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### DR. SETH CAPRON.

[Written and read before the Milwaukee Chapter by Mrs. Louisa K. Capron Thiers, No. 10,844.]

DR. SETH CAPRON was born in Attleboro, Massachusetts, September 23, 1762. He was the oldest son of Elisha, son of Jonathan, son of Banfield, the first Capron that came to America.

Banfield, with three boys about his own age, fourteen years, schoolmates, agreed together to leave their friends in England and come to this country. Finding a vessel about to sail they concealed themselves in the hold, with food enough for a few days, and sailed from Chester, Cheshire County, a seaport on the north of England, in the year 1674. When the vessel was about four days out they were discovered, and after some parley allowed to continue on the voyage.

He lived in Massachusetts until 1752, when he died at the age of ninety-two years, leaving a family of twelve children, six sons and six daughters.

The great-great-grandson of Banfield, Seth Capron, was too young to be drafted when the war broke out, and too short in stature to pass inspection at muster. In 1781, at the time of his country's greatest peril, it is known that he managed, by elevating himself upon his toes, to pass the mustering officer, and so enlisted at the age of nineteen. He first served as private, afterwards as corporal in Colonel Shephard's regiment, and first heard the music of artillery at the siege of Newport,

attached to General Lafayette's corps of light infantry. It was there that a cannon ball, aimed at the General, grazed the top of his head.

He took part in the battle of White Plains, was then transferred to headquarters at West Point under Washington, where he served during the remainder of the war, commanding the barge that conveyed the "Father of his Country" to Elizabethtown Point, where he was the last man to receive the General's benediction.

He then returned to his native town, Attleboro, where his father, Elisha Capron, owned a comfortable farm. About that time his father was induced to sell it and take his pay in continental money. A few days after the sale was closed the Government was declared bankrupt. The Script was worthless.

The young man then began the study of medicine with Dr. Bazeleel Mann, an eminent physician and man of letters of that day, who served his country during the war, his fellow-citizens having placed him upon the Committee of Safety, Correspondence, and Judiciary, services that the time of 1776 demanded of its best citizens.

Dr. Mann was the great-grandson of William Mann, of Cambridge, Massachusetts, who was grandson of Sir Charles Mann, of Kent County, England, knighted in 1625 for loyalty to his king, Charles I.

It may be well here to refer to the method of obtaining a medical profession in those days. There were but two schools of medicine in the country. The one at Harvard College, just established, and that at New Haven, organized in 1784. But by reason of the dangers and expense of traveling they were by no means well attended.

In general the medical education was such as the student could pick up by serving as an apprentice to some noted practitioner, which combined the duties of a student with many menial affairs. He ground the powders, mixed the pills, rode with the Doctor on his rounds, held the basin when the patient was bled, helped to adjust the plasters, sew wounds, and run with the vials of medicine from one end of town to the other. It was a white day when such a young man enjoyed the rare good fortune of dissecting a half putrid arm. So great, indeed,

was the difficulty of obtaining anatomical subjects that the medical school at Harvard College made a single body do duty for a whole year.

Under such circumstances the Doctor's knowledge was practical, and derived from personal experience rather than from books. The advantages of study were sparingly enjoyed. Few physicians boasted of a library of fifty volumes.

His apprenticeship ended, the student returned to his native town to assume the practice of medicine. At that period, with the exception of the minister and the judge, the doctor was the most important personage in the community. His genial face, his engaging manners, the sincerity with which he inquired after the carpenter's daughter, and the interest he took in the family of the poorest laborer made him the favorite for miles around. He knew the names and personal history of the occupants of every house he passed. The farmers' lads pulled off their hats to him and the girls dropped courtesies as he passed. Sunshine and rain, daylight and darkness, were alike to him. He would ride ten miles in the darkest night over the worst of roads in a pelting storm to administer a dose of calomel to an old woman or attend a child in a fit.

The drugs were stowed away on the shelves of the village store, among heaps of shoes, Rohan hats, packages of seeds and fitches of bacon.

The physician was compelled to compound his own drugs, make his own tinctures and put up his own prescriptions. His saddle-bag was the only drug store within forty miles. Each spring the blood must be purified, the kidneys excited, and the damsel who fainted profusely bled. Large doses of senna and manna, and rhubarb and molasses taken daily. It is safe to say that more medicine was taken every year by the well than is now taken by the sick in the same time.

Water was denied the patient tormented with fever. In its stead was given a small quantity of clam juice. Mercury was taken until the lips turned blue and the gums fell away from the teeth.

The writer has a vivid recollection, when about eight years old, in a raging fever, pleading for water; the nurse handed the pitcher and the child satisfied her burning thirst. Her

brother, overhearing what was going on, rushed into the room exclaiming: "You will kill her," but it was too late.

Dr. Capron, having obtained his profession, entered upon the practice in 1789, first in Cumberland, Rhode Island, and married Eunice Mann, daughter of Dr. Bazeleel Mann, referred to before.

In 1806 he removed to Oneida County, New York, traveling across the country in his own carriage with his wife and four young sons—a long and tedious journey of five hundred miles. He located at Whitesboro, now a part of the city of Utica, then a small village composed of a few families of rare culture and refinement.

Here, by diligent attention to his profession, he secured a handsome competency.

Aside from his profession he took a great interest in manufacturing, thoroughly convinced that the establishment of manufactories, upon a permanent basis, was essential to the independence and prosperity of the country. He built the first cotton and afterwards the first woolen mill, it is said, in the United States, and laid the foundation of its present magnificent industries. Associated with him in this enterprise were Dewitt Clinton, Elisha Jenkins, and Francis Bloodgood, of Albany, New York.

In 1814, the youngest son being between ten and eleven years of age, the father fifty-five, mother fifty, there came a daughter into the family. At a time when everybody knew everybody else it caused no little excitement. Years afterwards a gentleman called, saying he was anxious to see the child "born out of due time," as he expressed it.

The parents had brought with them the New England customs and in a measure the religious beliefs prevalent at that time. If the doctor was held in great respect in old New England, what shall we say of the minister? In no other section of the country had religion so firm a hold upon the affections of the people. They looked upon the pastor with reverence and awe. He was to them a just man made perfect, a sure guide to truth.

Under such influences the mother hardly dare question his

teachings, but she did draw the line when he proclaimed from the pulpit that "Hell was paved with infants not a span long."

Dr. Capron was quite independent and advanced in his views, consequently discussions were frequent, not bitter, but decided. The children's almost daily intellectual food was different opinions upon such subjects as "original sin," "foreordination," "freedom of the will," &c., but the father's wise counsels and loving words, that always fell from his lips, made him the idol of his sons from youth to old age.

The mother ordered well her household, being a woman of strong intellect; she commanded, through a long life, the respect and love of all who knew her.

When Dr. Capron located in Oneida County the Indian in his paint and feathers lived in wigwams and roamed in the forests on the banks of the Mohawk. The writer well remembers seeing a tall Indian open the front door, stalk through the house, and without saying by your leave, help himself to a drink of water, clad in little else than a shirt collar and a pair of spurs.

There could have been no lunatic asylum in the first quarter of the present century. The insane roamed about the country at their will and were the terror of the children. The cry, "Mother Kimball is coming," would send every one, old and young, indoors, as she made frequent tramps through the town.

There were no stoves in those days, but large cavernous fireplaces, which took up half the side of a room, sending half the smoke into the room and half the heat up the chimney, as you enjoyed the sensation of roasting on one side and freezing on the other.

The cooking was done in pots and kettles on hooks hung on cranes over the fire.

Large brick ovens were built in beside the fireplace in the kitchen, in which the baking for the family was done once a week, on Saturday. Great pains were taken to prepare the wood, about three feet long, split fine and carefully dried. It took about two hours to heat the oven. In the meantime the housewife would prepare the beans, meat, bread, and pies. When the oven had attained the proper degree of heat the coals were removed with a long-handled iron shovel, at the risk of

the face, hands, and clothes. The beans and meat were first put in and the door closed for fifteen or twenty minutes, then the bread and pies. The beans and brown bread must be left in until Sunday morning breakfast, as no work could be done on the Sabbath, not a bed made from six o'clock Saturday until six Sunday night.

What a day of torture the Sabbath was to a child. To breathe was about all the privilege allowed them, unless it might be to look at the few cheerful pictures in the Bible, of Cain killing Abel, children eaten by bears, Daniel in the lion's den.

" No man without a fine  
Dare walk the street,  
Or at the tavern dine."

Dr. Capron removed to Walden, Orange County, New York, in 1823 in a canal boat from Utica to Albany, the Erie canal having been completed. It was thought to be a wonderful advance in the mode of traveling. So comfortable, if one got tired of the boat they could stop the boat, get out and walk on the bank, or tow-path, as it was called. From Albany to Newburgh, on the Hudson, by steamboat, ninety-five miles, it took two days and one night; on landing, as there were no wharves, you were sent on shore in a rowboat.

He resided in Walden until his death, September 4, 1835, after an eventful life of seventy-four years.

In a periodical of that day it was said of him: " He was a man of great integrity and moral worth, uncommon ardor, industry, and enterprise. Few have led more active lives, and few have accomplished more. His mild, persuasive manners, the honesty and goodness of his purposes, and the uniform correctness of his example gave him a wonderful influence over the villagers. Obedience followed his will as if he had been invested with absolute power. The village will long mourn for him as a father."

" Dust unto dust " and to his God  
Earth has resigned the trust he gave,  
Yet memory shrines the burial sod,  
And marks it as the good man's grave.

LOUISA KIRWAN CAPRON THIERS.