

A DOCTOR'S STORY.

(From the *St. James's Gazette*.)

I MET Laura at a charity ball. It was a case of love at first sight on my part, and I got introduced.

"Dr Sprigge—Miss Laura Wyatt" The introduction was made in an instant. We had one waltz, only one, which we danced from start to finish; and then, we both felt as though we had known each other all our lives.

How I managed it I don't exactly know, but I did manage it. I succeeded in getting introduced to old Mr Wyatt, Laura's papa.

I fancy I made a rather favourable impression on old Wyatt. I had cultivated a good professional manner. Some people say that in profession manner is everything. I was what may be called an extra-professional—your young consulting physician always. I had the etiquette and ethics of the profession at my fingers' ends; and at that time I honestly felt that if it had not been for my peculiarly prepossessing appearance, and the fact that I was deficient in the physician's crown of glory (I mean a bald head), a large and lucrative practice must be mine eventually; and till the night I saw Laura I was absolutely devoted to the profession of medicine, and I longed—I actually longed—for that bald head and the accompanying large and lucrative practice.

I called, and I was very favourably received. Mr Wyatt asked me to dinner; and he made a very favourable impression upon me, and he gave me a very good dinner; and the interest the old gentleman took in medicine was something wonderful. Old Wyatt lived in a very large house in thoroughly respectable style—butler who looked like an arch-deacon and two parlour maids.

Well, I was very much in love with Laura (it was fifty years ago, and I am as much in love with her now as I was then). I proposed to Laura in form; and then I had to confess to old Wyatt that I had only six thousand pounds of my own left. I had got through four thousand of my original ten in the rent of the consulting room, the hire of a brougham, and the usual taxes to which the young consultant is subjected. I told old Wyatt flatly that I did not want his money it was his daughter I wanted and not his ducats. This statement was absolutely genuine, for I was very much in love. I explained to Mr Wyatt that by the time the rest of the ten thousand was gone I might honestly expect to be in receipt of the magnificent professional income of five hundred a year.

Then old Mr Wyatt threw himself back in his chair and laughed aloud. I thought he never would leave off laughing. I remonstrated with him on his heartless conduct.

"My dear fellow," he said, "I can't help it, it's too ridiculous. You deliberately throw away ten thousand pounds and the best years of your life for the sake of a possible income of five hundred a year. Now Dr Sprigge, I will not attempt to conceal from you that my daughter is much attached to you. You are young, you are enthusiastic, you are ready to sacrifice your profession for my daughter? I am a bit of a doctor myself," he said, with a curious chuckle, "and I have a great respect for doctors; but there are reasons—good and substantial reasons—why my daughter could never marry a medical man; or, rather, to be more accurate, there are reasons why no medical man could marry my daughter."

What could he mean? It was a most mysterious statement.

"If I threw up my profession for your daughter's sake we should not have enough to live on; six thousand pounds would not last very long."

"You need not trouble yourself about that," said Mr Wyatt, "I am fairly well off. I should be prepared to give you a share in my business—it's a very good business—and I am very fond of my daughter Laura, and she is my only child, you know. Don't be alarmed," said Mr Wyatt, "I shouldn't want your money. I should only want your assistance in developing my business. I could give you a salary if you liked—say a couple of thousand a year; or, as I said before you could have a share in my business."

"But I am not a business man," I remonstrated, "besides I know nothing whatever of the nature of the business," I added, for I was altogether puzzled.

"You will not betray my confidence?" said Mr Wyatt, with an air of mystery, "of course you won't. Well I'm a benefactor of the human race. Did you ever hear of Bumstead's Infallible Tincture? I married Bumstead's widow. Laura is my daughter by a second marriage—This will give you all the necessary particulars," he said, and he thrust a little pamphlet into my hands. "I'll come back for your answer in a few minutes." Then he left me and the room began to turn round and round.

Of course I had heard of Bumstead's Infallible Tincture—who hasn't? Who has not read the well-known advertisement beginning:—

Have you got a cold in the head? Try "Bumstead."

Do you suffer from indigestion? Try "Bumstead."

Is old age creeping upon you? Try "Bumstead."

And so on for a whole column. Had I not been continually irritated by my patients at the hospital telling me that they had tried "Bum-

stead" before they had tried me? Was not "Bumstead" familiar in their mouths as a household word? And my Laura's father had married the widow of a quack—he was a quack himself! And I suffered agonies as I remembered that Laura was a quack's daughter. The idea was a horrible one.

I read this little book. There were hundreds of testimonials, according to which "Bumstead's Tincture" was infallible; the testimonials were from all sorts and conditions of men. They were evidently perfectly genuine, for they attached their names and addresses. Perhaps the mysterious "Bumstead" had discovered the *Elixir Vitæ*. Then I read on till I came to the description of the remedy itself; it was said to be "prepared from certain medicinal plants found only in Central Arabia, Beloochistan, and the mountainous region of the north-western frontier of Crim Tartary." Oh, there could not be anything in it; of course it was a swindle. If it were only genuine, I felt that I would not hesitate for a single instant. At that moment the door opened, and Bumstead—I mean Mr Wyatt—entered.

"Well, my young friend," he said, with a good-humoured smile, "what is your determination?"

"Mr Wyatt," I said, and I assumed my very best professional manner, "if I could only think that the Infallible Tincture does all that it is said to; if I could only honestly believe in it, I would cast principle and pride and prejudice to the winds and instantly jump at your most liberal offer."

"You don't mean to say that you doubt the genuineness of the testimonials!" cried Mr Wyatt, in evident indignation. Then he read Lord Addlepat's testimonial very slowly and very softly. "Dr Sprigge," he said, at its conclusion, "Lord Addlepat is a peer of the realm, one of our hereditary legislators. Would you presume to doubt the word of an hereditary legislator? Call on his lordship, you are a physician; you can form your own opinion. The whole of these testimonials, sir, are absolutely genuine!" cried Mr Wyatt, and he thumped the table with his fist; "I believe in Bumstead, sir, and I've never had a day's illness in my life." I did not think much of that argument.

"Look here," said Mr Wyatt, "I'll make you a present of a gross of it. Take it to St Skinflint's and try it on your patients." The horrible suggestion caused me to shudder in spite of myself.

"Do you care so little for my daughter, Dr Sprigge," said Bumstead—I mean Mr Wyatt—very solemnly, "that you actually decline to investigate the matter? Didn't the whole world believe the earth to be flat till it was proved to be round? Wasn't Columbus looked upon as a fool and an impostor? Let me tell you, sir, the day is coming when all the world will revere the name of Bumstead."

When I looked around upon the evident signs of wealth, when I looked into that old man's face, and I remembered that he was Laura's father, I could not doubt the honesty of his convictions. I seized his hand; there were tears in my eyes as I bade him an affectionate farewell.

"I will investigate it, sir!" I cried, "and I will communicate the result to you in a fortnight."

Then we shook hands.

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I went into the nearest chemist's. I asked for a bottle of Bumstead's Infallible Tincture.

"It's a very valuable remedy, sir," said the chemist; "most of our customers find it a perfect panacea."

It was strange, very strange. Your true physiologist never hesitates to make a crucial experiment upon his own person. I took a double dose of "Bumstead" that night. It did not have the slightest effect upon me. I finished the bottle the next day; it did not even make me feel ill. I did not think much of "Bumstead" as a medicine. Most valuable remedies make you feel very ill indeed—that is my experience. Then I called on six of the testimonial-givers; they all swore by "Bumstead." "A man must take medicine of some sort, sir," one remarked to me; "when I'm a bit out of sorts I just flies to 'Bumstead,' and it does me a power."

On the appointed day I called upon Mr Wyatt. I respectfully saluted him as a benefactor of the human race. Within three months I married Laura. I gave up the practice of the profession as a matter of conviction. I went into partnership with old Mr Wyatt; he died a year or two ago; he left everything to Laura. I am a rich man now, I live in Kensington Park Gardens, and I have a lovely place in the country; and I became, I practically became—well—"Bumstead."

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