



The Doctor's Ideal.

(Maggie Fearn, Author of 'That Maid of Monsons,' 'Tempted,' etc., in the 'Alliance News'.)

CHAPTER I.—'NO EQUIVALENT.'

Dr. Gordon was a handsome man, above the average height, and with a grace and suppleness of limb and ease of bearing which accorded well with his entire 'tout ensemble.' He was still a young man, too, though at the temples the fine brown hair was taking on a touch of silver. But his eye was as alert, and his step as buoyant as it had been ten years earlier; and, although, if a stranger were wishful to describe his personality, he would be spoken of as a man in his prime, well fashioned, and well preserved.

Upon a certain New Year's Eve the doctor, while paying his customary round of daily visits, called at the house of a patient with whom he had often enjoyed a wordy argument upon questions of social reform, placing Temperance prominently in the foreground. Not because Dr. Gordon was himself an abstainer, or advocated total abstinence to any exclusive extent among his patients, but because the lady was what the doctor was pleased to term a 'red-hot fanatic' upon the subject, and was accustomed to hold her own opinion even against the possible views of her medical friend and adviser.

After some talk upon different matters, the doctor, leaning in true English fashion, against the decorated mantelshelf, began to cultivate his predisposition for banter.

'To-night, Miss Sinclair,' said he, 'I intend to watch the Old Year out and the New Year in, in a manner which will shock you terribly.'

The tone, the curve of the lip, the merry twinkle in the eye, prepared her for battle. She smiled.

'I intend to brew a bowl of punch.'

'You don't expect me to say I hope you will enjoy it, Dr. Gordon?'

'Oh, no! I expect nothing of so commonplace a nature from you. Instead, perhaps, you wish it will make me so horribly ill that I shall renounce such abominations for the future.'

Miss Sinclair laughed a little.

'Tis of no avail to wish so vain a wish, doctor. I know you are much too cautious to exceed that strict limit beyond which you would risk the loss of your dignity and self-respect. You know and value your profession too highly to tamper to any excess with such dangerous poisons. You are too good a surgeon to venture to make your hand unskilled. You pride yourself on the deftness of your touch and the clearness of your brain.'

He moved his position slightly. Was it because of a passing uneasiness that the straightness of the words occasioned? Miss Sinclair was apt to be very definite.

'It is not habitual for me to take anything of the kind,' said he, partly dropping his jesting tone, and speaking more gravely. 'There are days when I touch neither wine nor spirits, but it is not because I am a believer in the total abstinence theory. What harm is a glass of beer, or wine likely to do any man in normal health? I know what you would say. You renounce it, and deny yourself for the sake of those poor senseless victims who take too much; but it's no good. You'll never convert the world to your way of thinking.'

'Doctor, I could not go to one of those poor senseless victims, as you term them, and urge them to give up what is ruining them, body and soul, all the time I was taking it in a lesser and modified degree myself.'

'Fudge! Miss Sinclair; why not?'

'I should feel as if I were treading on shifting sand, instead of firm ground—solid, unyielding, reliable earth. I should have no

power when pleading with them. Practice must go with theory.'

'Oh, no. I can talk fanaticism when necessary, and go home and drink my glass very comfortably. Why not?' asked the doctor again.

'Because your 'vis-a-vis' will never see the fine boundary line of distinction. He will say, "You take the quantity you judge good for you, and I also have the right of drinking as much as I choose. It is only a question of degrees." So, you see, doctor, you would gain little by speaking—or I should, anyway—especially to people who will not argue with cool reason.'

'All very well, Miss Sinclair, but I tell you I have some patients to whom I read as stiff Temperance lectures as even you could wish. They get furious, and threaten to pitch me out of the window, and other lively things; but I only laugh at them for answer. But I give them thorough dressings for their folly, and a bottle of the worst physic my surgery contains.'

'And altogether see that they have a hard time of it? I admire some portion of your policy, doctor, but not all. You would do better to say to such, "Don't touch the drink! It is poison to you; it is poison to everyone when consumed as a beverage. Even taken in small quantities it interferes with the action of the brain and heart." Your profession would allow you to say all this, doctor; and you are neglecting your privileges while you remain silent.'

'Nonsense!' The doctor pulled at his moustache. 'I don't blame a man for spending his evenings at the public-house. He knows he will have plenty of jolly company, a warm welcome, and warmth, and light, and comfort—'

'Doctor, not a public-house! Why not say a good coffee tavern, or Temperance recreation room?'

'Because'—and the doctor's eyes flashed with genuine feeling—'I have never yet seen one of these places where any of the essentials I have just named can be obtained. As a rule, the coffee houses and Temperance rooms are dull and dirty, and miserable. There is nothing to tempt a man in, and you can't expect him to give up the comfort and warmth of the old public-house bar parlor, unless you offer him an equivalent. It isn't fair; and, moreover, the working man won't do it.'

Miss Sinclair looked thoughtful. She had no words ready which seemed quite to fit in after the doctor's sweeping assertion. It was too sweeping, and she knew it to be so; but she had an unpleasant picture presented to her mind of the unattractiveness of certain Temperance rooms in the very town in which she was living, and they certainly deserved the description Dr. Gordon had glibly given: 'Dull, dirty, and miserable.' The public-houses might not be models of cleanliness, but in some way they invariably managed to cast a certain attractive glamor about their surroundings which their rivals failed to imitate. Where did the fault creep in? Why could not coffee, and cocoa, and aromatic tea be made pleasing to the eye as well as refreshing and luxurious to the taste?

'I tell you what it is,' the doctor went on, warming with his subject, 'I don't blame a man for going to the public-house if he hasn't anywhere else as good or better to go. I should do the same myself.'

'I hope not, doctor. I should regret if, when I needed you, I had to send to a public-house for you.'

But he refused to smile.

'I should do the same myself,' he repeated, under similar circumstances. It's like this. Suppose a man has been hard at work all day, and when he goes home in the evening the children are all crying at once at the topmost maximum of their reserve lung power, and the wife is tiring herself to death over a tub of steaming soapsuds, where the children's dirty pinafores are getting their weekly bath, and there is a general confusion all the way round. These people haven't houses like yours and mine, Miss Sinclair, where screaming children could be shut away in an upper room, remote from sight and sound. Mostly there is but one small six-foot-square apartment, where all the family must herd together; and can you understand what that means? Do you wonder that a man turns his back upon such an alternative, and seeks the only place where

he can be sure of warmth, and comfort, and companionship?'

'Doctor, if a man hasn't enough principle to keep him from going where his conscience condemns him, whatever the alternative may be, I pity him.'

'You may talk about principle till you forget how the word is spelled, and yet be no nearer to convincing a man or changing his habits. It's a moral impossibility, I tell you, to keep the average working man from his snug corner in his favorite bar parlor, unless you provide him with its equivalent in warmth and comfort, Miss Sinclair.'

And Dr. Gordon looked particularly obstinate. Miss Sinclair looked up with a sudden inspiration in her face.

(To be continued.)

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