and after a brief examination gave me such a compassionate look. "Your mother is very, very ill, will you get one of the neighbours to come in?" She was beyond any aid he could render, and in a few hours she passed quietly away.

Dr. Alderton, of Barnoldswick, newly arrived fifty years ago, included Earby in his round, and he was a welcome visitor. He rode a fine horse in those days, and made his journey through Salterforth and Kelbrook to Earby, returning via Thornton and Coates. He had a good number of patients at Earby, and was always regarded as a very efficient doctor, and quite a specialist in the treatment of some cases. He had a sympathetic manner, with just a touch of "snap" in his geniality, and is gratefully remembered to this day. He is now living in semi-retirement in his adopted town of Barnoldswick. He succeeded Dr. Roberts as factory surgeon of the district.

AN IRISH PERSONALITY

After a period of about five years, a new resident practitioner arrived in the person of Dr. Hunter. He was an Irishman, of typical Irish geniality and gusto. At first he resided in the front row of Wesley Place, opposite the Wesleyan Chapel, and later occupied a new house in Green End Villas. He soon became a popular doctor, and established a good practice, with the result that he had built a new commodious house, with surgery, in Water Street. The home rule agitation was then at its height and the doctor allied himself with the Liberal Party, which was then very strong in the village. He addressed several meetings, and could always speak interestingly, with firsthand knowledge. He was very much attached to the Victoria Institute, and made many friends among all sections of the community. Of a progressive type of mind, the provision of more educational facilities made a strong appeal to him, and on the occasion of the first school board election he stood as an independent candidate. There were eight candidates, and Dr. Hunter was one of the successful aspirants for membership of the Board, but was returned by a narrow majority, being only three votes above the next on the list. At the election which followed, three years later, Dr. Hunter was at the head of the poll, a tribute alike to his popularity and service for the community. He worked in happy association with the other members of the board, and greatly enjoyed the service which he was able to render for the benefit of the children of the district. Dr. Hunter's wife was a talented artist and musician, and was highly esteemed.

Dr. Hitchen came to Earby as the village began to develop, in the early 'nineties, and quickly established a good practice. He commenced operations in Skipton Road, where Mr. Oates now resides. Later, he occupied a house in the West End Terrace, and then moved into Harrington House, near the railway crossing, at the gate house which was specially built for him. He was getting on in years when he settled at Earby, and on his retirement was succeeded by Dr. Storrs. Dr. Hitchen was a kindly disposed man and a highly esteemed physician.

Dr. Storrs came to Earby in the prime of life, and was a doctor of eminent gifts and qualifications. After a few years' service in the Earby district he took over a larger practice in Colne, where he attained a leading position in the medical world.

Dr Sutherland succeeded Dr. Storrs' Earby practice, and was a doctor of the highest qualifications. During the War he was called up for service, which terminated his association with Earby.

Dr. Canter, later of Crosshills, practised at Earby for a few years in the prosperous days before the War, and he occupied "The Woodbines," in Skipton Road.

Dr. Ward had a brief period of service as a local doctor, residing in West End Terrace, Skipton Road. He also was commandeered for war service.

Dr. Archer took up residence at the south end of Earby, in Colne Road, past the station. He attended particularly to Kelbrook and Salterforth district, as well as to the station end of Earby. He died a few years ago, and was held in much esteem by his friends.

DOCTORS OF TODAY

Of those who are now serving the community with characteristic skill and fidelity, mention

must be made of Dr. Falconer. He was the successor to Dr. Hunter, coming to Earby 36 years ago, having been engaged for a few years at the Victoria Hospital, Burnley. He also brought with him a charming wife, who had been a hospital sister in the same institution.

Dr. Falconer soon won his way into the hearts of the Earby people, a place he has retained through all the varying years, by his unflinching tact and courtesy, combined with fidelity to his honourable calling. He is so much at home in Earby that he claims the privilege of addressing his innumerable friends by their christian names, and the young people he has seen grow up regard him with singular affection.

Dr. Falconer has been associated with the ambulance movement through its career in Earby, and has been unsparing in his efforts to ensure its splendid success. All those who have passed through the Ambulance Brigade and Nursing Division, as well as those who are still attached to these organisations, hold him in the very highest esteem. During the life time of the old Institute, Dr. Falconer was one of its heartiest supporters, and none felt it more keenly than he when it had to be closed.

Dr. Falconer's son, Alic (Alexander) has just completed his training at Edinburgh University, and is a valued member of the staff at the Burnley Victoria Hospital. About ten years ago Dr. Falconer took possession of Warrington House, and he was succeeded in residence at Oldfield House, Water Street, by Dr. Niven. Both these doctors are worthy sons of Scotland, and Dr. Niven, by his singular charm of manner, sympathetic demeanour, quaint humour and unflinching devotion, has endeared himself to all who know him.

Dr. Jagoe, who succeeded Dr Archer, is the township's latest acquisition, and he does not fall behind his companions in public esteem and appreciation. Dr. Jagoe is a son of Ireland, and possesses in full measure the genial wit and capacity for friendliness which distinguish his race.

May these three worthy men long be spared to exercise their beneficial ministry among us.

J.H.