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An Unprofitable Servant.

BY L. G. MOHRLEY.

We never thought much of him when we were all fellow students together at St. Chads' Hospital. "Poor old Parke" he was generally called, and, by those who knew him best, "poor old Tom." He was such a funny, original sort of fellow—a queer mingling of the casual and the hardworking. His figure was familiar to more than one set of St. Chads' students, for he spent an abnormal time in getting through his exams, and as he used to say ruefully:

"I'm such a fool of a fellow, things seem to go in at one of my ears and out at the other: I can't for the life of me, remember the names of them."

An examination drove every scrap of knowledge he possessed straight out of his head. It paralyzed him, and he was the despair of his teachers and examiners. Indeed, it was several times more than hinted to him that he might be wiser in adopting some other than the medical profession; but he always shook his head over such a proposition.

"No, no! I can't give it up. It's the finest profession in the world, and I'm going to stick to it."

When I left the hospital, he was still plodding on patiently and hopefully. He came sometimes to my rooms in the days before I left, and poured out his aims and ideals to me. I don't exactly know why he chose me for his confidant, except that I had tried to be friendly now and then to the poor fellow. It seemed hard lines that he should be so universally looked down upon and laughed at.

He had some awfully lofty notions about a doctor's work. I can see him now, as he stood on my hearth-rug, talking fast and eagerly about the moral influence a doctor ought to have over his patients, and I couldn't help wondering what sort of influence poor old Tom would have over his patients (if he ever got any.)

He did not look a very impressive object in those days. He was always rather an untidy sort of chap. His clothes hung upon his loose, shambling figure, a little as if he were a clothes-prop; his hair—it was red—had a way of falling loosely over his forehead, which gave him a habit of tossing back his head to shake a straying lock from his eyes. He had no beauty to recommend him. His eyes were green, and they were not handsome, though their prevailing expression was one of good temper and kindness. His smile was wide and kindly, but somehow his whole countenance bordered closely on the grotesque, and the more he talked of ideals and lofty aspirations, the more acutely did he tickle one's inward sense of humor.

Tom's talk and his personality did not fit well!

I left him behind me in St. Chads', as I say, when my hospital days were over. I carried away with me a vivid recollection of the grip of his big red hand, as he said:

"Good-by, Marlow. I say, I wish you weren't going, you know. You've—you've been jolly good to me." There was a queer look of wistfulness in his eyes. It reminded me of the look in the eyes of my Irish terrier when I left him behind me.

"Poor old Tom," I said to myself; I'll come back and look him up now and then. He's such a lonely sort of chap."

I'm sorry now that I didn't stick to my resolution, but other interests soon filled my life, and I forgot to look Tom Parkes up, or even to ask him to come and see me. Then I left town, and shortly afterwards England, and for eight years or so I did not set foot in London.

II.

Shortly after my return I went down to St. Chads', and, as I strolled round the old hospital, feeling a terrible Rip Van Winkle among all the "new men, new faces, new minds," I all at once bethought me of old Parkes. A stab of remorse smote me. What a beast I had been, never to think of the poor chap in all these years! Was he, perhaps, still at St. Chads', toiling at exams, which he never passed? Later on I called upon the dean of the medical school, and asked him if he could give me any news of Parkes.

"Poor old Parkes," Dr. Thursby said, smiling, "oh, yes; I can tell you where he is. He has a sort of surgery in Paradise street, in the borough. He is not making his fortune, I gather."

He gave me the address of a street about half an hour's walk from St. Chads', and thither I repaired on the following evening, with a laudable determination to find Tom Parkes and cheer him up a bit.

"For it must be precious dull living in these God-forsaken slums," I thought, as I walked down a forlorn little street, the facsimile of others of its type, which all present an appearance of having been forgotten when the dustman went his rounds. Bits of things of all kinds littered not only the gutters, but even the roadway and pavement. The dwellers in Paradise street evidently

used the road as their dustpan, paper basket and general rubbish heap. It was unsavory as well as unsightly. It belied its name. It bore no resemblance to any paradise. Each house exactly resembled its neighbors in grayness and dreariness, but over one door was a red lamp, and upon the same door a small brass plate, bearing the words, "Tom Parkes, Surgeon."

Poor old Tom! There flashed before my mind his wistful ideals of a possible house in Harley street in some dim future. This depressing street in the Borough must have choked his ideals considerably. As I knocked at the door I noticed how the paint was peeling off it, how dilapidated was the bell-pull, how rickety the knocker. It was plain that times were not good for the dwellers in Paradise street.

The door was opened almost at once, and Tom himself stood before me. In the dim light I thought he looked much the same Tom as I had last seen eight years before, except that his face seemed to be older, and thinner, and whiter. He flushed when he caught sight of me, and his eyes grew bright.

"Why, Marlow!" he exclaimed, grasping my hand; "I say, I am jolly glad to see you. It's awfully good of you to come down here, and—and—" I saw his eyes running over my clothes, which were perfectly ordinary; but—well, the poor chap was so woefully shabby himself it made my heart ache. "I say," he went on, hesitatingly, still holding the door wide open, "I've got poor sort of diggings. Do you mind coming in? My landlady is out today, and we're in a bit of a muddle."

"Mind? My dear chap, of course not. I want to have a chat, if you can spare time?"

"I'm free just this minute," he said; "but I expect some patients will drop in presently, and I may be sent for, too. I'm rather busy just now, that's the truth. There's such a lot of influenza and typhoid about."

"Making your fortune," eh, Parkes?" I asked, as I followed him down a grimy passage into a small, dingy room.

"He smiled, but the look in his eyes gave me a queer lump in my throat."

"Not much," he said; "you see, you can't—well, you can't take fees much from people who—well, who are starving themselves."

I glanced sharply at him. In the better light I could see that his own face was terribly thin, and his eyes had a curious sunken look. Good heavens! how thin the man was altogether. His chest seemed to have sunk in, and he had acquired a stoop which I could not associate with the red-faced, hearty student of eight years before.

The room into which he ushered me was bare of everything but the merest necessities, and those of the cheapest and commonest kind.

"This is my consulting-room," he said, with a little smile; "the patients wait next door," and he pointed through half-open folding doors into a second and even barer room, that was furnished only with a few chairs.

He pushed me into the only armchair his room possessed—an uncompromising and ancient horsehair chair, stuffed, judging by the sensation it produced, with stones!

He seemed pleased to see me, but he talked very little; it was hard to think that he could be the same being who had stood before my fireplace in the old days, talking so volubly of all his hopes and plans. I had not been with him more than a quarter of an hour, when a knock came at the outer door. Tom answered it in person, and returned, accompanied by an old woman.

"That's another doctor, Grannie," he said, nodding towards me; "you don't mind him, do you?"

The old lady, having signified that she had no objection to my presence, proceeded to give a lengthy and graphic account of her various ailments.

Parkes listened to it all with a patient interest which I could not but admire. Something in his tone, as he spoke to the old woman, struck me particularly—an indescribable ring of sympathy, of gentleness, which I cannot put into words. Having taken up a good half-hour and more of his time, the old lady rose to depart, drawing her miserable shawl around her.

"Oh, doctor, dear," she whispered, as he told her to send up in the morning for some fresh medicine, "and I ain't got nothin' to give yer, for yer kindness. Will yer let it go till next time? Jem 'e've 'eard of a job, and if 'e was to get it—"

A faint smile showed in Tom's eyes.

"All right, Grannie," he said, gently; "times are hard just now, aren't they?"

"So they be, doctor, so they be. What with the cold, and the strikes, and the influenza, there ain't much doin' for pore folks."

He opened the door for her as if she had been a duchess, and, before admitting the next patient (several had arrived in the waiting room by this time,) he said to me wistfully, almost apologetically—

"They're awfully poor just now. One can't make them pay. I know philanthropic people call it pauper-

izing, and all that, but—" He broke off lamely.

"Why don't you send them up as out-patients to St. Chads'?" I asked.

"It's a long way from here, isn't it? A good half hour's walk; and then it means a lot of waiting about, and losing work, perhaps. It doesn't seem fair to send them so far, and we've no hospital nearer here."

"He said no more, and I stayed on, fascinated, in spite of myself."

The same thing happened over and over again that evening. Half-starved-looking men and women shamefacedly asked to be let off any payment, and the same answer met them all in a cheery voice, which somehow did not seem at all to go with Tom's thin, bent form.

"Oh, that'll be all right. We'll settle up when times are better, won't we?"

When the last patient had gone he turned to me, his face flushing:

"I say, Marlow," he said, "I'm awfully sorry I can't offer you supper; but the truth is my landlady is out, and—and so I sha'n't have my supper at home." He tried to speak jocosely, but my own impression was that he did not expect to have any supper anywhere.

"Look here, old fellow," I said, "I'm going to have something, somewhere. Come with me for auld lang syne."

I could hardly bear to see the look that came into his eyes. It reminded me of a starved dog I had once fed.

"Thanks," he answered; "but my old working clothes aren't decent to go out in, and—and—"

Oh, I could guess well enough where his other clothes were. But, of course, I only laughed and replied—

"Nonsense, old fellow, never mind the working clothes, I'm certainly too hungry to wait whilst you make yourself smart. Let's go to a quiet restaurant. I shall be offended if you don't come."

"I'd like to come," he said, and the eagerness in his tones made my heart ache again. "I've got a lot of patients to go and see later—influenza and so on, and I'd be glad of a snack of something first." He tried to speak carelessly, but it was a failure.

I felt ashamed, downright ashamed of myself, for being well nourished and well clad as I sat opposite poor old Parkes in that restaurant. It made me choky over and over again, I can tell you, to see the man put away that meal.

Before we parted I tried to persuade him to let me lend him a little spare cash. I put it as nicely as I could, saying I knew that doctoring in a poor neighborhood was very uphill work. But he shook his head.

"It's awfully good of you," he said; "but I haven't ever borrowed, and I don't know when I could pay back. I shouldn't like a debt."

And I could not move his resolution.

"You'll look me up again some day?" he asked.

"Rather; as soon as possible."

III.

But a summons to a distant part of England on important family business kept me out of town for three weeks, and when I went next to the house in Paradise street, poor old Parkes did not open the door to me.

A frouzy landlady confronted me.

"The doctor, sir? 'E's awfully bad. 'E've a got up, as I persuaded him not to, with such a cough. But 'e says 'I must see my patients,' and so 'e's a sittin' in 'is room as ought to be in bed. 'E was took on Saturday, and today is Wednesday," she ended.

I pushed past her into the consulting-room, and there sat Tom in the arm-chair beside an apology for a fire, coughing and gasping for breath. A wonderful relief came into his face as he saw me.

"I'm—I'm awfully glad to see you," he whispered; "got—a touch of the flu—I think."

He spoke gaspingly, as though speech were painful.

"I'll tackle this patient for you, old man," I said, glancing at an old woman who sat before him. "Look here, let me help you on to the couch."

He could hardly stand, and I almost lifted him on to the horsehair sofa of unprepossessing appearance, and, after getting rid of the old patient, turned all my attention to making Tom comfortable.

"It's nothing much," he gasped. "I've just got—a touch—of—infl—such—a lot—about," he muttered, wearily; "such bad nights—so many sick—and dying—and dying—"

He rambled on whilst the landlady and I brought his bed into the consulting-room, and I lifted him upon it, and undressed him. It was pitiful to see his thinness.

"Pore gentleman!" the landlady exclaimed, "e's bin and starved 'isself, that's what it is; and many's the time I've a brought 'im in a bite of somethin' we've bin 'avin', and 'e says, 'always so cheery, 'Now that's kind of you, Mrs. Jones,' and never missed payin' the rent neither, though Lord knows 'ow 'e got it. 'E've a put away most everythin'," she whispered, whilst I stood looking down at the flushed face and bright, unseeing eyes, and listening to his rambling, disconnected talk.

We did our best for him, poor fellow. I fetched one