A LITTLE MISTAKE.

That doctors commit mistakes is not generally known, although cases from time to time find their way into the newspapers. Dr. Carpenter, who may be said to have introduced the scientific study of human physiology into Germany, turned himself to death while attempting to take a Turkish bath in his own room by enveloping himself in a blanket and sitting over a spirit lamp. However, when a man poisons himself it is his own peculiar mode of which is needed, but when he takes to poisoning others, not with any malicious intent, but simply in error, a natural apprehension may well pervade the public mind. Protection in the matter is certainly simple, as the following narrative will show.

About 8 o'clock on a June evening a victoria drawn by a pair of high stepping bay horses drove up to a celebrated chemist's shop in Bond street, and an elegantly dressed lady of about 25 years of age descended from the carriage, she walked hurriedly through the shop into the dispensing department, and, throwing a piece of paper on the counter, said:

"Please make up the prescription and send it at once. I would wait and take it myself, but I am just going out to dinner. It is very important."

The assistant bowed, took up the prescription and then sent to bottles.

"Well," said the lady, who seemed of a highly nervous, irritable disposition, "well, what is the matter?"

"I am afraid, madam," stammered the assistant, "that I cannot dispense this prescription."

"Oh, nonsense!" replied the lady. "That is what they said at —— in Mayfair, so I brought it on here. I suppose Dr. Black knows what he prescribes."

"Doubtless, madam; but, although Dr. Black is one of the most eminent of his profession, I dare not make up this prescription, as the strength at which the drug is here ordered is not allowed by the British pharmacopeia."

"Oh, nonsense!" repeated the lady, commencing to patter on the floor with her small feet. "This is monstrous. Here is my husband waiting for medicine of the utmost importance in his condition, and two chemists' assistants think they know better than a man for him that one of the leading men of the College of Physicians. Give me the prescription, and I will get it prepared elsewhere." The assistant was loath to part with the paper.

"If you will allow me, madam," he said, "I will take a cab to Dr. Black's, and if he confirms the prescription I will then prepare it."

"No, I will not," returned the lady, who was now in a state of extreme irritation. "I will not. My husband is in a serious condition, and I shall be late for dinner. I have already lost half an hour, and I cannot have further delay." With that she snatched up the prescription and hurried out.

The assistant was seriously perturbed. The mistake in the prescription was a grave one, as grains instead of minims administration of a single dose would probably prove fatal within two hours. It was possible that some young or inexperienced assistant at some small chemist's, encouraged by the great name of the physician and by the lady's imperious manner and elegant attire and equipage, would be found to dispense it. Then trouble would ensue, which might be stopped now. Thinking thus, the assistant told his fellow workers in the dispensary that he would go to Dr. Black's, and, hurrying into Bond street, jumped into the first passing hansom, and in five minutes was ringing the bell of the doctor's house in Harley street. The footman who opened the door said Dr. Black was out.

"Where was he?"

Really the footman did not know. "Very important, very important!"

Ah! Well, then, he (the footman) must inquire. This he leisurely proceeded to do. And the chemist's assistant, who was of an imaginative turn, summed himself by picturing meanwhile the death of his patient, the professional ruin of himself, the Mayfair element and the great physician; the grief and self reproach of the lady, who, despite her waywardness, irritable and careless temper, was evidently fond of her husband. And he had already arrived at the coroner's jury's verdict of manslaughter when the footman returned with the intelligence that his master was dining in Maida Vale. The cab soon whirled the errand knight of the pestle and mortar into the Edgeware road and drew up at one of the large houses which lie on the right hand side of Maida Vale immediately after passing the canal. Dinner was evidently in full progress, and the footman showed the assistant into an anteroom with no very good grace. Here another wait occurred, which preyed on the already irritated nerves of our friend some more than the previous one at Harley street. At last the door opened, and the doctor entered. He was a dapper little man, about 5 feet 3 in height, with a pale, thin face and hair and moustache the color of tow. His clean, shaved lips gave to his appearance the idea being insignificant. He looked inquiringly at the assistant, who, bowing, said:

"I am a dispenser, sir, at Messrs ——."

At about 8 o'clock this evening a lady, Mrs. ——, presented a prescription signed by you in which poison strychnine was ordered in three drams doses."

"Good God!" cried the physician. "Is it possible?"

"It is, sir; I have no doubt of it," replied the assistant, "as the prescription was refused by another chemist."

The doctor walked hurriedly up and down the room.

"Can it have been allowed?" he muttered.

"I looked carefully for that, but there was not the slightest sign of an erasure, Sir," continued the assistant. "I am afraid it is a little mistake on your part. I only fear that it may be made up and administered, and I therefore went at once to your house, and, learning where you were, came on here."

"Quite right, quite right," said the doctor. "Hurry off to cab, waiting? That's well. I'll go with you at once to the patient."

It took but a few minutes for the doctor to make his coats and return ready for departure, and the cab, once more in motion, turned toward the neighborhood of Edge square. The house at which it now pulled up betokened far greater wealth than either of the other houses which it had passed this time. In Court street, but on any of somewhat peculiar circumstances in which the invalid, in a very critical condition persisted in the house. The street door was opened tremulously by a footman before the occupants of the cab were fairly on the doorstep, and the dining was shown into a room on the ground floor which answered the purpose of a library as well as each rooms usually do in London houses.

"Send me Nurse Morris," said the doctor.

"Nurse Morris is out for exercise," replied the footman. "Nurse Norris is on duty, I happen to know, for she took the new medicine which I carried up the five minutes ago."

Dr. Black was a little man, and little he was usually quick to take offence. But never did man, little or big, fly up the stairs at the same rate as he did before the last words were out of the footman's mouth. The assistant followed, but had only reached the first floor when the house echoed to the bedroom as he arrived. Nurse Norris was standing by the bed presenting a dose of medicine from a bottle, she was a tall, dark young woman of 35, very pleasant looking and apparently a capable nurse, throwing with care, as she did not even look up when the doctor entered.

"Dose of that, nurse?" exclaimed the doctor.

"I by jumbo, sir!" said the nurse, now aroused to the sense of some unusualness in the physician's manner, which became intensified when a strange young man, very much out of breath, almost fell into the room from the passage.

"I should say, How is the patient? A very warm night, and likely to render him uncomfortable," continued the doctor with his eye and in his eyes and his eyes on the bottle.

"I think I see a little better, doctor," said a weak voice from the bed, on which lay a man of about 40 with the peculiarly constricted and drawn look which invariably follows a prolonged or very severe illness; "a little sooner."

"That's right," said the doctor, feeling the invalid's pulse, "that's right. Yes, a marked improvement." Then, having completed a rather lengthy examination, he turned to the nurse. "A decided improvement, nurse. For to-night we will discontinue all drugs. Give nothing except his usual nourishment until I come again. Dr. W—— will return tomorrow, and when we have a local practitioner once more in attendance you will take your leave of them from him. In the meantime give no medicine. Indeed, I will take it with me." And without noticing the hurt and resentful look of the nurse the doctor rounded the bottle and transferred it to his outer pocket.

On that particular June evening the assistant at Messrs —— had been gravely cautioning whether he would be justified in sending the girl of his choice, who was no delicate to be able to add to the income paid, on a salary of £100 a year and had decided in negative. Six months after a quiet but very happy wedding party returned to a very modest chemist's shop in the neighborhood of Cavendish square which bore the name of the assistant, over the front as its proprietor. And if you have ever occasion to consult the great physician, you may be sure that, without any intention, conveyed by the great name of the physician and by the lady's imperious manner and elegant attire and equipage, would be found to dispense it. Then trouble would ensue, which might be stopped now. Thinking thus, the assistant told his fellow workers in the dispensary that he would go to Dr. Black's, and, hurrying into Bond street, jumped into the first passing hansom, and in five minutes was ringing the bell of the doctor's house in Harley street. The footman who opened the door said Dr. Black was out.

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