

Country doctor's interesting items

Written by Ann Middleton

Wednesday, 10 October 2012 08:16 -

Rupert Peyton, a Bossier Parish historian, submitted to The Bossier Banner-Progress a lengthy article for the paper's September 18, 1952 issue. The article told the story of Dr. Jonathan Singleton Cheshire, and of the record that he kept about his Northwest Louisiana patients and their care. The article will be presented in several installments, so I hope that you will read this column weekly to enjoy the full story.

"Jonathan Singleton Cheshire, M. D., wanted to leave something to his posterity. He had no wealth of consequence but he did write in a handsome Spenserian style, embellished by delicate shading that is almost a lost art to modern penmen. So Dr. Cheshire left a diary."

"During the latter years of his life Dr. Cheshire wrote some item each day in this record which he intended to pass on to his progeny of four sons and four daughters. With meticulous care and with flourishing pen, he put down the daily happenings on his farm and community where he resided near Sarepta, Webster Parish, La. Often he wrote of the weather, of the damage of drouth [sic], the perverseness of heavy rains, the problem of farm help and those little events so common to a north Louisiana farming community in the eighties and early nineties. Sometimes he mentioned his friends, his sons and daughters, their visits, church services at Old Moriah Primitive Baptist church where he and his good wife, Nancy Sandlin Cheshire, were devout communicants."

"He was a religious man who often gave vent to his thoughts as he pondered the great spiritual forces that so engulfed his soul. "Heaven Bless Him," "May the Good Lord Bless Him," were expressions oft repeated in this old manuscript."

"Although there were plaintive notes in his record, Dr. Cheshire seldom in his diary was critical of any man. Once he told of a tragedy, how a young man who had helped him shear his sheep, had been shot down in 'cold blood' by a rival for a young woman's affections. His heart poured out in sympathy for the dead youth, but he gave supplications for his slayer that he would eventually find the righteous path."

"Sometimes Dr. Cheshire bemoaned the fact that help was not available sufficiently to cultivate his acres when the rains came and the crops were grassy. Such feelings he recorded in his diary."

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“But strangely, though a country doctor whose practice ranged throughout Webster Parish and along the northern areas of Bossier and Claiborne, Dr. Cheshire seldom mentioned his professional experiences which were many. Those who later had the privilege of reading the diary wondered at this.”

“This mysterious omission from the good doctor’s diary had an answer, but it was not solved until sixty years after his death. The reason why Dr. Cheshire did not mention his professional work more in his diary was that this was recorded in another book—a secret one—which he decreed was for no other eyes but his own. For decades this book has lain in virtual obscurity. Few eyes ever looked upon its esoteric pages, and most of those of children who little realized their import...”

Next week you will have a look at the secret book and be able to read what good Dr. Cheshire had to say about many of his patients. If you are interested in finding out before then, please visit the Bossier Parish Library Historical Center.

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