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GEORGE HENRY KNIGHT

BY MRS. ISABELL BARROWS.

Some fifty-eight years ago there was born in Lakeville, Connecticut, a little son to Dr. and Mrs. Henry Martyn Knight. He received family names of George Henry and grew up in his native place as most country boys do, learning a good deal about farming, a great deal about horses, more than ordinary boys do, and above all, he learned to know and have a kindly feeling for the feeble-minded and imbecile children in his father's excellent school.

The outline of the boy's life from the time he gave up childhood's fun and frolic, till he laid it down beloved and honored, is brief. Educated at a preparatory school in Massachusetts and New Haven, at Yale for two years, and in the medical schools of New York, he was, at twenty-four, so well trained, so executive, that he was appointed superintendent of the newly organized State School for the Feeble-Minded in Minnesota, the youngest State Superintendent ever so appointed.

Then six years in Faribault, where he saw the institution under him grow as few new institutions grow, not like Joude's gourd in a night, but as the result of the ceaseless effort which he and his young wife put into making it a success. Six years there, then his recall to Connecticut to take his father's place. It was pure filial love which caused this return, but when it came to be a choice between going on to a more brilliant out-flowering

in a great state school and the plainer task of taking up the work left by his father, there was no hesitation. Love of home and of his devoted parents carried the day. And so for twenty-five years he labored in that father's footsteps till 1912 when he too ceased from his labors.

Such is the skeleton that the statistician may care to lay away in his archives, but what of the flesh and the blood, the clever mind and the dominating spirit? Let us see how these developed in these years. As a boy, Dr. Knight must have been full of eager life, making light of toil, and turning all his experiences into coin for future use. I doubt if he had the scholar's mind, but he had acute powers of observation and rare capacity in turning all that he saw into practical use, which served his purpose in life far better than a complete knowledge of the classics. In one thing in his youth he excelled, perhaps then more in promise than in fulfillment, music. Had he applied himself to that alone, he would have been a master musician. At Yale he became well known for his talent in this direction and for many years, in his home church he was the organist, and it was heart breaking at his funeral to see the mute organ and to think that the hands folded so quietly on the breast of the sleeper would never again wake the quiet of the church with the beautiful tones he knew so well how to evoke.

As he did not finish his course at Yale that University in 1878 recognized his ability and gave him the degree of Master of Arts. From New York he brought away a medical degree and a bride. Had he begun life then and there as a physician, he would have become eminent among doctors, for he had every instinct in that direction. He seemed to have the power to read his patient through and through like a human X-ray. He was always ready for emergencies. One of them once occurred on a far western train when a man, crushed and bleeding, was thrust upon the train to be taken for surgical treatment to the first city they should reach. But for Dr. Knight, the only physician on the train, who ministered to the man in wonderful ways the whole night long, the sufferer would surely have died. He was

always the one called upon, and responded invariably with alacrity and wisdom.

In his own department, caring for the feeble-minded, the imbecile, the idiotic, he was past master. No lord or lady of high degree could have been treated by him with greater respect and kindness than he showed to these poor creatures. It was a lesson to even the humanitarian to go through his institution with him and see how his own self-respect and conscious manhood were reflected, so far as it could be, in these objects of his care. He was sincerely devoted to them and I recall one night when he paced the floor in restless anxiety for fear one of the "old-timers," "Ike," I think they called him, who was critically ill, should die.

Dr. Knight's ideas as to the care of these imperfect creatures were like himself, simple and unpretending. He looked after their physical well-being with constant care, he furnished schooling for those who needed it, but not a dollar was spent for show or display. The children loved him and crowded about him as a loving father.

Of course, in his native town Dr. Knight was called upon for every kind of civic service, which he cheerfully performed. Then the state demanded him and in the legislative halls for several years he was one of the members to whom men naturally turned for his sturdy common sense and honest dealing.

At last, a still wider vista opened and he was nominated for Congress. But Death drew the curtain. The man's work was done, and well done.

The Lakeville lad, who had driven up and down the beautiful hills and hunted over the highlands as youth and man, had grown up with the strongest impress of New England upon him. From long gone ancestors he had inherited the finest qualities that go to make up a man. Purity of purpose, integrity of action, these marked him from boyhood. Kindness, unbelievable generosity, sympathy, these were also his characteristics, but far and above all these, he was an absolutely honest man. For this reason all trusted him, high and low alike, the Governor of the State and the poor widow whom someone had attempted to defraud.

Politicians of different parties trusted him because they knew he could be trusted. Little children trusted him because they not only read unbounded love in his great heart, but they felt his protecting care that nothing could change. His own little daughter grew up believing that no higher type of man could exist than was embodied in her father, and she was right. Wise men and women would echo her thought, but alas, the hundreds and hundreds who had felt the beneficence of his care could only accept it without the honoring and grateful word. To some it might seem a waste for such a life to be spent for the feeble-minded. He did not so regard it. His deep religious spirit accepted with humility the command to care for these least of the little ones and he served with gladness and a single eye to their good. So though they could not eulogize him, they wept bitter tears when they saw his face no more.

From the many tributes and resolutions passed in his honor the following extracts are made, showing the estimation in which Dr. Knight was held by the world at large, but no words can compass the honor, esteem and love in which he was held by his friends.

"Thus for twenty-seven years Doctor Knight devoted himself almost exclusively to his special work, writing and speaking on that subject for publications and meetings in many states. In his own state, he did most effective work in having Connecticut the first to place among her statutes a law making the marriage of feeble-minded or epileptic persons a crime punishable with fine and imprisonment. For the past six years during his service in the Connecticut Legislature, as Chairman of important committees,—Public Health and Safety, Humane and Appropriation Committees,—he broadened somewhat his field of usefulness in charitable work in influencing legislation for the betterment of existing conditions wherever possible. Such measures as compulsory vaccination, sanitary conditions in public places, meat inspection, the Colony for Epileptics, the Reformatory for Young Criminals, and the establishment of homes for the treatment and care of tuberculosis in the state received the most enthusiastic and untiring support of both himself and the Committees of

which he was Chairman. He continued as a member of the State Board of Pardons and as Chairman of the Tuberculosis Commission until the last. To a close friend he said that his conception of a happy life was to have a little more to do each day than a man could possibly accomplish, and to wake up the next morning with strength enough to begin all over again."

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