

**DOCTOR BREEN'S
PRACTICE,
A NOVEL**

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Doctor Breen's practice, a novel by William D. Howells

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WILLIAM D. HOWELLS

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A NOVEL

BY
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WILLIAM D. HOWELLS

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DR. BREEN'S PRACTICE.

I.

NEAR the verge of a bold promontory stands the hotel, and looks southeastward over a sweep of sea unbroken to the horizon. Behind it stretches the vast forest, which after two hundred years has resumed the sterile coast wrested from it by the first Pilgrims, and has begun to efface the evidences of the inroad made in recent years by the bold speculator for whom Jocelyn's is named. The young birches and spruces are breast high in the drives and avenues at Jocelyn's; the low blackberry vines and the sweet fern cover the carefully-graded sidewalks, and obscure the divisions of the lots; the children of the boarders have found squawberries in the public square on the spot where the band-stand was to have been. The notion of a sea-side resort at this point was courageously conceived, and to a certain extent it was generously realized. Except for

its remoteness from the railroad, a drawback which future enterprise might be expected to remedy in some way, the place has many natural advantages. The broad plateau is cooled by a breeze from the vast forests behind it, which comes laden with health and freshness from the young pines ; the sea at its feet is warmed by the Gulf Stream to a temperature delicious for bathing. There are certainly mosquitoes from the woods ; but there are mosquitoes everywhere, and the report that people have been driven away by them is manifestly untrue, for whoever comes to Jocelyn's remains. The beach at the foot of the bluff is almost a mile at its curve, and it is so smooth and hard that it glistens like polished marble when newly washed by the tide. It is true that you reach it from the top by a flight of eighty steps, but it was intended to have an elevator, like those near the Whirlpool at Niagara. In the mean time it is easy enough to go down, and the ladies go down every day, taking their novels or their needle-work with them. They have various notions of a bath : some conceive that it is bathing to sit in the edge of the water, and emit shrieks as the surge sweeps against them ; others run boldly in, and after a moment of poignant hesitation jump up and down half-a-dozen times, and run out ; yet others imagine it better to remain immersed

to the chin for a given space, looking toward the shore with lips tightly shut and the breath held. But after the bath they are all of one mind ; they lay their shawls on the warm sand, and, spreading out their hair to dry, they doze in the sun, in such coils and masses as the unconscious figure lends itself to. When they rise from their beds, they sit in the shelter of the cliff and knit or sew, while one of them reads aloud, and another stands watch to announce the coming of the seals, which frequent a reef near the shore in great numbers. It has been said at rival points on the coast that the ladies linger there in despair of ever being able to remount to the hotel. A young man who clambered along the shore from one of those points reported finding day after day the same young lady stretched out on the same shawl, drying the same yellow hair, who had apparently never gone up-stairs since the season began. But the recurrence of this phenomenon in this spot at the very moment when the young man came by might have been accounted for upon other theories. Jocelyn's was so secluded that she could not have expected any one to find her there twice, and if she had expected this she would not have permitted it. Probably he saw a different young lady each time.

Many of the same boarders come year after year,

and these tremble at the suggestion of a change for the better in Jocelyn's. The landlord has always believed that Jocelyn's would come up, some day, when times got better. He believes that the narrow-gauge railroad from New Leyden — arrested on paper at the disastrous moment when the fortunes of Jocelyn's felt the general crash — will be pushed through yet; and every summer he promises that next summer they are going to have a steam-launch running twice a day from Leyden Harbor. But at present his house is visited once a day by a barge, as the New England coast-folks call the vehicle in which they convey city boarders to and from the station, and the old frequenters of the place hope that the station will never be nearer Jocelyn's than at present. Some of them are rich enough to afford a sojourn at more fashionable resorts; but most of them are not, though they are often people of polite tastes and of æsthetic employments. They talk with slight of the large watering-places, and probably they would not like them, though it is really economy that inspires their passion for Jocelyn's with most of them, and they know of the splendid weariness of Newport mostly by hearsay. New arrivals are not favored, but there are not often new arrivals at Jocelyn's. The chief business of the barge is to bring fresh meat for

the table and the gaunt bag which contains the mail ; for in the first flush of the enterprise the place was made a post-office, and the landlord is postmaster ; he has the help of the lady-boarders in his official duties.

Scattered about among the young birches there are several of those pine frames known as shells, within easy walk of the hotel, where their inmates board. They are picturesque interiors, and are on informal terms with the public as to many domestic details. The lady of the house, doing her back hair at her dressing-room glass, is divided from her husband, smoking at the parlor fire-place, only by a partition of unlathed studding. The arrest of development in these shells is characteristic of everything about the place. None of the improvements invented since the hard times began have been added to Jocelyn's ; lawn-tennis is still unknown there ; but there is a croquet-ground before the hotel, where the short, tough grass is kept in tolerable order. The wickets are pretty rusty, and it is usually the children who play ; but toward the close of a certain afternoon a young lady was pushing the balls about there. She seemed to be going over a game just played, and trying to trace the cause of her failure. She made bad shots, and laughed at her blunders. Another young lady

drooped languidly on a bench at the side of the croquet-ground, and followed her movements with indifference.

"I don't see how you did it, Louise," panted the player; "it's astonishing how you beat me."

The lady on the bench made as if to answer, but ended by coughing hoarsely.

"Oh, dear child!" cried the first, dropping her mallet, and running to her. "You ought to have put on your shawl!" She lifted the knit shawl lying beside her on the bench, and laid it across the other's shoulders, and drew it close about her neck.

"Oh, don't!" said the other. "It chokes me to be bundled up so tight." She shrugged the shawl down to her shoulders with a pretty petulance. "If my chest's protected, that's all that's necessary." But she made no motion to drape the outline which her neatly-fitted dress displayed, and she did not move from her place, or look up at her anxious friend.

"Oh, but don't sit here, Louise," the latter pleaded, lingering near her. "I was wrong to let you sit down at all after you had got heated."

"Well, Grace, I had to," said she who was called Louise. "I was so tired out. I'm not going to take more cold. I can always tell when I am. I'll put on the shawl in half a minute; or else I'll go in.