PART I

"The history of the world is the biography of great men."

—Thomas Carlyle.
CHAPTER I

MEDICAL ADVENTURES 1528—1687

The biographies of the great doctors of Texas cannot be written without recording Texas history. While they have never been given the historical credit due them as medical and surgical men, they have always been idealized as great statesmen, diplomats and soldiers. Their education, their good, logical minds, their tender sympathetic natures, along with the adventurous spirit that brought them to Texas, naturally made them leaders in various activities of life.

As for the practice of medicine and surgery: with all their knowledge and skill, the pioneer doctors could not confine their activities to the practice of medicine alone, when often there was no medicine to be had; and in surgery, many times they had to make their own instruments. Their resourcefulness in obtaining remedies and in using the materials at hand in many instances amounts almost to magic, or, shall we say, Divine intuition.

In writing the biographies of persons whom one has never seen or conversed with, an author is very prone to color the subject of his biography with imagined or desired characteristics. To avoid this tendency, the writer shall, whenever possible, quote the doctors and surgeons of Texas in their own words. Thus in many instances in this book, the reader may feel, as the writer has, that he has really talked with some of the early doctors of Texas.

It is an interesting problem to find just when Texas history begins. The French claim that La Salle, in the name of Louis XIV, took possession of the whole country from the Mississippi to the Rio Grande in 1685. Spanish historians claim that De Soto in 1544, in the name of the King of Spain, took possession of all the country both east and west of the Father of Waters. The Spanish adventurers, Cabeza de Vaca and Coronado the Conquistador, had both crossed Tejas, or Texas, before this time.
American historians know that way beyond these recorded times the real Americans, our Indians, had lived in Texas and had known a type of civilization that we are just learning to respect. There are many types of Indians, just as there are many types of other nationalities. The two types that are most outstanding are the Pueblo Indians and the nomads, or roving type. The Spanish on their first journey found the Pueblo Indians living in their quaint adobe houses, grouped in little villages and surrounded by high, thick, adobe walls. They were peaceful, agricultural people and lived in groups to protect one another from the savage tribes who stole and killed for their daily bread. The cliff dwellers of New Mexico, according to some authorities, were of this same type of Indians and made their habitation in the sides of the high sandstone cliffs overlooking the fertile valleys which they cultivated. They climbed high ladders to their homes, then pulled their ladders up after them to keep out their enemies. The Indian Medicine Man was a very important person among both the Pueblos and the Cliff Dwellers.

As Texas and New Mexico were all in the same province, we must acknowledge that our first Texas doctors were really the Indian Medicine, or Mystery, men. The nomadic tribes also had their medicine men and we shall later relate several incidents where the early Texas Anglo-Saxon doctors really studied medicine under some of these Indians. Many medicines and medical plants were made known to the white man by the Indians, both male and female practicing this art. New England had an Indian doctor, Joe Pye, who was a great help in colonization times by his knowledge of native herbs and roots. The "Joe Pye Weed"—campion—purpureum—is named for him. To the aborigines of America is ascribed the knowledge of the uses of quinine, ipecacuanha, cocaine and curari, podalphylin (may apple), and belladonna (night shade).

Many old newspapers contain articles written of early medicine in Texas and signed "Gid.". This was the nom de plume of Dr. Gideon Lincecum of Long Point, Washington County, whose interesting biography is given later in this volume.

Dr. Lincecum had lived many years with the Choctaw
Indians and had made a close study of Indian remedies. We quote him:

"Nature has sowed the remedies for Texas diseases in Texas soil and I have put myself to the trouble to familiarize myself with them. You can not imagine how grand I feel, and with what confidence I walk into God’s interminable botanic garden and help myself to the pure, fresh, efficient remedies when I need them. Admittance always free, labels very plain and there are no old medicines wrapped up in newspapers to fool the sick man within that grand drug store."

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DE VACA

It has been surprising but vastly interesting to find that the first record of a white man in Texas carries with it the experiences of a medicine man. We find this record in "The Narrative of Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca" printed first in 1542—afterward printed and translated in many languages.

De Vaca was one of the six hundred colonists and soldiers who sailed from Spain, June 17, 1527, with Pamfilo de Narvaez to conquer and colonize the country between Rio de las Palmas in eastern Mexico (probably one of the streams that empties into the Gulf of Mexico near Tampa) and Florida.

The adventurers met with too many hardships to relate here, the most important being one of our terrible hurricanes off the coast of Cuba.

After reaching the Florida coast, dissensions arose and the party divided into groups. De Vaca, with two Spaniards—Andres Dorantes de Carranca and Captain Alonzo del Castillo Maldonado, the son of a doctor—and Estevanico, a blackamoor of Azamor and a slave of Dorantes, were the only survivors of the expedition who ever returned to a civilized community.

They crossed the Mississippi River in small crude boats fourteen years before De Soto discovered it. Landing on an island which they called Malhado—Island of Mis-
fortune—(probably Galveston or Velasco Island) they became slaves to the Indians who inhabited these regions. We will let De Vaca tell his own story in the following extracts from his "Relacion":

"On an island of which I have spoken they wished to make us physicians without examination or inquiring for diplomas. They cure by blowing upon the sick and with that breath and imposing of hands they cast out infirmity. They ordered that we also should do this and be of some use to them in some way. We laughed at what they did, telling them it was folly, that we knew not how to heal. In consequence they withheld food from us until we should practice what they required.

"Seeing our persistence, an Indian told me that I knew not what I uttered in saying that what he knew availed nothing; that stones and other matters growing about in the fields have virtue and that passing a pebble along the stomach would take away pain and restore health, and certainly, then, we who were extraordinary men must possess power and efficacy over all other things. At last, finding ourselves in great want, we were constrained to obey; but not without fear, lest we should be blamed for any failure or success.

"Their custom is on finding themselves sick to send for a physician and after he has applied the cure they give him not only all they have, but seek among their relatives for more to give.

"The practitioner scarifies over the seat of pain and then sucks about the wound. They make cauteries with fire, a remedy among them of high repute, which I tried myself, and found benefit from it. They afterwards blow on the spot and having finished, the patient considers that he is relieved.

"Our method was to bless the sick, breathing upon them, and recite a Pater-noster and an Ave-Maria, praying with all earnestness to God our Lord that He would give health and influence them to make us some good return. In His clemency He willed that all those for whom we supplicated should tell the others that they were sound and in health, directly after we made the sign of the blessed cross over them."
“For this the Indians treated us kindly; they deprived themselves of food that they might give to us, and presented us with skins and some trifles.

“So protracted was the hunger we there experienced that many times I was three days without eating. The natives also endured as much, and it appeared to me impossible that life could be so prolonged, although afterward I found myself in greater hunger and necessity, which I shall speak of farther on.”

He relates how they went soon to the other side of the island to eat oysters and remained until April. The natives all went without clothes except the women, who covered a part of their bodies with a wool that grew on the trees. (Spanish moss.)

After living on or near the island for six years “I set to trafficking and strove to make my employment profitable in the ways I could best continue and by that means I got food and good treatment. The Indians would beg me to go from one quarter to another for things of which they have need, for, in consequence of incessant hostilities, they cannot traverse the country nor make many exchanges. With my merchandise and trade I went into the interior as far as I pleased and traveled along the coast forty or fifty leagues. The principal wares were cones and other pieces of sea snail, conchs used for cutting and fruit like a bean of the highest value among them, which they used as a medicine and employ in their dances and festivities. Among other matters were sea-beads. Such were what I carried into the interior; and in barter I got and brought back skins, ochre with which they rub and color the face, hard cones of which to make arrows, sinews, cement and flint for the heads, and tassels of the hair of deer that by dyeing they make red. . . .

“I was in this country nearly six years, alone among the Indians, and naked like them.”

Through a friendly Indian, De Vaca learned of the abode of Dorantes and Castillo and the negro Estevancio and made his way to them. After joining his friends the four of them started their journey across Texas, or New Spain, to reach the land of Christians near the South Sea (Pacific Ocean). They waited until the season when the
Indians went to another part of the country to eat prickly pears. This fruit was the main staff of life for about three months of the year, and the time was looked forward to with great eagerness.

De Vaca, Dorantes, Castillo and Estevanico journeyed part of the way with the Indians, but finally left secretly and from then on went from tribe to tribe, an Indian scout usually going ahead to the next village to announce the arrival of the “children of the sun” as the Indians called them, believing them to be demi-gods and insisting on their treating the sick. This they did reluctantly. De Vaca says: “Many Indians came that Castillo might cure them. Each offered his bow and arrow which Castillo received. At sunset he blessed them, commending them to God our Lord, and we all prayed to Him the best we could to send health; for that He knew there was no other means than through Him by which this people would aid us, so we could come forth from this unhappy existence. He bestowed it so mercifully that the morning having come, all got up well and sound and were as strong as though they never had a disorder. It caused great admiration and inclined us to render many thanks to God our Lord, whose goodness we now clearly beheld.”

De Vaca and his comrades had similar experiences in all the villages through which they passed, and there were many of them. He says they were sometimes followed by as many as three thousand.

The following incident is probably the first surgical case recorded in American history, and while not performed by an orthodox surgeon, it is nevertheless quite interesting.

“They fetched a man to me and stated that a long time since he had been wounded by an arrow in the right shoulder, and that the point of the shaft was lodged above his heart, which, he said, gave him much pain, and in consequence he was always sick. Probing the wound I felt the arrow head, and found it had passed through the cartilage. With a knife I carried I opened the breast to the place and saw the point was aslant and troublesome to take out. I continued to cut and putting in the point of the knife at last with great difficulty I drew the head forth. It was very large. With a bone of a deer and by
virtue of my calling, I made two stitches that threw the blood over me, and with hair from a skin I staunched the flow. They asked me for the arrow head after I had taken it out which I gave, when the whole town came to look at it. They sent it into the back country that the people there might view it. In consequence of this operation they had many customary dances and festivities. The next day I cut the stitches and the Indian was well.”

De Vaca and his companions finally reached the Christians in a Spanish settlement near the South Sea. They went from there back to Spain, where De Vaca died in 1557.

CORONADO

De Vaca’s wonderful experiences were much talked of in both Old and New Spain.

Shortly after his return, Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, a gentleman from Salamanca, was appointed Governor of this newly discovered province. He immediately formed a large party of gentlemen, slaves and Indians to visit and establish his new province. He was especially interested in the seven cities of Cibalo, said to have been so rich in gold, silver and turquoise.

His adventures, led by the negro Estevancio, sometimes called Stephen, and Friar Marco are a separate history, and one fabled in story and song. We are interested in the fact that one of his companions, Pedro Castanado, in his account of the “Journeys of Coronado,” mentions an instance where a physician and surgeon was doctoring the Governor General, so they must have had a medicine man in the party. Several times he says that poisoned arrow wounds were treated most successfully by applying quince juice, which was provided and carried on the journey for that purpose.

In speaking of the customs and habits of the Querechos or Tejas Indians, he says: “When they open the belly of a cow (buffalo) they squeeze out the chewed grass and drink the juice that remains behind because they say that this contains the essence of the stomach.” Perhaps our knowledge of the essence of pepsin was derived from this source.
LIOTOT

The next Caucasian doctor on Texas soil of whom we have any record, was the French surgeon Liotot, who was one of the adventurers accompanying La Salle. According to the story of Joutel, one of the surviving members of this ill-fated party, on July 24th, 1684, La Salle made his second expedition to American shores on his search for the mouth of the Mississippi River. He was given a fleet of four vessels by Louis XIV and 238 men, of varied types who started with him on this great adventure. Among them was Surgeon Liotot who was subsidized by the King to care for the health of the party. La Salle was made commander of the party, but Captain Beaujean was in command of the fleet. Dissension soon arose over this division of authority, and when the party landed at Matagorda Bay, instead of Louisiana, the land previously discovered by La Salle and named for his sovereign, there was great discord in the company. A camp was made on the shores of Matagorda Bay and named Fort St. Louis. Here they lived and traded with the Indians. Many trips were made along our gulf shores in search of the mouth of the great river.

In January, 1687, food being scarce, a party was sent out to find some buffalo meat that La Salle had cached in a hollow tree near the mouth of the Trinity River. The meat was found decayed, but they soon sighted and killed two more buffaloes. Being hungry and desperate, an argument arose over whether they should eat their meat then or travel back to the fort with it. Two messengers sent by La Salle to see what had become of the first party, on their arrival were most inhumanly murdered by Liotot, the surgeon, who used an ax on the tired men as they slept after their journey. La Salle soon followed to see what had happened to his men, and he was shot from ambush by Duhaut, one of the malcontents who had been plotting such an act for months. Liotot was a witness and acquiesced in this great tragedy—the untimely end of one of the greatest adventurers that history records. Retribution was near, for the murderers soon received the same treatment from some of their fellows.

On their arrival at camp, they found about twenty savage Indians who had joined forces with some of the
deserters from La Salle's party. A general quarrel arose over the division of axes and knives, and Liotot was among those killed.

Some of the surviving members of the party cast their lot with the Indians; others wandered for months through the wilderness of a new land, finally coming to civilization at a fort that La Salle had built on his first expedition at the mouth of the Arkansas River.

Thus ends a record of the first doctor or surgeon on Texas soil. Nothing to his credit can be recorded, but we must remember that at this period surgery was often practiced by a very low type of barber, and the razor was the instrument commonly used. The bishops and priests were the learned men, having access to the books of the day. They either treated the sick themselves or delegated the men who should, and surgery was left to the barbers. Then, too, we must consider what type of man would start on such an expedition and before we judge too harshly, wonder what we would do under such conditions —disappointed in their adventure, hungry, cold, thousands of miles away from their home, and across an angry sea.