



Restored through
a grant from

Daniel Maggin



ROUND THE RED LAMP

BEING

FACTS AND FANCIES OF
MEDICAL LIFE

BY

A. CONAN DOYLE

AUTHOR OF 'MICAH CLARKE,' 'THE WHITE COMPANY,'
'THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES,' ETC.

METHUEN & CO.
36 ESSEX STREET, W.C.
LONDON
1894

THE PREFACE



[Being an extract from a long and animated correspondence with a friend in America.]

1948-3
3720
.6382
I QUITE recognise the force of your objection that an invalid, or a woman in weak health, would get no good from stories which attempt to treat some features of medical life with a certain amount of realism. If you deal with this life at all, however, and if you are anxious to make your doctors something more than marionettes, it is quite essential that you should paint the darker side, since it is that which is principally presented to the Surgeon or the Physician. He sees many beautiful things, it is true; fortitude and heroism, self-sacrifice and love, but they are all called forth (as our nobler qualities are always called forth) by bitter sorrow and trial. One cannot write of medical life and be merry over it.

‘Then why write of it, you may ask? If a subject is painful, why treat it at all? I answer that it is the province of fiction to treat painful things as well as cheerful ones. The story which wiles away a weary hour fulfils an obviously good purpose, but not more so, I hold, than that which helps to emphasise the graver side of life. A tale which may startle the reader out of his usual grooves of thought, and shock him into seriousness, plays the part of the alterative and tonic in medicine, bitter to the taste, but bracing in its result. There are a few stories in this little collection which might have such an effect, and I have so far shared in your feeling that I have reserved them from serial publication. In book form the reader can see that they are medical stories, and can, if she or he be so minded, avoid them.—Yours very truly,

‘A. CONAN DOYLE.

‘*P.S.*—You will see that nearly half of the contents have not appeared before.’

CONTENTS



	PAGE
BEHIND THE TIMES,	1
HIS FIRST OPERATION,	9
A STRAGGLER OF '15,	20
THE THIRD GENERATION,	46
A FALSE START,	65
THE CURSE OF EVE,	89
SWEETHEARTS,	109
A PHYSIOLOGIST'S WIFE,	120
THE CASE OF LADY SANNOX,	156
A QUESTION OF DIPLOMACY,	174
A MEDICAL DOCUMENT,	200
LOT NO. 249,	220
THE LOS AMIGOS FIASCO,	281
THE DOCTORS OF HOYLAND,	295
THE SURGEON TALKS,	316

ROUND THE RED LAMP



BEHIND THE TIMES

MY first interview with Dr James Winter was under dramatic circumstances. It occurred at two in the morning in the bedroom of an old country house. I kicked him twice on the white waistcoat and knocked off his gold spectacles, while he, with the aid of a female accomplice, stifled my angry cries in a flannel petticoat and thrust me into a warm bath. I am told that one of my parents, who happened to be present, remarked in a whisper that there was nothing the matter with my lungs. I cannot recall how Dr Winter looked at the time, for I had other things to think of, but his description of my own appearance is far from flattering. A fluffy head, a body like a trussed goose, very

A

bandy legs, and feet with the soles turned inwards—those are the main items which he can remember.

From this time onwards the epochs of my life were the periodical assaults which Dr Winter made upon me. He vaccinated me, he cut me for an abscess, he blistered me for mumps. It was a world of peace, and he the one dark cloud that threatened. But at last there came a time of real illness—a time when I lay for months together inside my wicker-work basket bed, and then it was that I learned that that hard face could relax, that those country-made, creaking boots could steal very gently to a bedside, and that that rough voice could thin into a whisper when it spoke to a sick child.

And now the child is himself a medical man, and yet Dr Winter is the same as ever. I can see no change since first I can remember him, save that perhaps the brindled hair is a trifle whiter, and the huge shoulders a little more bowed. He is a very tall man, though he loses a couple of inches from his stoop. That big back of his has curved itself over sick beds until it has set in that shape. His face is of a walnut brown, and tells of long winter drives over bleak country roads with the wind and the rain in his teeth. It looks smooth at a little distance, but

as you approach him you see that it is shot with innumerable fine wrinkles, like a last year's apple. They are hardly to be seen when he is in repose, but when he laughs his face breaks like a starred glass, and you realise then that, though he looks old, he must be older than he looks.

How old that is I could never discover. I have often tried to find out, and have struck his stream as high up as George the Fourth and even of the Regency, but without ever getting quite to the source. His mind must have been open to impressions very early, but it must also have closed early, for the politics of the day have little interest for him, while he is fiercely excited about questions which are entirely prehistoric. He shakes his head when he speaks of the first Reform Bill and expresses grave doubts as to its wisdom, and I have heard him, when he was warmed by a glass of wine, say bitter things about Robert Peel and his abandoning of the Corn Laws. The death of that statesman brought the history of England to a definite close, and Dr Winter refers to everything which had happened since then as to an insignificant anti-climax.

But it was only when I had myself become a medical man that I was able to appreciate how

entirely he is a survival of a past generation. He had learned his medicine under that obsolete and forgotten system by which a youth was apprenticed to a surgeon, in the days when the study of anatomy was often approached through a violated grave. His views upon his own profession are even more reactionary than his politics. Fifty years have brought him little and deprived him of less. Vaccination was well within the teaching of his youth, though I think he has a secret preference for inoculation. Bleeding he would practise freely but for public opinion. Chloroform he regards as a dangerous innovation, and he always clicks with his tongue when it is mentioned. He has even been known to say vain things about Laennec, and to refer to the stethoscope as 'a newfangled French toy.' He carries one in his hat out of deference to the expectations of his patients; but he is very hard of hearing, so that it makes little difference whether he uses it or not.

He always reads, as a duty, his weekly medical paper, so that he has a general idea as to the advance of modern science. He persists in looking upon it, however, as a huge and rather ludicrous experiment. The germ theory of disease set him chuckling for a long time, and his favourite joke in the sick-room was to say, 'Shut

the door, or the germs will be getting in.' As to the Darwinian theory, it struck him as being the crowning joke of the century. 'The children in the nursery and the ancestors in the stable,' he would cry, and laugh the tears out of his eyes.

He is so very much behind the day that occasionally, as things move round in their usual circle, he finds himself, to his own bewilderment, in the front of the fashion. Dietetic treatment, for example, had been much in vogue in his youth, and he has more practical knowledge of it than anyone whom I have met. Massage, too, was familiar to him when it was new to our generation. He had been trained also at a time when instruments were in a rudimentary state and when men learned to trust more to their own fingers. He has a model surgical hand, muscular in the palm, tapering in the fingers, 'with an eye at the end of each.' I shall not easily forget how Dr Patterson and I cut Sir John Sirwell, the County Member, and were unable to find the stone. It was a horrible moment. Both our careers were at stake. And then it was that Dr Winter, whom we had asked out of courtesy to be present, introduced into the wound a finger which seemed to our excited senses to be about nine inches long, and hooked out the stone at the end of it.

'It's always well to bring one in your waist-coat pocket,' said he with a chuckle, 'but I suppose you youngsters are above all that.'

We made him President of our Branch of the British Medical Association, but he resigned after the first meeting. 'The young men are too much for me,' he said. 'I don't understand what they are talking about.' Yet his patients do very well. He has the healing touch—that magnetic thing which defies explanation or analysis, but which is a very evident fact none the less. His mere presence leaves the patient with more hopefulness and vitality. The sight of disease affects him as dust does a careful housewife. It makes him angry and impatient. 'Tut, tut, this will never do!' he cries, as he takes over a new case. He would shoo death out of the room as though he were an intrusive hen. But when the intruder refuses to be dislodged, when the blood moves more slowly and the eyes grow dimmer, then it is that Dr Winter is of more avail than all the drugs in his surgery. Dying folk cling to his hand as if the presence of his bulk and vigour gives them more courage to face the change; and that kindly, wind-beaten face has been the last earthly impression which many a sufferer has carried into the unknown.

When Dr Patterson and I, both of us young

energetic and up-to-date, settled in the district, we were most cordially received by the old doctor, who would have been only too happy to be relieved of some of his patients. The patients themselves, however, followed their own inclinations, which is a reprehensible way that patients have, so that we remained neglected with our modern instruments and our latest alkaloids, while he was serving out senna and calomel to all the countryside. We both of us loved the old fellow, but at the same time, in the privacy of our own intimate conversations, we could not help commenting upon this deplorable lack of judgment.

‘It is all very well for the poorer people,’ said Patterson, ‘but after all the educated classes have a right to expect that their medical man will know the difference between a mitral murmur and a bronchitic rale. It’s the judicial frame of mind, not the sympathetic, which is the essential one.’

I thoroughly agreed with Patterson in what he said. It happened, however, that very shortly afterwards the epidemic of influenza broke out, and we were all worked to death. One morning I met Patterson on my round, and found him looking rather pale and fagged out. He made the same remark about me. I was in fact

feeling far from well, and I lay upon the sofa all afternoon with a splitting headache and pains in every joint. As evening closed in I could no longer disguise the fact that the scourge was upon me, and I felt that I should have medical advice without delay. It was of Patterson naturally that I thought, but somehow the idea of him had suddenly become repugnant to me. I thought of his cold, critical attitude, of his endless questions, of his tests and his tappings. I wanted something more soothing—something more genial.

'Mrs Hudson,' said I to my housekeeper, 'would you kindly run along to old Dr Winter and tell him that I should be obliged to him if he would step round.'

She was back with an answer presently.

'Dr Winter will come round in an hour or so, sir, but he has just been called in to attend Dr Patterson.'

HIS FIRST OPERATION

IT was the first day of a winter session, and the third year's man was walking with the first year's man. Twelve o'clock was just booming out from the Tron Church.

'Let me see,' said the third year's man, 'you have never seen an operation?'

'Never.'

'Then this way, please. This is Rutherford's historic bar. A glass of sherry, please, for this gentleman. You are rather sensitive, are you not?'

'My nerves are not very strong, I am afraid.'

'Hum! Another glass of sherry for this gentleman. We are going to an operation now, you know.'

The novice squared his shoulders and made a gallant attempt to look unconcerned.

'Nothing very bad—eh?'

'Well, yes—pretty bad.'

'An—an amputation?'

'No, it's a bigger affair than that.'

'I think—I think they must be expecting me at home.'

'There's no sense in funking. If you don't go to-day you must to-morrow. Better get it over at once. Feel pretty fit?'

'Oh, yes, all right.'

The smile was not a success.

'One more glass of sherry, then. Now come on or we shall be late. I want you to be well in front.'

'Surely that is not necessary.'

'Oh, it is far better. What a drove of students! There are plenty of new men among them. You can tell them easily enough, can't you? If they were going down to be operated upon themselves they could not look whiter.'

'I don't think I should look as white.'

'Well, I was just the same myself. But the feeling soon wears off. You see a fellow with a face like plaster, and before the week is out he is eating his lunch in the dissecting rooms. I'll tell you all about the case when we get to the theatre.'

The students were pouring down the sloping

street which led to the infirmary—each with his little sheaf of note-books in his hand. There were pale, frightened lads, fresh from the High Schools, and callous old chronics, whose generation had passed on and left them. They swept in an unbroken, tumultuous stream from the University gate to the hospital. The figures and gait of the men were young, but there was little youth in most of their faces. Some looked as if they ate too little—a few as if they drank too much. Tall and short, tweed coated and black, round-shouldered, bespectacled and slim, they crowded with clatter of feet and rattle of sticks through the hospital gate. Now and again they thickened into two lines as the carriage of a surgeon of the staff rolled over the cobblestones between.

‘There’s going to be a crowd at Archer’s,’ whispered the senior man with suppressed excitement. ‘It is grand to see him at work. I’ve seen him jab all round the aorta until it made me jumpy to watch him. This way, and mind the whitewash.’

They passed under an archway and down a long, stone-flagged corridor with drab-coloured doors on either side, each marked with a number. Some of them were ajar, and the novice glanced into them with tingling nerves. He was re-

assured to catch a glimpse of cheery fires, lines of white-counterpaned beds and a profusion of coloured texts upon the wall. The corridor opened upon a small hall with a fringe of poorly-clad people seated all round upon benches. A young man with a pair of scissors stuck, like a flower, in his button-hole, and a note-book in his hand, was passing from one to the other, whispering and writing.

‘Anything good?’ asked the third year’s man.

‘You should have been here yesterday,’ said the out-patient clerk, glancing up. ‘We had a regular field day. A popliteal aneurism, a Colles’ fracture, a spina bifida, a tropical abscess, and an elephantiasis. How’s that for a single haul?’

‘I’m sorry I missed it. But they’ll come again, I suppose. What’s up with the old gentleman?’

A broken workman was sitting in the shadow, rocking himself slowly to and fro and groaning. A woman beside him was trying to console him, patting his shoulder with a hand which was spotted over with curious little white blisters.

‘Its a fine carbuncle,’ said the clerk, with the air of a connoisseur who describes his orchids to one who can appreciate them. ‘It’s on his back, and the passage is draughty, so we must not

look at it, must we, daddy? Pempigus,' he added carelessly, pointing to the woman's disfigured hands. 'Would you care to stop and take out a metacarpal?'

'No thank you, we are due at Archer's. Come on; ' and they rejoined the throng which was hurrying to the theatre of the famous surgeon.

The tiers of horse-shoe benches, rising from the floor to the ceiling, were already packed, and the novice as he entered saw vague, curving lines of faces in front of him, and heard the deep buzz of a hundred voices and sounds of laughter from somewhere up above him. His companion spied an opening on the second bench, and they both squeezed into it.

'This is grand,' the senior man whispered; 'you'll have a rare view of it all.'

Only a single row of heads intervened between them and the operating table. It was of unpainted deal, plain, strong and scrupulously clean. A sheet of brown waterproofing covered half of it, and beneath stood a large tin tray full of sawdust. On the further side, in front of the window, there was a board which was strewed with glittering instruments, forceps, tenacula, saws, canulas and trocars. A line of knives, with long, thin, delicate blades, lay at one side. Two young men lounged in front of this; one

threading needles, the other doing something to a brass coffee-pot-like thing which hissed out puffs of steam.

'That's Peterson,' whispered the senior. 'The big, bald man in the front row. He's the skin-grafting man, you know. And that's Anthony Browne, who took a larynx out successfully last winter. And there's Murphy the pathologist, and Stoddart the eye man. You'll come to know them all soon.'

'Who are the two men at the table?'

'Nobody—dressers. One has charge of the instruments and the other of the puffing Billy. It's Lister's antiseptic spray, you know, and Archer's one of the carbolic acid men. Hayes is the leader of the cleanliness-and-cold-water school, and they all hate each other like poison.'

A flutter of interest passed through the closely-packed benches as a woman in petticoat and bodice was led in by two nurses. A red woollen shawl was draped over her head and round her neck. The face which looked out from it was that of a woman in the prime of her years, but drawn with suffering and of a peculiar bees-wax tint. Her head drooped as she walked, and one of the nurses, with her arm round her waist, was whispering consolation in her ear. She gave a quick side glance at the instrument

table as she passed, but the nurses turned her away from it.

'What ails her?' asked the novice.

'Cancer of the parotid. It's the devil of a case, extends right away back behind the carotids. There's hardly a man but Archer would dare to follow it. Ah, here he is himself.'

As he spoke, a small, brisk, iron-grey man came striding into the room, rubbing his hands together as he walked. He had a clean-shaven face of the Naval officer type, with large, bright eyes, and a firm, straight mouth. Behind him came his big house surgeon with his gleaming pince-nez and a trail of dressers, who grouped themselves into the corners of the room.

'Gentlemen,' cried the surgeon in a voice as hard and brisk as his manner. 'We have here an interesting case of tumour of the parotid, originally cartilaginous but now assuming malignant characteristics, and therefore requiring excision. On to the table, nurse! Thank you! Chloroform, clerk! Thank you! You can take the shawl off, nurse.'

The woman lay back upon the waterproofed pillow and her murderous tumour lay revealed. In itself it was a pretty thing, ivory white with a mesh of blue veins, and curving gently from jaw to chest. But the lean, yellow face, and the

stringy throat were in horrible contrast with the plumpness and sleekness of this monstrous growth. The surgeon placed a hand on each side of it and pressed it slowly backwards and forwards.

'Adherent at one place, gentlemen,' he cried. 'The growth involves the carotids and jugulars, and passes behind the ramus of the jaw, whither we must be prepared to follow it. It is impossible to say how deep our dissection may carry us. Carbolic tray, thank you! Dressings of carbolic gauze, if you please! Push the chloroform, Mr Johnson. Have the small saw ready in case it is necessary to remove the jaw.'

The patient was moaning gently under the towel which had been placed over her face. She tried to raise her arms and to draw up her knees but two dressers restrained her. The heavy air was full of the penetrating smells of carbolic acid and of chloroform. A muffled cry came from under the towel and then a snatch of a song, sung in a high, quavering, monotonous voice.

'He says, says he,
If you fly with me
You'll be mistress of the ice-cream van;
You'll be mistress of the—'

It mumbled off into a drone and stopped.

The surgeon came across, still rubbing his hands, and spoke to an elderly man in front of the novice.

‘Narrow squeak for the Government,’ he said.

‘Oh, ten is enough.’

‘They won’t have ten long. They’d do better to resign before they are driven to it.’

‘Oh, I should fight it out.’

‘What’s the use. They can’t get past the committee, even if they get a vote in the House. I was talking to—’

‘Patient’s ready, sir,’ said the dresser.

‘Talking to McDonald—but I’ll tell you about it presently.’ He walked back to the patient, who was breathing in long, heavy gasps. ‘I propose,’ said he, passing his hand over the tumour in an almost caressing fashion, ‘to make a free incision over the posterior border and to take another forward at right angles to the lower end of it. Might I trouble you for a medium knife, Mr Johnson.’

The novice, with eyes which were dilating with horror, saw the surgeon pick up the long, gleaming knife, dip it into a tin basin and balance it in his fingers as an artist might his brush. Then he saw him pinch up the skin above the tumour with his left hand. At the sight, his nerves, which had already been tried

B

once or twice that day, gave way utterly. His head swam round and he felt that in another instant he might faint. He dared not look at the patient. He dug his thumbs into his ears lest some scream should come to haunt him, and he fixed his eyes rigidly upon the wooden ledge in front of him. One glance, one cry, would, he knew, break down the shred of self-possession which he still retained. He tried to think of cricket, of green fields and rippling water, of his sisters at home—of anything rather than of what was going on so near him.

And yet, somehow, even with his ears stopped up, sounds seemed to penetrate to him and to carry their own tale. He heard, or thought that he heard, the long hissing of the carbolic engine. Then he was conscious of some movement among the dressers. Were there groans too breaking in upon him, and some other sound, some fluid sound, which was more dreadfully suggestive still? His mind would keep building up every step of the operation, and fancy made it more ghastly than fact could have been. His nerves tingled and quivered. Minute by minute the giddiness grew more marked, the numb, sickly feeling at his heart more distressing. And then suddenly, with a groan, his head pitching forward and his brow cracking sharply

upon the narrow, wooden shelf in front of him, he lay in a dead faint.

When he came to himself he was lying in the empty theatre with his collar and shirt undone. The third year's man was dabbing a wet sponge over his face, and a couple of grinning dressers were looking on.

'All right,' cried the novice, sitting up and rubbing his eyes; 'I'm sorry to have made an ass of myself.'

'Well, so I should think,' said his companion. 'What on earth did you faint about?'

'I couldn't help it. It was that operation.'

'What operation?'

'Why, that cancer.'

There was a pause, and then the three students burst out laughing.

'Why, you juggins,' cried the senior man, 'there never was an operation at all. They found the patient didn't stand the chloroform well, and so the whole thing was off. Archer has been giving us one of his racy lectures, and you fainted just in the middle of his favourite story.'

A STRAGGLER OF '15

IT was a dull October morning, and heavy, rolling fog-wreaths lay low over the wet, grey roofs of the Woolwich houses. Down in the long, brick-lined streets all was sodden and greasy and cheerless. From the high buildings of the Arsenal came the whirr of many wheels, the thudding of weights, and the buzz and babel of human toil. Beyond, the dwellings of the working-men, smoke-stained and unlovely, radiated away in a lessening perspective of narrowing road and dwindling wall.

There were few folk in the streets, for the toilers had all been absorbed since break of day by the huge, smoke-spouting monster, which sucked in the manhood of the town, to belch it forth, weary and work-stained, every night. Stout women, with thick, red arms and dirty

aprons, stood upon the whitened doorsteps, leaning upon their brooms, and shrieking their morning greetings across the road. One had gathered a small knot of cronies around her, and was talking energetically, with little shrill titters from her audience to punctuate her remarks.

'Old enough to know better!' she cried, in answer to an exclamation from one of the listeners. 'Why, 'ow old is he at all? Blessed if I could ever make out.'

'Well, it ain't so hard to reckon,' said a sharp-featured, pale-faced woman, with watery-blue eyes. 'He's been at the battle o' Waterloo, and has the pension and medal to prove it.'

'That were a ter'ble long time ago,' remarked a third. 'It were afore I were born.'

'It were fifteen year after the beginnin' of the century,' cried a younger woman, who had stood leaning against the wall, with a smile of superior knowledge upon her face. 'My Bill was a-saying so last Sabbath, when I spoke to him o' old Daddy Brewster, here.'

'And suppose he spoke truth, Missus Simpson, 'ow long ago do that make it?'

'It's eighty-one now,' said the original speaker, checking off the years upon her coarse, red fingers, 'and that were fifteen. Ten, and ten,

and ten, and ten, and ten—why, it's only sixty and six year, so he ain't so old after all.'

'But he weren't a new-born babe at the battle, silly,' cried the young woman, with a chuckle. 'S'pose he were only twenty, then he couldn't be less than six-and-eighty now, at the lowest.'

'Ay, he's that—every day of it,' cried several.

'I've had 'bout enough of it,' remarked the large woman, gloomily. 'Unless his young niece, or grand-niece, or whatever she is, come to-day, I'm off; and he can find some one else to do his work. Your own 'ome first, says I.'

'Ain't he quiet, then, Missus Simpson?' asked the youngest of the group.

'Listen to him now,' she answered, with her hand half raised, and her head turned slantwise towards the open door. From the upper floor came a shuffling, sliding sound, with a sharp tapping of a stick. 'There he go back and forrards doing what he call his sentry-go. 'Arf the night through he's at that game, the silly old juggins. At six o'clock this very mornin' there he was beatin' with a stick at my door. "Turn out guard," he cried, and a lot more jargon that I could make nothing of. Then what with his coughin' and 'awkin' and

spittin', there ain't no gettin' a wink o' sleep. Hark to him now!

'Missus Simpson! Missus Simpson!' cried a cracked and querulous voice from above.

'That's him,' she cried, nodding her head with an air of triumph. 'He do go on some-thin' scandalous. Yes, Mister Brewster, sir.'

'I want my morning ration, Missus Simpson.'

'It's just ready, Mister Brewster, sir.'

'Blessed if he ain't like a baby cryin' for it's pap,' said the young woman.

'I feel as if I could shake his old bones up sometimes,' cried Mrs Simpson viciously. 'But who's for a 'arf of fourpenny?'

The whole company were about to shuffle off to the public-house, when a young girl stepped across the road and touched the housekeeper timidly upon the arm. 'I think that is No. 56 Arsenal View,' she said. 'Can you tell me if Mr Brewster lives here?'

The housekeeper looked critically at the new-comer. She was a girl of about twenty, broad-faced and comely, with a turned-up nose and large, honest, grey eyes. Her print dress, her straw hat with its bunch of glaring poppies, and the bundle which she carried had all a smack of the country.

'You're Norah Brewster, I s'pose,' said Mrs

Simpson, eyeing her up and down with no friendly gaze.

'Yes ; I've come to look after my grand-uncle Gregory.'

'And a good job too,' cried the housekeeper, with a toss of her head. 'It's about time that some of his own folk took a turn at it, for I've had enough of it. There you are, young woman ! in you go, and make yourself at home. There's tea in the caddy, and bacon on the dresser, and the old man will be about you if you don't fetch him his breakfast. I'll send for my things in the evenin'.'

With a nod she strolled off with her attendant gossips in the direction of the public-house.

Thus left to her own devices, the country girl walked into the front room and took off her hat and jacket. It was a low-roofed apartment with a sputtering fire, upon which a small brass kettle was singing cheerily. A stained cloth lay over half the table, with an empty brown teapot, a loaf of bread, and some coarse crockery. Norah Brewster looked rapidly about her, and in an instant took over her new duties. Ere five minutes had passed the tea was made, two slices of bacon were frizzling on the pan, the table was re-arranged, the antimacassars straightened over the sombre brown furniture, and the whole room

had taken a new air of comfort and neatness. This done, she looked round curiously at the prints upon the walls. Over the fireplace, in a small, square case, a brown medal caught her eye, hanging from a strip of purple ribbon. Beneath was a slip of newspaper cutting. She stood on her tiptoes, with her fingers on the edge of the mantelpiece, and craned her neck up to see it, glancing down from time to time at the bacon which simmered and hissed beneath her. The cutting was yellow with age, and ran in this way:—

‘On Tuesday an interesting ceremony was performed at the barracks of the third regiment of guards, when, in the presence of the Prince Regent, Lord Hill, Lord Saltoun, and an assemblage which comprised beauty as well as valour, a special medal was presented to Corporal Gregory Brewster, of Captain Haldane’s flank company, in recognition of his gallantry in the recent great battle in the Lowlands. It appears that on the ever-memorable 18th of June, four companies of the third guards and of the Coldstreams, under the command of Colonels Maitland and Byng, held the important farmhouse of Hougoumont at the right of the British position. At a critical point of the action

these troops found themselves short of powder. Seeing that Generals Foy and Jerome Buonaparte were again massing their infantry for an attack on the position, Colonel Byng despatched Corporal Brewster to the rear to hasten up the reserve ammunition. Brewster came upon two powder tumbrils of the Nassau division, and succeeded, after menacing the drivers with his musket, in inducing them to convey their powder to Hougoumont. In his absence, however, the hedges surrounding the position had been set on fire by a howitzer battery of the French, and the passage of the carts full of powder became a most hazardous matter. The first tumbril exploded, blowing the driver to fragments. Daunted by the fate of his comrade, the second driver turned his horses, but Corporal Brewster, springing upon his seat, hurled the man down, and urging the powder cart through the flames, succeeded in forcing a way to his companions. To this gallant deed may be directly attributed the success of the British arms, for without powder it would have been impossible to have held Hougoumont, and the Duke of Wellington had repeatedly declared that had Hougoumont fallen, as well as La Haye Sainte, he would have found it impossible to have held his ground. Long may the heroic Brewster live to treasure

the medal which he has so bravely won, and to look back with pride to the day when in the presence of his comrades he received this tribute to his valour from the august hands of the first gentleman of the realm.'

The reading of this old cutting increased in the girl's mind the veneration which she had always had for her warrior kinsman. From her infancy he had been her hero, and she remembered how her father used to speak of his courage and his strength, how he could strike down a bullock with a blow of his fist, and carry a fat sheep under either arm. True that she had never seen him, but a rude painting at home, which depicted a square-faced, clean-shaven, stalwart man with a great bearskin cap, rose ever before her memory when she thought of him.

She was still gazing at the brown medal and wondering what the '*dulce et decorum est*' might mean, which was inscribed upon the edge, when there came a sudden tapping and shuffling upon the stair, and there at the door was standing the very man who had been so often in her thoughts.

But could this indeed be he? Where was the martial air, the flashing eye, the warrior face

which she had pictured. There, framed in the doorway, was a huge, twisted old man, gaunt and puckered, with twitching hands, and shuffling, purposeless feet. A cloud of fluffy white hair, a red-veined nose, two thick tufts of eyebrow and a pair of dimly-questioning, watery-blue eyes—these were what met her gaze. He leaned forward upon a stick, while his shoulders rose and fell with his crackling, rasping breathing.

‘I want my morning rations,’ he crooned, as he stumped forward to his chair. ‘The cold nips me without ’em. See to my fingers!’

He held out his distorted hands, all blue at the tips, wrinkled and gnarled, with huge, projecting knuckles.

‘It’s nigh ready,’ answered the girl, gazing at him with wonder in her eyes. ‘Don’t you know who I am, grand-uncle? I am Norah Brewster from Witham.’

‘Rum is warm,’ mumbled the old man, rocking to and fro in his chair, ‘and schnapps is warm and there’s ’cat in soup, but it’s a dish o’ tea for me. What did you say your name was?’

‘Norah Brewster.’

‘You can speak out, lass. Seems to me folk’s voices isn’t as loud as they used.’

‘I’m Norah Brewster, uncle. I’m your grand-

niece come from down Essex way to live with you.'

'You'll be brother Jarge's girl! Lor', to think o' little Jarge having a girl.'

He chuckled hoarsely to himself, and the long, stringy sinews of his throat jerked and quivered.

'I am the daughter of your brother George's son,' said she as she turned the bacon.

'Lor', but little Jarge was a rare un,' he continued. 'Eh, by Jimini, there was no chousing Jarge. He's got a bull pup o' mine that I gave him when I took the bounty. You've heard him speak of it, likely?'

'Why, grandpa George has been dead this twenty years,' said she, pouring out the tea.

'Well, it was a bootiful pup—ay, a well-bred un, by Jimini! I'm cold for lack of my rations. Rum is good, and so is schnapps, but I'd as lief have tea as either.'

He breathed heavily while he devoured his food.

'It's a middlin' goodish way you've come,' said he at last. 'Likely the stage left yesternight.

'The what, uncle?'

'The coach that brought you.'

'Nay, I came by the mornin' train.'

'Lor', now, think o' that! You ain't afear'd

of those new-fangled things! To think of you coming by railroad like that! What's the world a-comin' to?'

There was silence for some minutes while Norah sat stirring her tea and glancing sideways at the bluish lips and champing jaws of her companion.

'You must have seen a deal of life, uncle,' said she. 'It must seem a long, long time to you!'

'Not so very long, neither. I'm ninety come Candlemass, but it don't seem long since I took the bounty. And that battle, it might have been yesterday. I've got the smell of the burned powder in my nose yet. Eh, but I get a power o' good from my rations!'

He did indeed look less worn and colourless than when she first saw him. His face was flushed and his back more erect.

'Have you read that?' he asked, jerking his head towards the cutting.

'Yes, uncle, and I am sure you must be proud of it.'

'Ah, it was a great day for me! A great day! The Regent was there, and a fine body of a man, too! "The ridgment is proud of you," says he. "And I'm proud of the ridgment," say I. "A damned good answer, too!" says he to Lord Hill, and they both bust out

a-laughing. But what be you a-peepin' out o' the window for?'

'Oh, uncle, here's a regiment of soldiers coming down the street, with the band playing in front of them.'

'A ridgment, eh? Where be my glasses? Lor' but I can hear the band, as plain as plain. Here's the pioneers an' the drum-major! What be their number, lass?'

His eyes were shining and his bony, yellow fingers, like the claws of some fierce old bird, dug into her shoulder.

'They don't seem to have no number, uncle. They've something wrote on their shoulders. Oxfordshire, I think it be.'

'Ah, yes,' he growled. 'I heard as they'd dropped the numbers and given them new-fangled names. There they go, by Jimini! They're young mostly, but they hain't forgot how to march. They have the swing—ay, I'll say that for them. They've got the swing.'

He gazed after them until the last files had turned the corner, and the measured tramp of their marching had died away in the distance.

He had just regained his chair when the door opened and a gentleman stepped in.

'Ah, Mr Brewster! Better to-day?' he asked.

'Come in, doctor! Yes, I'm better. But there's a deal o' bubbling in my chest. It's all them toobes. If I could but cut the phlegm I'd be right. Can't ye give me something to cut the phlegm?'

The doctor, a grave-faced, young man, put his fingers to the furrowed, blue-corded wrist.

'You must be careful,' he said; 'you must take no liberties.'

The thin tide of life seemed to thrill rather than to throb under his finger.

The old man chuckled.

'I've got brother Jarge's girl to look after me now. She'll see I don't break barracks or do what I hadn't ought to; why, darn my skin, I knew something was amiss!'

'With what?'

'Why, with them soldiers. You saw them pass, doctor—eh? They'd forgot their stocks. Not one on 'em had his stock on.' He croaked and chuckled for a long time over his discovery. 'It wouldn't ha' done for the Dook!' he muttered. 'No by Jimini! the Dook would ha' had word there.'

The doctor smiled.

'Well, you are doing very well,' said he. 'I'll look in once a week or so and see how you are!' As Norah followed him to the door he beckoned

her outside. 'He is very weak,' he whispered. 'If you find him failing you must send for me.'

'What ails him, doctor?'

'Ninety years ail him. His arteries are pipes of lime. His heart is shrunken and flabby. The man is worn out.'

Norah stood watching the brisk figure of the young doctor and pondering over these new responsibilities which had come upon her. When she turned, a tall, brown-faced artillery man, with the three gold chevrons of sergeant upon his arm, was standing, carbine in hand, at her elbow.

'Good morning, miss!' said he, raising one thick finger to his jaunty, yellow-banded cap. 'I b'lieve there's an old gentleman lives here of the name of Brewster, who was engaged in the battle o' Waterloo?'

'It's my grand-uncle, sir,' said Norah, casting down her eyes before the keen, critical gaze of the young soldier. 'He is in the front parlour.'

'Could I have a word with him, miss? I'll call again if it don't chance to be convenient.'

'I am sure that he would be very glad to see you, sir. He's in here, if you'll step in. Uncle, here's a gentleman who wants to speak with you.'

'Proud to see you, sir—proud and glad, sir!' cried the sergeant, taking three steps forward into the room, and grounding his carbine while

C

he raised his hand, palm forwards, in a salute.

Norah stood by the door, with her mouth and eyes open, wondering whether her grand-uncle had ever, in his prime, looked like this magnificent creature; and whether he, in his turn, would ever come to resemble her grand-uncle.

The old man blinked up at his visitor, and shook his head slowly.

'Sit ye down, sergeant,' said he, pointing with his stick to a chair. 'You're full young for the stripes. Lordy, its easier to get three now than one in my day. Gunners were old soldiers then, and the grey hairs came quicker than the three stripes.'

'I am eight years' service, sir,' cried the sergeant. 'Macdonald is my name—Sergeant Macdonald, of H. Battery, Southern Artillery Division. I have called as the spokesman of my mates at the gunners' barracks to say that we are proud to have you in the town, sir.'

Old Brewster chuckled and rubbed his bony hands.

'That were what the Regent said,' he cried. "'The ridgment is proud of ye,'" says he. "'And I am proud of the ridgment,'" says I. "'And a damned good answer, too,'" says he, and he and Lord Hill bust out—a-laughin'.'

'The non-commissioned mess would be proud and honoured to see you, sir,' said Sergeant Macdonald. 'And if you could step as far you'll always find a pipe o' baccy and a glass of grog awaitin' you.'

The old man laughed until he coughed.

'Like to see me, would they? The dogs!' said he. 'Well, well, when the warm weather comes again I'll maybe drop in. It's likely that I'll drop in. Too grand for a canteen, eh? Got your mess just the same as the orficers. What's the world a-coming to at all!'

'You was in the line, sir, was you not?' asked the sergeant, respectfully.

'The line?' cried the old man with shrill scorn. 'Never wore a shako in my life. I am a guardsman, I am. Served in the third guards—the same they call now the Scots Guards. Lordy, but they have all marched away, every man of them, from old Colonel Byng down to the drummer boys, and here am I a straggler—that's what I am, sergeant, a straggler! I'm here when I ought to be there. But it ain't my fault neither, for I'm ready to fall in when the word comes.'

'We've all got to muster there,' answered the sergeant. 'Won't you try my baccy, sir?' handing over a sealskin pouch.

Old Brewster drew a blackened clay pipe from his pocket, and began to stuff the tobacco into the bowl. In an instant it slipped through his fingers, and was broken to pieces on the floor. His lip quivered, his nose puckered up, and he began crying with the long, helpless sobs of a child.

'I've broke my pipe,' he cried.

'Don't, uncle, oh don't,' cried Norah, bending over him and patting his white head as one soothes a baby. 'It don't matter. We can easy get another.'

'Don't you fret yourself, sir,' said the sergeant. 'Ere's a wooden pipe with an amber mouth, if you'll do me the honour to accept it from me. I'd be real glad if you will take it.'

'Jimini!' cried he, his smiles breaking in an instant through his tears. 'It's a fine pipe. See to my new pipe, Norah. I lay that Jarge never had a pipe like that. You've got your firelock there, sergeant.'

'Yes, sir, I was on my way back from the butts when I looked in.'

'Let me have the feel of it. Lordy, but it seems like old times to have one's hand on a musket. What's the manual, sergeant, eh? Cock your firelock—look to your priming — present your firelock — eh, sergeant?

Oh, Jimini! I've broke your musket in halves!

'That's all right, sir,' cried the gunner, laughing 'you pressed on the lever and opened the breech-piece. That's where we load 'em, you know.'

'Load 'em at the wrong end! Well, well, to think o' that. And no ramrod, neither! I've heered tell of it, but I never believed it afore. Ah, it won't come up to Brown Bess. When there's work to be done you mark my word and see if they don't come back to Brown Bess.'

'By the Lord, sir,' cried the sergeant, hotly, 'they need some change out in South Africa now. I see by this mornin's paper that the Government has knuckled under to these Boers. They're hot about it at the non-com. mess, I can tell you, sir.'

'Eh, eh,' croaked old Brewster. 'By Gosh! it wouldn't ha' done for the Dook; the Dook would ha' had a word to say over that!'

'Ah, that he would, sir,' cried the sergeant; 'and God send us another like him. But I've wearied you enough for one sitting. I'll look in again, and I'll bring a comrade or two with me if I may, for there isn't one but would be proud to have speech with you.'

So, with another salute to the veteran, and a gleam of white teeth at Norah, the big gunner

withdrew, leaving a memory of blue cloth and of gold braid behind him. Many days had not passed, however, before he was back again, and during all the long winter he was a frequent visitor at Arsenal View. He brought others with him, and soon through all the lines a pilgrimage to Daddy Brewster's came to be looked upon as the proper thing to do. Gunners and sappers, linesmen and dragoons, came bowing and bobbing into the little parlour, with clatter of side-arms and clink of spurs, stretching their long legs across the patchwork rug, and hunting in the front of their tunics for the screw of tobacco, or paper of snuff, which they had brought as a sign of their esteem.

It was a deadly cold winter, with six weeks on end of snow on the ground, and Norah had a hard task to keep the life in that time-worn body. There were times when his mind would leave him, and when, save an animal outcry when the hour of his meals came round, no word would fall from him. As the warm weather came once more, however, and the green buds peeped forth again upon the trees, the blood thawed in his veins, and he would even drag himself as far as the door to bask in the life-giving sunshine.

'It do hearten me up so,' he said one morning, as he glowed in a hot May sun. 'It's a job to keep back the flies, though! They get owda-cious in this weather and they do plague me cruel.'

'I'll keep them off you uncle,' said Norah.

'Eh, but it's fine! This sunshine makes me think o' the glory to come. You might read me a bit o' the Bible, lass. I find it wonderful soothing.'

'What part would you like, uncle?'

'Oh, them wars.'

'The wars?'

'Ay, keep to the wars! Give me the Old Testament for chice. There's more taste to it, to my mind! When parson comes he wants to get off to something else, but its Joshua or nothing with me. Them Israelites was good soldiers—good growed soldiers, all of 'em.'

'But, uncle,' pleaded Norah, 'its all peace in the next world.'

'No it ain't, gal,'

'Oh yes, uncle, surely!'

The old corporal knocked his stick irritably upon the ground.

'I tell ye it ain't, gal. I asked parson.'

'Well, what did he say?'

'He said there was to be a last fight. He

even gave it a name, he did. The battle of Arm—Arm—'

'Armageddon.'

'Ay, that's the name parson said. I 'specs the third guards'll be there. And the Dook—the Dook'll have a word to say.'

An elderly, grey-whiskered gentleman had been walking down the street, glancing up at the numbers of the houses. Now, as his eyes fell upon the old man, he came straight for him.

'Hullo,' said he, 'perhaps you are Gregory Brewster?'

'My name, sir,' answered the veteran.

'You are the same Brewster, as I understand, who is on the roll of the Scots Guards as having been present at the battle of Waterloo?'

'I am that man, sir, though we called it the third guards in those days. It was a fine ridgment, and they only need me to make up a full muster.'

'Tut, tut, they'll have to wait years for that,' said the gentleman heartily; 'but I am the colonel of the Scots Guards, and I thought I would like to have a word with you.'

Old Gregory Brewster was up in an instant with his hand to his rabbit-skin cap.

'God bless me!' he cried, 'to think of it; to think of it.'

'Hadn't the gentleman better come in?' suggested the practical Norah from behind the door.

'Surely, sir, surely; walk in, sir, if I may be so bold.'

In his excitement he had forgotten his stick, and as he led the way into the parlour, his knees tottered, and he threw out his hands. In an instant the colonel had caught him on one side and Norah on the other.

'Easy and steady,' said the colonel as he led him to his arm-chair.

'Thank ye, sir; I was near gone that time. But, Lordy, why, I can scarce believe it. To think of me, the corporal of the flank company, and you the colonel of the battalion. Jimini! how things come round, to be sure.'

'Why, we are very proud of you in London,' said the colonel. 'And so you are actually one of the men who held Hougoumont?' He looked at the bony, trembling hands with their huge, knotted knuckles, the stringy throat, and the heaving, rounded shoulders. Could this, indeed, be the last of that band of heroes? Then he glanced at the half-filled phials, the blue liniment bottles, the long-spouted kettle, and the sordid details of the sick-room. 'Better, surely, had he died under the blazing rafters of the Belgian farm-house,' thought the colonel.

'I hope that you are pretty comfortable and happy,' he remarked after a pause.

'Thank ye, sir. I have a good deal of trouble with my toobes—a deal of trouble. You wouldn't think the job it is to cut the phlegm. And I need my rations. I gets cold without 'em. And the flies! I ain't strong enough to fight against them.'

'How's the memory?' asked the colonel.

'Oh, there ain't nothing amiss there. Why, sir, I could give you the name of every man in Captain Haldane's flank company.'

'And the battle—you remember it?'

'Why, I sees it all afore me every time I shuts my eyes. Lordy, sir, you wouldn't hardly believe how clear it is to me. There's our line from the paregoric bottle right along to the snuff-box. D'ye see? Well, then, the pill-box is for Hougoumont on the right, where we was; and Norah's thimble for La Haye Sainte. There it is all right, sir, and here were our guns, and here, behind, the reserves and the Belgians. Ach, them Belgians!' He spat furiously into the fire. 'Then here's the French where my pipe lies, and over here, where I put my baccy pouch, was the Proosians a-comin' up on our left flank. Jimini! but it was a glad sight to see the smoke of their guns.'

'And what was it that struck you most, now, in connection with the whole affair?' asked the colonel.

'I lost three half-crowns over it, I did,' crooned old Brewster. 'I shouldn't wonder if I was never to get that money now. I lent 'em to Jabez Smith, my rear rank man, in Brussels. "Only till pay-day, Grig" says he. By Gosh! he was stuck by a lancer at Quarter Brass, and me with not so much as a slip o' paper to prove the debt! Them three half-crowns is as good as lost to me.'

The colonel rose from his chair, laughing.

'The officers of the Guards want you to buy yourself some little trifle which may add to your comfort,' he said. 'It is not from me, so you need not thank me.'

He took up the old man's tobacco pouch and slipped a crisp bank note inside it.

'Thank ye, kindly, sir. But there's one favour that I would like to ask you, colonel.'

'Yes, my man?'

'If I'm called, colonel, you won't grudge me a flag and a firing party?'

'All right, my man, I'll see to it,' said the colonel. 'Good-bye; I hope to have nothing but good news from you.'

'A kind gentleman, Norah,' croaked old

Brewster, as they saw him walk past the window; 'but, Lordy, he ain't fit to hold the stirrup o' my Colonel Byng.'

It was on the very next day that the corporal took a sudden change for the worse. Even the golden sunlight streaming through the window seemed unable to warm that withered frame. The doctor came and shook his head in silence. All day the man lay with only his puffing blue lips and the twitching of his scraggy neck to show that he still held the breath of life. Norah and Sergeant Macdonald had sat by him in the afternoon, but he had shown no consciousness of their presence. He lay peacefully, his eyes half-closed, his hands under his cheek, as one who is very weary.

They had left him for an instant, and were sitting in the front room where Norah was preparing the tea, when of a sudden they heard a shout that rang through the house. Loud and clear and swelling, it pealed in their ears, a voice full of strength and energy and fiery passion.

'The guards need powder,' it cried and yet again, 'the guards need powder.'

The sergeant sprang from his chair and rushed in, followed by the trembling Norah. There was the old man standing up, his blue eyes

sparkling, his white hair bristling, his whole figure towering and expanding, with eagle head and glance of fire.

'The guards need powder,' he thundered once again, 'and by God they shall have it!'

He threw up his long arms and sank back with a groan into his chair. The sergeant stooped over him, and his face darkened.

'Oh, Archie, Archie,' sobbed the frightened girl, 'what do you think of him?'

The sergeant turned away.

'I think,' said he, 'that the third guards have a full muster now.'

◁ THE THIRD GENERATION

SCUDAMORE LANE, sloping down riverwards from just behind the Monument, lies at night in the shadow of two black and monstrous walls which loom high above the glimmer of the scattered gas-lamps. The foot-paths are narrow, and the causeway is paved with rounded cobblestones so that the endless drays roar along it like so many breaking waves. A few old-fashioned houses lie scattered among the business premises, and in one of these—half way down on the left-hand side—Dr Horace Selby conducts his large practice. ✓ It is a singular street for so big a man, but a specialist who has an European reputation can afford to live where he likes. In his particular branch, too, patients do not always consider seclusion to be a disadvantage. } ✓

It was only ten o'clock. The dull roar of the traffic which converged all day upon London Bridge had died away now to a mere confused murmur. It was raining heavily, and the gas shone dimly through the streaked and dripping glass, throwing little yellow circles upon the glistening cobblestones. The air was full of the sounds of rain, the thin swish of its fall, the heavier drip from the eaves, and the swirl and gurgle down the two steep gutters and through the sewer grating. There was only one figure in the whole length of Scudamore Lane. It was that of a man, and it stood outside the door of Dr Horace Selby.

He had just rung and was waiting for an answer. The fanlight beat full upon the gleaming shoulders of his waterproof and upon his upturned features. It was a wan, sensitive, clear-cut face, with some subtle, nameless peculiarity in its expression—something of the startled horse in the white-rimmed eye, something, too, of the helpless child in the drawn cheek and the weakening of the lower lip. The man-servant knew the stranger as a patient at a bare glance at those frightened eyes. Such a look had been seen at that door before.)

'Is the doctor in?'

The man hesitated.

'He has had a few friends to dinner, sir. He does not like to be disturbed outside his usual hours, sir.'

'Tell him that I *must* see him. Tell him that it is of the very first importance. Here is my card.' He fumbled with his trembling fingers in trying to draw one from the case. 'Sir Francis Norton is the name. Tell him that Sir Francis Norton of Deane Park must see him at once.'

'Yes, sir.' The butler closed his fingers upon the card and the half-sovereign which accompanied it. 'Better hang your coat up here in the hall. It is very wet. Now, if you will wait here in the consulting-room I have no doubt that I shall be able to send the doctor in to you.'

It was a large and lofty room in which the young baronet found himself. The carpet was so soft and thick that his feet made no sound as he walked across it. The two gas-jets were turned only half way up, and the dim light with the faint aromatic smell which filled the air had a vaguely religious suggestion. He sat down in a shining leather arm-chair by the smouldering fire and looked gloomily about him. Two sides of the room were taken up with books, fat and sombre, with broad gold lettering upon their

backs. Beside him was the high, old-fashioned mantelpiece of white marble, the top of it strewed with cotton wadding and bandages, graduated measures and little bottles. There was one with a broad neck, just above him, containing bluestone, and another narrower one with what looked like the ruins of a broken pipe stem, and 'Caustic' outside upon a red label. Thermometers, hypodermic syringes, bistouries and spatulas were scattered thickly about, both on the mantelpiece and on the central table on either side of the sloping desk.

\ On the same table to the right stood copies of the five books which Dr Horace Selby had written upon the subject with which his name is peculiarly associated, while on the left, on the top of a red medical directory, lay a huge glass model of a human eye, the size of a turnip, which opened down the centre to expose the lens and double chamber within.)

Sir Francis Norton had never been remarkable for his powers of observation, and yet he found himself watching these trifles with the keenest attention. Even the corrosion of the cork of an acid bottle caught his eye and he wondered that the doctor did not use glass stoppers. Tiny scratches where the light glinted off from the table, little stains upon the leather

of the desk, chemical formulæ scribbled upon the labels of some of the phials—nothing was too slight to arrest his attention. And his sense of hearing was equally alert. The heavy ticking of the solemn black clock above the fireplace struck quite painfully upon his ears. Yet, in spite of it, and in spite also of the thick, old-fashioned, wooden partition walls, he could hear the voices of men talking in the next room and could even catch scraps of their conversation. 'Second hand was bound to take it.' 'Why, you drew the last of them yourself.' 'How could I play the queen when I knew the ace was against me.' The phrases came in little spurts, falling back into the dull murmur of conversation. And then suddenly he heard a creaking of a door, and a step in the hall, and knew with a tingling mixture of impatience and horror that the crisis of his life was at hand.

Dr Horace Selby was a large, portly man, with an imposing presence. His nose and chin were bold and pronounced, yet his features were puffy—a combination which would blend more freely with the wig and cravat of the early Georges, than with the close-cropped hair and black frockcoat of the end of the 19th century. He was clean shaven, for his mouth was too good to cover, large, flexible and sensitive, with a

kindly human softening at either corner, which, with his brown, sympathetic eyes, had drawn out many a shame-struck sinner's secret. Two masterful little bushy side whiskers bristled out from under his ears, spindling away upwards to merge in the thick curves of his brindled hair. To his patients there was something reassuring in the mere bulk and dignity of the man. A high and easy bearing in medicine, as in war, bears with it a hint of victories in the past, and a promise of others to come. Dr Horace Selby's face was a consolation, and so, too, were the large, white, soothing hands, one of which he held out to his visitor.

'I am sorry to have kept you waiting. It is a conflict of duties, you perceive. A host to his guests and an adviser to his patient. But now I am entirely at your disposal, Sir Francis. But, dear me, you are very cold.'

'Yes, I am cold.'

'And you are trembling all over. Tut, tut, this will never do. This miserable night has chilled you. Perhaps some little stimulant—'

'No thank you. I would really rather not. And it is not the night which has chilled me. I am frightened, doctor.'

The doctor half turned in his chair and patted

the arch of the young man's knee as he might the neck of a restless horse.

'What, then?' he asked, looking over his shoulder at the pale face with the startled eyes.

Twice the young man parted his lips. Then he stooped with a sudden gesture and turning up the right leg of his trousers he pulled down his sock and thrust forward his shin. The doctor made a clicking noise with his tongue as he glanced at it.

'Both legs?'

'No, only one.'

'Suddenly?'

'This morning.'

'Hum!' The doctor pouted his lips, and drew his finger and thumb down the line of his chin. 'Can you account for it?' he said briskly.

'No.'

A trace of sternness came into the large, brown eyes.

'I need not point out to you that unless the most absolute frankness—'

The patient sprang from his chair.

'So help me God, doctor,' he cried, 'I have nothing in my life with which to reproach myself. Do you think that I would be such a fool

as to come here and tell you lies. Once for all, I have nothing to regret.'

∩ He was a pitiful, half-tragic and half-grotesque figure as he stood with one trouser leg rolled to his knee, and that ever-present horror still lurking in his eyes. A burst of merriment came from the card-players in the next room and the two looked at each other in silence.

'Sit down!' said the doctor abruptly. 'Your assurance is quite sufficient.' He stooped and ran his finger down the line of the young man's shin, raising it at one point. 'Hum! Serpiginous!' he murmured, shaking his head; 'any other symptoms?'

'My eyes have been a little weak.'

'Let me see your teeth!' He glanced at them, and again made the gentle clicking sound of sympathy and disapprobation.

'Now the eye!' He lit a lamp at the patient's elbow, and holding a small crystal lens to concentrate the light, he threw it obliquely upon the patient's eye. As he did so a glow of pleasure came over his large, expressive face, a flush of such enthusiasm as the botanist feels when he packs the rare plant into his tin knapsack, or the astronomer when the long-sought comet first swims into the field of his telescope.

∩ This is very typical—very typical indeed,' he

eye

1
D. J. Stone

murmured, turning to his desk and jotting down a few memoranda upon a sheet of paper. 'Curiously enough I am writing a monograph upon the subject. It is singular that you should have been able to furnish so well marked a case.'

He had so forgotten the patient in his symptom that he had assumed an almost congratulatory air towards its possessor. He reverted to human sympathy again as his patient asked for particulars.)

'My dear sir, there is no occasion for us to go into strictly professional details together,' said he soothingly. 'If, for example, I were to say that you have interstitial keratitis, how would you be the wiser? There are indications of a strumous diathesis. In broad terms I may say that you have a constitutional and hereditary taint.'

The young baronet sank back in his chair and his chin fell forward upon his chest. The doctor sprang to a side table and poured out a half glass of liqueur brandy which he held to his patient's lips. A little fleck of colour came into his cheeks as he drank it down.

'Perhaps I spoke a little abruptly,' said the doctor. 'But you must have known the nature of your complaint, why otherwise should you have come to me?'

‘God help me, I suspected it—but only to-day when my leg grew bad. My father had a leg like this.’

‘It was from him, then?’

‘No, from my grandfather. You have heard of Sir Rupert Norton, the great Corinthian.’

‘The doctor was a man of wide reading with a retentive memory. The name brought back to him instantly the remembrance of the sinister reputation of its owner—a notorious buck of the thirties, who had gambled and duelled and steeped himself in drink and debauchery until even the vile set with whom he consorted had shrunk away from him in horror, and left him to a sinister old age with the barmaid wife whom in some drunken frolic he had espoused. As he looked at the young man still leaning back in the leather chair, there seemed for the instant to flicker up behind him some vague presentiment of that foul old dandy with his dangling seals, many-wreathed scarf, and dark, satyric face. What was he now? An armful of bones in a mouldy box. But his deeds—they were living and rotting the blood in the veins of an innocent man.’

‘I see that you have heard of him,’ said the young baronet. ‘He died horribly, I have been told, but not more horribly than he had lived.’

My father was his only son. He was a studious man, fond of books and canaries and the country. But his innocent life did not save him.'

'His symptoms were cutaneous, I understand.'

'He wore gloves in the house. That was the first thing I can remember. And then it was his throat, and then his legs. He used to ask me so often about my own health, and I thought him so fussy, for how could I tell what the meaning of it was. He was always watching me—always with a sidelong eye fixed upon me. Now at last I know what he was watching for.'

'Had you brothers or sisters?'

'None, thank God!'

'Well, well, it is a sad case, and very typical of many which come in my way. You are no lonely sufferer, Sir Francis. There are many thousands who bear the same cross as you do.'

'But where's the justice of it, doctor?' cried the young man, springing from the chair and pacing up and down the consulting-room. 'If I were heir to my grandfather's sins as well as to their results I could understand it, but I am of my father's type; I love all that is gentle and beautiful, music and poetry and art. The coarse and animal is abhorrent to me. Ask any of my friends and they would tell you that.'

‘And now that this vile, loathsome thing—Ach, I am polluted to the marrow, soaked in abomination! And why? Haven’t I a right to ask why? Did I do it? Was it my fault? Could I help being born? And look at me now, blighted and blasted, just as life was at its sweetest! Talk about the sins of the father! How about the sins of the Creator!’ >

for
the
sides

He shook his two clenched hands in the air, the poor, impotent atom with his pin-point of brain caught in the whirl of the infinite.

u 20^h

The doctor rose and placing his hands upon his shoulders he pressed him back into his chair again.

‘There, there, my dear lad,’ said he. ‘You must not excite yourself! You are trembling all over. Your nerves cannot stand it. We must take these great questions upon trust. What are we after all? Half evolved creatures in a transition stage; nearer, perhaps, to the medusa on the one side than to perfected humanity on the other. With half a complete brain we can’t expect to understand the whole of a complete fact, can we, now? It is all very dim and dark, no doubt, but I think Pope’s famous couplet sums the whole matter up, and from my heart, after fifty years of varied experience, I can say that—’

]

But the young baronet gave a cry of impatience and disgust.

‘Words, words, words! You can sit comfortably there in your chair and say them—and think them too, no doubt. You’ve had your life. But I’ve never had mine. You’ve healthy blood in your veins. Mine is putrid. And yet I am as innocent as you. What would words do for you if you were in this chair and I in that. Ah, it’s such a mockery and a make-belief. Don’t think me rude though, doctor. I don’t mean to be that. I only say that it is impossible for you or any man to realise it. But I’ve a question to ask you, doctor. It’s one on which my whole life must depend.’

He writhed his fingers together in an agony of apprehension.

‘Speak out, my dear sir. I have every sympathy with you.’

‘Do you think—do you think the poison has spent itself on me? Do you think if I had children that they would suffer?’

‘I can only give one answer to that. “The third and fourth generation,” says the trite old text. You may in time eliminate it from your system, but many years must pass before you can think of marriage.’

'I am to be married on Tuesday,' whispered the patient.

It was Dr Horace Selby's turn to be thrilled with horror. There were not many situations which would yield such a sensation to his well seasoned nerves. He sat in silence while the babble of the card-table broke in again upon them. 'We had a double ruff if you had returned a heart.' 'I was bound to clear the trumps.' They were hot and angry about it.)

('How could you?' cried the doctor severely. 'It was criminal.')

'You forget that I have only learned how I stand to-day.' He put his two hands to his temples and pressed them convulsively. 'You are a man of the world, Doctor Selby. You have seen or heard of such things before. Give me some advice. I'm in your hands. It is all very sudden and horrible, and I don't think I am strong enough to bear it.'

The doctor's heavy brows thickened into two straight lines and he bit his nails in perplexity.

'The marriage must not take place.'

'Then what am I to do?'

'At all costs it must not take place.'

'And I must give her up!'

'There can be no question about that?'

The young man took out a pocket-book and

drew from it a small photograph, holding it out towards the doctor. The firm face softened as he looked at it.

'It is very hard on you, no doubt. I can appreciate it more now that I have seen that. But there is no alternative at all. You must give up all thought of it.'

'But this is madness, doctor—madness, I tell you. No, I won't raise my voice! I forgot myself! But realise it, man! I am to be married on Tuesday—this coming Tuesday, you know. And all the world knows it. How can I put such a public affront upon her? It would be monstrous.'

'None the less it must be done. My dear sir, there is no way out of it.'

'You would have me simply write brutally and break the engagement at this last moment without a reason? I tell you I couldn't do it.'

'I had a patient once who found himself in a somewhat similar situation some years ago,' said the doctor thoughtfully. 'His device was a singular one. He deliberately committed a penal offence and so compelled the young lady's people to withdraw their consent to the marriage.'

The young baronet shook his head.

'My personal honour is as yet unstained,'

said he. 'I have little else left, but that at least I will preserve.'

'Well, well, it's a nice dilemma and the choice lies with you.'

'Have you no other suggestion?'

'You don't happen to have property in Australia?'

'None.'

'But you have capital?'

'Yes.'

'Then you could buy some—to-morrow morning, for example. A thousand mining shares would do. Then you might write to say that urgent business affairs have compelled you to start at an hour's notice to inspect your property. That would give you six months at any rate.'

'Well, that would be possible—yes, certainly it would be possible. But think of her position—the house full of wedding presents—guests coming from a distance. It is awful. And you say there is no alternative.'

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

'Well, then, I might write it now, and start to-morrow—eh? Perhaps you would let me use your desk. Thank you! I am so sorry to keep you from your guests so long. But I won't be a moment now.' He wrote an abrupt note of a few lines. Then, with a sudden

impulse, he tore it to shreds and flung it into the fireplace. 'No, I can't sit down and tell her a lie, doctor,' said he rising. 'We must find some other way out of this. I will think it over, and let you know my decision. You must allow me to double your fee as I have taken such an unconscionable time. Now, good-bye, and thank you a thousand times for your sympathy and advice.'

'Why, dear me, you haven't even got your prescription yet. This is the mixture, and I should recommend one of these powders every morning and the chemist will put all directions upon the ointment box. You are placed in a cruel situation, but I trust that these may be but passing clouds. When may I hope to hear from you again?'

'To-morrow morning.'

'Very good. How the rain is splashing in the street. You have your waterproof there. You will need it. Good-bye, then, until to-morrow.'

He opened the door. A gust of cold, damp air swept into the hall. And yet the doctor stood for a minute or more watching the lonely figure which passed slowly through the yellow splotches of the gas-lamps and into the broad bars of darkness between. (It was but his own shadow

which trailed up the wall as he passed the lights, and yet it looked to the doctor's eye as though some huge and sombre figure walked by a mannikin's side, and led him silently up the lonely street.

Doctor Horace Selby heard again of his patient next morning and rather earlier than he had expected. A paragraph in the *Daily News* caused him to push away his breakfast untasted, and turned him sick and faint while he read it. 'A Deplorable Accident' it was headed, and it ran in this way:—

'A fatal accident of a peculiarly painful character is reported from King William Street. About eleven o'clock last night a young man was observed, while endeavouring to get out of the way of a hansom, to slip and fall under the wheels of a heavy two-horse dray. On being picked up, his injuries were found to be of a most shocking character, and he expired while being conveyed to the hospital. An examination of his pocket-book and card-case shows beyond any question that the deceased is none other than Sir Francis Norton of Deane Park, who has only within the last year come into the baronetcy. The accident is made the more deplorable as the deceased, who was only just

of age, was on the eve of being married to a young lady belonging to one of the oldest families in the south. With his wealth and his talents the ball of fortune was at his feet, and his many friends will be deeply grieved to know that his promising career has been cut short in so sudden and tragic a fashion.'}

A FALSE START

IS Doctor Horace Wilkinson at home?’

‘I am he. Pray step in.’

The visitor looked somewhat astonished at having the door opened to him by the master of the house.

‘I wanted to have a few words.’

The doctor, a pale, nervous young man, dressed in an ultra-professional, long black frock-coat, with a high white collar cutting off his dapper side-whiskers in the centre, rubbed his hands together and smiled. In the thick, burly man in front of him he scented a patient, and it would be his first. His scanty resources had begun to run somewhat low; and, although he had his first quarter's rent safely locked away in the right-hand drawer of his desk, it was becoming a question with him how

E

he should meet the current expenses of his very simple house-keeping. He bowed, therefore, waved his visitor in, closed the hall door in a careless fashion, as though his own presence thereat had been a purely accidental circumstance, and finally led the burly stranger into his scantily-furnished front room, where he motioned him to a seat. Doctor Wilkinson planted himself behind his desk, and, placing his finger-tips together, he gazed with some apprehension at his companion. What was the matter with the man? He seemed very red in the face. Some of his old professors would have diagnosed his case by now, and would have electrified the patient by describing his own symptoms before he had said a word about them. Doctor Horace Wilkinson racked his brains for some clue, but Nature had fashioned him as a plodder—a very reliable plodder, and nothing more. He could think of nothing save that the visitor's watch-chain had a very brassy appearance, with a corollary to the effect that he would be lucky if he got half-a-crown out of him. Still, even half-a-crown was something in those early days of struggle.

Whilst the doctor had been running his eyes over the stranger, the latter had been plunging his hands into pocket after pocket of his heavy

coat. The heat of the weather, his dress, and this exercise of pocket rummaging had all combined to still further redden his face, which had changed from brick to beet, with a gloss of moisture on his brow. This extreme ruddiness brought a clue at last to the observant doctor. Surely it was not to be attained without alcohol. In alcohol lay the secret of this man's trouble. Some little delicacy was needed, however, in showing him that he had read his case aright, that at a glance he had penetrated to the inmost sources of his ailments.

'It's very hot,' observed the stranger, mopping his forehead.

'Yes. It is weather which tempts one to drink rather more beer than is good for one,' answered Doctor Horace Wilkinson looking very knowingly at his companion from over his finger-tips.

'Dear! dear! You shouldn't do that.'

'I! I never touch beer.'

'Neither do I. I've been an abstainer for twenty years.'

This was depressing. Doctor Wilkinson blushed until he was nearly as red as the other.

'May I ask what I can do for you?' he asked, picking up his stethoscope and tapping it gently against his thumb-nail.

'Yes, I was just going to tell you. I heard of your coming, but I couldn't get round before—'

He broke into a nervous little cough.

'Yes,' said the doctor encouragingly.

'I should have been here three weeks ago, but you know how these things get put off.'

He coughed again behind his large, red hand.

'I do not think that you need say anything more,' said the doctor, taking over the case with an easy air of command. 'Your cough is quite sufficient. It is entirely bronchial by the sound. No doubt the mischief is circumscribed at present, but there is always the danger that it may spread, so you have done wisely to come to me. A little judicious treatment will soon set you right. Your waistcoat, please, but not your shirt. Puff out your chest, and say ninety-nine in a deep voice.'

The red faced man began to laugh.

'It's all right, doctor,' said he. 'That cough comes from chewing tobacco, and I know it's a very bad habit. Nine and ninepence is what I have to say to you, for I'm the officer of the Gas Company, and they have a claim against you for that on the meter.'

Doctor Horace Wilkinson collapsed into his chair.

'Then you're not a patient?' he gasped.

'Never needed a doctor in my life, sir.'

'Oh, that's all right.' The doctor concealed his disappointment under an affectation of facetiousness. 'You don't look as if you troubled them much. I don't know what we should do if everyone were as robust. I shall call at the Company's offices and pay this small amount.'

'If you could make it convenient, sir, now that I am here, it would save trouble—'

'Oh, certainly!'

These eternal little sordid money troubles were more trying to the doctor than plain living or scanty food. He took out his purse, and slid the contents on to the table. There were two half-crowns and some pennies. In his drawer he had ten golden sovereigns. But those were his rent. If he once broke in upon them he was lost. He would starve first.

'Dear me!' said he with a smile, as at some strange, unheard-of incident, 'I have run short of small change. I am afraid I shall have to call upon the Company after all.'

'Very well, sir.'

The inspector rose, and with a practised glance around, which valued every article in the room, from the two-guinea carpet to the

eight-shilling muslin curtains, he took his departure.

When he had gone, Doctor Wilkinson rearranged his room, as was his habit a dozen times in the day. He laid out his large *Quain's Dictionary of Medicine* in the forefront of the table, so as to impress the casual patient that he had ever the best authorities at his elbow. Then he cleared all the little instruments out of his pocket-case—the scissors, the forceps, the bistouries, the lancets—and he laid them all out beside the stethoscope, to make as good a show as possible. His ledger, day-book and visiting-book were spread in front of him. There was no entry in any of them yet, but it would not look well to have the covers too glossy and new, so he rubbed them together, and daubed ink over them. Neither would it be well that any patient should observe that his name was the first in the book, so he filled up the first page of each with notes of imaginary visits paid to nameless patients during the last three weeks. Having done all this, he rested his head upon his hands and relapsed into the terrible occupation of waiting.

Terrible enough at any time to the young professional man, but most of all to one who knows that the weeks, and even the days, during

which he can hold out are numbered. Economise as he would, the money would still slip away in the countless little claims which a man never understands until he lives under a roof-tree of his own. Dr Wilkinson could not deny, as he sat at his desk and looked at the little heap of silver and coppers, that his chances of being a successful practitioner in Sutton were rapidly vanishing away.

And yet it was a bustling, prosperous town, with so much money in it that it seemed strange that a man with a trained brain and dexterous fingers should be starved out of it for want of employment. At his desk Doctor Horace Wilkinson could see the never-ending double current of people which ebbed and flowed in front of his window. It was a busy street, and the air was for ever filled with the dull roar of life, the grinding of the wheels, and the patter of countless feet. Men, women and children, thousands and thousands of them, passed in the day, and yet each was hurrying on upon his own business, scarce glancing at the small brass plate, or wasting a thought upon the man who waited in the front room. And yet how many of them would obviously, glaringly, have been the better for his professional assistance. Dyspeptic men, anæmic women, blotched faces,

bilious complexions, they flowed past him, they needing him, he needing them, and yet the remorseless bar of professional etiquette kept them for ever apart. What could he do? Could he stand at his own front door, pluck the casual stranger by the sleeve, and whisper in his ear, 'Sir, you will forgive me for remarking that you are suffering from a severe attack of acne rosacea, which makes you a peculiarly unpleasant object. Allow me to suggest that a small prescription containing arsenic, which will not cost you more than you often spend upon a single meal, will be very much to your advantage.' Such an address would be a degradation to the high and lofty profession of medicine, and there are no such sticklers for the ethics of that profession as some to whom she has been but a bitter and a grudging mother.

Doctor Horace Wilkinson was still looking moodily out of the window, when there came a sharp clang at the bell. Often it had rung, and with every ring his hopes had sprung up, only to dwindle away again, and change to leaden disappointment, as he faced some beggar or touting tradesman. But the doctor's spirit was young and elastic, and again, in spite of all experience, it responded to that exhilarating summons. He sprang to his feet, cast his eyes

over the table, thrust out his medical books a little more prominently, and hurried to the door. A groan escaped him as he entered the hall. He could see through the half-glazed upper panels that a gipsy van, hung round with wicker tables and chairs, had halted before his door and that a couple of the vagrants, with a baby, were waiting outside. He had learned by experience that it was better not even to parley with such people.

'I have nothing for you,' said he, loosing the latch by an inch. 'Go away!' He closed the door, but the bell clanged once more. 'Get away! Get away,' he cried, impatiently, and walked back into his consulting-room. He had hardly seated himself when the bell went for the third time. In a towering passion he rushed back, flung open the door. 'What the—'

'If you please, sir, we need a doctor.'

In an instant he was rubbing his hands again, with his blandest professional smile. These were patients, then, whom he had tried to hunt from his doorstep—the very first patients, whom he had waited for so impatiently. They did not look very promising. The man, a tall, lank-haired gipsy, had gone back to the horse's head. There remained a small, hard-faced woman, with

a great bruise all round her eye. She wore a yellow silk handkerchief round her head, and a baby, tucked in a red shawl, was pressed to her bosom.

'Pray step in, madam,' said Doctor Horace Wilkinson, with his very best sympathetic manner. In this case, at least, there could be no mistake as to diagnosis. 'If you will sit on this sofa, I shall very soon make you feel much more comfortable.'

He poured a little water from his caraffe into a saucer, made a compress of lint, fastened it over the injured eye, and secured the whole with a spica bandage, *secundum artem*.

'Thank ye kindly, sir,' said the woman when his work was finished; 'that's nice and warm, and may God bless your honour. But it wasn't about my eye at all that I came to see a doctor.'

'Not your eye?'

Doctor Horace Wilkinson was beginning to be a little doubtful as to the advantages of quick diagnosis. It is an excellent thing to be able to surprise a patient, but hitherto it was always the patient who had surprised him.

'The baby's got the measles.'

The mother parted the red shawl, and exhibited a little, dark, black-eyed gipsy baby, whose swarthy face was all flushed and mottled

with a dark red rash. The child breathed with a rattling sound, and it looked up at the doctor with eyes which were heavy with want of sleep and crusted together at the lids.

‘Hum! Yes. Measles sure enough—and a smart attack.’

‘I just wanted you to see him, sir, so that you could signify.’

‘Could what?’

‘Signify, if anything happened.’

‘Oh, I see—certify.’

‘And now that you’ve seen it, sir, I’ll go on, for Reuben—that’s my man—is in a hurry.’

‘But don’t you want any medicine?’

‘Oh, now you’ve seen it, it’s all right. I’ll let you know if anything happens.’

‘But you must have some medicine. The child is very ill.’

He descended into the little room which he had fitted as a surgery, and he made up a two-ounce bottle of cooling medicine. In such cities as Sutton there are few patients who can afford to pay a fee to both doctor and chemist, so that unless the physician is prepared to play the part of both he will have little chance of making a living at either.

‘There is your medicine, madam. You will

find the directions upon the bottle. Keep the child warm and give it a light diet.'

'Thank you kindly, sir.'

She shouldered her baby and marched for the door.

'Excuse me, madam,' said the doctor nervously. 'Don't you think it too small a matter to make a bill of? Perhaps it would be better if we had a settlement at once.'

The gipsy woman looked at him reproachfully out of her one uncovered eye.

'Are you going to charge me for that?' she asked. 'How much, then?'

'Well, say half-a-crown.'

He mentioned the sum in a half jesting way, as though it were too small to take serious notice of, but the gipsy woman raised quite a scream at the mention of it.

'Arf-a crown! for that?'

'Well, my good woman, why not go to the poor doctor if you cannot afford a fee?'

She fumbled in her pocket, craning awkwardly to keep her grip upon the baby.

'Here's sevenpence,' she said at last, holding out a little pile of copper coins. 'I'll give you that and a wicker footstool.'

'But my fee is half-a-crown.'

The doctor's views of the glory of his profes-

sion cried out against this wretched haggling, and yet what was he to do?

'Where am I to get 'arf-a-crown? It is well for gentle-folk like you, who sit in your grand houses, an' can eat an' drink what you like, an' charge 'arf-a-crown for just saying as much as "'Ow d'ye do." We can't pick up 'arf-crowns like that. What we gets we earns 'ard. This sevenpence is just all I've got. You told me to feed the child light. She must feed light, for what she's to have is more than I know.'

Whilst the woman had been speaking, Doctor Horace Wilkinson's eyes had wandered to the tiny heap of money upon the table which represented all that separated him from absolute starvation, and he chuckled to himself at the grim joke that he should appear to this poor woman to be a being living in the lap of luxury. Then he picked up the odd coppers, leaving only the two half-crowns upon the table.

'Here you are,' he said brusquely. 'Never mind the fee; and take these coppers. They may be of some use to you. Good-bye!'

He bowed her out, and closed the door behind her. After all, she was the thin edge of the wedge. These wandering people have great powers of recommendation. All large practices have been built up from such foundations.

The hangers-on to the kitchen recommend to the kitchen, they to the drawing-room, and so it spreads. At least he could say now that he had had a patient.

He went into the back room and lit the spirit kettle to boil the water for his tea, laughing the while at the recollection of his recent interview. If all patients were like this one it could easily be reckoned how many it would take to ruin him completely. Putting aside the dirt upon his carpet and the loss of time, there were twopence gone upon the bandage, fourpence or more upon the medicine, to say nothing of phial, cork, label and paper. Then he had given her fivepence, so that his first patient had absorbed altogether not less than one-sixth of his available capital. If five more were to come he would be a broken man. He sat down upon the portmanteau and shook with laughter at the thought, while he measured out his one spoonful and a half of tea at 1s. 8d. into the brown earthenware teapot. Suddenly, however, the laugh faded from his face, and he cocked his ear towards the door, standing listening with a slanting head and a sidelong eye. There had been a rasping of wheels against the curb, the sound of steps outside, and then a loud peal at the bell. With his teaspoon in his hand he

peeped round the corner and saw with amazement that a carriage and pair were waiting outside, and that a powdered footman was standing at the door. The spoon tinkled down upon the floor, and he stood gazing in bewilderment. Then, pulling himself together, he threw open the door.

'Young man,' said the flunkey, 'tell your master, Doctor Wilkinson, that he is wanted just as quick as ever he can come to Lady Millbank, at The Towers. He is to come this very instant. We'd take him with us, but we have to go back to see if Doctor Mason is home yet. Just you stir your stumps and give him the message.'

The footman nodded and was off in an instant, while the coachman lashed his horses, and the carriage flew down the street.

Here was a new development! Doctor Horace Wilkinson stood at his door and tried to think it all out. Lady Millbank, of The Towers! People of wealth and position, no doubt. And a serious case, or why this haste and summoning of two doctors? But then, why in the name of all that is wonderful should he be sent for?

He was obscure, unknown, without influence. There must be some mistake. Yes, that must

be the true explanation ; or was it possible that someone was attempting a cruel hoax upon him. At any rate, it was too positive a message to be disregarded. He must set off at once and settle the matter one way or the other.

But he had one source of information. At the corner of the street was a small shop where one of the oldest inhabitants dispensed newspapers and gossip. He could get information there if anywhere. He put on his well-brushed top hat, secreted instruments and bandages in all his pockets, and without waiting for his tea, closed up his establishment and started off upon his adventure.

The stationer at the corner was a human directory to everyone and everything in Sutton, so that he soon had all the information which he wanted. Sir John Millbank was very well known in the town, it seemed. He was a merchant prince, an exporter of pens, three times mayor, and reported to be fully worth two millions sterling.

The Towers was his palatial seat, just outside the city. His wife had been an invalid for some years, and was growing worse. So far the whole thing seemed to be genuine enough. By some amazing chance these people really had sent for him.

And then another doubt assailed him, and he turned back into the shop.

'I am your neighbour, Dr Horace Wilkinson,' said he. 'Is there any other medical man of that name in the town?'

No. The stationer was quite positive that there was not.

That was final, then. A great good fortune had come in his way, and he must take prompt advantage of it. He called a cab, and drove furiously to The Towers, with his brain in a whirl, giddy with hope and delight at one moment, and sickened with fears and doubts at the next, lest the case should in some way be beyond his powers, or lest he should find at some critical moment that he was without the instrument or appliance which was needed. Every strange and *outré* case of which he had ever heard or read came back into his mind, and long before he reached The Towers he had worked himself into a positive conviction that he would be instantly required to do a trephining at the least.

The Towers was a very large house, standing back amid trees, at the head of a winding drive. As he drove up, the doctor sprang out, paid away half his worldly assets as a fare, and followed a stately footman who, having taken

F

his name, led him through the oak-panelled, stained-glass hall, gorgeous with deers' heads and ancient armour, and ushered him into a large sitting-room beyond. A very irritable-looking, acid-faced man was seated in an arm-chair by the fireplace, while two young ladies in white were standing together in the bow window at the further end.

'Hullo! hullo! hullo! What's this—heh?' cried the irritable man. 'Are you Dr Wilkinson? Eh?'

'Yes, sir. I am Doctor Wilkinson.'

'Really, now. You seem very young—much younger than I expected. Well, well, well, Mason's old, and yet he don't seem to know much about it. I suppose we must try the other end now. You're the Wilkinson who wrote something about the lungs? Heh?'

Here was a light! The only two letters which the doctor had ever written to *The Lancet*—modest little letters thrust away in a back column among the wrangles about medical ethics, and the inquiries as to how much it took to keep a horse in the country—had been upon pulmonary disease. They had not been wasted, then. Some eye had picked them out and marked the name of the writer. Who could

say that work was ever wasted, or that merit did not promptly meet with its reward?

'Yes, I have written on the subject.'

'Ha! Well, then, where's Mason?'

'I have not the pleasure of his acquaintance.'

'No? That's queer, too. He knows you, and thinks a lot of your opinion. You're a stranger in the town, are you not?'

'Yes. I have only been here a very short time.'

'That was what Mason said. He didn't give me the address. Said he would call on you and bring you, but when the wife got worse, of course I inquired for you and sent for you direct. I sent for Mason, too, but he was out. However, we can't wait for him, so just run away upstairs and do what you can.'

'Well, I am placed in a rather delicate position,' said Dr Horace Wilkinson, with some hesitation. 'I am here, as I understand, to meet my colleague, Dr Mason, in consultation. It would perhaps hardly be correct for me to see the patient in his absence. I think that I would rather wait.'

'Would you, by Jove! Do you think I'll let my wife get worse while the doctor is coolly kicking his heels in the room below? No, sir, I am a plain man, and I tell you that you will either go up or go out.'

The style of speech jarred upon the doctor's sense of the fitness of things, but still when a man's wife is ill much may be overlooked. He contented himself by bowing somewhat stiffly.

'I shall go up if you insist upon it,' said he.

'I do insist upon it. And another thing; I won't have her thumped about all over the chest, or any hocus-pocus of the sort. She has bronchitis and asthma, and that's all. If you can cure it, well and good. But it only weakens her to have you tapping and listening; and it does no good, either.'

Personal disrespect was a thing which the doctor could stand, but the profession was to him a holy thing, and a flippant word about it cut him to the quick.

'Thank you,' said he, picking up his hat, 'I have the honour to wish you a very good day. I do not care to undertake the responsibility of this case.'

'Hullo, what's the matter now?'

'It is not my habit to give opinions without examining my patient. I wonder that you should suggest such a course to a medical man. I wish you good day.'

But Sir John Millbank was a commercial man, and believed in the commercial principle that the more difficult a thing is to attain the

more valuable it is. A doctor's opinion had been to him a mere matter of guineas. But here was a young man who seemed to care nothing either for his wealth or title. His respect for his judgment increased amazingly.

'Tut! tut!' said he, 'Mason is not so thin-skinned. There! there! Have your way! Do what you like and I won't say another word. I'll just run upstairs and tell Lady Millbank that you are coming.'

The door had hardly closed behind him when the two demure young ladies darted out of their corner, and fluttered with joy in front of the astonished doctor.

'Oh! well done, well done!' cried the taller, clapping her hands.

'Don't let him bully you, doctor,' said the other. 'Oh, it was so nice to hear you stand up to him. That's the way he does with poor Doctor Mason. Doctor Mason has never examined mamma yet. He always takes papa's word for everything. Hush, Maude, here he comes again.'

They subsided in an instant into their corner, as silent and demure as ever.

Doctor Horace Wilkinson followed Sir John up the broad, thick-carpeted staircase, and into the darkened sick-room. In a quarter of an

hour he had sounded and sifted the case to the uttermost, and descended with the husband once more to the drawing-room. In front of the fireplace were standing two gentlemen, the one a very typical, clean-shaven, general practitioner, the other a striking-looking man of middle age, with pale blue eyes and a long red beard.

‘Hullo, Mason! You’ve come at last!’

‘Yes, Sir John! And I have brought, as I promised, Doctor Wilkinson with me.’

‘Doctor Wilkinson! Why, this is he.’

Doctor Mason stared in astonishment.

‘I have never seen the gentleman before,’ he cried.

‘Nevertheless, I am Doctor Wilkinson— Doctor Horace Wilkinson, of 114 Canal View.’

‘Good gracious, Sir John!’ cried Dr Mason.

‘Did you think that in a case of such importance I should call in a junior local practitioner? This is Dr Adam Wilkinson, lecturer on pulmonary diseases at Regent’s College, London, physician upon the staff of the St Swithin’s Hospital, and author of a dozen works upon the subject. He happened to be in Sutton upon a visit, and I thought I would utilise his presence to have a first-rate opinion upon Lady Millbank.’

‘Thank you,’ said Sir John drily. ‘But I fear my wife is rather tired now, for she has

just been very thoroughly examined by this young gentleman. I think we will let it stop at that for the present, though, of course, as you have had the trouble of coming here, I should be glad to have a note of your fees.'

When Dr Mason had departed, looking very disgusted, and his friend the specialist very amused, Sir John listened to all the young physician had to say about the case.

'Now, I'll tell you what,' said he, when he had finished. 'I'm a man of my word, d'ye see? When I like a man I freeze to him. I'm a good friend and a bad enemy. I believe in you, and I don't believe in Mason. From now on you are my doctor, and that of my family. Come and see my wife every day. How does that suit your book?'

'I am extremely grateful to you for your kind intentions towards me, but I am afraid there is no possible way in which I can avail myself of them.'

'Heh! What d'ye mean?'

'I could not possibly take Dr Mason's place in the middle of a case like this. It would be a most unprofessional act.'

'Oh, well, go your own way,' cried Sir John in despair. 'Never was such a man for making difficulties. You've had a fair offer and you've

refused it, and now you can just go your own way.'

The millionaire stumped out of the room in a huff, and Dr Horace Wilkinson made his way homeward to his spirit lamp and his one-and-eightpenny tea, with his first guinea in his pocket, and with a feeling that he had upheld the best traditions of his profession.

And yet this false start of his was a true start also, for it soon came to Doctor Mason's ears that his junior had had it in his power to carry off his best patient and had forborne to do so. To the honour of the profession be it said that such forbearance is the rule rather than the exception, and yet in this case, with so very junior a practitioner and so very wealthy a patient, the temptation was greater than is usual. There was a grateful note, a visit, a friendship, and now the well-known firm of Mason & Wilkinson is doing the largest family practice in Sutton.

THE CURSE OF EVE

ROBERT JOHNSON was an essentially common-place man, with no feature to distinguish him from a million others. He was pale of face, ordinary in looks, neutral in opinions, thirty years of age, and a married man. By trade he was a gentleman's outfitter in the New North Road, and the competition of business squeezed out of him the little character that was left. In his hope of conciliating customers he had become cringing and pliable, until working ever in the same routine from day to day he seemed to have sunk into a soulless machine rather than a man. No great question had ever stirred him. At the end of this snug century, self-contained in his own narrow circle, it seemed impossible that any of the mighty, primitive

passions of mankind could ever reach him. Yet birth, and lust, and illness, and death are changeless things, and when one of these harsh facts springs out upon a man at some sudden turn of the path of life, it dashes off for the moment his mask of civilisation and gives a glimpse of the stranger and stronger face below.

Johnson's wife was a quiet little woman, with brown hair and gentle ways. His affection for her was the one positive trait in his character. Together they would lay out the shop window every Monday morning, the spotless shirts in their green cardboard boxes below, the neckties above hung in rows over the brass rails, the cheap studs glistening from the white cards at either side, while in the background were the rows of cloth caps and the bank of boxes in which the more valuable hats were screened from the sunlight. She kept the books and sent out the bills. No one but she knew the joys and sorrows which crept into his small life. She had shared his exultation when the gentleman who was going to India had bought ten dozen shirts and an incredible number of collars, and she had been as stricken as he when, after the goods had gone, the bill was returned from the hotel address with the intimation that no such person had lodged there. For five years they had worked, building up the

business, thrown together all the more closely because their marriage had been a childless one. Now, however, there were signs that a change was at hand, and that speedily. She was unable to come downstairs, and her mother, Mrs Peyton, came over from Camberwell to nurse her and to welcome her grandchild.

Little qualms of anxiety came over Johnson as his wife's time approached. However, after all, it was a natural process. Other men's wives went through it unharmed, and why should not his? He was himself one of a family of fourteen, and yet his mother was alive and hearty. It was quite the exception for anything to go wrong. And yet in spite of his reasonings the remembrance of his wife's condition was always like a sombre background to all his other thoughts.

Doctor Miles of Bridport Place, the best man in the neighbourhood, was retained five months in advance, and, as time stole on, many little packets of absurdly small white garments with frill work and ribbons began to arrive among the big consignments of male necessities. And then one evening, as Johnson was ticketing the scarfs in the shop, he heard a bustle upstairs, and Mrs Peyton came running down to say that Lucy was bad and that she thought the doctor ought to be there without delay.

It was not Robert Johnson's nature to hurry. He was prim and staid and liked to do things in an orderly fashion. It was a quarter of a mile from the corner of the New North Road where his shop stood to the doctor's house in Bridport Place. There were no cabs in sight so he set off upon foot, leaving the lad to mind the shop. At Bridport Place he was told that the doctor had just gone to Harman Street to attend a man in a fit. Johnson started off for Harman Street, losing a little of his primness as he became more anxious. Two full cabs but no empty ones passed him on the way. At Harman Street he learned that the doctor had gone on to a case of measles, fortunately he had left the address—69 Dunstan Road, at the other side of the Regent's Canal. Johnson's primness had vanished now as he thought of the women waiting at home, and he began to run as hard as he could down the Kingsland Road. Some way along he sprang into a cab which stood by the curb and drove to Dunstan Road. The doctor had just left, and Robert Johnson felt inclined to sit down upon the steps in despair.

Fortunately he had not sent the cab away, and he was soon back at Bridport Place. Doctor Miles had not returned yet, but they were expecting him every instant. Johnson waited

drumming his fingers on his knees, in a high, dim lit room, the air of which was charged with a faint, sickly smell of ether. The furniture was massive, and the books in the shelves were sombre, and a squat black clock ticked mournfully on the mantelpiece. It told him that it was half-past seven, and that he had been gone an hour and a quarter. Whatever would the women think of him! Every time that a distant door slammed he sprang from his chair in a quiver of eagerness. His ears strained to catch the deep notes of the doctor's voice. And then, suddenly, with a gush of joy he heard a quick step outside, and the sharp click of the key in the lock. In an instant he was out in the hall, before the doctor's foot was over the threshold.

'If you please, doctor, I've come for you,' he cried; 'the wife was taken bad at six o'clock.'

He hardly knew what he expected the doctor to do. Something very energetic, certainly—to seize some drugs, perhaps, and rush excitedly with him through the gaslit streets. Instead of that Doctor Miles threw his umbrella into the rack, jerked off his hat with a somewhat peevish gesture, and pushed Johnson back into the room.

'Let's see! You *did* engage me, didn't you?' he asked in no very cordial voice.

'Oh, yes, doctor, last November. Johnson,

the outfitter, you know, in the New North Road.

'Yes, yes. It's a bit overdue,' said the doctor, glancing at a list of names in a note-book with a very shiny cover. 'Well, how is she?'

'I don't—'

'Ah, of course, it's your first. You'll know more about it next time.'

'Mrs Peyton said it was time you were there, sir.'

'My dear sir, there can be no very pressing hurry in a first case. We shall have an all-night affair, I fancy. You can't get an engine to go without coals, Mr Johnson, and I have had nothing but a light lunch.'

'We could have something cooked for you—something hot and a cup of tea.'

'Thank you, but I fancy my dinner is actually on the table. I can do no good in the earlier stages. Go home and say that I am coming, and I will be round immediately afterwards.'

A sort of horror filled Robert Johnson as he gazed at this man who could think about his dinner at such a moment. He had not imagination enough to realise that the experience which seemed so appallingly important to him, was the merest everyday matter of business to the medical man who could not have lived for a year

had he not, amid the rush of work, remembered what was due to his own health. To Johnson he seemed little better than a monster. His thoughts were bitter as he sped back to his shop.

'You've taken your time,' said his mother-in-law reproachfully, looking down the stairs as he entered.

'I couldn't help it!' he gasped. 'Is it over?'

'Over! She's got to be worse, poor dear, before she can be better. Where's Doctor Miles?'

'He's coming after he's had dinner.'

The old woman was about to make some reply, when, from the half-opened door behind, a high, whinnying voice cried out for her. She ran back and closed the door, while Johnson, sick at heart, turned into the shop. There he sent the lad home and busied himself frantically in putting up shutters and turning out boxes. When all was closed and finished he seated himself in the parlour behind the shop. But he could not sit still. He rose incessantly to walk a few paces and then fall back into a chair once more. Suddenly the clatter of china fell upon his ear, and he saw the maid pass the door with a cup on a tray and a smoking teapot.

'Who is that for, Jane?' he asked.

'For the mistress, Mr Johnson. She says she would fancy it.'

There was immeasurable consolation to him in that homely cup of tea. It wasn't so very bad after all if his wife could think of such things. So light-hearted was he that he asked for a cup also. He had just finished it when the doctor arrived, with a small black leather bag in his hand.

'Well, how is she?' he asked genially.

'Oh, she's very much better,' said Johnson, with enthusiasm.

'Dear me, that's bad!' said the doctor. 'Perhaps it will do if I look in on my morning round?'

'No, no,' cried Johnson, clutching at his thick frieze overcoat. 'We are so glad that you have come. And, doctor, please come down soon and let me know what you think about it.'

The doctor passed upstairs, his firm, heavy steps resounding through the house. Johnson could hear his boots creaking as he walked about the floor above him, and the sound was a consolation to him. It was crisp and decided, the tread of a man who had plenty of self-confidence. Presently, still straining his ears to catch what was going on, he heard the scraping of a chair as it was drawn along the floor, and a moment later he heard the door fly open and someone came rushing downstairs. John-

son sprang up with his hair bristling, thinking that some dreadful thing had occurred, but it was only his mother-in-law, incoherent with excitement and searching for scissors and some tape. She vanished again and Jane passed up the stairs with a pile of newly-aired linen. Then, after an interval of silence, Johnson heard the heavy, creaking tread and the doctor came down into the parlour.

'That's better,' said he, pausing with his hand upon the door. 'You look pale, Mr Johnson.'

'Oh no, sir, not at all,' he answered deprecatingly, mopping his brow with his handkerchief.

'There is no immediate cause for alarm,' said Doctor Miles. 'The case is not all that we could wish it. Still we will hope for the best.'

'Is there danger, sir?' gasped Johnson.

'Well, there is always danger, of course. It is not altogether a favourable case, but still it might be much worse. I have given her a draught. I saw as I passed that they have been doing a little building opposite to you. It's an improving quarter. The rents go higher and higher. You have a lease of your own little place, eh?'

G

'Yes, sir, yes!' cried Johnson, whose ears were straining for every sound from above, and who felt none the less that it was very soothing that the doctor should be able to chat so easily at such a time. 'That's to say no, sir, I am a yearly tenant.'

Ah, I should get a lease if I were you. There's Marshall, the watchmaker, down the street, I attended his wife twice and saw him through the typhoid when they took up the drains in Prince Street. I assure you his landlord sprung his rent nearly forty a year and he had to pay or clear out.'

'Did his wife get through it, doctor?'

'Oh yes, she did very well. Hullo! Hullo!'

He slanted his ear to the ceiling with a questioning face, and then darted swiftly from the room.

It was March and the evenings were chill, so Jane had lit the fire, but the wind drove the smoke downwards and the air was full of its acrid taint. Johnson felt chilled to the bone, though rather by his apprehensions than by the weather. He crouched over the fire with his thin white hands held out to the blaze. At ten o'clock Jane brought in the joint of cold meat and laid his place for supper, but he could not bring himself to touch it. He drank

a glass of the beer, however, and felt the better for it. The tension of his nerves seemed to have reacted upon his hearing, and he was able to follow the most trivial things in the room above. Once, when the beer was still heartening him, he nerved himself to creep on tiptoe up the stair and to listen to what was going on. The bedroom door was half an inch open, and through the slit he could catch a glimpse of the clean-shaven face of the doctor, looking wearier and more anxious than before. Then he rushed downstairs like a lunatic, and running to the door he tried to distract his thoughts by watching what was going on in the street. The shops were all shut, and some rollicking boon companions came shouting along from the public-house. He stayed at the door until the stragglers had thinned down, and then came back to his seat by the fire. In his dim brain he was asking himself questions which had never intruded themselves before. Where was the justice of it? What had his sweet, innocent little wife done that she should be used so? Why was nature so cruel? He was frightened at his own thoughts, and yet wondered that they had never occurred to him before.

As the early morning drew in, Johnson, sick at heart and shivering in every limb, sat with

his great-coat huddled round him, staring at the grey ashes and waiting hopelessly for some relief. His face was white and clammy, and his nerves had been numbed into a half-conscious state by the long monotony of misery. But suddenly all his feelings leapt into keen life again as he heard the bedroom door open and the doctor's steps upon the stair. Robert Johnson was precise and unemotional in everyday life, but he almost shrieked now as he rushed forward to know if it were over.

One glance at the stern, drawn face which met him showed that it was no pleasant news which had sent the doctor downstairs. His appearance had altered as much as Johnson's during the last few hours. His hair was on end, his face flushed, his forehead dotted with beads of perspiration. There was a peculiar fierceness in his eye, and about the lines of his mouth, a fighting look as befitted a man who for hours on end had been striving with the hungriest of foes for the most precious of prizes. But there was a sadness too, as though his grim opponent had been overmastering him. He sat down and leaned his head upon his hand like a man who is fagged out.

'I thought it my duty to see you, Mr Johnson, and to tell you that it is a very nasty case.

Your wife's heart is not strong, and she has some symptoms which I do not like. What I wanted to say is that if you would like to have a second opinion I shall be very glad to meet anyone whom you might suggest.'

Johnson was so dazed by his want of sleep and the evil news that he could hardly grasp the doctor's meaning. The other, seeing him hesitate, thought that he was considering the expense.

'Smith or Hawley would come for two guineas,' said he. 'But I think Pritchard of the City Road is the best man.'

'Oh, yes, bring the best man,' cried Johnson.

'Pritchard would want three guineas. He is a senior man, you see.'

'I'd give him all I have if he would pull her through. Shall I run for him?'

'Yes. Go to my house first and ask for the green baize bag. The assistant will give it to you. Tell him I want the A.C.E. mixture. Her heart is too weak for chloroform. Then go for Pritchard and bring him back with you.'

It was heavenly for Johnson to have something to do and to feel that he was of some use to his wife. He ran swiftly to Bridport Place, his footfalls clattering through the silent streets,

and the big dark policemen turning their yellow funnels of light on him as he passed. Two tugs at the night-bell brought down a sleepy, half-clad assistant, who handed him a stoppered glass bottle and a cloth bag which contained something which clinked when you moved it. Johnson thrust the bottle into his pocket, seized the green bag, and pressing his hat firmly down ran as hard as he could set foot to ground until he was in the City Road and saw the name of Pritchard engraved in white upon a red ground. He bounded in triumph up the three steps which led to the door, and as he did so there was a crash behind him. His precious bottle was in fragments upon the pavement.

For a moment he felt as if it were his wife's body that was lying there. But the run had freshened his wits and he saw that the mischief might be repaired. He pulled vigorously at the night-bell.

'Well, what's the matter?' asked a gruff voice at his elbow. He started back and looked up at the windows, but there was no sign of life. He was approaching the bell again with the intention of pulling it, when a perfect roar burst from the wall.

'I can't stand shivering here all night,' cried

the voice. 'Say who you are and what you want or I shut the tube.'

Then for the first time Johnson saw that the end of a speaking tube hung out of the wall just above the bell. He shouted up it,—

'I want you to come with me to meet Doctor Miles at a confinement at once.'

'How far?' shrieked the irascible voice.

'The New North Road, Hoxton.'

'My consultation fee is three guineas, payable at the time.'

'All right,' shouted Johnson. 'You are to bring a bottle of A.C.E. mixture with you.'

'All right! Wait a bit!'

Five minutes later an elderly, hard-faced man with grizzled hair flung open the door. As he emerged a voice from somewhere in the shadows cried,—

'Mind you take your cravat, John,' and he impatiently growled something over his shoulder in reply.

The consultant was a man who had been hardened by a life of ceaseless labour, and who had been driven, as so many others have been, by the needs of his own increasing family to set the commercial before the philanthropic side of his profession. Yet beneath his rough crust he was a man with a kindly heart.

'We don't want to break a record,' said he, pulling up and panting after attempting to keep up with Johnson for five minutes. 'I would go quicker if I could, my dear sir, and I quite sympathise with your anxiety, but really I can't manage it.'

So Johnson, on fire with impatience, had to slow down until they reached the New North Road, when he ran ahead and had the door open for the doctor when he came. He heard the two meet outside the bedroom, and caught scraps of their conversation, 'Sorry to knock you up—nasty case—decent people.' Then it sank into a mumble and the door closed behind them.

Johnson sat up in his chair now, listening keenly, for he knew that a crisis must be at hand. He heard the two doctors moving about, and was able to distinguish the step of Pritchard, which had a drag in it, from the clean, crisp sound of the other's footfall. There was silence for a few minutes and then a curious drunken, mumbling sing-song voice came quavering up, very unlike anything which he had heard hitherto. At the same time a sweetish, insidious scent, imperceptible perhaps to any nerves less strained than his, crept down the stairs and penetrated into the room. The voice dwindled

into a mere drone and finally sank away into silence, and Johnson gave a long sigh of relief for he knew that the drug had done its work and that, come what might, there should be no more pain for the sufferer.

But soon the silence became even more trying to him than the cries had been. He had no clue now as to what was going on, and his mind swarmed with horrible possibilities. He rose and went to the bottom of the stairs again. He heard the clink of metal against metal, and the subdued murmur of the doctors' voices. Then he heard Mrs Peyton say something, in a tone as of fear or expostulation, and again the doctors murmured together. For twenty minutes he stood there leaning against the wall, listening to the occasional rumbles of talk without being able to catch a word of it. And then of a sudden there rose out of the silence the strangest little piping cry, and Mrs Peyton screamed out in her delight and the man ran into the parlour and flung himself down upon the horse-hair sofa, drumming his heels on it in his ecstasy.

But often the great cat Fate lets us go, only to clutch us again in a fiercer grip. As minute after minute passed and still no sound came from above save those thin, glutinous cries, Johnson cooled from his frenzy of joy, and lay

breathless with his ears straining. They were moving slowly about. They were talking in subdued tones. Still minute after minute passing, and no word from the voice for which he listened. His nerves were dulled by his night of trouble, and he waited in limp wretchedness upon his sofa. There he still sat when the doctors came down to him—a bedraggled, miserable figure with his face grimy and his hair unkempt from his long vigil. He rose as they entered, bracing himself against the mantelpiece.

‘Is she dead?’ he asked.

‘Doing well,’ answered the doctor.

And at the words that little conventional spirit which had never known until that night the capacity for fierce agony which lay within it, learned for the second time that there were springs of joy also which it had never tapped before. His impulse was to fall upon his knees, but he was shy before the doctors.

‘Can I go up?’

‘In a few minutes.’

‘I’m sure, doctor, I’m very—I’m very—’ he grew inarticulate. ‘Here are your three guineas, Doctor Pritchard. I wish they were three hundred.’

‘So do I,’ said the senior man, and they laughed as they shook hands.

Johnson opened the shop door for them and heard their talk as they stood for an instant outside.

'Looked nasty at one time.'

'Very glad to have your help.'

'Delighted, I'm sure. Won't you step round and have a cup of coffee?'

'No thanks. I'm expecting another case.'

The firm step and the dragging one passed away to the right and the left. Johnson turned from the door still with that turmoil of joy in his heart. He seemed to be making a new start in life. He felt that he was a stronger and a deeper man. Perhaps all this suffering had an object then. It might prove to be a blessing both to his wife and to him. The very thought was one which he would have been incapable of conceiving twelve hours before. He was full of new emotions. If there had been a harrowing there had been a planting too.

'Can I come up?' he cried, and then, without waiting for an answer, he took the steps three at a time.

Mrs Peyton was standing by a soapy bath with a bundle in her hands. From under the curve of a brown shawl there looked out at him the strangest little red face with crumpled features, moist, loose lips, and eyelids which

quivered like a rabbit's nostrils. The weak neck had let the head topple over, and it rested upon the shoulder.

'Kiss it, Robert!' cried the grandmother. 'Kiss your son!'

But he felt a resentment to the little, red, blinking creature. He could not forgive it yet for that long night of misery. He caught sight of a white face in the bed and he ran towards it with such love and pity as his speech could find no words for.

'Thank God it is over! Lucy, dear, it was dreadful!'

'But I'm so happy now. I never was so happy in my life.'

Her eyes were fixed upon the brown bundle.

'You mustn't talk,' said Mrs Peyton.

'But don't leave me,' whispered his wife.

So he sat in silence with his hand in hers. The lamp was burning dim and the first cold light of dawn was breaking through the window. The night had been long and dark but the day was the sweeter and the purer in consequence. London was waking up. The roar began to rise from the street. Lives had come and lives had gone, but the great machine was still working out its dim and tragic destiny.

SWEETHEARTS

IT is hard for the general practitioner who sits among his patients both morning and evening, and sees them in their homes between, to steal time for one little daily breath of cleanly air. To win it he must slip early from his bed and walk out between shuttered shops when it is chill but very clear, and all things are sharply outlined, as in a frost. It is an hour that has a charm of its own, when, but for a postman or a milkman, one has the pavement to oneself, and even the most common thing takes an ever-recurring freshness, as though causeway, and lamp, and signboard had all wakened to the new day. Then even an inland city may seem beautiful, and bear virtue in its smoke-tainted air.

But it was by the sea that I lived, in a town

that was unlovely enough were it not for its glorious neighbour. And who cares for the town when one can sit on the bench at the headland, and look out over the huge blue bay, and the yellow scimitar that curves before it. I loved it when its great face was freckled with the fishing boats, and I loved it when the big ships went past, far out, a little hillock of white and no hull, with topsails^s curved like a bodice, so stately and demure. But most of all I loved it when no trace of man marred the majesty of Nature, and when the sun-bursts slanted down on it from between the drifting rain-clouds. Then I have seen the further edge draped in the gauze of the driving rain, with its thin grey shading under the slow clouds, while my headland was golden, and the sun gleamed upon the breakers and struck deep through the green waves beyond, showing up the purple patches where the beds of seaweed are lying. Such a morning as that, with the wind in his hair, and the spray on his lips, and the cry of the eddying gulls in his ear, may send a man back braced afresh to the reek of a sick-room, and the dead, drab weariness of practice.

It was on such another day that I first saw my old man. He came to my bench just as I was leaving it. My eye must have picked him

out even in a crowded street, for he was a man of large frame and fine presence, with something of distinction in the set of his lip and the poise of his head. He limped up the winding path leaning heavily upon his stick, as though those great shoulders had become too much at last for the failing limbs that bore them. As he approached, my eyes caught Nature's danger signal, that faint bluish tinge in nose and lip which tells of a labouring heart.

'The brae is a little trying, sir,' said I. 'Speaking as a physician, I should say that you would do well to rest here before you go further.'

He inclined his head in a stately, old-world fashion, and seated himself upon the bench. Seeing that he had no wish to speak I was silent also, but I could not help watching him out of the corners of my eyes, for he was such a wonderful survival of the early half of the century, with his low-crowned, curly-brimmed hat, his black satin tie which fastened with a buckle at the back, and, above all, his large, fleshy, clean-shaven face shot with its mesh of wrinkles. Those eyes, ere they had grown dim, had looked out from the box-seat of mail coaches, and had seen the knots of navvies as they toiled on the brown embankments. Those