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Harley Street
London, 1 April 1890

My dear Smith,

I was delighted to hear from you again, and I regret the press of business that has prevented me from replying to your letter sooner.

Early last year I was able to purchase a well-established practice for a very reasonable amount, and since then I have been kept quite busy with my professional duties. The practice, I regret to say, had been allowed to deteriorate quite badly, and it has taken some hard work to bring it up to its previous high position of integrity. But from the unceasing flow of patients to my door, I think I can say with all modesty that I have succeeded fairly well. I am now able to command a very handsome income, and to attract to my doors the better classes of people who once before called here for medical advice. Of course, I still do my fair share of charity work in the wards; it is expected. But I confess I take a proper pride indeed in having members of the peerage among my patients.

The former resident was a brilliant physician who built the practice up almost from scratch, but in later years he appears to have treated his professional duties with shameful disinterest. His patients were forced to schedule their consultations to fit his strange hours in residence -- hours which became gradually less frequent as time wore on, until at last he was hardly available for more than two hours a week.

As I am sure you will realize, this is a very unprofessional attitude for a physician. To make matters worse, the while he was away from his duties he was running up the close and down the stair with -- of all people -- a detective! He could be seen in almost any part of England -- and occasionally on the Continent -- in this strange company. The only place he could not be seen was in his consulting rooms! Eventually, of course, his patients began to consult other physicians, and, as I remarked, the practice deteriorated until it must perforce be sold or abandoned entirely. At this stage I happened on the scene, and after my purchase of the practice a few of the former patients began to return.

I fear I am rather incensed at my predecessor's neglect of his duties. The Hippocratic Oath and what is to me -- though you may laugh -- an innate sense of what is right and decent both dictate that a doctor of human ills should stick to his calling and not go haring about consorting with the police and common criminals! He should leave the "adventuring" to the soldiers of fortune and others with few responsibilities to humanity.

I suppose I am being too harsh on my predecessor. It may be that he found, ultimately, that medicine was not his true calling. Indeed, I believe I saw, just the other day, at the book shop, that he has written a volume or two about his experiences with the detective; perhaps he will find his true calling in writing.

In any case, I expect his former patients will soon forget the inconvenience -- and, in some cases, hardships -- he caused them, under my ministrations. His name has almost faded out on the door -- luckily, "Watson" being six letters long, our names were the same length, and the gilt letters almost cover the old spaces exactly.

But enough of my rather humdrum existence -- though I would not seek to change it. I should, however, be glad to hear of your exploits in the Orient when you can find time to write.

Sincerely,
Petrie

D I R E C T C U R R E N T S

CREATH THORNE: There are Hospitals and Hospitals. They differ from one to the other just as people's impressions of them differ. When I managed to compound fracture both bones in my lower left leg in 1948 (age:12) they carted me off to a Catholic hospital in Passaic, New Jersey where I spent 10 very uncomfortable days. Uncomfortable -- but not all that painful. So my experience disagrees with your first impression. Though they used ether for the operation at that time, when I went back a year later to have the plate removed they used pentathol. I remember the helluva time they had finding the vein -- "wildcatting" I called it -- but again it wasn't that painful, so there is a disagreement with your second impression, too. On Impression #3 we agree, however: doctors are nuts in the operating room. They are deliberately so, to keep the patient's attention off the operation and/or his ailments. Mine didn't discourse on music, but he argued with me over some triviality (exactly what, I disremember.) As for Impressions 4 and 5, we agree there, too: nurses' aides do all the work, and a RN invariably has a needle in her hand when she enters. Those were 10 damn long days for a 12-year old, especially since the accident happened about 2 days before school was to open, and I had been looking forward to going back after summer boredom had set in. And then to know for a year you have to go back again... .

You will notice the Table of Contents lists this PARITY as #13. Fred did this on my say-so, as my records show that you already had #'s 11 and 12 in previous D's.

FRED PATTEN: You mentioned in D66 that you had been to Knott's Berry Farm to ride the carousel, but didn't think it was worth the 50¢ admission to the MacDonald's Farm area to ride the carousel there. Well, the small group that went Carouselling last Saturday -- Hannifen, Gold, Pelzes, Johnstone, Hilda Hoffman, Ruth Berman, Neal Reynolds and small son -- wish to report that you missed a bet or two. After eating our picnic lunches at Griffith Park and riding the carousel there for a while, we went to Knott's and rode their big one with the various animals. Then we wandered over to MacDonald's Farm. The admission is only 35¢ (25¢ for those under 12), and once you get in, you can ride the carousel free. (Limit is supposed to be one ride, but if they don't have too big a crowd you can ride again.) This carousel is made of old timbers, with large wooden seats similar to those on a roller-coaster, and its motor is capable of one mule-power. But that one mule, stepping fairly quickly around the central pole, certainly gets the carousel up to a good speed. The carousel is reputed to be 100 years old, having been originally used in the Ozarks.

Besides the carousel, they have a few trained animals: a chicken that rings a bell, a rabbit that rides a cart down an incline, etc. They are interesting enough, I guess. There are also other animals that are just on exhibition: a huge Scotch steer, a Longhorn, a monstrous Holstein steer, etc. And wandering around loose, tame as anything: a tapir! Half the people who saw it didn't know what it was, and I've never seen one outside of a zoo, but Tillie the Tapir let herself be petted, photographed (Ted introduced the tapir to his taper), and occasionally ridden by one of the small children. It was just big enough to look over the edge of a trash barrel, and, when it saw an apple therein, pull the barrel over to get the apple. (It was uninterested, however, in an abandoned ice cream cone; so much for the encyclopedia's statement that tapirs are omnivorous.)

All in all, an excellent time was had by all. I suggest you try MacDonald's Farm next time you're at Knott's.

The Way of Life 13

by Edward J. Dean

Leo Carter was far from his usual cheerful self at work Tuesday. He was still polite and helpful to the customers to ask about tours or book reservations through the agency, but he seemed much more apprehensive than he had ever been before, especially when his supervisor came over to talk to him. The first time this happened, Leo jumped a foot at the sound of the supervisor's voice, and even at the third time, he twisted his hands together while the supervisor was talking, and looked nervously from the floor to the supervisor and back to the floor again as if expecting to be fired at any moment. But each time it was only a question of passing on some business information.

When five o'clock came, Leo punched out with a sigh of relief and drove home, thankful that the work-day was over. After dinner he picked up the phone and called Coral Gables.

"Nina? Did anything happen at your end of this mess?"

"No, not today -- but with the amount of red tape that has to be dealt with on any problem at the University, it would probably take at least a week for me to find out if anything did happen. How about you?"

"Nothing. And with a small agency like ours, if anything happened I'd be called in on the carpet immediately, I'm sure. So maybe we're all right -- he'd certainly act immediately if he was going to do anything, wouldn't he?"

"I'm no psychologist, and I've been worried enough about what I'd do if anything happened to be able to sit down and puzzle out the mental labyrinth of his mind. He must be somewhat psychotic, though, to want to ruin two careers that way, and to brag about it to me beforehand, too! I could have understood it if he had tried blackmail, I think, but he only threatened. No conditions, or anything. What can we do but wait?"

"Well, shrot of murder -- or, at least, burglary to get that picture back -- I don't know. We can't even complain to the police that we're being blackmailed. I suppose we could say we were, and get them to investigate Miller -- no, we haven't a shred of evidence. No notes, or anything. It wouldn't work. I do think you ought to tell Harold, though, so he'll be aware of what's going on. Maybe, if Miller does send the photo to the University, Harold's knowing about it would help mitigate the circumstances. You can convince him what really happened, can't you?"

"I..I guess so. Harold isn't always easy to talk to; it depends a good deal on what kind of a mood he's in. Right now he's working late at the University, so I'll have to wait until he's been home a while, so I can see whether it would be a good time to tell him. But I will tell him; you may be right about it being the best idea."

"OK. I'll just have to wait, as there's no one I could tell to help me out. But maybe I can find out why Miller's mad at us, so we can try to talk him out of it. It won't help to talk to him before we know why'n hell he's doing it. I'll see you Saturday at the club, won't I?"

"I guess so, if nothing happens before then. Good-bye, Leo."

Leo hung up and headed for the typewriter. Miller or no Miller, he had a deadline to meet soon. Besides, he always thought better at the typer, and maybe he could think up a reason for Mike Miller's actions.

And in Coral Gables, Nina Cosgrove sat in the living room, a drink in her hand, listening to the background chatter of her son's typewriter as he too worked on his fanzine, and wondering how -- and exactly what -- to tell her husband when he came home.