

perature was normal, her blood pressure a little low, her blood hemoglobin showed her a little anemic, but not unusually so for her age, and she sat motionless except for her gentle breathing. Her lungs were clear and, to be honest, I didn't know why they called me, but I could only assume that the lady of the house (Tante's niece) felt that she had noticed something different. So I went through the procedure, told them that Tante was all right and asked them please to call me again if she needed me, because at that age one is never quite sure and in this case a fragile balance was so carefully achieved.

One occasion was different, however. It was three o'clock in the morn-

ing when I heard a frightened child's voice on the telephone: "Sorry to call you, Doctor, but Tante is dying. Can you come quickly?"

"I'll be right there."

I pulled on my clothes and boots, went out in the sharp winter air, started the car and set out in the dark on the long gravel road through the forest.

When I got to the house there were cars and trucks everywhere — in the road, on the lawn, on the neighbour's lawn. I parked on a mound of grass between two trucks and entered through the porch door, which brought me into a corner of the main living room. In the opposite corner, facing into the centre of the room, was the parish priest in full

vestments, the distinctive *calotte* and *soutane* and a wonderful embroidered overgarment, conducting a Mass in French. He was holding a silver cross with which he blessed his congregation, for the floor of the room out into the doorways and corridors was totally occupied by kneeling figures, presumably friends, close family and all the relatives that could be mustered. They all faced the priest, praying with him and making their responses. The whole scene was lit with the yellow glow of kerosene lamps and two large wax candles that stood on small tables on either side of the priest. I took off my hat, put down my black bag, knelt among the faithful and watched and listened. Presumably Tante had

One thousand words



US National Library of Medicine, History of Medicine Division

Tobias the Elder is cured of his blindness: etching by Rode dated 1769. In the apocryphal Book of Tobias the archangel Raphael, in the appearance of a young man, accompanies the younger Tobias (and his dog) on his first journey away from home, to recover some money belonging to his blind father. Raphael, whose name means "God has healed," teaches Tobias about the use of fish entrails in exorcizing demons and as a curative ointment for the eyes. On the journey Tobias finds a wife, and the angel's first remedy proves useful in getting rid of the demon who killed his bride's seven previous bridegrooms. On his return, Tobias follows the angel's instructions to restore his father's sight: "You must put the fish's gall to his eyes; the medicine will smart and will draw a filmy white skin off his eyes. And your father will be able to see and look on the light" (*Tobit* 11:8).