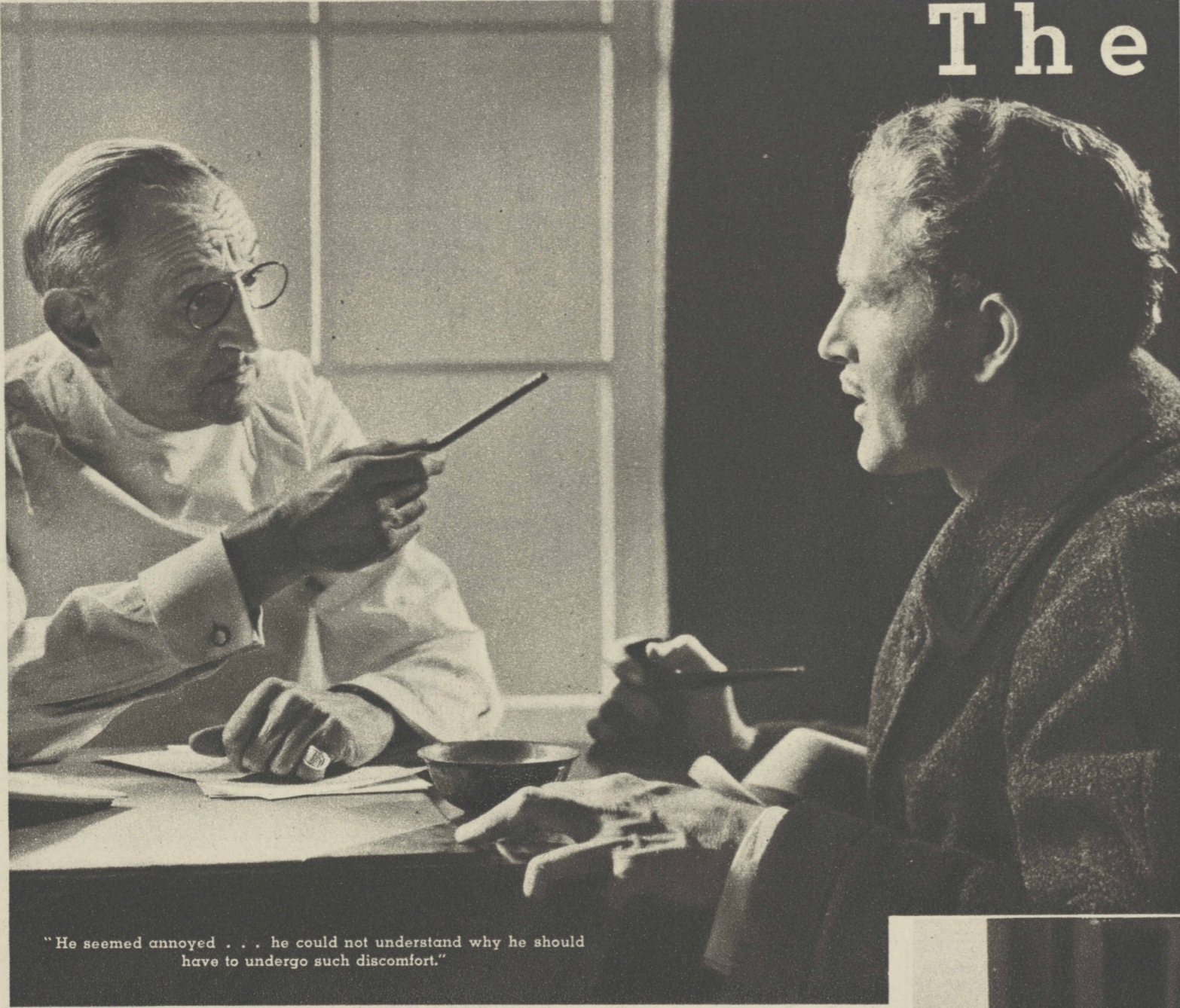


The Doctor's Diary



"He seemed annoyed . . . he could not understand why he should have to undergo such discomfort."

The Dramatic Record of a Physician's Fight Against Syphilis

(Continued from page one.)

fiery eyes; full, sensual lips; strong white teeth; close-clipped mustache; high-bridged, aristocratic nose—These assured him an easy preeminence over the young gentlemen at the big dinner. He was free of self-consciousness and affectation, and his personality was vigorously masculine.

Whenever I glanced across at his wife a little farther down, I could not but notice how slyly yet keenly she kept an eye on her husband. She conversed as if in a trance. Her mind was never off the couple opposite me, yet I could discern no trace of jealousy in her sensitive face.

At the end of the dinner we men went into the smoking room. Soon Beau Eugene joined us and I found myself in conversation with him. He was cultured, well read, versatile, interested in the arts, of perfect social ease, and with independence of judgment. Now and then his talk betrayed a certain harshness of temperament—a sort of cynical brutality.

After that dinner I continued to see Beau Eugene and his family occasionally, for they were the most stimulating people I had encountered in this town. The first time I called on them at their own house the Baroness von L— received me, because her husband was away on a business trip to Paris. Among men these "business trips to Paris" usually are not taken too literally. The drawing-room in which we talked was furnished and decorated with all the elegance of a palace.

She was gracious but noticeably cool. She radiated ease, experience, self-confidence. They say her relatives used to call her "the icicle." But beautiful she was despite her thirty years—or because of them—with a mature blonde loveliness. She was taller than most women and beautifully proportioned. Her skin was delicately rosy, and her hair had the grayish-yellow cast of the Nordics. Her eyes were almond shaped, deep blue, and very steady. Her nose might have been a little less pointed. Her mouth and chin were classic, though not without energy. She spoke quietly and with assurance.

Usually I can tell within ten minutes whether a woman is intelligent or not, and I was sure the baroness was intelligent. But I was not clear as to her liking me. I sensed a bit of antagonism in her, and could not say what might be the reason. But how could a man prefer other women to her!

Nov. 1.—I spent a miserable

night last night. I was opening a patient's abscess yesterday and laid the lancet aside while I bandaged the wound. I must have slipped on the polished floor and, without looking, grabbed the edge of the stand where the instrument lay. At any rate I cut my thumb on the point of it, while it was still foul. I washed out the little wound at once with ether and alcohol and cauterized it with a platinum wire. I didn't give the occurrence much thought but went to bed tired after my day's work.

At midnight I woke up and was hopelessly unable to go to sleep again. Involuntarily I began to brood about my little misadventure and to ponder on the unpleasant knowledge that blood is the prime carrier of the syphilitic virus. And then I thought of the dentist that had infected himself in pulling a tooth and acquired the disease

despite everything he did, and of an unfortunate woman patient of mine for whom a pinprick (by a pin that had just been held in her seamstress's mouth) had become the cause of tragedy. I turned hot all over and felt the perspiration oozing from me. The thought that my case was like theirs made further rest impossible. Not till then had I appreciated the desperateness of the danger I was in. I closed my eyes and tried forcing myself to sleep. In vain; I could only toss from side to side. This morning I felt as if I had been broken on the wheel. My mirror showed me a sickly-yellow, flabby face. I look years older.

Nov. 4.—I have hardly eaten or drunk for three days. I cannot dispel the fear that I am infected. I catch myself examin-



"A little seamstress . . . going through her coquettish squirmings in her effort to attract a male eye." (Tribune Studio photos.)



"Ten times a day I examine my mouth, my lips, my gums, my throat in the mirror . . . I look years older."

ing my thumb twenty times a day, and looking for the coating on the tonsils. Now and then the little wound begins to itch or throb, and I feel a strange tenseness in my whole right hand. It is fortunate that I have had to work and talk to my patients. I sought distraction in a new line of study. It was of no use.

Even in the theater I have no peace of mind. I go wandering about half the night like Ahasuerus fleeing from himself. I am deathly tired yet afraid to go to bed for fear of a nervous breakdown. I have always wanted someone around me, yet now I hate everybody that lingers too long. The situation is intolerable. I used to fancy I understood the spiritual collapse, the mental agony, of my patients. It was a foolish belief. Never did I imagine the torture that lies in danger and its prolonged uncertainty. No one can imagine it who has not been in the hell that I am in. And when the dread symptoms definitely appear—God give me strength to hold out!

Nov. 6.—I begin to shun peo-

ple. I feel like a sick wolf that crawls into its den to die. Poor Ludovica goes about in tears. I hardly speak even to her. She thinks I am dissatisfied with her. I tell her it is irritability and vexation. She is a faithful soul. I hear her creeping past my door nights. She thinks it is some secret trouble. Whenever I hear the bedroom door creak open I close my eyes and pretend to snore gently. Then she comes in and stands at the foot of the bed and looks at me. And I feel her touch my forehead to see if her "big boy" has fever. She always calls me that when there is nobody else around. It is the maternal instinct emerging. She renounced marriage and motherhood, but the destiny that nature has fixed for women is now having its way.

Nov. 13.—"Yes, dear doctor," I say to myself, "if you are a savior, then save yourself." In the past it always seemed entirely natural that the great majority of cases recovered easily and completely, and I honestly fancied I could heal some of my broken patients by assuring them that their troubles were curable. And often I could not restrain a superior smile when they were afraid to believe it.

"Tell yourself that now!" an inner voice taunts me. "Try it

"The Doctor's Diary" is based on an original translation of "Die Gottesgeißel" (The Scourge of God), by H. C. Peterson (Ph. D., Leipzig). Because of the widespread interest in the subject of the diary, readers may wish to comment in letters. These should be addressed to the Editor of the Graphic Section and should be brief, so that the best of them can be printed.

had a sore on his lip the size of a pin head that had been there four weeks and felt hard to the touch. It looked suspicious.

Nov. 20.—The Wassermann test has come through, and a rash is beginning to appear on the man's chest. There is no doubt that he has it. He got infected by a kiss. He was brave enough; only his large, good-natured blue eyes began to swim. Then he drew a deep breath.

"Thank God!" he said. "That is nothing to thank God for!" I said, astonished. "It's always a bad business."

"I know it, doctor. But can't you understand the state a fellow gets into after he has had the dread of syphilis with him day by day for twenty years? Can you understand why I have to get drunk at the end of every month, so that I can forget, and

very seldom. But I did chance to see him in an unguarded moment this morning.

A little seamstress was walking along the sidewalk in front of me. I knew her because she had once been a patient of mine. I knew that she had syphilis and that she continued to pick up men to supplement the meager wages she earned over the sewing table.

As I watched her going through her coquettish squirmings in her effort to attract a male eye, I almost collided with Beau Eugene. But he was blind, bewitched, and had no sense for anyone but the little seamstress. He did not see me. But I shall never forget the one glimpse I got of him. His eyes were those of a beast of prey as he hurried along behind the dainty, youthful figure of the woman. His face bore a sharp, ugly, lecherous, unspeakably feline expression. I thought of a black cat that I had once seen on board a ship. The cat's eyes were exactly like his as she was creeping up on an exhausted stalling that had taken refuge on one of the ship's bits. So violent was her rapacity that her jaws worked sideways against each other as if she had lost control over them. So, too, had Beau Eugene obviously lost control over his facial expression.

Dec. 4.—Little by little I am becoming apathetic about my fate. The incessant brooding exhausts one, so that one gets stupid. I move about like a machine, eat like a machine, and do my daily tasks like a machine. If I could only sleep like a machine! But I have a terror of the night. And then there is the dread that somebody will notice something. I am obsessed with the feeling that my acquaintances look at me strangely, that something about me is out of order, for I must have changed my personality completely.

I think I ought to force myself out among people more. Nothing has shown itself to betray me so far, but I fancy I notice a certain weakness in my legs. I get tired easily and am losing weight—in fact I've lost ten pounds in these four weeks of terror. Bad symptoms!

Last night I lay awake, thinking how I should have to reshape my existence when the disease should break out. In my mind's eye I saw my god-children and my nephews and nieces running to meet me when I came on a visit, and my relatives coming to greet me and myself thrusting them away gently, because I was infected. And the children regarding me with big round eyes and wondering why I was so different and so unfriendly—I being the one who always used to pick them up and romp with them. Then I decided to give up my practice and emigrate and not come near my people for years, until I should be out of every danger.

Dec. 6.—This cannot go on much longer. Thirty-six endless days, and no change so far in the little wound, which has entirely healed up. I suppose I have examined this thumb of mine more times in these thirty-six days than my face before the mirror in thirty-six years. I am somewhat calmer. A Wassermann test turned out negative. But that means nothing; the next one may be positive. For syphilis is the trickiest and most slinking of all the maladies in the world. I have had three men under treatment with pronounced symptoms of this disease, who could not remember ever having had an ulcer, or a scratch, or any least abrasion that might have given entrance to the infection.

I must pull myself together and go out and see my friends. Brooding is literally suicidal for persons in my condition. Max Lange, a close friend, asked me this morning to go and call on his brother; his sister-in-law wished to meet me. "Old chap," he said, "either you are in love, or you have become profound . . ."

I think I will go tomorrow. And on Sunday I am invited to a dinner at Beau Eugene's. I wonder how that will come off.

NEXT SUNDAY: The Doctor Finds New Tragedy.

on yourself, if you really believe it."

Then again I tell myself that I came by my infection innocently and do not need to reproach myself as others reproach themselves who caught it from a woman in a moment of delirium. I tell myself that I am like a soldier meeting his death on the battlefield in the fulfillment of his duty. And this seems to be the only thought that has any comfort in it. But the uncertainty is undermining my resistance.

Nov. 18.—Last night I slept fairly well. The sore on my thumb is healing up, but the twitching in my fingers is still there. This uncertainty is terrible. Ten times a day I go and examine my mouth, my lips, my gums, my throat in the mirror. Then I strip and go over my whole body for the rust-colored spots.

Every new case of syphilis excites me. Today there came a circus performer—a professional athlete—a young, powerful, healthy-looking fellow. He