

**DR. BREEN'S
PRACTICE,
A NOVEL**

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

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WILLIAM D. HOWELLS

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DR. BREEN'S PRACTICE

A NOVEL

BY

WILLIAM D. HOWELLS

AUTHOR OF "THE RISE OF SILAS LAPHAM," "A MODERN INSTANCE,"
"INDIAN SUMMER," ETC.



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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,