

ginning. It rests like a heavy weight on my spirits. It shadows me with a strange foreboding. I am foolish, perhaps."

"Over-sensitive about anything that touches one so dear as your wife," I answered, with a smile. "It is natural. But don't give yourself needless anxiety. Tumors in the neck are usually benignant, as we say, and surgical skill ensures their removal."

"Can they not be extirpated, without using the knife," he asked—"reabsorbed by a restored healthy action of the parts?"

"In rare instances this has occurred, but there is no established treatment on which we can rely. In my own practice I have not met with a single case where a well-developed tumor was reabsorbed by a normal action of the parts."

"At four o'clock this afternoon, doctor?" Mr. Baldwin arose.

"At four promptly," I answered, and he went away.

Mrs. Baldwin received me with a quiet cheerfulness of manner, saying, "My husband is apt to worry himself about little things, as you are aware."

Her composure was only assumed; I felt that as her hand lay in mine. My first diagnosis was not satisfactory, and I found great difficulty in concealing the doubts that troubled me. The swelling was clearly outlined, but not so sharply protuberant as I had been led to suppose by the likeness to a walnut which my friend had suggested. I feared from its shape and presentation at the surface, and also from the fact that the patient complained of a sense of pressure on the vessels of the neck, that the tumor was deeply seated, and much larger than my friend had suggested. But I was most concerned as to its character. Being hard and perceptibly modulated, there was in my mind an apprehension that it might prove malignant in character, and the apprehension was made stronger by the fact that my patient had a scrofulous diathesis.

There was no congestion of the veins, nor discoloration of the skin around the hard protuberance; no pulsation, elasticity, fluctuation, or soreness. Only a solid lump that I recognised as the small section or lobule of a deeply-seated tumor, already beginning to press upon and obstruct the blood vessels. It might be fibrous or albuminous—benignant or malignant; which, in this my first diagnosis, I was not able to determine. But for the constitutional habits of the patient, I would have concluded favorably.

It was not easy to veil my concern from Mr. Baldwin, who followed me downstairs, after I had finished the examination, and plied me with eager questions.

"Deal plainly with me, doctor," he said. "I wish to know exactly what you think. Don't conceal anything."

His blanching lips, and voice pitched to a low key that its tremor might be hidden, told plainly enough that I must conceal every apprehension that troubled me.

"It presents all the indications of what we call a fibrous tumor," said I.

"Are they of a malignant type?" he asked, with suspended breath.

"No; they are entirely harmless, but for their mechanical pressure on surrounding vessels, tissues, and organs."

He caught his breath with a deep sigh of relief; then asked:

"Is there any danger in their removal?"

"None," I replied.

"Have you ever taken a tumor from the neck?" he asked.

"More than a dozen."

"Were you always successful?"

"Always."

His breath came more freely. Then, after a little pause, he said:

"There will have to be an operation in this case?" I saw his lips grow white again.

"I fear that it cannot be avoided."

"There is one comfort," Mr. Baldwin remarked, his voice rallying to an almost cheerful tone, "the tumor is small, and evidently superficial in its character. The knife will not have to go very deep among the arteries, veins, and nerves so thickly gathered about the neck."

I did not correct his error.

"How long will it take?" he next queried.

"Not very long," I answered, evasively.

"Ten minutes?"

"Yes; perhaps a little longer."

"She will not be conscious of pain?"

"No; no more conscious than if she were a sweetly sleeping infant."

Mr. Baldwin walked nervously the whole length of the parlor twice; then stood still in front of me.

"Doctor," he said, solemnly, "I place her in your hands. She will consent to anything I may conclude it best to do. We have entire confidence in your judgment and skill."

He stopped short, and turned partly away to hide excess of feeling. Rallying after a moment, he continued, with a forced smile on his lips:

"To your professional eyes I show unmanly weakness. But you must bear in mind how very dear she is, doctor! It makes me shiver in every nerve to think of the knife going down into her tender flesh. You might cut me to pieces if that would save her."

"Your fears exaggerate the reality, Mr. Baldwin," I replied. "She will go into a deep sleep, and while she dreams pleasant dreams, we will simply dissect out the tumor, with all its foreign accumulations, and leave the healthy organs to continue their action under the old laws of unobstructed life."

"I am weak and foolish, I know," he answered; "but I can't help it. The whole thing touches too nearly home."

"As I was leaving, he said, "Doctor, how soon ought it to be done?"

"The sooner the better," I returned. "After the hot weather is over. Say in October. In the meantime I will carefully watch its growth and condition."

My next examination of the tumor, made in about a fortnight, satisfied me that it was deeply seated, and probably as large as a small orange. The protruding portion was only a small lobe of the foreign body. A substance so large, and of so hard a texture, must necessarily cause serious displacement of the blood-vessels, nerves, glands, and muscles of the neck, and render an early extirpation necessary to save life. In the two weeks there had been perceptible growth.

During the next two months I saw Mrs. Baldwin frequently, and noticed with concern increasing signs of pressure on the carotids, indicated by a slight suffusion of the face. The middle of October was set down as the time when the operation should be made. As the period approached, I felt a nervous dread about the case. I had consulted the most distinguished surgeon in the city, my senior by over fifteen years.

His diagnosis agreed in every particular with my own. We were satisfied that it was a fibrous tumor, non-malignant, but so deeply cast among the great vessels, and probably so attached to their sheaths, as to render extirpation a difficult, and, without great caution, a dangerous operation.

This was the only case in all my practice where I felt like transferring the responsibility to another, not because of the difficulty (that would have quickened my ardor), but because Mrs. Baldwin was the tenderly beloved wife of the oldest, warmest, and truest friend I possessed, and I knew that personal feeling would come in, and might disturb the cool equilibrium of mind so essential to skill and steadiness of hand.

As the time approached, my concern increased. So oppressive did this become that at last I sent for Mr. Baldwin, and seriously proposed that Dr. B——, the eminent surgeon, to whom I have just referred, should be called on to perform the operation.

"He is older, and has a larger experience," I said. "All the profession award to him the first place in our city, if not in the country."

"I have no doubt of his skill," replied my friend, speaking in a firm, decided way, "but his skill is not supplemented with sobriety. You know that as well as I do. His habit of drinking too freely has become a thing of common notoriety, and is gradually destroying public confidence. Oh, no, doctor! The hand that cuts down into her dear flesh must be steadied by healthy nerves, and not by wine or brandy. I will not hear of it! The man is a drunkard. I call his habitual and excessive use of strong drinks by its right name, and so I set him aside. I will not run any risks with a drunkard. He hangs out a sign on which is written, Beware! I read it, and pass over to the other side, getting out of the way of danger."

I felt strongly the force of all this, and said no more about Dr. B——. The day came at last. Ten o'clock was the hour at which the operation was to be performed. For two whole days I had strictly abstained from even a glass of wine, giving my nervous system that long period in which to recover the natural steadiness which might have been weakened through overaction occasioned by stimulants.

Mr. Baldwin called on me as early as eight o'clock. He was very nervous, and, oppressed by evil forebodings. The number and variety of the questions he had to ask annoyed me; for I could not answer them truthfully, without adding to his overwrought fears. Not that I apprehended danger, for I was master of my profession, and knew the exact location of every artery, vein, nerve, gland, and muscle among which I had to pass the scalpel. Nay, in order to make assurance doubly sure, I had spent an hour in the dissecting-room on the day before, giving to the anatomical organism of the neck a new and close examination. I had but to extirpate a tumor—badly located, it is true—and this any skilful surgeon might safely accomplish. A steady and confident hand, and favoring circumstances were all that he desired.

I carefully concealed my annoyance under a light, almost playful exterior, and rallied him for his unmanly weakness; called the operation one of minor importance, involving little risk. I could not reassure him, however. A shadow of coming evil