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DIARY OF A CANADIAN COUNTRY PHYSICIAN: JONATHAN WOOLVERTON (1811–1883)

by

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THE WOOLVERTON name has a long history in England, and several variant spellings are recorded in the Domesday book. In 1682 Charles Woolverton, a Staffordshire Quaker, migrated from Dorchester, England, to America. He was Jonathan's great-great-grandfather. Jonathan's father, Dennis, came to The Forty¹ with his family from New Jersey in 1798, a few years after the original influx of United Empire Loyalists to the area.

Jonathan was born on 22 February 1811, just five years before The Forty was renamed Grimsby. After receiving his elementary education in Grimsby he studied medicine for one year in Montreal, followed by a year at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, receiving his medical degree in 1834. Jonathan then returned to Grimsby to practise. In 1836 he went back to Philadelphia and married Miss Emeline Bergmen. Although he had planned at one time to practise in York (now Toronto) he remained in Grimsby, practising his profession for forty-nine years. Six of his children reached maturity.

The diary begins in 1832, continuing intermittently to the final entry in 1862. I have abridged the diary somewhat, principally by deleting certain lengthy passages of a religious nature. I have not altered spelling or punctuation; occasional insertions to the text are identified by square brackets.

Dr. Jonathan Woolverton wrote on the back page of his diary the following history of his family.

Dennis Woolverton was born in the year 1709 and died 1774, aged sixty-five years. Elizabeth, his wife (formerly Elizabeth Pettit) was born in the year 1713, and died 1785, aged seventy-two years. She was an aunt of old John Pettit, Esq. of this place.

The father of Dennis was Charles Woolverton by profession a Quaker. He wrote some books in favour of his tenets as I have been informed by my grandfather, Jonathan Woolverton (deceased). I have no direct evidence of the time in which he came to America from England, his native place, but suppose it probable that he came out with or shortly after William Penn. He settled in the state of Pennsylvania where I presume he is buried but I cannot learn the precise place. His children afterwards removed to the state of New Jersey, where graves of the above mentioned persons are to be found in what is called the Kingwood burying place.

Written 12 October 1837, by Jonathan Woolverton, son of Dennis Woolverton, son of Jonathan Woolverton, son of Dennis Woolverton, son of Charles Woolverton, son of . . . Adam.

Woolverton's professional education began in October 1832, in Montreal. Abbott states that in 1832 the Faculty of Medicine of McGill University was the only place in

¹ So-called because the first settlement grew around a stream flowing into Lake Ontario. The mouth of the stream was roughly forty miles from the Niagara River where the original settlers, United Empire Loyalists, crossed from the newly founded United States of America into Canada. 'The Forty' became 'Grimsby' in 1816.

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Montreal for English-speaking students to study medicine,² so we must assume that Jonathan attended there. University records, however, are incomplete, and do not confirm Jonathan's attendance. He is disappointingly terse about his medical experiences in Montreal. There is a single entry dated 22 December 1832:

Vacation commenced this day, so far as yet I have spent my time very agreeably in the attendance upon the lectures and pursuit of my studies. The first lecture is at 8 o'clock in the morning, Anatomy. Second at 11, Chemistry. At 12 visit the Hospital, at 2 practice of Physic, at 3 Midwifery.

Most of the Montreal entries are of a highly evangelical nature, and are therefore omitted. The diary continues:

May 4th. This day got home, found my friends in reasonably good health; a blessing which I have enjoyed having the whole of my absence but this was not the case with Mr. Cameron for he had a severe attack of ophthalmy and also of the congestive typhus.

May 21st. This day started for York [now Toronto] accompanied by Allen Nixon, saw many of my old friends, Mary, also and am happy to find that she is so contented. [Mary, his sister, married John Campbell, March, 1832.] I purchased some of the late Dr. Black's books & Medicine; and have thought it best with the permission of Dr. Rolph³ to reside at home during the summer.

This season during harvest, I was attacked with an acute ophthalmy, caused by bathing, after immoderate exertion, and as my eyes were the weakest part, the blood was praeter-naturally determined thither and thus they became the source of violent inflammation. Shortly before this I had commenced the study of the French Language and was also pursuing the Latin under the tuition of a Mr. Kockle an accomplished classical scholar. But now my plans were all frustrated. The inflammation continued for some time and, after it had in some measure subsided I imprudently took a tour to Dumfries when all the symptoms returned and were renewed with more violence than ever, in consequence of which I was confined to my room the greater part of the fall.

During my solitary moments I was oft disposed to repine when reflecting upon my situation. Secluded from the light and the pleasing scenes of the natural world, the disease tedious, protracted and intense, with little hopes of its terminating favourably to vision, my time precious, my studies urgent, the session fast approaching; these and many other things I say would often ruffle my mind and tempt me to repine at my lot; but when I remembered that all things were under the direction and guidance of a just, wise, and merciful God, my murmuring ceased. . . .

October 21st. This day left home for the purpose of attending lectures the ensuing session in Philadelphia . . . and arrived at Aunt Hannah's [Hannah, daughter of Jonathan Woolverton Sr. married Col. Jonathan Potter of Pottersville, New York] on Friday morning the 1st day of November. . . .

My late arrival at my Aunt's made it impracticable to stop long with her. Accordingly on Monday, the 4th of November (the day the session commenced) I set out with Samuel, His wife and Mary to visit our relatives in Kingwood and from thence to proceed as soon as

² This school began as the Montreal Medical Institution in 1822; in 1829 it became the Faculty of Medicine of McGill University, which conferred its first degree in 1833. (Maude E. Abbott, *History of Medicine in the Province of Quebec*, Toronto, Macmillan, 1931, p. 66.)

³ John Rolph (1793–1870) was one of the most fascinating of Canada's nineteenth-century constellation of physicians who were genuine characters as well. Rolph studied law and medicine concurrently at Cambridge. At various times after coming to live in Ontario he practised both professions. The first medical school in Ontario was Rolph's, started in 1824 in St. Thomas. In 1837 Rolph was one of the heads of an insurrection against the government; when the revolt collapsed ignominiously, he escaped to the New York state with a price of £500 on his head. Six years later the ban was lifted, and he returned to make a distinguished career as a medical educator.

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practicable to Philadelphia . . . We found them all enjoying very good health. . . . I took a Hack for Trenton from thence on Thursday the 7th by rail-road and steam-boat to the great city of Philadelphia. My first business was to find out Mrs. Blackwell's boarding house, as I had learned when I was in Jersey that she was living in the city at the corner of Wood and third streets engaged in the above business. After a little search I found her out; she appeared to be much pleased in meeting with me, as also was I myself in finding a friend so kind in a distant land. . . .

For a while I was considerably perplexed to find out the residence of the Dean of the Medical Faculty, being wholly unacquainted with the location of the university or any person belonging to it—upon visiting Daniel Bray's and making known my perplexity he immediately pointed out the place and sent a young man to conduct me thither; viz at the SW corner of Spruce and 9th Streets—Dr. Horner.⁴ Here I obtained information relative to the residence of the different Professors; in a day or two I obtained all my tickets and attended regularly every day to the whole of the lectures; delivered in the following manner 1st—Lecture on Materia Medica, Dr. Coxe⁵ at 9 o'clock A.M. 2nd—on surgery, Dr. Gibson⁶ 10 o'clock. 3rd.—on Practice of physic, Dr. Chapman,⁷ 11 o.c. 4th—on Chemistry, Dr. Hare⁸ 12 o'clock. 5th. on Anatomy, Dr. Horner 1 o'clock p.m. 6—on Midwifery, Dr. Dewees,⁹ half past 3 o'clock P.M. On Monday, Wednesday & Friday evenings, at 7 o'clock Dr. Hopkins adjunct Professor of Anatomy, and from 8 to 10 in the evening practical Anatomy. On Wednesdays and Saturdays visit the Alms House and have Clinical lectures on the practice of Physic and Surgery By Drs. Jackson,¹⁰ Gibson, Hodge, and Barton. Also in the afternoon of those days at 3 o'clock Dr. Jackson on the Institutes and Practice of Medicine.

Notwithstanding the distance from Mrs. Blackwell's Boarding House to the University, which is situated in 9th street below Market, is more than a mile, I chose still to stop with her although I had to walk back and forth twice or thrice a day. 1st. because I liked her as a mistress, 2nd. I did not wish to form new acquaintances & 3rd. she was more reasonable in her charges. My time now passed along very agreeably without anything particularly occurring to disturb my peace, excepting that my eyes troubled me considerably and retarded my studies. I applied to Dr. Chapman and Physic was ordered, to restrain from study for

⁴ William E. Horner (1793–1853), a Virginian, graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1814. After service on the Niagara frontier in the War of 1812–15, he returned to Philadelphia and work in his chosen field of anatomy. In 1820 he was made adjunct professor of anatomy, and was appointed professor in 1831. Horner seems to have been one of the first medical men in the U.S.A. to make a practical use of the microscope. (H. A. Kelly, *A Cyclopaedia of American Medical Biography*, Vol. II, Philadelphia, W. B. Saunders, 1912, pp. 7–11.)

⁵ John Redman Coxe (1773–1863) studied medicine at Edinburgh and under Benjamin Rush, obtaining his degree from the University of Pennsylvania. After 1819 he held the Chair of Materia Medica and Pharmacy in the Medical Department of the University of Pennsylvania. Coxe was a vigorous proponent of vaccination; he also took an active role as a medical editor and an author. (T. G. Morton, and F. Woodbury, *The History of the Pennsylvania Hospital, 1751–1895*, Philadelphia, Times Printing House, 1895, pp. 498–99.)

⁶ William Gibson (1788–1868) assumed the Chair in Surgery at the University of Pennsylvania in 1819 after holding the same position at the University of Maryland for eight years. He was vigorously active in the anti-tobacco crusade, an activity which must have been of interest to Woolverton, although no mention of this occurs in his diary. (Kelly, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 339–40.)

⁷ Nathaniel Chapman (1780–1853) was a distinguished Philadelphia physician, founder of the *American Journal of the Medical Sciences* in 1820, and first president of the American Medical Association (1847–48). He joined the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania in 1813, accepting the Chair of Materia Medica; three years later, on the death of Benjamin Smith Barton, Chapman assumed Barton's Chair of the Theory and Practice of Medicine, one of the most influential medical positions in America. (Kelly, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 171–72.)

⁸ Robert Hare (1781–1858) was called to the Chair of Chemistry and Natural Philosophy at Pennsylvania University in 1819. (Ibid., p. 384.)

⁹ William Potts Dewees (1767–1841) was professor of midwifery for many years, ' . . . though in 1834 he had an apoplectic attack and the next year had to resign his professorship.' Thus Woolverton was among the last group of students taught by Dewees. (Ibid., pp. 241–42.)

¹⁰ Samuel Jackson (1790–1872) became Professor of Materia Medica in the College of Pharmacy in 1821; in 1827 he became the assistant of Nathaniel Chapman in the latter's work as Professor of the Institutes of Medicine and Practice of Medicine. Jackson delivered the course on the Institutes, which was roughly synonymous with what we now call physiology. (Kelly, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 35–36.)

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a time, be bled both locally and generally and blistered. After following this advice for a time and having several bleedings, a few ounces each time, I relinquished this plan, and either suffered the bleeder or myself to abstract blood almost ad deliquim animi, and with manifest advantage.

On my way to this place I purchased in New York a cloak, price \$10.50, but before the winter was over it happened to fall into the hands of some person who I suppose thought they had a better right to it than I had, at least they took the liberty of carrying it off without my leave; several other students also lost their cloaks.

The attendance upon the lectures being very expensive, amounting to about 140 dollars exclusive of boarding, there being 6 lectures of 20 dollars each, and one of 10 dollars, Alms house and library \$10 more and my funds being in some measure limited, I did not nor had I any inclination to spend either my money or my time unnecessarily. I visited but little & formed acquaintances with but a few of the students, my object was not to make a show but simply to acquire useful knowledge; and this while many were boasting of their intentions and calculating much upon their future prospects, their ability to pass an examination etc. It was my aim to keep the 'noiseless tenor of my ways' and not to cry until I got out of the woods. . . .

The weakness of my eyes proved the greatest obstacle to the proper prosecutions of my intentions, they were more particularly troublesome to me in writing my Thesis¹¹ which I found very difficult to accomplish, nor did I finish it until the 10th of March, the day upon which they were all required to be put in. My examination did not take place until the 19th. I passed without much difficulty or agitation with the exception of a little confusion from the Professor of Obstetrics.

During my stay in the city I visited most of the places of Public resort that were either interesting or amusing, such as the Museum, the Navy yard, Fairmount, the Glass Works in Kensington, the Monument erected by the Quakers in the place where the Oak Tree stood, under which William Penn made a treaty with the Indians in 1682, the Jewish Synagogue, the deaf and dumb asylum etc. But from a firm conviction of the deleterious influence upon the minds and morals of men, as well as from their tendency to lead to evils of grossest kind I did not attend the Theatre stall; and I am now very glad that I have been prevented from gratifying a vain desire at the expense of reputation and a good conscience. . . .

To bid adieu to Philadelphia I may here add that I became acquainted with one (who if I may judge from the short acquaintance which I had with her) that I cannot better describe than in the words which Young applies to his Narcissa; 'Sweet Harmonist! and beautiful as sweet! And young as beautiful! And soft as young! and gay as soft! And innocent as gay! And happy (if aught happy here) as good!'

On the 22nd of March I left Philadelphia, after excusing myself to the Faculty for being absent from the Commencement in order that I might arrive in time to obtain my license for practicing in the Province of Upper Canada. My reasons were considered eligible, and accordingly permission was granted to be absent. After leaving an order to obtain my Diploma when it should be issued with direction to send it to my Aunts in Jersey with Mr. Blackwell, I set out, it was on Saturday a cold and blustering day I think as I ever experienced and being obliged to ride a great part of the way on the outside of the coach against a strong head wind sweeping down the river I suffered extremely from the cold. . . .

On Wednesday the 2nd, of April I set out for home. Jonathan Potter took me to the white house, from thence I took the stage and arrived at Easton the same evening about midnight, here I had to stay until Friday morning as there was no stage on Thursday Thence we went to Rochester . . . in this place I put up at the Rochester House which is carried on upon the principle of temperance, and I think I can truly say that I never saw a house for public resort carried on with so much decency regularity and order. It was the first temperance I had ever put up at, and I think when I can find them I shall never trouble any other. I

¹¹ The title of this thesis was, not surprisingly, 'Ophthalmia'. Unfortunately it does not seem to have been published, and no copy has been found.

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had heard before I came to this place that the steam boat was plying from this place to Toronto, if so I intended to go directly over, as it was now Tuesday of the same week in which the board was sitting in Toronto; but I found the boat had not yet commenced her trips nor would not for some time, I therefore began to think that it would be vain for me to think of getting to Toronto in time for an examination that session if I must go thither by land, and another thing I did not wish to let my friends know that I intended to offer myself as I could not endure the thoughts of being rejected, much less of their knowing it. I had, however, one hope remaining, and that was that the Canada steamer might have commenced her trips. I therefore took the stage on Wednesday morning and came upon the ridge road to Lewiston, a distance of 80 miles, and from thence I went to Youngstown the same evening where I staid over night, on Thursday morning I crossed the river and went to Mr. Oakley's where I stopped until time for the steamboat to come in. I then went to the wharf but found she had not come and was not much expected on account of the violence of the winds; here I was again put to my wits end. What to do I knew not, the stage had gone and left me, the boat did not come and the week was fast hastening away, and the probability was that if I waited another day for the boat it would again disappoint me, or if not, I might not by arriving so late in the week be admitted to an examination, or what would be worse than all (my mind being in such a confused state) if admitted, I might not pass. . . .

I now saw that there was bare time and that was all, being determined however to risk my fortune, I waited until Friday for the boat. It came, I crossed over, put up at the Ontario House, my mind in a state of much suspense; on Saturday morning I repaired to Dr. Rolph's house, found that only one candidate remained to be examined, viz. Mr. Blackwell,¹³ and that the Board did not meet until 6 o'clock P.M. I made known my intentions to the Doctor he examined me a little, gave me some books to run over to refresh my memory, in the evening I went to be examined, and be assured short as time is, I was glad when the hour was passed. I however gave satisfaction and consequently obtained my license.¹³ Thus, within less than three years from my commencing the study of my profession I had the good fortune to obtain my Degree of Doctor in Medicine from the University of Pennsylvania, and my license for practicing in the Province of Upper Canada. I stopped over Sunday in Toronto, and on Monday took the Constitution 2 O'Clock P.M. for Hamilton, from thence took the stage home where I arrived about 4 O'Clock in the morning. I found my friends in tolerably good health and much pleased on account of my safe arrival and good success of my journey.

During the past summer I have ever had it in contemplation and it has been my intention to go to Toronto, but I have found 'procrastination to be the thief of time.' I got into Practice and found it difficult to leave, I have had diseases of various kinds to treat, as well as many cases of a very serious nature, I have had the good fortune to see the most of them reinstated in health. There are however a few exceptions, John Moore lost his youngest child with the Dysentery or rather it may be termed bloody flux, this disease was epidemic among the small children upon the flat and of the most fatal tendency; not one of them I believe that had this form of the disease recovered, but the little patients after enduring much pain and distress for several days, died in great agony and convulsions, some were taken off as early as the third day, others that had it in a less severe form lingered on for nearly a fortnight. There were nine or ten children that died, at least it was said that there was not another child under 2 years old remaining upon the flat; many of these I attended with Dr. Goodman;¹⁴

¹³ John Harrison Blackwell (d. 1867) was born in New Jersey, and received his M.D. from the University of Pennsylvania in 1829. He practised in Ontario from 1834, when he obtained his licence. until his death in 1867. For the last forty years of his life he was in Drummondville or Lundy's Lane, (W. Canniff, *The Medical Profession in Upper Canada, 1783-1850*, Toronto, William Briggs, 1894, p. 256.)

¹³ 'April, 1834—Present: Widmer, Deihl, King and Rolph. Adolphus Williams of Gore District, G. H. Park, Charles Rolls, John Harrison Blackwell, and Jonathan Woolverton received certificates to practise. Five candidates were rejected.' (Canniff, *op. cit.*, p. 77.)

¹⁴ Henry Riggs Goodman, of Grimsby, passed his examination before the Medical Board in April, 1842 (*ibid.*, p. 177). Although we know very little about Goodman, we do know from this

the first indication of the child being attacked with this disease would be its passing pure blood, or blood mixed with slime from its bowels; the child would, however, often be quite playful for perhaps 12 hours after this symptom first appeared. It would then become often quite stupid and seem oppressed, loathe food, the stomach so irritated that it would generally reject both food and medicine; the passages from the bowels would now be so frequent that the child must be changed every few minutes, and if the blood stools were occasionally intermitted by those induced by medicine, yet as soon as the action of the purgative had subsided they would return with equal or greater violence than before; thus the bowels from the extent and violence of the disease becoming unfit to perform their function and the strength of the child being worn out, the little sufferer would sink in the arms of death. The disease was treated with purgatives, astringents, sedatives, alteratives, vermifuges, counter irritants, antiseptics, etc.; from a consideration of them all, and from the nature of the disease I should be inclined to treat such cases should they again fall under my charge in the following manner. Upon the first coming on of the disease, give a mild Emetic of Ipecac; to cleanse the stomach, and obviate if possible the irritability of this organ; after this exhibit a large dose of calomel to open the bowels; when the operation of the calomel was over, I would give antiseptics, and the best perhaps that we can exhibit is the burnt cork, as it not only answers all the ends of the common charcoal, but from its levity and pliability must be very congenial to the bowels; what would give us the most reason to expect beneficial results from the employment of these antiputrescent substances is that the blood which they void by stool appears to be in a dissolved, putrescent state, and after death takes place, the body in a few hours becomes gangrenous, and runs shortly into putrefaction. As the liver appears also to be disordered, I would give also in conjunction with the antiseptics, small doses of an alterative medicine in combination with opium.

Samuel S. Moore also lost his youngest Child by Hydrocephalus, it was ill for about ten days. It was always a weakly child. During its illness it was remarkable irritable, the bowels were obstinately costive, the secretion of the kidneys were almost wholly arrested, the pulse for about a week before it died was irregular and intermittent, the least motion particularly of the head caused much distress; the light was very offensive, consequently it, for the most part, kept its eyes closed; the stomach was very irritable rejecting for the most part both food and medicine and the child laid the greater part of its time in a stupid or comatose state with occasional startlings; towards the last the pupils became much dilated, the eyes put on a glassy appearance, and rolled upwards in their sockets; the air passages appeared to be entirely clogged up with a thick tenacious phlegm, so that the breathing for a time would be wholly arrested, during which time the countenance would become of a ghastly appearance, the eyes stared open and fixed in their sockets, the hands clenched, and in short every indication of agony was present. These fits continued to return at intervals longer or shorter for about 12 hours before death; finally the tragic scene was closed by a nervous convulsion and violent twitching of one side of the face and whole body, it was the left side. I suppose therefore that the principal seat of the effusion was the right ventricle of the brain, and perhaps also its base. Blisters, tort ointment [*sic*], mercurial ointment, drastic purgatives were the remedial measures.

I attended 3 or 4 of Peter Mitchel's children labouring under scarlatina, they passed through the fever very well, became quite smart so that I left them, but owing to want of proper food and clothing, together with an impure and tainted atmosphere in the hovel in which they lived they became debilitated, or rather did not regain the proper tone of their systems in consequence of which dropsical symptoms set in, and when I was again called in to see them, which was but a short time before death, a general anasarca had pervaded the whole body, and they were entirely out of the reach of medicine.

diary that he was in practice, in Grimsby, at least eight years before receiving his licence. This fact illustrates one of the problems of regulating the medical profession at this time; although a board of licensure existed, it was difficult or impossible to eliminate unlicensed practitioners—partly because some of the unlicensed were highly qualified, but had been in practice before the licensing board existed; and partly because the supply of practitioners, even poorly trained ones, was so deficient that it would have been politically dangerous to have eliminated all the unqualified.

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There have been two cases of Cholera occurred this season in this vicinity, the persons were Dennis Palmer and James Milmine fortunately however they both recovered. It is now the 12 day of November 1834 and I have before said that I have been intending the greater part of the season to go to Toronto. I have not yet started yet it is still my intention; time must yet reveal the steps I shall pursue, for a few months to come I scarcely know what to do myself, I hope however my steps shall all be directed by Divine Providence; and that I may be enabled to say at any period however distant, as I trust I can now say 'Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all my days.'

November 14th [1834]. This day I received a kind letter from Miss E. B. of Philadelphia.

December 1st, 1834. Pursuant to my intentions this day I set out for Toronto (late York); through carelessness of the driver the Coach was upset on Burlington Heights. Arrived in Toronto the following day—put up at Mr. Alexander Stewart's, Baptist minister—On the 15 of January 1835 the day on which Parliament was convened, my Father came to Toronto in company with Mr. Caleb Hopkins. . . . On the 20th I left Mr. Stewart's and went to Mr. Todd's at which place I remained during my continuance in the city—My time was principally occupied in the departments either of the sick, the dying or the dead, chiefly the latter; and when I look back upon the scenes which were transacted in the cholera Hospital¹⁵ during the winter, my mind almost recoils upon itself—I believe there were something like a dozen bodies mangled & dissected by James Mitchell¹⁶ and Myself. I frequently visited the house during the session and was much gratified and interested with the debates on several measures. The two houses were much opposed to each other, but so far as I can foresee the Legislative council by their obstinacy and illiberality are fast hastening their own downfall, before many years they must show a little more disposition to comply with the majority of the lower house, or the supplies will be stopped. On the 17th of April the house was prorogued. On the 18th I came home with my Father, found my friends in pretty good health—Mother it seems has suffered a good deal through the winter—On the 28th of April I wrote to Philadelphia and am now anxiously expecting an answer, but have not yet received one.

May 23. On this day Samuel Jackson died of the consumption, through life he had given an unlicensed sway to his carnal desires and sinful appetites, but being arrested by the hand of disease he was mercifully led (as we trust) to consider his ways and to seek after the one thing needful, he told me he thought the Consumption was one of the happiest diseases ever a person had; he said that earth had no charms for him, and that he was willing and resigned to die. He is the third person who has died out of this family with the consumption—last season 3 of Mr. Barber's Family and one of Mr. Ashman Pettit's died of the same disease-- and I fear that a few succeeding years will consign several more of the same families to the Honor appointed for all living. . . .

June 8th. At half past 9 O'Clock P.M. this day Died Mrs. Elizabeth Lewis, wife of James Lewis and only daughter of Mr. Benjamin Corwine. The first time that I saw her was on the 30th ult. She did not appear to have any urgent symptoms about her that would lead us in the least to anticipate so unfavourable a result. She had been confined about 4 weeks previous

¹⁵ 'An outbreak of cholera in 1834 saw the Hospital meeting a gruesome situation . . . It was imported into Canada in an emigrant vessel which arrived in Quebec, and it rapidly marched westward, carrying death and dismay into all the frontier settlements. . . . Every twentieth inhabitant was swept away by this visitation. A few heroic men and women banded themselves together for the purpose of visiting the homes of the struck, and securing to them such assistance as was necessary. Frequently some of this noble band, among whom was the Mayor, might be seen placing the victims in the cholera carts and driving them to the Hospital.' (C. K. Clarke, *A History of the Toronto General Hospital*, Toronto, William Briggs, 1913, pp. 43–44.)

¹⁶ James Mitchell (1793–1861) was born in London, in Upper Canada (now Ontario). He studied medicine with Drs. King and Rolph. After a winter at Jefferson College, Philadelphia, and service as 'an attentive pupil of the Toronto Hospital', he received his licence in October 1836. (Canniff, *op. cit.*, p. 519.)

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to my visit, and had been more than usually smart. The Uterine system however did not properly regain its tone, the Lochia continued to flow until within a day or two before I seen [*sic*], and it would seem that at that time it was rather arrested by the febrile state of the system than by a return of the healthy stock of the parts.

Her symptoms were first those attendant upon a mild remittent fever—induced as I apprehended by too active and premature exertion, and by making too liberal a use of bark [Jesuit's bark, or cinchona] and wine. I first resorted to the milder measures of subduing the fever by the administration of purgatives, and febrifuges—the 2nd day afterwards I saw her and found that the symptoms had not in any measure abated, but that the pain in the head was quite severe. There was however no pain upon pressure over the abdomen. The tongue was foul and disordered. I therefore thought it advisable to give an Emetic. I gave her quite a large one, but she did not vomit as freely as I could wish. She threw up considerable bile; I continued the febrifuges and purgatives. Next day I found the head still bad—not relieved by vomiting—slight delirium; applied a blister to the nape of the neck—the following day found the blister had not risen well and had done little or no good. A reapplication of the blister—bowels remarkably obstinate—repeat powerful purgatives until the bowels are acted upon.

Thursday, June 4. Bowels relieved. Headache very severe—pulse strong and resisting—fever high. . . . Blood neither cupped nor buffed. Next day head in some measure relieved by bleeding—delirium increases—Apply blisters to the neck & shoulders—repeat the purgatives—some remission of the fever in the evening pulse 104; following morning fever more urgent—pulse 112—Cont. omnia—slight remission in the evening—Sunday morning pulse more than usually frequent 120 in number—being somewhat alarmed at the obstinacy of the disease and wishing that the responsibility might not rest altogether upon myself, I advised sending for other advice. Dr. Goodman was called—The Doctor thought best to resort to stimulants—Camph. and nitre were administered for the first 24 hours; afterwards the Camph. and Carb. Ammon. Monday pulse 140. Much enlargement of the abdomen. Dr. McKenzie called—bowels obstinately costive—mercurial saline, and drastic purgatives employed on Tuesday. Medicine cont. enemata thrown up—patient insensible to passing circumstances, pulse upwards of 140, changeable, involuntary stools passed. Uterus much enlarged and every symptom of a woman dying with puerperal fever. From a review of the progress of the disease and the peculiarities attending it, I am led to conclude that had the same disease seized upon a constitution previously healthy that the patient would have passed through the disease without much difficulty, but in the present case the parts concerned in parturition not having regained their proper tonicity it seems that so soon as the fever reached to a certain degree of intensity those parts became involved and the consequence was the fever put on in its last stages the real puerperal character. How mysterious are the dealings of Providence and His ways past finding out—here we behold a person in the prime of life, in whom the affections of a husband centered, to whom a young and numerous family looked for direction—The only comfort of her aged parents cut off—cut off at a time when the world poured all its comforts and enjoyments into her lap; but with the pleasures of the world snares are connected, her Father took her away from the evils to come, and her friends sorrow for her now not without hope. Who would not die a Christian, Who will not at once exclaim—'Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.'

1835 June 15th. This day I sit thoughtful, pensive, silent and alone—fortune and Providence still smile upon me. What shall be my employment this day twelve month, what my situation and what my prospects—Be it my aim to be careful for nothing but in all things by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to let my request be made known unto God.

July 28th, 1836. I find that I have been so negligent in recording the passing circumstances and incidents of life that upwards of a Year has elapsed since I penned the soloquy above.

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As a contrast to what I then wrote, I can now say that I am sitting in the company of one whose presence robs the hours of their gloom, and chases the sad spectre care away; whose conversation sweetens the hours of solitude, and brightens those of the social circle.

Perhaps a short memorandum of my 'Hymeneal' excursion may not be uninteresting; I left home for Philadelphia on the 27th of October 1835, for the sole purpose of visiting one who had given some proof of her affection and attachment ere I left the place before; upon my arrival in the City I found that she was quite well and anxiously expecting me. I took a boarding house on the corner of 9th str. and ridge Road; attended the Lectures of both schools as much as time would permit. Also the Alms House and Hospital—and I think derived much useful instruction, especially in the science of percussion and auscultation, for which I desire to render my grateful acknowledgements to Dr. Pennock (his address is chestnut street No 484). Amidst the multiplicity of my occupations I however did not forget the main object of my visit, but made occasional calls in 2nd str., above Callowhill, No 301. On the evening of the 22nd of February the day I was 25 years of age, I was bound with the strong yet soft bands of 'Hymen'. On the 30th of March left the city with my new companion—Visited my relatives in Jersey, stopped for upward of a month, during which time Mary Potter was married, set out for home the 2nd of May, was detained for upwards of a week; arrived home on the 19th of May 1836 . . . We found our friends well and remained with them until the 18th of July when we moved to this house belonging to Mr. Ralph Walker (Rent 40\$ per an).

On the 5th of July my wife aborted it was a false conception; in place of a foetus there was found a mass of granular flesh about the size of a hickory nut; the membranes were perfectly in their natural state except that the amnion was reflected over the whole mass similar to what it is in natural products over the chord. You will readily perceive that I am in haste to express several things, above, and therefore do not attend to order or descend to detail, but attend to the old maxim of saying 'Mulum in Parvo' . . .

February 22 [1837]—This day I am 26 years of age. Providence continues to smile upon me. I am permitted to enjoy health and the comforts of life, which enjoyments are rendered doubly sweet by being participated in with a helpmate mete for man. It is now a twelvemonth since I entered upon the Matrimonial state, and so far am I from being discontented therewith that I would heartily advise all young men so soon as they can get their affairs arranged, to choose out a fair daughter of Eve and thus save themselves from many of the temptations and allurements of vice to which youth are subjected.

On the evening of the 31st of July, 1837, at about 10 O'Clock a helpless little visitor was committed to our care—he has continued up to this date growing a fine stout healthy boy.

October 3rd. At the age of 6 weeks he laughed out, but long before this he cried out. He can bear his weight upon his feet. Nov. 20. He begins to grasp objects presented to his view.

November 9th [1837]. This day I was called to see Christopher Correy, a young man who had his hand mangled with the spikes of a threshing machine. I found it necessary to amputate the three lesser fingers of the hand together with a portion of their corresponding metacarpals. The laceration was very extensive, it has healed over.

On the evening of the 4th of December [1837] the Rebellion was first discovered, the particulars of which are too well known to require any lengthened account.¹⁷ I may state

¹⁷ This event was the termination of a long series of problems in Canada. Dissension between French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians; the maintenance of political power by a tiny minority of the population; economic setbacks on a major scale; religious discrimination; and the distant and therefore rosy attractions of Jacksonian democracy were some of the factors contributed to popular unrest. All difficulties were compounded by the absence of wise direction from the British Parliament and by the appointment of an inexperienced and unqualified governor general. The rebellion began in Lower Canada (Quebec) in late November, and two weeks later in Upper Canada; both episodes drew little active support and ended quickly in defeat and dispersal of the revolutionaries.

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however that it has cast a gloom and depression over the whole country which still continues; thousands have left and are still leaving the country, business of all kinds is at a standstill, the currency is depressed, the Province in debt. The rebellion has been crushed in the bud, many of the insurgents have been incarcerated, three have been hanged, viz: Lount, Mathews, & Morreau. Many innocent have also suffered; I was out three weeks at the notorious siege of *Navy Island* acting as Assistant Surgeon. It is impossible at present to say what will be the fate of the Canadas, or when hostilities shall finally cease.

September 20, 1838. I find it rather tedious, and perhaps unprofitable to trace with much accuracy the development of [my son's] mental faculties or the trivial incidents of his life. I will however just say for his future information, that he has already grown quite an unruly boy. So much so that he gives his mother much trouble, which I hope if his life is spared, he will endeavour in some measure to compensate, by kindness and affection. During the last winter he was troubled with inflammation and abscess under his ear the scars of which he will always carry. He walked at the age of 13 months and was weaned at 14 months. . . .

June 29, 1839. It is now my painful task to record the death of a dear son. We traced with Parental affection the growth and observed with pleasure the successive expansion of his young mind and we thought it something more than ordinary. During his waking hours he was constantly in exercise so much so as to be remarked by all who knew him. His perceptive faculties seemed to be largely developed & consequently his sensibilities were very acute, and his memory retentive; his affection for his Parents was strong and like a vine which clings around the stock which supports it so was he with his sweet embraces twining around our hearts. But Alas! He was doomed not long to bloom in this lower world. . . . He died on the morning of the 15th of April 1839, aged 20 1/2 months. His was interred on the succeeding day. Sermon by Elder S. Griswold—2 Cor. 4 C. 17 Verse—'For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of Glory'. About six weeks before his death he was seized with scarlitina anginosa; he passed through the disease very well and was in a fair way for recovery apparently but the disease was of an insidious character, during the latter part of the night for several succeeding nights he would be attacked with threatening symptoms of Croup, as rough and difficult breathing attended with hoarseness and coughs, these symptoms were unfortunately too much overlooked, thinking they might in a short time spontaneously give way, but Alas! in this I was sadly mistaken (from this let me learn not to employ half measures in affection of the air passage.) He was attacked suddenly on the evening of the 28th of March with croup during my absence from home, Dr. Goodman kindly visited him; the most alarming symptoms a suffocation and its attendant horrors passed off after a few hours. Yet still distress of the most unremitting nature seemed to fasten upon him, his countenance was anxious, his breathing hurried and of the most oppressive nature, it resembled more than anything the breathing [of] a person who was supporting a very heavy burden upon his breast—if raised from the horizontal to the upright position, he expressed great uneasiness, being in danger of suffocation. The bowels were much vitiated in the character of their secretions and much tumified, the head and stomach were considerably affected, he would frequently put his fingers into his mouth, trying to direct attention to the throat as the seat of his uneasiness, his skin was parched and dry all over his body; there was scarcely any appearance of moisture upon any part of the surface during the whole course of the disease. The pulse was oppressed and frequent, sometimes almost imperceptible. Finding no internal remedies to avail in affording relief, I applied a blister to the chest and afterwards to the throat, they appeared for a time to act most beneficially the oppression in breathing being relieved, the pulse rising, becoming softer and fuller, & hope the torch of life again lit up our countenances with joy. But sorrow again too quickly veiled them, again did the smothered embers of disease show themselves and burst out into an uncontrollable flame. He pined away and gradually sunk sweetly in arms of death, he bore the disease with unexampled patience, severe as it was, and although so young he seemed to have the submission of riper years. On the morning above mentioned after a few short and irregular

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inspirations he died. I was carrying him in my arms, he seemed much exhausted, he expressed by signs a desire to lie down, in the course of a few moments he was no more. What most astonished me was that the pulse at this time seemed better if anything than before and it continued to beat even after the respiration had ceased. Although the disease passed for Bronchitis yet in reflecting upon the symptoms, progress and the termination of the disease, I cannot but think there most probably existed an abscess in the Larynx or upper portion of the Trachea. My reasons for thinking so are the obstinacy and long continuance of the inflammation about the throat, the intellect being clear through the whole disease which is seldom the case when inflammation extends to the extreme parts of the lungs, the circulation florid in the superficial parts, and more than all the pulsation of the artery at the wrist being distinct even after respiration had ceased. I trust it is my desire to acquiesce in the will of Providence, knowing that the Great Judge of all the Earth will do right. Yet I cannot but regret that I did not make early and more efficient counter applications to the throat—make more efficient and powerful means to restore the circulation to the surface and promote a constant Diaphoretic state of the cuticular capillaries; but most of all I wish I had performed the operation of Tracheotomy as apparently there might have been some chance of prolonging life by the introduction of air—but as the exact nature and location of the disease were not ascertained by post mortem examination, nor the effects of the operation by actual experiment, all my conjectures can pass only for probable theorising.

How mysterious are the dealings of Providence. He gave us a son in His own good time. He thought proper to take him from us, and who so good a right to take as He who gave. . . . But like an affectionate Parent who chastises his children for their benefit, and afterwards makes them partakers of his rewards, so did our Heavenly Father again make us partakers of his kindness by giving us another little boy—he was born on the morning of the 9th of April 1839. [Note: the date presumably should be May 9th, as can be seen from the date of John's death]. We call him Theoron.¹⁸

On the 16th of June [he] was baptized. Will the Lord grant that he may be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation; and, as I have prayed, so let me witness my prayers answered by the conversion of many of my friends and relations, especially those who constitute my nearest kindred. . . .

January 20th, 1841. This morning we were presented with a little son—we call him Edgar Judson. . . .

October 12, 1841. This day we left home with our two children for the purpose of spending the winter in the city of Philadelphia. . . . The winter was remarkably mild. I attended the lectures of the University and also of the Jefferson School. The latter school has I think decidedly the best faculty as a whole of any school I know of. I may here remark that I had my mind this winter called to the consideration of Homeopathy, which is becoming very popular in the city, but which as yet requires much observation and experience to place it in its proper place. . . .

April 20, 1842. This day left Philadelphia for home via N.Y. We stopped nearly another week in New York, and arrived at home on the 4th of May. . . .

This year is remarkable for the great excitement that has been produced relative to the second advent of the Messiah. Two men preaching the doctrine passed through here declaring that we should not see the 15th of April. The event did not take place as all who may hereafter read will know. Yet I cannot but think that Mr. Miller's views of truth are very sound and that if any mistakes are made it must be chiefly relative to his chronology. . . .

¹⁸ Theoron Woolverton (1839–1912) studied medicine, and was doing postgraduate work at Harvard in 1862. Apparently O. W. Holmes appealed for volunteers to serve during the Civil War, and Theoron became an Assistant Surgeon, U.S. Navy. He made his career in the navy, retiring with the rank of Medical Inspector. (*Hamilton Spectator*, 1 December 1959, and personal communication, Department of the Navy, 4 December 1963.)

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On the morning of the 24th of April [1843] we were presented with another little boy, we call him Algernon. May Divine Wisdom and Goodness protect him from harm, and guide his feet into the paths of virtue.

1845 Sept. 2nd. How fast does time fly and how little note do I keep of it. . . . I find my notes of events are being confined to one subject in a great measure, and that is in recording from time to time the births of some new comers, to enlarge the family circuit—On the Evening of the 31st of March 1845 We were again presented with another little boy—our fifth son—we call him Solon. . . .

June 19th, 1847. This day were again presented with another little responsibility in the shape of a son, this is our sixth son. We call him Delos. . . .

Oct 19th, 1849. Just recovering from an attack of Epidemic Dysentery reminds me that I should make a Memento of this signal expression of the goodness of God towards me. I attended the family of Mr. John Milward, 4 in number, they all had the disease, himself and his youngest child died. I evidently took the disease by infection. I was taken down about the 6th of October and am only now Oct. 19th beginning to get about. Considering the severity and danger of the disease, I think I have passed through it remarkably well, and with but little comparative loss of strength. I impute this in a great degree (so far as second causes are concerned) to a sparing & prudent use of internal remedies; the disease seemed to involve both the large and small bowels as great soreness existed throughout them, confined chiefly to the lining membrane, I think, as I had but very little symptomatic fever. I avoided calomel, astringents, tonics and irritants of every kind. I should look upon the following mode of treating Epidemic Dysentery as most judicious:

Light purging with Castor oil occasionally in the onset of the disease, with the intermediate administration of blue pill, combined with narcotics according as the pain is more or less severe. Continue the blue pill until the biliary secretion is fully established, but not to the extent of producing salivation. After the system is thus regulated the expectant practice is the best; obviate difficulties as they arise, give anodyne when needed, a mild solution of soda for drink. Adapt the diet to the disease—You must not try to stop at once the Dysenteric discharges; it will be a matter of time, the diseased surfaces must have time to heal—the return will be gradual, but be patient until 2 weeks at least pass over. A cataplasm of flaxseed over the abdomen gave me most signal relief. . . .

July 9th, 1857. After the lapse not only of months but of years (as it will be perceived by comparing dates) I sit down to record a few dates, in order to keep up the more important links in the chain of the passing, and past history of my life. Aug. 7th 1855—This day left home for the purpose of visiting Europe. First visited Philadelphia from thence to New York. Sailed on the 15th on the ship Jeremiah Thomson, Charles H. Blake, Captain, bound for Liverpool. Sept. 6th weather bound on the coast of Ireland; left the ship, landed in a fishing boat near the town of Clonakilty; from thence to Bangor, Cork, Killarney, Dublin, Liverpool, Chester, Wolverhampton, Birmingham, & to London. From London I took a short run down to Paris, called upon Mrs. McNichol and daughters, returned by the same route to London. . . . Resailed in the same ship September 30th. 500 emigrants, 20 Cabin Passengers. Acted as Surgeon for which I got my passage in lieu, both ways. Arrived in New York Oct. 22nd. Accompanied by I. W. Potter to Oswego, thence to Toronto, & thence home about the middle of November. And here I may as well record one of those irregular 'Episodes' which too frequently show themselves in men's lives—too frequently at least for pursuing undisturbed the noiseless tenor of our way. On my way homeward I engaged a house in Toronto—No. 2 Alma Terrace, Richmond Street, belonging to Mr. Manning. Dec. 18th Moved my family to Toronto, but not liking the city I only remained there 4 months and April 1st returned home again to my old Native spot (Grimsby). A Mr. Geo. Mercer occupied the house during my absence. The health of my family suffered considerably in Toronto

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and I now come to the conclusion that it is best to be content with my retired & rural yet healthy home. Grimsby Grammar School founded June 1857.

Jan. 7th, 1857, This day I qualified for a Justice of the Peace. . . . Saturday 22nd Feby. 1862. This day 51 years of age. A recurring birth day reminds me of my negligence in keeping up the chain of events in my history—And I can only at present think of a few links to add thereto. In the spring of 1859, Mrs. Woolverton and our son Edgar visited the friends in Philadelphia. In the Spring of 1861 Theoron obtained his degree of M.D. from Harvard College, Massachusetts. He is now tending the Hospitals and dissecting rooms, New York.

Feby. 22, 1862. Edgar goes to the Grammar School. Algernon is at University College, Toronto. . . . Many are the incidents of daily life which are continually transpiring, but then perhaps a record thereof would only serve to encumber, instead of to please or interest those (if any there be) who shall ever take the trouble to glance over these imperfect sketches of my life. Suffice it to say that up to this date, I can both trust and trace the hand of My heavenly Father in all his dealings with me; and, although I have felt that chastisement for the present is not joyous but grievous, yet in the end have I found the promise verified that all things work together for good to all that are exercised thereby: to all that love God.

'In each event of life, how plain
Thy ruling hand I see;
Each blessing of my life more dear,
Because conferred by thee.'

Woolverton's diary ends thus, in 1862. He lived another two decades, dying in April, 1883. After a lifetime of service to his community and his profession he received the following obituary: 'On the 12th ult., Dr. Jonathan Woolverton, of Grimsby, aged 73 years.'¹⁹

¹⁹ [Obituary]: *Canada Lancet*, 1883, 15, 288.

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