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CONFESSIONS OF A TRAINED NURSE

Tragedy and Comedy, Melodrama and Romance Thrill the Hearts and Touch the Sympathies of the Hospital Worker

Here is one of the most dramatic episodes that has ever come into my experience. My patient was a man of about forty or forty-five, big, handsome, sweet-tempered, highly strung, intelligent and very likable. There was no hope for him, he had a cancerous growth, but though he was suffering intensely, he bore it all with wonderful patience, rarely murmuring, never complaining.

After I had watched with him, however, for a short time, I came to the conclusion that some intense mental suffering was the probable explanation of his fortitude, that it made him almost unconscious of physical pain. His mind seemed to be constantly dwelling on very dreadful, all absorbing thoughts.

These thoughts, whatever they were gave him no rest. He would battle with them until he was quite exhausted and then he would beg us for drugs. This was the only time he ever complained. "I'm so tired, so tired," he would say. "Please make me sleep." But even in his sleep the struggle evidently still went on, often he would moan pitifully, and sometimes cry aloud.

One day he was unusually weak and nervous and the black thoughts would not be downed. He began by mumbling and muttering, and then he shrieked out: "Did he live, did he live? Oh, God, let me know, let me but be sure. I cannot die until I know," broke from him. And then his voice grew weaker, and he sobbed: "I did not know, I did not know. Oh, God, is that an excuse? I did not know."

Of course, we managed to quiet him, but I was more than ever sure now that my surmise was correct, bottom of the trouble, and, if possible, I decided that I would set to work, find the means of satisfying him. It has always seemed to me that in this troubled world it is due every man at least to die in peace. And so with the interest and sympathy I had always manifested, it took only a few well directed questions to bring forth his story.

As a young man, some twenty or twenty-five years before, he had studied medicine. He took his degree, hung out his sign, and his very first call was from the apartment above his office, where the little son of the family had been taken suddenly ill during the night. After examining the child, he pronounced the case bronchitis, ordered hot applications, and told the parents to keep the room very warm. But the next day the child was worse, and he continued to fail very rapidly.

Whether from inexperience, or carelessness, or the arrogant infallibility of youth, the young doctor did not even seem to consider the probability of a wrong diagnosis, but continued with the same treatment. The little boy was an only child, and the parents were almost frantic with fear. Finally they decided to consult another physician and called in a well-known child's specialist. The new physician hardly looked at the child when he pronounced the disease to be diphtheria. Then, noting the closed windows and hot packs, he said: "What did you have here, a horse doctor?" He worked over the child for an hour or more, entirely reversing the treatment, but confessed to little or no success.

My poor little patient made me understand the humiliation as he slipped out of the room. He said that he had never been able to understand why he did not recognize the disease, for it is always impossible to mistake diphtheria. At first he was alive only to the professional stigma, but gradually the possible consequences of his mistake overwhelmed him. He was horror-stricken. Perhaps he had killed the child. He could not tell, and he was afraid to find out. And he had been afraid to find out ever since.

The next day he left the city and for two years he tramped the earth trying to forget. When he returned home the family had moved and he made no inquiries about them. But he never practiced medicine again. He decided that he was not fit to be entrusted with the fate of a human life. He opened a drug store, but he never presumed on the knowledge of his lost profession and never allowed himself to advise even for the slightest ailment.

"I only had one case, you know," he said: "It was my first and my last." He was silent for a moment after finishing his story, and I confess I was too choked with pity to find anything to say. Then he turned to me, his eyes big with hopelessness and pleading. "Do you think he lived? Or, if he died," and he shuddered, "could his parents forgive me? Tell me, tell me! I cannot face my God with this sin upon my soul."

Of course I tried to reassure him. But he would not be satisfied. "Ah, no; you are only saying that to quiet me." And he became more excited. "I must know the truth. I must know or I cannot die. Oh, God, have I not done penance enough? Let me know; let me know! I am so tired, so tired."

That afternoon when his brother came I told what I had learned. Of course the brother knew all about it, and then I unfolded my plan. He was to make every effort to locate this family which had had the sick child, and if possible to bring the father or the child to see the patient. If it was impossible to have one or the other come in person, then he was to bring in writing an affidavit either of the recovery of the child, or in case of its death, of the parents' forgiveness, for I felt sure that after all these years they could not refuse to grant it to the man when they heard that he was dying and how he had repented and suffered.

The brother willingly agreed to fol-

low my suggestion and to leave no stone unturned in his efforts to locate this family. It is needless to go into the details of his search, which was successful. He found the father and learned that not only did the child live, but that when he grew up he himself took up the study of medicine. The father and mother, moreover, had really almost forgotten about the whole incident. Neither the man nor his son was able to come to the hospital, but the brother brought to us a paper which plainly stated that the boy had completely recovered.

I feel that once I have had a view into Paradise, for I have seen a soul reclaimed. I handed my patient this letter, and as he read it a look of truly heavenly joy and contentment smoothed away all the trouble and worry he had ever known. He looked up at me and just whispered, as if the news was too good to say aloud. "It's all right. The boy's alive. They've forgiven me. Surely my Lord will not be less kind. I think I shall rest now." Then he gave us such a happy smile and closed his eyes to sleep. He did not wake again but the smile remained.

Peggy, too, has told me of a very melodramatic life story of one of her patients though it was of an entirely different nature. This patient had attracted Peggy's attention because married. She had been brought into the she was so perceptibly out of her element free ward with brain fever, but in her appearance, manners and speech she evinced such a really unusual degree of culture and intelligence that Peggy was curious to know what had brought her here.

This "curiosity" about the lives of our patients which both Peggy and I confess to is not mere idle, inexcusable prying. We refuse to regard our patients as "cases" and have always considered each as an individual personality. To this theory we both believe we owe whatever little success we may have had in our profession.

Often the "story" behind the "case" has given us the key to the proper treatment of the patient. And I know we can sincerely say that after—well, many years practice—we are still interested in our work. How many nurses can lay claim to that? At any rate Peggy listened sympathetically to the bits of personal history this woman told her during her lucid moments, and, supplemented by hints gleaned from her delirium, was able to piece together this story:

The woman was born in Russia and had evidently been highly educated, for she spoke three or four languages fluently. When she was about eighteen years old her family lost their money, she was forced to earn her living and had become governess in a noble family. A marriage of convenience she soon learned had not brought about a very happy family life. The mother apparently cared little for anything except society, not even for her children. The father was absorbed in political affairs, but he, at least, seemed to have some sense of duty and visited his children every day.

On one visit to the nursery he noticed the children's governess and she found favor in his eyes. The girl was young, beautiful, highly strung, with warm red blood in her veins, and was wearing away her life as a children's governess. The man was

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Josh Billings, the quaint philosopher whose maxims are full of homely wisdom, once said: "The longer I live the more I believe a good set of bowels are worth more than a good set of brains." Celery King makes good bowels. 25 cents at dealers or by mail. S. C. Wells & Co., Toronto.

Why Not Both

young, handsome, proud, wealthy and heart hungry. Love entered into their hearts; they welcomed it and were glad.

The girl gave up her position as governess and for a time was very happy. Every wish she had was gratified. Every comfort that money could buy or love could invent was hers. His position and his religion forbade divorce, but it was understood that if anything should ever happen to his wife she would be united to him by the laws of church and state. His wife died. But this was after they had known each other for a full five years. And so while she was joyously and eagerly looking forward to an early marriage with him his visits grew rarer and rarer. His messages colder, and one day she received a letter from him in which he announced that "For reasons of state he was forced to marry again, a countless high in favor at court."

He said that he thought it only right to let her know before the betrothal was made public, that he would always regard her as a good friend, but he considered it best for them not to see each other again. though she was to retain her house and all her possessions and was to receive a stated amount of money every month for the remainder of her life, in memory of the many happy days they had spent together.

The very next day she left the house. Twice in the months that followed she tried to take her life, for living was only a dreadful nightmare to her now. But both times she had been discovered too soon. After a time she thought to forget her sorrow in hard work, for she was resolved to follow out his desires to the letter and never see him again. Then gradually the conviction came to her that this former life, which she had sincerely believed was justified by the unreasonable social conditions which alone forbade its public announcement, and by the strength and purity of her love was, on the contrary, altogether wrong, had been unlawful, sinful and inexcusable. She was convinced that her grievous punishment was only a just retribution, and so she decided to do what penance she could. She moved to another part of Russia, joined a secret order which did charity work among the peasants and accomplished some good. She thought she had forgotten her old life or that at least she was safe from any reminder of it. But it is almost impossible to be lost in police-fretted Russia.

So one day a letter from him was delivered to her. He wrote that he had found it was she whom he had always loved and that he could not live without her. He begged her forgiveness and wanted to bring back the old days again. She did not answer the letter. But she knew that the old love in her heart had only been sleeping, and for fear her good resolutions might not be strong enough, that her conscience might not be able to hold out against her love for him if once she chanced to see him, she ran away.

Peggy could never gain very clear details of her journey here to America, but it must have been one long series of privations and fearful obstacles. When she arrived in New York she sought for work unsuccessfully. Then, hearing of a possible position in a certain Western city, she set out for it. I suppose this was the last straw. She reached the hospital and Peggy, and she never seemed to want to go any further.

Peggy says she is glad the girl died. She had read the book of life very thoroughly, the humor and the pathos, and if she had lived there would have been only blank pages for her to turn over and over all her days. And in the book of life it is not good to have blank pages.

Now, as long as I am doling out plots for embryonic authors, here is as pretty and complete a romance as ever was done into print. One of my young friends, who has recently graduated, told me this story:

She was nursing a young girl with typhoid, a private patient. The girl was full of life and high spirits, and during her convalescence chafed at the necessary confinement and inactivity. Grace says that if she had not been so pretty and dear and lovable it would have been impossible to bear her impatience and constantly impending explosions.

One day the girl started in to hum softly to herself, and I suppose en-

couraged by Grace's tolerance, began to whistle boldly, her high treble bubbling blithely forth. The tune she chose was "Love Me and the World is Mine." Suddenly she stopped. Through the walls came an answering whistle, full, clear, basso, and the tune it carried was "I Love You, I Adore You," from the "Serenade." The little lady's eyes twinkled with mischief. "Teasing, Teasing, I Was Only Teasing You," came from her lips. "Arrah, Go Way, and Stop Your Teasing." Was the whistled response. By this time the girl was getting so excited that Grace firmly put a stop to the concert, but not before she had a chance to bring out, "I'm Tired, So Very Tired," and received the reply, "Rip Van Winkle Was a Lucky Man."

Then the girl went to sleep, for Grace had promised to find out all about this unknown, typical twentieth century serenade. That night just before "lights out" they heard softly through the walls "Goodnight, Ladies." And she managed to keep her eyes and her mouth open long enough to answer "Goodnight, Sweet Dreams; God Bless Thee Everywhere." The bugle for "taps" was his final reply.

Next morning the "Reveille" announced His Lordship's awakening, and my lady being evidently inspired started, "Hark, Hark! The Lark!" His nature refused to accept anything so classic so early in the morning, and, going back to school days, he gave her "We Meet Again in Gladness." But the spell was still upon her, and "I Dreamed I Dwelt in Marble Halls," from "The Bohemian Girl," was her next contribution to this musical conversation. "Dreaming, Dreaming, Talking in Your Sleep," came his prosaic shot.

So they kept it up off and on all day. He sent her flowers, while he whistled "Tis the Last Rose of Summer." And her thanks were impatiently worded, "You Can Fool Some of the People all of the Time." But she sent him a book, and he was eracious enough to whistle, "Every Little Bit Added to What You Got Makes a Little Bit More." One day he started, "You're the Only Girl in the World for Me," and she was quick enough to catch the spirit, and back went "Just Because It's You." "When We Are Married" broke from him, and she went him one better again with "Honeymooning."

For a week this hospital antiphony kept up, opera, grand and comic, popular songs, symphonies, ballads, every kind of music being called upon to contribute its share. Then one day their respective nurses announced that they would be able to go out on the porch. Each one asked whether the other was going, too. By this time the nurses had become interested, and so they managed to put the two chairs side by side, and, by introducing the whistlers, assist them to a more normal mode of conversation. As they met I understood that their lips involuntarily puckered. Now, I wonder if it was really from the whistling habit or in anticipation of—well, something else that lips are made for.

At any rate, these two patients were together whenever possible. It was curious, Grace tells me, how eager they both were to get out on the porch, and how loath to come in. The nurses saw how the wind was blowing, and I believe they gave it an extra puff themselves. The man and the girl left the hospital on the same day. About four months later their respective nurses received cards announcing the engagement, and they celebrated their roles as substitute Cupids.

We have had melodrama and romance, and now would you have a bit of simple tragedy? A young girl with spinal meningitis was once put under my care. She was seventeen years old, not seventeen years young, mind you, for she had never known anything but responsibilities. Her mother was weak and helpless and prolific. Her father was ignorant, shiftless and lazy. She was the oldest of six living children, and had always had to look after the house and take care of the family. Now she was its chief support. Since she was twelve years old she had worked in a necktie factory, slaving all day, and sometimes getting piece work to do (continued on page 6, 4th column.)

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