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DEERING J. ROBERTS, M. D., - - *Editor and Proprietor.*

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Original Communications.

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It is customary for writers or speakers to choose some subject or heading, and then draw out the threads of their discourse or essay from that subject or heading. I shall make an innovation upon that custom at this time and reverse the order, letting the threads of my essay merge into a heading at the end of the chapter. Just—

"How the subject theme may gang,
Let time and chance determine;
Perhaps it may turn out a sang,
Mayhap turn out a sermon."

Fifty years ago, when I was a boy, things were not as they are now. It is true that there were boys and girls then as now, with habits and instincts much the same. The young lady then (for there were young ladies then as now), that was fortunate enough

to have a calico dress to go to meeting in (we call it going to church now), and a figured cotton handkerchief, with Leghorn bonnet, would toss her head in disdain at her less fortunate sisters who could afford nothing better than linsey-woolsey dresses and sun-bonnets of home making. And the young man in that day, that was fortunate enough to possess a pair of store shoes and a rabbit fur hat, was just as self-important as the modern dude with his cut-away coat and all other store clothes. The dude of fifty years ago, in his brogans and fur hat, looked down with contempt upon his less fortunate neighbor boy, who could afford nothing better than a wool hat, clop-down shoes and tow breeches. The young lady in that day was just airy and as bewitching in her calico dress, running the young men as crazy as her modern sisters of to-day in their jewels, silks and furbelows. Human nature is the same; the change is only in externals. The instincts, ambitions, loves, hatred and desires are the same in all ages. The rural school-house in that day is well worth preserving on canvas or in history. It was built of logs, the cracks being filled with mortar made of clay and straw. It was seated with unbacked benches made of undressed slabs. It was lighted on two sides by taking out a log the whole length of the building, nailing slats across the opening, to which paper was pasted and oiled to make it tough and more translucent. The fireplace took one-half of the end of the building. Its jambs and back-wall were made of rough stones and mortar, and its chimney of wood and clay.

It was in such a building that the writer first learned to read about the "old man who found a rude boy on one of his apple trees stealing apples." Children had no arms full of books to "tote" to school. One book was all that parents could afford to their children. I have known as many as two and three get their lessons out of the same book, their heads together studying at the same time, or taking it in turns. The school boy of that day was just the same lazy urchin of to-day. And the school master (we call him teacher now), presided with as much dignity and importance in his humble phrontistery as does his modern successor with all his new-fangled facilities.

From these humble beginnings went forth talent that has climbed to the highest position within the gift of the people or the world of letters.

There were no railroads in those days in all the West. Steam was only in its swaddling clothes. The old stage coach, that has now been relegated to the outskirts of civilization and almost forgotten, was the great *sine qua non* of the day. The sound of the stage-driver's horn was electrifying, thrilling and weird, as it re-echoed from hill to hill, setting all the dogs to howling and all the boys to running. Many a time I have dropped my hoe in the middle of the cornfield and ran like a scared rabbit to the road to see the stage go by. How I admired the painted coach and the trappings of the horses, and envied the driver as he gave a few notes of "Yankee Doodle" from his brass horn. The coming in of the stage always collected a crowd just as the coming in of the cars do now. The stage was the only means of fast travel in those days. Six miles an hour was fast time. Stage fare was 6¼ cents a mile, and one was fortunate if, in muddy weather, he did not have to get out at the foot of every hill, and carry a fence-rail to help prize the coach out of the mud. I have paid such fare, and had to walk half the distance up hill in rainy weather, toting a rail on my shoulders.

Postage on letters in those days ranged from 6¼ cents to 25 cents, owing to distance, for single sheets. If double sheets, double postage. Postage was not prepaid, but collected from the office from the person to whom the letter was sent. I fancy our postmasters would have a lively time of it now, if they had to collect postage as they delivered letters. Those of us whose names come in the X. Y. Z.'s would have to camp out around the office for six to eight weeks awaiting our turn.

The therapia of those days kept abreast of the times. The bellyache (we call it *dolores intestinorum* now), was cured by pukes of lobelia or polk-root, that made us so sick that the belly-ache was happiness to it. Worms were expelled by vinegar off of rusty nails, or copperas water. Butternut or polk-root were the favorite purges, and "boneset" the universal febrifuge. These were some of the domestic remedies. The doctors carried big

saddle-bags holding about a peck in each end. These were stuffed until they stuck out like a peddler's pannier, with bottles, and herbs, and roots, pewter syringes, tooth "twisters," and forceps.

The doctors in those days meant business. They could make a man sicker, and come nearer turning him inside out, *and keep life in him*, than any modern son of Æsculapius would dare to attempt. Now, all the doctors carry are little morocco cases in their side-pockets, and hypodermic syringes. The doctor of olden times, in my beat, was clad in homespun, booted, spurred and leggoned, and, in cold weather, with a caped great coat that came to his heels. He could not visit many cases in a day, for he had his medicines to prepare for administration, in decoctions or syrups after he got to his patient. He generally stayed until he bled, puked and purged his patient. The doctors now flit in and out of the sick chamber like butterflies, clad in broadcloth, kid gloves, and French calf boots. Taking from his side-pocket his case of pellets, after ungloving one hand and feeling the pulse, adjusting his glasses and looking at the tongue, he leaves a few of them to be given; or writes a prescription, and is gone. The old-time doctor knew every article of medicine by taste or smell. The modern doctor, but for the labels, would not know what they were. The old-timer could no more decipher a modern prescription than he could read bird tracks in snow.

When railroads and telegraphs were first talked about, the wonder element in me rose as big as a meeting-house. My verdant mind was prepared to believe the stories of Sinbad the Sailor, of Aladin's Lamp, the Enchanted Horse, and the Roc that carried Sinbad and dropped him over in that valley of diamonds; but the idea of a wagon running from place to place without horses; or that we could send messages to distant cities through a streak of lightning, was utterly inconceivable. The young were a gaping crowd of bewildered boobies. The old were a frowning crowd of indignant fossils, who declared such schemes impracticable and the mere dreams of cranks.

Time grew on apace. The Atlantic seaboard and our Western waters began to be studded with steam vessels, and the track of the iron horse began to reach away through long stretches of

country connecting distant cities. Soon it was announced that Baltimore and Washington were connected by telegraph, and that the people could actually talk to one another a distance of forty miles. "Clay and Frelinghuysen nominated; convention adjourned," was the first message that ever went over the wires, which was sent at the adjournment of the Whig Convention that met in Baltimore in 1844. This message reached Washington two hours in advance of the train, and astonished the delegates no little when they got to Washington on the iron horse, which then took two hours to make the trip, to find that the news had been two hours ahead of them. It took the wind out of the sails of the delegates, who thought they were the first to bring the news of the action of the Convention, to find the story told by telegraph.

When I first heard this news the wonder element in me swelled well-nigh to the bursting point. "And still I gazed and still the wonder grew," and, in fact, it is growing yet. I had not yet arrived at manhood—was only a good-sized hulk of a boy—when the iron horse, that everybody thought was barred by the Appalachian chain, came thundering through the mountains, and snorting down the valley, with the tread of an earthquake in close proximity to the old homestead.

So wonderfully rapid were seemingly impossibilities taking place that they nearly knocked the breath out of me. When I gazed on that iron horse as he sped down the valley, scattering his foam on the impending woods, I said to myself, "I'll let nothing astonish me hereafter. It is possible for events to arise in the future that are not yet born in our most visionary conceptions." Thus far I have glanced at the past, and only that past that has come under my observation.

What of the present? I shall only glance at it to enable me to track out a few possibilities that may arise in the boundless and unexplored wilderness of the future.

I do not care to be outstripped again, or made a booby a second time, but propose to tuck up my mantle and trot along by the side of the chariot of future possibilities.

The old tallow candle and oil lamps have long ago been rele-

gated to the shades of oblivion. Gas and electricity have taken their places. The moving power of the industries of the world is steam. Our railroads now encircle the continent and radiate from center to periphery—the ocean is decked with steam habitations. Steam has conquered the world and is the civilizer of nations. It has sung the funeral knell of the Indians on our plains, and of all the inferior races of the earth. They must get up and dust themselves or be trampled beneath its giant tread. It is but a question of time, and that no æons of years, before the world will be brought so near together that all nations will be practically one nation. The telegraph now encircles the globe, and the telephone is making rapid strides in the same direction. Less than a quarter of a century ago it took six months to cross our plains. Now we make the trip in four days. It almost takes one's breath to grasp the changes from fifty years to now. We live in an age of discovery and invention, such as never before dawned upon the world. Astonishment and incredulity no longer bewilder or fetter the mind. The world now stands on tip-toe in anticipation of coming events. And there is room yet for events as astonishing to the coming ages as the present are to the past. "Coming events cast their shadows before." I see through the mist of the morning the time when we will talk to our neighbors across the Atlantic as easy as across the way. While our breakfast is getting ready we may read the news from all the world, talk with the Autocrat of Russia, and inquire into the health of Her Majesty Queen Victoria, and know what our neighbors on the other side of the sea had for breakfast. Whether the President of these United States and our members of Congress have, that morning, taken their whisky straight or sugar in it; whether Mrs. McKay was full-jeweled at last night's reception in Paris. Some inventive genius will take out a patent for bottling up and storing away all the waste sunshine that nature so lavishly furnishes us. Why not? Our wood and coal are but locked up sunshine. Some enterprising Yankee will improve upon the method and make his fortune selling sunshine. Wood, and coal, and gas will be set aside, and sunshine will be brought out and used when needed for heat and light.

The power of all the Niagaras, and waterfalls of the earth, that have been going to waste all these ages, will be converted into electricity, and steam and the old lumbering cars will be relegated to where the old stage coach now is. Electricity will be the moving power of all the industries of the world. Guided by the hand of man, it will plan and sow, and reap and thresh. About this time men will begin to fly. I do not mean that they will evolve wings after the Darwinian theory, but will sail in ships in the circumambient air, propelled by the natural element of the clouds—electricity. The exploration of the bottom of the sea will be a thing of fact, and the treasures of the deep will be uncovered, and men will go prospecting and mining in sub-aqueous regions; bonanzas will be discovered, and Floods and Fairs and mining stocks will be then as now. Greed is destined to gnaw at a man's vitals, and he will never be satisfied until he has a world all to himself, and he will be found reaching out after the star-dust, out of which worlds are made, and trying to make one of his own. Some soulless syndicate will be among the first to straddle the lightning when it is first harnessed for the race in life, and go nosing among the clouds to find out where the thunder is made, and they may create a corner in that commodity.

What about disease? Well, so long as the butcher is allowed to feed us on meat that died before it was killed, bacteria will luxuriate in our bowels, and microbes will gnaw holes in our midriffs, and quacks will fatten on our misfortunes, then as now.

This brings the threads of our article to a heading, which, the reader will see, is

WHAT HAS BEEN, IS, AND IS TO COME.