Medical manners

Although Mr Lydgate and other physicians mentioned here have established the art of patient communication and, perhaps manipulation, the Yorkshire doctor in Howarth has clearly abandoned any such effort—one suspects that he had never acquired it.

In case one thought that overspecialisation was a modern failing, Dostoyevsky quickly disabuses us. In the same extract he describes the disarming directness of a medical student!

Henry Fielding, 1749, Tom Jones
To say the truth, every physician, almost, hath his favourite disease, to which he ascribes all the victories obtained over human nature. The gout, the rheumatism, the stone, the gravel, and the consumption, have all their several patrons in the faculty; and none more than the nervous fever, or the fever on the spirits.

Gustave Flaubert, 1865–7, Madame Bovary
When Dr Larivière was angry, the whole hospital quaked. His pupils revered him to the point of trying to imitate him in everything as soon as they set up in practice themselves.

Elizabeth Gaskell, 1857, The Life of Charlotte Brontë
When my husband had checked the effusion of blood with a strap that one of the bystanders unbound from his leg, he asked if a surgeon had been sent for.

"Yoi," was the answer; "But we dunna think he'll come."

"Why not?"

"He's owed, yo seen, and asthmatic, and it's up-hill."

My husband, taking a boy for his guide, drove as fast as he could to the surgeon's house, which was about three-quarters of a mile off, and met the surn of the wounded lad leaving it.

"Is he coming?" inquired my husband.

"Well, he didna say he woulda come."

"But tell him the lad may blee to death."

"I did."

"And what did he say?"

"Why, only 'D -- n him; what do I care?"

George Eliot, 1858, Scenes of clerical life
They had both been long established in Milby, and as each had a sufficient practice, there was no very malignant rivalry between them; on the contrary, they had that sort of friendly contempt for each other which is always conducive to a good understanding between professional men; and when any new surgeon attempted in an ill-advised hour, to settle himself in the town, it was strikingly demonstrated how slight and trivial are theoretical differences compared with the broad basis of common human feeling.

Charles Dickens, 1859, A Tale of Two Cities
Doctors who made great fortunes out of dainty remedies for imaginary disorders that never existed smiled upon their coty patients in the ante-chambers of monseigneur.

George Eliot, 1871, Middlemarch
Mr Lydgate had the medical accomplishment of looking perfectly grave whatever nonsense was talked to him and his dark steady eyes gave him impressiveness as a listener.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, 1880, The brothers Karamazov
I happened to come across a very enthusiastic little medical student. "You may die," he told me, "but at least you'll have a very good idea of what illness you're dying of!" And, then again, the way they have of sending you to specialists. "We can only diagnose your diseases," they tell you. "You'd better go to such and such a specialist and he'll be sure to cure you." I tell you the old-fashioned doctor who used to cure you of all illnesses has quite disappeared. Now there are only specialists and they all advertise in the papers. If there's something wrong with your nose, they will send you to Paris: There's a European specialist there who cures noses. You go to Paris, he examines your nose. "I'm sorry," he tells you, "I can only cure your right nostril, for I don't cure left nostrils, it's not my specialty. You'd better go to Vienna. There you'll find a special specialist who will cure your left nostril."

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