

# Doctor by Any Other Name



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THE D's are rising! The LL. D.'s, the Ph. D.'s, the D. D.'s and various brands. It is all about the use of the word doctor in greetings and conversation. Are the doctors offended because the intellectual proletariat fails to give them their title? Bless you, no! It is the other way about. They are trying to get rid of it. It has been overdone. Let it be left for physicians—the savants want to be called plain Mister.

At least, a growing number of them do. There have been mutterings for some time, but the spirit of rebellion took no definite and official form until recently, when a group of learned doctors at the University of Virginia united in formal protest. They have formed an organization which goes under the name of the Society for the Rationalization of the Title of Doctor, which name itself is almost a guarantee that the promoters are within the inner circle and are therefore not prompted by malice and envy.

It is all very well for the older ones, this reform. But to any one who served in the late war, and recalls the way in which Second Lieutenants put Generals and Colonels to shame in the matter of pride and imposing demeanor, the question will it once occur, How about the fledgling doctors? How about the worn-rimmed-spectacled young man who has just won his degree by presenting the world with a thick volume entitled "The Intensive Use of Skylights in the Monasteries of the Thirteenth Century," with voluminous footnotes abounding in Latin on each page? And the other young man who has been similarly rewarded for his thesis on "The Declining Prestige of the Preposition 'Ab' After the Second Punic War." And he who has chased the parts of speech all the way from H. G. Wells back to Chaucer and is off the press with a tome demonstrating beyond a doubt that Pope was more fond of intransitive verbs than was Francis Bacon? What of these? And of thousands of others like them? Is it not cruel and unusual punishment to deprive them of the glory for which they have so faithfully labored?

Perhaps so, say the most ardent among the new rationalizers. But they will have to endure it, and after a while they will get over the disappointment. And somebody has got to suffer. No sorely needed reform can be achieved without leaving bruised heads and wounded feelings.

It may be that the hovering spirit of Thomas Jefferson, renowned, whether justly or not, for conspicuously democratic habits and behavior, moved the professors at the university which he founded to declare that all men were not only free and equal but should show it by wearing the same title. Whatever the source of the inspiration, it is a fact that the meeting which may become historic took place at Mrs. Perkinson's eating house on the edge of the university grounds. There half a dozen or so teachers, all themselves heavily D. D.'d, talked about it and finally generated enough enthusiasm and indignation to draft a constitution and by-laws and pass resolutions.

From the eating house, growing more enthusiastic in their crusade, the group went on to the Colonnade Club, the Faculty gathering place on the edge of the famous Jeffersonian lawn, and proposed their scheme to a wider circle. It met instant response, and the professors present eagerly took the oath of allegiance.

The announcement that came out to the proletarian world was in the name of George B. Eager, professor of law and one of the charter members of the new organization. He included the title of professor in his condemnation, saying:

"I believe that 'doctor' and 'professor' are obnoxious to 99 per cent. of the teaching staffs of American universities. It is certainly confusing to outsiders who have no way of knowing whether the person they are speaking to is a Ph. D. or a surgeon. Vaudeville has taken a hold on the American public, and audiences are so used to being told to 'watch the professor' perform some trick of legerdemain that the comparison with a college professor is anything but flattering. 'Mister' So-and-So seems the most appropriate form of greeting."

Another member of the new society declared:

"The title doctor is a professional title for physicians, and a decorative title for Ph. D.'s, D. C. L.'s, Litt. D.'s and other degree holders, and a courtesy title for any teacher in a higher educational institution. Its misuse has become a nuisance. As for professor, it is used not only in its proper sense, but for barbers, wrestlers, jiu-jitsu exponents, dancing experts, physical culturists, lecturers, dog and pony trainers, prestidigitateurs and others. Therefore the title doctor should be left to physicians, and the title professor to those who are willing to have it misused."

When some outsider propounded the objection to depriving the newly created D's—particularly Ph. D.'s who had labored diligently preparing theses—of the pleasure of wearing their decoration, the society took under advisement the proposal to endorse the use of doctor for one year after the conferring of the title. The tender-minded and tough-minded members have lined up against one another on this question, and no decision has yet been reached.

Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, while not yet a member of the new society, quite evidently approves its purpose. He goes further and advocates the dropping of doctor even from the names of physicians.

"I see no reason why the disagreeable habit of addressing certain persons by the title of doctor should not be done away with entirely," he said to an inquirer the other day. "And there is no more reason for addressing a doctor of medicine as doctor than for so addressing a doctor of philosophy, of laws or of theological. In fact, in England it is not done."

"Having suffered from this unfortunate habit for many years, I am in a position to speak with some feeling. I warn you, however, that you will not be able, no matter how industrious, to do away with the title doctor. The American people love to use titles, and most persons who have obtained a doctor's degree would be greatly shocked at having the title omitted when they are addressed."

Evidently Dr. Butler—pardon, Mr. Butler—has not yet popularized his

own belief in the confines of his own province. A Columbia man who goes often to the President's office was asked how people addressed the President.

"Why, we call him Dr. Butler, of course—what else? He professed astonishment that any other practice had ever been suggested."

It appears that in actual practice some institutions have got ahead of the University of Virginia in the elimination of the unwelcome title. The reform has been of the silent, unorganized variety. So it has been at Brown University in Providence.

"Plain mister, when used in personal address, is good enough for any man under heaven," said W. H. P. Faunce, President of Brown, when he was asked for his view. "No one, as far as I know, ever addresses a colleague on our Faculty as doctor or professor, but always as mister. I wish this custom might extend far outside the colleges. Democracy means the dropping of all titles in personal conversation and address, except those which are absolutely necessary to distinguish a man's occupation."

Miss Virginia Gildersleeve, Dean of Barnard College, was away on a tour of Europe when a call was made

at her office, but her secretary, Miss Bishop, said:

"Of course I can't speak for Miss Gildersleeve on this matter, but I can tell you the practice at Barnard. We seldom use the title of doctor, but apparently prefer the title which indicates academic rank on the Faculty—that is, professor. Only a few instructors, who have Ph. D.'s but are not yet professors, are called doctor."

"It is always unsafe to dogmatize concerning social usage," said President Garfield of Williams College, "and I presume the question you raise comes under that head. My preference is to confine the title of doctor to M. D.'s and D. D.'s. Here at Williams we address one another familiarly as mister, seldom using the word doctor even in formal presentation."

There are all manner of complications to be faced in laying down rules and regulations for the use of doctor. For example, before the new society was a week old it was called upon to give heed to a cry of alarm over certain unofficial titles of an affectionate character. Around a college town there are always men who, though they have no degrees, are referred to as "doc" by their

friends. Sometimes they are in the Faculty, sometimes not. Is this usage to be frowned upon? If so, say some, personalities will be robbed of their distinction.

The society went into executive session over this question, and when the meeting was over the announcement was made that such titles of affection should not be interfered with. Also, it was held that druggists, who are frequently called doctor by their neighborhood constituencies, should not be made to relinquish the honor.

Though the title professor does not come within the purview of the society, under its constitution, it has been necessary to issue semi-official dicta about it, because it raises a closely allied question. The vote of the society, thus far, is that anybody who wants to use the title professor should be allowed to do so without being subject to objections or reproaches. If a teacher does not want to run the risk of being confused with wrestlers and barbers he can divest himself of the title of professor. If he is willing to run that risk, and is confident that his physiognomy, conversation and general bearing and conduct will sufficiently distinguish him, he may keep it.