

THE CURE OF A MENTAL HABIT.

I read "Dorothy Elmore's Achievement" in the January number of the *Parents' Review* with great interest, and as I can furnish some testimony to the truth of the principle which the story would teach, I have written the following account of some personal experience.

I was married young to a man double my own age, with whom I spent eighteen very happy years. In fact I have rarely seen a marriage such as ours was, and on looking back I often ascribe a good deal of that happiness to the following facts.

I had not been a wife many weeks when I discovered that my husband had a sulky disposition. It was a surprise to me, for I had never seen anyone really sulky before. I had never been to school, nor had I associated with other children. I was an only girl with no relations, and the tendency of our small family circle was irritability of an outspoken kind which was soon over, with certainly no sulks or moodiness.

This new experience was not pleasant, and I admit I felt alarmed. I loved my husband dearly; he was a highly intellectual man, full of sound sense, possessed of a kind heart, and devoted to me, but I at once saw that "the little pitted speck" in his years' garnered fruit "would slowly moulder all," and I said "This must not be!"

I recognised that such a mental or moral condition for such a man as my husband was disease, and I wondered whether it was *curable* at his age, forty; enduring I did not think it—for myself!

Long I pondered over the case of mental ill-health which had come under my notice, for though this happened before scientific training had been thought of as a necessary part of a girl's education, my own common-sense taught me to observe that there are many aberrations of the brain in perfectly sane people.

I determined to watch and study my patient, and to devise a plan which I made up my mind should cure him even at his

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age of chronic fits of the sulks, to which I soon learned he had given way from a child.

I think the first ray of helpful light came into my mind when one day, sighing over a particularly trying fit which was attacking him, I inwardly exclaimed, "Oh! if I had only been his mother he should never have become like this!"

That was a revelation. The next thought was, "Why should not I become a veritable mother to him and help him against himself? I do not believe it is ever too late to mend. Is he to go on in this foolish way—he, such a good, clever darling as he is—to the end of his days? And if we have children, are they to be sulky too? No, never, if I can help it! Besides, what was the good of his marrying me if I am not to help him in return for all he is teaching me? Yes, he *must* be cured, and I will do it."

After each "attack" he and I used to have long talks on the subject, for I saw how ashamed he was not to have more power over himself. We both tried many plans of reform without success. We did not quarrel, for on our wedding-day we had entered into a solemn pact never to be cross both at the same time. That when one felt "awry" in any way, the other, who would presumably be better able to hold the reins of self-control, was to tighten the curb on self until the bad-tempered one had come round; and this answered well, but did not prevent my dear husband's sulky habits. They had simply become ingrained; his usually strong

will had lost its power of focussing itself, as it were, on those particular occasions, and required help from another will to enable its enfeebled condition to recover itself.

At last I thought of the following plan, which is the same in principle as that advocated by Dr. Evans in Dorothy's story, though it differs in detail.

I drew up a little deed in legal phraseology (I have it still, treasured up amongst other precious souvenirs of that blessed part of my life) which stated that whenever my husband was seized with one of the old moods or attacks, I was to allow him *five minutes* to collect his thoughts and concentrate his will power. At the end of that time, if we were alone, I was to kiss him, if we were not I was to look at him. All I required as a strict promise from him was that he would accept the kiss, or return the look. He signed the agreement. I did so too, as I

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had to promise not to allow any annoyance I might feel to prevent the kiss or the look; and a short time after, the first occasion occurred when the condition it imposed had to be fulfilled. My heart beat fast as I made the experiment. The novelty caused it to be successful that first time; but I knew the result would not always be so satisfactory. Still I made up my mind that little by little the bad *habit* should be given up, and slowly, but surely, it disappeared. I do not say it was not a hard fight, it was. It took several years to accomplish, but what of that when the victory became each time easier? Many and many a time have I quietly said on looking at my watch, "Time is up, darling," and have then seen a new light come in the eye, and, having confided to him the wish which had engendered my course of action, have often heard his own lips re-echo my thought, "If you had but been my mother as well!" Was not that worth patience and hope?

He died at the age of fifty-nine. Our eldest child was sixteen, our youngest ten. They are grown up now, and a little while ago I told them this story, much to their astonishment, for they never knew their father had been the victim of such a habit. As his children had enjoyed his most intimate companionship, their ignorance of the fact justifies me in considering that between us we conquered that distressing form of bad temper.

Whatever attenuations he possessed at the end of his life, they were so slight that they were not noticeable except to the wife who loved the faint reminders of past struggles and victories.

Has the disposition recurred in any of the children? One of my sons has occasionally shown a tendency to silence when not pleased, and no doubt the glumness would have developed into the hereditary fault had he not been helped out of it by watchful determination on the part of those who knew from what a pitfall he had to be protected until the habit of a different "set" of mind had been established.¹

¹ We have to thank the writer for this *bonâ fide* statement.—ED.