

A PARAGON OF UNSELFISHNESS.

"Only a Plain Red-Headed Girl," She Calls Herself, But Where Will You Find the Like of Little Delia Eagan?

She Has Endured the Pain and the Loss of Large Strips of Skin, and All for the Sake of Her Friendship for Poor Mrs. Wilck.

Up in Bellevue Hospital yesterday, wheeling herself about in a rolling-chair, there was a young girl—she is only nineteen years of age—who well deserves a high place in the annals of heroism.

Her name is Delia Eagan. She is only a poor working girl, an employee in a co-operative laundry shop, but voluntarily, joyfully, she has said that she is willing to be flayed alive if she can only restore to health again her lifelong friend, Minnie Wilck.

She will not have to be actually flayed alive, however, this generous little Delia Eagan, but she will be scarred for life. A long strip of flesh had already been taken from each of her legs to build up a scalp on Minnie Wilck's now fleshless head, and a great deal more will have to be taken from her body before the friend for whom she has sacrificed so much will be fully restored. She is ready to endure it all to aid the operation and the surgeons in their remarkable experiment. She is a plucky little thing. She bared her flesh last Wednesday

when the grafting was begun as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world.

READY TO ENDURE IT ALL.

Yet two more operations of the same kind must be undergone before Minnie Wilck's scalp is made good again.

"I have gone through one, I will stand them all," said plucky, generous little Delia Eagan.

Mrs. Wilck, it will be remembered, is the young wife of Herman Wilck, the proprietor of the laundry at No. 396 First avenue. The day after last Christmas, while she stopped running a polishing machine over shirt-fronts and collars for a moment close a window against the little blizzard of that morning, she was caught in the belting of the works and hurled up against the ceiling with the rapidity of lightning. She had a long, luxuriant head of hair, and the belting, as it whirled and whirled around, glued her to the ceiling by her tresses as if had been a jack-screw. For a second she hung there, the machinery all the time revolving 300 revolutions to the minute, and then she dropped to the floor. She had been scalped as completely as if the tomahawk of an Apache had been drawn about her head.

THE TERRIBLE ACCIDENT.

The work-people in the establishment ran to her assistance, but when the woman was picked up she was unconscious. They did what they could to restore her, but was beyond the reach of their immediate aid. Then they summoned an ambulance. When it came she was placed, still unconscious, upon the wagon and the vehicle rolled away to Bellevue. By her side, wrapped up in a newspaper, was her scalp, with the long, luxuriant tresses hanging from it as if it were the head of a Medusa. The accident occurred about 7 o'clock. It was fully half an hour after when Mrs. Wilck was carried into the hospital.

It was a remarkable chance for conspicuous operation and House Surgeon Woods, when notified of the affair, immediately grasped the importance of the opportunity. He was still in bed when the woman was brought into the hospital offices, but he got up and dressed at once. The patient was put into a small room and Dr. Woods inside of ten minutes was standing beside unconscious Mrs. Wilck with his sleeves rolled up and the needles in his hands.

Over thirty minutes had elapsed since the scalping, but the enthusiastic young surgeon still hoped to insure the replacement of the skin and hair which had been torn away. Skillfully, bit by bit, the torn flesh was adjusted to the head and was sewed on just as a seamstress would repair a rent in a garment. But in spite of the surgical possibilities that the occasion offered it was too late.

NATURE WOULD NOT CO-OPERATE.

A week went by and, while everything promised at first to turn out successfully, the result was a failure. The scalp adhered to the skull in one or two places, but bit by bit as it had been sewed on it began afterwards to die about the edges. All these points at the edge that did not adhere were cut off from time to time, till at last the whole original scalp had been pruned away. One ear had fallen off entirely, the whole scalp had withered and even the prospect of restoring her once prettily-arched eyebrow to its whilom curve became only a matter of conjecture.

By Jan. 10 Mrs. Wilck was completely recovered otherwise, but her head was one big sore. She knew nothing of the extent of her deformity, and her head was kept bandaged tightly in flannels. Her faithful husband, however, visited her every day; and he at last was told that the attempt to reclaim the scalp and ear was a failure. The operation had been attempted too late.

Herman Wilck, himself, was a florid, well-built, full-blooded man, and when he was told that skin grafting was the method by which his wife only could be restored to her natural condition, he told Dr. Louis C. Zerega, who on New Year's Day had taken Dr. Wood's position, that he willingly would give the flesh from his own body to supply that necessary to cover the bare skull of his wife.

Last Wednesday the head of Mrs. Wilck had become thoroughly granulated and everything was ready for the operation. Skin-grafting in moderate quantities during the past decade has been a common thing. But the wound on Mrs. Wilck's head was fully twelve inches square, and the amount of flesh required to cover the deficiency was far beyond the ordinary.

Herman Wilck dearly loves the young wife whom he married eight years ago. He is over forty; she is just twenty-four years of age. "I am strong and healthy," he had said when the true condition of affairs was told him. "She is my wife. Take the necessary skin from me."

But when Wednesday came the excitement of the ordeal, the shock which the accident had given him, and the long, continued anxiety of several weeks' suspense had so broken him down that it was deemed inadvisable to subject him to the operation. He had never faltered in his devotion to his suffering, shattered young wife for a day, but he had himself become as a broken vessel.

HERE'S A TEST OF FRIENDSHIP.

Then it was that Delia Eagan, the young girl, who had known Mrs. Wilck ever since she could remember anything and who had been working in the Co-Operative laundry, at No. 396 First avenue, for three years, came to the rescue.

"I love Minnie Wilck dearly," she exclaimed. "I, too, am young and strong

and healthy. Let me try if Mr. Wilck is too weak."

And so on Monday a week ago yesterday, the name of Delia Eagan, of No. 411 West Thirteenth street, was entered in the books of Bellevue Hospital, and she was characterized between the red wide lines opposite the blotter as one who had "walked in."

AND SHE IS SCARRED FOR LIFE.

"Walked in" well and robust she had a week ago last Monday. Yesterday she was wheeling herself about in an invalid chair, cheerful and happy as a lark, but scarred for life. Wednesday a week ago the surgeon had put her under ether, had bared her legs and peeled them down the front of each as a forester would the bark of a tree.

A strip, at least a foot long and three inches wide, visiting Surgeon Frank Hartley and House Surgeons Zerega and Artman pared off from the front of each of the young girl's legs. In her devotion to help her friend and helpmate her zeal was all the time awake while her body slept under the influence of the narcotic.

"You are not doing it right," she moaned in her stupor. "You must cut this way."

And during her moaning the surgeons were hacking at her flesh, which was to make Minnie Wilck hale and herself again. They gave the girl more of the narcotic. Then she slept heavily.

The two strips of skin that were taken from Delia Eagan were then adroitly adjusted to the fleshless head of poor unfortunate Minnie Wilck. The surgeons sliced one of them on to the front of the skull and down on to the side and the other they neatly affixed to the cranium just above it. Once more Mrs. Wilck was swathed in bandages and the slow, tedious healing process was begun.

That was a week ago. Yesterday a World man found the two women chatting to-

gether about the cots that they occupy in Ward 7 of the Hospital. Mrs. Wilck held a book listlessly in her hands. Delia Eagan was as blithe and merry as a bird.

A PARAGON OF UNSELFISHNESS.

"Oh, well, you know, I am only a plain, red-headed girl. The operation can't spoil my beauty, for I haven't any," she was saying.

Her hair in reality was auburn, and she had such kind, sparkling eyes and such a sunny smile that her gentle face became illumined while she spoke half jestingly of her sacrifice.

"Yes, I feel a little stiff in my right leg," she went on. "But my left doesn't pain me and only catches me once in a while when I move it too quickly."

"And you are going to give all the other skin necessary to cover your friend's head?" asked THE WORLD man wonderingly.

SHE HAS PLENTY OF FLESH TO SPARE.

"Oh, of course," the generous girl answered with a soft smile. "I want to see the whole thing through now I have once undertaken it. I don't know just where they are going to take the remainder of the necessary flesh from, but I have plenty of it to spare."

She wasn't a very large woman nor very plump. In fact, she was a little undersized. But she was ready for the sacrifice, whatever it might be.

"I hope, though," she added, with a merry twinkle in her eyes, "that they will take the rest off my back somewhere. I can sleep on my face, and the sores won't hurt me so much then."

And so this young girl, out of a pure, generous love for a woman who had befriended her, was willing to endure this loss of blood and loss of flesh, all this pain and incarceration in a cheerless hospital ward, out of mere altruism for a fellow-being, for whom she cared more than for herself.

"SHE IS GOOD, SO GOOD," SAYS MRS. WILCK. Minnie Wilck was sitting by her, listening to the girl as she spoke. "Yes, she is good, so good," Mrs. Wilck said in a low voice. "They tell me it will take a great deal of her skin to make my head all well again. No, Delia, dear, don't try to laugh it off. It is noble in you to come here and go through this sacrifice for me."

"I have known her," Mrs. Wilck continued, turning to THE WORLD man, "ever since she was three years old. When it was found that some one must come to my rescue, she came gladly."

The shades of evening were falling as the two young women sat together talking. The woman with her head swathed in linen was very pretty to look upon. She had a fair complexion, deep blue eyes, teeth like ivory, and a sweet, low voice. From under the bandages one could see the edge of her severed eyebrow, which, by a plastic process applied some weeks ago, it is hoped may be saved in spite of the deep cut that it gave from the machine belting.

"I have been told that I must wear a wig all my life now," she remarked afterwards. And again she said, "I am beginning to be afraid that one of my ears is gone."

Poor little Minnie Wilck. Her ear died with her scalp three weeks ago, but no one had told her that.

"Oh, never mind, Minnie," said Delia Eagan cheerfully. "You'll look very pretty yet with one of those curly wigs they have to sell in Broadway. I shall be out in a day or two and have quite a long time to look about for a becoming one before I am back again for the next cutting."

Only a poor, "plain red-headed girl," No, rather a gentle, big-hearted heroine, though even as far as the East is from the West, but you will have hard work to find another modest, unselfish creature as this little Delia Eagan.