



Al Field

A PIONEER MEDICINE MAN OF IOWA

By DR. CHARLES KEYES

Until about a year ago Dr. A. G. Field was the oldest living medical man residing in our state. On the date of his demise, May 31, 1924, he had practiced medicine in Iowa within a few weeks of three-quarters of a century! Coming here three years after Iowa had been admitted into the Union, he was doubly a true pioneer, both as physician and citizen.

Arriving in Iowa in 1849 young Field first located in Centerville, Appanoose County. Then helping to lay out the county seat of Wayne County, Corydon, he afterwards moved there. In 1863 he came to Des Moines where he resided continuously until the final summons came.

Archelaus Green Field was born at Gorham, Ontario County, New York, on November 15, 1829. His father was Dr. Abel Wakely Field, a native of Vermont; and his mother, before her marriage, was Zilpha Witter, of Ontario. Archelaus was the eldest of three brothers. Although his surroundings were those of most farm youths in a frontier country, his education was greatly in advance of that of neighbor boys because of the efforts of his parents in his home and in getting him through the local academy.

When he was ten years old the family removed to Cattaraugus County, New York, and in 1844 migrated to Madison County, Ohio. Here after attending the academies at West Jefferson, London, and Worthington, he alternately taught school and worked on the farm for several years.

In the spring of 1849 teacher Field joined a company of emigrants who were leaving Madison County, Ohio, for Appanoose County, Iowa. There were eleven wagons and about thirty people. The company was nearly two months on the road, camping wherever night overtook it. The novel experiences were enjoyed by all despite the frequent necessary inconveniences. Traveling in this way, of course, was slow and wearisome, and finally became downright monotonous, especially over the miles and miles of corduroy roads through the black swamps of Indiana. When the Mississippi River was reached at Burlington, a flat ferryboat had

to make a number of trips to get the party and their belongings over onto Iowa soil. New inspiration came over all in the invigorating atmosphere of their new home.

Of this Ohio company the majority settled in and about Centerville. At this place young Field at once nailed up his shingle for practice. Calls, however, were few and far between. The people possessed surprisingly good health, and there were already on the ground a number of older doctors. The young Ohio doctor had to find something else to do to make ends meet. In the course of a year he was appointed deputy sheriff, and in this capacity assisted in the taking of the census of a large part of Appanoose County.

In the meanwhile commissioners had been chosen to select a location for the county seat of Wayne County, among whom was George Perkins, the county surveyor of Appanoose. The latter invited Field to join the party. After several days the nearest to an eligible site for the prospective town was found to be about seven miles from the center of the county. Then Perkins disclosed the purpose of his kind invitation to Field to come with them. He furnished Field with a little slip of paper on which were noted the numbers of the sections selected, and suggested that this eighty and that eighty, forming an "L" around the southeast corner of the established metropolis, would be a good thing to secure if the Land Office, then at Fairfield, could be reached in time to enter them.

Field lost no time in getting to Fairfield, arriving there the day before the commissioners did, and having placed upon his selections the proper land warrants. On his return to Centerville, a Dr. Nathan Udell, who enjoyed a large practice, offered to take Field into partnership with him. This arrangement which opened up bright prospects was suddenly terminated because of the death of Field's father back in Amity, Ohio. Returning to Ohio he took up the practice which his father had left, attended to it the best he could and settled up the affairs. Spring found him back in Iowa. Then returning to Ohio, he matriculated at the Starling Medical College, Columbus, Ohio, from which he was graduated in 1854 with the degree of Doctor of Medicine. Later he studied in the College of Physicians and Surgeons (Columbia), in New York City, having also the degree of M. D. conferred upon him

by that institution. For his interest and work in law and especially in the domain of medical jurisprudence Simpson Centenary College in after years conferred upon him the degree of LL. B.

In 1860, being elected president of the Wayne County Agricultural Society, he incidentally became a member of the State Board of Agriculture, a meeting of which he attended in the winter of the following year in Des Moines. The scenic beauty of the new Capital City, with its fine, wide bottom lands at the confluence of two noble streams, and with its forested hills on every hand, made such deep impression upon his artistic sense that before the adjournment of the board meeting he had already made up his mind to make the place his future home. Thither he promptly removed in the summer of 1863.

Opening his office in the Savery Hotel (now the Kirkwood), he found his fellow physicians in the town to be Drs. C. H. Rawson, H. L. Whitman, W. P. Davis, Isaac Windle, W. H. Molesworth, W. H. Dickinson, W. H. Ward, A. M. Overman, J. O. Skinner, George and Frank Grimmel, David Beach, D. V. Cole, Thomas T. Brooks, H. H. Saylor, and S. A. Russel. Drs. Hanawalt, Wiley, Cox, Grimes, Carter, Steel and others came later.

In 1865 Dr. Field was chosen city physician, and in the following year he became county physician, in which capacity he was prime mover in getting the County Farm established and the County Infirmary. Appointed in 1866 as United States examining surgeon for pensioners, he continued in this capacity for eight years, when he was appointed on the Board of Review in the Pension Department. But as this took him to Washington so much of the time he resigned in order that these duties might not interfere with those of the chair of physiology and pathology in the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Keokuk, one of the famous western medical schools of that day.

As secretary of the Iowa State Medical Society, Dr. Field served from 1869 to 1872, when he was elected president of the society. In 1876 he was selected by the society as delegate to the International Medical Congress which met in that year in Philadelphia. He was also an active member in various other medical and scientific associations, including the American Medical Association, the American Society of Microscopists, and the

American Association for the Advancement of Science. And he was a charter member of the Iowa Academy of Sciences, the first meeting of which was held in his office in Des Moines.

In 1877 Dr. Field was married to Hattie Weatherby of Cordington, Ohio.

Among the many publications which Dr. Field issued the following are some of the most important:

"Report on Spotted Fever," in the Transactions of the American Medical Association, 1865; "Hernia in Children," *New York Medical Record*, September, 1869; "Anomalous Human Head," *St. Louis Medical and Surgical Journal*, March, 1867; "Medical Aspect of Iowa," *Chicago Medical Journal*, March 22, 1867; "Decapitation at Transverse Presentations," *New York Medical Record*, April, 1868; "History of Medication by Atomized Medicinal substances," Report to the American Medical Association, 1868; "Puerperal Convulsions and Glycogenesis," *Clinic*, Cincinnati, Ohio, April 1874; "Present Attitude of Medical Science," president's annual address Iowa State Medical Society, pamphlet, 1872; "Elimination in Disease," *Northwestern Medical and Surgical Journal*, St. Paul, April, 1874; "Mildews on Grapevines," *Iowa School Journal*, July, 1874; "Physiology and Hygiene as a Branch of Popular Education," report of committee, Iowa State Medical Society, *Sanitarium*, New York, September, 1875; "Cellars and Diphtheria," *New York Medical Record*, December, 1875; "Doctors and Newspapers," before Iowa State Medical Society, *Tilden's Journal of Materia Medica*, New York, January, 1876; Address before annual meeting of the Iowa Association Railway Surgeons, *Railway Surgeon*, November, 1903; "Criticism of Brown's Physiology," slip to school board, Des Moines.

At the meeting of the American Medical Association in Baltimore, 1895, before the Ophthalmic Section, and also before the Columbus meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, he read a paper on "Bright Light in School Rooms a Cause for Myopia," in which he outlined a proposed remedy and the means for measuring the intensity of light in schoolrooms. This paper was an attempt to show the fallacy and damage of the popular doctrine that "the more light in the schoolroom the better," and that the abuse or careless use of such bright light, together with near vision, were responsible for

a very large per cent of the myopics who emanate from the schools. The subject was illustrated by a rectilinear photographic lens, to show that back focus recedes with reduction of the diaphragm. The stimulus of bright light contracts the iris and thus reduces the pupil or diaphragm of the eye, thereby elongating the eyeball. Near vision does the same thing, and the persistent strain thus placed upon the accommodative apparatus results in the immobility which constitutes myopia, or near-sightedness, which being long continued as in schoolroom work, overcomes the natural elasticity of the accommodative apparatus, and permanent and incurable myopia results. The intelligent and careful use of proper shades to modify the light, and free use of distant vision by blackboard exercises, are recommended as preventatives.

Dr. Field began experiments in photo-micrography as early as 1883, being one of the pioneers in this line of work. Later he gave considerable attention to microscopy in the natural sciences, including biology, histology, bacteriology, etc., and it was with a view of popularizing this line of work that the Des Moines School of Technology was organized in 1884. At various times he appeared before medical and scientific societies, illustrating the subjects treated of by photo-micrographic lantern slides of his own production, in which line of work he acquired a high degree of proficiency.

A mechanician of no small skill Dr. Field devised a number of useful instruments and pieces of apparatus which are widely used by the profession. Among these was an instrument for impinging the spray of medical solutions directly upon the mucous surfaces of canals and cavities. This was fully described in the May number of the *Medical and Surgical Reporter* of 1869. Another mechanism which he devised was a musculo-tension meter, to determine the extent of the softening of muscles in paralysis, a description of which appeared in the *Journal of American Medical Association*, 1889. A really wonderful device was his universal stand for microscopy, photo-micrography, and copying; it was illustrated and described in *Photographic Mosaics*, published in New York in 1890.

Always taking an active interest in public affairs Dr. Field did much towards the upbuilding of his home city. He was twice

ected by popular vote mayor of the town of North Des Moines. During both terms of office the affairs of the town were conducted without lawsuit or the incurrence of a dollar's bonded indebtedness.

After removing his home and family to Des Moines, he at length, by good business management and shrewd real estate investments where land values were rapidly increasing in an energetic little capital city, acquired a competency. With the latter his laboratories, library, apparatus, and facilities for conducting scientific research grew apace. For the last thirty years of his life he was virtually retired from the practice of medicine.

Although Dr. Field was a practicing physician with large clientele he appeared to find abundance of time for his scientific pursuits, which often took the bent seemingly of pure delight at being able to extend his knowledge in little known or entirely unknown directions. Seldom putting his observations on paper in finished form, he was nevertheless widely known for his accomplishments in histology and microscopical technique, and he devised adaptations of the camera to the microscope. He was, indeed, an expert along microphotographic lines when others were just beginning to realize the extent to which such performances could be carried. His microscope and its accessories were long the best and most complete in the state and perhaps in the country. Withal he was the most skilled bacteriologist that our state ever knew.

Dr. Field gained publicity chiefly through demonstration, but those who were fortunate enough to attend his lectures carried on the torch there lighted and got the accounts into print, thereby aiding in spreading widely the Fieldian methods. His records of successful medical treatments were more methodical and his descriptions of them readily found their way into the medical journals, to be widely adopted by the profession. Dr. Field's principal writings therefore were confined mainly to the realm of medicine.

Field was a man of many parts. He was a naturalist of the old school, intensely interested in all nature about him, her varied moods and her deepest mysteries. The plants, the beasts, the fowls, the fish, the rocks, and the minerals all came in for due attention. Those who were privileged to know him as a friend

not only respected and admired the compass of his learning and his virile personality, but felt for him an affectionate regard.

His mind was ever active and it remained clear to his very last hour. His final summons came while he was reading the latest copy of one of the technical medical journals. Up to the day of his death he took lively interest in all the affairs of the moment. During the last few years of his busy life, after he had attained the age of ninety years, he devoted much of his time to the study of geology, not only in the books, but in the field. Only a short time before his demise, having listened to a paper which I had read before the Iowa Academy of Sciences on the Glacial till sheets and interglacial deposits, so wonderfully displayed in Des Moines in the recent street cuttings on Fifth Avenue, he called at my home one day to have me go with him and point out on the ground some of the things which were not quite clear to him, and we tramped over the hills and climbed the cutting-faces for two solid hours, every moment of which he exhibited keenest attention. How few are the earth-students ninety-five years young!

A year or so before this he spent several months with the microscope looking over my collections of thin rock-slices, digging out what history he could from the books and then asking at stated intervals a running fire of questions that would do credit to the most enthusiastic graduate student of one of our universities. To him the lives of the rocks were illustrious realities.

Dr. Field had a keen sense of humor and great personal charm which endeared him to a host of friends. He was one of the most kindly, modest, and upright of men, courteous with that courtesy which we now call old-fashioned. Although busiest of men he was always at the disposal of his friends. To visit him on an evening in his own spacious home, in his marvel of a "den," when he was settling down to the work that he loved so well and lived so long for, was a lesson in largeness of heart and a stimulus to research that did not speedily pass away. With his strong character he was bound to be a leader in any society of which he was a member. With his recent passing from amongst us it seems as if the last link with the Heroic Age of science were severed.

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