

## A REALLY GOOD CASE.

A LEGEND OF ST. MICHAEL'S HOSPITAL.

Every one knows that St. Michael's, as we shall take the liberty of calling it, is the largest and most celebrated of the London hospitals. It is situated quite in the heart of the city; and is about equidistant from London Bridge, Westminster, Gower Street, Smithfield, and Whitechapel. I was student there, and there the happiest days of my life were passed. And now to my story.

A large number of the students had gone down for the short Christmas vacation, and I should have gone also, but was just then "dressed" to Carver Smith, and could not leave town; moreover, it was my week of residence. I must beg you to remember, what is perhaps but little understood by the general public, that a large part of the watching and care, and a certain proportion also of the treatment of hospital patients, devolve upon assistants selected from the senior students. Some of the less important appointments, such as the "dressings," are held by every student in turn; but the more responsible offices, some of which require twelve months' residence in the hospital, can only be gained by a few men each year; and for these appointments, which are esteemed positions of great trust and honour, and which are exceedingly valuable as stepping-stones to professional success, there is very keen competition. On the surgical side of the hospital, each of the four visiting surgeons had a resident house-surgeon; and to be Sir Carver Smith's "H.S." was one of the highest ambitions of a "St. Mike," for Sir Carver was at that time one of the leading English surgeons.

A man named George Adams held the post at this time; and as he is the hero of my story, so far as I have a hero, I will just say a word about him. He was one of those men that we occasionally meet with, who seem to stand head and shoulders above their fellows—very quiet and reserved, and when he chose, quite inscrutable. No one knew where he came from. But his very great ability, his calmness in all emergencies—I never saw him discomposed except once—his mature judgment, and his great kindness, won him the respect alike of the students, the nursing staff, and the surgeons. Under him were four dressers, junior men, who assisted in the hospital under his direction. I was one of them. Each week, one of us in turn resided in the hospital; and as I said, Christmas week fell to my turn, and that is how I came to spend Christmas in St. Michael's. I ought to add that there were four assistant-surgeons to the hospital; but their care was over the out-patient department, and it was only in the absence of the visiting surgeons that they had any duty in the wards.

Well, it was Christmas night, and our work for the day was done, except, some late visits to the wards by-and-by; and of course any casualties that might turn up. But Christmas day is usually slack in that respect. It is medical rather than surgical casualties that Christmas day produces. We had got up in honour of the day a little entertainment in an empty ward, for any of the hospital inmates who cared to attend and were able to do so.

We had a famous little programme. One or two of our residents could play and sing well; another had a curious facility in whistling to the piano; another was an amateur ventriloquist and prestidigitateur; and I fancy there were also some recitations and tableaux to come off. Also, there was one of the patients, an old sailor, who could sing in a grand rich stentorian baritone and bring down the house. Our chairman—Adams, of course—had just begun, and was delivering himself in a semi-serious way of some very eloquent remarks, amidst great applause—for nothing pleases the lower classes better than a few oratorical flourishes—when "tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, tinkle" went a small high-pitched imperious bell. It was the accident-bell!

Oh, ye lay mortals, ye little know how the social and domestic joy of a medical man are at the mercy of a bell! We invite our friends to tea, we welcome them, and anticipate a pleasant evening, and—there goes the bell! We come home tired and wet, change boots for slippers, and yet comfortable by the fireside, and—there goes the bell! We turn into bed on a cold night, and just get warm and snug when—there goes the bell! My bell-experience began that night at St. Michael's, and I shall not soon forget it.

It was Sir Carver's "taking in week," and his assistants had to attend to the acci-

dents. Adams nodded to me; and off I went to investigate, knowing it might be anything from a cut finger to a railway smash. I found a scene of considerable excitement in the accident-room. Two policemen, aided by a crossing-sweeper and a cabman, had just brought in a patient, and some other spectators had pushed their way in out of curiosity.

"Just happened outside, sir; knocked down by a runaway cab, sir."

"Lost a lot of blood; 'fraid it's a bad case, sir." Thus the policemen.

"Ask Mr. Adams to come down at once; clear the room," I said.

It was a young fair-haired girl of eighteen or nineteen, perfectly pale, unconscious, and almost pulseless. A strange contrast to her rough, swarthy, weather-beaten bearers. A deep wound in the neck was bleeding profusely; but on tearing open the dress, I found I could stop the hemorrhage almost entirely with my finger.

Adams was there immediately; in a minute he knew all about it, and had settled his course of action. Quietly he said: "Send for Sir Carver. Take her to the operating-room at once. Ask the other men to come." And then to me: "Keep up steady pressure, and don't take your finger away for an instant."

Nothing could be found out concerning her. No one was with her when she was struck down. She was very tastefully, though not expensively dressed. Her features were exceedingly regular and pretty, and when the colour was in her face she must have possessed a very considerable share of good looks. Nothing but a purse and a handkerchief were found in her pocket. The former was well filled, and the latter was marked "E. Stead." Adams said at once that she was a lady.

I do not know whether it ever happened before at St. Michael's that on the occurrence of a sudden emergency, no one of the surgical staff was at hand. Strange to say, it happened so to-night. Sir Carver Smith and three of the assistant-surgeons lived close to the hospital; but in five minutes the messenger returned with the news that Sir Carver had been called to some aristocratic celebrity at the West End, who had met with an accident, and had taken one of the assistant-surgeons with him. The second was out of town; and the third, who had been left to act in emergencies, had been taken suddenly ill.

We had been discussing the case, and offering advice upon it with all that calm assurance which characterizes embryonic surgeons. But matters now became serious. Half an hour would suffice to summon one of the other surgeons; but it was plain that something must be done at once. We all looked at Adams, who had said very little hitherto, but had gone on making everything ready. He simply said: "Begin to give chloroform; I am going to operate."

"What are you going to do?" we asked.

He told us; but I will not inflict any details upon my readers, but will simply say that the sharp end of a broken shaft had made a narrow deep gash in the root of the neck, and had wounded a large artery. The operation contemplated, afforded almost the only chance of life; and to delay it any longer would, Adams said, be throwing that chance away. It was an operation of the highest difficulty and danger under the present condition of the parts; and could its performance have been anticipated, the theatre would have been crowded with spectators from all the hospitals in London. And here was a young surgeon of twenty-five, called on at a few minutes' notice, to undertake what many a long experienced surgeon might hesitate to attempt; for it was impossible to perform it without much additional loss of blood; and it was not at all improbable that the patient might not survive the operation, to say nothing of after-dangers.

Adams carefully explained to the other house-surgeons what assistance they would have to give him; and when the patient was ready, commenced at once. Perfect silence reigned, broken only at intervals by a word from the operator; but indeed he had little need to speak, for we were well drilled at St. Michael's, and everything he needed was put into his hand almost before he asked for it. I think I can still see that quiet eager group of young men under the brilliant gas-light, standing around the pallid, slumbering, unconscious girl; and in the centre the young surgeon, cool, collected, with steady hand, without hurry, without hesitation, doing his work. I have witnessed many of the most brilliant operators in England, and of course have seen Adams himself many times in that operating-room in later years;

but I think I never saw that night's operation surpassed either by himself or by any one else. A special demand sometimes calls for special powers, and acts almost like an inspiration; and so it seemed now.

In a short time it was done, and successfully done; and the patient was carried away to a quiet ward, where she was duly cared for by the nurse in charge, Adams, and Sir Carver Smith, who came later on. I think Adams stayed up all night.

Our miscellaneous entertainment did not come off; but we scarcely regretted the change of programme. In a place where accidents are hourly, and operations daily occurrences, one more or less seldom creates much excitement; and when I go on to say that this case excited more interest among residents and non-residents than almost any other case I ever saw in the hospital, I wish you clearly to understand that this fact was due entirely to the extreme professional interest of the case, and the great enthusiasm of St. Michael's men for the study of surgery. At the same time I may state, although not particularly bearing on the question, that the patient was an uncommonly pretty girl; and day after day passed by without any light being shed on the question as to who she was and whence she came—circumstances quite sufficient to excite in a mind not preoccupied with such matters as burden the intellect of the average medical student, the liveliest interest and curiosity.

After the operation, she was at first too ill to be interrogated; and when she got a little better, she declined to give any information; at any rate none could be obtained from her. Perhaps she was a little "queer" with feverish or hysterical excitement.

At the expiry of two days I went in to help with the dressing. She was very grateful for everything done for her, and bore her pain very well. For a long time she was in a very critical state. As the euphonious phrase of the young profession went, "She had a very close shave for it." At the end of three weeks however, she was in fairly smooth-water; and for the first time some of the clinical class went in with Sir Carver to see the case. He had hitherto said nothing on the subject of the operation. He was a man of few words; but one word of praise or blame from him was never forgotten by any of us. Turning to us from the patient, he said: "This, gentlemen, is a case of so-and-so;" and he briefly explained it. Then he added: "Nothing but the most exceptional circumstances could justify a house-surgeon in this hospital in undertaking an operation of such importance. In this case, those exceptional circumstances existed. The operation is one of great difficulty and rarity. I have once, many years ago, performed it myself, and the patient died. Had my patient recovered, such a recovery would then, I believe, have been without precedent. But the gratification to myself of having performed the first successful operation, would not have been greater than is my gratification now at having under my care a case which will, I believe, recover, and whose recovery will be due without doubt to the prompt and skilful action of a St. Michael's student, my own house-surgeon, Mr. Adams."

"Strong for Carver, and good for Adams," was the general comment. Adams pretended to be writing notes; but there was not one of us who would not readily have suffered "ploughing" in our "final college" to gain such a word from Carver Smith.

Yes; she recovered rapidly; and prettier and prettier she grew as she got better. She talked very little, and said nothing at all to help her identification. Inquiry was fruitless, even though the case got into the newspapers. The interest among the students increased daily. It was reported that she was an heiress who had quarrelled with her guardian; that Adams was madly in love with her; that she was waiting for him to propose, and then would marry off-hand; that Adams knew all about her, but kept it snug. And the men got to chaffing him in a mild sort of way, wanting to know the "state of the heart" and the chances of "union by first intention." But Adams was impenetrable. Personally, I am inclined to think that whatever the condition of his patient's heart might be, he was a little affected in that region. She was evidently very fond of him, and liked no one but him to dress the wound. Still the mystery increased.

At last one afternoon I was sitting in Adam's room in a leisure interval, when a lady's card was brought in. It had a deep black border, and bore the inscription: MRS. STEAD, The Cedars. She wished to see Mr. Adams. Immediately afterwards, the lady was shown in. Adams motioned

me to stay. She was a fine, tall woman of fifty, dressed in deep mourning, with hair just turning gray, a firm mouth, soft keen gray eyes, and a face combining intellect and kindness.

"Have I the pleasure of speaking to Mr. Adams?" she said.

He bowed. She then produced a paper which gave an account of our famous case and of the part Adams had played in it.

"May I inquire whether this patient is still in the hospital? Can I see her?"

"Yes; certainly. Would the lady be able to identify her? Would it not be better for the patient to see the card first, to avoid sudden excitement; that is, if the lady's visit were likely to cause excitement?"

"Perhaps it would be better to take up the card, and say that Mrs. Stead desired to see her."

Wonderfully calm and self-possessed the lady seemed to us; and yet she could not entirely suppress some signs of emotion or excitement. She said that illness in her family had prevented her from seeing the papers for some time, or she would probably have been here before.

I took the card up and showed it to the patient. She turned very pale, then buried her face in her pillow and burst into tears.

"Shall the lady come up?" I said.

I thought she sobbed out "Yes."

The visitor came up. Slowly and calmly she walked up the ward. The news had somehow got about, and several of the men found that they had business in that part of the hospital just then. The lady stood by the bed, and said softly:

"Elizabeth?"

The girl looked up, and their eyes met. One glance at the face was enough.

"Yes," said the lady; "I can identify her."

"It is your daughter?" asked Adams.

"It is my cook," said the lady—"Elizabeth Saunders."

I think I said that I only once saw Adams considerably discomposed, and that was on the present occasion.

"I—I—thought her name was Stead," he said, and his eyes rested on a pocket-handkerchief lying on the pillow. The lady's eyes followed his, and a slight smile played on her features.

Yes; it was even so. The acute scientific observer, the far-sighted young surgeon, famed for his diagnostic acumen, had seen through this case, but had not seen through his patient. It turned out that the girl, being remarkably good-looking, and having acquired, from a previous situation in a nobleman's family, a very correct way of speaking and some very ladyish manners, and frequenting places of public amusement, where she usually attracted a good deal of attention. Her mistress having been called away from home to nurse a sick relative, had allowed her servant to go, as she thought, to visit her parents in the country; but the girl, having her wages in her pocket, had preferred to remain with an acquaintance in London, where she enjoyed her Christmas holidays very much to her own satisfaction, until her accident put a stop to her manoeuvres, or rather changed her field of action. Finding, as she recovered, that she was being addressed as "Miss Stead," and that she was the object of much interest and attention, it seems to me—judging by what experience of human nature on its female side I have since acquired—not very remarkable that she preferred to keep up the delusion; golden silence being her main line of tactics. And, fair readers, do you think it very contrary to your experience of human nature on its male side, that an otherwise exceedingly acute young man should be the subject of a delusion of this particular kind?

The lady spoke very kindly to the girl; and guessing, I fancy, how matters stood, said some very graceful things to Adams. Subsequently, you will perhaps be glad to hear, she proved a very kind friend to him, and her influence was of no small assistance to him in his future professional advancement. She became, in fact, quite a mother to him, though not a mother-in-law.

I really do not know what befel the girl, except that, at her own desire, the lady obtained for her "a situation in the country, out of the way of temptation;" and that she proved to be a faithful servant.

I am sorry to have to state that public interest in this case at St. Michael's somewhat rapidly declined after Mrs. Stead's visit; perhaps because, as the *Lancet* said, the interesting symptoms had all disappeared. But I said then, say now, and always will say, that it was, from all points of view, "A Really Good Case."