A DOCTOR, A DIARY AND A DIAGNOSIS.

If any one had told me that my own office could ever look to me so unfamiliar and lonely as it looks to-night, I should not only have refused to believe, but felt insulted besides, imagining the speaker insinuated that I was tiring, in my old age, of the profession I love.

It was my first love, too, for I was a "born doctor," so everybody said and continues to say—more as a matter of tradition now than of actual knowledge, of course, for I am the old doctor to-day, and those who smiled at the improvised clinics of my boyhood—ay, and most of those who rejoiced in my early honors and teased me on my college airs—are long since passed away.

It is their grandchildren who try to be companionable now to the old man, and who are careful, bless them! so to word their confidences that they may not recall too vividly the memory of my own youth and its love's young dream. I have said my profession was first; well, yes—chronologically considered; but there was a time, of which my young friends have heard, when professional success was secondary indeed to my hopes of winning Mary's love.

Mary, my wife! She sat with me in this office many an hour, which explains why it is still my office when the fickle tide of local fashion has long since turned in a different direction. Some of those old books here have been privileged to feel her touch; for books were precious then, when patients were not plentiful nor fees prodigal, and Mary took care of the few I had accumulated as gifts and college necessaries.

For years her picture hung above my desk, where I now write. I took it to the new home when the young doctor came to share the office. The girls whose mothers had been her contemporaries, stole shy glances at the smiling face, saying never a word in reference to it, unless I introduced the subject. They were all familiar with the story—their children know it now—of Dr. Hall's one year of married life with the girl who was in her day the beauty and belle of our native town and who married in the face of her family's sensible objections.

They could tell you as well as I the date of that terrible diphtheria epidemic, due entirely to the lack of sanitary precautions for which I had battled from the day of my graduation.

They have heard how I tried to fight it, as was my duty, when it came, not single-handed, as they might tell you, but with Mary for helper. I never consented to her undertaking what she did, but alas! I allowed her to overrule me and so the expected happened. She and I were taken down together, just as help came and the shadows had passed from the miserable hovels she had cleansed and the fine homes where she had brought the light of consolation.

When I arose, once more alone, the doctor's one happy year was ended, and since then he has only counted busy ones, prosperous and peaceful, perhaps, in the ordinary acceptation of the words.

My practice has been prosperous. Our little town, grown considerably, has never outgrown its confidence in my professional ability, and my home has been assuredly peaceful since the day Sister Judith, putting away apparently every other consideration, took up the lines of household management, lately fallen from the dead hand of Mary, my wife.

Judith believes in me too—in all except my ability to take care of myself, which is her province, shared of late with the young doctor. Between them they have insisted on my foregoing evening office hours, and this is the reason, of course, my own sanctum looks so strange to-night, when, as I told Judith, I positively must look in, because, as the town knows, the young doctor is away on his wedding trip!

Indispensable now those wedding tours, it would seem! So think Paul's mother and Paul's wife's mother, whose opinions count for much more, for besides being mother-in-law, she is the "leader of fashion in our midst," as the Weekly Visitor describes her in its announcement of to-day's event. Judith admitted the necessity, too, and as Mary and I could afford none in our day, I cannot claim the "personal experience," which phrase is my only weapon when I feel myself called upon to contradict any new departure of Dr. Paul. I do not grudge the boy his weeks of leisure, nor do I feel at all unable to resume the duties from which he has of late years relieved me. I only wish I felt as well assured of his happiness!

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A break is caused here by Judith's entrance, for my diary is the one personal possession of which she is not the joint caretaker and its safety is only guaranteed by concealment.

When I thought she had merely come in her character of guardian, I was entirely inclined to give her scant welcome, for I had just begun to enjoy the evening's privacy and the chance of talking unreservedly on paper. When one is nearing the golden anniversary of his graduation day, professional reserve has become so truly "second nature" that only on paper can one venture candid speech.

Now, as to Judith's errand. "She did not dream of my becoming lonely," nor did she anticipate night calls for me, because Dr. Paul had made a most exhaustive round this morning before the eventful noon (also, it would appear, a most exhaustive report to my sister as well.)

Therefore, notwithstanding the dreadful snowfall and the prevalence of that new disease she and Paul insisted on calling "la grippe" (it is ordinary influenza), Judith was quite sure that, except in case of accident, which seldom occurs with us, every one would await comfortably my morning visit.

She came then because she was uneasy—Judith did always like to share such symptoms—and her uneasiness was caught from Mrs. Kane, Paul's mother, who called to inquire if I had expressed any private opinion regarding that sudden seizure of her son's in church to-day.

Now, what in the world is strange about a sudden faintness of less than five minutes' duration?

Judith and Mrs. Kane thought there was in his case. "He was always strong, but then his grandmother's half brother had succumbed only forty years ago to heart trouble an[illegible] course, that remembrance now worried Paul's mother." Naturally so!

"Is it always hereditary, Henry?" asked my sister.

"No," I said. "I don't believe in heredity at all, at times; for, if there was much in the doctrine, how could Paul, for instance, be, as the old woman calls him, 'a rock of sense,' with a mother as silly as his? And I was about to add something regarding god-mothers, too, Judith bearing that relation to Paul, until I recollected just in time there was no argument for anti-heredity there.

Ordinarily Judith would have looked dignified and left me to my own reflections; to-night she reverted to her girlhood's plan of wheedling, as she used to do when I was an overworked student and she wanted me to suspend study for just one night to carry her skates to the town lake or act as escort at a "high tea."

"Well, then, without being bearish, I knew no more than I said at the time. Did she forget that Dr. Kane had, entirely without my wishes, made an unusual number of calls and under unusual circumstances, for the heavy snowfall rendered the carriage practically useless."

Then naturally he was embarrassed to find that, owing to his unforeseen delay, the bridal party had preceded him, taking refuge in the sacristy to escape the usual crowd of sightseers whom not even such weather could deter. Added to all this the sacristy was overheated, perhaps not for the bride and her under-dressed attendants, but one who had been ploughing his way amongst snow-drifts and rushing later through a dressing process even more tiresome to the ordinary man might well succumb there before the accusing glances of a delayed bridal party.

"It was only momentarily, of course," Judith admitted, carefully rehearsing the circumstances; the flurried best man of the occasion was just explaining, for the benefit of all concerned, that, owing to the storm, the bride's bouquet had failed to arrive—indeed, the train had, too, for that matter—when the bridesmaid, to smother Paul's regret, apparently, thrust into his face the enormous bunch of fragrant violets which had been substituted at the last moment for the conventional sweet peas. Then, to everybody's concern, the groom grew deathly white and certainly swayed a little—there was no gainsaying that fact.

"I should fancy the violets would restore him," remarked Judith; "they smelled so deliciously and the relief it must have been to see that they were to be had; they did go beautifully with Lillian's costume, for a mercy—didn't you think so, Henry?"

There was no use telling another bearish truth; that I had not given the combination a thought; neither did I remark audibly on the circumstance of Judith already calling the new Mrs. Kane by her given name, when as every one in town was aware, she (Judith) had never been admitted to the ultra select circle presided over by the lady's mother, whose difficulty in securing seven local eligibles for as many blooming daughters was, to my mind, the only reason that Lillian's fancy for the young doctor had not been rudely nipped in the bud.

Instead, I advised Judith to go home—a matter of a few blocks only—and if she cared in passing to call on Mrs. Kane, she could say my diagnosis was unchanged: "A passing faintness from over-exertion."

"Exactly; with no tendency as yet developed to follow in the way of a departed step-granduncle."

After she was gone, however, her remarks as they had trailed into the monologue she often substituted for conversation, kept recurring to my mind. "Those flowers, now! Had I ever noticed that Paul disliked violets? Come to think of it, he had never brought her any, and she could hardly say that of any other flower"; which I dare say is true, for he rarely returned from a country round without a bouquet of some sort for his godmother. Sometimes they came from the garden of a thoughtful patient, sometimes from the country hedgerows; frequently, I fancy, when these sources failed, Pearson, our town florist, supplied the deficiency.

In the days when I first undertook to train my assistant in the way he should go, Judith and I had differed somewhat in our view of this habit.

"Such a pretty attention to one of my age!" she was prone to comment when her godson's back was turned, while I quite as often remarked to his face that a man of his age carrying a bouquet, a doctor at that, looked lackadaisical.

To have started something in one's own way and then have extraneous thoughts actually forced on the mind you had just managed to concentrate in one direction, is very embarrassing to the amateur story-teller; so before I could resume my interrupted page I sat, pen in hand, scrawling idly over some blanks that lay near on my littered desk. I find one I have mechanically filled in with Paul Kane's name as patient, and under the heading diagnosis the unsatisfactory word "Idiosyncrasy," which enables me to take up the dropped threat of my narrative.

Great men have owned this idiosyncrasy—a repulsion for certain blooms and perfumes—they why not Paul? And why not violets?

What a plausible explanation this would have been and how much more satisfactory to the romantic bride and her bevy than that commonplace one of "over-exertion." Mrs. Borden herself might consider it a point that he shared one peculiarity in common with some celebrities and even crowned heads.

Judith would not have believed it, probably; for with the single exception of his mother, she considered herself as best acquainted with Paul's peculiarities. But is she? I have often thought there is a page of his life-book I alone have scanned and understood and that with no spoken word of explanation, the boy understands my knowledge thereof.

We are his own people, in a sense, Judith and I, for we adopted him in all but name on the death of his good father, whom I rather suspect my sister refused as a husband in the days when she thought I needed her most.

There was never any enforced separation from his mother, of course, beyond the customary one of college years; but she tacitly recognized the desired arrangement by devoting her time and straitened resources to the education of her girls, leaving Paul to me.

His childish confidences regarding dismembered birds and surreptitious experiments on family pets were mine in his school days and during my knowledge of theoretical medicine his college years. Why, it freshened to keep pace with the boy's progress and hold my own in our discussions. When he graduated with high honors it was natural he should come to me and the townspeople accepted him freely and gladly as the doctor's successor, who was being "trained in."

Some might demur a little to be sure. "Oh, he is so young, doctor!" a girl-mother some years his junior would say when incipient whooping cough alarmed her household; but the sensible portion of the community understood that he had the double advantage of new methods and my practical knowledge besides, while the fact of being Frank Kane's son was also in his favor.

My pet patients I still keep for my own—a sort of special practice—upon which Paul understood he must never intrude in the old man's day. There was one little girl who declared vehemently "The hour you send Dr. Kane here I shall leave for the city hospital."

She did not think then, poor child, how near the time was when such a contingency might arise, although she and I had a thorough understanding that dated from the winter her folks brought her home from the beloved convent school where she had just pulled through a serious attack of rheumatic fever.

We have no Catholic academy or sisterhood in our town, where members of that creed are in the minority, and those who, like the Moretons, prefer such education for their girls, are obliged to send them to a distance.

"Margery must not leave home again, nor indeed study under any circumstances," was all I said to the worried parents; but the child forced me to be more explicit later on.

"You take me away from my dear Sisters and my studies and forbid even my singing lessons, when every one calls my voice promising. Now I obey on one condition—that I know the whole truth."

And so for years she and I shared the knowledge, which she insisted must be spared her parents as long as might be, that her heart had been so badly weakened by the treacherous illness, there seemed small prospect of her accomplishments being ever utilized.

The girls with whom she sang at times, for whom she played so goodnaturedly at the impromptu dances, never understood why Margery did not further display her beautiful voice, or why Margery, who was so lithe and graceful, never danced or skated even a little.

The young men, always finding her sympathetic in a "good comrade" sort of way, kept on wondering why one never gained on his companions in Margery's favor. "The prettiest, liveliest girl in the town—she was so often bridesmaid," Judith used to say. "It might be she should be a bride." Rather it was she never would, sweet, brave Margery!

It was at a Halloweve party the first shadow of the end fell—the shadow she and I alone anticipated. A slight paralytic stroke, so light that there was little difference in her, even to me, except that she no longer rose from her sofa to greet me. And my visits were daily now—not that I could help much, but she was my pet patient. Dr. Kane, dropping me at her door each morning as he started for his suburban rounds, asked me at last how Miss Moreton was doing. "Nicely enough," I answered him; and took occasion to remark that my professional calls should not interfere with his social ones, for he made it a point, as I say, to avoid even the appearance of intrusion on my special practice, and Margery had been his schoolmate before the convent days and had always remained his sisters' friend.

A while later I told him enough to allow him, as a physician, to withdraw his own conclusions; but he made no comment, and I never met him at Margery's house, where the young people still loved to congregate. Then there came a time—another stroke, as you can understand—when I forbade even their companionship.

"You cruel man," smiled Margery. "Perhaps you will next deny me these." And her frail right hand paused from stroking its helpless fellow to caress the masses of blue violets, of which a fresh supply was every morning at her side, set before the marble figure that was the latest gift of her Sister teachers and representing Mary, the Mother of the Lord.

"No, I shall not banish your sweet friends, Margery, although you have never told the old man their story."

"Because, dear doctor, it would only mean added regret for you some time, and yet a causeless one, if you could understand all."

No more was said, but I thought I understood even then and she did not think so.

Was it not, Margery, that with the violets was offered, too, the love which might have clashed with your understanding of religious duty? Not merely as a death-bed sacrifice!

It would just as surely have been so in the heyday of her young strength were its restoration possible, for, loyal to her parents and every creed—loving and kind to me, whom she called her "dear old heretic"—Margery Moreton would never have considered a union that might not, like her violets, be laid for blessing before the "Mother of the Lord." She would accept literally her Church's verdict against marriage outside its fold.

Nor was she one to have shirked or softened such explanation. Still, through golden autumn days and chilling winter ones, when the sickroom was full of radiance, or again when it was gray with the grayness of foreboding, the violets were in place—all other bloom in the background. Ever since Margery was a baby her mother said they had been her passion; and the poor woman recalled with a pale smile early school days when her wayward little daughter quarreled with big boys who mocked her doll or teased her kitten, and would only accept as peace offerings the country violets which the offenders were accustomed to seek near and far.

"There was one boy in particular who got so many bad marks because of his country excursions, I used to think I should interfere in his behalf," said Mrs. Moreton once; but Margery, who always listened with attentive ears to her mother's reminiscences, interfered then:

"Mamma, dear, Dr. Hall is surely not interested in such ancient history," and taking her mother's hand she pressed it to her lips, lest the interruption might wound.

I think all my brethren should deny themselves the luxury of pet patients! With the selfishness of age I try to now, for my own old heart could not stand many such strains as it was to look my last on Margery. We were at least thankful that the tender touch of death restored to her dear face all its well remembered comeliness.

She never looked so lovely as in her white gown, fashioned from material once purchased for the graduation day that had not come, and treasured unused for all those years, even as Mary had served the simple wedding robe to serve, alas, the same unforeseen purpose at last. Her golden brown head was laid as in repose on a plentiful pillow of her beloved violets, and some were in the still hands, around which twined a shining chain, familiar to me as Margery's constant companion—her "rosary" she called it—and many a time of late I had restored it to the feeble hold whence it slipped so easily. Just as often Margery remarked: "Now for thanks I shall say one round for my dear old doctor, for I do want him to know Mother Mary."

That farewell eve, Judith being ill, I called to select my offering to the florist—our town boasts but one. The boy who assists or retards operations, as the case may be, called to an adjoining greenhouse, where his employer was busy, "that the doctor had come for his flowers."

"They have gone long since," came the answer (not meant for me, however), "and there will be no disappointment for to-morrow, though they say in the city it was not easy to fill the pillow order."

"Tell Pearson to send lots of lilies to Mrs. Moreton's for Dr. and Miss Hall," I said to the boy, and left without ordering the blossoms I had intended, because I remembered just then some one who never encroached on a specialty of mine. Lilies, as I happened to recall were surely an appropriate offering before that exquisite altar in Margery's church, that I had seen by invitation of her kindly pastor, who has grown to be my very good friend, as he was ever a co-worker to make the heart glad of any physician.

They were indeed in profusion, her favorite flowers, at altar and grave, and though each holiday-time finds me in the old cemetery—for Mary, too, is laid near by, with material walls as well as the barriers of creed to separate my dear ones in death—I have never missed the purpleglow of violets from the little glassed shrine above Margery's grave. Within its shelter the hands of her heart-broken parents placed the familiar image of that other "Mother," because the child had loved it so.

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I wonder if all this explains my assistant's idiosyncrasy, or is it rather contradictory of the fact?

I know it does not explain to-day's marriage, and yet there are many men who have taken to their hearts, in lieu of the lost love, even as I took my profession, the idols of ambition and social preferment. Marriage with Lillian Borden means the latter for my successor, in the town where her family interests are paramount, and of the former Paul was never guiltless.

Will it be mine now to tend for a little space another grave with Mary's, when the seasons of remembrance roll around? For Margery's parents have been mercifully called to reunion with their only child.

Then, for the limit of my dwindled years, the shrine shall not lack its tribute—speaking not alone an old man's love for a brave memory, but his gratitude as well to that Mary (whom he has not come to know, perhaps, as Margery meant) for all that he has found her name to mean to troubled human hearts.

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Another knock! Only Bill, our colored coachman, to ask if he shall see me to the house! Judith's interference again!

As he is evidently determined to wait, I must go, ending the day's record with my coachman's contribution of coincidence.

"Horses all right for to-morrow, Bill?"

"Yas, suh; yas suh!"

"And how are the roads?"

"Oh, clearin' finely, suh. They wuz pow'ful bad dis mawnin' up cem't'ry way. I jes gev Doctah Pau' up foh los', suh, 'fore he got back to th' kerredge."

Evidently I have not quite kept track of the practice, for I recall no patient up the cemetery way just now.—Margaret M. Halvey, in Catholic World Magazine.

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If we might credit Goethe to the eighteenth century few of those competent to judge would hesitate to call Sainte-Beuve the foremost critic of the nineteenth century. The qualifications of a critic are fourfold. First, he must have insight—acumen, the essential gift of the critical faculty—and this Sainte-Beuve possessed abundantly. Second, he must have an abundant equipment—scholarship, knowledge of many things, so that he may compare one thing with another, comparison being a chief necessity of criticism—and Sainte-Beuve had an equipment unapproached by other writers of his century, and his erudition was as wide as it was deep, for he not only knew many things, but he also knew all about each one of them. Thirdly, the critic must have disinterestedness, he must love veracity for its own sake, he must insist on setting forth the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and here was Sainte-Beuve's standard of honor, that as a critic he refused to be swayed by any of the social appeals to which most critics are only too ready to yield. He had a rigid independence, a sturdy individuality, a resolute freedom from party bias, although he is not always absolutely devoid of personal prejudice. And, in the fourth place, a critic needs sympathy, or at least he must have enough of it to enable him to understand and to appreciate men and women wholly unlike himself, and sympathy Sainte-Beuve had, although his share of this quality is not so full perhaps as his share of the three other qualifications for his great office.

He is the foremost critic of his century in the body and substance of his work. His contribution to literature looks big on the library shelves—some three score volumes, more or less, all solidly documented, all alive with the play of his keen intelligence and all illuminated by his intellectual integrity. A thin book of poems and a stillborn novel must not be neglected, for in them it is possible to perceive the reason for Sainte-Beuve's occasional lapses from justice in his estimate of some of the poets and novelists of his own time and of his own language.—Brander Matthews, in Century.

Culture is not an accident of birth, although our surroundings advance or retard it; it is always a matter of individual education.