

The Skeleton in the Closet.

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"THE SKELETON at the feast," grim and ghastly reminder of vanished joys crowned with garlands, its hideousness exposed amidst mirth and revelry is not half so hopelessly terrible as the "skeleton in the closet," shut carefully away from the light of day, surrounded by gloom and mystery, whose presence we dare not acknowledge. In the one case, however fearful the fact may be it is frankly acknowledged, mutual sympathy can make common cause against it, while in the other, doubt and obscurity lend accessories of horror.

We are all curious about other people's dark closets; we talk a great deal often very lightly and flippantly, God forgive us! about them, surmising, conjecturing what manner of monster may be concealed behind those closed doors. We allow our imagination full play, and wonder how the possessor of that ominous secret can fancy that all the world does not know the story which he is so anxious to conceal, yet we are all persuaded that no one suspects the occupant of our own gloomy corner.

These alading skeletons are derived from many and composite causes; the sins and sorrows, follies and foibles that make up our daily life. Many of them are formed by the pestilential influence of sickly sentimentality and diseased fancy, and should never exist at all. These are simply

"The midnight host of phantoms grim
That beguile the human soul."

and only require the exercise of a little common sense to put them to flight. People whose mental constitution leads them to fix their attention exclusively upon ideas of one kind, are prone to deny the reality of thoughts they do not share, and retain an excessive confidence in their own conclusions. Experience is the basis of all knowledge, and we should beware of excluding all experience except our own. Many refuse to admit even a gleam of reason into the dark chambers of their intellect, where they hide as sacred treasures the antiquated beliefs of past ages, ancient feuds and grudges, causeless fears, the worthlessness of which would at once become apparent if the light of day were permitted to shine in upon them.

Fidelity constitutes in many cases the skeleton in the closet. Not the honest, independent species, but the shabby-genteel variety that pinches in food and warmth, and goes in wretchedly comfortable fashion in order to adorn the hat with feathers and trim the jacket with imitation fur, that is determined to be taken for what it is not, and suffers horribly in the pretence. One good woman waxing valiant in her attempts to impose upon a cynical public, alludes grandly to "the servants," when her relay of retainers is represented by one humble maid of all work, while another puts a long dress, with a mature looking cap and apron upon a tiny child of twelve in the hope that she may be mistaken for an efficient tailmaid.

"Alice does not care for dress, she considers it frivolous," we are gravely informed, while we can see plainly that the girl's heart is bursting with envy of the companions whose means will enable them to make more show than herself. "Mamma does not approve of public amusements;" "Mamma's health will not allow her to entertain, even in a very quiet way," while those who listen smile at the transparent pretence.

Old age is to many a very terrible skeleton, something to be shunned and dreaded, and held away at arm's length as long as possible. All the long train of years are shut up behind the closet door, while the elderly woman, making herself up with the expenditure of care, time and money, really believes that she deceives the world into thinking her a mere girl. When horribly conscious of rapidly increasing avariciousness she compresses her waist, indulges in powders and cosmetics for the complexion and dyes for the hair. All the methods for repairing the ravages of time are so easily detected, and only harm the foolish people who use them. The world laughs in its sleeve, and out of it, at the pitiful spectacle, and the poor woman's mortified vanity supplies the disparaging comments which she may not hear uttered.

Conversational shams often display the very skeleton they are trying to hide. Ignorance is openly displayed by many a girl damsel who prattles about "Shakespeare and the musical glasses"; expatiating upon the Mahatmas, "that sweet thing in art," the philosophy of history, or the latest political entanglement of which she knows little and cares less. How wretched are all the small feints and subterfuges which the world sees through and mocks; pitiful attempts to hide that which cannot be hidden, ropes of sand whose making employs the best energies of mind and body, and which are so miserably inadequate to any good service. Alas! for the false pretensions which destroy the possibility of all true nobleness because of conscious deception, for the moral deterioration which comes of placing appearances in place of reality.

The fear of illness, the dread of death, both form a

very common variation of the skeleton in the closet. An old lady was haunted by the fear of falling a victim to cancer, and died at eighty-six of heart disease. Many of us have met humble-hearted Christians, who during life have walked softly in dread of

"That entrance to the life-elysium
Whose portal we call death."

and in the end have sunk to rest with a trustful smile on their lips.

Then there are the tragic sorrows shut away behind those closed doors. The sin committed in past years, and whose effects still live, the old loves and friendships, things that happened so long ago that they have been forgotten by all but ourselves. There are names that are never spoken not because they are forgotten, but because the quivering lips dare not trust themselves to utter the once familiar sound. There are thoughts which we seek to drive away by work, by pleasure, by anything that can keep down the pain in our hearts—thoughts that come to us in dead of night, or in the chill gray of early dawn, when they can neither be stifled or ignored.

After all, we may surely take comfort in the fact that the most grievous burdens when viewed calmly and truthfully in the light of God's sunshine, and of common sense, lose half the terror with which our imagination has invested them. Tender, reverent sorrow should not be made into a horror. The dark closet may be a sacred enclosure, consecrated by happy memories; and the skeleton no longer a reminder of perished hope, but a gracious presence, promising hope eternal.

Work of the Nurse.

Not a Sensational Occupation, but Arduous and Exacting.

THE sentimental idea of a nurse's occupation as consisting mainly in the gentle smoothing of pillows, is now generally disabused. The work of nursing proper demands muscle, pluck, endurance, deftness and sympathy, but does not in itself involve any serious strain to healthy and capable women. The word nursing has come to be a synonymous term with overwork, because the hours of continuous duty, by night and day, are very long, and also on account of the amount of cleaning work, sweeping, dusting, and polishing, which supplements attention to the patients.

The intensity of work varies greatly in different hospitals, and depends much upon whether they are situated in busy and densely populated centres or in quiet provincial towns. Things adjust themselves, however, with such nice economy that, though other circumstances may change from place to place, the labor of the nurse will remain just as much as she can manage to get through. In general hospitals, with medical schools attached, where the cases are acute, and require much attention, the proportion of nurses to patients will be comparatively high, and the greater part of the manual labor in the ward will be performed by ward servants.

In slow provincial hospitals or infirmaries, where the cases are mostly chronic, the proportion of nurses to patients will be low, and all the time the nurse is not actually engaged in necessary attention to the patients, will be filled up in various other ways. The term nursing is an elastic one, and can be made to cover such occupations as scrubbing, sewing, washing bandages, and even cleaning windows, as at Rhyl, in Wales. A good example of what seems an incredibly low proportion of nurses to patients is afforded by a hospital at Harrogate, in which there are two nurses to 100 beds, even supposing, as one is obliged, that the so-called "hospital" is, in reality, to all intents and purposes, a convalescent home.

A nurse may generally count on being on her feet the whole of the time she spends in the wards—that is to say, ten or eleven hours, and even longer on night duty, when the staffs are weak and the wards small. The prevalence of the deformity known as flat feet among nurses bears witness to an excessive amount of standing and moving. In many institutions it is a canon of etiquette that the nurse may never sit down in the ward, even should she have opportunity.

Lavender Toilet Water.

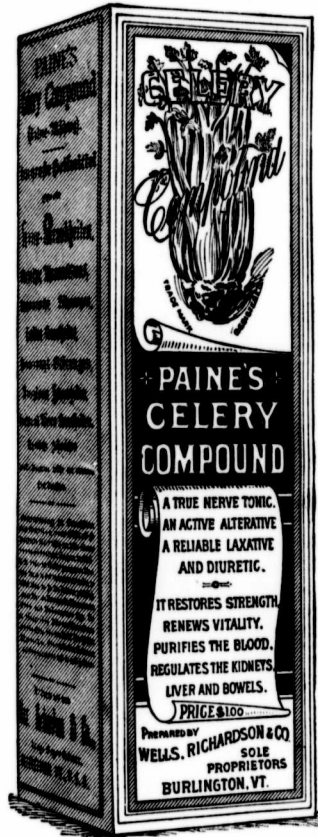
A simple yet delightful toilet vinegar can be made thus: Macerate one-fourth pound of fresh lavender for a fortnight in about a quart of vinegar. A few drops in water form an admirable lotion for the skin. It alleviates headache, while it is strongly antiseptic, cooling and refreshing in the sick room. A little may be placed in a saucer or sprinkler about near the bed, and a few drops in water used for bathing the head, face and hands.

JUST TAKE THE CAKE

of SURPRISE SOAP and use it, or have it used on wash day without boiling or scalding the clothes.

Mark how white and clean it makes them. How little hard work there is about the wash. How white and smooth it leaves the hands.

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