

WILLIAM H. CHRISTIE DOCTOR OF THE EARLIER SCHOOL

Epitome of the Career of a Country Doctor Who is Closing His Life as an Honored and Respected Citizen of Omaha, Where He Has Long Been an Active Participant in Affairs

MANY events, tragic, pathetic, dramatic, worked together to make a physician of William H. Christie, resident of Omaha and useful citizen for many years. The first scenes of his life are laid in the backwoods country, where he grew up one of that sturdy race of men brought forth by circumstances which fostered independence, mental and physical vigor and moral health.

He was born in Bergen county, New Jersey, March 31, 1844. His father was a mechanic and was not in very flourishing circumstances at the time of his son's birth. When William was 8 years of age his parents moved to New York City, where life was considerably different from life in Bergen county, where the quiet country lanes were exchanged for busy crowded streets, where cornfields gave way to blocks of towering buildings, where the little red school house on the hill was supplanted by a crowded metropolitan institution.

But the habits of the ambitious boy were not changed by this transplanting and he continued his studies faithfully and assiduously rising to the head of his classes, excelling as he had in the country. Two years of life in the metropolis were enough for the Christies and at the expiration of that time they left New York and plunged still farther into the primeval west, going to the end of the railroad line, which was then in Earlville, Ill., and from there driving overland to Paw Paw, Ill., where a farm was taken up. Here William continued his studies and, with the advantage of two years in New York, rapidly forged ahead. Having finished the course of study in the district school, he proudly entered the academy at Paw Paw, matriculation in which erudite institution gave to a student at once weighty prestige in the community until the people "still gazed, and still the wonder grew that one small head could carry all he knew."

The school authorities had trouble with a teacher in a neighboring temple of learning, also designated an academy, while Christie was still a student in Paw Paw. They came to him and asked him to take charge of the institution. Though he was only 17 years of age at the time, he accepted the place and filled it with credit, having three teachers under him.

Service as a Soldier

The civil war broke out just at the close of his term as teacher in this academy and he enlisted at once, being enrolled at Camp Dixon, Ill., in Company K, Seventy-fifth Illinois. The regiment moved into the scene of war at Louisville, Ky., and then marched on to Perryville, where it participated in the engagement at that place. In this battle young Christie was badly hurt, receiving gunshot wounds in the right hand and right shoulder and a flesh wound in the left arm. From the latter erysipelas developed and he was in a hospital from the time of the battle, October 3, until after Christmas. His father then came and took him home to recuperate. He remained at home until March and then went to the marine hospital in Chicago.

Not being fit to re-enter the service, he returned home. Several paths radiated before him. Which to choose for his life walk he did not know. And here the first influence entered. It was "Father" Warren, a pioneer Baptist preacher of that part of the country, a man whom Dr. Christie remembers today as the personification of all the virtues, a simple, unassuming man, but a man with a big heart, a man "to all the country dear, and passing rich on forty pounds a year." This good man took a deep interest in the studious and ambitious boy and suggested medicine for his life work. The suggestion met the approval of the young man's parents and looked attractive to the young man himself. Where to find an opening of the proper sort was still a serious question. Another incident which worked toward the same end had occurred several years before. It is a weird episode. The scene was laid in a lonely churchyard in a certain town in northern Illinois. Two men were the principal actors. The night was dark, the sky was overcast with clouds and a steady rain fell, when the two men crept into the churchyard and made their way between the stones that marked the graves of dead men. They stepped at a newly made mound and went to work. Down they dug through the soggy mud until their spades struck the top of the coffin placed there but a day before. This they ruthlessly broke open and from it took the shrouded figure. Then, abandoning their spades, they hurried back, bearing their ghastly burden between them to a carriage which was waiting for them. The two men, with their ghastly companion, then drove rapidly away in the darkness to a deserted building, where the dissecting was to be done by two ambitious young medics who had lacked for college advantages and dissecting rooms. But the deed was discovered. The whole country side was wrought up. The matter was brought into court and every effort made to apprehend the ghouls. The effort never succeeded. But it was during this time that "Father" Warren had made the acquaintance of Dr. Abner Hard, who was practicing then in Ottawa, Ill., and to Dr. Abner Hard young Christie was sent to begin his medical studies after the fashion of the day which was the day of apprenticeship in the professions as it was in the trades. A young man who was ambitious to be a lawyer went into the office of a lawyer to "read law," which consisted of sweeping out the office, building fires in the winter, doing all sorts of errands as occasion required and reading law as opportunity offered. Likewise to "study medicine" meant to go into the office of a physician with an established practice and do the chores and errands, drive the horse for the doctor as he made the rounds of his patients and learn by reading the few books the office afforded and observing the treatment of the patients by the doctor.

Apprenticed to a Doctor

Dr. Abner Hard was as old-fashioned as his name. He had a large practice in Ottawa and in the country surrounding Ottawa. He was a man looked up to in his profession and well deserving the implicit confidence which his patients had in him. In the office of this physician the embryo doctor studied for a year and a half. During this time he made the acquaintance of Burton C. Cook, then congressman from that district. Through him Mr. Christie received the appointment of cigar inspector for the district, a position which paid him sufficient to enable him to meet his current expenses and to take him to college in the fall of 1864, and pursued his studies in that institution for two years. Then he left college temporarily and went to Tiskilwa, Ill., where he entered the office of Dr. F. B. Ives. He remained there one year and then returned to Chicago, re-entering Rush Medical college and continuing there until he graduated, when he returned again to Tiskilwa, where he had become sufficiently well known to secure a profitable practice of his own.

While he was a doctor's understudy in Ottawa he became acquainted with John A. Logan, then making a campaign for congressman-at-large. Christie had considerable ability as a reader and was particularly proficient in rendering the political satires written by Petroleum V. Nasby from his "Confederate X Roads Postoffice." The politicians were not slow to grasp this fact and he was employed as a reader of some of these letters at meetings during the campaign. There he also met for the first time Jules Lombard, the singer, who became well known to a large circle of friends in Omaha later. Mr. Lombard came down from Chicago as a member of a quartet which had attained statewide prominence and celebrity during the political campaign. In November, 1869, Dr. Christie married Miss Sarah M. Whitford at Shabona Grove, Ill. She died three years ago.

Practice in the Country

After practicing in Tiskilwa for six years the young physician removed to Creston, Ia. The primary reason for this move was ill-health. Hard work of a large practice, constant exposure in all kinds of weather, had brought on an attack of bronchitis, with threatened consumption, and the opinion of brother physicians was that a change of climate was the only means of saving him from an early grave. A former college friend, Dr. J. Adams Allen, advised him to come west. He went out to Creston, Ia., looked the ground over and decided to move. He did so, with the result that he not only regained his health entirely, but found a good practice as well. Here



WILLIAM H. CHRISTIE, M.D.

Dr. Christie "buckled down" to that real, hard, never-ending work of the country doctor. He became such a physician as S. Q. Lapius has epitomized in his poem, "The Country Doctor:"

The country doctor! Bless be he
Who sets the weary sufferer free
From burning fever, racking pain,
And countless ills, and does it, too,
Without a thought or hope of gain,

Without a single cent in view!
I come to sing in praise of him
Whose soul is fat, whose purse is slim;
Whose eyesight's keen, whose foresight's dim.
For, caring naught for fame or pelf,
While there's a crust upon the shelf
He works for fun and boards himself.

"During the fifteen years that I practiced in Creston I pursued my

profession almost unceasingly," says Dr. Christie. "There was no let-up. I average, I think, fifty miles of driving over the country roads a day. I kept several horses and had a cart specially made on which I covered the road at a very brisk pace."

But the volume of his practice did not prevent him from taking an active interest in politics. In Tiskilwa he had been a member of the school board. In Creston he was also a member of this body. He was elected a delegate to the national republican convention in Chicago in 1884, when James G. Blaine was nominated for the presidency.

His Life in Omaha

Dr. Christie removed with his family to Omaha in 1887 and has been active in the practice of his profession since that time until within the last two years, when ill-health has prevented him from engaging in practice quite as actively as formerly. He has made his home with his son-in-law and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Lee Kennard, in the Majestic flats, since the death of his wife.

Dr. Christie's great activity wherever he has been during his life has been in the cause of education, particularly in the work on the school board, which is always a work of love, a work performed by men who do it from a deeply-rooted sense of duty and not for the sake of power or money. Dr. Christie was a member of the school board in Tiskilwa, where he first practiced. He was a member of the school board in Creston during one of the greatest eras of building activity in the line of public schools that city had ever seen. He became a member of the school board of Omaha six years ago and is still an active and valuable unit of that body and does a great deal of the important committee work.

"I consider it the duty of a man who owes all that he is to the public school system to do everything in his power to pay back that great debt which he owes to the state which fostered him in his helpless childhood," says Dr. Christie. "Work on the school board offers a man pleasing as well as a useful field for his energies and enables him to take that part in the government which makes him a valued member of the community. I am deeply interested in the public school system in all its workings and it is one of the most pleasant reflections of my life that I have devoted so much time to it for so many years."

Eminent as a Mason

During nearly all of his adult life Dr. Christie has been a member of the Masonic fraternity. He has taken every degree from the lowest to the highest. He has been master in the blue lodge, high priest in the chapter and eminent commander in the commandery, besides being prelate in the commandery.

Dr. and Mrs. Christie had five children, four of whom are living. The oldest, Charles Dana Christie, was killed by being run over by a train in Creston, Ia., when he was 8 years of age. Dr. Burton W. Christie, a graduate of the State university and the Omaha Medical college, is now in active practice in Omaha; Ralph Conklin Christie, also a graduate of the State university and now a student in the Omaha Medical college. The only daughter is Mrs. Lee Kennard, with whom Dr. Christie is now making his home. William Christie is a graduate of the Omaha High school and is employed at present by the Union Pacific railroad at Ponatello, Idaho.

In the organized bodies of his profession Dr. Christie has always held a high position. He was president of the Omaha Medical society and occupied other positions in the state organization.

For nearly twenty years he held the responsible chair of materia medica and therapeutics in the old Omaha Medical college, which position he resigned in 1907 on account of ill-health.

While in Rush Medical college Dr. Christie was a close friend of Dr. H. J. Winnett of Lincoln, now a member of the State Railway commission.

"Together we burned the midnight oil often," says Dr. Christie. "He was a really hard-working student. He had great powers of application to the subject in hand and those powers were largely what made him the successful man he is today."

Dr. Everett of Lincoln was also a college mate of Dr. Christie in Rush college.

Retired from active practice, Dr. Christie still takes a prominent and vigorous part in those unselfish pursuits which he considers it his duty as a good citizen to follow.

Dunkers' Queer Beliefs Mark Them Apart in World

QUAINTLY garbed members of the Church of the Brethren from all their settlements throughout the United States will go to Des Moines, Ia., early in June to attend the annual conference of the sect. This assemblage, always an occasion unique among religious gatherings, will be especially interesting this year because it will commemorate the 200th anniversary of the denomination. During the sessions, continuing from June 3 to June 11, the foremost elders of these "plain people" will tell anew the story of how eight earnest students of the Bible, under the leadership of Alexander Mack, were accustomed to meet together in Schwarzenau, Germany, for worship in 1708; how they differed from the established religions relative to the mode of baptism, and in spite of hardships and persecutions persisted in teaching the necessity of baptism by immersion in a running stream; how they were called "Dunkers"—a German word meaning "dippers"—because of their way of baptism; how Mack was made their bishop and how nearly all of them emigrated to Pennsylvania early in the nineteenth century.

Of the members of the church in America at the present time more than half still dwell in Pennsylvania, mostly in the fertile agricultural districts of the interior. In Germantown, now a fashionable suburb of Philadelphia, where their first church still stands and where Bishop Mack is buried, there is only a small congregation. From time to time colonies have been transplanted to the western states.

Plain Life is Theirs

Being an agricultural people and living in isolated communities, they have maintained many of the peculiar customs of two centuries ago. They insist upon the utmost plainness in dress, jewelry, ribbons, neckties and all manner of adornment being considered an abomination. Like the Quakers, they refuse to sanction warfare, oaths, lawsuits or a paid clergy. The ministers are chosen from the congregations and continue their previous employment after ordination.

The Dunker men never wear a mustache. Full beards are common, but the upper lip is always clean shaven. This is necessary because of the custom of exchanging the "kiss of charity" at their religious services.

Their meeting houses are almost as devoid of ornament as their barns. Indeed, there are branches of the church that believe barns good

enough to serve the purpose of churches, and their religious services are held on the spacious threshing floor. Ordinarily, however, a plain brick meeting house is built near a river or creek, the site being chosen to facilitate baptisms.

The great event of the year in the Dunker congregation is the love feast. This service begins with feet washing, the members laying one another's feet, each sex for itself, according to what they believe to be the custom authorized by scripture. A meal follows, lamb or mutton stew usually being the principal dish. The religious kiss is then exchanged, the elder who presides kissing the older men and he in turn his neighbor, until the kiss has made the round of the men. The last member returns to the elder and kisses him. In the same way the women also kiss, but the elder in starting the ceremony merely shakes hands with one of the older sisters. The men and the women sit separately at all services. After the feast an exhortation is delivered and then communion is administered.

Long in America

The Dunkers and the Mennonites are the two principal sects among the German "plain people" who settled in America. In mode of worship and life they differ little, the principal distinction relating to baptism. The Dunkers require immersion three times in a flowing stream and permit only adults to be baptized. The Mennonites likewise refuse to baptize children, but they believe that sprinkling is the proper method of baptism and that the ceremony may be conducted in a stream or indoors. This slight difference gave rise to a notable controversy in Pennsylvania in the eighteenth century. A branch of the brethren, adopting monastic customs, established a community at Ephrata, Lancaster county, where the big cloister buildings still stand. Many learned men joined this brotherhood and they founded a printing press and published some notable works. The Mennonites of Pennsylvania engaged these learned brethren to translate and publish for them Von Bracht's "Mirror of Martyrs," a history of the martyrdom of the Mennonites issued originally in Dutch. The Dunkers printed this work in 1749. It comprised 1,200 folio pages and bibliophiles consider it the most remarkable literary attempt in America prior to the revolution.

But the brethren exceeded their instructions somewhat by placing in the book a copperplate frontispiece showing an allegorical religious scene in which there was a baptism. This baptism, moreover, was represented according to the brethren's method. When the book came out the Mennonites offered vigorous objections to the picture, and it was therefore removed from most of the books. The few in which it remained are treasured today by book collectors who chance to obtain them.

The attitude of the brethren toward the civil law of the land sometimes produces queer complications. In the matter of lawsuits they felt at first that they could not even defend themselves in court and thus they frequently became victims of injustice. Now, however, they have come to understand that they do no wrong if, when attacked, they endeavor to prove the righteousness of their cause. They will not begin a suit, but if one of their number is made defendant in legal proceedings he appears in court with his witnesses. Should the decision go against him he never appeals to a higher court, for he believes that would be engendering litigation.

Some years ago a member of the Church of the Brethren in the Perkiomen valley was expelled for some misconduct. He went before a rural justice of the peace and brought suit against the elder of the congregation for "damages to his spiritual life" and the justice awarded him \$100. Had the matter been appealed to court the proceedings would undoubtedly have been set aside because of irregularity, but the elder declined to take such a step. As he was unable to pay the sum awarded, a constable levied upon his property and sold enough of it to cover the amount of the judgment. Friends bought the goods and returned them to the elder.

Obeys the Law

Though they refuse to resort to the law, the Dunkers do not try to evade its requirements. One of the very few instances when a Dunker figured in a criminal case occurred in Montgomery county. A minister of the sect shot a rabbit on his farm, and subsequently learned that the rabbit season had closed a few days before. So he went to the nearest justice of the peace, made information against himself for violating the game laws and paid the fine.

The peculiar plain garb of the Dunkers has occasionally come in conflict with the law. Pennsylvania has a statute forbidding public school teachers to wear any "religious garb." This was passed to prevent the employment of sisters of Roman Catholic orders as teachers in public schools. The law, however, affected Dunker school teachers in Lancaster, York, Cumberland

and other counties, where this sect forms a large part of the population, for the little white caps which the women wear were construed to be a "religious garb." The members of the Earl township school board in Lancaster county are now under indictment for violating this law by permitting a young woman who wore the Dunker dress to serve as a teacher.

Innovations Not Popular

The Dunker practice of immersion was the cause of litigation in Frederick, Md. Cold weather is not permitted to interfere with this ceremony, and during the winter the ministers not infrequently find it necessary to break the thick ice that covers their baptistries before the immersion of converts can be conducted. A 17-year-old girl employed in the family of a Dunker elder near Frederick embraced the faith and arrangements were made for her immersion in January. Her parents, who were not members of the church, feared the plunge in the icy waters would injure the girl's health and they appealed to the court to prevent the proposed baptism. The court decided that as the girl was a minor she was under the control of her parents. It was finally agreed to postpone the baptism until the weather was warmer.

These various distinguishing traits produce topics for discussion at the general conference of the denomination. In spite of the precautions of the leaders the young people from time to time seek to introduce innovations, and these receive careful consideration at the conference. The use of lightning rods, telephones and automobiles and the insuring of lives and property were debated frequently and at great length, but all were eventually approved. Other questions pending are the propriety of organ music at worship and the payment of salaries to ministers. A few churches in large towns have adopted these daring innovations, though they have not yet been officially sanctioned.

The general conference resembles a great camp meeting. Most of the participants live in tents, and the meetings are held in a temporary tabernacle seating thousands. Members of the churches in the vicinity serve as cooks and waiters. Pennsylvania Germans, even when they have moved into other states, are noted for their culinary skill, and therefore the meals constitute one of the important features of the conference. Pies in wondrous variety appear on the table three times a day and it is on record that 10,000 to 12,000 pies are required for every conference meeting.